

LEARNING TO MANAGE: HOW SAUDI FEMALE DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN  
EDUCATION MANAGE ACADEMIC AND MOTHERHOOD ROLES IN U.S.  
UNIVERSITIES

By

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requirements for the degree of Doctor of philosophy.

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## **Abstract**

### **Learning to Manage: How Saudi Female Doctoral Students in Education Manage Academic and Motherhood Roles in U.S. Universities**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of 14 Saudi female doctoral students who were managing motherhood and academic roles while studying in the United States. All of the participants were enrolled in doctoral programs in education in the U.S. This study asked the following questions: how do Saudi female doctoral students with children manage their roles as both doctoral students and mothers? What type(s) of support do Saudi females receive in managing their multiple roles? What challenges result from performing these multiple roles? How do Saudi women with children respond to these challenges? What strategies do female Saudi doctoral students develop to manage and balance their roles? What are the roles of advisors, faculty members, classmates, husbands, and family members in supporting Saudi doctoral mothers while they study in U.S. institutions? Through a qualitative research design, I explored the experiences of 14 Saudi student mothers through participant interviews. Several major findings were uncovered. First, Saudi mothers manage their academic and motherhood roles successfully. They received different forms of support from their advisors, faculty members, classmates, husbands, and family members. The reported stories from those Saudi mothers reveal a number of barriers they confront as mothers and doctoral students in U.S. institutions, such as lack of institutional support, lack of Saudi Cultural Mission support, academic difficulties, feelings of guilt, discrimination, and family adjustment problems. Finally, the study concludes that Saudi mothers developed a number of strategies to manage their roles and responsibilities, such as limiting social activities to online and weekends, setting priorities and doing urgent

tasks, using reminders, planning ahead of time, using daycare and housekeepers, delaying having babies, seeking help from friends, seeking help from older kids, keeping their kids busy, and rejecting help from others.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Problem Statement**

Many Saudi female students who pursue their studies in the United States are fully supported by the Saudi government scholarship program, which covers all of the students' financial needs, including a monthly salary, and academic expenses, including school fees, annual flights home, and full health insurance coverage (Saudi Ministry of Higher Education, 2015). Saudi women who participate in this scholarship program are required to be accompanied by a male chaperone (often a relative or a husband). Many Saudi female doctoral students are married and bring with them not only their spouses but also their children. These Saudi women with children who are enrolled in doctoral programs face critical challenges during their studies in the United States that emerge from performing multiple roles—wife, mother, and student. These multiple roles may make it difficult for these women to focus adequately on their doctoral studies. According to Brown and Watson (2010), the stressful lives of female graduate students that result from living within the dual roles of student and wife or mother often lead to a contradictory lifestyle and make mothers likely to progress slowly in completing a doctoral degree. Shiva (2013) explained that mothers face problems with finding a balance between work and family, for example, mothers with children in daycare do not have time to enjoy family functions and are not able to provide proper care to their family members. These challenges for Saudi mothers studying in the United States can create tension in their lives and take their focus away from their studies. This qualitative descriptive study aims to find out more about the challenges that Saudi mothers face in balancing academic and family life during their doctoral studies in education and to discover how they make it work.

### **Research Questions**

The main question guiding this study is: How do Saudi female doctoral students with

children manage their roles as both doctoral students and mothers? The sub questions that emerge from the guiding research question are as follows: (a) What challenges result from performing those multiple roles? (b) How do Saudi women with children respond to these challenges? (c) What strategies do female Saudi doctoral students develop to manage and balance their roles? and (d) What are the roles of advisors, faculty, classmates, husbands, and family members in supporting Saudi doctoral mothers?

### **Goal of the Study**

The goal of this exploratory qualitative study is to examine how Saudi women who are studying in the U.S. to earn doctoral degrees in education, and who have children manage their academic and motherhood roles as well as examining what coping mechanisms they use to face possible role conflicts. In keeping with other exploratory qualitative studies, the present study does not have a theoretical framework. The study focuses on the experiences of Saudi women with children who are enrolled in doctoral programs in education in U.S. universities. As the majority of female students in Saudi institutions have limited major choices, they often choose to major in the field of education (Onsman, 2011). As a result, when Saudi female students travel abroad to continue their graduate degrees in the United States, they tend to stick to the same major in order to follow the regulations of the Saudi Ministry of Education and to avoid notes on their degree evaluations stating that the degree is in a major that is not related to their undergraduate degree. Accordingly, the education field is the focus for most Saudi female students at the doctoral level. According to data from the Saudi Culture Mission in Table 1, the largest group of Saudi female PhD students in U.S. institutions in fall 2015 were majoring in education (22.5%).

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study is focused on the perspectives of Saudi mothers, and the collected data relies on their memory. This study also is focused on the perspectives of Saudi women with

children who are enrolled in doctoral programs in education located in U.S. institutions in the 2016 school year. As a result, the conclusions of this research study are not generalizable to all mothers, or all Saudi mothers studying in the United States.

### **Context of the Study**

#### **Saudi Students in the United States**

As a developing country, Saudi Arabia is primarily concerned with the development of human capital. This interest in the country's human development has been apparent in its attempts to train Saudi Arabian nationals in overseas institutions, especially in the United States (Alarmi, 2011; Miller, 2002).

In the late 1970s, the number of Saudi students in the United States began to rise rapidly, peaking in 1980–1981 with 10,440 students (Open Door, 2012) After this, there were years of fluctuation until 1993–1994, followed by a rise in students until 2001–2002. In the 2002–2003 academic year, Saudi student enrollment dropped 25% and continued to decline until 2005–2006, when participants in the Saudi Scholarship Program began to study on United States campuses (Open Doors, 2012). According to the recent Open Doors Report (2014), there were approximately 54,000 Saudi students in the United States, mainly sponsored by the Saudi government's scholarship program, which has been running for 11 years (Iie.org, 2014). According to Al-Ahmed (2014), as cited in Taylor and Albasri (2014), Saudi students who study abroad belong to one of three categories: Saudis who study abroad through the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) represent 76% of all Saudi study-abroad students; 13% are employer-sponsored students (e.g., employees at universities and oil companies); and 11% are self-sponsored students who study for one year and then have the right to apply to join the KASP if they meet the requirements, such as having a school acceptance letter. This study focuses not just on those students who are under the auspices of the KASP program but also Saudi students who work in Saudi universities as faculty

members and as administrators who have been sent to U.S. institutions to earn their doctoral degrees. Generally, the vast majority of Saudi students in U.S. institutions are under the supervision of the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission.

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

Historically, KASP has been considered the largest scholarship program in Saudi Arabia. In 2005, KASP was established through an agreement between President George W. Bush and King Abdullah, who desired to increase the number of Saudi citizens studying in reputable institutions such as American ones (Ministry of Saudi Higher Education, 2015). The KASP's central goal is to give students the skills and knowledge required to become successful at the individual and country levels so that they benefit Saudi Arabia; the aim is for the best, most reputable institutions in the world to help produce future leaders for Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the KASP aims to increase cultural communication between Saudi citizens and people of other cultures in the host countries (Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission to the U.S.). According to Taylor and Albasri (2014), few countries have scholarship programs that match KASP. The benefits that students enjoy include a monthly stipend, which is awarded not just to the students but also to their spouses and their children. Any increase in the number of immediate family members results in an increase in the monthly stipend, which covers all academic expenses, such as fees, books, and conferences. The benefits also include full medical and dental coverage, yearly round-trip tickets for the students and their families to return to Saudi Arabia, and academic supervision in Washington, D.C. There are rewards for students who earn high GPAs, and allowances cover scientific materials, private tutor fees, and funds particularly for students with special needs (Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission to the U.S., 2015). According to the Saudi Higher Education official website, 71,026 Saudi students were studying in the United States in 2012.

In the 2013–2014 academic year, 53,919 students from Saudi Arabia were studying in

the United States (up 21% from the previous year). This number reflects nine successive years of growth. Saudi Arabia is the fourth most common place of origin for students coming to the United States for the fourth year in a row, and it is the leader among Middle Eastern nations by an extensive edge, with 6.1% of the total of international students (Open Doors 2014). Many Saudi Arabian scholars study in the United States at the undergraduate level. In 2013–2014, 49.9% were undergraduates, 20.6% were graduate students, 28.1% were other, and 1.4% were engaged in elective practical training (IIE, Open Doors 2014)

Saudi international students face several challenges in United States institutions, such as the challenge of how to deal with culture shock in a new setting (Shaw, 2010). This is not unique to Saudi women, however, as most international students experience culture shock and adjustment problems during their studies in the United States (Cohen, 2006; Fischer et al., 2009; Gerstenfeld, 2002; Godwin, 2009; Koehl, 2007; Mori, 2000; Obst & Forster, 2005; Paige, 1990; Sandhu, 1995; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; Surdam & Collins, 1984)

The challenges that Saudi students face vary depending on a number of factors, including gender. Saudi female students face an additional challenge related to their traditional role responsibilities as women, wives, and students (Domyati, 1987). The literature is not rich in characterizations of Saudi students with children and how they manage their academic and motherhood roles. As a result, this study will have an influence, specifically with respect to female Saudi Arabian students and more broadly in relation to scholars from a comparable cultural background in the Middle East as well as students from other developing countries.

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

According to the recent statistics from the Saudi culture mission in Washington, D.C., a total of 17,994 female Saudi students are studying at all levels in U.S. institutions in Fall

2015 (graduate, undergraduate, and ESL). The largest number of Saudi female students is in California (12.3%), then Washington State (10.8%), then Ohio (6.6%).

The number of female Saudi students at the PhD level in all majors is 1,353, which represents 7.6% of all Saudi female students enrolled in U.S. institutions for the fall 2015. According to Table 1, the largest number of PhD female Saudi students in the United States are majoring in education (22.5%) followed by 20% in the professional majors (such as medical, dental, pharmacy, nursing, law, and health science), then 15% in physical science majors. The data emphasize that many Saudi female doctoral students in the United States are still limited to education majors due to many cultural and social factors emerging from the Saudi culture (Onsman, 2011).

Table 1

*Saudi Female PhD Students in U.S. Institutions in Fall 2015*

Rank	Category	Percentage
1	Education	22.5%
2	Professional	20%
3	Physical Sciences	15%
4	Other majors (not categorized)	13.5%
5	Biological Sciences	13%
6	Social Sciences	9.5%
7	Arts & Humanities	4%
8	Engineering	2.6%
9	Business	2%

Source: This table is created from data obtained from the Saudi culture mission Washington, D.C., Oct 2015.

### **Saudi Culture and Women's Roles**

The culture of Saudi Arabia is collectivist (Abu-Hilal, 1986). Individuals in Saudi Arabia prioritize the attitudes, needs, and values of the family over their own. Abu-Hilal (1986) emphasized the importance of the role of family in Saudi culture in this way: "For the

sake of the family everything must be sacrificed” (p. 76). El-Banyan (1974) explained, “The family in Saudi Arabia is the basic social unit. It is the center of all loyalty, obligations and status of its members” (p. 46).

According to Saudi traditions, the man or father is considered the main source of income in the Saudi Arabian family, while the woman or mother is considered the homemaker (Pharaon, 2004). Traditionally, women are not expected or encouraged to have jobs outside of the house. Instead, they are encouraged to stay home and take care of the children and household chores (Harper, 2007). In Saudi Arabian culture, fathers and grandfathers hold the authority in a family (Al-Khateeb, 1998; Long & Maisel, 2010). While the education system of males has always been under the supervision of the Saudi Ministry of Education, women’s education at all levels—general and higher education—remained under the authority of the Department of Religious Guidance until 2002. This was to ensure that women’s education did not deviate from the original goal of female education, which was to prepare women to be good mothers and wives and to perform the few jobs that were culturally acceptable for them in Saudi Arabia, such as teaching.

The major source of support for individuals in Saudi Arabia is the family (Abu-Hilal, 1986). For example, families in Saudi Arabia provide support for students from childhood through adulthood. When students face economic or health challenges, their families are expected to provide them with help (Dwairy, 1997). Saudi individuals, in contrast to many in the United States and other Western societies, rarely seek professional help or counseling services because the expectation is that individuals should seek help and support from their families, parents, relatives, and friends (Adeyemi, 1985; Al-Qasem, 1987; Ali et al., 2004). For Saudi individuals, asking for help outside of the family is unacceptable and taken as an offense by many families (Adeyemi, 1985; Al-Issa, 2000; Al-Qasem; Ali et al., 2004).

According to Long and Maisel (2010), over the past few decades, Saudi Arabia has undergone a collision between customs and modernization at a pronounced level. Long and Maisel (2010) stated that the traditional society with a closed culture is experiencing rapid transformation, especially regarding issues related to women's rights.

In recent years, Saudi society has witnessed huge debates and arguments about gender inequalities, women's rights, and women's roles in the development process in Saudi Arabia (Hamden, 2005). Al Munajjed (1997) explained that the Saudi government has been supportive of women's access to general and higher education by building hundreds of schools and campuses and by supporting them financially and administratively. According to Lacey (1981), in the 1940s, the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education began to send male citizens to pursue their college studies abroad. One Saudi woman, Fatina Amin Shakir, applied for a scholarship offered by the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education for citizens to study abroad; however, the ministry rejected her application because it was immoral to send women to study in Western countries (Arebi, 1994). Shakir's father then appealed to King Faisal, who was known to encourage women's education, and King Faisal changed the scholarship policies to allow women to take equal advantage of education abroad. Shakir, now an anthropologist, was the first female student whom the Saudi government sent abroad to complete a PhD, which she earned in the United States from Purdue University in 1971 (Arebi, 1994; Lacey, 1981).

This change demonstrated that the Saudi government was concerned with its female citizens and the status of women's education in Saudi Arabia. Since 1971, many women's campuses have been founded, and the Ministry of Saudi Higher Education has sent more and more talented women abroad and provided them with funding and medical support for the duration of their studies (Hamden, 2005). Saudi women who are sent to study abroad face particular challenges, however. For instance, single Saudi women are required to have

chaperones (male relatives such as husbands, brothers, fathers, and uncles) to travel to the United States or any country outside of Saudi Arabia (Saudi Ministry of Education, 2015). As a result, most Saudi females who benefit from KASP are married. This is because single Saudi women's brothers or uncles are usually married and have their own lives, families, and work, and they would not leave their jobs and wives for the sake of their sisters' education. However, Dumiaty (1980) found that Saudi wives who went to the United States with their husbands were confronted with many obstacles that hindered their desires to continue their own education. Family obligations and children were found to significantly limit these women's educational aspirations. Another problem may increase the level of role conflict that Saudi female students face: while their husbands often approve of their roles as students, the majority of these husbands do not provide help at home, which may decrease the support that the wives receive for their studies (Domyati, 1986). According to Berkov (1979), a husband's general attitude toward women's roles and capabilities is another indication of support. For example, a man may be verbally encouraging but then do nothing to help his wife or to ease her housekeeping and childcare responsibilities.

The challenges that Saudi women face when they decide to travel to continue their education in the United States begin to emerge even before they set foot on American soil. They are faced with critical social attitudes of people in Saudi society who consider women and even men who study abroad to have abandoned their religion, cultural values, and customs (Alarmi, 2011). Critics of KASP indicate that the abundance of students studying at Western universities will result in the Westernization of Saudi Arabian social elements (Alarmi, 2011). However, according to semi-structured interviews conducted by Opiatka and Lapidot (2011), Islamic women interviewed retained a strong sense of cultural identity throughout their time studying abroad. While this may refute the criticism of potential

Westernization, it could also contribute to the stereotyping and alienation of Middle Eastern students studying in a foreign culture.

Regardless of the various challenges that can hinder the fulfillment of Saudi women's aspirations, traveling abroad to continue their education is a good opportunity for Saudi women to develop their professional lives. Saudi female students who choose to study in the United States benefit personally, professionally, and academically. In addition, according to Taylor and Albasri (2014), scholarship programs such as KASP provide excellent opportunities for Saudi students to study majors that are not offered in Saudi institutions. Through KASP or other Saudi scholarship programs, students bring home the types of new thoughts and perspectives required to lead Saudi Arabia and to establish a more open culture and more competitive labor in global markets (Taylor & Albasri, 2014). Education overseas is perhaps one of the best investments for Saudi females, especially because 60% of females in Saudi Arabia are employed. There is a lack of PhD holders in the Saudi labor force from both genders, as they make up just 0.6% of the total Saudi labor force. Therefore, investment in sending students to earn PhD degrees is especially important.

### **Significance of the Study**

To the best of my knowledge, this study is the first one to explore the experiences of Saudi mothers in doctoral education programs in U.S. institutions. Thus, the study is important because the results will demonstrate the experiences of these students and the challenges they face, how these women manage to combine their motherhood and academic roles, and the available support mechanisms to help them navigate and manage their roles.

The Saudi government currently invests nearly \$2.4 billion in the King Abdullah Scholarship Program annually to fully fund students ([hmonitor.icef.com](http://hmonitor.icef.com)). Still, spending money is not enough to guarantee the success of this huge scholarship program. The Saudi Ministry of Education must use research findings to fill the gaps in the program and develop

it to avoid wasting its budget. This is especially true because the Saudi government has invested over 10% of the country's budget in higher education (Monitor, 2012). The data from the present study will benefit the Saudi government in reviewing some policies in the scholarship program that potentially hamper females with children in their studies in the United States. Addressing issues in this program will benefit all students, including Saudi mothers.

The current study also seeks to increase the awareness of deans, administrators, professors, and peers in the U.S. institutions by reviewing the implications for ways to better meet the needs of female doctoral students—especially those who are Saudi. Since the 1970s, many articles in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* have brought attention to the stressful lives of female doctoral students and argued that institutions should be supportive of female students with children (e.g., Grenier & Burke, 2008; Holmstrom & Holmstrom, 1974; Lynch, 2008; Shiva, 2013). According to Shiva (2013), it is important for a university as an organization to create a welcoming climate for female students that reflects concern for their lives outside of campus. Shiva (2013) and Lynch (2008) criticized the support institutions offered to graduate student mothers, including not offering daycare, which shows a lack of support and an unwelcome status of motherhood in academia. Grenier and Burke (2008) concluded from their own experiences as mothers and PhD students that the support available for graduate mothers from academic departments was an exception to the general rule rather than a direct result of efforts the university made to prepare advisors and faculty to support graduate mothers. According to Mason et al. (2007), in order for institutions to remain competitive, graduate programs that have an interest in retaining female students who wish to have children during graduate school must address their specific needs. The present study seeks to determine if the concerns of Saudi women doctoral students with children parallels the concerns uncovered in the research literature about other mothers who are doctoral

students.

### **Summary**

This chapter stated the study's main goal, which is to investigate the experiences of 15 Saudi female doctoral students of education who are also mothers and describe how they are managing their motherhood and academic roles. I pointed out the problems and significance of this study and what it attempts to add to the available literature. I also provided details about the study's context to clarify many facts about Saudi women, Saudi culture, and women's education in Saudi Arabia.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

To understand the experiences of Saudi mothers who are doctoral students in U.S. institutions and the challenges they face, it is important to review the literature on doctoral students' experiences to draw a clear understanding of what PhD students go through and what kinds of challenges and factors have affected their educational experiences and their personal and professional lives.

#### **Doctoral Students' Experiences in U.S. Institutions**

The literature review on doctoral students has identified significant aspects that contribute to the doctoral experience, including doctoral student attrition (e.g., Berelson, 1960; Gardner, 2008; Golde, 2005; Golde & Dore, 2001; Lovitts, 2001; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Smallwood, 2004), the supervisor–doctoral student relationship (e.g., Rothstein, 1995; Gardecki & Neumark, 1996; Costes, Helmke, & Steiner, 2006), difficulties and stresses doctoral students face in their studies (e.g., Hockey, 2004), and research on their personal, social life, and their marital status (e.g., Braxton & Baird, 2001; Madrey, 1983; Thomas, 2014; West, Gokalp, Pena, Fischer, & Gupton, 2011). In the next part, I will review the literature that focused on each aspect.

#### **PhD Attrition**

Half of doctoral students in the United States fail to complete their program (Council of Graduate Schools, 2010; Nettles & Millett, 2006). Many studies have been conducted to explore the high rate of doctoral student attrition, its causes, and consequences for the doctoral student (e.g., Golde & Dore, 2001; Lovitts, 2001; Nettles & Millett, 2006). Some studies conclude that there is no one particular reason why doctoral students choose to leave (Baird, 1993; Cook & Swanson, 1978; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Golde, 2005; Golde & Dore, 2001; Lovitts, 2001; Nerad & Miller, 1996; Nettles & Millett, 2006).

In this study, I will explore the experiences of Saudi doctoral students who are mothers and the challenges they face in balancing the demands of motherhood and doctoral studies. In the next section of this paper, I will review the research on another important factor that affects the doctoral students' advancement, the supervisor–doctoral student relationship.

### **Impact of the Supervisor–Doctoral Student Relationship**

Gardner (2009) stated, “In the existing literature, the doctoral advisor plays an integral role in the successful completion of the dissertation” (p. 83). Many scholars stated that the support of faculty advisors is critical for doctoral student success, especially at the dissertation stage (Allen & Dory, 2001; Brus, 2006; Gardner, 2009; Gilbert, 1982; Golde & Dore, 2001; Hagedorn, 1999; Lovitts, 2001; Miller & Stone, 2011; Swietzer, 2008).

Golde (2005) found that an incompatible advising relationship or a mismatch between the advisor and the doctoral student could drastically reduce interaction, trust, and intellectual support for the student, which may lead to attrition, especially in science departments. For married doctoral students, the faculty advisor is extremely important to their decision to stay in the program or leave it. Attrition, in this case, depends on the advisor's awareness of the needs and demands of married doctoral students, especially those with children (Brus, 2006; Gardner, 2009; Gilbert, 1982; Lovitts, 1996, 2001; Madrey, 1983). According to Lovitts (2001), “The adviser is often the central and most powerful person not only on the graduate student's dissertation committee but also during the student's trajectory through graduate school” (p. 131).

Brus (2006) explained the dilemmas that graduate students face when they are trying to raise children and have to deal with an inflexible institutional environment: “Imagine grappling with quandaries such as these: (1) staying home with a sick child and not getting paid because you have no sick or vacation benefits, (2) taking a child to work, (3) quickly

taking a midterm and then leaving to meet family responsibilities before returning for an evening meeting with an advisor” (p. 35).

Many studies have explored the impact of mentors and the gender of faculty members on the performance of female student performance (Costes et al., 2006; Gardecki & Neumark, 1996; Rothstein, 1995). Rothstein (1995) explored whether the percentage of employed female faculty had an impact on female students’ progress and found a significant positive association between the percentage of female faculty and female graduate students’ ability to advance in their degrees. Rothstein theorized that female faculty might strengthen the supportive atmosphere for female graduate students. However, Gardecki and Neumark (1996) found no support for the hypothesis that increasing the percentage of female faculty members improved doctoral female students’ outcomes, and only limited evidence that doing so reduces the time taken by female doctoral students to complete their doctoral degree.

Using a sample of female students, Costes et al. (2006) showed the same findings as Rothstein (1995), Gardecki, and Neumark (1996). Costes et al. (2006) also argued that female faculty members are less supportive than male faculty members are but that female students perceive them as valuable mentors (Costes et al., 2006). Schlegel (2000) and Raddon (2002) agreed that female students might need their mentors to be role models and to help them overcome barriers to development. As Raddon (2002) argued, female students with children who attempt to balance motherhood and their careers may require female faculty mentors. Gilbert et al.’s (1983) study findings disagreed with the findings of Costes, Helmke, and Steiner (2006), Gardecki and Neumark (1996), and Rothstein (1995). According to Gilbert et al., women doctoral students who had female role models showed more confidence, instrumentality, commitment, and aspiration than female doctoral students with male faculty role models.

Some studies have gone deeper than investigations into gender and its impact on the doctoral student experience. Costes et al. (2006) concluded that there are more important things than faculty gender that affect faculty support for students, including faculty attitudes and values. They found that students had more self-esteem and motivation when their faculty members validated the importance of family matters and supported their attempts to balance their personal and professional lives.

Given the findings of these major studies, it is obvious that support of faculty advisors is critical for doctoral student success (Allen & Dory, 2001; Brus, 2006; Gardner, 2009; Gilbert, 1982; Golde & Dore, 2001; Hagedorn, 1999; Lovitts, 2001; Miller & Stone, 2011; Swietzer, 2008). Based on the findings above, Saudi doctoral student mothers' experiences might be affected by their faculty advisers. In this study, I will examine the experiences of Saudi doctoral students who are mothers and the role of their professors in supporting their academic path. In the next section of this paper, I will review research on the nature of the difficulties and challenges faced by PhD students during each stage of their studies.

### **Challenges Faced by PhD Students during their Studies**

According to Braxton and Baird (2001), PhD students move through three stages: the beginning stage in the first year, the middle stage, and the end stage, which is also the dissertation stage. Braxton and Baird (2001) indicated that each stage has specific demands and challenges and is characterized by different kinds of relationships between PhD students and their professors and peers. Many scholars, such as Hockey (2004), have identified the challenges that PhD students face in the beginning of their academic studies. Hockey (2004) found that PhD students in their first year face unexpected challenges such as feelings of being socially isolated, being solely responsible for their work, managing their time, and working on building a good relationship with their supervisors (Hockey, 2004).

Gardner (2009) found that doctoral students feel pressure from the moment they begin coursework; then, slowly, the workload begins to prevent them from spending time with their families. As one student in the study stated, “The only thing I had to focus on [when an undergraduate] was school and now as a PhD student and working full time and married, there [are] other time pressures that I deal with now that I didn’t have to deal with then” (p. 47). Furthermore, Lovitts (2001) found that married doctoral students reported finding themselves having to choose between a spouse and continuing in the program. In her qualitative study.

Gardner (2008) used the lens of socialization to understand the doctoral student’s decision to remain in or depart from a degree program. Gardner (2008) argued that students’ experiences of socialization within a doctoral program either impedes or facilitates their successful completion of the degree. The sample in her study consisted of 14 male and 26 female doctoral students in two research institutions; eight of the students had children. Of these students, 12 reported taking anti-depressants or seeking professional help to get through their degree programs. The female participants commented on the male-dominated environment at their college and said that their campus was not female-friendly. Brenda, a history student in Lovitt’s study, commented: “Women who make inroads are very threatening” (p. 134). Students who had children reported difficulty being both a parent and a doctoral student. Gloria, a history student, reported, “I have to do this whole balancing thing with wife/mother craziness. I think my biggest concern is finding time for that” (p. 134).

Costes et al. (2006) interviewed 12 women and 8 men from 7 doctoral programs to identify impeding and enhancing factors in the success of doctoral students. All of their study participants indicated similar stress from sources such as time pressure, financial worries, and doubts about finding a job in the future. Gardner (2009) and Madrey (1983) concluded that doctoral students face many external stresses that make life difficult. A number of studies

have documented the nature of the stressful life that doctoral students lead (Toews et al., 1997; Williams et al., 1984). These stressors emerge in doctoral students' lives from many different sources, such as time management, family obligations, finances, self-expectations, workload (Brauer et al., 2003; Toews et al., 1993; Williams et al., 1984), and difficulties balancing their personal and professional lives (Raddon, 2002). Many studies have found that female doctoral students have much more emotional and academic stress than male doctoral students (e.g., Allan & Dory, 2001; Gilbert, 1982; Lovitts, 2001; Madrey, 1983; Nedleman, 1991; Nettles & Millett, 2006). Female doctoral participants in studies (Hudson & O'Regan, 1994; Toews et al., 1993; Toews et al., 1997) have reported higher levels of stress than men. Given the findings of these major studies, it is obvious that the life of doctoral students is full of academic and emotional challenges.

Based on the findings above, Saudi doctoral mothers might experience difficulties that hinder their advancement. In this study, I will examine the experiences of Saudi doctoral students who are mothers, the kinds of challenges they experience, and how they survive as mothers and doctoral students. In the next section of this paper, I will review the research findings on doctoral students' marriage stability and ability to have and raise children during their PhD studies.

### **Doctoral Students' Marriage Stability and Having and Raising Children**

According to Brannock, Litten, and Smith (2000) and Madrey (1983), being a doctoral student demands much time and requires emotional and physical stamina. Besides being away from family. Brannock et al.'s (2000) study found evidence of stressful and dissatisfied marital relationships, coinciding with Madrey's (1983) study of the effects of enrollment on full-time married doctoral students. Madrey used in-depth interviews to collect data from 16 married doctoral students (eight women and eight men), all of whom had children and studied at Ohio State University. Madrey indicated that the stress levels that

affected the marriages of the doctoral students were caused by external and internal factors, including “the educational level of the spouses, financial problems, time pressures, children, communication, sexual concerns, decision-making, role conflict, and physical and emotional separation” (Madrey, 1983, p. 16). These findings also coincided with Nedleman’s (1991) survey of 84 married graduate students in programs at the University of California, which showed that 40% of the respondents had children. Madrey concluded that the doctoral students’ greatest stressors were their relationships with their spouses. Nedleman (1991) and Madrey’s (1983) findings coincided with Thomas’s (2014) phenomenological qualitative study, which explored the experiences of married students with children who were enrolled in doctoral programs at a Midwestern research university. Data were collected from 10 doctoral students. Thomas (2014) concluded that time commitments of married doctoral students, such as attending classes, studying, and writing a dissertation, can harm their family relationships. Thomas (2014) also found that the lived experiences of married doctoral students are challenging because they have to balance multiple roles: personal, family, academic, and work. However, Madrey (1983) and Thomas (2014) found that with communication and cooperation with their partners, married doctoral students can develop successful academic careers and balanced, stable family relationships.

Madrey (1983) found that having to negotiate different roles often lowers marital stability, but developing skills to cope with these demands may improve marital relationships. Both Madrey (1983) and Thomas (2014) stated that the stressful lives of these doctoral students have positive outcomes, including sharing the joy of positive connections, successfully completing coursework, passing exams, and celebrating graduation with family members (Thomas, 2014).

In her study, Gardner (2009) claimed that being in a doctoral program puts stress on family connections and removes students from their family and friends. Gardner (2009) also

described the strain that doctoral students feel during the start of their doctoral coursework. For instance, one doctoral student explained, “The only thing I had to focus on [when an undergraduate] was school and now as a PhD student and working full time and married, there [are] other time pressures that I deal with now that I didn’t have to deal with then” (p. 47). Mason et al. (2009) similarly reported that doctoral students who are parents face difficulties balancing school, family, and work life; these students also reported having to make sacrifices to be good parents and leading stressful lives because of the demands of their doctoral degrees and their jobs.

West et al.’s (2011) quantitative study of 103 doctoral students in education found that “Among the challenges experienced by the students, those most commonly reported were time management issues, including balancing work and life commitments, as well as their relationships with their dissertation chairs” (p. 8). West et al. also reported that doctoral programs affect family relationships and that parents struggle to satisfy their children’s care responsibilities and academic demands. One doctoral student shared:

For me, obviously, time probably is the number one challenge just because I think, you know, having a family. My wife works full time and having no family here, working substantial hours, I have no social time. All my free time is put towards just finding the opportunity to write. (West et al., 2011, p. 9)

Those difficulties may cause doctoral students to think deeply before having children while they do their PhDs. In their study of doctoral students enrolled in 17 universities, Nettles and Millett (2006) found many married doctoral students forgoing children, at least temporarily: “Fewer women than men in our sample reported having children under the age of eighteen” (p. 53). Furthermore, doctoral students were found to delay parenthood until they finish their degree.

Given the findings of these major studies, it is obvious that doctoral students experienced stressful and sometimes difficult relationships with their spouses and families. It is likely that Saudi doctoral mothers might feel challenged by the stress of doctoral studies and the high demands on their time and energy, which may destroy their marriage stability. In this study I will explore the experiences of Saudi doctoral students who are mothers and the challenges they face in balancing the demands of family and doctoral studies, as well as how studying for a PhD affects their partners, marriage, and children. In the next section of this paper, I will review the research on the supervisor–doctoral student relationship.

### **Support Systems for Doctoral Students**

The literature exploring the experience of graduate students confirmed lack of institutional support for graduate students when it comes to childcare and other support benefits (Brus, 2006; Gardner, 2008a, 2009; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Middleton, 2001; Rovaris, 2004; Smith et al., 2006; Springer et al, 2009). In her qualitative study, Gardner (2008) interviewed 40 doctoral students, eight of whom had children. According to this study, academic structures are not designed to welcome students with children, whose multiple roles and responsibilities often mean that flexibility is needed. Springer et al. (2009) argued that institutions not only offer little support in their services for married doctoral students, but when they do offer services, students are unaware of them.

Golde (2000) found “that the primary agents of socialization and integration are faculty. Relationships with faculty advisors consistently seem more important in doctoral student completion than relationships with peers” (p. 202). For instance, one of the participants explained in an interview that doctoral students help each other prepare for oral exams. However, this is not always the case. Madrey (1983) found that it is mainly family who meet the doctoral student’s needs, so relationships between the students and their peers develop little. Smith et al. (2006) disagreed, concluding that married doctoral students with

children constantly rely on support systems of both the family and the institution. However, Lovitts (2001) argued that family support for doctoral students occurred during the coursework stage and declined during the writing of the dissertation, which caused student attrition from the doctoral program. Madrey (1983) admitted that doctoral programs are fraught with challenges; nevertheless, with family support and determination, doctoral students can complete their PhD programs.

Poyrazli and Kavanaugh (2006) explored the experience of 149 married international graduate students through a quantitative study. They found that these students believed they did not need outside social relationships but relied heavily on their spouses while studying; however, the top important complaint for married international students is the lack of extended family for support.

These findings make clear that doctoral students seek support from families, peers, and their institutions but do not get enough, especially when they have children (Brus, 2006; Gardner, 2008a, 2009; Madrey, 1983; Middleton, 2001; Rovaris, 2004; 2006; Springer et al., 2009).

Based on the findings above, Saudi doctoral mothers might feel unsupported by their institutions and try to rely heavily on their husbands and peers while they are studying for their PhDs in U.S. institutions. In this study, I will explore the experiences of Saudi doctoral students who are mothers and the challenges they face in balancing the demands of motherhood and doctoral studies, as well as the kind of support they receive from their institutions as doctoral students.

## **Summary**

The previous literature review on doctoral students enriches our understanding of the significant aspects that contribute to the experience of doctoral students, including a stressful lifestyle, attrition, and managing the role of also being a married and/or child-raising person.

No studies have explored the experiences of Saudi doctoral students who are mothers, but the previous literature review gives us clues to, if not an exact description of, the challenges they may face. Generally, few studies have explored the experience of international doctoral students. For example, while Gardner (2008) examined the doctoral experience of students from several underrepresented populations in graduate education, including women, students of color, older students, and students with children, she excluded international students. Gardner (2008) argued that she did not allow for the participation of international students in her study because she believed their experiences in doctoral programs would be distinct and particular to their culture of origin. Lovitts (2001) admitted in her study that very little is known about the experience of underrepresented populations like women and students of color or how their experiences differ by disciplinary and institutional context. Therefore, female international students may suffer more from additional challenges than local American students face. These challenges might relate to adjustment, language, culture, or religion. In short, this review clearly showed the gap in the literature on doctoral students' experience, which suggests a need for further research to better understand female international doctoral students, especially ones with children. This study will explore the experiences of Saudi female international doctoral students as one of the underrepresented populations in graduate education. This will enrich the available literature on the experience of Saudi female doctoral students with children. In the next section, I will review the literature that examines the experiences of female doctoral students in U.S. institutions.

### **Female Doctoral Students' Experience in U.S. Institutions**

The aim of this study is to explore how Saudi mothers who are students at the doctoral level in U.S. institutions balance the demands of academia and motherhood. The study also focuses on identifying the coping strategies those women adopt to manage their mother and student role responsibilities. As the major goal of the study is to examine the

experience of Saudi mothers at the doctoral level, I found it useful to review the literature on the experience of female doctoral students' experience to form an understanding of what those women face as doctoral students, what their challenges are, institutional and academic obstacles, psychological and physical health difficulties, classmates' and faculty attitudes toward female doctoral students, and how all these aspects affect them as women who have other roles in their lives in addition to their role as PhD students. According to Elg and Jonnergard (2003) and Perna (2004), women enroll in doctoral programs for a number of reasons, such as enjoying the freedom to devote time to interesting research areas that are often not found in a work setting. However, there are many roadblocks for women in attaining their doctorate. It is the purpose of this study to understand the effects of these challenges and difficulties on Saudi female doctoral students with children. In the next section, I will review what the research has found about female doctoral students' experience and their struggle to finish their programs. In the following section, I will review what the research has found about classmates' and faculty attitudes toward female doctoral students.

### **Classmates' and Faculty Attitudes toward Female Doctoral Students**

The earliest study to explore faculty attitudes toward female doctoral students was conducted in 1974 by Holmstrom and Holmstrom. Utilizing data from the 1969 ACE-Carnegie higher education survey, the analysis revealed a differential interaction rate with faculty that favored men, while female students who did have personal contact with faculty appeared to have additional qualifications from those of male students, such as academic competence proven by publication. Another negative factor was the deep-down conviction that women would waste their training by getting married and raising children. Similarly, Moyer et al. (1999) indicated that 21% of female doctoral students mentioned a number of complaints related to faculty behavior. Some of these complaints included faculty not giving adequate feedback or guidance and faculty being too stressed by the demands on their time to

provide more than perfunctory advising. Another complaint was that a number of faculty members were more concerned with furthering their own research than preparing students for postgraduate careers. Some of the female students who were mothers reported very intense conflicts with their advisors. One pregnant student in particular reported that she had clashes with her advisor over her personal life. These clashes were related to her decision to have a child in the last year of her graduate career: Her decision was questioned by her advisor, as was her desire not to work with radioactivity during her pregnancy. Similarly, Shroeder and Mynatt (1993) found that female “students feel overlooked, neglected, unsupported, and even dismissed by faculty” (p. 555), meaning that very few of them have had the type of mentor without whom a lot of gifted students would not complete their programs.

