FROM SINGULAR TO MIXED: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE SAUDI STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON IN ADAPTING TO THE COEDUCATION EXPERIENCE.

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FROM SINGULAR TO MIXED: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE SAUDI STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON IN ADAPTING TO THE COEDUCATION EXPERIENCE.

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Thesis

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

‘Looking towards the future while holding firmly on its culture and heritage’, is an accurate way to describe today’s Saudi Arabia. As an Islamic and Arab nation of significant wealth, for the last few decades the country has experienced pulls between modernism and conservatism, and these pulls have been evident through the nature of the developmental programs of the Kingdom, which tend to illustrate the want for a mid-way between the two approaches. “The constant process of balancing ideological purity and political and economic interests proved difficult for many of Saudi Arabia’s rulers” (Aarts & Meijer, 2012). To further elaborate, while the Kingdom has reformed the education system numerously since the 1990s, established several new universities during the last decade and in 2005 innovated an annual Scholarship program to send willing students abroad to continue their high education (Almotery, 2009), the public, political and social expectations are that these plans should not undermine or conflict with the country’s culture.

The Kingdom’s culture, which combines elements of both the dominant religion, Islam, and the Arabic ethnicity of its people, is considered to be conservative, especially concerning issues of gender. In this culture, men and women are formally required and
expected to study, work and socialize in gender-segregated environments, with the exception of close family members, i.e. parents and grandparents, children and grandchildren, siblings, nephews and nieces, and uncles and aunts. Additionally, all physical and romantic relationships between the members of the two genders outside the boundaries of marriage is prohibited. Thus, it is but a social norm that members of opposite genders interact in a respective, afar and limited manner. Due to the prominence of such a culture, schools and universities are divided according to gender, by either establishing gender specific institutions or separating the boys-only section from the girls-only section. As a result, people of Saudi Arabia are educated through a single-sex education system; from elementary through-out higher education and graduate studies. However, during the last few decades, a new liberal and modernist culture has begun to gain popularity in Saudi Arabia. This new social group has brought forth new values, beliefs and norms, which tend to contend many of the traditionalist and conservative culture’s principles. Moreover, members of this new group have become vocal and active in contending the gender separation policies, practices, norms and culture, and thus during the later years, the Saudi government has been in a consistent struggle to maintain peace and balance between the two fractions of the Saudi society.

In 2005, the Kingdom initiated an annual scholarship program, which presents the opportunity for thousands of young Saudi men and women to pursue their higher education abroad, and in accordance with specific stipulations (Almotery, 2009). However, while the program gives the applicant the opportunity to choose among several countries, such as the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, France, China, Japan
among others, a significant portion of them prefers to attend their studies in the U.S. (Almotery, 2009).


However, while several Saudi students in the U.S. and other countries have investigated the adjustment issues and challenges facing Saudi students attending educational programs abroad, there has been but limited studies that focus on issues related to the impact of experiencing a mixed gender education for the first time (Alhazmi, 2010). Moreover, I have found that none of such studies has compared the cultural worldview of Saudi male students to that of Saudi female students with a focus on the cultural and institutional norm of gender mixing.

Considering this observation, and acknowledging the differences between the cultural of Saudi Arabia and the U.S., especially with regards to issues of gender identity and norms, I explore how Saudi students at the University of Akron, who originating from a single-sex education system, view the coeducational experience and whether the gender of the student plays a role in the level of intercultural sensitivity of the student.
Research Problem

In 2005, the Ministry of Higher Education introduced the King Abdullah Scholarship program. The program was a product of a meeting between King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and President George W. Bush and other senior officials from both countries (Almotery, 2009). The objective of the program was to present Saudi youth with the opportunity to pursue higher education in universities and academic institutions in the U.S. (Almotery, 2009, and Heyn, 2013). In later years, the program was extended to other countries. Since 2005, the number of Saudi students attending universities in the U.S. has increased significantly, and as of 2014, Saudi students were the second largest international student group at the University of Akron (Ruiz, 2014) and the fourth largest international student group in the U.S. (Anderson, 2014).

While the trajectory of Saudi students attending higher education in the U.S. continues to climb, which may possibly indicate that these students are benefiting from their time and education in the U.S., research has shown that members of this group often face several challenges in adjusting to the unfamiliar social and educational norms of the U.S. (Heyn, 2013). Moreover, several studies have reported that one of these challenges is adapting to the mixed gender setting, and the new social and educational experience (Heyn, 2013, Alhazmi, 2010, and Alqahtani & Hewitt, 2003).

Although Saudi students represent a large portion of international students attending universities in the U.S., and considering that they originate from a culture that adopts single sex social, educational and cultural norms attend academic programs in a country of a mixed gender culture and norms, I find it perplexing that there has been little
investigation into this specific issue. Furthermore, it is unknown if the gender of the Saudi student is a factor in the adjustment process to the coeducational experience.

Thus, I identify the research problem as the following: to understand how Saudi students, both men and women, adjust to the phenomena of coeducation as students at the University of Akron, and to infer from their perceptions and experiences whether or not the gender of the student influences their adjustment strategies.

Purpose of the Study and Rationale

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the impact of experiencing coeducation on Saudi students at The University of Akron, who originate from a single-sex education and social system, and a culture that is different from the hosting culture. The study will describe how Saudi students of both genders perceive and adjust to the coeducational experience at The University of Akron through their own perspectives, and attempt to illustrate the role gender plays in their acculturation, specifically to coeducation norms. More importantly, this study will discuss the challenges, problems and difficulties in adjusting to a coeducation environment, as presented by those who experience it.

Thus, the purpose of this investigation is to (1) phenomenologically study the perceptions, experiences and adjustment strategies of Saudi students experiencing a coeducation setting.

(2) To compare perceptions, experiences and adjustment strategies of female Saudi students to male Saudi students I use Bennet Developmental Model of Intercultural
Sensitivity -DMIS- (Bennet, 2004) as a framework. I use this model as a framework because I find it applicable and highly relevant to the focus of this study. Bennet’s DMIS focuses on assessing the perspectives and cultural worldviews of individuals who find themselves in a different cultural environment and suggests that these individuals move back and forth between six stages of ethnocentric and anthropocentric worldviews when experiencing cultural differences (Bennet, 2004). By applying this model, I will attempt to explore any differences between Saudi male and female students perspectives and worldviews to the coeducation, which represents a different cultural norm to the gender separation norm of Saudi Arabia, by identifying and then comparing the level of intercultural sensitivity of each subject. From this comparison, I attempt to assess which of the two elements; the gender of the subject or length of stay, were of more influence to the adjustment of Saudi students to coeducation and mixed gender norms.

(3) To understand the challenges that face Saudi students when adjusting to the coeducation experience and norms at The University of Akron. Considering that Saudi Students have never experienced a coeducation format before attending their programs in the U.S., I find it important to understand and document what challenges they had found difficult to overcome in this regards.

Significance of the Study

The investigator anticipates that this study may be beneficial for future Saudi students in the U.S. and their families, future research related to acculturation and social
adjustment theories, models and strategies, especially for international students from Saudi Arabia and other countries of similar gender and social norms.

I have found little phenomenological research on the impact of transferring from a single-sex education setting to a coeducation setting for adult participants, both native and international, the role of gender in acculturation processes and social adaptation in general, and the adjustment to unfamiliar gender-related norms specifically. I believe that this study will be an addition to these focuses, and may become a reference for future investigators who may be encouraged to further study this issue through different frameworks and methodologies.

The findings of this study may assist in preparing perspective Saudi students interested in studying in the U.S., as they would have a more substantiated understanding of the reality of cultural differences, in addition to the perceived and/or experienced challenges and opportunities of studying amidst a coeducation setting as described by their fellow Saudi students. Moreover, they would understand the role of gender and time on these perceptions and experiences.

Additionally, the findings of this study will help address any misperceptions of the coeducation experience of the U.S. for families of perspective Saudi students and enhance their awareness to intercultural sensitivity. This is also important, and even more so for women, as the social norm in Saudi Arabia dictates that the family has significant influence on the decision-making of the family’s female members (Alhazmi, 2010). The investigator believes that for a Saudi woman to decide to study abroad in the U.S. is an instance in which the family participates actively in determining the final decision.
The study may also benefit faculty, counselors and administrators at UA, as they would have an insight to an issue of significant importance to Saudi students (i.e. gender norms and roles), and understand how and if this issue is perceived differently between Saudi students men and women. Thus, this study may help clarify to UA faculty a problem that may affect student participation and academic progress, and as a result, UA faculty may find it appropriate to apply certain instructional measures and techniques that can mitigate the impact of the coeducation experience on Saudi students and improve their level of intercultural competence.

This study may also be of heightened importance to the King Abdullah Scholarship program, as the sole financial and academic supporter of the majority of Saudi students in the U.S. and UA, and the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia which supervises all students studying abroad, whither through a scholarship or independent funding (MOHE 1). Both the Ministry of Education and the King Abdullah Scholarship Program have formulated preparation and information programs for students who are interested in studying abroad, and these students are mandated to attend these programs in order to earn the final approval to pursue their education abroad (MOHE 2). These programs cover all related information for an international student, in addition to presenting a brief insight to the social norms and culture of the chosen country (MOHE 2). I have attended such programs, and I have found that there was little focus on preparing Saudi students to accept cultural differences, especially with regards to coeducation norms vs. single-sex education norms. Thus, I believe that the findings of this study may present educational officials of the Ministry and the Scholarship program
with an insight to how Saudi students of both genders react to this experience, and encourage the Ministry to incorporate the findings of the study in preparation programs.

Finally, these benefits can be disseminated across other countries with similar social and cultural norms, especially countries with single sex education and/or social norms, such as Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, and other conservative and traditionalist societies.

Research Questions

Considering that the research problem of the study is to understand how Saudi students, both men and women, adjust to the coeducation experience as students at the University of Akron, and to explore whether their gender influences their perceptions, cultural worldviews and adjustment to cultural differences, I identify the research questions as follows:

- How do Saudi students, as products of a single-sex education system and a gender-segregated culture, perceive the coeducation experience while attending academic programs in the U.S.?
- Do Saudi women perceive the coeducational experience of the U.S. differently from Saudi men?
- Is the gender of the student a factor in hindering or accelerating adjustment to this new norm? Or is it the time spent in a coeducation setting? Or is it both?
- How may the perceived challenges of adapting to coeducation be mitigated or resolved?
Limitations of the Study

I am a Saudi female student who is attending the University of Akron and conducting a study on four Saudi students attending the University of Akron through a qualitative phenomenological methodology to analyze and compare the perceptions and experiences of the participants on coeducation. Due to such factors, I find that the study may have a few limitations that must be acknowledged and addressed.

Firstly, the investigator is from the same country and culture of the participants, and thus the investigator is experiencing the same phenomena as the participants, additionally, the investigator is also attending the same institution. This relation may affect the response of the participants, as they may feel pressured to answer certain questions in a non-revealing and selective manner, or to say what they expect the investigator wants to hear from members of the her country and culture. On the other hand, sharing the same native language and culture may present the opportunity to enhance the relationship between the investigator and the participant, and such an enhanced relationship may lessen any reservation or hesitance in revealing what they really think about the coeducation phenomena, as they know that the investigator herself has experienced this phenomena.

Secondly, due to the narrow focus of the study, the research problem it attempts to address, and the research questions it seeks to answer, this study excludes other nationalities of similar cultural values and social norms, especially with regards to gender issues and roles. Thus, although other countries and communities of similar cultural values and social norms, especially with regards to gender issues and roles, may benefit
from the findings of the study, it is important to acknowledge that the study was focused on Saudis alone, and studies of other nationalities may produce different findings.

Thirdly, this study analyzes the students of a specific institution in a specific time period. Studies of students in other institutions may bring forth different results, due to the variation in educational and social environmental settings from one institution to another. Additionally, this study was conducted in 2015, and considering the tendency of cultures and social norms to evolve and change over time, it is important to acknowledge that future research in this focus may produce different results.

Fourthly, this study analyzes and compares the perceptions and experiences of four students, and research on a larger sample may produce different results.

Fifthly, this study uses a qualitative phenomenological methodology to analyze and compare the perceptions and experiences of the participants in a coeducation setting, and consequently answer the research questions, thus the study will present the issue from the perspective of the participant. Research into this problem that uses a different methodology may produce different results. To illustrate, in relation to the research question; is the gender of the student a factor in hindering or accelerating adjustment to this new norm? Or is it the time spent in a coeducation setting? Or is it both? a participant in this study may see gender as an element that hinders his in class participation whilst attending a coeducation program, while a research that analyzes class evaluation and participation grades of both genders using a quantitative methodology, one may find data that refutes this claim. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that the results of this study are but the perspectives and perceptions of Saudi students who have experienced
coeducation, and further statistical research may be required to substantiate any results or answers to the research questions.

Sixthly, due to the focus of the study, and guided by the research questions, the investigator will focus on studying the perceptions of the subjects to one cultural difference; coeducation vs. single-sex education, and thus, other cultural differences will not be considered or included.

Finally, only the nationality, length of stay in the U.S., and the gender of the participant will be considered, and other factors such as social identity, educational background, socio-economic status, maturity and marital status among others will not be considered. Future research that includes these variables may produce different results.
CHAPTER II
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The theoretical framework of this study relies on three theoretical foundations, all of which are related to the focus of the investigation, and all of which will be used in analyzing the reported perceptions and experiences of Saudi students attending a coeducational program at the University of Akron. These theoretical lenses are gender identity theories, social identity theories, and acculturation theories and models. In the latter, the focus will be on the acculturation theories and models as an applicable framework to answer the research questions; How do Saudi students, as products of a single-sex education system and a gender-segregated culture, perceive the coeducation experience while attending academic programs in the U.S.? Do Saudi women perceive the coeducational experience of the U.S. differently from Saudi men? Is the gender of the student a factor in hindering or accelerating adjustment to this new norm? Or is it the time spent in a coeducation setting? Or is it both? How may the perceived challenges for adapting to coeducation be mitigated or resolved?

Guided by the research questions, I will relate these theories and models in understanding the perspectives and levels of cultural sensitivity of Saudi male and female students to the coeducational experience at the University of Akron.
The literature review will focus on previous studies, research that explored the experiences of Saudi students with coeducation and their perceptions in adjusting to this norm. Through reviewing these studies, I had identified two recurring themes; that Saudi male and female students perceive and experience coeducation differently, and that Saudi students perceive that the stress associated with experiencing coeducation decreases with length of stay. I will also relate these studies to the research questions, as to compare the findings of these studies to this investigation.

Gender Identity Theories

Gender is a more complex and broader term than sex. While the term sex is solely used to describe the biological features that differentiate a man from a woman, the term gender refers to the social, cultural and psychological traits that male and females acquire through social interactions and contexts, and the behaviors and emotions associated with a sex (Lindsey, 2011; Wood, 2009; APA, 2012; Stets and Burke, 2000; Shechner, 2010). Whereas, identity is defined in psychology as “a cognitive construct of the self fundamentally, relational and self-referential, that answers the questions who am I” (Korte, 2007). As for gender identity, it can be identified as “one’s sense of oneself as male, female, or transgender” (APA, 2012), or the degree one views himself/herself masculine or feminine in a specific social setting (Stets and Burke, 2000).

Considering the definition of gender and gender identity as presented, one can infer that both concepts vary from one culture to another and from one time period to the
next, as both are socially acquired and expressed in accordance to specific social
impulses and cultural ideas (Wood, 2009).

Researchers have presented several theories that attempt to explain one’s gender
identity development, and each of such theories describes this development through a
particular lens. Following is a summarized exploration of three of such theories.

Freud’s Psychoanalytic Theory.

The psychoanalytic theory was pioneered by Sigmund Freud (Stets and Burke,
2000), who was one the first scholars to argue that there was a dichotomy between gender
and biology (Carter, 2014), and that gender is different from the biological characteristics
of a sex (Tate, 2014). The psychoanalytic theory argues that the gender identity of an
individual is the product of learning and that it is developed at an early age of life from
social interactions within the family, specifically with the parents (Carter, 2014; Stets and
Burke, 2000). “Freud was implicitly arguing that parts of gender—namely, psychological
identity experiences—are crafted or develop, and are not fixed from birth” (Tate, 2014).

According to this theory, a child identifies his gender with the parent of the same
sex. By the age of three, the child would have developed an attachment to the parent of
the opposite sex and a resentment to the parent of the same sex (Stets and Burke, 2000).
Later, at the age of six, the child would begin to identify himself with the same sex parent
and simultaneously separate himself and his identity from the parent of the opposite sex.
(Stets and Burke, 2000). “Thus, boys come to learn masculinity from their fathers and
girls learn femininity from their mothers” (Stets and Burke, 2000).
This theory argues that mothers play a more prominent role in the development of the child’s gender identity: girls are presented with cues from their mothers from which they learn how to be feminine, while boys learn how to be masculine by differentiating and separating their identities from that of their mothers: i.e., not being feminine (Carter, 2014; Stets and Burke, 2000).

Moreover, this theory contends that this early learning process is of prolonged impact on girls, while boys continue to struggle to learn and exhibit a gender-based identity and behavior that is dissimilar from that of their mothers (Carter, 2014). “This rejection of femininity occurs early, and perpetuates throughout the life course for males” (Carter, 2014).

Kohlberg’s Cognitive-Developmental Theory.

“Cognitive-developmental theory is a stage model of gender identity that reveals different layers of gender experience over time” (Tate, 2014). Kohlberg, and similar to Freud’s Psychoanalytic Theory, argued that gender identity of a child was established through internal factors. (Martin, Ruble and Joel Szkrybal, 2002; Tate, 2014); however, he differed from Freud by attributing the origins of gender identity development to cognitive and not psychosexual factors (Stets and Burke, 2000).

Kohlberg’s Cognitive-Developmental Theory stresses on the role of cognitive processes of the child on the development his gender identity. As the child grows, so does his understanding of gender specific attitudes and behaviors, to which he begins to
associate and place himself in the category baring the same sex. (Stets and Burke, 2000; Martin, Ruble and Joel Szkrybalo, 2002; Tate, 2014).

The example, “I am a boy and thus like to do boy things” (Martin, Ruble and Joel Szkrybalo, 2002) illustrates that a child first understands his gender identity, and then follows this understanding with behavior and attitudes consistent with his gender. Thus, gender identification occurs at a stage before the child begins to identify himself with the same sex parent and behave as that parent does (Stets and Burke, 2000).

Stets and Burke, (2000) explore the two stages of gender development as theorized by Kohlberg. The first of these stages is (a) gaining a static gender identity. During this stage, the child first begins to hear himself being called a boy or girl. At the age of three, the child begins to apply these labels to himself, and consequently, permanently establishes himself as a boy or a girl. When the child is approximately four years old, he begins to categorize others as boys or girls, and it is at this point that the next stage begins, (b) the stability of child’s gender identity and gender consistency. This stage typically occurs happens when the child is five or six years of age, during which he understands that his gender identity will never change regardless of any different appearances.

“Once children establish knowledge of their own gender, the reciprocal interplay between one's behavior (acting like a girl) and thoughts ("I am a girl") leads to a stable gender identity, or in cognitive developmental theory terms, the child achieves gender constancy” (Bussey and Bandura, 1999).
The Learning Theory.

The learning theory is a theory with roots in sociology and behaviorism (Bussey and Bandura, 1999; Ryle, 2011). In general, sociological theories of gender development attributes gender identity development to social factors rather than internal factors and processes, and thus, differences between genders emerge from social and institutional variables more so than from individual characteristics and process (Bussey and Bandura, 1999; Ryle, 2011).

Thus, the learning theory, and in contrast to the two previous theories, stresses on the significance of social experiences, agents and environments on the shaping of the gender identity (Bussey and Bandura, 1999). According to this theory, the individual is a passive being who learns from such factors from a young age and has a non-active role in this learning process (Bussey and Bandura, 1999; Ryle, 2011). As a child, the individual would learn the expectations associated with his gender by observing the reactions of social agents, such as parents and teachers, to his behavior (Bussey and Bandura, 1999; Stets and Burke, 2000). This learning is reinforced by positive or negative feedback, i.e. rewards and punishment, although this feedback may not occur every time (Ryle, 2011). These rewards may be direct and actual such as a child complimented for wearing gender consistent clothes, or anticipated, such as a child imitating a celebrity of the same gender to receive the rewards the celebrity has received (Bussey and Bandura, 1999; Stets and Burke, 2000). Thus, and according to this theory, “through rewards and punishments, children learn appropriate appearance and behavior” (Stets and Burke, 2000).
Social Identity Theory.

Henri Tajfel was the first to propose the Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Trepte, 2006), with the objective of exploring how people view themselves and others in social settings (Korte, 2007). SIT stresses on the impact of groups on an individual’s identity, and proposes that individuals categorize and identify themselves and others with distinct social categories and groups (Trepte, 2006). The individual identifies the self as a member of a social group, to which the individual would demonstrate behavior consistent to that group, express favoritism and solidarity to this group and its members, and express forms of discrimination against other groups and individuals who are external to the group, or ‘outsiders’ (Trepte, 2006; Cameron and Lalonde, 2001). “Individuals develop a social identity (the element) through a process of self-categorization” (Korte, 2007).

According to SIT, self-categorization is an essential element in the development of the individual’s social identity. By categorizing one’s self into a social group, the individual will adopt the group’s norms, value and beliefs, all of which influence the behavior of the group’s members and the individual himself (Korte, 2007). “In adopting the identity of the group, the individual identity of the person recedes to the background, and the identity as a member of the group comes to the foreground” (Korte, 2007). However, the social identity is not a replacement of the individual’s personal identity, but rather an additional identity that has more power than the personal identity (Korte, 2007).

Through self-categorization, the individual is motivated to become a member of a social group because this membership may contribute to positive rewards such as a sense of purpose, self-esteem, self-enhancement and self-conception, in addition to pride, stability and involvement (Trepte, 2006; Korte, 2007; Cameron and Lalonde, 2001).
Because the individual is motivated to self-categorization and be identified as a member of a social group, he or she will seek to acquire and maintain a positive social identity, and the individual would identify such an identity by comparing the attributes of one social group to another (Cameron and Lalonde, 2001). Through these comparisons, if the individual finds that his social identity is negative, he may become motivated to apply certain strategies to resolve this problem. Tajfel, (as cited by Cameron and Lalonde, 2001) finds that these strategies are (a) social mobility, for example, moving to a higher social group, (b) social creativity, for example comparing what group members view as positive attributes of the group, and (c) social competition, for example, trying to improve the standing of the group. How and why an individual chooses one strategy over another is highly dependent on the individual’s perception to the group and its context (Cameron and Lalonde, 2001).

Theories in Cross-Cultural Adaptation.

There are many theories and models that explore how an individual who moves from one cultural environment to another adjusts and adapts to this new cultural environment, with each theory or model presenting a different perspective from a different orientation. For the purpose of the study, and in an attempt to establish a framework through which I may answer the research questions of this study, I chose to explore and apply three of such theories and models; the Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory, the Culture Shock Theory, and the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity.
Kim’s Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory.

The Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory was based on three assumptions of the open system theory regarding the notion that humans are highly adaptive living beings (Kim, 1995). Kim (1995) presented these assumptions as following. (a) Humans have an instinctive need to adapt and grow, as human curiosity and the need to achieve a feeling of efficacy motivate humans to learn and adapt to new experiences. (b) Adaptation to a social environment happens through communication. This is because adaptation is dependent on the individual maintaining a continuous communication activity by sending and receiving messages. (c) Adaptation is a process that is both complex and active, and because of this, “adaptation must be conceived as a phenomenon that consist of multiple dimensions and facets” (Kim, 1995).

Kim (1995) identifies the focus of her study to be strangers, a more inclusive term than the specific terms of sojourners, immigrants, refugees and other similar categories, who begin as cultural outsiders and then over time become cultural insiders. The identification of these strangers is limited by three boundary conditions. (a) The strangers must have been first socialized in one culture, and then moved to another different and unfamiliar culture. (b) The strangers must be dependent to some extent on the hosting environment for their personal and social needs. (c) The strangers must be involved in ongoing direct communication experiences within the hosting environment.

According to this theory, from within the presented assumptions and boundary conditions strangers experience a stress-adaptation growth dynamic, which is an ongoing stress and adaptation cycle that results in growth and cultural adaptation. (Kim, 1995; Harvey, 2007). The stress results from the stranger’s inability to communicate within the
host environment, which will further motivate the stranger to adapt and resolve the problem (Kim, 1995; Harvey, 2007). “Each stressful experience is responded to by strangers with a drawback, which then activates their adaptive energy to help them reorganize themselves and leap forward” (Kim, 1995). The adaptation and crisis resolution will result in learning and testing that produces more stress, causing the cycle to repeat itself time after time (Harvey, 2007).

Kim (1995) claims that this cycle will not only produce growth and cultural adaptation over time, but it will also result in three facets, which are the key aspects of intercultural adaptation and transformation. The first facet is functional fitness, which means that the strangers become increasingly capable of achieve a balanced synchronization between their internal responses and the demands of the hosting environment. “Successfully adapted strangers have accomplished a desired level of proficiency in communicating and developing a satisfactory relationship with the host society – particularly with those individuals and situations that are of direct relevance to their daily activities” (Kim, 1995). The second facet is psychological health, which is closely linked to the first facet. Kim (1995) finds that strangers who have realized reached functional fitness typically enjoy higher levels of psychological health. The third facet is intercultural identity, in which the strangers begin to lose their rigid and distinct cultural identity and replace it with a more flexible and expanded identity. Kim (1995) believes that when strangers possess an intercultural identity, they do not view themselves as members of one exclusive culture, neither do they see themselves completely detached from that culture, but rather they see themselves as members of several cultures.
Oberg’s Culture Shock Theory.

The term “culture shock” was first proposed by Oberg in 1960 (Yeu and Le, 2012). Oberg (1960) claimed that culture shock was “precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (Oberg, 1960). These signs, cues or symbols, which may include verbal and physical expressions, behaviors and norms, are learned through the course of growing up in a given culture, and it is these cues that help humans familiarize themselves to the daily situations and interactions (Oberg, 1960). When individuals move from one cultural environment to another, they find that all of the familiar cues and symbols have been removed, and Oberg (1960) believes that this generates frustration and anxiety, which in turn lead to culture shock.

Oberg (1960) claims that this feeling of frustration and anxiety, or culture shock, generates a two-phase reaction from the individuals who experience it. First, they reject the new cultural environment because they view it as the main source of their frustration and anxiety. “When Americans or other foreigners in a strange land get together to grouse about the host country and its people – you can be sure that they are suffering from culture shock” (Oberg, 1960). The second phase is regression, in this phase the home cultural environment becomes of heightened importance to the individuals, and they view it only through a positive lens. “All the difficulties and problems are forgotten and only the good things back home are remembered” (Oberg, 1960).

According to Oberg (1960), some individuals cannot bear the cultural shock and find themselves incapable of living in a foreign cultural environment; however, those who succeed in overcoming the cultural shock and achieving a level of adjustment to the
foreign cultural environment typically do so through four stages. Through these stages individuals in a foreign cultural environment would transit from cultural shock to a satisfactory adjustment (Yeu and Le, 2012).

The first is the honeymoon stage, during which the individuals are fascinated with their new environment (Oberg, 1960). “They stay in hotels and associate with nationals who speak their language and are polite and gracious to foreigners” (Oberg, 1960). The duration of this stage is dependent on the circumstances of the individual and as such it may last for a few days, a few weeks, or a few months (Yeu and Le, 2012).

The second stage, “characterized by a hostile and aggressive attitude towards the host country” (Oberg, 1960), happens when individuals extend their stay in the new environment or face problems and/or conditions in adjusting to their daily life abroad (Oberg, 1960). Because the individual may find that others who are native to the host environment do not fully comprehend these difficulties, he believes that they do not care about him or his problems, and thus he begins to dislike and criticize them and the host environment (Oberg, 1960). Oberg claims that it is during this stage that individuals decide to stay in the foreign environment or go back home, for “if you overcome it, you stay; if not, you leave before you reach the stage of a nervous breakdown” (Oberg, 1960).

Those who succeed in overcoming the second stage and acquiring an openness to the ways of the foreign environment enter the third stage, which is a stage of recovery, crisis resolution and culture learning (Yeu and Le, 2012). During this stage, individuals still experience some difficulties, but they have learned to deal with them in a “this is my cross and I have to deal with it” mentality and a sense of humor (Oberg, 1960). “Instead
of criticizing, he jokes about the people and even cracks jokes about his or her own
difficulties” (Oberg, 1960).

The fourth and last stage is when individuals achieve full adjustment to the ways
of the new environment, and see them as but another way of living (Oberg, 1960). “You
operate within the new milieu without a feeling of anxiety, although there are moments of
strain” (Oberg, 1960), and these strains will lessen as the individual increases his
understanding of the social cues and symbols of the host environment (Oberg, 1960).
Individuals who experience this stage tend to enjoy the ways of the host environment;
moreover, when they leave it, they find themselves longing for it, its people and ways of
life (Oberg, 1960).

Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

Milton J. Bennett proposed the DMIS to situate the reactions of individuals in a
foreign culture, as to discern levels of adaptation to another culture, and to diagnose the
interpretations and responses of people to cultural differences (Center for Intercultural
Learning, n.d; Hammera, Bennett and Wiseman, 2003). The term “intercultural
sensitivity” refers to the individual’s capacity to distinguish and experience related
differences between cultures (Hammera, et al, 2003). Closely related to intercultural
sensitivity is the term “intercultural competence”, which means “the ability to think and
act in interculturally appropriate ways” (Hammera, et al, 2003). According to DMIS,
greater intercultural sensitivity is closely related to a greater possibility of demonstrating
“The DMIS assumes that construing cultural difference can become an active part of one’s worldview, eventuating in an expanded understanding of one’s own and other cultures and an increased competence in intercultural relations” (Hammera, et al, 2003). Because of this orientation, DMIS is a model that focuses on changes in worldview structures and emotional movement and not on changes in attitudes and behaviors (CIL, n.d; Hammera, et al, 2003).

DMIS is a six stage linear scale, in which the individual may progress and regress alternatively according to the circumstances and his experiences. The first three of these stages are ethnocentric, in which the individual sees his culture the center of reality to some extent, and other three are ethnorelativist, in which the individual views his culture in the context of other cultures (CIL, n.d). The six stages of DMIS are denial, defence, minimization, these are the ethnocentric stages, and acceptance, adaptation and integration, which are the ethnorelative stages (CIL, n.d; Hammera, et al, 2003), presented in the following description.

(a) Denial. “The default condition of a typical, monocultural primary socialization is denial of cultural difference” (Bennet, 2004). In this stage, the individual views his culture as the only true and reasonable culture, and either does not acknowledge the existence of cultural differences or views them in a vague and unthreatening manner (CIL, n.d). Thus, the individual does not experience cultural differences, neither is he interested in them, and if they are brought to his attention he will try to avoid or disregard any differences, and thus his own culture remains unchallenged and center to reality (Bennet, 2004; CIL, n.d). A Saudi in the denial stage may realize that Saudis are different
from westerners, but would not realize that there are different cultures in the western world.

(b) Defense. In this stage, the individual views his culture superior to other cultures and the ultimate way to live, and thus they acknowledge cultural differences more than those in the denial stage (Bennet, 2004). Bennet (2004) suggests that because the individual believes that his culture is the only good culture, he tends to discriminate against cultural differences and feels more threatened by them. “The world is organized into “us and them,” where one’s own culture is superior and other cultures are inferior” (Bennet, 2004). Individuals in this stage tend to create positive stereotypes of their own culture and negative stereotypes of other cultures (Bennet, 2004: ICD, n.d).

A Saudi in the defense stage would not only acknowledge that the culture of the U.S. is different from the culture of Saudi Arabia, but may also see the former as a lesser culture which poses a threat to the ‘Saudi way of life’, and thus feel motivated to strengthen his cultural identity in the face of the dominant U.S. culture.

(c) Minimization. This is the last of the ethnocentric stages. Minimization represents the individual’s final attempt to maintain the centrality of his view and culture, and he attempts to achieve this by giving more weight to cultural similarities than to cultural differences (ICD, n.d). Bennet (2004) suggests that at this stage, the cultural worldviews of individuals become universal and applicable to all cultures, and the threat experienced in the defense stage becomes neutralized by assigning cultural differences to familiar categories. Thus, and according to Bennet (2004), during this stage individuals expect and seek after similarities that are consistent with their own cultural worldviews and expectations. They expect that people of other cultures have, or would prefer to have,
similar beliefs and values, and that they communicate and behave in a manner similar to themselves (Bennet, 2004). Any differences in the expectations and realities of cultural differences are viewed as superficial and but “variations on a theme common to all cultures” (ICD, n.d)

A Saudi who is experiencing the stage of minimization may see that gender separation is practiced in one form or another in all cultures, and that many people of other cultures would prefer gender separation, as opposed to gender mixing, if they were to experience it. He would not see gender mixing as a cultural difference, but rather as an alternative to the ‘right way’ of gender separation.

(d) Acceptance. This is the first of the ethnorelative stages and to reach it individuals must experience a change in their views of cultures; from inflexible and static to flexible and dynamic, and a change in their view of cultural differences; from things to processes (ICD, n.d.). Bennet (2004) suggests that individuals who reach this stage fully realize the reality of cultural differences and ‘accept’ that their culture is only one of many equal cultures, and thus appreciate that members of cultures, including their own, are but humans with relatively different values, beliefs, interactions and behaviors. During this stage, the negative ideas and stereotypes of the individual towards other cultures is replaced with a positive mentality and attitude towards them, even if he has yet to deeply experience the new culture (Bennet, 2004). Because of such a change in perspective, the individual would explore cultural differences rather than shied away from them or fear them, and welcome the notion that people of other cultures are different (ICD, n.d.)
A Saudi in this stage may accept that the culture and people of Saudi Arabia are equal to the people and culture of the U.S., and realize that while his culture values gender separation, other cultures do not; therefore, he should explore this difference and learn from it rather than disregard it or fear it.

(e) Adaptation. “Adaptation to differences as a stage in the development of intercultural sensitivity translates into a person's ability to act in an ethnorealative manner” (ICD, n.d). Individuals who experience this stage have successfully changed their way of thinking and behavior (ICD, n.d). They place themselves in the position of members of other cultures when perceiving situations, and other cultures become the temporary frame of reference for that situation and not just the culture of the individuals themselves, and thus they experience partial empathy (ICD, n.d). Additionally, their behavior changes and they become cultural pluralists as they are capable of acting according to the cultural frame of the situation and within multi-cultural references (ICD, n.d). However, while adaptation leads to adjustment, it does not mean that the one would replace his culture with that of the host environment; instead one would extend his cultural perspectives to include that of other cultures, thus “you don’t need to lose your primary cultural identity to operate effectively in a different cultural context” (Bennet, 2004).

A Saudi who experiences adaptation may accept and adapt to a gender-mixed environment when in public in accordance with the culture of the U.S., on the other hand, because he identifies himself as a part of the Saudi culture, he would also accept and practice gender separation when amongst Saudis in accordance with the culture of Saudi Arabia.
(f) Integration. Individuals who experience the last of the ethnorelative stages are capable of “construe[ing] their identities at the margins of two or more cultures and central to none” (Bennet, 2004). Typically, individuals experience this stage after living for long periods in different cultural environments during which they have had substantive interactions with members of different cultures (ICD, n.d). In this stage, the individual draws his values and perspectives from many cultures and not just one, and demonstrates an in-and-out movement to other cultural worldviews (Bennet, 2004). Because of such a movement, these cultural frameworks are not permeant, but rather interchangeable and related to the cultural context, and thus one does not identify himself with just one culture (ICD, n.d). In this stage, the individual becomes multicultural (Bennet, 2004).

A Saudi who experiences integration would accept both gender-mixed norms and gender separation norms regardless of the setting or context, for he would perceive that both norms are aspects of two cultures that form his intercultural identity.

Contextual Factors

To understand why Saudi students may perceive or experience coeducation different from students of other nationalities and cultural environments and establish a context from which I may answer the research questions, I find it important to present the gender and social identities of Saudi students. The focus of this presentation will be on the broad gender and social identities with regards to interactions between members of the opposite sex, which is a significant component of coeducation.
Social Identities in Saudi Arabia

In contrast to the individualistic culture of the U.S., the culture of Saudi Arabia is collectivist, and as such, in Saudi Arabia the values, needs and goals of the group are of higher significance for the individual than those of oneself (Heyn, 2013). Similar to other countries, Saudi Arabia hosts numerous social groups that are of family, tribal and/or regional affiliations (Heyn, 2013). However, the most distinct and powerful social groups in Saudi Arabia are; the traditional and conservative group, and the modernized and liberal group. “One is progressive, outgoing, at ease with global interactions; the other is inward-looking, extremely religiously oriented and very conservative” (Murphy, 2013). Each group has its unique norms, values, needs and motivations and both have a notable role in the modeling of one’s values, behaviors and goals (Heyn, 2013).

The traditionalist group is highly conservative and does not accept any change in the identity of the group (Murphy, 2013). They view any attempt to change the norms and values they promote as an attack on the Saudi Muslim Identity (Murphy, 2013). This group views children as passive beings who must receive and replicate the values, norms and culture of the group (Murphy, 2013).

The modernized group pushes for change and reform in the social life in Saudi Arabia, but these changes must not entirely discard the customs and traditions of the society (Murphy, 2013). “Young people want to maintain tradition. But they also want greater control over their own destiny” (Murphy, 2013). This group sees that staying true to the traditional identity and norms does not conflict with the need to modernize and evolve the Saudi society, especially the status of Saudi women (Almunajjed, 1997). “The preservation of the traditional Saudi identity constitutes a natural and essential element in
the evolution of the social entity of women in Saudi Arabia” (Almunajjed, 1997). Members of this group do not believe that the problem is with their religion, Islam, which is a major cultural factor in the country, but rather the manner in which it is interpreted and applied to public life (Murphy, 2013). “The dilemma is not so much Islam’s leading role in governance and public life—which most are not challenging—but rather the enforced dominance of one sect, that is, Wahhabism” (Murphy, 2013). They contend that Islamic scholars and priests should focus their attention on studying how Muslims should deal with new emerging issues related to modern life and its needs, rather than preoccupy themselves with trivial matters (Murphy, 2013). Moreover, members of this group consistently reassess the significance of certain traditions that they perceive to be of little necessity or pertinence (Murphy, 2013). Thus, members of this group hold tight to their religion, its teachings and cultural values, but also pursue a modernized public life that is consistent with the Arab/Islamic culture.

To illustrate the difference between both groups, traditional and modern, and the impact these two groups have on the topic of this study, I will discuss the concept of *Ikhtilat*. *Ikhtilat*, is an Arabic word that means mixing of genders or more specifically the physical interaction between unrelated individuals of opposite sexes. (Wagemakers, 2012; Van Geel, 2012) The traditionalist group advocates for the continuity and strengthening of public and private policies and social customs and traditions that prevent *ikhtilat* under any circumstances (Van Geel, 2012). Thus, members of this group accept and support any limitations on women’s interactions with the opposite sex, which includes preventing girls and women from studying or working in a mixed gender setting and the establishment of women-only facilities in the community (Van Geel, 2012). As a
result, not only do men and women of this group reject the notion of *ikhtilat*, but also they are unaccustomed to working with the opposite sex (Van Geel, 2012).

On the other hand, the modernized group views the concept of *Ikhtilat* differently. They accept it, but only under certain conditions and circumstances (Van Geel, 2012). “Arguments related to the conditions and circumstances under which *ikhtilat* should be allowed seem to have a spatial dimension; a dimension of necessity; and/or a dimension of behavior and dress” (Van Geel, 2012). They are willing to lessen their rejection of *ikhtilat* if it is in a professional environment and a necessity such as in hospitals, during which individuals, especially women, would guard their behavior and dress (Van Geel, 2012). Thus, while they reject *Ikhtilat*, their rejection of it is not unconditional as it is for the traditionalist group, but rather they allow it or reject it according to contextual factors.

**Gender Identities in Saudi Arabia.**

Madawi Al-Rasheed, professor of Anthropology of Religion at King’s College, University of London, as cited by (Alsadiq and Hausheer, (2014), and Sanauddin, (2013), believes that the gender identity of men and women in Saudi Arabia is the mixed product of religious nationalism, socio-economic and political factors. Al-Rasheed theorizes that with the establishment of the country, the government was faced with numerous tribes and communities of conflicting interests and values. In an attempt to nationalize the country and unify the social factors in accordance to Islamic measures, the state established policies, regulations and means to ensure that women and men do not mix in any public setting, and women were required to wear a black form of women’s outer
garment ‘Hijab’ called ‘Abaya’. “Cultural norms enforced by state institutions require women to wear an abaya - a loose-fitting, full-length black cloak covering the entire body - in public and to conceal their hair” (United States Department of State, 2011).

According to Al-Rasheed, the Saudi state later promoted the image of a woman that wears black ‘Abaya’ and avoids contact with unrelated men as the ideal picture of a Saudi woman who abides to the teachings of her religion (Sanauddin, 2013). Women were to become “the most visible symbols of religio-national identity of Saudi Arabia” (Sanauddin, 2013) and “who stays at home to take care of the children, cook and care for her husband; her place is within the family” (Alswel). Meanwhile, men were to assume all roles in social and institutional contexts that have been identified as unsuitable for a Saudi women, and they were expected to become guardians of virtue in the society by working to reinforce and maintain the mentioned image of Saudi women. (Alsadiq and Hausheer, 2014). In essence, women were to avoid men in public, and that meant that they were to be family and home focused and under the guardianship of men in the family and society. Meanwhile men were groomed to be the leader, protector and provider of the family and the builder of the nation.

Additionally, Al-Rahseed stresses that the oil boom in the 1970s presented women with better access to education and public services, as the increased national income meant that the Saudi government could afford to build gender-separated schools, colleges, and public agencies (Sanauddin, 2013). Thus, rates of illiteracy amidst women began to decrease, the rates of Saudi women seeking work increased and Saudi women became more visible in public spheres. However, the mentioned religio-national identity prevented them from working in professions or environments that may diminish the
image of what it means to be a Muslim/Saudi woman. (Sanauddin, 2013). As a result, a challenging mentality to the restricting gender norms began to emerge amidst portions of the Saudi female populous, which was met with increased resistance by the state and traditionalist portions of the public (Sanauddin, 2013).

Al-Rasheed argues that politics also played a significant role in the gender identity of Saudis, especially Saudi women, which is illustrated through the change in the promoted image of Saudi women post to 9/11. Al-Rasheed believes that “in order to improve its image to the West and to promote itself as a modern society, the state suddenly started encouraging successful and educated Saudi women to participate in international forums, to appear in the media, and to participate in business” (Sanauddin, 2013). On the other hand, men were encouraged to accept this shift and accommodate for it socially and institutionally, and in turn they had begun to witness the benefits of the active participation in society and work of Saudi women. Families begun to attain higher income, as both the man and woman would earn a living, and the social pressure and responsibility begun to lessen for Saudi men (Alsadiq and Hausheer, 2014).

This new gender identity of Saudi men and women has gained popularity, especially amidst the younger Saudi population. “Many Saudi youth are rejecting the traditional mindset of previous generations that stipulated proscribed roles for women as well as men” (Alsadiq and Hausheer, 2014).

From Al-Rasheed’s exploration of gender identity in Saudi Arabia, two distinct gender identities emerge, which mirror the two major social groups previously mentioned: a traditionalist gender identity and a modernized gender identity. The traditionalist gender identity models women into individuals of limited public visibility
and participation as to limit any interactions with men publicly, while men are modeled to assume the role of the leader, protector and provider of women. In this traditionalist gender-based modeling, Saudi women should not interact with other men in school, work or in any other public setting, and men of the family should take measures to ensure that women are not in need of interacting with other men in public. Additionally, men are to avoid interacting with other women in public unless permitted to do so by his social or professional position, such religious clerks, police, judges and public servants.

The other gender identity in Saudi Arabia, the modern gender identity, is quite different, and disregards the limitations and prescriptions of the traditionalist gender identity. This modernized gender-identity has gained popularity amongst young Saudi men and women. In this modernized approach, women are permitted and even encouraged to have more active roles in the social and professional circles of the community, even if it requires that women interact with men in public. “Tolerance for women in public life, however, is changing, as women’s presence in public life has expanded, with women appointed to high-profile positions, elected to office in mixed-sex business organizations, and filling indispensable roles on the staff of public hospitals” (Doumate, 2010). Men on the other hand, are more supportive of working and socially active women. They encourage women to pursue their educational, social and professional goals, and are more open to interact with women in public. “A common sentiment among young Saudis is that the next generation will change things for the better by accepting and even welcoming changes to patriarchal practices and expanding responsibilities for women” (Alsadiq and Hausheer, 2014).
Review of Previous Studies of Saudi Student’s Experiences with Coeducation

Considering that the gender and social identity of Saudi Arabians are evidently different from those in the U.S., where some Saudi students choose to pursue their studies, it is understandable that several Saudi students and researchers have taken to studying the experiences of Saudi students in the U.S.

However, upon surveying numerous studies on the experiences, challenges, and cultural adjustment issues of Saudi students in the U.S. and other western nations (Almotery, 2009, Al Murshidi, 2014, Al-Ahdal, & Al-Hattam, 2014, Alhazmi, 2010, Al-Shedokhi, 1986, Al-Shehry, 1989, Al-Sheikhly, 2012, Alqahtani & Hewitt, 2003, Hagler, 2014, Heyn, 2013, & Kampman, 2011), I have found that only two of such studies have devoted the core of their research on the gender issue (Alhazmi, 2010, & Alqahtani & Hewitt, 2003). Meanwhile, the rest of the studies have only designated portions of their research to the issue of this paper, confirming my observation that there is little literature in this regards.

