

University of Cincinnati

Date: 7/14/2021

I, Faisal Alsanea, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology.

It is entitled:

A STUDY OF HOW SAUDI COUPLES NAVIGATE THE CHANGING GENDER ENVIRONMENT IN SAUDI ARABIA

Student's name: **Faisal Alsanea**

This work and its defense approved by:

Committee chair: Annulla Linders, Ph.D.

Committee member: Derrick Brooms, Ph.D.

Committee member: Erynn Casanova, Ph.D.



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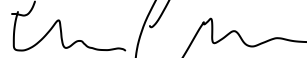
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A STUDY OF HOW SAUDI COUPLES NAVIGATE THE CHANGING GENDER ENVIROMENT IN SAUDI ARABIA

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Cincinnati

In partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Sociology

College of Arts and Sciences

By

Faisal Alsanea

July 5, 2021

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Annulla Linders, Department of Sociology (Chair)

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the views of Saudi Arabian couples concerning the changing gender environment in Saudi Arabia. Extant research on Saudi Arabia has examined some aspects of the gender environment, but no studies examine how couples navigate the changing gender environment differently depending on their experiences with and exposure to a changing gender environment. This study extends previous research by focusing on how differently situated couples navigate gender roles. Based on qualitative interviews with 55 Saudi couples (29 traveled and 26 non-traveled; 29 living in urban areas and 26 living in rural areas), three broad strategies emerged. First, Social Strategies capture how couples navigate social life in Saudi Arabia, with a special focus on experiences with mixed-gender environments. Second, Familial Strategies capture how couples navigate gender roles in the household. Finally, the chapter on Vision 2030 and Gender Relations addresses how couples think about and navigate the recent easing of gender-based restrictions. This chapter addresses some important changes (e.g., women driving and women's employment in Saudi Arabia). Taken together, the findings generally support previous research. But the focus on how couples navigate gender roles together provides new insights into how the gender environment is changing. Most importantly, the study finds that urban couples and rural couples adopt different approaches when it comes to navigating gender roles. Most rural couples take a traditional approach to navigating gender roles while urban couples are more open to a non-traditional approach to gender roles. Moreover, and most significantly, couples who have traveled to Western countries are generally more flexible when it comes to gender roles, but not uniformly so.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, male, and female roles were different from their present-day. Women were not treated equally in the past; however, now gender expectations are changing. The aspect of how couples negotiate and manage the gender context, both individually and socially, has also changed. Many scholars have demonstrated the importance of gender for relationship dynamics and for how inequality between men and women in terms of family, childrearing, divorce, work, income, promotions, and roles within society.

Gender roles are based on behavioral expectations that are set by societies for individuals or groups and it is determined by their biological sex (Blackstone 2003). Gender socialization is a role that is taught in childhood and raised as a family value; it is also considered as dividing people into two different categories, male and female, who behave according to these differences (Ferree et al. 1999; Glenn 1999; Lorber 1994; Ridgeway 1997; Risman 1998). Ridgeway & Correll (2004) emphasize that gender is like other social divisions, such as race and class: gender involves cultural beliefs and social relations that are affected by changes in gender roles. Cultural beliefs define and characterize men and women in terms of how they are expected to behave (Ridgeway & Correll 2004). Gender inequality characterizes most social institutions, including family, education, and the workplace. Although the changes are more likely to be favorable for women compared to men, changes have affected couples' lifestyles (Hochschild & Machung 1989). Before women's rights emerged to aspire to equality in the 1960s and 70's many husbands are unable to see themselves as equally responsible for work in the home because wives have been responsible for the household work (Bianchi et al. 2006). Ridgeway & Correll (2004) emphasize that this perception has contributed to a problem: while many women work full-time jobs, they also manage and perform most household chores and childcare. Gender perceptions around family and work have contributed

to binary views of men's and women's domains and roles (Hochschild & Machung 1989).

Historical changes in gender roles, gender expectations, and gender opportunities have had wide-ranging consequences not only for the lives of women (and men) but also for the relationships between men and women.

When it comes to Saudi Arabia, the issue of gender segregation has been discussed at international summits many times. One of the international summits held in the United States in June 2000 included representatives from 180 different nations from all over the globe who discussed the sensitive issue of gender inequality. Among these 180 nations, Saudi Arabia was ranked 129th in terms of gender segregation and inequality (Alsaleh 2009). Men in Saudi Arabia are more likely to adopt a dominant role in the society, women are required to be obedient to men. Saudi Arabia is the sole nation that indicate differences in the roles of women and men in the society (Almunajjed 1997). Men are more interacting with men and women are likely to be comfortable dealing with women. Moreover, Saudi Arabia is a country where family responsibilities, religious faith, and cultural practices that reflect religion from every aspect, are the top priorities for every citizen (Levy 2011).

When looking at women's rights and freedom, this has come into priority in the previous five decades across the globe. Even though it was in the nineteenth century when the issues regarding women rights began to be addressed internationally, it gained great focus in the post-war era (Berkovitch & Bradley 1999). In most advanced countries, the role of women has been acknowledged by offerings opportunities and address their important roles in the society. As the modernization is spreading across the globe, most women in the middle east have struggled a lot for the acquisition of basic rights especially in the employment sector. Under the statement of Holy Qur'an, knowledge-gaining is an obligation for every Muslim, either male or female, and in 1961 the government of Saudi Arabia has established the General Presidency of Girl's Education (Al Saloom, 1995, as cited

by Hofer 2009). Its mission is, to provide proper education to Saudi girls. This step laid the foundation for the development of sixteen elementary schools (Hofer 2009, Doumato 1999).

This dissertation will draw on a range of scholarship that addresses various aspects of how gender matters and is negotiated in couples. In marriage, couples negotiate household labor, childcare, and decision-making, and how the socio-historical gender context matters for such negotiations. Gender ideologies matter in various ways for how couples manage and experience family life. Furthermore, scholarship on various forms of inter-marriage (across class, race, religion, etc) demonstrates that different gender assumptions can cause tensions in relationships. Finally, the literature on trans-cultural migration suggests that gender is an important factor in how couples manage a new environment. Taken together, these bodies of literature provide insight into how gender is negotiated within couples. However, when it comes to how couples negotiate the external gender environment as a couple, we know significantly less. In this dissertation, I will draw on Goffman's notion of teams to investigate how husband and wife teams manage and negotiate gender as couples; that is, how they present themselves as couples (Goffman, 1959). One of Goffman's examples involves the performance of a middle-class couple in front of an audience:

In our society, when a husband and wife appear before new friends for an evening of sociability, the wife may demonstrate more respectful subordination to the will and opinion of her husband than she may bother to show when alone with him or when with old friends. When she assumes a respectful role, he can assume a dominant one; and when each member of the marriage team plays its special role, the conjugal unit, as a unit, can sustain the impression that new audiences expect of it. (1959:79)

In this example, the individual gender performances of the wife and the husband align perfectly with the performance of an appropriately gendered middle-class couple. But the example

also points to numerous ways in which such performances can go awry, linked to both individual performances and the expectations of various audiences.

This study aims to enhance our understanding of how couples negotiate gender, not just among themselves, but also in relation to the social world they take part in, as couples. Specifically, I examine how Saudi couples negotiate the changing gender environment in terms of their social structure. The study will examine couples who studied abroad and returned back to Saudi Arabia and the other set of couples are the ones who have not traveled to Western countries. The purpose of this research is to explore how the changing gender environment effect married Saudi couples who returned home from the U.S. In addition, this research shows how couples who have not traveled abroad, perceive the recent changes to the gender environment in Saudi Arabia. Originating from a conservative society and then adapting to the gender environment in the U.S. and how this adaptation affected them when they returned to their country. More specifically, this study will examine how participants navigate the new gender environment in Saudi Arabia whether they come from urban or rural cities.

Table. 1 Definition of Terms

Sharia Look	When couples meet each other for the first time to see if they are compatible with each other to proceed with the marriage (Ahmed 2009).
Nuclear Family	A family that consists of two biological parents and their children (Alanazi 2014)
Extended Family	A family that usually includes more than one generation, it also includes aunts, uncles, and cousins (Alanazi 2014).
Urban Communities	Modern societies that have more literate people, and mostly live-in large cities with industrial aspect (Hamdan 1990).
Rural Communities	Traditional societies that have some illiterate people, and live-in small cities with agricultural resources (Hamdan 1990)
Saudi Vision 2030	A Saudi vision that was launched on 25 April 2016. The main aim to reduce the dependency on oil and develop other economic resources (Saudi Vision 2030 2020).
Jumaa Day	The Friday Prayer, and it refers to when Muslims gather and warship during Friday midday prayer. It is also followed with a sermon (khutbah), most Muslim countries set Friday as the beginning of the weekend (The Pluralism Project 2020).
Ramadan's Nights	Ramadan is the ninth month of Muslim colander, and it is the month of fasting. During these holy nights' families gather on Iftar (breakfast after fasting), and Suhur (the meal to eat before fasting) (Britannica 2021).

CHAPTER. II THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Traditionally, in Saudi Arabia male and female roles were quite different from the way they are in the present day. Women were not treated equally in the past, and they are not now in some ways; however, gender expectations are changing, and how couples negotiate and manage the gender context, both individually and socially, has changed. Many scholars have demonstrated the importance of gender relationship dynamics and how equality issues between men and women strongly affect family, childrearing, divorce, work, income, promotions, and roles within the whole society.

Gender roles are based on behavioral expectations that are set by societies for individuals or groups, and these roles are determined by one's biological sex (Blackstone 2003). Gender socialization is a role that is taught in childhood and socialized as a family value; it is considered as dividing people into two distinct and different categories, male, and female, who behave according to these differences (Ferree et al. 1999; Glenn 1999; Lorber 1994; Ridgeway 1997; Risman 1998). Ridgeway and Correll (2004) emphasize that gender is like other social divisions, such as race and class: gender involves cultural beliefs and social relations that are affected by changes in gender roles. Cultural beliefs define and characterize men and women in terms of how they are expected to behave (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Gender inequality characterizes most social institutions, including family, education, and the workplace. Although gender role changes are more likely to be favorable for women rather than for men, changes in these roles have strongly affected couples' lifestyles (Hochschild and Machung 1989). Before women's rights emerged to encourage women to aspire to equality in the 1960s and 70's, many husbands were unable to see themselves as equally responsible for work in the home because wives had long been responsible for the household work (Bianchi et al. 2006). Ridgeway and Correll (2004) emphasize that the perception that women are

responsible for household tasks has contributed to a problem: while many women work full-time jobs outside the home, they also manage and perform the majority of household chores and childcare. Gender perceptions around family and work have contributed to binary views of men's and women's domains and roles (Hochschild and Machung 1989). Historical changes in gender roles, gender expectations, and gender opportunities have had wide-ranging consequences not only for the individual lives of women (and men), but also for the relationships between them.

In this section, I will examine the literature which in various ways addresses how couples negotiate gender. I intend to review and explore the dimensions on which couples' negotiations have been changing and how they socially and individually negotiate gender roles. Through this analysis of existing scholarship, I will examine how the changes in gender roles of women and their involvement in social, political, and economic environments affect their presence in the context of the couple (Moen and Wethington 1992).

2.1 Scholarship on Gender and Couples

Here I review a wide range of the literature that explores how couples negotiate gender in several aspects, especially the ways that couples negotiate gender roles in terms of household labor and childcare. A substantial body of literature examines couples and gender processes, and many studies have shown how gender impacts most aspects of couples' lives. Specifically, these areas include variations of gender ideology (Davis and Greenstein 2009), the division of household labor (Davis and Greenstein 2009), and childcare (Coltrane 1989). Despite a significant change in some areas, many studies highlight the enduring power of traditional gender role expectations and the challenges couples face when trying to manage and perform gender roles (Davis and Greenstein 2009). One of the crucial areas that scholars consider in the negotiation of gender and gender roles

is the context within families. Below I focus more narrowly on couples' gender roles in terms of ideology and marriage, decision-making, household labor, and childcare.

A. Gender Ideology and Marriage

In this section, I examine the theoretical perspectives about gender ideology and marriage and how couples negotiate their roles. I begin to place the current issue in context by reviewing some background about these issues in the United States.

The labor force in the United States changed in terms of who engages in paid work and family responsibility, especially during the period of the 1960s through the mid-1970s (Bianchi et al. 2006). Going back a little farther, from 1950 to 1986, the number of women participating in the workforce increased by 25 percent, and this change has affected their gender roles (Hochschild and Machung 1989). Public opinion polls showed concern regarding these changes in the labor force and how they might affect mothers with young children. One early survey was conducted in the mid-1960s to measure the concerns of families who were changing their perceptions regarding the traditional split in opinions on paid and unpaid work (Cherlin and Walters 1981). This included the perception of men being the breadwinners and women the homemakers (Cherlin and Walters 1981; Chodorow 1978; Mason et al. 1976). The survey showed hesitation to employ women with young children at home in the labor force (Hochschild and Machung 1989). The majority of women in 1964 indicated that they felt that women who were employed at that time were less likely to have a warm relationship with their children (Hochschild and Machung 1989). Even in the 1970s, roughly 70 percent of women held these attitudes. In spite of the negative opinion that many held about having women work outside the home, the U.S. labor force indicated in the mid-1990s that mothers continued to work in full and part-time employment (Mason et al. 1976). This suggests that because of the historical changes in attitudes Americans have grown more comfortable with the involvement

of women and mothers in the labor force. They are also more comfortable with men sharing household responsibilities (Bolzendahl and Mayers 2004).

Since the women's rights movement during the 1970s, gender attitudes have changed drastically. To understand how couples negotiate gender roles, we have to understand gender ideology. "Gender ideology" refers to the attitudes regarding the appropriate roles, rights, and responsibilities of men and women within the society (Davis and Greenstein 2009). The concept of gender ideology refers to attitudes in specific areas, such as economic, legal, political, or social domains. Gender ideology refers to "the justification of gender statuses, particularly, their differential evaluation. The dominant ideology tends to suppress criticism by making these evaluations seem natural" (Lorber 1994:30). Gender ideology constructs cover a wide range of attitudes from traditional, conservative, or anti-feminist to egalitarian, liberal, or feminist (Lorber 1994). Traditional gender ideologies emphasize the value of distinctive roles between men and women. In a traditional ideology, for instance, men are more likely to fulfill their roles in the family by being the breadwinners. Traditional ideology for women says that women fulfill their roles through homemaking and parenting activities (Wilcox and Dew 2008). Egalitarian ideologies regarding family tend to value men's and women's equal and shared responsibilities from breadwinning to nurturing roles. The final position on the spectrum of gender ideological positions is liberalism. This position favors married men's contributing to housework and childcare and negatively correlates with the assumption that housework should be solely women's contribution (Lorber 1994).

Gender ideology shapes the spouses' perceptions of marriage. Researchers have created terms to characterize couples' attitudes about gender ideology and gender roles. For example, Hochschild and Machung (1989) created a simple and clear method for categorizing the gender

roles according to data gleaned from interviews and participant observation. Interviews with individuals produced categories of ideologies now labelled as traditional, transitional, and egalitarian (Hochschild and Machung 1989). The main challenge in categorizing gender ideologies lies in the contradictions between what people claim to believe and how they behave. Hochschild and Machung (1989) assert that many fathers believe that they run their homes in an egalitarian style, while mothers believe that fathers run the house in a traditional style. This shows the contradiction between what couples believe and what they practice—how the households actually run. Another example of how couples think differently about sharing responsibilities occurs when, for example, a father takes the children to a baseball game three days a week and believes that this is like sharing childcare responsibilities with his wife. On the other hand, when the wife spends most of her time with the children, it would not be considered as sharing responsibilities, it is rather a duty (Hochschild and Machung 1989).

Couples who adopt traditional ideologies believe women should be more responsible for household activities and that men should focus on their career advancement. *Traditional couples* also believe that men should have more power than their wives both inside and outside the house (Hochschild and Machung 1989). One of the areas that most traditional couples negotiate is the workload; especially couples in which husbands work fulltime while their wives are staying home (Milkie et al. 2009). The research conducted by Milkie et al. (2009) suggests that unemployed wives work the least amount of time compared to employed wives and that they take on a more traditional role in household and childcare, performing unpaid housework tasks much more than the wives employed outside the home do. *Transitional couples* are dual earners who attempt to share responsibilities at home. A transitional wife tends to help her husband to earn more money, and she also wants to be responsible for taking care of the house and children as well. Even though a

transitional wife has a desire to work outside of the house, she also believes that the husband is the primary wage earner. A transitional husband supports his wife in her desire to work and take care of the house and children as well (Milkie et al. 2009).

In measuring gender ideology categories, researchers use a variety of measurements to describe an individual's level of support for a division of paid work and family responsibilities that is based on separate spheres for husbands and wives. The literature suggests that gender ideologies have changed over time in terms of defining gender roles (Bianchi et al. 2000; Craig 2007; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Milkie et al. 2009; Sayer et al. 2009). The tasks and beliefs that fall under this ideology include the division of housework, women's attitude toward the housework division, and the fairness of this housework division among couples (Amato and Booth 1995). This is an overview of the topics that gender ideology categories touch on and the differences between them.

B. Gender and How Couples Make Decisions

Decision-making and power in households are important topics in understanding how couples negotiate gender roles (Connell 2005). In marriage, couples need to make decisions on issues such as housework and finances, and, if they have children, how to manage childcare.

Gender scholars have focused on the relationship between decision-making and power. The theoretical perspectives in terms of decision-making processes and how couples negotiate it suggest that in the past that men have had more power in decision-making in the marital relationship because they have had more economic resources, educational advantages, and occupational opportunities (Blood and Wolfe 1960). This theory suggests that some traditional husbands are more likely to have power in the decision-making process than their wives; however, more recent studies indicate increasing equality between couples in making decisions (Komter 1989). Emerging

changes involving women's participation in the labor force have affected the way men and women make decisions in marriage. Now, of course, many husbands consider women's decisions to be as important as their own (Davis and Greenstein 2009).

Power is the ability of one partner to influence the other's behavior through the ability to make decisions (Blood and Wolfe 1960). The majority of women are now employed in the labor force, and about one-third of them are earning more than their spouses (Winkler et al. 2005). This participation in the labor force has increased women's power not only in the workplace but in the home as well. Employed women do less housework, get more childcare assistance from their spouses, and have greater control over financial decisions; however, their employment in the labor force has not yet equalized their balance of power relative to men (Bianchi et al. 2000; Pyke, 1994; Sayer, 2005). The gender perspective addresses the decision-making power that results from social norms for appropriate behaviors and interactions (Ferree 1990; Martin 2004; Risman 2004; West and Zimmerman 1987).

Balancing power may be considered each spouse's contribution to the marriage. Power in marriage means whoever is contributing the most has a greater influence in making decisions (Blood and Wolfe 1960). On the other hand, the work of Fox and Murry (2000) indicates that when couples view their marriage as equal and their family roles as egalitarian, husbands are still likely to have more power in decision-making processes. This power is not always wielded overtly: in some cases, husbands have found subtle ways to set the direction of conversations, and this strategy will indirectly influence the decision-making processes (Fox and Murry 2000).

Decision-making processes have been addressed as a measure of relationship equality in the sociology literature on marriage and the family. Making decisions equally can be the most beneficial part of a relationship between couples; however, decision-making processes in

contemporary marriages have been divided with each spouse usually being the decision maker in his or her own sphere. Wives are more likely to make decisions concerning day-to-day activities, while husbands are the ones who more often make choices about major career options or resource allocation (Davis and Greenstein 2009). Even though equality is a major aspect to consider when looking at gender roles between couples, the crucial process of making decisions tends to divide some couples.

C. Gender and the Division of Household Labor

This section offers a review of scholarship on gender roles and the division of household labor and how the division of labor is negotiated by couples. Over the past 20 years, researchers have examined the effects of gender ideology on the division of labor between couples (Forster and Fox 2012). All of these studies examine the division of labor in heterosexual couples, focusing especially on the proportion of housework performed by women and how it is related to the gender ideology of women and men. Among these is work by Davis and Greenstein (2009), who discuss how couples negotiate gender roles in the division of household labor.

In the not-too-distant past, taking care of the family and performing household labor was the main domain of women, while men's domain was the workplace (Bartley et al. 2005). The increased number of women participating in the workforce has reduced the amount of time that most women have available for the family. This has created a need for couples to balance the demands of the workplace with the need to perform household labor. Couples have made some movement toward sharing household responsibilities. Dual-earner couples are more likely to share more family work than are couples where the husbands are the only breadwinners (Davis and Greenstein 2009). The basic tasks of running a home—cleaning, cooking, and taking care of children—are examples of household tasks that must be negotiated between couples. Although

contemporary couples tend to negotiate gender roles in terms of household labor, the overall trend shows that contemporary women tend to invest less time in domestic tasks, compared to women in previous decades (Bianchi et al. 2000). This trend has created some conflict about who is performing the household work if wives are doing less. The research has presented somewhat conflicting conclusions pertaining to what each gender is doing; some studies concluded that men's involvement in household labor has increased. However, husbands are more likely to overestimate their domestic involvement, many believing that they are more involved in household tasks than they are (Kamo 2000). The level of husbands' involvement in domestic tasks is related to economic dependence, as men who are married to women with equal earning power perform most of the housework (Greenstein 2000).

When it comes to dividing the household tasks, the husband's attitudes are relevant when the wife is an egalitarian. An egalitarian believes in the equality of all people, and while egalitarian husbands who are married to liberal wives perform most of the housework, men who are married to traditional wives perform the least housework. Gender ideologies play a role when couples negotiate participation in household labor. Some men believe that they *must* participate, and others prefer *not* to participate in household labor.

D. Gender and Childcare in Families

The last aspect to analyze in terms of gender ideologies with married couples is how couples negotiate gender roles in childcare. Taking care of children and housework has traditionally been considered a woman's responsibility, but women's involvement in the labor force has challenged and changed couples' traditional gender roles (Cotter et al. 2001; International Labour Office 2009). Changing these roles has resulted in some positive changes; among them is the fact that, generally, fathers' involvement in childbearing is linked positively with health outcomes in the social and

emotional development of their children (Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda 2004). Despite the significant increase in parental involvement in recent decades, fathers were still less likely to participate in childcare and housework (Gaertner et al. 2007), but the rapidly changing trends of women participating in the labor force have forced fathers to change; more fathers now participate in childcare and housework (Pleck and Masciadrelli 2004).

According to some scholars, couples' attitudes are changing because of the rapid changes in the gender system and in the developing views of the responsibilities of men and women (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Childcare is still mostly in women's hands, but their responsibilities as workers have increased. As a result, fathers tend to participate more in childcare (Pleck and Masciadrelli 2004). Negotiations among contemporary couples are different from traditional negotiations. If we were to compare traditional living arrangements and couples' negotiations, there would be several noticeable disconnects (Aldous et al. 1998). In the past, women were virtually servants when their husbands came home from their jobs; preparing food and taking care of children was their responsibility (Coltrane 1996). As Coltrane (1996) asked, why did not men do more? Traditionally, men's roles were restricted at home and their duties were limited. However, things are completely different for non-traditional couples: both husband and wife often work outside the home, and, when they come home, they are expected to serve the family together, instead of the wife serving everyone while the husband is resting.

Contemporary researchers have recognized the multi-dimensional nature of father involvement and their approaches to meeting their children's needs. Fathers are proven to be capable caregivers for their children (Gaertner et al. 2007). Moreover, the early development of the father's role is important for their children, especially right after the birth of their child. Empirical efforts also have helped in distinguishing between quantity and quality involvement (Laursen et al.