Similar findings were uncovered by Gu (2012), who conducted interviews with 25 female doctoral students and 10 faculty members from both genders in physical sciences and engineering departments at one research university in the western United States to explore hidden barriers that many female students confront in their doctorate studies. These barriers took the shape of gender biases, unequal opportunities, dysfunctional advising, and forms of sexual harassment. Similar to Holmstrom and Holmstrom (1974), Gu (2012) concluded that department academic staff and faculty play a unique role in the progress of female doctoral students; however, Gu’s study found that some male faculty held negative attitudes about female doctoral students’ nonacademic career trajectories, and they also did not recognize their work–life balance issues. Male faculty members demonstrated these negative attitudes in daily interactions with their students, creating an environment in which it was difficult for women and generating doubts about pursuing academic careers with their faculty advisors.

On the contrary those findings, Maher, Ford, and Thompson (2004) found that 78% of early-finishing women were empowered by supportive advisors and/or mentors and campus resources; however, in many cases advisors’ support was not enough. Maher et al. also found

that late-finishing women also reported that faculty advisors had supported them; yet, they often faced one or more obstacles that hindered their progress, including financial issues, childcare responsibilities, and disruption by family–life demands, and factors such as these impacted degree progress.

Female doctoral students in the study by Sessanna (2012) reported receiving varying kinds of support to deal with their multiple roles. Although not all of them received the expected amount of support from their departments, they formed their own support networks of friends, support groups, spouses, or family. Most of the participants reported that their departments were not particularly understanding or supportive of the needs of female doctoral students. As a result, female doctoral students reported that they received support mainly from friends or colleagues, while the main sources of departmental support came from one or two advisors or professors.

Contrary to Holmstrom and Holmstrom (1974) and Moyer et al. (1999), Kenty (2000) found that female doctoral students received support from deans and administrators, who offered emotional support and reduced clinical workloads and teaching. By reducing the students' workload, faculty members and administrators allowed students the opportunity to focus on their doctoral studies. Many of these female students succeeded in adjusting to stressful life events and modifying their workload. However, not all female doctoral students may be as fortunate.

According to Kenty (2000), female doctoral students reported that classmates who offered to loan books or create study groups also provided support in school. In addition, colleagues at work who held PhDs or were familiar with the process offered support by sharing their learning experiences, encouraging the completion of one's dissertation, editing chapters of a dissertation, or helping with statistical analyses.

Given the findings of these major studies, it is obvious that these women found it challenging to be at the doctoral level. Based on the findings above, Saudi doctoral mothers might be also affected by negative faculty attitudes toward them, which increases the stress caused by the demands of their roles as PhD students and as mothers. This study aimed to explore the experiences of Saudi mothers and the challenges they face in their doctoral studies that affect their ability to manage the demands of motherhood and academics. In the next section of this paper, I explore the psychological and physical health difficulties that female doctoral students may face during their studies.

### **Psychological and Physical Health Difficulties**

Many researchers examining the experiences of female PhD students have found the women experienced many psychological and physical health difficulties (Cao, 2001; Holmstrom & Holmstrom, 1969; Moyer et al., 1999; Sessanna, 2012; Szekelyelt, 2008; Haynes, Bulosan, Citty, Grant-Harris, Hudson, & Koro-Ljungberg, 2012; Williams-Tolliver, 2010).

In his study, Cao (2001) examined how male and female doctoral students experienced their programs similarly and differently. Stress was especially high for female doctoral students, who often felt they had to work harder than their male counterparts to prove themselves. The female students reported feeling depressed, isolated, or strained in relationships. Cao argued that the familial obligations of female students make doctoral studies more stressful for them.

Additionally, Holmstrom and Holmstrom (1969) concluded that all the emotional stress felt by female doctoral students emerged because of negative faculty attitudes toward them, which contributed to decreasing their commitment to staying in graduate school. Similarly, a study by Moyer et al. (1999) found that lack of support led to many psychological and physical health impairments, as reported by 17% of participants, including

depression, lack of self-esteem, strains on social relationships, and migraine headaches. Additionally, Szekelyelt (2008) found that female doctoral students suffered from loneliness, lack of a support system within the university setting, and an insecure professional future. In addition, in Moyer et al.'s (1999) study, some female doctoral students reported having depression, low self-esteem, and feelings of isolation. In Williams-Tolliver's (2010) study female graduate students reported high levels of stress and anxiety and being at risk for heart disease and stroke due to their continuing struggle to balance their life roles.

Haynes et al. (2012) also concluded that conflict between roles could affect female doctoral students' overall emotional and physical well-being negatively. However, when female doctoral students adopted coping strategies to manage their life roles, they gained a sense of control over life aspects. Similarly, Sessanna (2012) found that all doctoral students reported that their huge responsibilities caused them to feel high stress and anxiety. A primary effect of those challenges was increased time to completion of doctoral programs. However, Sessanna found a common feeling among the participants was that they did not want to show their weaknesses to others. According to Kenty (2000), there are different sources of support for reducing role-change stress for the female doctoral student; the most important source of support was husbands, who mostly offered help around the house. Unmarried participants, who represented 25% of the total, also stated that support with household management from family members was critical.

Mansfield, Welton, Lee, Young (2010) conducted a qualitative study to understand the challenges facing 12 female doctoral students in educational leadership departments. The analysis of participants' stories revealed constraints within the organizational culture, personal and familial sacrifices, struggles with identity, self-questioning, and experiences with mentoring. The female doctoral students who devoted their time to caring for children or aging parents reported feeling that the stressful work and graduate studies exacerbated strains

in their familial lives. The study also found that family relationships provided basic support for females throughout their PhD studies. However, Kenty (2000) indicated that the more emotional support the participants received from friends outside school or work, the more stress they experienced. Besides cutting back on relationships with friends outside school and work to avoid more stress, some participants suggested engaging in self-renewing behaviors in order to maintain physical and emotional health, such as eating well, taking vitamins, exercising, enjoying leisure time with spouses and family, going to the theater, or listening to music. The first strategy women suggested for managing educational issues was to weigh the rewards and costs that would emerge with seeking a doctorate. Before starting a PhD program, women must check their readiness to ensure they have the commitment to start. Two of the mothers with young families stated they wished they had finished school before having children and that they would not have had a baby while studying for their doctorates.

Given the findings of these major studies, it is obvious that female doctoral students' emotional and physical health is affected negatively due to the huge academic and familial responsibilities they carry. Based on the findings above, Saudi doctoral mothers might be also affected by negative faculty attitudes toward them, which increases the stress caused by the demands of their roles as PhD students and as mothers. In this study, I will explore the experiences of Saudi mothers and the challenges they face in their doctoral studies that affect their ability to manage the demands of motherhood and academics. In the next section of this paper, I will explore the personal and professional responsibilities that female doctoral students may face during their studies.

### **Personal and Professional Responsibilities**

Many studies have been conducted to explore the challenges of female doctoral students in dealing with their personal and professional responsibilities (Kenty, 2000; Lebodin, Bornmam, Gannon, & Wallon, 2007; Maher et al., 2004; Moyer, Salovey, & Casey-Cannon,

1999). Moyer et al. (1999) conducted a study to identify the challenges facing 224 female doctoral students in the life sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Thirty-six percent of participants indicated that they had difficulties in balancing their personal and professional responsibilities. They also faced time pressures and struggled with the demands of being an academic professional and having a family life. Thirty percent of them mentioned strains with trying to finish required school papers before their stipends ran out while trying to balance teaching and research responsibilities. Williams-Tolliver (2010) also conducted a study to understand the experiences of 23 female graduate students' challenges in public universities in Virginia. He found those female students struggled to balance academic work and personal and/or family demands. Williams-Tolliver concluded that female graduate students struggle to find sufficient time to manage their studies and family and work demands. Further, Williams-Tolliver and Moyer et al. (1999) agreed that female doctoral students were overwhelmed with tremendous responsibilities from one side and lack of support from others on the other side. One participant in Moyer et al.'s study stated: "The workload was unmanageable, between course work, and clinical practicum, it averaged 85–90 hours per week" (p. 115). Similar findings were confirmed by Sessanna's (2012) qualitative study to examine the barriers that 13 female doctoral students encountered, as well as what type of support they received. Sessanna found that all doctoral students reported juggling multiple responsibilities during their studies; participants worked hard to balance their academic study with family and job responsibilities due to the gender role expectations that pushed female doctoral students socially to meet expectations to fill their multiple roles and responsibilities, such as family needs, childcare, and caring for aging parents.

Maher et al. (2004) conducted a qualitative study to explore the factors that constrain, facilitate, and differentiate the progress of female doctoral students. The unique thing about Maher et al.'s study was that they attempted to identify the factors that positively or

negatively impacted the women's degree completion and to explore the extent to which these factors varied between two categories of female doctoral students: first, early finishers (students who earned their doctorate relatively quickly), and second, late-finishing women, who took considerably longer. From early- and late-finishing female doctoral students' responses to seven survey questions assessing facilitative factors, Maher et al. (2004) found that the late-finishing women reported difficulties balancing degree-related and family-related responsibilities, indicating that their degree progress was slowed by (a) child-care responsibilities (36% versus 10%) and (b) marital problems or other family-related obstacles (28% versus 7%), which included divorce, caring for an ailing parent, or the death of a parent or family member.

Kenty (2000) conducted research aiming to explore how female doctoral students could manage doctorate-related stresses. Participants were 107 female doctoral students in nursing programs located in the National League for Nursing's North Atlantic region. In this study, Kenty combined qualitative and quantitative methods. The majority of participants were married (76.6%), and 90% of them were studying part time. Life-altering events, such as births, family deaths or health problems, divorce, and relocation, affected the majority (81.5%) of the female students, and four women even underwent chemotherapy treatment due to cancer. These women were challenged by role changes, home management, time constraints, and relationship changes. However, Kenty found that those female doctoral students maintained a positive outlook while attending school and maintained an overall positive mood while seeking their doctorates.

Kenty (2000) found that as the role changes of female students increased, time conflicts and time shortages increased. When adding the student role to their other roles they performed, roles conflicted because women had less time to spend with their husbands and family, socialize, and devote to their faculty role. Time pressures affected their everyday life.

Female doctoral students adopted strategies such as the following to manage time pressures: establishing clear goals, setting priorities, remaining focused on goals they wanted to achieve, and allowing time for children and family. With a focus on the goal of obtaining a degree first, setting their school role as a priority helped female students commit to completing their doctorates. The majority of participants in this study were successful in prioritizing, setting goals, and being willing to compromise. For example, women spent time reading or studying when they might otherwise have been cooking or cleaning and accepted a less-than-tidy house and fast food. Other participants sacrificed getting sleep and studied or cleaned house at night. Other strategies related to cutting back on professional and community activities, which included restricting social relationships with friends outside of school and work, as the research found that women seeking a doctorate had little time and energy to maintain relationships with outside friends.

While Lebدين et al. (2007) found that women at the PhD level could balance their work and families; they set their families at a higher priority than their studies. Therefore, they could not set aside much time for research and writing papers. Their resulting papers were less scientific than those of men. This was inconsistent with findings by Haynes et al. (2012), who conducted semi-structured interviews with eight doctoral students studying at a research-intensive university. They found that some female doctoral students placed a higher priority on their academic role and made the doctoral program their world at that time. Other female doctoral students attempted to place equal or greater priority on their other roles and made their doctoral studies just one aspect of their world at that time.

Given the findings of these major studies, it is obvious that female doctoral students struggle to balance academic work and personal or family demands. Based on the findings above, Saudi doctoral mothers might have more severe struggles to balance and satisfy the demands of their roles as PhD students and as mothers. In this study, I will explore the

experiences of Saudi mothers and their ability to manage the demands of motherhood and academics. In the next section of this paper, I will explore the institutional and academic obstacles that female doctoral students may face during their studies.

### **Institutional and Academic Obstacles**

Cao (2001) reported that many students felt their coursework had not prepared them for comprehensive exams and/or dissertation research. Moyer et al. (1999) stated that problems with faculty were reported by 38% of the female doctoral students they interviewed. Many female students begin their research feeling woefully unprepared. More males than females are given research assistant positions, which gives them experience in conducting research and provides networking opportunities, which can in turn provide future sources of assistance. Furthermore, Szekelyelt (2008) concluded that the academic system ignores female doctoral students' roles as mothers and their needs during pregnancy. Specifically, Szekelyelt argued that no doctoral programs in the United States plan for maternity leave. Campuses do not even offer daycare services or other small gestures of support for female students according to Moyer et al. (1999). Additionally, female students face communication troubles with faculty, supervisors, and administrators. Without communication, students and faculty cannot strike a mutual understanding, so the students are likely to not receive financial support, which agrees with many studies that found female students disadvantaged in terms of institutional financial support (Elf & Jonnergard, 2003; Maher et al., 2004; Moyer et al., 1999).

In their study on the inclusion of female PhD students in academia, Elf and Jonnergard (2003) found that women received fewer and lesser scholarships than men. In addition, Moyer et al.'s (1999) interviewees indicated that their main concerns were financial instability. The most frequently cited concerns of female students involved practical issues, such as finding secure employment and achieving financial stability. According to Maher et

al. (2004), female doctoral students struggle financially; their scholarships are modest and assistant positions are only temporary and offer low pay.

All those obstacles—financial, institutional, and academic—affect female students' ability to finish their degrees or at least extend the time it takes to do so. As Schmidt (2008) found based on data from 24 universities, doctoral students who were female international students tended to take longer than male international students did to complete doctoral programs. Schmidt's report covered 19,000 students who got their doctoral degrees in the 1990s and examined which students finished their doctoral programs later than other students did.

However, there is no one description of the experiences of female doctoral students, as Kenty (2000) found that a number of female doctoral students (77%) were satisfied with their doctoral experience, while other women (23%) were unsatisfied with their academic experience due to program issues such as lack of accessibility and flexibility, lack of commitment and support from the program, difficulties with the dissertation process, and their lack of computer skills.

Given the findings of these major studies, it is obvious that many female doctoral students experience a lack of financial support, or if received, the amount is lower than their male peers at the same level. Female doctoral students complain about many institutional and academic difficulties. Based on the findings above, Saudi doctoral mothers might be affected by such institutional and academic obstacles and by the lack of funding, which together influence their ability to meet the demands of their role as PhD students and their role as mothers. In this study, I will explore the experiences of Saudi mothers and the variety of challenges—including academic, institutional, and funding—they face in the United States, affecting their ability to manage the demands of motherhood and academics. In the next section of this paper, I will explore the literature examining student motherhood in academia

## **Student Motherhood in Academia**

The aim of this study is to investigate how Saudi mothers who are students at the doctoral level balance the demands of academia and motherhood. The study also focuses on determining the coping mechanisms these women develop to manage their mother and student roles and responsibilities. Though the main goal of the study is to examine the experience of a certain group of female students in U.S. academia, namely Saudi mothers at the doctoral level, there is no available literature that explores the experience of Saudi student mothers in the United States. Thus, I reviewed the literature on the experience of American student mothers in U.S. academia to form an understanding of how such women manage their multiple role responsibilities.

Many researchers have been interested in exploring the motherhood experience of doctoral students in U.S. institutions (Cohen Miller, 2013; Grenier & Burke, 2008; Lynch, Brown, & Watson, 2010; Onwuegbuzie, Rosli, Ingram, & Frels, 2014; Perkins, 2011; Tiu Wu, 2013), while others have been interested in exploring the general experience of female graduate students and how they balance their multiple life roles (Dyk, 1987; Kibelloh & Bao, 2014; Lynch, 2002; Shafir, 2005; Younes & Asay, 1998). Researchers have also examined the general experiences of graduate and undergraduate students and how they deal with their multiple roles (Brown, 2013; Home, 1998; Hooper, 1979; Menger, 1988). A few studies focused only on the experiences of undergraduate students and how they managed their work, study, and family role responsibilities (Awote, 2014; Feinstein, 1980; Spreadbury, 1983; Walkup, 2006).

To gain a clear understanding of the challenges that surround student mothers while they handle multiple role obligations, I review the available literature discussed above in the next sections of this paper. I first review the literature that explores the experience of female graduate students and how they manage their roles in motherhood and academics. Then, I

review the literature that explores how student mothers developed coping strategies to deal with multiple role demands.

### **Mother Graduate Students**

Many researchers have been interested in examining the motherhood experience of female graduate students (Cohen Miller, 2013; Dyk, 1987; Grenier & Burke, 2008; Kibelloh & Bao, 2014; Lynch, 2002; Lynch et al., 2010; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2014; Perkins, 2011; Shafir, 2005; Tiu Wu, 2013; Younes & Asay, 1998). Most of the studies have found that graduate mothers find it difficult to manage their mother and student roles and feel guilty. However, they attempt to develop strategies and support systems that empower them to combine their roles.

### **Graduate Student Mother Role Conflicts**

The major studies that examined the experiences of doctoral student mothers have revealed that they struggled to combine their roles (Brown & Watson, 2010; Grenier & Burke, 2008; Lynch, 2008; Malone, 1998; Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2014; Perkins, 2011; Tiu Wu, 2013). A number of studies that explored similar experiences of female graduate students with children have also found that they struggle with role conflicts (Dyk, 1987; Younes & Asay, 1998).

A qualitative study was conducted by Malone (1998) examined how 37 female administrators who were also doctoral students coped with their multiple roles. Malone interviewed the participants by telephone and asked them open-ended questions about how they dealt with their multiple roles as wives, mothers, administrators, and students. The data revealed that the participants experienced conflicts among their roles. Malone concluded that role conflicts emerged when the “performance of one role interfered with the performance of another role(s)” (1998, p. 102).

Similarly, Onwuegbuzie and Frels's (2014) examination of the experiences of five married doctoral students and one divorced student showed that female students at the doctoral level experienced role conflicts. All of the study's participants reported feeling pulled between their roles as mothers or wives and their roles as doctoral students.

These findings are also consistent with a case study conducted by Lynch (2008) to explore both the structural academic environments and the sociocultural constructs that affect mothers' daily experiences. The study utilized data from 30 in-depth interviews with mothers who were studying at the doctorate level in 18 academic fields at five separate U.S. universities. The data indicated that female doctoral student who are mothers are often challenged by conflicts between their roles.

Similarly, doctoral student mothers in Brown and Watson's (2010) study reported that a lack of time affected their ability to fulfill their responsibilities to their families and doctoral studies. Their study concluded that balancing family and academic demands generated great stress that made mothers feel threatened by their roles as mothers and doctoral students. The most important point that they raised in their study was that women suffer in the academic field is not because of their gender but because of the dual roles they performed at once. Brown and Watson (2010) argued that women who perform multiple roles—such as mother, wife, and doctoral student—are likely to have slow progress toward completing their doctoral degrees.

The findings of Grenier and Burke's (2008) study on the experience of two women who were balancing motherhood and doctoral studies found that these women struggled to balance their personal and academic responsibilities. According to the study, the stress that is created by doctoral student mothers while they struggle to balance their roles generates physical and emotional consequences. Additionally, the study found that women who choose to enjoy their motherhood while studying at the doctoral level are faced with increasing

demands and conflicts over time, which cause a high level of anxiety, stress, and depression. This, according to Grenier and Burke (2008), explains why female doctoral student mothers are more likely than their male peers to drop out before graduation and take longer to finish their dissertations. The study also found that there are many barriers that prevent doctoral student mothers from finishing their academic paths, such as the physical and psychological demands of pregnancy, the desire to meet their own self-expectations, the social pressure to be good mothers, and institutional policies.

Similarly, in Perkins's (2011) qualitative study on the experiences of five female doctoral students who were managing the roles of mother, educational administrator, and doctoral student, the participants reported feeling overwhelmed by their tremendous family, work, and academic demands. Such demands included working for 9 hours, collecting children from daycare or other places, completing household chores, cooking dinner, writing research papers, and studying. These findings agreed with those of Tiu Wu (2013) who explored how 25 female doctoral students balanced school, motherhood, and work. The findings indicated that female doctoral students with children experienced role conflicts as a result of external and internal influences.

Dyk's (1987) qualitative study, which aimed to explore how graduate students managed their family and academic roles, identified student-family conflict as "a form of inter-role conflict in which the role expectations of participation in the family and school are mutually incompatible in some respect" (p. 330). In other words, the multiple roles that graduate students perform compete for their time, effort, and energy. The demands of being a student decrease one's available time for family (Dyk, 1987). Younes and Asay (1998) presented similar findings in their qualitative study that explored how eight married female graduate students negotiated their multiple roles. The participants in this study were married

and had one or more children. Of the participants, 74.3% were studying for their doctorate and the rest were studying for their master's degree.

The graduate student mothers in Younes and Asay's (1998) study reported that their children were their primary responsibilities. Younes and Asay (1998) concluded that female graduate students experienced role conflicts between their familial and professional roles. They also reported a strain associated with performing their multiple roles. Further, the data revealed that the demands of academic study on family time generated a great source of discomfort in the female students' lives.

Mother–student role conflicts have been found to be a global phenomenon that does not exclusively affect female graduate students in U.S. higher education. Kibelloh and Bao (2014) conducted a qualitative study in China to explore the perceptions of international graduate student mothers toward e-learning as a solution to overcome their academic and family strains. They collected their data through face-to-face interviews with 21 participants who were students in Wuhan, China. Their findings revealed that the strain generated from managing the conflict of mother and student roles, besides cross-cultural adjustment difficulties, is a common experience for international student mothers enrolled in higher education.

Given the findings of these major studies, it is obvious that these women found it challenging to manage multiple roles (Brown & Watson, 2010; Dyk, 1987; Grenier & Burke, 2008; Kibelloh & Bao, 2014; Lynch, 2008; Malone, 1998; Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2014; Perkins, 2011; Tiu Wu, 2013; Younes & Asay, 1998). Based on the findings above, it is highly likely that Saudi doctoral mothers feel stressed by the demands of their multiple roles. In this study, I will explore the experiences of Saudi mothers and the challenges they face in balancing the demands of motherhood and academics. In the next section of this paper, I will

explore notions of guilt and review what researchers have found out about the feelings of guilt that female students face.

### **Graduate Student Mothers and Feelings of Guilt**

The feelings of guilt that female students often experience during their doctoral programs were found to be a common complaint reported by mothers in several research studies that were conducted to investigate how women balance motherhood and doctoral studies (Malone, 1998; Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2014; Brown & Watson, 2010; Perkins, 2011; Tiu Wu, 2013; Giles, 1983; Younes & Asay, 1998) Malone (1998) argued that if a doctoral student mother had a class and family function scheduled at the same time, then the mother role was in conflict with the student role and the woman had to decide which role had precedence over the other. This type of conflict caused participants to feel guilt and stress. Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2014) also found that performing the roles of mother and doctoral student led to negative feelings for the study participants, such as feeling guilty, panicked, and disappointed if they found themselves unable to fulfill their role expectations. Similarly, Brown and Watson (2010) found that female doctoral students experienced feelings of guilt when they felt that they were not able to allocate time to fulfill both familial and doctoral student demands. In addition, the role conflict experienced by female students frequently generated stress and tension (Brown & Watson, 2010). Additionally, Perkins (2011) concluded the experience of female doctoral students that they have loads of work and study responsibility that caused them to miss out on events in their children's lives because it was often hard to find significant time for children, which caused those mothers to feel guilty. All five women in the study sample reported feelings of guilt when they attended classes and left their children with their husbands or friends. Tiu Wu (2013) explained that feelings of guilt and stress were often experienced by mothers who were students at the doctoral level, because of the increase of external and internal loads that they had while they were

performing their multiple roles. In addition, Grenier and Burke (2008) indicated that female doctoral students faced internal and external stress factors, including anxiety, fear, and the pressure to make decisions related to their multiple roles as mothers and doctoral students, such as timing their pregnancies, trying to manage increasing responsibilities, and feeling uncertain about the future. Similarly, Younes and Asay's (1998) study revealed that the demands of academic study on family time generated great discomfort for graduate student mothers, including feelings of guilt and loneliness.

Based on the findings above, Saudi doctoral mothers may feel discomfort and guilt because their focus on their academic responsibilities as international students limits the time they have available to take care of their children. In the next section of this paper, I review what the research has found about the support systems that affect student mothers and how they are benefitted or harmed by current policies in U.S. institutions.

### **The System of Support for Mother Graduate Students**

While many researchers concluded that female graduate students with children face difficulties in managing their multiple roles and consider the successful combination of motherhood and the pursuit of the graduate studies to be the "impossible dream" (Vartuli, 1982, p. 93), other researchers found it is possible when these mothers are offered a little support from institutions (Cohen Miller, 2013; Perkins, 2011). Cohen Miller (2013) found that all four doctoral students who participated in his study were able to successfully combine motherhood and academic roles while being the primary caretakers for their children. They were able to maintain their courses and studies through becoming pregnant, giving birth, and raising their children. Perkins (2011) also reported in her study that all female doctoral student participants successfully balanced their motherhood with their doctoral studies. According to Perkins (2011), all participants in her study sample shared the qualities of persistence, tenacity, ambition, drive to achieve their goals, and resilience. All of these traits

empowered those female doctoral students to continue balancing their multiple roles no matter what their life circumstances. Perkins (2011) also found in her study that not one female doctoral student mentioned that they sought a doctoral degree to earn a promotion, but they all expressed the personal desire to be fulfilled beyond their roles as mothers. Younes and Asay (1998) found that female graduate students sought degrees for many reasons: personal fulfillment, career improvement, financial support, and job security, although the participants appreciated the impact that their education would have on their careers.

This finding was also supported by Giles (1983), who concluded that female doctoral students reported feeling a high level of satisfaction and self-esteem besides their ability to find new interests outside of their traditional roles as mothers and wives because of pursuing their doctoral studies. Tracy (1996) found in her study the opposite of the commonly held assumption that children are a burden for women who choose to pursue doctoral degrees. All mothers in the study reported that their children were very emotionally supportive during their doctoral studies.

According to the available literature conducted around the students' motherhood, the support that many student mothers received came from different sources. In the next sections, I review what the research has found about support types that may help student mothers in their paths, such as families, husbands, peers, friends, and institutional supports.

### **Institutional support for mother graduate students**

Institutional support is very important for female doctoral students with children to continue their degrees. However, many studies have concluded that the U.S. academic environment is not designed to fit the needs of mothers (Lynch, 2008; Grenier & Burke, 2008) According to Cohen Miller (2013), the available informal policies that allow for doctoral mothers to navigate their programs, such as having space to nurse or pump and maintain funding, were not guaranteed solutions and were not available to all mothers at the doctoral level.

Additionally, Grenier and Burke's (2008) study of two mothers balancing their motherhood and doctoral studies found that doctoral students reported that the type of support they got was the exception rather than the rule because it came from sheer circumstance and not as a direct result of university regulations that prepare faculty members and advisors to provide support.

According to Grenier and Burke (2008), although universities supported the mothers' choices, the institution expected mothers to be fully responsible for taking care of themselves without interrupting their studies or using any institutional adaptations. Consistent with this, Lynch (2008) concluded that the U.S. academic environment is not well designed to fulfill the needs of student mothers, who reported feeling unsupported by their academic departments and faculty members emotionally and financially. Their major complaint was that they got little support with childcare, and the little financial support that was offered to them was likely designed for childless students and not for women with a number of children (Lynch, 2008).

A different view was expressed by Tracy (1996), who asked fifty professional women at Eastern Illinois University to rate people based on the emotional support they provided them during their doctoral program. Of these women, 97% reported that the institutional faculty was very emotionally supportive during their doctoral programs. Only 3% said that faculty rarely gave them emotion support during their doctoral programs. While many studies show that faculty members' support mothers (Lamm & Grohman, 2009; Dyk, 1987), students juggle the demands of multiple roles due to the lack of support from other parts of their institutions. As, Younes and Asay (1998) illustrated, the difficulties experienced by female graduate students who reported facing role strains were potentially generated by academic stress, unfriendly atmospheres, and lack of departmental support and resources for female students managing personal and academic responsibilities.

### **Peer support for mother graduate students**

In her study, Tracy (1996) asked 50 professional women at Eastern Illinois University to rate people based on the emotional support they provided during their doctoral program. Of these women, 93% shared that their university peers were very emotionally supportive. Similarly, Grenier and Burke (2008) found that female students with children sought support from females in their institutions who were in the same family situation and had similar feelings as mothers, such as female classmates or faculty who experienced being mothers and scholars. Likewise, Lynch (2008) found that doctoral mothers who reported high satisfaction with their relationships with peers and classmates felt supported by peers who, like them, balanced graduate studies and motherhood. However, graduate student mothers who found themselves the only ones who had children in their departments reported feeling unsupported, isolated, discouraged, and less satisfied in their relationships with peers.

Lamm and Grohman's (2009) quantitative study of the experience of 15 student mothers seeking master's degrees in occupational therapy in Touro College found that 86% of student mothers reported that occupational therapy faculty supported them. According to Dyk (1987), married female graduate students shared that they asked for support from their classmates and faculty members to meet role demands. For example, they joined study groups to share in reading discussions with their classmates and increase their understanding of course content (Dyk, 1987).

### **Husband and family support for mother graduate students.**

Research confirms that husband and family support is critical to mothers completing their PhD studies (Grenier & Burke, 2008; Perkins, 2011; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2014, Lynch, 2008; Giles, 1983; Tracy, 1996) Also, Lamm and Grohman (2009), Dyk (1987), Tracy (1996), and Berkove (1979) agreed that husband and family support is critical for mothers at the graduate level.

Lynch (2008) defined family and husband psychological and emotional support in her investigation of the effects of doctoral studies on marriage and family as “encouragement, listening to problems, sharing frustrations, and making the home more conducive for study by assuming certain responsibilities for managing the household” (p. 10). According to Lynch (2008), doctoral mothers reported relying on the emotional support of husbands, family members, and friends to manage their multiple roles and overcome their stressful lives. Tracy (1996) made a similar finding when she asked 50 professional women at Eastern Illinois University to mention three individuals who encouraged them the most while they attended their doctoral program. Of these women, 47% indicated that their husbands or significant others encouraged them, while 33% of respondents indicated that they got the most encouragement from their parents. Of participants who were asked to rate people based on the emotional support they provided during their doctoral program, 84% reported that their husbands were significant emotionally supportive.

Similarly, Perkins (2011) found that doctoral female students relied upon members of their families for assistance in managing multiple roles. Every female doctoral student surveyed discussed the supporting roles their significant others played throughout their life journeys. Their husbands also provided encouragement and significant emotional support. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2014) compared single doctoral students with married doctoral students in their study. They found that married students had larger extended families and more close family members, such as their husbands and in-laws, who were available to support and motivate them in direct or indirect ways to succeed in their doctorates. Married doctoral students reported that their husbands provided them the most support in completing their doctoral studies. In contrast, for single students, the sources of intrinsic motivation, such as faith in God, were considered more important than external motivators.

In Lamm and Grohman's (2009) study, 100% of the female graduate students in the sample reported that they got emotional and physical support from their parents and their husbands. The study found that 6.7% of the participants listed their husbands' emotional support as their most important coping strategy. Dyk (1987) also found that married female students asked for support from their spouses and family members to meet family role demands by coordinating childcare and house chores.

Some studies, such as Berkove (1979), found that the areas of spousal support varied. Berkove (1979) conducted a descriptive study of how spousal support and family roles were perceived by 361 returning female graduate students in Detroit metropolitan universities. The study revealed that there were four types of spousal support: behavioral, attitudinal, financial, and emotional. According to Berkove (1979), attitudinal support referred to husbands' attitudes regarding women's roles, demands, and responsibilities, while emotional support was husbands' encouragement of their wives' educations. Financial support was demonstrated by the husbands' willingness to fund their wives' educations. Behavioral support meant husbands helped with household chores and childcare. Berkove's (1979) study found that 54% of female students reported that their husbands were supportive of them, and 44% reported that their husbands were willing to share childcare responsibilities; while 14% shared that their husbands were rarely supportive. Half of female students indicated supportive marital relationships, and over half reported a very good quality of communication with their husbands, who took their interests seriously and had positive attitudes about their studies. Only a fifth of the female students mentioned marital conflicts when they were enrolled in the university. Husbands were less willing to help in household tasks but willing to help with childcare. Over two thirds of female students reported that their husbands stayed with the children while they attended classes (Berkove, 1979).

Friends, especially female friends, were also found to be great sources of support to women during their doctoral studies. In Tracy's (1996) study, 50 professional women at Eastern Illinois University were asked to rate friends based on the emotional support they provided them during their doctoral program; 96% reported that their male friends were very emotionally supportive during their doctoral programs, while 100% reported that their female friends were emotionally supportive.

Based on the findings above, Saudi doctoral mothers may seek support from different sources, including husbands, families, friends, and institutional supports. In this study, I explore what type of support Saudi students have. The study also explore how Saudi women benefit from the services and polices available to them as mothers in U.S. institutions. In the next section of this paper, I explore the literature review that explores the experiences female students have with motherhood, including undergraduate students.

### **Female Students Experiences with Motherhood, Including Undergraduate Students**

Brown (2013) explored the differences between the experiences of female undergraduate and graduate students performing multiple roles. Participants in this study were 24 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in a mid-Atlantic state university. The study sample consisted of 16 mothers, six of whom were expecting a child and 21 who had children, and eight fathers. The study determined that graduate students had more flexibility in dealing with and scheduling their multiple roles than undergraduates did. However, Menger (1988) found no significant difference in the degree of role strain experienced by female students in universities or community colleges or between female graduate and undergraduate students.

Studies by Menger (1988) and Home (1998) were the first conducted to explore the experiences of female undergraduate and graduate students had in performing multiple roles.

Both researchers were interested in analyzing and identifying the three strain factors: role conflict, overload, and contagion of female students. Home's (1998) study sample consists of 443 female graduate and undergraduate students in education, nursing programs, and social work. All students surveyed had work, children, and family responsibilities. Home (1998) concluded that role conflicts were generated by the simultaneous demands of performing multiple roles. Role overload occurs when there is insufficient time to meet all demands. Role contagion was defined as preoccupation with one role while performing another role. According to Home's (1998) study, the intense demands female students faced in their multiple roles—including family, school, and work—was the strongest predictor of role conflict, overload, and contagion.

Menger (1988) was also interested in analyzing the role strain experienced by 480 married mothers in Texas Tech University and the Community College of South Plains. This study found that female students who combined mothering with student-wife roles experienced high role strain. In addition, 73% of the female students who were performing four roles (mother, wife, student, and worker) reported facing moderate to high role conflict. Besides the complaints of feeling exhausted, being under stress, and having no chances to relax, they also felt guilty because they could not give their children time and attention. In terms of spousal support, Menger (1988) found that 73% of married student mothers indicated that their spouses were not supportive and showed a lack of empathy for their academic problems. Two out of every five women in Menger's 1988 study shared that their husbands' support occurred as long as their college role obligations did not disrupt family role demands. This finding is consistent with those of a study by Hooper (1979), who found that although husbands of mothers approved of their wives student roles, the majority did not offer to help their wives at home. In his work "My Wife, the Student" Hooper (1979) interviewed the husbands of 24 graduate and undergraduate students with at least one child

by phone to determine their attitudes toward their wives' student roles. Only one fourth of husbands reported providing help in the home.

It is clear that the earlier studies conducted to explore female students' multiple roles, such as Menger (1988), Home (1998), and Hooper (1979), did not mention anything related to family support. However, recent studies like Brown's (2013) stressed the importance of family support to ease the mother's burden. Brown (2013) found that unmarried mothers reported that they had harsher lives, felt pressured to work, looked for financial aid, and went to class. Students who were single mothers had no one else in the home to take care of their children. Pregnant and parenting students who were unmarried complained about the lack of resources and the increased difficulty they had in caring for their children.

It is clear from the problems the student mothers reported that not much changed over the years. Students in Menger's (1988) study reported having problems studying, such as difficulty finding quiet places, finding time, and scheduling their classes besides problems linked to the college bureaucracy. Brown (2013) found that mothers reported difficulties with achieving their academic goals and difficulties related to institutional policies, such as lack of financial aid, daycare offered on campus, reserved campus parking, and transportation. Child safety seats were not available on buses. There was a lack of bus stops during school to reach their children quickly. There were problems related to enrollment and class-scheduling conflicts, as one of the mothers shared that she often shut out of required class sections that fit their children's daycare schedules. All of these problems generated extra anxiety in an already stressful life for student mothers. To reduce the problems student mothers faced, Brown (2013) provided many suggestions for how to avoid dropout associated with motherhood, like creating standard policies in the institutions addressing student needs, which prevents any discrepancies from occurring in the future, like making more bus stops, improving the daycare system, and making on campus family housing more available. One of

the pregnant students reported that the lack of this service caused her to drop out of classes after childbirth. In the next section of this paper, I explore coping strategies that student mothers have developed to deal with their multiple role demands.

