4-2017

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Identity Transformation in Saudi Male International University Students

Studying in the United States

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in English: Teaching English as Second Language

April, 2017

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Abstract

The number of Saudi Arabian international students who pursue higher education in the United States has steadily risen over the past decade. Relatively little research has been devoted to investigating how the experience of studying at an institution of higher education in the United States impacts the Saudi Arabian identity. It is an area of significance given the interconnected nature of language acquisition, identity, and culture, and the differences between Saudi Arabia and the United States.

The aim of this small-scale qualitative study was to explore how the experience of studying in the United States impacts Saudi male identity. Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted with seven Saudi Arabian male students at a Midwestern university about their experiences studying in the United States, their feelings and perceptions of those experiences, and how they feel it has ultimately impacted their individual identities, as well as the collective Saudi male identity. Nine major themes relating to identity were identified in analysis of the interviews, seven of which related to transformation in the Saudi male identity: independence/self reliance, academics, open-mindedness/tolerance, experiencing discrimination and stereotypes based on perceptions of their identity, interactions with females as peers/classmates and teachers, and evolving perspectives on aspects of Saudi Arabian society culture and society.

Acknowledgements

All praise and thanks to God. I express gratitude to my advisor, Dr. James Robinson, who has been instrumental in my enrollment in and completion of this program. I appreciate his sincerity, his insights and guidance throughout this process, and his commitment to making the world a more understanding place through his efforts with the TESL program at St. Cloud State University. I also extend thanks to my other committee members, Dr. John Madden and Maria Mikolchak, for being a part of my committee, and for your insights and contributions to my research throughout this entire process. I thank every TESL faculty member at St. Cloud State with whom I had the pleasure of taking a course.

I am grateful to each of the participants in my research, who made themselves available to me amidst numerous other responsibilities, and patiently sat through the interview process, opening themselves up and sharing their experiences, positive and negative, with me, in a second language. Without them, this research would not have been possible.

Thank you to my mother and father, who raised me to be who I am, who instilled in me a passion for learning at a young age, and helped to give me the foundation that makes such a vast undertaking as this paper possible.

I thank my wife, Noha, who took the steps of this journey with me, who provided moral support throughout, and endured two Minnesota winters. And to my son, Musa, a beautiful addition to our family, who came to us as I undertook this project, serving as a vast source of inspiration for me.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction/Problem Statement

The United States continues to be a prominent destination for international students pursuing higher education, with an enrollment of over 1,000,000 students at US colleges and universities in 2015/2016 (International Institute of Education, 2017, Open Doors). Saudi Arabians have emerged as one of the largest groups of international students living and studying abroad in the United States. According to the Institute of International Education (2017), the number of Saudi students in the United States increased from 3,448 in 2005/2006 to 61, 287 in 2015/2016, comprising 5.9% of total international students and ranking third largest; this trend in growth has been consistent for the last decade (Open Doors Report on International Exchange). These enrollment numbers have been fueled by Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP); according to Kottasova, (2016) approximately 90% of these students are recipients (CNN Money). KASP is an education initiative that was launched in 2005, and according to Bukhari and Denman (2013), it is "the largest fully endowed scholarship program…established by a nation state" (p. 151). The Ministry of Finance of Saudi Arabia (2015) reported that they allocated an estimated equivalent of 6 billion US dollars to the scholarship fund (Statement of National Budget, 2015). KASP is the result of an agreement between Saudi Arabia's sixth king, Abdullah bin Abdullah Aziz, and former-president of the United States, George W. Bush. Among its goals, it was hoped that KASP would repair the international image of Saudi Arabia, and improve the long-term relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia, which had been devastated by 9/11 terror attacks in the United States. As 15 of the perpetrators were reported to have been Saudi Arabian, the visa process for Saudis entering the United States was severely restricted in its aftermath (Hilal, Scott, & Maadad, 2015, p. 257). Consequently, Saudi enrollment dropped by 25% in 2002-2003.

KASP was to help mend ties between the two countries by reversing the restrictions, and fostering intercultural understanding through the presence of international students. Additionally, according to the Ministry of Higher Education (2014), KASP goals are to prepare Saudi Arabians to participate in a competitive international job market by equipping them with the education and skills to do so, thereby helping Saudi Arabia in the long term to transition from an oil-based economy to a knowledge-based economy (Introduction). As the number of Saudi students continues to grow on college and university campuses across the country, it presents great economic and cultural benefits for the United States; it also creates a need for a greater understanding of this group and their experiences as they acculturate. While there has been an abundance of research on identity and the challenges international students face, there has been little research that focuses specifically on Saudi international students in a post-9/11 context. While all international students may undergo degrees of transformation, those whose home country differs vastly from the host country may experience unique challenges. In general, as individuals of Middle Eastern origin, Saudis may be faced with particular circumstances based on perceptions of their culture and/or religion. More specifically, they may experience unique and drastic changes in their transition from a culturally conservative and traditional environment of their home country, to the United States. There are potentially significant implications in terms of the impact these factors have on their identity.

The study sought to explore identity transformation in Saudi Arabian male international students in an American university in a post-9/11 context, in terms of how the students perceive and understand themselves and their experiences. Given the current geo-socio-political situation in which all that is perceived to be "Middle-Eastern" is hyper-visible, and the magnitude of the influence of Saudi Arabian presence on American higher education in terms of their student

population and monetary contribution, it is an area of worthwhile investigation. This study was intended to help identify particular issues or commonalities, positive or negative, that this group experiences in the shaping of their identity, in an effort to contribute to greater understanding of an under-researched area of growing significance, so that teachers and institutions may provide these students with the appropriate support.

Research Questions

1. What changes do Saudi Males perceive experiencing in their individual and collective identities as international students in an American institution of higher education?

2. How have their experiences changed their personal beliefs and views about themselves and Saudi Arabian culture?

As is typical of qualitative studies, I have selected broad questions to discover information through interviews and their subsequent analysis. As Strauss and Corbin (1998) note, qualitative studies are best suited for gathering information "in areas about which little is known… or phenomena such as feelings, though, processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods" (p. 11).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Background Information: Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), or Saudi Arabia, is an Arab country in West Asia. According to Belanger (2016), it is the largest country in the Arabian Peninsula and the second largest Arab state in geographical size after Algeria. Its population is about 27,000,000 (Our World).

Before the establishment of what is now KSA, the area was comprised of four different regions, were controlled by various tribes. These nomadic tribes were, according to AlMunajjed (1997), "in a constant state of warfare with each other" and "provided the basis for social and political organization of the peninsula" (p. 4-5). For the majority of Saudi Arabia's modern history, no singular centralized power existed (AlMunajjed, 1997, p. 4-5). Following a history of previous attempts by various rulers, in 1932, Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud of the family of Al Saud, emerged from the Najd region and united the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and named himself as king. KSA has since been ruled as a hereditary monarchy under the Saud family; it has a centralized government.

Historically, KSA was a poor country, largely comprised of tribes of inhabitants who lived a rural and nomadic life dependent on limited agriculture and herding (Belanger, 2016, Native People). In 1938, however, this changed drastically when large deposits of petroleum were discovered in the Eastern region of the country, and later elsewhere, giving birth to a thriving oil industry (Beeston, Serjeant, Ochsenwald, & Ghul, 2012, Postwar Arabia to 1962). Soon after, the country began mining and exporting oil, and it is now one the largest producers and exporters of petroleum in the world. Vast amounts of revenue from the petroleum industry have fueled modernization and industrialization efforts, which triggered the migration of its rural

population to urban areas. It also spurred the growth of the foreign work force, which according to the Central Intelligence Agency's World Factbook (2016) accounts for 30% of KSA's population (Population). As one of the richest countries in the world due to its petroleum industry, it has significant influence and economic power, and has maintained alliances with such Western countries as the United States (Belanger, 2016). About 50% of Saudi Arabia's population is under the age of 25 (CIA World Factbook, 2016, Introduction).

Religion

Aside from its oil, Saudi Arabia is also well known for being conservative in its adherence to Islam, the official state religion. Islam has a long and complex history in the Arabian region. Religious identity in many ways is integral to and inseparable from the image of Saudi Arabian national identity, as it is interwoven into the fabric of society, at times indistinguishable from culture and tradition. A collective historical Islamic identity in the Arabian Peninsula chronologically precedes the conception of the Saudi national identity, as the history of Islam predates by a thousand years the unification and formation of the nation of Saudi Arabia. Moaddel (2006) conducted a survey in 2003 of over 1,000 Saudis that included opinions on national and religious identity. 90 percent of the respondents indicated religion being important in their daily lives, 75 percent stated that Islam was the most important aspect of their identity, while 17 percent considered being Saudi the more important (p. 82). A manifestation of Islam plays a central role in the establishment of Saudi Arabia as a nation. As AlMunajjed (1997) notes, "in Saudi Arabia, Islam acts as a major force in determining institutional norms, patterns, and structures of society" (p. 9). While religion is not the focus of this research, its prevalence necessitates discussion of some points for better understanding of the context from which Saudi Arabians students arrive.

The Arabian Peninsula holds significance to Muslims worldwide in that it is the cradle of Islam and the birthplace of its prophet, Muhammad. Muhammad was born in the city of Mecca, Arabia in 570, and began spreading the message of Islam in the 7th century (Schimmel, Rahman, & Mahdi, 2016, Islam). Two of Islam's holiest cities, Mecca and Medina, are found in Saudi Arabia. Mecca is the site of Islam's holiest site, the *Kaaba*. According to Ibn Kathir (N.D.), it is considered to be an ancient sanctuary of monotheistic worship, constructed by Abraham (*Ibrahim)* and his son Ishmael (*Ismail)* in ancient times (p. 94). Kuran (2011) states that even in pre-Islamic Arabia, the Kaaba was considered a holy site by the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula (p. 45-62). Every year, millions of Muslims from around the world visit Mecca and Medina to complete a holy pilgrimage, or *Hajj,* which is considered obligatory for Muslims who are financially able to complete one time in their life.

The official religious and dominant discourse in Saudi Arabia today is an interpretation of orthodox Islam, referred to as a Saudi variant of Sunni *Salafism* or *Salafiyya*. It may also be more specifically referred to as *Wahhabism,* or Wahhabiya, by others. The practices and interpretation of Islam that Saudi Arabia espouses is not representative of Islam as a whole (Jordan, 2011, p. 146). There is some controversy and ongoing debate surrounding the terms *Salafi* and *Wahhabi* and their use. While an extensive discussion of these terms is beyond the scope of this research, some background knowledge about these terms will be useful in providing context. They are fluid terms that do have various associations with Saudi Arabia, as well as with different historical and contemporary movements.

Salafism*,* according to AlDakhel (2007) is the "dominant school of theological and legal thought in Islam in the past and present" (Rise of Wahhabi Movement). Al Rasheed (2007) states, "it is a methodology that invokes the literal interpretation of religious texts, and the return

to the early tradition of the pious companions of the Prophet." There is no consensus on who these individuals were, although many scholars would identify them as between the first and third generations of followers of the Prophet Muhammad (Al Rasheed, 2007, p. 3). That being said, "in the 21st century there is no agreement over the meaning of…Salafi…[it is] an elastic identity that is invoked to convey a meaning or several meanings" (p. 3). In practice, it is pluralistic and has no unified group or authority (Moussalli, 2009, p. 3). It has been used to describe a variety of movements, but those who invoke the term are drawing a connection between themselves and the example of Prophet Muhammad and those that immediately followed him.

Salafi and Wahhabi are not strictly interchangeable, and many scholars distinguish between them, again calling Wahhabism a Saudi version of a Salafi movement. Adherents themselves do not generally use the term, preferring to be called simply Muslim, Salafi, *Salafiyya, Ahl Al Tawhid,* or other terms that assert their belief in pure monotheism. Algar (2002), Abou El Fadl (2005) and other critics who object, say that this implies other Muslims are not monotheistic (p. 1-2, p. 57). Moussalli (2009) remarks, "all Wahhabis are Salafis, but all Salafis are not Wahhabis" (p. 3). *Wahhabi* has become something of a contended blanket term, often having derogatory connotations, and has taken on a variety of meanings and associations in contemporary and historical discourse to describe different trends (Al Dakhil, 2007, Rise of Wahhabi Movement). Delong-Bas (2004) states, "Wahhabi Islam is neither monolithic nor stagnant…many of the regimes and movements labeled as Wahhabi in the contemporary era do not necessarily share the same theological and legal orientations" (p. 123, 279). Al Rasheed (2007) defends her use of the term, contending that, "it may be distinguished from other Sunni Muslim religious discourses by its own specific interpretations and interpreters" (p. 2).

The Wahhabi movement was championed by the Saud family from the inception of the first Saudi state, and continued through the establishment of the monarchy through the present. Historically, it is traced to a reformist movement based on the teachings and writings of 18th century scholar, theologian and reformer named Muhammad Ibn Abd al Wahhab (1703-1792). Ibn Abd al Wahhab is noted as an influential figure in Saudi Arabian history. He was from a family of Hanbali theologians and jurists in Central Arabia, or the Najd region (the Hanbali school is one of the four major orthodox schools of Islam) (Delong-Bas, p.18-19). He was an affiliate of the Hanbali school of Islamic law and "generally followed the Hanbali methodology of jurisprudence," though he never referred to himself as a Hanbali (Delong-Bas, 2004, p. 95). His theological and legal writings reveal a familiarity with a broad base of Islamic jurisprudence, and a variety of Islamic schools of thought (Delong- Bas, p. 94, 282). Despite this, he considered only the *Qur'an*, the holy book of Muslims, and *hadith*, recorded sayings of Prophet Muhammad, to be "authoritative" sources, and is noted for a "radical rejection of imitation of past scholarship in favor of independent reasoning" and "direct interpretation of scriptures and Islamic law" (Delong-Bas, 2004, p.13, 93-94). Ibn Abd al Wahhab was dismayed with what he saw in Arabian society as widespread harmful innovations in religious matters that deviated from the core principles of Islam. He advocated for a return to what he understood as absolute monotheism through emphasizing study of the Qur'an, and the *hadith,* or sayings and teachings of Prophet Muhammad (Delong-Bas, 2004, p. 94).

