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# From the Middle East to the Midwest: the Transition Experiences of Saudi Female International Students at a Midwest University Campus

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FROM THE MIDDLE EAST TO THE MIDWEST: THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF  
SAUDI FEMALE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT A MIDWEST UNIVERSITY  
CAMPUS

by

Alia Kamal Arafah

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in Urban Education  
at  
University of Wisconsin Milwaukee

May 2017

## **ABSTRACT**

### **FROM THE MIDDLE EAST TO THE MIDWEST: THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF SAUDI FEMALE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT A MIDWEST UNIVERSITY CAMPUS**

by  
Alia Kamal Arafeh

The University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee, 2017  
Under the Supervision of Professor Carol Colbeck

This study explored the essence of the transition experiences of 10 female international students when they made the decision to study and live in the U.S. through their third semester in college. The main research question that framed this study was: How do Saudi female international students navigate their transitional experiences to study and live during their first two academic years in an urban Midwest university?

Most research about international students does not account for their national, religious, cultural, and linguistic differences. Much of this previous research focuses on the students' academic challenges and language barriers and non-academic challenges such as acculturation difficulties, alienation, and discrimination. The few studies that have addressed the specific experiences of Saudi female international students emphasized the social and academic challenges they encountered in the U.S.

Because Saudi female students come from a segregated culture where historic and current conditions for women leave them without many human rights in Saudi Arabia, I sought to understand their experiences in a U.S. university from their own perspectives. Schlossberg's (1983) transition theory provided the theoretical foundation for understanding how Saudi female sophomore students progressed through moving in to a Midwestern university in the U.S., moving through their first year, and moving on to their second year of study at the university.

Phenomenological inquiry approach was implemented to understand the essence of the 10 Saudi sophomores lived experiences. In-depth individual interviews followed by a focus interview with four of the participants elicited their reflections about their transition experiences evolved over time and the coping resources they employed to facilitate their transition.

Data analysis proceeded across five time periods starting from Time One, when they Saudi females made the decision to study and live in the U.S. Time Two, addressed their first semester in the U.S and Time Three addressed their experiences in the second semester of their freshman year. Time Four encompassed the transition experiences of six of the participants who visited Saudi Arabia in summer, and Time Five addressed their transition experiences during the first semester of their sophomore year. Data analysis within each time period used the four Ss, of transition theory (Schlossberg, 1983): situation, support, self, and strategies, to understand the Saudi females own perspectives about their transitions over time.

Five main findings emerged from the data analysis: 1. Saudi females who participated in this study described primarily positive feelings about their experiences during the five stages of their transition to live and study in the U.S. 2. There was a strong relationship between the support these participants received from their fathers and their initial and emerging self-confidence. 3. Although they enjoyed life in the U.S., almost all Saudi females expressed their desire to go back to Saudi Arabia upon graduation to create positive changes in their home county. 4. The interrelationship between the four coping resources, situation, support, self, and strategies, fostered the emergence of self as a primary asset for all the participants. 5. Because of the inadequate campus support they received during their first academic year, these Saudi female students began to find ways to gain support from other resources during their second year.

This study also suggested four implications for practice and two implications for future research: 1. Because campus support for international students is inadequate, their services should be improved. 2. The English language support program that is expected to prepare international students linguistically and academically for college life needs to be improved to enable them to do college level work in English. 3. As Saudi students were not fully aware of the education system on U.S. campuses, a one credit course on college study skills would enhance their academic preparation for academic programs. 4. Fostering cultural awareness among domestic students would be through holding cultural events on campus. These events would break the ice between both domestic and international students that would foster healthy campus climate. Future research should address the following two issues: 1. The transition experiences of Saudi female students when they go back to their home country upon completion of their academic programs should be explored to improve understanding of the repatriate experience life in Saudi Arabia. 2. More research is needed on American students' perceptions of international students, particularly Muslim students.

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**To my mother Amneh Suhail Samara  
To the soul of my father Kamal Saeed Arafah**

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degrees. My thanks also go to my children, Sara and Jamal who kept praying for me and supporting me until this work was accomplished.

## **CHAPTER ONE: PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Transition to live and learn in a foreign country presents several challenges to international students in general (Bhandari and Bluementhal, 2011; Shapiro, Farrelly, and Tomas, 2014) and Saudi female international students in particular (Hakami, 2012; Davis, 2014; Davis and McGovern, 2015; Al Remaih, 2016). In addition to the restrictions Saudi women experience in their home country, arriving in the United States causes numerous complications for them. Stereotypes surrounding the Middle East and Middle Eastern women leave Saudi women vulnerable to discrimination, which puts additional pressure on them as they begin their studies in the United States (Davis, 2014). Moreover, the terrorist attacks that erupted in several cities both in the United States and overseas in November and December 2015 in Paris and San Bernardino respectively, increased hate crimes against Muslims in general, and Muslim women in particular (Siemaszko, 2015). Although offenders declared allegiance to ISIS and other terrorist groups, hate crimes in the U.S. targeted Muslims indiscriminately (Sullivan, Izadi, and Bailey, 2015). The Institute of Economics and Peace's Global Terrorism Index asserted that terrorist attacks would not end even after 15 years of the "War on Terror" declared by the former U.S. President George W. Bush (Friedman, 2016; The Global Terrorism Index, 2015).

Moreover, the 2016 Presidential campaign contributed to increase the hateful sentiments toward Arabs and Muslims in the United States, especially the anti-Muslim rhetoric of the Republican Presidential candidate (The New York Times, 2016). In August 2016, a survey was distributed by researchers in Adelphi University in New York to explore the impact of Islamophobia during the 2016 Presidential election campaign. More than 500 Muslim participants responded to the survey questions. The survey results revealed that 93% reported experiencing "some" or "extreme" negative impact from the campaign. Forty-seven percent

reported feeling “somewhat safe” as a Muslim in the U.S. whereas, 53% reported feeling “very” or “extremely” unsafe (Eissner, 2016). The survey results implied that hate sentiments do not only have a negative impact on Muslims who were either born or raised in the United States, but also all Muslims who enter the United States for various reasons such as business and education.

Although the experiences of Muslim students are extreme, almost all international students reported various types of difficulties when studying abroad (Shaprio, 2014; Eland and Thomas, 2013). The challenges that international students encounter on U.S. campuses can be classified into academic and non-academic. Academic challenges include learning to navigate different education systems, classroom settings, writing styles, course content, and teaching methods from those in students’ home countries (Shapiro et al. 2014; Eland and Thomas, 2013).

Among non-academic challenges faced, international students suffer from the cultural differences between their home countries and the United States that add to their stress and anxiety. Finding themselves in an environment with different values and lifestyles from their own, adds more pressure (Eland and Thomas, 2013). For instance, adjusting to the geographical climate, using public transportation, pondering food choices, learning money management, and exploring shopping options are among the many challenges that international students encounter in the U.S. (Hakami, 2012; Davis and McGovern, 2015).

While several U.S. campuses declare their distinctive services offered to international students, Fischer (2014) emphasized that there is a mismatch in general between international students’ expectations about U.S. campuses and services offered to them. Most international students who chose to drop out or transfer mentioned finances issues, academic adjustment, problems in the English language proficiency, and their desire to attend another university that is better fit. The Association of International Educators (NAFSA) released a report in 2014 that

revealed the discrepancy between international students' reasons for dropping out or choosing to transfer to another institution and what educators perceive. For example, 53% of campus leaders think that the orientation programs play a key role in international students' retention, while only 22% of international students agree. More than 51% of institutional respondents believe that the writing center and the tutor center services on campus contribute to international students' retention, whereas only 21% of international students concur.

International students in the United States arrive from more than 200 countries. Fifty-eight percent of them arrive from China, India, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia.



*Figure 1.* The top ten sending countries of international students to the United States (Open Doors, 2015).

According to a report released by Open Doors, an annual statistical analysis study of international students in the United States developed by the Institute of International Education (IIE), the number of international students has increased from 565,039 in the 2004-2005 academic year to 1,043,839 in the 2015-16 academic year (Open Doors, 2016). Saudi Arabia ranks third after China, India, in the number of students sent to earn their higher education

degrees in U.S. academic institutions (Open Doors, 2015), as shown in Table 1 which includes numbers of international students in the academic year 2014-2015.

*Table 1.* Top 10 sending places of origin and percentage of total international student enrollment in the U.S. in 2014-2015 (NAFSA, 2015).

Rank	Place of Origin	Number of Students	Percent of Total
1	China	304,040	31.2%
2	India	132,888	13.6%
3	South Korea	63,710	6.5%
4	Saudi Arabia	59,945	6.1%
5	Canada	27,240	2.8%
6	Brazil	23,675	2.4%
7	Taiwan	20,993	2.2%
8	Japan	19,064	2.0%
9	Vietnam	18,722	1.9%
10	Mexico	17,052	1.7%

Most international students prefer to pursue their higher education in the United States for various reasons. Besides receiving quality education, U.S. graduates are usually equipped with the qualifications and credentials required for the job market (Abo Rabia, 2015). In addition, some governments such as Saudi Arabia seeks to hire Saudi youth to take leadership positions in the country as part of the localization, or what is referred to as Saudization (Al Asfour and Khan, 2014). Saudization means replacing non-national employees with nationals in almost all sectors in the country. The number of foreign workers who entered Saudi Arabia on work visa has increased since the oil advent in 1938. Some of these employees take leadership positions because of the lack of equivalent qualified Saudi nationals (Al Asfour and Khan, 2014). Therefore, the Saudi government started to offer a number of full scholarships to Saudi students since 1970s to encourage them to pursue their higher education in the West, mainly the United

States, the UK, and Australia to gain the required qualifications and replace the foreign workforce in the Kingdom (Al Asfour and Khan, 2014).

Consequently, the number of international students arriving from Saudi Arabia to study at U.S. colleges and universities has constantly increased. For example, in the academic year 1997-1998 there were 4,571 Saudi students in the United States. However, this number sharply declined after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 to become 3,035 in the academic year 2004-2005. The number started to increase again after an agreement between late King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and the former U.S. president George W. Bush launched the King Abdullah Scholarship Program in 2005. The King Abdullah Scholarship Program offers thousands of full scholarships to male and female Saudi youth to pursue their higher education in the United States and other countries. The Program aimed to bridge the gap between the East and the West and foster peace and solidarity after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (King Abdullah Scholarship Program, 2015).

*Table 2. Growth in number of Saudi students studying at U.S. campuses from 1997-1998 to 2011-2012. Table 2. Adapted from Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia (2013)*

Year	Number of Saudi Students	The % of Previous Year
1997-1998	4,571	
1998-1999	4,931	7.9%
1999-2000	5,156	4.6%
2000-2001	5,273	2.3%
2001-2002	5,579	5.8%
2002-2003	4,175	-25.2%
2003-2004	3,521	-15.7%
2004-2005	3,035	-13.6%
2006-2007	7,886	128.7%
2007-2008	9,873	25.2%
2008-2009	12,661	28.2%
2010-2011	22,704	43.6%
2011-2012	34,139	50.4%

In the academic year 2014-2015, the number of Saudi students on U.S. campuses increased to 59,945, of whom 17,171 are females (Open Doors, 2015).

Since the focus in many higher academic institutions in the United States is on recruiting international students, understanding retention rates is almost overlooked (Schulmann and Choudaha, 2014). However, some academic institutions conducted research within their institutions to understand the retention rates among international students attending their campuses. For example, the Institutional Research Council (IRC, 2016) at a Midwest college campus, reported that Saudi males' retention rate in their first academic year was 91% compared to 78% of Saudi females in the academic year 2014-2015. Although these rates sound higher than domestic students, all Saudi students are expected to finish their degrees and go back to their country as a requirement of King Abdallah Scholarship Program (SACM, 2015).

Thus, it is likely that many Saudi female students encounter several transition challenges that force them to drop out after their first academic year in the United States. Therefore, understanding the challenges surrounding their transition into the U.S. higher education system will help campus leaders at all levels modify institutional support to foster their academic success.

Although most international students face challenges while transitioning to living and studying in the United States, the drastically different socio-cultural climate in the U.S. poses extraordinary challenges for female students from Saudi Arabia. While nearly all international students encounter significant language barriers, cultural differences, and other academic difficulties, Saudi females encounter substantial additional hindrances due to their relatively low social power in their home country. Taylor and Al Basri (2014) pointed out that culturally, Saudi women are expected to be covered from head-to-toe in almost all cities in their country. The highly segregated culture, where women are not allowed to have any direct communication with males who are unrelated to them, creates additional divides between the rights of Saudi men and

women (Davis, 2014). Saudi women need a guardian's permission to make many decisions such as pursuing their higher education, getting married, and working outside their homes (Taylor and Al Basri, 2014). Saudi women are also prohibited from driving a car, travelling alone without a guardian permission, and selecting their future husbands (Davis and McGovern, 2015).

Furthermore, women in Saudi Arabia are dependent on male members of their families, such as husbands, fathers, brothers, and uncles. For example, a Saudi female cannot go outside her house to pay a visit to a friend without having a male family member to give her a ride (S. Hafez, personal communication, August 20, 2016). Historically, the Saudi government forbade women from having their own identity cards, as they were listed as dependents on their male guardians' cards (The Economist, 2014). Therefore, treating around half of the Saudi society as dependents presents additional challenges to Saudi women coming to the U.S.

Saudi female students need to learn to be self-confident when making their own decisions. They also need to foster their self-esteem to help them cope with the new requirements in the United States (The Economist, 2014). Duties traditionally shouldered by Saudi males, such as problem solving, may become part of the daily routine for these women once they arrive in the U.S. to pursue higher education. These women now need to make their own decisions, possibly for the first time in their lives. Learning to be independent while transitioning to life in a new country adds complexities and confusion that may negatively impact their academic performance.

### **Research Questions**

This study attempted to understand the transition experiences that Saudi female international students encounter at an urban Midwest university and the approaches they used to foster their academic and social engagement. It also sought to understand the strategies Saudi

female students implemented to cope with the transition, as well as the role of higher academic institutions in supporting international students' academic and social success, particularly Saudi female students. While most higher academic institutions in the United States are serious about internationalizing their campuses by increasing the number of international students (Brook and Waters, 2011), there is a need to understand the unique challenges these students encounter in order to provide them with adequate support that facilitate their academic and social integration. Therefore, this study addressed the question:

- How do Saudi female international students navigate their transitional experiences to study and live during their first two academic years in an urban Midwest university?

Sub-questions addressed the coping resources cited in Goodman et al. (2006) that incorporate the four S's: situation, self, strategies, and support to improve understanding of the ways that Saudi female students navigate their transitions.

- How do Saudi females perceive they navigated challenges in their home country as they make the decision to study and live in the United States?
- How do Saudi females perceive they navigated the transition to living and learning on a U.S. campus during their first six weeks?
- How do Saudi females perceive they navigated transitions in their academic and social lives by the second semester of their first academic year on a U.S. campus?
- How do Saudi female students perceive they have navigated academic and social transitions by the end of their third semester on a U.S. campus?

Addressing these questions will help campus leaders and policy makers understand the unique needs of female Saudi students, their motivation to study in the United States, the different stages of adaptation to live and study, and the campus role in fostering their academic

and social success. Furthermore, the results of this study may be useful to guide current Saudi female students who struggle with various academic and social challenges. Moreover, this study will provide needed insight to Saudi female students who aspire to pursue their higher education in the United States but are reluctant to take this step because of various unforeseen challenges.

Regardless of the degree of understanding of Saudi culture in the United States, most view Saudi women as culturally oppressed, banned from their rights to education, and suppressed by their husbands and male members of their own families (Al Rumeih, 2016; Davis, 2014). For these reasons, campus leaders need to be aware of Saudi females' unique needs and challenges when transitioning into U.S. culture. Understanding this cultural divergent might play a key role in helping Saudi women throughout their academic careers. Without supports in place, these women may be prone to fail in accommodating with the new academic and social contexts that might lead to academic disappointment or drop out. Redden (2007) asserted that U.S. campuses need to be aware of the increasing number of Saudi students and provide them with appropriate academic support to foster their success.

## Key Concepts and Definitions

The following key terms will be addressed in this study:

*International students:* Open Doors (2016) defined an international student as anyone studying at an institution of higher education in the United States on a temporary Visa that allows for academic coursework. These include primarily holders of F (student) Visas and J (exchange visitor) Visas. Open Doors only counts students at institutions other than accredited, four-year colleges and universities and not students attending secondary schools or vocational schools. Individuals who have permanent residency or a separate work Visa are also not counted.

*Institute of Higher Education (IHE):* An independent not-for-profit organization founded in 1919, IHE is among the world's largest and most experienced international education and training organizations. It is committed to delivering program excellence to a diverse range of participants, sponsors, and donors. IHE was established in the aftermath of World War I by Nobel Peace Prize winners Nicolas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, Elihu Root, former secretary of State, and Stephan Duggan, Sr., Professor of Political Science at the College of the City of New York and IHE's first President. They believed that lasting peace could not be achieved without greater understanding between nations, and that international educational exchange formed the strongest basis for fostering such understanding.

*Open Doors:* Open Doors is published by the Institute of International Education (IIE), the leading not-for-profit educational and cultural exchange organization in the United States. Open Doors is supported by a grant from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, and is a comprehensive information resource on international students and scholars studying or teaching at higher education institutions in the United States as well as U.S. students studying abroad for academic credit at their home colleges or universities.

*King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP):* An academic scholarship offered to Saudi nationals, both males and females, to allow them to pursue their higher education abroad. It was launched in 2005 through an agreement between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

*Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to the United States (SACM):* The Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM) to the United States is one of the specialized agencies created by the Saudi government in 1951 to administer programs and policies to meet the educational and cultural needs of Saudis studying in the United States. It also functions as an intermediary between U.S. educational institutions and their counterparts in the Kingdom in terms of issues pertaining to culture, education, and science (SACM, 2016).

*F1 Visa:* The F1 Visa is a non-immigrant visa issued to foreign students who wish to pursue their higher education in the United States (USCI, 2016).

*Transition:* Goodman, Schlosberg and Anderson (2006) defined transition as: “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p.33).

*Culture shock:* Pedersen (1994) defined culture shock as, “the process of initial adjustment to an unfamiliar environment” (p.1).

*Coping strategies:* Taylor (1998) defined coping strategies as “the specific efforts, both behavioral and psychological, that people employ to master, tolerate, reduce, or minimize stressful events” (Para,1).

*Situation:* scrutinizes the elements of a transition and how they may affect an individual taking into consideration timing, duration, stress, and assessment (Goodman et al. 2006).

*Self*: is one's attitude toward life influenced by a combination of the demographic characteristics, socio economic status, gender, age, ethnicity, and culture (Goodman, et al. 2006, p.65).

*Support*: includes all possible resources a person need to assist transition, such as family, friends, and financial supports (Goodman, et al. 2006)

*Internationalization of higher education*: The Association of International Educators (NAFSA) defined internationalization as the conscious effort to integrate and infuse international, intercultural, and global dimensions into the ethos and outcomes of postsecondary education. To be fully successful, internationalization must involve active and responsible engagement of the academic community in global networks and partnerships (NAFSA, 2011).

### **Summary of the Chapter**

Saudi female international students encounter unique challenges when they make the decision to study and live in the United States. The hardships they encounter upon their arrival in the United States add more pressure and anxiety to them. The underlying phenomenological approach accompanied with Transition Theory guided the exploration of the challenges Saudi women students encountered prior to their arrival in the United States and throughout their first academic year. The main question and sub-questions of the study helped understand the lived experiences of these Saudi females and the coping strategies they adopted to overcome various obstacles.

### **Overview of Dissertation**

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One introduces key transition challenges facing international students attending higher academic institutions in the United States in general, and Saudi female international students in particular. It includes the problem statement,

research questions, and definition of major terms and concepts. Chapter Two examined literature related to the research problem and introduced the theoretical framework that outlined the study including the transition theory, and culture shock theory. Chapter Three explained the phenomenological foundation and qualitative methods used to explore the essence of the lived experiences of Saudi female students through individual interviews followed by a focus group. Chapter Four reports the analysis of data collected from interviewing 10 sophomore Saudi female international students, and the focus group analysis. Chapter Five includes summary of the study, analysis of findings, implications for practice, implications for future research, and concluded thoughts.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

This chapter investigates international students in the United States, internationalization and the impact of campus diversity, campus climate and international students, challenges faced by international students, international student identity development, female international students from Saudi Arabia, research on Saudi female international students. Each heading mentioned above included related subsections. This chapter also examined the theoretical framework of this study, the transition theory, Schlossberg (1983), and the culture shock theory (Oberg, 1960) developed by Ting-Toomey (1999).

The literature review was conducted through campus library database, EBESCO, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest, doctoral dissertations, master theses, peer reviewed journals, magazines, and news websites as well as Google Scholar. Keywords used to search for related topics were: phenomenological approach, transition, transition theory, college student theories, international students, female international students, students from the Middle East, Saudi students, Saudi female students, Saudi culture, education in Saudi Arabia, women's rights in Saudi Arabia, culture shock, adaptation, academic difficulties, social integration, gender differences, language barrier, and social integration, academic challenges, international student identity, campus climate, and internationalization.

### **International Students in the United States**

The number of international students attending American higher academic institutions exceeded one million in 2015-2016 for the first time in the American history of higher education. According to the 2016 Open Doors report, there were 1,043,839 international students attending

U.S. higher academic institutions in the academic year 2015-2016, and they constitute five percent of the college students in the United States. With this number, the United States maintains its top position among its competitors, the UK, Canada, and Australia. In this section, the literature review addresses the history of international postsecondary students in the U.S. as well as provides information about their numbers, geographic distribution in the U.S., and preferred majors.

### **Historical background**

International students in the United States prior to World War I were a very small population of students on U.S. college campuses. No exact statistics of international students were maintained at that time, but the number remained well below 5,000 students (Bevis and Lucas, 2007). An accurate census of foreign students was not issued until the middle of the twentieth century which revealed the constant increase of international students in the United States after World War I to become 8,075 students in 1942 arriving from 95 countries and studying in 600 American higher academic institutions (Bevis and Lucas, 2007). However, the list of American institutions did not include hospitals that provided nursing training, religious institutions, and private business schools. Therefore, the Institute of International Education (IIE) asserted that those institutions should be added to the list as they host international students. In 1948, the IIE issued an updated list of institutions that included 2,512 higher academic institutions hosting 26,759 international students (Bevis and Lucas, 2007).

In the aftermath of the World War II, several educational agencies were established in Europe that aimed to promote peace and solidarity in the countries affected by the devastating consequences of war (Altbach, Gumport, and Berdahl, 2011). Those efforts aimed to increase the number of international students in the American campuses and offer them scholarships

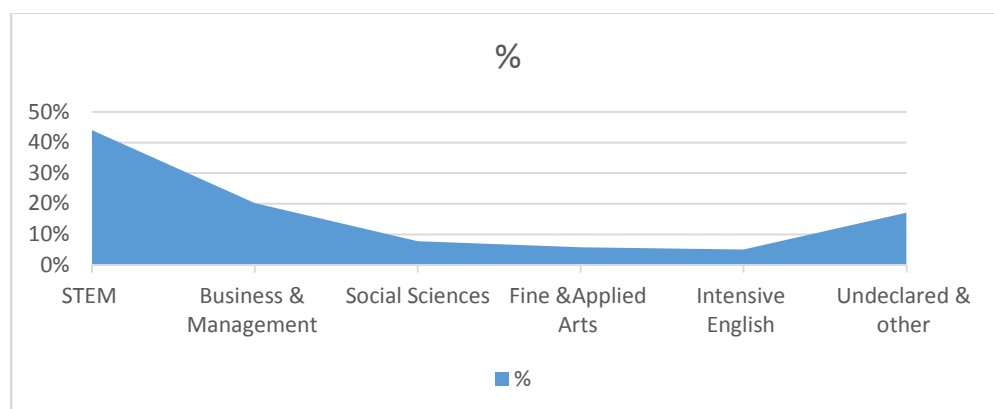
(Altbach, et al. 2011). Similar efforts began in the United States when J. William Fulbright, former U.S. Senator from Arkansas, offered the Fulbright Scholar Program to promote peace through education in 1946. The Fulbright Scholar Program offers hundreds of scholarships annually for international students who wish to study in the United States as well as for American students who aspire to study abroad (Fulbright Scholarship Program, 2015). To oversee and ensure the effectiveness of Fulbright Scholarship Program, the Institute of International Education (IIE) was established in 1947. The IIE also aspires to attract more international students to the U.S. from all over the globe to benefit from the various educational opportunities such as studying in Columbia University which hosted 1,140 international students, and University of California with 971 international students. Most of international students at that time arrived from Canada and Newfoundland, China, India, and Mexico (Bevis and Lucas, 2007). Due to the efforts of the IIE, the number of international students attending U.S. campuses increased immensely in the last two decades (Bevis and Lucas, 2007). For example, the number of international students attending American higher academic institutions in the academic year 1996-1997 was 500,000, and grew to 1,043,839 in the academic year 2015-2016.

International students in the United States today arrive from more than 200 countries and speak more than 150 languages (Open Doors, 2015). Most international students prefer to attend college in large states like California, New York, and Texas (Open Doors, 2016). Besides prospects of attending prestigious universities that offer international research opportunities, cutting edge-technology, and future career openings, international students prefer diverse environments and metropolitan areas where job searches after graduation may yield more results than in small towns (Ruiz, 2014). More than 85 percent of undergraduate international students studied in 118 metro areas between 2008-2012 (Ruiz, 2014).



*Figure 2.* Distribution of international students in the United States. Open Doors (2016).

Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) courses besides business are the most preferred majors among international students (Open Doors, 2015).



*Chart 1.* Fields of study among international students adapted from Open Doors (2015)

## **Internationalization and the Impact of Campus Diversity**

Hosting international students on U.S. campuses is part of the internationalization process that most American academic institutions engage in to enrich diversity on their campuses (Brook and Walters, 2011). Over the past 25 years, internationalization of higher academic institutions emerged to augment the role of higher education institutions in the changing world (Brook and Walters, 2011). Many scholars assert that internationalization is essential to create healthy and diverse campuses (Altbach, et al. 2011; Brook and Walters, 2011; De Wit, 2011). Hence, the

implementation of internationalization in higher education involves two fundamental approaches. First, campuses prepare domestic students to join the global workforce where they might work with people from multicultural environments who speak different languages. One method involves providing students with opportunities to study abroad. For instance, 313,415 U.S. students studied abroad in the academic year 2014-2015. Their top destinations were the UK, Italy, Spain, France, China, and Germany (Open Doors, 2016). The second approach involves hosting international students. The Open Doors 2016 report revealed that the leading countries sending international students to study on U.S. campuses in the academic year 2015-2016 were China, India, Saudi Arabia, and South Korea.

*Table 3: The top leading sending international students in 2015-2016 and changing of numbers from 2014-2015 adapted from Open Doors (2016)*  
2014/15 - 2015/16

TOP 25 PLACES OF ORIGIN OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS, 2014/15 & 2015/16					
Rank	Place of Origin	2014/15	2015/16	% of Total	% Change
	WORLD TOTAL	974,926	1,043,839	100.0	7.1
1	China	304,040	328,547	31.5	8.1
2	India	132,888	165,918	15.9	24.9
3	Saudi Arabia	59,945	61,287	5.9	2.2
4	South Korea	63,710	61,007	5.8	-4.2
5	Canada	27,240	26,973	2.6	-1.0
6	Vietnam	18,722	21,403	2.1	14.3
7	Taiwan	20,993	21,127	2.0	0.6
8	Brazil	23,675	19,370	1.9	-18.2
9	Japan	19,064	19,060	1.8	0.0
10	Mexico	17,052	16,733	1.6	-1.9

Therefore, an increasingly heterogeneous body of international student fosters diversity in classrooms as they bring perspectives and opinions that are often different from those of students raised in the U.S. (Glass, Wongtirat, and Buus, 2015a). Research that addresses diversity on American campuses focus primarily on Latin American, African American, and/or Asian American students. International students are typically considered a separate body of the

campus population in most literature (Glass, 2012; Glass et al. 2015a; Lee, 2015). However, international students arrive from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds with different national traditions and lifestyles (Odell, Korgen, and Wang, 2005; Lee, 2015). Being among minor groups on most college campuses poses various challenges for international students (Rose-Redwood, 2010). Therefore, providing friendly climates on American campuses will assist international students with overcoming various academic and social challenges that might hinder their academic progress (Glass, et al. 2015a).

### **Campus Climate and International Students**

Literature on the impact of campus climate on international students' engagement often times focuses on problems that domestic minority students experience such as discrimination, marginalization, microaggression, and blatant hostility (Roemer, 2016). Therefore, a healthy campus climate fosters integrity and inclusion for students, staff, and faculty (Reason and Rankin, 2006). Campus climate is also seen as an essential factor for developing sense of belonging among students (Glass et al. 2015a).

Sense of belonging among first year college students usually starts in the middle of the first semester (Kanes, Chalcraft, and Volpe, 2014). The success of creating a supportive environment for first year students besides developing positive student-faculty relationship foster students' sense of belonging (O'Keefe, 2013). Research found that professional counselling and active participation in campus life augment sense of belonging (O'Keefe, 2013). Conversely, campuses that fail to integrate students into campus life such as curricular and co-curricular activities end up with high attrition rates (Kanes et al. 2014).

In this section, I am going to address inclusion of international students, sense of belonging, international students' engagement in campus activities, and challenges faced by international students.

### **Inclusion of International Students**

Creating equity, quality, and inclusive college environment have been the chief goals of most American higher academic institutions in the twentieth century (Association of American Colleges and Universities, AAC&U, 2016). Most educators and practitioners believe that there is a strong positive correlation between equal treatment, quality of education, and sense of belonging among college students. Therefore, their academic achievement surpass other students who are either stereotyped or discriminated against within their campuses (Glass, et al. 2015b). As international students are part of campus body, being respected on their campuses fosters their sense belonging that positively impact their academic performance (Glass, et al. 2015a).

**Sense of belonging.** Advisor's support and student support services are fundamental factors in fostering international students' sense of belonging. The advisor's support has been reported as the most important factor that increased international graduate students' sense of belonging to their academic institutions (Curtin, Steward, and Ostrove, 2012). Similarly, most graduate international students who were satisfied with their experiences in their academic institutions reported high levels of sense of belonging. Their advisors' support was listed among the top three factors that contributed to their success besides campus financial support and interaction with their faculty (Trice and Yoo, 2007).

Similarly, in a research conducted to measure the level of sense of belonging among international students, it revealed that there was a strong positive correlation between academic advising and sense of belonging among undergraduate international students (Mataczynski,

2013). In addition, the same research showed that there was a strong positive correlation between campus support and retention rates among undergraduate international students (Mataczynski, 2013). Other research showed that participation in class discussion as well as professors' support and understanding of international students' needs augment international students sense of belonging (Glass et al. 2015a, Glass, Glass et al. 2015b; O'Keefe, 2013).

Despite campus efforts to provide international students a compelling academic atmosphere, international students reported incidents of being marginalized, stereotyped, and discriminated against which forced them to be alienated from campus activities and social lives (Eland and Thomas, 2013).

### **International Students' Engagement**

While many American higher academic institutions focus on engaging all students in campus events, activities, and leadership roles, international students' events do not attract many domestic students. Similarly, international students' attendance of campus events is limited (Glass et al. 2015a).

**Engagement in campus activities.** Although there is an ample research on the challenges facing international students on U.S. campuses, the research that explores international students' engagement is scant (Korobova, and Starobin, 2015). Not all international students are easily adapted to campus life. Arriving from array of diverse backgrounds, international students' engagement in campus activities is limited (Zhao, Kuh, and Carini, 2005).

However, recent research showed that first year international students tend to participate on campus activities more than their senior counterparts. Research explained this phenomenon based on a quantitative research conducted on international students attending U.S. campuses. First year international students have more time to engage in campus activities due to the low

load of course work, whereas it becomes more difficult for senior students who become more involved in their complicated course work to participate or engage into campus life (Korobova, and Starobin (2015).

**Engagement with other students.** Several studies focused on the role of international students in fostering campus life. However, the research that illustrates international student engagement with other students is limited. Most international students arrive in the United States with stereotypes about American students. For example, Asian international students try to avoid communicating with African American students due to pre-misconceptions about the African American communities in the United States. Therefore, forming friendships with minority students or students of color is not easy to accomplish (Pandit, 2013).

As segregation is usually associated with domestic students on U.S. campuses, international students reported similar incidents of segregation. In most cases, international students prefer to befriend who shares with them the same culture and language (Rose-Redwood, 2010).

Additionally, the restrictions imposed on international students as temporary visitors create obstacles for a comprehensive institutional engagement (Paltridge et al. 2012). Most higher academic institutions aspire to mingle international students with domestic students where both can gain cross-cultural experiences (Pandit, 2013). However, there are barriers that impede achieving these goals. At the institutional level, most American campuses have offices of international students as separate units. Moreover, international students are treated as a secluded component of the student body. Therefore, the institutional plans that aim to foster students learning experiences need to be reviewed (Pandit, 2013).

## **International Student Identity Development**

There is abundant research that describes and explores identity development of college students in general. However, these studies usually focused on White students and students of color who were either born or raised in the U.S. (Chickering and Reisser, 1993; Kramer, 2007; Evans, et al. 2010; Jones and Abes, 2013), whereas, research on international student identity development is scant. For example, Kim (2012) attempted to develop a theory that addresses international student identity development. She conducted her study in only one big research university and her sample was international students from different countries, mainly South East Asia. None of her participants was from the Middle East which raised several questions about the applicability of her theory to students from other global regions.

### **Challenges Faced by International Students**

The challenges that face international students upon their arrival in the United States can be classified into academic and non-academic challenges. This section explores the academic challenges that incorporate language barrier and different education systems, whereas the non-academic challenges encompass alienation, misunderstanding of rules and systems, and stereotype and discrimination.

#### **Academic Challenges**

As all international students must meet the same admission requirements of domestic students, it becomes more difficult for them to conform with the high academic standards to maintain a satisfactory scholastic level (Eland and Thomas, 2013). Therefore, the academic challenges they encounter maximize their anxieties and frustrations that lead in many cases to drop out or transfer (Glass, Gomez, and Urzua, 2014).

**Language barrier.** Most international students, who do not master English as a second language, face various academic problems. For instance, they do not manage the huge amount of academic readings and writings (Pandit, 2013). Therefore, the language barrier deprives them from fully understanding their instructors, participating in class discussion and group work, and communicating with their classmates. Thus, some faculty endeavor to help international students by avoiding using idiomatic expressions and slang language in class, they also give international students extra time to do their homework and exams (Pandit, 2013).