2004). In addition, some research suggests that the majority of less traditional fathers tend to spend more time in childcare and related activities. Egalitarian men's definitions of success are also related to their involvement in their children's lives (Coltrane 1989; Gerson 1993). Studies such as those of Aldous et al. (1998), Appelbaum et al. (2000), Bulanda (2004), Deutsch (1999), Gaunt (2006), and Ishii-Kuntz et al. (2004) have shown that fathers' gender ideology is associated with paternal involvement with childcare; other studies, such as the one by Marsiglio (1991), have suggested more specifically that less traditional fathers tend to spend more time in taking care of their children. The interviews in Marsiglio's (1991) research suggest that egalitarian men believe that taking care of their children is a better indicator of their success than their financial contribution to the household. In addition, fathers experience greater challenges when translating their egalitarian beliefs. Even though men are changing their perception of success to include the balance between work and family, they experience these limitations in workplace-created constraints (Deutsch 1999) While traditional women are more involved in their work, they tend to experience feelings of guilt about leaving their children and returning to work (Doucet 2009). They feel that they are pulled toward taking care of their children, while fathers are more likely to be pulled toward paid work.

In conclusion, mothers are still more likely to take care of children, even considering the recent changes in how women are involved in the labor force. Fathers are participating in childcare more since both parents' work. This sharing of responsibilities will create a balance of how both parents are involved in their children's lives. This section addressed how gender ideologies are perceived for couples and how they negotiate gender roles in terms of household labor and childcare. Considering the recent changes in how women participate in the labor force, gender roles

have changed a great deal since women began working more, and couples are more likely to negotiate gender roles when they are both working and earning.

2.2 Scholarship on how men and women Negotiate and Manage changes in the context of Intermarriage

The way couples negotiate gender roles is complicated by other differences such as race, class, and culture. This dissertation will address how these differences affect couples who marry across one of these lines. This section will cover the literature around racial intermarriage, class intermarriage, and intercultural intermarriage. It is important to examine each in order to see how couples navigate these intersections and challenges.

A. Racial Intermarriage

Racial and gender stereotypes have impacted some couples' life outcomes, such as job opportunities, housing, education, or gender roles in marriage. Because of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and the subsequent changes to laws in pursuit of achieving equality, cultural and social interactions have also changed (Omi and Winant 2015). Interracial marriage has become increasingly common in the United States. Specifically, the trend of black-white intermarriage has long been increasing (Lee and Bean 2010). This topic of interracial marriage has been the focus of many researchers who have examined interracial marriages and how such couples manage gender roles (Harris and Sim 2002), and it is the focus of this section as I analyze literature on interracial couples and discuss how the findings differ from those on same-race couples.

Many couples who are involved in interracial marriages deal with discriminatory behavior, experiencing disapproval from those who do not approve of their relationship. In addition to disapproval coming from others, interracial couples are more likely to experience stressors because of racism and gender roles than same-race couples are (Killian 2001), especially while racism still

plays a significant role in society (Anderson 2014). One qualitative study done by Rose and Firmin (2013) found that among 20 college students half of them expressed negative responses to interracial relationships. This suggests that even now, decades after the Civil Rights Movement, one of the challenges that interracial couples still face is the negative response from the community concerning their relationship. Societal pressures that interracial couples face may negatively impact their relationship (Killian 2001).

To understand how interracial couples negotiate gender roles, there is a need to consider how race impacts gender arrangements (Lareau 2003). Killian (2001) studied how gender plays a role in interracial relationships. But the limited research on interracial couples' gender roles reveals more similarities than differences: it showed that couples seem to choose one another based on the same homogeneity of characteristics as same-race couples (Harris and Kalbfleisch 2000). Interracial couples maintain their relationships similarly to the ways that same-race couples do (Harris and Kalbfleisch 2000). Most marriages face similar responsibilities and challenges between couples; however, in the United States, race has a significant impact on one's life, and this includes marriage (Harris and Kalbfleisch 2000). Despite the similar approaches to choices and habits listed above, marital interaction patterns are different in same-race White couples or same-race Black couples, and this raises the question of how those patterns manifest in interracial couples.

There are varied socializing practices and racial differences in Black and White families in terms of marital roles (Cunningham 2001; Dade and Sloan 2000; Hill and Thomas 2000). In parenting, Black couples tend to enforce fewer gendered expectations on their children regarding household and child-rearing tasks compared to White families (Hill 2002). While Black girls are socialized to be self-sufficient and assertive, Black boys are expected to participate in household labor (Hill and Thomas 2000). When it comes to White families, socialization is influenced by

traditional gender roles expectations. Such families are more likely to socialize their boys or girls in gender-specific roles for household labor (Cunningham 2001). These are examples of the different approaches of parenting among couples who are different in race.

For the gender roles, empirical work on race in gender roles attitudes has found that compared to European Americans, Black and Mexican Americans have more positive attitudes toward working wives, but, ironically, they endorse the traditional role of men as head of household and primary economic provider (Blee and Tickamyer 1995; Kane 1992; Taylor et al. 1999). Black men report more conservative attitudes about some of the gender role issues such as the responsibility for housework and achievement outside the home (Taylor et al. 1999). The racial differences in gender roles attitudes in the early stages of marriage where race is a silent determinant of the impact of social context variables, such as husband's participation in housework, the presence of children, and its impact on women's work (Taylor et al. 1999).

A study by Phillips and Sweeney (2006) indicates the marital stability among interracial couples. The study finds that interracial marriages are less stable than endogamous marriages. It is more likely that interracial couples will face challenges because of stress, social disapproval, and cultural differences (Phillips and Sweeney 2006; Zhang and Van Hook 2009). Killian (2001) suggests that partners from different races negotiate different identities based on race and gender and position themselves as insiders or outsiders within the society (Killian 2001). Moreover, interracial marriages are most likely to occur between Black and Whites groups (Qian and Lichter 2007).

When measuring interracial couples, estimates of the number of interracial couples have been distorted because of changes the U.S. Census made in the racial categorization section. In 2000, the Census presented the option for individuals to identify as belonging to more than one

race. This affected individuals who were negotiating their race self-identification in a less formal way (DaCosta 2007; Zhou 2004). Couples in an interracial marriage must also contend with race and gender power balance in terms of being aware of negative public reactions and concerns when making decisions about their children's opportunities in society. Over time, people's self-identification with race has changed, and they are more likely to blur the lines between racial categories. These are significant factors that interracial couples experience and that define their gender perception toward each other within a relationship (Killian 2001). These are some aspects that interracial couples deal with when negotiating gender roles as couples and parents. Looking at how interracial couples perceive gender roles differently from same-race couples emphasizes how race and gender roles intersect in marriage.

B. Class Intermarriage

Interclass marriages are on the rise in the United States. In this section, I address how cross-class couples negotiate gender roles. It is critical to identify families' social class, and individuals within families, since they experience different socioeconomic resources that impact their lifestyle (Streib 2015). One of the sociological theorists who addresses social class is Pierre Bourdieu (1990). His concept of habitus refers to everyday activities such as thinking, talking, and gesturing; however, it also has other dimensions, such as how people treat their bodies to show the disposition of habitus. Habitus includes family upbringing, educational experiences, and interactions with peers who help in shaping perceptions and feelings. Since individuals past experiences are unique for each of them, Bourdieu argues that some of the social aspects of those past experiences can be shared by others of the same social class. These similar experiences define a social group. Habitus and practices allow us to explain inequalities because the meanings attached to differences are hard to change.

Gender roles are displays in Bourdieu's theory of habitus and practices (Bourdieu 1990). For instance, parents are responsible for teaching their children gender stereotypes such as "boys don't cry" or "girls are only the ones who play with dolls" (Leaper 2014). The lifestyle of families coming from different classes differ. Middle-class couples tend to manage their children's lives; however, working-class parents are more likely to let their children grow and make their own decisions (Lareau 2003). Most sociologists tend to see family as a unique structure, but families are shaped by the resources available to those in their class position. This suggests the important roles of social class in determining gender roles.

Social class has been measured considering educational level, income, and occupation, separately or combined. When couples are married, the definition of social class can be hard to measure, considering that they are dual-earner couples and married. In that past, researchers determined social class by the husband's job, since he typically was the primary provider for the family (Perry-Jenkins and Folk 1994). Perry-Jenkins and Folk (1994) define social class individually for husband and wife. They consider occupation without education and income. This suggests that recent studies have changed their measurement of social class to look individually at wives and husbands.

While gender studies examine many aspects concerning the family structure, some attention has been paid to social class and how it impacts couples' gender roles. The research by Ferree (1987; 1990) suggests that social class moderates the connection between the division of labor in households, spouses' perception of household labor, and the marital relationship in dual-earner couples. The study addresses how the division of household labor in cross-class marriages and the perception of fairness relate to marital conflict and satisfaction in marriage. As a result, the relationships among dimensions of marriage, division of labor, and perception of equity are not

only different between couples, but also different in working-class versus middle-class couples (Ferree 1987; 1990).

Streib (2015) investigates the question of what happens when couples from different social classes marry and how it impacts the negotiation of gender roles. Streib argues that class origin shapes how each partner wants to manage each task and use each resource. This work also examines marriage between an individual from a middle-class background and an individual from a working-class background. Streib explains that such a marriage presents different points of view on couples' roles as parents, such as decision-making, taking care of children, making financial decisions, advancing in one's career, and spending free time together as a couple may all affect how they negotiate gender roles (Streib 2015). Even though class diversity has contributed to bring cross-class couples together, it affects most couples negatively by creating more conflicts, such as decisions about money, leisure, parenting, and dealing with emotions (Kanieski 2015).

When it comes to gender roles and class origin, women of white-collar origin generally prefer to enroll their children in many structured activities, to the dismay of husbands of blue-collar origin (Streib 2015). This suggests one way that those of white-collar origin differ from those of blue-collar origin. Gender and class interactions between couples also exist in housework. Men from both classes are less likely to perform housework chores. Women of white-collar origin have higher expectations of their husbands in terms of sharing housework responsibilities than women of blue-collar origin. White-collar women are more likely to be frustrated by their husbands compared to those from a blue-collar background (Streib 2015).

For women coming from working-class backgrounds, middle-class spouses may face challenges in male-dominated fields such as law, business, and medicine. Middle-class individuals who marry working-class spouses are more likely to adopt different models for career advancement,

such as encouraging their spouse to pursue additional education or encouraging them to be more self-directed, as this affects the negotiation of gender roles between partners in terms of how much time they are spending in work or at the home (Bowles et al. 2005). Moreover, individuals' social class influences how they raise their children.

Interclass marriages can result in different choices being made between couples in terms of negotiating gender roles. In this section, I addressed how interclass couples communicate, make parenting decisions, and how parenting style can affect setting gender roles for children at a young age.

C. Intercultural marriages

The last form of intermarriage is intercultural couples. Ho (1990) defines intercultural marriage as a marriage between two people who belong to different cultural backgrounds, and that includes different nationalities, races, religions, or different cultures (Kim 2001; Perel 2000; Ting-Toomey 1999; Ting-Toomey and Oetzel 2001). While some research on intercultural couples remains limited, there is research suggesting that cultural differences in marriage could contribute to marital distress (Dalmage 2000; Heller and Wood 2007; Waldman and Rubalcava 2005). Some scholars contend that intercultural couples are more likely to suffer from stressors that are different from those affecting same-culture couples (Falicov 1995; Fu and Heaton 2000; Sung 1990). To understand how intercultural couples negotiate gender roles, there is a need to understand how they navigate gender roles during the marriage and how culture plays a role.

Triandis (1988) has argued the difference between collectivism and individualism; such a difference may play a significant role in how couples deal with coming from different cultures. Collectivism is when individuals view themselves as parts of a whole, such as a tribe or a family. They are more motivated toward the norms and duties imposed by the collective entity. On the

other hand, individualists are more likely to be motivated by their own preferences. They give more priority to personal goals than to an entity goal (Triandis 1988). Kellner (2009) suggests that in individualistic cultures like the United States, married men and women are more likely to be flexible in their roles than people from other cultures. In contrast, in collective cultures such as those in Asian and Middle Eastern countries, gender roles are highly differentiated; moreover, women are more likely to be defined by their allegiance to men (Kellner 2009). Furthermore, the impact of different cultural beliefs and identities can shape and organize a couple's interactions. This suggests the importance of couples negotiating their cultural background and understanding gender roles (Kellner 2009).

Overall, intermarriages play a huge role in negotiating gender roles. In order to understand how this has an impact on couples negotiating gender roles, I addressed several forms of intermarriages in this section such as interracial couples, interclass couples, and intercultural couples to understand the intersectionality between them and gender as well. Intermarriage forms affect how couples negotiate roles. Even though they experience challenges because of their differences, some of them negotiate gender roles to reach a better relationship.

2.3 How Couples Manage Changes to the Gender Context

This final section on theoretical background will cover how couples living in a different culture negotiate gender roles. I will address what the challenges are for couples who migrate to a different culture and review how couples perceive marital stability while living in a different culture.

A. Couples, Gender, and Cultural Differences

Societies are becoming more diverse and globalized, and this has encouraged families to migrate and find better opportunities (Arias 2013). In this section, I address how couples negotiate gender roles when they are living in a different culture. Traditional gender role beliefs imply that

the husband is the breadwinners of the family, and his career is a vital interest for the family. Even though employed women are more likely to be co-providers for the family, the wife's career is a minor interest for the family (Jurges 2005). For egalitarian gender roles, beliefs imply the importance of both partners' careers. The decision for a couple to relocate to a different culture is determined by the gender role beliefs. If the job of only one of the partners is important for the well-being of the family, the family will be less retrained in making the decision that they can lose the income from the secondary provider (Jurges 2005). This aspect relates to how couples manage the changes in an external gender context. When couples move to a different culture, they face challenges in their marriage in terms of prioritizing aspects in life such as job opportunities or spending time with the family (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999).

Globalization has increased the acceptance of other cultures; however, couples who relocate are challenged to maintain their cultural identity (Tienda and Booth 1991). Although some researchers assert that cultural differences create challenges between couples, other scholars consider migration as an opportunity for couples to either learn from each other or move forward without focusing on cultural differences (Heller and Wood 2007; Romano 2001). Some factors have contributed to the migration trend, including immigration legislation, foreign labor, and available job opportunities (Castles and Miller 2003). In contrast, sociologists argue that the importance of a husband's and wife's job is not only focused on the job and income but also the gender roles shared between couples (Jurges 2005). This suggests that women are more likely to have experience differences from men in terms of migration and this affects how they negotiate gender roles in a different culture (Kofman 1999; Mahler 1998).

Many challenges affect migrating couples and how they negotiate gender roles. The first challenge that international migration couples face is moving and adjusting to the new culture

(Arias 2013). As mentioned above, traditional gender roles prioritize the male's economic well-being and minimize women well-being as it has a negative impact on her (Boyle et al. 2008). Another difficulty is finding a job for both partners in the same city. A study by Hyman et al. (2008) suggests that international migration results in changes in gender roles for participants coming from Ethiopia to Toronto, as the research sample suggested. The new economic and social responsibility when migrating may change the distribution of power in the family. These changes will lead to greater participation in household decision-making and the control over resources (Boyd and Greico 2003; Darvishpour 2002).

When it comes to the marital stability, international migration modifies gender norms between couples (Fouron and Schiller 2001; Mahler 2001). International couples may experience conflict as they confront the difference between gender norms in home and host countries. These studies suggest that international migration affects gender relations. Types of effects that can appear in a couple's relationship when they migrate include becoming more stressed or changing the context of migration to adopt other culture's definition of gender norms (Fouron and Schiller 2001; Mahler 2001). Some factors can cause stress between couples when they migrate, such as a spouse's gender expectations and attitudes (Boyle et al. 2008; Jolly and Reeves 2005). Some Mexican migrant women, for example, experienced greater freedom from some gender norms that they had gotten used to; when they returned to their home country, they were more likely to experience marriage instability with their partners (Hirsch 2003). Another ethnographic study done by Zontini's (2010) indicates that women change their perception of gender roles in response to migration, sometimes becoming the breadwinners of the family. Couples can experience migration in a variety of ways.

Looking at international migrant couples and what they go through, gender roles are even more modified because of migration than they are by other factors. International migration couples tend to negotiate gender roles when they are in different cultures to get better job opportunities and enhance their lifestyle (Junge et al. 2014). International migration couples face some challenges in their marriage: some of them will consider the move as an opportunity to strengthen the relationship, and others may face martial instability that may lead to separation (Boyle et al. 2008; Jolly and Reeves 2005). It is this final factor—negotiating gender expectations in a new country that I turn to next. Our past experiences on negotiating gender roles affect our future perception of how gender roles are set.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 The Case

Saudi Arabia is a very gender-segregated country. Mixed gatherings of women and men are prohibited, especially in educational institutions and recreational places (Mayer 2000). The King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) makes it possible for qualified female and male students to pursue advanced degrees abroad. The program has supported numerous youthful Saudi students to encounter new cultural and social environments in a variety of host nations. Most Saudi students are studying abroad to encounter new instructive and social conditions in the United States. In 2009 Saudi Arabia was recorded as having the fifth highest number of students— after China, India, Korea, and Germany —working on degrees abroad (Deputyship for Planning and Information 2010).

No matter how welcoming the host country is, international students are likely to experience difficulties in adjusting to a new country and a different culture. Saudi students' experience can be especially challenging, since they come from a country that routinely separates women and men. Living and studying in a mixed-gender community can change the students, both socially and in how they see and learn from instruction. The main objective of sending Saudi students to study abroad is to prepare them and help them qualify to compete on an international level in the labor market and the different areas of scientific research (SACM 2016). In April 2016, the Crown Prince and Chairman of the Council of Economic and Development Affairs, Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, presented Vision 2030, a huge undertaking intended to reflect the country's strengths and capabilities. The objectives of the vision are to reduce Saudi Arabia's dependency on oil by investing and developing other sources to diversify the economy. In working to meet the goals of Vision 2030 many changes in society have taken place. One of the important

transformations in the society began in June 2018 as women were allowed to drive. This change opened many other opportunities to women in managing businesses and having other employment opportunities. Since the opportunity to drive was opened up, the employment rate of Saudi females has increased (Vision 2030). In research for my master's degree, I examined how the gender environment affects Saudi couples who study in the United States and come from a conservative society such as Saudi Arabia (Alsanea 2017). The research examined the social, gender, and cultural strategies that could be developed in the new gender environment. In the previous research, I interviewed 20 participants, ten married couples, to reach a better understanding of their adjustment approaches. For the current research, I extend that earlier work to examine the strategies that the Saudi couple students adopted when they returned home. The core questions of this study address, how couples adapt to the recent changing gender expectations in Saudi Arabia? How do rural and urban couples who live abroad adapt and how do rural and urban couples who have not traveled abroad adapt to the new expectations for gender roles? Additionally, I will examine how the strategies impacted the process of adjustment. In other words, how couples are adjusting to gender expectations, whether they live in urban or rural Saudi Arabia or whether they have lived in a different culture with much more liberal gender expectations? The participants consisted of 110 participants. There are 29 couples who traveled abroad and returned to Saudi Arabia (15 urban couples and 14 rural couples). The other set of couples are the ones who did not travel (14 came from urban and 12 from rural areas in Saudi Arabia). This provided a better understanding of the adopted approaches in their adjustment process.

3.2 Research Questions

The following research question will be addressed in this dissertation:

- How couples who studied abroad and the ones who have not traveled to Western countries identify the condition of the changing gender environment in Saudi Arabia?

The empirical sub questions will be addressed under the first question:

- a. How couples who traveled to the U.S. adjust to the gender roles after they return to Saudi Arabia?
- b. How couples who have not traveled to Western countries adjust to the gender roles in Saudi Arabia?
- c. How vision 2030 contribute in adjusting to the gender environment in Saudi Arabia?
- d. How Saudi couples adjust to the Saudi society gender environment after studying abroad?

3.3 Research Design

Research design is a process used to achieve the objectives of the research and to solve the research questions. In other words, it is a strategy developed to outline the procedure and method for data collection, analysis, and confirmation (Adams et al. 2007; Gilbert 2001). To fulfill the purpose of this research, I use a qualitative research design. The goal of using qualitative research is to achieve an in-depth understanding. To get more reliable outcomes, a qualitative research sample size of roughly 30 or more respondents is best (Creswell 1998; Miles and Huberman 1994). This research study is exploratory, since such an approach is flexible, unstructured, and qualitative, allowing the researcher to explore the problem by gathering new information about the particular phenomena (Bajpai 2011).

Grounded theory is a qualitative methodology used to develop a theory that is grounded in the experience of the participants (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Grounded theory conducted from a constructivist epistemological paradigm is particularly suited for examining processes, structure, and context, all of which are key tools in broadening rather than narrowing the inquiry and exploring identity as a socially constructed phenomenon in the context of hierarchical social structures such as patriarchy (Charmaz 2006).

In this research, I used qualitative data collected from 55 Saudi couples coming from urban and rural cities in Saudi Arabia. 29 couples traveled abroad and returned to Saudi Arabia, and 20 couples did not travel. Couples who traveled consist of 15 urban couples and 14 rural couples. The non-traveled couples consist of 14 urban and 12 rural couples. The research was conducted in the United States and the interview data were collected virtually from couples who live in rural and urban areas in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The participants were informed that the study is voluntary, and they were free to not participate or not continue the interview. I conducted a total of 110 interviews, and the interviews lasted from 55 minutes to 1 hour.

3.4 Selection of Participants

The participants had to be 18 years old or older. They also needed to fit the participants' criteria. Of the 29 couples who had studied abroad and returned home, they had to have stayed at least one year in Saudi Arabia. The other 26 couples were couples who had not traveled abroad. There was an option to conduct more than 55 couple interviews but limiting the number to 55 couples allowed me to make the most efficient use of money and time needed for transcribing and translating. This helped to get more accurate information from my collected data. Since the dissertation examines how Saudi couples negotiate gender roles, it was important to distinguish

between those who studied abroad and others who have not traveled to Western countries. Having two different sets of participants allowed me to examine how both negotiate the gender environment in Saudi Arabia. I chose one year for couples who had studied abroad, since a year is the usual amount of time required to get stable and familiar with the environment by experiencing all seasons and holidays in Saudi Arabia. This span of time helped me learn about their full experience and obtain their feedback on it. It was also important to have couples coming from rural and urban areas to understand if their background affects their experience in negotiating gender roles. This allowed me to understand the differences in the way that couples negotiate gender roles and the adjustment to the gender environment when they return from the United States and to compare their responses with those of the couples who have not traveled abroad. As a result, I planned to have the first of 14 couples come from rural areas who studied abroad and returned to Saudi Arabia. Another set of 15 couples is comprised of those who are from urban areas and studied abroad and have returned to Saudi Arabia. The other set of 12 couples were the ones who had never traveled outside Saudi Arabia and come from rural areas. The last set of 14 couples were the ones who had not traveled outside Saudi Arabia and come from urban areas.

To select participants, I used a word-of-mouth strategy to get participants to communicate with me. First, I posted details in a Facebook group for Saudi students who are studying abroad. The post contained information about the study and the types of participants that I am looking for, and I included my contact information. Another account that I communicated with is *Saudis in the United States*, a popular account platform for many Saudi students inside and outside the United States. The account helped me spread the word about my research. They used their Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat platforms to announce my study. I also used my family and friends' network. Once participants saw the announcement, they contacted me, and I checked to see if they fit the

research participant criteria. If they did, I sent them the information sheet with the consent form. I asked them to select a convenient day and time to meet. After they selected their preferred meeting time, I sent them the Zoom link with its password.

Before starting the interviews, I made sure to explain the purpose, significance, and the anticipated questions of my research. I assured the participants about the informed consent form. I also informed them that the sensitive information they provided would be protected, as the topic of my research in general and there is minimal risk associated with participation in the study. It was up to the subjects to choose the preferred language for the interview; they could choose their second language, which is English, or their native language, Arabic. In the case of respondents who selected Arabic, I used a translation service to help me translate the entire questionnaire into Arabic, transcribe the answers, and then translate them back to English. Once participants chose their language preference, the information sheet and the consent form were shared with them. The research objectives were shared with the participants in their language preference as well. Before I started the interview, participants were asked to take a self-administered demographic questionnaire that helped in categorizing the participants. The interviews lasted for roughly one hour and were conducted by the principal investigator. The consent form was obtained from all participants. I did not include participants' names; all participants were given a pseudonym. Data are confidential and all identifying information is altered in the interview transcript to protect participants' identity. The only identifiable data that were collected are the names on the consent form and this was collected following IRB regulations. The research data are kept on my computer and protected with a password. If any questions emerged after the interview, participants were invited to call me on my cell phone which was listed on the Consent Form that was provided to them at first.

