FOUR WOMEN: SAUDI SCHOLARSHIP STUDENTS, INTENSIVE ENGLISH PROGRAMS AND SELF-AUTHORING

by

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ABSTRACT

JEANNE McCLOSKEY MALCOLM. Four Women: Saudi scholarship students, Intensive English Programs and Self-Authoring. (Under the direction of DR. SPENCER SALAS)

This participatory qualitative inquiry explored the shifting subjectivities of three women from Saudi Arabia, as they pursued tertiary education in the United States through benefit of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program. Informed by a Vygotskian theoretical framework for understanding the construction of identity (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998), the study examined the lived experiences of these scholars. Data analysis revealed a wide variety of tensions that arose as they struggled to learn enough academic English to pass the TOEFL exam and enter the university. These tensions included loneliness of "living" in the United States and Saudi Arabia, but not truly being in either 100%, financial struggles which resulted from the loss of the scholarship and, finally, acquiring academic English language. Implications for practice and research highlight further examination of support for this population.

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Ultimately, I would like to thank my participants Meriam, Ciamah and Rose who welcomed me into their homes and hearts 100%. I hope this and future research will help improve and expand educational opportunities for all women.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

While Saudi Arabian nationals have been attending universities as matriculated students for decades, the number of students working first towards the goal of passing English proficiency tests is rapidly increasing. Many of these students have conditional acceptance to American universities contingent on successfully passing English language assessment tests. According to the Open Doors Report (2013), the population of Saudi students studying English in Intensive English Programs (IEPs) or enrolled in U.S. universities grew from 5,000 in 2005 to nearly 45,000 in 2013, increasing its previous year's total by 30.5%. Saudi Arabia, a country of 29 million, was at the time of this study fourth in countries of origin for international students in the United States behind China, India and South Korea. In 2013, Saudi students made up 5.4% of all international students attending U.S. universities far exceeding all other Middle Eastern countries. Of the 45,000 Saudi nationals enrolled in U.S. higher education in 2013, females made up 30% of those scholarship recipients.

The accelerated rise of Saudi Arabian scholars in the United States since 2005 is a direct result of an agreement between then President George Bush and newly named King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, to help ease the strained relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia since 9/11. In 2001, it was determined that Osama bin Laden as well as 15 of the 19 terrorists involved in the attacks on the United States, were from Saudi Arabia; one of whom was here on a student visa . Fifteen of the visas were granted from the State Department in Saudi Arabia, at the U.S. Consulate in Jeddah or the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh, the only two visa-issuing posts in Saudi Arabia. Subsequently, the Office of Homeland Security was later established in 2002 and immediately granted

oversight on visa policy. This resulted in increased scrutiny placed on visa applications from Saudi Arabia. With this increased security, the number of visas granted to Saudi Arabians was greatly reduced resulting in a sharp decline, which continued until a 2005 meeting between the two heads of state.

Two decisions emerged from this meeting between then President Bush and King Abdullah. The first of these was for the United States to expand the student visa program and the second established the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP). According to the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education:

> The program is designed to be an important source of support for Saudi universities as well as the public and private sectors in the Kingdom by supplying them with highly qualified Saudi citizens and through the development, preparation and qualification of human resources in an effective manner, so that they may compete on an international level in the labor market and the various fields of scientific research.

This scholarship provided financial support to Saudi nationals pursuing tertiary education outside of their country. Scholarship recipients were granted a monthly stipend for each student, spouse, and children, as well as full academic tuition, medical and dental coverage, annual round trip tickets for students and family, and academic supervision. Students may either study English in an Intensive English Program (IEP) or pursue a university degree. Undergraduate students had the choice to study medicine, medical sciences, or health sciences. Graduate students were offered more diversity in course of study. They were able to pursue an advanced degree in a variety of medical fields, Engineering, Computer Science, Law, and many fields in business and finance ("Ministry of Higher Education", n.d.).

Statement of the Problem

American universities benefit greatly from the international student community. The internationalization of U.S. campuses provides opportunities for rich cultural exchange, sharing of global perspectives, as well as contributions to research and scholarly publication. Additionally, internationalization brings a tremendous amount of financial gain to universities with international students paying full tuition; bringing $24 billion to the economy in 2013. As international student scholarship steadily increases in the United States, 7.2% in 2012/13 to a record high of 819,644 students, consideration of what higher education means not only to American university communities but also to these students is of great importance. University experiences, expectations and outcomes vary across borders and do not always translate wholly. Of the top nine countries of origin, making up 66.4% of international students, the 44,566 students from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia were the only Middle Eastern students ("Open Doors Data," 2013). These students, making up 5.4% of the total international student population, identify with different educational experiences and gaining an understanding of socio-cultural practices could inform members of the university community.

"Understanding international student experiences from an institutional perspective is critical for improving their satisfaction and ensuring their retention as well as enrollment of others from their country" (Lee, 2010, p. 67). This understanding of student experiences cannot only be considered from the point of view of the American university perspective. What can be troubling with an increase of international scholarship is the privileging of English language dominance and the spread of "one single model of excellence" from the viewpoint of U.S. higher education (Green, 2013).

To that end, this qualitative inquiry leveraged participatory qualitative interviews (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) to create a thick description of the figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998) of an under-represented yet growing body of students whose educational, social and cultural background may not fully align with U.S. tertiary educational practices. Through this multiple semester interview study of three Saudi females currently or recently on scholarship for study in the U.S., I intended to further understand the dynamic experiences of three women and how their understanding of self; their identity, positions and repositions them on a campus of a public university in the United States.

Conceptual Framework

This inquiry was grounded in the theoretical construct of figured worlds (Holland, Lachicotte Jr., Skinner, & Cain, 1998); the socially and culturally created understanding of self which is paradoxically autobiographical and subject to outside influences. That is, figured worlds are "a realm of interpretation and action generated by the participants of a movement through their shared activities and commitments that imagines the terrain of struggle, the powers of opponents, and the possibilities of a changed world" (Holland, Fox, & Daro, 2008). By figured world, then, we mean a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (p. 52). These become the foundation of identity construction and reflect one's existing position.

Identities, constructed through social and cultural relationships, become one's figured world, their perception of their own human existence. Holland et.al. (1998) draw

from sociocultural theory (Bakhtin, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978) to argue that the formation of an identity is the complex of f many actions or in the case of figured worlds, many socio-cultural events. These "are a pivotal element of the perspective that persons bring to the construal of new activities and even new figured worlds" (Holland et al.,1998, p. 65).

Holland et al. (1998) describe the concept of figured worlds as multifaceted, being made up of distinct but interrelated aspects. This symbiotic relationship intends to explain the resulting shifting construct of social and cultural worlds. Figured worlds begin with the historical phenomena that we find ourselves coming from and going into, the places that we enter which are contextually significant. As we enter these historical phenomena, we have in place, layers of preexisting identity through gender, age, religion etc. These determine in part, how we enter the phenomena and how the experience will proceed. The historical phenomena are as much a participant in the development of figured worlds as each person is (Hatt, 2007).

Additionally, one's position within the historical phenomena situates them as it locates and limits within one world, but does not consistently follow someone into another world. Cultural worlds are socially created and reproduced and within such worlds, participants acquire "roles" (Holland et al, 1998, p.41) within the world, and through this; each event is organized and replicated. The existence of each figured world is a consequence of the social, cultural and historical context, the participants and the roles they play. The construction of one's figured world is an ongoing fluid process and is therefore never completed, never acquiring a static description. They are marked by social and cultural interactions where this formation of identities is complex, as it is

situated within the social and cultural settings that we move in and out of daily. Over time, we acquire and lose parts of that creation and those identities pivot again.

Research Questions

The qualitative interview study examined the lived experiences of three F-1 Visa women from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia pursing tertiary education in the United States with scholarship granted from the King Abdullah Scholarship Program. Informed through Holland's theory of figured worlds, I began this study with three research questions in mind:

- What are the figured worlds of female Saudi Arabian F-1 visa students studying in urban public university in the United States?
- What contexts mitigate and form or reform their identity formation?
- How do the women articulate their understandings of the role of identity in and out of the social worlds of the U.S. university community?

These research questions were informed by a pilot study that began in March 2014 and continued through May 2014. An additional phase of data collection began January of 2015 and continued into March of 2015 through four to six semi-structured 45-60 minute long interviews, field notes and five to ten hours of strategic, invited observation and/or shadowing and archival analysis of documents pertaining to the IEP and the Saudi scholarship. As is typical in qualitative research, my analytic procedures were ongoing and recursive (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Data analysis occurred through multiple readings and coding. Through these codes, I pulled out themes, which I then used to

frame further interviews. Additionally, I met with each participant individually for verification in March and April of 2015.

Vignette writing was utilized as another form in in-process analysis. As I transcribed each interview, I highlighted and considered the stories that exemplified their explanation, and my interpretation of each participant's experience through data stories (De Walt & De Walt, 2002).

Outline of the Dissertation

Chapter Two, a literature review, considers research on female students from Saudi Arabia studying in the United States. It presents studies, which are similar; however differ slightly from this one. Although much attention has been paid to international student experiences while studying in the United States, those studies which solely investigate Saudi females returned few results. This review of the literature continues with findings of similar projects that highlight the need for more research. It is followed by the examination of post-secondary, Intensive English Programs in the United States. It then details Holland et al.'s (1998) Vygotskian construct of figured worlds to frame this study and present the findings.

In Chapter Three, I present the research methodology for this project. I detail the methods and processes of data collection and analysis which I have utilized.

Chapters Four, Five and Six present my findings in relation to my research questions. Each participant is highlighted in her own chapter. In Chapter Four, I present Meriam, a young college graduate who felt the need to "do something" after sitting three years post-graduation in Saudi Arabia. In Chapter Five, I present Ciamah, also a college graduate, who was living here with her three school aged children while her husband

returned home to work. Finally, in Chapter Six, I present Rose, a young undergraduate who was not initially granted the KASP yet her determination to study abroad led her to apply a second time.

Chapter Seven concludes the study with implications for practice and research.

Contribution to the Field and Significance of the Project

With more than 1 million international students currently studying in U. S. universities ("Open Doors Data," 2016) it is of great interest to universities to understand how best to serve these scholars both inside and outside of the lecture hall. The KASP was established to amend the post 9/11 relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia. Now in its second decade, and the rise of a new monarch, we see a shift in direction of the KASP, which now requires additional academic preparation prior to travel. That said, there remain significant struggles that all international students face attending university in the United States. These students, who not only contribute financially to these institutions of learning, but culturally, and academically as well (Perry, Lausch, Weatherford, Goeken, & Almendares, 2017), face cultural, financial, health, academic and language obstacles.

In an effort to strengthen the international students' experience and encourage the continuation of the internationalization of institutes of higher education, more investigation is necessary. This study looked at a small sample of women from Saudi Arabia who were living and studying at a U.S. university. Saudi Arabia is the fourth largest sending country to U.S. universities with females making up 30% of these students. These women face their own unique obstacles to higher education in a secular world. In the university setting, students, faculty and staff, inhabit a richly diverse and

increasingly global space. In 2012/13 international students studying in American universities increase 7.2% reaching 819,644. That number passed 1 million in 2016 ("Open Doors Data," 2016). Classrooms of the 21st century see the largest groups of transnational students coming from China, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Canada ("Open Doors Data," 2013). In 2005 there were 2,500 Saudi students studying in the United States. According to the Saudi Cultural Attaché Assistant for Administrative and Financial Affairs in Washington, D.C., Dr. Abdulrahman Al-Subayil, that number has risen to 45,000 in 2013 ("Open Doors Data,"). Due to the increase in governmental scholarship for non-matriculated Saudi Arabian students entering Intensive English Programs in the United States, and the limited amount of research concerning the needs of Saudi Arabian female students studying in American universities and Intensive English Programs, this research provides in-depth insight into the thick description of the personal and cultural worlds of three female students from Saudi Arabia studying in the United States on an F-1 Visa.

International students' experiences vary greatly throughout their academic careers. The transition into the United States' university system is marked by cultural, language, and financial differences, as well as the struggle with being unfamiliar or misinformed about educational practices and expectations, discrimination through stereotypes and general loneliness and culture shock (Andrade, 2005; Andrade, 2007; Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007). These factors contribute greatly to the successes and failures of international students, however to look further at how these overarching variances contribute to the figured worlds of women on scholarship from Saudi Arabia offers understanding and insight into how their lived experiences in the United States.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

> Yes, I would talk more loudly; this is not my real personality… like in your school, not my real personality. If there were all women (in class), I would be different and you would see-Fatimah (IEP student from Dennam, Saudi Arabia.)

Fatimah was a student in my high intermediate English class who never spoke. I was surprised to hear that she had been in the United States studying at this university for a year because I could not remember ever seeing her in the halls. Her older brother, also in the class, was nearly as quiet as she was, and he stood out in my mind because of this. I did not know much more about her other than the quantifiable data collected by my department: age and nationality, including city and country.

What defines a person, a student; a woman; an international student, as something static or having an essence, limits their possibilities to be anything but that. By filing an individual into tidy folders other people decide what they do thereby defining who they are. Nevertheless, a person knows who they are; their identity, by knowing themselves rather than being told who they are.

The first section of this chapter presents a review of the literature on Saudi Arabian females studying in the United States. The second section presents information on Intensive English Programs, specifically in the United States and their procedures and practices. The third section discusses the theoretical framework of Holland's figured worlds and identity formation. The last section concludes with a discussion on self-authoring within Saudi Arabia.

Literature on Saudi Arabian females studying in the United States

For decades, scholarship for TESOL has explored the experiences of international students in postsecondary education—often with emphases ranging from students' negotiation of the disciplinary specificity of academic writing (Prior, 2013), the complex and fluid relationship to their first-language writerly identities (Canagarajah, 2013a, 2013b), pedagogies for developing ESL/EFL undergraduate writer's academic literacies (Leki, 2009), as well as the specificity for teaching U.S. educated ESL basic writers (Generation 1.5) in postsecondary remediation (Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999).

The Journal of Second Language Writing , established in 1992, for example articulates its aim and scope as " publishing theoretically grounded reports of research and discussions of central issues in second and foreign language writing and writing instruction . . . personal characteristics and attitudes of L2 writers, L2 writers' composing processes, features of L2 writers' texts, readers' responses to L2 writing, assessment/evaluation of L2 writing, contexts (cultural, social, political, institutional) for L2 writing, and any other topic clearly relevant to L2 writing and/or writing instruction" ("Journal of Second Language Writing", n.d.).

That said, for the most part, the experiences of international students in IEP have been somewhat less explored—and the specificity of Saudi females in such coursework remains underexplored. A review of the literature revealed an absence of scholarly articles addressing this population specifically. To look separately at the topics of gender in classrooms, Saudi Arabian students, specifically female Saudi Arabian students and Intensive English language programs, which are entirely made up of international students, returned limitless articles and text. Yet to research them as a whole, returned

very few results. A 2011 study of five female students from Saudi Arabia at the University of Portland included gender consideration in the classroom yet the discussion in this qualitative research project was limited. The investigator did not plan to observe gender and it seemed like a consideration after the research began. Another difference in this study is that the participants were enrolled in general university classes in business management. In such classes, it would have possible that they were the only international student in the class. One aspect of my research that differs from the 2011 study is that it is looking at international students' experiences living in both multiple worlds simultaneously, rather than their experiences only in general American university classes (Kampman, 2011).

Another study, conducted by Meloni (1990), utilized questionnaires and journals to evaluate how Arab students viewed the experience of adaptation. Due to the length of time that has passed and the consideration of political events, as well as change in Saudi Arabian leadership, this study was not considered to benefit this study. Additionally, it included other variables such as males as well as students from Kuwait, Egypt and Iraq; countries which are not 100% Muslim. Of these two variables, gender is of greatest consideration. My research looked at women specifically, and could not be compared to the experience and socio-cultural expectations of Arab males. Additionally, due to the political history of Saudi Arabia and the United States since the 2001 bombing attacks, the findings of the Meloni study did not apply. The Saudi Arabian scholarship was designed to improve relationships between the United States and Saudi Arabia due in part, to terrorist attacks in 2001, where it was determined that 14 of the 19 terrorists were from Saudi Arabia.

A comparative study on the motivation to study English as a Foreign Language (EFL) between male and female university students concluded that motivational construct was linked to academic majors (Javid, Al-Asmari , & Farooq, 2012). “The major objective of Saudi undergraduates is to learn English mainly for utilitarian and academic purposes” (p. 294). The researchers examined overarching reasons for studying English as a foreign language and utilized this data to investigate how motivation is separate by gender and course of study. This quantitative study utilized statistical information collected in Arabic, from a survey to inform their results. Additionally, this research was conducted on university students at Taif University in Saudi Arabia rather than those living abroad. The key difference here was that these students never were truly situated outside their own world. Classes still were structured for Saudi culture and each day, at the end of class, they returned to their world never needing to negotiate their identity. These EFL classes neither removed nor repositioned the participants.

As evidenced by the limited amount of literature available on this research topic clearly shows, there is a need for further investigation. The demographics of Intensive English Programs are ever changing and with that come a need for empirical research that could inform IEPs as well as those working with Saudi nationals who continue in the university systems. It would also serve administrators who are planning schools who serve international students as well as both male and female instructors.

Saudi women and postsecondary education in Intensive English Programs

Enrollment of international students in American universities has consistently increased from 25, 464 students in 1948/1949 to 819,644 students in 2012/2013 with few exceptions. The 7.2% rise in admission for 2013 demonstrates that international students

made up 3.9% of U.S. enrollment ("Open Doors Data,"). International students wishing to study in American university must pass English proficiency exam. The two most widely accepted are the IELTS and TOEFL. These exams assess students' ability to comprehend and utilize academic English language in four skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing.