**Different education systems.** Living and studying in a foreign country has not been ever easy for most international students. Many adjustment challenges that international students encounter are due to differences between the academic systems between their home country and the United States (Shapiro et al. 2014). For example, classroom settings, communication with their classmates and with their instructors, abide by campus rules and regulations, and getting academic support from campus support services are among challenges most international students encounter (Eland and Thomas, 2013). It is also important for international students to understand what their instructors expect from them, as they need to adjust their experiences to fit U.S. education systems (Eland and Thomas, 2013).

While time management is considered an indicator of success, some international students face several challenges due to lack of time management skills (Eland and Thomas, 2013). Some international students acquire a relaxing approach to time such as chronic lateness to class and pass the due dates in turning in class assignments. This eventually will lead to fail classes, be on probation, or drop out (Eland and Thomas, 2013).

Likewise, some international students do not take the academic rules and regulations seriously (Shapiro et al. 2014). For example, class attendance is highly important on U.S.

campuses. Students who skip classes without previous notice are opting to fail and encountering future academic difficulties (Eland and Thomas, 2013). It is worth mentioning that some international students are not aware of the precarious consequences of academic misconduct and plagiarism. Therefore, they need to understand that any misappropriate academic behavior could lead to dismissal or loss of academic status (Eland and Thomas, 2013).

### **Non-Academic Challenges**

The difficulties that international students face in their transition to the host country are different from undergraduate and graduate students. For most undergraduate students, their parents help them manage their schedule, find a place to live, and prepare them for the trip to the United States (Schuh, Jones, Harper, and Associate, 2011). Whereas, graduate students, in most cases, are more independent in arranging their own schedules and travel plans, and are more capable of making critical decisions (Schuh et al. 2011). Therefore, the hardships that international undergraduate students encounter in the United States could be double or triple of their domestic peers as their parents and family are half a world away (Schuh et al. 2011).

**Alienation.** Compounding these problems, international students experience more social and emotional hardships such as feelings of isolation, loneliness, lack of social support, and difficulties with establishing new friendships (Eland and Thomas, 2013). Most undergraduate international students studying in the United States are in their late teens and early twenties. This designates that they are in the critical stage of shaping their own identities, beliefs, and values that increases their sense of loneliness (Schuh et al. 2011).

**Misunderstanding of rules and regulations.** Although living in the United States offers international students a wide spectrum of freedom, there are rules, restrictions, and regulations that they should strictly follow (Eland and Thomas, 2013). For example, some international

students have been infringed on laws such as moving violations, underage drinking, breaking landowners' rules, and roommate problems (Eland and Thomas, 2014). Hence, it becomes essential for international students to know how to get legal advice when they get into trouble.

Some international students might encounter other non-academic problems such as identity theft, credit card theft, robbery, violence, addiction, and suicidal thoughts (Eland and Thomas, 2013). While international students are potential targets for criminals, they are ignorant of the best practices they need to follow, or whom they need to contact first. "Some prefer to keep silent and choose not to report these incidents" (Eland and Thomas, 2013, p. 149). These situations could be devastating to international students and lead to more frustration and confusion.

**Healthcare system.** Securing healthcare can also be a problem for international students. Many international students are not familiar with the healthcare system in the United States (Eland and Thomas, 2013). Although health insurance is mandatory for all international students, many students do not know where to go in case of emergencies (Shapiro et al. 2014). Although the orientation sessions inform international students about their health insurance, most international students find the U.S. health system confusing (Eland and Thomas, 2013). Some international students reported that they received high medical charges due to their ignorance of the U.S. healthcare system (Eland and Thomas, 2013).

**Stereotype and discrimination.** Studying in a foreign country increases the possibilities of discrimination and stereotype problems (Ruble and Zhang, 2013). These problems lead to more anxieties and frustrations among international students (Lee and Rice, 2007). However, not all domestic students discriminate against international students. In a study conducted in a Southwest large American campus, American students indicated their satisfaction with having

international students on their campuses, and thus, they perceive them as hard workers and willing to learn (Baumbaugh, 2015). In addition, research shows that there is a strong negative correlation between academic preparedness and stereotypes. International students who are academically well prepared are faster in the adaptation process and therefore, the opportunities to be stereotyped or discriminated against become very few (Baumbaugh, 2015).

### **Female International Students from Saudi Arabia**

The focus on Saudi female international students for this study stems from the fact that this unique body of international students arrive from the most conservative country in the world regarding women's role in society (Le Renard, 2014; Al Munajjed, 1997). For example, women are denied several rights like getting a driver's license and drive their own cars. They are also prohibited from traveling without permission from a male guardian, who in some cases can be their twelve-year-old brother or son (Al Rumaih, 2016). In addition, Saudi females are not allowed to have any medical treatment or undergo any surgery without a permission and consent of their primary guardian (Altorki, 1986). However, a few rights were recently given to Saudi women like the right of vote and nomination in 2015 for the first time in the history of Saudi Arabia (BBC, 2015).

Although Saudi women encounter these struggles, they determined to pursue their higher education in the United States and get a degree where they aspire to create positive changes in their society. Now, Saudi women take leadership roles in their home country, Saudi Arabia. They are school teachers, school principals, university professors, deans, nurses, doctors, pharmacists, and health care practitioners ( Le Renard, 2014).

However, the misconceptions that most American people have about Saudi Arabia and Saudi women augment their challenges and cause them several frustrations.

In this section, I will provide the context that helps understand the experiences of Saudi female international students since their arrival in the United States. This section includes geographical location of Saudi Arabia and historical background, Saudi culture, Saudi Arabia before the oil advent, customs and traditions, after the oil advent, girls' education, higher education in Saudi Arabia, study abroad opportunities, King Abdullah Scholarship Program, Saudi female students on U.S. campuses, and research conducted on Saudi female international students.

### Geographical Location

Saudi Arabia is located in the Arabian Peninsula with population of 27,345,986 according to 2014 census (Saudi Arabia, 2015). The country is combined of five major areas, the North, South, East, West, and the Central (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2016).



*Figure 3. The Five Main Regions in Saudi Arabia*

Each area has its own traditions that impact people's lives. Most of these traditions are derived from the Islamic Law, which is also called 'Sharia Law' (CIA, 2016). These rules vary among regional areas. For instance, in the West area where Jeddah, the second largest Saudi city is located, rules and regulations are more flexible than the central area where Riyadh, the capital city is situated (Al Munajjid, 1997). Therefore, the West and East Coasts of Saudi Arabia are known to be open-minded regions which means that rules and restrictions on women's mobility,

education, work, and dress are more adaptable than other conservative regions like the Central area. For instance, women in Jeddah are allowed to travel alone with a written permission from a guardian unlike women in the Central region who must be accompanied by a male relative. In addition, women in open-minded regions enjoy the freedom of pursuing their higher education when they get their guardian permission. However, in the conservative regions, many families do not allow their daughters to pursue their education or work (Le Renard, 2014). While, *Niqab*, a face cover, is not mandatory in Jeddah, it is required in the conservative regions (Le Renard, 2014; The Economist, 2016). Moreover, as a tribal society, each tribe in Saudi Arabia has its own rules and regulations that differ from other tribes in other areas in the country (Al Munajjid, 1997).

### **Historical Background**

The unique cultural and societal aspects of Saudi culture are essential to understand Saudi students' motivations to study abroad and the various challenges they encounter. After the oil advent, several changes occurred in the Saudi societal and economic structure. Many families aspired to send their sons to study abroad to be able to take leadership positions in the young growing country (Heyn, 2013). However, Saudi females were not given equal opportunities of education for several societal and cultural restrictions (Le Renard, 2014).

### **Saudi Culture**

The imposed segregation between men and women Saudi society prohibits women from communicating with men who are unrelated to them and limiting their social mobility (Le Renard, 2008; Eckstein et al., 2003; Al Munajjed, 1997; Altorki, 1986). Despite the changes that occurred in Saudi Arabia in the last 50 years due to the oil advent, the fundamentals of Saudi society are still rigid (Le Renard, 2008; Pharaon, 2004).

Due to various restrictions in Saudi society, conducting research about Saudi women and their everyday lives can be nearly impossible. However, two Saudi female researchers, Soraya Altorki (1986) and Muna Al Munajjed (1997), were able to get inside Saudi households where they recorded lengthy interviews with Saudi women of different ages and asked them about various social, religious, and cultural subjects. Altorki (1986) conducted her study in Jeddah, a city in the Western part of Saudi Arabia. Being a Saudi female and sharing the same culture, religion, and language of the women she interviewed, helped her gain their trust. Both Altorki (1986) and Al Munajjed (1997) provided extensive description of Saudi women's lives that continue to help Western scholars understand the various challenges, adversities, and hindrances these women experienced.

**Religion.** Saudi Arabia is a 100% Muslim country (Le Renard, 2008). In an effort to promote women's rights, the Saudi government put significant resources to help women integrate into society and appoint them to leadership positions (Le Renard, 2008). Despite these efforts, some religious groups in Saudi Arabia continue opposing these social improvements, as they see women in leadership positions a violation of the social fabric (Paharon, 2004).

Social life in Saudi Arabia was derived from Islamic law, but has since been expanded upon by other cultural and tribal traditions (Al Munajjed, 1997). There are various cultural rules and regulations that are thought to be derived from Islam, but are not. For example, the veil covering the face worn by women in most cities in Saudi Arabia is not an Islamic obligation, despite common belief that it is. Moreover, banning women from participating in public life, driving a car, and communicating with men who are not related to them are cultural attitudes rather than Islamic beliefs (Altorki, 1986). The Islamic law still shapes the Saudi society and it is the main sources of laws, rules, and regulations (Pharaon, 2004). Although Islam affords women

various rights, the Saudi culture resists providing women more freedom and equal rights as societal and tribal constraints are still dominating their society (Pharaon, 2004).

**Saudi Arabia before the oil advent.** Before the advent of oil the dominant source of income was the revenues from pilgrimages who visited the two holiest cities, Mekka and Al Madina. Residents of these cities were settled in homes unlike the rest of populations who used to move searching for water and food for them and their families (Altorki, 1986).

**Customs and traditions.** In her lengthy narrative about Saudi women, Altorki (1986) described the lives of Saudi women, their relationships with their husbands, neighbors, and friends. Saudi culture denied women opportunities for education until late 1950s. Several cultural and social beliefs contributed to prohibit Saudi women from getting their education. For instance, most Saudi families believed that girls should not leave their parents' homes until they get married (Al Munajjed, 1997). This meant that they were not allowed to go to school or form any social relations outside their families.

Most Saudis believed that girls should learn to cook, care for their younger brothers and sisters, and do the housework with their mothers as training for when they would get married (Altorki, 1986). The presence of an unmarried girl with her mother outside the home was seen as an effort to exhibit her as a potential wife for other women in search for a wife for her son or brother (Al Munajjed, 1997). In addition, women were not allowed to leave their homes without consent from their husbands or male members of their families (Al Munajjed, 1997).

Men were considered to be both physically and mentally superior to women, and therefore, they were responsible for making decisions. Women were considered incapable to make any decisions because they “lacked reason and religious observance” (p. 51). As they were considered mentally incapable, women were not given the right to choose their husbands. Most

girls were forced to marry between the ages of twelve and sixteen years to men they had never met before (Al Munajjed, 1997). They met their future husbands on their wedding day. Some girls thought that marriage might give them some freedom as they could be released from their fathers and brothers' control, they instead found themselves chained to their husbands' rules and regulations, which in most cases were harsher and tougher (Al Munajjed, 1997; Altorki, 1986).

Saudi men had the right to deprive their wives and daughters from access to education. Women's duties were restricted to raising children, caring for their husbands, and doing housework (Altorki, 1986; Al Munajjed, 1997). If, for any reason a wife did not obey her husband, her husband would send her to her parents' house or divorce her (Altorki, 1986). Hence, men had the right to divorce and make decisions as means to control their wives' and daughters' lives, and to prevent them from several rights granted to them by Islam. These rights included their right to education, to choose their future husbands, and to work outside the home (Altorki, 1986). Generally, women were expected to conform to their husbands' demands unless those demands were in violation of Islamic teachings or valued traditions (Altorki, 1986).

**Saudi Arabia after the oil advent.** The oil exploration in Saudi Arabia in 1938 created a fundamental change in the Saudi infrastructure (Pharaon, 2004). Saudi Arabia used oil revenues to develop a range of sectors in the country (Alamri, 2011). Various challenges emerged as the country transitioned from being vast desert to an oil-producing country and generating billions of dollars per year (Pharaon, 2004). Thus, the Saudi government prepared plans to invest oil revenues in national projects that would benefit Saudi society. Pouring money into improvements in the education system was top priority (Pharoan, 2004; Alamri, 2011).

Although schools at that time were restricted to boys, there were calls to open schools for girls (Altorki, 1986; Al Munajjed, 1997). However, as traditional and cultural rules were so rigid,

opening schools for girls proved to be a challenge. Some religious scholars at that time believed that sending girls to schools meant that girls would be distracted from their chief jobs as future mothers.

### **Girls' Education in Saudi Arabia**

Despite the restrictions on Saudi girls' education, popular demands increased in the 1950s from a group of educated, middle class Saudi men who urged the government to open schools for girls (Al Munajjed, 1997). Educated Saudi men criticized the educational system in their country that excluded girls. Their appeal emphasized that, as educated men, they needed educated wives to help them establish a harmonious family atmosphere (Al Munajjed, 1997). Their appeal also asserted that not having educated Saudi wives would incentivize them to marry educated women from neighboring countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq (Al Munajjed, 1997).

Faisal ben Abdel Aziz, the King of Saudi Arabia from 1964-1975, was exposed to the Western world from a very young age. Learning from this exposure, he created a dramatic improvement in the education system in Saudi Arabia. King Faisal aspired to create positive changes throughout the country without violating the traditional and religious heritages of the country. King Faisal believed in equal access to education for both males and females. He supported his beliefs with evidence derived from both the Holy Quran and Hadith, Prophet Mohammad's sayings and daily practices that are considered major sources of guidance for Muslims in addition to the Holy Quran (Al Munajjed, 1997). King Faisal's wife, Princess Iffat, founded the first private school for girls, Dar Al Hanan, in 1956. Iffat was raised in Istanbul, a cosmopolitan city in Turkey known for being a center of knowledge and education. Dar Al Hanan was opened for orphans, as no one would object to taking care of orphan girls and

equipping them with education to become independent. The first cohort consisted of fifteen girls. Following this first cohort, more families were encouraged to send their daughters to school. The steady increase of girls going to school motivated the school principal to offer new classes. The first girl to graduate from Dar Al Hanan went to England to be trained as a doctor (Al Munajjed, 1997).

In 1960, the first public school for girls opened in Riyadh, the capital city, despite the opposition from some Islamic conservatives, most notably a group known as Ulama. Members of Ulama claimed, that girls' schools would contribute to spread corruption of their morals and destruction of their families. They also requested that girls should be kept at home and not to be allowed to get their education (Al Munajjed, 1997). Conservative families agreed with Ulama and banned their daughters from going to school. Therefore, schools in conservative regions such as Buraida, a center city in the Najad Province in Saudi Arabia, were stoned, and government troops were dispatched to restore order (Al Munajjed, 1997). To convince religious scholars that educating women was not against Islamic belief, King Faisal quoted verses from the Holy Quran and Hadith that urged all Muslims to seek education – both men and women including verses that contended that Islam did not impose any barriers to women's education (Al Munjjed, 1997). King Faisal also persuaded conservatives that educating girls would help them read the Holy Quran, which would enable them to teach the Holy Quran to their future children (Al Munjjed, 1997). Furthermore, King Faisal appointed some conservative religious leaders to ensure that educational materials provided to girls were in alignment with Islamic teachings and beliefs.

The turning point in achieving education for Saudi girls occurred in 1961 when conservative families, convinced that King Faisal's opinions were derived from Sharia Law, began sending their daughters to school. More than 15 public schools opened in various areas

across the country (Al Munjjed, 1997). The number of girls enrolled in schools increased rapidly until it reached 55,000 in the 1964-65 academic year. By that time 96% of female students were enrolled in elementary schools while the remaining four percent of female students were enrolled in middle and secondary schools (Al Munajjed, 1997). From 1982-83, of the 1.78 million students enrolled in school, 700,000 of whom were females (Al Munjjed, 1997, p. 65).

Courses taught to Saudi girls at that time were different from those provided for boys. Girls took classes to help them raise their children, sew, and take care of their houses and husbands. Besides Arabic, religion, and math classes, Saudi women were typically encouraged to finish school and get married.

### **Higher Education in Saudi Arabia**

A number of Saudi businessmen who received their higher education from other countries believed in the importance of educating Saudi youth and equipping them with the professional development necessary to take leadership roles in the country. Thus, the first university, King Saud University was founded in 1957, in Riyadh, the capital city. Twelve years later, King Abdel Aziz University opened in 1967 in Jeddah, a main city on the coast of the Red Sea (Al Munajjed, 1997). Due to the increasing demands for higher education by Saudi women, King Abdul Aziz University opened a separate campus for women (Al Munajjed, 1997). Because of the societal rules of segregation, male faculty were and still are not allowed to enter female lecture halls. Instead, the university implemented the closed-circuit TV system so women could watch some lectures given by males and communicate with them through a microphone (Alharthi, Dighrir, and Alharthi, 2013; Al Munjjed, 1997). In a later stage of higher education in Saudi Arabia, and due to the increasing number of Saudi youth aspiring to continue their education, six more public universities were opened across the country. Saudi women continued

enrolling in these universities, which contributed to the increase in the number of Saudi graduates (Alamri, 2011).

Higher education in Saudi Arabia is free of cost to all students at all levels (Alrawaf and Simmons, 1991). Although education is not compulsory, thousands of male and female high school graduates enroll in higher education institutions every year (Pharaon, 2004). The increasing number of Saudi students enrolled in higher education institutions made it necessary to establish the Ministry of Higher Education to oversee the universities (Alamri, 2011). The purpose of establishing the Ministry of Higher Education was to supervise higher academic institutions and programs to cope with the country's current needs (Alamri, 2011).

Today, Saudi universities are committed to offering quality programs to Saudi youth, both males and females, to assist them with obtaining the qualifications needed for the job market (Alamri, 2011). For instance, the quality of programs offered by King Saud University has been compared to elite universities across in the globe. According to the Academic Ranking of World Universities, King Saud University is among the top 100 universities in science and engineering (Academic Ranking of World Universities, 2015).

**Study abroad opportunities.** The significant educational development in Saudi Arabia in recent decades encouraged country leaders to consider ways to prepare Saudi youth to take leadership roles in their country (Alexander, 2013). The educational strategic plans of the Saudi government are not restricted to offering higher academic education inside the country. They include sending Saudi youth to other countries to take advantage of the technological, industrial, and economic development in those countries (King Abdullah Scholarship Program, 2015). For this reason, the generous scholarships offered to Saudi students through King Abdullah Scholarship Program encourages Saudi students to earn academic degrees abroad and return to

their country to contribute to the development process (King Abdullah Scholarship Program, 2015).

### **The King Abdullah Scholarship Program**

Late King Abdullah believed in the aptitudes of the Saudi youth to pursue the growth of the monarchy (SACM, 2015). The launching of King Abdullah Scholarship Program in 2005 served various goals. On one hand, it helped thousands of Saudi youth achieve their dreams and study abroad, and on the other hand, it contributes in promoting cross-cultural understanding (SACM, 2015). The agreement between the late King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and former U.S. President George W. Bush, sponsored by the American Embassy in Riyadh was a milestone in the Saudi academic history (King Abdullah Scholarship Program, 2015). The two leaders' intentions were to bridge the gap between the East and the West following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The program also aims to prepare Saudi youth to become professionally and academically competent leaders in their country (King Abdullah Scholarship Program, 2015).

Saudi women can take advantage of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, which offers considerable support to them and their partners or families. Alongside the reform in Saudi Arabia, women are granted these opportunities to study abroad, earn university degrees, and return to their country to contribute to the improvement process (LeBaron, and Hausheer, 2013). Furthermore, the massive flow of Saudi students who benefited from the King Abdullah Scholarship has helped reduce the negative stereotype most Americans have about people from the Middle East (LeBron, and Hausheer, 2013).

The first program cohort consisted of 6,000 students. Today, the number of Saudi students on U.S. campuses exceeds 100,000 including students in the intensive English Program, ESL. Most degree-seeking Saudi students are enrolled in science, technology, math, and health

departments (Open Doors, 2015). Saudi women are well represented, as they comprise 24% of the total number of Saudi students who study abroad (LeBaron, and Hausheer, 2013).

Although the King Abdullah Scholarship offers opportunities to Saudi youth to study in more than 20 countries across the globe, most Saudi students prefer the United States as their first choice. The UK is the second choice, followed by Australia and Canada (Ahmed, 2015). Moreover, the King Abdullah Scholarship Program offers scholarships for Saudi to study in some European countries such Germany, Italy, and Netherlands. Some other Saudi students study in Arab countries like Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan. However, the vast majority prefer the United States (Ahmed, 2015).

### **Saudi Female Students on U.S. Campuses**

The number of Saudi female international students attending U.S. campuses has increased significantly in the last eight years (Open Doors, 2015). Regardless of the negative stereotypes and the misconceptions shared among U.S. students, most Saudi were able to reveal misconceptions about Islam and Islamic laws (Harb, 2013). Therefore, recruiting international students from Saudi Arabia is perceived ever more favorably by most American campuses as the Saudi students' presence encourages an understanding of issues in the Middle East, particularly about the religious restrictions and the societal constructions (Harb, 2013).

Because misunderstanding of Saudi culture and Islam in the Western world has increased in the last few years (Guta and Karolak, 2015), the Saudi government increased efforts to improve the image of the Saudi society and women's rights in the country by offering free education to all Saudi women who take leadership positions in various disciplines (Alamri, 2011). It also offers generous scholarships to Saudi females who wish to get higher academic degrees abroad (Alamri, 2011). The flow of Saudi female students into U.S. campuses started

after the launching of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program in 2005 (SACM, 2015). Before 2005, the number of Saudi female students in the U.S. was relatively low. For example, in the academic year 2002-2003, there was fewer than a thousand Saudi female students studying on U.S. campuses.

In the academic year 2014-2015, there were more than 17,000 Saudi female students studying in the United States (Open Doors, 2015). Ahmed (2015) stated that Saudi females' presence in studying abroad programs has been increasing constantly. The statistics of the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia affirm that there are 150,109 Saudi male students, and 49,176 females studying abroad, in the United States and other countries, which forms a significant proportion of 3:1.

### **Research on Saudi Female International Students**

The presence of Saudi females on foreign campuses across the globe raises many questions about Saudi women's societal framework, their motivations to study abroad, the roles they aspire to perform upon their arrival, and the various challenges they encounter (Pharaon, 2004). A few recent doctoral dissertations have investigated the various challenges Saudi female international students encounter in the United States. These studies explored the various academic and social challenges Saudi females face when living and studying in the United States. For instance, Macias' (2016) interviews with 11 Saudi females revealed that Saudi female were strongly connected to their religion and their families even while they were dealing with language barriers and academic challenges. Al Remaih (2016) interviewed 20 Saudi female graduate students at different U.S. institutions and learned that the women encountered spiritual challenges in addition to social and academic hindrances. Davis' (2014) interviews with 25 students at various U.S. campuses found that the Saudi female students' academic challenges

were due to language barriers and different educational systems. Their acculturation difficulties stemmed from divergent cultures and lifestyles. Hakami's (2012) survey revealed that language challenges were a hindrance, but some Saudi women's adjustment was facilitated by establishing friendships with peers.

Three of the four dissertations about Saudi female students on U.S. campuses used qualitative methods; one used quantitative methods. Theories used included Hofstede's cultural dimension model (Davis 2014; Al Remaih, 2016), structure inertia theory (Al Remaih, 2016), the Rasch model (Hakami, 2012), and Schlossberg's transition theory (Al Remaih, 2016). The studies, however, inadequately explained how the theories applied to their findings. This means that data analysis did not well address any of the theories used in the study which created approximate confusion.

While these studies provide good insights into the various challenges faced by Saudi female international students, the study proposed here will build on their work in two important ways. First, in addition to improving understanding of the challenges faced by Saudi women studying on U.S. campuses, the proposed study will explore what support these women sought as well as the coping resources they used to succeed and the impact of their transition on their identity. Thus, the study begins from the standpoint that the women have agency and may not be passive victims of circumstance.

Second, rather than focusing on the transition as a single event, this proposed study will elicit retrospective insight about the process of transition through all of the stages outlined by Schlossberg and colleagues (2006). For example, this study will explore Saudi females' interpretations of their "moving in" experiences when they made their decision to pursue their higher education in the United States, including challenges and/or opportunities they encountered

in their home country when they made the decision. This study will then explore Saudi female students' perceptions of their initial "moving through" to their U.S. universities, including the supports they received and the strategies they implemented to adapt to their new situations. Further, this study explored how these women perceived transition experiences when they "moved through" from one academic phase to another. Finally, this study specifically addressed Saudi females' interpretations of the impact of their first summer vacation in Saudi Arabia after they had "moved on" by coming back to the United States to pursue and complete their academic journeys.

In the next main section of this chapter, I describe the theories that support this study.

### **Philosophical Framework**

The underlying qualitative inquiry framework for this study was phenomenology. In addition, transition theory and culture shock theory contributed to the design of the study. The integration of these theories enhanced general understanding of how Saudi female international students perceived their experiences as they progressed through several stages of transition, including their decisions to study and live in the United States, their first six weeks on a U.S. campus, their overall first year experience, and their second year experiences after spending summer vacation back in Saudi Arabia.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Transition Theory**

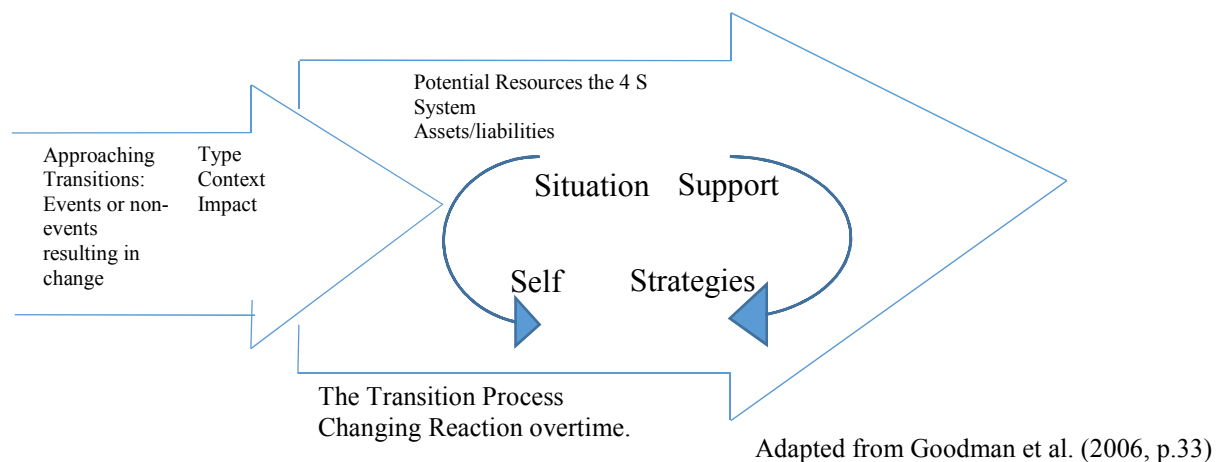
Transition Theory introduced by Schlossberg (1983) addressed the transition of adults who undergo conditions that force them to change their habits, responsibilities, and relationships. Goodman, Schlossberg and Anderson (2006) defined transition as "any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 33). If a transition occurs as a result of an anticipated event such as a marriage, travel, or getting a new job, people might

be more prepared to adjust to the transition. On the other hand, if the transition is not anticipated in situations such as death, sudden sickness, or job loss, the consequences of these transitions might have undesirable results (Goodman et al. 2006).

Likewise, transition is part of human life and it can be categorized into ordinary and extraordinary. The normal or ordinary incidents such as having a baby, getting married, or getting a new job usually have a positive impact on the individual. Whereas other incidents are extraordinary or abnormal, such as serious illness, road accidents that result in severe injuries, and death, normally have negative consequences on the individual (Goodman et al. 2006).

Adults who experience transitions undergo three stages; moving in, moving through, and moving out. In my study, the process is still moving on because the Saudi females were sophomores when I conducted my study. The moving in stage starts when individuals start a new role, experience, or responsibility in their lives. Moving through addresses the mixed feelings and emotions that individuals experience throughout their new practice, whereas, moving out encompasses the evaluation of individuals of their new experience (Goodman, et al. 2006). Throughout these three stages, adults need to use coping resources that assist their transition. These coping resources as identified by Goodman et al. (2006) are the four S's, or the four S system that incorporates self, situation, strategies, and support.

People who experience transition are of different ages, backgrounds, possess different characteristics and have divergent interests, abilities, and deficits. They also pass through various life changes such as death, divorce, marriage, losing a job or starting a new job, welcoming home a new baby, moving to another place, aging, sickness, as well as change in personal relationships (Goodman et al. 2006). Throughout these transitions, people need to use coping resources to assist their transition.



*Figure 4.* Schlossberg's Transition Model that Reflects the Individual Transition.

The coping resources, situation, support, self, and strategies, also known as the Four S's, help understand how adults experience transition and how they implement these resources to adjust to the new environment.

***Situation.*** The situation seeks to answer the question related to an event that took place in a specific time and environment and the influence of various variables on it (Goodman et al. 2006). Therefore, situation investigates the impact of the event on individuals' behaviors. For international students, the situation in which they need to transfer from their comfort zone requires implementing coping resources to facilitate their transition. As a transition triggers good or bad consequences, international students, who chose to study abroad and live in a different environment, expect to encounter various challenges. These challenges vary according to geographical area, culture, and gender. To illustrate, international students who arrive from a country that is close to the host country could adjust faster than students who arrive from remote areas. Moreover, international students who share some cultural aspects with the host country usually find that their adaptation process easier (Pedersen, 2004).

***Support.*** Support encompasses all possible resources a person needs to accommodate to a transition phase. The types of support could be psychological, financial, or social (Goodman, et

al. 2006). International students who receive support from family and friends back home are faster in adaptation to their new lives than students who lack this type of support (Eland and Thomas, 2013). Smith and Khawaja (2011) argued that international students who form friendships with domestic and other international students are able to adjust faster to the new environment in the host country than students who remain isolated. These friendships establish a support system for international students and help them adjust socially, psychologically, academically, and cognitively in the new setting. It may be hard for Saudi females to establish friendships with other international students due to the huge cultural differences and language barriers (Arafah, 2016). Moreover, some Saudi female students come to the U.S. with their families and children, therefore, establishing friendship networks adds more pressure on them as they encounter difficulty in balancing between their academic responsibilities and family commitments (Arafah, 2016). Financial support could be in forms of job opportunities and scholarships, whereas social support can be in forms of expanding their social networks and participation in various social and cultural events (Smith and Khawaja, 2011).

*Self.* addresses how one's attitude toward life may be influenced by a combination of the demographic characteristics such as socio-economic status, gender, age, ethnicity, and culture (Goodman et al. 2006). Usually individuals have their own resources, skills, and deficits. Therefore, the ability to understand one's own capacities may help one move through a transition. This ability may vary, as each individual has a unique personality (Goodman et al. 2006). Therefore, some international students who arrive in the United States for the first time may undergo psychological struggles. On one hand, they want to maintain their 'selves' that they have known since birth; and on the other hand, they may want to accommodate to the new life that, in most cases, does not fit their identities, or the selves that they have previously known

(Wu, Garza, and Guzman, 2015). For Saudi females, arriving from a society in which they acquired different values and morals than they find in American society and where religion is an integral part of their lives and personalities, their perceptions about life in the United States may affect their identities. Therefore, understanding the influence of the transition on their selves and identities add another dimension of the transition to understand. Goodman et al. (2006) asserted that people who have lived in situations where they acquire different values from those in their new situation act differently and therefore, their tolerance of transition may take a longer time. Moreover, people have a sense of self based on their socioeconomic class and gender.

Additionally, as international students transition to live in the United States, they may start to see situations and events from different perspectives including friendships and economic issues, and compare them with similar issues in their own culture. Therefore, these comparisons affect their perceptions about themselves and their roles in their new environment (Shapiro et al. 2014).

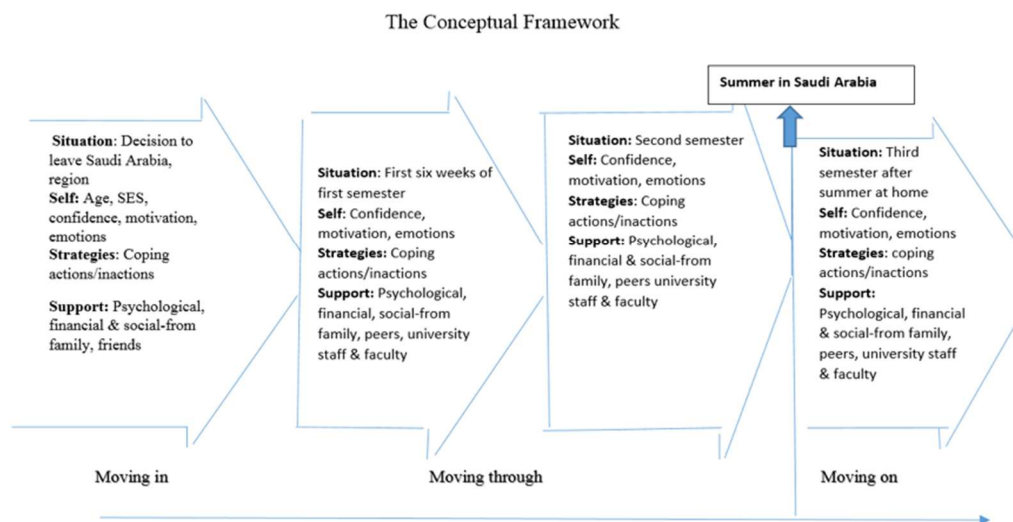
***Strategies.*** Strategies involve the approaches that individuals use to cope with the transition. Adults implement coping strategies that differ based on their gender and social status (Goodman et al. 2006). For instance, many men tend to hide their emotions, and therefore, their coping with transition takes longer time than for women who tend to share their worries and concerns to find applicable solutions (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Therefore, individuals use different coping strategies to reduce the stress that results from transition.