3.5 Interview

Interviews were conducted with the help of an interview guide. The rationale for selecting interviews for my study is that interviews clearly allowed me to see the values, beliefs, and emotions of my respondents. It helped my respondents to reflect upon and consider all those aspects that helped them in the adjustment and modification of their attitudes and behaviors towards the dynamic gender atmosphere of the United States when they returned to Saudi Arabia. This form of qualitative research allows both structured as well as less-structured questions to obtain data from all the subjects under study (Merriam 2009). Tellis (1997) supported the semi-structured interviews by expressing their significance regarding widening the scope of data access with the inclusion of additional sources that provide information.

Due to COVID-19, the method of my research changed from in-person to virtual interviews that were conducted through Zoom software. This allowed me the advantage of getting access to a much larger sample size. Another advantage of the virtual method is having the couples sitting together in a virtual setting is more comfortable than Face to Face settings. The last advantage of a virtual setting is having the wives participating at the same time. This allowed them the opportunity to express their thoughts more.

I, the principal investigator, conducted interviews that consisted of open-ended questions. Using this kind of interview questions is critical for answering the research objectives. The questions are open-ended and aimed at revealing the comparison of Saudi couples who studied abroad and the other couples who have not traveled abroad in navigating the new gender environment in Saudi Arabia. I used the snowball sampling technique for data collection. The technique of sampling is applied in which the respondents also referred other individuals to participate in the research. It is regarded as one of the best approaches for meaningful sampling

techniques (Merriam 2009). I conducted interviews with the known Saudi couples who had returned to Saudi Arabia after studying abroad and asked them to introduce the research to other friends who had just returned to Saudi Arabia. For the other group of participants, I contacted some friends who had not traveled outside Saudi Arabia and asked them to introduce the research to others as well. Since the interviews were conducted through Zoom software, appointments were scheduled according to their time that is convenient for the respondents to participate in the interview. After an appointment was set, the link to the meeting was sent to the participants a day before the interview.

3.6 Data Analysis

During the interview, I informed my participants that I would be recording the interviews to assist me in coding and categorizing the data. In addition, I made sure to welcome the participants and establish trust (Doody and Nonan 2013). Directly after the interviews, I wrote down some details and saved the recorded interview. Once the recording was saved, I assigned a pseudonym to couples who did not indicate a preferred name. A detailed list of all the participants and the demographic information is provided in a table at the end of this chapter. The data were analyzed and coded in qualitative data management software, NVivo. The software-assisted my work systematically through each interview transcript. NVivo managed all the transcripts in one project file that connected the variables. I used an open coding method to break down the data to analyze it. The chapters were divided into three themes: familial and household strategies, social strategies, and Vision 2030 and gender relations. First, the data were coded in a preliminary description. Then, I examined the participant data that supported the initial description. This helped in making the connection between the description and the data too.

The interviews address questions that consider the cultural, gender, and behavioral aspects of the participants. As a result, I am expecting their answers to be different from each other and this allowed me to organize them in separate segments to analyze the data.

Table. 2 Couples Demographic Information

	Name & Age	Urban (U)/Rural (R)	Gender	Traveled (T)/Non- Traveled (N)	Length of Marriage	Number of Children	Employed (E)/ Unemployed (U)
1	Mansoor, 32	U	M	T	10	0	E
2	Neam, 27	U	F	T	10	0	E
3	Nour, 26	U	F	T	4	0	U
4	Azzam, 29	U	M	T	4	0	E
5	Reham, 28	U	F	T	6	2	U
6	Mohannad, 33	U	M	T	6	2	E
7	Abdulrahman, 32	R	M	T	5	3	E
8	Hind, 27	R	F	T	5	3	U
9	Hani, 46	R	M	T	20	4	E
10	Hanadi, 43	R	F	T	20	4	U
11	Areej, 31	U	F	T	13	2	U
12	Abdullah, 35	U	M	T	13	2	E
13	Aljawhara, 30	U	F	T	5	0	E
14	Muhaisen, 34	U	M	T	5	0	U
15	Khalid, 37	R	M	T	5	0	E
16	Mona, 33	R	F	T	5	0	U
17	Faisal, 30	R	M	N	3	1	E
18	Nora, 27	R	F	N	3	1	E
19	Hams, 37	R	F	N	11	2	E
20	Fawaz, 40	R	M	N	11	2	E
21	Lama, 25	R	F	T	6	1	U
22	Abdullah, 27	R	M	T	6	1	E
23	Heba, 34	U	F	T	15	3	E
24	Mohammed, 36	U	M	T	15	3	E
25	Abdullah, 50	U	M	T	25	3	E
26	Nahla, 45	U	F	T	25	3	E
27	Saeed, 28	R	M	T	4	1	E
28	Meaad, 25	R	F	T	4	1	U
29	Khalid, 35	U	M	N	8	2	E
30	Joud, 30	U	F	N	8	2	E
31	Mona, 31	R	F	T	12	3	E
32	Hisham, 35	R	M	T	12	3	E

33	Ahmed,42	U	M	N	10	5	E
34	Amal, 40	U	F	N	10	5	U
35	Mariam, 29	R	F	T	5	2	E
36	Haidar, 31	R	M	T	5	2	E
37	Mohammed, 34	R	M	T	19	4	E
38	Wadha, 32	R	F	T	19	4	U
39	Sary, 33	U	M	T	10	1	E
40	Arwa, 30	U	F	T	10	1	U
41	Nahar, 30	U	M	N	3	0	E
42	Nouf, 28	U	F	N	3	0	U
43	Marwa, 32	U	F	T	15	3	E
44	Salem, 37	U	M	T	15	3	E
45	Abdulaziz, 35	U	M	T	11	4	E
46	Sara, 30	U	F	T	11	4	E
47	Abdulaziz, 30	U	M	T	10	0	E
48	Nujwd, 27	U	F	T	10	0	E
49	Marwan,28	U	M	T	2	0	E
50	Nora,25	U	F	T	2	0	E
51	Dala, 36	U	F	T	13	4	E
52	Fahad, 37	U	M	T	13	4	E
53	Hamza, 34	U	M	T	7	3	E
54	Nour, 29	U	F	T	7	3	U
55	Nora, 27	U	F	T	11	2	U
56	Nasser, 32	U	M	T	11	2	E
57	Sara, 33	R	F	T	5	2	E
58	Abdullah, 35	R	M	T	5	2	E
59	Fatimah, 34	R	F	T	17	2	E
60	Hassan, 38	R	M	T	17	2	U
61	Huda, 38	R	F	T	11	4	U
62	Mohammed, 42	R	M	T	11	4	E
63	Ayman, 40	R	M	T	15	4	E
64	Amani, 39	R	F	T	15	4	E
65	Nouf, 25	R	F	T	10	2	U
66	Saleh, 29	R	M	T	10	2	E
67	Rawan, 29	R	F	T	8	3	E
68	Mohammad, 31	R	M	T	8	3	E
69	Ahmed, 30	U	M	N	9	3	E

70	Yara, 27	U	F	N	9	3	E
71	Sultan, 35	U	M	N	10	5	E
72	Kholod, 31	U	F	N	10	5	U
73	Sahar, 35	U	F	N	6	2	E
74	Abdullah, 37	U	M	N	6	2	E
75	Fawaziah, 30	U	F	N	11	4	U
76	Salah, 33	U	M	N	11	4	E
77	Farah, 24	U	F	N	4	0	E
78	Waleed, 27	U	M	N	4	0	E
79	Salman, 29	U	M	N	9	2	E
80	Manal, 26	U	F	N	9	2	U
81	Abdulrahman, 26	U	M	N	7	3	E
82	Asma, 25	U	F	N	7	3	U
83	Samah, 28	U	F	N	4	1	E
84	Abdulaziz, 30	U	M	N	4	1	E
85	Turki, 34	U	M	N	10	3	E
86	Abeer, 30	U	F	N	10	3	U
87	Salamah, 27	U	F	N	8	3	E
88	Mohannad, 30	U	M	N	8	3	E
89	Saud, 27	U	M	N	4	1	E
90	Arwa, 25	U	F	N	4	1	E
91	Alhanouf, 23	R	F	N	5	2	E
92	Omar, 29	R	M	N	5	2	U
93	Khlil, 31	R	M	N	7	4	E
94	Amjad, 30	R	F	N	7	4	U
95	Badriah, 36	R	F	N	12	5	E
96	Abullah, 32	R	M	N	12	5	E
97	Lamia, 29	R	F	N	10	3	U
98	Salem, 32	R	M	N	10	3	E
99	Husam, 32	R	M	N	5	2	E
100	Asam, 29	R	F	N	5	2	E
101	Nouf, 26	R	F	N	4	1	U
102	Sami, 29	R	M	N	4	1	E
103	Salma, 23	R	F	N	8	0	U
104	Azzam, 26	R	M	N	8	0	E

105	Zainab, 28	R	F	N	8	2	U
106	Hamad, 30	R	M	N	8	2	E
107	Hashim, 34	R	M	N	5	1	E
108	Haifa, 30	R	F	N	5	1	U
109	Hanan, 28	R	F	N	9	3	E
110	Bader, 32	R	M	N	9	3	E

CHAPTER IV: FAMILIAL AND HOUSEHOLD STRATEGIES

Saudi Arabia is considered a largely collectivist country with family and community being prioritized over simply an individual (Al-Namlah et al. 2006). Marriages are most likely to be traditional (arranged) marriage. Women and men cohabiting is uncommon, and such a choice would be neither socially nor religiously acceptable (AlTamimi 2009). In Saudi Arabia, couples dating is not a common form of relationship (AlTamimi 2009). Since dating is not common in the Saudi society, individuals who date are less likely to tell other people that he or she is seeing someone regularly. The fear of being judged by people in the community prevents dating couples from sharing information about their relationships with others. On the other hand, they would share such information with their best friends or peers (AlTamimi 2009).

Social norms and forms of relationships vary from family to family. Official marriage is the most common form of relationship with men and women in Saudi Arabia, and families usually arrange these marriages; most couples see each other one time before proposing—this visit is a “sharia look” (Defined previously in the definition of terms) (Ahmed 2009). Traditionally, Saudi families are considered male-dominant institutions; however, with the recent changes in the society, this aspect of family life has been shifting to acknowledge the importance of women’s roles in the community (AlTamimi 2009).

In a society that is considered mostly male-dominant, men are more likely to make most family decisions. Such decisions involve financial planning, household decisions, and parenting styles. Recently, however, women’s roles in the marketplace have been increasing, but their earnings are considered as a secondary source of income compared to that of the men in a household. According to Altamimi (2009), in Saudi Arabia men are still the most likely to be the breadwinners. In order to address couples’ roles in household, gender roles need to be examined. In

analyzing gender ideology categories, researchers use a variety of measurements to describe an individual's level of support for the idea of husbands and wives sharing paid work and family responsibilities that is based on the idea that each gender has its own separate sphere of responsibility. Researchers examine gender ideology and gender role attitudes in couples (Davis and Greenstein 2009). The literature suggests that gender ideologies have changed over time in terms of defining gender roles (Bianchi et al. 2000; Craig 2007; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Milkie et al. 2009; Sayer et al. 2009). These changes include attitudes about the division of housework and the perception of fairness in how couples negotiate gender roles (Amato and Booth 1995). These researchers provide some background of the gender ideology categories and the differences between how husbands and wives might perceive them.

In this chapter, I will analyze the responses couples gave in interviews that asked about familial strategies related to gender. An analysis of the data revealed three areas to examine:

- *What role each member of the couple plays in the household*
- *How the couples handle childcare responsibilities*
- *How couples deal with relatives in the extended family.*

The couples I interviewed indicated their responses on how they negotiate the changing gender environment in Saudi Arabia. In the following sections, I will analyze data from two sets of couples: those who had traveled and lived abroad and then returned to Saudi Arabia and those who had never traveled abroad. I will present these couple perceptions on gender roles in the family, and I will also compare and contrast how couples navigate the changing gender environment and their gender roles as couples and parents in Saudi Arabia.

4.1 Household Couples' Roles

Traditionally, taking care of the family and household was primarily the domain of women, while men's domain was the workplace (Bartley et al. 2005). In spite of the increased number of women participating in the marketplace, women's jobs are considered as a secondary source of income, and husbands are still more likely to be the ones who take care of the household's finances. When it comes to other areas of shared life, couples have made some movement toward sharing household responsibilities (Davis and Greenstein 2009). Cleaning, cooking, and taking care of children are examples of household tasks that must be negotiated between couples. Although contemporary couples tend to negotiate in terms of household labor, the overall trend is for women to invest less time in domestic tasks compared women in previous decades (Bianchi et al. 2000). This new trend has created some conflict about who is responsible for performing the household work since wives are now doing less in the home (AlTamimi 2009). The research has presented somewhat contradictory conclusions in terms of which spouse is doing what, but some studies have concluded that men's involvement in household labor has increased (AlTamimi 2009). In order to understand how couples currently negotiate gender roles in a changing Saudi Arabia, I examine how couples who studied abroad negotiate gender roles when they returned to Saudi Arabia and how those who have not been abroad address those same issues. Additionally, I examine how couples from different areas perceive their gender roles, as I compare and contrast couples who come from rural and urban areas in Saudi Arabia (AlTamimi 2009).

The first set of interviews below is with couples who come from an urban area, traveled abroad, and then returned to Saudi Arabia. Mansoor (32) and his wife Neam (27) traveled abroad for four years and returned to Saudi Arabia a year ago. Both are working, and Neam has a full-time job. The couple lives in an urban area in Saudi Arabia, and they do not have children. They shared

their perceptions in how they handle gender roles in the households, especially when both of them are working, as Mansour indicated:

We are still sharing some responsibilities since we returned. Such as washing dishes after using them, making up the bed and cooking. We sometimes make a schedule on how to do these jobs especially if we are planning to go out.

His wife, Neam, elaborated:

I believe sharing responsibilities helped us a lot in understanding our roles in the house. Actually, we shared this since the beginning of our marriage when we were abroad. When we are planning to go out, it sometimes disrupts our schedule, so we are planning to go out on the weekends and avoid weekdays.

This couple demonstrated that returning to Saudi Arabia did not affect the approach to dealing with household responsibilities that they had adopted in the United States. They had created a strategy in following a schedule to help them keep up with the demands of the changing gender environment. Both spouses come from urban areas, and they are more likely to be flexible in adopting these approaches to take care of the house. It seems that coming from an urban area played a huge role in the flexibility of a number of the couples I interviewed. Out of the 15 couples who come from urban areas, 12 have shown that they are more likely to take a flexible approach in adapting to the changing gender environment.

Another couple who come from an urban area demonstrated their perception of adapting to the gender roles while studying abroad and then returning to Saudi Arabia. Nour (26) and her husband Azzam (29) have been married for four years and do not have children. The husband is working in a full-time job. Nour explained how they have allocated responsibilities:

Managing housework has been an important aspect in my life. I believe if I am controlling the house and everything is clean, I can be in a good mood. My husband helped me a lot in assigning the roles in our house. He is responsible of vacuuming, taking trash out and cleaning the dishes. For me, I am responsible of cooking and cleaning, laundry, and the rooms in the house. I believe this strategy helped us a lot in managing the house and being happy.

Azzam agreed:

Yes! This strategy helped us a lot in being on the same page in terms of the house.

“Happy wife, happy life.”

This couple found that sharing responsibility and assigning chores in the house helped them avoid any conflicts. This couple comes from an urban area as well, so they are more likely to be flexible in adapting to changes easily. The couple explained that their strategy after they returned home is what they followed when they were abroad, and it works well for them. Adopting a strategy on assigning the chores for the house can ensure that tasks are divided fairly. The data suggest that couples who come from urban areas and traveled abroad are negotiating gender roles by assigning household responsibilities.

In another interview, Reham (28) and her husband Mohannad (33), who studied abroad and returned to Saudi Arabia 13 months ago, told me that they experienced some challenges when they returned home after living in the United States. The couple, who have been married for six years, are also from an urban area in Saudi Arabia, and they have two daughters. The husband is working in a full-time job, and Reham is searching for a job. She explains her views:

I found out there are a lot of things we do that I consider waste of time such as hanging out with friends and family for a long time. Unnecessary social courtesies

meant that I had to change some of my approaches in how to communicate with some people. When we returned, we tried to reset our minds to understand our surrounding.

Her husband, Mohannad, revealed:

It was very difficult because we are used to the American lifestyle. As far as the quality of life here, there is some restrictions in the society such as the freedom of speech. I would say that it was hard to adjust at the beginning but being with my wife and my kids, it made it easier to adjust. We spent the first months together and to set our home together. This made the transition easy on us.

Time management is one of the aspects that most couples mentioned in their interviews. There are 11 out of 15 urban couples who indicated that time management is one of the challenges that they faced in negotiating gender roles. When they returned, they faced some challenges due to differences in the two cultures. Saudi Arabia is a night owl country, where most of the stores and restaurants are open at night. The night life is a very usual part of life for Saudi people. As a result, coming from an early bird society such as that of the United States meant that it was hard to function and manage time.

Most urban couples who traveled abroad had learned to be comfortable sharing responsibilities. There are 12 of 15 urban couples who lived abroad and returned to Saudi Arabia who continue to share household responsibilities, maintaining similar habits to those they used when they were abroad. They also indicated that they faced challenges returning home, such as time management, but those problems mostly occurred at the beginning; then they adjusted and had gotten used to the environment as couples.

On the other hand, for rural couples who traveled abroad and returned to Saudi Arabia, only four out of 14 couples changed their perception on navigating gender roles. While abroad, they shared responsibilities, but when they returned, husbands were less likely to continue sharing responsibilities.

For instance, Abulrahman (32) and his wife Hind (27) who come from a rural area in Saudi Arabia have been married for five years and have three children between the ages of one and three. The couple demonstrated different opinions from others who had traveled abroad. The husband is working in a full-time job and the wife does not have a job yet, Abdulrahman said:

I believe a lot of things have changed in sharing the house responsibilities. Abroad I was completely available for my family, I take care of the house and the kids with my wife. When we returned to Saudi Arabia, everything has changed. I have to work most of the time, and I have my social life to maintain too. Even my wife, she became busy now in dealing with social life and keeping up with everyone.

Hind said:

I agree when we returned, it was hard to keep up with managing our house. We are still figuring out how to be in a schedule that can work for all of us. Even though I have been in Saudi Arabia for almost a year, I am still struggling to control this aspect of our lives. I am doing most of the work in the house now. When we were abroad, we shared some responsibilities but now we cannot.

This couple indicated that coming from a rural area influenced their perception on how to perceive gender roles in Saudi Arabia. Husbands have devoted most of their time to work or social events. Out of the 14 couples who traveled abroad and returned to Saudi Arabia, three have addressed this aspect.

Another couple is Hani (46) and his wife Hanadi (43) who come from a rural area in Saudi Arabia. The couple has been married for 20 years and have four children. They shared their perceptions on how to navigate gender roles as a couple. The husband works in a full-time job, and the wife is unemployed. Hanadi explained:

After going back to Saudi Arabia, I was stressed on how to take care of my house and my kids. I do most of the work in our house, my husband is working full-time, so it is hard for him to keep up with us and the house.

Hani, her husband, indicated:

I was not expecting this load of work, especially when I am on the weekend. I am on the call most of the time. I try my best to share responsibilities with Hanadi. I return home after working for more than 8 hours in a day to see how she is tired of taking care of the kids.

Adjusting to the changing environment when they returned is still a challenge for some participants, especially in trying to achieve a work-life balance. Most couples indicated working as full-time employees has changed their perception on how to navigate gender roles. As a result, they face challenges in taking control of their lives as couples or parents. The couple agreed on sharing responsibility when they were abroad because the environment encouraged them to work together. When couples were abroad, hiring housekeepers was costly, so most of the work was done by both members of the couple to avoid any financial strain. The kind of lifestyle the couples want plays a huge role in their approach to household roles, whether they share responsibilities or not. Their lives focus mostly on work and social life. This is what changed when couples returned to Saudi Arabia. While living abroad, couples shared responsibility for the home, but when the couples return to Saudi Arabia, paid work and social life require nearly all their time. Rural couples in Saudi

Arabia have changed their perception in navigating gender roles in social and work life. In addition, they indicated that growing up in rural areas without a lot of diverse communities and developed places in their cities contributed to their approach as a couple. Their families had always valued social and work life, and these aspects are what most Saudis focus on: four rural couples out of 14 indicated a similar approach in how they changed their perception of navigating their roles as couples.

In addressing couples who traveled and returned, the main goal was to understand how the couples perceive the gender environment in two different settings. This section will cover couples who did not travel abroad to see how they are different from or like the traveling couples in adapting to the changing gender roles. A study done to address couples' adjustment to the gender environment found that most couples report that adjustment to the United States is hard, given the dynamic gender environment (Alsanea 2017). The traveling couples soon adopted flexible behavior, such as leniency in their attitudes towards avoiding the opposite gender, increased participation in mix-group discussions, and occasional attendance at informal functions, as they felt it mandatory for their adjustment to life in the United States and necessary if they were to actively participate in social and academic settings. In this section, however, I turn to how couples who did *not* travel abroad perceive the gender environment without directly experiencing the Western culture.

For this set of couples, the ones who never traveled abroad but who come from urban areas in Saudi Arabia are more likely to be flexible in sharing household responsibilities than are those who never traveled and come from rural areas. Most of them indicated that growing up with families in urban areas has encouraged them to be flexible in perceiving gender roles. They suggested that they observe their parents being flexible in terms of taking care of the house and

sharing responsibilities together. Some of the husbands indicated that being the breadwinner for the family may affect how much they are involved in household chores. The time that they spend working impacts how they perceive gender roles in the household. Most are both working full-time, and this affected how they decide who is responsible for household chores.

One couple who are from an urban area in Saudi Arabia is Areej (31) and her husband Abdullah (35). They have been married since 2009 and have two children (four and eight years old). The husband is working in a full-time job, and the wife is a stay-at-home mom. Areej said:

We do share some responsibilities in our house. I am more likely to do all the work and my husband will help whenever he feels.

Abdullah said:

I work most of the time, so it is hard to help a lot with the house. When I have the time, I would like to help.

This couple also share responsibilities whenever the husband (the breadwinner) has time. Most husbands are more likely to be the breadwinner of the household, but they would participate if time allowed them to. They indicated that work life has controlled how much they share responsibilities with their wives. It seems that the wives are more flexible with their husbands' roles, especially since they are often stay-at-home moms. The husbands are also willing to offer help when they have time.

Aljawhara (30) and her husband Muhaisen (34) are from an urban area in Saudi Arabia. For this couple, the roles are reversed since Aljawhara is the breadwinner for the house. The couples indicate that Aljawhara is a doctor who is earning a lot, so Muhaisen quit his job to be around the house. The husband indicates:

I believe we must share; especially with Aljawhara's work during the day. I get the chance to take care of the house and cleaning.

Aljawhara said:

Being the breadwinner of the house has been challenging, but Muhaisen supported me a lot in terms of working in the house. When I came back from work, we prepare the lunch together and spend time together.

When it comes to couples dealing with work life, Parker (2002) identified factors that are important to the family structure, and these include greater financial and social independence for women. Saudi women are more likely to participate in the workplace now than ever before (AlTamimi 2009). The interview addressed one important change and the trend of women participating in the workplace because of the new opportunities available with Vision 2030. This couple shows how traditional gender roles of husbands being the breadwinners have changed, changing their approach in how to take care of the house as a couple. When wives are the breadwinners, husbands are more likely to change their roles in the house. In addition, couples who live in urban areas in Saudi Arabia are more likely to be flexible with equal distribution of household tasks in their roles as couples. They indicated that being in an urban environment and being exposed to diverse communities has helped them in adopting this flexible approach. Most urban areas are more likely to host diverse communities of people coming from all over the world to visit these areas. There are 7 urban couples out of 14 who shared their perception as being flexible in sharing equal responsibilities. Most husbands indicated that they cook or clean the kitchen and take trash out.