IELTS is offered 48 times a year in 900 locations throughout 130 countries at a cost of $205 and is accepted by 1,688 institutions in the United States for admission. The first segment of the test consists of a 30-minute section in which students listen to four recorded texts spoken by native speakers with a variety of accents and then answer questions. Part two, lasting 60 minutes, requires a candidate to read three authentic passages from books, journals and newspapers and answer 40 questions. The third part is a 60-minute writing section where students are required to answer two prompts or tasks. The first of these tasks involves interpreting information and text from a visual prompt and answering in 150 words, guiding questions about the data. The second task requires the candidate to write a 250-word essay answering the prompt. The final section of the IELTS exam is an 11-14 minute recorded interview with an examiner that begins with general information about the candidate and then presents a general topic, which the candidate builds on. Each test is graded by a trained examiner and given a band descriptor of one through nine. The band descriptors are then averaged giving the candidate an overall score. University requirements vary but a score of 6 is a general requirement for undergraduate admission and a 6.5 for graduate admission.

The TOEFL exam differs slightly from the IELTS exam as it is offered both on paper and as an online assessment at an official TOEFL testing center for a cost of $185.

The online version, TOEFL Internet based test (iBT), is a 4-hour exam that assesses reading, listening, speaking and writing. The reading section is 60-80 minutes long and contains three to four passages from academic texts with 36-56 questions. The next section requires the test taker to listen to 60-90 minutes of lectures, classrooms discussions and conversation by native English accents (including North America, The United Kingdom, New Zealand or Australia) and answer 34-51 questions. Test takers then take a 10-minute break before continuing with the rest of the test. The second half of the exam is a 20-minute speaking section during which candidates complete six tasks. These tasks allow 15 seconds to listen and 45 seconds to respond. The final section requires a candidate to write two essays based on a reading and listening task. Each section of the TOEFL exam is worth 30 points with an overall score of 120. While institutions set their own requirements, generally a score of 65 is accepted for undergraduate and 85 for a graduate program.

The purpose of Intensive English Programs is to prepare students to succeed in American university settings by increasing their Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS); students' surface skills to communicate in English and their Cognitive Academic Learning Proficiency (CALP); students' ability to manage the academic skills needed in a university setting (Cummins, 1979). Common curriculum for IEPs contains integrated skill instruction prepared for students' proficiency levels. Students are initially assessed upon admission and placed in an appropriate level for instruction. Because IEPs vary widely, it is difficult to describe a universal curriculum but often, when they are located on a university campus, program directors align course of study with university requirements for admission. Beginning students attend English language classes solely

within the IEP while advanced students with good academic standing are permitted to take a university course, usually math, while still enrolled in the IEP.

Students who are working towards passing either the IELTS or TOEFL exam often enroll in IEPs. This is generally the end goal of English programs that cater to international students. These programs, offered throughout the United States, vary in size, location and curriculum and differ widely in their mission. Here too, exists a gap in the literature on programming types and standardization of curriculum goals. One type of program which exists within a university can be, but is not always, aligned with an academic department and is often not deemed equal. While students receive grades through the IEP, these do not transfer into the university's system of academic reporting. These self-funding programs which Kaplan (1997) deems as "homeless" , can struggle to prepare students for academic expectations of universities.

Often programs do not parallel the rigor of the rest of the university community. Those aligned with the University and College Intensive English Program (UCIEP) consortium do uphold academic standards that "advance professional standards and quality instruction in intensive English programs at universities and colleges in the United States". These 72 members are only a fraction of the total number of accredited and non-accredited English programs.

Another Intensive English Program model is the franchised independent language school which operates in multiple locations under the same name. These programs often provide scripted instruction that offer shorter-term intensive instruction. These models also vary greatly both within and outside of the United States and depend on the design of the administrators. They do not usually offer college credit but can focus on TOEFL and

IELTS instruction specifically. Additional models include programs teaching English for Specific Purposes, visitor exchange programs as well as private tutoring.

Figured Worlds: Theory and Features

The social and cultural construct of one's identity and how it is performed and addressed has been operational in developing thick descriptions of where an individual is located in place and time. Qualitative studies that investigate the unique identity formation of an individual benefit from the in depth analysis of one's perceived world. In looking at a key component of figured worlds, Holland et.al. (1998) state that individuals position themselves and are positioned in multiple figured worlds simultaneously, worlds which shift back and forth, as we exist within them.

Worlds that move, and are moved, constantly creating a web-like social space unique to each individual. Worlds that are contingent on context which can control or be controlled by the individual to negotiate agency. This agency, often built on the byproduct of social interactions, becomes the social constructed reality (Côté & Levine, 2002). To explain what is formed from the fluidity of these shifting social worlds is as difficult to explain as the identities themselves.

Identity formation through figured worlds has been embraced by contemporary scholarship for language, literacy, and culture (Chang, 2014; Chang, Torrez, Ferguson, & Sagar, 2017; Urrieta, 2007). Of importance to this research project is identity formation in university women from Saudi Arabia. It is clear that there is a gap in the research though there have been some investigation into female international students from the Middle East. Research looking at the identity production in the figured worlds of 25 undergraduates of color, applied her own experience of feeling "like an insider, in-

betweener, and outsider in differing cultural worlds because of my Multiracial/multiethnic heritage" (Chang, 2014, p. 26). Chang's understanding of the expectations of her own multiracial identity within the university, which were "laden with stereotypes and accompanying academic expectations" (p. 26), caused her to choose to identify herself as a mono-cultural student to help create a belonging in the social world of mono-cultural, minority students within a predominantly white university. Choosing to shed her Chinese and Italian heritage for her more physically identifying Latina, Chang (2014), constructed a figured world at the university.

Through this investigation into how a group of undergraduates of color identified themselves through a practice of self-authoring, Chang (2014) found that their figured worlds were as unique as they each were. Their individual identity formation came through improvisational activities such as their individual choice to identify as mono or multi-cultural or creating a new identity. Some participants chose to "perform cultural markers of authenticity" (p.38) through clothing choice or dialect to position themselves while others chose to identify outside of race all together claiming that race was not part of their identity formation.

Holland et.al. (1998) state that figured worlds, "rest upon people's abilities to form and be formed in collectively realized "as is" realms" (p. 49). Chang (2014) applied this theoretical framework to examine multi-racial identity formation within figured worlds of undergraduates. This investigation into how cultural identity affects the self-authoring of identity formation allies with an exploration into the figured worlds of female F-1 visa students from Saudi Arabia studying in the United States. Religious practices of Muslim women, such as the requirement to wear a hijab, can be

misinterpreted as a racial identifier. The authoring of self in this situation is preceded by social and cultural understanding of the religious practice of Muslims living throughout the world rather than the self-realized cultural identification of the individual woman.

Hatt (2007) applied Holland et.al. (1998) theory of identity formation through figured worlds to marginalized urban youth. The researcher examined how school smartness contributes to lowered academic achievement for minority students. In looking at how "smartness is socio-culturally produced, rather than being biologically based, and the ways it becomes embodied through academic identity" (p. 146), the figured worlds of poor urban students in the world of school life and the world of street life was examined. They intended to look at the meaning of knowledge in relation to schooling but found that all but one participant considered school knowledge and a more highly valued street knowledge to be separate, and their position within each separate world has distinct meaning in identity creation. The researchers used the socio-cultural lens of Holland et al. (1998) work as a theoretical framework as it "takes shape within and grants shape to the coproduction of activities, discourses, performances, and artifacts" (p. 51). The work of figured worlds also "emphasizes how the everyday, mundane activities in life build, inform, and (re)create identities and social spaces. In essence, their work allows us to analyze being ''smart'' as connected simultaneously to culture, power/status, and identity within everyday practices of school life" (Hatt, 2007, p. 150). Within these two worlds, education and knowledge are two distinct entities. In the narrowed world of school, students are denied access to the curriculum through tracking or curriculum that does not align with their street world. Smartness, like identity, measured within our figured worlds cannot be reduced to one static description. Yet through the position of these

participants in an educational setting, the dominant discourse of the world of schooling, did impact their sense of self. One of the origins of identity building is through the dominant institutions of society (Castells, 1997).

Self-authoring

Identity formation, a process of fashioning a sense of self from our own histories, beliefs, gender, or nationality, is an ongoing process which hinges on multiple, uncontrollable factors. While the construction of identity is self-authoring, it is often structurally marked, the cultural study of identity formation "invites us to see persons taking form in the flow of historically, socially, culturally and materially shaped lives". This self-authoring offers an opportunity to respond to the historical narratives which locate and limit us. By allowing space for identity creation through self-authoring and personal narratives, we further allow an expansion of thought and an understanding of "the temporalities that structure personal narratives reinforces their value as documents of ongoing self-construction and social transformation" (Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008, p. 33) .

As identities, formed through figured worlds, are fluid due to their vulnerability to external and internal input, the positioning and repositioning self-perpetuate the fluidity. Additionally, we live in multiple figured worlds simultaneously. Our own subjectivities position us differently throughout each world greatly affecting our power and status depending on social, cultural and historical context. As we exist within multiple cultural landscapes, we become aware of how it is possible to manipulate our identities and have them manipulated by other participants, to reveal and conceal certain subjectivities and aspects that place identity upon us. As identities are formed within context of time and

place, social and cultural settings contribute to the fluidity of meaning. Having a role assigned by race, gender, or ethnicity can re-center meanings and cause us to lose ownership as the context redefines subjectivities. Ownership shifts from forming identities to having them formed by a larger social structure. Within each context, these structures present metanarratives constructed through and by subjectivities and context.

Self-authoring, Saudi Women and Education

Established in 1932, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia began the formal education of males with the creation the Education Directorate that became the Ministry of Education in 1953. Education for females was launched in 1959 beginning with the opening of 15 primary schools and one institute for teacher training. In 1963, as the first students completed elementary schools, secondary schools were established greatly increasing the number of females enrolled in school. Education in Saudi Arabia is free, open, and compulsory for all citizens, Primary and secondary schools are separate for females and males, and this separation continues through to institutions of higher education. Women are allowed to attend universities but they are not permitted to study with men with exception. In 2009, the first mixed gender university was opened. The King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, (KAUST), was the only school that allowed men and women to study together. Of the nearly five million students enrolled in Saudi schools and universities in 2011, females made up slightly more than half of the population. The government spent nearly 40% of its entire budget on education. Of the nearly 24 government universities, only KAUST allowed women to study with men. These universities offer Bachelors, Masters and Doctorate degrees, though women are limited to studying the humanities, in particular Education as well as Nursing, Islamic

Studies and Natural Sciences and can only earn a PhD in Education. Additionally, women were prevented from studying and working in what some regard as traditionally male fields such as law, engineering, and finance. While they were allowed to study at the tertiary level, outside of KAUST, they were further limited by access to larger libraries typically found in men's universities and to qualified teachers (Arebi, 1994). Moreover, women did not receive equal quality education as men, in part because female teachers had been educated in the same system. Over 1/3 of the teachers at men's universities held Doctorates compared to only 3% of those who teach at women's universities and colleges (AlMunajjed, 1997). Although women comprised more that 50% of university students, the percentage of women working outside the home, according to the 1999 census, is 5% and these women are in the teaching and health sectors (Baki, 2004).

What was evident by this is that although the system of higher education appeared to offer opportunities for women to study, there was a mismatch on the outcomes of such programs. While women were not allowed to work in many fields, they were systematically educated to not be employable. The national directive to educate women might not therefore, be interpreted to provide opportunity for employment. Furthermore, the social value of women and education was also undermined by their traditional roles as daughter and wife. There is no official marriage age in Saudi Arabia, and young wives often do not finish their studies. The dropout rate at the university level in 2005-6 was nearly 60% (Mesbah, 2009).

To further explain the differences between women's and men's education, traditionally classrooms are single gender and are often instructed by a teacher of the

same gender. If a male instructor does teach a university course, special accommodations are made. At women's universities such as, Unn Al Qura University, male instructors teach via closed circuit television. Women are allowed to ask and answer questions via a microphone that both the instructor and the student have access. In this situation, the camera in the women's classroom is turned off so the male instructor cannot see them. Another example is at the Al-Faisal University, a co-ed university opened only to men currently due to protests, where women were seated in a balcony that is enclosed with a one-way glass wall. Although it was a co-educational facility, it did not plan to admit females until it gained more credibility (Krieger, 2007). Private underground entrances would be available for the female students to enter the classroom through a private staircase, without being exposed to male students. All female only universities are surrounded by brick walls and are secured by the National Guard. Women may only leave in the company of their father, brother, husband or approved chauffeur (Baki, 2004; Mobaraki & Soderfeldt, 2010). Men and women cannot socialize together outside their immediate families, which include brothers, father and uncles. In addition, women must wear traditional clothing: an *abaya* that covers their body and a *hijab* to cover their hair and neck.

Figured worlds are built from social and cultural events, which contribute, to one's position and power within that world. Our own subjectivities add to this newly formed and ever changing identity construct. For female F-1 visa students from Saudi Arabia studying in the United States, identity construction holds additional complexities beyond social and cultural events, which is religion. Saudi Arabian citizenship is exclusively for Muslims. Within Saudi Arabia, there are explicit religious expectations

for women that supersede social and cultural practices. These religious expectations provide an established framework for identity that re-centers Saudi women in dogma. Religion structures the way women are expected and permitted to live within the Islamic state of Saudi Arabia. Secular law, known as Shari'a, defines the moral and legal elements of life for Muslims. Saudi Arabia has one of the strictest interpretations of Shari'a, these laws, limit women's opportunities in their social and cultural worlds by applying Muslim identity as an overarching composition within the Saudi state (Hefner, 2011).

The postmodernism foundation of figured worlds which allows micro-narratives to coexist are not absent within Saudi Arabia. Within the figured worlds of Saudi females living in the Arabian Peninsula, are personal and intimate identities formed in day-to-day interactions. Their worlds are also figured through their lived experiences and opportunities as well as within time and place.

Western Feminist thought has questioned Saudi women's social positions as being limited. A paradox between the micro discourses of Feminist thought and their interpretation of oppression and equality with Islamic Shari'a is noteworthy (Hamid, 2006; Holland & Quinn, 1987). How a woman from Saudi Arabia positions herself within her social life of her world contributes to her awareness of self.

Shifting social settings resets our figured worlds, positing how this same woman, in a different social context, creates or maintains her identity. In the case of students traveling to the United States to pursue tertiary education, the change from an Islamic to a nonsectarian country significantly affects one of the many layers of her self-understanding and the foundation of her created self-understanding. Shari'a addresses

many aspects of life as a Saudi woman. As a religious custom, women in Saudi Arabia wear clothing that demonstrates modesty; most importantly the *abaya*, a full cloak that loosely covers a female's clothed body from neck to ankle and shoulder to wrist. In addition, she wears *a hijab*, a scarf to cover her hair, ears, neck and chest. Female modesty is neither a social nor a cultural norm in the Kingdom but a national expectation as it is dictated through the common religious belief system of all Saudi nationals. Within the United States, a dominant majority stereotype often portrays veils to be "a symbol of the subordination of women within Muslim societies" and are often referred to as "emblems of the Muslim world in general, demonstrating not only that Muslim women are oppressed, but also that Muslim societies are backward" (van Santen, 2010, p. 275). Shari'a also addresses legal, marital, and educational issues within the country, but as Saudi Arabian students leave the Kingdom, they bring with them their religious beliefs, but not necessarily the religious laws. Shari'a, a foreign law, is not recognized in the United States and in theory, no longer holds power over Saudi women here. In this situation, the complexities of identities creation that are formed and reformed over time and place could experience a major shift. The development of the figured worlds of women from Saudi Arabia, who choose to leave their country to study abroad, situates women in multiple figured worlds simultaneously

Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined the experience of Saudi Arabian women studying at the tertiary level in the United States. I have presented a review of the literature on the subject and shown that there is a gap in the research of this group of international students. I have presented the significance of the study and explained aspects of

Intensive English Programs. Additionally, I have presented the socio-cultural framework of figured world and self-authoring, and how Saudi women self-author within the context of a university setting.

In Chapter Three, I expand on the use of the theoretical framework of figured worlds and how it aligns with the methodology of qualitative inquiry of an interview study. I also include my method of data collection and analysis as well as a description of the research site, three participants and a subjectivity statement.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

In this chapter, I describe the evolution of this participatory qualitative inquiry which is surrounded in the lived experiences of three Saudi women attending an IEP at Central Georgia State University. Drawing on Holland's (1998) theory of the construction of identity and self-authoring through figured worlds, I describe the analytical framework whereby I examine the self-authored identity formation of these women. Following this, I present the purpose of this study and the research questions that guide it. I then describe the general description of the participants and the research site. I include my subjectivity statement as it has emerged through my own developing understanding of figured worlds. Each data chapter begins with a vignette to illustrate representation of the data in each participant's voice. I conclude with detailed descriptions of the recursive process of my data coding and analysis.

Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative research begins with a question, an inquiry into a social and cultural real world event, in an attempt to learn about some aspect of the social world. It is "the collection, analysis and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual (i.e., non-numerical) data to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interests" (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2000, p. 7). It is collected through various methods from structured to semi-structured interviews, focus groups, field notes, artifacts and documents that build onto each other directing and redirecting the development and creation of a thick description of an experience. Through data collection and analysis qualitative researchers form and reform, creating their contextually situated interpretation (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Emerson et al., 1995; Wolcott, 1994, 1995). Through a process of inquiry of an

individual phenomenon, qualitative researchers approach their research interests through interactions with their participants. This form of research provides a broad understanding of culture as it looks into a small window of participants' time and place and through interpretive inquiry is able to describe and interpret meaning. This interpretation falls into question as it relies on the researcher to determine the direction of the process as opposed to a quantitative design which "collects and analyzes numerical data to describe, explain, predict, or control phenomena of interest" (Gay et al., 2000, p. 6). "Qualitative Research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). It is knowledge constructed by and through its members; both researcher and participants and it is this construction that distinguishes this as a valued "The primary aim of qualitative research in to develop an understanding of how the social world is constructed" (McLeod, 2011, p. 3).