### **Saudi Female International Students' Transition**

Various theories address students' transition to college life. However, few have investigated the transitional challenges international students face on U.S. campuses. Despite hosting international students since the nineteenth century (Bevis and Lucas, 2007), most

theories that address college student development overlook international students. Furthermore, theories that have examined students of diverse backgrounds usually discuss minorities and students of color who were born or raised in the United States (Evans et al. 2010). Most of these theorists investigated specific topics such as first year college students, first generation college students, or minorities and students of color (Evans et al. 2010).

The Transition Theory that Schlossberg (1983) first presented to understand adult transition can be applied to international students because they experience similar stages to what Schlossberg introduced in her theory (Al Rumaih, 2016). In addition, the four coping resources that Goodman et al. (2006) implemented to understand the Adult transition, I used them to identify the Saudi female transition experiences of the moving in, moving through, and moving on phases. Therefore, for this research, my approach is to understand the role of the Four S's in four different stages.



*Figure 5:* Illustrates each of these stages and the implementation of the four S's in each process.

The transition stages that most international students experience can either help them grow to be more mature, or turn down, become anxious, depressed, and eventually fail

academically and drop out. When a transition occurs over a period of time, people experience the transition with mixed feelings. Moreover, Hopson (1981) argued that the transition requires integration with the new situation. The stage of acceptance might be delayed until the individual adjusts to the new situation.

Consequently, the transition period that most international students experience is accompanied with mixed feelings of happiness and anxiety. International students usually feel happy when traveling from their countries to the United States to achieve their dreams. However, their happiness, in most cases, does not last for long due to the various challenges they face (Shapiro, et al. 2014).

### **Stage One: Moving In**

Stage one starts when Saudi females made their decisions in Saudi Arabia to study abroad. This stage incorporates the four S's in supporting their decision. The *Self* reflects their motivation to study abroad, and the strength of their determination to prove their abilities as successful women. The *situation* includes the socioeconomic status of Saudi females and the area of Saudi Arabia where these women were raised. Goodman et al. (2006) suggested that “strategies incorporate implementing resources, functions, information seeking, direct action, and inhabitation of action” (p. 56). Most international students who wish to study in the United States first need to secure admission in one of the higher academic institutions in the United States, search for funding resources, and then apply for a student visa through the American Embassy or consulate in their country. They also need to seek information about studying in the United States, potential hindrances and obstacles.

## **Stage Two: Moving Through**

**Part one.** The first six weeks of the moving through this stage create the most critical *situation* for most international students. In most cases, international students' *self* undergoes mixed feelings of happiness and fear when they first arrive in the host country (Pedersen, 1995). They may feel happy to be in the "Dreamland" and fear about the unforeseen future. Moreover, they may experience low self-esteem and lack self-confidence that add more pressure (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Nevertheless, they may implement *strategies* such as navigating options for housing, transportation, dining places, and places for worship that might reduce their anxieties and pressure (Shapiro et al. 2014). They also seek help and *support* from campus resources and peers, who have been on campus for more than one year.

**Part two.** The second part of this moving through phase starts in the second semester of the first academic year. In this stage, some international students sense of *self* becomes stronger as they become more self-confident to make their own decisions (Ting-Toomey, 1999). They are now more familiar with campus services, academic requirements, and the culture of the host country (Pedersen, 1995). However, they still seek *support* from campus resources, academic departments, professors, and friends to overcome various challenges (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Their familiarity with the academic and social situations helps them ponder various strategies to overcome different obstacles.

## **Moving On**

This stage starts in the first semester in the second academic year. Saudi students, are offered free annual round trip tickets for them and their families to spend summer holidays in Saudi Arabia (SACM, 2016). In this stage, it is necessary to understand the implications of Saudi females when they come back to the United States after spending their summer vacation among

family and friends back home. The implementation of the four coping resources back home and when they return to the United States might have been changed since their first arrival in the United States. In the second academic year, most international students become more self-confident and independent (Ting-Toomey, 1999). However, the continuous academic and social challenges might suggest different strategies to handle various situations. Besides, their support system is now well established. Saudi females in this stage are now acquainted with life in the United States which would assist them with figuring out their support resources easily.

Persistence in the first academic year is considered a great achievement for most college students (Wayt, 2012). There are several factors that assist college students with their persistence. Social support as well as family and financial support are among other factors that play a key role in college student persistence (Wayt, 2012). For Saudi female international students, moving to the second year is considered a remarkable achievement for them and their families. The coping resources or the four S's: situation, self, support, and strategies are key factors in fostering persistence in college.

### **Applications of Transition Theory**

Many researchers used the transition theory to explore changes that adults experience in various settings. For example, Lazarowicz (2015) implemented the transition theory to understand the transition experiences of community college students who transferred to a four-year university. Pendleton (2007) identified the coping strategies of welfare recipients attending post-secondary institutions. Heck-Sorter (2012) used the transition theory to explore the academic and social experiences of students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders attending four-year universities. Long (2005) investigating the transition experiences of first –

generation students. Rumann (2010) explored the transition experiences of veterans' returning to community college.

Schlossberg's (1983) Transition Theory has been used in prior research on international students. For example, Kovtun (2010) explored the adaptation of international students to U.S. colleges and the impact of a first year foundation course at a large college in the Midwest on their academic performance. Similarly, Barg (2013) studied Chinese students' expectations and how they experienced transition to a Midwest university in their first semester. The phenomenological approach that Barg (2013) implemented investigated the differences between Chinese students' expectations before arriving in the United States and what their experiences were like after arriving in the U.S. The research question and sub-questions focused on Chinese students' social and academic lives in the United States including cultural adjustment, resources on campus, and interactions with Chinese students and other international students. Al Remailh (2016) used the transition theory, structural inertia theory, and Hofstede's cultural dimension categories in her study on the social and academic challenges that Saudi female international students encounter in the United States. The results revealed that Saudi females encountered several social and academic challenges while living and studying in the United States.

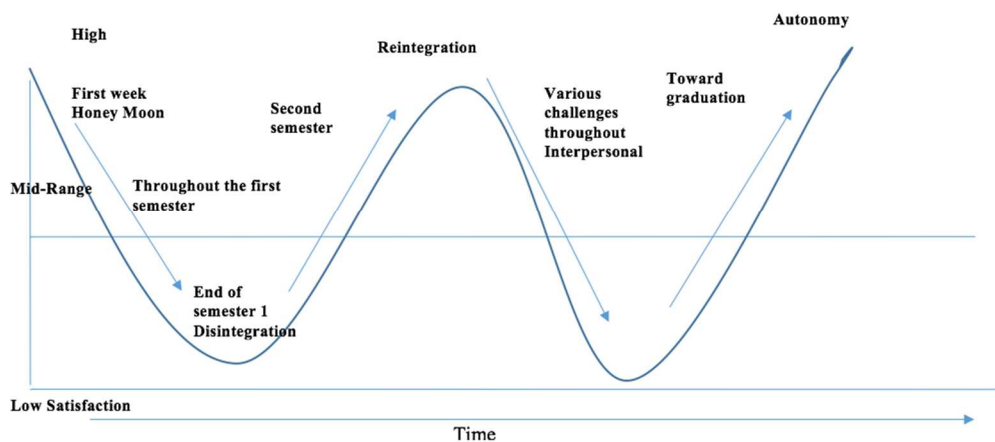
In a personal communication, Schlossberg communicated her interest in finding out how her theory will be applied to examine the transitional challenges of Saudi female international students in the United States (N. Schlossberg, personal communication, March 20, 2016).

### **Culture Shock Theory**

Culture Shock Theory first introduced by Oberg (1960) addressed the anxiety and stress that result from ignorance and unfamiliarity of what to do when exposed to a new culture (Pedersen, 1995). Pedersen (1995) expanded on Oberg's (1960) definition of culture shock as

“any situation where an individual is forced to adjust to unfamiliar social system where previous learning no longer applies” (p. 1). Those who move from one place to another where they need to adjust to new culture, language, values, and behaviors, usually experience six stages of culture shock (Pedersen, 1995). First, when a person does not know the appropriate behavior when in a new culture. The second stage addresses the values that a person acquires in his own culture that are not upheld in the host environment. Third, the disorientation within the host culture creates anxiety and discomfort. The fourth stage encompasses feelings of dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and lack of self-confidence. Fifth, the recovery skills that a person used to implement in home country are no longer valid in the host culture, and the sixth stage occurs when a person feels that this culture shock period is permanent and it will never end (Pedersen, 1995). Culture shock is usually accompanied with negative feelings including depression, discomfort, confusion, and rejection of the new culture (Oberg, 1960; Pedersen, 1995; Ting-Toomey, 1999).

Although many studies mention Oberg (1960) as the pioneer who developed the “U-curve” Culture Shock Theory, Pedersen (1995) asserted that Lysgaard (1955) was the first who developed the U-curve to explain his hypothesis regarding the various stages that international students experience in the host culture. Then, Oberg (1958) explained the stages that international students experience based on Lysgaard’s (1955) hypothesis. The U-curve of culture shock developed into the W-curve by Gullahorn and Gullahorn in 1963 (Pedersen, 1995). Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) pointed out that there are similarities in adjustment stages between moving to a new culture, and going back home which is known as “reverse culture shock” (Pedersen, 1995, p. 2).



*Figure 6.* Illustrates the Revised W- Shaped Model of Culture Shock Theory

In recent studies, Culture Shock Theory has been used to explain the hardships and acculturation challenges that international students encounter when moving to study in another country (Hotta and Ting-Toomey, 2013). Hotta and Ting-Toomey (2013) argued that despite the bulk of research that explored the challenges that international students experience in the host country, there is still a lack of in-depth understanding of the adjustment stages throughout international students' academic journeys. Most research on international students focuses on academic hardships, forming friendships, and social adjustment issues (Hakami, 2012; Davis, 2014; Portela-Myers, 2006). Hotta and Ting-Toomey (2013) conducted twenty interviews with international students. The interview analysis revealed that there were various adjustment patterns that form an M-shape rather than the traditional U, W, or J-curves. The M-shape explained the adjustment difficulties international students encounter when moving to a foreign country, and the contradictory feelings they experience (Hotta and Ting-Toomey (2013).

Other researchers investigated the effect of culture shock on international students' performance in the host country. For instance, Li (1999) conducted a study that explored the factors that contributed to culture shock on ESL student adjustment. The results of her study

showed that the degree of culture shock depends on several factors. For example, students who had previous travel experience did not experience culture shock at the same degree of students who had not traveled before. In addition, students who stayed for a longer time in the United States (more than one semester) were better adjusted than newly arrived students. Most importantly, forming friendships with American students contributed significantly in reducing the effects of culture shock among international students.

Similarly, Portela-Myers (2006) examined the relationship between culture shock and social support on international students. The quantitative study revealed that there was a strong positive correlation between culture shock and social support. International students who received social support upon arriving to the United States experienced lower levels of culture shock than international students who did not receive any form of social support. Moreover, international students whose English communication skills were more advanced reported fewer effects of culture shock and greater levels of social support compared with students whose English was less advanced. The research concluded that there was a strong positive correlation between English proficiency and the degree of culture shock.

Onyemenem (1988) also explored the effects of culture shock on international student adjustment. His quantitative study concluded that there was a strong relationship between age, gender, marital status, and culture shock. Generally, young international students had negative experiences in the host country especially in their first year. However, students who were older or who spent more time in the foreign country did not experience the same level of culture shock. Married students were able to overcome various challenges that accompanied culture shock better than single students. Notably, Onyemenem's (1988) study revealed that female students experienced alienation, homesickness, and frustration more than male students.

In addition, Mckinlay, Pattison, and Gross (1996) claimed that the previous research focused on the impact of culture shock on international students and the various shape models that could be applied to international students' psychological and behavioral situations. The geographical distance between the host country and the home country also plays a key role in either increasing or decreasing the effect of culture shock (Mckinlay et al. 1996). Nevertheless, Furnham and Bochner (1986) suggested that the geographical distance cannot predict the difficulties international students encounter when forming social relations. For example, students who arrive from neighboring countries are not necessary faster in adjusting to the culture of the host country. According to Mckinlay et al. (1996) acquiring social skills is another factor that helps international students reduce the impact of culture shock regardless the geographical distance.

Generally, most research on culture shock explained the stages of culture shock, its impact on students, and the negative consequences of it. However, the research that explored strategies to overcome the difficulties that accompany culture shock is scant. Moreover, studies that implemented culture shock theory typically focused on the whole population of international students and ignored national origin and religious differences. However, recent studies addressed the role of culture shock in shaping experiences of international students and took into consideration national origin and religious beliefs. For instance, Davis (2014) conducted a qualitative research to explore the acculturation adjustment of Saudi female international students in the United States. However, Davis (2014) did not explore the impact of culture shock on female Saudi students and superficially discussed stories of various incidents without supporting them with in-depth analysis. Similarly, Hakami (2012) conducted a quantitative study where she applied the Rasch Model to examine the acculturation challenges faced by Saudi

female international students in the United States. Although Hakami (2012) focused on acculturation challenges and adjustment hardships, she did not implement the Culture Shock Theory in her study. All the variables mentioned in her research, such as language, religion, social status, and social support, are considered essential components in Culture Shock Theory. However, Hakami's (2012) study agrees with Davis's findings (2014) that female international students' challenges range according to their English language proficiency, social support, and marital status. Female Saudis whose English is considered of an advanced level did not face a lot of challenges in adjusting to U.S. culture as others whose English proficiency was low. Moreover, students who received social support were able to adjust to life in the United States easier than students who felt alienated. Additionally, family plays a significant role in reducing stress that results from moving to a foreign country. Married Saudi female students adjusted faster to life in the United States than single females.

Although Davis (2014) and Hakami (2012) focused mainly on acculturation difficulties and to life in the United States, they did not conduct an in-depth analysis of the strategies these women used to cope with their new environment, nor the impact of these challenges had on their academic performance and social adjustment. Additionally, the theories implemented by both Hakami (2012) and Davis (2014) ignored the role of Culture Shock Theory and Transition Theory in understanding the various challenges Saudi females encountered.

While most research on Saudi female international students focused on their current challenges they encountered in the U.S. I focused on the transition periods Saudi females experienced since they made the decision in Saudi Arabia to study and live in the U.S. until their sophomore year. I also implemented the four coping resources presented in Goodman et al. (2006) (situation, support, self, and strategies) and how Saudi females used these coping

resources to persist and move to their sophomore year. In addition, the transition theory helped me understand the impact of transition on Saudi female identity development, and the changes occurred to their perspectives of social, academic, and political lives both in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia.

### **Summary of the Chapter**

In this chapter, I reviewed literature that served as a foundation for my research. Therefore, I started with a detailed account on the historic background of international students in the U.S., internationalization and the impact of campus diversity, campus climate and international students, inclusion of international students, sense of belonging, international student engagement, international student identity development, the academic and non-academic challenges that faced international students, more specifically female international students from Saudi Arabia. Next, I gave detailed account about the geographical regions in Saudi from where the Saudi females in my study came from, history of education of females in Saudi Arabia, higher education in Saudi Arabia, opportunities to study abroad through King Abdullah Scholarship Program. Then, I addressed the literature on Saudi female students on U.S. campuses. Then, I explained the philosophical framework that encompassed the underlying phenomenological approach, and the theoretical approach that incorporated the transition theory, and culture shock theory. Finally, I addressed in brief the research on Saudi female international students, the gap in literature that did not address the transition experiences of Saudi female students when transitioning from their home country to the U.S., and the coping resources they implemented to overcome various hindrances.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Methodology**

To understand the Saudi female international students' experiences on a U.S. campus, I used qualitative research methodology because it provided me with a large platform to describe, reflect, and interpret data collected (Patton, 2015). As I focused on understanding the essence of the individual experiences of this group of Saudi females through listening to their life stories by conducting the individual interviews, and their collective essence of experiences through the focus group, the underlying hermeneutic phenomenology approach perfectly fitted my research goals (Crowther et al. 2016). This also explains my choice of qualitative methodology over quantitative research method. Quantitative methodology is usually employed to generate numeric data from a large population. It is also structured and static where there is very limited space to understand the individual reflections (Hodis and Hancock, 2016).

### **Research Question**

As I stated in Chapter One, this study sought to answer the main research question:

- How do Saudi female international students navigate their transitional experiences to study and live during their first two academic years in an urban Midwest university?

This question guided my data collection and analysis as my focus was to understand, interpret, and reflect the essence of the Saudi female students' experiences and life stories when they left Saudi Arabia to study in the United States until their sophomore year.

This chapter describes the qualitative methods I used to conduct this study based on the underlying hermeneutic phenomenological approach. I also discussed the sample of students who participated in this study for both the individual interviews and the focus group interview, my data collection method, data analysis, validity and reliability, and the limitations of the study.

### **Goals of Framework**

I expect that my qualitative study will fulfill two goals. First, the results will impact higher education sector in the United States through stimulating international student recruitment, and second, it will foster diversity and multiculturalism awareness on U.S. campuses. With the constant increase of international students in the U.S. and the growing interest of higher education leaders to maximize numbers of international students on their campuses, understanding the experiences of this group of international students who arrive in the U.S. to achieve their dreams and get an American degree becomes imperative. Therefore, the underlying hermeneutic phenomenological approach was employed to craft, understand, and reflect the essence of the Saudi female stories.

My motivation to conduct this study was grounded on two main reasons. First, I am an international student who arrived from the Middle East and shared some similarities with the Saudi females. Second, I found out that literature on international students in general and Saudi students in particular did not dwell inside international students' lived experiences and report their reflections, interpretations of their lives, and the impact of living and studying in the U.S. on their identities. Previous research on international students focused primarily on challenges they encounter in the U.S. with little attention to gender, cultural, and religious differences.

### **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is the philosophy that provides the foundational inquiry framework for this study. The philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is considered the founder and the father of Phenomenological School in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Van Manen, 1990). Husserl believed that understanding human behaviors in different contexts stems from comprehending their lived experiences (Patton, 2015). As human beings experience life events differently, understanding

their experiences requires acknowledging their own perspectives and interpretations. It is necessary to understand the circumstances and conditions that encourage people to behave in a certain way in order to evaluate their behaviors toward various themes (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, in this study, I took into consideration the circumstances that motivated the Saudi female students to make the decision to study in the U.S. such as the region where they grew up, the level of their parents' education, the support they received, and the strategies they implemented to achieve their dream and come to the U.S. and persist.

Phenomenology attempts to describe the characteristics of human experiences that affect their lives and their behaviors (Van Manen, 1990). Thus, phenomenologists view human behaviors as a product of how people interpret their world (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975). Therefore, phenomenology helps understand how people experience things, the meaning of their experiences, and the impact of these experiences on themselves (Smith, 2016). Accordingly, I focused on the essence of the experiences of these Saudi females trying to understand what it meant to them to be independent, free, and responsible in the U.S. and the impact of these assets on their identities and growth as mature young women.

Most definitions of phenomenology revolve around the importance of understanding how individuals interpret their experiences of a specific subject or theme and the impact of their experiences on their future (Patton, 2015). This involves capturing and describing how individuals experience a phenomenon and how they make sense of it when sharing with others (Patton, 2015). In order to capture the lived experiences, it is essential to conduct in-depth interviews with participants to understand their perceptions, descriptions, and interpretations of a phenomenon (Patton, 2015). However, to get the best results of individual interviews,

participants need to feel comfortable and trust their interviewer so they can share their experiences wholeheartedly (Moustakas, 1994).

There are two main types of phenomenology. Edmund Husserl developed descriptive phenomenology while Martin Heidegger developed the interpretive phenomenology (Connelly, 2010). The descriptive phenomenology, also known as transcendental phenomenology which mainly seeks to understand people's lived experiences through giving detailed description (Smith, 2016), whereas, the interpretive phenomenology, also called hermeneutic phenomenology, focuses on how people interpret and make sense of their lived experiences (Moran, 2000).

As a researcher, my intention was not to work on data but with data (Van Manen, 2014). I did not play the role of a descriptivist who reported the picture as it is. Yet, I was an interpreter of each incident these females reported as part of their life stories. So, my duty was to collect these pieces of stories to complete the holistic picture of their experiences and instill soul in it to become like a magic mirror that reflected the inner sides of these females, how they felt, behaved, and reacted to various incidents. So, my role was to study the essence meaning of their transition from their responses to my questions. The essence was to be aware of what these transition experiences meant to them, and how they changed their lives, attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors differently from the first time they arrived in the U.S.

Therefore, for this study, I followed the hermeneutic phenomenology to help me understand the essence meaning of the Saudi female transition experiences. There are various definitions of hermeneutic phenomenology. Crowther et al. (2016) defined hermeneutic phenomenology as “an ongoing, creative, intuitive, dialectical approach that challenges pre-determined rules and research procedures, thus freeing us from dichotomous ‘right’ and ‘wrong’

ways of doing things” (p.2). After collecting my data from the individual interviews, my initial analysis was based on detailed description of their individual transition stories starting from Saudi Arabia and ending in the first semester of their sophomore year. The detailed description helped me understand the holistic experiences of these females. In this stage, I suspended myself from giving any judgment or justification on their description. I gave them adequate time to describe their experiences, what they liked and disliked and what they agreed on or disagreed. This stage is called phenomenological reduction or epoch (Edmund and Kennedy, 2017; Giorgi, 2009).

Then, I analyzed their stories based on the transition theory stages, moving in, moving through, and moving on and by applying the four coping resources, situation, support, self, and strategies. I wanted to understand the factors and circumstances that contributed to facilitate their transition (Kaufer and Chemero, 2015). I also wanted to know how they were able to overcome various challenges and the impact their impact on themselves and their perceptions about the academic and social lives in the U.S. Then, the last step, I was able to explore the essence of their experiences by asking the questions, what did it all mean to them? How did these factors affect their lived experiences? What was the impact of these experiences on themselves and their academic and social lives? And whether their experiences were inspirational, influential, or overwhelming (Smith, 2016). Then, I shared my initial analysis with the focus group to get more in-depth understanding of their experiences and topics they mentioned but did elaborate on. Integrating the analysis of the individual interviews and the focus group interview fostered my understanding of the essence meaning of the Saudi female experiences.

Therefore, the main goal of hermeneutic phenomenological research was to reflect the lived experiences of these 10 Saudi female students when making the decision to study and live

in the U.S., and their own interpretations of their transition experiences. This approach also focused on understanding the challenges they encountered and the coping resources they employed to overcome several obstacles from the perspectives of the participants themselves. The three main transition stages (moving in, moving through, and moving on) supported understanding of the ways these Saudi females employed the four S's (situation, self, support, and strategies) as they progressed through their transition experiences.

### **Sample**

The participants of this study were 10 sophomore Saudi female international students who volunteered to participate comprising approximately 60% of the population of Saudi female sophomore students attending an urban Midwestern research university.

For this study, I used three expressions to refer to the Saudi female participants, "girl" to refer to unmarried female, "woman" refers to both married and divorced females, and "females" refers to both girls and women.

The university where I conducted my study in is situated in one of the most diverse cities in the Midwest (Kent and Frohlich, 2015). There are about 27,000 degree seeking students, of which about 16,000 are international students representing 81 countries comprising 5.9% of the whole student population. In the academic year 2014-2015, Saudi students were the second largest international student body after Chinese students comprising 23.3% of international student population in the same university. Among the 373 enrolled undergraduate and graduate Saudi students, around 200 were females. This number of enrolled Saudi students is higher than other comparable campuses in the Midwest. For instance, there were only 39 enrolled Saudi students in a neighboring city in the academic year 2012-2013 (Simmons, 2012).

Furthermore, there is a strong representation of Muslims in this city where the university I conducted my study was situated. The estimation of Muslim residents in 2015 in the same city was 20,000 comprising 1.3 % of the city population. The presence of this Muslim population, creates a sense of community for Saudi female students. They can ponder their food choices among a variety of Arabic grocery stores, celebrate Muslim religious occasions, and practice their religion in one of the nine mosques across the city. Furthermore, living expenses such as rent, utilities and transportation are relatively lower than other bigger cities in the Midwest.

The Saudi female sophomore females in this study were selected to capture their lived experiences spending two academic years at the university and who persisted the first year in college. The phenomenological approach of this study suggests, as Patton (2015) asserts, that people retrospectively talk about their experiences after a period of time, they can recall their feelings, emotions, and incidents. “One cannot reflect on an experience while living through the experience” (p. 104). Therefore, the individual interview guide was derived from the conceptual framework to capture the essence of these young women’s experiences. The conceptual framework provided a guide but did not limit the possibility of other themes to emerge.

Therefore, sophomore students were able to reflect their lived experiences from when they first decided to study in the United States, the challenges they encountered in their home country when they made the decision and through their experiences in three academic semesters on a U.S. campus. Moreover, six of these Saudi students spent their summer vacation in Saudi Arabia. The students’ reflections of their experiences in their home country after spending an academic year in the U.S. revealed their interpretations of their experiences back home through the lens of making comparisons between their lives in Saudi Arabia and the U.S. The lengthy in-depth interviews fostered understanding how these young women made sense of the various

experiences they encountered and the coping resources they implemented to overcome various hindrances.

In qualitative research that employs the phenomenological approach, there is no magic number of participants (Vagle, 2014). The sample of 10 for this study, however, included nearly 60 percent of the total population of 17 Saudi sophomore female students at the Midwestern University at the time. The focus of this study was on the lived experiences of these Saudi female students, their stories, and own interpretations of their experiences (Vagle, 2014; Seidman, 1998).

Recruiting Saudi female international students started after securing approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) on campus. When preparing the IRB documents, I paid particular attention to protect the confidentiality of the participants given cultural difference between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia and the fact that Saudi females cannot study abroad without a written permission from their guardians. In addition, using pseudonyms and referring to their cities where they grew up in Saudi with the name of the whole region aimed to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the information these females shared.

The recruitment was accomplished through personal communication with Saudi females and the campus database. The pilot study I conducted in spring 2016 provided the basis of this current study and helped me recruit the Saudi females. Two students I interviewed for the pilot study connected me with their friends who were also sophomore students. Furthermore, as a devout Muslim woman myself, I went to the prayer room on campus where most Saudi students go to perform their prayers, where I was able to connect with sophomores who also helped me connect with other students who met the criteria for the sample for this study. In addition, I was

able to get a list of all sophomore Saudi females on campus with their contact number and email addresses from campus database, which made the recruitment process easier.

### **Data Collection**

Conducting individual interviews with 10 sophomore Saudi female students aligns with the spirit of the phenomenological approach. My goal was to understand the meaning of lived experiences of participants, elicit their interpretations of their transition experiences, their feelings about themselves when they made the decision, the essence of their experiences, and the coping resources they implemented to overcome various difficulties. Therefore, the interview guide mirrored the conceptual framework.

In order to encourage Saudi females to share their lived experiences, it was important to build rapport with them through introducing the purpose of the study, the reason for conducting the interviews, and the benefits others might gain when the results of the study were published. Adequate explanation about the study helped the females feel more comfortable when they shared their experiences. Moreover, the trust relationship was reinforced because I, as the researcher, am also from the Middle East and shared some similarities with the Saudi females such as language and religious affiliation. Because I assured the participants that their identities would remain confidential and pseudonyms would be used instead of their real names, the students were encouraged to share their experiences and express their opinions wholeheartedly which significantly affected the richness of data collected.

The individual interview questions addressed the five time periods of these females' transition experiences. Each time incorporated questions on the role of the four Ss in facilitating their transition. Making the decision to study in the U.S., the support they received, their feelings about themselves, and the strategies they implemented to overcome various obstacles. As the

interview questions were derived from the conceptual framework, they did not limit the possibility of other themes to emerge that might assist the conceptual framework (See Appendix A).

Eight of the Saudi females used Arabic to answer the interview questions as they mentioned it was more convenient for them to express their opinions and feelings in their mother tongue. Two females used English with some Arabic expressions, phrases, and terminologies. I translated and transcribed all interviews to ensure confidentiality, reliability and trustworthiness of the research.

All Saudi females answered all questions without any reservations. The amount of information they shared revealed the level of comfort they felt when sharing their experiences. They expressed their happiness to meet and talk with a researcher who cared about sharing their experiences with a larger population and having their voice to be heard. Some of them told me that they did not feel they received adequate care as international students who arrived in the U.S. knowing nothing about both academic and social lives. They needed to explore various options and resources by themselves and with the help of their Saudi friends and relatives in the U.S. However, some students asked me not to include some information they shared for more protection of their identities and confidentiality, which I did.

I conducted nine interviews in the Student Union on campus, and one interview via Skype. The Union is the place where most Saudi females meet, especially during the prayer times where the prayer room is located. I asked all females if they would prefer another place on campus or a nearby coffee shop where they might feel more comfortable, but all agreed to have the interview in the Union. Before starting the interview questions, I asked each the females to read the consent form and sign it. I also assured them that they needed to understand each item in

the consent form that aimed to protect their confidentiality. I also asked the females for their permission to record the interviews, and all agreed. I assured all females that all recordings would be destroyed as soon as I finished my data analysis and published my research. At the end of each interview, I informed each female that I would call again to invite her to participate in a focus group interview; four females were able to participate in the focus group. This focus group served as a follow up after analyzing the individual interviews so I could elicit their feedback about the initial analysis, and they all agreed. The focus group was also an expansion of the findings of the individual interviews because I addressed issues that the females in the individual interviews did not give adequate detail.

The focus group question guide was derived from the conceptual framework and the themes emerged from the individual interviews. The focus group interview with four participants improved my understanding of the essence of the transition experiences of these women after I had completed the initial analysis of the individual interviews. The collective thoughts of these four females assisted me with comprehending their perspectives about their lived experiences, their interpretations of several themes, the changes that occurred to their understanding of themselves, people, and settings. In addition, because of the focus group, I was better able to understand the impact of their transitions on their identities and their own interpretations of social, economic, and political issues in both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia

The focus group interview took place in the second week of the spring semester of the students' sophomore year. I sent a Doodle Poll to arrange time and venue, and I sent all 10 participants text messages to their cell phones. Four students were able to join the focus group interview. The focus group was held in the meeting room on campus. When students arrived, I explained to them the purpose of the focus group and I asked them to sign the consent form. I

also asked for their permission to record the discussion while ensuring confidentiality. All females used Arabic as a means of communication as it was more convenient for them to share their stories and experiences with their group. During the focus group, the females also shared a lot of information that they asked me not to disclose it in the study for further protection of their confidentiality, which I also did. After recording all responses, I translated and transcribed their accounts.

Conducting focus group interviews assists researchers with getting a variety of collaborations with the participants (Morgan, 1997). Therefore, the focus group I conducted with four females was a unique opportunity to share their insights about several topics. The group discussion motivated them to share their experiences, agreements and disagreements on the several topics.

### **Data Analysis**

Each interview required between seven to nine hours of translation and transcribing. This process was done after each interview to help me stay engaged throughout the data collection and analysis as suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). I added line numbers to each interview transcript to make it easier to refer to quotes. This means for example, in the first cycle coding when I added the related quotations for each of the participants, I added the line number, so it became easier for me to pull out the full quotation from the context. Interviews after being translated and transcribed were coded. The coding process was based on three cycles. The first cycle coding was for all interviewees. An Excel sheet document was used to make it easier to expand horizontally and vertically to accommodate quotes from all ten participants. Students' pseudonyms were added at the top of each column. Then, vertically, the Excel sheet was divided into five main sections representing the five time periods, starting from Time One

when the Saudi female students were in Saudi Arabia and their experiences when they made their decisions to study in the U.S. The second section included their Time Two reflections about their experiences in the first semester when they first arrived in the U.S. for the first time in their lives. The Time Three section included participants' reflections about their experiences in their second semester of their freshman year. The Time Four section reflected their experiences when six of them spent their summer vacations in their home country after spending one academic year in the U.S. Finally, the Time Five section of the matrix included the participants' reflections about their experiences in the first semester of their sophomore year.

Then, I divided each main section into four categories for the four coping resources: situation, support, self, and strategies. The main reason for dividing each main section into four subcategories was to facilitate understanding of the Saudi female students' perspectives about their transitional experiences and the impact of the coping resources on their transitions. So, the process of adding quotations for each participant for each time period that matched the coping resource made the coding and analysis processes easier and added credibility and trustworthiness to the work.

### **First Cycle Coding**

The first cycle coding was based on the conceptual framework. As I employed the hermeneutical phenomenological approach, informed by transition theory and culture shock theory, I looked for related words and concepts such as experience, self, support, strategies, situation, cultural differences, barriers, disintegration, dependence, independence, confidence, responsibility, lost, academic difficulties, and alienation. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) described the first cycle coding as a way to "retrieve and categorize similar data chunks so the researcher can quickly find, pull out, and cluster segments relating to a particular research

question, hypothesis, construct, or theme” (p. 72). Therefore, I categorized the transitional experiences that Saudi female students faced based on Schlossberg’s (1983) Transition Theory, and the three stages of my conceptual framework: moving in, moving through (part one and two), and moving on. All codes and sub codes were developed throughout the transcribing process. Therefore, the initial cross-case coding helped me draw out similar words, phrases, and ideas from the matrix created. This method according to Miles et al. (2014) helps find segments of data. In the first cycle coding I added to the matrix the students’ quotations that matched each stage of their transition and each coping resource with the line number from their transcriptions.

To illustrate, “Father’s support” was a code that emerged in Time One. Ghada, Lara, Lana, Layan, and Ishraq explained how their fathers supported their decision to study abroad and provided tremendous emotional support. Therefore, the code emotional support was added. I used SUPPORT as a main code, “emotional” was listed as a sub code, “father” was listed as sub sub code.

*Table 4. First Cycle Coding*

Time One	Ghada	Lara	Lana	Layan	Ishraq
SUPPORT b.emotional i. father	"My father talked to my brother about my right to try something new and study abroad. He told him that he had the opportunity to study abroad and I have the right as well" (19)	" So, my father agreed and encouraged me to study and get a degree from another country."33	"The main support I got was mainly from my husband and my father, they supported me a lot."126	"My father appreciates the degrees from the U.S., he knows that getting a degree from the U.S. will help me find a good job in the future."63	"My father is the biggest supporter for me, even in the later stages, he was the best friend of me."(21)

## Second Cycle Coding

The second cycle coding requires grouping words, phrases, and concepts into a smaller number of themes (Miles et al., 2014). The choice of themes was based on their relevance to the theoretical framework mentioned earlier in this research (Miles et al. 2014). This process also helped me see where similar themes were also congruent with the conceptual framework. In this process, I also looked for the outliers that either contradicted the main themes, or did not fit with the original conceptual framework. I kept these themes to support my analysis of data collected. For instance, Ghada talked about marriage traditions in Saudi Arabia in Time One, which at that point did not belong to the conceptual framework that mainly address the lived experiences of the Saudi females. However, When Ishraq mentioned the huge transformations happened to her personality, particularly, her new perspectives and attitudes toward traditional marriage in Saudi Arabia, at this point I could use what Ghada mentioned about marriage traditions in Saudi Arabia in Time Four to support Ishraq's point of view.