### **Managing Roles and Copying Strategies for Mother Students in U.S. Institutions**

Many studies found that mothers adopted prioritization as strategy to manage their role demands (Dyk, 1987; Perkins, 2011; Malone, 1998; Lamm & Grohman, 2009) According to Perkins's (2011) case study of how five women who were doctoral students and educational administrators balanced their life roles, five participants relied upon prioritizing tasks (Perkins, 2011). According to Perkins (2011), all doctoral students relied upon set schedules for the time they spent at home, including getting ready in the mornings and their evening routines once they arrived home. All prioritized their children and husbands when they were not at work or in class. Similarly, Malone (1998) found that the women in her study sample prioritized the role functions they had to do (the functions associated with their roles as mothers, wives, doctoral students, and administrators) and chose to sacrifice the performance of other roles that were not as important, such as being members of church organizations. Likewise, Lamm and Grohman (2009) indicated that 93.3% of student mothers reported prioritizing schoolwork, writing what they had to do down, meditating, and praying. Similarly, Dyk (1987) found that graduate students adopted prioritization strategies to manage their mother and student role demands. Students set relative priorities in their family and academic roles. Dyk (1987) found that married graduate students' strategy for minimizing family and student role conflicts was to "give up or add a particular aspect of the role, not the entire role" (p. 331). For instance, they reduced their course loads and took incompletes instead of dropping out during semesters when their children were ill. Graduate students who had children in school shared that they limited their activities in volunteering, sports, and family life. Other studies besides Dyk (1987) found that mothers chose to

sacrifice the performance of activities that were not as important (Malone, 1998; Perkins, 2011) In Perkins's 2011 study, all female doctoral students reported that they put their families' needs and their careers tracks above their own needs. As a result, they did not find time to care for their own mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

In Malone's 1998 study, married participants with supportive families relied on their husbands to do some of the household responsibilities and help with the dissertation. Participants in Malone's study reported that they sought help and support from their husbands and children (1998). For example, when they needed more hours to study and had less time to cook and clean, their family members would do more work around the house and require less of their time. Although participants thought their husbands, children, and marriages may have suffered because of their studies, the women in the study explained that they needed the guidance of the university to complete the requirements of their doctoral programs and dissertations.

Many studies found that mothers used time management as a strategy to balance their role demands (Lamm & Grohman, 2009; Perkins, 2011; Malone, 1998). In a quantitative study to identify coping skills used by 15 student mothers from the occupational therapy master's program in Touro College, Lamm and Grohman (2009) found that 93.3% of student mothers reported using time management strategies, while 67% used alternative coping strategies, such as planning in advance, walking, listening to their favorite music, doing homework the whole night, watching their favorite shows, cooking, talking to friends, and seeking help from family. In their responses to the survey question on the most important coping strategies, 20% of the participants listed time management, planning, and emotional support as important, while physical support was listed as the second most important strategy by 26.7% of the participants. Also, in Perkins's 2011 study, all female doctoral students surveyed reported that time management was their survival tactic for managing the pressing

needs of their multiple roles besides keeping up to date with their priorities, which forced them often to categorize their friendships and extended families as less important. Malone (1998) also found that female doctoral students responded to the challenges that occurred due to their role conflicts by adopting strategies for time management and depending on a support system of faith and trust in God, husbands, families, friends, school colleagues, and professors. Like Perkins, Malone (1998) found that the doctoral female educational administrators in her study sample used daily planners to be efficiently organized and focused. They tended to use chunks of time for doctoral study research processes, writing dissertations, and performing related functions of their job.

Lynch (2008) revealed a strange strategy that doctoral mothers practiced to create balance in their roles. First, hide their maternal status in public” they utilize a strategy of maternal invisibility’. This strategy allows student mothers to appear to be ‘just students,’ preserving a cultural form in which a graduate student is 100% committed to their work, 100% of the time” (p. 296). Respondents implemented maternal invisibility in various ways. For example, in their department, these students avoided disclosing their motherhood status to department members or advisors, even at their offices. They avoid taking their children to institutional gatherings or meetings so that their motherhood remains hidden and invisible. The second coping strategy is switching to part-time status following childbirth to spend time with their newborn babies. While some students attempt to hide their motherhood, others admit it and use their own skills to benefit from being mothers. According to Perkins (2011), the five doctoral students and educational administrators relied upon forms of internal support, such as flexibility, interpersonal skills, and charisma, and utilized them in managing their life roles. They relied upon colleagues, structures in their doctoral programs, and friends as sources of motivation. Dyk (1987) found that graduate students adopted a number of role

strategies to manage their mother and student role demands, like compartmentalizing their roles to minimize overlap.

According to this strategy, “an individual chooses not to attend to one role while performing another” (p. 331). When students are at homes, they leave their notes and papers, block all study things, and put their internal attention on only their families. Another role strategy used by graduate mothers is declining role expectations. For example, graduate students who do not finish reading all assigned articles prior to their classes because of time limits decided to read some of the articles hoping that their professors would not focus on the remaining articles. Another role strategy that graduate students use to manage their role conflicts is employed assistance in order to get free time to study. Most of the graduate students hired teenagers to babysit their children, while married female students reported hiring house cleaners.

Many graduate students mentioned that they sought computer consultants for research data input assistance on assignments when they faced close deadlines (Dyk, 1987). Lamm and Grohman (2009) found that seeking additional daycare was listed as the most important coping strategy by 20% of the participants. In addition, 13.3% of the participants listed exercise as their third most important coping strategy. Similarly, Lynch (2008) found that doctoral mothers developed some strategic practices to balance their roles, such as using private daycare, while the rest of the mothers alternated childcare and other responsibilities with spouses, relied on family members, or hired someone to watch their children at home (Lynch, 2008). The study also revealed why doctoral mothers use private daycare facilities for childcare when some universities offer childcare on their campuses. The majority of doctoral mothers reported that these facilities were ineffective, expensive, and inconvenient.

Some studies asked the doctoral students for suggestions on what would help them to combine their mother and student roles. In Lynch’s (2008) study, female doctoral students

suggested strategies such as increasing communication between female students and faculty and increasing the number of tenured women with children. They also suggested that simple gestures, whether by individuals or departments, such as sending cards after childbirth, greatly enhanced feelings of support. Such gestures could reduce the attrition rates of student mothers.

Kibelloh and Bao (2014) suggested that e-learning might be a good strategy for mothers who were struggling with managing their motherhood and graduate studies. According to Kabbalah and Bao (2014), strain generated from managing the conflict between mother and student roles, besides cross-cultural adjustment difficulties, is a common experience for international student mothers who enrolled in higher education. Kibelloh and Bao's (2014) findings revealed that e-learning was convenient and helped international graduate mothers to balance their motherhood with academic work by saving them money, time, and effort. It was more convenient for them as mothers because it resolved their struggles with managing their motherhood and the demands of their graduate studies. It was useful to them and their children in terms of time management in that it gave them as mothers more time to allocate to their children, families, and graduate studies. However, many international students who participated in the study indicated that e-learning may have been ineffective and limited with the poor and costly internet connectivity in developing countries. Furthermore, the students and faculty did not offer them chances to interact face-to-face. They also reported that the online environment did not motivate them to learn, had a negative reputation, was met with skepticism, and was not taken seriously or viewed as a legitimate method of learning in developing countries.

### **Summary**

The current literature on student motherhood extends our understanding of the challenges of balancing motherhood and academic demands. Generally, the findings of those

studies indicated that female students in all academic levels suffered from role conflicts (Brown & Watson, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2014; Grenier & Burke, 2008; Perkins, 2011; Tiu Wu, 2013, Malone, 1998; Lynch, 2008). However, many of those female students developed support systems to manage their multiple life roles (Lynch, 2008; Perkins, 2011; Malone, 1998). The current literature that examines student motherhood focuses mainly on the experiences of local American female students. Therefore, this study was created to explore the experience of one group of international female students in the United States: Saudi mothers. The voices of Saudi mothers who are international students have not been heard yet. This study will fill the gaps left by the first study, which was conducted to explore how Saudi mothers deal with their multiple roles as well as what kind of challenges, supports, and strategies they had while they studied toward their PhDs in U.S. institutions. In the next section of this paper, I will explore the literature examining the experience of international students in U.S. institutions, including in particular the experience of females.

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

This study aims to examine the motherhood experience of Saudi doctoral students at U.S. institutions to explore how they deal with their student and mother roles and the coping strategies that they have adopted to balance those responsibilities. Currently, there is no available study that explores the experience of Saudi student mothers at U.S. institutions, so to gain a clear understanding of the factors that affect the experience of Saudi student mothers at U.S. institutions at the doctoral level, in this chapter I choose to review the literature that examines the experience of international students in the United States. First, I will review the literature that explores the benefits of international students in the United States, challenges encountered by international students, and international students' methods to overcome the adjustment problems. Second, I will review the literature that explores the

experiences of female international students in the United States, the types of challenges they face, and their strategies for overcoming those challenges.

A huge body of research has been conducted to explore international students' experiences in U.S. institutions. According to Araujo (2011), systematic research on international students has been conducted ever since the 1950s, when an increasing number of international students began pursuing their degrees in U.S. institutions. The growth of these studies has coincided with the increase of international student population in the last decades.

Those studies, however, focused on different issues such as the benefits of international students in U.S. institutions (Biddle, 2002; Burreli, 2010; Labi, Birchard, & Overland, 2008; Marino, 2007; Pandit, 2007; Trice, 2003); academic challenges and adjustment problems that international students face during their studies in the United States (Mori, 2000; Cohen, 2006; Fischer et al., 2009; Gerstenfeld, 2002; Godwin, 2009; Koehl, 2007; Obst & Forster, 2005; Paige, 1990; Sandhu, 1995; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; Surdam & Collins, 1984); and the coping methods that international students adopt to adjust to life in the United States (Meloni, 1986; Surdam & Collin, 1984; Araujo 2011; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). There is also a group of studies that focused on the experience of female international students in the United States (Saxena, 2014; Fatima, 2001; Green & Kim, 2015; Bonazzo & Wong, 2007). In this section I will review the literature on international students' experiences in U.S. institutions generally and then the literature that explores the experiences of female international students in U.S. institutions.

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

According to Wu, Garza, and Guzman (2015), international students represent great investments into the economic and international relations for the American universities because of their spending on studying and accommodation. These students help universities

increase their income. Biddle (2002) explained in her report *Internationalization: Rhetoric or Reality* how American institutions benefit from international students. She stated that universities must internationalize to prepare their students for a global world and teach them to communicate with people from other cultures. Peterson, Briggs, Dreasher, Horner, and Nelson (1999) argued that international students—by their music, food, writing, thoughts, and class discussions—contribute to “educate Americans about intercultural issues” (p. 70). Additionally, Pandit (2007) argued that international students played a significant role in advancing America’s research competitiveness in the STEM disciplines. Researchers such as Peterson et al. (1999), Marino (2007), and Wu et al. (2015) concluded that having international students on campuses increases their diversity.

### **Challenges Encountered by International Students**

International students provide benefits to U.S. host colleges and universities. However, they face different types of challenges during their time studying on American campuses, including legal, cultural, academic, financial, and psychological challenges.

**Legal Challenges.** Legally, all international students in the United States must obey the student visa regulations in order to remain in the country. Unlike domestic students, they cannot enroll in school as part-time students. Paige (1990) criticized these regulations by describing them as “undeniably discriminatory” (p. 166). Paige (1990) argued that international students do not have “the same flexibility as host country students do to drop in and out of school, reduce their course load, or work to help themselves” (p. 166). Paige (1990) concluded that such restrictions put the international student under great stress because violation of the terms of the student visa to become a “ward of the state” (p. 166). A number of other studies such as Birchard and Overland (2008) and Koehl (2007) concluded that the legal regulations that international students have to navigate in the United States are the major instigator of the stress and depression that many students have struggled with.

Based on the findings above, it is likely that Saudi doctoral mothers might feel stressed by the demands of being international students. They must obey many regulations that put them under stress, which limits their abilities to manage their motherhood and academic roles. In this study, I will explore the experiences of Saudi mothers and the challenges they face as international students and mothers. In the next section of this paper, I will discuss other cultural challenges that international students have faced, and review what researchers have learned about that challenge.

**Cultural Challenges.** International students also encounter cultural challenges. Alexander et al. (1976) explained that for international students the differences in basic familiar things such as food, language, communication style, and weather create cultural shock for them (as cited in Sandhu, 1994). Similar findings in an early study conducted by Meloni (1986) to examine the adjustment problems of international students concluded that international students' most frequent problems include homesickness, failure to make friends and create relationships with the opposite sex, and social exclusion. Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994) argued that international students, while pursuing their studies, might experience negative emotions besides culture shock, such as fear of losing their cultural identity, fear of discrimination, and guilt due to leaving loved parents, friends, and relatives behind. All of those negative feelings may develop to cause serious mental health problems. In a study that aimed to address the mental health concerns of international students, Mori (2000) found for international students trying to adapt to the new culture caused adjustment stress, which manifested itself in symptoms such as "dysfunction in pituitary-adrenal activities, mass discharges of the sympathetic nervous system, impairment of immune systems, and heightened susceptibility to all illnesses," in addition to other symptoms that international students suffer, like feeling isolated, lonely, and depressed (p. 139).

A group of studies showed that being married affects international students' adjustment in the United States culturally (Meloni, 1986; Al-Ahdal & Al-Hattami, 2014). Meloni (1986) found that marital status influences what kind of challenges international students have; single international students seem to have more social, personal, and academic problems than married ones. However, married students may face huge cultural challenges with their children (Meloni, 1986).

Mehdizadeh and Scott (2005) conducted a qualitative study to explore the adjustment problems of 70 Iranian international students and they found that the greatest cultural problems for the married international students were bringing up children in a new culture. Iranian students' responses showed that they appreciated cultural differences; however, they felt there were many misconceptions about their own Islamic culture. Their main concerns were about bringing up their children according to the Islamic religion and Iranian traditional norms and values. According to Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994), international students, while pursuing their studies, may experience negative emotions besides culture shock, such as the fear of losing their cultural identity. A study by Abdalla and Gibson (1984) that examined the attitudes of 53 male and 47 female Libyan students toward American culture found that those students rejected the American cultural attitudes and values and that those students strongly held the traditional values of Arab Islamic culture.

Surdam and Collin (1984) and Araujo (2011) in their studies exploring international students' adjustment problems concluded that there is a significant relationship between international students' adaptation and a group of factors, such as the level of religiosity. Studies showed that not all international students are affected in the same way; there are always cultural differences among them. For example, Zhou, Frey & Bang (2011) pointed out that students from individualistic cultural countries, such as European students, faced adjustment problems due to being treated by Americans as a foreigner, while students from

collectivist cultures such as many Asian countries felt stress due to gender discrimination, and stereotyping. Similarly, Meloni (1986) found that, culture of national origin is one of the major variables that influence what kind of challenges international students face. For instance, Indian and Pakistani international students in the United States reported hardship in dating and finding friends, while Asian students complained about being isolated and ignored, receiving unfriendly treatment, and lacking English proficiency. For Arab students, there were very social and their major problems were related to language proficiency, such as difficulties expressing thoughts in English, taking notes and, making presentations.

Given the findings of these major studies, it is clear that international students at U.S. institutions, particularly Muslim, face significant difficulties in terms of adjusting to life in the United States. Based on the findings above, it is likely that Saudi doctoral student mothers are more likely to be restrained by their traditional gender role that makes them struggle to adapt and adjust to the new culture and successfully balance their life roles. This study examines the experiences of Saudi mothers to identify the challenges they may face as international student mothers. In the next section of this paper, I discuss other challenges that international students may face, which are academic and language challenges, and review what researchers have determined about those obstacles.

**Academic and Language Challenges.** Surdam and Collin (1984), Araujo (2011), and Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) in their studies exploring international students' adjustment problems concluded that there is a significant relationship between international students' adaptation and a group of factors, such as the length of stay in the United States and the level of English-language proficiency. Also, Dao, Lee, and Chang's (2007) and Sümer, Poyrazli, and Grahame (2008) studies showed that the international students with lower levels of English proficiency were at risk of high levels of anxiety.

Meloni (1986) concluded that international students' most urgent problems include lack of English-language proficiency, not being able to understand lectures, not being active in class discussions, and having difficulty preparing written papers and oral reports. Those findings are consistent with many studies that have reported that international students often have difficulties in understanding professors' expectations and grading style (Zhou, Freg, & Bang, 2006), giving oral presentations, asking the professor questions, and participating in seminar discussions (Gebhard, 2010; Han, 2007; Coward, 2003).

Han (2007), for example, discovered that international students across American universities face trouble in participating in whole-class seminar discussions for many reasons, including anxiety and weak content knowledge. A study by Lee and Carrasquillo (2006) aimed to analyze professors' perceptions of the causes of academic hardship that faced by Korean college students in U.S. institutions. These causes include viewing professors as having absolute authority, having difficulty in expressing their thoughts, and answering questions.

Godwin (2009) found that international students experience academic culture shock that emerges from differences in teaching and learning style. Godwin (2010) argued that students in the United States are encouraged to challenge authority, the student-teacher relationship is expected to be informal, and students are given access to a myriad of campus support services and courses. On the other hand, international students are not familiar with all aspects of American academic culture. For example, Meloni (1986) concluded that Arab students in the United States face difficulties in dealing with course elective systems because in their homelands each program in the Arab educational system is highly structured, so they are not used to planning their own programs, which frustrates them. For example, they used to believe that teachers are the only authority and that they not supposed to challenge them even if they have made mistakes (Godwin, 2010).

According to Godwin, the impact of these different educational systems can shock and hinder international students' academic success and cause some of them fail to adjust to the new academic culture and so to decide to leave the United States (Godwin, 2010). One Korean student shared that "In Korea in a course the professor only uses one book. Here I have to read many books, and content is difficult. I can't finish all my homework reading. It is a big problem" (Gebhard, 2012, p. 186).

Wu et al. (2015) found that international students encountered serious challenges in the United States related to communicating with Americans in society and institutions, which causes them to fail to make friends and to feel isolated and ignored in the classroom and in social life. For example, one Japanese student says, "Professors used many group discussions in class. My classmates usually did not invite me to join their group discussion" (Wu et al., 2015, p. 5). Additionally, Wu et al. (2015) found that international students face academic barriers in addition to those experienced by all students, regardless of culture or origins. For instance, they complained that they had difficulties communicating with their professors due to cultural differences and expectations from professors. For example, a participant stated that it is rude to interrupt a professor who is speaking.

Given the findings of these major studies, it is obvious that international students at U.S. institutions face many academic and language challenges. As the literature shows, Arabic international students have particular problems that relate to the academic differences between the American and Arabic educational systems.

Based on the findings above, it is highly likely that Saudi doctoral students who are also mothers struggle academically and find it difficult to accommodate the demands of being international students at the doctoral level and being mothers, which may affect their abilities to manage their motherhood and academic roles. In this study, I will explore the experiences of Saudi women and all kinds of challenges they face as international student mothers. In the

next section of this paper, I will discuss other challenges that international students have faced, which are cultural challenges, and review what researchers have determined about those obstacles.

### **International Students' Methods to Overcome the Adjustment Problems**

Many researchers have investigated international students' coping strategies in the United States (Gebhard, 2012; Meloni, 1986; Wu et al., 2015). Wu et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study of ten international students' adaptation in a city in the southernmost part of the United States. They found that international students adopted many strategies to overcome challenges they faced, such as seeking support from school services on campus (including student clubs, writing centers, counseling offices, and support groups), to gain strategies to handle their problems. Al-Ahdal and Al-Hattami (2014). Al-Ahdal and Al-Hattami conducted a study to find out the adjustment problems faced by Arab students in American institutions. They found that Arab students have to solve adjustment problems by themselves to fit in the new social setup; they solve these problems according to their culture. Based on an online questionnaire survey of 101 Fulbright international students from Bahrain, Egypt, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. Al-Ahdal and Al-Hattami's (2014) findings showed that most of those international students do not seem to use the services for international students offered by their universities. Most of the students in this study claimed that they were not aware of the availability of support facilities in their universities. The participants shared that they sought help from their professors, friends, classmates, or family members when they experience any academic or adjustment problems (Al-Ahdal and Al-Hattami, 2014).

Gebhard (2012) concluded from interviews with 85 international students that the students had academic, social, and emotional challenges. However, to manage their problems, students employed "coping strategies, use of supportive people, observation and

imitation, and reflection. Behaviors interpreted as impeding adaptation include expecting others to adapt, complaining, and withdrawing” (Gebhard, 2012, p. 184).

Studies also showed that international students reach out to the university to help them solve their adjustment problems. For example, students use the international office, advisors, student clubs, and academic and tutoring services, computer labs, and writing center (Zhou et al., 2011). According to the findings of these major studies, it is obvious that international students at U.S. institutions attempt to solve their adjustment problems by developing many strategies. However, the literature shows that Arabic international students depend on themselves to solve the adjustments’ problems they face because they want to address them according to their cultural values. So, based on the findings above, it is likely that Saudi doctoral student mothers might feel stressed about the prospect of finding their own technique to adjust—with their children—to the new culture in the United States, as well as how to satisfy the demands of being international students and good mothers.

In this study, I will explore the experiences of Saudi mothers and the many challenges they face as mothers and international students at U.S. institutions. In the next section of this paper, I will review what researchers have determined about female international students’ experiences.

### **Female International Students’ Experiences**

Many researchers have explored female international students’ experiences in the United States (Saxena, 2014; Fatima, 2001; Green & Kim, 2015; Bonazzo & Wong, 2007). According to Saxena’s (2014) study that aimed to explore the motivations of female international graduate students in America, international students come to the United States to access better education and “opportunities to use their skills, and pursue a life different from the lives they led in their home countries” (p. 18), besides “improving their chances at professional success, acquire skills and build a network that will allow them to advance in

their careers and achieve global mobility” (p. 17). Fatima (2001) asked 10 female graduate students, “Why did you choose to pursue your graduate study in the United States”? (p. 39). Two participants stated they came because they got a scholarship from their home government to study in the United States, while two other participants shared that a degree from the United States would help them to find a good job and job security. Other participants explained that the educational system in their countries could not accommodate or satisfy their learning style, since the learning process in their country’s educational system is very stressful and competitive and students had to go through many standardized tests that are difficult to pass.

Green and Kim (2005) concluded from their qualitative studies that international female PhD students came to the United States to study for many reasons. For instance, the Korean PhD students believed that the American educational system was a better place to promote their rights as women and pursue their professional careers due to the availability of the resources they need, such as day care centers. Those participants shared that they feel more supported and comfortable in the United States compared to their homes, where they had many personal experiences of sexual harassment and being treated unequally in the workplace, and they believed discrimination against them for being women was still prevalent in their home.

Given the findings of these major studies, it is clear that female international students come to study in U.S. institutions to seek a better education and to build a better professional life. Based on the findings above, it is likely that Saudi doctoral mother students come to study in U.S. institutions because they are motivated by many personal and professional goals. In this study I will examine the experiences of Saudi mother students to explore the challenges in balancing their life roles that they face as mothers and international students in U.S. institutions, as well as what motivated them to choose to study in the United States. In

the next section of this paper, I will discuss the other challenges that female international students face, specifically academic and language challenges, and review what researchers have found out about those challenges.

### **Challenges Faced by International Female Students in US institutions**

According to Al-Ahdal and Al-Hattami (2014) gender and having or not having children were not significant for the students in the term of adjusting to life in the United States. On the other hand, other studies found that gender is a significant factor that is related to differences in international students' adaptation and adjustment abilities (Meloni, 1986; Manese, Sedlacek, & Leong, 1988; Lee & Carrasquillo, 2006). For example, in their study of the gender differences in international students' adjustment, Lee and Carrasquillo (2006) found that female international students were less likely to be restrained by their traditional gender role; also, they showed higher level of adjustments than male students. Those findings were not consistent with Manese, Sedlacek, and Leong (1988) who concluded that female international students are more discouraged and less confident and face a harder time than their male counterparts in their school. Additionally, Meloni (1986) found that Afghan and Iranian female students experienced more severe problems than male students, which Meloni attributed to their cultures roles.

Fatima (2001) investigated the personal experiences of the international female graduate students' adjustment problems at an urban research university and she found from interviewing 10 international female students that English language is a major academic adjustment problems. The lack of English-language proficiency affects the participants' ability to explain their thoughts very well in class discussions and presentations. For some participants, the problem was not just understanding English but also being understood by their American peers and professors. The problems that the participants shared include discrimination, stereotyping, and Americans' lack of knowledge of other cultures. One of the

participants shared her own experience by saying, “It is the same thing with me too. When they hear that I am from Bangladesh, they said oh your husband always beat you. When they hear that I am Muslim, they would say oh your husband has four wives” (Fatima, 2001, p. 46).

Bonazzo and Wong (2007), in a qualitative study that examined four Japanese undergraduate international female college students, found that those female students faced forms of discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes. Participants in the interview complained that their professors treated them differently and lacked understanding of other ethnic groups.

Another qualitative study of the experiences of twelve Korean female doctoral students in academe by Green and Kim (2005) found that most of the students complained about stereotyping and being viewed by Americans as “cute Asian little girls” (p. 491). Those negative gender stereotypes around the Korean women hinder their ability to develop relationships in the department with colleagues and faculty. Additionally, Saxena (2014) concluded from her conversations with her female international graduate students that they find difficulties with life roles balance while in graduate school also stereotyping them. Faid-Douglas (2000) also conducted a phenomenological study of international female students to explore how they developed strategies to attain success. Faid-Douglas found that those female students struggled with culture shock, language proficiency, stressful life, time management, overwhelming family responsibility, and different forms of discrimination.

Given the findings of these major studies, female international students in U.S. institutions face many challenges in their academic and personal lives in the United States. The findings above suggest that Saudi doctoral mother students are likely to face many obstacles—besides being restrained by their traditional gender role—that make them struggle to adapt and adjust to the new culture of the United States. This may in turn make it harder for them to balance their life roles successfully.

This study examined the experiences of Saudi mother students to identify what kinds of challenges they face as mothers and international students in U.S. institutions. In the next section of this paper, I discuss and review what researchers have found out about female international students' strategies for overcoming discrimination, stereotypes, language barriers, and differences in culture.

### **Female International Students' Strategies for overcoming discrimination, stereotypes, language barriers, and differences in culture**

Saxena (2014) found that female international students often seek help from their peers, faculty, and mentors in identifying methods to balance their personal and professional lives. Besides helping to fulfill the demands of graduate school, peers, faculty, and mentors can help and have a positive impact on the female students' transition process. Bonazzo and Wong (2007) found that Japanese international female students overcame discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes by avoidance, while Green and Kim (2005) found that Korean international doctoral students adopted strategy to overcome minority myth and gender stereotypes: interacting with diverse individuals to find a comfort zone and to build supportive relationships. Green and Kim (2005) found that relationships with peers and faculty and family support were identified as major strategies for overcoming many problems such as racial and gender stereotypes, language barriers, and differences in culture. Respondents also reported that collaboration with school colleagues and advisors was essential for their high academic achievement. In addition, some interviewees shared that they depended on their religion and faith in order to persist in their doctoral studies. Fatima (2001) found that all of the participants reported that they developed a networking support system to help them cope with difficulties and dilemmas. Part of the networking consisted of friendships with Americans or other international graduate students and seeking help from professors or advisors. Fatima (2001) emphasized the importance of their professors' support,

advice, and understanding of their problems. Faid-Douglas (2000) also found that international female students developed strategies they used to attain success. The success strategies included developing a support system, depending on religion to alleviate stress, and improving their skills to overcome language difficulties (Faid-Douglas, 2000).

The findings of these major studies reveal that female international students in U.S. institutions develop many strategies to overcome the barriers in their academic and personal lives in the United States. These findings indicate that Saudi doctoral mother students may develop their own techniques that help them with their families to overcome any kind of discrimination, stereotypes, and differences in culture, which as a result empowers them to balance their life roles more smoothly.

In this study, I examined the experiences of Saudi mother students to identify what kinds of strategies they use to overcome barriers and what cultural differences they face as mothers and as international students in U.S. institutions at the doctoral level. In the next section of this paper, I summarize and review what the current literature adds to our understanding of the experience of international students in U.S. institutions, what gaps I found in the relevant literature, and how this study full these gaps.

### **Summary**

Many of the studies discussed in this chapter emphasized the existence of academic, social, and personal challenges and adjustment problems encountered by international students, such as culture shock, depression, homesickness, discrimination, and language barriers. At the same time, researchers agreed that international students' experiences are affected by multiple variables including nationality, culture, gender, English proficiency, and marital status. However, there were a few gaps in the studies.

Generally, the review of previous studies offered a clear understanding about the experience of international students in the United States and their adjustment problems and

about how they cope with those challenges by several methods, such as seeking help from friends, peers, and professors or in campus services and so on. The majority of these studies applied a qualitative approach to reach the depth of the experience of international students studying in the United States. However, the samples of the majority of those studies that investigated the international experience with challenging obstacles may not completely represent the international student experience in US institutions. The samples were not representative because they were limited to particular groups, such as Asian students, and focused in their sample selection on students from specific ethnicity and excluded the Arab international students. For instance, this is shown in the Gebhard (2012) study of international students “from China, Ghana, Grenada, Kenya, Korea, Nigeria, Poland, Senegal, Taiwan, Thailand” (186). Few studies that were found to be represented, for example, is the study of Wu et al. (2015) participants were selected from different countries, such as Mexico and Saudi Arabia, not including the Asian students from Taiwan, China, South Korea, and Japan. The similar critique applies to the research that explores the experience of female international students in the United States, as it mostly explores the experience of Asian females, such as (Saxena, 2014; Bonazzo & Wong, 2007; Green & Kim, 2005), and even the few studies that explore the experience of female international students ignore the factor of motherhood and its basic effect on a woman’s life, including her studies; in other words, the literature review suggested that female international students encounter many challenges and cope to adjust themselves with the new culture and system, but for female international students with children, we do not know what particular challenges are related to their roles, not only as students but also as mothers. The voices of those international student mothers were lost. I did not find any study that considered the motherhood factor, and so the literature on international students’ experience has a lack of research about the experience of international female graduate students with children.

None of the studies dealt specifically with the adjustment experiences of international females with children. The literature review did not inform whether international female graduate students with children in the United States encountered the same adjustment problems as other groups of international students. Hence, the purpose of this study was to fill this gap and investigate what kinds of challenges are faced by international student mothers in U.S. institutions. In addition, few studies discussed international students' experiences from the Middle Eastern countries, including international students from Saudi Arabia. This study will attempt to fill this gap and study the experience of a group of female international students with children who were not represented in the literature on international students' experiences. In this study, I explore the challenges that hamper Saudi mothers in the doctorate level and how they cope with those challenges and balance their lives and responsibilities.

### **Experience of Saudi International Students in the United States**

The existing literature on the experience of Saudi international students has focused on the following insights. First, studies have identified Saudi students' adjustment difficulties (Al-Harathi, 1987; Al-Jasir, 1993; Al-Shedokhi, 1986; Al-Shehry, 1989; Hofer, 2009; Jammaz, 1972; Molly, 2013; Shabeeb, 1996); studies explored the Saudi students' attitudes toward their new culture and new educational environment (Al-Khedaire, 1978; Alnusair, 2000; El-Banyan, 1974); a number of studies explored the change of Saudi students' attitude toward women's rights (Alfauzan, 1992; Alshaya, 2005); and a couple studies explored the experiences of Saudi female students' adjustment in a U.S. institution (Albalawi, 2013; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015).

In the next section of this paper, I will discuss the Adjustment problems that Saudi international students face, and review what researchers have found out about those adjustment problems.

### **Saudi International Student Adjustment Problems**

Jammaz (1972) concluded from the questionnaires of 345 Saudi students in the U.S. that younger Saudi students were less well adjusted than older ones. This finding is consistent with Hofer's (2009) study, which also showed that younger Saudi students faced more adjustment problems than older Saudi students did. Jammaz also found that Saudi students who were highly sociable with Americans had the least adjustment problems, which positively affected their academic achievement.

In his investigation of the problems experienced by Saudi students while enrolled in U.S. institutions, Al-Shedokhi (1986) surveyed 379 male and 51 female Saudi students studying in higher education institutions by using the Michigan International Student Problem Inventory (MISPI) to identify Saudi international students' adjustment problems. Al-Shedokhi's findings stated that the Saudi students' greatest challenges were financial assistance, living-dining concerns, and university acceptance and admission issues. A few years later, Al-Shehry (1989) conducted an investigation of the financial and academic problems expressed by Saudi graduate students during their studies in the U.S. institutions by using the MISPI. The Al-Shehry (1989) findings indicated that the greatest challenges to Saudi students included using English, academic records (writing essays, grades, and advising), while the least of Saudi students' concerns was admission selection and health services.

Shabeeb's (1996) quantitative study aimed to explore the adjustment problems of Saudi international students by using the same tool that Al-Shedokhi (1986) applied in his study. Shabeeb mailed the MISPI questionnaires to 150 Saudi students in six universities located in Eastern Washington. There were 103 usable questionnaires and only four female students responded. Shabeeb concluded that the Saudi students viewed the adjustment problems from most difficult to least difficult; the following difficulties were related to the

English language: (b) social-personal difficulties, (c) living-dining, and (d) academic difficulties. As Shabeeb explained, the lack of English fluency for Saudi students caused them many emotional problems such as homesickness and loneliness.

Another dissertation was conducted by Al-Jasir (1993) to identify the Saudi students' adjustment problem in the United States. It revealed that language is a main barrier to Saudi students' adjustment in the United States. This finding was consistent with Molly (2013). Molly explored in his qualitative study the academic and personal lived experiences of nine male Saudi international students at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan. According to Molly (2013), studying the English language is a main barrier that the majority of the participants faced. They addressed related challenges to language such as difficulties with reading, writing assignments, understanding professors and lectures, and weak communication with peers and faculty members. In addition, in the Shaw (2009) qualitative study, the 25 Saudi student participants reported facing difficulties using English, adjustment problems, managing full-time study, and feeling homesick.

According to the findings of these major studies, it is clear that Saudi international students at U.S. institutions face difficulties in terms of adjusting to life in the United States. Based on the findings above, it is highly likely that Saudi mothers who are doctoral students more likely to be affected by adjustment problems; these problems may cause struggles in adapting and adjusting to the new culture and in successfully balancing their life roles.

In the next section, I discuss other challenges that international students face, such as social and personal challenges, and review what researchers have determined about those obstacles.

### **Other Social and Personal Challenges**

Studies also revealed that Saudi students faced social and personal challenges such as discrimination and prejudice (Molly, 2013; Shabeeb, 1996). In the Molly (2013) study, five

of the nine participants had experiences of racism and prejudice in the United States. For instance, one of the Saudi students captured the way in which he and his Saudi friends in the university experienced racism on the campus. For example, in classroom activities, the professor divided the U.S. and international students into groups "... sometimes some students don't want to be in the [Saudi students'] group.... Or even if they are in [my friends and my] group the [American students] try to work alone and avoid talking to [me and my friends]" (Molly, 1913, p. 92).

Shabeeb (1996) concluded that the social-personal difficulties that Saudi students faced are discrimination based on their ethnicity and culture. Shabeeb found that two-thirds of the participants admitted that their Islamic Saudi culture was extremely different from the American culture. According to the Shabeeb study, culture was the main obstacle that Saudi students studying in the United States faced during their adjustment; also, the living-dining concerns using bathroom facilities, such as taking showers with others, were noted as an issue in communal residence hall bathrooms, which caused stress for those students. As well as living-dining concerns, Shabeeb noted that Saudi students found it difficult to adjust to the food culture, seasonal changes, and cold weather conditions in the United States because Saudi students are from a warmer climate. Similarly, Molly (2013) also found that participants experienced personal challenges during their studies in the United States such as missing family and the home collectivistic culture. Molly (2013) reported that most participants missed their culture and family back home and felt homesick. For example, one participant addressed a cultural difference between the United States and Saudi Arabia: "The other thing that I don't like is the social life [here] is not that strong as ours. Here, for example, you have to make an appointment to go see people... and arrange appointments here.... In our country, you can come and knock on the door and hang out, as you want. We go frequently to see each other. The total system, I mean, we feel comfortable going to [see]

each other without any appointment to hang out. (Molly, 2013, p. 92)

Molly (2013) addressed another personal challenge that Saudi students face in the United States, which is learning how to be independent and how to balance their lives without parents' support. One of the Saudi students shared that "cooking and being responsible for [himself]... [he] just had to do everything by [himself]" (Molly, 2013, p. 95). Another student shared that "It is difficult because back home I have my family to help me. Here I have to do everything on my own... like doing the laundry, cooking and paying bills." (Molly, 2013, p. 95). Another Saudi student extended the ideas presented by explaining:

Living alone is a drama. Living alone made me depend on myself... take care of everything alone and do stuff I don't remember doing... a lot back home-like making food, washing dishes and clothes. I even had to put limits and control on money spending... I had a student salary from my Cultural Mission, [which] started like two months since I arrived to the United States; yet, I was always careful to not spend everything I had in case of emergencies.... I never thought of asking anyone here for support. Even my family... I don't remember taking a penny from them just to show them that I [do not] need it..., which I don't. So it made me manage myself in many ways. (Molly, 2013, p. 95)

Given the findings of these major studies, female international students in U.S. institutions face many challenges in their academic and personal lives in the United States. The findings above suggest that Saudi doctoral mother students are more likely to be faced by many obstacles—besides being restrained by their traditional gender role—that make them struggle to adapt and adjust to the new culture of the United States. This may in turn make it harder for them to balance their life roles successfully.