This form of research has progressively become popular form of investigation for studies that intend to explore the naturalistic production of culture and identity (Eisner, 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). As a form of social research, developed from the fields of cultural and social anthropology and sociology, qualitative research, has become a sound approach to research on human groups in social settings. Rather than looking at a one snapshot of a large group of participants in response to a treatment, as quantitative research does, qualitative research intends to look deeply at a small group over an extended period. By taking advantage of the flexibility that time allows, qualitative research allows data to be generated from what is observed, and adjusts the research processes to further develop a full understanding of the social

phenomenon. By operating through the conceptual framework of figured worlds, which guides the course of the study, quantitative research seeks to look at the participant through their own worldview. This worldview is derived from the context and the understanding of how it has been formed, and requires depth in understanding.

Developed from the field of anthropology, the study of culture, involving a holistic study of a group or a culture, this research entailed a series of in-depth interviews between the researcher and three participants. Relying heavily on socio-cultural knowledge, researchers develop an analysis of data through their interpretation of events through cultural lenses (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1973). Harris, (1968) states, "the culture concept comes down to behavior patterns, associated with particular groups of people, that is, to "customs", or to a people's "way of life" " (p. 16). Furthermore, looking at culture, as defined by Nieto & Bode (2012) as "the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and world view shared by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors that can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class and/or religion" (p.111). Van Maanen (1988) states, the *ever-changing* aspect of culture are of importance:

> Culture is not something that can be known once and for all. Fieldworkers may stalk culture and meaning, but these elusive, will-o'-the-wisp targets slip in and out of view, appear in many apparitions, look different from different angles (and to different stalkers), and sometimes move with surprising speed. Knowing a culture, even our own, in a never-ending story (p. 188).

The researcher then, in observing this socio-cultural event, takes on the role of both the "storyteller and the scientist" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 2). Qualitative research intends to learn about people *from* the people instead of studying *about* them and explores the informal "give and take of everyday life" (Stocking Jr., 1992, p. 16) as well

as how individual people come together and live. Researchers are then tasked with developing a balance between interpreting their field experiences and their research training (Fetterman, 1989).

These preconceptions inform the research project and design, and guide data collection and analysis. “Subjectivity can be virtuous, for it is the basis of researchers making a distinctive contributions, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected” (Peshkin, 1988, p. 18). Additionally, it requires “some understanding of the language, concepts, categories, practices, rules, beliefs,” (Van Maanen, 1988a, p. 13). Qualitative researchers enter the field with an open mind researching a problem and defining a question and a theoretical framework to look at the phenomenon by gaining access to a site and developing a plan for collecting data.

Research Questions and Description of the Study

Deep understanding of a person’s identity draws from Holland’s et al. (1998) notion of figured worlds. The complexities of existing within multiple worlds and the popular discourse of mainstream cultural understanding hinder identity creation. Instead, they rely on the already created discourse and further perpetuate the misalignment between a static description of one’s self, a generalization that can be seen as inaccurate and judgmental. Understanding of the social and cultural worlds of three women from Saudi Arabia, attending a large university in the United States is not something that can be reduced to one single description. It is the understanding of the fluidity and multifaceted worlds which are affected by historical and cultural influences as well as a greater grasp of the understanding of self and the nested and contested pieces of self that

contribute to one's identity formation. Figured worlds exist within time and place and vary in and out of social contexts.

As previously explained in Chapter One, this study was driven by an ensemble of research questions that included:

- What are the figured worlds of female Saudi Arabian F-1 visa students studying in urban public university in the United States?
- What contexts mitigate and form or reform their identity formation?
- How do the women articulate their understandings of the role of identity in and out of the social worlds of the U.S. university community?

During the spring of 2014, I prepared and applied for approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to study, "Saudi women negotiating U.S. universities." As part of a class project for the Topics in Urban Education Leadership course, we were to identify our research interests and develop and submit an IRB with the intention to design and conduct a pilot study. The process of completing an IRB involved reading multiple examples, attending an IRB workshop presented by the university's Institutional Review Board, writing up a draft for coursework and submission. My initial submission was not accepted and returned to me with condition of revisions. After completion of revisions, I resubmitted it and received protocol approval.

The pilot study began in the spring of 2014 with two participants, both of whom met the criteria of the study: female, from Saudi Arabia, and studying in the United States on scholarship. Unfortunately, my first participant, backed out of the study due to scheduling. Shahad (pseudonym), a mother of two young boys, was completing her final

semester of graduate work and unable to commit to the interviews. My second participant, Rose (self-chosen pseudonym), was able to participate in two interviews. Rose was a former English student of mine and was at the time a sophomore studying biology at Central Georgia State University (institutional pseudonym). I began the interview with my recruitment script followed by questions prepared in advance (APPENDIX A). The semi-structured interview was conducted off campus at a coffee shop and lasted 90 minutes (APPENDIX B). Audio data was recorded digitally and transcribed by me later that afternoon. During the interview, I recorded field notes and observations; and commentaries were written in the form of jot notes were included in this to help to expand my transcripts (see Figure 1).

Field Notes	Comments/questions
Rose modesty	What does she mean? Different here in the U.S. than Saudi Arabia?
"I think here I am struggling with, for me like some courses, like anthropology and sociology. *We don't study these things in my country so something easy to the American student because they used to it in high school but it is really something new to us- something new and hard.*	How can she articulate this in a classroom filled with mostly American educated students?
" my family, like my father and my grandfather"	What role do female family members play in this?
"this is my chance" "this is a gift"	For what? To replace something?

Figure 1: Sample of Field Notes with Comments/Questions

I conducted multiple readings and re-readings on the transcription and expanded on my transcripts using comments and question then adding vignettes, observations, descriptions of the setting and participant searching for themes in the data. These themes then informed my second interview question set. Realizing that more data came from fewer questions, the second interview was less structured and more participant led.

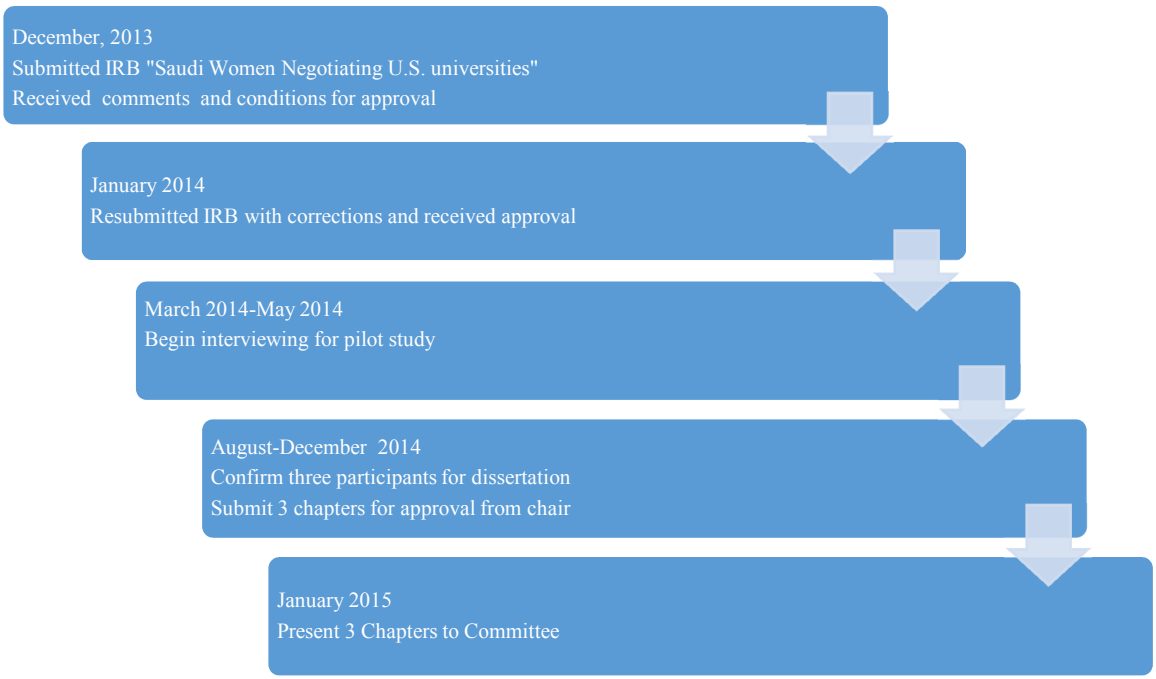

Figure 2: Pilot Study

Data Collection

With the approval of my prospectus, data collection began in January 2015 and ended in March 2015, with follow up interviews for clarification purposes throughout the spring semester of 2015. I conducted interviews in a location that is chosen by the participant with consideration for social and cultural preferences. These locations were both on and off the campus of Central Georgia State University. Throughout this in depth interview study, data on each participant was collected through interviews, field notes, 5-10 hours of strategic, invited observation and archival analysis of documents pertaining to the IEP and the Saudi scholarship.

Interviewing

Interviewing a group of three female international students who represent a growing trend in enrollment in U.S. institutes of higher education was a “powerful way to

gain insight into educational issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives constitute education" (Seidman, 1998, p. 7). This purpose comes from interview knowledge that is "produced, relational, conversational, contextual, linguistic, narrative and pragmatic" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This concept of interview knowledge further explaining how the purpose; here the research questions, is evolved from the ongoing research.

The idea that the data drawn from the interview is not found but is instead, actively created by both partners and that knowledge is relational to the researcher and the participant who, by bringing their own subjectivities into the project, create a unique phenomenon within that relationship; co-constructed (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Mishler, 1986; Paget, 1983; Silverman, 2001; Wengraf, 2001). The context of the study, time and place of each interaction was specific to the project and cannot be reproduced. Translation of meaning outside of the phenomenon can be considered yet never duplicated. Through this knowledge, the investigator's own understanding of the context, participants, and culture, the flexibility needed by qualitative researchers develops.

Interviews allow researchers to access information that is not accessible through the flatness of observation alone. Seeking to capture the dynamics and vitality of a personal and shared inner view of a participant through in depth interviewing has the "potential to convey the power of life inherent in human contact" (Chirban, 1996, p. xi). They respond to "features of the ongoing interaction, the nuances of mood and the context of the evolving conversation" (Paget, 1983, p. 69). Well thought out, planned interviews can capture background information, in-depth data about experiences, feelings, emotions, concerns, and values.

While interviews can range from very structured to informal, Kvale & Brinkmann, (2009) state they should all have many aspects. As qualitative research aims answer questions about real life phenomena through rich descriptions that are focused and purposeful and have meaning yet are sensitive to the participants and to the topic, they additionally require other characteristics. The first of these is that they are interpersonal, where knowledge is created through interactions and the reciprocity of a personal relationship is prioritized. This relationship, between the interviewer and interviewee, can only be of value if the interviewer, aware of the ethical issues of the research, builds trust with the interviewee. This trustful relationship is the foundation of the researcher's project and differentiates it from any other qualitative study.

Qualitative research permits a wide range of data collection methods each of which can be used to gather rich descriptions of individual's experiences. The experiences that I explored were difficult to understand solely through the limited literature, literature that flattens an experience through its limitations of individual words. These words, meaningful to the writer and specific to that individual experience cannot be replicated by me because they rely heavily on the web of time, place and participants' positionalities.

Furthermore, in looking at the improvisation of their figured worlds, I was of course looking at the worlds of real people; women I knew and at different times in our lives, have spent a considerable amount of time together at school. Although previously positioned as teacher-student and then as a researcher-participant, it was still an inquiry into human life which was "necessarily partially unpredictable and, therefore, effective decisions and actions must always take into consideration the concrete situation that

emerges at a given time" (Douglas, 1985, p. 17). It was at the time of the study that my position as Cervantes-Soon (2012), called a "partial insider", a trusted teacher, and resource outside the classroom, with socio-cultural understanding of their lives in the United States, granted me access to their worlds.

Although our social locations differ, the context of our relationship and our mutual interest in this inquiry, both personally and as a way to fill the gap in the misinformed or under-informed perception of women from Saudi Arabia studying in the United States, s created a new social situation. In this social situation, my access was privileged through my long-term relationship with not only these three participants, but also with their other members of their communities. What this qualitative research did not do, in essence, was to anticipate results. Although I did enter into the field with certain biases and subjectivities that contribute to the design of the research project and analysis, as there is no end-stage to identity creation nor is it possible to find one static description, therefore, I did not foresee finding quantifiable results (Fetterman, 1989; Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Van Maanen, 1988).

With consideration to my research interest on the identify formation of female Saudi Arabia F-1 visa students studying at an American universities I conducted four to six, 45-60 minute long, semi-structured interviews with each participant. Although I was looking to create 'thick' descriptions of their experience in the United States, the initial interview questions were designed to understand each woman's experience throughout and their decision making and application process to the KASP; prior to traveling to the United States. (APPENDIX A) These initial questions were designed to provide

background information about each woman's initial intentions, expectations and experience prior to arriving in the United States.

Each interview was recorded, by me, using both a digital recorder and an iPhone. Additionally, I created various handwritten field notes during the interview to record the unspoken nuances that each participant displays in an unconscious or visceral way. These field notes, which included tables, drawings, diagrams, and sketches, contributed to the rich data generated by the transcript. I transcribed and stored each interview on my home computer directly after the interview. As I transcribed each interview, I used my field notes to expand on the transcript and connect the spoken with the observed. I collected these notes and observations in three separate field journals, one for each participant. Each participant was given a pseudonym as was the research site to provide anonymity.

Interviewing, as a method of research for a group of Saudi Arabian women, studying on a F-1 visa in the United States, allowed me to present a thick description of a relatively new and rapidly expanding group of students in American universities, who, as seen by gap in current literature written on the subject, are largely unrepresented.

Field notes and strategic, invited observation

Pairing qualitative inquiry of interviewing with participant observation improves the quality of the data collection, increases the interpretation of meaning and assists the researcher in the development of new research questions (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Gubrium & Holstein, 2003; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, 2003). In addition to conducting, transcribing and analyzing interviews, I recorded ongoing field notes to contextualize data further. Field notes and jot notes from participant observations were also written up

concurrently and expanded with observations and vignettes. I realize that field notes play in intrinsic role in the collection, interpretation and analysis of data. In addition, that the electronic collection of an interview or an observation through a digital recording or videotape can provide a real-time report of the fieldwork. Yet what it cannot do is provide insight, through my own subjectivities, biases, cultural understanding and personal investigative interest of the event.

My comments, jot notes, diagrams, sketches tables provided raw descriptions of what I am experiencing as the interview progresses. Data that go beyond the spoken word, the smells, sounds, gestures, the environment, what people chose to wear, or where to meet and how they situated themselves within that environment, all contribute to the thick description which comes from qualitative research (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Emerson et al., 1995; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Van Maanen, 1988).

Participant observation is often used as a descriptive piece helping to locate the participant in context and developing the background story to base further investigation. This long term, sustained immersion in the field can vary as much as research settings. As an interview is a "conversation with purpose" (Burgess, 1984, p. 102), participant observation must be purposeful too. The benefit to spending extended periods of time in the field observing, is that it creates a deeper understanding about what is significant or important and what should or should not be investigated further (Robert M. Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Initial impressions, taken as headnotes, often cannot lead to deep analysis of non-verbal data and need to be ongoing and reflective. What occurs in the social world of the participant does not happen without meaning. The "actions,

interactions and events that catch the attention of people habitually in the setting may provide clues" in order to facilitate cultural analysis through observation (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, p. 25). I use the terms strategic and invited here in describing the type of observation that I conducted. These observations were chosen by the participants and I was an invited guest. These observations varied by participant and took place outside of campus, within their private world.

One such event was a "Women's Night Out" hosted by the Office of International Programs. This women's-only evening event provided a place for women to celebrate with other female classmates without the presence of males. This event, in the past, had been attended by many women from Saudi Arabia who were accustomed to having evenings with other women where they can dance and socialize. As these events were not open to men, women were not required to wear their hijabs and abayas during the event.

Another event was traveling outside of home and school without a male chaperone. Women from Saudi Arabia are required, by law, to travel with a chaperone within their country. Those participating in the KASP also must travel to the United States with a chaperone, but within the country, practices vary. Two of my participants have U.S. driver's licenses and cars. They had permission from their male guardians to drive as needed or as they pleased within the United States.

Coding and ongoing data analysis

In addition, it was important to present my "interpretation (of some aspect) of the reality of human action and not merely a description of it" (Jacobson, 1991, p. 4). These interpretations were informed by both my own subjectivities and research, but are "fictions, in the sense that they are "something made," "something fashioned" (Geertz, 1973, p. 15) Geertz continues to explain this "fashioning" of data as our truths:

> Really our own constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to-is obscured because most of what we need to comprehend a particular event, ritual, custom, idea, or whatever is insinuated as background information before the thing itself is directly examined. (p. 9)

In qualitative research, data analysis is an inductive, recursive, and ongoing process that accompanies data generation and continues afterwards (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Emerson et al., 1995; Wolcott, 1994, 1995). As the ongoing analysis in qualitative research requires researchers to first recognize their own subjectivities and biases and the filter it presents in analyzing data (Geertz, 1973). Incorporating reflexivity in the analysis recognizes the subject position and how it filters data collection, how decisions about content choice and relativity decisions were made. "The spoken or written word has a residue of ambiguity, no matter how carefully we word the questions and how carefully we report or code the answers" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 697). Through readings and re-readings, analysis was ongoing and recursive (see Figure 3). I analyzed data through multiple readings in which I coded transcripts, field notes, sketches, and artifacts. I conducted multiple readings during which I added additional notes to shape subsequent interviews.