In the second cycle coding, I deleted all the quotations and kept the line numbers only which made my document much smaller. This made it easier for me to see similarities and differences among themes for all 10 participants together on only one sheet.

*Table 5. Second Cycle Coding*

Time One	Ghada	Lara	Lana	Layan	Ishraq
SUPPORT b.emotional i. father	(19)	(33)	(126)	(63)	(21)

### Third Cycle Coding

Third cycle coding focused on finding patterns across the data collected from all of the individual interviews with the Saudi females. I colored the main themes that emerged in different colors to indicate the times they were repeated among the 10 participants.

*Table 6. Third Cycle Coding*

Time One	Ghada	Lara	Lana	Layan	Ishraq
SUPPORT b. emotional i. father	(19)	(33)	(126)	(63)	(21)

The cross-case analysis aimed to find generalizations that address the phenomena I was attempting to understand. Miles et al. (2014) assert that the “fundamental reason for cross-case analysis is to deepen understanding and explanation” (p.101). The systemic analysis I followed also helped assure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Patton, 2015).

Keeping an updated memo notebook also helped me organize my data and find similar patterns and themes from which to derive the conclusion and implications of the study. Writing memos throughout the analysis process helped me record my initial impressions, observations, and thoughts (Miles et al. 2014). For example, the large body of data was overwhelming to organize based on themes and patterns that emerged and connect them to students, who said what. Therefore, the memo notebook was a kind of training for me to organize my data according to their relevance to each time. For instance, in Time Four, not all students went to Saudi Arabia for summer vacation, so, I had to document this in the memo notebook. Their experiences with the limited freedom of mobility was a major theme in Situation Time Four. However, they address this limited freedom from different angles. So, I added this to my memo as well. Limited freedom of mobility for Dalia was her inability to go to the grocery shop down the street to buy food. For Lara, she had to call one of her male family members to offer her a

drive to either visit a friend or go shopping. For Lana, if none of her male family members was free to give her a ride, she used to cancel her plans to go out.

### **Preparation of Summary Document to Share with the Focus Group**

Once I finished analyzing the 10 interviews and recorded the major themes and patterns that emerged, I prepared a report to share with participants in the focus group. I also prepared the focus group interview guide (See Appendix B) to elicit more reflections to understand if the essences of their experiences were similar or different. For example, in the individual interview, going back to Saudi Arabia after graduation was not on one of the girl's future agenda. She loved life in the U.S. where she enjoyed freedom of mobility, speech, and dress. This theme was also shared with other females in the individual interviews. Therefore, I wanted to address this theme in the focus group interview to understand the different interpretations of these females of life in the U.S. and the reasons that motivated them to stay. So, when I shared this finding with the focus group, they agreed on the idea that life in the U.S. was comfortable and they enjoyed several rights, however, they would not live here forever. One of the girls shared her experience as she grew up in an open-minded family. She preferred to stay in the U.S. However, she would go back to Saudi Arabia and live there in case she got married and had children. She wanted her children to grow up in a Muslim community. Another girl who disagreed with her family back in Saudi Arabia regarding covering her face with *Niqab*, she surprised me when she mentioned that she would be ready to cover her face in Saudi Arabia if it was the only condition to live with her family back home. She preferred to be covered and be with her family to be uncovered and live alone. Her answer revealed her strong ties with her family and the place where she grew up in.

Therefore, the main goal of having a focus group interview after the individual interviews was to share the themes that emerged from the analysis of the interviews, expand them, and

uncover other meanings. For instance, there were a few apparent differences in opinions and perspectives among the females regarding their understanding of diversity, American students, sense of belonging, financial issues, changes in thoughts and beliefs and the decision to either stay in the U.S. after graduation or leave back home. Therefore, the focus group interview provided opportunities for the participants to support, confirm, or reject the emerging themes.

### **Analysis of Focus Group Interview**

After translating and transcribing the focus group interview, I carefully read the transcription for the initial coding so it became easier to generate themes and integrate them in the analysis of the individual interviews. Writing memos throughout the process helped me track the expressions used, participants' reflections on the issues and the subjects discussed, and participants' level of engagement and enthusiasm for the initial findings of the individual interviews. The second stage of analysis involved categorizing the common themes and patterns, and noting where and whether there were similarities with the themes that emerged from the individual interviews. I also noted expressions that reflected the participants' interpretations of various incidents and issues, and the terms they used to describe situations and events.

### **Integration of Findings**

After analyzing both the individual interviews and the focus group interview, visual integration of findings helped me understand the phenomena, similarities, and differences between both results. Lambert and Loisell (2008) asserted that the integration of individual interviews and focus group interview results guide the exploration of the phenomena that a research aims to investigate. For example, when I asked the females in the individual interviews about the American friends, they did not give a detailed account of the nature of the relationship with American students. They only mentioned that they met some in their classes. However, in

the focus group, they gave more details about the nature of their friendships with American students. They were also able to identify American students of different backgrounds. For example, one of the girls mentioned that she had American roommate from Latin America, another woman shared her experience with her African American friend who cried when she left her for Saudi Arabia to visit her family, and another girl mentioned her White American friend who had several mutual interests with her. So, I integrated the two findings by saying that the Saudi females were able to form friendships with American students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds when they were in their sophomore year, the time when the Saudi females became familiar with social life in the U.S. In addition, all students confirmed that living in the U.S. gave them an opportunity to meet people from different cultures and backgrounds, which enriched their multicultural awareness and encouraged them to revisit what they learned in their country about other people who were affiliated to different religions, sects, and beliefs.

When I asked the females in the individual interviews about their scholarship they received from their government, none of them shared her feelings toward her country. Therefore, I wanted to understand their own interpretation of receiving this scholarship and whether it affected their sense of belonging to Saudi Arabia or not. I assumed that their answers would be positive and their love to their country increased. However, I was surprised that all of the four females who participated in the focus group affirmed that there was no relationship between the scholarship and their sense of belonging. So, I added this part in the findings of the individual interviews in Self- Time Five.

In the interpretation step, I addressed the question “What does it all mean?” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 12). For this research, it was essential to make sense of the transition experiences in terms of what they meant to these Saudi females, to distill the essence of their transitions, and

understand the impact of the transitions from their own perspectives. Keeping the focus on the meaning of the experiences to the Saudi females themselves guided all steps of the analysis and helped derive conclusions and implications of this study. In the interpretation stage I was careful to bracket myself and not to involve my own experience as an international student arriving from the Middle East and sharing the same religion and language with the Saudi females.

Although most students in the individual interviews have limited access to American students, they appreciate their hard work. In the focus group students made a comparison between themselves and the American students. While KASP covers Saudi students' tuition fees and pays monthly stipend in addition to other privileges, American students need to work two or three jobs to pay for their college expenses.

Furthermore, in the individual interviews four females indicated that they loved living in the U.S., and they would like to stay after graduation. In the focus group, two of these young women declared that although they enjoyed freedom in the U.S. and other privileges, they want to go back and be with their families in Saudi Arabia. The third student revealed that she did not have plans to go to Saudi Arabia after graduation because she wanted to establish her life in the U.S.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Implementing the hermeneutic phenomenological approach in data collection runs the risk of the researcher imposing their own biases into the narrative of the participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2015). As this research aims to explore the lived experiences of sophomore Saudi females from their own perspectives, I might, unintentionally, impose my interpretations derived from my own experiences as an international student from the Middle East. This could present issues related to the reliability and validity of the research. In order to avoid any potential bias or

ethical issues in data collection and analysis, I bracketed my own experiences when interviewing the Saudi females. I did not affect participants' opinions by imposing my own experiences, suggesting solutions, or agreeing or disagreeing with their narratives. Had I done so, these issues could affect the whole procedure of the research and hence, the research might be considered invalid (Creswell, 2015).

In qualitative research, researchers should build trust with readers (Chenail, 1995) as well as with participants. Building this trust can be accomplished through various means, including providing the information that I told the Saudi females at the beginning of the individual interviews and the focus group interview about the purpose and the significance of the research (Chenail, 1995). Similarly, Wolcott (1994) asserted that if a theory is going to guide the research from the beginning, it is important to inform the readers to avoid any type of confusion. Therefore, in both the individual interviews and the focus group interview, I informed the Saudi female students about the theories I used in my research. For example, in the focus group, I drew the cultural shock line on board that shows the five stages of culture shock theory as suggested by Ting-Toomey (1999), and then I asked the Saudi girls to draw their own cultural shock lines to learn whether they believed their experiences were similar or different from those proposed in the theory. Surprisingly, none of the females' lines matched the culture shock theory. In addition, the difficulties in their lines represented their academic challenges only. The discrepancies between the two cultures, the American and the Saudi did not create any hindrances for their integration. Therefore, the culture shock theory does not apply to the group of Saudi females in my study.

To set criteria to ensure credibility of qualitative research methods should be clearly clarified at the beginning of the research to give readers a clear idea about the research approach

(Shenton, 2004). Then, a researcher should introduce the research participants by providing details that help readers understand the demographic information of participants and the circumstances that can affect them throughout the research (Shenton, 2004). The sample in this case is the 10 Saudi females in their second year in college. Moreover, Shenton (2004) states that a researcher could use more than one method in conducting qualitative research such as a focus group, observations, and case study to ensure the credibility of the results, which I did.

To ensure honesty when the researcher is collecting data, participants need to be given the choice to decline, revoke, or withdraw from the study if they do not feel comfortable answering the questions (Shenton, 2004). Participants who find themselves forced to participate may not give the detailed information that a researcher hopes or they may give false information (Shenton, 2004). For this research, all participants signed a consent form that ensured their voluntary participation and their right to decline answering any question or withdrawing without any negative consequences. One Saudi girl called me after I interviewed her and told me that she wanted to withdraw from the study. She also asked me to destroy her voice recording which I did.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The small sample of Saudi females, 10 sophomore participants, might not represent the whole population of Saudi female students on other U.S. campuses, even though the sample represents more than half the population of Saudi sophomore students at the Midwestern University. There were more than 17,000 Saudi female undergraduate and graduate students studying the United States in the academic year 2014-2015 (Open Doors, 2015), and they were distributed across the United States. Saudi sophomore female students at other campuses might have different experiences from my sample. In addition, because this study addresses the

transition challenges of sophomore Saudi female students their perspectives about their experiences might be different from those of juniors, seniors, and graduate Saudi females. In addition, this study only addressed the transition experiences of female Saudi students whose experiences might be different from their male counterparts who enjoy a larger space of freedom from social, cultural, and religious standpoints.

### **Summary of the Chapter**

In this chapter, I explained the processes I followed when conducting my study. The use of the hermeneutic phenomenological approach, the sample size of participants, data collection, data analysis, sharing the initial report of the individual interviews with the focus group, integrating the results of the individual interviews and focus group, ethical issues, validation and reliability of the study, and research limitations.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

The five sections of this chapter presented the Saudi sophomore female students' reflections on the five periods of their transition experiences starting from Saudi Arabia where the decision was made to pursue undergraduate study in the United States through the first semester of their sophomore year. The first period started in Saudi Arabia when each female made the decision to study in the United States. The second period depicted the Saudi girls' experiences in the first semester on a U.S. campus. The third period described their transition to their second semester. The fourth period described their experiences when they went back home during the summer holiday. Finally, the fifth period explored their experiences during their first semester of their second academic year in the U.S. As I shared what the 10 Saudi females revealed about their experiences in each of the five periods, I used transition theory to describe their understandings of the situations they faced, incorporating the coping resources of support, self, and strategies to help understand the impact of their transition experiences in the U.S. and the fundamental changes in their identities, perspectives, and beliefs.

### **Participants' Demographics**

The 10 Saudi females who participated in this study were sophomore students who completed two academic semesters in a Midwest campus and started their sophomore year when the individual interviews were conducted. The focus group took place in the second week of second semester of the sophomore year. All females indicated that they were members of the middle class in Saudi Arabia which constitutes more than 60 percent of the total population, or about 18 million of the estimated 29.3 million in 2015 census (Alnuaim, 2013).

## **Marital Status and Children**

The ages of females ranged between 20-26 years old. Five were single, four were married, two had children, one was pregnant, and one was divorced. In Saudi Arabia, the word “girl” refers to single female who never got married whereas, “woman” refers to both married and divorced females. Therefore, for this study, the word “girl” refers to single females, “woman” refers to married and divorced, and I used “females” when I referred to girls and / or women.

## **Area of Origin**

The participants arrived from different areas in Saudi Arabia: The West Coast, the East Coast, the East region, and the Central region. In Saudi Arabia, regions vary in degree of conservatism, especially when related to the treatment of women, travel, and dress code. The most conservative areas are the Central Region, where the capital city Riyadh is located, and the East Region where Ihassa is located on the border with Qatar. According to the females interviewed for this study, conservative families in Saudi Arabia do not allow females to uncover their faces, leave their houses, or travel alone without a male companion known as *Mahram*. A *Mahram* is a male companion who can be either a husband, son, father, grandfather, uncle, or nephew. However, there are always exceptions. In Riyadh, the capital city, there are some open-minded families who allow female family members to travel alone and to get their education abroad. Conversely, in regions that are predominantly open-minded, not all families give permissions to their daughters to study abroad or go out without covering their faces.

The increasing number of educated Saudi men since the establishment of the first university in Saudi Arabia in 1957 has created fundamental changes in the Saudi society (Altorki, 1986). Despite the slow improvement of social lives of Saudi females, the rights they

gained in the last few years have been remarkable. When King Abdullah was formally enthroned in 2005, he created substantial changes in the country that had positive effects on people's lives. Rules regarding females have become more flexible; for example, a male guardian may give a written permission to a female relative to travel without him accompanying her.

### **English Language Program**

Six of the females learned English while living in other English-speaking areas before arriving in the Midwest. Five lived previously elsewhere in the U.S. between two months and two years, and two lived in other English speaking countries. The time they spent taking English courses before gaining admission to their academic programs ranged from four months to two years.

### **Academic Programs**

Eight of the participants were studying health care sciences related majors and two were studying social sciences.

### **Time One Transition: Decision to Study in the United States**

Time One addressed the challenges the 10 females encountered in their home country when they made the decision to study and live in the United States. It incorporated the four coping resources they implemented to facilitate their transition, situation, support, self, and situation.

### **Situation – Time One**

The situation for Time One described the area where these females grew up and their families' perspectives about their studying abroad. It also addressed the females' decisions to study abroad, who supported or opposed the decision and why. Findings also revealed the big

differences between the Saudi females' generation and their mothers' and grandmothers' generation. The females' attitudes toward religious police was another theme that emerged in the situation in Time One. Finally, some girls' situations in Time One were affected by complicated admission requirements to Saudi universities.

**Region and family.** The situations of both family and region where these females grew up played significant roles in their choices to study abroad. Whether or not a region reflects open-mindedness toward females, the region has an impact on the families that live in that region. Females who were raised in open-minded families and who grew up in a relatively open-minded region such as the West and the East Coast of Saudi Arabia did not face major challenges in making the decision to study abroad. These two regions do not impose strict rules and regulations on women in terms of travel and study. Therefore, most families residing in these two areas are influenced by the cultural norms of the region. One of the girls mentioned that she grew up as independent because her parents raised her in this way. They never imposed their opinion on her nor ask her to wear hijab or be covered when travelling outside Saudi Arabia.

On the contrary, the Central region where the capital city Riyadh is situated, rules and instructions prohibit women to uncover their faces or travel alone. Women must be accompanied by a male guardian (Le Renard, 2014). However, there were exceptions. The family of one of the girls, who lived in a very conservative region, was open minded compared to other families in the same region. Therefore, her father was criticized for allowing his daughters to study abroad. She explained:

I was born and grew up in the Central Region. It is known that my area is one of the most conservative regions in Saudi Arabia. It is hard for girls to make their own decisions or travel alone, or even speak aloud their opinion and thoughts. So, it was bizarre for people

to see us as an open minded family, especially my father who motivated me and my sister to study in the United States.

In contrast, the region where one of the women was from was known for being an open-minded region to be compared to other regions in Saudi Araba. She stated:

People who grew up in the West Coast are different because the location of this area, and it is a commercial city, so people come to it from different areas around the world. This also explains why there is much more freedom in my region.

**Social status.** All females interviewed declared their belonging to the middle class in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi society witnessed dramatic socio economic changes after the oil advent in 1938 (Altorki, 1986). Thousands well-paid jobs were created in the oil sector and other economic and service divisions in the Kingdom. Saudi qualified nationals have the priority of employment in high ranking positions that offer large salaries and several benefits, whereas, lesser professional expatriates take positions that offer fewer privileges (Alnuaim, 2013). In addition, the historic geographical location of Saudi Arabia increased its importance as an international channel that connects the East to the West. Therefore, trade was one of the most popular and ancient professions in the Kingdom. Many Saudi have their own businesses either in a form of firms or local business stores that sell different goods (Alnuaim, 2013). The free tax business conditions help the economy flourish in the country and encourage international companies to open their branches in the Kingdom which has increased employment and the country's monetary revenues (Haddad, 2013). In addition, the Saudi annual income is considered the highest in the region (Haddad, 2013). Therefore, the participants of this study belong to the middle class as they revealed that their fathers were either businessmen, or employees in high

ranking positions so that their salaries allowed them to own their own houses, support their families, and travel overseas for vacations (Alnuaim, 2013).

**Generational differences.** The Saudi culture witnessed several changes since 2005 when King Abdulla of Saudi Arabia took the lead, as the females confirmed. These changes incorporated study abroad opportunities and the dress code for Saudi females.

**Study abroad.** When the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) was launched in 2005, many families were hesitant to send their daughters to study abroad. Despite the huge benefits KASP offered to all Saudi students, females' families had several concerns. For example, the institutionalized segregation of Saudi society and the dominance of males created doubts among families whether their daughters were well-prepared to live in a divergent culture, take care of themselves, and succeed (Hamdan, 2005). In addition, one of the women mentioned that her father was scared to send her abroad because she was only 18 years old. Although her brother was studying in the U.S. at that time, and it was planned for her to stay with her brother, her father was hesitant to give her permission to travel.

However, when the first few females who took advantage of the KASP returned with American degrees, more families were encouraged to send their girls to the U.S. One of the females explained:

At that time, it was very unfamiliar for girls to study abroad. No one at that time, both in my family, and my relatives allowed girls to study abroad. And even my father at that time, he used to say, "if I had a daughter, I would never allow her to study abroad." People at that time were not used to do this. I mean, studying abroad for females was something prohibited among most families.

**Dress code.** The older generation of Saudi females used to cover from head to toe all the time and cover their faces when they went out their houses. Eight of the females indicated that they did not cover their faces as their mothers and grandmothers did. However, they still wear abaya and cover their heads in Saudi Arabia when leaving their homes as it is a mandate.

One of the girls had a courageous conversation with her father who asked her to cover her face. She was brave enough to convince her father that covering the face was not a religious obligation. She explained the situation: “I do not cover my face when I am in Saudi Arabia. My father asked me about the reason and I discussed with him my perspective and he agreed with me.”

Most of the females who participated in this study grew up in relatively conservative families where Islamic teachings and instructions were an integral part of their lives. However, the family of one of the girls was different. Her family encouraged her to adopt morals and values derived from Islam, but they never asked her to pray or cover her head. So, she grew up with no intention to cover her head. She used to wear her abaya as it is a traditional obligation, but did not cover her hair which created a lot of problems with the religious police.

**Religious Police (RP).** Religious Police in Saudi Arabia constitute the official vice squad who enforce Sharia Law. Religious police monitor peoples’ behaviors in public places to ensure their commitment to Islamic laws and instructions. Because she did not wear a head scarf, she got into several troubles with the religious police. She revealed: “I used to encounter many troubles with the RP. These people’s job is to roam the streets and public areas to ensure that men are not harassing girls and girls are all covered.” The terrible situations with the RP encouraged her to make the decision to leave her home country. She said: “I decided that I have to leave the country and find another country to live, work, or study in.”

Similarly, another woman grew up in an open-minded family where her parents never asked her to cover her head or wear abaya when she was abroad. However, her father encouraged her to abide by the Saudi laws regarding women's dress to avoid any negative consequences with the RP. She elucidated:

My father asked me to put the head scarf on while we were in Saudi Arabia in order to avoid troubles with the RP. But when I travel outside Saudi Arabia either with my father or my husband, I am like this, in my casual clothes, jeans and shirt with no headscarf.

**Complicated admission rules to Saudi universities and majors.** Although higher education in Saudi Arabia is free, the complicated admission requirements encourage several students to search for other alternatives. To get an admission to one of the public Saudi universities, students must take a comprehensive exam to assess their knowledge of several subjects. One of the women explained:

Even though we have free education, we have a lot of rules. We have to take tests that are hard to pass. For example, when we finish high school, they test us in everything we learned since elementary school. We are tested in math, chemistry, physics, biology, and English. Can you imagine that a normal person can go through all of that and pass the exam?

Besides the complicated admission rules, students who are able to pass the comprehensive exam, do not have the freedom to choose their majors. Majors are chosen for students by the admission committees in Saudi universities based on high school GPA. These rules ruined one of the women's dream to study pharmacy in Saudi Arabia. She explained: "I wanted to study pharmacy and I applied to study pharmacy. Usually they announce names of

admitted students in three cohorts. My name was not there in the first cohort, but I was admitted to the college of sciences.”

Another woman had a similar experience. She revealed:

I applied for several universities in Saudi Arabia, and I did not get an admission to the major I love. In Saudi Arabia, we do not choose our majors. The university receives all applications and then based on high school scores, they offer us the major that we need to study.

Therefore, the complicated admission rules were a source of motivation for these females to find other options. They did not give up as they wanted to achieve their dreams and get a higher degree.

### **Support – Time One**

The support that most females received was emotional support from close family members and financial support from two main sources, KASP, and their fathers. However, one of the girls supported her own education in the U.S. as she had not yet received a scholarship until the moment of this research.

**Father’s support.** The support that the Saudi students received when they were in Saudi Arabia can be categorized into two main sources: emotional support and financial support. There appears to be a strong relationship between the two types of support. Five of the girls received tremendous emotional and financial support from their parents, mainly from their fathers. Three received emotional support only because they received their scholarships before leaving Saudi Arabia. One of the girl’s parents passed away years ago, and therefore she supported herself, and the father of another one opposed her decision at the beginning to study abroad.

***Father's emotional support.*** The dream of studying abroad could not be achieved without receiving support and approval from a male guardian who has the right to allow or ban his female dependents from studying abroad. However, two of the Saudi females revealed that some of their close family members opposed their decision to study abroad. In Saudi Arabia, the father is usually the guardian of his wife and daughters. In case of father's death, the eldest brother takes the guardianship role. If a Saudi female's father is deceased and she has no brothers, her uncle becomes her guardian. If she gets married, her husband becomes her guardian, and in this case, her father cannot prevent her from travelling as long as her husband approves (Le Renard, 2014). A woman explained the tremendous support she received from her father, she stated:

My father used to talk to my brother about my right to try something new and study abroad. He told him that he had the opportunity to study abroad and she has the right to study abroad too. Even if it is difficult, and she has so many difficulties, even if she is not going to be successful abroad, she should have the opportunity to achieve it and we should support her and her decision.

Another woman confirmed her father's support: "My father wanted me and my brother to get good education and he wanted us to learn English because it is so important nowadays."

***Father's emotional and financial support.*** One of the girls described how her father was supportive and empathetic as he did not like watching his daughter suffering alone while her mother was away from her. She explained:

My father felt that I was struggling and I needed my mother to be with me. So, he proposed that I could go to the United States to be with my mother and sister. He told me that even if I do not get a scholarship, he will support me financially.

Another woman's father supported her decision to study in the U.S. after her divorce. She revealed: "I had a bad experience with marriage and I got divorced, and in our culture a divorced woman should stay at home and not to go out at all." Despite all cultural restrictions on divorced women, her parents and brothers supported her emotionally and financially. She stated: "People believed that my family should punish me by forcing me to stay at home and not to leave until I get married again. But of course, my parents and my brothers did not agree at all on this idea." This woman's bad experience with her first marriage encouraged her parents to support her. She continued, "Now my parents are fully convinced that I should not get married again until I finish my education."

As a well-educated parent, a girl's father first encouraged her to study in another English speaking country where he earned his PhD. He had old friends there who could help his daughter navigate her options. Because she was engaged at that time, her fiancé encouraged her to study in the U.S. where he could also find an opportunity to pursue his master's degree. Her father did not oppose the decision. She explained, "My father agreed, and he supported me financially to come here and study."

Likewise, another girl's father supported her both financially and emotionally when she decided to study in the U.S. She clarified: "My father does not object any decision related to education. I mean, if any of his children, either girls or boys, ask him to give money for education, or study abroad, he agrees and allows us."

Another girl's parents also supported her decision to study in the U.S. She explained: "My parents encouraged me a lot. They told me that it would be a great opportunity to study in the United States and get a degree."

**Family opposition.** Opposing the decision of studying abroad was based on two factors: family interference and fear. A woman's father opposed her decision to study abroad because she grew up in a conservative family who did not allow women to travel abroad. She reported that she did not obey her father because she was married and her father was no longer her guardian, and therefore, he could not control her life. In Saudi Arabia once a girl gets married, her husband becomes her guardian, and she has to follow and obey his orders instead of her father's commands (Le Renard, 2014). She explained the situation: "So, since my father at that time could not force me to stay, he first opposed the decision, and then he accepted since my husband became my guardian, not my father."

Because his daughter was too young, another woman's father opposed her decision to study abroad. She disclosed: "He was kind of scared because I was only 18 years old and he was like scared if I came here at that young age." However, her mother interfered and was able to convince her father. She continued: "My mother was able to persuade my father because I would stay with my brother in the U.S."

One of the women was upset because her grandmother opposed her decision to study abroad. She explained:

My grandmother did not like at all the idea of studying in the U.S. In her opinion, there is no need for me to encounter many challenges and difficulties in my life. Since I can study in one of the universities in Saudi Arabia, there is no need at all to travel to another country.

In this case, her grandmother could not prevent her from travelling because guardianship is exclusive to males in Saudi Arabia.

Although some family members opposed these females' decisions to study abroad, the support they received from their fathers and close family members in addition to their determination to achieve their dreams empowered them to move on despite all obstacles.

### **Self - Time One**

There appears to be a strong relationship between making own decision to study abroad and self. The decision to study abroad reflected the initial strong self-confidence of the females who believed in their abilities to study in a foreign country, learn another language and succeed. They had dreams to get an American degree, to get a well-paying job in their own country, and to enjoy a decent life.

**Making the decision to study abroad.** Several factors contributed to females' decisions to study abroad. Seven indicated that it was their own decision to study abroad. In contrast, three revealed that they did not want to study abroad at the beginning, but they were convinced by close family members to study in the U.S.

***Achieving a dream.*** Three females indicated that their dream to study abroad started when they were in high school. One of the women revealed that she was inspired by her brother who was studying abroad at that time. She noticed how her family respected his opinion and admired his ideas. She explained:

I was fascinated with his personality and I wanted to be like him. At that time, I was in grade 10 and I used to tell my father, I would like to study abroad when I finish the high school to be like my brother.

Similarly, another woman also wanted to study abroad when she was in high school. She expressed her ambition by saying: "When I was in high school, my dream was to study abroad

and all my focus was to study abroad. So, when I finished high school, I went to the UK to study English for six months.”

Another girl’s decision to study abroad was supported by her father who was himself a student in the U.S. 25 years ago. She explained: “My dream was to study abroad since I was a high school student. My brother was in the U.S. and with the support of my father and my family, my dream became true.”

***The U.S. as the first choice.*** One of the girls pointed out that she had three options for her higher education. She explained:

I was qualified to get admission to the medical school in Saudi Arabia. But at that time, I had also an opportunity to study either in the U.S. or one of the European countries. But I prayed and asked Allah for the best choice. So, I felt more comfortable to come to the U.S.

Another girl decided to study in the U.S. where she could practice her freedom of choice, dress, and lifestyle. She revealed:

It was my own decision. I studied for two years marketing in Saudi Arabia. And then, I did not find myself in marketing. I did not like that major. So, I left the university and worked for two years and a half. But I did not feel I fit in the society. Then, I made the decision to study abroad.

One of the women disclosed that she was motivated to make the decision to study abroad because she did not like the complicated admission process in her country, Saudi Arabia. She explained: “I was motivated enough to make the decision, because education in my country sucks. Even though we have free education, but we have a lot of rules.”

***Desire to change lifestyle.*** One of the girls declared that she had two motivations to study abroad. She clarified: “I knew that learning English in a country where they speak the language is much better than learning the language in Saudi Arabia. And another reason, I wanted to travel and try other forms of life.”

In addition to her dream to study abroad, one of the women was not satisfied with life in Saudi Arabia. She expressed her opinion by saying: “I did not like how we live in Saudi Arabia. I wanted to live a free life. That was the main reason why I wanted to study abroad.”

***Following advice.*** In contrast, one of the girls enjoyed a stable life in Saudi Arabia where she completed her BA and had a job, but she was convinced by her father to travel to the U.S. and start a new life. As she was truly committed to her friends in Saudi Arabia, she did not like the idea her father proposed to travel to the U.S. to be with her mother and sister. She explained: “I did not want to study abroad at that time, but later, I decided to follow my father’s advice and travel.”

Likewise, the husband of one of the women convinced her to apply for the scholarship and study in the U.S. Because her relationship with members of her big family, especially her mother and sister, were very close, she did not wish to leave them. However, her failure to get admission to her desired major in Saudi Arabia encouraged her to follow her husband’s advice. She explained:

My husband liked the idea that we need to live in another country and try living in another culture. When my name was not in the pharmacy cohort, and I was admitted to the college of science instead, this made me change my plans and apply for the scholarship through King Abdallah Scholarship Program.

The fiancé of one of the girls who was engaged at that time had plans to study in the U.S. and take her with him to pursue her education. However, because of changing plans in his work place, he lost his opportunity to study in the U.S. So, he encouraged his fiancée to apply and study in the U.S. where he could accompany her and pursue his education as well. She revealed: “We designed a plan to come to the U.S. and study together. He can pursue his master’s degree and I can start my bachelor’s.”

**Self-confidence.** One of the girls was highly motivated to study abroad. She was financially self-supporting, independent, and did not fear speaking her own opinion or making her own future decisions. She explained how she surprised her family:

I remember when I got the admission and the American visa, my family had a family gathering, and I announced that I would be in the United States in two weeks. They were shocked of my decision. However, they knew that I was a kind of independent person and self-confident.

### **Strategies – Time One**

The strategies used in Time One involved mainly taking the initiative to apply to American universities, to obtain American Student F1 visas, and to prepare for travel to the United States. To get an American F1 student visa, all students must secure admission to one of the accredited universities or English language centers in the U.S. Support from family members was important for some students to complete the admission process. Therefore, there was a strong association between support and strategies.

**Seeking support.** All international students who wish to study in the U.S. must apply for the F1 Student Visa. Only students who secure admission from one of the accredited academic institutions in the United States can apply for a student visa (U.S. Department of State, 2017).

The visa application process is overwhelming and requires a lot of information to be filled out. Therefore, some of these females sought assistance from a third party.

One of the women's applications for the student visa and admission to the university were easier than she imagined. She explained: "My husband helped me with that because he was living in the same city where the university was located, so helped me with the whole application process" Whereas, another girl was overwhelmed with the amount of paperwork she had to complete. Therefore, she was encouraged to seek help from one of the service offices that help students fill the required documents. She stated:

I did not know anyone to help me fill out the paperwork for the American visa and university admission. So, I sought help from one of the offices in Saudi Arabia that offers these services for high charges. I told the office about my preference and what university I wanted to study in and the major.

***American Embassy in Saudi Arabia.*** The American Embassy is the only official department responsible for issuing all types of American visas for non-U.S. citizens who wish to travel to the U.S. for various purposes. The delay of one of the women's husband's American visa encouraged her to seek help from the American Embassy in Saudi Arabia. Calling the embassy and explaining her critical situation was a successful strategy to expedite her husband's visa. Her husband was able to get his visa few days later. She explained:

I was afraid of canceling my scholarship as my husband's visa was delayed. So, I communicated with the American Embassy and I told them that I am sponsored by the government and if my husband does not get the visa, I will lose my scholarship. So, after a week, my husband got his visa.

***Relatives in the U.S.*** One of the women sought her uncle's help to apply for universities in the U.S. Because he was a former student in a university in the same city, her uncle was a great support for her throughout the admission process. She explained: "My uncle helped me in filling out my application to the university, and he helped me navigate my options."

One of the girls was happy with the presence of her aunt in the U.S. when she started her application process. She revealed: "I told my father that my aunt was studying here in the U.S., so I could go to the same city and I could be very close to her. And my aunt could help me as well. So, my father agreed."

***Friends.*** Being unfamiliar with the academic options in the U.S. encouraged two of the females to seek help from their friends who were studying in the U.S. at that time. One of them wanted first to study in Canada. But when she called her friend who was already there, her friend did not encourage her to study in Canada as the admission requirements for international students were very complicated. Therefore, she communicated with another friend who was studying in the U.S. She explained:

When I called my friend who was studying in the Midwest, she was happy with life in the U.S. She told me that living in the Midwest is very comfortable and life expenses are very reasonable. So, I was motivated to come to the U.S. and study.

Similarly, the other girl communicated with her friend who was studying in the U.S. She stated: "I was confused to which university I should apply. I was searching for almost all states. Then, I called one of my friends who was studying in the U.S. and she encouraged me to apply to the same university where she was studying."

## **Time One Summary**

The relationship among the coping resources, situation, support, self, and strategies for these Saudi females was quite interconnected. The situations of the families and areas where these students grew up played a significant role in their decisions to study abroad. These female students' opportunities to pursue undergraduate study in the U.S. would not have been achieved without support from their families, especially the guardians who had the authority to either allow or prevent these females from travelling abroad. In addition, these females could not have made the arrangements to study in the United States without taking actions and applying for universities or language centers in the U.S. to be able to get a student F1 visa. Therefore, the Saudi females who participated in this study implemented the four coping resources to come to the U.S. and to pursue undergraduate education in fields of their choosing.

## **Time Two Transition: First Semester, First Year**

Time Two focused primarily on the first semester of the 10 Saudi female students' first academic year at a Midwestern university. The actual beginning of transition to life in the United States for nine of the females, however, began with a period of studying English upon arrival. I will briefly describe how these females made sense of their pre-college U.S. experiences before addressing the Saudi female students' perceptions of their transition to live and study at a Midwestern university. Again, I will explore their transition experiences using the transition theory coping resources of situation, self, support, and strategies.