Expelled from his hometown due to his teachings, Ibn Abd al Wahhab gained political protection through an alliance with Muhammad Ibn Saud of the Al Saud family in 1744, forming a political-religious movement. In their agreement, Ibn Abd al Wahhab would reside over religious matters, and Muhammad Ibn Saud over political and military concerns, promoting Ibn

Abd al Wahhab's religious teachings in the process (Delong-Bas, 2004, p. 34-35). This famous pact would lead to the foundation of the first Saudi state. Later, in the 20th century, Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud would utilize the Wahhabi movement in his military campaigns as a unifying ideology and a source of legitimacy, in the political centralization of Arabia and establishment of Saudi Arabia. He implemented it as a state institution, which "gave the state control over religious discourse" also granting the right of interpretation to approved scholars (Al Rasheed, 2007, p. 28). This has solidified its role in Saudi Arabia's modern history, also forging a lasting link between religion and political authority.

The Saudi Arabian government today officially rules by a combination of interpretations of the Qur'an, the Sunna, and the Islamic legal system; some sources also mention tribal customary law (AlMunajjed, p. 3, 1997). The interpretation is still greatly derived from those outlined by Ibn Abd al Wahhab (Jordan, 2011, p. 146). It is an absolute monarchy, advised by a Council of Ministers, and the Council of Senior Scholars, consisting of top religious leaders, or *ulema* (Al-Sweel, 1993, p. 52-53). Historically, the ulema had been largely led by members of the Al ash-Sheikh family, who are the descendants of Ibn Abd-al Wahhab, but this circle has begun to widen somewhat (Al Rasheed, 2007, p. 28). Aside from being responsible for officially interpreting Qur'an, Sunna, and Islamic law, the ulema manage girls' education, Islamic universities, the Great mosques, and the Organization for Promoting Good and Discouraging Evil, "which supervises the public morality committees" (Al-Sweel, 1993, p. 53).

The *ulema* thus have a profound influence on managing the social sphere and ensuring that the public adheres to certain norms. This includes separation of the genders, modesty norms, and the mandatory closing of shops for the five daily prayers. "The appearance of the public sphere is highly Islamised- mosques, minarets, predominance of religious education, etc." (Al

Rasheed, 2007, p. 33). "Society evolved into a community of the faithful who vigorously

engage in controlled rituals of worship, both communal and individual, that are regularly

displayed in the public sphere. Such display is strictly controlled…" (Al Rasheed, 2007, p. 59).

Noncompliance with the social norms is a punishable offense. The government's legitimacy

rests on its official promotion of Islam and its guardianship of the holy cities of Mecca and

Medina. (Jordan, 2011, p. 148).

While KSA is predominantly Sunni, there is a minority of Shi'a Muslims. According to

the CIA Factbook (2016), 85-95% of Saudi Arabians are Sunni, while 10-15% are Shi'a (CIA

Factbook). Sunni and Shi'a Islam represent the two major branches of Islam. They differ on

theological issues, but these differences are originally rooted in the question of who was to be the

legitimate successor of prophet Muhammad upon his death in 632 AD. Sunnis maintain that

Abu Bakr, companion of the Prophet and the first caliph, was the legitimate leader, and that

subsequent leaders should be selected through a process of consensus. The Shi'a believe that the

legitimate successor should be of hereditary descent from Muhammad's closest companions,

thus making Muhammad's cousin Ali Ibn Abi Talib rightful leader, followed by his descendants

(Al-Sweel, 1993, p. 19, Wynbrandt, 2004, p. 64). These differences resulted in conflicts that led

to the development of two distinct sects. Saudi Arabia's Shi'a population is primarily

concentrated in the Eastern Province (CIA Factbook, 2016, Saudi Arabia). With the government

promoting its interpretation of Islam, and the majority of the population adhering to it, the Shi'a

represent a minority. As both groups travel abroad to the United States, there is a chance for

interaction between these two groups outside of the parameters of cultural norms in Saudi

Arabia. Differences in their experiences of Saudi Arabia as representatives of a majority or

minority group may also inform their experiences and impact their identity in different ways.

In one form or another, Islam continues to permeate daily life in Saudi Arabia. The relationship between KSA and Islam is by no means a simple matter. As Al Rasheed aptly puts it, "Given that religious discourse permeates all aspects of public debate, it is very difficult to draw the boundaries between the religious, the political, and the social" (p. 14). Furthermore, due to their relationship, it is sometimes difficult to delineate between "Social norms versus what Islam prescribes" (p. 16). It is important to note for the impact that it surely has on identity, because it occupies such a dominant space in Saudi Arabia. Since religious identity is not easily separated from Saudi identity, then it must have some bearing on the Saudi individual, regardless of individual religiosity.

Gender

Gender dynamics in Saudi Arabia differ significantly from the United States, and are thus an area that may have an impact on students and their identity. In Saudi Arabia, the country promotes and abides by a practice of gender separation. As AlHazmi (2010) states, it is "a cultural norm evident in almost every public and private institution…this phenomenon of gender segregation is central to most people's social, educational, and political activities" (p. 2). This is true of private and public educational institutions at every level, including higher education, and places of entertainment, such as malls and parks. In restaurants, there are generally designated sections for males and families with family sections consisting of separate partitioned sections; the society is greatly concerned with promoting a traditional family unit (AlHazmi, 2010, p. 2). The interaction between unrelated males and females in public space does occur in a professional capacity, as in hospitals, but these interactions are rare and restricted.

Saudi Arabia is a patriarchal society that holds traditional views on male and female roles. Males are associated with the public life; they are considered caretakers and providers

who are responsible for the safety and security of the family. Females are in charge of the

domestic sphere and are responsible for nurturing family relationships; their roles have thus

traditionally revolved around private life (AlHazmi, p. 3). Baki (2004) attributes it to the

prevailing interpretation of Islam in Saudi Arabia, which has responded to certain Islamic

guidelines on interaction between unrelated males and females by "tightly restricting any type of

interaction among unmarried and unrelated men and women" (p. 2). Gender dynamics in Saudi

Arabia also stem from a concern with preservation of its understanding of decency, reputation,

and chastity, referred to as *Ird* (Baki, 2004, p. 3). These practices discourage intermingling of

unrelated males and females. Gender segregation and other related practices are "a measure

taken by society to protect the chastity of women and prevent other men from encroaching on the

male honor of the family. At the same time it is a sign of respect and decency, and of

identification with the traditional and nationalistic values of Saudi culture" (Al Munajjed, 1997,

p. 8). It should be noted, however that these roles have begun to change in the last few decades,

as women become more educated and seek employment outside of the home. It is still, however,

the prevailing custom.

Due to the stark difference in gender norms between Saudi Arabian and American

society, mixed gender situations may have a significant impact on the identity of the Saudi male

and how he perceives masculinity and femininity.

Arab Identity

Muslim identity. As established above, Islam plays a distinct and prominent role in the

daily life of Saudi Arabia, and being Muslim configures greatly into the identity of Saudi

Arabians as a whole. There is no monolithic "Muslim identity," and there are, as mentioned,

different branches of Islam that vary in practice. Additionally, being a Muslim differs from

individual to individual. Still, Muslims do share a common belief in the Qur'an, the Hadith, and Islamic law, (albeit different interpretations of them). Additionally, there are certain tenets of Islam, called the Five Pillars, which all Muslims accept. (Jordan, 2011, p. 143). They are:

1. The Declaration of Faith (*Shahada)*: "I bear witness that there is no god but God, and Muhammad is his messenger."

2. Prayer (*Salah)*: Muslims turn towards the city of Mecca at prescribed times and offer prayer five times daily.

3. Charity (*Zakat/Sadaqat)*: Muslims consider it an obligation to give a certain percentage of their wealth to be distributed according to those in need.

4. Fasting (*Siyam)*: Every year during a specific month called Ramadan, Muslims worldwide participate in a fast from food and drink during daylight hours.

5. Pilgrimage (*Hajj):* Those who are financially able are required to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia once in their life, and observe certain rituals and rites. This occurs during a specific time ever year according to the Islamic lunar calendar.

There are other guidelines for behavior and other restrictions, but the aforementioned sources and tenets contribute to a normative Muslim identity (Jordan, 2011, p. 143-144).

Language

According to ADC (2015), the term Arab is used both linguistically and culturally; in terms of language, it refers to people whose primary language is Arabic (Facts about Arab World). The Arab world consists of between 21 and 23 countries; some of these countries list Arabic as an official language, while in are a diverse people Useful to consider AlAmrani (2014) highlights the language of Arabic as a unifying element.

Family/Lineage/Tribe

Another prominent feature of Saudi identity is a strong sense of family. Family ties

provide the foundation of the structure of the society. "Its nucleus is not just father mother and

children, but all the brothers of one generations, their wives and children, grandparents, possibly

some elderly aunts and uncles, and occasionally some cousins… the family unit is the source of

identity for each individual in it." Families and extended families often live in the same house,

building, or in very close vicinity to one another. Isolation is not common, and family members

are always surrounded by one another. The family and associated obligations traditionally

supersede all others. (Al-Sweel, 1993, p. 67-68). Of the Arab family in general, Amrani (2011)

writes, "His sense of devotion and loyalty to the family or the tribe is deeply mixed with a sense

of dependency, gratefulness and mutual trust" (p. 77). The stress on the importance of the family

in society naturally collects to   Saudi Arabian identity---Islam, the tribe, the family.

Branching out from the family, clans are groups of several families who have a common

ancestry, and these clans in turn form tribes. "…all Saudis can tell you which of the over 80

major Arabian tribes they belong to, and the fact of belonging is a source of pride and an

obligation to aid fellow tribesmen." Not only is there a pride and awareness of lineage, but there

is also a sense of communal obligation that precedes individual interest (Al-Sweel 1993, p. 72).

The preference of the collective over the individual has been traced by some back to a time when

a strenuous environment required such sacrifice for the survival of the tribe. What also seems to

continue to play an important role is a strong sense of personal honor, which if lost, results in a

sense of shame that they perceive as being a negative reflection on the family (Al-Sweel, 1993,

p. 77).

Definitions of Identity

Identity is a complex, multifaceted concept and a vast area of study, to which much research in a number of disciplines has been devoted. In TESOL research, increasing attention has been given to identity as it relates to language learning and international students, because it is shown to play a significant role in the language acquisition process. Some early conceptions of identity (often referred to as "the self") were anchored in Western humanist philosophy. This notion of the individual was described as having a "core" true self that was and fixed and stable and uninfluenced by exterior forces. As Hall (2000) elaborates on this "Cartesian self…the old logic of identity," he states, "it contains the notion of the true self, some real self inside…the husks of all the false selves…it is a kind of guarantee of authenticity. Not until we get really inside…do we know what we are really saying" (145).

In contrast, Norton and Toohey (2011) summarize contemporary definitions among identity theorists as "multiple, changing, and a site of struggle" (p. 414). It is "diverse, contradictory, dynamic, and changing over historical time and social space" (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 417). In short, notions of identity have shifted from a traditional, fixed, stable and historical self to a post-modern ongoing, ever-changing and contradictory self.

In the field of psychology, Markus and Nurius (1987) also comment on the nature of the self as fixed and stable or changing and dynamic. Their Possible Selves theory (discussed at length in a later section) offers the possibility that the self can be both stable and changing. The "self-concept", as they refer to it, if expanded to include possible selves, "allows us to account for both its situational and temporal malleability and for its overall stability" (p. 964). To the question of whether there are many selves or one true self, "to suggest that there is a single self…or an authentic self that one can know is to deny the rich network of potential that

surrounds individuals and that is important in identifying and descriptive of them. Possible

selves contribute to the fluidity and malleability of the self, because they are differentially

activated by the social situation…at the same time the individual's hopes and fears, and the

cognitive structures that carry them are defining features of the self concept; these features

provide some of the most compelling evidence of continuity of identity across time" (Markus &

Nurius, 1987, p. 965). Markus and Nurius propose that the existence of different possible selves

may account for a conception of self that is both stable and dynamic.

Identity, to many, is no longer perceived as divorced from specific social and historical

considerations; on the contrary, it is understood to be deeply entrenched in them. It is important

to place individuals in a larger social context, as social relationships are pivotal in "how

individuals are constructed, and how individuals construct themselves" (Norton & Toohey, 2011,

p. 417). Another key concept at play in social relationships and social positions is power and the

distribution of power. Various social positions and the negotiation of these positions and

relationships play an important role in access to language, resources, interaction, and contribute

heavily to identity (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 415). In line with this view, Kinginger (2009)

states that as much as language is about acquisition, it is also strongly embedded in a learner's

process of socialization. Identity is a product of socialization: how learners perceive themselves,

what they envision themselves to become, and the ways that those around them include or

exclude them are all integral to identity construction (p. 155-156). AlAmrani (2014) elaborates,

discussing how identities are formed from a combination of how people see themselves and how

the world perceives them, specifically considering, among other factors, religion, race, gender,

and culture (p. 70).