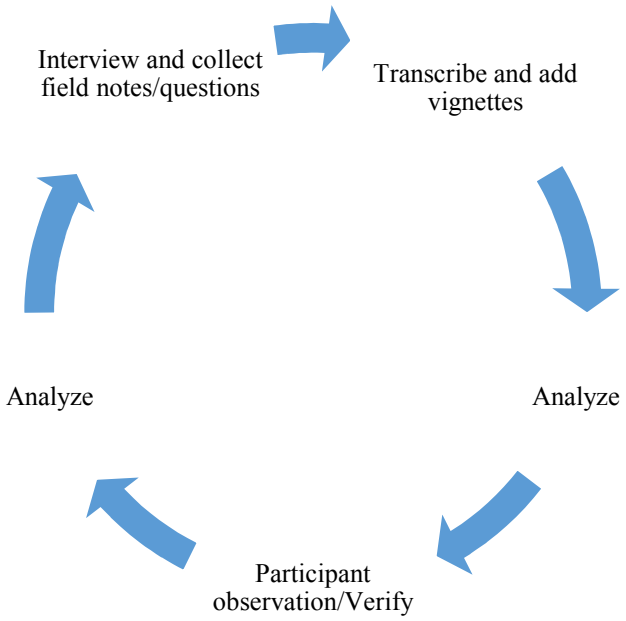

Figure 3: Data Collection and Analysis

Research site

This in depth interview study took place at Central Georgia State University, a comprehensive state university in the southern part of the United States. The university offered 90 fields of undergraduate instruction as well as more than 60 graduate-level programs and several doctoral programs in Arts and Sciences, Architecture, Business Administration, Education, Engineering, Information Technology and Nursing. At the time of the study, there were over 1,100 international students representing 95 countries. Located in the northeastern section of Atlanta (an urban center of over one million), the university offered international students a variety of academic, social and cultural opportunities.

The university also offered an Intensive English Program through the Office of International Programs (OIP) that provided academic English based lessons for six hours a day, four days a week, for twelve weeks each semester including a slightly shortened summer term that often overlapped with the holy month of Ramadan. The curriculum focused on preparing students to succeed in American universities, adaptation to U.S. culture and academic English. Advanced students received TOEFL and IELTS preparation and were allowed to take one university course, per semester, while still attending the Intensive English Program.

The IEP was located in the center of the 75 building, 1,000-acre, wooded campus, in a newly built four story classroom building across from the Student Union and within walking distance of the library, sports fields, recreational services and most classroom buildings. It occupied half of the Office of International Programs floor and due to its continuing growth, s expanded to other classroom buildings across campus. Most of the lower level students stayed in the main classroom building, but intermediate and advanced students often traveled around campus.

I chose this site to conduct my research because I had worked here for six years and had access to the IEP, its staff, curriculum, and a limited amount of administrative files. Although I was no longer teaching at the IEP, I have been allowed to continue utilizing these resources. Additionally, my six years of employment here had allowed me to become a "partial insider" (Cervantes-Soon, 2012), providing me with insight attainable only through long-term relationships. It was this relationship that granted me access to the participants and allowed me to engage in data collection that I believed would not have been possible to a researcher without it.

Participants

Each Saudi female participant came to the United States on an F-1 visa that allowed them attend university as a full time student. Prior to arriving in Atlanta, all but one participant applied for and received conditional acceptance to the university meaning the student had met all the requirements for admission to the university except the required English test scores (official scores of 64 on IBT or 507 on PBT, or an IELTS band score of 6.0). All three participants had been students in my classroom at the IEP and were aware of my research interest prior to their recruitment. None of the participants was currently in my classroom nor were they in future semesters. I had worked at this IEP for six years and had developed a long-term relationship not only with many female but also male students from Saudi Arabia. Each woman agreed to participate in this study only after checking with her father or husband first.

Meriam

Meriam (pseudonym) came to the United States in January of 2014. As soon as her family found out her older brother had been accepted into the university and she applied for a scholarship. Upon arrival in the U.S., she was placed in the classroom with two other women, one from Saudi Arabia and the other from Brazil. Her immediate friendship with the other Saudi woman was natural; sisterly, and they each moved in sync with the other but the very close relationship with Milena (pseudonym), a married mother of teenagers, surprised me. Meriam apologized to me the first week of school for being so quiet. She explained that she was nervous about speaking in front of people. She said that when she was young, she was taught to speak quietly outside her home, and only when people spoke to her and to *never* laugh loudly. I often saw the two women walking

together on campus or in the Student Union. I had learned that Meriam regularly went to Milena's house on Fridays while her husband was at work, spending hours talking in low intermediate English about everything from babies and Botox to politics and peace. Milena, enthusiastic and playful, seemed to be Meriam's opposite, however they continued to build a strong friendship. Even as I watched them laugh between and at themselves as they notice different behaviors; Meriam looking up and cracking a smile as Milena danced her way into the classroom, I could see Meriam processing it all.

Ciamah

Ciamah (pseudonym) was aloof about her actual age but from the data I had gathered as faculty at the IEP where she attended school, I estimated her age at 47. She earned a Bachelors and Master's degree in Textiles and Clothing and taught in a women's college for a short time before applying to KASP. She and her children had been in and out of the United States on scholarship since 2010 studying at two different IEPs. Her husband traveled back and forth from Saudi Arabia while she attended English classes and one university math course. In between studying and raising her family, she spent a great deal of time on campus participating in student activities ranging from library workshops to Zumba classes. In addition to her educational demands, she also took on the role of the sole parent, negotiating the U.S. public school system, learning to drive, and the general pressure of raising sons and daughters alone, outside Saudi Arabia.

Rose

I first met Rose (pseudonym), a 22-year biology major, in 2012. She was a new student in my IEP class. A young woman entering my room alone, as many of our students do in the first days of the semester, she appeared nervous. Sitting alone, in an

alcove in the back of our kitchen-turned-classroom she stared at her book. As she sat and listened to the animated voices of Arabic men in the classroom, I watched her shift further into the tight corner that used to serve as a place for recycling containers in the back of the kitchen. Wrapped in Burberry; a cell phone provided a way out of any unwanted conversations. Rose had not spoken with another man who was not her relative in over seven years and within 72 hours of leaving her country; she was sitting in a classroom with ten.

I remembered expecting her to move over to sit next to the other Saudi women in the class but each had found her own corner in the mismatched room and never left that spot. Every morning I would come into my classroom early to find them sitting in one of the three individual desks rather than at the six-foot tables. I was not sure where those individual desks came from. The classroom was made up of items found in the storage closet; a small white board, a computer on wheels without a document camera, six foot tables and three individual desks; one for each of the Saudi women but not one extra.

Subjectivity Statement

Qualitative research is inherently subjective through understanding, interpretation and presentation. While researchers offer a small window into a cultural or social event, it is still, conceptualized through her own interpretive lens that is informed and reformed by her own subjectivities. My interest in working with female students from Saudi Arabia came from working in an Intensive English Program in the U.S. South, although this work was not my intended goal; little turns out the way we plan. Our lives are so dependent of the actions and stories of those with who we share it. What we become, or what we are at this time depends on a series of events that shift and shape us, and how we

participate in this construction of self. The identities that we form, our figured worlds, position and re-position us within the stories. As I reflect back on the authoring and re-authoring of my own figured worlds, the complexities which are entailed in the development of my identities, socially and culturally formed, becomes clearer.

I was brought up in Pennsylvania by parents who saw the benefit and safety in living in a small town that had more cattle than people. As children, we traveled extensively throughout the United States in the back of a motorhome and in every city or town we drove through which had a university, was a stop for us. I can remember the view of the Rocky Mountains over the top of Colorado University at Boulder or the windy drive up to Cornell overlooking Cayuga Lake. I remember walking through the library at Mount Holyoke imagining how I could find a reading corner and stay here forever. Adding to this is the memory of my mother, a college graduate, and her habit of ending each sentence with "after college". I was allowed to go and sell bananas in Belize "after college" as long as I had a diploma in my back pocket. I *always* saw my future self on a college campus.

Contributing to my own figured world is that in the late 1970's and early 1980's it was common, in my small town to host foreign exchange students. For me, exchange students were, for a lack of a better word, worldlier in my eyes, pulling me out of the triviality of small town teenage life. Through scholarship from the Lions and Rotary Clubs, we often had international students in our schools and in part due to the fact that I lived in the town center and near the schools, in a house with five children, eventually meant that we also had exchange students in our home. François lived with us for three months and then sadly moved on to another family. Ulrika, a tall fair-haired student from

Stockholm, seemed such a contrast to my own dark hair and freckles. Angela, from Brazil, became a so close to one of my brothers that he followed her back to Brazil and proposed marriage to her. These lived experiences along with our parents' encouragement to see the world inspired each of us to study abroad finding ourselves mailing home letters written on thin airmail paper, folded into envelopes.

Eventually I applied and was accepted into a Bilingual/ELS/Multicultural teacher education program. After graduation, I worked as a K-12 ESL teacher in Massachusetts and New York. After working in New York for five years, we decided to move with our two young sons. I found myself lost in a new city with a husband who had taken a job to spend more time at home, but was always at the office. Furthermore, my identities in this new city did not include the role of teacher, and more specifically the role of the ESL teacher. I had no understanding of the public schools because my children were so young and of the few stay at home mothers I knew, who had been teachers, had worked for only a year or two before leaving the profession.

When you have young children, most of your conversations revolve around baby needs, feeding, sleeping, pediatricians and diapers. I had become a baby talker so far physically and mentally from my former life as a teacher that I sometimes did not recognize myself and thought, "Am I really doing this?" as if I was less qualified to take care of two small children than twenty. At least I had taken courses on how to take care of the twenty. I found myself at playgrounds and parks watching children speaking many languages play alongside my own children but for them, I was that boy's mother, not teacher, just lady. While I cherished my role as a mother and was forever grateful for that

time with my children, I felt very sad about that piece of me that I left in a classroom in New York.

I did not return to teaching for five more years and when I was ready to leave my now three children home, I found that I could not find part time teaching in the public schools. The large urban school district that I lived in was not hiring part time teachers. I would be able to get a full time K-12 job but that would not fit in with our schedules. This was around the time when I learned about Intensive English Programs. I knew that universities offered ESL classes because when I was an undergraduate, I had accidently registered for one instead of English 101 finding myself, for the first time, the top student in an English class. I applied to two IEP programs and was hired by the larger one. Returning to work was reforming my identities again. As my role as a teacher returned, it did not hold the same place that it did five years earlier. My role as a mother did not shift; it can never shift. So now, my return to teaching meant that my family's identities also reformed. My husband now was the primary caretaker of the children until we could do the prisoner exchange in the parking lot of his school where we would switch kids and cars. I became a mother again after 11:00.

To be clear, my own analysis of these three women from the Saudi Arabia was informed by my own subjectivities, some different from their own. I spoke very little Arabic; mostly bits and pieces picked up in the classroom and a general understanding of the grammar of the language but not enough to hold these interviews in a language other than English. Nor had I ever traveled to Saudi Arabia or throughout the Middle East. I had though, been an international student studying in a second language abroad and had taught English Language Learners for 14 years, six in that IEP. While the difference of

age, language, or status as a teacher may have positioned me apart from these participants, I had become a "partial insider" (Cervantes-Soon, 2012) whose insight was informed by my experience teaching international students during that time. Over time, due to my long-term teacher-student relationship with both male and female students from Saudi Arabia, these students, acting as gatekeepers (Glesne, 2006; Seidman, 1998), generously offered to share their stories.

Summary

In conclusion, by the time of this study, the Saudi government had developed a long-term plan for their system of higher education, to support and help transform its narrow, oil-based economy, to one that sustained a diverse and progressive economic future. This system, known as *Afaaq*, was why the Saudi budget for higher education had tripled since 2008 and currently included $160 billion for a population of 27 million, 60% who younger than 25 years old (Bukhari & Denman, 2013). A portion of the higher education budget included the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) established to "equip Saudi nationals with the knowledge and skills needed to build business and community leadership capacity within the Saudi Arabia" (Bukhari & Denman, 2013, p. 153). Through benefit of the scholarship established in 2005, as well as private corporate scholarships from corporations such as Saudi Aramco and Saudi Airlines, the number of students from Saudi Arabia studying abroad, had sharply increased.

While Saudi nationals had been attending foreign universities as matriculated students since 1927, the number of students working first towards the goal of passing English proficiency tests had been increasing since 2005. Saudi students fell into two categories in higher education reporting. The 45,000 students reported by the Institute of

International Education were attending US universities as college students. The second group of students was those enrolled in Intensive English Programs that focused on English language learning with an end goal of helping students to pass the language assessments needed to enter the university. Most of these students had conditional acceptance to American universities and were not included in the Institute of International Education data. In an effort to provide high quality international educational experiences for Saudi nationals, King Abdullah had increased the number of scholarships that include tuition, travel and salary. According to the Open Doors Report, the population of Saudi students studying English or enrolled in U.S. universities has gone from 5,000 in 2005 to 45,000 in 2013. Females made up 30% of those scholarship recipients ("Open Doors Data," 2013).

For F-1 visa students from Saudi Arabia who were studying in the United States, identity construction held additional complexities beyond social and cultural considerations. It was the understanding of the identities that were placed upon them that can create a fiction of self. Through this understanding of their figured worlds, it was possible to re-conceptualize the static description of this growing population in U.S. systems of higher education and provide place for the self-authoring that occurs through living in multiple worlds simultaneously.

CHAPTER FOUR: MERIAM, LIKE HER ENGLISH, WAS ONLY 50% HERE

> Because when I came here, you see there were no leaves on the trees and I was so disappointed. My brother said to me, it is winter Meriam. The leaves fall away. Why are you so sad about a leaf? You know they will come back. I said, I know but I don't know. Maybe I just complained about the weather because the weather hid my feelings from him. I couldn't tell him why I was sad. I missed my family. I missed my friends and, umm, I missed the leaves.

F-1 Visa students' integration into U.S. postsecondary education, such as Meriam's, the protagonist of this data chapter, is often marked by cultural, language, and financial differences as well as the struggle with being unfamiliar with or misinformed about educational practices and expectations, discrimination through stereotypes and general loneliness and culture shock (Andrade, 2005; Andrade, 2007; Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007). Contemporary scholarship on the international experience of F-1 Visa women in particular shows heightened levels of loneliness due in part to the adjustment process of life in a new country paired with the expectations of university work in a second language (Iarovici, 2014; Kwon, 2009; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Sümer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008). This data chapter is, among other things, about loneliness.

As I explained in Chapter One, this participatory, qualitative inquiry into the lived experiences of Saudi scholarship women in an intensive English Language Program was driven by my interest in better understanding of each of them as individuals and myself—and to give voice to their lived experience here in the United States.

My inquiry was guided by three questions:

- What are the figured worlds of female Saudi Arabian F-1 visa students studying in an urban public university in the United States?
- What contexts mitigate and form or reform their identity formation?
- How do the women articulate their understanding of the role of identity in and out of the social worlds of the U.S. university community?

To that end, in this first data chapter, I analyze an extended two-year conversation with Meriam, a 22-year-old Saudi scholarship recipient, and my narrative of her transition from life in the Middle East to the United States. I recount her lived experiences at an Intensive English Program in the United States and the improvisations that allowed her to be in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia simultaneously.

During eight hours of semi-structured interviews, conducted at off campus coffee shops and within her home, Meriam described a different experience than the other participants, yet one that is uniquely compelling. Our relationship began, as the others did, as teacher and student at an Intensive English Program at Central Georgia State University. I present her story in this chapter as another window into the figured worlds of Saudi female students negotiating tertiary education in the United States.

The often-researched international student experience, is explored both qualitatively and quantitatively, but too often is reported categorically. The experience of a student from a particular country for example, can explain certain specific obstacles based on cultural differences, familiarity of the language of instruction, or perceived discrimination. Yet, the nuances of the lived experience of each individual student can

vary greatly once researchers look further into their own subjectivities and those of their participants. In consideration of specific nuances in this study of women from Saudi Arabia, here in the United States on a government scholarship, this qualitative interview study was conducted by a partial insider, through the lens of their former teacher turned researcher (myself).

Sweet Meriam

Over the course of a year, I read and reread my field notes, interviews and emails. I (re)analyzed this data, countlessly coding theme, after theme, after theme, trying to find one that would present Meriam for who she was and wanted to be, and for what her life here had been. In my attempt to create a representation which presented the data through the theoretical framework of Holland's figured worlds, while taking into account my own subjectivities that had influenced my analysis, I hesitantly present here, Meriam, the international student who never left home.

As a preface and aside, I note that this is one of many drafts of a story I have imagined about this participant, and my least favorite. It is because it describes a woman who, at the end of our relationship, I was frustrated to know. That is, Meriam did not get the chance to stay long enough to break the ties with home and put both feet here. I loved Meriam for who she was when she was with me, for the bright-eyed student who I saw a few hours a week and the volunteer research participant who without hesitation, graciously agreed to meet with me while in the middle of her own busy semester. What she never was able to, or perhaps never wanted to articulate though, was that she would not be able to finish her story. Perhaps she knew that she would not be here long. In writing this chapter, writing her as a lonely student, it seems as if something tragic

happened to her, something akin to a horrible illness that laid dormant only she and her physician knew about and that she kept from me, her brother, her mother. Something that she could not tell because, as she repeated over and over again, "my language only suits me 50%". Something she caught at the study abroad office. Allow me to explain.

Day one, spring semester

Meriam and I first met at Central Georgia State University in January of 2011, our student and teacher roles defined by our own understanding of the context of an American university. Mine was informed by experience and hers, she later told me, was informed by a combination of information gathered at an orientation held in Jeddah and the Disney channel. Meriam quietly laughed, as she had been taught to do, as she reflected on the juxtaposition of the two extremes, but nodded and smiled; that was what she came with.

She sat in my classroom that January morning as quiet as a mouse, or as I now came to know, as quiet as an English as a New Language student. She arrived as I was setting up my projector in our small, windowless classroom within the IEP's suite. Not interrupting me that first day with what would become her daily pleasant greeting or a polite smile, without looking up, she followed an imaginary direct line on the floor to an empty seat in the second row, to the side of the classroom. There, away from the door, she could see the whiteboard and my podium without the need to turn her head. She had no need to look up and catch a view of anyone else who may, or may not, come in. I remember looking up and speaking an unanswered hello, wondering if she was the Meriam or Sara on my roster, knowing she clearly was not Melina, my Brazilian bombshell whom I saw, head thrown back, laughing loudly with my Venezuelan students

from last semester. Dressed in dark pants and ballet flats, a long cardigan and dark shirt, clothes typical of college students in the winter in the south, her collegiate "uniform" differed only with a stylish turban atop her head. Her style, she later told me, here in the United States was traditional but “you know, I am a girl and I like the fashion".

