

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Walking the Narrow Path: Narratives of Migration and Mental Health among Saudi Arabian Women at Oregon State University

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Since the inauguration of the King Abdullah-Aziz Foreign Scholarship Program in 2005, the number of Saudi university students in the United States has increased exponentially, and an unprecedented amount of Saudi women are seeking international degrees. The absence of scholarly research within these women's home and host countries highlights the need for an ethnographic account of their transnational experiences, which can elucidate ways in which knowledge, values, and customs are in a constant process of contextual negotiation. This in turn influences available sources of social support and psychological well-being. Drawing on data from free-lists, a focus group, and in-depth semi-structured interviews, this ethnographic research aims to uncover and examine the social determinants of psychological well-being as described by the narrative experiences of Saudi Arabian women studying at Oregon State University. After providing a detailed analysis of specific sociocultural structures operating in these women's lives, two sides qualifying Saudi Arabian women's experiences are examined: stakes of their international education projects and challenges in maintaining good mental health. These stakes, formed by sociocultural structures, circumscribe their experiences, decisions, and behavior in the U.S., where they must navigate through new challenges and sources of distress. The challenges they face cause distress, but also delineate possible sources of support and create avenues for agency. Finally, this thesis is concluded by recommending applications for mental health care providers and examining macro-level theoretical underpinnings of social determinants of psychological well-being.

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Walking the Narrow Path: Narratives of Migration and Mental Health
among Saudi Arabian Women at Oregon State University

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Kristen Elizabeth Gentry, Author

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose of the study

This study examines the social determinants of well-being and mental health as identified by the narrative experiences and explanatory models of Saudi Arabian female students at Oregon State University (OSU). Since the inauguration of the King Abdullah Foreign Scholarship Program in 2005, the number of Saudi students enrolled in higher education in the U.S. has increased dramatically. Unfortunately, scholarly research has not been able keep pace with these sociopolitical developments in international education. Indeed, Saudi Arabian students, in particular female students, are vastly underrepresented in the international education and anthropological literature. Adding to this deficit, for social science research, the nation of Saudi Arabia “represents a virtual terra incognita” in ethnographic literature (Altorki 1986: 2). The absence of scholarly research within these women’s home and host country highlights the need for an ethnographic account of their transnational experiences, which can elucidate ways in which knowledge, values, and customs are in a constant process of contextual negotiation, which in turn influences available sources of social support and psychological well-being.

Saudi Arabia remains one of the most religiously conservative nations in the world with one of the largest youth populations. Saudi Arabia has over 27 million citizens; however, over 50% is under the age of 25 (Yamani 2000).

Partially because of this, the Saudi government has been expanding educational opportunities for its citizens in order to cultivate the necessary human resources for future development and to productively manage this demographic group (SACM 2011, Yamani 2000). The Saudi Ministry of Higher Education (SACM) developed the King Abdullah Foreign Scholarship to offer Saudi students world-class education opportunities but also to foster mutual understanding and respect between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, with students as ambassadors. The scholarship offers full tuition and living stipends to both students and their dependents for English education, bachelors, and graduate degrees. Saudi students are required to maintain a 2.5 GPA in order to keep their scholarship. Currently, there are 420 Saudi Arabian students enrolled at OSU. Although men represent the majority of the scholarship cohort nearly three-to-one, women's representation in the U.S. and at OSU has increasingly gained ground, as international education becomes more popular and acceptable. One reason for the smaller number of females is the underlying concern over their honor, safety, and well-being. To help ensure this, the Ministry of Higher Education requires women to be accompanied by a male—a husband, father, brother, or uncle—in order to receive the scholarship. Subsequently, the amount of Saudi women and men in the U.S. exponentially increases annually, as many migrate in pairs.

Alongside this expansion in educational opportunities for a growing youth population, rapid and extreme transformations have unfolded within the Arab world. Saudi Arabia's political system is governed by a strict interpretation of

Sharia law; however, its authority and primacy has been compromised by global processes. The metamorphoses caused by external pressures from globalized media, international trade networks, and the centralization of the nation-state have both expanded social horizons and undermined the foundation of societal and regional stability (Yamani 2000). Because of this, the region is in flux; this transformation requires reconciliation between past and present, host and home, modes of being, the details of which will be unpacked in the following pages. In many ways, Arab youth are caught between two sociopolitical worlds: the “traditional” notions of family and tribe, and the newer, “modern” institutions of the global market and state. Significantly, the socioeconomic position of women in Arab societies embodies these contradictions, where traditional pressures attempt to enshroud women under the fabric of patriarchy and Islamic values, while global economic forces and liberal ideologies advocate for women’s inclusion in the workforce. These competing pressures suspend women in a liminal state, from where they must renegotiate their cultural identities, values, and avenues for agency; this can be a significant source of confusion and distress, but also an outlet for positive transformation and empowerment (Yamani 2000).

Within this context of massive social change, the field of mental health is a nascent discipline in many Middle Eastern countries, but it is also a psychological state which many Saudi international students have experienced challenges achieving. Due to the lack of academic literature on this population and its expanding presence in the university education system, the course of this research

sought to reflect the most relevant issues for Saudi women studying at OSU. In an attempt to document these narratives of transnationalism, this study began by identifying and investigating what topics they found to be most present and problematic in their lives in regards to personal health. Depression, anxiety, and homesickness were unanimously identified as concerns. Because of this, issues of psychological well-being and distress oriented the research process.

The World Health Organization defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community” (WHO 2011). This definition provides one of the comparative standards for psychological well-being. Good mental health precedes success in any endeavor, international education is no exception. In light of this, research has shown that migration causes intense acculturative stress, placing international students at a greater risk for psychological distress and mental disorders (Walker et al. 2008, Hassounch 2007). Their ability to “work productively and fruitfully” and “to cope with the normal stresses of life” determines their success in an economic and social environment where their hopes for the future are at stake. Today, a large number of Saudi students choose to acquire their degree abroad; this number rises every year as international education has come to be viewed as socially and professionally valuable. Because of this, their mental well-being represents a concern for American universities and

administrators and, upon their return, has significant implications for Saudi society.

The purpose of this study is three-fold. Relying on emic definitions of distress and well-being, this thesis aims to 1) describe the sociocultural structures which influence psychological well-being as described by female students from Saudi Arabia, 2) examine how these structures influence the stakes under which these women seek higher international education, and 3) discuss challenges, as well as supports, that influence their ability to maintain good mental health. This study contends that, despite geographic separation from their home country, Saudi Arabian gender norms and values, as shaped by the construct of neopatriarchy, determine the ways in which these women navigate their transnational sense of self, their avenues for social support, and their own mental well-being.

Chapter Organization

This thesis will proceed as follows: In Chapter 2, I offer a theoretical framework that considers the fluctuating social position of the Saudi woman and describes the social structure of norms and values that undergird Saudi women's educational experiences at OSU. The structuralist-functionalist literature provides a basic understanding of the honor/shame system in Mediterranean societies. Calling on the work of postcolonial feminist theorists, I will then progress into examination of gender dynamics in Muslim societies, while paying careful attention to spaces for women's agency and autonomy. Using Hisham Shirabi's

theory of neopatriarchy, I will then sketch out how changing economic, political, and social changes have engendered a unique hybrid of classical patriarchy and modernity and its implications for contemporary women. These theories, rooted in ethnography, will uncover some of the foundations and analytical tools for understanding Saudi women's obstacles and determinants for positive mental health, how they negotiate the weight of tradition while acting as autonomous agents in the U.S. In the latter part of Chapter 2, I describe the social determinants of psychological distress and well-being, integrating information from the previous portion into my analysis. Chapter 3 summarizes the economic, cultural, and political transformations in Saudi Arabia since its inception, focusing on education, employment, and shifting concepts of social identity. By providing historical background information, this chapter will help contextualize the changing socioeconomic position of women as homemakers, students, and professionals.

In Chapters 4 through 6, I will focus on analysis of the interviews I conducted with female Saudi Arabian international students at OSU. Chapter 4 provides an explanation of the research methodology that created space for participants' voices and allowed them to determine which research questions were most relevant to their lived experiences in the U.S. Chapter 5 considers the stakes of their transnational education, illustrating how neopatriarchal structures forge the real and perceived benefits and risks of their decision to study abroad. Family and nation circumscribes this process, requiring these women to renegotiate

sociocultural norms and expectations. Their emic descriptions of what is at stake provide context for the pressure behind their will to succeed and behind the challenges they must overcome along the way, adding another layer to the ways in which these challenges may affect their mental health and overall success. Chapter 6 describes these challenges women face in the U.S. in maintaining mental well-being and accessing psychosocial support, highlighting how sociocultural determinants—as exercised by their presence in neopatriarchal structures—function as both a source of stress and a source of support. I conclude in Chapter 7 with providing some recommendations for mental health care providers and reflecting on the research questions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter Introduction

Many of the first ethnographic accounts of the Mediterranean region identified several cultural constructs governing social behavior and maintaining kinship cohesion—the honor/shame system and patriarchy, respectively. Although much has changed in the Arab world since these initial ethnographies, many of these cultural structures continue to determine Saudi women’s behavior, decisions, and experiences as transnational females by setting limits while also creating spaces for agency. The first part of this chapter seeks to explain the theoretical considerations of the cultural foundations and structures undergirding women’s transnational experiences of mental health, while illuminating analytical perspectives on their gendered position.

These structures of honor, reputation, and gender norms require an understanding of the Arab patriarchal family and Islamic-based theories of gender and sexuality. During the course of this research project, women commonly described both an internalization of and a frustration with these cultural frameworks, as they navigate through myriad transnational pressures and expectations. Specifically, they employed the idiom of reputation to refer to issues of honor, kinship, and gender norms as sources of both distress and of psychosocial support. In order to situate these women’s narratives in a theoretical context, I will briefly summarize classic patriarchy, the honor/shame system, and

Islamic considerations of women. Although these concepts provide a solid background for ethnography, I will also discuss the analytical tools I employed in my interpretation of their narratives: postcolonial feminist considerations of agency under hegemonic regimes and the theory of neopatriarchy. The former contributes an explanation of agency, resistance, and avenues for change within a hegemonic system, and describes how women carve out spaces for their own interests. The latter provides a tool to analyze the political and social position of Saudi women at OSU as subject to modern social flows, while still firmly embedded within the patriarchal family, and the implications of this position at the societal and individual levels. These theories and analytical tools provide a more robust understanding of these women's position as agents within the hegemonic systems of nation and family.