Norton (1997) defines identity as "how people understand their relationship to the world,

how that relationship is constructed across space and time, and how people understand their

possibilities for the future" (p. 410). Norton perceives a strong correlation between who one is,

and what one is able to do.

Hall (2000) describes identity as "a process of identification, of saying that this here is

the same as that, or we are the same together. But something we have learnt from

the...discussion of identification…is the degree to which that structure of identification is always

constructed...through splitting…between that which one is and that which is the other…This is

the self as it is inscribed in the gaze of the Other" (146-147). Here, Hall proposes that identity

formation is a process that is necessarily linked to how one is perceived by others, whether those

perceptions are accurate or not. This is a salient point in that Arab males studying in Western

institutions in a post 9-11 context will have to confront perceptions of who they are. Due to the

current hyper-visibility in the media of the Middle East and Islam, a religion always associated

with the Middle East, students may be perceived according to misconceptions of others, which in

turn may impact their process of socialization.

Race/Racialization/Islamophobia

Identity and identity formation in this context cannot be discussed without considerations

of race/ethnicity, for as Omi and Winant (1998) state, "without a racial identity, one is in danger

of having no identity" (p.15). Race in turn cannot be discussed without historical considerations.

Omi and Winant (1998) give a very brief account of the historical evolution of the concept of

race, which is sufficient in this context. During the era of global expansion and exploration,

European contact with various groups of people raised serious questions and stirred debate about

the human race. How did one account for the great physical variations in the human species?

Were these physical differences markers of other differences? Were there multiple species of

humanity, and if so, were they equal? These types of questions led to attempts to understand

race scientifically as a biological concept. Influenced by the study of other organisms in nature,

18th and 19th century scholars tried to classify the differences in human beings in a hierarchy

where some were biologically superior to others; this is now referred to as scientific racism

(Winant, 2000, p. 184). Although it is an ongoing debate, race has remained elusive as a

biological reality (Omi & Winant, 1998, p. 13). Expanding on the relationship between

racialization and identity formation, Ibrahim (2009) says "This alchemic formula of racialization

is directly implicated in the identity-formation process, which in turn mediates what one learns

and how." (p. 179).

As a social concept, race is situated within larger socio-historical contexts, where race

and its meaning shifts "tremendously over time and between different societies" (Omi & Winant,

1998, p. 14).   Through this lens, race and its delineations undergo changes in a process Omi and

Winant label "racial formation," where "social, economic, and political forces determine the

content and importance of racial categories and by which they are in turn shaped by racial

meanings" (p. 15). Race, they conclude, is used as an indicator; phenotypes reveal intrinsic

differences that are perceived as fixed, static and natural, despite the fact they are constructed

through a complex socio-historical-politcal-ideological process (Omi & Winant, 1998, p. 16).

This process, termed *racialization*, is explicitly defined as "the extension of racial meaning to a

previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group" (Omi & Winant, 1998, p.

17). Race is thus a malleable concept that expands, contracts and shifts to include and exclude

individuals or groups of people.

The process of racialization divides people into categories along a spectrum. An

historical examination of the United States and its relationship to various groups of immigrants

and how those have shifted over time provides one with a prime example of how categories of

race may change. Therefore racialization is a term that frames race not as something that is fixed

and immoveable, but as Rattansi (2005) describes it, as a "floating signifier" (p. 272).

Racialization involves the conflation of other distinct categories including culture, ethnicity, and

religion (Rich & Troudi, 2006, p. 617). Understanding racialization, they believe, may lead to a

greater understanding of how Islamophobia connects to notions of race, racism, and

marginalization; in other words the impact that these forces have on identity (Rich & Troudi,

2006, p. 617).

Racialization may also be integral in understanding the construction of current discourse

surrounding Islamophobia and its potential impact on individuals of Middle Eastern descent. In

a post-9/11 context we have witnessed the racialization of Islam. As Ibrahim (2009) describes,

through the process of racialization, race and ethnicity (defined in terms of language, culture, and

religion) are fused together, and internal differences among and within the so called racial

groups is erased" (p. 178). What we witness then is a flattening of distinct individuals and

distinct groups of people into a racialized category where Islam, Middle Easterner, Arab and

Muslim are all one in the same; there is consideration of plurality from the outsider. The

intersectionality of these categories and discourses is pivotal, for as Rattansi (2005) states, it

creates an exclusionary climate where individuals are lumped together in a category that can be

justifiably marginalized (p. 295). Elaborating on racialization Kubota and Lin (2006) state that

"racialization produces and legitmates differences among social groups based on perceived

biological characteristics, yet it is a dynamic and historically situated process in which racial

significations are always shifting" (p. 477).

In "Race and TESOL," Kubota and Lin (2006) state that race is an under-researched area

in the field of TESOL, possibly due to the connections that are made between race and racism, which has negative connotations. Kubota and Lin encourage exploration of the concepts of race within the TESOL field and their relationship to identity formation, teaching, highlighting the nature of the field as eventually leading to its centrality. In defining race, they state that scientists have concluded that race is not determined by biology, but a socially constructed category that draws divisions between groups based on phenotype (Kubota & Lin, 2006 p. 474). "As a social construct, racial representations are always in flux and situated in social and historical contexts…it is shaped by discourses that give specific meanings to the ways we see the world, rather than reflecting the illusive notion of objective, stable, and transcendent truths" (Kubota & Lin, 2006, p. 474). They view ethnicity as a politically correct word used in place of race to attempt to determine differences based on "sociocultural characteristics, such as ancestry, language, religion, custom, and lifestyle." They discuss ethnicity as problematic, because similar to race, the differences are not grounded in biology; they are rather based on constructed differences, in order to distinguish one group from another (Kubota & Lin 2006 p. 475).

Kubota and Lin (2006) pose the question of whether exploring cultural issues in teaching and learning English relate to posing questions about race. They argue that ideas about racial difference have been replaced with the notion of cultural difference, which is ultimately used again as a device to exclude certain groups (Kubota & Lin, 2006, p. 476). They thus conclude that the notions of race, ethnicity, and culture may be linked and manipulated in similar fashions.

Giroir (2014) reports on a study that investigates the experiences of two Saudi Arabian male international students in an Intensive English Program (IEP) in a post 9/11-context in the United States. The narrative-based study focuses on how these two members of a racialized and politicized group, subject to marginalization based on their identity, went about gaining access to

the dominant community of English speakers from the periphery. Racialization, she argues,

informed their experiences as L2 speakers, but they were able to negotiate these diverse

experiences to gain agency and participation, although in different ways. One subject, for

example, was subjected to various forms of discrimination based on the dominant discourse

about his identity as a Middle-Eastern man. He was able to utilize that same discourse as a

resource to assert an individual identity that ran counter to the dominant discourse. Giroir

discusses identity as a discursive practice, in that it is multifaceted and based on an on-going

negotiation between various social factors that are constantly shifting.

Hall (2013) conducted a grounded theory qualitative study on Saudi male perception of

their experiences studying in the United States. The purpose of his study was to explore how

KASP scholarship recipients made their decisions to study in the United States, how their beliefs

and perceptions related to their experiences, the changes they experienced in their personal lives,

belief and values, and how these ultimately related to the goals and mission of KASP

(Introduction, ix). He conducted semi-structured, one-hour face-to-face interviews with twelve

Saudi male undergraduate students. In his findings, he reports on several themes and patterns that

emerged from his data analysis. Among the patterns relevant to identity, he found that many

students perceived a significant shift in understanding of their own culture, in that the

opportunity to study abroad facilitated interactions with other groups of Saudis with whom they

would not normally interact, namely between the Shia and Sunni sects (Hall, 2013, p. 72-74).

The majority of students also reported having spent more time interacting with Saudi females

that were not family members than they would in Saudi Arabia. Students reported feeling a

positive change in their perception of gender-interaction, which contradicted previous beliefs that

they learned in their home country (Hall, 2013, p. 74-76). Hall found that students reported

feeling uncomfortable and a sense of anxiety sharing any changes in their attitudes, beliefs and

behaviors with their friends and family in their home country, and in some instances, even fellow

Saudi students in the United States, out of fear of the social consequences. They instead reported

to "compartmentalize" their lives, drawing divisions between their American lives and their

Saudi Arabian lives (Hall, 2013, p. 80-84). The students also reported having aspirations of

helping to change the culture of their home country over the long-term (Hall, 2013, p. 85).

Hilal, Scott, and Maadad (2015) conducted a study surveying 1000 male and female

Saudi students pursuing studies outside of KSA, to gather information on their perceptions of the

benefits of international study both for themselves and for their home country (p. 260). Students

were surveyed on the advantages and disadvantages of the KASP scholarship. The survey

yielded interesting results in terms of student perceptions of culture and identity. When asked

whether they felt interacting with individuals from different cultural/religious backgrounds

would have a negative impact on their own cultural identity, 63% disagreed. However, the

responses to a subsequent question about whether students felt cultural and national identity

would remain intact as Gulf countries sent more students abroad, many disagreed or strongly

disagreed (Hilal, Scott, & Maadad, 2015, p. 264).   Although the authors consider these findings

to be inconclusive, the results suggest that Saudi students studying abroad feel confident in

retaining their own identity, while at the same time expressing uncertainty about the impact on

the larger national and cultural identity (Hilal, Scott, & Maadad, 2015, p. 264).

Rich and Troudi (2006) conducted a small-scale qualitative study involving five Saudi

male graduate students at a university in the United Kingdom. The study consisted of interviews

and open-ended questionnaires. They sought to discover how the students perceived the impact

of a racialized and Islamophobic discourse on their experiences. They describe racialization as a

"situated, socially constructed response to sociocultural, political, and historical conditions at a given point in time" (Rich & Troudi, 2006, p. 615-616). Questions about the process of racialization, they believe, may lead to a greater understanding of how Islamophobia connects to notions of race, racism, and marginalization; in other words the impact that these forces have on their identity (Rich & Troudi, 2006, p. 617). The majority of the participants felt that these categories intersected in their lives in different ways, and reported feeling that they had been marginalized in various ways due to these. There were also several individuals whose perception of themselves shifted, from considering themselves primarily international students, to feeling marginalized due to perceptions of their culture, race, religion, ethnicity, etc. (Rich & Troudi, 2006, p. 623). Their results suggest that Islamophobia and racialization have an impact on how these individuals are treated, and thus on their identities.

AlAmrani (2014) conducted a qualitative study to investigate how minorities, in particular Arab male international students, construct and reconstruct their cultural identities in relationship to the dominant western/English culture. Drawing on Hegelian theory, he notes that minorities, in an effort to gain recognition, must consider and often amend their social and cultural identity according to the prevailing culture; the latter on the other hand, need not recognize or have an accurate perception of a minority group (AlAmrani, 2014, p. 80). Employing the methodology of a longitudinal ethnographic study, he observed over a period of two years a community of 73 Arab male ESL students who attended a southern university (AlAmrani, 2014, p. 67-68). He observed the participants in three locations - the university student union, a local mosque, and an Arabian school; he chose these different locations to get an opportunity to observe the participants in more culturally traditional spaces versus the "counter-cultural" space (AlAmrani, 2014, p. 72). He collected field notes, and conducted semi-structured

formal and informal interviews with four participants that he chose from the larger group, from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Morocco. He notes that previous western studies of Arab students have tended to examine Arabs as a monolithic group, not exploring the complex differences that exist in cultural background, class, language, and religion amongst them. He argues that Arab ESL students are a complex group consisting of smaller subgroups that acculturate in vastly different ways. Through analysis of the interviews, speech of participants, and his field notes, he found that individuals could be broadly categorize according to "personality models," or similarities in patterns of behavior; he admits that these categories and identity profiles are not all encompassing or static, but still useful in understanding "common background behaviors of the ethnic group" (AlAmrani, 2014, p. 93). He concludes that Arab ESL students are far from homogenous, and that they react to the dominant culture and new environment in many different ways.

Norris (2011) conducted a study to explore to what extent Arab/Middle Eastern students perceive themselves as either included or marginalized in their experience at a large public four-year Northwestern university in the United States. He surveyed and interviewed eight students of Middle Eastern descent about their experiences on campus pertaining to their identity as Middle Eastern, and how they perceived that it impacted their experience. Norris found that three main themes emerged from the interviews in terms of how students felt: "not being recognized as a cultural group, lack of representation within Student Services, and lack of cultural understanding/classic signs of discrimination" (Norris, 2011, p. 59). Students used a variety of strategies to circumvent situations that they felt were blatantly discriminatory, including using humor and self-degradation to "gain acceptance" (Norris, 2011, p. 58). Students reported that their peers were unsure about their identity, for example conflating Arab and Muslim, and also

feeling that the media played a significant role in the misconceptions about their culture and identity (Norris, 2011, p. 49).

In considering identity, it is important to understand the broader complex socio-political context in which Saudi international students arrive in the United States. A post-9/11 context refers to "the dominant storylines that have developed in the media and public discourses on the topics of Islam…US citizenship, and terrorism," since the events of September 11, 2001, in which attacks were executed in The United States (Giroir, 2014, p. 38). These events have played a central role in the shaping of American legislation and domestic and foreign policy since (Giroir, 2014, p. 38). There has also been a subsequent rise in Islamophobic discourse and rhetoric. *Islamophobia* is defined by Rich and Troudi (2006) as "an irrational fear of Muslims and what Islam represents" (p. 617).