In the next section, I will examine Saudi students' academic challenges and outline researchers' findings regarding such problems.

### **Academic Problems**

Al-Shedokhi (1986) and Shabeeb's (1996) findings stated that the Saudi students' greatest challenge was academic records (grades and writing papers), admission, and giving oral presentations in class. Similarly, Jammaz (1972) found that many Saudi students face problems taking notes and writing and reading English, and they have low effectiveness in class participation. Jammaz's study clearly underscored that Saudi students struggle with academic problems, especially in their use of the English language such as writing assignments. Mustafa's (1985) findings were similar to Al-Shedokhi (1986) and Shabeeb (1996). Jammaz found that Saudi students identified academic English to be the major problem of their academic life in the United States. They often struggled giving oral presentations, participating in discussions, practicing pronunciation, writing essays and papers, and writing essay exams.

In terms of marital states, Jammaz (1972) found that single students adjusted better than married students did. Yet, according to Mustafa (1985), marital status had little effect on some skills for married students, such as the ability to understand and complete tests in appropriate time, and it was more difficult for married students. As explained by Mustafa (1985), unmarried students usually tend to interact with Americans, which advances their English language, while married students tend to talk in Arab, with their spouses, thus spending less time practicing English. This finding is not consistent with the Hofer (2009) study that found single Saudi students have more difficulties in terms of using the English language, social-personal issues, and school admission than married Saudi students. In terms of gender, Hofer (2009) found that male students face more adjustment problems compared with female students in the area of admission. On the other hand, an investigation of the financial and academic problems perceived by Saudi graduate students while studying in the United States, conducted by Al-Shehry (1989), found that students who were married to a

spouse without a degree or education expressed more problems with English and financial aid than students with an educated spouse. In addition, Al-Shehry found that Saudi female students had more problems in the category of academic records than male Saudi students who lived in non-private housing and had more problems with English than those who lived in a house or apartment. Hofer also found that Saudi students attending smaller institutions faced fewer problems in the English language category than Saudi students attending large institutions did.

In terms of majors, Jammaz (1972) found that students who study humanities and social science were less adjusted than students studying engineering and science, which is consistent with Shabeeb's (1996) report that students who majored in fields related to the arts and humanities encountered more problems in the area of health service than those who majored in science-related fields. The Hofer (2009) study's goal was to identify the barriers that hamper the progress of Saudi students' educational experiences studying in the state of Missouri. Hofer (2009) found from the distributed MISPI survey to Saudi students, which received 81 responses from 419, that Saudi students studying in Missouri who majored in technical majors faced more problems in terms of the living-dining category, while Saudi students who majored in non-technical majors faced more financial challenges.

Some studies stressed the importance of the orientation events for Saudi students' preparation for the new living conditions in the United States; for instance, Al-Shedokhi (1986) reported that Saudi students who attended a pre-departure (from Saudi Arabia) orientation (to the United States) had fewer adjustment problems. This finding agreed with Al-Shehry (1989), who found that Saudi students who did not attend a pre-departure orientation expressed more problems using the English language, admission selection, and their academic records such as grades and writing essays. Yet Shabeeb (1996) found no statistically significant differences in the areas of orientation services, social-personal, living,

dining, religious service, English language, student activity, and placement service.

Al-Harhi (1987) chose a different approach in his study to the Saudi students' adjustment problems, and the study's goal was to identify the challenges that are specific to Saudi scholarship students and not the American culture or educational system differences. By using three questionnaires that were built by the previous doctoral researcher, Al-Harhi (1987) conducted his quantitative study that aimed to explore the academic problems of Saudi students in the United States. Al-Harhi mailed them to 200 Saudi students (114 responded), 30 academic advisors (19 responded from the Saudi Arabian cultural mission), and 50 governmental representative sponsoring agencies in Saudi Arabia (43 responded). The Al-Harhi study revealed the number of problems that Saudi students struggled with, such as a lack of an math and science basic knowledge , which, according to Al-Harhi, occurred as a result of the fact that Saudi high schools did not prepare students for American higher education, which caused a weakness in Saudi students' academic background (especially in math and science).

Given these studies' findings, Saudi international students at U.S. institutions clearly face many academic challenges. According to the findings described above, Saudi mothers who are studying at the doctoral level may face academic problems that impede their ability to balance the demands of motherhood and academics. In the next section, I discuss the length of Saudi students' residency in the U.S. and how this affects these students' adjustments.

### **Length of Residency in the U.S. and Saudi Students' Adjustment**

Many researchers discussed the role of the length of time that Saudi students spent in the United States. For example, Jammaz (1972) found that the length of time that Saudi students spent in the United States had a low association with their adjustment level. According to Mustafa (1985), the academic level had no effect on the students' perceptions

of their problems. Yet Shabeeb (1996) reported that Saudi students who were in the United States for a longer time had more adjustment problems than those who were in the United States for a shorter time.

Mustafa (1985) also concluded from his study that the length of the time that Saudi students spent in the United States was highly associated with their adjustment level. According to Mustafa's study, the long stay in the United States increased the language fluency and their understanding of the American educational system. According to Mustafa, (1985), Saudi students who spent less time in the United States reported many problems such as "writing essay type exams, taking and organizing notes, keeping appointments and punctuality with instructors, understanding the American educational system, and having too many credit hours in one semester" than students who stayed longer in the United States (p. 76).

Similarly, Al-Shedokhi (1986) found that Saudi students in the graduate level had fewer problems compared with students in a lower level because the students in graduate levels spent more time in U.S. institutions, so they were more familiar and understanding of the U.S. academic system. Younger students had more problems, probably due to levels of maturity and a lack of experience. All those findings were also consistent with Hofer (2009); she also found that Saudi students who stayed in United States for 2 years or less experienced more difficulties using the English language and living-dining than students who lived in the United States longer than 2 years.

Based on the findings shown above, it is very likely that Saudi mothers' academic and motherhood experiences are affected by the length of their residency in the United States. In this study, I will examine the experiences of Saudi mothers at the doctoral level and examine how their academic challenges affect their ability to manage roles as doctoral students and mothers. Below, I will discuss Saudi students' attitudes and perceptions.

### **Saudi Students' Attitude and Perceptions**

Many researchers were interested in exploring the Saudi students' attitude and perceptions toward the general cultural and educational matters (Al-Khedaire, 1978; Alnusair, 2000; El-Banyan, 1974), while a number of studies explored the change of Saudi students' attitude toward women's rights (Alfauzan, 1992; Alshaya, 2005).

**Saudi Students' Attitude toward U.S. Culture and Women's Rights.** The Alfauzan (1992) study was conducted to explore the impact of American culture on the attitudes of Saudi students in U.S. institutions toward women. Alfauzan (1992) concluded that Saudi students in the U.S. institutions held more liberal viewpoints than Saudi students who study in Saudi institutions. This finding is consistent with the Alshaya (2005) study, which was conducted to explore the attitude of Saudi students in the United States toward women's rights in Saudi Arabia, including the right of women to drive. From the 242 respondents to Alshaya's survey, only 9% were female Saudi students. Alshaya showed that 80% of the participants agreed that Saudi women should be able to drive. Additionally, the study showed that the variable of the length of residence, degree, age, and marital status had no significant difference on the Saudi students' attitudes toward women's rights in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, the study showed that 80% of Saudi students were in support of women's roles in the family: 1) A husband should help his wife with household responsibilities; 2) women are as capable of making important decisions as the men in the family; 3) it is acceptable for the wife to have a higher position (i.e., education or job) than her husband; and 4) women, like men, have the ability to be good professional workers outside the house (Alshaya, 2015, p. 91).

Similarly, Molly (2013) also explored Saudi students' attitude toward women's rights and their educational experiences in U.S. in his qualitative study "Experiences of Night: Male Saudi International Students at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan. The

researcher conducted in-person interview. The study showed that six of the male Saudi students had positive perceptions about their educational experience in the United States. Yet the rest of the participants did not explicitly report whether or not they held positive perceptions. The positive perceptions that were reported by Saudi students toward their educational experiences in the U.S. included studying in strong universities, being taught by professional professors, experiencing technology in education, and dealing with open-minded people in the best educational model globally. Most of the participants reported having a shift in their ideas toward women. According to Molly (2013), most of the Saudi male students changed their perceptions toward Saudi women, and they believed that women could have equal opportunities like men in terms of employment and positions.

For instance, one student reported that he was only allowed to communicate and speak to women who are members of his family in Saudi Arabia, so when he arrived in the United States, it was initially difficult, and his new habit was talking to women in the United States who were not family members. He stated, “It was hard for me to have conversations with [women] when I first arrived to the United States, but now it’s easy to talk to them” (Molly, 2013, p. 109). Another male Saudi student also claimed, “women [in Saudi] should have more opportunities for jobs and they should be able to drive.... In my country the majority of jobs for women [right now] are in teaching... but women should be able to work in other jobs” (Molly, 2013, p. 109).

**Attitude of Saudi Students toward Living and Studying in the U.S.** El-Banyan (1974) was the first study of the relationship between Saudi international students’ experiences in U.S. institutions and the changes in their attitudes toward Saudi cultural values. El-Banyan (1974) found that Saudi students in the United States reported feeling lonely and isolated when they were dealing with cross-cultural adjustment problems. Additionally, the Banyan (1974) study indicated that the adjustment experience did not have

a large effect on Saudi students' attitudes toward their home culture and traditional values. On the other hand, those students, during their exposure to the U.S. culture, developed favorable attitudes toward women's emancipation.

Oweidat (1981) conducted a study to investigate the changes in the value orientations of a number of Saudi and Arab students depending on their experiences studying in the United States. Oweidat (1981) found that those students who had stayed in the United States for 3 years as a minimum showed values similar to those held by American people. On the other hand, Saudi and Arab students who had recently arrived in the United States showed the conservative views that were prominent in Saudi Arabia in terms of the school size. The Al-Khedaire (1978) study explored 258 male Saudi students to determine their attitudes toward American culture. The Al-Khedaire study indicated that Saudi students attending small institutions developed more favorable attitudes toward the American culture than Saudi students attending the large institutions did. Al-Khedaire inferred this finding to suggest that Saudi students in small campuses have bigger opportunities to interact with American students than large campuses.

By using the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ), Alnusair (2000) explored the perceptions of 171 university Saudi students and how they perceived the educational environment in their college. Alnusair used CSEQ to determine what students did in the university, such as the activities, conditions, and variables that influenced what they did and what they gained. Al-nusair stated that Saudi students were more involved than the international student group in academic, conversational, and scholarly activities but less satisfied about their educational gains, and they had lower scores. Al-nusair's research indicated that students' satisfaction was positively correlated with gains.

### **Successes Strategies**

Despite all the previously discussed challenges that Saudi students struggled with,

researchers found that those Saudi students cope to overcome each of them. Shaw (2009) interviewed 25 Saudi students to explore their perceptions of their learning environment, what kinds of strategies those students developed to gain their academic goals, and how they thought it is different compared with the educational one in Saudi Arabia, Shaw (2010) found that the Saudi students developed success strategies, such as taking advantage of many available campus resources of learning, including the library and many other resources. They took advantage of the technology in the university, the better climate, and the beauty of nature as a stress reduction strategy. This also included interacting with people from different cultures, feeling as though they belong to their university and are part of its student body, persisting, goal setting, studying hard, developing study skills, joining study groups, and time management. Motivators for Saudi students play an important role in pushing them to work hard; for instance, Molly (2013) found that there are primary motivators that push the Saudi students to survive in the United States and continue until their graduation, which include: making their family proud and not disappointing them at home in Saudi Arabia as well as the fear of disappointing the Saudi government that pays for their studies. In addition, Shabeeb (1996) and Molly (2013) found that Saudi students were empowered and supported by different sources such as advisors, faculty members, Americans, and Saudi friends and families who helped them adjust to their new life in the United States. Shabeeb (1996) also found that Saudi students were empowered by their faith in God and many Islamic religion beliefs.

Jammaz (1972) and Shehry (1989) argued that social relationships that Saudi students developed with American students and the community have a significant effect on the students' ability to overcome language difficulties and enrich their academic progress.

Other studies, such as Al-Harathi (1987), showed the lack of support that Saudi students experience from their government. Al-Harathi found that Saudi students were not

provided with sufficient academic advising in American institutions or by their sponsoring agencies, Saudi students in this study reported the lack of guidance from the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission; for instance, Saudi students shared that they were not asked about their scholarship decisions. In addition, their academic preferences were not considered when they were selected for a scholarship program, and their academic desires were ignored when assigned a major. There was also a lack of procedure for monitoring the students' academic progress; on the other hand, Saudi students indicated the weak academic advising offered to them by their U.S. institutions.

These major studies show that Saudi international students at U.S. institutions attempt to develop their own strategies to overcome adjustment problems. In the following section, I will review literature that examines Saudi female students' adjustment to U.S. institutions.

### **Saudi Female Students' Adjustment in U.S. Institutions**

Albalawi (2013) interviewed three Saudi female scholarship students to explore the cultural challenges they encountered while they are in U.S. The three of them came to the United States to continue their masters. The first participant is Dana, who is married and has two daughters. She came to the United States with her husband. The second female Saudi student is Alkadi, who is married and has a daughter. She also came with her husband. The third student is Acacia, who is single. The three students came to United States for a master's degree to develop their skills in order to be qualified for better jobs when they returned to Saudi Arabia as well as to learn the English language and the other culture. In addition, all participants believe that the American educational system is the best in the world. For most of the female Saudi student participants, Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) found that the most difficult period of adjustment for female Saudi students was the first 3 months after their arrival to United States, although some found it difficult to adjust between 3 to 6 months or 6 months to a year. One female student reported that her difficult adjustment

period was 1 to 2 years while a couple of participants reported that they did not face a difficult period of adjustment when they arrived in the United States.

### **Saudi Female Student's Culture Shock and Religious Concerns**

In Albalawi (2013), all female Saudi students reported a type of challenge in the host culture. However, adjusting problems to the new culture was not only experienced by the female students by themselves but was also a challenge to their family members, as in Dana's husband's situation, where Dana noticed that her relationship with her husband changed. He did not accept for her to be in the class with male classmates, which is not acceptable in Saudi Arabia; both of them are in the same class, so it is difficult for him to see his wife participating with men in the dissections or activities (Albalawi, 2013). On the other hand, Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) found that the majority of Saudi women who were interviewed did not experience "culture shock" or even acculturative stress when they arrived in the United States. Many of them gave reasons for not feeling acculturation stress such as traveling before and because they knew about the culture in the United States through family members and friends, the Internet, and the media. However, three of the participants mentioned feeling homesick when they first arrived in the United States. One participant said:

I came here by myself at Ramadan, and I just was crying about that. And I did not used to be by myself, to sleep by myself.... You know, I was so close with my mom,... (laughter) Yeah, lonely more than, I think, more than, yeah, more than "culture shock." I think I'm used to, for example... to remove my abaya, it was easy for me. The food, it's okay. But, because I am lonely, I was crying here. (Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern, 2015, p. 415)

In terms of hijab, according to findings of Albalawi (2013), all three participants shared that having male classmates was acceptable to them, and two of the three participants reported

that hijab was not a problem in the United States, but the last participant, Alkadi, faced difficulties about the hijab and veil.

Alkadi reported being discriminated against a couple times. She said, “While I am riding the bus one day, a drunk man pointed to me and said bad words. The bus driver had to stop the bus and ask him to leave. It was a tough situation” (Albalawi, 2013, p. 56). Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) asked Saudi women students if they had been discriminated against in the United States or treated differently. Less than half of Saudi females said they had experienced discrimination, and the same number shared they had not experienced any forms of discrimination. The remaining Saudi women students shared that people were curious about the female’s hijab or head covering. However, those female students who were discriminated against often explained that it was not uncommon and a majority of American people are accepting and kind. Only a few people were treated unkindly, and none of the female students with children in the Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) or Albalawi (2013) study reported any problems related to their motherhood except one mother to a 1-year-old girl in the Albalawi (2013) study who complained about her 20-month-old daughter whom she was afraid to leave with the strangers in day care.

### **Attitude of female Saudi students in the U.S.**

Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) also shed light on the expectations and changing attitude of female Saudi students in the United States toward the United States. Most of those female students who participated in the study had unrealistic thoughts about American culture and living in the United States based on TV shows and the media. One of the participants shared: “I expect it to be like the movies. So I came—it’s not like a movie” (Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern, 2015, p. 413). Most female Saudi students explained that they expected living in the United States to be dangerous and that they may be killed.

One participant shared, “I had a scary idea about America. That I won’t find a safe place. I thought I need my brother with me all the time. I thought I might not go back to Saudi Arabia alive (Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern, 2013, p. 413). A number of participants expected intolerance toward them because of their religion as Muslims. Some participants expected to be discriminated in the United States due to their hijab

One of them stated, “Because I wear the hijab, I thought they would deal with me without respect but what I thought is different. They respect my religion and what I believe” (Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern, 2013, p. 413). According to Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015), the change of attitude of female Saudi students toward living in the United States was explained by many of them.

Well, because of movies, and we saw a lot of movies.... So, we think it’s very dangerous to come here and stay. And the people aren’t friendly, that’s what media tells to us. Yeah it’s very different. Big huge difference. And I always tell my family it’s not dangerous here, it’s very safe. ...when we came here we got scared, but we saw people smile, and they say hi, and we felt safe, and we liked it very much.... People are very kind and friendly. (Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern, 2013, p. 415).

### **Learning English and Differences in Teaching Methodology for Saudi Female Students**

The Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) qualitative study was conducted to explore the female Saudi students’ adjustment in U.S. institutions by using the grounded theory. The sample for this study consisted of 25 female Saudi international students who were studying in universities across the United States. According to Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern, the adjustment of Saudi women students was affected by their proficiency in using the English language, and half of the female students reported having

good English language skills and feeling confident in their conversation with people and in their studies. And the third of the participants shared that their lack of proficiency in the English language and difficulties in communication were a challenging barrier to their complete adjustment. According to Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern, the English language could be either a help or barrier for female Saudi students based on the situation, slang, and cultural misunderstandings that may be involved. For instance, one participant stated, “My English is fine but sometimes it would be embarrassing when I pronounce something the wrong way or use a word in the wrong context, but most of them understand” (Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern, 2015, p. 420).

Albalawi (2013) found in her study that all Saudi female student participants reported that they live under the stress of losing their scholarship. The biggest challenge for Dana and Alkadi was learning the English language and receiving the required score for the TOEFL or IELTS exam for admission into a university. She reported that spending months studying English in the ESL program caused her the stress of losing her scholarship, According to Dana shard: “the survival English school was a waste of time for us, the only advantage that we learn good vocabulary there but nothing to put in an academic context” (Albalawi, 2013, p. 54).

Albalawi (2013) study showed that all three participants were challenged by the different American academic culture. All participants stated that the education practices were new to them. For Alkadi, giving presentations and taking notes were difficult in the beginning. However, Alkadi and Dana admired the American teachers who cooperated with her to overcome many of the difficulties she faced in the university. Dana realized the differences between the American teaching methodology, and in the Saudi methodologies, the students explained that Saudi teachers gave lectures without providing the students the opportunity to ask and discuss. No activities were done in class. Yet U.S. teachers

encouraged interaction with students, and activities are an important part of the learning process in class. Alkadi reported, “the teacher holds a pen and a paper and starts explaining to me, it is impossible for this to happen in Saudi Arabia” (Albalawi, 2013, p. 59).

These major studies have clearly shown that Saudi female students face many academic obstacles in the United States. The findings described above indicate that Saudi doctoral students who are also mothers might be challenged by differences in educational systems and will struggle more in learning English. This may hinder their ability to successfully manage their personal and professional lives. In the following part, I discuss the coping strategies that Saudi female students develop and the support systems that are available for such students at U.S. institutions. I will then consider what researchers have determined about these strategies and types of support.

### **Support System and Coping Strategies by Saudi Female Students**

In the Albalawi (2013) study, one of three participants, Dana, was not supported by her husband, while the rest of the participants were supported by their families to continue their master’s degrees. For instance, Alkadi was encouraged by her husband and mother to study abroad; however, she did not receive any support from American friends when she asked them to spend time with her after school to practice her English. Nevertheless, she depended on herself and worked hard to study English grammar alone. Both her father and mother supported and encouraged her to go overseas and complete her studies (Albalawi, 2013). Different findings by Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) showed that Saudi female students who did not have relatives living with them developed a support system depending on their closest relationships with Americans or friends from different countries, including neighbors, teachers, and American families. One participant, who is a mother to one child, explained the welcome and support she received from Americans when she came to the United States:

All my neighbors, when I moved there, when I came, everyday someone knock my door and bring cookies, or cakes or flowers. They'd say, "We saw you came!"

Flowers, even tomatoes, someone plant something. They, they let me feel like my home, my country. Yeah, very welcome. Even my neighbor, because they have class from 2 to 3, and my daughter, I have to get her from school at 2:30, she offered to take her every day. They are very good friendly, very friendly. (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern , 2015, p. 421)

In addition, Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) found from their study that over half of the women in their study sample were married, and almost all of the married Saudi female students lived in the United States with their husbands. Moreover, the single ones had a companion with them such as a brother or father. This situation offered for those female students a source of social support from their family members, which also offered a close relationship to those women.

Albalawi (2013) indicated in his study Alkadi and Dana, who learned the English language by studying hard. Alkadi's strategy to overcome people's dirty looks was to ignore those people. Her husband helped her overcome these difficulties. In the Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) study, most Saudi female students expressed how they became open to other cultures and changed when they arrived in the United States. They shared that they became more independent and confident. One participant shared, "I think I have to learn how to live independent, because—I don't know if you know, we have a maid in Saudi Arabia. Each house has a maid and driver. I expect to live alone, to live with no one with me, without my family, without support. I expect, during the time, I'm going to have friend, I'm going to have different life, I'm going to improve myself" (Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern, 2015, p. 423).

A reasonable conclusion from the findings above is that Saudi doctoral students in the United States who are also mothers may seek different types of support and to develop strategies that assist in balancing and managing their own lives and those of their families.

### **Summary**

The review of research of the experience of Saudi international students in the United States showed that most of studies are doctoral dissertations conducted by Saudi PhD students in the United States, and the majority of research on the experience of Saudi international students' interests included adjustment problems that Saudi students face (Al-Jasir, 1993; Al-Shedokhi, 1986; Alkhelaiwy, 1997; Jammaz, 1972; Shabeeb, 1996; Shehry, 1989). In addition, many groups of studies, such as Shehry (1989) and Al-Shedokhi (1986), used the same instrument, which is the MISPI, to identify the adjustment problems.

The review showed the United States that Saudi students face many challenges in their adjustment processes culturally, academically, and emotionally (Al-Ghamdi, 1985; Al-Harthi, 1987; Al-Jasir, 1993; Al-Khedaire, 1978; Al-Shedokhi, 1986; Al-Shehry, 1989; Hofer, 2009; Jammaz, 1972; Mustafa, 1985; Shabeeb, 1996). They also confront change and conflicts in their attitudes toward many cultural and religious matters (Akhtarkhavari, 1994; Alfauzan, 1992; Al-Khedaire, 1978; Alnusair, 2000; Alshaya, 2005; El-Banyan, 1974; El-Banyan, 1974; Molly, 2013; Oweidat, 1981), especially toward Saudi women's rights (Alfauzan, 1992; Alshaya, 2005). It is obvious from this review that the general studies of the experiences of Saudi international students in the United States ignored female students and mainly focused on male Saudi international students (Alfauzan, 1993; Al-Harethi, 1986; Al-Khedaire, 1978; El-Banyan, 1975; Shabeeb, 1997). In relation to the current study, there has been no specific research about the experience of female Saudi international students with children. However, the review showed that in a few studies that explored the experiences of Saudi women international students in the United States, such as Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-

McGovern (2015) and Albalawi (2013), the sample in both studies consisted of married female students who have a number of children; however, both studies mainly focused on the cultural adjustment problems that female students face such as the differences of the education system and discrimination. The couple studies ignored the female students' motherhood issues and how those female students with children manage their lives besides the huge challenges that they already have, as stated by the lecture review on the Saudi students' experiences in the United States. So, this study was presented to fill this gap to explore the experience of Saudi female international students with children, how they adjust with their children in the new system, what additional challenges they face as mothers and students, and how they combine and balance their motherhood and academic roles.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

This exploratory qualitative study explores the experiences of Saudi female doctoral students who were managing motherhood and academic roles while studying in the United States. This study asked the following questions: how do Saudi female doctoral students with children manage their roles as both doctoral students and mothers? What type(s) of support do Saudi females receive in managing their multiple roles? What challenges result from performing these multiple roles? How do Saudi women with children respond to these challenges? What strategies do female Saudi doctoral students develop to manage and balance their roles? What are the roles of advisors, faculty members, classmates, husbands, and family members in supporting Saudi doctoral mothers while they study in U.S. institutions?

In this chapter, the researcher explains the study's research design, sample, data collection method, interview questions and procedures, trustworthiness, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

#### **Research Design**

This study collected in-depth qualitative data to capture Saudi women's experiences of the combination of motherhood and doctoral studies. A qualitative descriptive research design is the best way to gain a deep understanding of Saudi mothers' experiences. According to Maxwell (2005), the qualitative approach allows a researcher to "explore the meaning of experience, to understand context and influence within which the participants act, to identify unanticipated phenomena and influences, and to understand the process in which the events and actions take place" (pp. 22–23). The researcher in this study is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis.

### **The Study Sample**

For this qualitative research study, the researcher applied the purposive sampling technique, which is based on the assumption that one wants to “discover, understand, gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most” (Merriam, 1988, p. 48). The sample informs an understanding of the research’s central phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p. 125), so the sample was composed of candidates from the population in question who fit my study’s specific criteria. The study sample consisted of Saudi women who have children and who are enrolled in doctoral programs in education at U.S. universities that are approved by the Saudi Minister of Education (see Appendix J).

I recruited participants through Facebook. I posted an advertisement on the Facebook page of the Saudi students group called Creative Women Saudi PhD Students in U.S. This group has female members who study in different majors at the doctoral level in U.S. institutions. After I got the page owner’s permission, I posted the advertisement on April 25, 2016 asking the Saudi female students to volunteer to participate in my study if they were a doctoral student, the mother to at least one child and study at the U.S. in any major in education. I posted the advertisement in Arabic with my email address so the Saudi mothers will know how to contact me.

I got email responses from 29 mothers who volunteered to participate in the study. From this pool, I selected 16 participants who met the study’s criteria to participate in the study. For research purposes, I selected 16 participants who fit all of the criteria mentioned below:

- ✓ International student who holds Saudi nationality enrolled in a PhD program.
- ✓ Mother to at least one child under 18 years old who lives with her and not in Saudi Arabia.
- ✓ Under U.S.–Saudi culture mission supervision.

- ✓ Female who studies with full-time enrollment in any education discipline and any kind of doctoral program.
- ✓ Willing to participate in a phone interview lasting 60–90 minutes in the Arabic language.
- ✓ Have no problem with the interview being recorded by phone.

The other 13 volunteers were not selected because (9) participants who just finished ESL programs and not yet started their classes in doctoral program, (3) participants were not majored in education, (1) participants who currently in Saudi Arabia for postpone.

Then, I emailed the 16 selected participants with introductory email. In the first introductory letter, I introduced myself, identified my school and advisor, described the general study topic, confidentiality of responses, and estimated duration of the interviews. I briefly explained the study's purpose and asked whether the recipient was able to participate (see Appendix A). If the response was affirmative, I sent a follow-up email regarding the time of the phone interview. I emailed the introductory letter to participants before making phone calls, so participants would not be surprised by the call. In the letter I introduced the phone call interview so participants would know in advance of my call who the researcher and why I was calling. I prepared a brief script for the introduction that emphasized the importance of their participation. I also mentioned that the interview was voluntary, and there was no penalty for not participating. In the introductory letter, I informed the participants about the need to record the phone interview before I started asking the interview questions. Burke and Miller (2001) found that some interviewees might be affected by the tape-recording and give short answers. I emailed a copy of the consent form for each participant to read and sign. I used a consent form (as shown in Appendix C) to protect the participants' identities to ensure they are relaxed and willing to share their experiences. According to this contract, all identities of the participants are anonymous and confidential; the data collected

will also remain confidential (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 139). The data obtained will not be shared with the Saudi Cultural Mission or with the Saudi Ministry of Education; no one listen to the interview recording, no one will read the interview transcripts except for the researcher and her professors, and then only for research purposes.

I emailed each participant to arrange an interview time, and date. According to Creswell (2009) and Patton (2002), the researcher should conduct interview at time that is convenient for the participants. In this study, I considered that the sample is made up of busy mothers who can hardly find time to chat with others, so I were flexible and conducted interviews whenever the Saudi mothers chose to do them I also, kept a daily log of communications with the participants that I called.

During the phone interviewing, two participants chose not to continue participating in the study, so I dropped them from the study sample. The sample size for this study is 14 students. Merriam (1988) mentioned that a generic interview study, in which the researcher looks at themes that cut across interviews, often involves a sample size of 15 to 20 people.

### **Data Collection Method**

In this qualitative descriptive study, I used phone interviews as the primary data collection tool, telephone interviews are considered the most appropriate choice for collecting data for this study.

#### **Why Interview by Phone?**

Compared to face-to-face interviews, data collection using the telephone has many benefits:

1. Phone interviewing saved Saudi mother students money and time as opposed to conducting a face-to-face interview outside the house, especially because most Saudi female students do not drive and depend on taxies or public transportation. Aday (1996)

and Chapel (1999) reported many benefits of telephone interview such as low cost and travel.

2. The study sample consists of busy mothers who hardly have time to meet people due to the many responsibilities and obligations that their roles demand. According to McCoyd and Kerson (2006).
3. Phone interviewing decrease social pressure. In Saudi culture, it is considered shameful to have someone visit the house without making him coffee, tea, and dessert. This means that a face-to-face meeting would require the study participants to spend more effort, money, and time to prepare, while a phone interview would require no effort or cost.
4. Phone interviewing guarantees the researcher ability to collect data from mother students who might avoid unnecessary social activities or meetings outside their house. It gave them more time to study and take care of their children. Phone interviewing guarantees that those moms will not be absent and will participate because they will remain at home, surrounded with their children.
5. Phone interviewing is more flexible in the term of (re)arrangement. If a mother's child gets sick, she can simply call me and rearrange the interview (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004), Holt (2010) highlighted that when an unexpected interruption happens during or before a scheduled interview, it is easier to arrange for another appointment, whereas in face-to-face interviewing it could be embarrassing to cancel an appointment, especially if the researcher has already arrived at the participant's home or the agreed location.
6. Mothers often feel more relaxed and comfortable with collecting data by phone because in a face-to-face interview they would have to keep watching their children in public places. They might be nervous about their children's behavior in front of interviewer, especially if the children cry or feel hungry, which might make them hurry in their responses or not completely focus on what they are saying in a face-to-face interview.

Participants have been found to be more relaxed on the telephone and willing to discuss even intimate information more openly, and the data collected by phone have been described to be high quality, rich, and detailed (Chapple, 1999; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004; Sweet, 2002). Additionally, participants stay on “their own turf” (McCoyd & Kerson, 2006, p. 399), so there is no need to leave home to conduct an interview. This offered more privacy to Saudi mothers, especially the veiled participant in this study who is required to be veiled in public places but not in her house. As Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) stated, phone interviewing offers more privacy for participants and encourages them to feel relaxed and more willing to disclose sensitive information (Burke & Miller, 2001).

Additionally, phone interviewing saved the researcher travel costs and allowed her to reach respondents who are dispersed geographically (Aday, 1996; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004; Sweet, 2002). The sample in this study consisted of female Saudi students who are dispersed across the United States.

I prepared the participants for the phone interview following Burke and Miller’s (2001) three steps: (1) before the phone interview, (2) during the phone interview, and (3) after using the phone interview to collect the study data. These steps are summarized by in Appendix H.

### **Step 1: Before the Phone Interview**

**Building the interview questions.** According to McNamara (2009), effective research questions for interviews are open-ended, as neutral as possible, and clearly worded. In this study, I have used simple words in the questions. I also created prompts for each question for use as reminders and to keep participants on track during the interviews.

All of the interview questions were formatted to avoid yes/no responses (Posavac & Carey, 1997, p. 222). In this study, I built open-ended questions, which have been divided

into six major sections (see Appendix B). Each section covered a specific aspect of the participants' lives as students and mothers:

1. Personal background,
2. Academic background,
3. Cultural background,
4. Performance of multiple roles,
5. Coping strategies, and
6. Recommendations.

The reflection questions that emerged during the interview allowed for more discussion.

**Pretesting the list of interview questions.** I pilot tested the interview questions before using it to collect data for the main study by conducting a pilot study of the list of interview questions with individuals who are demographically similar to my ultimate sample. This helped me to identify appropriate wording. In addition, a pilot interview indicated how long the interviews would take.

**Trustworthiness.** Silverman (2004) stated, "Validity and reliability are two important concepts to keep in mind when doing research because in them the objectivity and credibility of research are at stake" (p. 283). Trochim (2001) stated that reliability and validity together contribute to a study's trustworthiness. In this study, as in any qualitative study, the researcher considered validity and reliability during the study design, data collection, and data analysis (Patton, 2001). I adopted a combination of the following strategies to enhance the study's trustworthiness.

I used a pilot interview to determine any weaknesses in the interview protocol. According to Kvale (2007), a pilot test benefits the researcher by allowing him or her to make revisions before the study's implementation (Kvale, 2007). In this study, I conducted a pilot interview with a female Saudi student in the education doctoral program at the University of

Kansas; the pilot interviewee is also a mother to two children, so she has characteristics that are similar to those of the individuals who participated in the study. The data gathered from the pilot interview was not counted for this study. Through this pilot interview, I attempted to ensure that the interview questions I designed made sense and were clear. During the pilot interview, I also took notes about what worked, what did not work, and what should be changed.

According to Merriam (1998, p. 204), several strategies exist to enhance internal validity; one of them is a member check. In this study, I used the multiple-check method to improve the reliability and validity of the interview questions. To get feedback, I discussed my ideas with a group of Saudi mothers who are also doctoral students in different majors and at universities across the United States.

For further feedback, I shared the interview questions with a group of mothers who are faculty members at Saudi universities and who have studied in U.S. institutions (see Appendix D). Via email, I asked those women to read the interview protocol carefully and to make suggestions to improve the interview questions in order to determine the interview's content validity and to provide the researcher with feedback to ensure that the interview questions would answer the research questions, were clearly stated, and covered all aspects of mothers' lives at the doctorate level. I also wanted to ensure that important questions were not left out.

Based on the pilot interview and the check groups, the following feedback and suggestions were given attention:

1. Add a question about the hardships of rearing children, such as following up with their schools, helping with their homework, and answering their questions about other religions.
2. Add a question about the husband's responsibilities.

3. Add a question about how the desire to study in the United States affects female students' thinking in terms of choosing a major and having more children.
4. Add a question about the importance of the role of Saudi student clubs in the United States.
5. Add a question about the importance of the role of Saudi students within each university.

**Recording the phone interviews.** I audiotaped the phone conversations during the phone interviews, for which I prepared in advance. I bought an app called Voice Plus by Google Play store and used it to record the phone interviews because it works with all carriers and types of mobile phone, so it was an easy way to record calls on my Android phone. It is also user friendly and costs \$10. Voice Plus displays a dialog box allowed me to rename files, viewed details for every record, and added notes to a record.

**Why conduct the phone interviews in Arabic?** The researcher conducted the phone interviews in Arabic, specifically the local Saudi accent. Conducting the interview in Arabic allowed the participants to openly express their stories and experiences without feeling limited by language. Also, Saudi students often feel embarrassed when talking to one another from the same country (Saudi Arabia) in English because some of them have weaknesses in English speaking and would not like to expose those weaknesses to others or being criticized for them. By using the Saudi accent, the researcher avoided using formal, and complex Arabic words.

## **Step 2: During the Phone Interview**

### **The Researcher's Role**

The researcher in this study is the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data. Interpretations were based on my knowledge of the topic and on the previous literature about the topic. Merriam (1988) highlighted the importance of the researcher in a qualitative

study: “The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data are mediated through this human instrument, the researcher, rather than through some inanimate inventory, questionnaire, or machines” (p. 19).

I am a mother who have four children from 9 to 15 years old. They lived with me while I studied ESL for two years in Chicago; then we moved to Lawrence, Kansas, to start my PhD in education. The children lived with me for four years until I finished the doctoral program coursework. I am known in Saudi society as a writer in the field of Saudi female student awareness in U.S. institutions. I am also known for writing in many prominent Saudi journals about the experiences of Saudi female students in the United States. In 2009, I founded an important Saudi student group in the United States called Creative Saudi Female PhD Students in the U.S.; I also wrote a “Guide for Saudi Mother Students in the U.S.,” which the Saudi government published and adopted as a basic source that is available to increase Saudi mothers’ awareness about life in the United States. The Saudi Culture Mission also published it online and has made it available on its official website since March 2013 ([http://www.sacm.org/pdf/Saudi\\_Mothers\\_in\\_USA\\_PDF.pdf](http://www.sacm.org/pdf/Saudi_Mothers_in_USA_PDF.pdf)).