Keeping these women's social positions under the structure of neopatriarchy in mind, the latter part of the chapter will then discuss social determinants of distress and well-being as identified by the social psychology literature. The discussion of gender and neopatriarchy provides a context for understanding how these social determinants actually manifest in these women's lives and influence their mental health, while the second section on distress will help elucidate how neopatriarchal social structures exert psychological pressures and supply avenues for support. A discussion of both these social structures and determinants is necessary for analyzing the narrative experiences of psychological

well-being among Saudi women, because it provides a basis for understanding the role these structures play in shaping the expression of these social determinants.

Theoretical Background

Classic Patriarchy

The Islamic religion provides an ideological basis and code of correct conduct for the Arab world. In fact, Islam cannot be extricated from the complex social fabric into which it is woven. Although Islamic principles represent the absolute, inerrant will of God, their values and norms are primarily deployed through the social structure of the family (Yamani 2000, Altorki 1986, Mernissi 1975, Abu-Lughod 1986). In turn, the deployment of these values into every day modes of interaction is then reinforced by divine authority. As I will argue in later chapters, this cement between socioreligious ideology and behavior is not immutable, but in fact subject to transformative processes. In the meantime, the structure of the Arab kinship must be first understood as fundamental to the functioning of the honor/shame system, which in turn allows space for agency and power.

Social scientists classify family structure in Arab societies as primarily patriarchal. The term “patriarchy” is commonly employed as a blanket term in reference to the authority of the male gender. Its vernacular and generalized usage requires a more precise definition in regards to the Arab family. Patriarchy as a term defines “a specific kind of social political structure, with a specific value

system and forms of discourse and practice, based on a distinctive mode of economic organization” (Sharabi 1988:15). Patriarchal systems are not exclusive to the Arab world, and in fact, have their roots in the pre-Islamic era. However, patriarchy, as seen in the Middle East, exhibits some unique traits regarding the position of women, the material base of male authority, and marital contracts.

Scholars express Middle Eastern, Islamic systems as intrinsically different from other forms of patriarchy by referring to it as “classic patriarchy” (Kandiyoti 1988: 278). Although classic patriarchy has changed in response to rapidly transformative global processes, many of its characteristics still linger in Arab societies, influencing the experiences of Saudi international students. Classic patriarchy constitutes a socioeconomic system centering on the dominance of the father in vertical, generational social relations over the patrilocally extended household (Kandiyoti 1988). Although demographic and economic changes have limited the prevalence of the tri-generational household, its cultural trappings still represent a powerful and pervasive ideal. The father’s will is absolute, and his wife, his children and grandchildren must obey him. He assumes control on account of his sex and his age. Hisham Sharabi refers to this as “dual domination”: of the father over the household and the male over the female (1988). This includes all household affairs: its economic relationships, reproductive capacities, and social networks. The centrality of the family as the essential political and economic unit posits significant power and control in the hands of men, in both intra and interfamilial relations.

Before the advent of the modern nation-state, competition for resources, political power, and social status characterized interfamily relations. Pre-state pastoralist societies in the Middle East were concerned with accruing familial assets in order to gain access to limited opportunities and capital. Patriarchy is a product of this context. In the absence of centralized state control, the family and tribe served as the dominant political unit (Awwad 2001). Additionally, a legal system based in Islamic ideology bolstered the kinship structure and reinforced its patriarchal relations (Sharabi 1988). These two religious and political factors solidified the ascendancy of the family and tribe as a touchstone for individual loyalty and identity, which still remains today as illustrated in Saudi women's narratives.

Because Arab societies practice patrilineal marriage systems with patrilocal residency patterns, the transformation of a beloved daughter into a bride incites concern over her shifting and divided allegiances. As her religious duty, a married woman must observe both her husband's and her father's wishes; she is under the jurisdiction of two extended families. As a married woman, she becomes the responsibility of her husband, but also remains firmly embedded in her patrilineal family. Because of her split role as a member of two kin networks, marriage was, and continues to be, an economic and political arrangement between families. In the past, her economic input consisted of her domestic duties and her ability to perpetuate the patrilineage. For this reason, a woman's reproduction is family business. As the male heads the family, a daughter's or wife's reproductive

capabilities, and by extension her sexuality, fall under his jurisdiction. (Altorki 1986)

Theoretical Considerations of the Arab-Muslim Woman

The exchange of women between patrilineages as a reproductive and sexual being begs the question of her position under a patriarchal structure. How did she come to be in this position as a reproductive commodity? Why is she under the control and protection of male relatives? What cultural frameworks and ideologies provide the foundation for this system? Post-colonial feminists Fatimah Mernissi (1975), Lila Abu-Lughod (1986), and Sherry Ortner (1972, 1978) offer theoretical rationales to explicate gender characteristics, expectations, and roles within a patriarchal system, many of which are reiterated in Saudi women's narratives.

In her ethnography about Bedouin tribes in Egypt, Lila Abu-Lughod provides emic accounts of "natural" female inferiority and male preference. Although many differences exist between Egyptian Bedouin groups and Saudi society, their shared structural similarities, such as their Islamic faith, tribal system, and patriarchal forms of kinship, are the main manufacturers of gender ideology and norms. Because of this, her discussion on gender and sexuality in Bedouin thought supplies a generalizable basis for understanding the ideological underpinnings of women's position within the patriarchal unit and the honor/shame code.

Abu-Lughod argues that men and women are symbolically juxtaposed as fundamentally different. Their childbearing abilities define women, not only in their social role as mother and wife, but in the natural aspects of menstruation, conception, gestation, and delivery. In these moments, women lose control over their bodies and become ritually polluted. This lack of control constitutes the premise for their pollution; “women’s lack of independence from nature compromises them vis-à-vis one of the crucial virtues of honor, the self-mastery associated with ‘*agl* (social sense or reason)’” (Abu-Lughod 1986: 124). Their self is intertwined in natural, uncontrollable processes. In this way, women’s association with natural symbols and procreative capacities prevents them from acquiring the same amount of morality as men. In many respects, Abu-Lughod’s Bedouin ethnography exemplifies anthropologist Sherry Ortner’s (1972) theory on the gendered aspects of the nature/culture dichotomy.

In her article *Is female to male as nature is to culture?* Sherry Ortner (1972) provides a symbolic structuralist explanation for the universal devaluation of women. She refutes biological determinism in gender hierarchy by arguing that these inferior/superior positions take place within a cultural framework of values and symbols. Ortner suggests that women’s bodies and functions are culturally associated with nature, and that humanity “transcends the givens of natural existence, bends them to its purposes, controls them in its interest” (Ortner 1972: 10). Ortner equates culture with the product of human consciousness, through which humankind controls and regulates the forces of nature. She bases her

argument on the functions of the female body, which carries significance at three levels: 1) the female body, in contrast with men, is more involved with the perpetuation of life; 2) this places her in social roles that complement and accommodate these functions and are considered less valuable; 3) her social roles produce a different psychic structure which is perceived as closer to nature, as emulated by the nurturing, compassionate mother. In sum, “since it is always culture’s project to subsume and transcend nature, if woman is a part of nature, then culture would find it natural to subordinate her” (Ortner 1972: 11). Her discussion of nature/culture as the premise for female devaluation and subjugation has been supported by several Arab ethnographies (Altorki 1986, Mernissi 1975, Abu-Lughod 1986). Ortner’s theory rings especially true in Abu-Lughod’s discussion on symbols and morality associated with women in Bedouin thought.

With this background in mind, Abu-Lughod (1986) describes these very psychic and symbolic attributes Bedouins ascribe to women. The association with nature is the source of negative and positive value. They can produce the children so desperately desired by society. Because of this, they are attributed with and valued for their affectionate, passive, nurturing qualities, which, according to Ortner, they come to embody. Such characterizations even embed themselves linguistically. Indeed, as Arabic is a root-based language, the word for womb (*rihm*) and the word for mercy (*rahma*) share similar roots (Abu-Lughod 1986). This example illustrates how the very structure of discourse and language genders biology and social qualities.

In the negative light, women are more fearful, weaker, and vulnerable than men, both physically and emotionally, leading to moral inferiority. Fertility's requisites—menstruation, childbirth, and sexuality—temper these positive values associated with femininity. Menstruation compromises women's ability to attain cultural ideals of morality and honor, representing natural weakness and deficiency in self-control. Abu-Lughod describes a version of the creation myth in which Eve does not menstruate until she hits the ground from her fall from grace. For this reason “women's monthly menses commemorates the fall into early sin, or at least to that which is not godly” (Abu-Lughod 1986: 130). Furthermore, its association with symbolic pollution prevents menstruating women from praying or fasting during Ramadan, two of the five pillars of Islam. She may not enter a mosque, read the Quran, or engage in sexual intercourse with her husband; she must isolate herself ritually and physically. On a daily basis, regular prayer and Qur'anic reading define one's spiritual devotion, which men may do without “natural” restrictions, making them superior in piety and purity (Abu-Lughod 1986).

The pollution of menstruation is not restricted to the time of her monthly cycle. Abu-Lughod believes that the uncleanliness of their menstruation taints them from menarche to menopause. This inferiority articulates itself through the aforementioned association of men with greater purity, higher morality, greater self-control, and logical reason. Abu-Lughod argues that this distinction is reflected in clothing styles among the Bedouin community. In Saudi Arabia and the Arab gulf, such associations may indeed be evident in the black *abaya* for

women and the white *thawb* for men, as similar colors worn among Bedouins are also ascribed with symbolic values. These symbols suggest women possess less purity and piety during their reproductive years.