In relating the previous explored studies to the research questions of the current study, I found that previous studies suggest that (a) Saudi students, as products of a single-sex education system and a gender-segregated culture, perceive the coeducation experience to be challenging at first, but less challenging with the passing of time. (b) Saudi women perceive the coeducational experience differently from Saudi men. (c) While the gender of the student is an influential factor in their adjustment to coeducation, as female students in the previous studies found it more difficult than male students, so is the time spent in a coeducation program, as the findings of these studies suggested that the passing of time helped lessen the level of difficulty of the adjustment process.
Reoccurring Themes

While several of the previous studies have been of an academic and cultural focus, I believe that their findings with regards to the impact of experiencing a coeducation on Saudi students in the U.S. and other western countries, in addition to the two gender-focused studies, to be highly relevant to the issue at hand. Moreover, I found that they collectively present two reoccurring themes and observations, although the studies were conducted at different times and contexts. Following is a review of these themes.

The First Theme: Saudi Male and Female Students Perceive and Experience Coeducation Differently. The first reoccurring theme is that the impact of experiencing a mixed-gender education differs according to the gender of the Saudi student, as I noted that the majority of studies conclude that female Saudi students tend to perceive the experience more challenging than their male counterparts (Alhazmi, 2010, Al Murshidi, 2014, Al-Sheikhly, 2012, Almotery, 2009 & Kampman, 2011). Alhazmi (2010), in his study of Saudi students attending a coeducation institution in Australia, found that “being in a mixed gender environment was a difficult experience for the female” and that several Saudi female students preferred isolating themselves “rather than engaging with her classmates, particularly the males”, while one female subject even called the mixed-gender education experience “scary” (Alhazmi, 2010). He also found that male subjects of his study approached the experience with “concern and hesitation” (Alhazmi, 2010). Likewise, Al-Sheikhly (2012) observed, and with regards to Saudi female students in the U.S., that “there is much more pressure for them to succeed academically and personally while still maintaining their cultural identity” (Al-Sheikhly, 2012). Al-Murshidi (2014)
concurred with this observation, as his observation was that “female students had expressed their discomfort when working with the opposed gender”, noting what one female subject of his study had said to him during the study’s interview: “I try to avoid male students in our discussions in our classes. It does not matter if the male students are American or Arabs” (Al Murshidi, 2014).

Almoetry, (2009) found that while the majority of his male subjects perceived “the coeducational environment a distraction”, they also believed it to be positive and enjoyable. As for the female subjects of his study, the dominant perception was quite different, as they perceived it to hinder their participation in physical activities, for example, they were not comfortable with engaging in sports in front of men. Moreover, and interestingly enough, Almotery himself unintentionally personified the problematic issue of mixed gender relationships in the Saudi culture. When discussing the limitations of his study Almotery (2009) noted that “due to the cultural norms dictating Saudi male/female relationships and opposite sex communication, female participants may not have revealed some personal experiences or opinions that they may have shared if the interviewer had been female” (Almotery, 2009).

In Abou Naaj et al (2012) investigation to how students of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a country of similar culture and social norm with regards to issues of gender, perceive a blended learning experience and explore whether their perceptions and level of satisfaction differs according to gender, the results were in line with the previous studies. Abou Naaj et al (2012) found that 19.7% of the female participants preferred not to answer questions or participate actively in the physical or virtual presence of male students, as they would have in the absence of male students. Moreover, the authors
found that while all students perceived the experience to be satisfactory, the impact of gender was evident, as the level of satisfaction of female participants differed from that of male participants. The same can be said for distance learning. Alharthi, (2005), and through studying the experiences of six students from countries of the Arabian Gulf, including Saudi Arabia, attending distance education programs in the U.S., found that female participants were more comfortable to participate online as opposed to face-to-face classes.

Both studies, while not solely focused on Saudi students, are highly relevant to the issue of this study, for the UAE and the other Gulf states are not only neighboring countries to Saudi Arabia, but they also share common economic and political settings, social norms, religious values and cultural identities (Abou Naaj et al, 2012 & Alharthi, 2005). Additionally, the two studies demonstrate how the gender and social identity of women and men in this culture may influence their individual perceptions and experiences when attending a coeducational program, even if the program lacked physical and social interactions.

The Second Theme: Saudi Students Perceive that the Stress associated with Experiencing Coeducation Decreases with Length of Stay. A second recurring theme is that time spent in the coeducation institution is of significant impact on the perceived intensity of the experience, as Saudi students believed that the experience of the mixed-gender education was stressful in the beginning and less stressful with the passing of time (Alhazmi, 2010, Almotery, 2009, Heyn, 2013 & Shaw, 2010). Alhazmi, (2012) reported that participants in his study found it difficult to adjust to a mixed gender environment at the beginning. “The difficulty was very significant in the beginning, from participants’
arrival, particularly in the first three months and then getting used to it along with the time” (Alhazmi, 2010). Alhazmi (2010) concluded that this was because as products of a single-sex education system, Saudi students had never experienced a mixed-gender education experience before joining a university in a western country. Shaw (2010) also found that while the experience was of significance to the participants of her study, they were capable of adjusting to it over time. In a similar manner, Almotery (2009) found that subjects of his study believed that initially the mixed-gender education experience was intolerable, but with the passing of time, they were capable of adjusting to it. Heyn (2013) findings were in line with this theme, and she documents this by quoting one of her study’s male participants: “It was hard for me to have conversations with [women] when I first arrived in the United States, but now it’s easy to talk to them” (Heyn, 2013).
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Introduction

Guided by the research questions, through which I study the perceptions and experiences of the participants; students of a sex-segregated education and culture, to coeducation, I use a qualitative phenomenology research method in answering the research questions. I use this methodology so I may research the phenomena from the perspective of those who have experienced it, and use this information in answering the study’s research questions. Thus, I had identified this methodology, so I may analyze and compare the perceptions and experiences of Saudi Female students to those of Saudi male students and assess the impact of the phenomena on both genders based on their individual experiences and worldviews.

The Phenomenological Research Methodology

Phenomenology is one of the five qualitative approaches to inquiry (Creswell, 2007), and a methodology to describe a phenomenon through the eyes of those who experience it (Lester, 1999). Thus, a phenomenological study is one that focuses on studying a phenomenon; a part of the human experience, from the subjective perspective
of the individuals (Creswell, 2007; Lester, 1999). As such, “phenomenological approaches are good at surfacing deep issues and making voices heard” (Lester, 1999).

In contrast to the narrative inquiry approach, in which the focus is on a singular individual, phenomenology attempts to describe and study common themes of many individuals when experiencing the same phenomenon, and consequently “reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (Creswell, 2007).

Creswell (2007) explores the two major approaches to phenomenology; the hermeneutic phenomenology approach and the empirical or psychological approach. The first approach; the hermeneutic phenomenology, is an interpretive oriented approach in which the researcher will interpret the meanings of the reported experiences and the differences between them. The second approach; the empirical or psychological phenomenology, is more descriptive than interpretive, for the focus in this approach is more sided towards describing the experiences of the individuals rather than the interpretation of such experiences by the researcher. In this method, the researcher should set aside his own experiences and perceptions as much as he can, and study the experiences of the individual to the phenomenon as if he had no previous recognition of the phenomenon. For the purposes of this study, I will apply elements of both approaches.

Creswell (2007) suggests that there are eight systematic procedures that an investigator must use when conducting a phenomenological study, and believes that these procedures should be used regardless of the phenomenology approached that the researcher chooses to apply.
The first procedure is to determine whether applying the phenomenological approach is the best option for studying the research problem (Creswell, 2007). Considering that the research problem of this investigation is to study and compare the perceptions and experiences of Saudi male students to that of Saudi female students in adapting to coeducation, and that phenomenology is concerned with studying an experience through the eyes of those who live it, I find that my choice of methodology is appropriate.

The second procedure is to identify a phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2007). In this investigation, I have identified the phenomenon as Saudi male and female students adjusting to coeducation, which is different from what the participants’ are accustomed to in their original environment, i.e., separate sex education.

The third procedure is to recognize and identify the general philosophical assumptions of phenomenology, which establishes that “researchers must bracket out, as much as possible, their own experiences” (Creswell, 2007).

The fourth procedure is to collect information from individuals who have experienced the identified phenomenon, and the most common data collection method in phenomenology is interviewing several participants (Creswell, 2007).

The fifth procedure is to ask the participants open-ended questions that help understand the experiences of the participants with regards to the phenomenon, and these questions should include two general questions; what have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? what contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon? (Creswell, 2007).
The sixth procedure is to identify statements that stand out as the most noteworthy in describing how the participants experience the phenomenon, and then clustering these statements into themes (Creswell, 2007).

The seventh procedure is to present a textual description, in which the researcher describes the participants’ experiences, and a structural description, in which the researcher describes the circumstances, factors and contexts that influenced the participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2007).

Finally, the eighth procedure is to develop an invariant structure in which the researcher describes the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Sampling Procedures and the Participants

Due to the focus of the study, and the research questions I seek to answer, the subjects of the study are Saudi students attending the University of Akron. First, the investigator distributed an invitation letter and questionnaire amongst Saudi students attending the University of Akron, asking them to assign to themselves a pseudonym of their choice and identify their gender, how long they have been in the U.S., the program they are currently enrolled in at UA, and means of contact such as email and/or cell phone. The survey also presented information regarding the purpose of the study, the method through which the data will be collected, how I will preserve their privacy and confidentiality, and the estimated time required for the interview. Additionally, I asked that if they are willing to answer the questionnaire and participate in the study, to respond
to me via a means of communication of their choice and identifying themselves only with their chosen pseudonym.

After collecting and analyzing the responses, I selected four participants who were willing to participate in the study and who were of the following characteristics: One Saudi male student attending the English language program at UA, and has spent <6 months in the U.S. One Saudi female student attending the English language program at UA, and has spent <6 months in the U.S. One Saudi male student attending an academic program at UA (undergraduate/graduate/doctoral), and has spent >6 months in the U.S. One Saudi female student attending an academic program at UA (undergraduate/graduate/doctoral), and has spent >6 months in the U.S.

I identified these characteristics, because I want to incorporate in this study (a) individuals who to some extent represent the population; Saudi students of both genders who are attending universities in the U.S. for different lengths of time. This will help me answer the research questions; Is the gender of the student a factor in hindering or accelerating adjustment to this new norm? Or is it the time spent in a coeducation setting? Or is it both? Do Saudi women perceive the coeducational experience of the U.S. differently from Saudi men? (b) Individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of adjusting to coeducation. This characteristic will help me to answer the research question; how do Saudi students, as products of a single-sex education system and a gender-segregated culture, perceive the coeducation experience while attending academic programs in the U.S.? and infer from it answers to the research question; How may the perceived challenges of adapting to coeducation be mitigated or resolved?
These two characteristics will help shed light on the perceptions and experiences of Saudi students when adjusting to coeducation, and assess the impact of the gender of Saudi students on their adaptation to coeducation and on their level of intercultural competence.

While the objective of selecting multiple subjects is to identify and analyze any occurring themes and structures, which if established, may grant the study greater validity to infer the findings of the study to other members of the population from which the subjects of the study were selected. However, although the applied methodology may help in inferring relations amongst the general populous from which the participants were selected, one “must be tentative in suggesting their extent in relation to the population from which the participants or cases were drawn” (Lester, 1999).

Finally, although a larger number of participants were desired, due to the time limitations of the study and predicted conflicts of scheduling interviews with full time students, the study was limited to only four participants.

Data Collection Procedures

To collect the data, I had conducted individual interviews with each participant that were recorded. Later, I had transcribed the interview as to explore the participants’ responses and incorporate them in this study. Following is a detailed description of the data collection procedures.
Interviews

In this study, I collect information from four participants through face-to-face individual interviews. I ask the participants a series of questions that attempt to provide an insight into the participants’ perceptions to coeducation and their experiences in adjusting to this cultural difference, and an understanding of the circumstances, factors and contexts that may have influenced their adjustment processes and level of cultural sensitivity to coeducation. Prior to the conducting the interview, the selected participants were asked their consent to interview them, record their responses and incorporate them in this study.

The participants were asked to describe their thoughts, perceptions and experiences that relate to their coeducation experience through several promoting questions that covered three different periods; (1) prior to beginning their studies in the United States, (2) during their first month and semester as participants of an educational program in the United States, and (3) at present. Exploring the participants’ perceptions and experiences over three time periods, is to assess the impact of time on their adjustment to coeducation, which has been identified as a research question and inquiry. In addition to the main questions of the interview, the investigator occasionally asked other questions depending on the response given by the student such as; Can you tell me more about this experience? How did this make you feel? Can you give me an example?

Before beginning the interview, the investigator presented each participant with both verbal and written information on the study, the specifics of the interview, the potential risks and expected benefits of the study, and adequate insurances to the preservation of the participant’s confidentiality and privacy. The verbal information was
presented to the participants in their native language; Arabic, and the participant had the choice between two copies of a written consent; one in Arabic and one in English.

The Informed Consent Form introduced the participant to the purpose, procedures, exclusions, risks and discomforts, and benefits of the study. Additionally, the consent stressed on the participant’s right to withdraw from the study, maintain the confidentiality of his identity and records, and contact my advisor or/and The University of Akron Institutional Review Board with any inquiries or reservations regarding the study. The participant was asked to read the consent thoroughly, and sign the document with his/her chosen pseudonym and date.

Due to predicted English language limitations, each participant was given the choice of conducting the interview in either Arabic or English, and each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes.

During the interview, only the investigator and one of the participants were present. The interview took place in a secluded and quiet location that was different for each participant. The investigator believes that choosing a quiet and secluded location that varies from one participant to the next will help in maintaining the privacy of the participant.

Documentation

The data from the preliminary survey was incorporated in an electronic document, and all paper documentation prior to that was destroyed. The collected information and data from the surveys, the recordings of the interview, and the transcriptions, in addition
to all other documents related to the study, were saved on the investigator’s personal computer and in a password-locked folder in a remote location on the local drive. After the completion of the study, all audio recordings and their transcripts were erased and no copies of any correspondence, recordings or transcripts were made.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Post to collecting and documenting the data, and before conducting my analysis of the findings, I had bracketed out my own perceptions and experiences to coeducation. After that, I analyzed the data in light of the theoretical framework, literature review, and research questions. Following is a detailed description of the related procedures of the portion of the study.

Bracketing

As described in the Limitations of the Study (see chapter I), I am a woman from the same cultural environment of the participants who is attending The University of Akron and experiencing the same phenomenon as are the participants. Thus, there is a possibility that this relation may affect the participants’ responses during the interview or influence the data analysis. However, I had prepared myself to conduct the interview and present the description and discussion as an outsider looking into the research problem for the very first time and I did my best to limit any subjectivity on my behalf during the data description and analysis.
Guided by Creswell’s (2003) phenomenology procedures, in chapter IV I discuss my personal perceptions and experiences in adjusting to coeducation, as to bracket out my personal experiences and position on the research questions, and fully focus on describing and analyzing how the participants perceive and experience coeducation and what this means in terms of the research questions.

Data Presentation

After bracketing out my own perceptions and experiences, I present a textual description of the perceptions and experiences of the participants in adjusting to coeducation at The University of Akron. Then I present a structural description of the circumstances, factors and contexts that the participants report to have influenced their adjustment to coeducation. Both descriptions included quotes and detailed narrations from the participants.

Developing Themes

I carefully reviewed the statements of the participants and identified significant statements that reveal how the participants view and experience coeducation as a cultural difference, and the circumstances, factors and contexts that had influenced their views or experiences. I identified the statements that propose or reject any differences between the views and experiences of male and female Saudi students to coeducation. Then I organized and grouped these statements in meaningful themes, which represented cross-
case agreement in the described or interpreted perceptions and experiences of the participants.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the perceptions and experiences of the participants in adjusting to coeducation and the circumstances, factors and contexts that may have influenced their adjustment, and what it is like for a Saudi student who has been educated and raised in gender-separated culture and settings to experience coeducation as a student at The University of Akron in the context of the theoretical framework and previous studies.

Invariant Structure

Based on the findings of the study and the analysis in the context of the theoretical framework and previous studies, I present an invariant structure to how a Saudi student of both genders in the U.S. perceive, experience and adjust to coeducation. The focus in this structure will be to answer the following research questions: How do Saudi students, as products of a single-sex education system and a gender-segregated culture, perceive the coeducation experience while attending academic programs in the U.S.? Do Saudi women perceive the coeducational experience of the U.S. differently from Saudi men? Is the gender of the student a factor in hindering or accelerating adjustment to this new norm? Or is it the time spent in a coeducation setting? Or is it both?
Implications and Recommendations

In chapter V, I attempt to answer the fourth research question; How may the perceived challenges of adapting to coeducation be mitigated or resolved? Inferring from the study’s findings and analysis, I explore the implications of the study for The Ministry Education in Saudi Arabia, The University of Akron, future Saudi students attending U.S. universities and future research, and present recommendations for each group that relate to the research questions of this study.
CHAPTER IV

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the participants’ responses to the interview questions in several formats. Firstly, I present a textual description of the responses of each participant, during which I quote or restate their responses with the minimum of interpretation. Secondly, I present a structural description of the circumstances and factors of each participant that may have played a role in the adjustment of the participant to coeducation. Thirdly, and from a cross-case exploration of their responses, I present several themes that relate to the research questions and problems.

However, and before presenting such data, I bracket out my personal perceptions and experiences in adjusting to coeducation, so the reader and I may differentiate between my perceptions and experiences, and those of the participants in adjusting to coeducation.
My Personal Perceptions and Experiences in Adjusting to Coeducation

I am a Saudi woman attending a graduate program at The University of Akron. I am married and I have three children. My husband is also attending a Master’s program at The University of Akron. My family and I have been in the U.S. since June 2012. Traveling to the U.S. was the first time I had experienced a culture other than that of my country and neighboring Arab/Islamic countries that I had the opportunity to visit. Before arriving in the U.S., I had little English proficiency and intercultural awareness.

Initially, and before arriving in the U.S. I had formed an idea that the educational system of the U.S. was advanced when compared to the educational system of my country, Saudi Arabia. Thus, I expected my educational experience to be a challenge, and I mentally prepared myself to invest additional time and effort to be capable of succeeding in such a developed education system.

Socially, I had feared for myself and my family, as I predicted that we would find difficulty in adjusting to unfamiliar educational, cultural and social norms of the U.S., while personally, and as a Muslim woman who wears Hijab, I questioned how would the social and educational communities view me.

Moreover, I had thought about the coeducation norms, and while I perceived that experiencing this norm might come naturally to those who had become accustomed to it, I expected that it might be challenging to adapt to coeducation and gender mixing for those who have no previous experience with these norms. However, while I predicted adapting to coeducation challenging, I believed in my capacity to meet the challenge and adapt accordingly. Thus, I began to visualize situations that I might find myself in as a
student attending a coeducation program, and of these situations was sitting next to a 
student of the opposite gender. To avoid this uncomfortable situation, I decided that I 
would apply certain strategies that included arriving in class early and choosing a suitable 
place to sit, or befriending a female student and asking her to save a seat for me next to 
her.

Upon arriving to the U.S., and on the very first day of school in an English 
language program at Ohio State University, I had conflicted feelings since I was very 
nervous and excited at the same time. I was excited because I was in a foreign country 
and beginning a new educational experience, and I was nervous for the same reasons. 
During the first month in the program, I had very limited interactions with non-Saudi 
students, which I believe was mainly because I did not possess the English proficiency to 
speak and interact with, and neither did they. On the other hand, I had a several 
interactions with other Saudi students in the program, and while these interactions came 
natural with female students, I found my interactions with male students to be 
uncomfortable as I was unaccustomed to such a public interaction from an unrelated man. 
Thus, due to my English limitations and unwillingness to interact with male students, 
during that period I did my best to ensure that I was placed in a group of Saudi female 
students when the class was divided into groups.

To illustrate my feelings when interacting with a man at the time, I present the 
following example. As an in-class exercise, our teacher one day asked that each student 
introduce himself or herself to the class and once the student finishes, he or she must pick 
the student to follow in the introductions. After a few students had introduced themselves 
and chosen others to introduce themselves, a Saudi male student finished his introduction
by choosing me to introduce myself. I remember that I was taken back by this interaction, and I felt that this student, who was a Saudi like myself and thus appreciated that his action breached the acceptable social norms regarding interactions between opposite genders, should have not chosen a female student. I saw that there were other male students he could have chosen to pick, and I questioned why he saw it appropriate to choose me. Nevertheless, I did my best to hide my discomfort and I introduced myself as required. After I had completed my introductions, I chose a female student to follow because I believed that such was the appropriate behavior. Later, and upon questioning my initial reaction and feelings to this interaction, I began to lessen my discomfort by relating the interaction in the context of the cultural environment. I reminded myself that I was attending a coeducation program and that in accordance with the norms of coeducation, this interaction may possibly be a normal occurrence.

Because I had succeeded in reexamining this instance and my reaction to it, I believe that it was a valuable lesson, for through it I learned to contextualize any interactions between male students and myself. Moreover, I had learned that my previous formed perceptions of coeducation and the strategies I had prepared to use as a student in a coeducation program were of little impact on my experience. This is because I found that the circumstances and factors of each situation and interaction differed, and thus the best alternative was to adapt to each instance accordingly and promptly.

Overall, I find that my first month as a student in a coeducation program was stressful and challenging at first, and that the intensity of these feelings and perceptions lessened with the passing of time. I attribute the decrease to my willingness to succeed in adapting to the new norm of coeducation, and the social lessons, tips and suggestions I
was fortunate to learn from Saudi female students who have been in the U.S. for a longer time.

As of today, I have no difficulty in working in a group of students from both genders and different nationalities, neither do I find it uncomfortable to interact with students of the opposite gender. I believe myself to be more capable of succeeding in a coeducational program, than I was during the first month, and that this confidence became evident by the end of the first semester. I also believe that the lessons I have learned from experiencing coeducation for a long time, in addition to the lessons I had learned from Saudi female students, were instrumental to the change of my perceptions to the experience of attending a coeducation program as a student from a single sex education system.

Relating my experience to future endeavors, I have but one concern to continue my studies or work in a mixed gender environment: that such studies or work are in a cultural environment in which mixing genders is the norm. Thus, if I would continue my studies or work in Saudi Arabia, I would prefer to do it in a single sex environment. This is because I believe that contextual and situational factors dictate what is socially and culturally acceptable, and to study or work in a mixed gender environment in Saudi Arabia is not acceptable in many social and institutional settings.

I believe that my experiences, feelings and perceptions are unique to Saudi women, for Saudi men are not concerned with Hijab, which I perceive to be both a garment and an attitude through which a woman limits her interactions with unrelated men. I also believe that because Saudi women are raised to this gender-specific norm, the
pressure to avoid and limit interactions with men is more heightened than it is for Saudi men to avoid interactions with unrelated women.