## **Pre-College Experience**

Pre-college experience incorporates the females' experiences with the intensive English courses, weather challenges, and American people. It is worth mentioning that period of time these females spent taking English language courses depends on their English language

proficiency. To get an admission to one of the universities in the U.S., all international students must take a language proficiency test, either Testing of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), or International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and get the required score for admission. Students should get at least the minimum score that a university asks to get an admission to one of the academic programs.

**Pre-college English courses.** One of the women's experiences with the English language courses lasted for two years before she was able to enroll at the Midwestern University. That period of time reminded her of the most distressful moments of her life in the U.S. When she first arrived in the U.S. with her ex-husband, she used to cry all the time. In addition, her husband did not show any sympathy nor supported her emotionally. She clarified:

My husband did not like the way I behaved at that time. He used to tell me that there is no need to cry, and I was exaggerating the whole situation. However, it was out of my control. I felt so bad at that time and my husband made the situation get worse. He never tried to calm me down or encourage me.

Besides not receiving her husband's support, this young woman felt she was lost, unprotected, and lonely, because her classmates did not show any support for her either. She explained: "I was in a very bad situation, I felt that the students who took the intensive English courses with me did not care about my situation. I felt I was alienated and excluded."

One of the women had a different experience. Arriving in the U.S. with limited English created several complications for her. In addition, arriving from a conservative region in Saudi Arabia, the East Region, where she never had communication with foreign men generated further problems for her. She revealed:

Before arriving in the U.S., it was impossible for me to talk to a man. So, when I first came here and started the English classes in the Institute, I used to sit in the class and only look at the floor without uttering any single word. I did not talk to anyone and I did not like anyone to talk to me.

As she was struggling with the English language, she was not able to communicate her needs with her teachers. She elaborated: “If I needed something from my teachers, I used to take with me one of the Saudi students whose English is better than me to translate. So, it was a difficult situation.”

Another girl’s experience with the English courses was prolonged. As her father could not afford her college tuition fees, she preferred to keep taking English classes because they were affordable until she secured the scholarship. She stated: “I took English courses in seven months. Then, I continued taking English courses because I was waiting for the scholarship. It was expensive for my father to pay for university courses.”

**Weather challenges.** The weather in Saudi Arabia is known to be very hot in summer and mild in winter. This means that it is very rare to have cold winter and it hardly rains. The temperature in winter does not go below 70 degrees Fahrenheit, it rises up to 110 in summer (Weatherbase, 2017). For these Saudi females, seeing snow for the first time was a wonderful experience. The girls revealed their experience with the cold weather in the Midwest in various ways:

- The weather was a big challenge for me. When I first came to the United States, it was in January, and it was snowing at that time. It was the first time in my life to see real snow. It was a nice experience, but so cold.

- “When I arrived here, I did not know that it was going to be cold. In the East Coast where I first arrived to take the English courses, it was 46, but it was really cold for me.”
- “The weather was so cold here in the Midwest. The first year I came here, the temperature was -40 Celsius and it was a crazy weather.”

Only one Saudi student expressed her bad experience with the cold weather that made her rethink whether she would be able to persist or not. She explained: “When I came here at the end of December, it was extremely cold, and in the first two weeks, I said to myself that it was going to be difficult for me to adjust to this city.”

**American people.** None of these females had any prior experience communicating with American people when they were in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, their first impression about American people was remarkable. Five of the females mentioned how American people were kind and friendly and helped them. One of the women’s first experience at the airport was bad and good. First she and her husband met an American couple who tried to cheat them, but later they met another American couple who helped them. She explained:

The first American people we met at the airport were black couple who tried to cheat us. They noticed that we were searching for a taxi and we did not know where to go. They stepped close to us and told us that they knew cheaper taxi that could take us to the hotel. When we followed them, they took us to the upper level and there were not taxis there. We felt that they were trying to cheat us, or steal us, or they used their private car as a taxi. But we did not listen to them and we went downstairs. Then, there was a very old couple who stepped next to us and helped us with the suitcases. At that point, I felt somehow comfortable about the situation.

One of the girls had a good experience with American people when she started her life in the U.S. She explained: “When I started my academic life taking the English courses, I was at another university, people there were so helpful and kind.” Another girl was surprised because she noticed that people in the U.S. respected other religions and other cultures besides being kind and friendly. She revealed:

I told my friend that I wanted to pray. She did not know how to make the place very comfortable for me to pray. She asked her little son to go to his room and she tried not to make any noise while I was praying. So, I felt they do respect other religions.

**Dress code.** Abaya and a head scarf are the traditional dress code in Saudi Arabia. It is an enforced law that all women in Saudi Arabia should wear abaya and cover their heads (Le Renard, 2014). Arriving in the U.S., these females did not feel comfortable wearing their abayas as its black color connotes various repressive interpretations. Because of the increased hate sentiments against Muslims in the West, these females decided to take off their abayas in the U.S. One of the young women explained:

I was wearing my abaya and I noticed that people at the airport were surprised to see me in black. Some people looked scared from my appearance and some others mentioned the beauty of my abaya specially the broiders I had on the sleeves. At that point I did not get it. I was overwhelmed with the whole situation.

The open and free society in the U.S. where women usually do not cover themselves with long gowns and a head scarf, one of the women felt that it was inappropriate to wear her abaya in the U.S. She explained:

Because the culture here is different. For example, in Saudi Arabia, it is part of our culture to wear abaya when we go outside home. And it is unacceptable for females to go

outside their homes without their abayas on. So, when I came here, I found that my abaya will attract people's attention and they will not accept that. So, I wear clothes that cover all my body, and this is what our religion asks us for regardless of the color and style.

One of the girls did not cover her hair nor wear her abaya in the U.S. Her father encouraged her not to wear her head cover in the U.S. to avoid any potential harassment. She explained:

My father was right. I remember once I was with my two friends. Two of us did not wear a headscarf, and the third one was wearing her scarf. We were walking down the street in a busy city, and a man stopped and spit on my friend who was wearing her scarf. He also said insulting words to her and then walked away. It was very strange and embarrassing situation for all of us.

Similarly, another woman did not wear a headscarf in the U.S. for a similar reason. She associated being safe in the U.S. with not wearing her headscarf as no one will figure out her identity. She stated: "No one knows that I am Saudi and a Muslim. I am not wearing my headscarf, so I am safe."

**Religious commitment.** Although three participants in this study did not wear a headscarf, they mentioned their strong religious faith. When I asked one of the women who did not wear a headscarf about her religious commitment, she emphasized, "Yes sure, I pray five times, and I fast in Ramadan." Another girl added:

I do not wear a headscarf here in the United States, but I am committed to praying the five times and fasting in Ramadan. I do not drink, and I do not do anything that violates my Islamic rules and values. For example, I do not go to nightclubs, or have close relations with boys.

Another girl explained her opinion regarding headscarf:

I know that the headscarf is obligatory in Islam, but it is not a pillar like praying or fasting in Ramadan. So, not wearing it does not mean that I am not a Muslim. I pray five times, and I fast in Ramadan, and I help the needy whenever I can, but I am not wearing a headscarf. So, I do not think I will go to hell if I do not wear it. This is my own perspective.

According to the other seven females who wear the headscarf in the U.S. they mentioned their strong commitment to the Islamic religious rules and instructions particularly religious duties of praying, fasting, and wearing decent clothes. One of the women explained:

I felt it kind of hard not to wear my abaya and just wear regular clothes in front of foreign people, especially men. But I got used to it. As much as I love my abaya, I respect their culture. I respect what they think. So, sometimes the way we look in our traditional dress make them not comfortable. So, yeah, I am still respecting my religion, wearing my scarf and not showing anything from my body. It would be more comfortable for me to wear my tradition dress here, but you know, for example, I chose to keep my headscarf. Since I wear my headscarf and cover my body, it is fine for me. I got used to it.

## **College Experience**

This period of time started when these females started their academic life in the Midwest university. The main themes emerged in this time were freedom of mobility, their relations with American students, and adjustment to various challenges.

**Freedom of mobility.** In Saudi Arabia, women are not allowed to go out of their houses without having a companion. For a woman to walk alone on the street is culturally unacceptable (Le Renard, 2014). Therefore, through living in the U.S. where the freedom of mobility is a

normal situation, Saudi females recognized the blessings of freedom of mobility without restrictions. They declared their happiness in different ways:

- Freedom! I felt that I am free here. I can go out alone, and I can visit alone and whatever I need to buy I can go by myself. There is no need to have a male to accompany me as I used to have in Saudi Arabia.
- “Here I have the freedom to go out whenever I want. The weather is also very nice.”
- In Saudi Arabia if I wanted to visit a friend or go to the mall, I used to have either the driver to drive me there or my father. We do not have public transportation in Saudi Arabia and even if we have, I do not think we will be allowed to use them.

**American students.** The Saudi females’ experience with American students varied. For instance, one of the women felt that part of the academic challenges she faced when she started her program was miscommunication with American students. She revealed:

It was one of my labs. I felt that American students, the native speakers did not like to work with international students or communicate with them. They try to help when you ask them, but they do not propose helping you. This was one of the academic challenges I faced.

Her perception was affirmed by another girl when she mentioned in the focus group that it was difficult to befriend American students. She explained:

I noticed that after the age of 18 when they have their freedom to leave their parents’ homes and live alone, it becomes difficult to infringe their privacy. It is also becoming difficult to befriend them or be a close friend. You need to gain their trust first.

In contrast, one of the girls said that she was able to befriend American students easily. For example, she said, “I have an American friend and she is the best.”

**Adjustment challenges.** Although these students had either Saudi friends in the U.S. or relatives who helped them when they first arrived, they encountered adjustment challenges. For example, one of the women who stayed with her brother when she first came to the U.S. did not have a choice but to move from one place to another where she needed to adjust again to the new place. She explained:

When my brother moved from to the West Coast, I did not want to stay alone in the East Coast. It was very cold there. So, I moved with him to the West Coast. Then I got married and my husband lives here in the Midwest. So, I had to move to be with him.

Another woman encountered several challenges when she started her academic courses. Having multiple responsibilities created anxiety and discomfort for her. She stated: “Having two babies with other responsibilities made life more complicated.”

### **Support – Time Two**

The support that students said they received when they arrived in the U.S. can be divided into three main categories; financial support, emotional support, and academic support.

**Financial support.** Seven of the girls were on the King Abdallah Scholarship Program that covered their tuition fees, payed them a monthly stipend, and offered them a free annual round trip to Saudi Arabia. In addition, students on the scholarship who were accompanied by their husbands and children, also received stipends for them. The Saudi females who participated in the focus group agreed that financial support was a fundamental issue that Saudi females should take into consideration before thinking of coming to the U.S. to study. As life in the U.S. helped Saudi females foster their self-esteem and self-confidence, they perceived that having financial support should be guaranteed before thinking of studying abroad. One of the girls

explained: “I think the main reason to come to study is to have enough financial support. Without adequate financial support, it becomes difficult to pursue education in the U.S.”

***Father’s support.*** One of the women revealed that her father was a great support for her both financially and emotionally. She also confirmed that her father would support her financially and pay for her tuition fees and life expenses even if she had not secured the scholarship. She stated: “My father supports me and sends me pocket money. He sends me more money than I need to encourage me to save money.”

Only one girl who I interviewed supported herself financially. She had three main sources of income. As she had not resigned from her work in Saudi Arabia, she received half of her salary by doing her job online. In addition to her late father’s salary, she received a share of the monthly income of her father’s owned rented property. She explained:

I get my father’s salary. Since my father death, his work still pays me his salary and brothers agree on this. I also have regular income from my father’s property that we rent to people, so I get my share as well.

***Brother’s support.*** One of the women declared that her brother supported her financially when she first arrived in the U.S. Because she had many siblings, her father could not afford paying for her education in the U.S. Therefore, her brother supported her financially until she got her scholarship. She explained:

When I first came here, I did not get the scholarship, so my brother supported me financially, and I mean, emotionally. I was also supported emotionally from the whole family. Then I got the scholarship and then I was supported financially by the government.

**Emotional support.** The emotional support Saudi females received when they first arrived in the U.S. was mainly from father, Saudi friends, and close family members in the U.S.

***Father's support.*** Father's emotional support was also a source of strength to most Saudi females who participated in this study and it encouraged them to persist and pursue their studies in the U.S. For instance, when one of the women was experiencing difficult times, she used to call her father. She explained:

My father was different from my mother and from my brothers. When I used to call my father, he just listened to me. And he also knew how to help me overcome all the obstacles I used to face while I was there. He used to comfort me a lot and he understood the critical situation I was in. He was the main support for me.

Similarly, another girl appreciated her father's great support both emotionally and financially. She clarified: "My father was the biggest supporter for me. Even in the later stages, he was the best friend of mine. I used to share with him all my challenges and problems, until he passed away last December." After her father's death, her mother did her best to provide her daughter adequate emotional support. She elaborated: "My father was very supportive. But when he passed away, I lost the main source of support for me. My mother tried to be supportive, but my father support was more than hers."

***Saudi friends' and relatives' support.*** One of the girls expressed her gratitude to her friends in the U.S. who offered her all means of support to start a new life in the U.S. She explained: "I first stayed with my friends for five days, and they were searching online for an apartment for me. And they found some good places for me." Having relatives in the U.S. helped other females in their adjustment to life in the U.S. Their relatives helped them with housing options, major choices, and many other services they needed to know about upon their

arrival. For example, one of the women was grateful for her uncle, who was a student in the same city, because he helped her and her husband navigate services and facilities in the city. She explained: “My uncle was here and he stayed one month after his graduation to help us. He told us about the grocery shops where we can buy Arabic food and other stuff.”

Relative support was not only restricted to navigate housing and food options, but also for many other services. One of the Saudi girls mentioned the amount of support she received from her cousin in the U.S. who facilitated her academic life when she first started. She revealed:

My cousin helped me overcome almost all challenges. She was always there. She offered me help because she came to the US before me and she knew a lot of things. So, she was my friend and my mentor.

She added: “My cousin helped me choose my courses. Many students go to their academic advisors and they take difficult courses together, but my cousin was knowledgeable of the courses and she advised me of taking the courses I needed.”

**Campus support.** The Saudi females claimed that the campus support they received upon their arrival was very limited. However, most of them did not mention any major role of campus support upon their arrival. For example, one of the girls indicated that a staff member in the international office offered minimal assistance. She stated: “During the orientation, she told us about the health insurance and how to get the bus permit.” In her opinion, there is much more information she needed to know such as the education system, support services, and how to use the public transportation.

**Lack of support.** The Saudi female students participated in this study expected to receive huge campus support upon their arrival. Instead, they navigated their options with the help of their relatives and Saudi friends who were residing in the U.S. Even the academic advisors who

were supposed to help new students select their courses did not meet Saudi students' expectations. The advisor of one of the women suggested that she take classes that were not required for her degree plan. He just wanted her to fulfill the requirement of her F1 Visa by taking 12 credits. According to the immigration laws, all international students are required to maintain their full time student status. Undergraduates are required to take at least twelve credits, whereas, graduates must take 8 credits per semester (U.S. Immigration Department, 2017). In addition, her academic adviser did not comprehensively explain the academic system in the university particularly courses and program required credits. She explained:

Most classes I was supposed to take were all closed. So, the situation was very confusing for me. My academic advisor told me that I need to take at least 12 credits and I did not know the meaning of credits. And I noticed that there were numbers beside the courses, such as two, three, and four. And I did not know what these numbers stand for, and I did not ask him. I felt I was lost. Then, the advisor told me that since the required courses I was supposed to take were closed, I could take art courses. He suggested taking an art course. So, I took an acting class. And I also took another class that was not required but to fulfill the credits that I need to take.

Another girl was frustrated from campus support. She stated: "Actually, I did not feel that the campus really cares about us. They did not reach out to us. May be if I went there to ask for help, they would help me, but I did not try to get help from them." Not receiving adequate support made her feel bad, especially when she made a comparison between campus support and the Saudi organization on campus. She clarified: "There is the Saudi Organization on campus. They always reach out to us and encourage us to talk to them whenever we face any problems, or when we do not like something."

One of the girls had two different experiences with campus support at two different universities prior her transfer to her current university. The lack of support that she found at the Midwestern university contrasted negatively with the support she received when she first attended the two previous universities. When she finished her language courses in one of the universities in the Midwest, this girl started her academic life in another university where she received great support. However, following her friends' advice she transferred to her current university. She explained:

I started my academic life in one of the universities in the Midwest. The staff there were very helpful and very friendly. Then, I transferred to another university where the staff and the faculty were almost the same, very kind and friendly. Later, when I moved to this campus, I did not find a lot of help from staff here. It was a challenge for me to cope with the situation here.

Receiving various types of support was essential for these females to persist in their first academic semester in the U.S. Without support in place, negative unpredictable consequences might happen, such as drop out or fail classes.

### **Self – Time Two**

The major themes that emerged in self as a coping resource are: freedom of mobility and Independence, homesickness, determination to meet the challenges, satisfaction, and culture shock.

**Freedom of mobility and independence.** Comparing their lives in the U.S. with their lives in Saudi Arabia, these females were happy to practice their right to go wherever and whenever without restrictions on their mobility as they used to have in Saudi Arabia. One of the girls explained that freedom of mobility helped her overcome homesickness she had in her first

semester by being away from her family. She explained: “Freedom! I felt that I am free here.” Being able to navigate her options alone gave her a strong sense of independence that she could do many things by herself without help from a male.

One of the girls who grew up as independent in Saudi Arabia did not seek help from anyone when she used to roam the streets searching for an apartment to rent. She stated: “I did not seek help from anyone. I tried to find places by myself. I used to Google every place I wanted to go to. Google Maps was my friend, and it was very helpful.”

**Homesickness.** Although most females were happy with freedom of mobility in the U.S., they also expressed missing their close family relatives back home. One of the girls revealed that she missed her parents back home. She revealed:

I suffered from homesickness. I was always longing for my family, because when I first came here, I was alone with my two brothers, and my parents were still in Saudi Arabia. I was always yearning to go back home and sometimes, I used to cry a lot when I remember my family.

One of the women had similar feelings as she did not want to leave Saudi Arabia when she finished her high school. She wanted to stay beside her mother and sister, and her close friends. She felt sad and depressed all the time as everything was new to her. She explained: “It was the first time in my life to be away from my family and friends. Everything was new for me. It was very hard time, I was always sad and depressed.” Another woman had similar feelings. She said: “The first six months were the worst. I was thinking a lot of going back to my home country and leave everything behind.”

**Determination to meet the challenges.** Despite meeting various challenges in the first semester, all girls were determined to pursue their academic journeys. Having support from

friends, family members, either in the U.S. or Saudi Arabia helped them persist in the first academic semester. In addition, their determination to face all types of challenges fostered their self-confidence. Although one of the women faced various challenges when she first came to the United States, such as the weather, finding a suitable apartment for her family, and a daycare for her little daughter, she was determined to pursue her academic journey and she did not think of quitting and going back to SA. She described her feelings: “I did not want to go back. I just wanted to confront the challenges here.” Another girl revealed:

I did not think of going back to Saudi Arabia. Despite all challenges I faced at the beginning, I never thought of going back. I had this idea in my mind, either to do it or not. So, this gave me strength to go on.

**Satisfaction.** Satisfaction with the new situation in the United States was a motivation for one of the girls to stay and persist in college. Although she did not want at the beginning to leave Saudi Arabia, her work, and friends, she found that life in the U.S. opened her eyes to new cultures and new lifestyles that encouraged her to stay and become successful. She clarified:

I was happy to be in a new country and meet different people of different opinions and different cultural backgrounds. It was a very good learning experience for me. I was satisfied and at the same time, I was confident I am going to be successful.

The challenges that one of the girls faced at the beginning of her life in the U.S. fostered her self-esteem, her self-confidence, and she became satisfied of her achievements. She reveals her satisfaction: “Despite all these challenges, I felt that I am a strong woman. I am doing things by myself without the help of my aunt. And I did all of these things alone.”

Because she left her family in a young age to live with her brother in the U.S., the father of one of the women was not sure whether his daughter would be willing to meet the challenges

of living and studying in the U.S. However, she proved to her father and her family back home that she was keen on bearing the responsibility to succeed. She stated: “I am very satisfied. I am 100% satisfied.” Similarly, one of the girls was very satisfied to take that important step in her life and come to the U.S. She expressed her pleasure: “I felt that this was the step that I should have been taking long time ago. I feel very satisfied about this. Despite all challenges, I was very happy to take this important step in my life.”

**Positive culture shock.** Unlike much research on international students, Saudi females who participated in this study did not mention any obvious evidence of culture shock. Their happiness to be in the U.S. despite all challenges gave them strength to move on and succeed. Surprisingly, two students described their first experience in the U.S. as a “Positive Culture Shock.” For example, when one of the women first started her English classes in the East Coast, she had a misconception that people there might treat her badly because she was different. She explained:

I did not feel I was different. I did not imagine that I could immediately make friends. I got along with my teachers. It was a positive culture shock. I was afraid that people would treat me differently based on how I look and my dress, but actually, they did not care about how I look. They cared about my personality and morals.

Another girl had similar feelings, she affirmed: “It was not a major culture shock for me.” The similarities between these two females were based on one mutual interest. The girl explained, “I used to watch a lot of American movies.” And the woman added, “I used to watch American movies, so I knew what I signed up for.”

Another girl's experience with pre-American life was different. When she finished middle school, she was enrolled in a private school in Saudi Arabia where most students were from several countries and backgrounds. She elucidated:

I was in an international school, and we had an extra English class which was all about the American culture, and American cities, and we also studied about the history of the United States. And since that time, I imagined myself living in the U.S.

Themes of self-confidence, self-esteem, independence, and freedom continued to emerge throughout the five stages of this research. The Saudi students had these attributes even though they not nurtured under the umbrella of the Saudi government that imposes several restrictions on Saudi females living in Saudi Arabia.

### **Strategies – Time Two**

The strategies these females used to cope with various transition challenges differed from one student to another. The main themes emerged for strategies implemented by these Saudi students were: positive thinking, hanging out with friends, and studying harder.

**Positive thinking.** Positive thinking was a remarkable strategy these students implemented to persist in their first semester in the U.S. Despite all challenges they faced, they were optimistic about achieving a bright future. One of the girls explained:

I was thinking of my future, and how when I finish my degree, I will go back to my country and get a good job in a good place, and I will be able to get a high salary that will enable me to live a happy life. Whenever, I have bad feelings, I just focus on my goal and why I am here.

Another girl's positive thinking enlightened her path. Despite all challenges she encountered when she first arrived in the U.S., she positively thought that Allah has always a

plan for her. She confirmed: “If I did not find a chance to pursue my education in the U.S., for sure there is a better place for me to pursue my education.”

**Confront challenges.** The combination of positive thinking and determination to confront challenges gave these students extraordinary power of perseverance. Patience was a secret weapon one woman used to confront all types of challenges she faced in her first semester. She conveyed:

Patience! I had strong belief that whatever I face in my life, it will be for good things for sure, and therefore, I do not need to complain. When I felt I am in the middle of the road, and it was difficult for me to go back, I had only one choice, which was to keep going on the road until the end.

Similarly, a woman expressed the situation when she first came to the U.S. She said: “I did not have the idea of going back. I just wanted to confront the challenges here.”

Another girl had been a very hard working student in Saudi Arabia who had secured an admission to the medical school in her country and in a European country. Therefore, facing challenges did not discourage her. On the contrary, it gave her more strength to resist all types of frustrations. She declared: “I recognize that the more hardships I encounter, the stronger I became.”

Writing was another girl’s strategy to confront the challenges. She used to write down everything. She explained: “I used to write a lot. This helped me reduce stress and helped me plan my life ahead of time and have alternative plans as well.”

The independence that one woman learned when she first came to the U.S. was her strategy to solve a lot of difficulties she encountered. She first lived with her aunt in a different city, but she failed to secure admission to the same university her aunt attended; therefore, she

used travel to another city by train to finish her admission paper work for the Midwestern university. She also used to travel every day to meet her academic advisor and take her classes. The round trip by train took her around four hours a day. Although it was a big challenge for her to use public transportation because she never used it before, she was excited about her achievement and about solving her own problems without her aunt's help, as she said: "I used to travel to the city where my aunt's apartment [was] and sleep there. Then early in the morning, I used to take the train to my university to attend classes. At the end of the day, when I finished my classes, I took another train back."

**Hanging out with friends.** Having Saudi friends in the U.S. was one of the strategies Saudi females used to reduce stress. One of the girls declared:

Frankly speaking, the first thing that gave me some kind of relief when I came here was when I met some Saudi female students who came for the same purpose of mine. And it was the first experience for them in the U.S. I used to go out with them, make arrangements to cook together, and eat together. We also used to call each other and write food recipes. This helped me a lot to overcome the homesickness and the feeling of loneliness.

One of the women had friends in the U.S. who were strong advocates for her. She explained: My friends here are like my relatives. When I was so depressed, or stressed, I used to sit with them and talk to them. They were a big source of relief for me. We used to sit together and they used to tell jokes and funny stories. Laughing was a good thing to forget about my miserable situation.

## **Summary of Time Two**

Time Two started upon the Saudi female students' arrival in the United States. All participants revealed that it was their first time to travel to the United States. Although two of the girls had previous experiences in other English speaking countries, the rest did not have the opportunity to live outside the borders of Saudi Arabia. In addition, much research on international students asserted that culture shock had a negative impact on students' academic achievement. In this study, none of the students mentioned any major complications related to cultural discrepancies. The support that all students received upon arrival in the U.S. was from either family members or Saudi friends who were residing in the U.S. None of the girls mentioned any major help from campus. In addition, their self-confidence and determination to succeed energized their ambition to pursue their academic journey.

## **Time Three: First Year, Second Semester**

This section addresses the perceptions and lived experiences of the Saudi female students as they were navigating transition in their academic and social lives by the second semester of their first academic year on a Midwestern campus. Their implementation of the four coping resources: situation, support, self, and strategies differed from the first semester. The Saudi females in the second semester became more aware of the academic and social settings which impacted their performance and adjustment.

### **Situation- Time Three**

Although the Saudi students were more familiar with the academic and social settings in the U.S., life events and academic challenges affected their experiences in the second semester.

**Transition in the transition.** The cold weather in the Midwest encouraged one of the women to spend her winter break in Saudi Arabia. This woman, who described her first

experience in the U.S. as “awful,” travelled with her family to Saudi Arabia to enjoy the warm weather and family gatherings. However, another girl’s winter break was different. As she was happy with her life in the U.S. which she considered as a “positive culture shock,” her greatest financial and emotional supporter, her father, was struggling with a serious disease. In order to not create any anxieties for her during the first semester, her family hid her father’s illness and waited until she finished her first semester. Her winter break was devastating. She was able to stay with her father for only one week before he passed away. After her father’s death, her life went upside down. She was in a very bad mood and decided not to come back to pursue her education in the U.S. However, to fulfill her late father’s wish, she made up her mind to come back to the U.S. after only 10 days of his death.

Arriving late in the U.S. a week after the start of spring semester, this same girl faced difficulties in enrolling in classes. A hold had been placed on her account which prevented her from starting her classes. When she tried to explain the situation to the financial office on campus, they did not sympathize with her situation, nor suggested any options. To remove the hold, the Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission (SACM), responsible for releasing students’ scholarship monies, asked her for her fall transcript to ensure that her GPA did not fall below the minimum requirement of getting the scholarship, 2.5/4. Failing to get her transcript with the hold on her account, her situation became more complicated. She did not have any other choice other than communicating with the Saudi Embassy in D.C. and explaining the whole situation to them. The Saudi Embassy understood her critical situation and released her scholarship money. After two terrible incidents in a short period of time, her second semester did not go well. She lost enthusiasm and she also faced several academic challenges. Although her grades were great in the first semester, they went down in the second semester. She explained:

My grades were very good in the first semester, but in the second semester all my grades went down because the death of my father affected my academic progress negatively. It was hard for me to focus on my courses while thinking of my father who I lost.

**Academic challenges.** In contrast to the situation of the girl whose father passed away, the situation in the second semester was better than the first semester for most of female participants in this study. Adjusting to the new life, understanding the educational system, and having more Saudi friends helped the Saudi females adapt to their academic and social lives. However, upon starting taking core courses in the second semester, some students declared that they spent longer hours trying to understand the tough courses. For instance, while one of the women was optimistic in the second semester because she was waiting for her scholarship, her hard classes, especially chemistry, created anxieties for her. When she started the first semester, she mainly took language classes in addition to general education university requirements that were easy to understand. However, the second semester required taking core courses that were more complex than courses she took in the first semester. She explained:

I was studying very difficult subjects like chemistry which was totally new for me. As I took two years only English, and the language courses did not require a lot of effort as core courses, so the semester was stressful and I was not satisfied with my grades.

Similarly, one of the girls explained the academic difficulties as she started to learn new skills to which she never had not had prior exposure. She elucidated:

In the first semester, I did not take core courses. In the second semester, the first strange thing for me was to read a whole book or a whole article in a language that is not mine or not my mother tongue. I never studied something like that. I never read a whole text in

English. So, that was the most difficult part for me. And I felt the class was very difficult for me.

Several of the women had similar experiences. One of them explained:

The second semester was harder. I started taking harder classes and they required a lot of time. It was a challenge for me to take care of my family, especially my son and my courses. I struggled at the beginning.

Another woman added: “The second semester was more difficult for me. In the first semester, I mainly took English classes, and because I spent two years taking English classes, the courses I took in the first semester were easier for me.” A third woman explained:

I chose easy classes in the first semester because I was expecting my second baby. But in the second semester, I started taking core courses, I also took new courses that I had no previous idea about them. So, those courses in the second semester were more difficult than the first semester and they required more time and more effort.

Surprisingly, this woman’s general experience in the second semester with core courses and two babies was “overall OK.” Another girl’s experience was similar to her peers. She described experience in the second semester as difficult because she used to spend a lot of time looking up new words. She also felt jealous about her American peers. She revealed: “When I take classes with native speakers, I feel the difference. I feel that they do not spend the same amount of time I spend when they study because they do not need to look up words. It is their language.”

One of the girl’s experience in the second semester was unique. First, she is self-supporting so she could study whatever she want without restrictions on her choice of major unlike her peers on the scholarship program. SACM had a list of majors and universities in

which Saudi students must enroll in if they wish to get the scholarship. Students whose study majors that are not listed or in universities not approved by SACM become illegible to get the scholarship (SACM, 2017). Therefore, this girl was one of a few students who was able to study the major that she liked. Despite the huge difficulties of her major, she was willing to meet the challenge. In her program, she was the only international student. Thus, she faced the challenge to establish a study group that might help her understand the American political system. She explained:

Most of the students in my major were American students. So, when I wanted to study with someone, I announced that I would like to find someone to study with. I usually did not get a reply. So, it was difficult for me to study alone and do all the assignments, that was so difficult.” Besides the hard academic material, she also struggled with the language and terminology.

She also added: “As I am studying about the American system, the terminology is too hard for me to understand.” Having a monarch system in Saudi Arabia, it was hard for her to understand the democratic system in the U.S. “I learned about the political system in the U.S., and I did not understand the differences between the Supreme Court and the federal court, and the differences of the political divisions in this country.

Pregnancy created several challenges for another woman. She used to spend two to three days in the hospital to monitor her fetus and her health. As an international student, she was required to be a full time student to fulfill her immigration status. Therefore, she was not allowed to drop classes, nor to take less than 12 credits. In addition, postponing a semester and going back to Saudi Arabia was risky as she feared she might lose her scholarship. So, she felt she had no choice but to meet the challenges and maintain an acceptable GPA to keep her scholarship.

**Academic adjustment.** The situation in the second semester for some of the Saudi female students was much better than the first semester. One student said:

The second semester was much better. I had my own apartment and I felt more stable. I also stopped going to my aunt's city because I met new Saudi friends here and I started to build my new friendship network here.

Another woman also had a positive experience in the second semester. She started to understand the education system. She declared:

Of course! The second semester was better because the first semester was hard to choose classes and subjects and sometimes I was stuck with difficult professors. But the second semester was better because I knew what to choose, people in the university can help me and also students. So, the second semester was better.

A third student said:

In the second semester I started to get used to the whole situation in general. So, it was much easier for me. In the first semester, I used to think of my family and I wished to be with them all the time. But in the second semester, I got used to the situation that my family were away from me and it is hard for them to be with me. So, I accommodate myself to the new situation.

### **Support- Time Three**

The support these females received in the second semester was mainly emotional support from family and friends. They also received financial support. Often times, the campus support did not meet these females' expectations. Although seven of the females were on the Scholarship Program, the financial support they received from SACM was not a dominant theme in this stage of their lives. However, having adequate financial support was essential for these females to

pursue their education in the United States. Regarding the academic support, it was mainly from their professors, the writing and tutoring centers on campus.

**Emotional support.** The emotional support that Saudi females received in the second semester was mainly from their Saudi friends in the U.S., their husbands, and their relatives back home, primarily from their parents.

***Friends' support.*** Seven females addressed the importance of having Saudi friends in the U.S. Their friends were a main source of emotional support for them. One of the girls was able to create a network of Saudi friends who were a great emotional support for her. She explained:

I know more friends now, almost all Saudi female students who study in the city. This helps me a lot and gave me a lot of support. Even I know Saudi female students who study in other universities here in the same city. I also know female students from other Arab countries but not too many, may be five or six, and sometimes I meet new friends in my classes.

Yet, another girl was careful in her friendship relations. It was not easy for her to befriend any girl. She explained: "I have two friends here and they are in the PhD program. So, when I meet them during the weekend, I try to avoid talking about my troubles because it is time to enjoy our weekend."

Having friends in the same city where one of the girls lived encouraged her to stop travelling to meet her aunt and her friends every weekend. She was happy with her new friends who were a big support for her as well as a source of joy and happiness. She explained:

In the second semester, I stopped going to meet my friends in the city where my aunt resides because I met some Saudi friends here and I started to have my network mainly from Saudi girls who were studying in the same university as well.

***Husband's support.*** Three women had their husbands with them in the U.S. These young women underscored the boundless support their husbands provided them. Without their husbands' support, they believed their lives in the U.S. would be very challenging. For instance, one of the women designed a plan with her husband who was helpful and supportive. She said:

I used to manage my time with my husband. For example, when I had classes, I used to leave the children with him. I had a baby boy in my second year in the U.S. So, having two babies with other responsibilities made life more complicated. But I and my husband were cooperating together. So, when I have exams, my husband took care of the children. He used to clean the house and cook for us. He also used to take the children for a walk or to the mall when I had exams to help me focus on my courses. So, cooperation with my husband helped me a lot.”