Women's sexuality, necessary for her role as mother and nurturer, compounds her moral inferiority as well. Pregnancy and childbirth, like menstruation, is seen as polluting. New mothers are ritually taboo for forty days, and cannot pray, fast, read the Quran or have intercourse during this time. Sexuality and reproduction are perceived as natural events over which females have minimal control, "thereby providing the avenue through which others come to control them" (Abu-Lughod 1986: 133). Furthermore, women are the vehicles for the continuation of the patrilineage; "their value as reproducers leads men to want to control them" (Abu-Lughod 1986: 133). Additionally, because of their innate capabilities as sexual beings, they cannot measure up, as men can, to the ideals of social order or *'agl* (social sense). (Abu-Lughod 1986)

Sexuality is seen as a threat to social order, compromising one's *'agl*. Common descent and consanguinal relations represent the primary cement for social bonds in classic patriarchy. The sexual bond threatens this system in three ways. First, the sexual bond unites individuals outside of this acceptable social framework, thus threatening the patriarchal system. According to Abu-Lughod, sexuality is not merely a "conceptual threat" to the "conceptual system" of kin-based social relations, but compromises the agnatic kin group's solidarity (Abu-Lughod 1986: 145), as evidenced in married women's split allegiances between

two families (Altorki 1986). Secondly, the sexual, and of course marital, bond detaches a man from his agnatic kin and cleaves him to his wife. The more children they produce, the more the man approaches independence from his kin group. Abu-Lughod identifies other patriarchal groups in which anthropologists describe the legitimate sexual bond inspiring husbands to divide joint households of male kin “in order to increase both access to resources and to the power accruing to the person at the top of the domestic hierarchy in an independent household” (Abu-Lughod 1986: 146). Finally, sexuality and marriage are capable of undermining the control and authority of elder kinsmen, who advocate for the interests of the family. Marriage splits the new wife’s allegiance, and parenthood provides the husband with a dominion for his own authority. Unsurprisingly, sex outside of a nuptial bond intensifies the threat to familial cohesion and patriarchal authority (Abu-Lughod 1986). Significantly, such threats to the agnatic bond partially explain why marriage consists mostly of contract between families, and less between the pair involved. Furthermore, the potential for a sexual bond out of wedlock supplies the basis for strict gender segregation.

Moroccan anthropologist Fatima Mernissi (1975) takes a different approach to the devaluation of women, their fertility, and their sexuality. Rather than Abu-Lughod’s structural symbolism, she locates the question of women’s status as rooted in Islamic doctrine and ideology (Mernissi 1975). Mernissi divides this basis into two theories: the explicit and the implicit. She argues that in societies where surveillance and seclusion of women is common, i.e. Arab groups,

the implicit concept of female sexuality is active rather than passive. Imam Al-Ghazali's (1111 CE) classical work, *The Revivification of Religious Sciences*, articulates women's nature, which is purely aggressive and sexual; she is the hunter and the man her prey. Other Arab poets and Muslim scholars have also supported this notion in their discourse, in their philosophical considerations, and in their interpretations of the Qur'an and *ahadith*. Civilization struggles to control and mitigate women's "destructive, all-absorbing power. Women must be controlled to prevent men from being distracted from their social and religious duties" (Mernissi 1975: 4). The explicit theory, articulated by both early Western and Arab scholars such as Sigmund Freud and Abbas Mahmoud al-Aqqad, describes the prevailing belief that men are naturally aggressive in their dealings with women, who are by nature passive and seek out subjugation. This masochistic theory instead casts the man as the hunter and the woman as his willfully alluring prey. According to Mernissi, these two theories both recognize women's *qaid*, or "power to deceive and defeat men, not by force, but by cunning and intrigue" (Mernissi 1975: 5), upon which Muslim social organization revolves.

These two interpretations of gender dynamics combine with Islamic cosmology to produce both fear and control of female sexuality. According to Mernissi:

Islam has a more sophisticated theory of the instincts (than Christianity), more akin to the Freudian concept of the libido. It views the raw instincts as energy. The energy of instincts is pure in the sense that it has no connotation of good or bad. The question of good and bad arises only when the social destiny of men is

considered. The individual cannot survive except within a social order. (Mernissi 1975:1)

All social orders carry a set of dogmas and rules which dictates the appropriate use of these instincts. “It is the use made of the instincts, not the instincts themselves, which is beneficial or harmful to the social order” (Mernissi 1975: 1). In relation to human sexuality, the sexual instinct is not sinful in itself, but only if deployed outside of the mandated social order of Islamic principles. In this way, sexuality and social order are antagonistic to each other, except when sexuality is integrated under it. According to Imam al-Ghazali (Mernissi 1975: 2), “if the desire of the flesh dominates the individual and is not controlled by the fear of God, it leads men to commit destructive acts.” In other words, God created sexuality for humans to fruitfully multiply, but only within the socio-religious institution of marriage. Outside of religious mandates, sexuality represents a powerful force, destructive to mankind and the social order. (Mernissi 1975)

This caution against unrestrained sexuality provides the basis for female devaluation, surveillance, and regulation. The women’s *qaid* power, in both the explicit and implicit theory, implies her ability to seduce, either actively or passively. Mernissi (1975) claims that the Muslim woman is endowed with an irresistible, fatal attractiveness. Men must be protected from her *qaid* in order to maintain the social order. Otherwise, she could plunge society into *fitna*, or chaos, caused by freelance sexuality. Significantly, the word *fitna* also references a destructively erotic woman, a *femme fatale*. In this way, a sexually unrestrained

woman embodies social disorder and threatens *'agl*; she is “the polarization of the uncontrollable, a living representative of the dangers of sexuality and its rampant disruptive potential” (Mernissi 1975: 13).

Rather than as a function of symbol or religion, Sherry Ortner reconciles these two perspectives on women’s position in society as a result of patriarchal family units. She recognizes the two dichotomies presented by Abu-Lughod and Mernissi: nature/culture and disorder/order. Ortner argues that, after the rise of the patriarchal kinship system, women were brought under direct and systematic control by their natal families and then by their in-laws. This coincides with a shift in ideology involving women:

Before they were dangerous, but now they are said to be in danger, justifying male protection and guardianship. Before they were polluting, and this had to be defended against, but now they are said to be pure, and to need defending. (Ortner 1978: 26)

In the case of the Arab woman, we can see evidence of women’s dangerousness and vulnerability, her pollution and her purity in ethnographic data and discourse analysis (Abu-Lughod 1986, Altorki 1986, Mernissi 1975, Yamani 2000). This duality will become apparent in my discussion of the research data.

According to feminist scholars, the project of Arab-Islamic patriarchal social structure is to mitigate the threat of female sexuality. Combined with this, Ortner also provides a historical basis for understanding the need for protecting the female. These projects are embodied in customs of sexual segregation,

surveillance, arranged marriages, and modesty codes, all of which are deployed through the social system of honor and shame under the vehicle of reputation.

Honor/Shame System: A Structuralist Approach

Structuralists and functionalists understand the honor-shame system as a tool to maintain the prominence of the family unit in socioeconomic relations in the absence of a centralized nation-state (Sharabi 1988, Awwad 2001). Honor functions to keep a society together, as the ideology of honor is shared among competitors and is employed as a comparative measurement of social worth and status. Thus, “what cements people together is their agreement on what separates them” (Coombe 1990: 223); honor, in its varying degrees, distinguishes kin groups from each other. Honor is understood by structuralists as “a structure of relations (which are) generative of possibilities” (Delaney 1987: 35). According to Pierre Bourdieu, honor serves as the foundation of a moral code for an individual “who sees himself always through the eyes of others, who has need of others for his existence, because the image he has of himself is indistinguishable from that presented to him by other people” (Bourdieu 1966: 211). In this way, the moral code of honor is self-reflective, internalized, and involves social exchange (Eickelman, 1989).

Being honorable requires abiding by the moral, religiously sanctioned mode of correct conduct within the Islamic social order. Variables which endow honor or shame include hospitality, modesty, rationality, reciprocity, courage, strength, dignity, and conflict avoidance (Baxter 2007, Abu-Lughod 1986). Honor

also requires *'agl*, a theme I thoroughly discussed in reference to women's reproduction and sexuality and which contributes to gender roles within this code of conduct, making men naturally predisposed to dealing in terms of honor.

Possessing honor means receiving respect, which awards many socioeconomic and political benefits. Honor and respect bring a reward of psychological and emotional well-being; individuals can enjoy the approval of their community and can feel validated by living up to a set of socially and personally highly regarded standards. Honor and respect of individuals also can alleviate pressures from family members by meeting each other's expectations. Intact honor, especially for males, can also incur types of economic and political advancement; others want to do business or make agreements with people of honorable repute. This also applies to the arrangement of marriages; both parties should have a good reputation. The more honorable your family, the better chances you have of an advantageous marriage, resulting in political, economic, and social advancement. (Baxter 2007)

Although the honor-shame code involves many variables for trespass or reward, many of its tenants revolve around gender norms and sexuality. Also, as we know, bonds of kinship dictate interpersonal responsibilities and relationships, and represent the primary arena of socio-economic relations. That is to say, honor and shame are often articulated in terms of gender and family. In the context of classic patriarchy, they serve as a qualitative measurement of value and worth, an ideological vehicle through which families compete for status and access to

resources. Tapper (1992) and Pitt-Rivers (1977) argue that the ideology of honor and shame is the idiom through which issues of production and reproduction, bound up in the political economy of kinship and sexual relations respectively, are discussed and evaluated. Therefore, honor is maintained and cultivated through socially directed and accepted gender behavior.

For the purpose of this research, the issues of honor and shame are bound up in moral qualities associated with relations between males and females. These relations become especially significant for international students, as they must navigate between the pressures and expectations of two cultures simultaneously. The code imparts “responsibilities and rights; it regulates, restricts, disciplines, and denies” particular interactions between the sexes (Baxter 2007). That is to say, honor and shame can be gained or lost by an individual (and, by extension, a family) if he (or she) does not live up to his responsibilities, claim his rights, or adhere to the regulations imparted by the social order. Those who do not meet the principles and standards of the honor code will encounter psychological and material consequences. The converse to honor is shame, and with it its helpmates: embarrassment, humiliation, guilt, and isolation. Socially, “a damaged reputation leaves a family vulnerable” (Baxter 2007: 746), jeopardizing their potential for upward mobility or knocking them down a few rungs on the social ladder.

Honor has been understood as a positive attribute bestowed upon men by other men largely based on their women’s appropriate behavior as the fundamental axis of evaluation. Although men’s actions can also damage honor and reputation,

their violations of social norms are less harmful and less ridiculed (Altorki 1986); many women in this study expressed frustration with this double standard.

Harkening back to a fundamental fear of unrestrained feminine sexuality, honor serves as a currency and a compulsion to ensure the continued unilateral regulation of women by men, in an attempt to mitigate their erotically destructive nature, while operationalizing a system of measurement for social worth. In the structuralist school of thought, women are portrayed passive, static vessels of honor, and as such, must be both protected and protected against through strict social norms.

The Honor/Shame System: A Post-colonial Critique

For structuralists, the honor system functioned as an ideological tool through which powers of domination perpetuated themselves. In this school, the honor system maintained relatively static social dynamics. The structural approach leaves minimal space for social change with little regard to historical contingency, political forces, or international economic trends. Furthermore, subordinate groups (such as women) are acted upon, rather than considered as agents acting in their own self-interest within the hegemonic system. Largely, the structuralist treatment of honor/shame begs the question of perspective (Coombe 1990). In other words, their interpretation presents the ideology of those occupying privileged positions in the social structure. What about women's perspectives of this system or possibilities for transformation, reproduction, and agency?