My goal in this study is to examine the views and stories of the participants to explore how they balance their doctoral studies and motherhood. As Glesne (1999) mentioned, a researcher who conducts a qualitative study serves both as the one who conducts the study and as a learner. As the researcher, my personality and my experience as both a PhD student and a mother cannot be separated from the study. According to Creswell (2003) and Merriam (1988), qualitative methods give the researcher opportunities to bring their personal values, biases, and interests into the research and to include them in the reporting. However, to find the essence of the phenomenon, as a researcher in this study I did not let my thoughts and personal experiences influence my interpretations of the data (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Cohen and Manion (1994) and Ritchie and Lewis (2003) argued that

there are disadvantages to using phone in-depth interviews to collect data. Based on this argument, the researcher attempted to pay attention to those disadvantages, which include bias, to counteract them. I have taken the following steps to avoid bias:

1. I did not let my personal experience influence my opinion. I was a good listener, allowing the participants to talk openly without any interruption.
2. I asked reflecting questions that help the participants to talk more about their thoughts, beliefs, and experiences. In addition, the researcher avoided wordy and leading questions (Merriam, 1998).
3. All phone interviews were audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, electronically saved, translated into English, and printed (Creswell, 2009). The audiotaped interviews provided the researcher with the chance to review the interview responses to avoid hasty interpretations.
4. I attempted to learn from the study participants. As Glesne (1999) mentioned, the researcher should be a “curious student who comes to learn from and with research participants” (p. 41). This came not by trying to approach the interviews but rather by being a good listener and being open to new thoughts from the participants.
5. I attempted to be as neutral as possible (McNamara, 2009). For example, I did not show strong reactions (such as surprise, excitement, or pleasure) to the participants’ responses while listening to their answers and taking notes. According to McNamara (2009), a reaction from an interviewer can influence the answers to the remaining questions.

**Phone interview procedures.** The data for this study was collected by phone interviews that took approximately 60 to 90 minutes to complete. I tried to create a friendly interview style by beginning with a greeting and thanking the participant. I provided a brief

description of the study. The consent form was also signed and returned to the researcher prior to the phone interviews.

I built a climate of trust with the interviewees so they were not surprised by any hidden issues. In other words, they understood every aspect of their participation. For instance, I asked participants' permission to turn on the audio recorder during the interview. This increased the participants trust and gave them a sense of control. I was also available to clarify and explain each topic to the interviewees before the interviews, both by email and by phone.

I started each interview with an informal conversation, during which I introduced myself, thanked the mother for her time, and explained how much her participation is appreciated. Then, after this period, I read questions in a conversational tone and avoid awkward pauses between questions, not showing any surprise to a participant's responses.

This study used a semi-structured interview. I asked all of the interviewee's six similar open-ended questions. The first question in the interview asked about demographics and academic background. Then I asked in-depth questions related to the topic, and the interviewee was allowed to answer and add comments. As Alvesson (2011) stated, when an interview is semi-structured, this "means that there are themes to be covered, but in a relatively broad and flexible way" (p. 53).

I utilized what Rudestam and Newton (1992) called the "important skills," which "include listening, observing, and forming an empathic alliance with the subject" (p. 33) It requires additional skills to be effective in a qualitative study, such as having "tolerance for ambiguity," having "sensitivity," and "being a good communicator" (Merriam, 2001, pp. 20–23). I have previously been a counselor, so my counseling and practical experiences allowed me to be professional and to use my interviewing skills to create effective communication that encourages participants to talk more by asking additional reflection questions.

At the end of the phone interview, I asked participants if they would like to add something, then I offered to share my research findings when it is done if they are interested.

### **Step 3: Post-Interview Phase**

After transcribing each phone interview, I invited each participant to make comments on her own phone Arabic interview transcript to make sure that the transcript's themes reflect the phenomena that the study aims to investigate (Long & Johnson, 2000). According to Pitney (2004), the dependability of a study can be verified using member checks. A member check allows a participant to clarify to the researcher that the researcher's interpretations are accurate based on the answers that the participant has provided (Pitney, 2004).

In the last step of data collection, I prepared the collected data for analysis after each interview. Then, I analyzed the data using Creswell's six-step analysis (Creswell, 2009). In the first step, I transcribed all interviews verbatim from recordings. Next, I read the transcripts to capture a general sense of the data; then, I coded the data (using color markers) by rereading each transcript to find similar thoughts and phrases; then I coded the data into categories and labeled it. In step four, I checked the data to identify recurring themes and unique experiences. In step five, I discussed the intersecting themes using subthemes, perspectives, and quotations, and in the last step, I interpreted the data by asking, "What were the lessons learned?" (Creswell, 2009, p. 189).

### **The Translation Procedure**

In order to reach a reliable translation process and maintain the integrity of the data, I performed the steps described below. I collected the data by using Arabic as a source language (SL); later, data disseminated in English, which is the target language (TL). Because the researcher is a native speaker of Arabic and the interviews were conducted in Arabic with Arabic participants, the language and cultural challenge was limited. This is in accordance to statements made by Nes, Abma, Jonsson, and Deeg (2010):

With participants and the main researcher speaking the same language, no language differences are present in data gathering, transcription and during the first analysis, because usually the first coding phase stays closely to the data. The first language differences may occur when interpretations are being discussed among members of a multinational research team. (p. 153).

In this study, I adopted Al-Amer et al (2016) steps in managing language challenges in two ways: I started by transcribing the participant's' phone interviews, which I conducted in Arabic. Subsequently, I analyzed the Arabic transcripts in Arabic and determine themes; then, as a researcher, I translated these themes from Arabic to English, as Al-Amer et al. (2016) recommended. I conducted the analysis in Arabic. Then, I translated the whole narrative at the initial phase from Arabic to English. Additionally, I translated and transcribed all of my interviews into English first – not just the themes.

The study utilized the services of an American female translator who holds a PhD in education. She is a native English speaker, and she has Arabic roots. Thus, she shares the participants' language and culture and can assist me. In the initial interpretation phase, the interpretation of the translated data, I discussed with her the clarity of the intended meaning and the yielded various interpretations. It should be noted that these differences in interpretation were discussed with the translator to guarantee clarity and consensus. I also discussed with her the translation of the interview questions from English to Arabic before conducting any phone interviews with the study participants to ensure that my translations were clear and held the intended meaning.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study adhered to the ethical considerations of the students at the University of Kansas. The following measures were taken while conducting the study to ensure that the

rights of the participants are protected and that no one will be hurt in any way because of participating in the study.

I explained in my introductory email to each participant that participation is optional and that there is no penalty for choosing not to participate. I did chose participants who are not my friends to ensure that the participants would not be under pressure to participate for the sake of friendship. I asked each participant to email me her confirmation before the interview to ensure that each participant agreed to participate and that those who do not wish to participate will not be annoyed by future emails.

I provided each participant with information about the study, such as its title and purpose, my name and background, what is required from the participants, and the times and dates of participation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002, pp. 138–139). Respondents were never misled during the study. I was available by phone and email and was willing to clarify any research procedures that participants do not understand (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, pp. 138–139).

I ensured the respondents experience no physical or mental discomfort in the study (Ary et al., 2002, p. 438; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 377; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, pp. 68–69). For example, I made sure that the interview time was suitable for women with children. I informed the participants that they can stop when their children needed them during the phone interview; I called them back to continue the phone interview.

I went through the process of having the human subject research study approved by my school's institutional review board. This step is important to protect both the participants' and the researcher's rights as well as to ensure that no one will be harmed by this study. I have also completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) tutorial.

In this study, the researcher protects the identities of the 14 participants by using pseudonyms and by concealing the names of the institutions and cities where they live. She also makes some changes to make it hard for anyone to guess the identity of each participant.

### **Summary**

This chapter dealt with the study's research design, including its methodology, sample selection, and data collection method. The interview procedures were explained systematically, as were the strategies that was implemented to ensure trustworthiness. The researcher's role, the study's ethical considerations, and the data analysis process were also outlined.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Results**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study is to investigate the experiences of 14 Saudi female doctoral students enrolled in doctoral programs in education in U.S. institutions. In the first section of this chapter, I provide a brief description of each participant. In the second section, major themes that emerged as the participants were telling their stories is highlighted. I discuss the challenges that the Saudi mother students and their families face in their academic and personal life. Then, I discuss the roles of their academic advisors, faculty members, classmates, husbands in the students' motherhood and doctoral experiences while they study in U.S. universities, as well as the coping strategies that Saudi female doctoral students develop to manage motherhood and academic roles while studying in the United States.

#### **Description of the Sample**

This study's 14 participants are Saudi mothers who are studying in doctoral programs in education at U.S. institutions (See Table 2). Each has at least one child under 18. As Table 2 shows, the mothers range in age from 29 to 45. The mothers study at universities in different states: four in Michigan, three in Illinois, two in Washington, DC, and one each in Florida, Kansas, Ohio, Indiana, and Wisconsin. These women are funded from Saudi Cultural Mission. In this section, I provide a brief description of each participant.

#### **Emman**

Emman is 37 years old and a mother to two boys, aged 12 and 16. She is in the United States without her husband and is studying in a small Midwestern town. Her brother studies in the same university but lives in another apartment with his wife. She is in the second year of her PhD program in education and is still taking courses. She received a scholarship to study in

Table 2

*Description of the Sample*

Name	Age	Location	Academic Progress	Organization	Number of Kids (Ages)	Husband's Status
Emman	37	Small Midwestern town	2nd year (taking classes)	The Ministry of Education	2 (16 and 12 years old)	No husband (single mother)
Basemmah	29	Small Midwestern town	3rd year (taking classes)	Saudi university (faculty member)	2 (both 2 years old)	Studying in the U.S.
Rawan	29	Small Midwestern town	2nd year (taking classes)	Saudi university (faculty member)	2 (3 and 9 years old); uses birth control.	Studying in the U.S.
Amina	30	Small Midwestern town	3rd year (taking classes)	Saudi university (faculty member)	1 (2 years old); is 8 months pregnant.	Studying in the U.S.
Aseel	37	Small town in the eastern part of north-central	3rd year (exams complete and working on her dissertation)	Saudi university (senior administrator)	2 (11 and 12 years old); uses birth control	In the U.S. but not studying
Wedad	42	Small town in North-central	3rd year (exams complete and working on her dissertation)	Saudi university (faculty member)	5 (newborn and 6, 8, 12, and 14 years old)	In the U.S. but not studying
Aziza	32	Small Midwestern town	3rd year (exams complete and working on her dissertation)	Saudi university (faculty member)	3 (3, 7, and 12 years old)	No husband (single mother)
Zahra	34	Small Midwestern town	4th year (exams complete and working on her dissertation)	The Saudi Ministry of Education	2 (4 months old and 8 years old)	In the U.S. but not studying
Dana	30	Large Pacific Northwest city	3rd year (taking classes)	Saudi university (faculty member)	1 (11 years old)	No husband (widow)

Table 2

*Description of the Sample, continued*

Name	Age	Location	Academic Progress	Organization	Number of Kids (Ages)	Husband's Status
Sarah	33	Medium-sized city in southeastern	4th year (exams complete and working on her dissertation)	Saudi university (faculty member)	3 (4, 8, and 12 years old)	Working in Saudi Arabia
Maryam	45	Large Midwestern city	4th year (exams complete and working on her dissertation)	Saudi university (faculty member)	5 (3, 7, 9, 11, and 17 years old)	In the U.S. but not studying
Sharefah	38	Large Midwestern city	3rd year (exams not yet complete but already working on her dissertation)	Saudi university (faculty member)	2 (2 and 9 years old)	Studying in the U.S.
Hend	31	Large Pacific Northwest city	2nd year (taking classes)	Saudi university (faculty member)	3 (4 months old; 3 and 7 years old)	Studying in the U.S.
Toga	31	Large Midwestern city	4th year (exams complete and working on her dissertation)	Saudi university (faculty member)	3 (2, 8, and 10 years old)	Studying in the U.S.

the United States from the Saudi Ministry of Education. She came to the United States because she got her master's degree in England and wanted to try a new place to study so that she could have different experiences. Emman described her educational experience in the United States as being positive:

I like living in the United States. I have never faced discrimination. I think I am different from other Saudis, as I know how to deal with people here by being nice to them, asking questions politely, trying not to ask too much of them, and depending on myself. While I faced difficulties in the beginning, my brother was ready to help me; he drove me everywhere. Then, after 6 months, I learned how to drive and depend on myself; driving made my life easier.

### **Basemah**

Basemah is 29 years old and a mother to 2-year-old twins. She is in the United States with her husband, who is a master's student. She is studying in a small town in the upper Midwest. She is in her third year, and she is still taking courses. She received a scholarship from a university in Saudi Arabia where she is a faculty member. She chose the United States for her PhD studies for several reasons. Basemah explained:

My choice was the United States . . . When I asked friends for advice on where to study, they told me that people in the United States are friendlier than those in England. English people are rude, and U.S. expenses are cheaper than those in England. The department in the university I worked for in Saudi Arabia also informed me that they preferred that I get my PhD in the United States.

Basemah described her educational experience in the United States as positive, stating, "I enjoy being in the United States, I feel no pressure with exams like I did at Saudi universities; here, it is completely different, as grades depend on papers; the professors are very nice and will talk to us."

**Rawan**

Rawan is 29 years old and a mother to two children, aged 3 and 9. She is in the United States with her husband, who is a master's student. She is studying in a small Midwestern town. She is in her third year, and she is still taking courses. She received a scholarship to study in the United States from a university in Saudi Arabia where she is a faculty member. She enjoys her motherhood in the United States. She stated, "I believe that the fact that I am a mother helps me to be more accepted in the department than the other Saudi students are."

Rawan described her educational experience in the United States as positive with a few negative aspects:

I like the atmosphere. I feel that I take advantage of the classes and that I am learning. The diversity in the department is rich, so there is an understanding of international backgrounds, and I do not feel lonely as the only international female student in the department. I feel safe. There is only one thing I do not like: The class assignments such as reflections and discussion board posts do not offer research experience.

Rawan was motivated to come to the United States because it is where her mother is from, so she feels more belonging here than in other countries and is familiar with the country. However, she also had other motivations:

I spent a long time looking at the British educational system and how teaching is done there. I realized that it is focused on studying one approach in depth. It is not broad, unlike the U.S. education system, where students at the doctoral level learn many things. I checked the syllabuses and curriculums of PhD programs at U.K. universities, and I found that students submit a proposal and then start their own research immediately while taking the classes to help with their research. However, students in the United States start by taking courses to gather knowledge before

making the decision about which research topics they would like to work on for their dissertations.

### **Amina**

Amina is 30 years old. She is the mother of a 4-year-old boy, and she is 8 months pregnant. She is in the United States with her husband, who is a master's student. She is studying in a small Midwestern town. She is in her third year, and she is still taking courses. She received a scholarship to study in the United States from a university in Saudi Arabia where she is a faculty member. She chose to study in the United States because she had lived in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom and found from her experience that Americans were friendlier and more flexible, which made it easier for her to learn and to improve her English. She described her educational experience in the United States as positive: "In our education department, I noticed that they appreciated my work. It is easy to polish and present my work."

### **Aseel**

Aseel is 37 years old and a mother to two children, aged 11 and 12. She is in the United States with her husband. He does not work or study. They live in a small town in the eastern part of the north-central region. Aseel is in the third year of her PhD program; she has finished all of her coursework and passed her comprehensive exams, and she is working on her dissertation. She received a scholarship to study in the United States from a university in Saudi Arabia where she is a faculty member. Aseel chose to study in the United States because she is more familiar with the United States than other countries:

I chose the United States because my father received his PhD in the United States, so I am more familiar with the United States than the United Kingdom or Canada. I also wanted my children to get the same educational opportunity that I benefited from while I was studying in U.S. schools when my father was student in the United States.

. . . In addition to those reasons, when I compared the PhD programs in the United Kingdom to those in the United States, I concluded that the latter were better. U.S. universities would allow me to take classes and have a rich educational experience, but in U.K. programs, I would just have to do research.

However, Aseel described her educational experience in the United States as a disappointment. She explained that by saying in her phone interview:

I have no problems in the department, but when I came to the United States to study for my PhD, I had high expectations in my mind. I was looking at the professors as experts and at myself as inexperienced student who came to get knowledge from those experts. . . . The classes were amazing, but I did not find what I was looking— basically, experts on the Saudi higher education system—so I was disappointed that I did not find someone to answer my questions and provide knowledge about that topic, especially for questions related to Saudi female students in higher education, What bothers me is the way our department courses are taught; they are very focused on the U.S. higher education system, so we basically study its financial assistance, rankings, and so forth. We study all of this only from a U.S. point of view. I was looking for a more international point of view so that I could benefit more, especially now that higher education is global and works across cultures.

### **Wedad**

Wedad is 42 years old. She is in the United States with her husband, who does not work or study. Wedad is a mother to five children: a newborn baby and 6-, 8-, 12-, and 14-year-olds. Although she has five children, the center of her life is her daughter, who is eight. This daughter has five kinds of disabilities. Wedad is studying in a small town in the north-central region. She is in the third year of her PhD program. She received a scholarship to

study in the United States from a university in Saudi Arabia where she is a faculty member.

She reported that she is happy with her educational experience in the United States:

I passed the comprehensive exams, and all the coursework successfully, thanks to God, and my GPA was 4 out of 4, and now I am working on my dissertation. . . . I came to the United States because the educational system here is the best in the world—not just for me but also for my children, as the education system for children is better here than the one in Saudi Arabia.

### **Azizah**

Azizah is 32 years old and a mother to three children, aged 3, 6, and 12. She is in the United States as a single mother. Her husband was feeling bored because he could not work in the United States, and this bothered both of them, so he decided to return home to work in Saudi Arabia. She is studying in a small town in the upper Midwest.

She is in her third year, and she has passed her comprehensive exams and finished all her coursework. She is working on her dissertation. She received a scholarship to study in the United States from a university in Saudi Arabia where she is a faculty member. When her department at the university where she works in Saudi Arabia asked her to choose a country in which to pursue a PhD, her choice was the United States:

A long time ago, my dream was to come to the United States; it was my passion to study there. The U.S. education system is the best one, so when the department at the university where I work as a faculty member in Saudi Arabia asked me to pick a country to study in for my PhD, my choice was the United States without even thinking about it.

### **Zahra**

Zahra is 34 years old and a mother to two boys, who are 4 months and 8 years old. Her husband lives with her in the United States, but he is not a student and does not work.

She is studying in a PhD program at a university in a small town in the upper Midwest. She is in her fourth year; she has finished her classes and comps and is working on her dissertation. After receiving a scholarship from the Saudi Ministry of Education, she decided to enter a PhD program in the United States:

I did not find any opportunity to study in Saudi Arabia; I spent 2 years trying to get accepted to a master's degree program at a Saudi university, but it was useless. You know, our Saudi universities have many complex conditions, so I applied for scholarship programs in the Ministry of Education. Fortunately, I was accepted, and I went to the United States. . . . At that time (2006), the scholarship program was only open to applicants going to the United States. It was not like today, when you have the choice to go to England, Canada, or any other country you want.

Zahra described her educational experience in the United States as generally positive, but she faced some problems, as she recounted in her interview:

I can say that my studying experience in the United States has been positive, but some difficulties in language and in understanding the new culture have affected my studies. My major is related to understanding U.S. culture deeply, and it is a new culture to me, so understanding it required that I spend time communicating with Americans.

### **Dana**

Dana is 30 years old and a single mother of an 11-year-old child. Her husband died 10 years ago. She is studying in a large Pacific Northwest city, and she is in the third year of her doctoral program, in which she is still taking coursework. She received a scholarship to study in the United States from a university in Saudi Arabia where she is a faculty member. Dana came to study in the United States because she believed that the education system is the best

in the world. Dana explained in her phone interview that there are positive and negative aspects of her educational experience:

I have language difficulties; I think this is due to the fact that I got my master's degree in Saudi Arabia. . . . The American education style not understandable to me. For many assignments, I did not know how to do them. . . . For instance, I had never heard about reflection papers when I was studying for my master's degree in Saudi Arabia.

Dana added the following in her description of her academic experience:

There also positive aspects; my way of thinking and analyzing matters changed, and my decisions and practices became more research-based and scientifically informed. For instance, if I want to design and apply a particular program at school, I first choose the practices and check the previous research about that program; I review my practices and make the decision about whether to apply the program based on scientific evidence.

### **Sarah**

Sarah is 33 years old and a mother of three daughters, aged 4, 8, and 12. She is in the United States by herself, and her husband works in Saudi Arabia; he returned home to work, as Sarah mentioned in her phone interview:

He graduated 2 years ago, and he got a good job offer thanks to God. We talked a lot about it and what to do, and I told him to go back home. Honestly, we need that money to at least buy a house so that when we come back from the United States, we will have at least have a place to live in.

Sarah is studying in a medium-sized southeastern city. She is in the fourth year of her PhD program; she has finished her coursework and passed her comps, and she is working on her dissertation. Like the majority of the other participants, Sarah received a scholarship to

study in the United States from a university in Saudi Arabia where she is a faculty member.

Sarah chose the United States based on her friends' recommendation, as she related:

I was confused at the beginning. I had three choices: Canada, Australia, and the United States. I did know which one was best, so I started asking friends (and almost everyone else I met) which country was the best place to study for a PhD. Many people told me to go to the United States; they told me that it has many options—both many majors and many universities. They explained to me that academic life in the United States is more comfortable and cheaper than in other countries and that people there are more accepting of students from different cultures.

Sarah described her academic experience in the United States as a positive one; however, she faced many obstacles in the beginning, which she conveyed in her phone interview:

It was not good at first. I really had a hard time, as our department was very small, and the number of faculty members was limited. Not many options were open to me, so I was forced to take classes with two professors who were racist. We all (the Arabic students) knew that they were racist. I also was suffering because of the language: One of my professors gave me a hard time about this, so before I would submit a paper to her, I used to pay an American editor around \$300 to edit my papers. The professor said all the time that my papers did not sound American. She drove me crazy, but I was controlling myself, so I told her that she was right because I am not American. I said, "You want me to be American, but I cannot be that, so my writing does not sound American." I was trying to convince her to accept the differences between me and my American classmates.

**Maryam**

Maryam is 45 years old and a mother to five children, aged 3, 7, 9, 11, and 17. She is in the United States with her husband, who is not a student. She is studying in a large Midwestern city and is in the fourth year of her PhD program. She has finished her coursework and passed her comps, and she is working on her dissertation. The university where she works in Saudi Arabia gave her a scholarship to study in the United States. She based her decision to get her PhD in the United States on advice from a colleague in her department. Maryam expressed this in her phone interview:

At the beginning, I wanted to go to England because I have daughters, and I would not want them to be in an open country. . . . I was thinking that the United States is very open and thus not a good place to raise my daughters, but when I discussed this with one of my colleagues, he told me that my conceptions about Americans were not true. He encouraged me to go to the United States. He told me, "Because you have daughters and you want something better for them, you should go to the United States." I was convinced because he had been in both countries and I had not, and he was right. God bless him. The United States is better for me and my family.

Maryam reported in her phone interview that she faced difficulties in her academic experience in the United States:

I spent two years studying the English language; I am 45, so I did not come to the United States at an early age. I was feeling that it was too late to learn English at my age. Then, I received academic acceptance for my PhD program; the major that I was looking at after I started studying in the department was not easy, but I really started enjoying my learning experience. I felt that I received many advantages, such as opportunities to attend many conferences and education workshops.

**Togah**

Togah is 31 years old and a mother to 8- and 10-year-old daughters and a 2-year-old son. She is in the United States with her husband, who is an ESL student. She is studying in a large Midwestern city; she is in her fourth year, so she has finished her coursework and passed her comps, and she is working on her dissertation. She received a scholarship to study in the United States from a university in Saudi Arabia where she is a faculty member. She mentioned that she came to the United States based on her brother's recommendation:

When I decided to come to the United States, that decision was based on the recommendation of my older brother, who was a student in the United States 20 years ago. He got his PhD from Ohio. We talked a lot about it, and he tried to convince me by telling me that Americans welcome Saudi culture and respect religion. He said I would not face discrimination. I liked this, so it became my choice.

Togah reported in her phone interview that she is enjoying her educational experience in the United States but that she faced obstacles at the beginning:

The beginning was too tough. . . . First of all, the language was very academic and strong. I had never used that type of English, and it was different from what we learned in college in Saudi Arabia; we never talked using that type of English.

Professors were talking to me, and I understood them, but I was not familiar with their tone. For example, some words related to leadership were hard for me because they were new. The professors also did not always say the whole word, so I would not know what these words meant. Reading was another difficulty. If I had three chapters to read, it was too hard to do, but thanks to God, I took a course to improve my language. This course was beneficial, and it advanced my reading and writing.

**Sharifah**

Sharifah is 38 years old and a mother to two daughters, aged 2 and 9. She is in the United States with her husband, who is a master's student. She is studying in a large Midwestern city. She is in the third year of her PhD program. She has finished her coursework but has not taken her comps. She is, however, working on her dissertation. She received a scholarship to study in the United States from a university in Saudi Arabia where she is a faculty member. In her phone interview, Sharifah mentioned many reasons for choosing the United States as a place to study:

I was born in the United States, so I feel familiar with the people, the culture, and the education system. . . . While studying in the United Kingdom has many benefits, the PhD programs there are shorter and more like those in Saudi Arabia, and I was scared to communicate with British people. I did not feel the same about Americans because I was familiar with them. Another aspect that motivated me was that education in the United States is, as we all know, strong and among the best globally.

Sharifah described her educational experience in the United States as positive. She recounted:

It was absolutely positive. I learned much more than in my experience in my master's degree program. My PhD program was designed to prepare students to be faculty members, so it strengthens students' research skills. . . . The courses are rich with knowledge. I am very much enjoying my learning experience at my school, but I am mad because I have finished the coursework; every semester has amazing courses that I would like to continue to study.

However, Sharifah related in her phone interview that she is facing difficulties in her academic life in the United States:

I feel treated differently by professors. Some professors know that I come from a foreign country, and they are biased against me. They have high expectations of me, and they want me to work harder than the other students because I am an international student. . . . Last semester, they frequently criticized my academic writing; even when I had my papers edited by Americans, they still criticized my papers.

### **Hend**

Hend is 31 years old and a mother to three daughters who are 4 months, 3 years, and 7 years old. She is in the United States with her husband, a bachelor's student at a different university in the same large city in the Pacific Northwest. She is in her second year and is still taking courses. She received a scholarship to study in the United States from a university in Saudi Arabia where she is a faculty member. Hend chose to study in the United States because PhD programs in the United States offer the best higher education in the world; she expounded on this in her phone interview:

I chose to study at a U.S. university because I like that PhD programs in the United States consist of three elements: research, training, and courses. In the United Kingdom, it is different story, as they just focus on research without any coursework.

She described her educational experience in the United States as generally being good, stating the following:

I am enjoying the academic atmosphere in the United States, such as the class discussions and the research papers; everything here is motivating me to learn, and even the challenges that I face motivate me to keep going and to fight to achieve my goals.

As Table 2 shows, six of the participants are still taking classes, and the other eight have finished their coursework and have begun work on their dissertation research; seven of the eight have passed their comprehensive exams. Two mothers in the sample are

unemployed; the Saudi Ministry of Education sent them to the United States. The majority of the participants ( $n = 12$ ) are studying in the United States because of their work, as they are already employed at Saudi universities, one as a senior administrator and the others as faculty members. Three mothers in the study sample live in the United States without their husbands, who stayed in Saudi Arabia to work at their jobs; one mother is a widow; and the other 10 mothers have husbands living with them in the United States (five of those husbands are students, too). These Muslim Saudi mothers vary in their levels of religiosity, as well: One mother is veiled, nine wear just a hijab, and three choose not to wear a hijab all the time.

In the next section. In their own words, the participants reveal the type(s) of challenges they and their families face in their experiences of managing motherhood and academic roles while studying in the United States.

### **Mothers' Barriers While Studying at U.S. Institutions**

The mothers in this study reported a number of challenges that they and their families faced while living in the United States. According to the mothers' responses in this study, the most common challenges are lack of the Saudi Cultural Mission support, lack of the institutional support, the feeling of guilt, discrimination, academic difficulties, and family adjustment problems.

#### **Lack of the Support from the Saudi Cultural Mission**

The Saudi Cultural Mission (SACM) in Washington DC represents the Saudi Ministry of Education and it is the official department that applies regulations and funds and supervises all Saudi students in US institutions. Each state has one advisor for all the Saudi students in that state.

**SACM Advisor Support.** The Saudi mission ensures, with students' advisors, that each student follows the Saudi Ministry of Education regulations such as taking courses full time, achieving academic progress, attending classes, and not crossing the absence limits, etc.

Students communicate with their SACM advisors by phone or email. Of the students interviewed, eight out of 14 (Azizah, Hand, Basemah, Rawan, Maryam, Togah, Sharifah, Emman) reported that the SACM advisors' support varies according to the gender of the advisor. The eight agreed that the female advisors at SACM are very tough and detailed with applying rules while male advisors are more flexible and supportive. For instance, Basemah reported that her female advisor dealt with her when she asked to be waived from having to be a full-time student in order to reduce the academic pressure she felt when she gave birth. This would give her more time to be with her newborn son. Basemah reported: "she doubted me all the time. For instance, I had to send her my medical records that stated that I had a C-section in order to make her sympathetic and to allow me to be a part-time student in the semester when I gave birth to my son."

According to Emman, her relationship with her academic advisor at the Saudi Culture Mission is supportive. She said: "I feel like he is my father. He is flexible and offers help all the time and suggests solutions. When I was pregnant, he allowed me to take two classes instead of three, which was helpful to me at that time."

Similarly, Azizah reported, "they change advisors repeatedly, but I noticed from my experience that female advisors in Saudi culture are strict and not cooperative while the male advisors were nicer and more flexible." Azizah's responses are the typical responses that the eight participants gave about their SACM advisors' support varies according to the gender.

It is clear from the participants' stories that they received less support and understanding for their motherhood needs from SACM female advisors who deal with students who are mothers less flexibly and are less willing to waive some strict regulations and give monthly exceptions when the students need them.

**SACM Regulations as Perceived Barrier.** Regulations refer to the rules that apply to Saudi students in their academic studies in US institutions such as being a full-time

student, not taking online classes, and attending classes. Of 14 mothers, 10 reported that SACM regulations do not fit mothers' and their children's needs claimed that they are designed for single students.

Sharifah indicated that there is no flexibility in the SACM rules about mothers and that all the regulations apply to single students and mothers in the same way. She said:

One year ago, I was enrolled in two courses for eight hours. Each one was four hours of credit, and if I added one more course, it would be 12 hours, which is too much for me. I tried before to enroll for 12 hours, and I suffered a lot, and then, that semester, I just tried to avoid that pressure on me, especially because at that time, I had many appointments for my little daughter Leen, and I was shocked that the Saudi mission rejected my request just because I was enrolled in eight instead of nine hours. Then I raised another online request asking for someone to call me, and then the SACM advisor called me and ask me: "why do you not follow the rules?" I said I needed an exception due to my daughter's situation, and finally, the advisor accepted my request by saying: "just this term. I am not going to make it each term."

Zahra added that the regulations do not consider mothers' responsibilities toward their children. She explained:

They do not understand that we are mothers. For example, they do not think about the kids' needs when they cut financial support for the violation of one rule. So how will we pay for daycare and feed them? The kids need health insurance so I wish they would think about our kids before they take the decision to cut the mother's monthly allowance or reject the extension of their scholarship.

In addition, Aseel criticized the SACM regulations by stating, "there are no clear policies at the Saudi Cultural Mission for mothers. There is no clear process, but every time it is based on individual decisions." Aseel's responses are the typical responses that the 10

participants gave about the SACM regulations that do not fit mothers' and their children's needs claimed that they are designed for single students with no children.

It is clear from the participants' responses that mothers feel treated unfairly by SACM because there is no exception for mothers and pregnancy needs, and the current policies and regulations do not consider mothers critical needs.

**Perceived Insufficient SACM Funding.** Each student has medical insurance and one annual ticket home. They also have a monthly salary, while mothers get an extra \$200 monthly for each child. Of the 14 participants, 12 reported that there is a lack of funding from SACM to Saudi mothers in US institutions. For instance, Togah explained:

I had no problem with the Saudi Cultural Mission, but maybe financially... They give us for each kid \$200, right? As I remember... But if you think about it, my son's diapers cost \$40, and I buy two cartons of diapers monthly. Also the baby's wipes also cost \$40, and I buy two, so the total is \$120 for wipes. Also, the milk. I buy two cartons, and each one costs \$40. Now the \$200 is gone and nothing remains from the \$200, and now I need to buy juice or cereal for him. Suppose it will cost \$100, and add to that the clothes and other kid things, and I live in Chicago. It is too expensive.

According to Emman, "the Saudi Cultural Mission should review their policy on supporting kids and consider the kids' ages. Kids at age two have different needs with different expenses." Sarah added that her life is difficult due to the small amount of SACM funding. She said:

My laptop charger does not work. I have many obligations. I cannot go and buy a new one. It cost maybe \$80, which is too much for me. I would rather pay for the babysitter. I have to pay for many basic things, and my laptop has no charger. I was working on the university computers. I could not borrow a charger from anyone because everyone needs their own charger. (Laughing). So it really makes a

difference if they pay us for children's things, which will reduce the pressure we feel, especially when I do not like to ask people to borrow money.

Sarah's responses are the typical responses that the majority of participants gave about the lack of funding from SACM to Saudi mothers in US institutions.

It can be concluded from the major participants' responses that SACM funding for Saudi mothers is not sufficient, especially the monthly children's portion. It does not cover children's expenses in the United States.

### **Lack of the Institutional Support**

Only five of 14 participants indicated that their universities offered support. The other nine participants reported that their campuses were not friendly to mothers or that their universities also did not offer services for mothers (e.g., day care and family activities); these universities also did not have clear policies for dealing with mothers.

**Day care on campus.** Among the nine participants who indicated that their university has no services offered for mothers, six participants also reported that there is no day care on campus. For example, Maryam noted, "all of the day cares are off campus. You are not sure if it is good or not, but if it were a university day care, the university will direct their performance, which means better service standards. Hopefully, they will have one soon."

Basemah said she used private day care because there is no day care at her university: "The day care I use is private, and the price for day care is not expensive. They gave me a discount. I wish the classes were conducted during the business hours of the day care. There are a few day cares who stay open until 11, but their services are very bad, they are not clean, and there are no activities for kids."

The data collected from three participants (Zahra, Togah and Azizah) indicated that even if there is a day care on campus, the mothers could not use it because it closes early and is expensive. Zahra stated, "I take my child to an Arabic babysitter. It is cheaper and I feel it's

better for my kid. She is a Muslim Arabic woman.” Similarly, Azizah stated that she uses a day care that is not at school. She said, “I advised the university to make a day care at the school that stayed open late in the evening because the day care closed early at 6 p.m. and my school goes from 6 to 9 p.m.”

In conclusion, participants reported that their universities did not support them by offering services for mothers such as day care and family activities.

**Mothers do not know if their university offered services.** Of the 14 participants, five reported that they did not know if their university offered services for mothers. As Hend noted, “I am too busy to check or even to take advantage of any services.” Sarah noted, “I do not know if the university offers any services or centers for mothers. Sometimes they have activities for families, but I never go. I do not have time. Even if the activities are during the weekends I cannot go because my kids have Karate classes or something.”

Danah stated, “I do not know if there are any services in university for mothers but I go to the university counseling center that my academic advisor told me about. As I remember, they told us about it during the orientation. It offers academic and emotional support for international students but no specific services for mothers.” Similarly, Amina said, “I heard that the university has an international women’s center, but I do not know anything about its services. Recently I heard that in my college there is a technology center for early childhood doing research and helping mothers. I have been in the school since 2014, but I just learned about it this semester.”

While nine participants stated that their universities do not offer services for mothers, the other five participants reported that they did not know if their universities offered services for mothers, this indicates that their universities do not offer enough support for student mothers.

### **Perceived Organizational policies**

Two participants indicated that their universities had no clear policies to protect or support mothers' rights. Such policies could indicate, for instance, the number of days that a mother is allowed to be absent when she gives birth; they could also describe procedures for holding makeup exams or presentations after giving birth and for submitting research papers and assignments when a student has a newborn baby, experiences fatigue due to pregnancy, or must care for a child with a serious illness.

According to Togah, there are no policies to support student mothers, and when they get support, it depends on luck and the professor's kindness. Togah also added that there is no place for mothers to take care of their motherhood needs in privacy, such as areas to pump their milk or breastfeed. She told the following story about this need:

It is a funny story. I would go to school at 8:00 in the morning, and at 9:00 a.m. my husband would come to my classroom. I would ask the professor's permission to leave just for 10 minutes, then I would take the baby to a small hidden spot in the corner and breastfeed my baby. It was embarrassing. Everyone in the classroom knew that I was going to breastfeed my baby. They would smile.

Rawan raised an important point to show the difference in motherhood policies between Saudi Arabian and U.S. institutions:

When I gave birth to my daughter while I was studying, I noticed that the university did not have a clear policy for mothers who study but that it had one for employees and faculty members. So I did not know for how long I could be absent or whom to ask about it. Also, it all depended on the faculty member, if she was nice and allowed me to be absent, so it depended on luck. They do not have official roles for female students who give birth while they are studying, like in Saudi Arabia, where they have a clear policy for student mothers. So in Saudi Arabia if female students give birth

during the semester, naturally you have two weeks to be away from classes and if the mother gives birth by operation she has one month.”