Similarly, another woman's husband helped her when she first came to the U.S. as well as when she started her classes. Having her own baby added more duties for her. However, with the support of her husband, she was able to overcome a lot of challenges both at home and at college. She explained: “My husband helped me a lot especially when I had exams. He takes care of our son and he tries to keep the place quiet for me to study.” Another woman's husband was very supportive and thoughtful. He did his best to provide her all types of assistance to help her pass that critical period of her life. She clarified: “My husband is always supportive right from the beginning like if I have difficulty in school or I have a difficulty in one of the subjects, he is always helpful and he is there to help.”

***Parents' support.*** Nine females expressed appreciation for the role of their parents played in supporting them emotionally as well as financially. Having a supportive family had a positive impact on these students' persistence in the first year of their college life. Although two of the

women's fathers were not very satisfied with their daughters' decisions to study abroad, they were happy with their daughters' achievement as the two women reported. One of the women shared the tremendous emotional support provided by her father as well as her mother. However, she focused on her father as he was more understanding of her situation. Her mother was very emotional and asked her to leave the U.S. in case she did not feel comfortable. In contrast, her father wanted his daughter to become stronger and face her challenges as he believed that her degree from the United States would help her in her future. She explained what her father told her: "You can consider your presence in the U.S. as having fun'. So, my father was the main source of support for me. He always supported me and wanted me to be strong and pursue my academic journey." Another woman's father support helped her succeed in her academic journey in the U.S. Although her father wanted her to pursue her education in another European country, he did not abandon his daughter when she made her decision with her fiancé to study in the U.S. She commented:

My father was the main source of support for me. My father used to tell me that whenever I finish my classes and I have a break, I can travel to Saudi Arabia, so there is no need for me to cry or feel upset.

One of the women also compared her father's support with her mother's. She stated: "My mother was more emotional. She was upset when I used to tell her that I was feeling lonely and I cried. She used to talk to me to help me pass the bad situation." She also considered herself very lucky because she had three beloved people supporting her. She commented: "My husband is the best person supporting me emotionally, then my mother, then my father. But of course the best person to support my education is my father."

**Financial support.** The death of King Abdullah affected the rules and regulations of the Scholarship Program. SACM was responsible for covering all students' tuition fees and all other expenses for all Saudi students from the first moment they arrived in the U.S. In addition, the scholarship covered students' intensive English courses. After the King death, all Saudi students who wished to apply for the scholarship were required to secure an admission in one of the accredited American universities approved by SACM, finish 30 credits, and maintain an acceptable GPA not less than 3.0 on a 4.0 scale. Therefore, three females were unable to secure the scholarship before leaving Saudi Arabia.

***Father's financial support.*** One of the women's father informed her that he would support her financially even if she did not get the scholarship. She explained: "I did not get the scholarship because after the death of King Abdullah, the criteria for scholarships changed. But my father told me not to worry about the scholarship and he is now supporting me." Another woman was afraid to go back to Saudi Arabia in case her father failed to continue supporting her financially. Her father had previously promised to support her financially. However, the high tuition fees were a big burden on her father's shoulders who might be unable to continue supporting her at any moment. She expressed her anxiety:

I was afraid of failure. How people will perceive me. People will not understand that I came back because of financial issues. They will say that I failed and came back, and because I am divorced, people will start creating false stories about me. I know their gossip will not affect me, but I was afraid it would affect my family especially after my failure in marriage. It is too difficult to go and study and then come back without completing a degree. There are two hard things to happen in my life, failure in marriage and education.

The father of one of the girls told her that he could support her English courses until she obtained the scholarship. Paying for the language institute was cheaper for him than paying for college tuition fees. Therefore, she continued taking the English courses for 18 months until she was able to get the scholarship. She explained: “The scholarship requirements became very complicated after the King’s death. I continued taking English courses for 18 months until I got the scholarship.”

**Insufficient campus support.** The campus support the Saudi students received was helpful in some cases, whereas, it created more complications for others in other occasions.

**International office.** One of the women was not satisfied with campus support she received, especially from the Office of International Students (OIS), which, in her opinion was founded to help all international students. As she needed to secure 30 credits to apply for the scholarship, the OIS changed its rules so that the intensive English courses she had previously taken were not transferable. The OIS informed her that they could not change her transcript as the rules were changed after finishing her English courses. She revealed her frustration and disappointment. She declared:

I felt I was cheated because all students who took the language courses had them counted as college credits because they [OIS] changed the name of these courses. But, because I took these courses a year before, I did not get any college credits for that. All what the international office did was to write a letter to SACM to explain the issue. But SACM refused the letter as they wanted to see the credits on my transcript.

Another girl sought help from both the writing center and the tutoring centers on campus to help her with her courses in political science. Although she got support, she was not able to

pass her courses. She commented: “I got help from the tutoring and the writing centers but they did not help me pass. I got an F.”

***Financial office.*** One of the girls was not pleased with support from the campus financial office. Finding a hold on her account encouraged her to seek help from the financial office to release her transcript as a required document for SACM to get her scholarship money. Denial of her request created complications for her. She explained:

I had a hold on my account and there was a problem with the financial aid office. I tried to solve the problem and remove the hold. The Saudi government wanted to see my transcript to issue the financial aid for me and the financial office on campus refused to give me a transcript for the Saudi Embassy office in DC.

***Academic advising.*** One woman’s academic advisor did not offer her adequate professional support when she registered for her classes in the second semester. She clarified:

I took a very difficult class that my advisors registered for me. Later, I realized that there was an easier class that I should take before that class as a prerequisite and my advisor did not tell me about that class. So, I did not get a good score in that class. I felt I was lost.

***Sufficient campus support.*** Although some of the females expressed their dissatisfaction with few services on campus, some others reported they did receive support.

***Faculty support.*** Although one of the girls did not get adequate campus support, her professors helped her overcome several difficulties as she explained:

My department understands that I am an international student and I am from Saudi Arabia where the system is completely different from here. But they gave me this kind of

self-confidence that I know more than American people how the government runs here in the U.S. They motivated me and encourage me to be able to reach my goals

**Classmates.** One woman found support from her classmates. She emphasized the importance of having a support system on campus to help. She commented: “Knowing people in the university makes it easier for me. I mean the support system. In the second semester I made a lot of classmates who were very helpful and they helped me in my academic journey in the university.”

### **Self-Time Three**

The second semester had a huge positive impact on the Saudi students’ identities. They learned many skills that they were not able to learn in their home country because of the family and cultural restrictions. Self-awareness, independence, self-confidence, and responsibility were attributes they learned in the U.S. The combination of these attributes reflected the positive changes on their lives from being in the U.S. Experiencing a variety of situations in the U.S. encouraged them to take an action and gain confidence.

**Independence and confidence.** One of the girls saw herself as more mature as she learned several skills that she would never have acquired when living in Saudi Arabia. She explained:

When I came to the U.S., I learned to do things that I never did back home. I learned to cook, do the laundry, and do the dishes. So, it was difficult for me at the beginning because I was completely depending on my family to do everything for me. Now, I am alone and I have to do everything by myself.

Having the opportunity to become independent, surprised her mother back home. She added: “My mother laughed when I told her that I cook here and I took care of my apartment and

myself. She considered this as a joke. She could not believe that I can do these things by myself.” Another woman described how living in the U.S. created positive changes in her identity. She explained: “I would say, I became more confident. At the beginning, I did not want to say I was scared from the whole academic situation, but the first semester I was lost. But in time, I got more confidence in myself.”

Similarly, another girl said, “The difficulties helped me think more positively, be more self-confident, and changed my personality and way of thinking. I also learned how to deal with difficult situations as well as with different people. I also learned how to communicate with people.”

Another woman confirmed that living in the U.S. fostered her identity and self-confidence, “I realized that I am learning new things every day. This reflects on my identity and fostered my self-confidence. I learned so many things from my courses and life here.” One woman gained confidence in herself as a learner. She revealed: “I was satisfied. My life went well, and I started to get used to the new academic setting and also my grades started to become better. Despite the hard courses, I was able to get good grades.”

**Self-determination.** Besides working hard, another girl had strong determination to be a distinguished student as well. She explained:

I was taking an anatomy class, and all my friends told me that it is one of the most difficult courses. So, I said to myself since there were students who got an ‘A’ in this course, I could get an ‘A’ as well. Since other students were able to overcome the difficulties they faced in the anatomy course, I could do it as well. Having these positive ideas about facing the challenges helped me stay focused and motivated me. So, I always try to get rid of negative thoughts.

### **Strategies- Time Three**

Time management and studying hard were the main themes that emerged in the second semester as strategies these girls implemented to accommodate to their lives as students in the U.S. Taking core classes in the second semester and having other responsibilities encouraged these girls to manage their time to be able to create balance among all their duties.

**Time management.** Family and course commitments created a lot of complexities for one woman who started to learn a new skill that helped her balance among all her duties. She commented: “I have two children, and I need to be more organized and prioritize duties, and I had more responsibilities. I used to come to the library to study as well.” Another woman said, “I needed more time to finish my assignments and take care of my family.” When one woman started to take core courses, she was overwhelmed with the whole situation. She was unable to create balance and prioritize her duties until she sought help from one of her friends who helped her with her difficult courses and taught her how to manage her time. She elucidated: “I was studying very difficult courses like chemistry, which was totally new for me, but praise be to Allah, and to my friend who helped me understand chemistry and how to organize my time.”

**Study hard.** As the courses became harder in the second semester, the Saudi females spent more time trying to understand the material to pass their exams. The ultimate goal of one woman was to get good scores to reduce her anxiety. Therefore, she did not mind spending long hours trying to understand the material, to do her assignments, and to seek all means of support to help her succeed. She stated: “I felt happy with my grades which gave me some kind of relief.” Another woman took several difficult courses in the second semester, but that did not prevent her from working harder to understand the difficult material. She explained, “I took anatomy, physiology, and advanced English. So, these classes in the second semester were more

difficult than the first semester, and they required more time and more effort. But overall, they were OK.”

Another girl followed two strategies in the second semester to foster her success. When she started her academic journey, she lived far from campus. She used to take the public transportation which consumed a lot of time and deprived her from studying in the library, her best place to study. Using the public transportation at night was not convenient for her. She used to leave campus before the sunset to assure her safety. In the second semester, she moved next to campus which was more comfortable for her. She said, “Now, I live just a five-minute walk from campus. So, it becomes easier for me to focus more on my courses and study well. Now, I can come to the library and leave at any time.”

### **Summary of Time Three**

The second semester created fundamental changes in these students’ lives. Besides learning many things about themselves and their capabilities, they also learned several skills such as time management, prioritization, and setting plans for their future duties and responsibilities. The academic challenges they faced empowered them and fostered their self-efficacy. They had a strong desire to prove to themselves and to their families back home that they were willing to face all obstacles and succeed.

### **Time Four- Summer Vacation in Saudi Arabia**

Time four started after the end of the second semester and the beginning of the summer holiday. Six females preferred to spend their summer vacation with friends and family back home. The other four preferred to stay in the U.S. for multiple reasons. One of the women had workshops required for her program, another did not want to visit her family as her father would not be at the airport to receive her as he used to do before he passed away, one of the girls had

some immigration issues with her student visa, and the fourth girl preferred to spend her holiday in the U.S. with her family who had come from Saudi Arabia to stay with her. However, these females who spent the summer holiday in the U.S. had a chance before to visit their families for a short time for two weeks and less. I did not focus on these short visits for two reasons. First, one or two weeks may not be sufficient to understand their lived experiences back home. Second, their short visit was either during the time when they had the intensive English courses, or during the spring break in their freshman year. The summer vacation for the six females who went to Saudi Arabia was for about three months.

#### **Situation- Time Four**

The situation in Time Four focuses mainly on Saudi female experiences when visiting their families in Saudi Arabia during the summer holiday. The major themes that emerged were comparing the U.S. and Saudi Arabia in terms of freedom of mobility, and social behaviors.

**Comparing the U.S. and Saudi Arabia.** The summer holiday was like a preliminary experience for these female students who planned to go back home permanently after graduation. Although they were frustrated from the strict rules and regulations back home, they were thrilled to see their families and relatives again. However, after enjoying freedom of mobility in the U.S., they had no choice in Saudi Arabia but to abide by the strict rules that confined their mobility. Nevertheless, several of these students had the courage to speak out and criticize the situation. They also started to compare between their lives in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. Six of them expressed similar feelings. For instance, the situation in summer for one of the girls was confusing. When she was in the U.S. she felt that none of her relatives cared about her. Once she arrived in Saudi Arabia in summer, her relatives felt they had the right to impose several restrictions on her. They prohibited her from walking down the street to buy her groceries which

was a paradoxical situation for her. In Saudi Arabia, she was not allowed to leave home alone, whereas in the United States she had unrestricted freedom to go wherever and whenever. She commented:

When I went home in Saudi Arabia, our private driver was on vacation, and whenever I needed anything to buy, I used to take a taxi which cost me a lot of money. And when I wanted to go to the grocery shop which was at the end of the street where I live in Saudi Arabia, my family there did not allow me to go. It was confusing for me. Here I live alone and my family does not have any idea how I live my life. I am totally independent here, but when I went to Saudi Arabia, they wanted to control my movements and restrict my freedom. That was very difficult for me. I was unable to buy my own food by walking to the grocery shop.

After enjoying her freedom of mobility and dress in the U.S., another woman explained how she complied with the Saudi rules. She did not have any chance to leave her parents' house without having a male to drive her. She explained:

When I went to Saudi Arabia this last summer, I did not like the whole situation. For example, when I wanted to go shopping or visit a friend, I needed first to call my father or my husband to offer me a ride. If they were all busy, I would not go.

Likewise, another woman started to compare between her life in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. She explained:

I was happy to be home again. But later, I started to see the differences between my life in the U.S. and in Saudi Arabia. For example, in the U.S. when I wanted to go anywhere, I used to call Uber, the private taxi service, or take a bus and go. But in Saudi Arabia, if I want to go anywhere, I need to call my father to see if he has time to drive me to the place

where I want to go to, or call my fiancé, or call my brother, and sometimes if all of them were busy, I needed to wait until one of them call me back and ask me to get ready.

This girl was recently married when I interviewed her during the first semester of the sophomore year. She got married during her summer vacation. This means that she started her life in the U.S. as a girl and in her sophomore year she became a woman who was responsible for her husband and her own house in Saudi Arabia.

**Family notices of changes.** Besides comparing their lives in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, the changes that these females had in their behaviors, way of thinking, and motivation drew their families' attention back home and raised their curiosity to learn more about their lives in the United States. One of the women explained,

Arriving from the U.S. is something different. As if I arrived from a different planet.

People asked me so many questions about people, the situation, and every detail. And because so many members of my relatives never travelled before, they asked me so many questions, and I showed them so many pictures I took in the U.S.

**Happy with changes.** When these females went back home in summer, all their families were happy with the positive changes that happened to their daughters. One of the girls mentioned, "My family was happy with the changes that happened to me. I mean, the way I changed my mind about people and life." Another girl stated, "My family was happy with the positive changes that happened to my personality."

**Shocked with the changes.** One of the girls described how her new ideas and perspectives about life, marriage, and other sensitive topics were shocking for her family members. Her life in the U.S. had created fundamental changes in her personality, beliefs, and lifestyle. She started to see and evaluate things from different perspectives that contradicted with

the societal values with which she grew up. For instance, in Saudi culture, Saudi women should marry Saudi males. This girl had a debate with her family about whether a Saudi girl should marry a foreign man. Based on religious evidence that all men and women were created equal, and there should be no differences based on color, heritage, or nationality. Her ideas created discomfort among her family members. She explained:

Discussing marriage issues with my family was not an easy topic to convince them of my opinion. They did not like the new ideas and thoughts that I brought with me for being in the U.S. for a while. And I also cannot imagine myself living again in that society where people's thoughts are so hard to change. I am happy with the changes that happened to me.

Similarly, one of the women's relatives were surprised that her behavior violated Saudi cultural and social norms, especially because these relatives believed she was supposed to stay at home after her divorce. She explained:

My relatives did not imagine how I was strong enough to divorce my husband and go back to the U.S. and pursue my education. They could not imagine the situation at all. They want me to stay at home and cry all the time over my past experience.

**Social behaviors that now felt uncomfortable.** After living in a country where freedom of speech, mobility, dress, belief, and privacy for females are respected, the absence of these rights in Saudi society created a lot of discomfort to the Saudi students. Three of the females mentioned that in Saudi Arabia many people give themselves the right to interfere in other people's business and impose their opinion on them.

***Relatives interference.*** A Saudi woman was annoyed from her relatives who interfered in her own business and tried to impose their opinions on her and her parents. She explained:

All my relatives encouraged me to stay in and not to go back to the U.S. In their opinion, there is no reason to stay in the U.S. and be away from my parents and relatives. There is also no reason, from their opinion, to get education from the U.S. They told me at the end it is a university degree and it does not matter whether it is from the U.S. or Saudi Arabia. They also felt that staying in the U.S. was a waste of money and time, as I did not get the scholarship at that time. They told me that my father paid a lot of money and it is a university degree at the end. So, it is better to quit and go back to Saudi Arabia.

Another woman compared between people in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. She explained: People back home love interfering in other people's affairs. I mean, they try to control one's life by telling them to do things and not to do other things. I did not like this at all. I do not feel that I can control my life there.

**Gossip.** Another woman grew up in a community where gossip was an essential part of her mother and aunts' social gatherings. Going back in summer, she noticed that her aunts continued their way of criticizing others. She failed to persuade them that gossip was social behavior that contradicts the Islamic teachings, but they did not respond. She said,

I felt that their stories were silly and they did not talk about good subjects. All their stories were just gossip and criticizing others. But later, I noticed that I am criticizing them a lot and I should not do that. I did not want them to think that I arrived from the U.S. with completely different ideas. So, I preferred to keep silent.

**Disorganized.** Two girls compared levels of organization in Saudi and American cultures. One said,

I started to compare between life here in the U.S. and how people are more organized and life in Saudi Arabia where people do not know how to stand in a line when they want to

buy grocery, or when they wait in the restaurant to order or pay for their bills. Even driving in Saudi Arabia is very dangerous. Many drivers do not abide by the traffic rules and instructions.

The other girl voiced a similar awareness, she said, “I noticed when I used to go to one of the shopping malls that people were not well organized, and people broke the rules and laws. They did not respect the laws.”

#### **Support- Time Four**

The support that these girls received during their vacation in Saudi Arabia was mainly emotional from family and relatives.

**Emotional support.** The emotional support was the primary theme when these six females spent their vacation in Saudi Arabia.

Despite all challenges one of the Saudi women faced from her relatives who tried to force her to stay and pursue her education in Saudi Arabia, her parents and brothers were big supporters for her. She explained:

My relatives expected that my family should punish me by forcing me to stay at home and not to leave until I get married again. But of course, my parents and my brothers did not agree at all with this idea. My parents believed that what happened to me was my fate and no one can object fate.

Another girl explained how her parents were proud of her achievement. She commented: Of course my parents were the main source of support for me. When I was there, they were happy that one of their children is studying in the U.S. and I am going to get a degree from the U.S. They were proud of me and they encouraged me until now to do my best and be always a distinguished student.

**Cousin.** One of the women described the tremendous support she received from her cousin who encouraged her to go back to the United States to pursue her education. She clarified,

I have only one cousin who was the only one among my relatives who encouraged me to continue my education in the U.S. She told me that I do not need to listen to any of my relatives and I have to pursue my education and achieve my dream. She also told me that no one will help me in the future if I do not have a degree. Neither a husband, nor children will help me when I grow old, only my education and my work.

#### **Self-Time Four**

After living for one academic year in the U.S., these girls had learned a lot about themselves. They were happy with the changes that happened to them which fostered their self-confidence and their self-esteem. They perceived that they had become more responsible, independent, and more aware of several issues that they never thought of before travelling to the U.S.

**Adopting new perspectives.** One of the girls adopted new opinions that were shocking to her family. Being annoyed with her new ideas, she did not care about how her family perceived her. She was happy with the changes that she had made. She explained:

I totally changed. I also noticed that about myself. It was not my way of thinking before arriving in the U.S. My thoughts were very much similar to people with whom I grew up. I was living with the flow. I did not have my own identity, I did not have my own freedom and my freedom of speech.

**Self-confidence.** One of the women was proud of her achievements in the U.S. She told her family about the things she had accomplished without getting help. She elaborated:

I felt I was more self-confident. I felt I achieved important things in my life. I was happy and proud of my achievements. I felt that not all people can come alone and do what I did alone in a country where I did not know anyone to help me. It was a very stressful situation for me, and I was thrilled that I was able to cope with the stress and overcome all the difficulties and I was successful in doing so.

Another girl became more self-confident especially when her relatives back home valued her assistance. She explained:

I was more self-confident. I felt that I was the person whom people could rely on doing things for them. While my family used to treat me as a baby before travelling to the US, they started to ask me do things for them such as booking air tickets for them, translate documents into English, and many other things. I felt that my family trusted me doing all of these things for them.

Living in the U.S. helped one of the women become independent. When she first left Saudi Arabia to live and study in the U.S., her mother prepared everything for her. She was completely dependent on her parents to do things for her. However, living in the U.S. encouraged her to learn how to be an independent and responsible woman. When she visited her family in summer, they were surprised of the positive changes that happened to her. She stated:

Similarly, another girl explained: “I became more independent. Becoming independent was the major thing to happen for me. You know, I started doing my stuff by myself. I did not ask my dad or my brother to do that for me.”

I felt that I have more self-confidence and more independent. I felt that I could do several things without any help from anyone. I can travel alone and I can do many things by myself. When I was in Saudi Arabia before travelling to the U.S., I had the impression

that I could not live without my parents. And I cannot survive without somebody to help me do things for me.

**Hiding identity changes.** After spending an academic year in the U.S. and went back to Saudi Arabia, one of the women noticed so many changes that happened to her identity and her evaluation of various situations. But, in order to keep her mother satisfied, she preferred to hide this part of her identity. She explained:

My family were afraid that I would come back with a lot of different ideas as most Saudi students who study abroad. So, my mother was very scared that I would treat them differently or criticize them or their lifestyle. But, I did not. Because many suffer from this.

Another girl did the same. She preferred to hide the changes that happened to her beliefs to avoid any misconception that her relative might have. She stated:

I did not mention any of the things I did in the U.S. because I did not want to give people an impression that the U.S. changed my identity and sense of belonging. So, I did my best to avoid all of these things. I wanted to behave as normal as I could without having the American influence on my personality.

One of the girls did not hide how her identity had changed to please her family. However, she still hid changes in the way she dressed from her brother. She noted:

I did not wear the face cover *Niqab* in Saudi Arabia. My mother did not like that, but I insisted not to wear it. My brother did not know that I did not wear my *Niqab* and I respected his feelings. So, I did not tell him that I did not wear it because he would be blown away.

The challenges one girl faced in the U.S. taught her that life has never been easy. She did not want her family to notice these changes in her identity. She explained:

When I came here, I felt that life taught me how to be tough. But when I went to SA, I hid this part of my identity. I used to show them that I was the same person who laughs and takes things easy. I also did not show them that I had a big burden on my shoulders. I always showed them that I was fine and everything was OK.

#### **Strategies-Time Four**

The female students who returned to Saudi Arabia for the summer realized that they were unlikely to change the current situation in Saudi Arabia overnight. Although they did not like several social and family behaviors, but because they knew that changing habits and mentalities required a considerable amount of time, they chose to accept the situation as it was.

One of the women decided to keep silent after criticizing her aunts' gossip. She realized that criticizing her relatives all the time would not improve their behavior. She commented, "I preferred to keep silent in most of the social settings."

Another girl noticed the disorganization of Saudi people especially when they violated the rules by not standing in a line to pay for their purchases, or breaking the traffic rules and regulations. She could not do anything to create a positive change, therefore she preferred to go with the flow at least for that limited period of time. She elaborated:

I just accepted the situation as it is. I cannot change anything overnight, so I accommodated myself to the same rules and instructions." Similarly, another woman criticized several social behaviors in Saudi Arabia when she went for her summer vacation. However, she preferred to move with the flow as changing the current situation

was impossible. “I did nothing. I knew that I could not change the whole situation, so I just followed the strict rules.

### **Summary of Time Four**

Visiting their families during the summer vacation drew the Saudi females’ attention to the numerous dramatic discrepancies between life in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. As most of these females mentioned they went with the flow while they were in Saudi Arabia, the endless restrictions, social behaviors, and strict rules and regulations created discomfort for them. However, as they could not change the current situation, they preferred to keep silent. On the other hand, life in the U.S. inspired these females to be more-self-confident, responsible, and independent which made their families happy with the positive changes that happened to their daughters.

### **Time Five- First Semester Second Academic Year**

Time Five started from the beginning of the first semester of the second academic year. The female students’ reflections about this time period revealed the fundamental changes that happened to these girls throughout their academic journey in the U.S. until the end of the first semester of the second academic year. Again, the four coping resources: situation, support, self, and strategies were used to understand the essence of the Saudi female students’ experiences after spending three academic semesters at the Midwestern University.

### **Situation-Time Five**

The main themes that emerged in this period of time were positive transition, American friends, discrimination, and cultural awareness. All the students shared that they found the first semester in the second year much easier than the first semester when they first arrived in the U.S.

They had become familiar with academic and social settings, had friend networks, and they were better able to manage their time.

**Positive transition.** All females indicated that the first semester in the second year was easier than the first semester when they first arrived in the U.S. and started their academic lives. One of the women who was not satisfied with her life in the first semester in her freshman year, when she described the whole situation as “awful,” her opinion flipped in the first semester of her sophomore year when she was adjusted to both academic and social lives in the U.S. She explained:

I did not face the same challenges when I first came here. We planned, I and my husband, so he would pick the children up from the kindergarten by car when I had classes. The situation in general is excellent. I tried not to take all difficult classes in one semester. Praise be to Allah, I was able to manage my time, so it was not a great pressure on me this semester.

Another girl compared between her feelings when she first arrived in the U.S. and her first semester of the sophomore year. She explained:

In the first year here, I did not feel that this country is a place that I can establish a stable life. I always had the feeling that I need to go back to Saudi Arabia. Now, I feel when I go to Saudi Arabia that it is not the place where I wish to be in. It becomes the place where I do not feel comfortable and I am not enjoying a stable life.

Another woman also made a comparison when she said:

I was scared in the first semester. But now I feel that I am used to the whole situation, the university system, the course system, and even the city. Now, I feel that I am accommodated to the whole situation and the problems are fewer.

**Adjustment.** One of the women revealed that she became aware with various resources on campus. She clarified:

I am getting used to everything here. I know all buildings. It is much better now than the first semester. There are so many differences. Now, I feel I am adjusted to the whole situation, and I like it here. It is a free open society and people here respect others' privacy.

Similarly, one of the girls became acquainted with campus resources that facilitated her academic life in the U.S. She elucidated:

The first semester this year is much easier. I now know everything here on campus. I am familiar with the courses that I need to take, I know resources and I have the courage to ask about things myself without having my cousin ask for me or help me.

One girl described her experience in the second year as good as she became more familiar with the whole situation. She commented: "I am now more knowledgeable about things going around me and I follow a different procedure of studying. Before I was studying hard but not smart. Now, I study smart and not hard."

After getting married during the summer vacation, one of the women explained that she became more determined to reach her goal and get a degree. She stated:

I got married this summer and I have my own house in Saudi Arabia. So, I became used to the situation to have my own place, and to be away from my family. Now, I feel that I have to work harder to finish my education and get a degree.

**American friends.** In the first semester of their first academic year, the Saudi females did not have strong connections with American students as they did not know how to approach

them. Whereas, in the first semester of their second year, four Saudi females were able to share their perceptions about American students.

***Different lifestyle.*** One of the girls preferred to befriend international students to American students. Her opinion was based on her daily communication with her classmates who arrived from different cultures and backgrounds. She stated:

I decided to befriend other international students, but not Americans. I think that American students have their own lifestyle and their own identity and privacy that made them isolated within their own culture and lifestyle. Sometimes I feel they look at me in the class as a good classmate. They respect me with my headscarf, they are good classmates but I do not imagine that they will accept me as a best friend of them. I feel they have their own lifestyle.

Although one of the women had kind and friendly American classmates, she did not want to have close relationship with them. She explained:

One of the girls invited other girls including me to study in her house. But of course, I told her that I could not go. I know that in their culture it is OK to have boys and girls studying together. And sometimes they drink beer. Their lifestyle is different from us and it is impossible to do the same of what they do. They have different life from us. We do not feel comfortable with them, and I guess they have the same feeling.

***Cultural differences.*** One of the women acknowledged the cultural differences between American and Arab friends. She elaborated:

The American friends are unlike the Arabs. It is difficult to ask them to go out at any time. If you ask them to go out to have coffee, they get out their calendar and they start telling you the times they are available. They cannot go at any time without having that

on their calendar. According to Arab friends, they do not have this strict time management.

In contrast, other Saudi females shared how they befriended American students:

- You need to gain their trust first. I feel this is similar to me. I feel that I have my own privacy. Not anyone is allowed to enter my life and befriend me. So, I respect their privacy as I want people to respect my privacy.
- I think that befriending American students is much more difficult. They have red lines in their relations with foreigners. They cannot befriend foreigners until they have the full trust. In class they are excellent. We can work together on a project, on an assignment, this is OK, but to hang out together, or to visit each other, they are not this kind of people who can open their hearts and houses easily.

One woman described her friendships with Americans of different races and ethnicities. She said:

I have an American friend who was OK and we were friends. And also, I had an African friend who was very good and when I traveled to see my family in Saudi Arabia, she was crying because it was hard for her to leave me. I also had an American friend from Latin America and she was also good.

Another girl was able to summarize the process of selecting a friend regardless color or national origin, she said, “I think having a good friend needs to have commonalities.”

Although discrimination is a prominent topic in international student research, the females in this study denied having any discriminatory action on campus. One of the girls articulated her opinion in the focus group and the other three females agreed with her. She explained:

I think that other people exaggerate about discrimination that American people have toward foreigners. I do not think that they discriminated against me. I never ever felt that I was in class and they humiliated me. They respect us and they never showed any hostility against us. On the contrary, I felt that they are very supportive.

***Discrimination among Arabs.*** The girls in the focus group explained that discrimination was part of the social norm in Saudi Arabia. One girl explained: “In Saudi Arabia, they discriminate against you if you are different. The discrimination is based on heritage, tribe, origin, and religious sect.” Another girl agreed with her, “We, the Arabs are racist against who are different from us. We make these differences among us such as Sunni and Shia.”

However, one of the girls revealed that her father told her that racism started as a new phenomenon in the Saudi society. She elaborated:

Racism and differences among religions are new to the Saudi society. Now, it is sad to watch Muslims kill each other and do not respect each other. In the past they used to live with everyone and respect everyone despite religious and cultural differences. They used to live together very peacefully.

**Political situation in the U.S.** The 2016 presidential elections in the U.S. followed by President first aborted travel ban of people from seven Muslim countries had an impact on the Saudi females. Because they are from Saudi Arabia, the world’s second largest oil reserve, some of these female felt a kind of comfort that nothing would threaten their presence in the U.S. However, the reactions of some others to President Trump’s rhetoric varied between fear and carelessness.

When I first asked the females who participated in the individual interviews about their opinion of the 2016 Presidential and Congressional elections, some said they were scared from the consequences, while others did not perceive there would be any difference. A girl said:

This is the worst elections that happened in the history of the United States. I am a kind of afraid of what is going to happen, and what will happen in the airport after that. I have a friend who arrived from Saudi Arabia just two days after the Presidential election, and one of the custom officers told her in a loud voice, ‘we are glad that we are going to make American great again.

Another commented, “Everyone was scared. They were scared that he [President Trump] will kick all Saudi students out but nothing happened until now.”

One girl shared her feelings: “I know that this President does not care about us. So, people who elected him, obviously they are racists like him and they like what he is going to do.” However, one girl did not share the same feelings toward American people with her friends. “I feel that the American people are kind and friendly and electing this President does not represent all American people and we should not overgeneralize because overgeneralization is the language of stupid people.”

One woman expressed her opinion:

At the beginning, students were afraid that the Saudi government might ask us to leave the United States and go back to Saudi Arabia. For me, I was afraid, but at the same time I said to myself if this would happen, I am sure that Allah has a better plan for me and other students to study somewhere else.

I asked the four students in the focus group to share their perceptions of the aborted attempt by President Trump to ban travelers from six Muslim countries in early February, 2017. Some females had concerns about the future, while others did not care.

***Feelings toward the Muslim ban.*** The Saudi females' feelings regarding the presidential order of banning Muslims from seven Muslim countries to enter the U.S. fluctuated. Some of them expressed their fears, others did not care, and some others were confident that nothing will happen to them. Two girls mentioned their fear, "I first felt afraid that I might be kicked out of the country before finishing my education," and "I felt that it would be more difficult for us if we need to renew our visa in the future and there will be complications." Another girl showed indifference:

To be honest, I did not care at all about the whole situation. I felt that the order will not last forever because it is impractical and insensible. I do not think he is going to harm any Saudi. He will not ban any Saudi from entering the U.S. When he was asked about Saudi Arabia, he said, Oh, I love Saudi Arabia, they give me a lot of money.

Another woman mentioned the illusion that surrounded the Muslim ban. She stated, "This president thinks that Muslims are terrorists and they are the source of terror in the world." Another girl did not expect that Saudi people will be banned from entering the U.S. She explained:

I feel we are protected because we have oil and he cannot ban us from coming here because he will lose a rich source of money. I think it is not a benefit for him to ban people from Saudi Arabia." Another girl was pessimistic about the order, "I think if this president bans Muslims from the Gulf countries, this will be like a

declaration of World War III. If you noticed the banned countries are the weakest Arab countries now.

This period of the Saudi female lives revealed the level of maturity, social and political awareness, and knowledge they gained after studying and living in the U.S. for almost two years. They were able to figure out their own way and have better understanding of diversity and multiculturalism. They also had their own interpretations of the social, economic, and political situation in the U.S. and the anticipated future of the U.S. and their country.

### **Support- Time Five**

Academic and financial support were the main themes about support that emerged in Time Five. After spending one academic year on campus facing several challenges, the girls were better able to explore campus services during their second year that helped them accommodate to academic life in the U.S.

**Academic support.** The academic support that some of these females received was mainly from the tutoring and the writing centers on campus. Taking difficult classes did not let these females down, however, it motivated them to seek sources of support to help them understand the hard subjects and succeed. A woman shared her experience with the tutoring center on campus. She declared:

Once I took a psychology class. I was happy with that class because I learned a lot of things. But, at the same time it was difficult for me. So, it was interesting and difficult at the same time. It was difficult because all the material since the beginning of the semester was included in the final exam. So, I went to the tutoring center. They helped me a lot. And I was happy to get a full score in the first exam.