In relating my experiences to the research questions of the study, I find that as a product of a single-sex education system and a gender-segregated culture, I find the coeducation experience to be significantly different from my previous separate-sex education experience. While I currently perceive coeducation to be but a norm of the cultural environment that I have become accustomed to, this does not mean that my adjustment to coeducation was without its challenges and stresses. Thus, I find that adapting to coeducation was a challenging experience, but once I had become accustomed to it, the significance and influence of coeducation lessened, and the experience became less challenging and stressful.

As presented, and in relation to the research question; do Saudi women perceive the coeducational experience of the U.S. differently from Saudi men? it is my belief that as a Saudi woman, my experience was different from that of a Saudi male student, and thus, my perceptions of coeducation would differ from that of a Saudi male student. However, although I am in conflict whether to describe my gender as a hindering or beneficial factor to adjust to coeducation, I am not at conflict in describing my gender and the time I spent in a coeducation program as influential factors in my experience adjusting to coeducation.

From my personal experiences, I believe that the challenges I had experienced in adapting to coeducation might have been lessened if I were permitted to sit next to, and work, with only female students during my first couple of weeks in a coeducation program. This is because I had experienced the most stress and difficulty in functioning
in a coeducation program during those first weeks, and I predict that had my teachers acknowledged such a difficulty and applied certain strategies that would help students as myself gradually ‘settle in’, my experience would have less stressful and challenging. Additionally, I value the role other Saudi students of the same gender had in my adjustment process to coeducation, for as presented, they had played a vital role. Thus, and based on my experience, I believe that it could be beneficial for novice Saudi students to seek the assistance and guidance of experienced Saudi students from the same gender in matters related to adjusting to coeducation.

The Findings of the Study

The interviews had varied in time and length of responses, as I found that the male and female participants who have been in the U.S. more than six months had provided more lengthy responses and comments. During the interviews, I had found that occasionally the participant would not fully understand the question or misunderstand the time-period associated with the question. In these instances, I would restate the question or stress on the time period of concern. Following is a textural description, structural description of the participants’ responses, and a series of themes I had developed based on these responses.
Textural Description

In the following, I describe the responses and comments of each participant individual, which I support with direct quotations from the participant. All of the interviews were conducted in Arabic, and I did my best to ensure that the translation of the responses to English was as accurate as possible.

Amira.

Amira is a Saudi female student attending an English language program at the English Language Institute at The University of Akron. She has been in the U.S. for just under six months. Before arriving in the U.S. she had assumed and expected that American educational systems were developed and advanced and was aware that this system normalizes coeducation. During that phase, she had predicted that experiencing and adjusting to coeducation may be difficult, and that she expected to be in constant embarrassment and discomfort, and not knowing how to interact with male students. Amira reported that she “saw it [coeducation] as something hard to adjust to. At the time, I had never experienced coeducation and I have never had to attend a class with boys, and this was the thing I was most afraid of experiencing”. Additionally, she had predicted that she might become stressed by how others may view her as a Muslim woman who wears Hijab: “the issue with my cover [she points to her hijab], will they laugh at me? But if I take it off the guys [male students] will see me uncovered”. However, while she predicted that adjusting to coeducation may be difficult for her, Amira said that she had not thought about specific situations she wanted to avoid as a student attending a coeducation
program, and neither had she considered specific strategies to mitigate any distress or discomfort from experiencing coeducation other than focusing on improving her English proficiency.

Amira said that she was excited on the first day of her classes, saying that,

“Everything was great, you know? It was exciting to see the university and class for the first time, especially since I was not a university student before and to see the university and the people was something nice. But, on the first day I didn’t know much English, you know, I barely knew a few words in English and so in class I had no idea what was happening around me. Plus, I didn’t know much outside class too, and so I got my husband to help me”.

In class, she said that she found that all of her classmates were Saudis, both male and female, and because of this, the only interaction she had had with non-Saudi students during the first month of her studies was when she needed directions outside the class.

When asked about her experiences with Saudi male students in class during the first month of her studies, Amira said that she had worked with them as a group, and while at first she had felt that both the male students and herself were embarrassed to interact with each other, she said that with the passing of time it became ‘normal’.

When I asked her if her initial perceptions and expectations of experiencing a coeducation had any impact on that first interaction, she said,

“No. I don’t think it did have any effect on changing anything because those who were with me in class were in my same position. You know, all of us weren’t that good in speaking English so we were sticking together, meaning that it was normal not like I had expected it to be where I would be embarrassed and wouldn’t know how to speak because they [Saudi male students] knew how it was. Everyone was like me so it was normal that we stuck together”
I asked Amira to describe her interactions with Saudi students from the opposite gender in a class related activity during the first month, and she answered with the following.

“There was three guys in class and seven girls including me, so in the writing class we would sit together you know, as a group of girls and boys, and each one of us would tell the story he or she was going to write, and that’s it. But, in other classes you are seated next to the boys, like at the same table and such, and so you had to talk to the person next to you about the lesson. It was ok because we only talked about our classes and maybe work and there were no problems”.

However, she also reported feeling some level of embarrassment as she feared that if her hand would accidentally touch the hand of the male student sitting next to her when passing him a paper or pen she would become uncomfortable and embarrassed, and she believed that this would not be the case if this incidence were to be with a female student.

As for attending classes with teachers from the opposite gender, Amira did not believe it to be a problem in general and welcomed this new change. However, she also commented that while she saw attending classes with male teachers as a “nice experience”, she would become uncomfortable when a male teacher “comes up to me to explain something and we make eye contact. You know? It’s something new to me: for a man to come up close and make eye contact. But overall it was a good experience”.

Amira believed that the experiences she had had during the first month helped to lessen the embarrassment and anxiety she feels when interacting with male students and that because of these experiences she has become “more open minded and confident” to interact with men. She also comments that she begun to witness a change in her perceptions, views and feelings as a Saudi student attending a coeducation program “after
the second month”, and that other female Saudi students in her class were exhibiting a similar change.

Amira said that she had not experienced any significant problems during her first semester that were related to her interactions with students of the opposite sex, but also said that she had to make sure that her relations with male students were not misinterpreted by other people, especially her husband. In this regards, she comments,

“I remember that I had a guy in class with me, and we would talk and later he became like a friend. But, you know, I was worried a bit about how people would view me because of this relationship. They may ask questions like, why? how? and say that this is Aieb [a socially unacceptable behavior]. So, because I am married, I told my husband about my friend and that we had exchanged numbers and that our relationship is just about class stuff, you know, we help each other with our assignments and other stuff. So it became normal for me to be walking with my husband and we pass my friend, and I would smile at him. But of course, within limits”.

Additionally, she believes that her willingness to befriend a male student is contrast to what she had in mind before arriving in the U.S., as she reports that she “would have never imagined becoming a friend with a guy”. However, although Amira was willing to interact and study with male students, during the first month of her studies, she had preferred to work in groups that were female-only, whether they were Saudi or not. She commented, “studying with a group of girls was more comfortable for me, I mean, if I were to make a mistake it wouldn’t be a problem because they are like me, but with boys it would be more difficult”.

Overall, Amira saw that adjusting to coeducation during the first month of her studies was difficult for her at first, and that with the passing of time this difficulty lessened and she became open to this unfamiliar norm. She reported that,

“The first days were hard, I mean it’s something difficult to adjust to. You know, when I arrive late and there’s guys in class and such, or you have to get up and write
something on the board, even when I’m just passing by them in class and something happens, you start to think about it a thousand times, especially when you have a group of guys with you in class. It was all new to me, but later it became normal to get along with them”.

I asked Amira how she saw the coeducation experience now, to which she said that although she had previously preferred to attend a single sex program, she now saw coeducation “OK” because every student, whether male or female, was in class for a specific reason: to learn. Thus, as of today, she has no problem in attending a mixed gender class “even if all of the students are boys”.

Amira also mentioned that her perceptions and feelings to coeducation are different today than they were during the first few days because she has become “used to it”. She said that she has now become more willing to participate in discussions and communicate with her male classmates, and she believes that this is a significant change from her previous shy attitude and behavior with men.

Amira said that because of this change, she would “be OK” in joining a group of male and female students, on the condition that she was not the only female student in the group.

When I asked Amira if she were of the opposite sex, did she think that her thoughts, perceptions and experiences would be the same, she commented, “Of course they would be the same, I mean, if I were a Saudi male student I would be in a similar position because I wouldn’t have attended a class with girls before. It would be strange and hard for him too”.

As for whether or not she would prefer to continue in a coeducation program or transfer to a single sex program, Amira said that she “wouldn’t change anything because
it’s normal now and I have no problems with it”. However, when I asked her that if she were to be offered a choice between two jobs; one in a single sex setting, and the other in a mixed sex setting, which would she choose, she said that she would choose the single sex setting in both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, but for different reasons. As for why she would prefer a single sex work environment in the U.S., she mentioned her Hijab and said, “it [single sex setting] would be more comfortable and I could get along within it better, for example I could take off my Hijab for a while”. While as for her choice of setting in Saudi Arabia, she commented,

“Of course it would be women only. In Saudi Arabia they’re a bit strict, I mean, even the way of Saudi guys is different from the way of American guys, you know how it is. Here, I think, they respect women more than they respect men. Anyway, in Saudi Arabia we [women] even fear guys a bit and even here we do, so I would choose women only, its better”.

Um Hala.

Um Hala is also a female Saudi student in The University of Akron. She is currently attending a graduate program and has been in the U.S. since February 2011. Um Hala said that when she had decided to pursue her studies in the U.S. she asked her father for guidance because he had earned his Masters and PhD degrees from the U.S., and commented, “he gave me a lot of advice and told me about the professors and teachers and how it was in American universities. This really helped me”. She mentioned that she also sought the guidance of her mother because her mother spoke English fluently, and said that her mother had told her, “as long as you respect yourself, I mean, you don’t cross any lines you’ll be fine, regardless if you wear Hijab or not”.

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While Um Hala, before arriving in the U.S., had predicted that her limited English proficiency and “social difficulties” may cause problems for her, she perceived that experiencing coeducation would be an “exciting thing because it’s something new”. I asked Um Hala if she had envisioned specific situations that she wished to avoid as a student in a coeducation program, she said that she had not expected to attend class with a high percentage of Saudi male students and commented, “I never expected to attend a class with so many Saudi male students. I mean, I know it’s a coeducation program. But you know how conservative we are in Saudi and how coeducation is, and then this!”.

When I asked her if she had considered, before arriving in the U.S., using any strategies to overcome any unwanted experiences as a student of coeducation, she said that she only prepared herself to be “strong and independent”.

I asked Um Hala to describe her first day as a student in a coeducation program, to which she said,

“It was a shock! At first, I was a student at the English program at Kent State University. I was placed in the beginner’s level in a class that was full of young guys and I was the only girl. Most of them had just finished their high school so I was like their mother or older sister. You how young guys can be, they’re young and sometimes act like adolescents so the first two weeks were hard for me. I expected to find Saudis like me, but they were Saudis from other parts of Saudi so they weren’t like me you know? First, they were younger than me and second their way of thinking was different and so the things that concerned them were different. During the breaks I would walk the hallways searching for a girl to talk to and they would be over there talking among themselves, not exactly ignoring me, but it’s like they were saying ‘there’s a woman over there, so lets keep it down’. I just couldn’t get along with them, maybe I was too serious for them and they were young and wanted someone fun. It was hard for the first few days and I even thought about leaving the program because of this”.

Additionally, she remarked that throughout her English studies, she did not have any significant interactions with non-Saudi students because her classes were usually
comprised of only Saudi students, and that her limited English proficiency prevented her from interacting with students of other nationalities when in public. Um Hala said that the first meaningful interaction she had with non-Saudi students was on the first day of her academic program, during which she found herself in a group study with several American male and female students. On this experience Um Hala’s comments were,

“They were really friendly and helpful, especially since the class was about diversity. I had no idea how racism and discrimination was an issue in the U.S., because we don’t talk about these things back home, so they were helpful in explaining it to me. I think the only problem with this interaction was that I found it hard to raise to their expectations and their understanding of the topic because I had little information about it, while they may have actually experienced it. But the good thing is that helped me understand as best as they could, plus they appreciated anything I did and considered it like, wow!”

Um Hala said that before arriving to the U.S., she had expected to be shy when interacting with male students, but when she started her studies she found that she was only shy when interacting with Saudi male students only. She explained that these feelings became evident to her by working with groups of students, and commented,

“With Americans, we would talk when working on a presentation and other topics would pop up, like my family, how it is in Saudi, how hard is it living here, why am I wearing Hijab and such. And I was like ok with these questions, you know, because I knew they didn’t know about these things and they haven’t lived my experiences. But with Saudis no, especially Saudi guys. We would only talk about the assignment at hand, and it would be like the question is such and the answer to it is such, and that’s all. Thank god, I was usually studied with decent Saudi guys who understand how things are for us Muslim women and know our conservative environment. Plus, we had the same goals like getting better in English and earning good grades, so they were respectful, but still my shyness was clear when interacting with them”.

Moreover, she stressed that the Saudi/American male dividend extended to the teachers as well. When I asked Um Hala how she felt when she attended a class with a male teacher for the first time, she said that she did not feel shy because the teachers were American; however, she also mentioned that she would have preferred to attend classes
with female teachers. This was because she had expected that a female teacher, being a woman like herself, would “understand what it means to be a woman and knows our responsibilities more. It would be hard for me to explain my situation to a male teacher, like my daughter is sick or I am sick and I couldn’t attend class because of this”.

Um Hala perceived that her interactions with non-Saudi male students were positive and instrumental in her attempts to adjust to coeducation, and that through these interactions, she had learned to voice her opinion and was capable of addressing misconceptions regarding her Hijab. She mentions that

“They [American male students] thought I wore hijab because I was forced to wear it by my husband and that I was suppressed or something like that!. And I was like no. I need to explain this to them, and so I told that it is my choice to wear hijab and no one forced me to do so. So these interactions taught me to listen to what they have to say, and also say what I have to say”.

I asked Um Hala if these experiences were similar to her initial expectations of how the coeducation experience would be, and she said that they were “definitely not”, and that she had never envisioned herself being other than shy and embarrassed when interacting with all men. Um Hala said that, “once I knew how American guys were like, all my shyness when talking to them went away, and I become very motivated to voice my opinions”.

Um Hala mentions her Hijab as the most significant issue that she has faced as a student in a coeducation program. She said that Saudi women with her varied in how they wore the Hijab (covering the hair and whole face, the hair and the bottom half of the face, or just the hair), and that this variation was the cause of many questions, and at times misconceived judgements, from non-Saudi students. She also said that her method in dealing with such a problem was to continue to interact with male students and voice her
opinions, but to limit her social interactions with non-Saudi students to the boundaries of the classroom.

Um Hala believes that her choice of solution to this problem was different from the solution she had initially considered. She mentioned that she had prepared herself to avoid and shied away from any problems she may face, and that now she prefers to talk about them within the limits of the class.

Because she felt shy interacting with Saudi male students and did not see any reason to do so, and because her English proficiency was limited, during her first Month of studies in the U.S. Um Hala said that she would have preferred to work with a group of Saudi female students.

Overall, Um Hala said that the first month in a coeducation program – at Kent State University- was difficult for her because she was the only female student in the class consisted of male Saudi students, who were of younger ages and different mindsets and interests. She said that the hardships of this experience were the reason why she had transferred to The English Language Institute at The University of Akron, for she had sought a more gender, nationality and age-diverse experience. Um Hala comments that she had found the more diverse experience at The University of Akron instrumental in lessening the anxiety and difficulty she had previously felt.

I then asked her to comment on her current position on coeducation, to which she said,

“With Americans? I’m all for it. But with Saudis I think there should be some sort of differentiation. I mean, I learned from my experiences that the age of the male student is an important factor. So if the Saudi male students are a bit older, not high school
graduates, then having them in class with female students is ok, but if they are younger, no. They should be separate. I don’t know, maybe it’s a maturity issue”.

Um Hala stressed on that the length of stay in the U.S., and her achieved maturity and age growth, were influential factors to the change of her perceptions and attitude towards coeducation, and that she begun to witness early signs of this change when she had developed an advanced level of English proficiency. She said that her confidence increased and her shyness decreased when interacting with male students, when she believed that she possessed the linguistic skills to communicate effectively and the social know-how of “the American culture and how things are here”.

As of today, Um Hala said she strongly supports attending a coeducation program in the U.S., but not for Saudi students “just out of high school”. She also said that currently, she would prefer to join a group of male and female students of any nationalities other than Saudi Arabia, and comments, “I want to get to know others: other nationalities, other cultural norms and other viewpoints. For me, that means a chance to acquire new information and be open to new ideas.” She added, seeming to be surprised by her own remarks, “I really have changed!”.

I asked Um Hala to consider whether she believed that her perceptions and experiences would be the same if she was a Saudi man, and she answered, “Yes, but I’m not sure why. I always share my thoughts and experiences with my husband and brother and I always find that they have similar ideas”.

I asked Um Hala if she had the choice between two jobs in the U.S., one in a mixed gender setting and the other in a single sex setting, which of them would she choose? She said, “I’m currently an intern at a department at the University, and my
supervisor is a man. I haven’t had any issues so I say why not. Its OK”. I then asked her the same question, but substituted the U.S. for Saudi Arabia and her answer was,

“That I go and work in a mixed gender environment in Saudi? No. why? because everything is socialized, and this [working in a separate gender environment] is how we’re brought up. I mean, if I had no other choice, then I wouldn’t care about public opinion, but if I had the choice, I would choose the separate sex environment”.

Khaled.

Khaled is a young Saudi man who has been the U.S. for six months. Currently he is attending the English Language Institute at The University of Akron in preparation of his academic studies, which he hopes to start once he develops an advanced level of English proficiency.

Before arriving in the U.S., he had presumed that education in the U.S. relied on the individual efforts of students; however, he said that he later found it to rely more on collaboration and cooperation between students. When he discovered that there was a significant attention and value for relationships and collaborations amongst students, and that classes are typically consisted of male and female students, he predicted that the experience would be chaotic, and commented, “I expected it to be very chaotic. There wouldn’t be any order. Having female students or female teachers with male students? It would only cause chaos”.

Because of this, not only had Khaled expected to find it difficult to attend mixed gender classes, but he had also prepared himself to make the decision to cease his studies and return to Saudi Arabia, if the challenge of coeducation proved to be too difficult. I
asked him if there were specific situations he had expected to experience, but wished to avoid, as a student in a coeducation program, and what strategy would he use to deal with such situations, and he said,

“Yes, I expected to study with girls, but I had hoped I didn’t need to. And so I told myself that I would avoid them [female students] as much as I can. But, I later discovered that this wasn’t possible. I mean you can avoid them for periods of time, but eventually you are bound to interact with them sooner or later. For example, when I first started my English program, we had the girls with us in class, so I went to the teacher and told her I want to change this because of how embarrassing it was. She said I can’t and that I should just give it time and my feelings will change. So I didn’t really have any choice and I just told myself that I would have to live with it”.

Then I asked Khaled how he felt when he finally arrived in the U.S. and had the chance to attend a mixed gender class for the first time, and he said that, “it was a hard day for me, I mean, I never expected it to be this hard. I was tired, I missed my family and to add to it, I was attending a class with girls. It was embarrassing and very difficult”. As for his first interaction with non-Saudi female students, he mentioned that he was capable of interacting and communicating with them, and that such an interaction extended to social meeting and social gatherings. He comments, “I never expected it to be this easy, I mean it was very normal and easy, I mean you just had to start talking to them and it was OK”. However, he differentiates between his interactions with Saudi female students and non-Saudi female students, as he said that his interactions with the former group were limited by “red lines we can’t cross, so we don’t cause embarrassment for the other”.

Khaled said that his interactions with Saudi female students during the first month were about their assignments and classes or other closely related matters such as, why did they choose The University of Akron? What program will they attend? He said that did
not socialize with Saudi female students as he had with non-Saudi female students. He commented on this by saying,

“There wasn’t much interaction with them [Saudi female students], because I didn’t want to cause them any embarrassment or discomfort. Like they say, ‘there’s red lines for everything’, and I didn’t want to cross any lines. So we talked about the small stuff in class only and I would try to avoid any other interactions and so would they, so we don’t get into trouble”.

He said that attending a class with a teacher of the opposite sex was at first difficult and stressful, and he attributed his feelings to the lack of experience of learning with female teachers, and says, “I mean, for twelve years we [Saudi male students] have been taking classes with male teachers, and suddenly things change and they become females. It was very hard to adjust to”.

Khaled also said that in general, his interactions with students of the opposite sex were usually superficial, for he feared that he “may cause them embarrassment, and embarrassment leads to unwanted things. So yes, interacting with male students was different then it was with female students. With female students, it was superficial. With the guys you can go out with them and be yourself, but not with girls. We have been raised to not interact with them [unrelated females]”. In general, Khaled says that these interactions, although superficial, were a great leap from his presumptions of how he would behave in the presence of female students and said, “I expected that my relationship with them would be awkward. I had prepared myself to not embarrass them by directly looking at them. So I guess, superficial interactions were better than nothing at all”.

I asked Khaled, if he had experienced any problems during the first month in relation to coeducation. He said that he had tried to limit his participation and carefully
choose his words as to avoid problems and not “cause them [female students] any embarrassment. Because talking to someone of the same gender is of course different than talking to someone from the other gender. You have to careful to not cause yourself or others any discomfort”. Khaled also said that he had acknowledged that this was a problem that he had to resolve; therefore, he had begun to “try to talk to them as much as I can and break any barriers between us”. He also said that because he was so determined to adjust to the unfamiliar format of coeducation, during the first month he had preferred to join groups that were consisted of male and female students, whether Saudis or not.

Khaled described his reaction to coeducation during the first month as “positive and unexpected”, because he had expected that female students would not respond to his attempts to interact, and that the barriers would be numerous and difficult to overcome. He comments, “my reaction wasn’t what I had expected and neither were my experiences. I tried to make it more positive than negative by trying to give and take with them [female students] so I could break the barriers between us”.

I asked Khaled how he saw coeducation now, after experiencing it for approximately six months, and he said that it “felt normal. I don’t feel embarrassed or stressed like before. I can be myself”. He said that his current perception of coeducation is significantly different from his initial perception, and comments, “I had expected that I wouldn’t be capable of continuing with the class I was in at first. I had even tried to change my class to one with no female students. But later, and when I had actually spent time in the class with them, I found it normal and quite good actually. Even better than a class with just us guys”.
I asked Khaled when did he start to notice a change in his perceptions towards coeducation and he said that it was during the third month in his program, and attributes this change to attempts, from himself and female students, “to break the barriers and defeat the fear”. He also said that this change has extended to his behavior in class, and comments,

“Everyone, whether male or female, should have the opportunity to participate in class, as it is their right to do so. I mean, if the teacher asks a question and I know the answer, I wouldn’t answer, no, I would give the chance to someone else so there can be order and justice for others to participate. This way, both male and female students would have the equal chance to participate and interact. This is quite different from what I had in mind before. I would never have imagined that I would behave like this. It was only after I arrived here and experienced it [coeducation]”

When I asked Khaled, if he thought that his perceptions and experiences would be the same if he were a Saudi female student, he said, “no, they would never be the same. I mean men in general are less shy than women. If I were a Saudi woman I wouldn’t be trying to break the barriers like I am now, and I wouldn’t be as progressive”.