As Giroir states, there has been a particularly dominating discourse about Islam. It has had had significant implications for perceptions of the religion of Islam and all things associated, accurately or inaccurately, with it. Saudi males, originating from a conservative Muslim country as Saudi Arabia is, are perceived as the Muslim/Other, regardless of their religious practice, since these categories are racialized and become one in the same. As Norris's study showed, those unfamiliar with Islam and Arabs may have a tendency to conflate the two.

These studies and findings suggest that Saudi male students may find themselves susceptible to racialization and marginalization. These factors may play into their experiences, and thus the identity formation process, as they pursue their studies. At the same time, it is just as plausible that they do not have these experiences or perceive them to be significant in their identity formation process; it is necessary to conduct a study to gather information directly from the students about their experiences and their perceptions of those experiences.

Motivation

Learner motivation is an area that has been given considerable attention in the study of language learning. It is an important factor in discussing the international student and identity, as motivation is integral to one's sense of self. What forces are at play which help to inform an individual's decision to pursue the challenging path of L2 acquisition in a foreign country, and how does it impact one's identity? There is an abundance of research on motivation and language acquisition, which draws on many disciplines, including psychology and clinical psychology. Among these is the theory of Possible Selves. According to Markus and Nurius (1986), "an individual's repertoire of possible selves can be viewed as the cognitive manifestation of enduring goals, aspirations, motives, fears, and threats…As such, [possible selves] provide the essential link between the self concept and motivation" (p. 954). There are many possible selves, or variations of the self that one could conceivably become, but these selves are specific and related to one's hopes, goals, and fears (p. 954). Interestingly and not unlike definitions of identity, Possible selves are thought to be influenced by sociocultural and historical context, social experience, and by the media and the images and narratives it presents (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954).

Central to Possible Selves Theory is the role of the imagination and mental imagery, because possibility, by nature, is linked to imagination. In this context, the ability of the human being to conceive of something that is not reality, but in the realm of possibility, and to hold an image or an idea in one's mind as though it were real. In Western history, the relationship between imagination and motivation can be traced back at least as far as Aristotle, who believed that the image that one held in one's soul [or imagination] could serve to inspire a person as though that image were actually present (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 16). More contemporarily, Dörnyei,

Markus and Nurius (1986), Wenger (1998), and Paivio (1985) also attest to the importance

and power of imagination/self imagery in motivation and construction of the possible self. Some

studies have even been conducted which apparently show parallels between how human beings

respond to mental images and visual ones (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 16). Thus, possible selves,

influenced by the social/historical context and informed by imagination and mental imagery,

play a pivotal role in motivation.

Building on these psychological theories, Dörnyei proposes the L2 Motivational Self

System, which applies to second language acquisition the psychological theories of Higgins, and

Marcus and Nurius, with particular focus on social context, identity, and the self. It is comprised

of three components: The Ideal L2 self, the Ought-to L2 self, and the L2 Learning experience.

The first two components draw on the work of psychologist E.T. Higgins' conception of the

ideal self and *ought self*, explicitly defining these terms in his theory of motivation (p. 13). The

ideal self refers to the attributes, characteristics, or qualities that a person would ideally like to

have. The ought self, on the other hand, relates to the qualities, characteristics, attributes, etc.

that one feels one should possess, based on extrinsic factors and expectations, or "representations

of someone else's sense of duties, obligations or moral responsibilities" (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 13).

It should be noted that there may sometimes be difficulty in distinguishing between the ought

self and the ideal self, as the ought self can be internalized to various degrees due to the social

nature of human beings and the pressure to adhere to group norms (Dörnyei, 2009 p. 14). The

ought self is also instrumental in motivation as a "negative reference point," in that it is

concerned with avoiding who and what one does *not* want to become (insert quotation for

negative reference point). Markus and Nurius (1986) describe this as feared self in their Possible

Selves theory (p. 954). "Indeed focusing on what would happen if the original intention failed

has often been seen in motivational psychology as a powerful source of energy to keep us going" (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 21-22). The optimal possible self would have a harmonious balance between these various aspects of self.

Dörnyei's Ought-to L2 self is the "L2-specific facet of one's ideal self" (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29). That is, if the ideal image of the self speaks an L2 and has international friendships, then this would serve as a strong motivator to acquire the new language (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29). This also relates closely to one's feelings about the L2 speakers and their community, for "it is difficult to imagine that we can have a vivid and attractive ideal L2 self if the L2 is spoken by a community that we despise" (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 28). The Ought-to L2 self "concerns the attributes that one believes one *ought* to possess to meet expectations and avoid possible negative outcomes" (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29). The Ought-to L2 self corresponds to the aforementioned Ought-self as derived from Higgins. If one pursues an L2 out of a sense of obligation, moral duty, or the expectations of family, friends, teachers, or other external factors, then the Ought-to L2 self prevails.

The final component is L2 Learning experience, which "concerns situated 'executive' motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience" (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29). This component considers the real and direct impact that teachers, students, and the learning environment may have on students and their motivation (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29). In short, these three components represent different branches of motivation: the individual's perception of themselves, the extrinsic forces acting on the individual in the form of expectations, etc., and the learning environment.

Chapter 2: Research Methodology

Participants

Participants in the study were seven Saudi Arabian single male international full-time students, aged 18 to mid 20s, pursuing undergraduate or graduate studies at a small Midwestern university. Participants had resided in the United States for a minimum of two years in order to have more of an opportunity to acculturate and have more experiences, having been in a classroom environment with the opportunity to regularly interact with domestic students/non-Saudi international students. Two years would have also given them time to acquire a language proficiency to articulate their thoughts on their experiences during the interview process. The number of participants was chosen based on previous studies that have been conducted, to get an adequate sample size. The rationale behind the sample size, according to Patton (2002), is that in conducting qualitative interviews, smaller sample sizes allow for the research to be more in depth, allowing for more detailed understanding of an individual's perspective (p. 227-228). A larger number of interviews would also provide an overwhelming amount of data that would prove to be unrealistic to analyze in depth. I chose to focus on males of this age group, because according to SACM, they represent the largest group of Saudis currently pursuing studies in the United States. Additionally, due to cultural norms and sensitivities that prevent Saudi females from typically being alone with non-relative males, Saudi males would be easier to access for one-on-one interviews, and would feel more comfortable discussing their experiences with a male.

Instruments and Procedures

Instruments consisted of semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face, one-on-one

interviews with open-ended questions, in which participants were allowed to elaborate on their responses, as they felt appropriate. Considering the research questions, Norton's (1997) Hall's (2000), and Norton and Toohey's (2011) definitions of identity, and the background researched conducted on Saudi Arabia, a list of interview questions was formulated. These questions were intended to elicit responses from Saudi students about their experiences leaving Saudi Arabia and studying in the United States, their feelings and perceptions of those experiences, and how they feel the experience as a whole has ultimately impacted their individual as well as a collective Saudi male identity. Follow-up questions relating to the original questions were asked, to seek to either clarify the meaning of questions, or to encourage students to elaborate on a particular aspect of their response. As is common with the grounded theory approach to qualitative research, later interview questions were partially influenced by answers in previous interviews, so that questions become more narrowed and refined to hone in on particular areas, themes, and patterns that begin to emerge throughout the process (Hall, 2013, p. 60). At the time of the interview, a series background information questions was also collected from participants about their age, marital status, their length of stay in the United States, the number of years completed in their undergraduate or graduate studies, and previous educational experience, language experience, and cross-cultural experiences (studying abroad in another country, for example). Following the background information questions, the interviews consisted of 21 original questions and follow-up questions. Participants were interviewed individually for privacy, in a private area on campus, with no interruptions. The duration of all interviews was between 60 and 90 minutes, depending on the depth of the responses of the individual participant.

Interviews were digitally recorded using recording software on a password protected personal laptop computer with a clear internal microphone, owned by the researcher. The digital recordings were saved both to the laptop as well as to a password-protected external hard drive also owned by the researcher, to ensure recovery of the data in the event of a malfunction of the laptop. Field notes were also taken during the interview by the researcher on a notepad kept in his possession. Following the interview, the interviews were transcribed word for word by the researcher, and also saved to the password-protected laptop.

In order to find candidates, a call for participants outlining the purpose of the research and procedures was emailed to Saudi male students in the target group, requesting interested parties to respond. The interviewer also used his contacts with members from the target group at the university to assist in finding potential participants. Seven individuals responded. Some of these individuals requested more basic information about the study and/or interview; this was either emailed to them, or discussed with them via phone. A time was arranged between researcher and participant to meet in person to conduct the interview. At the time of the meeting, the researcher presented the participants with the consent form, read and discussed it with the participant, and answered any remaining questions pertaining to the study and/or interview process. The participants then signed the consent form, and the interview immediately followed. Participants were allowed to read through the questions in the time prior to the interview if they so chose; otherwise the interviewer read the questions aloud and gave the participants a hard copy to read, which was recollected at the end of the interview.

Data Analysis Procedure

This is a qualitative study that adopts the grounded theory approach in methodology. As opposed to creating a hypothesis and then testing it to see whether it is valid or not through data collection, the grounded theory approach, according to Nunan and Bailey (2009), derives its hypothesis from the data that is collected, the data analysis and reduction process (p. 194, 218). The advantage of this particular approach is that it enables the researcher to develop an understanding of the data based on the patterns or themes that emerge from analysis, and generate theories from it, as opposed to developing a hypothesis before research is conducted (Hall, 2013, p. 51). This is why the open-ended and semi-structured format was selected for the interview – to allow these areas of inquiry to be explored based on the participants' responses. Charmaz (2014) states that "grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded in themselves" (p. 1). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), other features of grounded theory are simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis, constructing analytic codes and categories from data, not from preconceived logically deduced hypotheses, using constant comparative method, which involves making comparisons during each stage of analysis, and advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis (p. 12-14). Due to the dynamic nature of the human experience, it was reasonable to utilize this approach in assessing the experiences of Saudi male international students, and how those experiences have impacted their identities.

As mentioned previously, the researcher made field notes during each interview. The researcher then transcribed each interview, and additional field notes were made at

that time. Both of these stages play an integral role in the analysis process, in that field notes highlight potential areas of importance, key words, and patterns that seem to be emerging. This preliminary analysis informs later questioning, for as Hall (2013) notes, "one important feature of grounded theory is to allow earlier interviews to influence the questioning and direction of interviews in order to narrow the categories ultimately used" (p. 60). Although latter interviews did not diverge greatly from previous questioning in order to maintain consistency, the researcher was generally able to more carefully hone follow up questions to elicit responses in areas of significance.

After transcribing each interview, the data was re-read, to increase the researcher's comprehension of each interview. The researcher continued to make field notes during this reading; these notes were made directly below each participant's response in the transcriptions of the interview and were color-coded. It was re-read, and using line-by-line analysis, sentence analysis, and whole paragraph analysis, the data was categorized under tentative labels and color-coded with code notes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 120). This process of assigning labels, developing categories, and categorizing data is called open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 190, p. 102, 121). In the axial coding stage, each interview was carefully compared and contrasted for similarities and differences, and major categories and sub-categories were related "according to their properties and dimensions;" in other words, to determine how categories relate to each other (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 124). The data was analyzed for patterns as well as inconsistencies and recurring themes were noted (Nunan & Bailey, 2009, p. 416-417). Patterns and themes were then narrowed and the most salient of them, or "core/central categories" were identified. This is a part of the selective coding stage, which is "the

process of integrating and refining the theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 143).

During this stage the core categories are related to the other categories, relationships

between them are confirmed, they are refined, and conclusions/theories from the data are

formed.

In addition, member checks were performed to help verify the validity of the data.

Member-checking involves asking the participants to read the transcribed data once it has

been condensed, to ensure it represents the participant's statements properly, and to elicit

feedback from them about interpretation of their statements (Nunan & Bailey, 2009, p.

363, 429-430).

Chapter 4: Discussion/Findings

A number of patterns and themes relevant to identity and identity transformation emerged in the data analysis process. They will be discussed in this section. The most salient and relevant themes and patterns have been identified and discussed. Excerpts from interviews are provided as evidence to support the establishment of patterns and themes. A total of nine major themes were identified: Independence/Self reliance, Academic transformation, Familial ties, Open-mindedness towards other groups /Sunni-Shia relations, Religious identity, Facing discrimination/stereotypes, Gender dynamics, Saudi social networks, and Perceptions of Saudi Arabian society.

Theme One: Saudi Males express a feeling of increased independence/self-reliance after living/studying in the United States.

The theme of independence/self-reliance appeared consistently in every interview. Each of the participants reported that studying in the United States made them feel more independent and self-reliant than they had been at home in Saudi Arabia. This independence was expressed in a number of ways, such as being able to take care of one's self, cleaning, doing one's own laundry, cooking, paying bills, and so forth, as expressed by the participants:

Participant A: I can say like more independent. All my stuff by myself. I don't have to wait for someone to help me…

Participant C: In KSA, I mostly depend on my family, like they're doing my stuff, doing my laundry, a lot of other stuff for me. When I came to USA, it was all about me. I just do my stuff. Laundry, clean, when you…know the culture in KSA its so different.