Khalid (37) and his wife Mona (33) live in a rural area in Saudi Arabia. The couple has been married for five years and do not have children; they shared their perceptions on sharing household

responsibilities with the other partner. The husband is working in a full-time job, and the wife is unemployed. Khalid indicated:

Yes! We like to share responsibilities in our house. Even though I am the only one working in our small family, I am the breadwinner in our house. For some other responsibilities such as cleaning, or cooking, I like to participate when my time allows, especially on the weekend.

Mona agreed:

I like that we share some responsibilities in our house. I am not working now and not planning to work in future, so I don't mind working more in the house. I really love my house.

Another couple who lives in a rural area in Saudi Arabia are Nora (27) and her husband Faisal (30). They have been married since 2018 and have one child (11 years old). The couple lives in Taif and their families live in Riyadh, so they are considered as living in a rural city in Saudi Arabia. The husband has a full-time job, and the wife runs a small business from home. Nora said:

We have to share some house responsibilities because we live far away from our family. We visit them every 2 weeks, but we try to manage the house together. I cook and clean the kitchen and my husband does other rooms in our house.

Faisal, her husband, said:

I like that we divide our household responsibilities. It helped us a lot in managing the house in an efficient way. We also do not stick with a schedule; we like to share any chores just to make everything put together.

This couple live in a rural area in Saudi Arabia; however, they live far away from their extended family. This created a challenge for them in how to manage the household. They have to

divide the household responsibilities in an equal manner since no external assistance from their families is available for them. Since the Saudi family structure emphasizes closeness with family members, most rural families are likely to visit their parents nearly every day. In addition, the couple indicated that they don't stick with a schedule that each spouse strictly follows—they are flexible in assigning responsibilities in an equal manner. As a result, they worked on dividing some responsibilities in the house, so they manage the house and take care of their child. This interview shows that there is a small number of participants who live in rural areas who adopt a flexible approach in dividing the household chores. Gender roles can be flexible for couples who live in rural areas in Saudi Arabia. There are 3 out of 12 couples who suggested being flexible in sharing responsibilities with the other spouse has helped them with managing the household responsibilities.

Another couple is Hams (37) and her husband Fawaz (40). They come from a rural area. They have been married for 11 years and have two children. The husband is working in a full-time job, and the wife has a part-time job. In discussing sharing responsibilities in the house, Fawaz indicated:

I try to share some responsibilities with Hams such as taking trash out and driving my wife around. She did not drive yet, and I don't think she is interested in that.

Hams said:

I do most of the work since I work part-time as well. I do take my kids to my parents' house when I go to work. I don't have a housekeeper. I am not comfortable with driving yet; I like to be in the passenger seat.

This couple identifies sharing responsibilities differently from other couples. Moreover, I found that most of couples who come from rural areas are more likely to negotiate household

responsibilities differently. The couple is more likely to adopt a traditional mindset in the sense of the husband is the breadwinner of the house, and the wife is working in a part-time job. The wife is more likely to take care of the house most of the time; the husband is participating in other roles in the house, such as taking trash out or driving, since the wife is not driving yet. They identify these tasks as sharing responsibilities. Most families in Saudi Arabia hire housekeepers. The *Middle East Monitor* (2020) reports that the number of domestic workers (housekeepers, servants, or maids) is nearing four million. Two out of 12 couples coming from a rural area who did not travel abroad indicated that these roles are not considered as sharing responsibilities: they believe these are “husband roles” in the household. They are more likely to hold a traditional mindset in managing household responsibilities.

Overall, couples who are from urban areas in Saudi Arabia and traveled abroad seem to adopt flexible approaches in dealing with gender roles in the household. They are more likely to either participate freely or assign chores to manage the household responsibilities. Dual earners couples tend to share responsibilities and set a goal to achieve balance in social and work life. Couples coming from urban areas indicated that being in an urban environment has helped them in sharing responsibilities with their spouses. Being in an urban area in Saudi Arabia exposed couples to diverse communities. They can share responsibilities because the community around them—family members, friends, and relatives—encourages that perspective.

A few of the couples who traveled abroad and returned to Saudi Arabia changed their perception of sharing responsibilities in household. Those couples are from rural areas in Saudi Arabia. Even though they were exposed to the Western culture, they did not adopt the flexible approach in taking care of the house. There were 3 out of 14 couples who live in rural areas who are flexible in their gender roles. They share responsibilities and a willingness to participate in the tasks

required to run the house. Couples who never traveled abroad and live-in urban areas are more likely to adapt some changes in terms of household responsibilities, especially if they are dual earners. Couples who come from rural areas, however, are less likely to share responsibilities. In fact, few of them shared negotiating gender roles in household different from the ones who live in urban areas. They mentioned few tasks that husbands share with wives and they are referred to as “husband roles.” Gender roles are assigned differently when “husbands’ roles” mentioned. Two out of 10 rural couples consider roles such as taking trash outside and driving the family around as part of the husband’s role. The wives of these few participants did not drive and expressed no interest in driving. The data indicate that urban area couples, regardless of whether they had traveled abroad or not, are more likely to adopt a flexible approach in dealing with household responsibilities; however, couples who come from rural areas are more likely to adapt a traditional mindset in navigating gender roles.

4.2 Childcare Responsibilities

According to some scholars, couples’ attitudes are changing because of the rapid changes in the gender system and the responsibilities of men and women (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). With women participating in the labor force, their responsibilities as workers have increased. As a result, fathers tend to participate more in childcare (Pleck and Masciadrelli 2004). Negotiations among contemporary couples are different from traditional negotiations. If we were to compare traditional living arrangements and current couples’ negotiations, there would be a huge gap (Aldous et al. 1998). In the past, females were servants when their husbands came home from their jobs; preparing food and taking care of children was their responsibility (Coltrane 1996). As Coltrane (1996) asked, why didn’t men do more? Men’s roles were restricted at home and to other duties

within certain limitations. However, things are completely different for non-traditional couples: both husband and wife often work outside the home, and, when they come home, they are expected to serve the family together instead of the wife serving everyone while the husband rests. Another question is how, if they both work outside the home, they share responsibilities such as childcare. Until recently, the traditional marriage meant that the man was the breadwinner, and the woman was responsible for housework and childcare, but this has changed as gender roles evolve (Bianchi and Milkie 2000; Rogers and Amato 2000). These changing gender roles in marriage may impact the quality and satisfaction of marriage. Women in Saudi Arabia are expected to prioritize their children over work, while men are not expected to do that (Omair 2017). This set of expectations—those women and men have separate spheres—has encouraged traditional gender roles in Saudi Arabia. When analyzing Saudi couples, it is important to address the childcare aspect specifically, especially with a fertility rate that amounts to 2.32 children per woman in Saudi Arabia (O'Neill 2021).

In this section, I focus on how couples who studied abroad and returned to Saudi Arabia are dealing with taking care of children with respect to the changing gender environment. I will also address the other set of participants, those who never traveled abroad, to see how they approach childcare and deal with their children as couples and parents.

Mohannad (33) and his wife Reham (28) have been married for six years and studied abroad for four years. The couple has two children (a four-year-old and a nine-month-old). The wife works in a part-time job, and the husband has a full-time job. The couple comes from an urban area.

Mohannad explains their approach:

I take care of my responsibilities now and my daughters, I help my wife more and around the house. When we returned to Saudi Arabia, we faced some challenges on

how to agree of our roles as a couple. When we were abroad, we used to share everything because we spent most of our time together. When we came to Saudi Arabia, it is hard to keep up with our responsibilities. Some responsibilities are cleaning the house, preparing the food, and picking up the kids from school. Now, we try to share some of the responsibilities.

Reham said:

I take care of my daughter's education most of the time. I also make sure that their rooms are clean as well. I do most of the work, but when my husband is around, he helps me with the kids.

Their answers revealed that the husband, Mohannad, faced some challenges when they returned. Among these were how to navigate gender roles in the changing environment. This also involved the practical question of how they manage taking care of the children while both are in the workforce. His wife, Reham, seems to have adapted well to returning to Saudi Arabia. Not only must couples adjust to the new environment, but their children must also adjust to new social norms, new school, friends, and family. The couple also faced some challenges in adapting to the gender environment. Even though the couple came from an urban environment, it was challenging at the beginning.

Nine out of ten couples coming from urban areas indicated that they faced some difficulties in adjusting. Some difficulties include language barriers since children are more likely to learn the English language than Arabic. Out of 15 urban couples, three managed to teach their children Arabic and English as well. Others struggled to keep up the Arabic language. Another challenge is being familiar with family members. Since children had spent most of their years abroad, being

familiar with family members was challenging at the beginning. They also indicated that living in an urban setting has contributed positively to adjusting to the new environment as a couple.

Non-traditional couples are more likely to share responsibilities in taking care of the children. Some examples include following up with schoolwork, creating a children-friendly environment in the house, and simply being around the children most of the time. Of 15 urban couples who returned to Saudi Arabia, eight are willing to support each other in terms of how to navigate the responsibilities associated with having children in their lives. They acknowledge the importance of both spouses being around the children and participating in taking care of them.

A couple who lived in a rural area in Saudi Arabia, Abdullah (27) and his wife Lama (25), had just returned to Saudi Arabia one and a half years earlier. They have been married for six years and have one child, a three-year-old. The husband has a full-time job, and the wife is unemployed. Lama said:

The responsibility of being a wife and mom has been difficult for me. I also don't ask my family to help because I am used to take care of everything at the beginning. I don't have a housekeeper too, so I have to get used to it. My husband has his own responsibilities at work, so he doesn't help a lot in the house, and I don't expect him. He is not used to sharing responsibilities in the house.

Abdulla agreed:

I don't help a lot in the house, but I work as a full-time, so I can't work a lot in the house. I know my wife has been taking care of everything and I really appreciate it, I may help sometimes.

The couple indicated that they faced some challenges at the beginning. The changing environment has impacted how they expect to navigate gender roles as a couple. Having children

also creates some challenges in sharing gender roles as a couple. With the husband working full-time, the wife performs most of the household duties, and this involves taking care of the child. As previously indicated, in Saudi Arabia women are expected to prioritize children over work, and men are not expected to spend most of their time with their children. This has created a challenge in navigating gender roles (Al-Tamimi 2009). Moreover, couples who come from rural areas and have children face some added difficulties in adapting to gender roles. Most couples coming from rural areas are more likely to adopt a traditional mindset in navigating gender roles as couples. The traditional aspect of parenting involves men as the breadwinner and the women as stay-at-home moms. When the couple lived in the United States, they were used to Western culture in terms of being exposed to more equal gender roles; however, when they went back to Saudi Arabia, they changed their roles as couples. Couples who come from rural areas and studied abroad face challenges in negotiating their roles as a couple when they return because the environment around them emphasizes the traditional marriage. A minority of the participants supported this finding that couples who live in rural areas will not maintain roles similar to the ones they had adopted when they were living in the United States. There are 5 out of 14 rural couples faced challenges in adopting back more traditional roles with taking care of their children together.

One important aspect of parenting that many participants agreed on is the necessity of being “on the same page” as parents. Most felt that even if the parents disagree, dealing with it privately is the best strategy to avoid children being in the middle. Creating the best environment for the children is an essential aspect that couples focused on, especially couples coming from rural areas. Making sure that children have good relations with others in their circle is also important to these couples. Eight out of 15 couples coming from urban areas and who traveled abroad are more aware

of their children's environment and relations. There are 6 out of 14 rural couples who traveled shared similar aspect to urban couples in how they navigate children's environment and relations.

One couple who had never traveled abroad, Areej (31) and her husband Abdullah (35), shared their perceptions on how they handle childcare and parenting style. They are from a rural area in Saudi Arabia. The couple has two children. The husband is in a full-time job, and the wife is a stay-at-home mom. Areej said:

We do share equally, but I think I am doing most of the work. My husband sometimes helps but not all the time. I like to spend time with my kids and play with them, but sometimes the housework limits the time to spend.

Mohammed stated his opinion regarding their parenting style and childcare:

We are good at sharing. We raise the kids together and make decisions. I am not spending most of my time at our home, but I like to share our thoughts on our day-to-day activities. It is hard to keep up with children's activities, work and visiting family members and relatives too.

This interview illustrates how rural couples who never traveled abroad perceive specific gender roles assigned to each spouse. They may adopt a flexible approach in sharing some responsibilities, but a traditional mindset is mostly adopted. The traditional aspect means the husband is more likely to be the breadwinner, while the wife is taking care of the house and the children. Being social is one of the challenges that affected managing time as a family. Social gatherings and visiting relatives are very important in the rural areas, where social life is perceived as an essential aspect of their daily lives. They value the nuclear and extended family members, having grown up in an environment that appreciated social life with family members and neighbors.

Out of 12 rural couples who traveled abroad, four indicated that it is hard to keep up with taking care of children and keeping up with family gatherings and visiting relatives.

Another traveled couple, who come from an urban area, are Heba (34), the wife, and husband Mohammed (36). The couple has been married for 15 years and they have three children. The couple are working in full-time jobs. Heba revealed:

We are good at sharing responsibilities and one of them is taking care of the kids together. We like to make sure that we make decisions together as well.

Her husband said:

Yes, we like sharing the household responsibilities along with the kids. I am sure that Heba is doing great job taking care of the kids. I do work full-time, but I like to help a lot with the kids.

This couple from an urban area is more likely to share responsibilities in terms of taking care of the children and making decisions than couples who did not travel abroad, because of the traditional perspective in how to perceive gender roles. They emphasized that they like to agree on how to deal with their children. They negotiated how to parent and educate their children. Urban couples are more likely to perceive equal gender roles in dealing with their children. When making a decision, the couple would state their thoughts equally to come to the right decision. Six of the twelve couples coming from urban areas have helped in sharing responsibilities together as a couple. They are more likely to be flexible about that as well. Seven of the twelve indicated that they share responsibilities in taking care of their children.

4.3 Couples Perceiving Family and Relatives Involvement

This section addresses family members' involvement in couples' lives. The family structure in Saudi Arabia is very essential in both rural and urban areas. Islam is the main religion in Saudi Arabia, and Islam emphasizes the importance of the family structure and respecting family members (Hamdan 1990). The strong identity with Islam indicates that Islam is not only a religion—it is also a way of life. In addition, some Islamic rituals encourage Saudis to practice them with family members; some of these are Ramadan's nights (when Muslims fast for one month), and Jumaa day (Friday when people gather to pray). These are examples of how Saudis appreciate social gatherings and how Islam emphasizes practicing these rituals (Hamdan 1990). In this section, I will address the importance of family members and relatives and their impact on Saudi couples in how they navigate gender roles.

I will first address how couples who returned to Saudi Arabia from abroad evaluate relatives and family members' involvement. Those couples who did not travel will be addressed as well. Both set of couples shared their perceptions on how relatives are involved in their marriage or parenting styles. In this section, I will analyze their response to understand how couples negotiate gender roles and perceive family involvements in their lives.

Lama (25) and her husband Abdullah (27) shared their perceptions on the involvement of family members. The couple are from a rural area in Saudi Arabia, and they have been married for six years. They have one child who is three years old. The husband has a full-time job and the wife is unemployed. Lama explains the conflict between her desire to have her parenting respected and her desire to be respectful to her own mother:

After living with my husband only in the United States for 6 years it was difficult to perceive the social life in Saudi Arabia; especially when the family get involved in

our private life and how we raise our kids. One time my mom criticized my parenting style, I did not like that, but I have to keep going and be respectful. I don't appreciate anyone getting involve[d], but if it was my mom, I have to respect that.

Abdullah explains:

I can only say that we are still getting used to the responsibilities with the family comparing to our life in the United States. When we returned, most of them were involving in our lives, especially when we make decisions about our kids. I try to calm my wife more since she feels irritated from people getting involve. We had our kid abroad, so we are not use to people being involve in our lives.

Of the 14 rural participants who traveled abroad and returned to Saudi Arabia, six struggled with family and relatives' involvement. Most of the conflict involves how they parent their children, especially the wives. Most women indicated that family members and relatives maintain a stereotype that women are the ones who should be responsible of the children. Husbands are not considered in terms of taking care of the children. Women's responsibilities include how wives take care of the children's eating habits and general behavior. The respondents indicated that this family scrutiny required them to adjust when they returned. Some of them indicated that they try to avoid any gatherings with relatives. Because of the traditional stereotype from family and relatives, it seems that wives are more likely to get upset by the way relatives judge their children. On the other hand, the majority of husbands among this sample are not bothered by how much family and relatives are involved in making decisions. Because of the traditional mindset, husbands are not the one who are criticized by relatives and family members about how they deal with children.

Another couple from urban area in Saudi Arabia are Abdullah (50) and his wife Nahla (45). The couple has been married for 25 years and they have three children. The couple returned to

Saudi Arabia more than one year ago. They shared their perception on how the couple approaches relatives' involvement in their personal life. Both spouses work in full-time jobs. Nahla indicated:

It was average between ease and difficulty. We struggled at the beginning, but we got used to it. My kids were struggling and this what made it hard for me. They saw other kids' behavior and could not keep up with them. Such as how to play or even talk and understand others.

Abdullah said:

Yes, I would agree that we faced some challenges at the beginning. I saw my kids not getting along with other kids. I know that this created a challenge in terms of adjustment. One thing I notice they did not get used to traditions in Saudi Arabia such as wearing traditional clothing for men and women. We used to visit every year, but since we are staying longer than a month, they noticed the change. Me and my wife work hard on being on the same page in terms of dealing with our kids, but sometimes we lose it in how to approach the situation and start arguing.

This couple indicated that they faced some challenges at the beginning with their children adjusting to the environment. They indicated that wearing the traditional clothing and adjusting to social norms in Saudi Arabia were confusing for the children and required getting used to. There are 7 out of 15 couples who come from urban areas in Saudi Arabia who report that both husbands and wives struggle in dealing with the effect of relatives' involvement. There are 6 out of 15 couples who seem to agree on how to deal with their children; however, the relatives' involvement in simple decisions created some problems in how to respond to their involvement as a couple. Family members and relatives commenting on and criticizing the couple's behavior—criticizing their first language (English) or discipline approach—has bothered most of those interviewed.

Saeed (28) and his wife Meaad (25) are from a rural area in Saudi Arabia. The couple has been married for three years and returned to Saudi Arabia one year ago, and they have one child. The couple expressed their thoughts on family involvements in their lives as a couple. The husband is working in a full-time job while the wife is a stay-at-home mom, Saeed indicated:

When we returned to Saudi Arabia, we noticed how our life is different than when we lived in the U.S. especially with our parents being involved. For me, I am not bothered by that at all. Actually, they used to get involved even when we were abroad. So, it was not a big of a deal.

His wife Meaad indicated:

I did notice the change; especially when we spent the first three years of our marriage abroad. For us, we are used to it, so I don't see any difficulty in dealing with that. My husband as well, his family is more involved than before, and we don't mind it. They are our families, if they don't get involved who will.

Couples coming from rural areas in Saudi Arabia are less likely to be bothered by family and relatives' involvement since they are used to it. This means that most wives are less bothered and judged in terms of how they deal with their children. In addition, couples who come from rural areas are more likely to be close with other family members and relatives because of their family structure. Half—seven out of 14 couples—indicated that they were used to family involvement before, during, and after they studied abroad. They were brought up in a community that appreciated the closeness of family members. Some examples of how parents were involved concern how one spouse is dealing with children compared to the other spouse. They believe that family members will provide them with helpful feedback for their lives, and they are used to this close family structure in their community. In addition, most rural areas in Saudi Arabia are small,

so the closeness aspect is a norm in these areas. Even though they spent some time abroad, these couples did not change their perspective on how families are close. Most couples seem to agree on their approach and understanding of family and relatives' involvement.

For couples who never traveled abroad, I will indicate how these couples approach the family and relatives' involvement in their children's lives. I will also address how the couples' perception of this involvement affects their gender roles in the household.

The first couple, Khalid (35) and his wife Joud (30), come from an urban area in Saudi Arabia. The couple has been married for eight years and have two children. Both work full-time. Joud states her strong feelings:

I really do not appreciate others getting involve in my life or my kid's life.

Sometimes people feel they are obligated to be involved in your life; however, I sometimes clarify that to others. I believe this is the best way to stop them from involving themselves in our lives.

Her husband indicated that he is far less upset:

I see how my wife is upset; I am not sure why she got upset very fast. For me, if I see someone getting involved, I just don't care at all.

This couple indicated that they have different perspective in terms of how they approach other people. The wife gets upset if someone gets involved; however, the husband stated that he does not understand the frustration. Again, wives are more likely to be judged in how they treat their children, while husbands are not expected to be as much involved as the wives. This kind of different perspective in how couples deal with family and relatives created some challenges for this couple, since they do not agree on how to approach the involvement of family and relatives. There are 7 out of 14 couples coming from urban areas who do *not* prefer family and relatives getting

involved in their lives. Husbands saw that wives get sensitive if someone got involved in their lives. This shows how some spouses perceive gender roles differently in how they deal with family and relatives' involvement.

Fawaz (40) and Hams (37) live in a rural area in Saudi Arabia. They have been married for 11 years and have two children. The husband is in a full-time job, while the wife is a stay-at-home mom. Hams indicated:

In our community, we are used to family and relative's involvement. They get involved in everything. How do we deal with our kids, or how we deal with each other? For me, I got used to it, that I don't bother getting upset or considering their opinion.

Her husband, Fawaz, agreed:

Yes! I saw many of our family members get involved, so we don't bother.

Sometimes I do respond to them; especially if it is something with my wife like how we communicate as a couple.

This couple suggested that they are used to family members and relative's involvement in their lives and that they are more likely to ignore others' input. Out of 12 couples coming from rural areas who have not traveled abroad, eight are used to family members' involvement in their personal lives. Three out of 12 husbands coming from rural areas in Saudi Arabia indicated that they are used to such family involvement. On the other hand, in four out of 12 couples, husbands mentioned that their wives did not appreciate family members' involvement in their parenting style. In fact, some spouses may argue because of family involvement. As a result, they are more likely to respond to (or ignore) advice from other family members and relatives. Couples coming from rural areas in Saudi Arabia are more likely to get used to family members' involvement in

their personal lives. Being in rural areas in Saudi Arabia, couples are more likely to be close to family members and relatives because of the nature of the community. As rural communities encourage the closeness of family members, family involvement is a norm within the community.

Conclusion

Overall, in this chapter I have presented findings on how couples navigate gender roles in managing household duties, share childcare responsibilities, and deal with family and relatives' involvement. In the first subtheme, I analyzed couples' perception of how they negotiate gender roles as couples. The first set of couples are those who traveled and lived abroad and then returned to Saudi Arabia. By the time of the interviews, most couples had spent more than a year back in Saudi Arabia. The data showed that couples originally coming from urban areas in Saudi Arabia perceive gender roles differently from those who come from rural areas in Saudi Arabia. After analyzing couples' responses, I found that most of the urban couples who returned to Saudi Arabia faced some challenges at the beginning; however, adopting some strategies to help them navigate their roles helped them a lot in overcoming any challenges. One strategy is dividing the household responsibilities and sticking with sharing those tasks. Another strategy is managing time well, such as avoiding going out during the week. This approach was adopted by most couples who are dual earners. When it comes to rural couples, fewer than half of the couples changed their perception on how to navigate household responsibilities as couples. In rural areas, family bonds are essential to maintaining social life. Couples indicated that if one spouse is a full-time worker, that makes it hard to make sense of navigating gender roles. Some husbands indicated that they would share some responsibilities if they had the time. The other sample of couples were those who had never traveled abroad. More than half of urban couples indicated that they share responsibilities together, especially in taking care of the children. Rural couples indicate that keeping up with the household

responsibilities is challenging, especially if one spouse is working full-time. Rural and urban couples differ in navigating gender roles, and this goes back to their family structure and how they perceive their lives as couples.