I then asked Khaled whether or not he would prefer to continue in a coeducation program and he said that because he is in a country that normalizes mixing genders and coeducation, he would prefer to continue in a coeducation program. He echoed this answer when I asked him if he were to work in the U.S., whether he would prefer to work in a mixed gender or a male-only setting, by saying, “Of course I would choose to work in a mixed gender environment, because there would be more opportunities to exchange ideas in this regards. I mean, men think alike, so if you are working with women you have the chance to learn new things and the work environment would be different and more diverse. Plus, all of us could work together in breaking the barriers.”
However, when I asked him the same question, but for Saudi Arabia, he said that he would prefer to work in a separated-sex setting because of the embarrassments he may experience from working with Saudi women. He explained by saying,

“If I were to work in a mixed gender setting in the U.S., chances are that I would be working with American women and not Saudi women. But, when I return to Saudi, I would return to what I was raised to and the embarrassment would reemerge. So it would be awkward to work with Saudi women. I don’t expect and I don’t believe that I could do it”.

Ayman.

Ayman is a Saudi male student attending a graduate program at The University of Akron. He has been in the U.S. since August 2013. Before beginning his academic studies, he had attended an English Language program for approximately a year.

Before arriving in the U.S., he said that he had formed “a clear idea” about education in the U.S., as he had asked several of his relatives whom had studied in the U.S. Ayman said that they had described to him many of the common policies and norms of U.S. universities and advised him to focus on developing his English proficiency. As for his initial view of coeducation, he mentions,

“In general, I am quite open to non-Saudi communities. I can communicate and interact with them smoothly, because I used to work at a bank and meet many other them. But with the Saudi community, there was a level of embarrassment. I couldn’t talk with them [Saudi women] in general stuff. So I expected the same when I would start my studies in the U.S.”

Ayman said that during that phase, the main issue he was concerned with was how he may develop his English proficiency and succeed in his studies, and not how to adapt to coeducation. He comments,
“I didn’t give much thought to gender mixing. I knew that it was normal in the U.S. and I expected that I would adjust to it with time. Plus, my relatives had gave me some ideas about it and I had some sort of experience through my work. My prime concern was how to learn English so I may communicate with others.”

I asked Ayman if he had predicted experiencing any challenges or problems as a student in a coeducation program and he said that “maybe in communication? Because I wouldn’t have the English skills to interact with them [female students]. So I told myself that I would simply avoid them and communicate with male students instead”.

Ayman said that on his first day as a student in the U.S., he was in “fear, because I didn’t know what was happening. Everyone was speaking in English and I had no clue what they were talking about”. As for his first interaction with Saudi female students during those first few days, he mentions, “it was a bit weird. I was thinking that with a Saudi woman, there’s no way to interact with them. We simply don’t have the culture in which you [a man] can talk to women. So I was surprised to see how natural and easy it was”. Ayman said that his main concern during these interactions was to convey information to them, and present a positive image of himself and those with whom he interacted.

I then asked him how he related his presumptions of coeducation to his initial interaction with Saudi female students. He said that they were consistent, for he had known that the mixing of genders was a social and educational norm in the U.S., and his lived experiences proved that notion. Khaled also mentioned that although his expectations and experiences were similar, he still experienced various degrees of embarrassment and difficulty when interacting with female students during the first month, especially with Saudi female students. He comments,
“Frankly speaking, at first I firmly refused to participate in a group activity with them [Saudi female students] for reasons I’m not sure what they are. Well, maybe it was because I was shy more than anything, I mean I didn’t know how to talk to them or maybe I just felt more comfortable talking to non-Saudi female students. My main concern was that they weren’t Saudis. If they weren’t Saudis then I could talk to them and be myself. So when my teacher placed me in a group with just Saudi girls, and I went to the teacher and said: ‘I can’t’, I don’t know why, but I know I can’t, and then I explained that in our culture, it’s just wrong. My teacher seemed to respect this and formed the groups based on gender. I think that they still do it this way”.

He continued to stress on the differentiation between interacting with Saudi women and non-Saudi women. He said that for long he has established an idea that interacting with non-Saudi women was natural and normal, and interacting with Saudi women was “unacceptable”. Khaled said that because of this distinction, he was comfortable interacting with female teachers and students that were not from Saudi Arabia, and always felt shy when interacting with Saudi female students.

Ayman said that he has not experienced any significant problems from being a student in a coeducation program and commented, “everyone’s got a role to play, and that’s it. We treat each other as colleagues, especially the non-Saudis. It was a bit tricky at first, but then it became OK”.

I asked him about the strategies he used to resolve problems that he may have faced, and he said that he had preferred to “not think about it [coeducation] too much, even when I was in Saudi. So I hadn’t really thought about any strategies other than avoiding uncomfortable situations and not speaking until I was asked to”.

Ayman said that during the first month, he had preferred to join groups that did not include Saudi female students. He said that he would choose a group that consisted of Saudi male students due to the cultural and linguistic compatibility, or a group of non-
Saudi male and female students because, “I would be able to talk to them freely, without any social pressures or embarrassment or anxiety. I wouldn’t have to think: what will they’re reaction be?”.

Ayman mentioned that forming idea to the reality of coeducation before arriving in the U.S. helped him in adjusting to it; however, he also mentioned that “knowing is not like seeing. So attending a class and having guys and girls all around you was a new thing to me during the first month and it was a bit embarrassing at first, although I knew beforehand that I would experience it”.

When I asked Ayman of his current perceptions of coeducation, now that he has experienced it for approximately two years, he said that he sees it a normal aspect of education in the U.S., and that any initial hesitation and reluctance to interact with a non-Saudi female student has become minimal. I asked Ayman; ‘when did you notice this change?’ and he responded,

“The change came after a couple of months and it became like normal to talk to an American girl without any problems. While many Saudi male students may find it OK to interact with Saudi female students, I don’t. I tried, but I can never feel comfortable when talking to a Saudi woman like I do when talking to an American woman. With them [American women] it like I don’t see the difference between men and women”.

He said that because of this, he still prefers to join groups of students that do not include Saudi female students.

I asked him if he expects that his perceptions and experiences would be the same if he were to be a Saudi woman, and he said, “while I can’t talk on the behalf of others, but I expect that the feelings would be the same. She would try, but I don’t think that she would interact with others [men] unless she really has to”.
I then asked him whether he would prefer to continue to attend a coeducation program, or would he prefer to transfer to a single sex program, he said,

“I’m not sure. I think either one would be OK. The goal is to learn, whether in a mixed or separate sex setting and I have experienced and learned from both. But when I think about Saudi women, I’m like I don’t know. Maybe I would transfer to a single sex setting, just to avoid interacting with Saudi female students”.

His answer to the question (If you were offered a choice between two jobs in the U.S., and the same in Saudi Arabia; one in a single sex setting, and the other in a mixed sex setting, which would you prefer?) reflected his distinction between interacting with Saudi and non-Saudi women. His comments were,

“In the U.S., I think it would normal to work in a mixed gender setting, given that I am not the only guy working amongst female coworkers. In Saudi, I would prefer to work in a men-only setting. I couldn’t work, function or succeed in a setting with Saudi female coworkers because our culture doesn’t allow it and we are still very much loyal to our heritage and social habits. I mean, when I used to work at the bank, I would get phone calls from our colleagues in the women’s branch and I would feel so embarrassed talking to them, and sometimes they would visit our branch for something and I would ask someone else to see to them because I couldn’t deal with them. It’s too embarrassing”.

Structural Description

Amira’s perceptions and experiences as a Saudi in a coeducation program seemed to be influenced by the anticipated or experienced feeling of embarrassment and social discomfort. Before arriving in the U.S., she had anticipated experiencing these feelings when interacting with male students, and later when she had arrived and attended her classes, she reported that she had felt them.

Amira mentioned that during the first month she had felt embarrassed to study with students from the opposite sex, and predicted that these students had also felt similar
feelings. She attributed these feelings to the lack of exposure to coeducation. Amira said that before attending her studies in the U.S. she had not experienced an educational setting in which members of both sexes interact together in close proximity. I expect that this unfamiliarity may have been the cause for her embarrassment, shyness and shortness of confidence when in a mixed gender setting, for she is a product of a culture in which the separation of sexes in the majority of environments is the norm. My prediction may be supported by Amira’s comment that once she had the chance to experience coeducation for a period of time, and consequently become more familiar to the norm, the intensity and the influence of these feelings on her behavior lessened and she became more confident to engage with male students and teachers.

On the other hand, Um Hala’s perceptions and experiences as a student of a coeducation program were influenced by her value of age and maturity. She reported that she believed that the more mature the students were, specifically Saudi students, the more expectable coeducation was to her. Thus, she does not recommend or approve of coeducation for Saudi students of young ages, but she finds it acceptable for older students, such as graduates, who have acquired a level of maturity with their progress in age. Due to this, while she had felt discomfort when she was attending a class with Saudi students who had recently earned their high school diploma, her discomfort ceased when she transferred to a program in which the students were “more mature”. This perception was also evident through her choice of work environment in the U.S., as she commented that she content with her current work situation as an intern at the university in a mixed gender environment. I expect that her acceptance and adaptation to the mixed gender
norms of her work environment is related to how she views her colleagues with regards to their maturity and age.

Additionally, because she viewed her *Hijab* as part of her Saudi, Arab and Muslim identity, according to which sexes should be separated in the majority of settings in life, she reported that it had played a significant impact on her experiences as a student in a coeducation program. Um Hala mentioned her Hijab several times during the interview, and each time she would stress on its importance to her, and its significance to her identity and on her behavior when interacting with men. When she had decided to study abroad and had sought the guidance of her family, her *Hijab* and how it would define her in the eyes of others was one of her concerns. During her discussions with non-Saudi students, she mentioned that she had felt that she need to clarify why she wore the *Hijab* and what it represents to her, on more than one occasion. Had Um Hala been attending a single sex program, she would have not worn her Hijab as it is only worn in the presence of non-relative men and because of this, she may not have had the same experiences. Thus, I predict that Um Hala’s perceptions, behaviors and experiences in coeducation were influenced by how others view her as a woman wearing *Hijab* and the importance of *Hijab* to her.

Khaled, and similar to Amira, had perceived that attending a coeducation program would cause himself and students of the opposite sex considerable embarrassment, and later during his first month, he had experienced such feelings. By anticipating that his behavior and actions in class may cause female students embarrassment, he felt it necessary that he limit any interactions with students of the opposite sex as much as possible. Moreover, he expected that feelings of embarrassment and shyness were
intensified in females more so than in male students, and this comment, that there were fundamental differences between female and male students, was echoed in his answers to other questions. Thus, the anticipation and experience of social discomfort and embarrassment, the projection of such feelings on other students, and his perception of the influence of gender-based differences, had influenced his perceptions and experiences as a student in a coeducational program.

Additionally, it appeared that Khaled, who was unaccustomed to the norm of coeducation before attending his studies in the U.S., viewed it as an abnormality at first, and his comments in predicting coeducation as chaotic and disordered support this observation. By normalizing separate sex education and destabilizing coeducation, Khaled demonstrated his value of familiar and normalized social and formal settings, which may have influenced his experiences and perceptions to coeducation.

Ayman’s responses demonstrated that he differentiates between interacting with Saudi women and non-Saudi women, regardless of the nature of the setting. He had mentioned that through his career, he had interacted with non-Saudi women with little difficulty or discomfort, and that it was only when such interactions were with Saudi women that he felt heightened levels of embarrassment, social discomfort and anxiety. Later, when he began his studies in the U.S., he reported experiencing similar feelings and reactions, for while he was comfortable to interact with female students of different nationalities, he found it difficult to interact with Saudi female students.

All four participants reported a clear distinction between interacting with Saudi students of the opposite sex and non-Saudi students of the opposite sex, and it appeared that it did not lessen with the passing of time. However, in Ayman’s case, I find that this
differentiation is a significant element and context that influenced his perceptions and experiences as a Saudi attending a coeducation program more than it did for other participants.

Themes

I had developed seventeen themes from the participants’ responses, which I had categorized into three time periods; prior to initiating studies in a coeducation program, during the first month and semester in a coeducation program, and currently. These time periods are a mirror of the time periods of the interview questions.

Themes from the Period Prior to Initiating Studies in a Coeducation Program

Following are three themes I had found in the participants responses to questions related to their perceptions and expectations of experiencing coeducation before arriving to the U.S. and initiating their studies.

All Participants had Developed a Premonition About Education and Coeducation in U.S.

All participants reported that they had developed an initial idea of the general characteristics of education in the U.S. and the nature of coeducation in this country before traveling to the U.S. While Amira and Khaled had not specified the source from which they had obtained the information needed to develop such initial perceptions, Um
Hala said that she had gathered such information from her father, who had earned his graduate and doctoral degree from the U.S., and Ayman said that his relatives had provided him with information regarding education and coeducation in the U.S. None of the participants mentioned the Saudi Ministry of Education, or the King Abdullah Scholarship program as sources of information.

None of the Participants had Identified any Specific Situations or Challenges They Wished to Avoid in Coeducation.

While the four participants had vaguely anticipated various levels of difficulties and discomfort, none had preconceived specific situations, challenges and sources of stress they would prefer to avoid as students in a coeducation program.

All Participants Believed that any Challenges They Meet in Coeducation Should be Resolved by Themselves.

All participants had identified themselves as the sole agent of change and adaptation to coeducation. Amira and Ayman had mentioned that they had decided to focus on developing a sufficient English proficiency to be capable of interacting and communicating with students of the opposite sex. Um Hala and Khaled had mentioned that they had decided that they would focus their attention on gaining the confidence and courage to interact with students of the opposite sex. None had mentioned The University of Akron and its faculty, or the Saudi Ministry of Education and the King Abdullah
Scholarship Program as potential agents that may have a role in mitigating any challenges from experiencing and adjusting to coeducation.

Themes from the First Month and First Semester in Coeducation.

In the following, I present eight themes I had developed from the participants’ responses to questions related to their perceptions and experiences during the first few days, the first month, and the first semester in a coeducation program.

A Mutual Feeling of Stress and Anxiety on the First Day.

All participants reported feeling various degrees of fear, anxiety, difficulty and stress on their first day in a coeducation program. While Amira was excited by the prospect of initiating her studies, she had felt some stress due to her lack of English, and thus she commented that she “did not know what was happening in class”, and Ayman had experienced stress and anxiety for the same reason. While Um Hala had mentioned that she felt “shocked” because she was the only female student in her class, Khaled said that it was “extremely hard” for him and that he was overcome by feelings of embarrassment.
Intense Feelings of Embarrassment and Discomfort During the Initial Interactions with Saudi Students of the Opposite Sex.

All participants reported feeling various levels of embarrassment, discomfort and shyness during their first interactions with students of the opposite sex. Ayman mentioned that he had objected to be placed in a group of Saudi female students because he felt that he “just can’t do it”. Khaled said that he was extremely shy and embarrassed, that he had considered ceasing his studies if such feelings continued, and that he was only capable of engaging in superficial conversations with female students. Um Hala commented that she had felt comforted, detached and aside from her Saudi male classmates, and she related these feelings due to the fact that she was the only Saudi female in her class, and to age and social differences. Amira said that at first, she was not comfortable sitting beside a Saudi male student because that meant that she was required to talk with the student which had caused her embarrassment.

An Unexpected Ease to Interact with Non-Saudi Students of the Opposite Sex.

All participants mentioned that they had found it “easy, normal and natural” to interact with non-Saudi students of the opposite sex, and that post to an initial temporary discomfort, they were capable of interacting with the students.
Female Participants Found Their Initial Perceptions and Expectations of experiencing a Coeducation Program to Have Little Impact on Their First Interaction with Non-Saudi Students from the Opposite Sex.

Amira mentioned that her expectations of coeducation had little effect on her actual experiences during the first month because she had discovered that other Saudi students had similar expectations and experiences. Due to these similarities, and post to the initial embarrassment she had felt, she said that she, and the other students, had realized that they were in need of overcoming any reservations, challenges and “embarrassment” in interacting with each other to succeed in their lessons. While Um Hala had mentioned that her initial perceptions and expectations had had little weight on her actual experiences with non Saudi students, and that her expectations, of experiencing embarrassment and shyness, only partially applied to Saudi students of the opposite sex.

The Experiences of Female Participants with Male Teachers were influenced by their Original Social Norms.

Both Amira and Um Hala had mentioned that while they accepted and enjoyed attending a class with a male teacher, they also mentioned that it took significant adjustment. Amira mentioned that she felt embarrassed because of the occasional close proximity between her and the teacher, such as when the teacher would approach her to help her understand an assignment or task, and the direct eye-contact resulting from it. This, she mentions, contradicted her original social norms, in which women and men do not work in close proximity and lengthy direct eye-contact in frowned upon between the
two genders. On the other hand, Um Hala said that she didn’t believe that male teachers would/could understand her, such as when she needed to clarify the reason for her absence, as would a female teacher. She relates her position to her belief that “an American woman in still a woman, and an American man is still a man, and it is embarrassing and difficult to explain to a man a woman’s problems”.

Female Participants were Concerned with the View of Others, and to Resolve this Issue They Sought to Clarify their Positions to Those Concerned.

Um Hala mentioned that she was asked on more than one occasion to the reason why she wore a Hijab, and she felt that the question was related to a misinformed perception regarding her identity. She commented “they thought that I was forced to wear it, or that I was oppressed, so I felt the need to clarify it to them”. While Amira said that she had formed a “respectful friendship” with a Saudi male student, and that because this friendship contradicted her social and cultural norms, she had felt compelled to clarify to her husband the nature and extent of this relationship.

Female Participants had Preferred to Join Groups of Female-Only Students During the First Month.

Both Amira and Um Hala mentioned that during the first month, and had they the option; they would have preferred to join groups that consisted of only female students. Amira said that she would prefer to work in a group of female students, whether Saudi or not, so that she “can be herself” and not feel embarrassed to make mistakes because she
felt that “dealing with men can be difficult”. Um Hala said that she would have preferred to join a group of Saudi female students. She commented that she would prefer the students to be Saudi because it “would easier to communicate with them”, and that she would prefer them to be female students because it would less embarrassing to her.

Participants had Normalized Coeducation before the End of their First Semester in their Program.

All participants reported that they had adjusted to coeducation before the end of the first semester –within three months-, and that any reservations, and feelings of stress and embarrassment had become minimized. By the end of the first semester, they all mentioned that it –experiencing coeducation- had become “normal”.

Themes from the Participants’ Current Perceptions.

In the following presentation, I explore themes I had developed from the responses of the participants to questions related to the current perceptions and experiences, while attending a coeducation program at The University of Akron.

The Participants Believe that their Current Perceptions to Coeducation are Different from their Initial Perceptions.

The four participants commented that during their first experiences, they had perceived adjusting to coeducation to be difficult, and that these perceptions are now
significantly different, as they reported that they have adjusted to attending a coeducation program and now view it to be “normal”.

All Participants Continue to Find Difficulty in Interacting with Saudi Students of the Opposite Sex.

While the participants report to be comfortable attending a coeducational program, each had mentioned that they still find degrees of difficulty and feeling of embarrassment when interacting with Saudi students of the opposite sex.

Female Participants Predict that their Perceptions and Experiences are the Same as those of Male Students.

Both Amira and Um Hala agreed that had they been of the opposite sex, their perceptions and experiences as Saudis in a coeducational program would be the same. Amira said that because Saudis, both male and female, hold the same social norms and have experienced the same challenges, their perceptions and experiences would be the same, and that like her “they would see it as strange and different”. While Um Hala said that she had learned through her discussions with her husband and brother, who are also attending a coeducation program in the U.S., that they had similar thoughts and experiences “because they come from the same environment I come from, and live in the new environment I am living in now”.

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All Participants would Prefer to Continue their Studies in the U.S. in a Coeducation Program.

Amira, Um Hala, Khaled and Ayman had reported that they would prefer to continue in a coeducation program in the U.S., even if they had the option to transfer to a single sex education program.

Male Participants would Prefer to Work in a Mixed Gender Setting in the U.S.

While Amira and Um Hala disagreed on this proposed situation, both Ayman and Khaled agreed that they would prefer to work in a mixed gender setting in the U.S. Ayman said that working in a mixed gender setting “is no different than studying in a mixed gender program”, which he now prefers. While Khaled said that working in a mixed gender setting would “present the opportunity to learn from the opposite gender ideas and thought that would not be present in a single sex setting”.

All Participants would Prefer to Work in a Single Sex Setting in Saudi Arabia.

Ayman, Amira, Khaled and Um Hala mentioned that they would prefer to work in a single sex work environment in Saudi Arabia, and related this decision to the social norms of Saudi Arabia.
Data Analysis

In the following, I present an analysis of the findings of the study. I first analyze the finding in context of the theoretical framework. Secondly, I analyze the findings of the study in the context of the reviewed studies and literature.

Analyzing the Findings of the Study in Context of Theory.

In Chapter II, I had presented several theories and models, which I presume to be related to the research problem. Through the following discussion, I will attempt to relate the findings of the study to these theories and models.

Gender Identity Theories.

The participants of this study were both male and female, and this variation in gender had produced different perceptions and experiences for them in their adjustment to coeducation. By relating the findings of this study to gender identity theories, I find that several interesting points stand out. Firstly, male participants had associated themselves with behaviors and attitudes of Saudi men, and female participants had associated themselves with behaviors and attitudes of Saudi women. Female participants were concerned with their gender specific apparel – wearing a form of Hijab –, functioning in close proximity to unrelated men, the view of others and society, and the need to gain confidence to succeed in a coeducational environment. On the other hand, male participants appeared to be concerned with not causing female students
embarrassment through their interaction with them, and thus they would avoid female students during their first semester in the coeducation program. It appeared that female students were concerned with maintaining their identity as Saudi women who wear Hijab, do not gain close proximity to men or maintain prolonged direct eye-contact, value hearsay and social opinion. While male participants saw it their responsibility to assist Saudi female students to do as such, by avoiding or limiting their interactions with them and ensuring that they do not cause them any discomfort.

Secondly, and as found by this study, these gender-specific behaviors and attitudes had changed over time. The participants reported that some of these concerns had decreased in importance after experiencing coeducation for a period of time. Female participants said that they now possess the confidence to actively interact with male students, can function in close proximity to unrelated men, and their concern of how others may view their identity or interactions in coeducation has lessened considerably. While male participants mentioned that they now interact with female students more actively, and expectations of causing embarrassment have lessened. All participants mention that experiencing coeducation has become normal. This observation may support the concept of gender identity development, which suggests that one’s gender identity is the product of internal cognitive processes or external social factors from which the individual learns the behaviors and attitudes associated with the gender. It appears that during their stay in the U.S., and their time in a coeducation program, the study’s participants have altered their gender identities, even if marginally and temporarily, through social experiences, environmental factors and cognitive processing. They have understood that gender identities in the U.S. differ from the gender identities in Saudi
Arabia, and they have adjusted their behaviors and attitudes to simulate those of the U.S. while attending a coeducation program.