In conclusion, the data collected from the 14 participants indicated a shortage of institutional support to mother students. The majority of participants' responses showed that there are no services for mother students, and even if there are services for them, they do not know about them or cannot take the advantage of them.

### **Perceived Academic Difficulties**

Nine of the 14 mothers reported having academic problems such, as a lack of English language skills, a low ability to explain their thoughts, and a poor understanding of cultural themes or nonacademic words. Azizah, Wedad, Danah, Maryam, and Basemah complained about language barriers that limited their academic advancement, reduced the benefits of their classes, and forced them to spend longer on their studies because they had to edit her work before submitting their papers, poor expression of their thoughts, and inability to participate in class discussions; for instance, Basemah reported:

At the beginning of the program, I faced language problems. I also had difficulties expressing my thoughts in classroom discussions. When in class, I often felt embarrassed because I knew everything that the professor and my classmates were discussing, but I could not say it, I did not know how to say it.

According to Zahra, Sarah, Aseel, some professors are tough with international students and do not consider that these students are not familiar with many cultural terms, and placed high expectations on international students. Sarah gave example of how the professor was not considering the limitations of international students:

During the exams, we felt shocked while we read the questions because he used many terms and examples of cases related to alcohol parties. When he asked us how to fix these cases, my Arabic classmates and I did not know what those terms meant. I told

him that I did not understand, and he said, “I am not responsible for explaining it for you; you are supposed to know what it means if you have already passed the school proficiency English test, I will not treat you differently because you are an international student.” My grades in that class were low because that professor did not respect our differences.

Similarly, Zahra reported that she had difficulties in language and in understanding the new culture. She explained that her major was related to understanding a new culture, and it required her to take time to communicate with people to understand it. However, she did not have enough time to communicate with Americans. Zahra reported that the challenges related to language and culture had a negative effect on her, but they motivated her to develop her skills.

Aseel testified to having academic challenges because she was the only international student; all her classmates understood the discussions, but she could not because she did not know much of the basic terminology:

When I was in class, sometimes during the discussions, I would not understand some terminology. I was always using Google, and this made me feel that I was less than the others and caused disconnection between me and the faculty and between me and the rest of the students. It was hard to deal with.

Togah depicted her difficulties in understanding people’s speech: “Americans speak English quickly, and they sound like they eat parts of their words. I could not understand, and this happened many times.” Togah explained that she had more academic difficulties at the beginning of her studies in the doctoral program:

My first semester was horrible. I faced difficulties in using academic words in sentences, but now, thanks to God, I am very good at that, and my English is better. I go to the writing center for help with my papers.

In conclusion, Saudi mothers who study as international students at U.S. institutions reported having academic problems related to knowing grammar, expressing thoughts, being active in class, and understanding basic terminology and cultural terms. Those problems are most severe in the first semester and decline with time.

### **Feelings of Guilt**

Eight of 14 participants reported feelings of guilt toward their families arising from the fact that they did not find time to play because they were busy all the time doing their schoolwork; For instance, Togah felt guilty when her children complained that she did not talk or play with them and instead spent her time doing her schoolwork:

I feel guilt when my children tell me, “Mom you always study; we do not see you ever. Why do you not sit with us?” When they say this, it destroys me. They sometimes hug me very tightly and tell me, “We miss you.” I was blaming myself, but what can I do? I have to study long hours to get my degree; I have nothing to do with that.

Similarly, other participants such as Basemah, Amina, Sharifah, Wedad, Sarah and Danah reported that feeling guilt toward their children arising from the fact that they did not find time to play because they were busy all the time doing their schoolwork; for instance, Danah continued that, when she returns home after taking her evening classes and finds her son sleeping, this situation makes her feel guilty because her son was watching for her and fell asleep without seeing her:

I had a class end at 10:30 p.m., and when I returned home, I found my son already asleep on his bed. I was not there when he went to bed, and I did not see him that day. The feeling of guilt kills me; that feeling is really painful, especially because his father died, and I am the only source of love in his life [crying].

Azizah's guilt occurred because she believed that her children would pay a price for being in the United States as she studied for her doctoral degree—that they would be victims because they lost their chance to study Arabic in Saudi Arabia, Azizah illustrated how she worked to fix this issue and to help her children stay in touch with their language:

One of the challenges that I face as a mother is feeling guilty because my children have started to forget Arabic. I am really concerned about their education when we go back to Saudi Arabia, so to reduce this feeling, every year when I return to the United States from Saudi Arabia after break, I bring the entire Saudi curriculum with me. I bring Arabic and math activity books so that my husband and I can teach them in our free time.

In conclusion, eight mothers reported feeling guilt toward their families because they spent long hours studying or working on their research and assignments, which made their children miss them. This caused those mothers to feel guilty because they could not give their children enough care and attention or because they felt that, their children were missing them while they were in school or studying at the library. In some cases, mothers feel guilty because they have prevented their children from having the opportunity to learn their mother language by taking them to live in the United States for years to finish their doctoral studies.

### **Perceived Discrimination**

Ten of the 14 mothers reported that they or their children had faced at least one form of discrimination that bothered them, such as being stereotyped, rejected, subjected to unwelcoming looks, ignored, or forced to explain themselves and their beliefs to others. According to the stories that the participants (Aseel, Danah, and Rawan) reported that Americans were stereotyping Muslims; for instance, Danah reported that people tended to be friendlier and more open when she wore the cap and that, when she wore the hijab, she felt communication barriers between her and other people.

Danah explained the differences in people's reactions:

When I am wearing a cap and that without the hijab, they talk to me more openly and for longer. . . . I guess the hijab represents something in people's minds—something that separates you from them. They are still nice and still talk to me when I am wearing my hijab, but they are not that warm.

According to the stories that the participants (Maryam, and Sarah) reported that Americans asked them about hijab and about other female friends who wore different kinds of Islamic coverings, such as veils, in public places and they forced to explain themselves and their beliefs to others; for instance, Sarah explained that:

When I went in stores or in the streets, people asked me, "Why do you wear this hijab?" They know I am Muslim, but they want to understand when we wear the hijab, where we get it, and who can see our hair and who cannot. They are curious.

Azizah and Rawan reported that most of the bothersome reactions from Americans occurred outside the campus. Rawan described how, when she is in the street, she notices people giving her unwelcoming looks and ignoring her:

They treat me differently. I will tell you this as an example. I notice when I buy coffee that the cashier welcomes the person who is before me in line by saying "Hi, how are you?" or "How's your day?" but when my turn comes, they say nothing to me . . . and do not welcome me by saying, "Hi, how is your day?" like they did for the person before me . . . When I have paid and am waiting for my order, I hear the cashier welcoming the person who came after me. I am wondering why they do that.

Similarly, Azizah reported that she discriminated against when not on campus; while she was driving in town, a man attacked her verbally. She also noticed that people in the town looked at her negatively. Azizah expressed her feeling this way:

I feel that, with my veil, I am weird and that I have something strange on me I feel this especially while I am driving my car, as I feel that people are not used to seeing veiled women drive cars. . . . I remember that a man attacked me verbally and screamed in my face, “Go back to your home.” . . . I did ignore him—I did not even look at him—but, as I said, it was just one time and not on campus”.

Some participants such as, Aseel, Zahra, and Sharifah reported discrimination from a number of classmates and professors. Sharifah and Aseel also reported that the minority students accepted them but that their other American classmates did not. However, two participants (Sarah and Sharifah) reported a different type of discrimination that came from the other Saudi students who lived in the same city. For example Sarah, described this insider Saudi discrimination:

There are many Saudi groups at the university who communicate, and each group has its own rules. For example, there is a group that does not like to communicate with females who are not veiled and another group that does not like to communicate with women who are not in an abaya. Other groups are open-minded, and they do not like to be with women with veils . . . I do not see females without hijab communicating with anyone; they are not seen. They may be scared to be criticized by other Saudi students.

Sharifah testified that she faced discrimination from Saudis, who avoided communicating with her while she was trying very hard to build friendships with them. They were not accepting of her because she was open and was not wearing a hijab, Sharifah related the negative emotional effects that Saudi society had on her and on her daughters. She was trying to communicate with other Saudi mothers to offer friendships with her children, but she could not succeed in becoming friends with Saudi mothers:

I remember that I was trying to make friends with Saudi mothers in the city and also that I was trying to find Saudi children to play with my young daughter, who kept telling me, “Mom, I want Saudi friends.” I was trying to make friends with Saudi mothers; I felt that they were avoiding me. They were thinking maybe that I would steal their husbands especially because I did not wear a hijab. Thus, my Saudi female friends were few, and they were all single students.

Two participants (Wedad and Maryam) stated that their children also faced discrimination from their classmates, for instance, Wedad reported that her 14-year-old son faced discrimination at school from the other boys and that this affected him emotionally. She told a story about an event that occurred at her sons’ schools:

This breaks my heart every time I remember it because it was caused by me. It was my idea to send the children to school with two cakes shaped as lamps along with cards that explained why Muslims celebrated Eid Adha, as it was Eid time and I was thinking it was a good idea to teach the Americans something about us. With my little son, it was OK. The children in his class ate the cake. However, with my older son, the other children made fun of him and laughed. One of them told him, “You are a terrorist.” He returned to me that day crying. That story affected both of us badly.

Similarly, Maryam stated that her daughter also faced discrimination from her classmates because of her hijab:

When we arrived in Indiana, my daughter was the only one in the high school wearing a hijab, and children in the school did not accept her. Sometimes, she found her lunch on the ground. My poor daughter—she suffered a lot, and as I told you, in Indiana, they also made fun of her and spread jokes about her. She could not understand what they were saying because we had just arrived in the United States. We complained to the principal, and they worked in the school to help her. Then, we moved to

Michigan, and here, there are many Arabic speakers, as you know. Having many Muslims here is really better for us.

In conclusion, perceptions of discrimination came from two sources. The first is inside discrimination from the Saudi students, which caused exclusion of the members of Saudi society who did not belong to the same religious category. The other is outside discrimination by Americans against Saudi students, which caused stereotyping, unwelcoming looks, and verbal attacks. The discrimination occurred both on campus and off campus. Some forms of discrimination touched the mothers themselves, and some mothers stated that their children were discriminated against by the other children at school. The degree of discrimination was not harmful and did not develop into physical attacks. In one case, a student who was veiled suffered a verbal attack from an American man while she was driving. The veiled women may suffer rejection, and the mothers in hijabs may just experience stereotyping.

### **Family Adjustment Problems**

Only two of the participants reported having culture shock: Azizah and Wedad. In addition, eight participants mentioned that one or more family members (children, husbands or both) had experienced cultural or religious adjustment problems related to the linguistic, cultural, or religious differences. The mothers noted that their children experienced cultural differences such as feeling they have lost their identities between cultures, not knowing where they belong, forgetting how to write and read in Arabic, being raised in a non-Islamic environment, and asking questions about other people's behaviors or appearances.

### **Children's Adjustment Problems**

Participants expressed that their children experienced cultural differences such as feeling they have lost their identities between cultures; for instance, Emman saw that her children adopted U.S. lifestyles and cultural values with time. Sometimes, though, they felt

shocked due to some issues in the United States, such as having girlfriends. However, she had open conversations with them about how to accept and respect the differences between cultures.

Amina also, said that her son always noticed the differences and asked about them. She told a story about her son's culture shock and how she dealt with it:

One day, he asked me about an American gay man; he was wearing an earring and putting on nail polish. . . . I think he saw the man at the day care. He was asking if it was okay to put on nail polish. . . . I was confused about what to tell him; before, I had been telling him that it was wrong and that men were not supposed to wear earrings or nail polish, but recently, I just stopped that and used a sense of humor to try to make him see that nail polish is a kind of makeup and that makeup is for girls.

Participants (Danah, Azizah, Togah, Aseel, Maryam, and Wedad) expressed their fear that their children will forget their Islamic identities; for instance, Azizah recounted that she is worried about her children's identities as Muslims:

As a Muslim mother who lives in an open country, I have difficulties protecting my identity and my children's identities. It is much harder than living in an Islamic country . . . . My husband is teaching the children Arabic so that at least they will know how to read.

Participants also expressed their fear that their children will forget their mother tongue; for instance, Danah reported:

My son is in fifth grade. His English is better than his Arabic. When we came to the United States, he had finished second grade in Saudi Arabia; he was perfect in reading and writing in Arabic. . . . His Arabic language skills became weaker and weaker with time. He can talk in Arabic, but his writing is very bad, and I feel guilty for this in my mind. To keep him on track, next year, I will teach him by myself.

Maryam also reported that she is scared that her children will not be able to read and write Arabic perfectly. She tries to fix this by hiring Arabic teachers to strengthen their Arabic:

My children's writing and reading in Arabic is fine but not perfect . . . Now, I am hiring an Arabic teacher to come to the house. She is teaching at the Islamic center in town; I saw her and asked her to come and teach my children two times per week, and she accepted.

In conclusion, six of the 14 mothers reported that their children experienced cultural differences. These mothers reported that the children eventually adapted to the new culture and stopped wondering or asking about cultural and religious differences. The mothers in this study worked hard to keep their children in touch with their own language and culture by teaching them Arabic at home or by hiring private Arabic tutors for them. The mothers who complain the most about their children's issues with linguistic, cultural, and religious differences are the ones with teenagers; those children are at the age when they grow into their identities.

### **Husband's Adjustment Problems**

According to the participants children were not the only family members who were affected by the American culture. Eight mothers reported that at least one member of their family had experienced linguistic, cultural, or religious differences; that family member could be a child or a husband. Mothers also reported that their husbands' attitudes changed, becoming more jealous and less accepting of being in an open culture where men such as male professors and classmates communicated with their wives directly, especially at school. They also criticized their wives for wearing clothing that did not match the Islamic religious limits; for instance, Zahra stated that her husband went through culture shock, which affected his behavior. He told her not to talk to any Saudi male in her department and asked her to

change her clothes if they were not acceptable to him or if they went beyond the Islamic religious limits:

During the first semester, too many Saudi male students were my classmates in my English program. My husband was in a different program, but every time, before we left for school, he checked what I was wearing. He did not like me to wear anything that was tight or short [laughing]. He was also telling me to not talk with Saudi men in class and to not sit in the classroom with legs crossed.

Her husband's reaction was acceptable to her, so she changed her clothes to satisfy him, but she did not obey his orders in class; she was sitting with legs crossed and talking with other Saudi males if it was required during the class activities.

Rawan stated that her husband allowed her to communicate with Saudi students, but he criticized what she wore. Sometimes, if she wore tight clothes, he told her nicely that she should change her blouse. Rawan explained that her husband does not mean to control her; he just does not want her to be excluded from Saudi society.

Sharifah also recounted how her husband's attitude changed in the United States, which made her very nervous all the time. He sometimes did not like what she was wearing when they left home. Sharifah reported that her marriage was not stable and that there was no understanding between them, as there was before, when they were in Saudi Arabia.

It is clear from this study that the majority of Saudi mothers do not complain about culture shock or cultural differences related to religious limitations; however, their husbands suffer from the cultural and religious differences, which affect their moods and increase their jealousy. The mothers in this study reported that they were not concerned about their husbands' adjustments; as wives, they obey their husbands and try to satisfy them, but they do not violate the Arabic cultural limitations. When it comes to their children's identities,

problems with adjustments, language, and being raised in a new environment concerned these mothers more, and they made efforts to help their children protect their identities as Muslims.

In conclusion, participants in this study reported a number of barriers that they and their families faced while living in the United States. According to the mothers' responses in this study, the most common challenges are lack of the institutional support, lack of the Saudi Cultural Mission support, academic difficulties, feelings of guilt, discrimination, and family adjustment problems. The next section discuss the mothers' strategies for balancing their mother/student roles.

In the next section of analysis, major themes that emerged as the participants were telling their stories would be highlighted. I discuss the roles of the Saudi mother's academic advisors, faculty members, classmates, husbands in the students' motherhood and doctoral experiences while they study in U.S. universities. In their own words, the participants describe their experiences of managing motherhood and academic roles while studying in the United States. Their stories reveal the type(s) of support Saudi females receive in managing their multiple roles and explore the coping strategies that Saudi female doctoral students develop to manage motherhood and academic roles while studying in the United States.

### **Saudi Mothers' Support System.**

The purpose of this study was to better understand the lived experiences of 14 Saudi mothers who are doctoral students in education at U.S. institutions, such as what kinds of support they have. The first theme is *Saudi student mothers' support systems*. This theme includes aspects of support that the Saudi mothers receive from their academic advisors, faculty members, classmates, and husbands.

**Perceived Academic Advisor Support.** Of the 14 Saudi mothers in this study, 13 reported that their academic advisors supported them in their lives as both mothers and doctoral students. These 13 participants all used the word *supportive* to describe their

advisors. As Table 3 shows, eight of the nine female advisors and all five of the male advisors were supportive. According to the data collected from the Saudi mothers, the advisors' support came in two types: emotional and logistical.

**Emotional Support by Advisor.** Of the 14 Saudi mothers in this study, nine perceived that their advisors offered emotional support by being available to give them solutions and advice to strengthen their trust and reduce their stress when they had crises, problems, or a desire to give up. The advisors also offered them encouragement when they had medical problems, when they experienced tragedies, or when they progressed in their studies. The participants perceived that their advisors listened to their problems and showed empathy and understanding their needs as mothers.

For example, Hend reported the following sad story as one example of how her advisor showed strong empathy toward her, especially when she had long classes all day, which made her child cry:

My husband told me that my daughter, the little one, was not asleep and was crying, so I told my husband to give her my pajamas or my blouse so that she could smell me, and that's what's happened: She smiled and went to sleep immediately. I cried that day at the university. Doing this was too hard for me. I felt very guilty and evil, too, because I was not supposed to be doing this so far from my daughters. They were supposed to be my priority, not my PhD. Then I remembered the day that I saw my advisor, she is not mother, as I complained to her, I was crying. She listened to me, and she was crying, too. I felt sorry for making her cry, but I felt like there was someone in this world who supported me.

Similarly, Aseel explained that her advisor supported her by listening to her talking about her challenge and by showing empathy, especially when she was beginning her studies

in the department and facing many cultural challenges. Aseel explained that her advisor's encouragement was crucial for her to survive:

The only person who supported me in the department was my advisor. The department assigned him to be my academic advisor because he has international research experience, as most of the other faculty members' academic experience is Western. . . . He is very motivated and is encouraging to me. His role was important to me, especially during my first year. Everything was new. I was afraid, and I was by myself, as my husband wasn't there. I complained to my advisor. I was thinking about going back home. I wasn't sure I could be a good mother and a good student. He was very supportive during that time in my life, and he is still supportive.

Amina also noted that she considers her advisor to be a strong source of emotional support in her life. She has built a strong friendship with him:

My advisor is a father with three kids. His kids are my son's age, so he asks me all the time about my son. This means that we have something in common, so he asks me all the time about my son's school and his day care. If I ask him a question, he will always answer it. He is very friendly—to the point that I do not have to call him "Doctor." I just say his first name.

Dana reported that her advisor supported her by being available to provide solutions that helped her solve the problems that challenged her. Dana said, "My advisor supported me. She gave me advice from time to time, especially when I faced something that bothered me or when I did not know what to do." Dana's responses are the typical responses that the majority of participants gave about their academic advisors' excellent and crucial support.

In conclusion, as Table 3 about the advisors' characteristics shows, emotional support was the most frequently mentioned type of support. Male and female advisors provided this emotional support equally, with five male advisors cited as providing it and five female

advisors providing it. Additionally, regardless of whether the advisor was a parent or not did not make difference according to the collected data, as 10 of 11 advisors who were parents and all three advisors who did not have kids offered emotional support.

Table 3

*Academic Advisors' Characteristics*

Student Name	Advisor Characteristics		
	Gender	Parent	Type(s) of Support Offered
Rawan	Female	No	Emotional, logistical
Aminah	Male	Yes	Emotional
Aseel	Male	Yes	Emotional
Wedad	Male	Yes	Emotional, logistical
Danah	Female	Yes	Emotional
Sarah	Female	Yes	Emotional
Maryam	Male	Yes	Emotional, logistical
Sharifah	Female	Yes	Emotional, logistical
Hend	Female	Yes	Emotional
Basmah	Male	Yes	Emotional
Togah	Female	Yes	Logistical
Azizah	Female	No	Logistical
Zahrah	Female	No	Logistical
Emman	Female	Yes	None

**Logistical Support by Advisor.** The second most commonly mentioned form of advisor support was logistical support. Of the 14 Saudi mothers in this study, seven perceived that their advisors offered logistical support. Logistical support in this study means the advice that the advisor offered to save the student mothers' energy and time in order to spend that time or energy with families. The forms of logistical support offered by advisors included making exceptions to be absent or allowing the women to do things by emails instead of in

person. These saved the mother's time, which they explained helped them to find more time to spend with their families, and allow them more time to be students

For example, Togah indicated that her advisor supported her as a mother by making exceptions for her during the enrolment process, such as allowing her to add or drop courses by email. She explained that this afforded her more time to stay with her kids:

My academic advisor was very supportive, and he made life easier for me. For example, a student who goes to enroll in courses has to fill out a form—you know that form—with the name and course number and take it to the advisor for a signature. Though, if I wanted to enroll in any course, she told me to just fill in the form, scan it, and email it to her. She even emailed me the form ... All these are exceptions she allowed for me but not for the other students. They had to make appointments with her and discuss their plans, but for me, she just told me not to come in and said that we could do it by phone. She also emailed my transcript to me.

Similarly, Rawan said that her advisor offered support by being flexible with the program plan. As Rawan explained that during some semesters, she did not have the ability to take classes at a particular time because the schedule of her husband, who is a student too, could not be as they planned. Her husband had to take evening classes, and she had to stay with the kids. Rawan said:

My advisor is a not a mother, but she supports me, especially emotionally. ... She has offered me advice many times and has offered me the option of not taking on a heavy class load due to my family responsibilities. She has also recommended classes to me and has given me the option of not taking a class in a particular semester if taking the class on the schedule the department had set was too hard for me. In some semesters, I could not do it with my husband—one of us must stay home in the evening with the kids.

In conclusion, the logistical support was the second most-mentioned form of support. As the table of advisor characteristics shows, a total of seven of the mothers suggested that their advisors offered logistical support.

### **Faculty Member Support**

Doctoral students not only work with their assigned advisors, but they also take coursework from other faculty members in their programs. According to the interviews, advisors as a particular group offered some kinds of support that was different from faculty member's just teaching coursework. The women interviewed in this study specifically talked about the faculty members who they took courses with and their forms of support.

The collected data show that 12 participants reported being supported by their faculty members; however, those 12 mothers received different forms of support. Nine of the 12 reported that they were supported by a faculty member's understanding of their motherhood obligations. Six of 12 mothers reported that they were supported by a faculty member who encouraged them by giving advice, appreciating their roles, and making comments to motivate them. There were also three mothers who reported that they received both forms of support. According to this data, which are represented in Table 1, I have divided the most common forms of faculty member support into two subthemes: understanding of motherhood obligations, and encouraging and giving advice.

**Faculty Understanding Motherhood Obligations.** Of 14 participants, nine reported that they were supported by a faculty member's understanding of their motherhood obligations. To these nine women, faculty understanding of motherhood obligations meant being flexible with students who are mothers when their family members needed them critically, such as when a child is sick, or when they had pregnancy fatigue, or when they gave birth without applying for any kind of leave of absence.

The nine participants related many stories indicating that their faculty members in the department were flexible with them while they were pregnant. For example, Amina reported that her professors in the department adjusted her comp exam date due to her pregnancy.

“The professors are friendly and they respect my role as a mother. For example, I am supposed to do my comps this summer, then when I discovered that I am pregnant, suddenly, all my plans changed and they accept that I will do the comps before finishing my coursework, while before my pregnancy they reject it.”

Additionally, Basemah explained that her faculty member understood that she has family and kids’ needs to take care of, so when one of them is sick they allow her to be absent. In addition, one of the faculty members allowed her to submit her assignments online and not attend the class if she felt tired from the pregnancy. She noted the following:

Professors in our department are very flexible and they gave the students the choice to correct the paper before submitting the final degree. My professor understands what being a mother is. One day while I was in the class and I was pregnant and I did not feel comfortable, he told me that I can leave the class any time if I feel very tired.

Rawan, Zahra, Togah, and Basemah reported that their faculty members considered their kids’ health conditions and were flexible with them. For example, faculty gave them more time to do papers or accepted their absences. Rawan reported, “my professors are cooperative with me as a mother. For example, when my kids get sick some professors offer delaying the assignments. When I explained to them they considered it and also other professors agree to my submitting everything online and accept my being absent when my family responsibility requires me to be home.”

Participants in this study reported, faculty understanding of motherhood obligations by being flexible with them when their family needed them critically, or when a child is sick, or when they had pregnancy fatigue, or when they gave birth.

**Faculty Encouraging.** The second most common form of faculty member support was offering advice and encouragement. Of the 14 participants, six participants reported that they were supported by a faculty member encouraging them by giving advice, appreciating their roles, and making comments to motivate them. For example, Sarah explained how the faculty members in her department motivated her and encouraged her to achieve by appreciating her work. She said, “The professors in the department accept and understand my role as a mother. The professors are supportive and when I make any achievement, they appreciate it. Currently, I run a Saudi American research association. They welcome the idea and they make me feel that I did something extremely good while it is simple.”

Additionally, Emman reported a faculty member encouraging her by admiring her ability to combine roles and by giving her advice. She said, “I took much advice from them about how to deal with kids’ matters in the US. They say to me positive comments that express their admiration of my ability to study in a foreign language and being a mother at the same time.”

Emman’s responses are typical of those offered by the majority of participants in terms of the support provided by faculty members in understanding the participants’ motherhood obligations toward their families. Six participants indicated that the faculty member support varies. Dana explained that faculty in the department knew that she is a mother and they supported her; however, she explained that the faculty member support depended on the professors’ personalities.

Similarly, Zahra reported that not all the professors are supportive of her. She said, “Also I had problems with one of the professors who criticized my language in my e-mails to her and she was all the time warning me about my English.” According to HEND, professors generally cooperated with her but it varied from one to another. She said that one of her professors was very strict while others were more flexible, but generally, they considered that

she is a mother when she had issues related to her children. However, they gave her the feeling she should not use her motherhood as an excuse. HEND told this story to express her meaning:

For example, my program is killer. Five courses and research and training... I remember when I was pregnant I was discussing with my professor the possibility to take just courses and postpone the training in summer. And she said, "No, you have to take both the training and courses." I told her, "I know, but *it would be nice* if I postpone the training to the summer semester and then do the training hours." She replied to me, "Okay, do what you want to do. But studying in this program one is supposed to take training with courses." So, the professor didn't say no to me and at the same time she does not support me one-hundred percent.

In conclusion, the data indicate that the majority of the participants reported being supported by their faculty members with at least one form of support. According to the participants, the most common form of faculty support was a faculty member's understanding of the participants' motherhood obligations; the second most common form of faculty member support was offering advice and encouragement. However, as six participants explained that the amount of faculty understanding and flexibility was not guaranteed in all cases but instead depended on the faculty member's personality and kindness.

### **Perceived Support by Classmates**

In this study, three of the 14 participants (Sharifah, Sarah, and Aseel) reported not receiving any classmate support, and two participants did not mention whether they received classmate support. However, nine participants reported that their classmates supported them. As the nine participants explained this support involved the classmates' roles of answering questions and helping in preparation for classes, exams, and presentations. For example,

Maryam reported examples of academic support from her classmates; for instance, they helped her prepare for her comprehensive exams:

My classmates consider my situation as a busy mom; they consider it. While we prepared for the qualifying exam by group studying, those American classmates came to the library to conduct our meetings, and they always chose the one in my area to conduct our meetings; they came to my area just to make it easier for me. They would not like me driving that long to school. They knew that I was a mother, so they told me, “It is okay; this time, we will come to you.”

Three of the seven participants who stated that their classmates supported them academically explained that they preferred to seek help and support from their Saudi classmates rather than from Americans. According to Rawan, her Saudi classmates in the department supported her; she provided an example:

My Saudi classmates like to organize group study, especially in statistical classes. In that group, we reviewed our homework with each other. Also, the Saudi classmates were very useful in the department; they usually offered information about the professors’ history with students—the good ones, the bad ones—especially the classmates who entered the program before me. They already knew the professors and how to deal with them, and they had already taken the classes, so they had answers to most of my questions about their experiences in the department.

Similarly, also, Maryam and Amina disclosed that they often received support from their Saudi classmates. They found that dealing with Saudi classmates is more comfortable.

At the same time, Danah and Togah revealed that they got more support from their American classmates than from Saudi classmates. Togah related this story:

As mothers in the department, we help each other, but my relationship with Saudi mothers in the department is superficial, and to tell you the truth, the American

female classmates are more generous in helping than the Saudis are. Some Saudi female students here do not like to offer help; they depend on you in everything. If we work in groups, they reject, for example, giving samples of assignments or textbooks. I remember one of them told me to buy the textbook from Amazon when I asked her about her books. I guess they do not like me to be better than them, but I do not treat the other students like that. I offer my help to other mothers, and sometimes, I give them my textbooks.

Zahra, Aseel, Sharifah reported that they did not find support from their American classmates. For example, Zahra reported, "I did face unwelcoming looks from female classmates who did not like me to talk or ask them questions about the class assignments." Aseel and Sharifah reported that their American classmates were not supportive and said they were supported by minorities such as international students from Latin America and other international students who interacted with them and offered help.

Classmates' social support for Saudi mothers consisted of being their friends, giving advice and answers regarding children's issues, and admiring their ability to combine roles. Emman divulged the following:

They were very useful and willing to help; sometimes, they encouraged me by saying positive comments that show they admire my ability to study in a foreign language and be a mother, too. . . . I also asked them advice about how to deal with kids' matters in the United States, and they most of the time gave me helpful answers.

Zahra and Togah also reported being supported more by their fellow classmates who were also mothers. Togah stated, "My American friends are my classmates in school; their ages are around mine, and they are mothers. They support me."

In conclusion, it is clear that classmates' support is important for Saudi mothers in doctoral programs. However, three participants (Sharifah, Sarah, and Aseel) reported not

receiving any form of classmate support. Sharifah, for example, disclosed that she feels disconnected from and rejected by her classmates, she documented negative experiences with her classmates, who did not feel comfortable working with her on class projects because she was pregnant. Sharifah told this story:

I took another class that semester, and the professor, from the beginning, put us in groups. When I gave birth, I was absent for two classes. The classmates that I worked with in my group were mean; they complained to my professor that I did not work with them and that I was pregnant and not serious with work.”

The data show that nine of the participants were supported by their classmates. It seems that who the classmates are matters a lot; classmates who are mothers offer help and support for Saudi mothers. In addition, diversity plays a role in whether classmates offer support; programs with many minorities and international students from Saudi Arabia or other countries were more supportive than classmates in programs with a majority of younger white American students. Most of the Saudi mothers got more support from other Saudi students than from their American classmates.

### **Perceived Support of Husband**

Husbands' support in this study encompasses two different common types: emotional support, which came in the form of encouraging and sharing feelings and plans, and physical support, which was conveyed by offering physical help, such as cleaning, cooking, being with the kids etc. The collected data shows that eight of 14 participants reported being supported emotionally and physically by their husbands, while five of the 14 reported being supported only emotionally by their husbands. Sadly, the only female in this study who is widow is Danah; she reported with a broken heart how she misses her husband in this period of her life. She noted that

The most significant thing that I am suffering from is that I am by myself here, my family is not with me to support me, I do not even have a husband. Some people, when they talk about me, they do not mention my name but say the ‘widow;’ I do not blame them [but] it sounds as though I am the only Saudi widow in town (about to cry).

**Husband’s Physical and Emotional Support.** Eight of 14 participants reported that they received both emotional and physical support from their husband. For example, Sharifah reported that her husband, a master’s degree student, also supported her emotionally and physically; for example, he helped her with cleaning, cooking, and caring for their two daughters (i.e., nine and two years old). She noted:

He cleaned the house and, to tell you the truth, he is more organized at home than me. My mind is like a macaroni; when I went to start cleaning, I did not know where to start, but he knew exactly how to organize everything... sometimes he cooks while I am studying out [of the home] or sometimes I buy food for outside.

Sharifah explained how her husband supported her emotionally when she became depressed: “After I gave birth to my daughter Leen last fall I [experienced] postpartum depression. I talked with my husband and he was the only [one to] listen to my suffering”

Similarly, Togah reported how her husband not only supported her, but also sacrificed his opportunity to receive an education in order to help with their three children. Togah noted, “After I gave birth, my husband stopped going to his ESL classes for one year to stay with our newborn son while I went to school. He sacrificed, God bless him.” She added:

He stayed with the kids while I went to school, he cleaned with me, God bless him; when I am tired, he washes dishes, he prepares the food for the girls, he cooks while I am in school...he tries his best to cook simple things, such as macaroni, eggs, and soups.

Togah also explained how her husband supported her emotionally when she became depressed:

I felt it was too much and I could not manage my life; it was out of control. I felt that everything was against me. I talked to my husband; I told him that I could not continue this, we have to [go] back and his answer was ‘think about it and go pray.’ I listened to his advice. I read the holy Quran and I prayed to God, then he took me to the cinema. I did not want to go, but he begged me to go out to help me to feel less sad.

Togah’s and Sharifah’s responses are the typical responses that the participants (Basemah, Aseel, Rawan, Azizah, Zahra, and Hend) gave about husband’s physical and emotional support that came in the form of encouraging and sharing feelings and plans, and physical support, which was conveyed by offering physical help, such as cleaning, cooking, being with the kids etc.

**Husband’s Emotional Support Only.** Husband’s emotional support, which came in the form of encouraging and sharing feelings and plans. The collected data shows that five of the 14 reported being supported only emotionally by their husbands.

Amina was one of the participants who reported perceiving her husband as emotionally supportive. She noted:

When I have to present I get panicked, but my husband tries to make me feel confident... he does not have any problem if I communicate with the male Saudi classmates in the department. On the contrary, he tries to motivate me to be active and interact in school...he has two classes weekly. While I was in the classes, my husband watched my 8-month-old son, but he is still a typical Middle Eastern man, he does not clean or cook, but when I asked him to do it, he does it to avoid disappointing me, but he never did it without me telling him.

Similarly, Maryam reported that her husband offered great emotional support to her.

She stated,

I am very close to him and we know each other really well. I cannot live without other people's support. He supports me and is with me all the time; in fact, I could not have gotten to this point without his support, honestly, and he is good listener to all my problems. I have even explained my research difficulties to him. While it is not his major, he tried to be with me in everything that I faced and he told me all the time not to give up when he saw me work hard; he showed his sympathy to me all the time.

However, Maryam reported that her husband does not offer any physical help to share the responsibility of taking care of their five children. Maryam noted

The Arabic man stays an Arabic man wherever he goes (laughing). He does not clean with me and I do not ask him to clean or to do anything; he is an old man—not that young, he is above 50, but he sometimes he cooks Kasbah.

Amina's and Maryam's responses are the typical responses that the participants (Wedad, Aseel) gave about husband's emotional support that came in the form of encouraging and sharing feelings and plans etc.

In conclusion, the collected data indicated that the majority of participants perceived at least some form of support from their husbands. Even the participants who disclosed that their husbands are not with them in the United States and remain in Saudi Arabia for work, such as Emman and Sarah, reported that they received emotional support from their husbands. For example, Emman said, "My husband keeps in touch with us all the time, he calls me and offers advice about everything, especially around the kids' problems, and he helps me to control them at these critical ages."

Sarah reported that her husband emotionally supports her indirectly by checking to make sure that she is fine and if she needs help or advice. She noted that

he calls us two to three times daily by FaceTime and I complain to him about what I faced...while my husband was here with me in the U.S., I never used the babysitter, but when my husband went back to KSA, I have to.

As the data shows, the 13 participants indicated that their husbands offered basic sources of support to them. Even husbands who are not in the United States remain in touch with their wives who study overseas and support them emotionally.

In conclusion, the collected data indicated that the majority of participants perceived at least some form of support from their academic advisors, faculty members, classmates, and husbands. In the next section. In their own words, the participants reveal the type(s) of coping strategies that Saudi female doctoral students develop to manage motherhood and academic roles while studying in the United States.

### **Mothers' Strategies for Balancing Their Mother/Student Roles**

The 14 mothers in this study reported developing many strategies to manage their roles as mothers and as PhD students. The most popular techniques that those mothers used were limiting social activities to online and weekends, setting priorities and doing urgent tasks, planning ahead of time, using reminders, using daycare and housekeepers, seeking help from their parents and their older kids, seeking help from friends, and neighbors, keeping their kids busy, delaying having babies, and rejecting help from others.

#### **Limiting social activities to online and weekends**

Eleven of the 14 mothers choose to reduce the time that they spent on non-priorities such as social interacting with friends and delaying interactions or meetings with people to weekends. Another strategy is to replace personal interactions with phone apps to save time.

Azizah chooses to be isolated from the other people in her city because she does not have much time to spare. She stated:

You can describe me as isolated socially from people, I do not go out of my home, and I rarely go out. I just go from home to school and from school to home. Honestly, I do not have time to socialize. I do not even make time to go shopping. I just go to buy basic stuff that my family needs. I do not have time to go to malls and browse the things.