Coffee for 2-no for 102 students

My first meeting scheduled to collect data with Meriam began with all the formalities of the teacher/student relationship that a university dictated. The politeness and manners that appeared to follow or lead this type of interaction seemed natural yet, unusual between us. Perhaps this was due to the year that separated us from our original roles as teacher and student in the spring of 2011 and then, in the spring of 2013, placing us together again as researcher and participant.

We met at a noisy coffee shop next to the university, her choice. Filled with a mix of backpack slinging college students and other 20 somethings who did not need to be in the office in the middle of the day, I grabbed the only table available while waiting for Meriam to show up. As I sat and waited, I watched a small number of my former students, mostly Saudi and Kuwaiti men come in and out of the busy shop, each catching my eye but gratefully, only a few held the look for long. I recalled feeling happy to see them but was concerned that the presence of other students may affect Meriam’s comfort level in regard to speaking openly to me, feeling their eyes on me as well. I quickly began to panic as I became aware that although I asked her to choose a place where she felt comfortable with, I did not consider the fact that her world, the university, was my world, too. We shared that connection, although in different ways. While I came to the meeting as a student researcher, in the eyes of my students, I was still their teacher.

Meriam arrived at our interview shortly after 5:00, that cold, but only southern cold, afternoon. She lived nearby but relied on her cousin, Omar, to drive her. Even though she had been in the United States for over a year, she had not chosen to learn to drive like some of the other women from Saudi Arabia had done in the shifting social setting of the United States. While Saudi women were not allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia and relied on family members and chauffeurs, here some women had chosen to learn whether it was for the novelty, the freedom that driving allowed them or because here, with only one male family member and no chauffeurs, driving was a necessity.

I asked Meriam if she planned to drive and she responded:

> [Our life is] not equal but they give us what we need. We are in the school. We have our own things. But what is not equal is like when you don't have car. But if you ask me, it is not big deal. I think it is not necessary to drive. I think this will make the work more for me. Do you think about it? If you don't have car, your husband will serve you [laughs]-this is not against you, it is FOR you. But this is for some, but I can't make it for all. OK my father is too kind and I cannot make it for all. This is me but maybe not every father do it. Maybe this is the big idea because not every father like mine. So this is what makes it. So what do you think is not equal?

Meriam entered the coffee shop alone that afternoon, walking through the door that no one bothered to hold open for her. Dressed in jeans, a long cardigan and a scarf this time, she looked the same as every other coed hunched over their laptops with an iPhone in one hand and coffee cup in the other. With a chevron scarf covering her tucked up, waist-length hair, she greeted me with a kiss, and then another and a hug. Recalling the first time we met in early 2011, Meriam explained she had been in the United States for less than 15 hours at the time. Dressed in her brother's clothes, she sat anxiously on the edge of a group of women, waiting for the first day of orientation to begin.

Looking back on the events that led up to that first full day in the United States she smiles as she recalls a distressing story which time has softened:

> This is another story because my bag didn't come to me until three days so the orientation at Central Georgia [SIGH] I was there with my brother's clothes! I just want to make the thing just GOOOOO. Horrible. But my brother just made the clothes-in the heat machine [dryer] and then they fit and I take. What a terrible day. Those first three days without clothes. I don't want to go to buy because I HAVE and it was late and I don't need. So I don't like to remember that first day. And the orientation [laughing] all three days.

Although the decision to come to the United States was her own, she chose to leave Saudi Arabia traveling through Turkey, continuing on to Washington D.C. and arriving in Atlanta, exhausted and without luggage, at 11:00 pm, the night before the semester began. A journey, which had begun spiraling six months earlier, dropped her with nothing but the clothes on her back, 7,000 miles away from everything and everyone she had ever known except her younger brother, Omar, whom she had not seen in years.

As spring ended and the summer semester began, Meriam moved from level three to level five of the school's seven level system, a jump granted to students who excel not only in English language acquisition, but also demonstrate academic knowledge and ability. Already a college graduate from Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, her grades, attendance and academic competence made evident her ability to move forward in her language learning. This advanced placement put her further away from my intermediate English classroom to an area of campus where I would rarely see her.

I continued to run into Meriam on occasion over the next 12 months on campus, mostly heading back and forth to classes. There were quick hellos in the hallway that

used to last longer when she, as a newly arrived international student, knew few people and, I thought, welcomed a chance to say hello to a friendly face and our large university campus. She had often greeted me with a hug and two kisses on my right cheek, standing beside me with the familiarity of a sister to ask politely about my children or classwork. She regularly walked quietly alone and inline between buildings, not looking down yet not looking up at anyone in particular but more towards the buildings, the trees which she remembered had been so bare and disappointing earlier in January when she had arrived, leaving her feeling deceived by the impression of America that she had seen through television and film. Often looking up towards the sky, taking in her new home, the one that she came to because she decided, "100% my decision", she could not spend another year, post-graduation, deliberating her future:

> I think I don't know, I just think I need to ***do*** something for my life. I can't just sit and wait. I will find a way but I think sometimes we need to do something for our lives this is like opportunity so I can't make it go away.

Meriam self-awareness of purpose, clearly part of her identity in Saudi Arabia, lead her to apply to KASP and this action alone, forever contributes to her ongoing creation of her figured world.

Decisions

Meriam explained this further as a struggle, one she was prepared to face, as part of the experience of living outside of the Muslim and Arab world. Everything in her life in Saudi Arabia, she explained, accommodated and supported her strong religious identity. This religious foundation guided her choices, a sentiment mirrored by each participant although not embraced by all. In Saudi Arabia, her life, not only within her

family and school but also in the everyday details, was designed to make her comfortable and without much contemplation about where to step next:

> I find myself, here, in the United States taking every step in my faith. Because, you know when you grow up with anything, not just religion, you don't think deeply about why. You just grow up with this thing. But this changed when I came here; but I think this is in a good way.

Unlike the improvisation required here, in Saudi Arabia, she did not feel as if she was living a life that was different from every other person she met. There she was not an exception, nor an example. She did not represent anything beyond anyone else in her world. There she was part of a family, part of a community, part of a country and there she lived with purpose and meaning rather than as a model or an expectation.

She explained that life at Georgia Central was exhausting. It had become difficult to explain to others, classmates, teachers, people on the street, that she lived here as a university student while still living faithfully to her belief system. It was as if she was a flat, 2D image, an edited for television movie version of a great novel, the hummock of an iceberg. Relationships beyond her common cultural background were unsubstantial, she reported, because they could not connect without the deep, religious understanding of her actions.

She explained that it did not make "logical sense but I just move on". Even when these relationships soured, she felt she knew the real reason, another unexplainable misunderstanding, and found the empathy to feel sorrow that they did not work. Reflecting on a friendship that at the time, I had thought to be strongest, she recalled the story to me:

> It was like a slap in the face because she asked us about fasting and in fasting time we don't eat and she said, how do you fast and no one sees

> you? See you like watch us. And I don't know what to answer because before I came here, I didn't prepare myself to answer this. I think it like a personal question. My religion is my own and I wasn't prepared to answer this but when I came here, I take listen to … I try to find way to answer because when you grow up with anything, not just religion, even though, you don't think deeply about why, you just grow up like … with this thing. Then, but this is all change when I came here, but I think this is in a good way. Before I came here, I try to find out answers but about what I am but in Saudi Arabia. For me. About what I am wondering about not what the people around me wonder. It's like different you know? Because what I make it, makes me feel wonder about something is not what you are really wondering about it like personal things. But when I came here, I just like study more about how to answer without getting hurt because I don't want someone to get hurt. I don't want someone to get or feel bad about my stuff. But my answer is that I watch myself. There is no reason for someone to watch me. I can watch myself. This is the answer that I like. My country makes everything fit for me you know? Here, like no. You understand? This is my responsibility to make myself be as you are and at the same time, don't lose your, like, eh…identity. For like just like, take this life.

Meriam's constant need to "watch herself" added to the struggle of living in a secular world. These struggles, situated within the fluid development of self that as an international student, Meriam labored to make sense of, fed her ongoing sense of not belonging.

Meriam's Loneliness

Meriam, like the other participants, struggled to find meaningful friendships in the United States. "I'm not quiet, I like to talk in fact to my character is always I think I find myself between people". She is here but she is home, passing her days 8 hours behind her family:

> Yesterday I want to go to a ladies' party. I go in the bathroom to remove everything and I put my phone on the sink and called my sister and to talk. We talked when we are in the bathroom and I said you are my sister and I need to talk with you while I get dressed. We talked one hour and I told her I don't have a watch so you are my watch, and I asked her if I am late.

> My sister and my mother are my whole life and I couldn't just forget this stuff when I came here.

Thinking about Meriam, I remembered that as an international student in the 1990s, I called home once a week. It took me nearly two hours to make the ten minute call. I could not call from my homestay and instead walked 45 minutes into town to a storefront that housed six private phone booths. Paying the nearly $15 to make the ten minute call, I rushed through my week with my family huddled around our kitchen phone. If they were not home, I had to wait another week, walking the 45 minutes back to Casa Eugenia to sit in her kitchen and, in limited Spanish, my own 50%, tell her the stories that belonged to my mother. The nuances of personal language, like academic language, takes years to acquire (Cummins, 1979) yet Meriam was stuck here now, and life was moving on. Her difficulty in making friends with non-Saudi students, mostly women, was limited both by culture and by language. Frustration built by her constant need to explain her cultural practices and her inability to expand on an unending number of "normal to think about" topics disheartened her:

> It's not easy to live in this other world. I'm like a girl and maybe it's normal to think about your style and, and your everything but I can only say like 50% about anything, any topic. Not because I am Muslim but just because I don't know the words yet. Why do people say it is so easy? I know it is easy to speak without 100% grammar correct but when you want to use adult thinking, it is like you can't express yourself with what you have.

As unfortunate as this was for Meriam, unlike my own study abroad experience in the 90s, she did have the Internet and could live in both the United States and Saudi Arabia simultaneously. With a sideways smile, she tapped on her iPhone and gave a modest laugh:

> Before I came here today, I called her [mother] twice. I always call her because it make me feel good. I call her and I feel her with me and sometimes I call her and she puts me on her lap and watches TV with me on the phone. And I can think I am there with my family in Saudi Arabia and I think I am like there. [Laughing] I think this makes it easier for me.

The thought of this struck me because as I sat and remembered my own loneliness of being away from home, feelings I had put on my understanding of her as an international student no longer applied in the same way. It was certain that she was lonely and longed for home, but a piece of her home sat there on the table under her long unpainted fingernails.

The orderliness of her life had manifested itself out of a smartphone. Meriam admitted that she called her mother every night at around 2:00 am after her homework was done. She wound down her evening as her mother ate breakfast, hanging up only after securing a wakeup call from her in a few hours for school in the United States. Then, only 30 minutes later Skyped again with her sister to discuss which outfit to wear to school. *Snapchat*, *Tango* and *WhatsApp* filled with homework questions from her 12-year-old sister throughout the day filled the empty gaps between classes. Her improvisation, the use of her cell phone, created an identity that hovered somewhere in the iCloud between the United States and Saudi Arabia.

I cannot tell anyone

In our final interview, Meriam explained that she had finally left the IEP and was looking for admission into one of the private universities that seemed more willing to trade admission for a lower TOEFL score and out of state tuition paid in full:

> The problem with me [being] here is that I am here for other people, but maybe you see, not for myself. Sometimes, like Melina, didn't need another person to be crazy with her. She needed someone to see her, to listen, to make her feel, you

> are here and we are with you. I think for our emotions here, that I need to find a sister here. Not just to practice English, but to have a real relationship, but I can't find it anywhere.

She had studied for, but not passed the TOEFL, and was not able to understand exactly why.

To ensure the security of the exam, results were sent out noting a score in a four scale section scores, but without an indication of which questions she had missed or an understandable explanation of which distinct skill was being assessed. The irony here was not missed as it occurred to me that you needed to comprehend English so that you could understand that you do not understand English. Expected to begin graduate school, Meriam repeatedly paid the $190 to sit for the exam, yet was unable to score the 83 required at Central Georgia State University.

Reading	**0–30**	High (22–30) Intermediate (15–21) Low (0–14)
Listening	0–30	High (22–30) Intermediate (15–21) Low (0–14)
Speaking	0–30 score scale	Good (26–30) Fair (18–25) Limited (10–17) Weak (0–9)
Writing	0–30 score scale	Good (24–30) Fair (17–23) Limited (1–16)
Total Score	**0–120**	

Figure 4: TOEFL Scores

I asked Meriam if talking was like food for her. She replied:

No like air for me. This is what, this is the most difficult thing for me. I think this is the more difficult thing because I already have my relationship with my country. I used to live with them and they understand me and I understand them. But here, no. In the beginning and all, I try to know new relationships and for me, I just everything the first second [chance].

No longer a part of her IEP, and not yet a matriculated student at the Central Georgia State University, or any university for that matter, Meriam found herself alone more often than before. The few students whom she had known from school left town, one to begin university, another to attend an IEP in a different town and Melina, sadly, giving up altogether, a parallel of sorts, to the leaves that were once again falling off the trees. There was a sadness to those bare trees. That feeling intensified as I found out that Meriam had left the United States and returned home before she had chosen her pseudonym for this research study. Therefore, I chose the name, Meriam, used here in this study. It is not as beautiful as her real name though; it only suits her 50%, I feel. A new semester began.

CHAPTER FIVE: HIGH STAKES TESTING, MOTHERHOOD AND LOSS: CIAMAH'S STORY

> I applied to scholarship to go to the United States. I want, for me, I want to go to Britain because it is closer to us and it has fashion it is beautiful. America has poor people and really, they don't care about fashion. He says, 'Come on you have to go to America. People dress good have fashion-have parties. I said no America, there is no peace. You can't stay there with kids. My husband says, 'The US have President George Bush. He is so tough. He sends soldiers. He kills people. It is safe. My husband, he knows people in the world because he travels. People are so nice. Innocent like us. Nobody does anything bad for you. I said-OK-you'll find out-you'll see. And then when I came. It's true. People are innocent. Nobody bothers you although there are bad people, the majority are so nice. So good. We love it here.

In the previous data chapter, I narrated the lived experiences of a young Saudi woman named Meriam and her unsuccessful bid to matriculate into an American university. Although the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) had enabled her to pursue her studies at Central Georgia State University, Meriam's unbearable loneliness was a deciding factor in her decision to return to her home country and abandon her U.S. studies.

In this second data chapter, I turned my focus to Ciamah and how the loss of the financial security of the KASP redirected her graduate school aspirations. I begin this section with an overview of Ciamah's experiences beginning with her arrival in the United States in 2012, until March 2015, when I began my data collection to illustrate the experience of another woman from Saudi Arabia who outwardly appeared similar to Meriam but in fact, faced different social settings each day.

Throughout our four-year long relationship, which began as a traditional teacher-student connection, I conducted semi-structured interviews at various locations both on and off Central Georgia's campus. During these interviews, Ciamah described

experiences of a female from Saudi Arabia who came to the United States after being awarded the KASP. To reiterate, this data chapter emanated from a trio of initial research questions: What are the figured worlds of female Saudi Arabian F-1 visa students studying in an urban public university in the U.S. South? What contexts mitigate and form or reform their identity formation: How do the women articulate their understanding of the role of identity in and out of the social worlds of the U.S. university community?

Ciamah, like Meriam had a college degree from Saudi Arabia. She in fact also had a Master's degree, and her expectations for a transition into an advanced degree program seemed unproblematic. In this chapter, I present the series of events that lead one international student, Ciamah, a mother and a graduate student, to slowly, despite enormous effort, slip out of her scholarship and away from her dreams.

Ciamah's Story

In August 2010, Ciamah arrived in Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International airport with her husband, two daughters and her young son on her hip. That spring she had received the prestigious KASP award with the understanding that she would spend one year studying at an Intensive English Program that would prepare her to take and pass the TOEFL exam. Her projected TOEFL success would then allow her to matriculate immediately into a graduate program, preferably a PhD in Textile Sciences. Her pre-arrival hope had been to take and pass the TOEFL in late summer of 2013 and begin graduate courses by that same August.

The fall semester started three days after her August arrival with two days of IEP orientation and placement testing. With seven levels of English offered, Ciamah was placed in Level Two. IEP students only moved up to the next level at the end of the 15-

week semester. This disappointing placement, just five days in the country, would not allow her to follow her imagined plan. An additional year to study prior to graduate school did not deter her for long. She carried on, as planned, with her "can do" attitude. Never foreseeing how much could happen in a year, she explained:

> Because I want to study PhD-it is so hard. I want to talk to the school in Jackson. I gonna show my papers. I feel comfortable for Jackson, my major because I apply for 13 universities before and none of them accept me. My husband called them and they say I have to finish Level Seven. I want to talk to Jackson. I gonna show my –I feel comfortable for Jackson, my major because I apply for 13 universities before and none of them accept me.

As was the case for all female KASP recipients, Ciamah was only permitted to travel to the United States to study accompanied by a male chaperone. Her husband provided this initial duty, but soon it became necessary for him to return to work in the Middle East. In December of that year, after quietly leaving Ciamah and her children in Atlanta, the role of chaperone was then again unofficially transferred to her son; the oldest and closest male relative. Officially not old enough to chaperone, Ciamah put her finger to her mouth and shrugged it off. After the departure of her husband, the semester ended and soon another one began.

Ciamah moved easily from Level Two to Level Three in the spring semester of 2013. During that semester, she enrolled her middle child, a daughter, in a local public school while leaving her young son, Ehab, home with her older two daughters. Ciamah was protectively vague about personal information about her children, in particular her daughters. I did find out, after our interviews began, that at the time of her initial arrival in the United States, her son was not old enough to attend public school. Her older daughters, whose name and age were unknown to me, stayed home to care for Ehab.

In May 2013, Ciamah transitioned again to the next level, Level Four, in her IEP. While international students were permitted to take the summer semester off from school without it compromising their F-1 Visa status, pressed by time, Ciamah chose to continue her studies and registered for classes. Summer sessions, because of the shortened term, tended to be more intensive, asking students to produce more work in less time. Out of consideration for Saudi students, like Ciamah, Ramadan also fell during the summer that year.