The second subtheme addressed how couples navigate gender roles as parents. Taking care of children is a hard task, and in that section, I addressed how couples perceive approaches in navigating gender roles while taking care of their children. The first set of couples were those who had traveled abroad. The data showed that couples coming from urban areas in Saudi Arabia who have returned from the United States face challenges in negotiating gender roles as couples. Some challenges escalate to arguments between the couples as they navigate their gender roles in parenting their children. The other set of couples who traveled abroad and come from rural areas in Saudi Arabia shared their perceptions as well. About half of the couples coming from rural areas in Saudi Arabia faced challenges in taking care of their children. They also had not maintained traditional gender roles while they were abroad. They indicated that the rural community played a huge role in perceiving a traditional gender role mindset.

When it comes to the second set of respondents, urban couples who never traveled abroad shared their approach on how to navigate gender roles while parenting. They are more likely to adopt a traditional perspective in parenting their children with wives being the ones responsible for taking care of the children. More than half of them indicated that they are willing to share responsibilities as couples.

The last subtheme was about family and relatives' involvement and how couples navigate gender roles. Among those who had traveled abroad who come from urban areas in Saudi Arabia, more than half indicated that they faced challenges with families' involvement in their lives. These challenges sometimes escalate to arguments between the spouses since both were involved in

taking care of their children. The second set are couples coming from rural areas; half of these spouses indicate that they are annoyed by having to deal with relatives' involvement. The other half of spouses suggested that they are used to such family and relatives' involvement. Since they are used to it, they are more likely to ignore any comments coming from relatives without disrespecting them. The other set of couples are the ones who never traveled abroad. More than half of urban couples who did not travel abroad consider the extended family's involvement as a difficulty; the wives struggle the most, since most feel they are judged. When it comes to couples coming from rural areas, more than half of them consider family involvement as a norm in their society, and they value the family structure and the involvement of family and relatives.

CHAPTER V: SOCIAL STRATEGIES

This chapter covers responses related to the ways that Saudi couples navigate their social environment: how they perceive social life in the society; whether they develop friendly relations with people in general; or whether they feel socially isolated because of the country's conservative attitudes. More specifically, what aspects in the gender environment play a role in steering a course through social life? This section will address the social strategies that couples adopt in terms of gender roles as well as provide information on social strategies couples employ to manage a social life. I will address couples' overall relations in Saudi society, dealing with the opposite gender, and with behavior in public places. The first section will cover how traveled and non-traveled couples navigate gender roles, comparing and contrasting their strategies and behavior. I also compare and contrast the ways they navigate gender roles. After reviewing all the responses that I recorded during interviews, the following sub-themes arose:

- *Examining couples' overall social relationships among Saudis in Saudi Arabia.*
- *Dealing with the opposite gender in public places.*

5.1 Couples' Overall Relations with Saudis in Saudi Arabia

In this paper, *social life* is taken to mean couples' external relationships. There are two forms of external relationships, relationships with family and relatives and relationships with friends. The data address couples' approach in determining how to navigate gender roles within social life. To do this, I interviewed two sets of couples: those who had traveled and lived abroad and those who had not traveled; I also took into account the variables of their coming from rural or urban areas in Saudi Arabia. Below, I analyze the respondents' answers in terms of their social relations with Saudi people.

The first set of couples are the ones who come from urban areas and then traveled abroad. Lama (27) and her husband Abdullah (25) come from urban areas in Saudi Arabia. The couple has been married for six years and does not have children. The husband has a full-time job, and the wife is unemployed. They returned to Saudi Arabia more than a year ago. They share a similar experience in terms of their social relations in the United States and how it impacted their lives when they returned to Saudi Arabia. They agree that at the beginning of their time abroad it was hard for them to form relationships with Americans, especially for those whose goal is studying abroad, as Lama explained:

The American culture imposed itself all over the world. I was shocked at the beginning but knowing about it is not like living it. One of the most important difficulties was the beginning of my study at the university as a covered Muslim girl. It was difficult to engage in university life with the rest of the students. A lot of students avoided talking to me because of the hijab, but with time I began to adapt to the situation as long as I was not harmed by anyone.

Abdullah, her husband, indicates that although he made friends, the experience was very difficult:

My goal was to finish my education as fast as I can, and I don't like to remember those years because they were stressful to me. The nicest thing was meeting some good friends.

The couple shared a similar approach to their experience in forming relationships when they were abroad. When it comes to forming relations in Saudi Arabia, the couple indicated that being around family members and relatives is one of the important aspects of their social life. They are more likely to be familiar with family and friends, since they share similar experiences. Couples

who come from urban areas are more likely to have similar feelings about how they navigate gender roles in external relations. Of 15 urban couples who traveled abroad and returned, 13 share similar approaches on how to navigate gender roles in social life. Moreover, they indicate that family members and friends are important aspects of their social life.

Another couple who come from urban areas in Saudi Arabia, Azzam (29) and his wife Nour (26), have been married for four years with no children; at the time of the interview, they too had been back in Saudi Arabia for more than a year. The husband is working in a full-time job and the wife is unemployed. The couple indicated that their experience was hard at the beginning; they too faced some challenges in forming friendships with Americans while they were studying abroad, as Nour explained:

As for the challenges, yes, there are challenges to this day as it is difficult to get Americans to accept you as a friend and you have to go through many stages first. Yes, we hear that the American people are very nice, but this is their lifestyle, but if you want to connect yourself in their lives and become one of their close friends, you have to do a lot to reach this stage.

Azzam agreed with his wife and explained how their experience abroad affected their relationships when they returned home:

We faced some challenges when we were abroad, I also believe that this helped us a lot when we returned to Saudi Arabia. We are more relaxed when we form new relations with other Saudis.

Nour and her husband shared a similar approach on how to navigate gender roles in social life. They mentioned an important aspect of how the challenge of forming friendships with Americans impacted their social relations skills in Saudi Arabia. Roughly half, eight out of fifteen

urban couples, mentioned that being in a challenging environment abroad encouraged them to be flexible in forming relations later in Saudi Arabia. These findings support previous research, as reported by Alanazi (2014)—that adopting a friendly attitude towards Americans both inside and outside the academic boundaries can help ease the adjustment challenges and difficulties when they return. In urban communities in Saudi Arabia, the social life is mostly within nuclear family members and close friends. It seems that having been abroad, taking part in diverse communities where both husbands and wives are earners, changes the way that couples interact socially. The nature of their social life has changed because of the couple's work obligations and their exposure to a wider circle of attitudes.

Rural couple Saeed (28) and his wife Meaad (25) have been married for four years and have one child. The couple described their previous experience when they were abroad and their later experience with social relations in Saudi Arabia. The husband is working in a full-time job while the wife is a stay-at-home mom. Saeed, the husband, said:

We faced some challenges in communicating with others in American society. Even though we were familiar with the Western culture, we struggled to make friends. I felt like I am an outsider and trying so hard to fit into society.

Meaad, his wife, agreed:

I agree with Saeed on how stressful it was for us to make friends with Americans. It is not about racism; it is more about what they assume the Saudi people are. One way I noticed Americans get excited is when I talk about the Saudi Arabian culture. They want to learn more about the culture and understand our traditions which I appreciate.

This couple indicated that they faced challenges in making friends with Americans when they were abroad. They argued that even though they have a great understanding of the Western culture, they still suffered from understanding the American culture. They found that initiating a conversation is very difficult to start with, so they proposed talking about the Saudi Arabia culture to make a conversation. Like the urban couples, Saeed and Mean agree that relatives are an important source of social life in Saudi Arabia. They suggested that the aspect of extended family and relatives is especially important in rural communities. There are about 10 out of 14 couples who shared similar feelings between the husbands and wives. They also suggested that being part of an extended family is a norm in rural communities and that they appreciate being around family members and relatives in Saudi Arabia.

Another interview collected information from Mona (31) and her husband Hisham (35) who are from a rural area in Saudi Arabia. The couple has been married for 12 years and has three children. Both the husband and the wife are working in a full-time job. They shared their perception of the challenges involved in making friends with the American people and its effect on them when they returned to Saudi Arabia. Hisham started:

We were very familiar with the American culture from the media, but we faced many cultural, financial, religious, social, and security challenges, especially when the children enrolled in public schools in American, and it became our responsibility to strengthen the Saudi Arabian and Islamic cultures in them, in addition to the difficulties we faced during our study.

His wife, Mona, agreed:

At first, my husband did not agree with me talking to my classmates, then when he went to classes, he saw the mixed-gender environment and understood it. We talked

a lot to set boundaries such as how we talk to the opposite gender. I also think we were worried about our image when we were abroad. When we returned, this helped us in understanding how to navigate our social life.

Couples who traveled abroad and come from rural areas agree on how to perceive gender roles in dealing with social life. In addition, having children impacted how they perceive gender roles when they were abroad. They supported each other in emphasizing Islamic laws. At the beginning of their study abroad, rural couples faced difficulties in how to make friends with American people. One difficulty concerned agreeing on how to perceive the opposite gender; then they began setting boundaries and understanding the other spouse and socializing with Americans became a fun aspect of life abroad for the couples. There are about 10 out of 14 rural couples who faced difficulty in learning how to perceive the opposite gender.

After analyzing the data for this section, many aspects have emerged on how to perceive gender roles in social life. The main aspect is comparing the rural and urban perceptions of gender roles. Couples coming from urban areas are more likely to agree on how to perceive gender roles with their social life. Being abroad affected their approach to navigating social life; however, rural couples who traveled abroad face more difficulties in adapting to the new demands that being abroad placed on their previous conceptions of gender roles.

I also interviewed urban couples who did not travel abroad. The first couple is Aljawhara (30) and her husband Muhaisen (34). They are from Dammam and have been married for five years with no children. The couples indicate that Aljawhara is a doctor who is earning a lot, so Muhaisen quit his job to be around the house. The couple has not traveled abroad or experienced Western society. Aljawhara explained her opinion on social life:

I believe there are limits and boundaries for socializing with others, especially in our community. We come from Dammam, so social life is very important for us. We have weekly meetings with family members and every month, we meet with friends. I and my husband respect each other life and understand our social life needs.

Muhaisen agreed but expanded on his wife's explanation:

Social life is very important in our community. For our family members, we appreciate weekly meetings and getting together. I also like to spend time with my friends almost every day, I sometimes argue with my wife about that. She understands my social life, but she thinks that I spend most of my time with them. I believe being around people is very important for me.

For urban couples, social life is also very important. They indicated that the urban community encourages social life, especially with family and relatives. Of 14 urban couples, 11 agree on the importance of social life. In addition, couples perceive balanced social life as essential for them. There are about 3 out of 11 husbands who indicated that their wives complained about the amount of time the husbands spent with their friends. They believe that they spent too much time with friends and that they should dedicate more time to their family members.

Another urban couple who did not travel abroad, Ahmed (42) and Amal (40) who have been married for ten years, shared their perception on how to navigate gender roles in social life. The husband is in a full-time job and the wife is unemployed, Amal indicated:

For our social life, we like to be around family members most of the time. We try to take turns for our weekend gatherings; especially if the two of us are attending the same gathering. I and my husband set a schedule on whom do we meet on weekends. He always respects my time; especially when I get together with my friends.

Ahmed, the husband, said:

I enjoy our weekly scheduled meetings; I think this helped us to understand each other's social needs. I like to spend time with my friends, and I like that my wife will be spending a fun time too. For our children, we like to be around families and friends who have children, so our children enjoy their time.

Urban couples who did not travel abroad also appreciate social life. They indicated that being in an urban community has encouraged them to socialize more with others. Husbands and wives share similar perceptions on navigating social life, with 12 out of 14 couples sharing a similar approach on how to navigate social life as couples. They believe having a balanced social life is important for them, so everyone in the family enjoys their time.

When it comes to rural couples who did not travel abroad, there are Nora (27) and her husband Faisal (30). The couple comes from a rural area in Saudi Arabia. They have been married for three years and have one child. The husband has a full-time job, and the wife runs a small business from home. They shared their thoughts on how social life has affected them as a couple. Nora indicated the importance of socializing with family:

I think over the years social life has changed in many areas in Saudi Arabia. For our city, we still value gatherings and being around people. The weekends are always busy for us, we gather with my family on one day and the other day is with my husband's family. This helped us a lot, but if we have friends gathering, it will mess up our weekend.

Faisal offers a slightly different perspective:

Family is always first, but sometimes I like to meet my friends on the weekends. I argue with Nora about it, but we figure it out some days. I like spending time with

my nuclear family too, but since social family is important in our city, I find it hard to set time limit myself to spending time with only my family and my extended family.

Another interview with a rural couple who did not travel abroad was with Fawaz (40) and Hams (37). The couple has been married for 11 years with two children. Coming from a rural area in Saudi Arabia, they shared their perception on how they perceive social relations in Saudi Arabia. The husband is working in a full-time job, and the wife has a part-time job. Fawaz, the husband, explained:

In our community, we like to be close with family members and friends. We value socializing with relatives too. We navigate social life by attending to most of them. Being around people all the time makes us feel good. We were already brought up in a community where they value members in the family and neighbors too.

Hams stated:

We do like to be around people most of the time, it makes us feel good about ourselves. We sometimes spend too much time that I miss my husband and the children too. Neighbors too are important in our community; we like to exchange some dishes and do monthly visits.

Rural couples also appreciate social life and gathering with family members and relatives from extended families. There are 10 out of 12 couples who shared that they grew up in a community where social gatherings are valued all the time. Some of them spend every day with other family members or relatives. In addition, there are 7 out of 10 couples who did not travel abroad who seem to share different perceptions on how to navigate gender roles in social life. While the husbands appreciate gathering with family, spending time with friends is also important to them. On the other hand, the wives expressed their feelings that they would like for their husbands to

spend less time with friends. Rural couples are less likely to agree on the process of navigating social life. Since they were young, socializing with people in their community or the family has been essential to them, but sometimes they feel that they may spend too much time with extended family members or neighbors around them.

The extent of couples' community in the city (and this includes family relations) can impact how they perceive gender roles. Couples coming from rural areas perceive social relations differently from couples coming from urban areas. After analyzing the data above, I can say that couples coming from urban areas in Saudi Arabia are more likely to agree on the process of navigating social life. Most couples both rural and urban indicated that they appreciate social life; being in a family-oriented environment has encouraged them to prioritize family and relatives. In addition, Saudi Arabia is a conservative country that follows the Islam religion; from what I observed from the interviews, couples are following the Islamic religion in terms of appreciating parents and family members. About 10 couples who come from either urban or rural areas mentioned a famous hadith that reflects the importance of social and family relations. According to *Hadith of the Day* (2016):

The person who perfectly maintains the ties of kinship is not the one who does it because he gets recompensed by his relatives (for being kind and good to them), but the one who truly maintains the bonds of kinship is the one who persists in doing so even though the latter has severed the ties of kinship with him. (Al-Bukhari)

When it comes to rural couples who did not travel abroad, 7 out of 14 couples perceive social life differently from each other. Husbands have indicated that their wives argue with them about how much time they want to devote to seeing friends in their social lives. The wives mentioned that they felt that their husbands spend too much time with their friends. Some indicated

that this has resulted in arguments every time the husbands mention going to see their friends. The rest of the rural couples have indicated that they value family and relatives' relations. Overall, urban couples differ from rural couples in how they navigate gender roles in social life.

5.2 Dealing with the Opposite Gender

When it comes to social life in Saudi Arabia, one important element has to be addressed: the mixed-gender environment and how couples' approach that in Saudi Arabia. Since Saudi Arabia is a very gender-segregated country, mixed gatherings of women and men are prohibited, especially in educational institutions and recreational places (Mayer 2000). In this section of the chapter, I will address how couples navigate gender roles in a mixed-gender environment. The respondents were asked about what changes they had implemented regarding gender-related behaviors such as gender-mixing relations and how to deal with them. For these questions, there are two sets of participants, again, the ones who traveled abroad and those who did not. Another important variable to address continues to be whether a couple comes from an urban or rural area in Saudi Arabia. I will address how they manage to share similar or different approaches as a couple and whether the couples perceived the mixed-gender environment as a norm, especially given the innovations initiated by Vision 2030 aspect.

Coming from urban areas in Saudi Arabia are Neam (27) and Mansoor (32). The couple has been married for six years with no children. They lived in the United States for more than one year. Both are working, and Neam has a full-time job. The couple shared their experience in communicating with the opposite gender and how they managed that as a couple. Mansoor said:

Well, it was easier to deal with both genders abroad due to the nature of their culture, and people are familiar since childhood with how to communicate with the opposite sex, unlike us in Saudi Arabia. I was familiar with how to respect the other gender,

so I did not face any challenges. When we got married, we understood that when we go abroad, we have to communicate with the opposite gender.

Neam supported his opinion by saying:

Yes! I agree with Mansoor, I believe their culture played a huge role in how we communicated with the opposite gender. I and my husband know that our behavior with the opposite gender will be mostly friendly. They are already used to it and they have some boundaries in dealing with the opposite gender. Even when we returned to Saudi Arabia, I don't have any problem with a mixed-gender environment. I respected other men while we were abroad or in Saudi Arabia.

This urban couple suggested that they were prepared for dealing with the opposite gender while staying in the United States. I asked them if they faced any challenges with dealing with the opposite gender when they returned to Saudi Arabia, and they indicated that they do not have any problem with that. They consider it very normal to deal with them. There are 12 out of 15 urban couples who traveled abroad who indicated that coming from urban areas and being abroad has helped them in navigating the mixed-gender environment. The couples seem to agree on how to perceive gender roles when interacting with the opposite gender. The other three couples indicated that they have changed in terms of navigating their gender roles with the opposite gender in Saudi Arabia.

Another urban couple, Reham (28) and her husband Mohannad (33), come from an urban area in Saudi Arabia. They have been married for six years and have two children. At the time of the interview, they had been in Saudi Arabia for more than a year after their return from the States. . The husband is working in a full-time job, and Reham is searching for a job. They shared how they perceive the mixed-gender environment as a couple. Mohannad said:

The mixed-gender environment has benefited women to achieve and maintain important roles in social and economic fields. The world needs both sexes for healthy purposes with keeping in mind the differences between the two genders. My wife and daughters never had issues dealing with the opposite sex. We were brought up in an environment that doesn't segregate women and men.

Reham seconded her husband's assessment:

I agree with Mohannad, I believe being in an urban community helped us navigate the mixed-gender environment easily. When we were abroad, we did not face any challenge to navigate the mixed-gender environment. Even when we got married, we were on the same page in terms of the mixed-gender environment.

This urban couple indicates that being in an urban community helped a lot in navigating the mixed-gender environment. The couple mentioned that they share similar perspectives in dealing with those of the opposite gender. These couples are among the 12 out of 15 couples.

Some couples, however, who traveled abroad had come from rural areas. One such couple was Mariam (29) and her husband Haidar (31). The couple has been married for five years and they have two children. Both spouses are working in a full-time job. They shared their perception on how to navigate gender roles in dealing with the opposite gender in public places. Haidar said:

When we were abroad, we got used to dealing with the opposite gender, especially in the workplace. We came from a rural more conservative community that believes talking to the opposite gender is a sin. At first, it was hard for us to navigate dealing with the opposite gender as couples. We were confused about how the other spouse will react.

Mariam explains how their process of communication evolved over time:

Coming from rural communities has affected us on how to navigate the interaction to the opposite gender. When we are abroad, we took time to understand ourselves. Then, we decided to communicate with the opposite gender and understand the other person with respect.

Rural couples who traveled abroad explained that their previous experiences in rural areas impacted how they perceived the opposite gender. Of the 14 couples, ten indicated that they faced challenges in navigating gender roles while dealing with the opposite gender. They suggested that it was difficult at the beginning, but that they then got used to it. Some, six out of the ten couples, maintained a similar approach in how to deal with the opposite gender when they returned to Saudi Arabia.

Another rural couple who shared their perception on navigating gender roles with the opposite gender is Mohammed (34) and his wife Wadha (32). They traveled abroad and then returned to Saudi Arabia. The couple has been married for 19 years and has four children. The husband is working in a full-time job while the wife is unemployed. At the time of the interview, the couple had returned to Saudi Arabia and been living there for almost a year. Mohammed revealed:

Socializing with the opposite gender is considered a harmful behavior in our religion. Especially if we are in public places, some men may look at my wife or my sister in a dirty way. Some believe that they have the right to do something like that because they were not exposed to the other gender. I always tell my wife that we should avoid mixed-gender places.

Wadha, his wife, agreed and explained:

Dealing with the opposite gender might be easy for some and hard for others. It depends on how they grew up and how they view the other gender. Even though we traveled, our community is not accepting the mixed-gender environment. As my husband said, yes, we avoid mixed-gender environments in public places.

Saeed (28) and Meaad (25), introduced earlier, come from a rural area in Saudi Arabia, and they shared their perception on how to navigate gender roles with the mixed-gender environment. The husband is working in a full-time job while the wife is a stay-at-home mom. The couple had traveled abroad and had returned to Saudi Arabia 14 months earlier when the interview took place. The couple has been married for four years and has one child Saeed said:

I think it is hard to adjust to the mixed-gender environment, especially in rural communities. We are still facing some difficulties with that. For our marriage, we like to be on the same page for how to navigate gender roles with the opposite gender.

His wife Meaad said:

We grew up in a strict environment that discourage any communications with the opposite gender. When we studied abroad, we faced some challenges at the beginning then we tried to break this barrier by talking first with teachers then classmates. This helped us a lot in communicating with the opposite gender.

The couple indicated a different perspective on the complexities of gender roles. They suggested that coming from rural areas has impacted how they choose to conduct themselves when it comes to gender roles. The couple shared the same perspective in terms of the mixed-gender environment. They both indicated that even choosing to adhere the limitations, they fear it may lead to some negative consequences, such as having relationships outside of marriage. They agree that

others may not respect the other gender, especially in public places. When men misunderstand and send the wrong signal, it may lead to confusion between individuals in public places. There are 4 out of 14 rural couples who avoid the mixed-gender environment. Most couples agree on how to navigate the mixed-gender environment.

The second set of couples are those who did not travel abroad. In this section, I will address how the non-traveling couples process navigating gender roles with the opposite gender. The couple is Aljawhara (30) and her husband Muhaisen (34). They are from a rural area in Saudi Arabia and have been married for five years with no children. The couple has not traveled abroad or experienced Western society. The couples indicate that Aljawhara is a doctor who is earning a lot, so Muhaisen quit his job to be around the house. They share their perception on how to navigate the opposite gender as couples. Aljawhara said:

I believe it is better to not have a mixed-gender environment in Saudi Arabia. The negatives are more than the positives. I do not think everyone understands how complicated it is to sit next to foreign men in a restaurant. Saudis are not used to it, so jumping into a mixed-gender environment is a risk. I think women face more pressure worrying about other men's looks in public places, so I don't think it is a great idea to be in a mixed-gender environment.

Her husband Muhaisen understood but added:

I see it is ok. I see how Aljawhara is bothered by that, and I understand it since she always complains about it. I also think since we have been in a society that is very conservative, it is hard for us to be in a mixed-gender environment. I and my friends always talk about how hard it is to be in a mixed-gender environment in public places, we cannot assume everyone behaves well.

The couple shared different approaches on how to navigate the mixed-gender environment in a public place. The wife indicated that she doesn't feel comfortable and does not support the idea of being in a mixed-gender environment. When she said “foreign,” she was referring to people who are not related to her. She was not comfortable while sharing her feelings, and that is why her husband jumped in and elaborated on her answer. He believes it is all right to be in a mixed-gender environment, but he understands his wife's discomfort about being around the opposite gender. Interestingly, he shared that his friends talk about the idea of being in a mixed-gender environment. He wanted to emphasize that not everyone is unperturbed by the mixed-gender environment in public places. In fact, 10 out of 12 couples do not agree with supporting the mixed-gender environment in public places. Two of the 12 couples do not agree, but also understand the other spouse's feelings.