Basemah said she limits social activities with her friends and neighbors during the weekdays. She keeps in touch with her friends over Whatsup and meets with them only on Saturdays. She reported:

[I] spend the weekdays attending classes and labs and socializing with other female Saudi students on Sunday. Also, we have a Whatsup group to communicate daily. So I just keep my social interactions more with my friends with their kids each Saturday and with my classmates in labs.

Basemah's and Azizah's responses are the typical responses that the majority of participants gave about their strategy of limiting social activities to online and weekends.

The participants in this study choose to sacrifice socially for the sake of their families and studies by limiting their relationships with others to save time for satisfying the demands of their multiple roles. Additionally, the mothers choose to switch their personal interactions with others to phone applications, which frees them from any social obligations that require energy and time. This saves their time and energy for their motherhood and academic responsibilities.

### **Setting priorities and doing urgent tasks**

Nine mothers manage their mother student role responsibilities by setting priorities and doing urgent tasks that cannot wait. For instance, Emman explained that she gives her family priority during the daytime and then studies at night while they are sleeping:

I divide my 24 hours. The daytime is for taking care of the kids, cooking, cleaning, and helping them with homework, and the nighttime is for studying. I just study at night. . . . When I have to choose to do something I choose to do the critical demands.

Sharifah was the only participant who gives her academic role priority above her mother role to survive academically and be able to complete her PhD study in the United States. Sharifah explained that:

I teach myself how to be on time and respect my appointments. I was trying to adopt the American culture. My attitude changed, I started to give my study the priority. . . . I have to get the work done and stop complaining and keep up, so in the second year I changed completely and I was not aware of that. I gave the study obligations priority over my family needs. This program is really tough and intense, the students in this program work like slaves, so it is designed to be the only thing in your life otherwise you will fail in it.

Aseel explained that when she has role conflicts, she tries to do the critical tasks that cannot be delayed. She stated, “My kids have the priority in my life. When the kids go to school I study. . . . Things can wait such as cooking and vacuuming. My house is not that perfectly clean. I clean the house while the kids are at school.”

Assel’s responses typical responses that nine mothers gave about their strategy of managing their mother student role responsibilities by setting priorities and doing urgent tasks. It is obvious from what the major participants said that they are not seeking to be perfect, they just do the important tasks that cannot wait to be done, and when they have a choice to do one thing they choose to take care of their kids. They study while their kids are in school or at night when they sleep in their beds.

### **Planning ahead of time**

Seven participants reported that they plan to do things ahead of time. They have a plan to follow from the beginning of the semester. For instance, Rawan mentioned that she plans to do things such as cooking ahead of time. “I make dinner for days. . . . I have a daily planner, every Sunday night I plan what I want to do in the whole week.”

Similarly, Wedad said she plans to do things ahead of time such as doing assignments. “I try to finish my assignments earlier, cook a big amount of what my kids like and put it in refrigerator, which saves me time.” Hend and Sharifah mentioned that they plan with their husbands ahead of time an academic and a family plan that helps them as much as possible to not leaving the kids at home alone or with strangers.

Hend reported:

Each semester I arrange with my husband, who is a student, too, our class schedules and what we plan to be enrolled in. We try to do it in this way so when I have a lecture my husband stays with the kids while I am at the school. So when me and my husband enroll in courses we make sure that not both of us are out of the house, so if one of us has a class the other stays with the kids.

Half of the participants’ choose the technique of making early plans and planning things ahead of time to make sure they do things on time. It is clear that the participants who had their husbands who also study in the United States have an academic and a family plan to organize their time more effectively. In those families, the responsibility of managing time and taking care of kids is not just the wife’s responsibility; husbands also share in the planning and in applying the plan.

### **Using reminders**

Nine participants reported that they use notes, calendars, and applications on their phones to remind them about things to do, such as their meetings, appointments, and research

papers. Maryam, Azizah, Danah, Togah, Rawan, Basemah, and Sarah use apps such as notes and calendar in their mobile phones as organizers and reminders.

Hend, Togah, Wedad, and Emman reported using manual reminders instead of using electronic reminder, they would rather write notes by hand. For instance, Wedad reported using many types of reminders on walls and in her handbag. Wedad explained that: “I put notes on the wall with all school and hospital appointments and they are updated. I also have another personal note I wrote in it all the contact information, my kids’ doctors, teachers’ phones, which saves me times when something happens and makes me ready all the time.”

### **Keeping kids busy**

Four participants (Danah, Sarah, Hend, and Aseel) reported that they put their kids in clubs, music, or sport activities after their schools let out to find time to do their responsibilities such as cook, clean, and study during the time that the kids are busy with those activities. For instance, Aseel reported that she enrolled her kids in sport activities. She reported: “I put my kids in many activities after school such as karate, chase, art, then I go to do my research papers.” Additionally, Sarah also put her kids in swimming and activities that they like to do so she can find free time to do her responsibilities. According to Sarah:

I have a principle as a mother to make the child busy or the child will make you busy, so I make the kids busy with something beneficial to him. So I started enrolling them in karate classes. At the beginning, I wanted them to learn new skills but they did not like karate so we stopped go there. Then I enrolled them in swimming classes to learn swimming in a right way. They love it so I enrolled them in the second level. Also, my son, I enrolled him in summer camp to learn everything about computers and baseball.

Only four mothers chose to keep their kids busy by doing activities and practicing sport or music while using that time when the kids busy to perform their roles’ demands such

as cleaning, cooking, reading, or writing papers. The other mothers in this study, especially the ones with a large number of children, do not follow this policy.

### **Seeking help from parents and older children**

Eight of 14 mothers (Hend, Togah, Amina, Danah, Maryam, Azizah, Wedad, and Aseel) reported that they did seek help from their parents. For instance, Togah sought help from her parents when she felt depression and was less motivated. She talks to her father for hours, which helped her to be strong and patient. Togah reported:

I call my parents when I feel that I am depressed, my father's words encourage me. He keeps telling me that I am almost done, you have to thank your God for what you have, there are many women who want to be in the US and study. I have to appreciate what God gave me. He was also telling me everything is not important except your dreams and passions.

Similarly, Amina reported that she sought help from her mother who advises her about motherhood issues. Amina reported that: "During my pregnancy, my mother was my support source. When I talk to my mom by FaceTime, especially when I got tired, my mother supported me emotionally and motivated me each time I talked to her."

Maryam, Azizah, Wedad, and Aseel reported that they seek help from their older kids with cleaning, laundry, organizing the house, and taking care of their little babies. For instance, Maryam reported that she got help from her daughter, who takes care of her little brother. Maryam reported that:

I was doing breastfeeding and my classes were in the evening and in the evening my older daughter was at home. Her age at that time 17 years old, so she took care of her brother while I am in the classes and she gave him the milk. And when I came back home I started breastfeeding him but when I was at school my daughter feed him the manufactured milk.

Only four mothers chose the strategy of seeking help from their older sons. And those mothers have a son or daughter older than ten and who are at an age when they are able to help in things such as cleaning, washing dishes, making formula, for babies.

In conclusion, just four of 14 mothers (Hend, Togah, Amina, and Danah) reported that they seek a help from their parents. The parents' support in their cases was limited to emotional support by calling, advising, and listening to their complaints and suggesting solutions to them. In addition, some parents came to the United States to support their daughters who delivered babies during their time while studying in United States.

### **Seeking help from friends and neighbors**

Seven of 14 mothers (Danah, Wedad, Rawan, Basemah, Togah, Azizah, and Zahra) reported that they seek a help from their friends and neighbors; for instance, Rawan reported that got help from Saudi mothers. The help is giving her advice. She reported: "I meet Saudi mothers in the Sunday school in the Islamic center. I get close to those Arabic mothers and they talk about the kids' issues and their schools." Basemah also reported that she got support from her Muslim friend who she is mother, too, and helps her with classes, textbooks, and presentations. Zahra also reported that she asks the other Arabic mothers in the city how to deal with problems such as finding a babysitter. Zahra explained that she meets her friends who are also Saudi mothers during weekends to talk to them about her problems and how to deal with them. In addition, it is a chance for their kids to meet each other and play. Danah also reported got help and support from Saudi female students in the university. For example, during the finals they communicate through the Whatsup phone application and ask questions about courses and books. In addition, they conduct females meetings in Eid and celebrate. Wedad also reported that Saudi female students support her emotionally on the Whatsup app. She takes the advice and answers from them.

Seven mothers sought help from friends who are female mothers. That help was in the form of advice or answers to their questions about kids' needs, finding babysitters, and so on.

### **Daycare and housekeeping**

Eight mothers reported that they use daycare or babysitters to help them with taking care of their kids while they were at school or studying. For instance, Maryam reported how using daycare supports her while she was preparing her for the comprehensive exams. "I depended heavily on daycare while I was going to campus. As you know, the study hours were long and intense, my son was age two at that time."

Amina explained that taking her son to daycare helped her to focus on her study without any disruptions. She explained that: "I take my child every day from 7 to 4 to daycare, and I use this time to study because I cannot study while he is at home, he gets mad when I open my laptop to work on my research. He said to me, 'mom it is not working time' and he shut my laptop by his hand" Recalling this event made her laugh. Amina added that her life as a student mother depends on daycare and she is satisfied with her son's daycare.

Similarly, Danah reported using daycare at the beginning of her study to find time for her to study, then later she changed to using a babysitter and she explained why. "The reason for choosing a babysitter is that a majority of city daycare close at 6 p.m. and I finish my class at 7 p.m. Also, I have one class that ended at 10:30 p.m." Her tool: study while her child is in school. In addition, she hires a babysitter to take care of her child, then she goes to her classes at 4 p.m. and comes back home at 8 p.m.

In conclusion, it is clear that eight mothers reported that they use daycare or babysitters to help them with taking care of their kids while they were at school or studying; however, the rest of the mothers reported not using daycare or a babysitter for a number of reasons, such as they arrange with their husbands their time and schedules. For instance, Togah did not use daycare but organized everything with her husband.

### **Delaying having babies**

Eight mothers (Rawan, Togah, Sarah, Sharifah, Azizah, Aseel, and Amina) reported delaying having additional babies during their study in United States to focus on their studies and their families. A number of participants wish to have more babies, but they keep this wish a secret to avoid extra work. For instance, Azizah reported that she uses birth control during her study but she wished to have more kids. She could not because she must focus on her current goal, which is her PhD. She reported: “If I were not studying for a PhD now, I will maybe have four or five kids so far”.

Similarly, Sharifah mention that she wished to have a baby but she could not. She wants to focus on her study and to take care her little daughter. Her husband did not encourage her to have more babies. Sharifah reported:

I am now using birth control to put all my energy into taking care of my little daughter. She has a critical need for my time and my physical and emotional efforts. Add to this my study obligations. Also, my husband is not interested like the other men to have many kids while I have a desire for a third baby, but I am hesitate. I am afraid to do it during all those circumstances around me, I am afraid not to balance between my daughters and my study and the new baby and my little daughter is still not independent enough.

It is clear from the eight mothers' perspectives that these mothers are trying to avoid becoming pregnant and they use birth control while they wish to have more babies, especially the older participants who are afraid that pregnancy at their age is considered as medical risk. In addition, for those mothers having new babies in this time of their life while they studying for a PhD in a foreign country may make their lives more stressful because they already have many responsibilities required of them as a mothers and as PhD students. There is no more energy remaining in them to have new child responsibility.

### **Rejecting help from others**

Six mothers (Sarah, Sharifah, Hand, Togah, Basemah, and Aseel) reported that they would rather depend on themselves and not seek any help from anyone outside their family members or parents because they do not trust strangers, or they are shy to ask for help, or they like to be independent. For instance, Sarah did not get help from neighbors. Sarah said, “I have friends from different cultures, but my personality type, I do not like to ask people for help, I feel embarrassed to do that.”

Hend also rejected help from neighbors. She explained that her neighbors are nice and offer their help to her with the kids, but she chooses to depend on herself. She said, “Well my neighbors are very supportive and nice. They offer to me to take my kids from the school bus, or invite my kids to play with their kids, but I rejected it. I would not like to depend on others so I just let my kids play with their kids.”

While two participants, Sarah and Basemah, did not communicate with or ask neighbors for any help not because she were not scared or did trust them, but because for Sarah she was busy with responsibilities and Basemah knew that her neighbors, who are also international students, are busy with their own responsibilities.

Additionally, two mothers (Aseel and Sharifah) reported that they are scared to put their children somewhere with strangers. For instance, Sharifah reported: “Me and my husband arrange our schedules so he stays with the girls. I feel panic when I just think of the idea of leaving my daughters with strangers to take care of them. I do not feel they are safe. I never allow any babysitter to enter my house, maybe I am over protective of my daughters. To be honest, my panic about getting help from others such babysitters or neighbors caused many problems and stress in my marriage relationship. I hear all the times about cases of sexual harassment of kids, in social media and news, and movies; I feel they hide behind their smiles on their faces their hate.”

In conclusion, mothers in this study reported adopting many strategies to manage their roles as mothers and as PhD students in order to make their lives more balanced. The most popular techniques that the 14 mothers use are: limiting social activities to online interaction and delaying meeting friends to weekends, using technology and online socializing instead of personal interaction, using time management skills such as setting priorities and doing urgent tasks, using reminders and smartphone technology, and planning ahead of time. The mothers used daycare and housekeeping, delayed their wishes to have babies for the sake of their PhD studies, sought help from friends, sought help from older kids, kept their kids busy, and sought help from neighbors.

### **Summary of Findings**

This qualitative descriptive study investigates the experiences of 14 Saudi female doctoral students who were managing motherhood and academic roles while studying in the United States. All of the participants are Saudi mothers who are studying in doctoral programs in education at U.S. institutions. Each has at least one child under 18. The mother's study at universities in different states. These women funded from SACM. The majority of the participants ( $n = 12$ ) are studying in the United States because of their work, as they are already employed at Saudi universities, one as a senior administrator and the others as faculty members. Ten mothers have husbands living with them in the United States (five of those husbands are students, too).

Of the 14 Saudi mothers in this study, 13 reported that their academic advisors supported them in their lives as both mothers and doctoral students. Twelve participants reported being supported by their faculty members. Nine participants were supported by their classmates. The data collected from the 14 participants also indicated a shortage of institutional support to mother students. The majority of participants' responses showed that there are no services for mother students. Eight of 14 participants reported being supported

emotionally and physically by their husbands, while five of the 14 reported being supported only emotionally by their husbands. Regarding, the SACM support, eight out of 14 (Azizah, Hand, Basemah, Rawan, Maryam, Togah, Sharifah, Emman) reported that the SACM advisors' support varies according to the gender of the advisor. The eight agreed that the female advisors at SACM are very tough and detailed with applying rules while male advisors are more flexible and supportive.

The 14 mothers in this study reported developing many strategies to manage their roles as mothers and as PhD students. The most popular techniques that those mothers used were limiting social activities to online and weekends, setting priorities and doing urgent tasks, using reminders, planning ahead of time, using daycare and housekeepers, delaying having babies, seeking help from friends, seeking help from their older kids, keeping their kids busy, and rejection help from others. According to the mothers' responses in this study, the most common challenges are family adjustment problems, discrimination, feelings of guilt, and academic difficulties.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of 14 Saudi female doctoral students who were managing motherhood and academic roles while studying in the United States. All of the participants enrolled in doctoral programs in education in the U.S. The main question guiding this study is: How do Saudi female doctoral students with children manage their roles as both doctoral students and mothers? The sub questions that emerge from the guiding research question are as follows: (a) what are the roles of advisors, faculty members, classmates, and husbands in supporting Saudi doctoral mothers? (b) What challenges result from performing those multiple roles? (c) How do Saudi women with children respond to these concerns and challenges? (d) What strategies do female Saudi doctoral students develop to manage and balance their roles?

In this chapter, I summarize the findings by answering the research questions, highlight key findings that are new to this study, identify the most important things that I found and, connect findings to prior literature. Then, I discuss the implications of findings for various groups – doctoral programs in education in the United States, institutions of higher education in the US, Saudi Culture Mission and Saudi mothers who are doctoral students. Finally, I discuss the limitations of study and areas for future research.

### **Major Findings**

The following section includes a discussion of how Saudi mothers in this study manage their multiple roles. I discuss the roles of their faculty members and advisors, classmates, husbands and family in the students' motherhood and doctoral experiences while they study in U.S. universities. Then, I discuss the most important barriers and challenges that Saudi mothers and their families face in their academic and personal life. Finally, I discuss the coping strategies that Saudi female doctoral students develop to manage

motherhood and academic roles while studying in the United States. This theme includes the ways that Saudi mothers manage their multiple roles, such as by limiting social activities to weekends except for online communication; setting priorities for urgent tasks; using reminders; hiring day care and housekeeping help; delaying having babies; planning ahead; and seeking help from friends, their parents, their older children, or their neighbors. In the next section, I answer the big question of this study. How do Saudi female doctoral students with children manage their roles as both doctoral students and mothers?

### **Do Saudi Mothers Balance Their Roles?**

According to the participants' stories about their experiences in the U.S., it seems that they are dealing successfully with their multiple roles and responsibilities. The majority of the Saudi mothers in this study reported that their experiences in U.S. institutions are positive. Some mothers reported facing challenges. However, they describe their experiences of being mothers and PhD students in the U.S. with the word "positive." This is not consistent with the majority of studies that examined the experiences of doctoral student-mothers, which have revealed that they struggled to combine their roles and experienced many psychological and health difficulties (Brown & Watson, 2010; Cao, 2001; Grenier & Burke, 2008; Haynes, Bulosan, Citty, Grant-Harris, Hudson, & Koro-Ljungberg, 2012; Holmstrom & Holmstrom, 1969; Lynch, 2008; Malone, 1998; Moyer et al., 1999; Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2014; Perkins, 2011; Sessanna, 2012; Szekelyelt, 2008; Tiu Wu, 2013; Williams-Tolliver, 2010). This is explained by the fact that the American female PhD students face many challenges in dealing with their personal and professional responsibilities (Kenty, 2000; Lebدين, Bornmam, Gannon, & Wallon, 2007; Maher et al., 2004; Moyer, Salovey, & Casey-Cannon, 1999). They also face many external stresses that make their lives as doctoral students who have children difficult (Gardner, 2009; Madrey, 1983). Many stresses emerge from sources such as time pressure, financial worries, and doubts about

finding a job in the future (Costes et al., 2006). In contrast, the Saudi mothers in this study did not have job responsibilities in the United States and were more concentrated on completing their degrees because they were full-time students. The majority of American mothers at the doctoral level had jobs that took energy and time away from family and school responsibilities. Sessanna (2012) emphasized this point; she found that all doctoral students in the United States reported juggling multiple responsibilities and working hard to balance their academic studies with family and job responsibilities. This was due to the gender role expectations that pushed female doctoral students to meet the social expectations to fill their multiple roles. Gu (2012) also found that female doctoral students reported difficulties in balancing their work and family lives. The Saudi mothers may also be different because most of the Saudi mothers in the United States are with their husbands or brothers who are here to support them. Saudi female students often have full scholarships, whereas the American government does not offer such scholarships to American female students. Additionally, Saudi mothers in the United States are without their relatives or parents, which means fewer social responsibilities, whereas American women studying for PhDs have many social responsibilities tied to their immediate family members, their relatives, and their friends. This is in addition to their work responsibilities, which create other stressors related to time management, family obligations, finances, self-expectations, and workload (Brauer et al., 2003; Mason et al., 2009; Raddon, 2002; Toews et al., 1993; Williams et al., 1984). All of these challenges and stressors make it more difficult for American female doctoral students to manage their roles as mothers and doctoral students.

Despite the reported barriers in this study that Saudi mother-students struggled with, the Saudi mothers built themselves a system of support and they copied each other successfully to overcome the barriers that affected the balance in their lives. A few published studies have found similar findings. Specifically, Perkins (2011) reported that female

doctoral student participants successfully balanced their motherhood with their doctoral studies. According to Perkins (2011), all participants in her study shared the qualities of persistence, tenacity, ambition, drive to achieve their goals, and resilience. All of these traits empowered those female doctoral students to continue balancing their multiple roles no matter what their life circumstances. The mothers in the present study reported that they are satisfied with their educational experiences in U.S. institutions. This finding was also supported by Giles (1983), who concluded that female doctoral students reported feeling a high level of satisfaction and self-esteem because of their ability to find new interests outside of their traditional roles as mothers and wives.

The present study also concluded that being a mother did not stop the participants from continuing their academic paths and working consistently on their degrees. All of the Saudi mothers in this study reported that they were proud to be mothers and students in the U.S., and they never hid the fact that they were mothers from faculty members or colleagues in their program. In the next section, I offer a discussion of the mothers' strategies that they developed for balancing their mother/student roles. The next section includes a discussion of the roles that others play in helping these women -- especially their advisors, husbands, and classmates.

### **Saudi student mothers' support systems**

The section includes a discussion of the roles of advisors, faculty members, classmates, husbands and family in supporting Saudi doctoral mothers.

**Roles of faculty members and advisors.** The fact is that support of faculty advisors is critical for doctoral student success, especially at the dissertation stage (Allen & Dory, 2001; Brus, 2006; Gardner, 2009; Gilbert, 1982; Golde & Dore, 2001; Hagedorn, 1999; Lovitts, 2001; Miller & Stone, 2011; Swietzer, 2008). This sentiment was confirmed by 13 participants in this study who reported that their academic advisors supported them in their lives as both

mothers and doctoral students. The 13 participants mentioned above all used the word *supportive* to describe their advisors. This study concluded that Saudi women doctoral students perceived that both male and female advisors provided emotional support.

Participants in this study not only felt supported by their assigned advisors, but they also reported feeling supported by other faculty members in their programs. Twelve participants reported stories showing that they felt supported by their faculty member's understanding of their motherhood obligations, encouraging them by giving advice, appreciating their roles, making comments to motivate them, being flexible with students who are mothers when their family members needed them critically without applying for any kind of leave of absence. This finding was not consistent with other major early studies that were conducted to explore faculty attitudes toward female doctoral students. In particular, these other studies found that mother doctoral students did not perceive they received sufficient support from their faculty members (Holmstrom & Holmstrom, 1974; Moyer et al., 1999; Shroeder & Mynatt, 1993). For example, Holmstrom and Holmstrom (1974) revealed a differential interaction rate with faculty who favored male doctoral students.

Similarly, Moyer et al. (1999) indicated that female doctoral students mentioned a number of complaints related to faculty behavior. Some of these complaints included faculty not giving adequate feedback or guidance and faculty being too stressed by the demands on their time to provide more than perfunctory advising. Additionally, Shroeder and Mynatt (1993) found that female "students feel overlooked, neglected, unsupported, and even dismissed by faculty" (p. 555). However, the findings of this study are consistent with other studies that were conducted in 2000 and later that showed faculty members showing support, and especially emotional support, for the doctoral students who were mothers. For example, Kenty (2000) found that female doctoral students received support from faculty members, who offered emotional support and reduced their clinical and teaching workloads.

What surprised me in this study is that eight participants agreed that the female advisors at the Saudi Cultural Mission (SACM) are very tough and detailed with applying rules while male advisors were perceived as supportive. It is clear from the participants' stories that they received more support and understanding for their motherhood needs from SACM male advisors than female advisors. In particular, female advisors were reported to deal with Saudi mothers less flexibly and were less willing to waive some strict regulations and give monthly exceptions when the students need them. This is surprising because Gilbert et al (2012); Gardecki and Neumark (1996) found that female faculty members are more cooperative and supportive with other females female students more than males. Additionally, Rothstein (1995) explored whether the percentage of employed female faculty had an impact on female students' progress and found a significant positive association between the percentage of female faculty and female graduate students' ability to advance in their degrees. Rothstein theorized that female faculty might strengthen the supportive atmosphere for female graduate students. This is a topic worthy of further exploration in a future study.

**Classmates' Support.** The majority of the Saudi participants reported that they felt supported by their classmates. As the participants explained, this support involved the classmates' roles of answering questions and helping in preparation for classes, exams, presentations, giving advice and answers regarding children's issues, and admiring their ability to combine roles. This also mirrored the attitude of the majority of the women in Kenty (2000) and Tracy's (1996) studies, who found that university peers were very emotionally supportive to student mothers.

What was particularly interesting is it seems from the participants' stories that who the classmates are matters a lot. In this study, classmates who are mothers were seen as being the most supportive. This is similar to what Grenier and Burke (2008) found, in that female

students with children sought support from females in their institutions who were in the same family situation and had similar feelings as mothers. Two participants in this study revealed that they got more support from American classmates than from Saudi classmates. I explain this by pointing to the idea that some Saudi mothers might seek assistance from American classmates when they need help from native speakers. According to Kenty (2000), female doctoral students reported that their classmates offered sharing their learning experiences, encouraging the completion of one's dissertation, editing chapters of a dissertation, or helping with statistical analyses.

**Husband and family support.** Not surprisingly, Saudi mothers felt that husbands and other family members served as sources of support to them. The data shows that eight of 14 participants reported being supported emotionally and physically by their husbands. In addition, 8 of 14 mothers reported that they sought help from their older children and their parents. This finding is consistent with existing research that confirms that husband and family support is critical to mothers completing their PhD studies (Grenier & Burke, 2008; Perkins, 2011; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2014, Lynch, 2008; Giles, 1983; Tracy, 1996; Lamm and Grohman, 2009; Dyk, 1987; Tracy, 1996; Berkove, 1979).

This study shows that Saudi husbands supported their wives who were doctoral students in United States. However, the type of support that Saudi husbands showed in this study was not similar to the support shown by husbands in the Western research, who offered both emotional and physical support to their wives who were students and mothers. For example, in Lamm and Grohman's (2009) study, 100% of the female graduate students in the sample reported that they received both emotional and physical support from their husbands. However, in five cases within this study, the Saudi doctoral students who were mothers reported that their husbands' support was limited to emotional support. In those five cases, the participants reported that their husbands were not willing to support them physically (e.g.,

cooking, cleaning, doing housework, washing dishes, etc.). This finding was emphasized in a Saudi study conducted by Dumyati (1980), who found that Saudi husbands often approved of their wives' status as students, but the majority of these husbands did not provide help at home, which decreased the amount of support the wives received during their studies (Domyati, 1980). In fact, I am not surprised by this result, and I explain this finding according to Saudi traditions, in which the man is considered the main source of income for the Saudi Arabian family. On the other hand, the Saudi woman is considered the homemaker, and it is her duty to clean and cook (Pharaon, 2004). As Harper (2007) explained, Saudi women are traditionally not expected or encouraged to have jobs outside of the house. Instead, they are encouraged to stay home to take care of the children and do household chores (Harper, 2007). This finding is consistent with one study that was conducted in 1979 by Berkove, who found that some husbands did not offer to help their wives who were students. Berkove (1979) also found that 14% of females reported that their husbands were rarely supportive, and a fifth of the female students mentioned that their husbands were unwilling to help with household tasks. It is no wonder that Berkove's results match the results of this study in terms of support from husbands: the cultural attitude toward women in Saudi society is similar in the attitude that could be found in Western societies in the past century.

### **Mothers' Barriers While Studying at U.S. Institutions**

In this section, I discuss the most important barriers that participants reported in this study. Saudi mothers indicated by their own words a number of barriers that affected their ability to balance their life roles. The challenges they faced when studying in PhD programs are not exclusive to Saudi mothers. Given the findings of major studies, it is obvious that female students with children found it challenging to manage multiple roles (Brown & Watson, 2010; Dyk, 1987; Grenier & Burke, 2008; Kibelloh & Bao, 2014; Lynch, 2008;

Malone, 1998; Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2014; Perkins, 2011; Tiu Wu, 2013; Younes & Asay, 1998).

Lack of institutional support was an important barrier that was indicated by the majority of the study participants. Most reported that their American campus cultures were not friendly to mothers and the campus administration did not offer services for mothers (e.g., day care and family activities, or clear policies for dealing with mothers). This finding is consistent with existing research that describes the experience of parent graduate students, which confirmed lack of institutional support for graduate students when it comes to childcare and other support services (Brus, 2006; Gardner, 2008a, 2009; Madrey, 1983; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Middleton, 2001; Rovaris, 2004; Smith et al., 2006; Springer et al., 2009). Participants reported that even if there are services for them offered by their institutions, they did not know about them or could take advantage of them. This is consistent with the argument by Springer et al. (2009) that institution administrations not only offer little support in their services for married doctoral students, but when they do offer services, students are unaware of them.

This study's finding agrees with the literature by researchers who explored the experiences of mothers and concluded that the U.S. academic environment is not designed to fit the needs of mothers (Grenier & Burke, 2008; Lynch, 2008). According to the participants' stories in this study, the Saudi mothers are dissatisfied with the universities' policies or services that are offered to them. The data about the backgrounds of those mothers show that all of the mothers in this study were students in Saudi institutions where student-mother rights are protected by Islamic law. However, participants indicated that the American universities had no clear policies to protect or support mothers' rights, such as policies that indicate the period that a mother is allowed to be absent when she gives birth or has a child with a serious illness and that explain procedures for holding make-up exams or

presentations when a student has a newborn baby or experiences fatigue due to pregnancy. In this study, participants raised an important point that shows the difference in motherhood policies between Saudi Arabian and U.S. institutions: whereas American women have more rights and have more freedom compared with Saudi women, Saudi mother-students in Saudi institutions have more protection of their rights as mothers. Many Western researchers have concluded that student-mothers depend on luck to get exceptions because the American academic environment is not designed to fit the needs of mothers (Lynch, 2008; Grenier & Burke, 2008). On the other hand, the participants reported that Saudi Arabian institutions have clear policies for student-mothers, and if female students give birth during a semester, then the mother has two weeks to be away from classes. If a mother gives birth by operation, then she has one month. In this study, most of the Saudi mothers reported that American institutions do not have clear policies for student-mothers. Participants in this study raised the point of differences of policies between U.S. and Saudi motherhood rights, which requires Western researchers who are interested in exploring student-mother rights in others cultures to shed light on other countries' experiences with supporting mothers and to take the advantage of those experiences to benefit mothers who pursue their education in Western universities. This will help student mothers to manage their multiple roles and focus more on their goals. As Brown (2013) concluded in his study, the absence of institutional policies related to lack of financial aid, day care offered on campus, reserved campus parking, and transportation have generated extra anxiety in an already stressful life for student-mothers, which affects their personal lives and academic performances negatively.

Another barrier that Saudi mothers reported is feelings of guilt. Eight of fourteen participants reported feelings of guilt toward their families arising from the fact that they did not find time to play with their children because they were busy all the time doing their schoolwork. This is not a new fact; the feelings of guilt that female students often experience

during their doctoral programs were found to be a common complaint reported by mothers in several research studies that were conducted to investigate motherhood and doctoral studies (Brown & Watson, 2010; Giles, 1983; Malone, 1998; Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2014; Perkins, 2011; Tiu Wu, 2013; Younes & Asay, 1998). This study shows that Saudi mothers, like the other Western or local doctoral student-mothers, share feelings of guilt that emerge from leaving the kids and going to school. However, feelings of guilt for Saudi mothers have different causes than they do for American mothers because Saudi mothers not only feel guilty because their kids miss them but because they feel they harm their kids' educational futures, Islamic identities, and prevent them from learning their mother language. These important concerns reported by Saudi mothers make their feelings of guilt might stay with them for years even after their graduation because, as the Saudi mothers reported in this study, their kids' Arabic language skills were weakened with time and some of mothers reported that their kids forgot reading and writing in Arabic.

Ten of thirteen respondents reported being discriminated against while studying in the U.S. This agrees with the existing research that has been conducted to explore the challenges and problems that Saudi international students face while studying in the U.S. Studies have revealed that Saudi students faced social and personal challenges such as discrimination and prejudice (Molly, 2013; Shabeeb, 1996). The participant who wore a veil in this study reported that she had been verbally attacked and that she experienced unwelcoming looks, whereas the other mothers in this study did not report this form of experience with discrimination or of being attacked verbally by others. Albalawi's finding is consistent with this study. Albalawi also found that participants shared that having male classmates was acceptable to them, and two of the three participants reported that a hijab was not a problem in the U.S., but one participant, faced difficulties with being veiled.

The most common discrimination type in this study was related to the hijab and stereotyping. Saudi mothers in this study found often that they have to explain to people why they wear a hijab. The Arabic women in this study were social, open about their experiences, and welcomed questions from people but that these mothers did not have English-speaking skills fluent enough to explain or defend their own beliefs to others, which embarrassed them.

It was clear from the participants' reported stories that most of participants stayed silent in their classes and did not join the class discussions because they have language barriers, as reported by nine participants. They suffer from a lack of English language skills, low ability to explain thoughts, poor understanding of cultural themes, and difficulties in speaking and writing skills. It is not a surprising fact and is consistent with many early and modern studies that concluded Saudi students have academic and English problems in their studies that make them often struggle when giving oral presentations, participating in discussions, practicing pronunciation, writing essays and papers, and writing essay exams (Al-Jasir, 1993; Al-Shedokhi, 1986; Al-Shehry, 1989; Jammaz, 1972; Molly, 2013; Shabeeb, 1996; Shaw, 2009). This finding may shed light on the quality of Saudi general education, which does not prepare Saudi students academically for university studies in English. The lack of preparation makes Saudi students suffer because they have weak knowledge and educational backgrounds that are considered a challenge to them when in the U.S. According to Al-Harhi (2009), this has occurred because of the fact that Saudi high schools do not prepare students for American higher education, which causes a weakness in Saudi students' academic backgrounds (especially in English language, math and science).

In addition, this study found that for Saudi mothers, having a full scholarship does not mean they have sufficient funding. Twelve mothers in this study reported that the Saudi government funding support is not enough and does not support their kids' needs such as day

care, which caused those Saudi mothers to report they were suffering financially. This finding is consistent with Hofer's (2009) study that showed Saudi students faced financial challenges.

Lack of funding for Saudi mothers by the Saudi government, representing The Saudi Arabia's cultural mission, was not the only obstacle for Saudi mothers in this study. They also reported that Saudi policies and regulations for mothers studying abroad are not fair and do not consider their motherhood needs and circumstances such as pregnancy or kids' illness, or delivery time of a newborn. Additionally, participants reported that they are unsatisfied with the way the Saudi cultural mission supervises them with no flexibility. This finding is consistent with Al-Harthi (1987), who found there is a lack of support that Saudi students experience from their government. Al-Harthi concluded that Saudi students were not provided with sufficient academic advising in American institutions or by their sponsoring agencies. Saudi students in this study reported a lack of guidance from the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission. In addition, their academic desires were ignored. A procedure for monitoring the students' academic progress is lacking.

The remarkable thing about the Saudi students' experiences in this study is that the majority of them did not report having adjustment problems, unlike the recent research conducted to explore the experiences of Saudi students' adjustment problems (Al-Harthi, 1987; Al-Jasir, 1993; Al-Shedokhi, 1986; Al-Shehry, 1989; El-Banyan, 1974; Hofer, 2009; Jammaz, 1972; Molly, 2013; Shabeeb, 1996; Shaw, 2009). The majority of participants in this study did not report being culturally shocked, which is consistent with the study conducted by Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) who explored the adjustment experiences of Saudi female students. They found that the majority of Saudi women who were interviewed did not experience "culture shock." However, some participants in this study reported having faced adjustment problems in their first months or year of their arrival. This is consistent with the existing literature review that found that Saudi students in their

first two years or less in the U.S. experienced more difficulties in adjustment (Al-Shedoki, 1986; Hosfer, 2009; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Mustafa, 1985; Oweidat, 1981).

The unique finding in this study is that Saudi mother-students did not report adjustment problems; however, they reported stories about how their husbands sometimes tried to direct their ways or styles of wearing clothes and how some husbands were jealous. Some of the participants reported that their husbands ordered them not to interact with males in their academic departments, which is consistent with Albalawi (2013), who found that Saudi women in his study reported that the problems adjusting to the new culture were a challenge not just for them but also for their husbands. This study shows that the mothers were more willing than their husbands to adjust to the new culture. This finding is consistent with Hofer (2009), who found that Saudi male students face more adjustment problems compared to female students in some areas of academic life in the U.S.

Eight participants in this study reported that their kids or husbands experienced cultural and religious adjustment problems due to the cultural differences between Saudi Arabia and the U.S. This finding is consistent with Mehdizadeh and Scott (2005), who found that the greatest cultural problem for married Muslim international students was bringing up children in a new culture. The participants in Mehdizadeh and Scott's (2005) study had the main concerns of bringing up their children according to the Islamic religion and Iranian traditional norms and values.

Although participants in this study reported that they adjusted to the American way of life, they reported being scared that their children will lose their Islamic identities, which put on their shoulders extra responsibilities as mothers to try to find time to teach and explain to their children Arabic and Islamic values. This is consistent with another study conducted by Abdalla and Gibson (1984) that examined the attitudes of 53 male and 47 female Muslim

Arabic students from Libya toward American culture. The researchers found that those students strongly held the traditional values of Arab Islamic culture during their studies in the U.S. In addition, this study was consistent with Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994), who found that international students pursuing their studies may experience negative emotions besides culture shock, such as the fear of losing their cultural identity.

This study found mothers faced discrimination inside the Saudi society in the U.S, which sometimes was considered a barrier that prevented Saudi mothers from socializing and supporting each other as a one unit. As Shariafah reported, she was rejected by the Saudi society in her city because she is not wearing hijab. Surdam and Collin (1984) and Araujo (2011) emphasized this in their studies exploring international students' adjustment problems. The researchers concluded that there is a significant relationship between international students' adaptation and a group of factors, such as the level of religiosity.