Maids in the house, they do most of the work. And here, you're just by yourself.

Independent.

Participant D: When I came here I put myself together. I changed because I grew up and the other one I got more independent on myself

Participant E: I never washed clothes, now I do that, never paid for my rent, now I do that… Everything changed I'm independent, I don't take care of anybody else, I pay my rent, I wash, I cook.

Participant F: It's helped me to rely on myself more. When I was in my country, my father was paying electricity, Internet, he brings the food for us, but here you are responsible for yourself. Nobody's gonna help you.

While some degree of increased independence/self-reliance is likely a common trend for international students of other nationalities, in the case of Saudi Arabia it holds particular significance. As described in the literature review, Saudi Arabia is a very family-oriented society. All participants of the study reported that prior to traveling to the United States, they lived at home with their families and depended on them in their daily lives, as it is the prevailing Saudi cultural norm (all participants in the study are single; family refers to parents, siblings, grandparents, and certain members of the extended family). As Participant F explains, "in KSA even when you're married or anything, a lot of people are living with the parents..." The majority of participants reported that this independence/self-reliance was one of the most significant changes that they have experienced, and they perceived it as a beneficial change. As Participant C states, "…I think it's positive because I started to depend on myself." Several participants also commented specifically on a feeling of increased confidence as a result.

Participant F, for example states, "The confidence and the self reliance [is what changed the most]…because you have to do everything yourself. I'm not gonna wait for my brother or father, so that makes me more confident with myself."

Theme Two: Saudi males experience significant academic transformation, becoming more focused students who take into consideration their futures.

Saudi males from the participant group have experienced significant transformation in their academic identities. Before studying in the United States, 70% of the participants reported not being particularly focused on their academic lives, or considering their futures. They report prioritizing their studies and becoming more focused as a result of studying in United States.

Participant B: I find myself, I cannot be in a free mode. I have to be involved in school. That's what impacted me. I was before I had one year in my university, but when I came here I wouldn't have thought myself as I am today. I would say I'm more focused student here… I think for my future? I was not really thinking about my future, a plan to ensure my future. So, that's something I did not think about. Which is different here. Which is how to be better here how to fill out that resume, how to make myself fa product at the market, job fair. Not right now.

Participant C: [In KSA] I had a lot of trouble studying. My family had to push me a lot. But it's different when I'm here.

Participant D: [Before] I wasn't focusing on school and stuff. …dependent on my family...Not focused on school. When I came here I put myself together…

Participant F: Yes I think it changed me. Makes me work harder. Like when I was in KSA, I wasn't study like how I am right now.

Participant G: And myself there [in KSA] it was about fun, no study.

Being in the USA apparently does not impact their initial goals in studying abroad. That is, most participants had initially planned to return to KSA or a neighboring Middle Eastern country, either immediately after finishing their educational goals or after gaining some work experience. At the time of this study, seven of the eight participants still planned to do so. Only one participant expressed a new desire to live in the United States permanently; interestingly, he felt conflicted in his desire to do so due to deep family ties:

Participant A: I want to stay here. I want to live here… but its hard for me, I can't do it. Like deep down I can't do it. I can't leave my family. I can't imagine I'm leaving my family for the rest of my life.

Thus, the majority of participants are not so greatly impacted by their experience in the United States that they decide to alter their plans to stay long-term.

Theme Three: Familial ties are integral to Saudi male identity. Living and studying in the United States does not seem to impact a deep sense of devotion to family.

All seven participants identified familial ties and a sense of devotion to family as central aspects of Saudi male identity. Excerpts from the interviews help illustrate the role of family in the participants' lives in Saudi Arabia, as well as some of their responsibilities there.

Participant A: I used to…go shopping everyday…to buy stuff for my mom.

Participant B: …We're families, we bond together. So, me traveling to USA was not the best idea, because my mom will want me, family will need me, chores...I had 12 siblings, and we didn't have a driver until I left. Me and everyone is contributing…

Participant C: To be a Saudi, I think the most important thing in Saudi guy identity, to be about family, to have family, support your family…

Participant D: We stay at home [to live] until for longer [than Americans typically do]. I was responsible since I'm the oldest [male child], I gotta be responsible for my younger siblings.

Participant E: Last 5 years when I was there [in KSA], I was with my [family member], taking care of him. Close to family. I couldn't study. I wanted to study a certain major, but my [family member] was ill, he never told me "don't study," but I was with him, fine…until he passed away. So [after that] I could come to US, my mom was okay with that. Everything changed…

Participant G: I was interested in helping family a lot, but when I came here things changed. I don't have anything to do here… sometimes I miss that…Family, I'm the oldest, out of eight...Lots of responsibilities…If you have sisters you have to do it all for them. Take them wherever they want to go whatever they need to do…So wherever I am [in KSA] I have to go back home and take my sisters or women anywhere.

These statements reflect each participant's strong sense of devotion and obligation to family. Family also features prominently in their decisions to study in the United States. 70% of the participants indicated that having family members (cousins or siblings) who were currently studying or had previously studied in the United States played a direct role in their decision to study there. For instance, Participant E stated, "My cousins were here [in America], three guys. I was about to go to Australia. My mom talked to me about my cousins, she said 'you don't speak English. Go to your cousins, they can help you until you start.'" Several of the participants even live with family

members. Such comments were common for the majority of the participants.

The data does not indicate any significant change in participants' overall views about the importance of these familial ties or their sense of obligation to family after having studied in America. As Participant B stated, "Here (in USA) I tend to not like the family style, they don't get together. Some Americans just leave the house never come back, they have their mom on Facebook, that's it. We can't do that (in KSA)." Statements like this, which may indicate an incomplete understanding of family life in the United States, still does reveal that maintaining close family ties in a traditional Saudi manner remains a continued priority for Saudi males.

Theme Four: Saudi males experience changes in their views of other cultures, groups, religions, and lifestyles due to their exposure to them in an open environment, feeling more "open-minded" or tolerant.

The majority of the participants reported feeling more "open-minded," or "less judgmental" as a result of studying in the United States. This is presumably from having the opportunity to interact with and develop relationships with individuals from diverse backgrounds, free from the cultural norms or expectations that might typically impede such interactions in Saudi Arabia. This open-mindedness is expressed in a variety of ways that include increased understanding, tolerance, and acceptance of other cultural groups, religions, and lifestyles. Participants describe their experiences with other faith groups and religions as impactful:

Participant B: I try not to be judgmental. I'm way less judgmental. I went to the church with my host family to get experience, to see the difference. And in it, everybody's praying to a god. I would never think about how many people are religious here. I

thought it's not important here, before, but that's changed definitely.

Participant C: About religion, I think I started when I came to USA, I started to respect other religions more…I learned about Buddhism, a lot about Christianity. Because when I was studying in English school…I had a lot of different friends and I learned a lot about them, and their religion, about their culture also. So, it was like there was like they opened my mind and see the real world.

Participant F: I think yeah I change a little bit of my ideas when I was in KSA. I accept people thinking, different thinking. I judged some people, because of how they look. But when I came here, it doesn't matter for me. Let them live how they want, its not my business. There it's sometimes different. Like I make friends from different countries. I understand different cultures and beliefs.

In each of these statements, the participants describe how the opportunity to foster relationships and friends with members of diverse groups, free of their societal or cultural norms, positively impacted their perception of those groups. In some instances, these experiences even had a direct impact on their feelings about KSA, with some participants reporting that they would like to see a similar tolerance of diversity in faith there. For example, Participant B says:

The way I think is different (now). I see perceive things as totally different. You come to the culture, we have to have other cultures, the rights for other cultures, we have to have religious rights [in KSA]. I'd say we need to change its laws to allow people to practice their religion. Open as in, but as in religion wise. That's how I feel it's the basic right. The reaction of the people would be totally different. Diversity in religion.

Another participant reported that his experiences in America had a direct impact on his personal dealings with other nationalities in KSA. He describes a visit back to Saudi Arabia and his interactions with various groups of people:

Participant A: Yeah, also I was more open-minded [when I went back home]. For example back home, we have different people from different countries… Like Pakistani, Indian, African, they are with themselves, from same country, but I haven't see Saudis interacting with them a lot unless for business (cashier). Yeah, I felt differently, more friendly with them, I was interacting with them. But before coming here, no. It was something different. Like for someone new, some people that made me think like "why did I do that?" Back home, most of my friends we are Saudis. But here, I have friends from different countries. Back home it was completely different. I'd say because when I came here I considered myself like them. Before, I didn't realize I was only interacting with Saudis, I didn't think about it.

Other participants revealed a wide range of feelings, experiences and opinions prior to arriving in the United States, which, in the opinion of the researcher, do indicate an open-mindedness that existed in those participants prior to arriving in the United States. For example, several participants who were well traveled had other opportunities to interact with diverse groups of people outside of Saudi Arabia, and their comments revealed an openness that already existed before their experiences in the US.

Theme Four (B): Saudi students have the opportunity to interact more freely with members of other Muslim sects (Sunni/Shia), which can have a positive effect on their perceptions of them.

Related to the fourth theme, all of the participants from the group, identifying as either Sunni or Shia Muslims, reported having friendships in the United States with members of the other Muslim sect (i.e. Sunnis making friendships with Shias and vice versa). They embrace the opportunity to interact and learn about them, and expressed an attitude of open-mindedness and respect. Most indicate that being in the United States has facilitated the circumstances that they may get to know each other, in terms of both physical proximity, and the lack of cultural restraints that may prevent interaction. When discussing their perspective on relations between the two groups, such responses were typical:

Participant F: In KSA, it's hard to meet the other group, we meet them but we don't live with them. Some cities are mixed, but mine isn't. We don't have friends from the other group… but when I came here I had many friends [from other group]…I'm open-minded. I accept people if you respect me, I respect you… When you travel to a new place, you have to accept other people. And know how they think. If I travel from KSA and go to USA and go back the same, I think that's stupid, I didn't learn anything.

Participant G: Here I have a lot of friends, Sunni and Shia. I respect all of them.In Saudi we don't live together. It's a good experience to interact with them my neighborhoods [from other sect]. They come to me I go to them. It's fine. We respect each other it makes me think 'why don't we do that there?'

It appears that due to the lack of opportunities from physical separation and cultural norms, Saudis do not typically interact with one another across sectarian lines. In the United States, they are able to, and they see this as a largely positive experience. The opportunity to study in the United States thus exposes Saudis to aspects of their own culture in new ways. Still, participants also remarked that there are Saudis that they know and have observed who avoid interactions with other Saudis, based solely on their identification as Sunni or Shia. No Saudis from the participant group, however, reported engaging in this particular behavior.

Theme Five: Religious identity is a central component of Saudi male collective identity. Participants perceive that their own individual Muslim identity remains intact in the United States, although adapted to the new context. Muslim identity of other Saudi males is perceived as affected by the experience.

The data shows a consensus among all participants that being Muslim is an important part of Saudi national identity, the Saudi male collective identity, and their own individual identities. All participants professed a continued belief in Islam, and engaged in an active practice of that faith to some degree, which differed for each individual.

However, participants did report feeling that living in the United States has had various impacts on their Muslim identity and how they practice their religion. Many of these differences relate to being a religious minority in a secular country; many reported that they felt it is more difficult to practice their religion here, despite the existence of religious freedom. This is due to the fact that they left a Muslim-majority country, where religion is not separated from the state; Islam is integral to daily life in the public sphere, apparent in the abundance of mosques, the public call to prayer (*athaan)* and communal

worship five times a day, etc. In the US, however, they report that they practice more independently and in private. None of the participants attend a mosque on a daily basis in the United States, as they would in Saudi Arabia. Overall, the majority of participants echoed such similar sentiments as the following:

Participant A: More group community there [in KSA]. Even for example, as a Muslim we pray 5 times. If I miss one prayer, my friends will miss me, "whats wrong with him, he didn't come to pray, so call him." But here if I stay in my room one year, who knows? No one will look for me, checks…I think here, you have to be stronger… you have to like depend on yourself, because I mentioned that earlier, you have to be independent. Back home, you share everything. Even for Ramadan, you fast with your family, all religion things. But here, like it its different, you have to stronger. There, it's more as routine…Back home, all shops closed for prayer, so kind of feel they encourage you to pray, because you cant do anything because everythings closed, except the mosque. But here, they are like many challenges, during prayer time, everything still open, even back home the *athaan* time we can hear that easily, but here we can't hear that. So there are changes. On my perspective. I don't think so. Unless to pray late, no other change for me.

Participant G: Because there [in KSA], the prayer calls and everybody reminds you, its community. But here nobody tells you to do that. No prayer call. More responsibility, more freedom.

Several conclusions can be drawn from these comments. Participants feel that the lack of community effort makes it more difficult to practice Islam. They feel they must make a more concerted individual effort to practice in the United States, since it is not enforced by the state and there is no societal expectation to do so. As a result, however,

many participants felt that being in the United States actually served to strengthen their

Muslim identity, in that it requires a concerted effort to maintain: **Participant B:** I find I

get stronger when I get exposed to other religions. I will never think about how many

people are religious here.

I want to feel the spirit for prayers. Stuff like that but still I had my bond within I had

when you get to yourself, by yourself, on all the people are different religion, for me… I

was a standing point, I was stronger than before, [stronger] here than before [there]. I felt

how lucky I am.

Participant E: Even though I pray in my house most of the time, I still feel like faith. I

don't know why, but I feel like I'm close to God even though I'm in my house.