Another couple who come from rural areas are Fawaz (40) and his wife Hams (37); they have been married for 11 years and have two children. The husband is working in a full-time job, and the wife has a part-time job. When they expressed their opinion on dealing with the mixed environment, Hams revealed:

It is good if it is under Islamic limits. Many workplace sectors encourage a mixed environment, such as the health sector. Doctors and nurses are more likely to be around the opposite gender. For public places, it will be hard to adopt a mixed-gender environment. For me, I am ok with it, I would avoid it sometimes. My husband knows that there are limited interactions with the opposite gender, so we both understand that.

Fawaz her husband said:

In my opinion, the interactions with the opposite sex should be within limits and for necessity only like in workplace or professional matter. My wife and I tend to avoid communicating with the opposite gender if there is no need. We believe in respect and communicating with the opposite gender under Islamic limits. This is how we are brought up in our communities.

The couple shares similar opinion on dealing with the opposite gender. They suggested that communicating with the opposite gender should be limited and may be avoided if there is no reason for it. Couples coming from rural areas indicate that they form this kind of perception based on where they grew up. Parents maintained a mindset that encourages avoiding the interactions of the mixed-gender environment. Out of 12 rural couples who did not travel abroad, nine indicated that coming from rural areas impacted their perception on how to navigate mixed-gender environments.

When it comes to urban couples who have not traveled abroad, Mansour (33) and his wife Hind (27) shared their thoughts on how they navigate the mixed-gender environment. Both are working, and Neam has a full-time job. They have been married for four years and have no children. Hind stated:

For the workplace, I think it should be normal to deal with the opposite gender with respect. I come from an urban community that encourages putting work first, even if it involves a mixed-gender environment. Even when I got married, my husband comes from an urban area too, so navigating the mixed-gender environment was not a challenge.

Mansour said:

Since we are used to the mixed-gender environment, it is normal to deal with the opposite sex. Most workplaces don't adopt the mixed-gender environment all the

time, it is only at important meetings. I always tell Hind if employees are respecting others, harassment will not exist.

The urban couple shared a similar approach on how to navigate gender roles. They indicated that the mixed-gender environment in the workplace is normal since everyone is respectful of others. Another important observation is that most couples coming from urban areas are more likely to find the mixed-gender environment as acceptable, since they were brought up in a culture that normalizes a mixed-gender environment in the workplace. There are 9 out of 14 couples who find that in the workplace the mixed-gender environment is a norm. Moreover, urban couples are brought up in an environment that encourages the mixed-gender environment in the workplace. Prioritizing work and professional aspects are essential for the urban community.

Another urban couple who did not travel abroad is Joud (30) and her husband Khalid (35). They shared their opinion regarding the mixed-gender environment in public places or workplaces. They have been married for eight years with two children. Both spouses work in a full-time job, Joud said

Where I work is the worst environment. I am facing many challenges in a mixed-gender environment, especially in a workplace. The place is full of self-restraint, stress, and hypocrisy. One example that happened to me a month ago . . . one of my male coworkers started talking to me about his personal life and thought that I can be involved in that. I was so bothered by that.

Khalid her husband indicated:

For me, it is hard to be in a mixed-gender environment. As my wife mentioned, some people from the opposite gender believe they have the right to involve you in their

life just because you are around them most of the day. I believe it is hard since we are not used to the mixed-gender environment.

The couple shared similar opinions on how they navigate gender relations as a couple and how the mixed-gender environment is affecting their lives. The couple indicated it is hard for them to accept the mixed-gender environment. The wife shared some negative experiences in her workplace. Her husband was sympathetic toward her experience. He supported his opinion by suggesting that Saudi society is not ready for the mixed-gender environment. There are five out of 14 couples who indicated a negative experience toward the mixed-gender environment in the workplace; as a result, they agreed on avoiding the opposite gender. The couple believes that the urban environment has impacted how they perceive their gender roles as couples. Most interviews suggested that the mixed-gender environment is not encouraged in rural communities. They presented some examples of how other people in the community do not respect the mixed-gender environment.

Conclusion

This section of the paper addressed couples' perceptions of how best to navigate the mixed-gender environment in Saudi Arabia. Some couples in Saudi Arabia adopt strategies to navigate the gender roles and gender-related issues with each other. I addressed interviews from both the travelers and non-travelers. I also examined the effect of couples' coming from urban and rural areas and how place affects forming perceptions and expectations about gender roles.

The first part of this section addressed the travelers' perception of social relations, noting as well whether couples come from urban or rural areas. For urban couples who traveled, most indicated that being abroad put them in a challenging environment, but it did not affect how they approach social relations. Their background helped them by giving them a boost as they navigated

social relations. Moreover, most couples indicated that growing up in urban communities helped them overcome the challenge of forming relationships abroad. They were already used to an environment that encouraged them to socialize with others. Experiencing this challenge abroad has helped them to be friendly in forming their social relations with Saudi people when they returned. Most couples agreed on how they perceive gender roles in a mixed-gender environment. Being used to the Western culture has contributed to how they navigate gender roles as couples.

When it comes to rural couples, most of them indicated that they faced some challenges when they were abroad. They also addressed how coming from rural areas has impacted their adaptation processes. Most agreed that the mixed-gender environment can be hard to navigate in Saudi Arabia. They shared that men's looking at women in public places discouraged them from treating this as a norm in the culture. When they were abroad, they maintained a respectful approach toward those of the opposite gender. On the other hand, when they returned, they changed again, becoming more conservative when navigating a mixed-gender environment in Saudi Arabia. There are two reasons suggested by the data: the first was that the more sparsely populated rural areas meant that they were fearful of being judged. A second reason is that they believe the Saudi society still maintains a conservative stand on how to proceed in a mixed-gender environment, especially in rural areas.

For couples who did *not* travel abroad, the two sets were also examined to address the navigation process. The first set of couples are the ones who come from rural areas. The majority of them indicated that growing up in rural areas has affected their navigation process. Their parents held a specific mindset, which they passed on to these couples, and these beliefs helped to shape their perceptions. Since both members of most couples come from the same area as the other spouse, agreeing on how to approach gender roles with the mixed-gender environment was usually

an area they agreed on. The second set are those who come from urban areas in Saudi Arabia. Mostly, the couples agreed on how to perceive the mixed-gender environment. Discussing this matter helped them in understanding the other person. Since they come from urban areas in Saudi Arabia, they are used to the mixed-gender environment. Even if they don't support it, they still manage to navigate it together as a couple by discussing it.

Overall, this chapter has explored the social strategies couples use in making decisions about mixed-gender environments. This chapter addressed the overall social relations with Saudis in Saudi Arabia and dealing with the opposite gender in public places. There were differences among those who had traveled and lived abroad and those who had not; there were also differences depending on whether they come from urban or rural areas in Saudi Arabia. The first section addressed the general importance of social relations for Saudi couples. The interviews provided data on how couples navigate social life in terms of their gender roles in Saudi Arabia. Both couples coming from urban areas and those from more rural areas indicated that social life is important for them. They supported their thoughts by saying that they had grown up in an environment that encourages social relations and getting together with family members, relatives, and friends.

When it comes to the more specific question of how they negotiate gender roles, couples who traveled and those who had not stated their approaches. Couples who traveled presented an important insight—that experiencing life abroad made them better appreciate social life in Saudi Arabia. Even though they were exposed to the Western environment, they struggled at the beginning to form friendly relationships with American people. Most couples agreed on how to perceive gender roles in their social life by listening to the other spouse and understanding their needs. The struggle while they were abroad helped them in stepping out of their comfort zone when they returned to Saudi Arabia. When it comes to forming relations in Saudi Arabia since their

return, couples indicated that being around family members and relatives is one of the important aspects of their social life. They find it easier to be familiar with family and friends since they share similar experiences. Couples who come from urban areas are more likely to share similar fillings on how they navigate gender roles in external relations. They indicated that planning their days has helped in knowing everyone's schedule and being connected with others. In addition, couples coming from urban areas are more flexible in navigating social life as couples. On the other hand, some rural couples—both those who traveled and those who did not—faced some challenges in negotiating gender roles. Non-traveled wives who come from rural areas suggested that their husbands were more likely to spend more time with their friends than with family members. This created an argument between the couples in how they navigate gender roles. On the other hand, other non-traveled rural couples suggested that they are more likely to spend too much time with extended family and relatives. This resulted in not spending enough time with the nuclear family (the children and spouse). Overall, urban couples who traveled are more likely to negotiate gender roles than couples who traveled and come from rural areas. Both couples coming from urban and rural areas acknowledge the importance of social relations to the family. Rural couples, both traveled and non-traveled, are less likely to change their perception of social relations and their importance. Among rural couples, those who traveled are more likely to change their perception of gender roles and social life when they return to a rural community. Rural couples who did not travel are more likely to experience a challenge in maintaining a balanced social life with nuclear family and friends.

The second section of the chapter addresses the couple's responses on how they navigate gender roles in dealing with the opposite gender in public places. Saudi Arabia is known for its conservative approach and segregation of men and women. Recently, the mixed-gender

environment has been adopted in most public places. Couples who traveled and come from urban areas are more likely to consider negotiating gender roles. In addition, they suggested that the mixed-gender environment should be considered as a norm now, especially given the changes associated with Vision 2030. Moreover, one aspect that most couples agreed on in navigating gender roles and dealing with the opposite gender is the importance of respecting others from the opposite gender. Couples who traveled and come from rural areas are more likely to adopt a different strategy in navigating gender roles and the mixed-gender environment. When rural couples were abroad, they faced a challenge in navigating gender roles. Understanding the other spouse is one aspect that has been highlighted by most couples. When they returned to Saudi Arabia, their approach to navigating gender roles in a mixed-gender environment had changed. They suggested that this change was a result of the rural environment and the fear of being judged by others. Non-traveled couples who come from rural areas are more likely to share similar perceptions in the mixed-gender environment. Some wives indicated that they are more likely to avoid the mixed-gender environment because of men's "dirty" looks to women in public places. Another important aspect is the mixed-gender environment in public places. Urban couples, both traveled and non-traveled, agree on how they perceive the mixed-gender environment in the workplace. Overall, couples who traveled abroad perceive the mixed-gender environment differently from non-traveled couples. Couples who come from urban areas in Saudi Arabia are more likely to take a flexible approach in navigating gender roles.

CHAPTER VI: VISION 2030 AND GENDER RELATIONS STRATEGIES

The implementation of Vision 2030 is clearly changing the gender context in Saudi Arabia, but we do not know much about how Saudi people think about, or are affected by, these changes. King Slaman Bin Abdulaziz, the Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) have developed Vision 2030 to adopt new economic resources to help the country transition from being solely dependent on oil. This will help the country to diversify and focus on other sources that will boost the economy (Rasooldeen 2017). Adopting Vision 2030 will also alter the social content in Saudi Arabia, as it will necessitate some degree of social liberation to enable the growth of other revenue sources, such as the tourism and entertainment industries. In addition, if Vision 2030 is followed, it will transform relations between the state and citizens, politically, socially, and economically (Kinninmont 2017).

To achieve Vision 2030, two main goals have been set—the growth of economic resources and social liberation. These two are entwined. In order to develop an array of economic sources, such as tourism, the Saudi people must be able to embrace diversity in order to accommodate foreign tourists. Embracing this diversity means that Saudi society should be prepared to deal with change, including the conflict that may arise from challenges to traditions and to religious institutions (Kinninmont 2017).

Empowering women and opening various opportunities to them is also a goal of Vision 2030 (Saudi Vision 2030 2020). Women are a vital factor in the society, and they are the key to achieving Vision 2030 (Nuruzzaman 2018). According to Alqahtani (2020), Saudi women need to employ their skills and knowledge to contribute to the country's economic development. In order for Vision 2030 to play a significant role in the global economy, it must promote gender equality.

As a result, implementing Vision 2030 is creating more opportunities for women to be involved in this development and increase their participation in the economy (MoHE 2013).

In this chapter, I first describe Vision 2030 and the gender-related changes that will be implemented. Then I will present the participants' perspective on how the road to achieve Vision 2030 has affected the gender roles of the couples. Two subthemes emerged from the interviews that address how couples perceive gender roles in relation to Vision 2030. The first subtheme is the new era of women in Saudi Arabia. Another subtheme will address the other changes involved in adopting Vision 2030. As in the previous chapters, I also explore how couples' prior experiences with various gender expectations impact their perceptions of Vision 2030. Hence, the two sections will distinguish between urban and rural couples who traveled abroad and returned to Saudi Arabia. The other set of couples are those who did not travel abroad and who also come from either urban or rural areas in Saudi Arabia. The analysis will address how the road to Vision 2030 impacted couples' perceptions. The data will show the variation between urban and rural couples who traveled and those who did not.

A New Saudi Arabia with Vision 2030

Vision 2030 and its goals describes many changes needed to develop the country's resources. Saudi Arabia has always made an effort to improve the lives of the Saudi citizens (Kinninmont 2017), but as more new generations differ than the previous ones, new challenges emerged in the quest to provide a decent life for Saudi citizens. In 2016 King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and his son Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud announced that Vision 2030 will focus on issues such as unemployment rate, non-oil exports, foreign direct investment, and enhancing the private sector performance (Saudi Embassy Report 2017). Achieving these goals means making many changes in the Saudi society.

Of particular importance for this study are the Vision's changes pertaining to gender. Vision 2030 acknowledges that women's chances, especially in the work force, have been limited. But this has changed gradually as women's participation has increased, creating equal opportunities between men and women (Saudi Embassy Report 2017). The adoption of Vision 2030 contributed to this increased number of working women, normalizing the idea of women participating in the workforce.

In other words, the restrictions on roles women can play in Saudi Arabia have been somewhat eased through the adoption of Vision 2030. When Vision 2030 was first published in 2017, the government announced that women would be permitted to drive for the very first time. Another order announced that women are now allowed to attend live sports at the national stadiums in Jeddah, Riyadh, and Dammam. These changes suggest a new commitment to increasing women's involvement in social life (Aljumie 2020).

In the view of Aljumie (2020), women in Saudi Arabia are expected to play an important role in the development of Vision 2030 going forward. The number of Saudi women in managerial positions has increased. The country has encouraged these changes in many ways, so that advancing women's participation will impact positively on the economic sector. Some of the measures include allowing travel and more freedom of movement for women over the age of 21. The decrees eliminated restrictions on women's ability to leave the house and to choose their own residences, since this was not allowed before Vision 2030. In the following sections, I will address couples' perceptions of the new era of Vision 2030 and its impact their gender roles. As in earlier chapters, I include those who never traveled abroad and those who did, focusing on how couples coming from urban or rural areas in Saudi Arabia perceive gender roles in terms of Vision 2030. The second section of this chapter will include how couples adapted to the new changes. Couples who traveled

abroad are more likely to already be familiar with the mixed gender environment and women's freedom. Couples who did not travel abroad did not experience these changes, even with the implementation of Vision 2030. These two sections will address the participants' responses in how they navigate gender roles as couples in terms of Vision 2030.

A New Era of Women in Saudi Arabia

Historically, Saudi women were encouraged to remain in the house and take care of the children and their husbands. The traditional mindset of women's roles in the household was supported by the Islamic approach (Alotaibi 2019). In fact, Islamic law does not prohibit women from participating in the workforce; rather, it encourages women to conduct their own business and financial issues. It says, however, that these business and financial issues should not conflict with women's main responsibilities in the house and taking care of their children (Al-Sheha 2000). Saudi society has adopted a strict approach in *how* women participate in the workforce; however, Vision 2030 was adopted to enhance the roles of women there (Alotaibi 2019).

Vision 2030 emphasizes the importance of women in the society. This involves increasing job opportunities for women and offering women various leadership positions. According to Hvidt (2018), men's participation in the workforce is 40% while women's is only 10%. In order to increase women's employment rate, Vision 2030 addresses the importance of women's participation. To get this started, Prince Mohammad bin Salman, the one who announced Vision 2030, asked some public sectors to post jobs for women in the labor market (Hvidt 2018). Another important aspect of this initiative is allowing women to drive (Al-Eisa, 2018). This order, issued in 2018, has helped many women to increase work-related productivity since most women were dependent on drivers, their spouse, or family members to drive them to work. Culturally, taxis and public transportation are not common in Saudi Arabia (Al-Eisa 2018). Allowing women to drive

has helped the national economic sector by easing the way for well educated women to participate in the workforce. Another consequence is that now husbands are more likely to be more productive in their own work, since they can focus on their own duties, rather than on driving their wives.

The data presented in this chapter vary in terms of how couples perceive gender roles with the increased rate of employed women. In the majority of the interviews, some people are quite comfortable with women's expanded role, while others have preserved a strict approach in how they perceive women in the workforce. In this section of the chapter, I will address three subthemes: women driving, women working, and women in public. In addition to those three themes, participants also mentioned other aspects of Vision 2030, such as its encouraging tourism and entertainment activities and the opening of music schools, amusement parks, and concerts.

Three subthemes emerged; they are:

- *Couples and Women Driving*
- *Couples negotiating gender roles with women increased participation in the labor market*
- *Couples navigating gender roles with more women in public places*

6.1 Women Driving

Driving has been one of the important topics to address when talking about Saudi women. Historically, driving used to be a male-only task. Hiring foreign drivers has been a common mode of transport for women in Saudi Arabia. Another way is their husbands or family members to drive them to their destination (Krane and Majid 2018). Having to depend on a spouse or relatives has restricted their freedom in how they achieve day-to-day tasks. In June 2018, the kingdom finally approved women driving. This impetus comes from Vision 2030's changes to boost the economy (Krane and Majid 2018). In this section I address couples' perceptions of how they navigate gender

roles in regard to women driving. Some participants think that it is a controversial step for Saudis; on the other hand, others appreciate this shift that will benefit them in many ways.

The first set of interviews examines couples who traveled abroad and come from urban areas. Neam (27) and her husband Mansoor (32) traveled and then returned to Saudi Arabia where they have lived for more than a year. The couple work in fulltime jobs. Mansoor indicated:

Yes, I am aware of the Vision, and I believe it is going to transform many things in our society. Some changes are women's driving, opening for tourism and entertainment activities, cinema too. A decade ago, discussing women driving was a controversial thing and now most women are driving.

Neam, his wife, adds:

I was driving my car abroad and I started driving when I returned. I was anxious at the beginning but after practicing, I got used to it. I was nervous about other drivers; especially, male drivers. However, after implementing harassment laws 2 years ago, it made it easier to drive and feel comfortable.

This interview showed how the couple are aware of the implementation of Vision 2030. The wife indicated that most of her female relative are driving; this suggests that people in urban areas are more familiar with women driving. They support the changes initiated in Vision 2030 and their implementation. Among the couples who traveled abroad and come from urban areas in Saudi Arabia, the vast majority (13 out of 15 couples) support women driving. They also indicated that they believed that most people in urban areas are likely to support the changes. They are used to seeing women everywhere, and they are flexible in adapting to changes. When it comes to encouraging tourism and entertainment activities, most urban couples indicated that most urban

areas embrace these activities to encourage tourism in urban areas, where most of these activities were held.

Another couple is Saeed (28) and his wife Meaad (25). The couple has traveled abroad and came from a rural city in Saudi Arabia. They have been in Saudi Arabia for more than one year. The husband works in a full-time job, while the wife is a stay-at-home mom. Saeed indicated:

We are aware of the changes toward Vision 2030. As you know women are driving cars now. At the beginning many people were not supporting that, but now they are. In our city, it was hard to go with the changes. We live in a small city around Abha, and I noticed not a lot of people are supporting that. My wife started driving, but I am still worried about her driving in the city.

His wife explained further:

Women driving has been one of the first approaches that was implemented as soon as Vision 2030 was announced. For me, I am doing well, I can see my husband worrying sometimes from other people in the street judging me. In our city, not a lot of women driving, so it was hard to drive around our city. People are still not familiar with women driving, they look around and point sometimes.

When the husband indicated that it was hard to go with the changes, he was referring to those implemented by Vision 2030 (increasing entertainment activities, encouraging tourism, and empowering women). He shared his perception based on his background of living in rural communities. It seems that rural couples are less likely to easily navigate the changes, especially the ones involving women. The traditional mindset is still adopted by rural couples in Saudi Arabia. The participant above indicated that others point at her as an example of unusual behavior in the city. People are still unfamiliar with women driving, as some of them stare or point to show

their discomfort with women's driving. According to Yilmaz (2008), individuals in rural areas are more likely to be conservative in adapting to changes and new trends. The aspect of adapting to the new changes in rural areas in Saudi Arabia seems to be challenging for most rural couples. About 10 out of 14 rural couples who had traveled abroad and returned to live in rural areas or small towns indicated that people in rural areas are not ready yet for women driving. The aspect of big changes and new trends, especially in regard to women, is not easily accepted in rural societies. Not being around a diverse community in rural areas makes it hard for residents to easily accept these changes.

Muhaisen (34) and his wife Aljawhara (30) came from urban area in Saudi Arabia. They had not traveled and lived abroad. The couple indicated that Aljawhara is a doctor, earning a lot, and she is the breadwinner. Her husband, Muhaisen, quit his job to be around the house. The couple shared their perception on women driving. Aljawhara indicated:

I did notice the changes toward Vision 2030. The big change was women driving. I know most of my relatives are driving. I also noticed if their husbands not agreeing they will get a driver license anyways. For me, Muhaisen is not supporting me driving, but I am trying to convince him for now. He is mostly concerned about the rush hours or driving at night.

Muhaisen said:

I really support Vision 2030, especially economic changes; however, some of the changes were going so fast. Women driving is one of the changes that are going fast. Even though we live in an urban city in Saudi Arabia, for me, I am not in favor to the fast changes in the society. For my wife, she will be driving very soon, but I am not supporting that 100%.

For this couple, it seems that the husband is not supporting his wife driving a car. On the other hand, she will be working on changing his mind. She also believes that driving is not a necessity for her, because she is not working, so she doesn't need it; however, owning a driver's license is considered as a status symbol by some. Some Saudi women prefer to own a driver's license, even if they don't drive most of the time, especially since most Saudi women talk about their driving experiences when they visit each other. About 4 out of 14 urban couples who did not travel abroad do not support women driving. Among the four couples, there are two husbands who do not support women driving; however, the wives are interested in getting a driver license. For this segment of the participants, it seems that husbands do not allow their wives to drive. This has created some challenges in negotiating equal gender roles in the household.

Another urban couple who had not traveled abroad shared their perception on women driving in urban areas in Saudi Arabia. Mohammed (36) and his wife Heba (34) have been married for 15 years. The couple are working in fulltime jobs. Mohammed revealed:

Heba drives and she is doing very well. I don't know any female relatives who started driving yet, but I think most of them are encouraging women driving. With Vision 2030, adopting to new changes such as the mixed gender environment and lots of entertainment activities is a must these days.

According to Heba, people are more comfortable after the changes in Saudi Arabia due to Vision 2030. She indicated:

I would say most people are accepting these changes. For my relatives, they are encouraging these changes and they believe it will benefit our country's economic situation. For me, I started driving, and I really enjoy the freedom aspect too. In fact, Mohammad is the one who encouraged me to drive. When they announced women

can drive, he started giving me driving lessons. I believe this has helped me with my driving skills too.

For couples coming from urban areas in Saudi Arabia, ten out of 14 couples support women driving. They indicated that they are noticing the big changes such as driving, the mixed gender environments, and the entertainment activities (concerts, music, and art) and supporting those as well. They said that people in their families are encouraging these activities too, since they are open to the changes in an urban area. According to El-Haddad (2003), families in urban areas are more likely to adapt to the changes. The author supported the argument with a study that addressed the changes in marriage in one of the urban areas in Saudi Arabia. The author reports that there are some aspects of change that people accept in urban areas (El-Haddad 2003). They believe these will benefit the country and residents too. In addition to women driving, they also mentioned tourism and entertainment in the country. When it comes to entertaining activities, concerts, music, and art have been projected to help with tourism and attract consumers (Khan 2020). Some suggested that these changes have helped them in understanding women's roles in the society.