In response to this, post-colonial feminism explored new ways for the consideration of gender in Arab-Islamic societies, highlighting agency, resistance, and avenues for change. Because this research centers on the women's narratives of transnational experiences, I employ these theoretical perspectives in my consideration of their accounts to offer a more fluid positioning of Saudi women as agents, subject to cultural constructs but also capable of acting in their own self-interest within them. First of all, Diane Baxter (2007) provides a feminist critique of the honor/shame code by refuting women's passive subject position within it. Rather, she argues, women employ this system, which offers them considerable leverage, for their own purposes. Embodied practices of honor pave avenues for female agency, privileges, power, and control over men. As aforementioned, honor carries with it responsibilities, rights, and regulations. It is a man's responsibility to protect and provide for her, and her right to demand it. Through these expectations, women's behavior reflects back on their male kin. Because of this, Baxter argues that women are not pawns in a man's chess game, but rather "principal actors within a complex and dynamic ideological construction" (Baxter 2007: 747). Men are at the mercy of their women's reputations; if her honor comes into question, the male has likely failed to protect her. An analysis of the honor system, without this consideration of female agency, "privileges particular aspects of ideology while denying others" (Baxter 2007: 764). In this way, a structuralist perspective of honor/shame glosses over the ways in which power can be contested, manipulated, and re-appropriated.

Deniz Kandiyoti (1988) provides a corresponding criticism. Similarly, she considers patriarchy and honor/shame as a baseline from which women strategize. Common interpretations of patriarchy invoke a monolithic social structure that does not account for the culturally and historically contingent arrangements between genders. She refers to these strategies within social constraints as the “patriarchal bargain,” which varies according to class, ethnicity, and location. Patriarchal bargains shape women’s gendered subjectivity and determine the strategies they can employ within the structure of gender ideology.

Women’s strategies are always played out in the context of identifiable patriarchal bargains that act as implicit scripts that define, limit, and inflect their market and domestic options... patriarchal bargains do not merely inform women’s rational choices, but also shape the more unconscious aspects of their gendered subjectivity, since they permeate the context of their early socialization, as well as their adult cultural milieu. (Kandiyoti 1988: 285)

Patriarchal bargains also influence the modes of women’s active or passive resistance. In contrast to a structuralist perspective, these bargains are highly susceptible to historical and political processes of transformation; such changes may forge new arenas for struggle and renegotiation of gender relations. Because of its contextual, dynamic nature, Kandiyoti argues that patriarchal bargains have a crisis phase and a normal phase, which can modify social researchers’ interpretations of what is really happening; such an analysis carries implications for the rapid changes taking place in Saudi Arabia. In her discussion of the patriarchal bargain, Kandiyoti emphasizes that women’s position within a

patriarchal system is not totally imposed upon them, but rather agreed upon and negotiated by both genders; her perspective reattributes women with agency, power, and arenas for resistance.

In her work on Islamic revival in Egypt, Saba Mahmood (2001) articulates how women involved in patriarchal religious traditions exercise agency in the face of hegemonic power. Similar to Kandiyoti, Mahmood locates and defines spaces for agency, largely ignored by structuralist interpretations. She defines agency as “the capacity to realize one’s own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles” (Mahmood 2001: 204). She calls on Judith Butler’s paradox of subjectification: the very processes that relegate women into their position are the same through which she becomes a self-aware agent. Mahmood implores the reader to understand agency not as a rogue portion of the self that resists relations of domination through its external consciousness, but as “a capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable” (Mahmood 2001: 211). Furthermore, Mahmood (2001) argues that the physical acts of piety and honor (such as sex segregation and standards of gender-appropriate behavior) propagated by patriarchal structures pervade the constitution of the self. “It is the sequence of practices and actions one is engaged in that determine one’s desires and emotions” (Mahmood 2001: 214). That is to say, women actively internalize and reproduce these behaviors and moral codes without the presence of direct, external enforcement. In this way, these mandates for behavior become part of the individual’s moral compass; she can

autonomously exercise her conscience and moral judgment on account of her active acceptance of and negotiation with the hegemonic system (Mahmood 2001). For Mahmood, agency is a capacity for active self-awareness which has been molded by the social systems in which these women carry out their projects. Such a perspective on women's forms of agency, morality, and strategies in the framework of patriarchy and honor/shame helps elucidate women's negotiations during the vast structural changes occurring in Saudi Arabia and the Arab region.

Neopatriarchy

The theory of neopatriarchy serves to ground an analysis of the contemporary Arab region in a sociopolitical context. According to Hisham Sharabi (1988), neopatriarchy refers to an uncomfortable marriage of classic patriarchy and modernity. Modernity, for his purposes, is the product of a historical development originating in Western Europe. On the other hand, patriarchy, by his definition, is both antithetical to and a predecessor of modernity. Neopatriarchy involves the blending of pre-state and nation-state sociopolitical relations, a result of European colonization of the Arab world. However, while neopatriarchy refers to the macrostructures of society, state, and economy, the theory can also include microstructures, such as the family or the individual. Therefore, it provides a holistic perspective through which to place people's lives within historically and culturally specific contexts. For the purposes of this research, neopatriarchy contributes an analytical tool through which to interpret the political and social location of Saudi Arabian international students.

In order to understand the specific situation of neopatriarchy, it will be helpful to outline some characteristics of modernity and classic, Arab patriarchy. Sharabi notes that while modernity mines for truth and knowledge through scientific thought and reason, patriarchy finds them in religious belief. In modernity, society is stratified by class, with people primarily dealing through horizontal social relations. In patriarchy, vertical social relations are organized by family and tribe. Patriarchy's social basis is religious and tribal identity; modernity's social basis is the nation-state. He conceptualizes neopatriarchy as a historical pit stop on patriarchy's transformation into modernity, while arguing that patriarchy's qualities prevent it from becoming fully modern.

According to Sharabi, neopatriarchy rests firmly in neither camp, but is caught in the liminal space between classic patriarchy and modernity; therefore it is impotent and highly unstable. With the pervasiveness of globalization, commodities, and technology, neopatriarchal macrostructures possess all the material, legal, and aesthetic trappings of modernity, but "lack the inner force, organization, and consciousness which characterize truly modern formations" (Sharabi 1988: 7). Government in neopatriarchal societies models itself after the patriarchal family formation, precluding horizontal democracy and instituting traditional ideologies into its structure. The state's will is absolute. It maintains its authority through direct forms of governmentality, such as internal security forces policing civic spaces. It cannot cultivate citizens' primary allegiance and loci of identity. The state is a patriarchal kinship system reproduced on a national level,

complete with control of women and enforced sex segregation. In other words, neopatriarchal structures continue to perpetuate the types of gender norms and classifications described by Mernissi (1975), Abu-Lughod (1986), and Ortner (1972, 1978) through the institutions of family and state.

On the micro-level, in the case of individuals and families, the neopatriarchal condition accounts for the submissive socialization of youth and the deployment of governmentality through various apparatuses, such as reputation and surveillance. The neopatriarchal society's domination of the individual lies in her repression within the family and in state-controlled civic space. Submission to the system is maintained through pervasive threads of governmentality, domestically and publically. It becomes her social constitution of selfhood and "conditions one's inner capacity for perception and one's experience of oneself and others" (Sharabi 1988: 42). Furthermore, Sharabi argues that the neopatriarchal condition nurtures and perpetuates the values and attitudes of heteronomy. Heteronomy refers to an actor acting out of subordination and obedience to authority rather than out of an internalized moral code. Sharabi argues that the transition from heteronomy to autonomy has not been completed in the Arab neopatriarchal family. The neopatriarchal condition then reproduces itself by requiring constant government and supervision in an effort to maintain social order and ensure proper behavior of its constituents, "creating again and again the possibility that masses of people can be governed by a handful of powerful individuals" (Sharabi 1988: 45). As a theory, neopatriarchy offers a useful

analytical tool through which to investigate macro and microlevel social phenomena.

Sharabi's (1988) consideration of neopatriarchy contradicts post-colonial theorists' discussion of female agency and autonomy. While Sharabi argues that Arab society as a whole has not reached a paradigm of autonomy, Mahmood (2001) maintains that women's participation within a neopatriarchal system cultivates an autonomous, agentic self—capable of self-aware, self-reflective, and self-disciplining behaviors. It is within the liminal space between public notions of heteronomy and individuals' assertion of autonomy within Saudi society that these women carry out their international educational projects. That is to say, although burdened by the pressures of neopatriarchal structures, Saudi women employ autonomy and agency in negotiating contradictory demands and norms. Their specific position as agents within a hegemonic structure poses many challenges, but also provides sources of comfort and avenues for personal development.

Social Determinants of Mental Health and Distress

Saudi women's position within these structures and ideologies undergird their daily lives, shaping and determining individual experiences of well-being, interpersonal relationships, and mental health. The World Health Organization defines mental health as "as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can

work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community” (WHO 2011). This corresponds to the narrative experiences of the women in this study. For many of them, good mental health allows them to cope with the pressures of school and succeed in their academic and personal endeavors. Psychological well-being and stability constitutes one of the avenues through which they obtain success, realize their personal capabilities, and secure future opportunities.

The effects of migration and gendered subject position among Saudi Arabian international students can partially be understood through an investigation into psychological processes, psychosocial resources, and sources of distress. The dynamics of psychological well-being interact with social, political, and historical conditions to produce particular risks or coping mechanisms, as well as areas of uncertainty and avenues for agency and resistance. This chapter will discuss the social variables of psychological well-being and distress, as well as ethnographically particular information about mental health cross-culturally.