Although Ciamah had arrived towards the end of Ramadan in 2010, this was her first full experience in a secular world without the support of her extended family and husband. Ramadan began that year on July 9, and ended on August 7, 2013. The daily preparation for *Iftar* conflicted with the increasing academic demands of an advanced English course.

In addition to the more rigorous course loads, the population in her IEP was beginning to shift. While Levels One through Three were populated mostly by KASP recipients, Levels Four through Seven were often composed of a more diverse language and cultural population. Many of these students, who had entered the IEP at this advanced level, had struggled with English acquisition in their home countries and were, as Ciamah claimed, "fresher". In addition, successful TOEFL scores became more common at this level. This was something that Ciamah began to notice, now past her one-year mark on her original plan, which should have located her in the university.

In the fall semester of 2013, Ciamah moved into Level Five in Central Georgia's IEP and began what would become a series of unsuccessful attempts at the TOEFL exams. She took and failed the TOEFL exam five more times over the following three

semesters. Beginning in Level Five Ciamah was now permitted to take a Plus One course. The Plus One status allowed students in the IEP to register for one university class outside of the IEP's language program in place of one of their three English classes. These three classes consisted of a Reading and Writing class, a Grammar class, and a Listening and Speaking class.

She, like many students, chose the freshman level math course, MATH 1120, on advice from the language center's staff. This course, though valuable in itself, was not a required course for the doctoral program for which Ciamah hoped to gain acceptance. It was simply, the course that many other students chose to take in order to meet the requirements of a Bachelor degree. Struggling through this course while continuing with English acquisition, the demands of parenthood began to take a toll on Ciamah. Yet she continued in her way, although at times frustrated:

> I talk to Ms. Jennifer (pseudonym) yesterday. I told her that I am not focused on my studies enough, I bought book for Level Six grammar. I have to develop myself good because I have responsibility to teach people in good way. If even if I get lower grade, I see what is weak and I can develop myself on it. I hate cheating. I didn't cheat ever-I have a friend who sees boys cheating. Everything open and looking and then they get an A and they congratulates them and nobody congratulates me but I hate cheating. This I know-it is OK. I go step by step by myself. No cheating. Sometimes I worry my husband wants higher scores because he pays money for me. Also, I want to study hard.

By the spring semester of 2014, Ciamah advanced again into Level Six of the English program and chose not to continue with the Plus One course of study but instead to take that time to register for an additional English course at the IEP. She chose this option again, as she moved on to Level Seven. Both semesters were rigorous and stressful due to the pressure to pass the TOEFL exam. Unable to do so in each semester, Ciamah

received notice that her scholarship would be revoked if she were unable to pass the TOEFL on her next attempt.

Those two years of intensive English training had not in fact, help Ciamah to successfully pass her TOEFL exam and had indeed resulted in her losing her government sponsored scholarship, as well as all the benefits that went along with it.

Why Ciamah Came, and Why She Left

"I knew I have to come to the United States for university, it was like my honeymoon with my husband, but for school. I wanted it my entire life". Ciamah leaned over to grab a tissue to wipe away a tear falling from under her ever-present heavily shaded, purple-chained sunglasses. We had been talking for a long time, hours it seemed, that February afternoon, as we always did during our bi-weekly meetings, the tear was from laughing hard. This was how many of our interviews went. By the fourth year of our relationship, gone was the formality of teacher-student relationship, the "Miss" dropped from before my first name, no longer called "teacher" but now "my friend". It had been replaced with long, rambling conversations about common interests, ranging from motherhood and family to cultural understanding and perhaps most meaningful to me, a supportive relationship that was unique between women struggling to pursue a degree while raising a family, trying to be an attentive wife, devoted daughter, and dear friend and sister. We knew we were always starving one as we were feeding the other.

Ciamah and I had spoken many times over four years about the university experience for international students, and in particular Saudi women, conversations that fueled my research interest in this field. As I advanced in my coursework, my understanding of the lived experiences of my students simultaneously became both

clearer and more muddled. There were complexities of life in a foreign country, a new language, laws, expectations which applied not only to herself, but also, for Ciamah, to her three children. What she, and other students, was constantly developing was an understanding of who they were during this point in time, in the shifting contexts of the classroom, the university, their new city, their new state, was a *Snapchat* version of understanding.

The loss of her scholarship in 2015 left her without the benefit of health insurance. Without health insurance, health concerns accelerated which left her financially strapped and forced to alter her life style in the United States and limited her ability to a pursue studying. Her limited access to direct English instruction, therefore, made it more difficult to prepare for and take the TOEFL exam which in the end, she could not afford to do anyway.

Money

As previously explained, as one of the many recipients of the total $6 billion King Abdullah Scholarship in 2012, Ciamah had initially been given a year to complete her English training and to pass the TOEFL or IELTS exam, which were required to enter an American university. This scholarship was later extended to 18-24 months in an English program followed by four years of support for undergraduate degrees, two for Masters and three for Ph.D. As an additional benefit of this scholarship package, students were allowed to take the $185 TOEFL exam as often as they liked and were expected to attempt it at least every two months. Removing the financial burden of studying abroad by providing along with tuition, a monthly salary and health insurance, recipients of the KASP are released from a considerable amount of this pressure.

For Ciamah though, four years in the United States had created other struggles that she had not anticipated. Many of these would have occurred whether she had remained in Saudi Arabia or not, in particular children getting older, health issues. However, those obstacles linked solely to the quest to learn English outside of the Arab world had proven arduous. Her goal had always been to complete a doctoral degree and return to Saudi Arabia, but she had not foreseen the time it would take or that she would be stifled by 120 questions on the TOEFL exam.

With the loss of financial scholarship, international students with F-1 visas must secure admission to a school through proven private financial guarantee. Although she had many options in the metro area, Ciamah chose to continue her education at the most reasonably priced institute, a community college in the same city. Admission at the community college required financial documents showing $16,850 in the bank. The community college stated this amount breaks down to $8,000 for tuition, $350 for medical insurance and $8,500 for living expenses and books. In addition to this amount, Ciamah was required to show $5000 per dependent for a total of $31,850. At the time Ciamah was applying for admission, her oldest daughter was also applying, potentially raising the expected balance to $43,700. With her husband traveling outside of Saudi Arabia for work, she was unable to secure those documents in time for that semester's admission. Ciamah had to continue her studies at home without formal instruction and in violation of her visa.

Health

Another one of the advantages of living in Saudi Arabia, Ciamah explained, was free, unlimited health care. In 2015, the Saudi health care system was divided into

sectors; the largest of these, the public sector, operated by the Ministry of Health, compromised 60% of medical facilities. Additionally, other government organizations, such as the Ministry of Defense and Aviation, the Ministry of Education, and the National Guard provided health care for their employees and dependents. Private sector health care, which compromised 20% of all health care, was not funded by the government and relied on individual citizens to pay for services.

Public sector hospitals and health care facilities were operated in accordance with Article 31 of the Saudi Arabian constitution, and offered free health care to all citizens (Albejaidi, 2010; Almalki M., 2011). This free health care was of tremendous importance to Saudi citizens and was extended to students studying abroad; free and full medical insurance was a component of their scholarship package. Students from Saudi Arabia, living within the United States on scholarship, were not burdened by the high cost of health care in the United States. Those students who were living here without the KASP were not afforded with these same benefits, and had to face the complex system of health care in the United States alone.

"In my country, medicine is free. You can sleep in a hospital for many years. All free." Ciamah recalled, "When I come here, we don't know that we have like a treasure in my country and when we come here, we feel like so different; we appreciate my country." Ciamah knew this now though. In the fall of 2014, on the day of her math final, she suddenly became very ill; she became so ill that she eventually needed to go to the campus medical center and then to the hospital, but only after finishing her final. She explained:

> When was your [my] final, on Friday, I was bleeding, I took medicine from Walmart…I was crazy with medicine! My daughter says, Mom, stay at home but I tell her no. If I lose the test, it is hard to get again. When I finished the test, I found the teacher and like the water [come out of me]. I go and drink two bottles of water from sink. I am so tired and I walked to student health center step.....by……. step. I rush but I fell down in the parking lot and they took me in a bed and said you not to go home. And they called an ambulance. I lost a lot of blood and the doctor said you have to go to the hospital now.

While Ciamah recalled this story, it was told with such disappointment heard both in her voice and shown on her face, head hung low. As I sat next to her, I could not help but remember two other similar events that she shared in the previous years, back when she still believed she could do anything, which ended quite differently.

During her undergraduate studies at King Abdullah Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, Ciamah gave birth to her first child, a daughter, whom she named Monya. It was easy to have a young child and continue with school in Jeddah. There, she had her mother, sisters, and staff to help her. They supported her as if it was a calling, pulled forth by culture, religion and responsibility. Ciamah rested and recovered with help from her family and staff. Her husband came daily to visit with her and the baby, but returned to work after a few hours, allowing her time to recuperate. She returned to school the following semester, and life as a mother, wife and student continued harmoniously without interruption.

Still aided at home by her family and house staff, she became pregnant again her final year at school, but did not see this as an obstacle to her finishing the year. “Why stop?” she said laughing. Her youth, and her can do attitude gave her the strength to race baby against final exam. “I know because I studied biology and I know I can wait. I want to finish. They say you must go and I say, no this is the last day for the test biology and I

want to finish". Ciamah took her exam while having contractions, finished and went to the hospital. "Exam won!" she laughed and pointed to her second daughter sitting beside her. In reality, in Saudi Arabia, Ciamah had won.

In Saudi Arabia, Ciamah was able to be both a mother and a scholar, again, without interruption. As fate would have it, her third child, Ehab, was born five years later, during final exams in graduate school. Finishing up a degree in Textiles, her final assignment culminated in a complex project that resulted in the making of a dress for graduation. Racing once again to complete her coursework while in the beginning stages of labor, Ciamah recalls, "I feel the pain and I think, come on Ciamah! However, my friends again say you have to go! I had to send my project to the seamstress and go to the hospital". Barely making it into the delivery room, with nurses yelling, "Stop! Don't push!" she became a mother for the third time. Laughing, she said, "My husband told me that I told him that the baby was going to come out. However, I finished [my project] and I am glad again. I want to finish my task and I don't want to fail". It seemed like she would not fail, that in a country that provided generous social benefits to its citizens through education, health care and financial support, Ciamah could pursue her educational dreams while maintaining a family. With the loss of her scholarship, and the benefits that came with them, she was unable to find a way to continue.

Profiling

In an effort to hold onto a fleeting hope of getting into any PhD program at this time, Ciamah explained that she had little time to do anything other than study English language. She would need, after all, to pass the TOEFL exam with a score of 83 to pass through the gateway of Intensive English coursework and into the degree sequencing she

dreamed of. To that end, she studied day and night, and her two daughters took on the majority of the housework so that she was free to study. Every morning she drove her nine-year-old son, Ehab up to the bus stop and waited with him. She loved the time she got to spend with her young son alone, a few sleepy minutes with a four-foot tall version of her husband. As if a light turned on inside her, she smiled, sighed and told me about her son:

> I absorb the time when they get home. Time now is gone from within my eyes. Sometimes, you don't know. You don't pay attention and if you don't look what then? Ten years is like ten months, too fast.

After her son's school bus left, the next part of her morning routine began. She pulled out her TOEFL prep flash cards and walked or jogged around the parking lot of a local church adjacent to the bus stop:

> Exercise, yes. It is an opportunity for me to listen to music and study my flash cards. Just in the morning when I drop off Ehab. 10 minutes. Because at home it is so boring to study and I'm not going to do so outside. Fresh air. I saw many people do it the same time as me and they say Hi, hello. It's good.

Ciamah's experience in the church parking lot highlights the improvisations she incorporated into her life here in the U.S. She reported liking the parking lot because there was no "smell for pollution" and no traffic. "I feel comfortable at a church. Not my church but good people". Here religion was replacing religion. This morning routine, unimaginable to her before coming to the United States, provided a great deal of balance to her hectic life until it was interrupted. She told a story of the morning the police started showing up in the same parking lot:

> Police come to me and come around and stare, so I say hi! And he pretends he is so busy and every single day I go out and I feel tired so I sit and read my book and I see him and he KNOWS me and I don't know if because I am Muslim and it's weird.

Under the protective eye of her new police guard, one last time, she parked her "lemon of a minivan" in the church lot so she could have her daily walk. On that morning, a man drove up and gave her a warning:

> Don't leave my [your] car here, I tell him ok. He says, we have children here, and I say, OK, I am neighbor. That's my house. Yes, I felt comfortable just stay here in my van but not comfortable for me now to walk around the church.

As a result of her interactions with the police and the man in the parking lot, her 10 minutes of exercise and fresh air, available to her only in the United States, were now gone, not taken from her, but instead discontinued reluctantly by choice.

This action suggested that she had become aware that although such practice was commonplace for some, her presence at that church parking lot did not align with the social and cultural practice of this world. While Ciamah attempted to perform as others did in this world, she realized that she did not have the agency needed for such practices. She paused and shook her head, "I did not do nothing, I mean anything". Lowering her eyes, she said, "I have never went in there [church], but it is in front of my house. I love it. I feel comfortable there. Close for God there". I suggested she take some time to go in and introduce herself but she replied, "It's always closed in the morning and on Sunday I stay home and listen to Joel Stein. I like him so much. His speech always motivates me". Not able to go back during the hours that the preschool is open, she discontinued her morning walks. She continued:

> I tell my husband I want to go back home. It is too hard to survive. He says because of my kids, have patience. He my husband. I told him I want to give up, I am so tired I want to go back home.

The story of the ending of Ciamah's daily church walks came from our last official interview. By chance, I saw her one more time, on campus and then she was gone. My texts went unanswered. Health issues and financial concerns contributed to her struggle to find reason to stay but what had had perhaps the greatest impact on her, living outside of her country she stated, was the increased activity of radical Islamic militant groups and the rising threat of terrorism in the west.

Lowering her voice, she whispered to me the words she told her nine-year-old son, who had been here in the United States for more than half his life:

> I told Ehab not to tell anyone because people, I watch their face and it changes. People think we ISIS, we kill people, execute people. I am so shocked for that. Ehab sees on TV they want to kill, to shoot. I tell them people think that about you. I tell my daughters that too.

She explained that it was possible for Ehab to go unnoticed as a Saudi. He had lived more than half of his young life here in the United States, and while attending public school, had replaced his Arabic with perfect English. "He's American, I told you. I try to teach some Arabic but hmmmmmm" she said making a clicking noise and shaking her head. His sisters, also fluent in English, did speak with a slight accent implying that English was not their first language however; it was unclear which language was their first. The sisters were young women, out of high school, who practiced Islam, as Meriam explained, "In the details", their hijab signaling to the world they were followers of Islam. They experienced, just as Ciamah did in the church parking lot, a substantial amount of pre-determined judgement on who they were.

With all that Ciamah had come to the United States with in 2012, I was unsure what remained. Her life as an Arab woman had changed so drastically. She had

American children now, one who did not speak Arabic, and another who cursed in English in front of her. Occasionally, she was in contact with her sisters and brothers at home but only through social media. She had lost her scholarship, which contributed to years of financial struggles.

As I looked at the lived experience of this female student from Saudi Arabia, I saw throughout the data that while there were substantial hurdles to learning enough Academic English to transition into a graduate program; for some international students like Ciamah, the sole responsibility of raising three children is a demand that can greatly inhibit their success. While I did not hear Ciamah say can a 45th time, I have often wondered in writing this chapter if it was there, in the church parking lot, when she silently said to herself, I cannot.

Discussion: Thinking about Ciamah and Me

It could be theorized that all graduate students have multiple identities that influence their lived experiences during their graduate school years; though those identities though may not be equally weighted. As a single graduate student working on my first Master degree, I was able to take two overloads and a winter session, allowing me to finish a 24-month program in 18 months. On the occasion that I find myself struggling in my current academic pursuit, I often put on the thread bare t-shirt from that university to remind myself that I can be successful in academia. During that time, I was free from other obligations and never needed to miss a class or ask for an extension for my assignments. In addition, when I was offered a Teaching Assistant position within the College of Education but outside my own TESOL strand, I assumed it was because I was always on campus and seen as available. I did not face what Lynch, (2008) described

as obstacles student-mothers faced such as financial support, childcare concerns and creating "maternal invisibility" at school and "academic invisibility" at home.

Ciamah, as both a student and a parent, faced quite a different experience. Her five years in the United States juxtaposed two significantly important worlds, both of which relied on near constant attention, yet seemed impossible to manage simultaneously. In addition, she was also attempting to learn a new language, negotiate the admissions process in the U.S. higher education system, all outside of Saudi Arabia and while her husband was a world away. While much has been written about the social and cultural worlds of women negotiating the complex demands of motherhood and scholarly pursuit in the United States and how the "multiple and overlapping responsibilities can impact female students' emotional well-being and the likelihood of completing their program of study" (Haynes et al., 2012) more is needed. Given the number of women from Saudi Arabia attending U.S. universities, these student-mothers (Lynch, 2008), who are attempting to gain entrance to higher education in the United States, are in need of further support.

Data collection for Ciamah lasted the longest of all three of my research participants. Our interviews were scheduled for one hour, but on every occasion, lasted more than twice as long. These meetings began as semi-structured interviews and progressed into conversations about life in the United States highly focused on family, issues on visas, immigration attorneys, universities throughout the country and alternative acceptance into those. Her struggles to be a student were amplified as a single parent in the United States, and eventually became complicated by the financial strain of the loss of the King Abdullah Scholarship, health issues, and ultimately, struggles with fitting into

the U.S. contributed to her inability to pass the TOEFL exam (which would have remedied nearly all of these struggles). Instead, they slowly dismantled her master plan.

Over the course of four years, her life was formed and reformed through influences both inside and outside the American university, as were the lives of her children who came with her, improvising their own lives while their mother is on campus. To note, while I mention her children here, this chapter does not intend to address them directly, but instead, I included them as an additional piece of the thick description that this qualitative interview study on identity proposed. In addition, I believe that the experiences that Ciamah was facing in the United States as a student and parent, in many ways, mirrored my own at the time of this research project. Our complicated figured worlds as student-mothers and mother-students, pivoted without definition into Hochschild's (2003) "second shift". In both worlds, Ciamah explained and I agreed we struggled as we switched from one world to the other.