**Faculty support.** Another girl compared between her experience with the difficult classes in the first semester in her first year and the first semester in the second year. As she used to cry when she was frustrated from the difficult courses, in the second year she was courageous to seek help. She explained:

This semester, I sought help from the instructor. I asked him to explain some issues that I did not get during the class. Now, I go to the tutoring center and I ask them to review my assignment. I also review my assignment before submitting it to the Dropbox. So, now, I am familiar with the strategies that will help me succeed and overcome the several difficulties and challenges I faced in the first semester when I first came here.

One of the women was happy with the tremendous support she received from her department. She stated:

Actually, the only support I feel it is worthwhile is from a TA who teaches us anatomy. Anatomy is a course that requires memorizing a lot of terms and their spellings. So, sometimes I lost grades in the quizzes because of the spelling errors. The TA was very kind and he used to help me correct my errors. He also asked me to be more careful to avoid similar errors in the future. The professor of anatomy was very helpful as well. Once he asked us to do a project and a quiz, and they were both difficult for me to do. I spent a lot of time on the project and I did not know how to do it. So, I went to his office and shared with him my struggles. The professor asked me to sit down and started explaining the project step by step. It was great that he understood my challenges and helped me.

**Financial support.** Without King Abdallah Scholarship Program, it would be impossible for nine of these girls to pursue their education in the U.S. Although one woman's father was

very supportive and encouraged her to pursue her education in the U.S., the high tuition fees and life expenses were hard for him to cover. Therefore, she was very anxious about her situation in the U.S. However, getting the scholarship in the first semester of the second year gave her a sense of relief. Because she did not need to worry any longer about financial support, she was motivated to study harder. She revealed:

There was a Royal order that all Saudi students who were waiting for a scholarship and they have not got it yet, to grant it to them even if they have not finished the 30 credits.

But, they have to prove that they are academically successful.

Without adequate financial support that covers the whole academic program besides life expenses, studying in the U.S. would be difficult for most Saudi students. Besides paying for the tuition fees, all Saudi students get a monthly stipend of \$1800 per adult family member residing in the U.S., and \$900 for each child (SACM, 2016). However, one woman stated that this money is not enough to cover all life expenses in the U.S., especially with her two children. She explained:

I think that if I am here with my husband and without kids, life is OK. We can manage the expenses. But with the kids, it becomes more difficult. It is very expensive to have children here especially when you pay for the daycare and for life expenses.

***Financial management.*** “It is essential in the U.S. to have a family financial plan.” This is what a woman shared with the focus group when I asked them about the financial support and the scholarship they received. Life in the U.S. encouraged one of the girls to manage her life expenses. She explained, “I feel the stipend is enough if we know how to manage our money. I and my sister used to manage our expenses and it was OK for us to live within our budget.”

Having a limited budget encouraged another girl to manage her expenses by buying affordable items. In the focus group, the same girl shared her experience with money management when she was in Saudi Arabia and then the U.S. She explained:

When I visited Saudi Arabia, I went shopping with my mother. I started to look at the prices and when my mother asked me to try something or when she liked to buy something, I used to look at the price and tell her that this was so expensive. So, that surprised her a lot. She never imagined that I might say something like that. We used to buy things without looking at the price and without caring whether it was expensive or not.

#### **Self- Time Five**

After being totally dependent in their parents' houses where either their mothers or the housemaids used to do everything for them, living in the U.S. helped most of the Saudi females become independent. In addition, life in the U.S. provided them with opportunities to meet people from different cultures and backgrounds which augmented their cultural awareness as well. Therefore, the major themes that emerged in this stage of their lives were, independence, self-confidence, change of beliefs and ideas, sense of belonging, and maturity of thinking.

**Independence.** One of the girls was happy to be independent in the U.S. She said:

As long as I learn and read and I have the freedom to create new things or read about new things, or get new information that the majority of people do not know, these all gave me self-confidence. Having my own space, and my own belongings that no one can share with me, and when I make my own decisions, this is independence.

One woman loved being independent in the U.S. The culture in Saudi Arabia imposes several restrictions that make it difficult for women to enjoy their independence. She revealed, "I

like to be more independent. Because when I go back, I did not have this freedom to be independent because of our traditions and how we live there.”

Another woman’s similar perspective about being independent revealed the influence of living in the U.S. on her identity. Being totally dependent in Saudi Arabia where there was no chance for her to live her life the way she wanted, she confirmed that independence meant a lot to her. In addition, living in the U.S. empowered her and fostered her courage to refuse being forced to do something that she did not like or not convinced of doing it. She explained:

Not to be chained to others’ opinion. I have my own identity and my opinion and nobody has the right to impose his opinion on me. Even with my husband, I feel that I have my own identity and my own opinion, but of course, I share with my husband my opinion and he also shares with me his opinion to come up with a shared opinion that satisfies both of us.

Dealing with several hindrances in the U.S. taught another young woman how to be strong and capable to face all challenges. Her determination, self-confidence, and independence helped her form new aspirations. She explained:

Independence does not mean to live alone and be away from my family. Independence means when I achieve my dreams and get a degree and a good job and have my own salary. This is independence for me. Some people see independence as living alone. For me, it is different, it means how to depend on myself to establish my own life the way I want it to be not the way people want it to be.

**Self-confidence.** Independence, self-confidence, and responsibility are interrelated and cannot be separated. One of the girls gave a wonderful metaphor on the connection between freedom, self-confidence, and responsibility. She elucidated:

I think freedom, self-confidence, and responsibility make a triangle where they depend on each other. So, if you have freedom, you should be responsible for your freedom and since you are responsible, you should be self-confident. So, I think these important issues should be taught to children from a very young age.

The positive impact of being independent fostered the Saudi females' self-confidence which in turn helped them become more responsible. The experiences of these female Saudi students reveal the impact of the three coping resources on self. This means that situation, support, and strategies all played key roles in fostering the self.

**Happiness.** One of the girls expressed her extreme happiness at being in the U.S., as her degree will help her get a well-paying job in her country. She clarified:

Now, I am so happy and I feel much more comfortable for being in the U.S. because I am pursuing my education and at the same time I am looking forward to going back to Saudi Arabia to get a good job that will help me have a comfortable decent life.

The changes that occurred to one of the girls were fundamental. Her life in Saudi Arabia was not very different from her peers. She used to live 'with the flow.' Living in the U.S. created major changes in her personality and beliefs. She explained:

I feel I am different from the past two years. I feel a lot of changes happened to my personality. For example, I did not have American friends, now I have. The reason is that I did not accept the changes as I did this past summer. This summer I had a chance to meet friends from other cultures.

As she stayed in summer taking a summer course, the summer time was an opportunity for her to communicate with American students befriend some of them.

**Promote cultural awareness.** One of the girls grew up as independent financially in Saudi Arabia before travelling to the U.S. As her parents passed away from a very young age, she used to travel to visit her grandmother who resided in another neighboring country when she was only 13 years old. She was also working in Saudi Arabia and supported herself financially. In addition, having no biological brothers, she felt that she did not need a permission to do anything in Saudi Arabia. Her work also required travelling to other neighboring countries. So, she got a permission to travel alone from her uncle. She was confident to make decisions in her work. However, living in the U.S. enhanced her self-confidence. She was able to discuss sensitive topics with her classmates and convince them of her opinion. Living in the U.S. where freedom of speech is one of the civil rights, she described a situation where she was able to promote cultural awareness among her American peers. She had the following argument with a classmate who asked her about issues related to her religion and its relation with terrorism. I chose to quote the whole story to support my argument of the level of confidence she reached when living in the U.S. that promotes academic freedom and free of speech. She explained:

I had a situation with one of the American students in class when we were talking about ISIS and we had like a fight in class because he had misconceptions that all Muslims were like ISIS, and Islam is a religion that promotes hatred and terrorism. I used to defend Islam trying to tell him that ISIS is not part of Islam and Islam is honest from these terrorists who commit awful things such as killing, raping women, and destroying houses in the name of Islam. This American student came to me and told me that since you defend Muslims, why did not you wear Hijab? I asked him, did you do some research? He told me, yes, I did. So, I told him before fighting Islam and accusing Islam

of things that are irrelevant, you first need to do some research and then come back to ask me questions about things that you did not understand, so I can explain to you.

This girl was proud of herself because she was involved in an intellectual debate with her American classmate and was able to convince him. The level of maturity she had and the freedom of speech she experienced stimulated her self-confidence and self-esteem. I chose this long quotation as an evidence of the level of political awareness this girl reached when living in the U.S. This unique opportunity to have a debate with an American classmate regarding a very sensitive political issue would never have happened in a Saudi university where freedom of speech is considered a severe violation of the Saudi rules and laws (Academic Freedom Monitor, 2013).

**Change of beliefs and ideas.** Growing up in a relatively conservative country where communication with people from different cultures and backgrounds was very limited, encouraged some of these Saudi females to read about other cultures and religions. Meeting friends who had different religious affiliations from them also fostered their beliefs about diversity and multiculturalism. These females had the opportunity to learn about themselves and about other cultures when living and studying in the U.S. They started to think about the values they grew up with and how they contradict other people's beliefs, yet, these people are kind and friendly. One of the girls explained:

I noticed that there are a lot of Saudi students whose ideas become different when they come to the U.S. For example, in Saudi Arabia, when I tell people that I met a girl who believes in Buddha, they will say, 'she is an idiot because she worships a piece of stone.' But they do not know that she has her own point of view and her own way to worship.

So, I learned how to respect other people's beliefs and not to judge them based on what they believe in.

Another girl confirmed that these ideas of dishonoring other beliefs are new to the Saudi society because her father told her that in the past people were more open minded to accept others who were different from them. She clarified: "In the past, people in Saudi Arabia were more open-minded to other religions and beliefs. People used to marry Jewish women. So, racism and differences among religions are new to the Saudi society."

**Sense of belonging.** Although all Saudi females interviewed declared their happiness to live in the U.S. despite all challenges, eight of them revealed that they will go back home upon completion of their degree programs. Most reasons mentioned were related to their families back home as they could not imagine themselves living in the U.S. forever. They revealed their aspirations to go back home in various ways:

- I cannot live away from my family. It is the place where I was born in and I was raised. And it is difficult to think that I might not go back again. So, as long as I live here, I have to go back home.
- Although there are a lot of deficits in my country, and there are a lot of challenges regarding women, I feel that Saudi Arabia is my land. I feel that I own myself in my country. As long as I am here enjoying life, but whenever I go home and open the door of my apartment where I live alone, I feel that I am a foreigner.
- I feel that my sense of belonging is to my family and relatives not to the land. Some people encouraged me to stay here in the U.S. as there are a lot of activities that are not available in Saudi Arabia, but when I think about the situation, I feel that I need to go home.

- I do not like to cover my face, but at some point if I need to cover it to stay in my country, I will.
- It is hard to live here forever and be alone. It is difficult to live in a country where I do not have any relatives there.

Although one of the girls does not have any sense of belonging to Saudi Arabia, she revealed that her plans might be changed if she had children. She does not want her children to grow up in the western culture and adopt the western lifestyle. She explained:

I would like to get a job and have a family here. But if I want to go back, it will be for my children to grow up in a Muslim environment but not because I have a sense of belonging.

Another girl changed her future plans. As she could not imagine that she might live in the U.S. for a long time in the first semester, she changed her plans in the second year. She started to realize that the U.S. is the place where she wants to establish a stable life. She clarified:

The first year here, I did not feel that this country is a place that I can establish a stable life here. I always had the feeling that I need to go back to Saudi Arabia.

Now, I feel when I go to Saudi Arabia, that my country is not the place that I wish to be in. It becomes the place where I do not feel comfortable and I am enjoying a stable life.

However, this girl explained in the focus group that she loved life in the U.S., but she could not imagine herself living here forever. She elaborated:

I feel that I am happy here and life is good but at the same time, I feel that this is a temporary situation and it is difficult for me to live here forever. But I do understand that

I am used to a lifestyle that it would be different when I go back home, but I do not think that I will stay here forever.

***Sense of belonging toward KASP.*** The four females who participated in the focus group asserted that there is no relationship between the scholarship and their sense of belonging. They are grateful for their country but this will not foster their sense of belonging. One of them explained:

I feel there is no relation between the scholarship and sense of belonging. I mean having the scholarship does not do anything with my sense of belonging to my country. I have this sense of belonging and the scholarship does not foster it. I am grateful for my country but this is not directly related to my sense of belonging.

**Maturity of thinking.** Living in the U.S. helped these girls become more mature in evaluating things and situations. Comparing their situation with American students made them appreciate the generous scholarship they get from their country. They expressed their gratitudes through different ways:

- When I compare our lives here with American students who need to work to pay for their tuition fees, I feel I am grateful for my country.
- The scholarship made me feel grateful that I live in a wealthy country and I do not need to work to pay for my tuition fees. And I know that there are other students who would like to be in my place, but they could not. I know that there are hardworking students who work hard to get money, but for me, I thank Allah that I live in a wealthy country and do not have these problems.
- Many Saudi students do not appreciate what Saudi Arabia is doing for them. I just want these Saudi students to work like American students two or three jobs to be able

to pay for their tuition fees and for their life expenses to see how life is difficult and how Saudi Arabia is offering them many privileges to succeed. I cannot deny that there are many things need to be improved in Saudi Arabia, but there are many privileges and advantages the Saudi people get and it is hard to find in other countries.

- I am wondering that some Saudi girls wish to live the same life of American people and I feel that there are many Americans who love to have the same privileges we have in our country. So, there is nothing perfect or complete.
- Sometimes I wish I could take the good things in Saudi Arabia and put them here and take the good things in the U.S. and put them in Saudi Arabia.

### **Strategies- Time Five**

Time management emerged again in time five as a feasible strategy to overcome various challenges. Preparation for going back to Saudi Arabia after graduation was another theme that Saudi females were planning for it, besides the option of getting a permission to work in the U.S. after graduation, the Optional Practical Training (OPT).

**Time management.** Learning how to manage time and prioritization were two skills that Saudi females did not learn in their home country. As they have several responsibilities, it became vital to manage their times and create balance to fulfill all required duties and assignments. One of the girl's first semester in the second year was much better. She was able to arrange everything before leaving for her summer vacation. She explained:

I registered for all my classes before the summer vacation and I knew exactly what courses I need to take and what I need to do for each of these classes. When I first came here, I took classes that I do not need because I wanted to fulfill my immigration status

by taking at least 12 credits. But this semester I was happy to come back with everything set up.

**Avoid negative thoughts.** One of the women used this strategy to keep herself focused and busy all the time. She explained:

I tried to create balance between my life and my education. For example, when I have exams or assignments, I just focus on them and try to forget about other problems I have. Sometimes when I do not have assignments and I think about myself, sometimes, I feel sad. Sometimes I feel satisfied, it depends on the situation I am in. I tried to avoid sad thoughts in order not to affect my education negatively.

**Going back home.** As the Saudi females revealed their plans to go back home after graduation, they did not know what strategies they need to take to help them prepare for this forthcoming moment. Getting used to life in the U.S. where these females enjoy a huge space of freedom, it would be difficult for them to adapt again to life in their home country. One of the girls reported:

Going back to Saudi Arabia is going to be very difficult because there are several situations in Saudi Arabia and in my life, that I do not want to face again. There are so many things that happened to me since I left Saudi Arabia for the first time and I do not want to go back and face the same issues. At the same time, it is going to be funny because I want to be home and go back home.

Another girl explained that she loved life in the U.S., but she wanted to go back to Saudi Arabia upon graduation. She clarified:

I adapted to a lifestyle that is difficult to change. For example, I depend on myself, I control my life and I do whatever I want but I feel that when I go back to Saudi Arabia, I

feel that people will control my life and I will lose the privileges that I am enjoying here in the U.S., but of course, I want to graduate and go back to Saudi Arabia.

Another woman, who has her family with her in the U.S., was worried when thinking of going back home after graduation. She revealed her anxieties:

This is the most topic that bothers me now. This is what I am thinking about all the time.

I have been here for a number of years and I am adapted to life here. I also arranged my life as I want so changing all of these things when I go home, I have no clue how my life is going to be. I think about that all the time.

**OPT.** The Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a one-year work permit given to international students who wish to stay in the U.S. after graduation and work. The international office on campus is responsible to send out information about the OPT to all international students at the beginning of the semester they plan to graduate in. Some Saudi students use this option as a technique to help them have a smooth transition to their home country. For one of the women, going back to Saudi Arabia after graduation created a lot of discomfort for her. She got used to life in the U.S. and at the same time when she graduates her husband will stay for another year to finish his degree. So going back to Saudi Arabia with her two children without her husband will not be a wise decision for the whole family. Therefore, she was thinking of applying for the OPT to be able to stay and work until her husband finishes his degree.

### **Summary of Time Five**

Time Five was rich of these females' insights. The Saudi females who participated in the study revealed the huge changes that happened to them since they arrived in the U.S. for the first time in their lives. The coping resources, situation, support, self, and strategies were tightly related to each other as they also affected each other. However, self emerged as a prominent

copied resource affected by the transition experiences of these females. Being in the U.S. reinforced self-confidence for all females who participated in this study where situation, support, and strategies also worked together to stimulate these traits. Noteworthy, these females had a minimal level of self-confidence when they first arrived in the U.S., however, living and studying in the U.S. contributed in stimulating their capabilities and self-confident that would be inspirational for other Saudi women who are planning to study in the U.S.

### **Summary of the Chapter**

Each Saudi female reflected on her experiences since she left Saudi Arabia until I interviewed her in her sophomore year. Although the 10 Saudi females arrived from different regions in Saudi Arabia, they all shared one goal: to study in the U.S. and get an undergraduate degree. Although the circumstances that surrounded their decision making in their home country were different for each, they were all determined and confident to achieve their dreams.

Once they arrived in the U.S., nine of the ten participants took intensive English courses to help them prepare for college life. They communicated with American students and students from other cultures and backgrounds that contributed to enrich their cultural awareness. Because they were unfamiliar with many aspects of life and study in the U.S. at first, they experienced some awkward situations. However, with the support they received from their families in Saudi Arabia, especially from their fathers, and friends and relatives in the U.S., the participants' self-confidence increased and fueled their ambitions to move ahead.

As the Saudi female participants reflected about the second semester of their first academic year, all expressed their comfort with their academic and social lives. They had become familiar with the education system, the courses required for their degree plans, and the services offered to them. However, some complained about the increasing difficulty of core courses they started

taking in the second semester. Because they believed in their abilities to overcome challenges, they adopted strategies to solve their academic problems. They sought help from their professors, friends, and campus support services. They also learned how to manage their time and set their priorities. The academic challenges they had did not dramatically impede their progress. On the contrary, their enthusiasm to persist grew. Surrounded with a strong support system combined with their families back home, friends and relatives in the U.S., their self-confidence also increased.

Six of these female students chose to spend their summer holiday back home in Saudi Arabia. After being away for more than one year, these females began comparing their lives in the U.S. and in Saudi Arabia. Although six participants did not like several cultural and social behaviors in their home country, some chose to keep silent while others started to criticize various social and behavioral deficits in the Saudi culture and lifestyle. Realizing that they were powerless to create palpable changes at that period of their lives, they decided to just go with the flow.

By the first semester of their sophomore year, all ten Saudi females were happy with the great progress they achieved that enabled them to persist to their sophomore year. They had learned several skills that would be impossible to acquire while in Saudi Arabia. They became more self-confident about their choices, as well as more independent and responsible. They appreciated their lives as they did not feel they were either discriminated against or humiliated. Even though the U.S. presidential election season of 2016 during the first semester of their sophomore years included rhetoric against Muslims, none of the Saudi female participants said they experienced any offensive acts. On the contrary, they felt supported by their professors, American friends, and campus.

The findings from the individual interviews and the focus group interview revealed the essence the transition experiences of these 10 Saudi female students. The fundamental changes

they experienced in a relatively short period of time, two academic years, made a huge impact on their sense of themselves. As the study concluded, these 10 Saudi female students at a U.S. university were celebrating their successes and were ready to welcome new experiences.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Conclusions and Implications**

In this chapter, I will draw conclusions about the essences of the transition experiences of 10 sophomore Saudi female students as they implemented four coping resources (situation, support, self, and strategies) during their first two years of study at a Midwest U.S. university. The first part of this chapter summarizes the explanation for the study, research questions, methods, and findings. The second section highlights the major conclusions of the study. The chapter concludes with implications for practice and for future research.

### **Summary**

The influx of international students in the United States since 2005 motivated me to ask questions about the various academic and social challenges these students encountered when transitioning to the U.S. and the resources they implemented to facilitate their transitions. Several studies were conducted between 2011 and 2015 to explore the impact of challenges international students faced on their academic performance and social integration (Nassim, 2011; Eland and Thomas, 2013; Glass, 2015, Shapiro et al. 2015). However, most of these studies addressed international students as a group and so appeared to assume that all international students encounter similar problems regardless their national origin, cultural differences, and religious affiliation (Lu, 2001; Pedersen, 2004; Mather, Schweitzer and Morson, 2011; Nassim, 2011). In particular, researchers have paid little attention to students arriving from the Middle East despite their proportional increase among international students on U.S. campuses. Saudi Arabia, for example, now ranks third after China and India in the number of students studying in the U.S. (Open Doors, 2016). The few studies that have addressed Saudi students are mainly doctoral dissertations conducted by Saudi students who lived and studied in the U.S. (Hakami, 2012;

AlRumaih, 2016; AlDousari, 2016). In addition, these studies addressed the social and academic challenges Saudi students encounter in the U.S. without exploring the meaning of their transition to the students or the impact of transition on their sense of self or their social, academic, and political perspectives.

To set the foundation of my research, I examined literature on the historic background of international students in the U.S., as part of the internationalization process. I also explored the impact of campus diversity and campus climate on international students. Topics such as inclusion of international students, sense of belonging, international student engagement, and international student identity development, were also fundamental topics I investigated for my literature review. Further, I learned about the various academic and none academic challenges faced by international students in general, and female international students from Saudi Arabia in particular.

Then, I focused my research on literature on Saudi Arabia to understand the historic background of education in Saudi Arabia and girls' education. I also addressed the immense role King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) in offering education abroad opportunities to Saudi youth males and females, mainly, in the U.S. Then, I addressed the literature that addressed Saudi females on U.S. campuses and previous research on Saudi females.

Then, the second part of chapter two, I explained the conceptual framework I used in my study that incorporated the underlying the phenomenological approach, and the theoretical framework of the transition theory, and culture shock theory. Then, I concluded my literature review with how my research was going to be different and the gap I addressed.

Transition theory provided a strong theoretical foundation for my study and allowed me to understand the transition experiences of Saudi females from the time when they made the

decision to study in the U.S. through the second semester of their sophomore year. Transition theory focuses on four coping resources (situation, support, self, and strategies) that individuals use as they experience a dramatic change. By exploring five different time periods during Saudi female students' transition, I could learn the impact of their transitions on their understandings of themselves, their social interactions, and their academic performance.

In order to explore the meaning of the transition experiences for Saudi female students attending a U.S. university, I addressed the main research question: How do Saudi female international students navigate their transitional experiences to study and live during their first two academic years in an urban Midwest university?

Four sub-questions addressed the coping resources cited in Goodman et al. (2006) that incorporate the four S's: situation, self, strategies, and support to improve understanding of the ways that Saudi female students navigate their transitions:

- How do Saudi female perceived they navigate challenges in their home country as they make the decision to study and live in the United States?
- How do Saudi females perceived they navigated the transition to living and learning on a U.S. campus during their first six weeks?
- How do Saudi females perceive they navigated transition in their academic and social live by the second semester of their first academic year on a U.S. campus?
- How do Saudi female students perceive they have navigated academic and social transitions by the end of their third semester on a U.S. campus?

## **Methods**

I selected hermeneutic phenomenology as the philosophical and methodological approach for conducting this study to assure that the qualitative findings would reveal and convey the

essence of participants' own interpretations of their transition experiences. To achieve the goals of this research, I recruited Saudi female sophomores at a single U.S. university in the Midwest. The university was selected because it has a sizeable population of Saudi students. I recruited sophomore students because their transition experiences were sufficiently fresh so they would remember specific details of their experiences since deciding to come to the U.S., yet they had sufficient time to reflect on what those experiences meant to them. The 10 Saudi females who agreed to participate in the study comprised 60% of the total population of Saudi female students at Midwestern University. The selected females arrived from different regions in Saudi Arabia that vary in levels of conservatism and open-mindedness. All females I interviewed received permission from their guardians to study and live in the U.S. Four of the participants were married, and three had their husbands with them in the U.S. Five were single, and one was divorced.

I conducted in-depth individual interviews with all 10 Saudi female sophomore students followed by a three-hour focus group with four of them. The interviews encouraged the participants to explore the essence of their transition experiences during five time periods from when they made the decision to study in the U.S. until after they had started the second semester of their sophomore year. For six of the 10 students, these experiences included visits with their families in Saudi Arabia during summer vacation at the end of their freshmen year. Through all five time periods, I aimed to understand how the Saudi female students used the four coping resources (situation, support, self, and strategies) outlined in Schlossberg's (1983) theory to facilitate their academic and social lives in the U.S. and back home during the summer holiday.

I analyzed the individual interviews by implementing the three cycle coding presented in Miles et al. (2014). I shared the findings of this initial analysis with a focus group of four

participants during the second week of the second semester of their sophomore year. Focus group questions elicited participants' further reflections of their experiences in light of findings from the individual interviews. The hermeneutic phenomenological approach helped keep my focus on understanding how each one of these females interpreted her own individual experiences as well as any changes that occurred to her life, way of thinking, and her evaluation of herself and other people. Each Saudi female sophomore student's story added new insight about the collective essence of the transition experience for Saudi female undergraduates at Midwestern University.

**Summary of findings.** I divided their transition experiences into five periods to understand how the four coping resources, situation, support, self, and strategies were implemented in each period and how their perceptions of these resources changed over time.

Time One started in Saudi Arabia. The support these females received before making the decision to study in the U.S. was mainly from their fathers, husbands, and close family members. Two females arrived from conservative areas in Saudi Arabia, and eight arrived from relatively open-minded regions. They received emotional support mainly from their fathers, although one received support from her husband, and another one from her fiancé. They received financial support from varied sources. Six girls received the King Abdullah Scholarship before leaving Saudi Arabia, and two got the scholarship in later stages of their residence in the U.S. One was self-supporting, and three were initially supported financially by their fathers, only one was still receiving support from her father by the end of the study. Two females mentioned that their fathers did not want them to travel at the beginning, but later they agreed. Generational differences also played a role in their decisions to study abroad. Girls and women of their mothers' generation would never have been allowed by their families to study abroad.

Although Time Two started in the first semester of the first academic year, nine of the participants had previously started their lives in the U.S. by taking intensive English courses to prepare them for college learning in that language. Their time spent in learning English ranged between four months to two years. I referred to that period as “Pre-college period” where the Saudi females experienced living and studying in the U.S. for the first time in their lives, weather challenges, and their first communication with American people. When the participants began their academic life in the first semester at the Midwestern University, the major themes that emerged were communication with American students, emotional and financial support, self-confidence, and independence. All females affirmed that the first semester was their first opportunity to communicate with American students in class. In addition, both the emotional support they received from family back home and friends in Saudi Arabia, accompanied with the financial support from either their fathers, or KASP nurtured their perseverance. Having the support system, both emotional and financial, augmented their self-confidence to persist and face all types of challenges. Their abilities to rely on relatives and friends in the U.S. helped them accommodate to their social and academic lives in the U.S. with little campus support.

Time Three occurred during the second academic semester of the Saudi female students’ freshman year. Participants characterized that period as more difficult than the first semester because they started to take core courses at the Midwestern University that required extra time and effort to understand. However, they felt the second semester was better than the first because they had become more familiar with both their social and academic settings and they were able to expand their network of Saudi friends who were a major source of emotional support. In addition, the financial support they received, primarily from the King Abdallah Scholarship

Program (KASP) that covered their tuition fees in addition to the monthly stipend, provided a tremendous financial aid and relieved some anxiety.

Time Four occurred during the summer vacation when six of the participants decided to spend their summer holiday in Saudi Arabia among their family, relatives, and friends. When in Saudi Arabia after spending a considerable amount of time in the U.S., these females started to compare their freedom of movement and speech in the U.S. with the lack of such freedoms in Saudi Arabia. In addition, they became critical of several social behaviors in Saudi Arabia that they had not experienced in the U.S. such as gossip, relatives' interference, disorganization in public places, and traffic violations. In addition, four participants who spent the summer in Saudi Arabia said they tried to hide how they had changed and while in the U.S. in order to not create any discomforts for their families who expected them to maintain the same identities they had before they left Saudi Arabia. Changes in participants' identities involved changing beliefs about traditional and cultural matters such as marriage, choosing their future husbands, gossip, personal privacy, and attitudes toward other religions. However, the participants perceived that their families were happy with their increase in self-confidence and responsibility gained while living in the U.S.

During Time Five, the first semester of their sophomore year, the participants reflected on the fundamental changes that they believed had occurred since they originally left Saudi Arabia to live and study in the U.S. They had become more familiar with campus life, support services on campus, and their programs of study. In addition, they had more courage to establish friendships with non-Saudi students, including American students. They felt that their self-confidence and maturity were continuing to grow after living in the U.S. for nearly two years.

## Conclusions

Through the in-depth examination of the individual interviews and the focus group interview grounded in the hermeneutic phenomenological approach and transition theory, I derived five main findings. These findings addressed the Saudi female perceptions about life in the U.S., the strong relationship between father's support and the female's self-confidence, their desire to go back to Saudi Arabia upon graduation to create positive changes in their country, the interrelationship of the four coping resources fostered *Self* to emerge as a primary asset, and their perceptions of inadequate campus support.

**All the Saudi females who participated in this study described primarily positive feelings about their experiences during the five stages of their transition to live and study in the U.S.** They volunteered that life in the U.S. helped them become more mature, responsible, confident, and independent.

My interview questions, grounded in transition theory, had neither a negative nor a positive bias as I asked the Saudi females about situations, supports, strategies, and themselves during each of the five stages of transition. All expressed generally good feelings about their lives in the U.S. They enjoyed and learned to take advantage of the freedom of mobility they had while at the Midwestern University which gave these students a feeling of independence. These females expressed appreciation for American culture in which people enjoy freedom of speech and mobility away from control, gossip, and interference. Furthermore, during individual interviews, two students described their experiences in the U.S. as "positive culture shock."

In contrast, most prior research on international students at U.S. universities has focused on the challenges such students encounter, perhaps because the studies were grounded in culture shock theory (Davis, 2014; Hendrickson, Rosen, and Aune, 2011; Hotta and Ting-Toomey,

2013; Presbitero, 2016). To make sure that I was not missing something important about culture shock with the participants in my study, I brought up the subject with the four participants who came to the focus group. I drew the line of culture shock as depicted by Ting-Toomey (1999) on the board, and I asked them to draw lines that reflected their experiences and explain them. Not one of the four Saudi female's lines matched the downward plunge of the culture shock theory line. As the students described how their own lines reflected their three semesters at Midwest University, they indicated that the minor ups and downs in their lines were associated mainly with academic challenges they had faced.

Therefore, it appears that my use of phenomenological approach and unbiased questions grounded in transition theory allowed me to hear that the Saudi female students at the Midwestern University did not go through negative culture shock experiences. Even though the culture of their home country, especially for women, was dramatically different from the culture of the U.S., all 10 participants had positive feelings about their experiences and about U.S. culture. Further, the Saudi female students told me that their positive feelings remained even after the political situation appeared more threatening for people from the Middle East after the 2016 election of President Trump.

While discrimination in the host country is a prominent theme in international student research (Ramos, Cassidy, Reicher, and Haslam (2016); Guillen and Ji (2011); Charles-Toussaint, and Crowson (2010), none of the Saudi females mentioned any discriminatory behavior. On the contrary, they expressed their appreciation to their classmates, professors, and university staff who respected them and never humiliated them. They mentioned that people usually exaggerate about discrimination against international students particularly Muslim females. Feeling safe in the U.S. was also a key factor in enjoying life in the U.S.

**An apparent strong relationship between support from their fathers and the Saudi females' ever-growing self-confidence helped them face several challenges and persist with their studies in the U.S.** Seven Saudi females confirmed that their fathers had a powerful impact on their decision to study abroad. The support they received from their fathers when they were in Saudi Arabia added to their self-confidence to live and study in the U.S. They felt encouraged to take the first steps and move forward on their applications for scholarships, university admission, and for a student visa. When they started their lives in the U.S, their fathers' support remained the primary source of strength for them. Whenever they faced any difficulty, they sought their fathers' support to help them overcome the hindrances they encountered. They perceived their fathers' support as more valuable than their mothers' because their mothers were more likely to become emotional and ask them to leave the U.S. and come back home. These Saudi females wanted to stay in the U.S., but they needed encouragement from someone whom they trusted to help them overcome their difficulties. In addition, father in the Saudi family is the figure of authority who takes the responsibilities to protect his family and provide them with all their needs (Le Renard, 2014). So, for these females, the father was an influential source of power as well as support.

Father's support is also related to the type of families these females belong to. The open-minded families often times encourage their daughters to seek education opportunities abroad (Le Renard, 2014). However, many Saudi families do not allow their girls to step out of the house without having a male guardian to accompany them. These conservative families prefer to help their daughters get married rather than pursue their higher education and get a degree (Al Munajjid, 1997).

This conclusion adds to knowledge about international students, particularly females from countries with cultures in which males are still dominant. The research on the role of father's support for international students is scant. Most research that has addressed social support for international students has focused on the role of counselling services on campus that provide international students with support to help them overcome the consequences of culture shock, homesickness, and academic difficulties (Chavajay, 2013; Baba and Hosoda, 2014). In general, there is insufficient research on the family support that international students received in their home countries before arriving in the U.S. and while they were in the host country.

**Almost all Saudi females who participated in this study expressed their desires to go back to Saudi Arabia upon graduation to create positive changes in their country.** Freedom of mobility, independence, and successfully upholding several responsibilities in the U.S. augmented the Saudi females' sense of competence. They indicated that they wanted to apply what they learned in the U.S. in their home country and to become part of the positive changes they believed they could help make happen in Saudi Arabia. They also wanted to inspire other Saudi females to seek their higher education in the U.S. and be part of the future changes.