Distress

Distress can be precipitated by many causal factors, and embody different symptoms and conditions. Mental well-being and distress occupy two poles on a continuum; any individual’s subjective state can fall anywhere along this continuum at any time. Generally, distress refers to an unpleasant subjective state usually exhibited through depression and anxiety. Distress differs conceptually from mental illness in that cognitive symptoms, such as seeing or hearing things,

take a back seat to affective problems; distress is an affective state which can exhibit cognitive components. Well-being, on the other hand, describes a general sense of enjoying life, feeling happy and hopeful about the future. (Mirowsky et al. 2003, Avison et al. 1994)

Although distress does not necessarily include mental illness, they are not mutually exclusive and, indeed, chronic distress exacerbates one's risk of mental pathology. Distress often manifests in the form of depression and anxiety. Those suffering from depression often report feeling sad, demoralized, isolated, and hopeless; they have trouble eating and sleeping, often overcome by lethargy or listlessness. Anxiety, on the other hand, makes its victims feel tense, restless, worried, irritable, or paranoid. Each product of distress takes on two forms: mood and malaise. Mood refers to feelings, while malaise refers to bodily states, such as lethargy or ennui. More than just components of distress, depression and anxiety relate to each other in their somatization—"maps of their social high and low zones are very similar, and a person who suffers more from one also tends to suffer more than usual from the other" (Mirowsky et al 2003: 23). The manifestation of depression and anxiety also illustrate the mutual relationship between the individual and society—how they interact with society and how society influences them. According to Arthur Kleinman:

Analyzing the relationship of depression (or any disorder) to society offers a glimpse of a symbolic bridge that ties individuals to each other and to the local systems within which they live. Depression is thus a social affect and disorder: the origins of depression are meanings and relations in the social world... the social world is

affective; it is embodied in the individual and his/her disorders.
(Kleinman 1986: 1)

In this way, the study of distress provides an essential perspective for analyzing both the influence of social structures on the individual and also the ways in which the individual navigates through these worlds.

Psychologists have identified many social determinants that mediate, buffer, or intensify sources of distress. Life events, chronic strains, social integration or alienation, role strain, and control of destiny set the stage for playing out one's relationship with society under the idiom of psychological distress. Life events always involve change of some sort; these changes inevitably alter one's assumptions and thoughts about the world. Change runs the risk of "losing the sense of life's reality" (McLean et al. 1994: 20), raising fundamental questions about choices, commitments, and positions. Change can refer to an infinite amount of actions, but for the purpose of this study, the primary point of change regards the act of migration and the social and personal transitions that it incurs. Although the temporary migration in the name of international education causes distress, many factors condition one's ability for adaptation. (McLean et al. 1994)

An acute life change or event results in distress or adaptation, but recently many researchers are now investigating the impact of chronic strains on distress and disorder. Persistent life difficulties refer to chronic stressors, impeding the individual's ability to adapt. Although the relationship between chronic difficulties and disorder cannot be quantified easily, their pervasiveness demands attention to

their possible contribution to the onset, maintenance, and remission of distress and disorder. Persistent life difficulties can intensify the negative experiences of migration or restrict possibilities for support.

Another area through which chronic strain can cause distress is through the social or economic roles in life. Domains of role strain include work strain, educational strain, relationship strain, caretaking strain, or financial strain; as well as strain from inhabiting multiple roles. Obviously, the particular roles and expectations will differ by gender, class, age, ethnicity, and can co-vary with other life changes, increasing or decreasing their harmful impact. Role strain does not only describe social positions, but also social expectations about behavior within those roles. It usually refers to the process of meeting standards—the difficulty in satisfying expectations or the inability to do so. Three kinds of role strains exist: conflict, ambiguity, and overload. Role conflict exists when two expectations involve incompatible or mutually exclusive demands or actions. Role ambiguity arises from a lack of clarity about expectations and role overload occurs when demands overwhelm the individual's resources or capabilities. The impact of role strain on distress can be mediated by emotional and instrumental social support.

Contrastingly, alienation also conditions social patterns of distress. Generally, alienation is any form of social dissociation, detachment, or separation, which can materialize through powerlessness, isolation, normlessness, self-estrangement, and meaninglessness. The former three carry significant

implications for the body of this research. Powerlessness refers to the inability to achieve important or desired outcomes in one's life and the cognitive awareness of this reality. Feelings of powerlessness compromise one's sense of self-assurance and hope for the future; when individuals feel that they lack control over their destiny, their will and motivation to overcome problems diminishes. In general, economic dependency, restricted opportunities, and role overload suggests a lower sense of control in women than their male counterparts. However, such theories are contingent upon age, class, ethnicity, employment status, and religion, varying greatly. Individuals who perceive little control over their destiny feel more distressed than others; this distress is more likely to transform into depression, anxiety, mistrust and paranoia. This correlation has been reproduced in many research settings and remains one of the best-established conclusions in all of social psychology. (Mirowsky 2003)

Isolation is another form of alienation concerning social networks. These help buffer and minimize the harmful effects of distress. Integration and support differ in their meanings. Social integration objectively measures degrees of isolation or integration, while social support is the subjective sense of enjoying fulfilling, positive relationships (Mirowsky et al. 2003). The former assumes the denser a person's social network, the more likely he/she will enjoy fulfilling personal relationship. However, the theory of social integration has one large hole: quantity does not mean quality. So conversely, social support refers to the

subjective measurement of quality of relations (Mirowsky et al. 2003, Smith et al. 2008). Important variables in this equation can modify the perceived or requisite quality of supportive relationships that the individual possesses.

First, personality characteristics of the recipient, particularly their expectations for receiving support, can influence what types of support they need and receive to buffer distress. Second, the nature of the relationship itself between the recipients and supporter(s) also dictates the amount and quality of support possible. Lastly, the situational contexts in which the supportive efforts occur influence the perceived outcome (Sarason et al. 1994). In many cases, social structures delineate possible cadres of support. Studies of social support have demonstrated “the multidimensional nature of the construct, including considerations of the structure of social networks, the functions of social support, and an awareness of the distinctions between perceived and actual support” (Avison et al. 1994: 5). These variables help bring to light some of the costs and benefits of social integration in its capacity to provide support.

As aforementioned, social integration increases the potential for supportive relationships. However, these systems also can bring distressing or constraining costs. Successful integration requires certain adherence to norms, values, and behaviors, which can restrain freedom and autonomy. Just as persons may gain substantial satisfaction and personal gratification from family relations, they may also suffer frustration, aggravation, hostility, and repressed anger from being

constrained to conform to the obligations necessary to meet social legitimated demands of others. (Mirowsky et al. 2003: 215)

Also, social integration can place burdensome obligations on the individual, creating role strain. Furthermore, higher social integration is associated with more dependency. These costs and benefits may account for the diverse findings on integrations, support, and distress. That is to say, individuals and structures within a social network can impact a person in myriad ways simultaneously on a continuum between harmful and helpful. (Mirowsky et al. 2003)

Those experiencing normlessness as a cause of distress usually find an incompatibility between socially approved behaviors and their short or long-term goals. The essence of normlessness is questioning the community as a source of standards. Some theories have suggested that normlessness is most common during conditions of structural and social consistency among individuals in lower status positions. Normlessness can also create social isolation or estrangement.

Mistrust of others also causes distress and compromises perceived social support. Mistrusting individuals interpret the intentions or behavior of others as dishonest, unsupportive, or exploitative. Mistrust expresses beliefs and understandings of relationships between the ego and the alter. However, although mistrust is a cognitive state, its causes can often be grounded in reality. This reality narrows the individual's network of social support.

Although many external factors influence the individual, the individual also may possess psychosocial resources which also manage the effects of distress. Self-efficacy and self-esteem mitigate the effects of distress. Self-efficacy involves personal constructs such as locus of control, mastery, helplessness, and fatalism, which studies have demonstrated have significant effects. Also, self-esteem has been correlated positively with good mental health in substantial bodies of research. However, the presence of these psychosocial resources partially depends on the presence or absence aforementioned external variables: social support/isolation, chronic strains, and life events.

Although distress does not necessarily cause acute mental disorders, it remains an important portion of social psychological inquiry because of its correlation with mental health and personal suffering. Suffering is still human pain, regardless of whether or not it is a normal response to stressors or a symptom of disease. Distress still incurs social costs. Additionally, it allows researchers to provide information that make improve people's lives and communities. Finally, the geography of the emotional highs and lows of distress, depression, and anxiety reveal important information about the nature and quality of life in different social positions and environments.

Experience and Mental Health

As argued in the preceding paragraphs, one's life experiences and social context play an important part in determining individuals' experience of

psychological well-being or distress, and by extension their coping mechanisms, social resources, and contributions. As the process of their migration to the U.S. constitutes a major life event, these women's experiences determines their ability to adapt to and thrive in their new environment and maintain positive mental health. How can anthropologists gain an insightful perspective into these determinants? What can these women's experiences tell us about these components? Arthur and Joan Kleinman (1991) suggest that medical anthropologists define experience ethnographically by examining what is at stake.

A central orienting question in ethnography should be to interpret what is at stake for particular participants in particular situations. That orientation will lead the ethnographer to collective (both local and societal) and individual (both public and intimate) levels of analysis of experience-near interests that...offer a more valid initial understanding of what are social psychological characteristics of forms of life in local moral worlds. (Kleinman & Kleinman 1991)

By considering what is at stake for these women when they study in the U.S., we can acquire a clearer ethnographic perspective on their specific orientation and strategies in developing a transnational sense of self and maintaining psychological well-being. These stakes of their international education—grounded in neopatriarchal structures—underpin their personal experience in the U.S., as they strive to attain academic success, personal development, networks of support, while navigating through sources of distress associated with the life change of migration.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has described two important layers to the analysis of Saudi women's narratives of mental health in the U.S. First, the theoretical portion of this chapter has explored the underlying social structures and gender norms influencing the lived experiences of Saudi women, as well as explicated the analytical perspectives on women's participation in hegemonic systems. Second, this chapter has provided an overview of social determinants of mental health in an effort to understand experiences of distress or well-being. These experiences illustrate symbolic connections between the individual and the social structure in which they are embedded. Specifically, by situating these women within the sociopolitical structure of neopatriarchy, we can begin to conceptualize how their position determines the sources and manifestations of distress, and also support. In other words, by investigating mental worlds narrated through experience, we can further understand specific ways in which society, the self, and community influence, construct, or delineate the experience of healthy or problematic psychological states. These concepts will be revisited and illustrated in the narratives of Saudi Arabian international students in Chapter 6.

Chapter 3: Historical Background

Chapter Introduction

This chapter will cover the historical background and changing social and political climate in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is geographically situated near several other Arab Muslim nations, resulting in a recognizable “Gulf culture”. These Gulf cultures share similar Islamic practices, dress, musical styles, and have tribally-based systems. For this reason, Saudi Arabia exhibits many qualities of other Gulf nations, but remains unique because of its history, isolation, and identity as the home of Islam. Although these countries differ historically, many contemporary processes of the international economy and mass communication influence them in similar ways, fostering parallel cultural circumstances.