In writing this chapter, I cannot help but admit that feel empathy for the sister that she had become. While I too, had sat in classes with classmates twenty years younger than me, who presented and published like it was their full time job, I always had to be the first one out the door after class to go home and relieve the babysitter. I, like Ciamah, had to go to pediatrician appointments and grocery shop rather than out for coffee or to university writing groups. I too, had to worry about field trip permission slips, pink eye and the guilt of not being there in the moments, putting family aside for books filled with statistical charts and extensive works cited pages. We both floated in and out of two worlds, becoming one person at home and another at school madly driving our minivans

back and forth between worlds that we loved, but were not sure could exist simultaneously.

Four years after her arrival to Central Georgia State University, Ciamah realized that her dream of pursing a graduate degree would never come to fruition. The energy and flow of positivity that I had admired; that I had wanted to bottle so many years before our final June interview had ultimately faded away and was used up by the tensions that had developed. I was undecided if I would attest it to being here, in the United States or rather from not being there, in Saudi Arabia, but her understanding of self, who not only she is but who her three children who she brought to the United States with her, had become, had shifted. Ciamah, the student, experienced all of these complications many times over as she raced back and forth between home and school. Time, and several failed TOEFL exams restricted her from successfully transitioning from an Intensive English Program into a graduate program, and had left her feeling defeated. She was ready to leave.

I understood Ciamah—and her struggle was a familiar one. We were women.

CHAPTER SIX: SHE DOES NOT NEED YOUR VITAMIN W

> You really need to get a convertible. Like a Camaro. You should have the top down, listening to your music. It would be nice for you. Yeah. My jaw must have fallen ever so slightly as I imagined myself ditching my scratched up minivan and driving off, Thelma and Louise style, with Rose. Smiling I thought, she was so young and it was such a wonderful time of her life. And she was happy most of the time. And I was happy for her.

In the previous data chapters, I detailed the lived experiences of two women from Saudi Arabia studying at the Central Georgia State University on KASP. While each woman in this study came to the United States with aspirations and expectations of graduate degrees, neither Meriam nor Ciamah were even able to successfully attain entrance into the graduate program of their choice. Each woman was unique in the lived experiences at home and in the United States, and both were unique in what eventually failed them. Meriam fell to loneliness. Her commitment, like her English language ability only served her 50%. Ciamah's attempt was blocked by the gatekeeper TOEFL exam which dominoed into a loss of scholarship resulting in serious financial struggles. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, international students' experiences vary greatly throughout their academic endeavors, often directed by cultural, language and financial differences. In addition, the social and academic hurdles that international students face in terms of loneliness and homesickness as well as the limits culture and language put on building personal relationships outside of the classroom, prove limiting (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2006; Andrade, 2005; Andrade, 2007).

This final data chapter narrates the experiences of Rose, a third participant. I discuss her understanding of self and how this contributed not only to her identity work, but also to the process that had repositioned her, from the storied Saudi woman to the

successful U.S. college student who happened to be from Saudi Arabia. I begin this chapter with an overview of the timeline of Rose's arrival in the United States and the brief time spent at the Central Georgia State University's Intensive English Program. I continue with her university life outside the IEP and present how her path differed from the other two participants' paths. Namely, Rose succeeded.

Rose's story

Rose arrived in the United States in 2011, courtesy of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program. She had originally applied for the KASP in 2009, during her final year of high school, but her application was inexplicably declined. She laughed as she explained that she must not have had enough "Vitamin W", referring to *wasta,* an Arabic term meaning connections, clout or influence in the Middle East (Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993).

The dismissal of the KASP scholarship was disappointing yet, shrugging her shoulders, she "moved forward" and enrolled in a university 30 minutes from her home outside of Riyadh. She completed a year of general education courses for chemistry. Rose reported that while she had always enjoyed school, in fact she fell in love with it at the university. She had heard stories of people traveling abroad, but had never met a single foreigner until she entered college. There, she met other female students and teachers from the United States and South Africa. It was there where she made her decision to apply to KASP a second time and just as inexplicably as the first time, this time her application was serendipitously accepted. She was granted a scholarship to study medical technology in Denmark. Sometime in the fall of 2010, she was informed via email from KASP that her assignment had been changed. She was to pursue nursing in

the United States. A specific school was not assigned to her. Instead, she was expected to research American universities and to apply to them on her own. This was common practice for scholarship recipients. In telling her story, she shared that while searching for a school, she sought council from her uncle who had studied abroad in Malaysia, as well as from her father's friend who traveled for work. She explained:

> I talked to my father's friend. I want to stay in a place where the weather was like here. A place with not too many Saudi people over there and with entertainment but not too much entertainment because I am coming here to study right? I know myself. Not too much fun.

Rose applied to universities throughout the southern United States and chose the University of Central Georgia. She arrived at the school's IEP in early 2011, was administered the English language exam and placed in Level Three of the seven levels. She attended the same IEP orientation as the other participants and began the spring semester relatively quietly.

Her uncle, who had been studying in Wisconsin, moved to Georgia to become her chaperone as was required by the terms of the scholarship. He entered the same IEP but at a higher level than Rose. They regularly drove to school together and left that close relationship in the parking garage, never talking to each other while on campus. Although Rose was permitted to participate in class with other male students, she reported not feeling able to, nor interested in approaching her brother and his classmates in the corridor. They lived completely separate lives outside their home.

Rose and I initially met after she had completed her first semester at the IEP. She was now in a Level Four English class. Each of the women in my class had arrived before me, but was seemingly too busy to look up from their phones to chat with each other, un-

phased by other students roaring in from the hall. It was there, as I described in Chapter Three, that she sat in my makeshift classroom, alone in one of the only three single desks. She was quiet, as many of my female students were at the beginning of the semester, yet unlike the other women, as class began; she looked up and spoke.

Slow to start, but once the rubber hits the road

Rose's command of the classroom was refreshing and novel in comparison to my previous scholarship recipients. Having already complete a year of college in Saudi Arabia and a semester at the IEP where she had taken five hours of English classes, four days a week, she was becoming used to the demands of a university course. During our first interview, she recognized that she initially stood under the umbrella of the storied female Saudi student, but she adapted quickly to her environment. "It's not that complicated. I adapt, you adapt, we all adapt".

Again, Rose completed the summer semester, and like most crossed into Ramadan successfully. She left my Moodle roster and disappeared into the larger university population. Advance English language classes, those above Level Four, were located throughout the large campus and I rarely saw her in the fall semester of 2011.

Early in 2012, Rose ran into me in the hallway of the Office of International Programs, and our relationship picked back up ever so briefly. Happy to see her after our semester long separation, she greeted me with a warm, sisterly hug. She reported that she had passed the TOEFL during the fall semester 2011 semester and after completing Level Five at the IEP, entered the university as a freshman in the Biology department. She found herself in our office suite in a desperation that I had not seen before. Rose had enrolled as a full time student in the university. Her course load was typical of many

freshmen but 15 credits were too many" for her. She had registered for some of the required courses and while four of the five were manageable, Geography, a topic she had already studied in Saudi Arabia was overwhelming and she was thinking about withdrawing from the course. She explained:

> It's like really tough year, a lot of reading like for I can read, eh, more than 100 pages for a week. Like a book from every course. In the university, maybe more than 200 students so eh, like I can't talk too much like with the teacher or like discuss anything in class. The class is, like, only for the professor. He comes, talks and….. That's it. Very hard.

Rose continued on, that day, to see her academic advisor and stopped into our office suite occasionally throughout the next few semesters when she was in the area. She often reported doing well in her classes even after the slight hiccup with her Geography class. On occasion, we met for coffee off campus and Rose went on with great excitement about the courses that she enjoyed and those with which she struggled. She recalled:

> For me like Anthropology and Sociology. We don't study these in my country so something easy to the American student because they are used to it in high school. But it is really something new to us. Something new and hard.

Before accepting the KASP scholarship, Rose had completed a year of university in Saudi Arabia where she had experienced total academic success, a success build on a strong Government based, secondary education in a school where her mother taught.

Rose reported that her mother had been exceedingly supportive of her effort to study abroad and had been preparing her for higher education, Saudi style, for her entire life. Now, a year into an American university, Rose reflected on the differences in her educational experience in Saudi Arabia and what she had experienced here.

She explained:

> Maybe because we only study the basic things in my country [in secondary school] like math and biology and geography and that's it. Like we don't have the more things to study like anthropology and sociology…..I like it. Maybe because it makes people think more or like want to know more like not only the basic things. Like, they think about everything around them with their culture and other people.

This reflection on coursework and academic expectations led Rose to make an informed and substantial change to her academic path. In April of 2013, at a coffee shop, she informed me that, "I don't think I am successful yet. Its education and I need more education. That is my success; that is why I am here". She continued to tell me that she had decided to change majors from Biology to Civil Engineering. This bold change, she explained, was because Engineering in her mind, would be easier. "I think language is always going to be a problem everywhere. I am changing major partly because of this. Engineering is math. Math is visual to me and makes sense. More education is more success".

Life is just fine; you do not need to worry

During one of our initial interviews, I asked Rose if she thought she would go back to Saudi Arabia for a visit. She had been in the United States since 2011 and many students used the prepaid scholarship ticket to go home during the semester breaks. Rose had not returned in years. Her family, which she described as only her parents, three brothers and a young sister, either lived here or came for extended visits. Her young sister, an American citizen, was born at the university hospital on one such visit. Questioned on why she stayed in the United States, she paused and replied, "Whenever I go home, I worry. I think about if they will let me out [of Saudi Arabia] or back in [to

the United States]". She feared that anyone could stop her, a relative, a police officer or an airport employee like a ticket or customs agent. It was not worth the risk nor was it interesting to her. "It is so boring there and I cannot drive. I must wait for my father for everything".

Unlike the other participants, one who suffered socially and the other academically, Rose reported feeling unaffected by either. As I read and reread transcripts and field notes, I found little to indicate she was struggling beyond the academic requirements that many university students faced. Nor did I find, as I did with the other participants, any mention of regret in her choice to come to America, or any reported feeling of being a representative of her country or a model international student. The United States worked just fine for her and why would it not? She moved forward.

Always moving forward-she was 100% committed

When Rose was granted admission to the university in 2011, she decided that one thing which would help her commit to staying in university, was to find a permanent place to live in the United States. The townhouse, which she shared with her extended family, was in one of the large colorful string of housing complexes bordering the university. It was filled day and night with students and its paper-thin walls made her feel as if they were leaning in to her bedroom. She reported feeling uncomfortable with the nearness of so many students. In addition, it lacked the privacy that she had been accustomed to in her home country. In Saudi Arabia, Rose lived in her family's home, surrounded by tall stone fences. She was able to maintain the seclusion that she was accustomed to. To remedy this, to keep moving forward here in the United States, the following year, she went to a builder and acting as her own buyer's agent at age 22,

contracted a 3,500 square foot new build home and paid in cash. As the completion of her new home drew near, she secured a moving company, purchased furniture, arranged delivery and assembled each piece using the 4mm hex key found at the bottom of each box.

As summer ended, she and her extended family moved into the four-bedroom house, taking the upstairs Master suite for herself. She bought a cat, which she regularly walked around the block on a leash and settled in to her new home. She registered for classes and quietly slipped in among the underclassmen hustling through campus. While she had detested living in the busy apartment complex, Rose was very content in a crowded lecture hall or in the lower, more socially active levels on the university's library. She met with classmates both on and off campus, held get-togethers at her home, joined a gym, and got hooked on running and the vegan lifestyle, all beautifully reported on Instagram.

It is about the scarf

> But then there is this scarf. I'm thinking about going to another city for spring break just to take it off. Maybe Las Vegas. This school is too small for me now to take it off here.

In all that Rose had done to find successful in her life here in the United States, there was one element of struggle that she faced as an international student. As I have mentioned, her experiences both socially and academically, did not mirror those of the other participants, Ciamah and Meriam. She had navigated her way through an Intensive English Program, successfully passed the TOEFL exam, which lead her to acceptance in the Biology program. Through this coursework, she had shifted her major to engineering and again, had successfully completed another year.

On one January morning in 2015, Rose texted me, and asked to meet up for coffee. She said she had some questions and wanted to tell me a story. Meeting again at our usual coffee spot, Rose breezed through the door with the winter wind. She sat, rosy cheeked and bright eyed as always and as I stared at her MAC glittered face, she smiled back saying nothing. Taking off her gloves, she blurted out, "I took it off" motioning the unwinding of her hijab around her head. With a deep exhale, she laughed at me as I stared, speechless wondering exactly what she had taken off. Over the course of the many years we had known each other, I had only seen her once without a scarf. At a women-only party at the IEP, curtains tightly closed, she danced with her friends for hours, her long brown wavy hair dancing down her back. As the party ended, scarves came out of designer handbags as cars pulled up.

As her laughter died down, she explained about her most recent trip to New York City:

> So before went there, I told myself, if I go there, I just [motioning to unwinds her scarf] gonna take it off. I gonna get any single scarf. It's fine. He said you can try it if you want. So, I just left the house without it, to the airport.

As she waited for my response, a pregnant pause and then she continued, "It's four years. I've never tried it before. Ever. Even when I order pizza for delivery, I put it on at the door and take my pizza". So when I asked the million-dollar question, "Why now?" she replied:

> I don't know. I just wanted to try it and yeah, I feel like I'm a normal person. Like everybody talk to me when I am around people. When I wear it, people try to put boundaries unless I start to talk. It's fine but they don't interact with me if I have it. And even like the thing that made me take it off. We had been to a Mexican restaurant with my friends and the guy who works there said, "Why don't you take it off? Like when you take it off, the guys are gonna come talk to

> you. With that they gonna put boundaries between you and them like, so I think, I'll try it.

Her trip to New York became the first of several times when Rose took off her hijab. Each time, as she drove outside the city limits, she reported, she removed her long scarf but tucked another smaller on in her handbag, just in case. This was always the case, always outside the city. She explained:

> This school is small now for me. Here, for me, like if I went to a new restaurant that I was like 100% for sure that no one was gonna be there from our group, the year. Maybe like after three years, when there are some new people here and they don't know Rose anymore….. I think I'm going to go on Spring Break like to another city, just to take it off. Maybe Vegas or on a cruise.

As more stories poured out of her, it became clearer to me that she realized that here, there was a connection between her and her scarf and how she was seen as different outside her home country. Struggling to make sense of it, even as she retold the story, she continued:

> I remember the first time I went to New York with my scarf on and I wanted to get like a picture with the Army guys at the station [Central Station] and he was like… Hmmm… well OK but I could tell they were like nervous to stand by me. Like I have a feeling they don't want to. But the last time I went to New York, without the scarf, I met a guy at the same station, from the Army and like he came to me and said, are you lost? I said no and smiled and said I'm not. But I wondered, why he come to me? There are many people here. Then I just like sat far from him and then he came to me again. I think. What does he want? Even my brother noticed that. Yeah.

When asked if the waiter at the restaurant was right, she replied, "He was right! I got wisdom from him". She continued, "It's not about the hair, it's about the scarf. Even if I had another type of hair, it would be without boundaries but that one hijab..."

Feeling freer than she had in many years, Rose returned to school with the weight of her scarf lighter on her head.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina 2015

One a Tuesday afternoon, in the winter of 2015, three young adults living in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, were executed in their home. Breaking news reported it was the result of an escalation of an ongoing dispute over a parking spot. Three students were shot execution style in their home, in an apartment complex similar to her former home next to campus. They were Muslim and the events shook Rose to her core:

> It's like do you think there is a person in the world gonna kill three people, two women, over a parking spot? Really? No, that can't be. It's not about a parking spot. And he used to, like the killer, post stuff on his Facebook page, so he is an Atheist I think. So he used to post things about Christians that were bad. So I think I am 100% for sure it is about religion. And they refuse to have the media here. The whole thing makes me angry. I remember what happened in Boston with the race. It is the same thing; three people died and like it was going on and on nonstop day after day. But for these three young people, like nothing.

Rose, as well as other students, had texted me their concerns asking if I had seen it on the news. NPR had included brief updates on the developing story. The following day, a former student who had returned to Saudi Arabia, texted me that it had been on a continuous loop on Arabic news stations. Rose confirmed this and said, "They even say that the American media, they don't want to talk about it. The refuse to talk about it". Later she posted on social media:

> Such a loss from the Muslims around the world. Three Muslims were murdered as first-degree murder in Chapel Hill last night. The media in ES refused to talk about the incident and of course try to hide the truth since it is a violation for racism purpose. But it is crystal clear and we all know the reason behind showing the truth.

Due to her decision to not return to Saudi Arabia for fear of losing her Visa, Rose was relying heavily on Social Media to keep up with news from her country and her friends there. Additionally, like Meriam, it was her primary method of keeping in contact

with her family, most importantly her mother. Just a few short weeks after her trip to New York and the smaller trips outside the city, where her hijab laid tucked away, Rose became more and more conflicted. She had decided to keep her hijab on while at the university, allowing herself to transform outside of the city. Because of one man's odious action, she worried about that decision. While it was enough for her to live at the university as a Muslim student and as something else outside the city limits, Rose watched as friends made the decision to remove theirs immediately. This trend swelled on every Social Media site she followed. An arbitrary man cautiously walked up to her in a store and told her she should remove it to be safe. Shaken and likely angry she messaged her mother asking, "Do you still want me to have my hijab? I feel, like, not safe".

The days and weeks that followed this heinous crime amplified Rose's concern with living between worlds. With identity formation based on situation, she controlled her own outward identity, which matched her inward identity, one not placed on her but jettisoned from within in her.

Data collection had officially ended with our final interview in January 2015 but whether out of friendship or fear, Rose contacted me via text over concerns of the shootings. We continued to meet on and off over the next year, and I still follow her on social media, along with 1,058 other close friends. Her Instagram identity mirrored her university self, a hijabi in every photo. Often I wonder if there is a second account. One outside the city limits.