Although none of the participants reported that their individual Muslim identity

had been compromised by living in the United States, five of the seven participants

expressed feeling that 'many other' Saudis were losing their Muslim identity:

Participant B: As in identity, I feel I still have my identity, I still do not like what some

of Saudis do for behavior, but I feel like it's a free country you do what you want.

Participant D: Lots of Muslims come here and lose their Muslim identity I see. I see a

couple who changed their identity religious. Some people they won't practice religion

even back home. So here it's open, so they're getting tattoos getting drunk, and things

like that. It's a mix.

Participant E: I have like atheists, they don't want anyone to know, Saudis, atheist

Saudi, I know one here.

Participant G: Some people think when they come here, nobody sees what they're

doing, so they smoke weed, drink, sleep with women, they don't do that at home, its

harder there…But here they believe in freedom. They do it a lot, they think about freedom, no father, mother, parents…

By "losing their Muslim identity", the participants mean that these Saudi males reportedly engage in actions and behavior that is generally understood as prohibited in orthodox Sunni Islam. However, these participants also acknowledge that despite this behavior, these individuals may still identity and perceive themselves as Muslims, for as Participant E comments, "I have like a lot of Saudi friends here who drink. Even though they drink, if there's discussion about Islam they still defend Islam. Or they will still pray and things like that." Such comments reveal the difficulty in relying on others to comment on the Muslim identity of others; this is an area that would require much more research, involving interviews with individuals who engage in such behaviors that fall outside the boundaries of permissibility.

Theme Six: Saudi males experience various forms of discrimination/racism in the United States based on their Saudi/Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim identity

During the interviews, all participants shared personal experiences of facing discrimination/racism, on or around campus, which were related to their Saudi or Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim identity. Their experiences range from subtle to more overt instances, as illustrated in the following comments:

Participant A: …I used to hang out with American boys the first two weeks here when I came... We were friends, had dinner together, for two weeks, then its done. When they realize I from Saudi, they try to skip [ignore] me, they didn't answer my calls [anymore]. I remember after like two weeks they asked where are you from? After they found out I'm from Saudi, they skipped me? They ignore me. They didn't answer my calls.

Participant D: Actually I have faced racism, like pointing at me making jokes at me, kidding around but it's not a joke…Sometimes when I'm out with my friends some things like that happen.

Participant E: ...Like before I came, I never thought there was racist, so when I came to United States…I saw many racist students. Around everywhere, downtown, I was smoking outside downtown, and a man asked where I was from and he talked bad about me, Saudi Arabians, and Muslims...In some classes, like we were in a group working together. They don't mention anything with me, they don't ask me, don't answer me. They don't want to. I could tell they didn't want to share with me anything, so I got a sheet, and I was working by myself. Like not a part of the group…**Participant G**: And here, my first time [here] I saw racism. I was at the bowling alley, I went there with five friends Saudi, we entered and people stopped and looked at us, all of them. We thought because we entered they did that. But for a minute nobody moved. In the whole place. And somebody said, "Get out!" The people inside bowling, said, "Get out of here." We kept silent and left. My first time, my first or second month here...That was from us being Arab.

These types of experiences appear to be a part of the collective Saudi male experience, at least at the location of this study in the United States.

Theme Six (B): Saudi males are often confronted with what they feel are stereotypes and misconceptions about Saudi Arabian/Middle Eastern culture and/or Islam; they feel misconceptions are related to representations in the media.

Similarly, each of the participants commented on stereotypes about Saudi culture and/or Islam that they face; the most common of these were perceptions about wealth,

gender inequality, and terrorism.

Participant B: About wealth, they think all of us are wealthy, which we have wealthy, middle class, and under poverty…They think terrorism, gender inequality, [that we are] not as knowledgeable as other people…

Participant C: I think some of them…see males in KSA, like oppressors like most oppressive men, they always oppress women. What they think about is you can marry four women and I get that question a lot, people mention that a lot to me, like you can marry four women. And they think women are like slaves in Saudi Arabia, and I hate that.   Because it's not true.

Participant D: Think we're terrorists or that we have oil money, that we're all rich. They ask me about women's rights—having four wives, driving… Some say things like are you terrorist? They think we don't follow the rules.

Participant E: They think we're here just to study and steal their country...terrorists. They think we're rich. They always ask me about money they say give us money, you're Saudi, you're rich.

Participant F: Sometimes they [other students] ask where I'm from, when I say where I'm from, they say rich man... It's the general idea. Actually I live in the East, has the most oil but still we have poor people…Like when people think you're from Saudi you have a lot of money, a lot of cars, that's not real. Something that I don't like, I say Saudi, they say "oh rich man" how do you know I'm rich?   The question about four wives always come, my classmates ask.

Participant G: My cousin in [state X] came to class, undergrad. The teacher… wrote a question on the board… it said "who are the richest people in the United States?" 99% of

them said Saudi. He said "why?" "They have a lot of money, they can do what they

want." They ask the professor, he said, "I think Saudis too. When I see them I think

there's a dollar walking around." I don't know why they think like that because news or

maybe some people there spend money like that.

All of the participants strongly felt that the portrayal in the media of Saudi Arabia,

the Middle East, and Islam/Muslims contributed to the misperceptions and stereotypes

that they faced. The majority of the participants felt a direct connection between their

personal experiences with stereotypes in the United States and images that were prevalent

in the media:

Participant A: I think they have the wrong ideas more than correct. I would say [they]

get their ideas] from the media because they never been in Saudi Arabia. From the media,

social media.

Participant B: A lot of media, have reflected a false perception about KSA, male and

female. If they come to me and ask me what would you I read this in the news, is this

true or not?

Participant C: It's harder here, actually, especially, with the news. If you see the news,

it's all about Islam and how Islam is bad, and these stuff. So, maybe that's hard because it

makes people judge or change the way they see you. So, that's what I feel. I get a lot of

questions… I was living with an older man, who was asking me about the news when he

sees something, he was always asking me about my religion, and do you do that, is that

really true?

Participant E: I guess they think like I don't know, it's because of the media. They give

the people images about Saudis, I don't want to say it but, terrorists, stuff like that. I think

people like think that, and they believe it.

Participant G: …The news here, the media, they give them a bad idea bout Saudi Arabia, Arabs, Muslims. They don't think about Saudis [specifically] they think about Muslims. Even if one Muslim did something bad that doesn't mean all of us are bad…The news is too bad here.

These comments and scenarios reveal that Saudis feel the prevailing narrative in the media about Saudi Arabia/Middle East and Islam has very real implications for them in terms of their personal experiences in the United States. They feel these images play a role in shaping the perception non-Saudis have of the Saudi male identity, which the participants face in various forms, as is visible in their reported interactions with others. It also influences how they express their identity to others, by how they choose to respond or react to these situations. For example, some participants stated that they tend to avoid disclosing their Saudi Arabian identity so as not to be confronted with difficult questions or the potential social ramifications:

Participant A: Sometimes you feel you don't show off your identity, I just say I speak Arabic, I'm from Middle East in general…I think because, I don't know why, but sometimes, I do that. If I'd say like I'm from Saudi, they'll keep space or try to question me a lot. "Why does Saudi does this? Are you rich?" About the oil. So many questions…

Others report being reluctant to express aspects of their identity publically, from weariness of how it will be perceived by others and the potential associations that could be made:

Participant C: You feel free when you're in the mosque or house, but you can't pray in public place. I never prayed in a public place, I feel I shouldn't do that. There's no rule

against it, but maybe people, see you differently, think you're bad or something….

And I feel some people don't want to look at you sometimes. Because they think you're a

terrorist.

Participant D: …I mean like here [in The US] I prefer to do like my religion practice in

my home, rather than in public. But I don't know what they think if they see it.

Participant F: Sometimes I feel like as a foreign student here I feel like American people

don't want to, not all of them…but for me sometimes I feel like some students don't want

to talk to me because I'm foreign or because I'm Saudi, I don't know.

It is evident that the participants' identities as Saudi/Middle Eastern and/or

Muslim, and perceptions of those identities by others, have played a distinct role in

shaping their lives as students in the United States, which may impact how they express

their identity. It may also affect their perceived acceptance by native speakers of the

target language, which may in turn affect their acquisition of the language and the

culture. Perhaps there is a correlation between this phenomenon and their social

networks, which generally lack relationships and friendships with Americans. However,

the data is inconclusive about such a relationship, and further research would need to be

conducted in this area.

Theme Seven: Having female teachers, classmates/peers is a new experience for

Saudi males that impacts their perception of gender dynamics.

Saudis must accustom themselves to vastly different gender dynamics in the

United States. Being in mixed-gender settings, regularly interacting with non-relative

females, and having female teachers is a novel experience for most Saudi males, due to

the practice of gender separation in Saudi Arabia. Five of the seven participants describe

adjusting to this aspect of American life as initially very challenging:

Participant A: I remember when I started my program, had class, culture, we were only three men, the rest of the class, women. I had a hard time interacting with them (women), so like I think I did not used to it, I came from a separated system, men go to one school, and women another school…Also back home, no female teacher. I'd say in the beginning here it was hard for me. I was trying to participate, I was quiet, I wasn't used to it.

Participant F: Actually in the beginning when I came, I was a little shy to talk to girls, especially Saudi girls.

Participant G: The tradition there, I can't be with girl. So it seems different here in class I can't talk to her at first. That made me crazy in the beginning…and the teacher, in beginning it was strange to have a female teach me. It's my first time let the woman teach me. So it was strange for me, something new.

The majority of participants have adjusted to having female classmates and teachers, and expressed attitudes about it that range from indifference (as in they now see no significant difference in studying with/learning from females) to feeling it was a very positive experience. Some individuals felt that having female classmates and teachers is particularly beneficial and has a positive impact on their academic selves. For example these participants attributed some of their academic success to having female peers:

Participant A: Since most of them [my classmates] are women my GPA is super high, because of that. Working with them, they affected me. I feel that when I see all my friends (classmates) are studying I have to be like them. Back home, I'd say most of my friends have same GPA, no big difference, but here, they impact me. Yeah, they motivate me so I'm keeping up.

Participant C: What I feel different when you are in class and you have female, I think you are in trouble, because females are better at studying than men, because women are mostly good at studying, so it's good because when you have a question, you just ask a female. They're better.

The first participant feels that females are better students, and having them as peers helps him excel academically. The second sees females as particularly able students who are able to assist when help is needed. Almost all of the other participants echoed the same sentiments about females being stronger students than males. Three also indicated that they felt females made better teachers.

These direct experiences do not appear to have changed the participants' perceptions of females as students specifically, as most of them reportedly held this viewpoint prior to coming to the United States. However, observing and working with females in mixed gender situations has led to reconsideration of notions of masculinity and femininity, as defined by their cultural norms:

Participant B: It's reflected into my way of thinking, the way I think of masculinity, feminism, that's totally a topic I never touched before being honest, never thought about, I respect my sister, women, never had an experience in Saudi Arabia [to interact with women], except in a hospital or something but I'll be very respectful. When I see it here I don't see a difference between the two… I see no difference if it would have been applicable in KSA. So its like why don't people do it? Why people don't accept it the fact that the other gender has rights. They're not a source of harm, what I mean, is they would not harm society, they would benefit society.

Participant C: In Saudi I thought females are shy, but when I came to United States, most of them are not actually.

Exposure to new norms that differ from what these individuals are accustomed to has prompted them to think more about male and female identity, and to question gender roles in their own society.

However, for others, it seems that the experience has actually served to reinforce certain Saudi cultural norms about gender. In comparing the general status of females in Saudi Arabia and in the United States, these participants report feeling that women have a preferable situation in Saudi Arabia. Such feelings are represented by the following comments:

Participant C: About the gender, actually when I look back to women in KSA, before I came, I thought women were a little oppressed, but when I came to the USA, I feel that they're living a good life. Because women here they study hard, they work hard, I mean they sometimes they don't have other people to depend on, and that's hard I feel its sad, because women sometimes need help. In Saudi Arabia, women get help from all family. Women in KSA, I think they really good life. I feel it's better than women in United States, because they get support from everywhere.

Participant G: For me, the woman there [in KSA] is treated like queen, with respect. If she asks you to do something, you must do it.

Finally, the majority of participants express considerably more reservation in their interactions with Saudi female classmates and peers, out of what is described as a concern for the comfort of these women and respect for the culture.

Participant A: The first day I remember I called my cousin who used to be studying here

in the US. I said I have like eight females in my class, and we are from the same country. So I don't know how to interact with them. Should I greet them or ignore them? He said just greet them and help them and let them help you. That was culture shock.

Participant C: I feel that I don't want to talk to Saudi females, because I don't think they feel comfortable. So I'm trying to have a distance and not talk. They are shy in Saudi so I don't want to talk to them because, I feel they don't feel comfortable around Saudi males so I keep distance.

Participant E: Actually I don't talk to them, if I have to talk to ask, I do. But just for fun I don't do that. I respect the culture.

While most reported that they do interact with Saudi females in the classroom, they do so more out of necessity, and even in doing so they still prefer to keep what they consider to be a respectable distance. This reveals a preservation of cultural norms concerning perceived appropriate gender relations, even in a new context. Also, presumptions about female habits and what they prefer are revealed in such comments as the following:

Participant A: I'm not sure but I'd say they were smarter than boys, because they [Saudi women] prefer to stay home a lot because they have time, but guys like to hang out of their house.