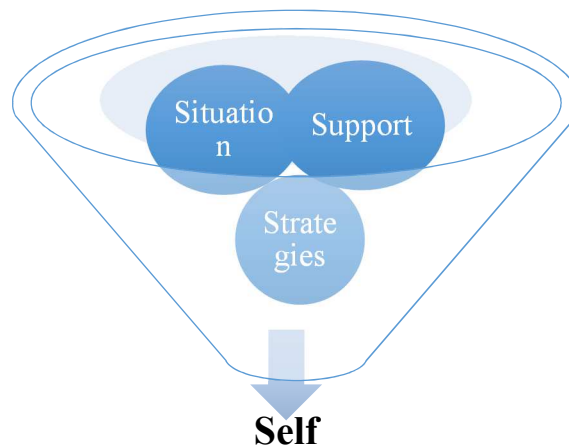
Although all Saudi females in my study respected life and culture in the U.S., they had a strong sense of belonging to go back to Saudi Arabia upon graduation. For example, one of the girls expressed her ambition to help people with disabilities in her country. As people with disabilities in Saudi Arabia are ignored, she wanted to seek help from the Saudi authorities to move forward to assist this group of excluded citizens. She admired the independence that people with disabilities enjoy in the U.S. and the public facilities provided for them. She wanted to work hard to apply what she experienced in the U.S. in her country.

Furthermore, when comparing their lives in Saudi Arabia and in the U.S., the Saudi females expressed their admiration of the American culture. They started to compare several social behaviors that were acceptable in Saudi Arabia such as gossip, infringing on privacy, and disorganization in public places with American culture in which they perceived these behaviors violated social norms and public rules. In addition, they also expressed their appreciation for American students who worked hard both on their school work and their jobs because they needed to pay for tuition fees and life expenses. The participants began comparing between the two cultures in the first semester of their academic journeys in the U.S. and were still doing so when they were in the first semester in the sophomore year. This overall period of time includes the descent into disintegration and subsequent lift depicted by culture shock theory (Pedersen, 1995). Because none of the participants in this study described experiences that would fit the disintegration stage of culture shock, the findings from this study contradict the findings of prior studies that relied solely on culture shock theory. This finding may be all the more remarkable because of the many differences between Saudi and U.S. culture.

The constant increase in the numbers of educated Saudi women is expected to create positive changes in Saudi Arabia in the future (Alferaehy, 2016). Well educated women usually criticize the restrictions and laws that confine their freedom and regulate their activities. Saudi women now have no justification for being deprived of one of the simple rights, driving a car. Nowadays, the debate in Saudi Arabia is whether to allow all women the right to drive, or to restrict this permission to women who need cars for their work, such as for doctors and nurses (Alferaehy, 2016; Le Renard, 2014).

**The interrelationship between the four coping resources, situation, support, self, and strategies fostered the emergence of *Self* as a primary asset.** To illustrate, the situation in both

Saudi Arabia and in the U.S. played key roles in the growth of these females' self-confidence. The support they received augmented their confidence. The strategies they implemented in both Saudi Arabia and the U.S. indicated the amount of self-confidence they had even before they came to the U.S. which helped them meet various challenges once they arrived in the U.S. They also started to acknowledge their aptitudes and potentials that had been difficult to explore while in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, their identity as college students developed and they became more mature in the U.S. The situation, support, and strategies collaborated to foster an even stronger and more positive sense of personal identity which they hoped would encouraged them to be a source of inspiration for other Saudi females back home. Therefore, as shown in Figure 7, these coping resources were blended together as an metaphorical ice-cream cone with three different flavored balls (situation, support, and strategies) that fostered the emerging of essence of a stronger self, or identity, as the result of their integration.



*Figure 7. The Integration of the Four Coping Resources*

This integration agrees with Bronfenbrenner's developmental ecology theory (Evans et al. 2010). Bronfenbrenner suggested that process, person, context, and time interact together in a certain way to enhance identity development. Thus, Bronfenbrenner's theory could also help understand the identity development of the Saudi female participants. The process incorporates

interactions between the Saudi females and both college and social environments. Self-confidence that had been reinforced since their arrival in the U.S. as well growing independence and responsibility contributed to their identity development. In addition, their interactions with their contexts, or situations, in both Saudi Arabia and the U.S. played a key role in fostering their identity development as they transitioned to life and study in the U.S. through the first semester of their sophomore year (Evans et al. 2010).

Although there is ample research on college student identity development (Chickering and Reisser, 1993; Kramer, 2007; Evans, et al. 2010; Jones and Abes, 2013), there is still a need for research that explores identity development of female college students who arrived from segregated cultures such as the Saudi culture. There was an attempt to develop a new conceptual framework that addressed international students (Kim, 2012). The International Student Identity (ISI) model, however, did not fit the Saudi female identity development in evidence from this study when participants lived and studied in the U.S. Kim (2012) suggested six stages that international students experience in the host country. However, when I tried to match her theory to my study, I found several discrepancies that did not match with the Saudi female experiences. Figure 7 proposes a model for exploring how the interrelationship between situation, strategies, and support may contribute to a stronger sense of self – of identity – for international students such as the Saudi females who participated in this study.

**Campus support was inadequate to address the needs of first year Saudi females, so they sought support from other sources.** All Saudi females who participated in this study conveyed that campus support upon arrival was almost absent as they did not know what to do and who to ask. Because all females I interviewed were able to succeed to their sophomore year, I was curious to understand the type of campus support they received that helped them persist.

All girls indicated, however, that they received minimal campus support during their first few months at the Midwestern University. Instead, campus support created more complications for these students, such as when a couple of the participants were provided incorrect guidance by academic advising services. None of the Saudi females mentioned any significant campus support upon arrival. The mandatory orientation session did not satisfy their needs, as it only covered minor services such as getting a bus permit and health insurance. In addition, they were frustrated by the unprofessional academic advising they received as they ended up taking either unrequired courses, or difficult courses that required a prerequisite they had not yet completed. Their academic advisors did not help them select the right courses for their programs.

Research on international student advising services showed that appropriate advising for international students contributes to international students' retention (Shapiro et al. 2014). However, the inappropriate advising lead to several complications and stresses for international students that encourage them to change their academic advisors or programs (Rice et al. 2016). A woman described how her academic advisor suggested taking four core courses in the same semester which created a lot of anxiety for her. When she moved to her sophomore year, she did not consult her advisor, but her friend, who she considered more knowledgeable than her academic advisor. This example illustrates how, even though campuses services were inadequate, the participants in this study were resilient enough to begin to seek help they wanted from other sources.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study revealed several implications that campuses can take into consideration to assist international students, especially the Saudi females, have fulfilling and compelling academic and social lives in the U.S.

**1- Because campus support for international students is inadequate, their services should be improved.**

Campus support services aim to assist all international students with their academic and social lives in the U.S. However, research shows that these services do not necessary meet the needs of all international students who arrive from different cultures and backgrounds (Roberts, and Dunwork, 2012). In addition, there is a debate that the services offered to international students do not match the high tuition fees they pay at public institutions compared to tuition paid by in-state students. Moreover, international students have high expectations of student support services that align with their needs (Forbes-Mewett and Nyland, 2013).

International students upon arrival in a foreign country look forward to receiving assistance throughout their first academic journey (Mamiseishvili, 2011; Glass 2012). However, inadequate cultural training to campus personnel create several difficulties for international students (Nassim, 2011). Therefore, to better support international students upon arrival, joint efforts of academic advisors, English language support program, international student office, student affairs, as well as faculty are needed to assist international students by understanding their needs. This could happen through reaching out to them, organizing workshops and seminars throughout the first academic year to introduce different campus services and how to use them (Mamiseishvili, 2011). In addition, cultural workshops for campus faculty and staff will enhance their cultural sensitivity that allow them to address the various needs of international students, particularly, females arriving form the Middle East (Nassim, 2011).

**2- The English language support program that expected to prepare international students linguistically and academically for college life needs to be improved to enable them to do college level work in English.**

Nine out of ten Saudi females who participated in this study took English courses in the U.S. before enrolling in academic programs. The length of these courses varied between four months to two years. Although some of these females spent two years taking English courses, during their freshman year at the Midwestern University, reading an article or a book in English was overwhelming for them. They revealed that the English courses they had taken during the intensive English program prepared them only to pass the English proficiency exams required for admission, either the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). They did not receive any academic language preparation that would enable them to read textbooks or write papers for classes.

**3- A one credit course on college study skills would enhance international students' academic preparation for academic programs.**

The academic challenges that most of the females in this study encountered were due to inadequate preparation for college life. The second semester of their freshman year was overwhelming for most of them because they started to take core courses that required a lot of time. As they were not prepared for college courses, they did not know how to study nor how to manage their time. Therefore, offering a mandatory one credit course that would help them to learn and apply academic skills would also help them learn appropriate study skills that aligned with their learning styles and their academic interests.

**4- Foster cultural awareness among domestic students through holding cultural events on campus. These events would break the ice between both domestic and international students that would foster a healthy campus climate.**

Some American campuses have successful cultural programs that aim to provide both domestic and international students with an ideal campus environment that helps bring all students together to celebrate their diversity. For example, Michigan State University launched a community volunteer program 50 years ago. This program aims to engage community volunteers to help international students, scholars, and their families. The cultural programs aim to bring international visitors and their families together with their new community (International Studies Program, 2017). In addition, MSU launched the Muslim Studies Program in 2006 to introduce the campus community to Muslim communities, culture, and philosophy. The program organizes conferences, workshops, and seminars to introduce Muslim communities across the world to students, faculty, and staff (Muslim Studies Program, 2017).

**Limitations**

Although my findings provide several insights about the Saudi female international students, there are several limitations that should be taken into consideration:

- Because the methods I used in this study were grounded in phenomenology, I relied on the participants' retrospective accounts of their experiences over one year starting from making the decision in Saudi Arabia to study in the U.S. until the first semester of their sophomore year. Although the participants shared rich experiences with details, their memories might not completely generate accurate reflections of what actually happened or how they actually felt in prior time periods.

- The sample of this study included only sophomore Saudi female international students. As a result of sampling sophomore students, my sample did not include Saudi females who may have dropped out during their first year. Most research on college students showed that the highest dropout rates occurred after the first academic year (Tinto, 1987; Frank, 2010). Therefore, this might have affected the findings about self-confidence. Those Saudi females who had less self-confidence to start might have already left college before I recruited the participants. One of the Saudi girls mentioned this possibility when she said:

The most important thing also for me is to persist living in the U.S. and have strong character and personality to live and adapt to life in the U.S. Any student who does not have these traits, it becomes impossible for him or her to come to the U.S. and study. I know there are so many girls who were spoiled in their parents' houses in Saudi Arabia and they did not have the capability to stay in the U.S., so, they just went back.

- This study was conducted in only one university located in a city with a relatively large Muslim population with Halal stores and easily available mosques. These factors might contribute to the positive experiences of the participants despite the lack of good support services for international students at this university campus. Therefore, the experiences of the participants in my study may not be generalized to experiences of Saudi females at all U.S. universities. Therefore, future research should include comparative case studies of Saudi females at several different universities of various sizes, locations, and relative strength of surrounding Muslim communities.

- The timing of study was during the 2016 U.S. presidential election and its aftermath which evoked intense and diverse feelings about individuals from the Middle East. Although the participants commented about the election the timing did not appear to affect the participants' overall perceptions of their experiences in the U.S.

### **Implications for Future Research**

This research on the transition experiences of the Saudi female international students at a Midwest campus suggested two themes for further exploration:

**Future research should explore transition experiences of Saudi female students when they go back to their home country upon completion of their academic programs to improve understanding of how they repatriate experience life in Saudi Arabia.**

After six of the Saudi female participants went to Saudi Arabia during the summer vacation, they expressed their dissatisfaction with various social and cultural issues. Because they had enjoyed several rights in the U.S. that they were deprived from in Saudi Arabia, such as freedom of mobility, created several anxieties for them. However, they mentioned that they planned to go back home to Saudi Arabia upon completion of their undergraduate degrees to help improve their communities and empower their female peers. Therefore, understanding their lived experiences back home and the factors that would affect their coping would be an important addition to research on female international students from segregated home cultures such as the Saudi culture. It is worth mentioning going back to Saudi Arabia upon graduation is not a KASP requirement. Saudi students have the freedom to either stay in the U.S. or go back home (KASP, 2016).

**More research is needed about American students' perceptions of international students, particularly Muslim students.**

The timing of this study coincided with tension between the United States and the Middle East which increased opportunities for American students to understand and learn from international students particularly from the Middle East.

The travel ban preventing immigrants and tourists from six Muslim countries and the restrictions on mobility of Muslim travelers in the U.S. and Europe suggests that it is important to understand how and what ways American students may improve their understanding of people from other national and religious cultures. As most prior research on international students has focused on the challenges they faced and their perceptions of American academic and social lives, the research on American students' perception of international students is limited. Improving American students' understandings will be necessary to create a welcoming and friendly campus climate and ultimately, the global community.

**There is a need of future research on the similarities and differences in identity development for females raised in the U.S. and international students, particularly women from the Middle East.**

Research that addresses identity development of Middle Eastern females who were raised in the United States is limited. However, Zimmerman (2013) conducted a study in which she explored the identity negotiation of young Arab Muslim women attending colleges in both the U.S. and France. As commitment to headscarf and Islam as a way of life were two major findings, Zimmermann's study did not address international Arab Muslim students who arrive from a divergent social and economic context from the west societies. Therefore, there is a need to understand the differences in identity development between Arab Muslim students who were raised in secular societies such as the United States, and those raised in conservative societies like Saudi Arabia.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

This study was an attempt to capture the essence of the transition experiences of 10 Saudi female sophomore students at the Midwestern University. The study revealed the huge impact of living and studying in the United States on these females. Besides learning new skills, living abroad opened their eyes to several social, cultural, and political issues that they never had exposure to while living in Saudi Arabia. The reflections these females shared also revealed the positive changes that happened in Saudi Arabia in the last decade. The opportunity of studying abroad for these girls with the support of male members of their families are signs of the fundamental changes that have started in the conservative Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Saudi women have been usually depicted in Western media as oppressed and suppressed by male members of their families (Nawar, 2007). This study revealed that these social behaviors are influenced by the nature of the societal fabric of Saudi Arabia and may change as the society changes. Saudi females now have several opportunities to get higher education degrees, either in their home country or abroad. The generational differences mentioned by participants in this study reveal the progress that had already occurred for women rights in Saudi Arabia by 2016-2017 when this study was conducted. This progress already had positive impact on Saudi females. Offering education opportunities for Saudi women to get quality education abroad has contributed to creating a new generation of well-educated males and females who are projected to take leadership positions in their country. The eagerness of Saudi females like the participants in this study to return to Saudi Arabia to apply their education may well make a positive difference for the future of their country and for future generations of women in Saudi Arabia.

The findings of this study indicated that Saudi women were willing to challenge themselves in difficult situations and succeed. The reflections they shared in both the individual interviews and the focus group provide evidence that their academic journeys in the United

States created fundamental changes in themselves and their life perspectives that encouraged them to speak their minds and share their worries as well as critiquing several social and political behaviors in their country. The intellectual debate they were willing to handle with foreigners to defend their opinions was also an indication of the level of maturity they gained by living and studying in the United States.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Individual Interviews Guide**

The participants need to read the consent forms carefully and sign them before starting the interview. They will be informed that their participation is going to be voluntary and they have the right to withdraw at any time.

Before, starting the interview questions, I need to introduce myself and the purpose of my research. This introduction will help establish a friendly atmosphere with the participants. I also need to inform the participants that the interview might take up to two hours and it is going to be divided into four parts. The first part will address their lives in Saudi Arabia when they made the decision to study in the United States, and the factors that encouraged them to take this step in their lives. This part might take around 15 minutes. Then, the second part of the interview will address their experiences in the first six weeks on campus, their perceptions, feelings, challenges, and the coping resources they implemented to overcome several obstacles. This part is anticipated to take between 20- 30 minutes. The third part of the interview will focus on their experiences in the second semester, how it is different from the first semester regarding themselves, the coping resources they implemented and what major challenges they are still encountering. This part of the interview might take between 20-30 minutes. Then, the last part of the interview will address their experiences as sophomore students toward the end of the first semester. Their perceptions when they went home over the summer, their families' opinions about them, whether they met any challenges back home, and their feelings as sophomores succeeding in the first academic year. This part might take between 30-40 minutes.

The introductory question is:

- 1- Could you please introduce yourself, your age, major, and city of origin in Saudi Arabia?
- 2- Let me go back in time with you when you were in Saudi Arabia before making the decision to study in the United States. Could you talk about that period of time? Who proposed studying abroad, who opposed it, and who agreed with it, the type of challenges you encountered, how did you handle the challenges, and how the region where you grew up affected your decision? (situation)
  - How did you perceive yourself when made the decision to study in the States? (self)
  - What strategies did you implement to take this step? (strategies)
  - Who supported your decision to study in the States, who opposed it, and why? (support)

Now, you are in the United States:

- 3- Describe the situation when you first came here.

What were the major incidents that happened in the first six weeks? (situation)

  - Describe your feelings at that time. How did you feel about yourself? (Self)
  - What strategies did you implement to cope with the challenges? (Strategies)
  - What types of support did you receive in the first six weeks? Include campus support, academic support, and family and friends support. (Support)
- 4- Now, let us move to the second semester:
  - How was the second semester different from the first semester regarding:
    - The academic and social settings (situation)
    - Yourself, your level of satisfaction, and level of self-confidence (self)

- The strategies you implemented to cope with various challenges, and how they are different from the first semester (Strategies)
- The support you received in the second semester, how was it different from the first semester? (Support)

5- Now, let us move to the first semester in your second year:

- If you travelled to Saudi Arabia over the summer vacation tell me about your vacation regarding:
- How was the situation different from when you made the decision to travel to the United States? (Situation).
- How did you feel about yourself after spending one academic year in the United States? What major differences had you noticed about yourself? (Self).
- What strategies did you implement to cope with the several changes in your home country after being away for one year? (Strategies).
- How about the support from family and friends in your home country? Did you notice any changes in people who opposed your decision when you decided to study in the United States? (Support)
- How does the situation differ in the first semester of your second year? Both academic and social situations. (Situation)
- How do you feel about yourself as a sophomore student? (Self)
- How are the strategies you implement now different from when you first came to the United States? (Strategies)
- What types of support you are receiving now? How does this support differ from when you first came to the United States? (Support)

6- Now, as we are approaching the end of the interview, would like to add anything else?

Do you feel that there is some information that might be helpful for this research?

As a follow up of this interview and after analyzing all interviews, I am going to invite you to join a focus group where I will share with you and other participants the initial findings of these interviews. Are you willing to join us? I will send you a Doodle Poll, so you can choose both the day and time most convenient for you.

Thank you for your participation and I look forward to meeting you again in the focus group interview.

## **Appendix B**

### **Focus Group Interviews**

Before contacting the participants for the focus group interview, I need to prepare a guide to share with them. This guide should include follow up questions based on the individual interview guide and address the gaps that I need to bridge for my research. So, I need to introduce myself at the beginning:

Good evening and welcome to our session. Thank you for taking the time to join us to talk about the transition challenges you encountered. My name is Alia Arafeh and I am a doctoral student in Urban Education/Adult and Continuing Education at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. After conducting individual interviews with each one of you, I would like to share the initial findings with you today. If you have any further comments, suggestions, or recommendations, please feel free to share them with us. Please, share your opinion even if it is different from others. There are no wrong answers in this discussion. I am interested in listening to your feedback, negative comments as well as positive comments.

Our discussion is going to be recorded because I do not want to miss any of your comments. I will use your first name tonight, but I will not use your names in my study. A pseudonym will be used instead. You may be assured of complete confidentiality. No one will have access to the recordings except me, and I will save all recordings on my locked and secured personal laptop. All recordings are going to be destroyed once the study is done. I placed a card on the table with your name to make it easier to remember each other's names. Now, please introduce yourself, your major, and your town/area in Saudi Arabia.

## Focus Group Guide

Based on the initial findings of the individual interviews, I would like to ask the following questions:

- 1- I want to share with you a line that some theorists suggest is the way that many people feel about their experiences adjusting to a culture that is very different from their own home culture. I would appreciate it if each of you would draw a line to indicate your own feelings over time from when you left SA until now, Then I hope each of you will share your lines and explain the reasons why you drew it the way you did.
- 2- Share an example or two that illustrate what your relationships have been like with international students who are not from Saudi Arabia? With American classmates? What do each of these types of relationships mean to you? Why?
- 3- My analysis of your interviews found that most of you experienced changes in self-confidence between when you first decided to come to the US and when I interviewed you last Fall. Please tell me more about what these changes in your self-confidence and sense of independence mean to you. [follow up] Please share an example or two of how you enact these changes in your daily life. How do you feel about the changes of your self-confidence and independence before and after arriving in the US?
- 4- I noticed that there may be a kind of paradox in your sense of independence, self-confidence, and your sense of belonging. Some of you indicated that you feel like you belong to this place, the US, yet you want to go back to SA upon completion of your degrees. How do you explain this paradox? [NOTE: you may elicit different responses this week than you would have last week, given Trump's immigration ban. This may be

a loaded question now! In other words, some of the girls may wish to discuss it A LOT!

You may wish to save it for the end.]

- 5- Most of you are on the King Abdullah Scholarship Program. What is the impact of this scholarship on your sense of belonging to SA? Especially when you see that the king is supporting your education.
- 6- Some of you indicated that when you returned to SA on vacation in winter or summer, you felt the need to hide from your family how much your life in the US has changed your identity, personality, and sense of belonging. What does it mean to you when you feel you need to hide a part of yourself?
- 7- In what ways, if at all, do you anticipate that your life with your family in SA will be different when your return after completing your degree? How do you feel as you anticipate both similarities and changes from the way things were before you came to the US?
- 8- What does wearing the headscarf mean to you now? How, if at all, does the meaning of wearing the headscarf feel different to you now in SA? In the US?
- 9- Although your reasons were different, each one of you had good reasons to come to the US to study. Now, after living in the US for a number of years, do you feel that other girls in SA who are considering study in the USE should consider other types of reasons?
- 10- How do you feel about your life in the US in general?

**Alia Arafah, PhD**

**Curriculum Vitae**

**Education**

**Degrees**

**May 2017: Ph.D–** Urban Education with specialization in Adult, Continuing, and Higher Education Leadership, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee.

Dissertation Title: *From the Middle East to the Midwest: The Transition Experiences of Saudi Female International Students at a Midwest University Campus*

**2013 Masters in Educational Leadership in Higher Education** – University of Wisconsin Oshkosh

**2009 Masters in English Language and Literature** – University of Jordan (2009)

**1993 Bachelor of Arts – English Language and Literature**, University of Jordan

**1990** High School Diploma, Amman, Jordan

**Professional Experience**

**2016- Present: University of Wisconsin Milwaukee**, Research Assistant- Administrative Leadership Department.

**Main Responsibilities:**

**Spring 2017**

- 1- Co-teach two master's level courses:
  - ADLDSP 711: Organization and Governance in Higher Education Administration
  - ADLDSP 787: Administration of Adult Education Programs
  - ADLDSP 693 Decision Making in Multicultural Organization
- 2- Assist faculty members with
  - Research
  - Literature review search
  - Conduct individual interviews
  - Transcribing interviews
  - Communicate with graduate students regarding their ePortfolio graduation projects
  - Monitor the Department Facebook page
  - Review graduate students ePortfolios
  - A member in the student ePortfolio presentation committee
  - Monitor student surveys
  - Offer technical support

**November 2015- August 2016: University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, Academic Assistant-Administrative Leadership Department.**

**Main Responsibilities:**

- 1- Receive and review graduate student applications
- 2- Admit graduate students
- 3- Review graduation applications
- 4- Provide direct support to graduate students
- 5- Work closely with the Department Chair, faculty, and staff to ensure quality to service offered to graduate students
- 6- Offer technical support
- 7- Work on the Department budget
- 8- Prepare reports on students' enrollments, numbers, and programs
- 9- Prepare student application for certificates and licensures
- 10- Prepare adjunct faculty contracts
- 11- Work closely with students, faculty, and the Graduate School to assist students with course cancellation, drops, and adds

**October 2015- present: University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, Executive Director of Graduate Student Advisory Council (GSAC)**

**Main Responsibilities**

1. Act as a liaison between the Graduate School and all graduate students on campus to ensure quality of services offered to students
2. Monitor the work of the subcommittees that work closely with the Graduate School Office, the Chancellor's Office and the Department Office
3. Hold regular meetings with members to follow up with current issues on campus, suggest solutions, and communicate them to the Graduate School
4. Design satisfactory survey to measure the satisfaction level of graduate students on campus
5. Recruit graduate students to act as representatives of their colleges and departments

**November 2014- June 2016: University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, Educare research assistant**

**Main Responsibilities**

- 1- Work closely with the headquarter of the project at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
- 2- Ensure confidentiality of students and parents records
- 3- Work with and monitor confidential documents
- 4- Enter student demographics and assessments to the main system
- 5- Prepare reports of students' development
- 6- Analyze parent surveys, more than 133 surveys with 15 pages each.
- 7- Work closely with staff to ensure the confidentiality and expediency of work

**University of Wisconsin Milwaukee.** University Housing. August 2014- January 2015.

**Main Responsibilities**

- 1- Driving the campus shuttle
- 2- Offer secure rides for students

**University of Wisconsin- Whitewater.** Research Assistant. February- August 2015

**Main responsibilities**

- 1- Assist a faculty member with her research on internationalization, international students, and study abroad programs
- 2- Reviewing and Editing scholarly articles on internationalization and international students

**2013 University of Wisconsin Oshkosh: Office of International Education:** Front Desk Advisor

**Main Responsibilities**

- 1- Offer direct support to domestic and international students
- 2- Assist domestic students with study abroad applications
- 3- Review online applications
- 4- Participate with the office team in organizing the Study Away Fair held twice annually.
- 5- Organize and monitor the office brochures
- 6- Ensure the quality of services offered to both domestic and international students
- 7- Analyze student study abroad surveys
- 8- Update the office website
- 9- Work closely with faculty and staff to ensure the quality of services offered to students in their study abroad programs.
- 10- Assist with the orientation week for international students
- 11- Provide pick-ups for international students from the airport
- 12- Provide shopping tours for international students
- 13- Provide several services to all international students to ensure their safety and convenience

**International Professional Experience**

**2010-2012: University of Nizwa – Sultanate of Oman: Lecturer,** University of Nizwa, Sultanate of Oman (January 2010 to August 2012). Worked as a full-time lecture teaching linguistics courses and translation (Arabic/English). Also served as an academic advisor for students

- Teaching Arabic as a foreign language to non-native speakers
- Organized translation conferences, workshops and seminars.
- Leadership positions as the head of the Translation Group for two years.
- Served as a member in the new Degree Program for Translation
- Served as a member in the recruitment committee
- Served as the Department convener.

**Mercy Medical Center, Oshkosh, Wisconsin.** Voluntary work in different areas in the hospital. February- June, 2014. Provided assistance to both patients and their families, front desk coverage, direct assistance, direct client communication with visitors and guests to provide information and answer inquiries.

**The Literacy Council, Oshkosh, Wisconsin.** Provided free English tutoring to new adult immigrants. February 2014- September 2016

**World Relief, Oshkosh, Wisconsin.** A translator, volunteer. Provide simultaneous interpretation to new immigrants by attending workshops, seminars, and private meetings and translate to them all information to help have better understanding of rules and instructions.

**Lecturer, University of Jordan (June 2009 to January 2010).** Worked part-time teaching skills courses, linguistics and communications skills (oral and written expression).

**High School Teacher, Ministry of Education, Dubai, the United Arab Emirates (June 1995 to January 2006).** A high school English teacher

#### **4. Research and Training**

- 4W Summit on Women, Gender, and Well-being & 40<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Women and Gender Studies Conference, April 27-29, 2017. Paper presentation: From the Middle East to the Midwest: The Transition Experiences of Saudi Female International Students at a Midwest Campus University.
- Race, Ethnicity, and Place conference at Kent State University, September 21-23, 2016. Paper presentation: “The Perceptions of Saudi Female International Students Concerning Student Support Services at an Urban Midwest Campus College”
- The 2016 Summit on Women’s, Gender, and Well-being at the University of Wisconsin-poster presentation: “The Impact of Transition on Saudi Female International Students”- Madison, April 14-16, 2016
- Research to Practice conference (R2P). Presented a paper on “The impact of 9/11 on International Students in the United States. What is next?” On November 15-17, 2015
- TESL conference in Ohio State University, Columbus. From 9/30-10/2, 2015.  
Present a paper on “The Impact of 9/11 on International Students.”
- AECT International Convention in Jacksonville, Florida. Presented a paper on “The Value of MOOCs in International Education.” November 5-7, 2014.
- Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas. Race, Ethnicity and Place Conference. Presented on “The Challenges Facing International Students at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh.” October 22-24, 2014.
- University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, Diversity and Leadership Conference September 27, 2014. Presentation on “Women in the Middle East: Facts.”
- Rotary International District 6270 Conference, Oshkosh, WI. April 25-27, 2014
- University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, presentation on “Diversity in Islam: Learning through Dialogue.” Student Diversity and Leadership Conference. March 15, 2014.

- American Red Cross: taking a course in Armed Conflict. American Red Cross, Oshkosh, Wisconsin, February 15, 2014.
- University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, presentation on Women in Jordan as part of the Women's Center activities, November 23, 2013.
- University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, participating in the International Education week on campus and presenting about Islamic Clothing.
- University of Wisconsin Madison, Presenting a paper in the 37<sup>th</sup> Madison Women's and LGBTQ Conference, Madison, October 18-20, 2013. "Reveal the Veil", the Struggle of Syrian Women during the Civil War.
- Loyola University, Chicago, USA, Participating in "Diversity Abroad Conference". April 1-2, 2013
- Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Certificate of SEVP Training for Designated Schools and Officials, U.S. January 15, 2013.
- University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, participation and Presentation of a Paper "Honor Killing in the Arab World" in the Diversity and Leadership Conference, November 3, 2012.
- University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, participating in the International Office activities, such as Study Abroad Fair, guiding and helping international students, February 2013 and October 2013.
- Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman, participation and presentation of Paper – "Pragmatics and Cultural Misunderstanding" in the ELT Conference (English Language Teaching), (April 2012).
- University of Nizwa, Oman, supervision of students from the university, completing studies at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh as a part of Cultural Exchange Program June 2 to July 12, 2012.
- Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman, participation and presentation of a Paper – "Integrating Culture into Language: Teaching and Learning," at the ELT Conference, April 2011.
- TESOL Arabia – Dubai, United Arab Emirates Regular Attendance and Participation at (1996 to 2006).
- TESOL Arabia member (1999 to 2006).
- Attendance and Participation at Various workshops, seminars, conferences on language teaching and education in the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Jordan (1999 to 2013).

#### **Publications:**

- The Impact of 9/11 on International Students in the United States: What Next? Research to Practice Conference Proceedings:  
<http://researchtopracticeconference.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Final2015ProceedingsoftheR2P.pdf>
- Arriving from Overseas: Challenges Facing International Students at a Teaching Midwest University. Under review. Submitted to the Journal of International and Intercultural Communication.
- The Transition Challenges of Saudi Female International Students at an Urban Midwest University. Under review. Submitted to the Journal of International and Intercultural Communication.

## **5. Professional Qualifications**

- Research Assistant: Administrative Leadership Department, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. August 2016- present
- Admission Specialist: Administrative Leadership Department, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. November 2015-August 2016
- Project assistant in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. Work with pre-school children' assessments.
- Research Assistant: Professional development related to international students in the United States. University of Wisconsin Whitewater
- A member in Campus Climate Committee in UWO from September 2015- Present
- A member in Graduate Student Appeal Committee (GSAC), University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. Sep 2015- present.
- Work with international students at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh.
- Providing help and guidance to international students and offering academic and social advising.
- Supervising groups of international students coming from Oman and offering them counseling and academic advising.
- Conducted research on international students and the major difficulties they face when coming to the United States.
- Member of the recruitment committee, University of Nizwa, Oman.
- Head of the Translation Group, University of Nizwa, Oman.
- Fifteen years experience in teaching English as a foreign language, Dubai, UAE and Oman.
- Translation from English into Arabic and from Arabic into English.
- Established computer and technology skills (Microsoft Office: Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Access, Publisher and Outlook. Software programs: Dreamweaver, PeopleSoft, Photostory 3, SPSS, and I Movie on Mac computers).
- Experience planning, coordinating, marketing and developing educational programs, seminars, workshops and other international meetings, activities and events.
- Supervisory experience with various education-related programs, services and activities, most notably including participating partners and participants for widespread international audiences.
- Oshkosh Rotary Downtown membership April 2014

## **6. Awards and Recognition**

- University of Wisconsin Milwaukee Chancellor's Award for Excellence for the academic years 2015-16. 2016-2017
- University of Wisconsin Milwaukee Russell D. Robinson Adult Education Scholarship Feb, 2015
- University of Wisconsin Milwaukee Robert Kuehneisen Teachers for a New Era Scholarship Feb, 2015
- University of Wisconsin Milwaukee Travel Fund Award, November 2014
- University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Travel Fund Award, December 2013.
- University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh: An award from Gender Equity Council,. March 13, 2013

- Wisconsin, Oshkosh Rotary Club Fellowship, March 2013 – April 2014
- Charlotte McEssey Scholarship for Higher Education Students, USA. March 10, 2013.
- Ministry of Higher Education, Jordan: Full tuition scholarship – (1990 to 1993)
- Note: Received numerous citations and certificates for attending conferences and workshops and completing programs of study from 1995- present.

## **7. Volunteer Service**

- Mercy Medical Center, Oshkosh, WI. Volunteer at the front desk. Offer help and guidance to patients and their families.
- The Literacy Council, Oshkosh Main Library, Oshkosh, WI. Offer free English classes to new immigrants.
- World Relief, Oshkosh, WI. Offer translation and simultaneous interpretation to immigrants.
- University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, participating in the Peer Leader orientation sessions for the new international students coming to the in January 2013.
- Picking up international students from Appleton Airport.
- Oshkosh for Education: A member of a community organization that takes care of improving education in the schools in Oshkosh.
- National Christian Forensics and Communication Association: A community judge in the 2013 Speech and Debate Tournament. NCFCA on January 23-25 in Gruenhagen Conference Center, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh.
- Oshkosh Rotary Club: presentation in the on March 11, 2013. “From the Middle East to the Midwest.”
- Kiwanis Club Oshkosh: delivered a presentation concerning misconceptions of the Middle East, June 2013.
- Numerous voluntary works on campus helping new international students and domestic students.

## **Additional Information**

### **Languages:**

Native Arabic speaker

Mastery of English

NAFSA Member 2016-present

NAFSA Poster Reviewer

ASHE Member 2016- present

Commercial Driving License\_ Licensed to drive a shuttle of 28 passengers