Faisal (30) and his wife Nora (27) are a rural couple who have not traveled abroad; they have been married for three years. The husband is in a full-time job, and his wife is unemployed. They shared their perceptions on women's driving. Faisal indicated:

We sure are aware of Vision 2030 changes. We also support these changes. For women driving, I believe not all my female relatives are driving yet especially in our city. I think they will be driving in 3 or 4 years; it is a matter of time to get used to women behind the wheel. Men in the family are worried about female relatives demanding to drive. Nora is driving now, and I think this helped us a lot to navigate

our roles as parents. She sometimes helps me with grocery shopping or picking up the kids.

Nora agreed:

I believe the best decision I made is driving my car. This helps us in sharing responsibilities as parents too. I helped picking up my daughter and he sometimes helped with running errands. I know most of my relatives are not in favor of women driving. They believe that women belong to the kitchen. They don't share responsibilities.

For this couple, the husband supports his wife driving the car. He indicated that in their city, women driving is not a common thing. He believes that time is needed to be comfortable with the new changes. Out of 12 rural couples, six who did not travel abroad indicated that they are supportive of women learning to drive. One common aspect that most of them shared is the traditional mindset about women's roles in the community, especially in regard to gender specific tasks. Four out of 6 couples suggested that people in their community are still having a hard time accepting women driving. Adapting to new changes from Vision 2030 is a challenge for people in rural areas because it is not common to witness the changing trends.

Another rural couple who did not travel broad is Hams (37) and her husband Fawaz (40). They come from a rural city and has been married for 11 years. The couple shared their perception on women driving and the implementation of Vision 2030. The husband has a full-time job, and the wife works in a part-time job. When it comes to sharing responsibilities in the house, Fawaz indicated:

We are aware of Vision 2030. It is hard to miss it, it is everywhere in our country, and many changes have happened toward that. Among these things, women driving

has been the major one. I support these changes but for me, I am not in favor of women driving. I already shared my thoughts to Hams, and she is still talking me into it. I think the community is not ready yet for women to drive.

Hams said:

Yes, I am trying to talk him into women driving. We are still having trouble taking care of the kids and going to work. So, to get his permission, I try to persuade him to change his mind, I think this will help us in managing. Life can be easier now.

This couple is also concerned about women driving. It seems that most women whose husbands are not in favor of women driving try to convince them to change their minds. About half, six out of 12 rural couples, who did not travel abroad do not support women driving. They indicated they perceive the changes as having a positive impact on the society; however, not many accept these changes. There are three wives trying to convince their husbands to change their minds. Still, some rural husbands have difficulty accepting the new change of women driving. Rural husbands still maintain a traditional mindset that women are not allowed to drive or to have an independent life. Wives in rural areas are willing to perceive Vision 2030 changes as having a positive impact on the society and for women specifically, especially with other women in urban areas in Saudi Arabia. This has created a challenge in understanding the other spouse's needs. Overall, women driving is an important aspect of gender relations for people in Saudi Arabia. The findings address couples who come from urban and rural areas and how they perceive gender roles. Couples who come from urban areas are more likely to embrace a non-traditional mindset in navigating gender roles as couples. On the other hand, rural couples stay with a traditional mindset; men, especially, due to growing up in a community that fosters the traditional mindset have a hard time accepting

this change. Living in a rural community has fostered the idea that women are responsible for the house and taking care of their children.

6.2 Women Working

Despite the global interest that women's careers have attracted, knowledge regarding the careers of women in Saudi Arabia is still limited. Women in Saudi Arabia have faced many struggles in employment and professional opportunities. Saudi women faced challenges pursuing professional careers outside the home. The gender stereotypes include adherence to a traditional mindset in most areas in Saudi Arabia (Al-Asfour et al. 2017). Tlaiss (2013) presented information about these social stereotypes, explaining how expectations affect women who hope to advance in professional careers. In a collectivist society, the value of group conformity means that individuals are expected to adjust their personal wishes and professional careers in order to maintain a proper social status in the community. Despite these challenges that women in Saudi Arabia face, they have increased their professional involvement in education and the economy. One study indicated that Saudi Arabia is considered conservative in "feminine areas" such as education, arts, and healthcare (Tlaiss and Elamin 2016).

One of the main goals of Vision 2030 is to provide equal opportunities. According to Vision 2030:

"Our economy will provide opportunities for everyone—men and women, young and old—so they may contribute to their best of their abilities. Saudi women are yet another great asset. With 50% of our university graduates being female, we will continue to develop their talents and provide equal opportunities. (Saudi Vision 2030 2021)."

The Vision has emphasized the role of females in the workplace and focused on the young generation to increase job opportunities. There are more positions for women in the workforce now.

In fact, companies will be fined \$4,000 if they do not employ two women in each shift (Al-Ubaydli 2019). Providing jobs for women means that a mixed gender environment has become more common now, especially in the workplace.

When it comes to the data, the participants stated their opinions on women participating in the workplace. This section will address the couples who traveled abroad from urban and from rural areas. Next, I will address couples who did not travel abroad, both those who come from urban areas and those from rural areas.

Sary (33) and his wife Arwa (30) come from an urban city in Saudi Arabia. The couple has been married for ten years and they have one child. The husband is in a full-time job, and the wife is unemployed. They have been in Saudi Arabia for two years. Sary indicated:

Since Vision 2030 did not come yet, but we are witnessing some of the changes. Of course, women driving is one thing. I would include women participating in the workforce is something that is noticeable with the changes toward Vision 2030.

Arwa is not interested in working, but I am totally supporting her in any decision she makes. Before women are more likely to prefer the educational field; especially since it is gender segregated. But now, I can see many women participating in all fields.

Arwa said:

I agree with Sary, and I also noticed how women are more involved and acknowledged than before. Such as some women are hired to some important positions in our society.

This urban couple who traveled abroad and returned home indicated that women's participation in the workforce has been encouraged since the announcement for Vision 2030. They

noted that there are various positions that women are involved in, such as governmental positions and military positions. The couple shared how women participating in the workforce is managed between them. The husband is supportive of his wife's decision and the wife indicated that she prefers staying at home for now. With women's increased job opportunities, they are now hired in various positions in the labor market. Moreover, to provide the best outcome of their involvement, Prince Muhammad bin Salman issued some orders that will benefit both the corporate side and women in the labor market. These orders include protection for women in the workplace and giving rewards to companies which provide equal opportunities for men and women (Wolff and Grand 2020). For a gender-segregated environment, this kind of step is very challenging to most people. About 13 out of 15 couples coming from urban area noticed women participating more in the workplace. They also indicated that they support these changes and support their wives in a decision to work and be in the labor market.

Couples who traveled abroad and come from rural area shared their thoughts on women participating in the workplace. Saeed (28) and his wife Meaad (25) come from a rural city in Saudi Arabia. They have been married for ten years and returned to Saudi Arabia a year ago. The husband is working in a full-time job, while the wife is a stay-at-home mom. Saeed said:

The changes toward the vision have contributed to increasing women participation in the labor market. This will provide a lot of opportunities for women in the labor market. I see how this is important, but I am still concerned in how women will deal with the mixed gender environment.

Meaad indicated:

I believe it is beneficial to our economy for women to participate in the economy. I know they used to do that, but it was limited participation in some fields. Such as

education is the most popular one. I know most of my friends are teachers or working in university and colleges. Even though I am looking for a job now, but being in a mixed gender environment in the workplace is something I am not interested in.

The couple perceived women participating in the workforce as a positive part of Vision 2030 changes. Most women indicate that they are looking forward to being involved in the labor market; however, they anticipate that the mixed gender environment will be hard to navigate. The community is not yet ready for such a big change. People are still confused in how to react in these situations, since not everyone is on the same page. In order to create more opportunities for women, the mixed gender workplace is part of Vision 2030. In a traditional marriage setting, husbands maintain a traditional mindset. There are five out of 14 rural couples who indicated that they understand that the Vision is creating opportunities for women in the labor market; however, they are not in favor of adopting the mixed gender environment in work. As stated above, most people in rural areas specifically perceive the mixed gender environment as a negative approach that will hurt society rather than benefit it. Individuals in rural areas are less likely to accept these changes due to that traditional mindset that women should not be involved in leadership positions. Three couples agreed that they do not prefer such an environment. The other two couples argue that society is still not ready for these changes.

The couple Nahar (30) and his wife Nouf (28) come from an urban area and have not traveled abroad. They shared their perceptions on how to navigate gender roles. They have been married for three years and do not have children. The husband is in a full-time job, and the wife is unemployed. Nahar stated:

In the last years, women have been involved in the labor market a lot. I am really proud of what we accomplished in our country. I know at my work; we do have women in our department. I believe if everyone is respecting the other, being in a mixed gender environment will be a great equal opportunity.

Nouf shared:

I work in a management company with a mixed gender environment. I feel comfortable in my job, everyone is respecting me; especially when they knew I am married. My husband too works in a mixed gender environment.

The couples who did not travel abroad and come from an urban area shared their perception on women participation in the workplace. Respect by the other gender in a mixed gender environment means that the other person is maintaining a professional approach when communicating with the other person. Most women indicated that they appreciate the respect from men in a mixed gender environment in a workplace, and that this helped them to overcome any discomfort from others of the opposite gender. They also shared how this affected their gender roles as a couple. The couple indicated they are not facing any challenge in how they navigate gender roles in a mixed gender environment in a workplace. Both work in a mixed gender environment, and they believe the road to Vision 2030 encouraged them to adapt easily. There are 12 out of 14 couples who come from urban areas in Saudi Arabia who managed gender roles as couples. The couples agreed that the mixed gender environment has been a good experience for them, especially in a workplace—this challenged them to get out of their comfort zone. They believe stating that the couple is married has helped them managing the mixed gender environment. Murphy (2010) discussed the “religious police” Sheikh Ahmed al-Gamdi and his stance regarding the mixed gender environment. Al-Ghamdi, had been indicating in multiple media platforms that he is against segregation, especially in the workplace.

Murphy (2010) addressed that AlGhamdi is sharing these religious beliefs because of the controversial debate on the mixed gender environment. It is also considered that achieving the goals of Vision 2030 is key to developing the Kingdom's economy; the aspect of the mixed gender environment has to be reevaluated, since keeping the sexes separate is considered as a barrier to modernizing the Kingdom and reaching global expectations.

Abdullah (35) and his wife Areej (31) did not travel abroad, and they come from a rural city in Saudi Arabia. They shared their perception on women's involvement in the workplace during the implementation of Vision 2030 and its effect on their roles as a couple. They have been married for 12 years and have two children. The husband has a full-time job, and the wife is unemployed.

Abdullah said:

I noticed many women are participating in the labor market with Vision 2030. I really support that; however, if they want more opportunities, they have to work in a mixed gender environment. I think this creates many challenges for single girls or husbands who don't prefer their wives to be involved in this kind of environment. In a mixed gender environment, both men and women will be talking and spending time together, being in this close relationship might impact negatively on the road toward the Vision.

Areej disagrees:

I see Abdullah's point, but I disagree with it. I think if the other person is minding their own business, they know how to set boundaries. We don't need others to tell us our boundaries. For me, I am so proud of women who developed themselves to meet the labor market demand toward Vision 2030. In my case, I am not in a mixed

gender environment; especially with my husband not supporting that. I do not want this to create any misunderstanding with my husband.

Some couples who came from a rural area and did not travel abroad presented different points of view from their spouses. About 10 out of 14 rural couples who did not travel support the changes outlined in Vision 2030 to include women in the labor market. On the other hand, they do not prefer their spouses to be involved in a mixed gender environment. Most rural husbands adopt a traditional mindset in how they perceive the mixed gender environment. They believe that the mixed gender environment will encourage strangers to communicate outside of a professional setting. Even if they trust their wives, they are familiar with men's attitudes toward women in general. As a result, they are more likely to avoid a mixed gender environment. This seems to create some challenges between the couples on how to navigate their gender roles within the changing gender environment initiated by Vision 2030. With the changes, many believe that people should be able to accept the changing environment in Saudi Arabia as the road to Vision 2030 will create a suitable life to people in the country. When it comes to rural couples who come from a traditional and conservative area, they still face challenges in navigating the changes implemented in Vision 2030. The challenges will be around the mixed gender environment and women opportunities.

This section addresses another aspect that most participants have already addressed, that is, women's involvement in the workforce. One goal of Vision 2030 is to increase women's participation in the economy while providing equal opportunities for Saudi men and women. For couples who traveled the majority are aware of the new opportunities for women in the labor market. Moreover, the majority of husbands support women in participating in the labor market. With this change, the mixed gender environment is adopted in order to provide more opportunities. Urban couples who traveled abroad are also supportive of their wives' decision to enter a mixed

gender environment. They are less likely to adopt a traditional mindset. Coming from urban cities and being exposed to foreign communities, husbands are more likely to support their wives.

Rural couples who traveled abroad shared their perception on women's increased job opportunities in a mixed gender environment. There are a minority of rural couples who indicated that they admire Vision 2030's changes in providing job opportunities for women in the labor market. On the other hand, husbands, specifically, are not in favor of the mixed gender environment. Most of the women are not interested in participating in the labor market or in entering a mixed gender environment in work; they do not mind the mixed gender environment. Adaptability is needed to accept Vision 2030 changes. A majority of couples did not face challenges in navigating gender roles in a mixed gender environment as couples. Most who live in urban areas are more likely to work in a mixed gender environment. When it comes to navigating gender roles, they indicated respect and trust between couples is needed to overcome any challenges in their marriage. For couples who did not travel abroad and come from a rural area, the majority of them support women's involvement in the labor market; however, they would not support their wives being involved in a mixed gender work environment. As a result, urban couples, traveled or non-traveled, perceive the mixed gender environment differently from rural couples, traveled or non-traveled.

6.3 Women in Public

This section will address couples' perceptions about women in public as they are affected by Vision 2030 changes. The new economy has encouraged entertaining activities by importing those with skills and promoting tourism. This has resulted in changing some strict laws, such as the gender separated areas in cafes and restaurants and most other public places. Before Vision 2030, restaurants were divided into families and single sections because of a traditional and conservative

approach that Saudi Arabia used. Under Vision 2030 separate areas have been discouraged in many urban areas. As a result, the mixed gender environment is now part of many public places. To provide a welcoming experience for tourists, some laws and traditions in the society have been loosened. Adopting this flexible approach will help in promoting tourism and attracting people from around the world to explore the Saudi culture. Before the changes implemented by Vision 2030, most foreign people avoided visiting Saudi Arabia because of its strict traditions. With the Vision 2030 changes, welcoming foreign people will be an advantage to the country's economy. In this section, I will address how couples, traveled or non-traveled, navigate gender roles with the Vision 2030 changes. I will also address how they perceive these changes in the society.

Mansoor (32) and his wife Neam (27) have traveled abroad and have been married since 2018. They do not have children. They both are working, and Neam has a full-time job. Mansoor indicated:

We have noticed tremendous changes such as women's driving, opening the country for tourism and entertainment activities, cinemas and music schools, and opening amusement parks and concerts.

Neam stated:

I think there are many changes; especially, with the entertaining aspect. It is surprising to see the changes and how fast they are implemented. Me and Mansoor went to watch a movie in the cinema, and it was our best experience. We also went to a concert, and this reminded us of our life when we were abroad. This also gave us an idea on where to spend time together.

Another urban couple who traveled abroad is Marwa (32) and her husband Salem (37). They have been back in Saudi Arabia for two years. Both the wife and the husband are working in a full-

time job. They have been married for 15 years and have three children. Salem shared his thoughts on Vision 2030 changes:

We are very excited for Vision 2030 changes. In the last years, we have been reading and educating ourselves about the Vision. I think this will contribute in an easy, healthy, and social life for our family. It will help us in being proud of our Saudi culture. It also helped us with our family relations, I think I am close now with my wife and my kids too.

Marwa indicate:

We noticed lots of entertaining places, and tourism might be the biggest change that I like. We noticed many foreign people are coming and enjoying our country. We also went to many places as a family. My kids went to historic places that me and their dad visited before and enjoyed too.

Urban couples who traveled abroad tend to like the new changes from Vision 2030. Most of them (10 out of 15 couples) indicated that the changes have helped them adapt to the changing environment in Saudi Arabia. They said that these changes have a positive impact on their relationship. The entertaining aspect encouraged, people to spend more time with spouses, friends, and family. This has given them the option to explore the city and spend time together. They also shared that they are more likely to spend time together as a family.

Saeed (28) and his wife Meaad (25) talked about their perception of the new changes. The couple comes from a rural area in Saudi Arabia. They have been married since 2017 and have one toddler. Both spouses are in full-time jobs. Saeed stated:

The changes have contributed a lot in adapting to the new changes. With Vision 2030, people tend to be more adaptable. For example, if the mixed gender

environment still prohibited in public places, adjusting to it in workplace will be a challenge. Now people are respecting others in public places, concerts and restaurants. I would say, I am not fully on board with the changes, but I can see how others are enjoying it.

Meaad said:

For me and my husband, we tend to avoid going out to these popular places. People in our city are not adapting to these changes, so not all of them are supporting the changes toward Vision 2030.

This couple indicated how the changes from Vision 2030 have helped them agree on how to navigate gender roles. The couple indicated that the changes are very noticeable. The husband described how some people are enjoying these changes, since they encouraged Saudis to explore their country and understand the Saudi culture. One of the Vision's goals is to encourage tourism in Saudi Arabia by showing people around the world the Saudi culture through attracting foreign visitors. To promote tourism, entertainment has been a priority with adopting some flexible laws, such as the mixed gender environment and providing fun events for people to explore. In rural areas, it seems that people are struggling to adapt to the changes brought about by Vision 2030. The interviews have emphasized how couples who traveled abroad and returned to rural areas noticed that the community is not adjusting as much as urban areas are. There are 12 out of 14 rural couples who traveled, and they indicated that they witnessed the challenge of accepting Vision 2030. People are more likely to judge in these areas because of the close relationships between members of the community, and this has discouraged some couples to go out.

When it comes to urban couples who did not travel abroad, Heba (32) and her husband Mohammed (36) shared their thoughts. The husband is in a full-time job, and the wife works part-

time. The couple has been married for 15 years and have three children. Regarding dealing with the opposite sex in public places, the couple indicated that they notice changes, especially regarding more freedom for women. Mohammed shared:

I can say that the changes are good kind of changes, I can see that people are more comfortable now compared to 5 years ago. We are lucky to be in an urban city, since the changes are mostly in urban areas. We like to go to restaurants as a couple and explore the city as well.

Heba added:

Before these changes, we used to go to limited places. We used to spend time in our homes with the family. Now, we are exploring new places and having fun. I like that some historic places that represent our culture has been remodeled to appeal to the public. Mohammad and I like to go out, especially on the weekends and we tend to plan for it during the week.

One important aspect that has been addressed is dealing with the mixed gender environment. With Vision 2030, an expansion of women's roles is encouraged. Couples who come from urban areas in Saudi Arabia are more likely to be familiar with the mixed gender environment. According to the interviews, 12 out of 14 urban couples who did not travel abroad, are less likely to be familiar with the mixed gender environment; however, being in urban cities has helped them to adapt to Vision 2030 changes easily. With the recent changes, most of them indicated that as couples they are used to a mixed gender environment in public places. Urban areas in Saudi Arabia are more likely to adopt a mixed gender environment, especially now that Vision 2030 is being implemented. When Vision 2030 was introduced to the society, it made it easier to easily adapt to the mixed gender environment. Urban areas are more likely to host many foreign visitors who either come for

employment purposes or for tourism; as a result, most urban people are more likely to adopt a flexible approach in navigating Vision 2030 changes.

Couples shared that with the changes, they are able to spend time together as a couple. Before Vision 2030 there were not many places to go out; however, now couples are more likely to go out and explore the new places. It was an interesting observation that most couples associated the changes with more entertaining places. Most couples who did not travel abroad indicated that they had at least attended a live concert or watched a movie in a movie theater. Eleven out of 14 urban couples who did not travel abroad indicated that they support the new changes with Vision 2030. In addition, they shared that with these entertaining activities, both parts of the couple were able to explore the city—women were able to explore the city on their own or with her friends. When it comes to gender roles, the participants addressed that the changes helped them to get close together and understand each other more. Most couples indicated that before the changes the entertainment options were visiting relatives or friends or going to a restaurant. To entertain themselves, husbands went to see friends and spent most of the time playing cards or video games, while wives and children were more likely to visit relatives or friends. With the Vision 2030 changes and the various options, couples or family in general explore the city and its activities as a family.

Another example of urban couples who did not travel abroad is Mansour (33) and his wife Hind (27) who come from urban area; they have been married for four years. The couple shared their perception on Vision 2030 changes and how it is affecting gender roles. The husband holds a full-time job, and the wife does not have a job yet. Mansour said:

Being in the city has helped us a lot in accepting the changes and looking for what is best for our country. I always like to explore the new places in the city with my wife.

The Vision means a lot to me because it keeps Saudi Arabia developing, and it is changing the society to be like the Western Society but in a good way especially between the two genders.

His wife, Hind, said:

Great noticeable changes that include supporting tourism and entertainment activities, opening cinemas and global restaurants, coffee shops with American and European styles. Even though we did not travel, I think the changes brought us the world.

The urban couple explained how these changes have helped them to explore the cultural places while experiencing the Western society. Eight of 14 couples who did not travel abroad said they are experiencing Western culture without traveling outside Saudi Arabia. The majority of couples indicated they like the changes because they have made it possible for them to explore places together. Being in a mixed gender environment is not a challenge for urban couples. Urban areas in Saudi Arabia tend to adopt a diverse approach, and this helped them in adapting to the Vision 2030 changes.

Nora (27) and her husband Faisal (30) come from rural areas and have not traveled abroad. They have been married since 2018 and have two children. The couple indicated their perception about Vision 2030 and how the changes affected the negotiation of gender roles. Faisal said:

The changes have been everywhere, and we support the changes. I would say that most of the changes are in urban areas. In our city, we did not see any changes. We travel to urban areas and see the changes, I like how the entertaining aspect is encouraged for most industries, but the mixed gender environment is a challenge for me. When me and my wife go to these areas, I make sure that it is not crowded with men because it is annoying to me sometimes.

Nora indicated:

I think the community around us still not accepting the changes. I like how we can have more opportunities, but with the mixed gender environment, it is hard to adapt to that.

This rural couple support some of the changes of Vision 2030, especially the expansion of entertainment opportunities in their city. About 10 out of 12 rural couples indicated that there are no such entertainment activities in their cities. They said that they are willing to explore in other urban areas. Another important aspect involves couples negotiating gender roles. Most of the husbands expressed concerns regarding a mixed gender environment. They said that even when traveling to urban areas in Saudi Arabia, they avoid crowded places with men around. The aspect of mixed gender environment where men are crowded in one place is new for most rural areas. Most women indicated they feel uncomfortable or “annoyed” with too many men around them. There are about 9 out of 12 couples who said they encourage these changes that include new places and developing economically; however, they avoid the mixed gender environment, if they can. After analyzing the rural couples’ responses, couples who did not travel and who come from rural areas are less likely to adapt to the changes, especially with the mixed gender environment.

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the changes associated with Vision 2030 and its effect on couples and how they navigate gender roles. There are three themes in this chapter: the first theme explores the participants’ perceptions about Vision 2030 on women driving. The second theme is women working, and couples shared their perception on how to navigate gender roles and women’s employment. The third theme analyzed couples’ responses on Vision 2030 changes and how it is affecting their gender roles in terms of women being in public.

The road to Vision 2030 has had a huge impact on the structure of the Saudi society (Kinninmont 2017). In 2016, Vision 2030 was introduced to the Saudi society by the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud. The main goal of Vision 2030 is to diversify the country's economic resources. To accomplish that some aspects of social life have changed. Two main goals of Vision 2030 are economic development and empowering women.