The Social Identity Theory.

By analyzing the responses of the study’s participants it seems that there is a level of conflict in their social identity. The participants reported to become adjusted to coeducation and see that attending classes with the opposite sex to be normal, which is behavior consistent with the social norms and identity of U.S. students. However, they also report that they still find various levels of difficulty and embarrassment to interact with Saudi students of the opposite sex, which is consistent with the Saudi social identity. Moreover, all of the participants mentioned that they would prefer to continue to study in a mixed gender setting in the U.S., but upon returning to Saudi Arabia they would prefer to join a single sex setting. Thus, it appears that their social identity is contextual, for while in the U.S. they associate themselves and demonstrate behavior consistent to the social identity of American students, when amongst Saudis they associate themselves and demonstrate behavior consistent to the social identity of Saudi students. Thus, as Saudi students attending a coeducational program in the U.S. they may categorize themselves with two social identity groups; a predominant and permanent Saudi identity that prohibits coeducation and a less dominant and temporary American identity that normalizes coeducation, and they shift their association from one group to the other according to the context, agents and the environment.
Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theories.

The basis of many of the cultural adaptation theories is that human beings are open systems that adapt to change in the cultural environment, and by relating this notion to this investigation, I find that the participants had demonstrated levels of adjustment and adaptation to the unfamiliar norm of coeducation. As presented, the participants originate from a cultural environment that normalizes separation between sexes in social and formal settings, which include education. Thus, to attend a coeducation program is a new experience and cultural norm that requires adjustment and adaptation on their behalf. To understand the participants’ degree of adaptation and adjustment to coeducation, I analyze the findings of the study in the context of three cross-cultural adaptation theories and models.

Firstly, Kim’s Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory had focused on the study of strangers; a broad term that includes all individuals who start as cultural outsiders and over time become cultural insiders. These strangers would have been socialized in one culture and then moved to another, and be dependent on the hosting cultural environment and experience direct communication within this environment. This term applies to participants of this investigation, as they were socialized in the Saudi culture and then moved to the American culture, they are dependent on the American cultural environment for their educational needs, and through their educational experiences, they experience an ongoing communication within the hosting environment.

According to this theory, strangers experience a stress-adaptation growth dynamic; an ongoing stress and adaptation cycle that leads to growth and cultural adaptation. (Kim, 1995; Harvey, 2007). Kim suggests that the stress results from the
stranger’s inability to communicate within the host environment, which will further motivate the stranger to adapt and resolve the problem (Kim, 1995; Harvey, 2007).

In this investigation, I found that the participants had expressed experiencing feelings that may cause stress, such as unfamiliarity, embarrassment and discomfort, especially during the first month and semester. The participants, and to resolve this stress, focused their attention on empowering themselves with new attitudes and behaviors. They mentioned that when they felt stress and anxiety during their initial interactions with members of the opposite sex, they had either focused on developing their English proficiency to be capable of communicating with non-Saudi students of the opposite sex, or building their confidence to interact with Saudi students of the opposite sex. Other than the first semester, is was not clear whether the participants had continued to experience stressful problems, and thus I cannot confirm that the stress-learning cycle was repetitive as suggested by Kim (1995).

Kim (1995) also suggested that the stress-learning experience would produce growth and cultural adaptation over time, which was evident through the participants’ responses, as they had mentioned that they now view coeducation as normal. Additionally, Kim (1995) mentioned that the stress-learning experience would result in three facets; functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity. By analyzing the responses of the participants, I find that they have realized a level of functional fitness, as they have “accomplished a desired level of proficiency in communicating and developing a satisfactory relationship with the host society – particularly with those individuals and situations that are of direct relevance to their daily activities” (Kim, 1995).
I also find that, aside from the initial stress they experienced during the first month and semester and the continued embarrassment they reported to experience from their interactions with Saudi students of the opposite sex, they now enjoy a high level of psychological health. Finally, I find that, as Kim (1995) had suggested, the participants now have an intercultural identity. Currently, they associate themselves with attitudes and behaviors of both the Saudi and the U.S. cultures.

However, their responses also illustrated that this intercultural identity may be temporary and contextual, for the participants had mentioned that while in the U.S., they would prefer to study in a coeducational program, but upon returning to Saudi they would prefer to join a single sex setting. I did not find any differences in this focus between female and male participants.

Secondly, Oberg’s Culture Shock Theory claimed that humans learn various signs, cues or symbols, which may include verbal and physical expressions, behaviors and norms, through the course of growing up in a given culture. When individuals move from one cultural environment to another, they find that all of the familiar cues and symbols have been removed, and Oberg (1960) believes that this generates frustration and anxiety, which in turn lead to culture shock.

Oberg (1960) also suggests that culture shock, generates a two-phase reaction from the individuals who experience it. They first reject the new cultural environment because they view it as the main source of their frustration and anxiety, and then the home cultural environment becomes of heightened importance to the individuals, and they view it only through a positive lens. In relating these reactions to the focus of this investigation, I did not find this true for the participants, for they did not report rejecting
coeducation at any phase, neither did they report that their home cultural environment had increased in importance.

As for relating the four stages of cultural shock; honeymoon, an aggressive attitude to the host environment, recovery and full adjustment, to the participants of this investigation, I find that the participants experiences were not consistent to these stages. While Amira had expressed feelings of excitement on this first day, which can interpret as experiencing the honeymoon stage, the other participants had not reported experiencing similar feelings. As for the second stage, none of the participants had expressed aggressive or hostile attitudes or behaviors towards the host environment or its members.

As for the third stage, it appears that the mutual experience for the participants was that they experience difficulties as a result of attending a coeducation program, but they had learned to culturally adjust and adapt, and deal with them. They had realized that they must undergo this experience, i.e. coeducation, and instead of shedding away from it, they had decided to confront their crisis and learn from them.

As for the fourth stage, in which the individual would have achieved full adaptation, the participants of this study reported that they now see coeducation as a norm. They had mentioned that they would prefer to continue to attend a coeducation program, even if they had the option to transfer to a single sex education program, which may translate as seeing coeducation as but another way of living. However, Oberg (1960) suggested that individuals who reach this stage would even long for the adapted culture when they return to their home environment, and I did not find this true for this investigation. This investigation did not include participants who had completed their
studies and returned to Saudi Arabia, and thus I cannot comment on the perceptions, experiences and attitudes of such group to coeducation and test their preferences. However, the participants of this study had mentioned that they would prefer to join a single sex setting, and not a mixed gender setting, upon returning to Saudi Arabia, which may illustrate that they have achieved a temporary and contextual adaptation to coeducation. Finally, I did not find any significant differences in relating the findings of this study to this theory between female and male participants.

Thirdly, Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) is a model that discerns levels of adaptation to another culture, and diagnoses the interpretations and responses of people to cultural differences (Center for Intercultural Learning, n.d; Hammera, Bennett and Wiseman, 2003). In relating DMIS to the findings of this study, I attempt to measure the participants’ level of adaptation to the cultural difference of coeducation according to the six stages of DMIS, which are denial, defence, minimization, acceptance, adaptation and integration, (CIL, n.d; Hammera, et al, 2003).

By analyzing the responses of the participants, I find that during the first few days, they were experiencing the Defense stage, as the participants had expressed comments that illustrate a categorization of two groups; them (non Saudi students) and us (Saudi students). They saw that coeducation was different and not as the norm of separate sex education to which they were accustomed, and this unfamiliarity was the source of stress for them. Ayman had mentioned that during this period he had refused to work with a group of female students, Khaled had prepared himself to cease his studies and return to Saudi Arabia, Um Hala had felt discomfort and Amira had felt embarrassed.
Their feelings and experiences during this phase may be because they saw coeducation as abnormal, wrong or unfamiliar.

I also found that the participants had later attempted to find similarities between the two cultures, which may be understood as experiencing the Minimization stage. Um Hala commented that a female teacher would understand her better than a male teacher because an “American man is still a man and an American woman is still a woman”, and Ayman commented that all students, whether in a coeducational program or a single sex program, have the sole objective of learning, which decreases the importance and significance of the gender-based orientation of the program.

By the end of the first semester, the participants reported that they had become comfortable attending a coeducation program, which may translate as experiencing the Acceptance stage. During this phase, they reported having positive perceptions, feelings and experiences as students in a coeducation program, and no longer shied away from interacting with students of the opposite sex. They had become aware that separate sex education was a norm in the Saudi culture and coeducation was a norm in the American culture, and they accepted this difference and learned to apply the norm in accordance to the context and agents.

By analyzing the comments of the participants that illustrated their current thoughts, perceptions and experiences as students in a coeducation program, I believe that all of the participants, both male and female, can be categorized as experiencing the Adaptation phase and not the Integration phase. This is because according to DMIS, individuals who experience the adaptation phase place themselves in the position of members of other cultures when perceiving situations, and other cultures become the
temporary frame of reference for that situation and not just the culture of the individuals themselves (ICD, n.d). I find that the comments of the participants illustrate similar attitudes and perceptions. They have learned to function in coeducation as members of the host cultural environment do, but this adaptation appears to be temporary as they mention feeling embarrassed when interacting with Saudi students, which may be a context and stimuli for the original norms of the Saudi culture to become predominant. Moreover, while they would prefer to continue in a coeducation program in the U.S., they have expressed their preference of joining a separate sex setting when returning to their home cultural environment. Thus, and in relation to coeducation, it appears that they function according to the cultural frame of the situation, all of which are characteristics of individuals experiencing the adaptation stage.

As for the Integration stage, I do not believe that the participants have reached this level of cross-cultural adaptation. This is because individual who experience this stage typically “construe their identities at the margins of two or more cultures and central to none” (Bennett, 2004), and by analyzing the participants’ responses, I find that the Saudi culture is still their central culture and reference. The participants still identify themselves as Saudis, although they currently associate themselves with aspects of the American culture. I did not find any significant difference in the level or stage of cultural sensitivity between male and female participants, and all had reached the stage of Adaptation during a similar period.
Analyzing the Findings of the Study in Context of Previous Studies.

As presented in Chapter II, I had found but a few studies and investigations into the problems and challenges Saudi students face during their time in the U.S., and any mention of adjustment to coeducation was typically a sub element of such studies. However, I had discovered that through these studies, two themes recurred repeatedly; that female Saudi student perceive and experience coeducation in a manner different from male Saudi students, and that any perceived or experienced difficulty lessens with the passing of time.

In this study, I had found that these two themes were only partially repeated. Firstly, in relation to the first theme of the previous studies, I found that the study’s female participants were concerned with issues that were not of significant concern to the male participants. In agreement with this theme, it appeared that female participants of this study were concerned with issues such as Hijab, the view of others towards their relations and identity, how they would interact with male teachers, and working within groups of female-only students. These challenges and issues were unique to the female participants, and might have influenced their perceptions and experiences in adjusting to coeducation. However, and in contrast to this theme, both male and female participants in this study had expressed similar feelings of anxiety, stress and embarrassment during the first month and semester in a coeducation program. Additionally, they found it extremely difficult to interact with Saudi students of the opposite sex during that period, and they reported that they still are experiencing degrees of such a difficulty to this day.

Secondly, by relating the second theme of the previous studies, I find that it also only partially applies to this study. While all participants believe that they have adjusted
to coeducation, they all agree that interacting with Saudi students of the opposite sex to continue to be challenging and difficult. Because of the high numbers of Saudi students in the U.S., there remains a high possibility that Saudi students would find themselves in a coeducation program that includes other Saudi students, some of which may be of the opposite sex. If Saudi students continue to find it difficult to interact with Saudi students of the opposite sex, even after the passing of six months – the minimum length of stay for the study’s participants-, then one can infer that they may continue to experience various degrees of difficulty as students in a coeducation program. Thus, this reported difficulty partially contradicts with the mentioned second theme, which claimed that with the passing of time, the difficulty Saudi students perceive or experience lessens with the passing of time. Hence, while this study finds that with the passing of time difficulty lessens for Saudi students in coeducation program, this study also finds that this is only the case when interacting with non-Saudi students of the opposite sex.

Invariant Structure

Guided by the research questions, I rely on the findings and analysis of this study in suggesting an invariant structure to how male and female Saudi students in the U.S. perceive, experience and adjust to coeducation.
How do Saudi students, as products of a single-sex education system and a gender-segregated culture, perceive the coeducation experience while attending academic programs in the U.S.?

For this question, I present two answers, both of which I have derived from the findings of this study. The first answer is that during the first semester a Saudi student will perceive coeducation to be an unfamiliar and challenging norm of the host cultural environment. This is because Saudi students have been socialized to accept and normalize the separation of the sexes in social, academic and organizational settings and thus, female-male interactions are either conditionally or unconditionally prohibited in their original cultural environment.

During the first few days in a coeducation program, Saudi students would categorize their colleagues into two groups, us (Saudi students) and them (non-Saudi students). This categorization would be a reasoning and justification to (a) reject interacting with Saudi students of the opposite sex, because ‘Saudis do not accept the mixing of genders’ and to (b) accept to interact with non-Saudi students of the opposite sex because ‘non-Saudis do accept the mix genders’. While this categorization may continue for the duration of the Saudi student stay in a coeducation program in the U.S., the extent of his/her rejection to interact with Saudi students of the opposite sex would depend on individual, social, situational and contextual factors.

For the duration of the first semester in a coeducation program, Saudi students would perceive coeducation to be a challenging and stressful experience that may vary in nature and impact, according to individual, social and circumstantial elements, and such a stress would generate a learning attitude and mentality. They would realize that they must
adjust to coeducation if they are to succeed in their studies and associate themselves with the dominant social group of individuals who see coeducation as a normal aspect of education. They would initially feel isolated and at lost, due to the removal of the cues, behaviors and attitudes associated with the familiar separate sex education. Therefore, they would take to learn the cues, behaviors and attitudes associated with the unfamiliar norm of coeducation, minimizing the differences between separate-sex education and coeducation, overcoming perceived or experienced challenges and difficulties during this adjustment process, and accepting coeducation as a norm of the host cultural environment in which they currently reside.

The second answer is that after the first semester, Saudi students would have learned ‘what it takes and means’ to attend a coeducation program through cognitive processing and from social interactions. The time they spend in a coeducation in the U.S., the exposure they gain and the communications they consistently engage in both in and out of class, would contribute to a change in their perception of coeducation from unfamiliar, difficult and challenging to ‘normal’. By perceiving coeducation normal and demonstrating behavior consistent to such a perception while in the U.S., they would achieve a level of adaptation to coeducation and an improved level of intercultural sensitivity. Moreover, they would have temporarily associated themselves with a social group that perceives coeducation as normal, and this group is different from their original social group that sees coeducation as abnormal.

Thus, and based on the findings of this study, the perceptions of Saudi students to coeducation would transform and differ according to the time spent in a coeducation setting and the context of the situation. (a) During their first semester, Saudi students of
both genders would perceive all that is associated with coeducation unfamiliar, difficult and challenging. (b) After the first semester and while continuing to attend a coeducation program in the U.S., they would perceive all that is associated with coeducation to be familiar and normal. (c) Upon returning to their native cultural environment, or when in a Saudi-related setting or context, Saudi students would re-associate themselves with their original social and gender identities and norms, and consequently they would once again perceive coeducation or interactions between the two genders abnormal.

Do Saudi women perceive the coeducational experience of the U.S. differently from Saudi men?

I find the answer to be yes. Saudi female students would perceive and experience coeducation in a manner different from Saudi male students, especially during the first semester, due to the different identities associated with each gender.

As presented, all participants in this study had reported to adjusting to coeducation by the end of the first semester; however, during the adjustment phase –the first three months - the female participants were concerned with issues that were not of the same concern to male students, and vice versa. The themes I had developed from the participants’ responses suggest that (a) female Saudi students’ expectations and predictions of experiencing coeducation would differ from their initial interactions with non-Saudi students. (b) The interactions of female Saudi students with male teachers during the first semester in a coeducation program will be viewed through the lens of their original social norms. (c) During the first semester Saudi female students in a
coeducation program would be concerned and preoccupied with how others view their interactions and gender identity, and would feel an obligation to clarify and address such views. (d) During the first month in a coeducation program, Saudi female students would prefer to work within female-only study groups. However, while their perceptions and experiences would be different from those of Saudi male students as the findings of this study suggest, (e) Saudi female students would expect and perceive that their perceptions to coeducation are the same as Saudi male students.

These gender-specific concerns, values and behaviors in the context of coeducation, will in turn produce gender-specific perspectives and experiences for Saudi students attending coeducation programs in the U.S.

Is the gender of the student a factor in hindering or accelerating adjustment to this new norm? Or is it the time spent in a coeducation setting? Or is it both?

Both the gender and time spent in a coeducation setting are influential factors in the adjustment of Saudi students to coeducation. From the findings of the study, and as demonstrated through answering the previous research question, I am led to believe that female Saudi students are concerned with more issues than male Saudi students, especially during the first few months. Because of this, I suggest that the gender of female Saudi students may be burdening factor in their adjustment to coeducation during the first semester; however, the weight of this ‘burden’ will differ according to the individual’s association to the Saudi gender identity.
In all cases, the influence and weight of gender-related differences would lessen post to the first semester, during which both female and male Saudi students would perceive and experience coeducation in a similar manner. In this regards, time is also of impact, for I found that all participants, both male and female, required approximately three months to adjust and adapt to coeducation.

Thus, (a) being a female Saudi student means that the adjustment process to coeducation will be more challenging during the first semester than it is for Saudi male students, and the gender of the former group could possibly be a burden; however, the extent of such a challenge and burden differs according to individual, situational and circumstantial factors. (b) Regardless of the gender of the Saudi student who is attending a coeducation program, he or she, will find that the first three months will be challenging, difficult and stressful, but after this time period, such perceptions and feelings will begin to lessen. In this stage, the gender of the student would become irrelevant to some extent.
CHAPTER V

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUMMARY

Introduction

In this chapter, I relate the findings and analysis of the study, along with the answers I had presented to the research questions in discussing the implications of this study for four groups; the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia, The University of Akron, future Saudi students who intend to attend their studies in the U.S., and researchers. While the focus of this chapter is to answer the research question; how may the perceived challenges of adapting to coeducation be mitigated or resolved? I will substantiate my recommendations on the answers to the other research questions.

How may the perceived challenges of adapting to coeducation be mitigated or resolved?

Before beginning to develop recommendations that may contribute in lessening the perceived or experienced challenges of adjusting to coeducation for Saudi students attending their studies in the U.S., I restate the answers of the research questions.

(a) For the first question; how do Saudi students, as products of a single-sex education system and a gender-segregated culture, perceive the coeducation experience while attending academic programs in the U.S.? I mentioned that the perceptions of Saudi
students to coeducation would vary according to the time spent in a coeducation setting and the context of the situation. (i) During their first semester, Saudi students of both genders would perceive coeducation unfamiliar, difficult and challenging. (ii) After the first semester and while continuing to attend a coeducation program in the U.S., they would perceive coeducation to be familiar and normal. (iii) Upon returning to Saudi Arabia, or when within a Saudi-related context, Saudi students would perceive coeducation, or interactions between the two genders, to be abnormal.

(b) For the second research question; do Saudi women perceive the coeducational experience of the U.S. differently from Saudi men? I mentioned that the answer was yes, and suggested that Saudi female students would perceive and experience coeducation different from Saudi male students, especially during the first semester, due to the different identities associated with each gender.

(c) For the third research question; is the gender of the student a factor in hindering or accelerating adjustment to this new norm? Or is it the time spent in a coeducation setting? Or is it both? I suggested that (i) a female Saudi student would find adjusting to coeducation more challenging during the first semester than it is for Saudi male students, and because of that, the gender of the former group may be a hindering factor that would differ according to influential internal and external factors. (ii) Saudi students, both male and female, in a coeducation program would find the first three months to be challenging, difficult and stressful, and after this time period, such perceptions and feelings will begin to lessen.

The answers of the research questions, in addition to the study’s analysis, suggest that (a) the first three months in a coeducational program would be a stressful and
challenging experience for all Saudi students. (b) The perceptions and experiences of Saudi female students would differ from those of Saudi male students, especially during the first semester, and because of this, (c) during the first semester, Saudi female students would find it more challenging to adjust to coeducation than do their male counterparts. (d) After the first three months in a coeducation program, male and female Saudi students would have adapted to coeducation. (e) Saudi students attending a coeducation program in the U.S. would have attained a temporary and contextual intercultural identity with regards to coeducation. For when they are in the U.S., or a context that normalizes interactions between opposite genders, they would view coeducation as normal, and when in Saudi Arabia, or in a context that does not normalize interactions between opposite genders, they would view coeducation as abnormal. Because of this contextualized perception of coeducation, Saudi students attending a coeducation program in the U.S. would find it difficult, embarrassing and unnatural to interact with other Saudi students of the opposite sex, and these perceptions and feelings will not lessen with the passing of time.

From this presentation, I find that there are certain implications for the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia, as the prime organization that supervises and oversees Saudi students studying abroad, and has a clear interest in their success. I also find that there are implications for The University of Akron, where the participants in this investigation currently study, and as the organization that facilitates the coeducation experience. Additionally, I find that this study has implications for Saudi students who have yet to attend their studies in the U.S. but intend to do so in the future. They are the party most concerned with the focus of this study, and will most likely will confirm to the
perceptions and experiences of the study’s participants. Finally, I find that the findings of this study present interesting opportunities for researchers concerned with the area, field and problem of the study.

Recommendations for the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education

The participants in this study had not mentioned the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education as a source of information regarding education and coeducation in the U.S., although all Saudi students who intend to study abroad are mandated to attend an orientation and preparation program. That they had attended such a program, which is a requirement to receive approval to study abroad, and had not received information regarding the norms and characteristics of the educational experience in the U.S. raises questions to the substance of information presented in such a program. The Ministry of Higher Education mentions that this program “aims to familiarize students with the scholarship and academic regulations, visa procedures, and legal obligations of international students in the United States” (MOE, nd). From this description, the lack of information related to the institutional and social norms of the educational institutions in the U.S. is evident; moreover, there is no mention of what the student may expect to experience psychologically and socially.

The participants of this study had expressed an unawareness to what challenges they may experience as students in the U.S., and as a result, they had not identified any strategies to mitigate any problems they may face. I inferred from their response that they
had taken an approach to resolve their problems that was broadly improvised and situational.

The study’s analysis and invariant structure had suggested that Saudi students find the cues, attitudes and behaviors associated with coeducation to be unfamiliar, and that this unfamiliarity was the cause of stress and the reason why adapting to coeducation during the first few months is a challenge. Had the students been educated to the cues, attitudes and behaviors associated with a coeducation setting, and had they been prepared to experience a cross-cultural adaptation experience, they might have been more prepared to adjust and adapt to any cultural differences they may experience.