A broad overview of the social transformations in Saudi Arabia begs discussion in order to situate the Saudi international student in a transnational context. Because these students plan to return to their native country upon graduation, their status as temporary migrants place them closer to the culture, economics, and politics of Saudi Arabia. In other words, despite their migration to the U.S., the neopatriarchal, sociopolitical context of Saudi still affects them, shaping their pasts and futures. For this reason, this chapter will discuss the context from which these international students migrated and into which they will return.

The Kingdom and Wahhabism

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, like many nations in the Middle East, is less than a century old. Since its foundation in the 1930s, Saudi Arabia has seen the birth and life of three generations of its citizens, each drastically different from its predecessor. These three generations have witnessed extreme and rapid changes in their society, governments, and livelihoods due to the gradual integration of regional factions, the explosive expansion of the oil market, and economic globalization (Yamani 2000). These rapid changes continue to remold the behaviors, social paradigms, and opportunities of Saudi Arabian citizens. For this reason, this description of the historical chronology of this nation-state will pay close attention to the transformations affecting women, education, and employment.

In 1932, Abdul Aziz Al-Saud unified the Hijaz, Asir, and Ahsa territories with the Nejd during a period of political upheaval and civil war. This conflict centered on the battle for land between the central Nejdi forces and the western Hijazi kingdom, the former seeking to gain political and ideological control. Rather than gain control quickly with extreme force, the Al-Saud began to unite the country through the religious dogma of Wahhabism. Wahhabism is a form of Islamic ideology which places all authority in the Qur'an and Sunnah as ultimate sources of law (Simons 1998). Significantly, mutual support between the monarchy and clerics continues to today. The Al-Saud ruling elite and the Wahhabi religious authorities have created a kind of coalition government, in

which Al-Saud gives money to the Wahhabi clerics, who in turn support the regime with declarations of divine legitimacy (Yamani 2005, AlMunajjed 1997). This alliance remains between the two parties; Wahhabi clerics control the nation's 71,000 mosques, the religious education system (which comprises 50% of the entire public school curriculum), and functions as an apparatus of the state to enforce the traditional, patriarchal order (Yamani 2000). Wahhabism represents the ideological status quo of many laws, social systems, and religious interpretations, touting its authority as the "true Islam" (El-Fadl 2001).

Generally, Wahhabi dogmas idealize the past, revering early Islam in its strict simplicity and orthodoxy. This doctrine's adherence to the Qur'an and *ahadith* takes a strict, literal interpretation (AlMunajjed 1997). The Qur'an and the *ahadith* are timeless; their rules and tenants must be applied today as they were 1,400 years ago. Because the paradigm advocates simplicity of belief and correctness in practice, it reduces every moral question to a simple yes or no (El-Fadl 2001). Its strict, uncompromising authority has been challenged by the forces of modernization, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

During the 1930s, the Al-Saud, under the banner of Wahhabism, gradually gained control of the four territories. At unification, social identity based itself in tribal and patriarchal family relations. The pre-state society in modern Saudi Arabia fostered patriarchal kinship systems, the ideal type of "classic patriarchy". Largely, these tribes subsisted on farming and pastoralism, interregional or international trade was limited to Jeddah or Ahsa, and religious education was

exclusive to men. Up until this point, the four regions were relatively autonomous and isolated, and for this reason, geographic area served as the foundation for political and cultural identity. Then, in 1938, Saudi Arabia struck oil and everything changed.

The 1950s and 1960s marked the solidification of the nation-state and the inundation of oil revenues. During this time, people's localized lives expanded as they came into contact with other regions and nations. A nationalized Saudi identity emerged in opposition to other countries; simultaneously, unification of dress, ease of travel, federal education system, and mass communication consolidated various territories into a centralized nation. With rapidly growing oil income, the Saudi government expanded their state institutions and citizens began to depend on them. This rapid economic growth from oil increased demand for foreign workers for construction and domestic tasks, as well as placed the population in contact with Westerners and non-Muslims for the first time. However, oil also widened the gap in the distribution of wealth, with some families becoming very rich and others very poor. Unlike the previous generation, women no longer were involved in agriculture or herding. As the economy expanded, the ways of life of the first generation slowly began to disappear; women became housewives for their husbands who worked in the nationalistic economy. This reduced social interaction as women focused their energy in the domestic sphere. Social and geographic mobility had expanded from the previous

generation, consolidating the state's legitimacy and authority through the distribution of wealth and financial opportunities. (Yamani 2000)

Also, during this time, university education for men became commonplace, and indeed, expected. More men began to study abroad, especially in the U.S. Because the kingdom acquired massive capital through oil, these Saudi graduates could be absorbed into a rapidly growing government sector. These ample wages allowed for a male to provide for his wife, children, and extended family, legitimating his primacy within the patriarchal extended household. Generally, the standard of living in Saudi during the oil boom drastically increased. Such wealth bolstered the centrality of the state, which represented power and splendor. Oil wealth and exposure to global influences during this time provided the first subtle threats to the traditional Saudi social fabric, rooted in Wahhabism.

History of Women's Education in Saudi Arabia

Education supplies one of the major vehicles for transmission of external, often secular, values, imparting challenging views that threaten conservative societies. Patriarchal family, Islamic tradition, and education represent conflicting loci of socialization in the context of socially transformative processes. Women's education, specifically, has long occupied the contentious center in the conflict between traditional and modern ways of life, among religious scholars, family expectations, and the state. (Yamani 2000, Altorki 1986, Coleman 2010)

While women's work became exclusive to the household during the oil boom, they also received the right to attend schools in 1959. However, this event was not construed as an attempt to integrate women into the growing global economy. Instead, their access to education based itself in Islamic teachings and traditional gender norms. The Prophet's *hadith* advocates for universal education: "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave" and "seek knowledge even from China." Furthermore, advocates for universal access, mostly members of the elite, argued that women schooled in secular education, with the overtones of Islamic doctrines, would be better, more pious wives and mothers. Such a mission harmonized well with the agenda of the Wahhabi establishment; women's education would not challenge tradition and religion, but indeed support it. With this objective in mind, several secular schools opened up in the early 1960's, touting religious objectives and sponsored by female royalty. Moreover, the spearheading by the elite of women's education trickled down into the lower classes. This trend has continued until today; that which is sponsored and validated by the social elite becomes desirable for lower classes as well. (Yamani 2000, Altorki 1986)

The continued oil boom in the 1970s also enhanced the allure and acceptance of international education, as more families could afford to send their children abroad. More affluent daughters were given the opportunity to study in other Arab nations, Europe, and the U.K. As education expanded, many students returned from their universities with new ideas on how to educate their daughters.

Women gained new perspectives of their roles as future wives and mothers. Some household responsibilities became fused as a preference for neolocal residence patterns arose. Because of the combination of these two developments, women gained more influence in their domestic groups and female school enrollment increased exponentially. (Altorki 1986, Yamani 2000)

This swing towards liberalization started to change in the late 1970s, when the government reduced the number of scholarships offered to Saudis, specifically discouraging women from international education unless accompanied by a male guardian. These restrictions accompanied a general intensification of piety and tradition, as well as government austerity measures in a declining economy. During the 1980s, desire and pressure to conform to strict Wahhabi principles expanded into the population and was reinforced by government policies (Yamani 2004). In contrast to the two previous decades of openness, the 1980s marked a deceleration in political and social liberalization. (Yamani 2000)

This period of pedagogical isolationism did bring positive results however. Fewer scholarships for international education required the Saudi education system to expand in its infrastructure, curriculum, and admission. This resulted in large numbers of women enrolling in Saudi Arabian universities. However, the prevailing ethos of piety also began to govern which subjects women could study and how they should be supervised in higher education. For instance, women could not study engineering or law, and must adhere to strict gender segregation in academic settings. (Yamani 2000)

In 1984, oil prices dropped dramatically. Because about 75% of Saudi's gross domestic product comes from oil, more austerity measures were introduced. These necessitated that education sector shift its emphasis from higher schooling to vocational skills for the labor market. This trend continued throughout the 1990s, as Saudi Arabia dropped from a high-income to middle-income nation. Slashes in state budgets often targeted women's sections of universities, but women's attendance has continued to climb. During this decade however, as tertiary education decreased within the middle class, the elites again began to send their children abroad for university.

At the turn of the millennium, however, many women were prevented from studying abroad. Families feared for their daughters' safety and honor, as they would no longer be under direct control of the patriarchal unit and modes of surveillance. Universities abroad do not enforce gender segregation, putting their daughters' honor at stake and, thus, their family's reputation and status. Then, in 2005, King Abdullah reintroduced a scholarship program to fund 5,000 Saudi students in international universities. This program widened access to international education, which slowly began to reverse the stigma of women obtaining their degrees abroad. Indeed, once met with skepticism and disapproval, a degree from international universities is now highly valued. (Yamani 2000, Coleman 2010)

In the last six years, the amount of Saudi international students seeking a degree in the U.S. has increased exponentially. According to the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM), the agency for Saudis studying in the U.S., currently

20,000 Saudi nationals are enrolled through the King Abdullah Scholarship in U.S. universities; with their dependents, this number approximates 30,000 individuals (Alomar 2011). However, the SACM and Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) limit the possible programs of study for their scholars, only funding science and engineering degrees, and other safe subjects like linguistics. Students may not specialize in social sciences (Coleman 2010). The scholarship fund also issues stipends for husbands, wives, and children. Many non-student dependents and relatives accompany students, particularly female students. In fact, female students are required by the SACM to be accompanied by their husband or non-marriageable male relative, such as their father, brother, or uncle. Alternatively, the father or husband does have the option to sign a form that allows his daughter to live alone in the U.S., taking a remote form of responsibility for her; few families exercise this option. Since 2005, social acceptance of women studying abroad has become more widespread.

This shift in acceptance and expansion in scholarships accompanied the rapid and innovative advancements in communication technology. Skype started its service in August 2003. It originally provided instant messaging service and allowed free or inexpensive calls via the internet to traditional telephone lines. Since its inception, Skype has scaled up its services, now offering free video chat, computer to cell, and cell to cell communication. Other similar services have been released that also facilitate rapid transnational, personal communication. These advancements serve two functions. First, enhanced communication technology

allows women and men to stay in close contact with their families back home, buffering homesickness with frequent transnational social support. Secondly, this communication allows for kin networks to keep tabs on their female relatives, mitigating some of the social anxiety caused by the possibility of these women bringing shame on their families. These technological possibilities have gradually increased the number of successful King Abdullah scholars.