The Vision has set goals to provide more opportunities for Saudi women in the labor market. In order to achieve that many changes have been adopted by some companies to increase women's participation. The couples have shared their thoughts on how these changes have affected their gender roles as couples. There were two groups of participations, the ones who traveled abroad and come from urban areas and rural areas in Saudi Arabia. The second group of participants are couples who did not travel abroad and come from urban and rural areas.

For couples who did not travel abroad and come from rural areas, a minority of rural couples do not support women driving. They support the government's decision of allowing women to drive; however, some of the husbands do not support their wives driving, and the wives are not interested in driving either. They also indicated that it is not common for women to drive in rural areas. In rural areas because of the closeness between family members and limited diversity in the community, adapting to new changes seems to be a challenge. The husbands are less likely to allow their wives to participate in a workplace because of the community in rural areas and the fear of being judged.

When it comes to couples who traveled abroad and come from urban area in Saudi Arabia, the majority of couples indicated their support for women driving. It seems that the majority of urban area participants support the changes. Most husbands supported their wives' decision on whether to drive or to be involved in a mixed gender environment. They believe that it is the right

time for women to drive. A minority of the couples were neutral on the gender roles and the effect of the Vision's changes on women. Most urban couples who traveled abroad welcome these changes and support them. Most indicated that these changes have contributed positively to their relationship, reminding them of the independent life that they used to have abroad. In addition, their exposure to the foreign environment has helped them navigate the changes of Vision 2030 and empowering women.

For rural couples who traveled abroad, most returned to the same city. A minority of the couples suggested that they understand that Vision 2030 is creating opportunities for women in the labor market; however, they are not in favor of adopting the mixed gender environment in work. A small number of couples who are not in favor of the changes believe that the rural community is not ready for these changes. When it comes to gender roles, they indicated that the Vision 2030 changes have changed their roles, especially when they returned to the city. A minority of the couples indicated that the mixed gender roles are a challenge for them; the changes have discouraged women from perceiving these changes positively. Coming from rural cities has contributed in how they react as soon as they go back to the rural community. The traditional approach has impacted how they navigate gender roles and Vision 2030 changes.

The other set of couples are the ones who did not travel abroad. For urban couples, they seem to share similar thoughts as the ones who traveled. Husbands support wives' decision on women driving or participating in a mixed gender environment. They believe these changes will impact positively on the country and the community. Again, couples coming from urban cities are more likely to navigate gender roles and Vision 2030 changes.

For couples who did not travel abroad and come from rural areas, almost half of them are not supportive of women to driving or participating in a mixed gender environment. Husbands and

wives agree on this. Some of them suggested that rural cities are not yet ready to adopt these changes. For gender roles, a majority of the couples agree that these changes did not impact how they navigate gender roles as couples. A minority of the wives have different perspective from their husbands. Most couples who come from rural areas indicated that it is a challenge to adopt these changes. In fact, the changes are not considered in the rural areas, as much as they are in urban areas which have especially benefitted from the entertainment activities and concerts. They also indicated that the rural community might need time to adapt to these changes. Another point that has been observed in terms of gender roles is that in rural areas most husbands are the ones who are the decision makers in the home. Another aspect is adjusting to the mixed gender environment. Several interviews indicated that the mixed gender environment is a challenge for them. A minority of husbands advised their wives to stay away from these jobs, while other husbands demanded their wives stay away. This may create a challenge for both spouses in negotiating gender roles. This suggests that the traditional and conservative mindset is still held by some rural couples and by husbands specifically. The fear of being judged by others in rural communities has been mentioned multiple times. The social pressure to follow certain roles may impact how couples navigate gender roles.

For couples who did not travel abroad and come from urban areas, couples who did not travel abroad indicated that they support the new changes with Vision 2030. The couples were excited to explore places and navigate them together as couples. Most of them believe that gender roles did not change between them. Urban couples perceived gender roles equally as Vision 2030 helped them to achieve better opportunities for men and women in Saudi Arabia. They tend to take a flexible approach to gender roles, sharing responsibilities to help the other spouse.

Overall, couples who come from urban areas, whether they traveled or did not travel, are more likely to adopt flexible approach in navigating these changes. Most of them indicate that the changes did not affect how they navigate gender roles. On the other hand, most couples who come from rural areas, traveled or non-traveled, faced a challenge with adapting to the new changes. Even though the ones who traveled adopted different approaches while they are abroad, and they changed their perception on how to navigate gender roles in rural cities. Most rural communities are more likely to maintain a traditional mindset, and this will impact how they adapt to these changes. Rural couples both those who traveled or did not are more likely to adopt a conservative approach in navigating gender roles as couples.

CHAPTER VII: DISCUSSION/ CONCLUSION

This chapter of the study provide an overview of the research question findings. The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how couples negotiate the changing gender environment coming from rural and urban institutions. There were three sections addressed in this study, social strategies, familial and household strategies, and Vision 2030 changes.

Saudi Arabia has a gender segregated environment that males are the dominant roles in the society. With the implementation of Vision 2030, the gender environment is changing. Recently, the vision has adopted to transform the Saudi society vision and have various economic resources and not depend on oil as the main source. This will help the country to reach to global measures and lead the way (Saudi Vision 2030). This study examined how couples navigate the changing gender environment in Saudi Arabia. The participants consisted of two groups, couples who traveled abroad and returned to Saudi Arabia. The second group are couples who never traveled outside Arab or Gulf countries. In addition, both groups consisted of rural and urban couples to understand how social structure is impacting their perception of gender. The study examined, how couples who studied abroad and the ones who have not traveled to Western countries negotiate the changing gender environment in Saudi Arabia? The empirical sub questions were also addressed, firstly, how couples who traveled to the U.S adjust to the gender roles when they returned to Saudi Arabia whether they come from urban or rural institutions. Secondly, how couples who have not traveled to Western countries adjust to the gender roles in Saudi Arabia. Thirdly, how vision 2030 contribute to adjusting to the gender environment in Saudi Arabia. Lastly, how Saudi couples adjust to the Saudi society gender environment after studying abroad.

The theoretical literature addressed gender expectations and gender roles. Gender is similar to other social divisions that consist of races and class (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). In fact, cultural

beliefs and social relations are also affecting the changes in gender roles. Cultural beliefs are set of expectations or sometimes “stereotypes” of men and women and their role in the society (Ridgeway & Correll 2004). The issue of gender inequality exists in most social institutions, including family, education, and the workplace. With gender inequality movement, women are able to have better opportunities as changes are more likely to be favorable for women compared to men. In addition, the changing gender roles are more likely to affect couples’ lifestyles (Hochschild & Machung 1989).

In Saudi Arabia, Vision 2030 goals are to have multiple resources of economy rather than being dependent on oil as a main source of economic growth. Another goal is to offer better opportunities for women in the society. As Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said when asked about women equality in Saudi Arabia:

“I support Saudi Arabia, and half of Saudi Arabia is women. So, I support women, in the Saudi government women are paid exactly like men. We have regulations like this that are going into the private sector. We don’t want divided treatment for different people (Alarabiya, 2020).”

The study focuses on how couples navigate the changing gender roles especially with the road to Vision 2030. The findings from this research revealed that some couples are adapting to these changes and supporting it. Others, still struggle in navigating these new changes and its impact on the society. Most couples share similar approach in how to navigate the recent changes. In addition, when it comes to negotiating gender roles, most couples perceive similar approach in how to negotiate gender roles individually, and socially.

7.1 Social Strategies

How couples navigate their social environment, and how they perceive the social life in Saudi Arabia are questions that have been addressed in this chapter. The theme consisted of two sub-themes: how couples navigate overall relations with Saudi in Saudi Arabia. The second theme examined how couples deal with the opposite gender in public places. In this study, when couples were asked about their perception in how to navigate social relations in Saudi Arabia, both couples coming from urban and rural areas value social life in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the data presented how couples who come from urban or rural areas share different approaches in addressing their social life. Majority of the couples indicated that because of their religious background, social life is important to them. Participants share the same religion, in Islam, a Muslim person needs to maintain a truly bond of kinship (Hadith of the day, 2016). When it comes to the participants, most rural communities have a strong relationship with their family and relatives. Even though, couples who come from urban areas value social life, they are more likely to prioritize nuclear family relations. For traveled and non-traveled couples, majority of them share similar approach in prioritizing social life relations. For traveled couples, majority indicated that they value family and relatives' relations as well. Majority of the couples agree on how they perceive social life in the Saudi society.

The second subtheme of this section addressed how couples deal with the opposite gender. Saudi Arabia is a conservative society where women are more likely to be segregated from men. In educational institutions and recreational places, the gender environment is still segregated (Mayer, 2000). With the recent Vision 2030 changes, the gender environment has change to be a mixed gender environment especially in public places in Saudi Arabia (Kinninmont, 2016). When it comes to traveled couples, who come from urban areas, the data has shown that they are used to dealing

with the opposite gender. Because of their exposure to Western society when they were abroad, they are more likely to be comfortable when interacting with the opposite gender. A theory presented by Mezirow (2000) who address the transformative learning theory in the United States. The theory supports the fact that education can change how people think. When looking at couples who studied abroad, getting educated and being in a different environment contributed to adapting with the mixed gender environment. As a result, couples who traveled abroad are more likely to easily adapt to the mixed gender environment in Saudi Arabia. According to Alqahtani (2020), Saudi students may experience some situations that challenge them in how they perceive women and their roles in the society. The transition from gender segregated environment to a mixed environment is difficult for Saudis. With the time spent in the U.S., Saudis can help them adapt to the new environment (Al-Romahe, 2018). The data presented that couples who traveled and return to Saudi Arabia can easily adapt to the mixed gender environment because of their previous experience in the U.S. When it comes to negotiating gender roles, urban couples who traveled abroad are more likely to negotiate gender roles with social relations. For rural couples who traveled abroad, they may adopt different strategy in navigating gender roles. With rural community, couples still maintain the traditional mindset in how to navigate gender roles. Since rural communities' value extended family structure, the fear of being judged by others in the family is what most rural couples who traveled or non-traveled shared (Hamdan, 1990). For non-traveled couples who come from rural communities, they shared similar feeling of how to navigate gender roles. Rural husbands and wives are more likely to avoid the mixed gender environment because of the traditional mindset of women and their roles in the society.

7.2 Familial and household strategies

The chapter addressed how couples navigate gender roles in terms of managing family and household responsibilities. Saudi Arabia is considered as a largely collectivist country where family and relatives take care of each other (Al-Namlah et al., 2006). When it comes to marriages, the most common form of marriage is the traditional marriage. With traditional marriages, the couples tend to meet each other once before they make the decision to marry, as it referred to "sharia look" (Ahmed, 2009). In most traditional family settings, the male is the dominant individual who makes most of family decisions (Altamimi, 2009). With the recent shifts of women roles in the society, most couples tend to make decisions together. In the second chapter, I addressed how couples respond to familial and household strategies. There were three subthemes emerged to address this section of the paper. The subthemes are household couples' roles, childcare responsibilities and couples dealing with relatives. The two groups were also addressed to understand how they are similar or different in their negotiation styles. In addition, the aspect of coming from rural or urban cities took into consideration to understand how couples' social structure impact how they navigate gender roles in marriage.

The first subtheme is *Household couples' roles*, this section investigated how couples negotiate gender roles in terms of household responsibilities. Traditionally, taking care of the family and household labor were the main responsibilities of women whereas men's domain was mainly to be the breadwinner of the house (Bartley et al. 2005). With acknowledging women roles in the market, the need to negotiate household roles is essential to comply with today's world. The data showed that dual earners couples who traveled and come from urban areas in Saudi Arabia are adopting flexible approach in dealing with household responsibilities. Majority indicated that they would share household responsibilities or follow a schedule in assigning specific chores to each

member of the household. Living in urban cities has helped them in sharing responsibilities since most of them grew up in an environment that encourage participating in the household. When it comes to rural couples who traveled abroad, majority of them are less likely to share household responsibilities. Rural communities tend to follow traditional approach in how women are more likely to be responsible of the house while men are the breadwinner of the house (AlTamimi, 2009).

The second subtheme is *Childcare Responsibilities*. In this section, I indicated how couples negotiate gender roles while taking care of the kids. With more women participating in the workforce, the roles are shifting, and most men are sharing responsibilities to navigate the gender roles in the market and the house as well (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). With couples who have children and traveled abroad, they face challenges, and the children too face adaptation challenges as well. When it comes to rural couples traveled or non-traveled, the traditional mindset still exists in how they navigate gender roles and how to take care of children. They believe that women are the one who is responsible of taking care of children such as feeding, teaching and playing with them. For urban couples who traveled abroad, they are more likely to adopt a non-traditional mindset in how they negotiate gender roles in taking care of children. Husbands are willing to participate with wives to take care of the children. Since urban couples live in urban communities, they are exposed to a diverse community and used to a flexible parenting style as their parents used to in their early childhood. The majority of traveled and non-traveled couples who come from urban cities, are adopting flexible approach in taking care of children and sharing responsibilities (Al-Tamimi, 2009).

The last subtheme of this chapter is *Couples Perceiving Family and Relatives Involvement*. In this section, I covered how couples perceive family relations. Family and relatives' relations is part of Saudi identity. Saudis are close with their family members in their community (Rahman, 2015).

Extended family are patrilineal in terms of lineal decent and this is when the father or grandfather have authority on the family (Pappe, 2013). This form of family structure has been mentioned by most participants in this study. The data emphasized how rural couples and communities value family relations. Majority of rural couples traveled or non-traveled are less likely to be bothered by family and relative's involvement in their life or their parenting style. They are more likely to be close with other family members, so their involvement doesn't create challenges for couples and how they navigate gender role. In addition, since rural cities are perceived, small areas compared to urban cities, so being close to each other is an unavoidable aspect (Hamdan, 1990). On the other hand, urban couples who traveled are more likely to be bothered with family involvement and this impacted how they navigate gender roles as couples. Some of them indicated that they are facing challenges in how to navigate gender roles in the society, especially with family and relative's involvement in their parenting style. When it comes to non-traveled couples who come from urban cities, majority indicated they are bothered by how family and relatives are involved in their lives since they consider themselves being close to them (Urey & Henggeler, 1983; Farber, 1968). As a result, since wives are the ones who shared their unpleasant incidents with family members and relatives involving, they indicated ignoring is the best approach to deal with these events.

7.3 Vision 2030 and Gender Relations in Saudi Arabia

The chapter covered three subthemes, the first one investigated *Women Driving*. Then, I addressed the second subtheme of this chapter is, *Women Working*. The last subtheme is, *Women in Public*. According to Kinninoment (2016), the road to achieve Vision 2030 has a huge impact on the Saudi society structure. There are two main goals that Vision 2030 is addressing, the first is to have multiple economic resources, and the second is empowering women in the Saudi society. These aspects will help the country to have a powerful position similar to other global countries

(Kinninmont, 2016). With Vision 2030 changes, women roles in the society have been its main focus. Many companies are providing opportunities for women, and most of them are holding powerful position in Saudi Arabia. The study examined how couples perceive these changes and its impact on their gender roles.

The first subtheme addressed *Women Driving*. Before adopting Vision 2030, women were not allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia. In order to provide better opportunities for women, Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman Al Saud issued the order of allowing women to drive in 2018 (Saudi Vision 2030). Participants in this study stated their thoughts on how to perceive these changes and its impact on gender roles. Urban couples traveled or non-traveled share similar thoughts on women driving. The couples share that they are supporting these changes since it will impact positively on the Saudi society. Majority of urban husbands said they support their wives to drive. Urban communities are more likely to accept the new changes since they are used to changes in the city (Farber, 1968). On the other hand, most rural couples who traveled change their perception in how to navigate Vision 2030 changes. Even when they were abroad, they encouraged these changes and its positive impact on Saudi women. As soon as they returned, they changed their perception to adopt a traditional mindset. Rural communities are more likely to have a traditional mindset in how they navigate women driving in Saudi Arabia. For rural couples who did not travel, they also adopt a traditional mindset in navigating these changes. They realize how these changes are beneficial to the country, but they believe they are not ready for it.

The next subtheme covered *Women Working*, couples shared how Vision 2030 contributed to offering job opportunities and change women roles in Saudi society. Gender segregated environment in workplace and public places was very common before the implementation of Vision 2030. For instance, women are used to interact with other women at workplace, and men are more

likely to deal comfortably with other men at the workplace (Khan, Ro, Gregory & Hara, 2016).

With Vision 2030 changes, women have more opportunities in the workforce. The study indicated that urban couples who traveled abroad negotiate gender roles as women participating more in the market. Majority of urban husbands are supporting their wives supporting the country's' economic. With the mixed gender environment in a workplace, majority of husbands do not mind their wives working in a mixed gender environment. When it comes to rural couples who traveled abroad, majority are supporting this change; however, they are not in favor of the mixed gender environment in the workplace. Rural communities are not ready for this kind of change because of traditional believes (Al-Ghamdi, 1991).

For couples who did not travel abroad and coming from urban cities, they are navigating gender roles as couples with women working in the labor market. Majority of the couples are supporting women working in the labor market. With urban communities, couples are adapting easily in navigating gender roles. For rural couples who did not travel abroad, majority are not supporting women in the labor market. Most spouses expressed that they are not supporting the other spouse to be involve in a mixed gender environment, especially rural husbands. With a conservative believes, husbands are not supporting their wives to be involve in a mixed gender environment. In addition, they suggested that they are less likely to adopt the mixed gender environment since it created some challenge for couples to navigate their roles.

The last subtheme of this chapter is *Women in Public*. To develop other economic resources, tourism is one of the aspects that has been addressed in Vision 2030. Some entertaining events and activities are adopted to attract foreign people to visit Saudi Arabia and explore its culture (Saudi Vision 2030, 2018). In order to encourage tourism, some laws had to be flexible such as the mixed gender environment in public places (Wolff & Grand, 2030).

Urban couples who traveled abroad are supporting these changes because of its positive impact on the society. One interesting aspect that has been observed is how these entertaining activities helped couples to visit and enjoy these places. Some couples indicated that this helped them to be close to each other and explore new places in the city. Being exposed to the Western society has helped in adopting flexible approach to navigate these changes. When it comes to rural couples who traveled abroad, they are less likely to support these changes. Most of them indicated that these changes came in very fast to the Saudi society. Rural communities are not ready yet for these changes since most of them are still holding a traditional assumption of how the Saudi society should look like. Urban couples who did not travel abroad share similar thoughts to the one who traveled. Being in an urban community that encourage diversity has helped the couples to navigate gender roles in terms of the mixed gender environment and women in public places.

Overall, this study addressed how couples navigate the changing gender environment in Saudi Arabia. In addition, it covered how these changes are measured in terms of couples coming from rural or urban cities in Saudi Arabia. As a result, the study revealed that urban and rural couples differ in how they navigate the gender environment in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, couples who traveled are more likely to adapt to these changes especially the rural couples.

7.4 Limitations and Recommendation

Participants addressed specific and meaningful information, that might be biased in terms of feedback, or inadequate wording while responding to the questions. They are more likely to answer in accordance with what researchers ask (Yin 2014). Patton (2002) indicated that with important issues in society, respondents may be feeling uneasy in answering questions. This study includes 55 couples and their responses on how to navigate gender roles in a changing gender environment. The opportunity to expand and include more respondents will help in examining variations across Saudi

couples, either in terms of their previous experience in Western countries, or when they returned to Saudi Arabia. In addition, it is more likely that the participants did not participate enough due to the minimal qualitative data. There is a possibility that the respondents could not expand in their responses, and the researcher could not obtain a follow up interview. Addressing more qualitative questions will help in answering how couples negotiate gender roles in their marriage. Moreover, since the dissertation address the implementation of Vision 2030, future research can study how couples negotiated gender roles with the changing gender environment in the year of 2030. This will help address how the Vision 2030 contributed in changing the Saudi society. More qualitative data would help better informing the research.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS STUDENT WHO HAVE STUDIED ABROAD

Demographic questions:

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. What city are you from in Saudi Arabia?
4. How long have you been married?
5. Do you have children? (How many? How Old?)
6. What is your level of education?

First Set of Questions about their experience of studying abroad and coming back:

1. How long have you lived overseas? And what is your country of study? Did you both study?
2. How long you have been in Saudi Arabia since you returned from studying abroad?
3. Have you traveled to western countries before studying abroad?

Second set of Questions about their adaptation process:

1. Describe your cultural experience when you started studying abroad? Were you familiar with the culture or did you face challenges?
2. What kind of changes did you adopt or adapt back to the culture?
3. Please describe your reentry experience to Saudi Arabia was it difficult or easy? why?
4. Describe the biggest adjustment you had to make?
5. What kinds of challenges (if any) did you experience as you readjusted to life in Saudi Arabia?
6. Have you changed your perspective toward your home country? If so, how and why?
7. Have you changed your perspective toward your former host country? If so, how and why?

8. Describe how your relationships with family and friends have changed since you returned home.
9. Describe how, if at all, your family life has changed if you compare how it was before you went abroad with how it is since you came back (think about kids, household labor, activities, etc). .

Third set of Questions about gender relations experience:

1. From your experience in studying abroad, can you describe some of the cultural differences you noticed when you studied abroad? can you give an example?
2. How did sharing socializing with the opposite sex in the host country affect your communication style with men or women in this country? What kind of experiences did you have with the mixed gender situation? Did you try to avoid them or seek them out? How did this impacted your kids if you have any?
3. How did you discuss the mixed gender environment with your spouse?
4. What were the practices that you got used to while studying abroad and brought them back with you?

Fourth set of Questions regarding the recent changes in Saudi Arabia:

1. Are you familiar with Vision 2030 and how it is impacting Saudi Arabia now? If so, what does it mean to you and how it is impacting your life?
2. Have you noticed any changes after the implementation of Vision 2030 if so, how?
3. Have you adopted any changes since the announcement of Vision 2030?
4. How did these changes affect your adaptation process?
5. Since women driving is a part of Vision 2030 plans, were your wife drove while studying abroad? And did your wife started to drive in Saudi Arabia? If not, are you planning in

future? Do you know any of your women relatives who is driving now? What do you notice from people around you seeing women driving? Did they encourage or discourage such a change?

6. Before we end this interview, is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS STUDENT WHO HAVE NOT TRAVELED ABROAD

Demographic questions:

7. What is your name?
8. How old are you?
9. What city are you from in Saudi Arabia?
10. How long have you been married?
11. Do you have children? (How many? How Old?)
12. What is your level of education?

First set of questions about their experience of staying in Saudi Arabia:

1. Have you traveled inside Saudi Arabia? If so, can you describe the differences between your hometown and the other city?
2. Is there a reason of why you have not traveled outside Saudi Arabia?
3. Are you familiar with the Western culture? If so, how?

Second set of questions about gender relations experiences, practices and perception:

1. How do you think the Saudi traditions handle gender relations? Can you give examples?
2. Being used to a separate gender environment? What is your experiences with mixed gender environments, including home, neighborhood and workplace? How would you consider the mixed gender environment in a workplace? Do you consider any boundaries? If so, give an example?
3. How do you perceive face-to-face interactions with the opposite sex? Do you avoid them or consider them as anyone else you contact with? Can you give me an example of a situation that you deal with the opposite sex?

4. How do you and your spouse manage and perceive gender relations with the opposite sex during marriage? Have this created any challenges for you?
5. How do each of you share responsibilities with your spouse? Can you give examples?

Third set of questions about the recent changes in Saudi Arabia?

1. Are you familiar with the Vision 2030 and how it is impacting Saudi Arabia now? If so, how it impacted your life?
2. Have you noticed any changes after the implementation of Vision 2030 If so, how?
3. Since women driving is a part of Vision 2030 plans, did your wife started to drive in Saudi Arabia? If not, are you planning in future? Do you know any of your women relatives who is driving now? What do you notice from people around you seeing women driving? Did they encourage or discourage such a change?
4. How these changes are different in your hometown compared to the capital city? Do you see people accepting these changes easily or are they still having struggle in understanding the changes? Can you give examples or practices about that?
5. After the recent changes in Saudi Arabia because of Vision 2030, and when it comes to interactions with the opposite sex, do you think people are more lenient or still strict toward the mixed gender environment interactions?