Preparing students to study and live abroad should be inclusive of information that relates to their daily experiences. Thus, the recommendation for the Ministry of Higher Education is that its orientation and preparation program include intercultural sensitivity workshops that present students with the information and skills to navigate and adapt to the new cultural environment and norms of the U.S., which includes coeducation. A suggested approach would be to invite Saudi students, male and female, who have completed their studies in the U.S. to lead such workshops and discussions, during which they would educate prospective students to the cues, attitudes and behaviors associated to coeducation. Additionally, the program should include an illustrative comparison to the similarities and differences between higher education, teacher-student relationships, and common instructional methods in Saudi Arabia (a separate sex system) and the U.S. (a coeducational system). Possessing such information and skills may help in lessening the impact and duration of initial stress resulting from the unfamiliar cues and norms of the U.S. cultural environment and coeducation.
Lastly, I recommend that the Ministry of Higher Education, as a party concerned with the outcome of Saudi students studying abroad, supervise and authorize a lengthy and broad assessment and study of the challenges that Saudi students experience as a result of attending a coeducation program.

Recommendations for The University of Akron

This study suggests that the first three months in a coeducational program would be a stressful and challenging experience for all Saudi students and these feelings were intense during the first month, and that during the first semester, Saudi female students would find it more challenging to adjust to coeducation than do their male counterparts. I find that this suggestion has implications for the institution that hosts these students, and in this case, the institution is The University of Akron.

Thus, I recommend that teachers and administrators at the English Language Institute at The University of Akron, as the first program Saudi students typically enroll in upon arriving in the U.S. and joining the University of Akron, acknowledge such issues and implement measures to mitigate such feelings. Of such measures is gradually introducing Saudi students to the common practices in a coeducation program, such as gender and nationality diverse study-groups. For example, the teacher may permit Saudi students to work with other students of the same gender during the first month. Later, and after the first month, Saudi students would be permitted to join groups of non-Saudi students of the opposite sex. Finally, and when the teacher finds that Saudi students are capable of functioning and interacting with Saudi students of the opposite sex, they
should encourage group activities between them. This requires continuous evaluation and observation of the social interactions between Saudi students of opposite sexes.

While other international students may find coeducation familiar, Saudi students have virtually no experience with this norm and have never attended a class with a teacher of the opposite sex. Thus, and when possible, it may be beneficial that teachers who lead classes that include Saudi students of the opposite sex to acknowledge the cultural differences between the Saudi and American cultures. For example, of such differences is a man maintaining direct eye contact and close physical proximity to a Saudi woman, which while may be acceptable in the local culture, it is not in the Saudi culture. Because Saudi students during the first month have yet to adapt to norms and common interactions and behaviors associated with coeducation, it is suggested that male teachers and administrators at the English Language Institute refrain from maintaining prolonged eye contact and close proximity with Saudi female students during that period.

Additionally, and due to the large numbers of Saudi students at The University of Akron and the cultural differences between the Saudi and host culture, it is recommended that faculty and administrators learn the cultural norms of Saudi Arabia, and make adjustments to their behavior and relationships with Saudi students, especially during the students’ first month and semester at the University of Akron.

Recommendations for Future Saudi Students Attending U.S. Universities

This study found that the participants had formed little information about education and coeducation in the U.S. Moreover, this information was obtained from
others who may have had different experiences and perceptions, and may have attended their studies in the U.S. at a different period and under different circumstances. I believe that the lack of informative insight and objective assessment may have influenced the participants’ experiences. Thus, it is recommended that prospective Saudi students research education and coeducation in the U.S. before initiating their studies.

The reasoning behind this recommendation is the same reasoning behind the recommendation the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education extends its orientation program to include matter related to the social experience of studying in the U.S. This study had found that during the first month and semester, Saudi students find coeducation to be unfamiliar, and that this unfamiliarity was the cause of stress and the reason why adapting to coeducation during the first few months is challenging. Addressing this unfamiliarity may contribute to resolving or lessening the extent of the challenge to adapt to coeducation.

There are many intermediaries that prospective Saudi students can utilize for this objective, such as documentaries about education in the U.S., information and multimedia on the websites of American universities, studies that describe culture shock and cultural sensitivity and adaptation, and the experiences of Saudi students in the U.S.

By obtaining information from various sources, students will be capable of envisioning themselves attending an educational program in the U.S.; moreover, and through such vision, they would have the ability to predict and consequently identify potential challenges and possible strategies to resolve them. This information will also help them decide whether they are willing and capable of adjusting to the cultural norms of the U.S., which include coeducation. As presented in Chapter II, one of the social
groups in Saudi Arabia does not accept the mixing of genders under any circumstances. Thus, members of this group, and by acquiring a sufficient insight to education and coeducation in the U.S., may decide that it is not for them before embarking on their journey, as opposed to reaching this conclusion after arriving in the U.S. Additionally, and as established in through the research questions, Saudi female students would find it more challenging to adapt to coeducation than Saudi male students during the first semester. By acknowledging this, prospective Saudi female students would be equipped with the insight to decide whether to accept the challenge of joining a coeducation program or not, and mentally prepared for the challenges ahead if they decide to study abroad.

Recommendations for Future Research

There is a shortage of studies that analyze and research how individuals from cultures that normalize the separation of the sexes in social and formal contexts adapt to cultures that normalize the mixing of genders. Moreover, there is a similar shortage of studies that study how members of the former culture interact with each other whilst living in the latter cultural environment. The studies I had found that discuss the challenges Saudi students face as students in the U.S., had not delved into how Saudi student in the U.S. interact with other Saudi students of the opposite sex.

Aside from the impact of time, which has been established as a determining factor in the intercultural adaptation theories and models discussed in chapter II, this study finds that gender is also a significant factor in the adaptation of Saudi students in the U.S., and
this factor has received little attention in the research I had surveyed for this study. I believe that this focus is one that deserves the attention of researchers, especially those concerned with issues related to Saudi students studying abroad, in addition to sociology, psychology, educational foundations, education counseling, and cross-cultural adaptation.

Thus, I recommend that the researchers and concerned parties embark on research that further explores the research questions of this study; how Saudi students, as products of a single-sex education system and a gender-segregated culture, perceive the coeducation experience while attending academic programs in the U.S.? Do Saudi women perceive the coeducational experience of the U.S. differently from Saudi men? Is the gender of the student a factor in hindering or accelerating adjustment to this new norm? Or is it the time spent in a coeducation setting? Or is it both? How may the perceived challenges of adapting to coeducation be mitigated or resolved?

Furthermore, I recommend that future research apply other research methodologies, increase the sample size, and include other variables, as to test the findings of this study. Such research may produce results that can assist Saudi students in adjusting to coeducation and interacting with Saudi students of the opposite sex, which this study finds to be the predominant source of stress for Saudi students attending a coeducation program at The University of Akron.

Summary

In this study, I had investigated how Saudi students at The University of Akron perceive and experience coeducation as individuals who originate from a cultural
environment and educational system that normalizes the separation of sexes, and explore any differences in such perceptions and experiences between male and female Saudi students. The objective of this study was to find answers to four questions; (a) How do Saudi students, as products of a single-sex education system and a gender-segregated culture, perceive the coeducation experience while attending academic programs in the U.S.? (b) Do Saudi women perceive the coeducational experience of the U.S. differently from Saudi men? (c) Is the gender of the student a factor in hindering or accelerating adjustment to this new norm? Or is it the time spent in a coeducation setting? Or is it both? (d) How may the perceived challenges of adapting to coeducation be mitigated or resolved?

To address the research problem and questions, I had applied a phenomenological methodology, as to study the perceptions of four randomly selected Saudi students attending the University of Akron, differing in gender, level of education and time spent in the U.S., and to assess the role of gender and time in their adjustment to coeducation.

Guided by the focus of this study, I presented a theoretical framework that consisted of several gender identity, social identity and acculturation theories and models, and used this framework in interpreting the responses of the study’s subjects.

Additionally, I had discussed the predominant social and gender identities in Saudi Arabia and reviewed previous studies that have researched the experiences of Saudi students attending higher education in western countries in relation to matters of gender and coeducation, as to present a contextual setting for the analysis of the responses.
In relation to the research questions, this study suggests that there are indeed differences between the perceptions and experiences of Saudi female and male students attending a coeducation program at The University of Akron. Female participants had found that their initial expectations of experiencing a coeducation program had little impact on their first interaction with non-Saudi students of the opposite sex. Additionally, they had commented that during the first month, their interactions with male teachers were influenced by the norms of their home culture, that they were more concerned with the view of others, that they had preferred to join groups of female only students, and that their perceptions and experiences would be the same had they been men.

However, the participants, male and female, had also reported to have similar perceptions and experiences in adjusting to coeducation. They had mentioned that before arriving in the U.S., they had developed a broad premonition about education and coeducation in the U.S., had not identified any specific challenges they wished to avoid whilst in a coeducation program, and believed that any challenges they would meet should be resolved by themselves. They also mutually agreed that on the first day, they had experienced stress and anxiety due to coeducation, and for the duration of the first month they had experienced intense feelings of embarrassment and discomfort when interacting with Saudi students of the opposite sex, and an unexpected ease to interact with non-Saudi students of the opposite sex. All participants had reported to view coeducation as normal by the end of the first semester and their current perceptions to coeducation to be positive, and significantly different from their initial perceptions, thus they would prefer to continue to attend a coeducation program in the U.S. even if they had the choice to transfer to a separate sex program. However, they also reported that
they continue to experience various levels of difficulty and embarrassment when interacting with Saudi students of the opposite sex, and that they would prefer to join a separate sex setting when returning to Saudi Arabia.

The gender-based concerns and issues not only suggest that Saudi female students may have several different coeducation-related perceptions and experiences, but also that their adaptation to coeducation may be more challenging for them than it is for Saudi male students. Thus, the gender of Saudi female students could be a hindering factor during their adaptation of coeducation, especially during the first semester attending a coeducation program. On the other hand, the mutual points of agreement between male and female participants suggest that Saudi students of both genders would also have similar perceptions and experiences during and post to adapting to coeducation. Therefore, while male and female Saudi students in coeducation would at times face similar challenges, hold similar perceptions and live through similar experiences, at other times, female Saudi students may have different experiences and perceptions that are unique to their gender. These gender-exclusive factors may make adapting to coeducation more challenging, demanding and stressful than it is for male Saudi students.

In the context of the previous studies, I found that the themes of this study partially differ from the themes of such studies, and add new themes that were not previously identified. The foremost significant new theme is that Saudi students of both genders, and regardless of length of stay and exposure to coeducation, continue to experience difficulty and embarrassment when interacting with Saudi students of the opposite sex, and not with non-Saudi students of the opposite sex. In the context of theories, this theme may translate as achieving a temporary level of cultural adaptation to
coeducation, and acquiring a contextual intercultural social identity. In other terms, and in answering the first research question, this means that Saudi students of both genders who are attending a coeducation program would base their perception of the normality of coeducation, or mixing of genders, on the context of the situation. For when in a context and situation that normalizes coeducation, such as attending their studies in a cultural environment in which coeducation is the norm or when interacting with American students, they would perceive coeducation as normal and appropriate. However, when Saudi students find themselves in a context and situation in which coeducation is not the norm, such as when returning to Saudi Arabia or when interacting with other Saudi students, their would perceive coeducation to be abnormal and inappropriate.

Thus, I conclude that Saudi students attending a coeducation program in the U.S. may have different perceptions and experiences while adapting to coeducation, especially during the first semester, which differ according to their gender and consequently make it more the adaptation process more challenging for female Saudi students. However, after gaining sufficient exposure to coeducation, Saudi students, both male and female, would achieve a similar level of adaptation and adjustment to the cultural difference of coeducation and be capable of interacting effectively and stressfully with non-Saudi students of the opposite sex. The exclusion to this conclusion is that they still may experience various levels of stress, difficulty and embarrassment when interacting with Saudi students of the opposite sex.

It the recommendation for Saudi students who intend to study abroad, The Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia, The University of Akron and researchers
to further investigate the causations of such issue and recommend resolutions that may mitigate the stress of these experiences.
REFERENCES


Al-Sheikhly, N. (2012).*Saudi Arabian women pursuing higher education at Oregon State University*. (Unpublished graduate thesis) Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL

Office of Research Administration
Akron, OH 44325-2102

NOTICE OF APPROVAL

February 17, 2015

Nadia Ahnafei
3747 Cascades Blvd, Apt. 103
Kent, Ohio 43720

From: Sharon McWhorter, IRB Administrator

Re: IRB Number 20150212 "From Singular to Mixed: A Comparative Study of the Perceptions of Male and Female Saudi Students at the University of Akron in Adapting to the Co-Educational Experience"

Thank you for submitting your Exemption Request for the referenced study. Your request was approved on February 16, 2015. The protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following federal category for exemption:

☐ Exemption 1 - Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.

☒ Exemption 2 - Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior.

☐ Exemption 3 - Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior not exempt under category 2, but subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.

☐ Exemption 4 - Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens.

☐ Exemption 5 - Research and demonstration projects conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine public programs or benefits.

☐ Exemption 6 - Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies.

Annual continuation applications are not required for exempt projects. If you make changes to the study's design or procedures that increase the risk to subjects or involve activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, please contact me to discuss whether or not a new application must be submitted. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please retain this letter for your files. This office will hold your exemption application for a period of three years from the approval date. If you wish to continue this protocol beyond this period, you will need to submit another Exemption Request. If the research is being conducted for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

Cc: S. MacDonald - Advisor

☒ Approved consent form/s enclosed
From Singular to Mixed: A comparative Study of the Perceptions of Male and Female Saudi students at The University of Akron in Adapting to the Coeducation Experience.

Dear Saudi Student:

My name is Nadia Alrefaie, and I am graduate student at the Educational Foundations and Leadership Department at The University of Akron. I am in the process of conducting a study that will analyze and compare the thoughts, perceptions and experiences of Saudi men and women attending the University of Akron with regards to coeducation. The study will rely on information gathered through individual interviews with each participant alone.

Attached is a demographic questionnaire for the study above. Through this questionnaire, I will ask you to answer questions with non-identifying information. I will use this information in selecting four eligible subjects for this study, who I will personally interview at a later date. Your participation in both this questionnaire and study is completely voluntarily. I will preserve your privacy, your choice, contact information, identity and responses to this questionnaire and study will remain confidential, and no identifying information will be disclosed in any form.

I estimate that this questionnaire will take approximately 5 minutes to answer it, and send me your responses. If you agree to participate and are selected for the study, you will be presented with the interview questions to review and asked for a signed consent, and both will occur before the interview. You may withdraw your consent during any time of the interview. The interview will be recorded by using a digital recorder and will be transcribed by the investigator. The recordings and transcriptions will be saved in a secure personal computer in a locked folder, and only the investigator will have access to the computer and folder. Any recordings and transcripts will be erased post to the completion of the study.

If you are willing to answer the questionnaire and participate in my study, please send me the following: (a) preferred pseudonym, (b) email, (c) gender, (d) how long have you been in the U.S.?, and (e) the program you are currently attending at UA. The responses should be in an email entitled (From Singular to Mixed Questionnaire: Your Preferred Pseudonym) to naa41@zips.uakron.edu.
If you have any questions, you may call me at (614) 316-2263, or contact my advisor Dr. Suzanne MacDonald at (330) 972-6075 or smacdonald@uakron.edu.

Thank you for your participation. Sincerely, Nadia Alrefaie.
APPENDIX C
LETTER OF INVITATION AND SURVEY IN ARABIC

عزيزي الطالب السعودي،

اسمي نادية الرفاعي، أنا طالبة ماجستير تخصص أسس التربية في جامعة أكرون، وأنا في طور القيام ببحث يحلل ويقارن آراء وخبرات وتجارب الطلاب السعوديين الذكور وإناث، الذين يدرسون في جامعة أكرون في شأن التعليم المختلط. يستند هذا البحث على بيانات تم استخلاصها من مقابلات شخصية مع كل مشارك على حدة.

يرجى إرسال البيانات التالية:
اسم وهمي من اختيارك، بريدك الإلكتروني، جنسك، مدة الأقامة في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية، والبرنامج الذي تدرس فيه في جامعة أكرون.

لا تفصح عن هويتك، وأنت مكلف بإرسال البيانات المذكورة إلى naa41@zips.uakron.edu.

ارسل البيانات من خلال البريد الإلكتروني أو الاتصال بالدكتورة سوزان ماكدونالد على الهاتف (330) 972-6075 أو البريد الإلكتروني smacdonald@uakron.edu.

شكراً على مشاركتك، وتقبلوا تحياتي، نادية الرفاعي.
APPENDIX D
INFORMED CONSENT FORM IN ENGLISH

Title of Study:
FROM SINGULAR TO MIXED: A COMPARATIVE STUDY
OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE SAUDI STUDENTS AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF AKRON IN ADAPTING TO THE COEDUCATION EXPERIENCE.

Introduction:
You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by myself,
Nadia Alrefaie, a graduate student in the Department of Educational Foundations and
Leadership, at The University of Akron.

Purpose:
Although Saudi students represent a large portion of international students
attending universities in the U.S., and considering that they originate from a country of
single-sex social, educational and cultural norms who are attending academic programs
in a country of a mixed gender culture and norms, I find it perplexing that there has been
little investigation into this specific issue. Furthermore, it is unknown if the gender of the
Saudi student is a factor in the adjustment process to the coeducational experience. Thus,
and by studying the perceptions of male and female Saudi students in experiencing a
coeducational program and comparing their thoughts and experiences, I will attempt to
identify any differences in these perceptions and experiences, and to what extent does
the role of gender influence their perceptions and behavior in a coeducation setting.

Procedures:
If you consent to participate in this study, you will be asked approximately 31
questions regarding your thoughts and experiences of studying in the U.S., and the
greater focus will be related to coeducation. These questions will be in formats such as,
describe your thoughts or reaction...?, what are your feelings..? Talk about a specific
instance. I will record the interview on a digital recorder, and later I will transcribe your
responses for further analysis. The only data I will use for the study, and aside from your
responses, is the pseudonym you have chosen for yourself, your gender, the program
you are currently attending at UA, and the duration of stay in the U.S.

Exclusion:
You are not eligible for this study if you are one of more or the following:
• Not a Saudi student.
• Not attending studies at UA.
• Have chosen not to disclose your gender.
• Have chosen not to disclose how long you have been in the U.S.
• Have chosen not to disclose the program you are currently attending at UA.
• Have chosen not to disclose your thoughts and experiences as a student at UA.
• Have chosen not to disclose your thoughts and experiences regarding
  coeducation.
Risks and Discomforts:

The researcher predicts that there is little potential of risk for you, and if it would to occur, it would be minimized and in the form of social discomfort and embarrassment that one may experience in typical social interactions. While the researcher predicts that discussing the topic of the study may be sensitive to some portions of the Saudi populous which may include yourself, if you were to experience these feelings or discomfort, I predict that it will be short-term and limited to duration of the interview. This is because only I will know your true identity, and I am committed to not using your true name or any identifying personal information that may lead to your identification by your family, friends, other students, and officials both in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. Whither through emails, the transcriptions of your responses, or the study itself, I will only use a pseudonym of your choice during these instances as to maintain your confidentiality and preserve your anonymity.

Benefits:

While I predict that this study may be of significant benefit to future Saudi students and their families, the field of study, educational programs and institutions in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, I do not foresee you receiving any direct benefits for participating in this study. However, your participation may help me understand how Saudi students in the U.S. perceive the coeducation experience, and whether there perceptions and experiences differ according to their gender.

Right to refuse or withdraw:

Your participation is entirely voluntarily, as you may withdraw your consent at anytime during the interview without any repercussions of any sort, and your identity and decision will remain confidential.

Anonymous and Confidential Data Collection:

The interview and data collection, documentation and presentation will be confidential. During all stages of the study and communication, I will only refer to you through the pseudonym you have chosen yourself. Your identity and all identifying personal information will be undisclosed to anyone and it will be kept in a locked folder on a secure personal computer, and no one will have access to either. I will destroy any paper documentation that may reveal your identity, and thus only I will know that your chosen pseudonym is your identification, and I will not indicate to the relation between your pseudonym and your identity in any form. If you chose to grant me your consent and sign this form, I ask that you do it using your chosen pseudonym, and not your true name. All of your responses will be presented in a manner that will not reveal your identity, or the identity of others. Nobody will be able to link your responses to you.

Confidentiality of records:

Your identity, and all identifying personal information will be undisclosed to anyone. The recording of this interview, transcripts of your responses and all other files related to you will be named in your chosen pseudonym and electronically saved in a password-locked folder on a secure personal computer, and no one will have access to either.
Audio and Video Taping:

If you chose to grant me your consent to participate in this study, I will record the interview using a digital audio recorder. This interview and recording will be of only you and me. I will later transcribe your responses using a electronic word processor. The recordings will not be used for any other purpose other than this study. Post to the completion of this study, I will personally destroy/delete/erase any audio tapings or recordings.

Who to contact with questions:

If you have questions about this study, you may contact me, Nadia Alrefaie (the researcher), at naha41@zips.uakron.edu, or my advisor at UA, Dr. Suzanne MacDonalld, at (330) 972-6075 or smacdonald@uakron.edu

This project has been reviewed and approved by The University of Akron Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the IRB at (330) 972-7666.

Acceptance & signature:

I have read the information provided above and all of my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information.

Participant Signature (Pseudonym)                                      Date

APPROVED
IRB 21/6/16

The University of Akron

Page 3 of 3
APPENDIX E
INFORMED CONSENT FORM IN ARABIC

وثيقة الموافقة المسبقة

عنوان الدراسة:
من تعليم منفصل إلى تعليم مختلط، دراسة مقارنة لانطباع الطلاب السعوديين الإناث والذكور الدارسين في جامعة أكرون تجاه تجربة التأقلم مع التعليم المختلط.

مقدمة:
أنت مدعو للمشاركة في مشروع بحث نادية الرفاعي، طالبة دراسات عليا في قسم أصول التربية والقيادة، في جامعة أكرون.

الغرض من الدراسة:
الطلاب السعوديين يمثلون جزء كبير من الطلاب الدوليين الذين حضروا للدراسة في جامعات الولايات المتحدة، ومع الأخذ في الاعتبار أنهما أتيا من بلد يعتمد على ثقافة الفصل بين الجنسين اجتماعياً وثقافياً وتعليمياً، وأنظموا للدراسة في بلد من ثقافته عدم الفصل بين الجنسين، إلا أنه هناك نقص في الدراسات المتعلقة بهذه القضية.

وباعتقادي أنه من غير المعروف أو المثبت إذا كان جنس الطالب له علاقة في قدرته على التأقلم في بيئة التعليم المختلط أم لا، لذلك، من خلال دراسة انطباع الطلاب السعوديين الذكور والإناث تجاه تجربة التعليم المختلط في جامعة أكرون ومقارنة أفكار وانطباعات وخبرات الجنسين تجاه التجربة، سأحاول تحديد أي اختلافات في هذه التصورات والخبرات، وإلى أي مدى نوع الجنس يؤثر في تصوراتهم وسلوكهم تجاه بيئة التعليم المختلط.