The enhanced value of international education has also accompanied a rapid increase in higher education for women. Specifically, women's representation in academic enrollment currently supersedes their male counterparts. Nearly 62% of all university graduates, domestically and internationally, are female (Coleman 2010, Yamani 2000, SACM 2010). In fact, the number of female graduates of university education has climbed 10% in the last decade (Yamani 2000, Coleman 2010). The high level of women's education in Saudi Arabia represents a source of national pride; however, other factors confound this achievement.

Women's education in Saudi Arabia inhabits a unique space in its social fabric. Although condoned by the Prophet's *ahadith*, it also represents a source of social anxiety and contention. Educated women may challenge cultural or religious values. However, they may also benefit their families, their communities, and the national economy. Because of these varying possibilities, education for women, their subjects of study, and their mode of school attendance, and their behavior in

the classroom is a matter of controversy and renegotiation among the Saudi government, Wahhabi authorities, concerned fathers, and the women themselves.

Saudi Women in the Workplace

Although women represent the majority of university graduates, gender norms, expectations, and segregation restrict their presence in the professional workforce. In Saudi Arabia, employers enforce strict gender segregation in the workplace. In addition to this, women are restricted from certain professions, such as law practice and engineering. Moreover, the employers do not bar women from entering these professions, but the educational system excludes them from the prerequisite training; available jobs for women reflect their educational opportunities (Yamani 2000).

Furthermore, many women also tailor their academic and professional goals to the social expectations of their gender. As women now claim education as their right in Islamic and legal discourse, they must decide on its purpose in their own lives. Their attitudes reflect their socially available options: studying for the sake of knowledge, studying for a future professional opportunity, and compromise. These compromises often consist of studying, either for a profession or a specific curriculum that is compatible with domestic expectations and responsibilities. (Yamani 2000)

Not only do available jobs to women reflect social norms, the positions women themselves pursue illuminate symbols of status and acceptability.

Generally, a woman may only work if she can meet three conditions: 1) Care of husband and children remains her top priority; 2) she works only within specific conditions in accordance with existing customs; and 3) she works in a field that suits her innate qualities (AlMunajjed 1997). Nursing, teaching, social work and medicine represent popular jobs that “suit (women’s) nature”—their qualities of nurturing, caring, and service to others—as a professional extension of women’s domestic roles (el-Sanabary 1996: 71). Indeed, estimates report that over 62% of female employees are working in the educational sector (AlMunajjed 1997). Such occupations adhere to cultural and religious prescriptions of gender segregation. Medicine, education, and social services is available to all Saudi citizens, and these sectors need women to fill these positions to prevent the inappropriate provision of service between men and women. Regardless of this gender segregation, employment outside the household threatens traditional concepts of family honor and shame as women may come into contact with unrelated males. (Yamani 2000, el-Sanabary 1996)

In conjunction with limited employment opportunities for women, Saudi Arabia sits in a dangerous location in regards to its unemployment rates and youthful population. The baby boom in the 1970s and 1980s drastically changed the nation’s demographics. At the turn of the millennium, over half of Saudi’s population consisted of youth under 20 years old; 27% of which were enrolled in colleges and universities. Managing the expanding youth population in the face of an unstable oil industry and job market presents an emerging challenge for the

political stability of Saudi Arabia. Currently, unemployment rates in Saudi hover at 11% for men, perhaps as high as 25% for both sexes (CIA World Factbook 2011); women represent 95% of unemployed individuals (Yamani 2005). While its improving education sector churns out university graduates, they are still incapable or unqualified for working in Saudi Arabia's private sector. The emphasis on religious education, which comprises half of the Saudi curriculum, places domestic students at a disadvantage in the job market. Islamic education functions as an apparatus of the state to consolidate traditional, patriarchal order.

(The Saudi religious curriculum's) main themes are *shirk* (idolatry in its various forms), sin, fear of the fires of hell, and rejection of the ways of the infidels. The textbooks memorized by secondary school students sharply define the boundaries of virtue and provide guidelines of how to remain vigilant against the dangers of temptation and sin. (Yamani 2005)

These forms of state control in the face of rapid globalization and unemployment represent another way in which Saudi's strict, Wahhabi political system is incompatible with contemporary social concerns of employment and development. The unavailability of jobs for men and women threaten to undermine the political status quo and represents a source of anxiety and uncertainty among educated youth, as many youth push for the modernization of the education system and secularization of the curriculum (Yamani 2000). However, female education and employment outside the domestic sphere also indicates that women are challenging set patterns and traditional gender identity. Such resistance will inevitable create new gender boundaries. In addition to this, forces of globalization

intensely influence these movements, while sculpting new social identities and expanding horizons for reform and renegotiation of customs and values.

Globalization in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's monarchs have been battling the forces of globalization for the past several decades. Despite its attempts at modernizing its workforce, education system, and global image, Saudi Arabia remains one of the most isolationist countries in the world. The effectiveness of their Wahhabi totalitarianism, which marginalizes large portions of Saudi citizens, has been challenged by the onslaught of globalization. While oil wealth and urbanization has vastly transformed Saudi livelihood, the state remains rooted in Wahhabism and its government appendages, such as workplace gender segregation, religious curriculum, and the moral police. Three aspects have challenged the neopatriarchal model of the Wahhabi Saudi nation state: 1) growing economic interdependence; 2) deterritorialization of political identity; and 3) the encroachment of the West.

The need for economic interdependence has been hastened by Saudi's primary commodity—oil. Oil-related industry accounts for the majority of Saudi's gross domestic product and sits in high demand as a staple in the international economy. Erosion of a national identity has occurred due to pan-Arabian media outlets, regional insecurity against Iran and Iraq, and the foundation of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The encroachment of western cultural expression, politics,

and ideology has further undermined traditional forms of being and the docility of the Saudi population in their current circumstances. (Yamani 2005, Yamani 2000)

Indeed, Wahhabism is incapable of dealing with such transformative influences. Through its strict adherence to traditional Islam, Wahhabism creates a space for the influx of new cultural models antithetical to its teachings. Scholars describe it as religiously sanctioned consumerism. The Prophet Muhammad worked as a merchant, thus the importation and buying of non-Muslim products and technology is permissible, if not encouraged. However, adopting social and political institutions, such as ideas relating to social justice, political power, critical analysis, and gender relations of non-Muslims, is considered immoral. In this way, Wahhabism cannot deal with globalization; products and ideas cannot always remain separate. Because of this, Wahhabism has inadvertently established a fertile arena for cultural influx and processes of social mitigation. (El-Fadl 2001)

Exposure to globalized processes, ideas, values, and media has created a renewed political and social consciousness among Saudi youth, which Wahhabism and strict government control cannot stifle. The social trappings of globalization, urbanization, integration into the international economy combine with the existing neopatriarchal structures to produce uneasy contradictions through which many youth must negotiate.

Changing Saudi Identities

In her ethnography of Saudi youth, Mai Yamani (2000) articulates some of the challenges and transformations stemming from globalization and traditionalism. Reflecting Sharabi's theory of neopatriarchy, many Saudi youth perceive themselves to be caught between the traditional authority of the family and religion and the newer institutions of the nation and market, which according to Sharabi, ferments a highly unstable social situation, on both a societal and an individual level (Yamani 2000, Sharabi 1988). The more static, "pre-existing social identities (of family and religion) seem less and less able to encompass the kinds of social practices and social relations to which the state and market have increasingly given rise" (Yamani 2000: 2). Because of this, they must redefine themselves in a conservative society under fire from globalized social and economic forces.

The current generation lacks many of the certainties of their predecessors. Their grandparents' generation enjoyed relative certainties in their static social position and lack of future opportunities as rural villagers compared to contemporary Saudi youth. Similarly, their parents found security in the vast wealth accumulated through oil revenues. The current generation lacks these luxuries of certainties. Still, the future of Saudi youth has been unarguably expanded, yet destabilized and insecure.

The move, in the space of two generations, from a self-supporting village, weakly connected to the outside world, to the cities of a modern state at the heart of a region undergoing the effects of

globalization has assaulted the identity of these young people, leaving them ambivalent and troubled by an apparently superficial way of life. (Yamani 2000: 9)

The cornerstones of individual identity are still many customs and traditions, as well as “new notions of belonging at the regional, national, and global levels” with national, profession, education, or gender identities (Yamani 2000: 132). However, these foundations of identity do not always provide coherent, stable groundwork for identity construction, often contradicting each other and producing new sources of confusion. Moreover, Yamani argues, dogmas and religious traditions have hindered young people’s ability to question and explore these sources of social disorientation, by censoring and restricting their thoughts, expressions, and actions. Such social grappling on the part of Saudi youth resides in one of two categories: strategically maneuvering through globalized economic changes and questioning cultural values and norms. (Yamani 2000)

Obviously, these two categories often overlap and intersect each other, particularly in the educational sphere. Gender roles are now actively being questioned by many young women who want to benefit from their education intellectually and economically. Furthermore, as youth aspire to higher education for a professional future, questioning of values and norms does not follow far behind. In these contexts, navigating socially acceptable courses of action can prove difficult; as society changes, consensus varies drastically. Such diverse social feedback creates stress and uncertainty in behavior. However, in the face of

dramatic transformations and uncertainties, many Saudi youth cling to three timeless constant sources of stability: the nation, the family, and Islam, rearticulating a dynamic hybrid of identities and understandings as they come to find their own balance between tradition and modernity. (Yamani 2000)

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has outlined Saudi Arabia's history and current sociopolitical context in regards to education, economics, and globalization. As illustrated, women's education and behavior has often occupied the crux of conflict between integration into the global system and maintenance of traditional values and beliefs. As such, women from Gulf nations are the battleground for these conflicts, embodying and renegotiating these competing forces in their own lives and in their interactions with others. This overview provides context of how these global processes and neopatriarchal structures have and continue to shape their subjectivity as female, Saudi, international students.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Grounded Theory

Cultural anthropologists employ ethnography as their primary methodological toolkit in social research. Within this toolkit, there is a myriad array of options for data collection; ethnography includes the use of participant observation, informal or semi-structured interviews with key informants, access to archival data and also quantitative measurements, such as surveys and social network analysis. The utilization of these tools depends on the research question and the research context. Qualitative research aims to gain in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons behind this behavior, investigating the *why?* and *how?* of a groups' beliefs, values, experience, and knowledge. Through this framework, qualitative research allows the researcher to gain an in-depth, emic perspective of the topic, while maintaining analytical flexibility to pursue interesting leads. These approaches translate descriptive data into rich cultural understanding. (Bernard 2006)

One of the ways qualitative research can be analyzed is through grounded theory, a process which seeks to discover patterns in human experience using inductive examination of data combined with the application of deductive reasoning (Bernard 2006). Grounded theory was pioneered in the late 1960's as sociologic qualitative research was quickly dissolving in favor of more positivistic quantitative methods, widening the division between research and theory in

academia. It was in response to this schismatic dissolution that Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss offered a viable alternative to this methodological trend in their 1967 seminal work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Their approach offers “systematic strategies for qualitative research practice” for generating theory. In essence, it allows an avenue for reconnecting research with theory, by “grounding” the theory in the data itself. (Charmaz 2006)

Grounded theory guides both the methods of data collection and its theoretical renderings. In grounded theory assessment, researchers ask a series of open-ended questions and look for common or recurring themes in interview narratives. Consequently, research, analysis, and results are “grounded” in the participants’ narratives of experiences, as interviewees’ responses (and not the researchers’ preconceived expectations or hypotheses) dictate which themes are present and subsequently evaluated. Grounded theory approaches require the researcher to collect and analyze data simultaneously, “elaborating categories, specifying their properties, defining relationships between categories, and identifying gaps” (Charmaz 2006: 6). Because of this, grounded theory approaches are inherently flexible, which can result in methodological modifications, especially in regards to interview topics and questions. This allows for the ethnographer to pursue whatever is most interesting to them or most relevant to the participants. Also, the results of grounded theory studies are often submitted to communities or participants for additional critique, these approaches

help ensure reliability and promote validity in qualitative research, while remaining meaningful and reflective of participants' perspectives and experiences (Charmaz 2006).