Postscript

Rose was a pseudonym for a pseudonym. When our interviews for this project began, I asked her to choose a name for me to use in this research project. I had suggested using her mother's name or that of a childhood friend, but she quickly blurted out an English translation for her real name and explained to me that was what her name meant in Arabic. Knowing that would too easily identify her, I penciled in Rose, like the flower, next to her name. In the beginning, flipping back and forth between the two names, like trying to make similar jigsaw puzzle pieces fit, I could not decide which to use.

Rose though, has been her name for much of this writing process. I initially chose the name, like the flower, because she was just that lovely. Something a green thumb would devote extra time to within the garden. As my student, she was the rose in my garden imagined classroom. Ironically, as I looked over the data, and as is presented here, I happened to see her, at times, not as a delicate flower that needed to be tended to, but instead as the beautiful wildflower that grows within the rose bed despite cultivation.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

As a preface to this conclusion, I note that this dissertation began with a discussion of the KASP and how it had benefitted thousands of international students from Saudi Arabia pursuing tertiary education in the United States. The scholarship, initiated in 2005, was a direct result of an agreement between then President George Bush and the late King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, as an effort to ease tension between the United States and Saudi Arabia post 9/11. With the ascendance of a new monarch in 2015the KASP was restructured The decade long scholarship program was then renamed the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Scholarship Program with an emphasis of "quality over quantity", granting scholarships to students with at least 30 credit hours from a university as well as higher GPAs (Kottasova, 2016). Even with the restructuring of allowances, the scholarship program continues to grant thousands of students interested in studying abroad, generous support.

In Chapter One, I presented the purpose of this study and the research questions. This research study was designed to incorporate the lived experiences of three women currently studying in the United States through benefit of the KASP. It was of particular interest due to two factors. The first of these was the rapid rise in students from Saudi Arabia entering American universities. In 2005, there were 5,000 Saudi nationals living in the United States on student visas. That number increase to 45,000 in 2013 ("Open Doors Data," 2013). The second factor was that while 30% of these scholarship recipients were women, little had been written about their experience as individuals. These two factors contributed to the construction of a qualitative research study that gave

voice to the often "storied" Saudi woman. In this research project, I explored the following research questions:

- What are the figured worlds of female Saudi Arabian F-1 visa students studying in an urban public university in the United States?
- What contexts mitigate and form or reform their identity formation?
- How do the women articulate their understanding of the role of identity in and out of the social worlds of the U.S. university community?

As this qualitative research project attempted to investigate the figured worlds of Saudi women studying in the United States under KASP, it must be stated that "identities—if they are alive, if they are being lived—are unfinished and in process" (1998, p. 5). The shifting identities of these research participants, and thousands of others, are in process, and it would be beneficial understand this dynamic.

In Chapter Two, I presented a review of the literature on studies which revealed that there are many studies on male students from Saudi Arabia studying in the United States, however few on Saudi women. Additionally, research was conducted on women from the Middle East studying in the United States but again, these research projects lacked the specific details that qualitative research is founded on. I presented an overview of education for women within Saudi Arabia. This was followed by a description of Intensive English Programs within the United States. I continued by discussing the theoretical framework of Holland's figured worlds and discussed self-authoring of Saudi females within Saudi Arabia and in the United States.

Chapter Three displayed my research methods for this qualitative inquiry. Drawing on Holland's 1998 theory of the construction of identity and self-authoring through figured worlds, I described the analytical framework in which I examined the self-authored identity formation of these women. I explained how this research was built off a Pilot Study which was conducted with participants at the same university's Intensive English Program. I included my subjectivity statement that influenced my own interpretation of the data.

In Chapter Four, I began the data stories with a presentation of my understanding of Meriam, the international student who never left home. Meriam's story began in early 2014 when she arrived from Saudi Arabia through courtesy of KASP at Central Georgia State University. It had been Meriam's intention to attend an Intensive English Program. It had been her goal to transition from the IEP into a graduate program in the United States after successfully passing the TOEFL. Meriam, who already held a Bachelor's degree from a Saudi Arabian university, was unable to meet that goal. The two years she spent in pursuit of a passing grade were stalled by her overwhelming loneliness. Although she did not face other struggles such as funding housing transportation, technology, common to international students, this loneliness became too challenging. As she explained in our interviews, Meriam realized that her English only served her "50%". She used social media to fill the void. Her daily Skype calls to her family in Saudi Arabia alleviated much of that loneliness and it was this "improvisation" that allowed Meriam to stay here as long as she did but not long enough to finish her degree. In the end, Meriam abruptly disappeared. I could only assume that her inability to pass the TOEFL combined with her increasing solitude caused her to return to her country.

In Chapter Five, I narrated Ciamah's four-year experience living in the United States, at times, through scholarship. Ciamah, who had studied and lived here, as a single parent of three children, was unable to manage being as Lynch (2008) described a "student-mother". She not only had to improvise her own life here in the United States, but those of her three children. Her inability to fulfill her initial plan of passing the TOEFL in one year became the catalyst to a series of unfortunate events. The eventual loss of the KASP, and the health insurance that accompanied it for both Ciamah and her family, had created unforeseen complications that she could not resolve. Ciamah, like Meriam, had come to the university, with a college degree, in fact a graduate degree, yet had not anticipated the challenge the systematic gatekeeper of the TOEFL.

In Chapter Six, I "crafted" (Cahnmann, 2003) the continuing lived experiences of Rose, who also came to study in the United States after being awarded the KASP on her second attempt. Unlike the other two participants, Rose had only completed two semesters of university in Saudi Arabia, yet was able to pass the TOEFL within the first year in the United States. That successful transition into the university was followed by more accomplishments both academically and socially. Like Meriam, and Ciamah, Rose was very aware of the limits language placed on her. Academically, she repositioned herself, by switching majors from Biology to Civil Engineering, which she felt better utilized her strength in Mathematics and did not have as heavy an academic writing demand. Socially, she moved herself off campus and into a home where she was able to live both as she had been accustomed to in Saudi Arabia, yet also allowed her the freedom to be a student living away from home. For the most part, Rose moved in and

out of the social and academic world on her own terms. With the exception of the events that took place in Raleigh, Rose reported feeling at home in the United States.

In and out of each of these data chapters was the presence of the fourth and final woman in this titled dissertation, myself. As Behar (1996) wrote of the researcher, the one who is both visible and vulnerable, as both a participant and an observer is not blending ethnography with autobiography but instead, presenting, through one's own subjectivity, an interpretation of what has occurred. These interpretations came through my own understanding of these women's lived experiences and would never be depicted the same if written by another. Although I, as the researcher, traveled in and out of their lives, they have never left mine. I present here, as a vulnerable author, their own vulnerable stories, which I came to understand as a researcher, teacher and friend.

Implications for Practice

Whole to Part: Creating a Global Classroom on an Internationalized Campus

Internationalization of universities in the United States has been common practice for decades. Open Doors reported 1,043,839 international students attended universities in the United States during the 2015-2016 academic year making up 5.2% of all students. Of the top three sending countries, in that same year, Saudi Arabia ranked third behind China and India. Engineering, Business Management, Math and Computer Science are the most chosen majors of these international students. With this increasing trend of international enrollment, Institutes of Higher Education have put into place multi-tiered programs that are available to faculty, staff and students to support their experience working with the expanding international community working and studying on their campuses. These programs vary from campus to campus and year to year but as the ever-

shifting global environment, both in the United States and abroad, schools continue to provide resources. At Central Georgia State University, programming provided by the Office of International Programs was abundant. There was a variety of resources for International students aimed to support their social and cultural needs from International Clubs, coffee hours, friendship and cultural exchanges, to International Enrichment Seminars and housing. In addition, for faculty and staff, the Office of International Programs provided an annual workshop on Understanding International Students, offered by request. There are extensive resources to encourage faculty to travel abroad offering resources that range from organizing and heading short-term study abroad programs, faculty exchanges, travel resources, travel grants and travel insurance. Guest speakers and programming are also provided across the curriculum.

Despite the plethora of programming, neither students nor faculty are required to attend any of it. Not one of the three participants in this study had gone to any of the activities other than the International Coffee hour and reported that was only because it was sponsored by the Intensive English Program that they had attended, which was under the umbrella of International Programming. Likewise, some were not able to return to campus for evening events and none of the students were allowed to live in international housing because they were required to reside with their chaperone.

Faculty and staff had access to endless professional development opportunities both inside and outside their department. Opportunities and time though may not align when you take into consideration their teaching, researching and writing requirements.

1. As this qualitative research has shown, female students from Saudi Arabia were faced with many challenges studying abroad. Universities, interested in

meeting their cultural and religious needs could, extend resources to support Saudi Arabian women during the daytime throughout campus.

2. Additionally, the international students in this research project felt they were not prepared for the academic demands of this American university. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Intensive English Programs vary in programming and curriculum. It would benefit these students, as well as other international students, to provide counseling on realistic expectation of American academic reading and writing in their respective field of study.

3. Teacher-student relationships can be powerful and transformative. Furthering faculty's awareness of the pivotal role they play in international students' experience would benefit their quality of life here in the United States.

Implication for Research

At the beginning of this research project, it was simple to find endless papers about international students attending university in the United States. However, extensive searches for research which specifically investigated women from Saudi Arabia, who were rewarded the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, yielded few results.

At the time this research project was finished, it became clearer that while there was an increase in scholarship on the experience of Saudi Arabian students, it is the added aspect of the female student that needs further understanding. In this research project presented here, two of the three women were not successful in their academic pursuits of attaining admittance to graduate school. Neither woman was able to pass the TOEFL exam with a score high enough to be granted admission to a graduate program.

While both women reported struggling with language, it would benefit both students and academic representatives to understand further where that disconnect occurs.

1. An additional gap in the research is seen in longitudinal studies that show the experience of female students from Saudi Arabia and their success in the U.S. university system. Further research which looks at women, like Rose, who have found success in college would greatly add to the field of internationalism in universities
2. Another gap in research for women from Saudi Arabia studying on a government scholarship is in the preparation these scholars receive before coming to the United States. While each participant in this program reported attending orientation meetings in Saudi Arabia, which focused on cultural differences and expectations as representative of the government, all three found the academic reading and writing to be far more difficult than expected. Investigating the disconnect, which impeded each participant's academic pursuit, could help bridge the transition from IEPs to academic coursework.
3. While this research project presents the lived experiences of women from Saudi Arabia studying in the United States, there continues to be a gap in the research in what occurs in the lives of scholarship recipients during the time they receive the scholarship and when they leave the country. This area of research could benefit those members of the university community that work with international students outside the classroom.

This qualitative research project emerged from observations from my own classroom in an Intensive English Program whose majority population, at the time, came from Saudi Arabia. My own prior experience teaching international students, while broad, had not yet mirrored this experience.

The intent of my research was to deconstruct and re-present the storied Saudi woman; to peel the layers of costumes and customs that had been imposed by others, the media and popular culture, and to highlight who each participant was as an individual; a scholar, an international student, a mother/wife/sister/friend. This insight, interpretation and analysis, afforded to me as a partial insider, filtered through our shared experiences as four women.

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APPENDIX A: FIRST INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What has your experience been like studying in the United States?
2. What informed your understanding of US culture before leaving Saudi Arabia?
3. Whose decision was it to apply for the scholarship? What was your role in the decision? What was the motivation?
4. How were you supported/not supported you in this experience? By whom?
5. Were you aware of any other Saudi Arabian students who are participating in this program and did their experiences influence your decision?
6. What was your original intention for studying in the United States? Has it changed?
7. Can you describe any informational sessions or orientations did you have before you left Saudi Arabia? How did it/didn't it prepare you for your experience? What are your responsibilities to your government because of this scholarship?
8. When did you arrive? Can you describe your initial impression?
9. Can you describe some of the initial adjustments you needed to make in the classroom? Lifestyle? Living experience?
10. What are some ongoing tensions you are still negotiating as a Saudi Arabian female in U.S. universities?
11. How would you describe your experience as an international student?

APPENDIX B: EXCERPT OF PILOT STUDY INTERVIEW

J: Can you think back to January 2011 when you first came here, that first day, you came here with one brother?

R: One cousin

J: Your older cousin? What did you think at first? Can you describe that time?

R: (Sighs) Like when I was in the airplane, I was shocked if they (Customs) gonna let me in or not and like for some silly reason they just let the student come back even if they get just like, even if you are in the airport, they just like take you and say you just go back. Like for some reason, the immigration send you. And I landed in Washington D.C. I got at the airport and I was shocked for the immigration from their like, questions, and like their investigation like I was in trouble or something like that, I after that, it's ok.

J: Why did you feel like you were in trouble?

R: It's like a normal think whenever I come here.

J: Why?

R: It's just a normal thing every time I come here. It's because international student

J: How did you get here?

R: I told you I talk to my father's friend; I want to stay in a place or a city where the weather is like here. A place with not too many Saudi people over there and with entertainment but not too much entertainment because I am coming here to study right? (Laughs) I don't want something to take me from studying. So he said California, Florida and North Carolina. And so both of these states, Florida and California both have entertainment so I know myself, I decide to come here.

J: Can you tell me what happened when you first got to Atlanta?

R: We first went to the hotel, we did not have a car and we were looking to where was the university and it was like 1 mile from the hotel but like we walked all the way to the other side but didn't see it and we talked to someone and they said-it was over there.

J: What did you think when you stepped onto the university campus?

R: It was beautiful!

J: What was beautiful?

R: It was so big his university the different departments and all the different buildings, the student union and like we have like big universities in my country but no one has like here. Like the facilities here.

J: At orientation, what did you think about the other students? Were there many students?

R: Yeah Saudi students, a student from Colombia, Kuwait, Mongolia

J: So you were in a classroom with men, and women from other countries, how did you feel?

R: ALL my thinking was about the Saudi students-the men. All I can think about it how I am going to talk, how I am going to walk into the class, how I am going to leave the class it's like something new to me. Is it ok to talk to another student? Is it like, are they going to understand me or think I am wrong. Yeah I was like confused on the first day.

J: Did they talk about that in KSA at the orientation?

R: Maybe, I don't remember

J: Can you describe some things you had to do differently?

R: I feel like I talk to myself, we are here to student so like we are not like back home and how the woman talk to a man So they're just my classmates so I have to just get used to it. And then for the first level I was shy and the second I get more confident and the last level I was like *different*, I like talked and I have what my confidences to talk and it's like it's not even like man and woman, it is like classmates

J: Did you have any male teachers?

R: Eh for the first level, no

J: What about adjustments with your lifestyle, living with your brother?

R: At first I lived in an apartment complex with American roommates, like my brother with three American roommates and me with three different roommates, in different apartments eh for me I didn't like it, it isn't that I don't like American roommates, like my lifestyle is different I have, I like to live my own place, like (pause)I don't know, I don't like sharing things, like this is mine so you know for example like in the kitchen like I wash my own dishes and I don't people to go there and used things and not wash it, you know

J: What else about that living experience was new for you?

R: Ummm …….. I don't know.

J: Can you think of some daily routines that were different from home?

R: Um… there is a privacy but like not too much because like everyone would like to invite their friends over there and they were female or male a so, female is ok but sometimes the males are not ok, yeah because yeah outside of the apartment

like or with a male I have to wear like my hijab and so that's not comfortable for me. Yeah

J: You have been here now three years, you had a lot of adjustments especially with gender but you said you have overcome them now, but do you still have some tensions about negotiating your life here as a Saudi female university student? Do you have anything you struggle with?

R: No, like I don't struggle, Yeah, I don't think so yeah I feel more comfortable now. Like before, when I walked on the street or at the university or I ever enter a classroom, I feel like people are looking to me because of my *hijab*, but now I feel like it's not something that they look hard at.

J: What about your experience as an international student in the university?

R: I think here I am struggling with, for me like some courses, like anthropology and sociology. *We don't study these things in my country so something easy to the American student because they used to it in high school but it is really something new to us-something new and hard.*

J: Do you feel like studying is different in the United States?

R: Maybe because we only study the basic things in my country, like math and biology physics, chemistry and that's it like we don't have the more things to study like anthropology and sociology we didn't study this back home-yeah. And they like to study new things here. Even it is weird. But I like these things and that's why I wanna have my little brother studying here.

J: What is it that you like about them (the courses)?

R: Maybe *because it makes people think more* or like *want to know more* like not only the basic things, like they think about everything around them with their culture and other people.

APPENDIX C: DEFINITIONS

The following terms were used throughout this research study. The terms were operationalized in the study as described under their definitions.

1. Abaya-An over-garment which is typically black, drapes from the head or the shoulders down to the feet loosely covering a woman from the neck down. An abaya is often worn with a hijab
2. Hijab- The hijab, or headscarf, is part of a traditional way of dressing modestly. This is required when a woman would be in the presence of men who are not *mahram*; not closely related to her. The hijab is not required in front of a woman's father, husband, brothers, sons, grandfathers, grandsons, father-in-law, sons-in-law, nephews, minor male children or elderly men.
3. Intensive English Programs (IEP) - Intensive English Program is open to non-native speakers of English who have a serious desire to improve their language skills. This challenging program is useful to working professionals and to students preparing for university study or professional programs. The course of study is based on an integrated-skills approach with listening, speaking, reading, writing and grammar components. Fluency and accuracy in both spoken and written English are emphasized.
4. F-1 Visa - an F1 visa is issued to international students who are attending an academic program or English Language Program at a US college or university. F-1 students must maintain the minimum course load for full-time student status. They can remain in the US up to sixty days beyond the length of time it takes to complete their academic program.

5. King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) was created in 2005. It provides full scholarship, salary, insurance and travel for Saudi nationals to study abroad. In 2013, the scholarship program was renewed until 2020.
6. Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) The TOEFL iBT (Internet based test) and the TOEFL PBT (paper-based test) measure the ability to use and understand English at the university level. Additionally, it evaluates how well you combine your listening, reading, speaking and writing skills to perform academic tasks
7. The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) assesses the English language proficiency of people who want to study at universities or work where English is used as the language of communication. This assessment measures reading, writing, listening and speaking in English.
8. *Wasta* -an Arabic word that translates to clout, influence or favoritism