### **Mothers' Strategies for Balancing Their Mother–Student Roles**

Many studies found that mothers adopted prioritization as a strategy to manage the demands of their roles (Dyk, 1987; Perkins, 2011; Malone, 1998; Lamm & Grohman, 2009). Mothers in this study also chose to manage their mother–student role responsibilities by setting priorities for urgent tasks and chose to sacrifice the performance of other less important tasks; for example, eleven of the fourteen mothers chose to reduce the time they spent on non-priorities, such as social interactions with friends. They delayed those interactions or meetings with others to weekends. This study, as with many other studies, found that mothers used time management as a strategy to balance the demands of their roles (Lamm & Grohman, 2009; Perkins, 2011; Malone, 1998).

It is interesting how the differences between the Saudi and Western educational systems limit the Saudi doctoral mothers' opportunities to take advantage of many options. Other strategies are adopted by Western doctoral mothers to manage role responsibilities; for

instance, participants in Kibelloh and Bao's (2014) study adopted online courses as a strategy for mothers struggling with managing both their motherhood and their graduate studies. According to Kibelloh and Bao (2014), electronic learning is convenient and helped graduate mothers to balance their motherhood with academic work by saving time and effort. The majority of the Saudi mothers in this study chose to take advantage of technology, such as setting reminders and phone applications to help them manage their time; however, none of the Saudi mothers suggested or adopted taking online courses as a strategy to manage their roles due to the strict regulation the Saudi ministry applies to Saudi students. One of these regulations is not being allowed to enroll in online classes. Even if the students are successful in online courses, the Saudi Ministry of Education will not value any degree after graduation if it has more than two online courses without the Ministry's permission. In addition, a coping strategy, such as being a part-time student, was reported by many mothers in Lynch's (2008) work. A second coping strategy doctoral student mothers adopted was switching to part-time status following childbirth to spend time with the newborn babies. This solution is not an option for Saudi doctoral students because US visa requirements state that international students must be enrolled as full time students.

The fourteen Saudi mothers in this study reported that everyone in the department knew they were mothers, and they admitted that being a mother is something of to be proud. Hidden maternal status is a common phenomenon among Western mothers, who are afraid to expose being a mother due to discrimination or stereotyping (Lynch, 2008). One of the previous studies conducted by Lynch (2008) revealed that domestic doctoral mothers hide their maternal status in public and "they utilize a strategy of maternal invisibility. This strategy allows Western student mothers to appear to be just students, preserving a cultural form in which a graduate student is 100% committed to their work, 100% of the time" (p. 296). For women who belong to the Saudi Islamic culture, being a mother and having a

family is considered the holiest duty given to her and above her personal desire to continue her own education.

One of the particularly interesting strategies that half of the Saudi mothers adopted, but was not discussed in the current research, was rejecting help from others. Six Saudi mothers reported they would rather depend on themselves, their husbands, or their family members instead of seeking help from anyone outside of their family. This finding is explained by researchers Abu-Hilal (1986), Adeyemi (1985), Al-Qasem (1987), and Ali et al. (2004), who explained that the major source of support for individuals in Saudi Arabia is the family. Culturally, parents and relatives in Saudi Arabia have responsibilities regarding students, and the family will offer the students support, regardless of their gender. When Saudi mothers face challenges, they seek support from their family members, because families are culturally expected to provide help. Saudi individuals, in contrast to many in the United States and other Western societies, rarely seek professional help or counseling services because the expectation is that individuals should seek help and support from their families, parents, and relatives (Adeyemi, 1985; Al-Qasem, 1987; Ali et al., 2004). For Saudi individuals, asking for help outside of the family is unacceptable and taken as an offense by many families (Adeyemi, 1985; Al-Issa, 2000; Al-Qasem; Ali et al., 2004). This explains why Saudi mothers seek help from their husbands, their older kids, and their parents overseas more than friends and neighbors.

On the other hand, Western doctoral mothers reported friends as a great source of support. Friends during their doctoral studies, especially female friends, were found to be great sources of support to Western women (Tracy, 1996). In Tracy's (1996) study, fifty professional women at Eastern Illinois University were asked to rate friends based on the emotional support they provided during the women's doctoral program; 96% reported that

their male friends were quite emotionally supportive during this time, and 100% reported that their female friends were also emotionally supportive while the mothers studied.

### **Summary of Findings, Implications, and Recommendations**

The mothers in this study are successful in their studies, and they manage their time by using calendars and online applications to interact with people. The majority of mothers reported they are giving their kids top priority and that their academic experience in the U.S. is positive and beneficial to them. This study highlighted the importance of faculty and advisors for Saudi mothers in dealing with their difficulties in their lives and encouraging them. The study also shows the importance of the husband's support, especially emotionally, which is clearly important in terms of Saudi women studying in a foreign country, where no sisters, parents, or brothers can help. Therefore, the husband remains an important source of support, especially since Saudi culture does not appreciate asking strangers for help. This, however, puts pressure on the husbands regarding their wife's needs. This study shows that the experiences of these fourteen Saudi mothers in managing their roles as wives and mothers while studying in America is unique regarding their challenges and their adopted strategies due to the effects of their culture. As the study concludes, culture plays a significant role in all aspects of female students' lives. For example, due to cultural values, the circle of support for Saudi mothers is quite tight and may be smaller than other international mothers in the U.S. who pursue their PhDs. Saudi female students have many cultural and religious limitations in their communication, interactions, and even in the clothes they wear, the life of those mothers could be more comfortable, and their learning experience could be more enjoyable, if the Saudi cultural mission and the U.S. higher education institutions reviewed the current available services that affect mother students in higher education.

A recommendation for Saudi mothers is to extend their support system to include people other than their husbands, older kids, or parents, and to create networks that support

and help Saudi mothers, not just while they study in the U.S., but in the future of their professional life. My recommendation to Saudi mothers is to be open to accepting help from friends and neighbors, regardless of their religion or nationality. This will extend support resources and decrease the pressure on the husbands, who can then also find time to focus on their studies if they are also a student in the U.S. It will also give each of them more space and time to build social relationships and take advantage of being in the U.S. by participating in workshops or training. This will keep each of them busy, and help them to feel valuable. Such a change will offer them opportunities to interact with Americans and learn about American culture, which will help them to overcome the difficulties in adjustment that this study indicated.

Campus life in the United States needs to be friendlier toward mothers. This study indicates that academic structures of American institutions are not designed to welcome females with children, whose multiple roles and responsibilities often mean that they require more flexibility. More services for mothers, such as daycare, are needed. This study shows that it is time for American institutions to create a welcoming environment for female students with children in order to make their lives less stressful and their educational experiences more enjoyable. Along with many other studies published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* since the 1970s (e.g., Grenier & Burke, 2008; Holmstrom & Holmstrom, 1974; Lynch, 2008; Shiva, 2013), this study brings attention to the stressful lives of female doctoral students and argues that institutions should be more supportive of female students with children.

This study aimed to investigate how Saudi mothers balance and manage their roles as students and as mothers. However, future research needs to be conducted to investigate how the experience of motherhood affects the academic paths of international female students in order to explore if this experience hinders these students' learning or motivates them. Future

research should also determine if motherhood affects international students' academic paths, such as their choices regarding majors, courses, advisors, and research topics. Additionally, future research needs to be conducted on other kinds of international mothers at U.S. institutions to determine if they also face challenges related to their cultures.

This study is the first one that explores one particular group of international mothers in U.S. educational institutions. Therefore, I recommend conducting other research to explore the motherhood experience of other international women in U.S. higher education institutions. The findings of such research will offer knowledge about those mothers in their educational and motherhood experiences in the U.S. and explore what kinds of systems they have to support them. Supporting international student mothers makes the American higher education system more competitive.

Western researchers need to explore how other countries in the world deal with the phenomena of student motherhood, and how other institutions support them. There is a critical need for comparative studies. For example, in Saudi Arabia, there are policies and official regulations that protect the rights of female students with children, allowing them to not have to depend on kindness or luck. The research that may explore American student–mother policies or other international student–mother policies will help the American educational institutions see how the choices in other countries determine those regulations and policies. Such research may help to establish a policy to support student–mother rights in American higher education, not just support the international students, but all groups of student mothers that study in U.S. higher education institutions.

For Saudi researchers and Saudi decision makers, this study shows that the Saudi Scholarship Program that costs the Saudi budget billions has weaknesses and gaps. For example, the scholarship is not designed to fit mothers, and the regulations for funding or load enrollment do not consider said mothers' needs. Orientations that are conducted for

students before they come to the U.S. only focus on increasing academic awareness, but did not consider increasing the cultural adjustment experience, which makes those thousands of student mothers and fathers suffer more than other students do. This means Saudi mothers require different orientation or preparation programs prior their arrival to the U.S. Such programs would help them to adjust more quickly and decrease any adjustment problems that the family may face while they study in America.

Funding policies by Saudi Culture Mission to student–parents needs to be reviewed to match the price and the cost of the host country. The current amount for each child is \$200, which is appropriate for Saudi mothers who use their scholarships in Egypt or China, but not enough for mothers who study in America or other expensive countries.

In Saudi Arabia, there is a need to do more research on King Abdullah’s scholarship program and explore the program’s weakness relate not just to the funding student–parents, but the other problems as well, such as the lack of academic preparation for Saudi Arabians, especially in English-speaking countries. Those problems must be explored and identified if the Ministry of Education is to improve the weaker sides of Saudi general education. As this study and other research conducted on Saudi student experiences in the U.S. show, Saudi students suffer academically, which means the Saudi educational system fails to prepare Saudi students academically and fails to make them competitive with the other groups of international students.

More research needs to be conducted to explore why female advisors from the Saudi Culture Mission do not cooperate with female Saudi students. Like the American advisors in U.S. educational institutions, the policies advising members in the Saudi cultural mission need to be addressed to guarantee advisors support students in foreign countries, especially mothers. Additionally, the Saudi culture mission recommends that there be active Saudi student clubs in each U.S. university. It would be a good idea to encourage such clubs to

organize orientations at the beginning of the semester to help freshmen with families to adjust to their new life in the United States. I also recommend that these Saudi clubs organize meetings that allow older Saudi students in the United States to talk about their experiences in the United States. The new students could take advantage of these meetings to learn from other Saudi students how to face the possible difficulties that the other Saudi students have faced and learn how they overcame those difficulties, especially problems related to raising kids in the United States. I also recommend that the Saudi Ministry of Education create preparation programs that prepare Saudi students with families for their new life in the United States. These preparation programs could be held in Saudi Arabia before the student comes to the U.S. to study.

### **Conclusion**

This qualitative descriptive study investigated the experiences of 14 Saudi mother doctoral students in U.S. institutions. In this study, phone interviews were the primary data collection tool used to explore how participants managed their roles as both doctoral students and mothers. The data show that Saudi mothers managing their roles successfully. They received forms of support from their advisors, faculty members, classmates, husbands, and family members. The reported stories from those Saudi mothers reveal a number of barriers they confront as mothers and doctoral students in U.S. institutions; however, the collected data indicated that Saudi mothers developed a number of strategies to manage their roles and responsibilities.

This study was the first research on Saudi mothers who were international doctoral students studying in the United States. It is also the first study that shed light on the experiences of a group of international students with children in the US. However, more research needs to be conducted to explore other groups of international students with children in U.S. institutions, and more research needs to be done on the King Abdullah scholarship

programs to improve it and resolve weakness. The decision makers in U.S. institutions should consider making the campus more family friendly to students who are mothers by offering more services, such as daycare that operate at convenient times. The Saudi education ministry should also review the funding policy for mothers and the advisors hearing policy, and should make the scholarship regulations more flexible for Saudi students who are mothers, especially when they have critical health or family circumstances.

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## Appendix (A)

### Recruitment Email

Dear Participant,

My name is Kawthar Alhajjuj, and I am a PhD student conducting qualitative research for my dissertation with the goal of exploring the experiences of female Saudi international students in U.S. institutions. This research study is under the supervision of Professor Lisa Wolf-Wendel of the Educational Leadership department at the University of Kansas.. I am emailing you to invite you to participate in my research study, which aims to explore “how Saudi female doctoral students balance academic and motherhood roles in in U.S. institutions in Education.” The reason that I am contacting you is that I am currently seeking as participants in this study female student volunteers who currently study in any education program, at any stage of the doctoral program level, who also have at least one child under 18 years old living with her, and not in Saudi Arabia. Participation in this study will involve a phone interview lasting 60–90 minutes in the Arabic language. The interview will be recorded with your permission. Please be aware that your name and identity will not be revealed, and your record will remain confidential. I will go through a human subjects review, and I will only analyze the data in the aggregate. However, the survey is voluntary. You can choose not to participate; the final decision about participation is yours.

If you are interested in participating, please email me at [Kawthar.alhajjuj@gmail.com](mailto:Kawthar.alhajjuj@gmail.com) to arrange and schedule a date, and time for the interview. Then, I will then send a confirmation email indicating that you have been signed up for one of those times. If you have to cancel your appointment, please feel free to do so. If you have any questions about this +17857276895

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kawthar Alhajjuj

ايميل تعرفي بالدراسة

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

انا طالبة الدكتوراه كوثر خلف حامد الحجوج اجري بحث نوعي بهدف استكشاف خبرات الطالبات الامهات السعوديات في مؤسسات التعليم العالي في الولايات المتحدة. هذه دراسة بحثية تحت إشراف البروفيسورة ليزا وولف ويندل من كلية التربية تخصص القيادة التربوية في جامعة كانساس. أدعوكم للمشاركة في دراستي البحثية، والتي تهدف إلى استكشاف "كيف تقوم طالبات الدكتوراه الإناث بالموازنة بين ادوارهن الأكاديمية والأمومة في الجامعات الأمريكية في تخصصات التربية". أسعى من خلال هذا الايميل الى الحصول على متطوعات للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة على ان تتوفر فيهن الشروط الآتية: ان تكون الطالبة الراغبة بالمشاركة في الدراسة طالبة سعودية تدرس دكتوراة باي تخصص في التربية و في ي مرحلة من مراحل مستوى برنامج الدكتوراه، وان يكون لديها على الاقل طفل واحد لا يقل عمره عن ١٨ سنة ومقيم معها في الولايات المتحدة وليس في المملكة العربية السعودية. وسيتطلب من كل طالبة دكتوراه مشاركة في هذه الدراسة ان تجرى معها مقابلة هاتفية مدتها الزمنية 60-90 دقيقة وسيجرى الحوار باستخدام اللغة العربية. وسوف يتم تسجيل المقابلة صوتيا من بعد موافقة الطالبة المشاركة بالدراسة على ذلك. يرجى الاخذ بعين الاعتبار ان اسم المشاركة وهويتها وبياناتها وكل ما تدلي به من معلومات لن يتم الكشف عنها وسوف تبقى سرية ولن يطلع عليها اي فرد ، لن يترتب هنالك اي نوع من الخطوره على هذه المشاركة وكل البيانات سوف تستخدم فقط لاغراض بحثية ، هذا ومن

الجدير بالذكر ان المشاركة في هذا البحث هي مشاركة تطوعية واختيارية وبامكانك الانسحاب باي وقت فالقرار بالمشاركة من عدمها يعود لك شخصيا. في حالة الموافقة على المشاركة في هذا البحث الرجاء ارسال ايميل لي للاجابة عن اية تفاصيل واسئلة وايضا لترتيب تفاصيل المشاركة من حيث الوقت والتاريخ وبممكنك مراسلتي على عنواني الالكتروني الآتي:

[kawthar.alhajjuj@gmail.com](mailto:kawthar.alhajjuj@gmail.com)

+17857276895 و في حال وجود اي استفسار يمكنك الاتصال بي من خلال رقمي الخاص

أشكركم على اهتمامكم  
كوثر خلف

## **Appendix (B)**

### **Interview Protocol**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experience of female Saudi doctoral students with children. In particular, this study looks at Saudi women in education doctoral programs in U.S. institutions. The study focuses on how these women manage motherhood and academic roles. In addition, this study aims to identify what support Saudi females receive in managing their multiple roles, and explore coping strategies that these Saudi doctoral students develop. Further, the study looks at what roles their husbands, family members, professors, peers, administrators, and related institutional policies play in their motherhood and student experience while they study in the U.S.

#### **First: Personal Background**

- Tell me about yourself (age, marital status, ...).
- Tell me about your family. (How many kids do you have? How old are they? ...)
- Tell me what your role is as a mother and a wife here in the United States. (What are your responsibilities? What does a typical day look like for you?)

#### **Second: Academic Background**

- Why did you decide to study in the United States?
- What is your major? At what stage of your doctorate are you?
- Why did you choose to major in education?
- How has your academic experience been so far? What are the things you are enjoying about your program? What are some things that are perhaps difficult or frustrating?
- Do your professors know you have children? If no – why have you not told them? If yes, in what ways have they been helpful or unhelpful to you?

#### **Third: Cultural Background**

- Tell me about your experience with living in the United States.
- What obstacles do you encounter while you communicate with Americans (e.g., language barriers, differences in values ...)
- What have been your sources of support ?

#### **Fourth: Performing Multiple Roles**

- In addition to your roles as a mother and as a doctoral student, what other roles do you have while in the United States?
- Tell me about your experience in performing multiple roles as both mother and PhD student.
- Do you have stressors in performing mother and PhD student roles? If you have stressors in performing mother and PhD student roles tell me about these stressors.
- If you have stressors in performing mother and PhD student roles what were the effects of these stressors on your performance and emotions? (Explain how those stressors hinder or motivate you? Use examples.)

#### **Fifth: Coping Strategies**

- Tell me about your personal method of managing and balancing your life as both a mother and doctoral student.
- What is your husband's role? What does he do to support you? Please give examples.
- What is the role of your academic supervisor in providing support, academically, emotionally, socially ....?
- What role do your Saudi friends and Saudi Student club in your institution play in assisting you academically, socially ... ?
- What role does your academic supervisor in the Saudi Cultural Mission in DC play in

assisting you academically, socially, financially .. etc. ?

**Sixth: Recommendations**

- Would like to add or recommend advice to other Saudi doctoral students who are mothers and study or plan to study in the United States?
- What suggestions do you have for your institutions, particularly the Department of Education in USA to support mothers who are doctoral students in education?

## Appendix (C)

### Consent Form

نموذج موافقة

#### Learning to Manage: How Saudi Female Doctoral Students in Education Manage Academic and Motherhood Roles in U.S. institutions

كيف تقوم الطالبات السعوديات بإدارة أدوارهن والموازنة ما بين مسؤوليات امومتهن ودراستهن في مرحلة الدكتوراه في مؤسسات التعليم العالي الامريكية

#### INTRODUCTION

The Department of Educational Leadership and Policy studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. Because you are a PHD student in the United States and have a child or more, you are eligible to participate. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

المقدمة

تقوم ادارة القيادة والسياسات التربوية في جامعة كانساس بدعم حقوق المشاركين في البحوث. لكونكي طالبة لدكتوراه في الولايات المتحدة ولديك طفل أو أكثر، فانت مؤهلة للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة البحثية. المعلومات التالية ادرجت لك لتقرر في ضونها المشاركة في هذه الدراسة كما انه لديك الخيار بعدم التوقيع والمشاركة في هذه الدراسة. ويجب ان تكون موقنا انه ايضا في حال موافقتك على الدراسة فانه سيبقى لديك حرية القرار بالانسحاب ورفض المواصلة بالمشاركة في اي وقت ترغب فيه وفي حال عدم موافقتك علي المشاركة في هذه الدراسة فان الخدمات المقدمة لك من دائرة البحوث او مع جامعة كانساس لن تتاثر وكذلك علاقتك بها.

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study will investigate the experiences of Saudi female doctoral students who are also mothers and who are studying in the United States and managing motherhood and academic roles. It will also explore the coping strategies that Saudi female doctoral students develop and explore what roles their husbands, family members, professors, peers, administrators, and related institutional policies play in their motherhood experience while they study in the United States.

الغرض من هذه الدراسة

سوف تقوم هذه الدراسة باستكشاف خبرات طالبات الدكتوراه السعوديات اللواتي هن أيضا أمهات ويدرسن في الولايات المتحدة حول كيفية موازنتهن لادوارهن كامهات وكطالبات دكتوراه في الجامعات الامريكية. وايضا تسعى هذه الدراسة الى الكشف عن الاستراتيجيات التي طورتها وتبنتها هؤلاء الامهات لتنظيم حياتهن والموازنة بين ادوارهن كامهات وطالبات وايضا تسعى الدراسة الى استكشاف دور الأزواج وأفراد الأسرة، وأساتذة، والأقران، والإداريين، والسياسات المؤسسية ذات الصلة في دعم الامهات ودراستهن للدكتوراه في الولايات المتحدة.

#### STUDY PROCEDURES

If you agree to take part in this research study, you will be interviewed by phone about your motherhood experiences and how you manage your life. The interviews will be conducted in the a Arabic language and will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes to complete. All of data will be confidential and that the data used will be restricted to research purposes. Also, identities will remain confidential by using a letter (unrelated to the real name) for each participant. Recordings are required to participate in the study procedures. Participants are given the option of having taping stopped at any time. The researcher will transcribe the recordings. Recordings will be stored security

إجراءات الدراسة

في حال موافقتك على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة البحثية، فانكي سوف تخضعين لمقابلة من خلال الهاتف للحديث عن تجاربك كام وكطالبة دكتوراة وكيفية ادارتك لمسؤولياتك الاسرية والدراسية. هذا وسيتم إجراء المقابلات باستخدام اللغة العربية العامية ، وسوف تستغرق المقابلة الهاتفية من 60 إلى 90 دقيقة . واشيد بالذكر ان جميع البيانات سوف تبقى سرية وسوف يقتصر استخدام البيانات على الاغراض البحثية فقط، وكذلك سوف تظل هويتك سرية باستخدام حرف (لا علاقة لها اسم مستعار) لكل مشارك. مطلوبة التسجيلات للمشاركة في إجراءات الدراسة. كما يتم منح المشاركات بالدراسة البحثية خيار التوقف عن المشاركة في أي وقت. وسوف يقوم الباحث بحفظ كل التسجيلات بطريقة آمنة وباستخدام ارقام سرية للملفات لا يعرفها الا الباحثة التي تجري الدراسة.

## VOLUNTRY PARTICIPANT/WITHDRAWAL

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. You are free to only answer questions that you want to answer. You are free to stop completing the survey at any time

المشاركة الطوعية / الانسحاب

ان مشاركتك في هذه الدراسة هي مشاركة طوعية اختيارية .ولذا فلديكي الحق في اختيار عدم المشاركة في هذه الدراسة. كما لديك كامل الحرية في الإجابة عن الأسئلة التي تريدين الإجابة عليها فقط. وكذلك لديك الحرية باختيار وقف استكمال مشاركتك في الدراسة في أي وقت ترغبين بذلك.

## BENEFITS

As a participant in this research study, there may be no direct benefit for you; however, information from this study may benefit other people now or in the future

فوائد

كمشارك في هذه الدراسة البحثية، قد لا يكون هناك فائدة مباشرة بالنسبة لك. ومع ذلك، من المعلومات من هذه الدراسة قد تفيد الآخرين الآن أو في المستقبل.

## RISKS

There are no known risks at this time to participation in this study

المخاطر

لا توجد اية مخاطر معروفة في هذا الوقت تترتب على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة.

## STUDY COSTS

Participation in this study will be of no cost to you

تكاليف الدراسة

ان المشاركة في هذه الدراسة لن تكلفكي اية تكاليف .

## COMPENSATION

You will not be paid for taking part in this study

تعويض

لن تتال الطالبية المشاركة في هذه الدراسة اي تعويضات او مبالغ من اي نوع.

## PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY

Your name will not be associated in any publication or presentation with the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. Instead, the researcher will use a study number or a pseudonym rather than your name. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless (a) it is required by law or university policy, or (b) you give written permission

"Permission granted on this date to use and disclose your information remains in effect indefinitely. By signing this form you give permission for the use and disclosure of your information for purposes of this study at any time in the future"

سرية المشاركة

لن يكون اسمك مرتبط في أي مطبوعة أو عرض لمعلومات تم جمعها عنك أو مع نتائج البحوث لهذه الدراسة. بدلا من ذلك، فإن الباحث في هذه الدراسة سوف تستخدم اسم مستعار بدلا من اسمك. لن يتم تبادل المعلومات الخاصة بك أو الدالة على هويتك إلا إذا (أ) كان ذلك مطلوباً من قبل القانون أو سياسة الجامعة، أو (ب) بإذن خطي منك "الإذن الممنوح في هذا التاريخ لإستخدام والكشف عن المعلومات الخاصة بك لا تزال سارية المفعول إلى أجل غير مسمى. وبتوقيع هذا النموذج الذي يعطي الإذن لاستخدام والكشف عن المعلومات الخاصة بك لأغراض هذه الدراسة في أي وقت في المستقبل."

## REFUSAL TO SIGN CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study

رفض التوقيع الموافقة والترخيص

لا يتطلب منك التوقيع على نموذج الموافقة والترخيص هذا ولك الحرية برفض القيام بذلك دون ان يؤثر رفضك على حقك في الاستفادة من الخدمات التي تتلقاها أو قد تتلقاها من جامعة كانساس وكذلك لن تؤثر على حقك في المشاركة في برامج وفعاليات تقيمها جامعة كانساس، إذا اخترت ان لا توقع على هذا النموذج ، فانه بناء على ذلك لا يمكنك المشاركة في هذه الدراسة.

## CANCELLING THIS CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

Be sure to consider the length of time the data will be collected and include whether you will use information that was collected prior to the participant's cancellation of permission. For example: You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose further information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to: Fill in name and campus address of Researcher here.

If you cancel permission to use your information, the researchers will stop collecting additional information about you. However, the researcher may use and disclose information that was gathered before she received your cancellation, as described above.

الغاء هذه الموافقة والترخيص

تأكد من أن تأخذ بعين الاعتبار المدة الزمنية اللازمة لجمع البيانات وتشمل ما إذا كان سيتم استخدام المعلومات التي تم جمعها قبل إلغاء اذن المشاركة . على سبيل المثال: يمكنك سحب موافقتك على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة في أي وقت. لديك أيضا الحق في

إلغاء ترخيص لاستخدام والكشف مزيد من المعلومات التي تم جمعها عنك، من خلال الكتابة في أي وقت أو عن طريق إرسال طلب خطي من خلال ملئ اسم وعنوان الباحث هنا. إذا قمت بإلغاء اذن السماح لاستخدام المعلومات الخاصة بك، فإن الباحث سيقوم بإيقاف جمع معلومات إضافية عنك. ومع ذلك، فإن الباحث قد يستخدم ويكشف معلومات تم جمعها قبل أن تلقى الإلغاء، كما هو موضح أعلاه.

#### QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher(s) listed at the end of this consent form

أسئلة حول المشاركة  
الأسئلة حول إجراءات المشاركة توجه للباحثين المدرجة اسمهم في نهاية هذا النموذج.

#### PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email irb@ku.edu

شهادة المشاركة:  
لقد قرأت نموذج الموافقة والترخيص. وقد أتيت لي الفرصة لطرح و تلقي إجابات على اسئلتني بخصوص هذه الدراسة. كما انني أفهم أنه في حال كان لدي أية أسئلة إضافية حول حقوقي كمشاركة في البحث، فإنه يمكنني الاتصال بهاتف (785) 7429-864 أو (785) 7385-864، وكتابة ايميل الى لجنة لورانس الحرم الجامعي (HSCL)، في جامعة ولاية كانساس، التي تقع في 2385 شارع ايرفينغ هيل، لورانس، كنساس 66045-7568، على البريد الإلكتروني irb@ku.edu

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form

أنا أوافق على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة البحثية. وافر قبل توقيعني أنه لا يقل عمري عن 18 عاما، وبأنني تلقيت نسخة من نموذج الموافقة والترخيص.

التاريخ

Date

كتابة/ طباعة اسم المشاركة بالدراسة

Type/Print Participant's Name

توقيع المشاركة بالدراسة

Participant's Signature

#### Researcher's Contact Information

بيانات التواصل مع الباحثين

Kawthar Alhajjuj  
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Joseph R. Pearson Hall  
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اسم وبيانات الاتصال بالباحثة التي تقوم بالدراسة كوثر خلف  
مبنى كلية التربية جوزيف بيرسون  
الواقع غرب الحرم الجامعي ١١٢٢  
لورنس كانساس ٦٦٠٤٥  
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اسم وبيانات الاتصال بالمشرف على الدراسة  
البرفسورة ليزا ولف وندل  
معاون عميد برامج الدراسات العليا والبحث العلمي  
في قسم التربية / غرفة رقم ٢١٤ سي  
جامعة كانساس  
قسم القيادة واصول التربية  
لورنس كانساس ٦٦٠٤٥  
تلفون رقم ٧٨٥٨٦٤

### Appendix (D)

#### Mother faculty members at Saudi universities who reviewed the interview protocol

Table 4

*Mother faculty members at Saudi universities who reviewed the interview protocol*

	Name of Faculty Member	Institution	Major/Faculty	City
1	Ashwag Albukhari	King Abdulaziz University	Biochemistry	Jeddah
2	Fadelah Almohammadi	King Faisal University	Math	Alhassa
3	Reem Alaskar	King Saud University	Information system	Riyadh
4	Norah abloushi	King Saud University	Health science	Riyadh
5	Fahdah Alshammari	University of Norah	Education	Riyadh
6	Reem Alshehri	Taibah University	Faculty of Science	

## Appendix (E)

### Phone interview as a data collection

Source: Burke, Lisa A. & Miller, Monica K. (2001). Phone Interviewing as a Means of Data Collection: Lessons Learned and Practical Recommendations [30 paragraphs]. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 2(2), Art. 7, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs010271>.

Before the interview	During the interview	After the interview
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-testing the interview protocol</li> <li>• Communicating with potential participants</li> <li>• Determining audio-taping techniques</li> <li>• Pre-determining data analysis needs and logistics of gathering data</li> <li>• Scheduling each of the interviews</li> <li>• Introducing yourself in the call</li> <li>• Informing participants of confidentiality</li> <li>• Identifying necessary form of note-taking</li> <li>• Communicating whether and/or how the results will be shared</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying appropriate interviewer style</li> <li>• Getting the participant to talk freely</li> <li>• Creating different types of questions</li> <li>• Giving useful feedback to participants, without distorting potential data</li> <li>• Considering interview length concerns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revisiting the collected data for accuracy</li> <li>• Preparing the data for analysis</li> <li>• Allotting ample time for data analysis</li> </ul>

Table 1: Phone interviewing as a means of data collection [4]

## Appendix (F)

### Phone Interview Protocol (English/Arabic)

بروتوكول المقابلة بالهاتف عربي/انجليزي

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experience of female Saudi doctoral students with children. In particular, this study looks at Saudi women in education doctoral programs in U.S. institutions. The study focuses on how these women manage motherhood and academic roles. In addition, this study aims to identify what support Saudi females receive in managing their multiple roles, and explore coping strategies that these Saudi doctoral students develop. Further, the study looks at what roles their husbands, family members, professors, peers, administrators, and related institutional policies play in their motherhood and student experience while they study in the U.S.

ان الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو التعرف على تجارب طالبات الدكتوراة الامهات و على وجه الخصوص فان هذه الدراسة تسعى لإستطلاع خبرات طالبات الدكتوراة السعوديات في برامج الدكتوراة بمختلف تخصصات التربية في الجامعات الامريكية . وتركز الدراسة على معرفة كيفية قيام المرأة السعودية بالموازنة ما بين دورها كام ودورها كطالبة بمستوى الدكتوراة . وأيضاً تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على الاستراتيجيات التي يستخدمنها طالبات الدكتوراة السعوديات الاناث لتحقيق هذا التوازن بين ادوارهن المتعددة . وعلاوة على ذلك، فان هذه الدراسة ايضا تهدف الى استكشاف أدوار أزواج الامهات السعوديات بمستوى الدكتوراة ، وأفراد الاسرة ، والأساتذة، والأقران، والإداريين، و السياسات التنظيمية ذات الصلة المرتبطة بالامهات الدراسات في الولايات المتحدة.

### First: Personal Background

Tell me about yourself (age, marital status)

Tell me about your family. (How many kids do you have? How old are they

Tell me what your role is as a mother here in the United States. (What are your responsibilities? What does a typical day look like for you?

اولاً: البيانات الشخصية

- ❖ اخبريني عن نفسك ، عمرك، حالتك الاجتماعية...
- ❖ اخبريني عن اسرتك .كم عدد اطفالك؟ وكم اعمارهم ؟ ..
- ❖ اخبريني عن دورك كام هنا بالولايات المتحدة . ماهي مسؤولياتك ؟ اوصفي لي يومك الاعتيادي

### Second: Academic Background

Why did you decide to study in the United States?

What is your major? At what stage of your doctorate are you

Why did you choose to major in education?

How has your academic experience been so far? What are the things you are enjoying about your program? What are some thing that are perhaps difficult or frustrating

Do your professors know you have children? If no why have you not told them? If yes, in what ways have they been helpful or unhelpful to you

ثانياً: الخلفية الاكاديمية

- ❖ لماذا قررتي الدراسة في الولايات المتحدة؟
- ❖ ماهو تخصصك؟ وفي اي مرحلة في برنامج الدكتوراة وصلتني؟
- ❖ لماذا اخترتي هذا التخصص للدراسة؟
- ❖ كيف تصفين لي خبرتك الاكاديمية الحالية؟ وماهي الجوانب التي استمتعتي فيها في دراسة هذا التخصص؟ وماهي الجوانب التي واجهتي صعوبة فيها.
- ❖ هل يعرف اعضاء هيئة التدريس بالقسم ان لديك اطفال؟ في حال كانت اجابتك بلا لماذا لم تبلغهم بذلك ؟ وفي حال كانت اجابتك بنعم ماهي الطرق التي ساهم بها لدعمك او اعانتك في مسيرتك الاكاديمية؟

### Third: Cultural Background

Tell me about your experience with living in the United States  
What obstacles do you encounter while you communicate with Americans e.g., language barriers, differences in values  
What have been your sources of support?

ثالثا: الخلفية الثقافية

- ❖ أخبريني عن خبرتك في الحياة في أمريكا
- ❖ أخبريني عن المعوقات التي واجهتك في التواصل مع الشعب الأمريكي مثلا معوقات لغوية او ثقافية، اختلافات في القيم ..
- ❖ أخبريني عن مصادر الدعم لديك

### Fourth: Performing Multiple Roles

Tell me about you experience in performing multiple roles as both mother and PhD student.  
Do you have stressors in performing mother and PhD student roles ? If you have stressors in performing mother and PhD student roles tell me about these stressors.  
If you have stressors in performing mother and PhD student roles what were the effects of these stressors on your performance and emotions? (Explain how those stressors hinder or motivate you? Use examples.)

رابعا: اداء الادوار المتعددة

- ❖ أخبريني عن تجربتك في الموازنة بين دورك كام ودورك كطالبة دكتوراه
- ❖ هل تواجهين ضغوطات بممارسة دورك كام وكطالبة دكتوراه بنفس الوقت، في حال وجود مثل هذه المعوقات حدثيني عنها.
- ❖ اذا كنتي تواجهين ضغوطات في الموازنة بين دورك كام وكطالبة دكتوراه فما هو تأثير هذه الضغوطات على ادائك ومشاعرك . اشرحي بأمثلة كيف تؤثر هذه الضغوطات وتعرقك مسيرتك او تحفزها للتقدم .

### Fifth: Coping Strategies

Tell me about your personal method of managing and balancing your life as both a mother and doctoral student.  
What is your husband's role? What does he do to support you? Please give examples.  
What is the role of your academic supervisor in providing support, academically, emotionally, socially ....?  
What role does your Saudi friends and Saudi Student club in your institution play in assisting you academically, socially ... ?  
What role does your academic supervisor in the Saudi Cultural Mission in DC play in assisting you academically, socially, financially .. etc. ?

خامسا: استراتيجيات الموازنة بين الادوار المتعددة

- ❖ أخبريني عن خبرتك بادارة ادوارك المتعدده كام وكطالبة تدرس بمستوى الدكتوراه
- ❖ أخبريني عن دور زوجك .هل هو داعم لك؟ اعطي امثلة على ذلك لو سمحتي
- ❖ أخبريني عن دور مشرفك الاكاديمي والعاطفي والاجتماعي..الخ
- ❖ أخبريني عن دور الطلبة السعوديين في الجامعة ودور النادي السعودي في دعمك اكاديميا او اجتماعيا او ماديا..الخ
- ❖ أخبريني عن دور مشرفك بالملحقية السعودية الثقافية في واشنطن في مساعدتك اكاديميا واجتماعيا واقتصاديا ..الخ

### Sixth: Recommendations

Would like to add or recommend advice to other Saudi doctoral students who are mothers and study or plan to study in the United States  
What suggestions do you have for your institutions, particularly the Department of Education in USA to support mothers who are doctoral students in education

سادسا: التوصيات

- ❖ هل ترغبين باضافة توصية او نصيحة للطالبات السعوديات الاخريات اللواتي هن اما امهات يدرسن في امريكا او امهات يخططن للدراسة في امريكا
- ❖ ماهي المقترحات التي يمكنك تقديمها للجامعات وبالتحديد كليات التربية الامريكية لدعم الامهات اللواتي يدرسن بمرحلة الدكتوراة بتخصص التربية .