إجراءات:
إذا كنت موافق على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة، سوف يطلب منك أن تجيب على ما يقرب من 31 سؤال بخصوص أفكارك وانطباعاتك تجاه الدراسة في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية، وبالتحديد تلك المتعلقة بتجربة التعليم المختلط. وهذه الأسئلة ستكون في صيغ متعددة مثل، صف أفكارك أو ردة فعلك؟ ما هي مشاعرك؟ حدثني عن موقف/حالة محددة. سوف يتم تسجيل المقابلة على جهاز رقمي، وبعد ذلك سوف ننسخ ردودك كتباً لتحليلها وتضمنها في هذه الدراسة. البيانات الوحيدة التي سوف تستخدم في الدراسة إلى جانب ردوتك في المقابلة هي اسمك، ومستعار تختاره لنفسك، ونجسك، والبرنامج الذي تحضر له حالياً في UA، ومدة إقامتك في الولايات المتحدة.

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الاستثناءات:

لاست مؤهلا لهذه الدراسة إذا كنت واحدا أو أكثر مما يلي:

- لست طالب سعودي.
- لست طالب في UA.
- تختار عدم الكشف عن جنسك.
- تختار عدم الكشف عن مدة إقامتك في الولايات المتحدة.
- تختار عدم الكشف عن برنامجك الأكاديمي حاليا في UA.
- تختار عدم الكشف عن الأفكار والخبرات الخاصة بك كطالب في UA.
- تختار عدم الكشف عن أفكارك والخبرات بشأن تجربة التعليم المختلط.

المخاطر والمعايير:

يُتوقع الباحث أن هناك احتمال ضئيل للمخاطر لا يتعدى عن كونه شكل من اشكال الحرج الاجتماعي الذي قد يواجه الشخص في التفاعلات الاجتماعية والنقاشات اليومية المعتادة. إلا أنه قد تكون مناقشة موضوع الدراسة غير مرئية أو حرجا لفترة قصيرة تقتصر على مدة المقابلة فقط. ولكن لتقليص أي مخاطر أو مضادات فسنلزم بعدم الكشف عن هويتك الحقيقية. أنا ولا غيري سوف يكونون على دراية بهويتك الحقيقية. أنا ملتزمة ألا تقوم أي معلومات شخصية قد تؤدي إلى التعرف عليك عن طريق عائلتك وأصدقائك أو الطلاب الآخرين أو المسؤولين. وسوف يستخدم إسمك المستعار فقط أثناء التواصل معك من خلال رسائل البريد الإلكتروني أو تدوين الاستجابات الخاصة بك أو أثناء تحليل استجابتك في الدراسة نفسها، وذلك للحفاظ على السرية وعدم الكشف عن هويتك.

الفوائد:

هذه الدراسة قد تكون ذات فائدة كبيرة في المستقبل للطلاب السعوديين وأسرهم، وللمجالات التعليمية المختلفة البرامج والمؤسسات التعليمية في الولايات المتحدة والإمارة العربية السعودية. ولكني لا أتوقع أن تقلق المشاركات نفسك أي أنك أو فوات مساهمة لمشاركتك في هذه الدراسة. لكن مشاركتك قد تساعدني على فهم الاطبابات الطلاب السعوديين في الولايات المتحدة من الجنسين تجاه تجربة التعليم المختلط، وعما إذا كانت تصوراتهم وخبراتهم تختلف وفقا لجنسهم.

الحق في الرفض أو الانسحاب:

مشاركتك في هذه الدراسة تعتبرا تطوعا، ولا احق الانسحاب في أي وقت خلال المقابلة دون أي تداعيات من أي نوع، وسوف تبقى هويتك سرية في جميع الأحوال.
جمع البيانات بسهولة مستعارة وسرية تامة:

المقابلة وجمع البيانات والتوثيق والعرض تكون بسرية تامة. وفي جميع مراحل الدراسة والاتصالات

سأشير لك فقط من خلال الاسم المستعار الذي اخترتته لنفسك. سوف تكون هويتك وجميع المعلومات الشخصية
المحددة غير معلومة لأحد، وسيتم الحفاظ عليها في مجلد مغلق على جهاز كمبيوتر شخصي آمن. ولن يطلع أحد آخر
عليها وسوف يتم التخلص من الوثائق التي تسجلها عن هويتك، وبالتالي أنا لن أشير إلى العلاقة بين اسمك المستعار
وهويتك الخاصة بأن كل من الأشكال. إذا اختترت أن توافق وتوقع على هذا النموذج، من فضلكأمضينا باستخدام
اسم مستعار من اختيارك، وليس اسمك الحقيقي. سيتم عرض ردودك وإجاباتك أثناء الدراسة بطريقة لن تكشف عن
هويتك أو هوية الآخرين بالتالي لا أحد سيكون قادرًا على ربط ردوودك بهويتك الحقيقية.

سرية السجلات:

هويتك، وجميع المعلومات الشخصية سوف تكون غير معلومة لأحد. تسجيل هذه المقابلة ونسخ ردوودك
وجميع الملفات الأخرى المتعلقة بك سيسجلها وتخزينها بالاسم المستعار الذي اخترتته لنفسك وحفظها إلكترونياً في مجلد
مغلق بكلمة مرور خاصة على جهاز كمبيوتر شخصي آمن، ولن يدخلها أحد آخر.

الصوت وتصوير الفيديو:

إذا اختترت أن تمنحني موافقتك على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة، سوف أسجل المقابلة باستخدام مسجل
صوتي رقمي وهذا التسجيل الصوتي سيكون بيني أنا الباحث والمشارك فقط. ولن تستخدم التسجيلات لأي غرض
آخر يخالف هذه الدراسة. وبعد الانتهاء من هذه الدراسة، سوف أترك الحفاظ على أي شرائح صوتية أو
تسجيلات.

عند وجود سوال:

إذا كان لديك أسئلة حول هذه الدراسة يمكنك الاتصال بي، نادية الرفاعي (الباحثة)، على البريد الإلكتروني
naa41@zips.uakron.edu أو البريد الإلكتروني smacdonald @ uakron.edu

تم عرض هذا المشروع والموافقة عليه من قبل مجلس المراجعة المؤسسي جامعة أكرون. إذا كان لديك أي
أسئلة حول حقوقك كمشارك في البحث، يمكنك الاتصال بIRB (على 330) 972-7666.

القبول والتوقيع:

لقد قررت المعلومات الواردة أعلاه وجميع أستنائي تم الرد عليها. وأنا أتفق طوعاً للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة.
وسوف احتفظ على نسخة من نموذج الموافقة هذا لمعلوماتي.

اسم المشارك المستعار
التاريخ

.............................................. ..............................................
APPENDIX F

THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS AND QUESTIONS IN ENGLISH

From Singular to Mixed: A comparative Study of the Perceptions of Male and Female Saudi students at The University of Akron in Adapting to the Coeducation Experience.

The Protocols

Before beginning the interview, I ask that you read the Informed Consent form, which is available in either Arabic or English, and sign it with your chosen pseudonym. If you have any questions or reservations to the study, interview or questions, feel free to ask me and talk to me, and you have the option to withdraw your consent at any point during the interview.

During the interview, I will ask you to describe thoughts, perceptions and experiences that are related to the coeducation experience, and to refer from disclosing any identifying information. I will ask you a series of questions that will cover three different periods; (1) prior to beginning studies in the United States, (2) during the first month and semester as student of an educational program in the United States, and (3) the present. In addition to the main questions of the interview, I may ask you questions such as, Can you tell me more about this experience? How did this make you feel? Can you give me an example?

You have the choice of conducting the interview in either Arabic or English. The interview will be recorded by using a digital recorder and will be later transcribed and analyzed by the investigator. The recordings and transcriptions will be saved in a secure personal computer in a locked folder, and will be erased post to the completion of the study. Only the investigator will have access to the computer and folder, and the investigator will preserve the privacy and confidentiality of the participants’ personal information. I anticipate that the interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

Pseudonym: ..........................................................................................................

Time Spent in the United States: .................................................................

Current Program: ...........................................................................................

Interviewer: ........................................................................................................

Date: ...................................................................................................................

Time: ...................................................................................................................

Location: ............................................................................................................

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The Questions

First, I would like to know your thoughts, perceptions and expectations regarding studying in the United States, before you left Saudi Arabia:

I) What are your thoughts of the educational system and experience in the U.S.?
II) What are your thoughts on coeducation in general?
III) What challenges or stressors did you anticipate experiencing as a student in the U.S.?
IV) How did you perceive the experience of studying in a coeducation environment?
V) With regards to your initial perception of coeducation in the United States, were there specific situations you expected to experience but wished to avoid?
VI) During that period, what strategies had you considered using if you were to experience these situations?

Secondly, I would like to ask you about your experiences during the first month and semester as a student in the United States:

I) How did you feel on your first day of class in the United States?
II) Can you please describe your first interaction with a non-Saudi student from the opposite gender in a class related activity?
III) How would you describe your reaction to this interaction?
IV) What impact did your initial perceptions and expectations of experiencing a coeducation have on that first interaction?
V) Can you please describe your first interaction with a Saudi student from the opposite gender in a class related activity?
VI) How would you describe your reaction to this interaction?
VII) How did it feel to attend a class with a teacher from the opposite gender for the first time?
VIII) What impact did these interactions have on your future relations and interactions with the opposite gender during the program?
IX) Were these experiences consistent to your initial expectations of how the experience would be?
X) Please describe any problems you had experienced during your first semester that were related to your interactions with students of the opposite sex?
XI) How did you deal with these problems?
XII) Was the way you dealt with these problems different from the strategies you had considered using before beginning your studies in the United States?
XIII) During your first month as a student in the United States, if you had been assigned to a study group and given the choice to choose the group, which of the following groups would you have preferred to join, and why:
   a) Same-sex students of any nationality,
   b) Same-sex Saudi students
   c) Same-sex students from countries other than Saudi Arabia.
   d) Opposite-sex students of any nationality,
   e) Opposite-sex Saudi students
   f) Opposite-sex students from countries other than Saudi Arabia.
   g) Mixed-sex students of any nationality,
h) Mixed-sex Saudi students  
i) Mixed-sex students from countries other than Saudi Arabia.

XIV) How would you describe your reaction towards the experience of attending a coeducation program during your first month as a student in the United States?

XV) What factors do you believe had the most impact on your mentioned attitude?

Finally, I would like to ask you about your current thoughts and recent experiences.

I) How do you feel about attending a coeducation program now?

II) Do you believe that your initial reaction to co-education has now changed, why or why not?

III) When did your position change? Or, do you expect that your position on coeducation will ever change, and if so then when do you expect it to change? And if you do not expect it to change then why not?

IV) How did/will you change your initial stance on coeducation?

V) If, and during this semester, you were to be assigned to a study group and given the choice to choose the group, which of the following groups would you have preferred to join, and why:

a) Same-sex students of any nationality,  
b) Same-sex Saudi students  
c) Same-sex students from countries other than Saudi Arabia.  
d) Opposite-sex students of any nationality,  
e) Opposite-sex Saudi students  
f) Opposite-sex students from countries other than Saudi Arabia.  
g) Mixed-sex students of any nationality,  
h) Mixed-sex Saudi students  
i) Mixed-sex students from countries other than Saudi Arabia.

VI) Describe your current thoughts concerning interacting and learning in a coeducation environment?

VII) If you were of the opposite sex, do you think that your thoughts, perceptions and experiences would be the same? Why and why not?

VIII) As of today, if you were given the choice to transfer to a single sex program as opposed to continuing in a coeducation program, which would you prefer?

IX) If you were offered a choice between two jobs in the United States; one in a single sex setting, and the other in a mixed sex setting, which would you prefer? And why?

X) If you were offered a choice between two jobs in Saudi Arabia; one in a single sex setting, and the other in a mixed sex setting, which would you prefer? And why?
دراسة مقارنة انطباعات الطلاب السعوديين الإناث والذكور الدارسين في جامعة أكرن تجاه تجربة التأقلم مع التعليم المختلط

المقابلة:

بداية سيتم طلب موافقة المشارك لإجراء المقابلة الشخصية، ومن ثم سيتم تسجيل هذه المقابلة لاستخدامها في الدراسة. سيطلب من المشاركين وصف أفكارهم وتصوراتهم وخبراتهم تجاه تجربة التعليم المختلط. الأسئلة في هذه المقابلة ستغطي ثلاث مراحل؛ (1) مرحلة ما قبل بداية الدراسة في الولايات المتحدة، (2) أثناء الشهر الأول أو الفصل الدراسي الأول كطالب في برنامج تعليمي في الولايات المتحدة، و (3) في الوقت الحاضر. بالإضافة إلى الأسئلة الرئيسية للمقابلة، قد يسأل الباحث المشارك أسئلة أخرى وفقًا لإجابة(ها) مثل، هل يمكن أن تخبرني المزيد عن هذه التجربة؟ ما هي مشاعرك تجاه هذا الأمر؟ هل يمكن أن تعطي مثالاً؟

سيتم تخريج المشارك بين إجراء المقابلة باللغة العربية أو الإنجليزية. سوف تجرى المقابلة في مكتبة بيرس في جامعة أكرن، وتوقع الباحث أن تستمر المقابلة لحوالي 60 دقيقة.

سيتم تسجيل المقابلة باستخدام جهاز تسجيل رقمي بالإضافة إلى الكتابة اليدوية من قبل الباحث. سيتم حفظ التسجيلات والمدونات في جهاز كمبيوتر شخصي آمن في ملف مغلق. سوف يكون الوصول إلى الكمبيوتر والمجلدات من قبل الباحث فقط، وسيتم الحفاظ على سرية التامة لمعلومات المشاركين.

الاسم المستعار: ..................................
مدة الإقامة في الولايات المتحدة: ..................
البرنامج الدراسي الحالي: ..................
الباحث: ...........................................
التاريخ: ............................................
الوقت: ............................................
المكان: .............................................


APPENDIX G
THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS AND QUESTIONS IN ARABIC

من تعليم منفصل إلى تعليم مختلط:
دراسة مقارنة انطباعات الطلاب السعوديين الإناث والذكور الدارسين في جامعة أكرن

تحاول تجربة التأقلم مع التعليم المختلط

المقابلة:

بداية سيتم طلب موافقة المشارك لإجراء المقابلة الشخصية، ومن ثم سيتم تسجيل هذه المقابلة لاستخدامها في الدراسة. سيطلب من المشاركين وصف أفكارهم وتصوراتهم وخبراتهم تجاه تجربة التعليم المختلط. الأسئلة في هذه المقابلة ستغطي ثلاث مراحل؛ (1) مرحلة ما قبل بداية الدراسة في الولايات المتحدة، (2) أثناء الشهر الأول أو الفصل الدراسي الأول كطالب في برنامج تعليمي في الولايات المتحدة، و (3) في الوقت الحاضر. بالإضافة إلى الأسئلة الرئيسية للمقابلة، قد يسال الباحث المشارك أسئلة أخرى وفقًا لإجابة(ها) مثل، هل يمكن أن تخبرني المزيد عن هذه التجربة؟ ما هي مشاعرك تجاه هذا الأمر؟ هل يمكن أن تعطي مثالاً؟

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الاسم المستعار: ..................................
مدة الإقامة في الولايات المتحدة: ..................
البرنامج الدراسي الحالي: ..................
الباحث: ...........................................
التاريخ: ............................................
الوقت: ............................................
المكان: .............................................


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الأسئلة:
أولاً، أود أن أعرف أفكارك وتصوراتك وتوقعاتك بشأن الدراسة في الولايات المتحدة، في فترة ما قبل مغادرتك المملكة العربية السعودية:
(1) ماذا كانت أفكارك وخبراتك (معلوماتك) تجاه النظام التعليمي في الولايات المتحدة؟
(2) ماذا كانت أفكارك الأولية حول التعليم المختلط بشكل عام؟
(3) ما هي التحديات أو الضغوطات التي توقعت أن تواجهها كطالب في الولايات المتحدة؟
(4) كيف كنت تصور أن تكون تجربة الدراسة في بيئة التعليم المختلط؟
(5) أثناء تصورك الأولي لتجربة التعليم المختلط في الولايات المتحدة من السؤال السابق، هل كانت هناك حالات أو صعوبات محددة توقعت أن تواجهها وترغب في تجنبها؟
(6) ولو افترضت أنك ستعايش تلك الصعوبات أو التحديات، ما هي الاستراتيجيات التي فكرت باستخدامها في حال لو واجهت تلك الحالات؟
ثانياً، أود أن أسألك عن أفكارك خبراتك خلال الشهر الأول والفصل الدراسي الأول كطالب/ة في الولايات المتحدة:
(1) كيف كان شعورك في أول يوم دراسي في الولايات المتحدة؟
(2) أوصف أول تفاعل لك مع طلاب غير سعوديين من الجنس الآخر في نشاط متعلق بالدرس؟
(3) كيف يمكنك وصف أفكارك وردك فعلك تجاه هذا التفاعل؟
(4) ما هو أثر تصوراتك الأولية وتوقعاتك عن التعليم المختلط على هذا التفاعل الأول؟
(5) أوصف أول تفاعل لك مع طلاب سعوديين من الجنس الآخر في نشاط متعلق بالدرس؟
(6) كيف يمكنك وصف أفكارك وردك فعلك تجاه هذا التفاعل؟
(7) ما هو شعورك تجاه حضور صف المدرس فيه من الجنس الآخر لأول مرة؟
(8) كيف كان كل هذه التفاعلات السابقة على بقية علاقاتك وتفاعلكم مع الجنس الآخر خلال مدة دراستك في البرنامج؟
(9) هل كانت هذه التجارب تتفق مع توقعاتك الأولية لما ستكون عليه تجربة التعليم المختلط؟
(10) من فضلك أوصف لي أي مشاكل واجهتك خلال الفصل الدراسي الأول فيما يتعلق بتعاملك مع الطلاب من الجنس الآخر؟
(11) كيف تعاملت مع هذه المشاكل؟
(12) هل كانت طريقة عملك مع هذه المشاكل مختلفة عن الاستراتيجيات التي فكرت باستخدامها قبل بداية دراستك في الولايات المتحدة؟
(13) لنفترض أن وخلال الشهر الأول لك كطالب في الولايات المتحدة تم تعيينك للعمل في مجموعة واعتيت الحرية لاختيار المجموعة. إلى أي مجموعة من المجموعات التالية كنت ستفضل الانضمام إليها؟ ولم؟
أ) مجموعة طلاب من نفس الجنس من أي جنسية سعودية أو غيرها.
ب) مجموعة طلاب من نفس الجنس ويكونون طلبة سعوديين،
ج) مجموعة طلاب من نفس الجنس من بلدان أخرى غير المملكة العربية السعودية،
د) مجموعة طلاب من الجنس الآخر من أي جنسية،
ه) مجموعة طلاب من الجنس الآخر سعوديين،
و) مجموعة طلاب من الجنس الآخر من بلدان أخرى غير المملكة العربية السعودية.
ز) مجموعة طلاب مختلطة الجنسان (إناث وذكور) من أي جنسية،
ح) مجموعة طلاب مختلطة الجنسان (إناث وذكور) من المملكة العربية السعودية.
ط) مجموعة طلاب مختلطة الجنسان (إناث وذكور) من بلدان أخرى غير المملكة العربية السعودية.

كيف تصف أفكارك وردة فعلك تجاه تجربة الدراسة في بيئة التعليم المختلط أثناء الشهر الأول لك كطالب في الولايات المتحدة؟ (XIV)
ما هي العوامل أو الظروف التي تعتقد كان لها أكبر تأثير على موقفك المذكور؟ (XV)

وأخيراً، أود أن أسألك عن أفكارك الحالية وتجاربك الحديثة.

كيف هو شعورك حالياً تجاه الدراسة في بيئة تعليم مختلط؟ (I)
هل تعتقد أن أفكارك وردة فعلك الأولي تجاه التعليم المختلط تغير الأثنان عن السابق، لماذا أو لماذا لا؟ (II)
اختر السؤال المناسب أداً بناءً على جوابك للسؤال السابق:
إذا كنت قد تغيرت أفكارك وردة فعلك عن السابق، فمتى لاحظت تغيير؟ (III)
أو إن كانت أفكارك وردة فعلك لم تتغير قبل أن توقع أن موقفك من التعليم المختلط سيتغير لاحقاً؟ وإذا كان الأمر كذلك، فمتى وتحت أي ظروف؟ وإذا كنت تتوقع أن موقفك لن يتغير، فلنفترض أن تغيرت أفكارك وردة فعلك في التعليم المختلط؟ (IV)

إذا كنت تتوقع أن موقفك من التعليم المختلط سيتغير لاحقاً، فمتى وتحت أي ظروف؟ وإذا كنت تتوقع أن موقفك لن يتغير، فلنفترض أن تغيرت أفكارك وردة فعلك في التعليم المختلط؟ (V)

إذا كانت أفكارك وردة فعلك لم تتغير حتى الآن، أي مجموعة من المجموعات التالية كنت ستفضل الانضمام إليها؟ ولم؟:
أ) مجموعة طلاب من نفس الجنس من أي جنسية سعودية أو غيرها,
ب) مجموعة طلاب من نفس الجنس ويكونون طلبة سعوديين,
ج) مجموعة طلاب من نفس الجنس من بلدان أخرى غير المملكة العربية السعودية,
د) مجموعة طلاب من الجنس الآخر من أي جنسية,
ه) مجموعة طلاب من الجنس الآخر سعوديين,
و) مجموعة طلاب من الجنس الآخر من بلدان أخرى غير المملكة العربية السعودية,
ز) مجموعة طلاب مختلطة الجنسان (إناث وذكور) من أي جنسية,
ح) مجموعة طلاب مختلطة الجنسان (إناث وذكور) من المملكة العربية السعودية,
ط) مجموعة طلاب مختلطة الجنسان (إناث وذكور) من بلدان أخرى غير المملكة العربية السعودية.

صف لي أفكارك الحالية المتعلقة بالتفاعل والتعلم في بيئة التعليم المختلط؟ (VI)
لم كنت من الجنس الآخر، هل تعتقد أن أفكارك وتصوراتك وخبراتك ستكون هي نفسها؟ لماذا أو لماذا لا؟ (VII)
بالنسبة إلى أفكارك وانطباعاتك الحالية تجاه التعليم المختلط، إذا أعطيت الخيار الانتقال للدراسة في برنامج منفصلين الجنسين بدلاً من الاستمرار في برنامج التعليم المختلط، أيهما تفضل؟ (VIII)
بالنسبة إلى أفكارك وانطباعاتك الحالية تجاه التعليم المختلط، إذا عرض عليك الاختيار بين وظيفتين في الولايات المتحدة؛ أحدهما في موقع غير مختلط الجنسين، والآخر في موقع مختلط، أيهما تفضل؟ ولماذا؟

بالنسبة إلى أفكارك وانطباعاتك الحالية تجاه التعليم المختلط، إذا عرض عليك الاختيار بين وظيفتين في المملكة العربية السعودية؛ أحدهما في موقع غير مختلط الجنسين، والآخر في موقع مختلط، أيهما تفضل؟ ولماذا؟

انتهت الأسئلة، وأشكرك على مشاركتك في هذه الدراسة مع أمنياتي لك بالتوفيق.