These interactions with members of the opposite sex in a mixed-gender environment represents an area of significant difference for Saudi males. It impacts individuals diversely, exposes them to female identity in new ways. For some, it apparently calls for them to examine their own male identity in a new context. For others, it seems to reinforce their own cultural norms and ideas about male and female

identity.

Theme Eight: Saudi males maintain networks that consist largely of other Saudi males, which may reinforce aspects of their Saudi identity, in particular language.

Saudi males tend to maintain a social network that is largely comprised of other Saudi males. Although they do develop friendships with people from other nationalities (largely other international students), they still elect to live with and spend the majority of their time with fellow Saudi males. No participant reported spending the majority of their time with non-Saudis. Some oft-cited reasons for this are comfort, and fear of inadequate ability in the English language:

Participant C: I think everyone is, putting himself in a circle with some friends and he doesn't want to go out of that circle... Sometimes I feel shy, I don't want to make mistakes in English.

Participant F: You feel more comfortable when you know someone from your place, you feel more comfort, that's what happened.

This pattern among Saudi males reinforces certain aspects of their identity, in particular extensive continued use of their native language of Arabic outside of the classroom, which may have ramifications in terms of their acquisition of the target language.

Theme Nine: Living and studying in the United States impacts Saudi males' attitudes and beliefs about specified aspects of Saudi society, culture and norms; it inspires a desire to see change in those areas in their country.

The experience of living and studying in the United States has had an impact on the participants' perceptions of areas of Saudi society. Influenced by their exposure to a

new set of norms, customs, and systems in the United States, participants express a desire to see changes in Saudi society. Participants anonymously agreed that changes were needed in education, and human rights. There were differences in opinion on gender norms (such as co-ed classrooms and allowing women to drive).

Participants conclude fro their experiences that the style and quality of the education in the United States is of a higher standard than that of Saudi Arabia. Participants would like to see a model of education in Saudi Arabia that is more applicable, includes more critical thinking and understanding, choice, and less rote memorization.

Participant A: For me, the education system [needs to change]. The study. I would say we have to learn critical thinking. They should change the old method, based on memorization.

Participant B: When it comes to education, the quality is not as good. You feel like you study up to date (here) cases here. In KSA its always books to read, not saying they don't have books to read, but its not applicable. I find it very hard in KSA, and the outcome it's hard but the outcome is not as good as here.

On the subject of human rights, participants discussed religious rights, the treatment and rights of foreign/immigrant workers, and gender issues, such as separation of the sexes and the right for women to drive.

Participants express an appreciation for the religious diversity and religious freedom that they witness in the United States, and stated that they would like to see more religious freedom in Saudi Arabia:

Participant B: I would say we need to change its laws to allow people to practice their

religion. Open as in, but as in religion wise. That's how I feel it's the basic right. The reaction of the people would be totally different. Diversity in religion.

Participant E: I go to the mosque here in *jumuah* (Friday prayer), and I park in front of church. That's beautiful. I like that. I love that. It's peace. Everyone has like their freedom. Everyone doing like his what he has to do. And we live in peace, stay together. I love it. I wish we had that back home, churches and stuff. So we should respect other religions…I like Saudis to try to feel free share society with other religions, other people.

Participant F: In Saudi, they think they control people with religion. I don't like that actually everyone should be able to what he or she wants, that's what I think.

Also in the category of human rights, participants display a concern for the treatment of foreign workers who come from non-Western countries, such as parts of Africa, Pakistan, Bangladesh, etc. They would like to see more awareness of their situation and better treatment of them.

Participant B: I would say abuse foreigner people get in KSA [is an issue]. I see that a lot. I didn't think about it back then. Unfortunately I was acknowledging, but not to the point where I say it's not fair to have like how hot it is, so they keep working in the exposed sun, might reach 115, and they will keep working, that's an example for laborer. Other example, inside homes, drivers, maids, they treated inhumanely. Yes. In *some* cases, not *all* cases.

Participant F: I think people in Saudi should respect these people more. Actually they don't get any respect from people. That's so stupid.

In discussing gender, participants expressed a variety of opinions on the particular issues of separation of the sexes, co-ed classrooms, and women driving in Saudi Arabia.

As previously discussed, many of the participants have grown comfortable with studying and learning from members of the opposite sex in the classroom in the United States, but expressed more hesitance in interacting with Saudi females. Most participants also apparently do not feel that more gender mixing, co-ed classroom situations, and the issue of women driving would work in Saudi Arabia at this point in time, and feel more comfortable leaving as it is. They feel this way due to the differences in history, traditions and customs between the United States and Saudi Arabia. Several comments from participants expound on this:

Participant D: In Saudi, I mean for that's fine I like it. The decision wasn't made recently it was made before I grew up, tradition. I don't think it works there because of culture and society, it would be hard. Keep it the same.

Participant F: For me, I think Saudi Arabia should still be, should not change. I think if they change, there are many things going to happen, nobody wants it. That's what I think. Like when you go to closed community and suddenly its opened, there's a lot of mistakes going to happen. If they did that before, mixed from beginning, it's okay, but when you change people mind become closed, then you want to open it that's very difficult. Like women can't drive. For me, women should drive, but, right now in KSA, I heard many comments social media some men say if I see a girl drive…I think it's difficult.

Participant G: Here (in the US) it's tradition, it's different since the time they're young. So it works here. It's a problem there because of men, they make it hard.

Several participants commented that they were not necessarily opposed to these changes as individuals, but their unwillingness to see such changes was rooted in a feeling that Saudi society as a whole is not prepared for them, and that they would

ultimately prove to be disruptive and detrimental to social fabric. Still, others strongly

felt that women should be able to drive, and that, in general, there needs to be more

reform in the area of gender roles and women's rights. Participants were roughly divided

in half in their opinions of gender issues and whether or not there should be change in

Saudi Arabia. Some felt that such changes should be implemented slowly and over time,

and some cthat steps in that direction are already being taken, at a pace and in a form

appropriate for that society. Several members summarize these perspectives:

We need time. People need awareness. If you want students (male and female) work

together, lets think about 20 years from now, over time, not next 5 years. We need years,

and years. I feel like right now, people are getting changed. Before, the fathers didn't

allow the women to work in place with a lot of men. But now you see that happening.

And if I talk about back home, I feel Saudi Arabia is changing, but the progress is not fast

paced. It's slow, it's a slow culture. And women will drive. Definitely.

Summary of Themes/Patterns

A total of nine major themes related to Saudi male identity and transformation

were identified by the researcher during the analysis of this qualitative study. The first

theme focuses on independence/self-reliance. The overwhelming majority of responses

from participants indicated that the experience of studying in the United States cultivates

the quality of independence and self-reliance in Saudi males, who are accustomed to

depending greatly on their families in day-to-day activities. They perceive this newfound

independence as a positive change.

The second theme reveals that the participants experience an academic

transformation during their studies in the United States, becoming much more focused on

their studies than they had been in Saudi Arabia. This could be the result of a combination of factors such as increased self-reliance and less dependence on family (resulting in maturity), age, the rigor and demands of their classes and schedules, the style of education, and change in environment. These findings cannot be generalized beyond the sample group, as there are many Saudi male students who do not experience academic success or high achievement in the United States.

The third theme in the data concerns familial ties. Strong family ties are an integral part of the Saudi male identity, and this appears to remain so during their studies in the United States. For many Saudi males, the decision to pursue studies abroad in the United States is in part influenced by the presence and experiences of their family members in the United States, and the support they gain from family members in this pursuit.

The fourth theme focuses on how Saudi males' perspectives of other groups is shaped by their experiences in the United States. The data indicates that exposure to other cultures, beliefs, lifestyles, and groups in the United States results in a positive change of attitude towards these groups, resulting in more open-mindedness, acceptance, and tolerance of others. These changes are facilitated by accessibility and the opportunity to build relationships with others free of cultural restraints. A sub-theme here concerns Saudi relations across sectarian lines. Sunni and Shia Muslims both feel that the opportunity to study in the United States exposes them to the other group in ways that would not have been possible in Saudi Arabia, often resulting in a more positive perception of that group.

Theme five focuses on religious identity of Saudi males. It was found that being Muslim is considered to be important to Saudi identity. Participants retain this sense of identity with some adaptations in the drastically different context, and in some cases, become stronger in their faith. However, according to the participants, the new degree of freedom, the challenges associated with the practice of Islam, and the level of individual commitment required have also resulted in a loss of religious identity for others.

The sixth theme reveals that Saudi males experience different forms of discrimination and racism related to their identity as Saudi/Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim. They are often associated with wealth, oppression of women, terrorism, and ignorance. They feel very strongly that these stereotypes and misconceptions they face are an effect of media representations of the Middle East and Islam. These experiences impact their interactions with others and play a significant role in their identity construction in the United States, often impacting how they are perceived by others, how they choose to respond or react, and how they conduct themselves. It may also impact their social networks and who they tend to create relationships with.

Theme seven in the data concerns gender dynamics. Having female teachers and classmates is a novel experience for Saudi males, and it is initially uncomfortable. However, they adjust and often display favorable opinions about female teachers and classmates. Saudi males feel that women make better students than men, and some feel that they benefit greatly from having female classmates in terms of their own academic selves. For some, this experience causes them to question their own nation's norms related to gender dynamics and gender roles. For others, it serves to reinforce their own

culture's norms and values concerning women. This is an area of study that would need to be expanded to draw more definite conclusions on the impact it has on Saudi male identity.

The eighth theme revealed that Saudi males tend to maintain social networks that are largely comprised of other Saudis, but they also often include other international students. They spend the vast majority of their time with each other, which tends to reinforce aspects of their Saudi identity, such as the use of their native language, Arabic. Some participants indicated that this tendency was due to the comfort of being around one's own kinsmen, and discomfort with using the English language. Additionally, as acquiring culture and the language of the culture are so closely intertwined, this may have implications in terms of acquisition of the culture as well.

The final theme focuses on how the experience of studying in the United States impacts Saudi males' attitudes and beliefs about Saudi Arabian society. Their experiences in the United States inspires the desire in the participants to see changes in Saudi Arabia that can be categorized as: human rights, quality and style of education, gender norms, and driving/traffic regulations/rules. Participants hope to see more religious tolerance and diversity, and more humane treatment of foreign/immigrant workers. Concerning gender, Saudi males are impacted by living in a gender-mixed society in the USA, but are divided on whether their own society should observe such norms. Some believe that improvement in the area of women's rights is needed, while others are of the opinion that based on the difference in history, culture, and tradition between the United States and Saudi Arabia, it should stay the same, or change at a slow pace.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the individual and collective Saudi male identity is impacted by the experience of living and pursuing higher education in the United States. The study used a qualitative grounded theory approach, using interviews with participants from target group to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. What changes do Saudi males perceive experiencing in their individual and collective identities as international students in an American institution of higher education?

2. How have their experiences changed their personal beliefs and views about themselves and Saudi Arabian culture.

The data from the study indicates that Saudi male identity is impacted in seven areas as a result of pursuing higher education in the United States: independence/self reliance, academics, open-mindedness/tolerance of other groups, experiencing discrimination and stereotypes based on perceptions of their identity, interactions with females as peers/classmates and teachers, and evolving perspectives on aspects of Saudi Arabian society culture and society.

Given the centrality of family in Saudi Arabia and the traditional interdependence of family members, the reported newfound independence/self-reliance represents a significant change in identity. In a society as family-oriented as Saudi Arabia, that places such an emphasis on interdependence of its family members, the reported independence/self-reliance of Saudi males in the US is a phenomenon that marks a notable change from the Saudi Arabian cultural norm. It has the potential to impact the individual and collective Saudi male identity, not in their sense of devotion to family, but

in that it creates a space for these individuals to develop an identity or sense of self removed from the family unit---which is unique for them. However, this has to be considered in combination with the findings on family relationships as Saudi males continue to maintain close ties with their families and still consider them to be of utmost importance.

Saudi males reportedly adapt to the new environment and culture, but they still retain a strong sense of their Saudi cultural identity. For example, their Muslim identity, which was identified in the study as strongly related to Saudi male identity, remains intact, and in some cases is strengthened through their experiences in the United States. The individuals in the study all reported that they have maintained their Muslim identity, although having to it to a new context that differs in religiosity from what they are accustomed to (participants also observed that others "lose" their Muslim identity, but no such individuals identified themselves in this research; this is an area that would benefit from further inquiry).

Although Saudi males reportedly develop a more open-minded attitude towards non-Saudis and build relationships with them as a result of opportunities available to do so in the new context, their social networks, in terms of sheer numbers, appear to be minimally impacted; they continue to live and interact with other Saudi males at the greatest frequency (the overwhelming majority reportedly spending 75% or more of their time with other Saudi males). This undoubtedly reinforces aspects of their Saudi identity, most immediately observed in continued dominant use of the Arabic language (which in turn has many implications in terms of identity/identity transformation).

Studying in the United States gives Saudi males exposure to aspects of their own culture from new perspectives that are not commonly possible for them in the Saudi Arabia. For example, they have the opportunity to interact with either Sunni or Shia Muslims free of the social limitations and stigma that would typically prevent such relationships in Saudi Arabia. This personal contact allows them to reassess their attitudes and beliefs about Saudi culture and other Saudis. For many of the participants, it appears to have resulted in a more positive attitude and greater respect for other groups. Over time this may impact the nature of the relationship of these groups in Saudi Arabia, which would mean it has the potential to the impact a collective Saudi identity.

The study strongly indicates that facing discrimination/stereotypes based on their identity as Middle Eastern/Arab/Muslim is a part of the collective Saudi male experience in the United States. As all of the participants strongly felt that negative perceptions of them by others, at least in part, were related to negative portrayals in the media, then it can be concluded that the current prevailing narrative about the Middle East may have very real consequences and implications for these individuals in terms of how they express their identity and how their identity develops in the United States. As Hall (2000) posits in his discussion of identity formation, it is a process that is linked to how one is perceived by others, whether those perceptions are accurate or not. Examples of this are the participants who expressed fear of praying in public for what they would be potentially associated with by *others*, or those who felt that they were perceived by non-Saudis as terrorists, misogynists, etc.

Furthermore, it may play a role in their process of acculturation. In line with this view, Kinginger (2009) states that as much as language is about acquisition, it is also

strongly embedded in a learner's process of socialization. Identity is a product of socialization: how learners perceive themselves, what they envision themselves to become, and the ways that those around them include or exclude them are all integral to identity construction. While no solid link was discovered between the discrimination/stereotypes Saudi males faced and the phenomenon of their predominantly Saudi male social networks, it would be an area worth further investigation.

In gender dynamics, several of the participants reported being impacted by the experience of interacting with female classmates/teachers to the point of questioning how they define their own masculine identity; for example they questioned the notion that interactions between males and females would necessarily be sexual in nature. Others were minimally affected in that regard. And while almost all participants were reportedly receptive to the experience of having female classmates and teachers in the context of the United States (and found it to be a neutral to favorable experience), many participants generally expressed an attitude that was considerably more reserved concerning Saudi females. Although they found themselves interacting with Saudi females in the classroom and elsewhere that would not occur in Saudi Arabia, the participants still often elected to keep distance from them. Many also felt the more conservative gender norms and roles found in Saudi Arabia were, in fact more appropriate for Saudi Arabia.

These findings are revealing of complex attitudes/beliefs about gender norms that may suggest that Saudi males express a different set of standards and values concerning Saudi women and non-Saudi women, or perhaps for the United States and Saudi Arabia. Further research specifically exploring Saudi Arabian male perception of gender norms and roles and how those are impacted by international study would be beneficial.

It is also concluded from this study that the Saudi male identity is impacted in terms of perceptions of their home country, its norms, culture, and values. Exposure to new norms, culture, and values in the United States apparently incites in Saudi males a desire for improvement in certain areas of Saudi Arabian life, namely quality of education, issues related to human rights, and driving rules and regulations. The hopes they envision for the collective Saudi identity in these areas are influenced by the standards they experienced in the United States.

At the time this study was conducted, a large number of Saudi male students are pursuing higher education in the United States. As these individuals fill university and college classrooms across the United States, it is essential that institutions and teachers understand their experiences, challenges, motives, and beliefs, and how their experiences in the United States potentially impact their lives. Considering the large investment that is being made on behalf of these students, it is important to acknowledge and, when appropriate, make the appropriate accommodations to assist these learners. As discussed in the literature review, identity formation has a strong connection to L2 acquisition and so this study may have significant implications in terms of L2 identity. If the goals of such initiatives as the KASP are to foster intercultural communication and understanding, then this type of research needs to be conducted in order to ascertain whether or not and to what degree its goals are being achieved.

The data from the study also asserts that Saudi males are not a homogenous group who think and act the same; Saudi males arrive in the United States from different areas of Saudi Arabia, with a wide variety of previous experiences, perspectives and opinions based on their upbringing, personalities, and viewpoints. While numerous patterns and

themes have been identified and discussed, it should be noted that there are also numerous examples that illustrate that their individual identities develop and change according to a unique trajectory.

Considering the larger discourse about identity, it can be concluded from the study that Saudi males do develop new aspects of their identity in response to the new social context. These observations align with Norton and Toohey's definition of identity as "diverse…dynamic, and changing over historical time and social space" (p. 414, 417). It is also in agreement with Markus and Nurius' (1986) Possible selves theory, in which identity is "influenced by sociocultural and historical context, social experience, and by the media and the images and narratives it presents (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). As for the overall "stability" of Saudi male identity, the study indicates that it remains relatively stable, as evidenced by the strong Saudi social networks that they maintain in the United States, and the fact that the overwhelming majority of the participants in the study indicated that they do plan to return to Saudi Arabia upon completion of their studies.

Given the limited scope of the research, it is difficult to determine whether or not Saudis will retain in the long term the aspects of their identity that have been impacted by living and studying in the United States. That is to say, when they return to Saudi Arabia, how much of these facets of their identity remain, and to what degree? Since Saudi males do tend to return to Saudi Arabia after completing their education, there is a possibility that if these large numbers of students remain consistent in the future, they may import their new perspectives, beliefs, and values, and affect change in Saudi Arabian society over time. For example, the interactions that take place between Sunni

and Shia Saudis in the United States may change the relationship between these two groups in Saudi Arabia, resulting in more interaction and tolerance. Likewise, participants' expressions of concern about such issues as human rights may result in a better treatment of migrant workers, maids, etc.

Furthermore, if Saudis perceive their experiences abroad as largely positive, they may elect to encourage their own children in the future to pursue this course as well, making the impact potentially generational. As was observed by many of the participants, changes in attitude about a great many issues are already taking place, possibly due to such initiatives as the scholarship program, and globalization in general. However, given the high regard for tradition in Saudi Arabia, it is reasonable to project that any such changes, should they occur would not be immediate, but at a rate appropriate to the country and culture. Future studies might attempt to answer such questions more definitively by expanding the scope of research to consider how identity changes or remains the same as students resettle in Saudi Arabia.

Pedagogical Implications

Considering the results of this study, there are several implications for educational institutions that host Saudi students, in an effort to better understand their situation and how it impacts them, in order to assist them during their studies in the United States. Saudi males come from a unique cultural situation. This study, by no means exhaustive, is intended to help develop a body of research concerning the target population, in an effort to better understand their experiences in the United States.

Given the dearth of studies that have been conducted on this population, data collected from studies such as this can be used to raise awareness and general knowledge

about a population of students that has grown immensely in higher education in the United States; it is necessary to know more about Saudi Arabia and Saudi culture, to better understand the challenges these students face, their perceptions, and how these experiences potentially affect their identity. Information from these studies should be dispensed in an appropriate manner to those who will have significant interactions with the population. For instances, teachers would benefit from knowing that Saudi males come from a background in which they have not interacted with females as classmates and teachers, and that this is new territory for them, which might explain some of their behaviors and the challenges they face in the classroom and on campus. An individual teacher would apply this knowledge as he or she felt appropriate for their educational situation, but to understand the context students come from is essential.

The challenges Saudi males potentially face in terms of discrimination and stereotypes based on their identity or perceived identity is an area that should concern institutions and teachers alike. Institutions with significant numbers of Saudi students can make efforts to educate their faculty on diversity and multicultural training, which in turn can be shared with the student body as appropriate. Knowledge of the collective Saudi male identity can be used to promote a culture of greater tolerance and understanding, in an effort to help them to get the support that they need, and achieve their academic goals.

Efforts could also be made on an institutional level to help Saudis build more relationships with non-Saudis/domestic students through programs and initiatives that foster meaningful inter-cultural relationships among all university students. These programs could take on many forms, such as partnering willing US/non-Saudi students

with Saudis as roommates for a specific period of time. As the study reflects a desire

in Saudi males to have more friends with American students in particular, but that they

may have trouble doing so based on insecurities with the English language and comfort,

this would potentially help Saudi males in English language acquisition, as well as more

cultural acquisition. This would be beneficial for all parties involved, as it would also

help non-Saudi students to gain a different understanding of Saudis from personal

experience.

Limitations of Study

The present research relied on data collected from interviews from a small sample

size of seven participants at one small Midwestern University, and must be considered in

that context. It is difficult to generalize about the experiences of all Saudi males across

the United States based on the findings of a small study in a particular region of the

country. The interviews were conducted in English, which is not the primary language of

the participants. As the participants had only studied English for a few years, their

responses would be limited to their ability to articulate themselves in the language. The

study also relied on the participants to self-report about their experiences and how they

perceive themselves/Saudi males collectively as having changed; thus, the research is

dependent on their statements. It is possible that participants withheld information to

present themselves and Saudi males in general in a more positive light.

Future Research

As mentioned before, research conducted on Saudi Arabian students in the field

of TESOL is lacking. It is recommended that more effort be made to study this group

and the impact the experience of studying abroad has on them, the countries in which they study, and ultimately Saudi Arabia.

Following from the present study, larger studies at other universities in other regions would help to give a more complete picture of the Saudi male experience, and how it may vary from region to region, and university to university. More research is also needed on the phenomena of Saudi social networks. Several participants in the study remarked that they would enjoy having more friendships with more non-Saudis. These studies could also be expanded into longitudinal ones that may chart the experience of students in the beginning, middle, and end of their experience. Studies could also include Saudi males who have completed their studies and returned to Saudi Arabia, to track how their identity has continued to evolve.

All of the participants in the study reported instances of facing discrimination and stereotypes. More research that examines specifically how discrimination and stereotyping affects the identity of Saudi males would be worthwhile.

Another area that would benefit from further research is the relationship between the Saudi male identity, the Saudi social network, the English language, and the presence of non-Saudis in their social networks. Since Saudi male social networks overwhelmingly consist of other Saudi males, then how does this specifically affect their acquisition of the English language, and subsequently their acculturation process and their identity? Are there any patterns in how the identity of those who spend more time with non-Saudis differs from those whose networks are predominantly Saudi?

Many of the participants made mention of Saudi males that they felt were in the process of "losing" their Muslim identity as a result of their experience in the United

States. These were reportedly individuals who engaged in behavior that deviated from

Saudi/Muslim norms, such as drinking alcohol. Future research in the area of Saudi male

identity should seek to include a wider variety of individuals, to include those who are

admittedly not practitioners of Islam or who are not religious, to see how this experience

affects them.

Finally, similar studies as the present one, which focus on Saudi female identity

are also greatly needed, so that more can be known about how this experience affects

females. Given the degree of gender separation in Saudi Arabia, their experience in the

United States might differ greatly from the males. Ultimately, these inquires would help

to provide more insight into the collective Saudi experience as students in the United

States.

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Appendix

Questions for Qualitative Semi-Structured Interview
Section 1: Demographic information
1. Age?
2. City/Region of origin?
3. Years of study in the United States?
4. Undergraduate or graduate student?
5. Area of study?
6. Years of program completed?
7. Single or married?
8. Have you lived in any countries other than Saudi Arabia and the United States?
9. Previous higher educational experiences? (Country, city)

Section 2: Interview Questions (semi-structured interview consisting of open-ended questions in which informant may elaborate as appropriate. Informant may choose to not answer any question he does not want to or feel comfortable answering)

1. Do you feel studying in the United States has changed you? How? Provide examples.
2. Have you ever lived or studied anywhere else besides Saudi Arabia and United States?
3. What were your perceptions of Saudi Arabia before you came to America? Give examples.
4. What did it mean to you then to be Saudi Arabian (before you studied and lived in America)? Was religious identity important to your Saudi identity?
5. Describe yourself before you came to America. Describe your social identity, religious identity, your Saudi identity.
6. Have your perceptions of Saudi Arabia changed or been affected by studying in the United States? How? Give examples (Example: wealth religion gender dynamics education social)? (Are there social norms that you now see differently after living in America? Do you see gender dynamics the same? Society is governed by religion. Do you see that differently?) Family obligations?
7. What do you think has changed the most for you since you've lived and studied in the United States? Give examples.
8. How do you think others perceive you as a Saudi Arabian/Middle Eastern male? Describe an experience/experiences that made you feel or think that way?
9. Describe/compare and contrast your educational experience in the United States and in Saudi Arabia?
10. Do you feel that having female classmates has had any impact on you and your previous experiences of the female gender? In what ways? Give an example. How did you see the role of women in Saudi society? How do you see that role now? What's your thoughts on gender mixing or separation? An example: women don't drive. What were your thoughts about women driving before and what are your thoughts about that now?
11. Do you feel that having a female teacher has had an impact on you and your previous experiences of the female gender? In what ways? Give an example.
12. Have you traveled back to Saudi Arabia since you have been in the United States? Can you describe this trip? Did your perceptions of home change after being in the United States? Do you think others saw you differently? Give examples.
13. Does being Saudi Arabian mean the same thing it does to you now, as it did before you studied in the US? Describe.

14. In what ways have Americans/non-Saudis affected your perception of what it means to be a Saudi Arabian? Describe specific experiences.

15. Have your perceptions or ideas about religion changed? Has the role of religion changed in your life? How? Has exposure to different cultures affected your religious identity? Do you feel a difference in your religious identity? Do you see other Saudis who engage in behavior that differs from Saudi norms when they come to America?

16. What does race mean to you? How have your perceptions of race changed before and after living and studying in the United States? Give examples.

17. How do you think being an Arab/Saudi has impacted your experiences in the United States? Do you feel it has had a positive or negative impact? Give examples.

18. How do you think American students/non Arab students perceive Arabs in general and Saudi Arabians specifically? How has this affected or impacted you? Provide examples.

20. What were your perceptions of America before you came to America? Provide any examples.

21. How have your perceptions of America changed from living and studying in the US? How? Give an example.

22. After living in America, is there anything you would want to see done differently in Saudi Arabia?