This ethnographic study was conducted through a grounded theory approach to qualitative data gathered from female students from Saudi Arabia. The data for this project were collected between October 1, 2011 and January 30, 2012. For this project, qualitative analysis offers a more comprehensive approach because of the presence of diverse socio-religious factors underlying women's experiences of migration and mental health. My methodological toolkit included, in chronological order: 1) two pilot interviews; 2) a free list; 3) a focus group discussion; 4) semi-structured interviews; 5) a literature review; 6) focused semi-structured interviews 7) reciprocal ethnography. These triangulation approaches help ensure reliability and validity in the results, while constantly guiding the course and sharpening the focus of the data collection.

Site Selection

The Oregon State University (OSU) community offers an excellent site for research of international students, particularly from Saudi Arabia. Saudi students compose more than 30% of OSU's international student population. Due to the university's prominent ESL program and because of the 2005 scholarship agreement between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, OSU has the sixth largest Saudi student population in the U.S. The male students far outnumber the female

students, however, because the female students are required to be accompanied by a male relative or spouse. These students represent a fruitful study population because they have been educated both in Saudi Arabia and in the U.S., acquiring knowledge and forming attitudes about mental health in both contexts, while also experiencing its transnational social determinants.

Sampling Methods

Subjects were identified through purposive and indirect, snowball sampling, a strategy often used in pilot studies, intensive case studies, and among hard-to-find populations (Bernard 2006). This method is viable because the population sample is limited and tight-knit, and the nature of the study is very in-depth and related to a specific perspective on a cultural phenomenon (Bernard 2006). In this sampling method, participation was self-selected. Information about the study was distributed through listservs, community gatekeepers, and word of mouth. Women who were interested in participating then contacted me for more information about the study and to schedule an interview. Participants passed on the information to other eligible individuals, who then contacted the researcher.

Research Methods

The trajectory of this research was largely motivated by the interests and concerns of the community in question and the methodology was designed to

provide these women a voice in determining the topics of study. The guiding empirical interests of this study revolved around the social determinants of mental health in regards to gender, specifically international experiences of psychological stress, sources of stress, and attitudes and perspectives on self-reported health status/concerns within a temporary, transnational context. Using a grounded theory approach, I sought to research relevant health concerns and topics as identified by the target population.

Pilot Interviews

Two pilot interviews were conducted with community gatekeepers and with what Abu-Lughod terms “halfies” (Abu-Lughod 2006). The pilot interviews provided constructive criticism on my interview guides, changing the diction of questions as well as suggesting alternative ways of soliciting information. They also identified some possible areas of study relevant to the community within my interests.

Free-list

Through the help of a community gatekeeper, eight women attended a free-list and focus group session. The object of free-listing is to get informants to list as many items as they can in a particular domain, and it is used to help investigators identify where to concentrate effort in applied research (Bernard 2006). At the start of the session, I asked the women to list their main health concerns in order of personal importance. This free-list helped shape the topics and questions for the subsequent focus group.

Focus Group

Focus groups have been used as a methodological approach for collecting data about content and process of a particular behavior, attitude, or experience (Bernard 2006) in order to illuminate areas of consensus or disagreement. Additionally, they are designed to provide in-depth data about the reasons underlying a particular behavior. Eight women attended the focus group discussion. The discussion centered on experiences of mental health, sources of stress, and kin-based and community-based support networks. The focus group was then transcribed, followed by the development of initial codes.

Semi-structured Interviews

In the months following the focus group and free-list, I conducted twelve informal, semi-structured interviews with Saudi Arabian women, lasting between 30 minutes and 1 hour. Two of the informants requested that one of the pilot interviewees accompany them for interpretation and support. This method is based on a general interview guide and allows the researcher to follow qualitative leads and gives the participant the freedom to expand upon topics which she considers significant (Bernard 2006). The semi-structured interview allowed for a building of rapport and flexibility. Each interview was transcribed and then reviewed for data that might inform subsequent interview questions and topics.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved a grounded theory approach, using inductive, Nvivo coding to analyze and pull themes from the texts which addressed my research questions. Coding in grounded theory involves a three-step process: 1) initial coding; 2) focused coding; and 3) theoretical coding. Initial coding requires an open exploration of theoretical possibilities for interpreting data. Initial codes are a provisional, comparative analysis which is grounded in the action of the narrative, usually line-by-line. Focused coding follows this initial process with more conceptually directed and selected codes in order to integrate and explain larger portions of data. Through comparing the data, researchers can identify what participants view “as problematic and can begin to treat it analytically” (Charmaz 2006: 47). Theoretical coding then specifies the relationships identified by the focused coding by conceptualizing how they relate to each other. These three steps were performed on each set of data. Upon coding, I identified pieces of missing data and contacted some of the participants for additional or clarifying information, as well as added more specific questions to future interviews. With the exception of the focus group, initial and focused coding was completed after I conducted eight interviews. These codes contributed to the questions in the remainder of interviews. After the completion of all the interviews, I coded for theoretical categories. This particular method of grounded theory relied heavily on an organic, participant-focused collection of data and development codes. Several themes emerged, which will be discussed in the following sections.

Reflections and Limitations

Because these interviews were conducted mostly in English, language barriers might have impeded detailed, articulate, or nuanced answers to the interview questions. Arabic is a root-based language and, because of these nuances inherent in their roots, cannot always be readily translated by proficient or fluent ESL speakers. I attempted to minimize potential misunderstandings by encouraging the informant to explain a concept in Arabic, which I then translated.

The snowball sampling method enabled several of my informants to come to the interview with a good idea about the nature of my questions and purpose of my research. Unlike some of my past research with this population, none of the informants made an effort to vindicate Islam, their values, or customs. This leads me to believe that my informants recognized my familiarity with their culture, and did not feel threatened or judged by my questions. However, questions regarding personal familial experiences and frustrations are susceptible to a social desirability effect, because the stability of the family unit is highly important to one's identity and reputation. Criticizing family members to non-kin compromises family honor and brings shame on both the individual and her relatives. Because of this, I am aware that the informants may not have been entirely straightforward. However, my sense is that most of them reported their opinions of their family honestly, because many of them cited areas of consanguinal disagreement or tension, as well as mutual support and appreciation.

In this case, my subject position as researcher may have served as an advantage. Recent feminist scholarship has emphasized that we as researchers cannot extricate ourselves from our social locations. These positions can subconsciously develop our research questions, what our data reveal or silence, and whose ends our research supports (Haraway 1988). For this reason, many anthropologists argue that we cannot hide our positions under the cloak of objectivity, but rather these positions should be acknowledged and explored in the name of academic transparency. My social position undeniably influenced this research. I am a non-Muslim, American woman of Lebanese descent. I speak at an intermediate level of classical Arabic. I am a third wave feminist whose research interests often attempt to subvert popular orientalist perspectives of women, Islam, and “progress” in the Arab world. My theoretical position is firmly planted in the post-colonial feminisms of Saba Mahmood and Lila Abu-Lughod, recognizing moral and political autonomy within gendered structures of power. Although I am known in the Saudi community, I am still considered an outsider. Because of this position, as well as the confidentiality required by the IRB, participants may have been more comfortable in disclosing sensitive information to me. That is to say, I am external to the transnational and local networks of surveillance and gossip and do not hold the same values on appropriate behavior and maintenance of reputation. I argue that my social and theoretical position combine to formulate a unique vantage point from which I can build rapport with my informants, tease out

significant intersectionalities, and analyze their responses, while adhering close to an emic perspective.

Chapter 5: Results- The Stakes

Chapter Introduction

This chapter will focus on framing Saudi Arabian students' stakes as transnational women within the metanarrative of the neopatriarchal structures of family and nation. As discussed in Chapter 2, one's life experiences and social context play an integral part in determining individuals' experience of psychological well-being or distress, and by extension their coping mechanisms, social resources, and contributions. By examining what is at stake in these women's decisions to study abroad, we can gain a more emic understanding of the importance of their academic and personal success in the U.S., which partially hinges on their psychological well-being. Using ethnographic examples fused with theory, this chapter will describe the stakes of these women's educational endeavors, the nature of which are shaped and perpetuated by neopatriarchy.

Because of their status as temporary migrants, they are still liminally under the influence of their nation and natal or affinal kin. All of the women I interviewed plan on returning to Saudi Arabia after the completion of their degrees. Consequently, they are at once under these neopatriarchal structures, but also geographically and socially removed from them, as social norms must be modified in lieu of different values and customs in the U.S. education system. In other words, neopatriarchal structures are the parentheses on either side of their time in the U.S., also giving context to their experience and regulating their

choices. They must navigate through their period in the U.S., while being acutely aware of how Saudi social structures and its expectations influence their future upon their return. However, their decisions to study abroad and their subsequent actions in the U.S. are never independent of neopatriarchal structures. Rather, these structures circumscribe and determine the real and perceived stakes of Saudi women's international education.

The stakes of their transnational educational projects underpin their quest for academic success, personal development, and psychological well-being—establishing avenues for agency, while providing both stress and support. Specifically, by stakes, I refer to the risks, costs, and benefits that their international education might incur upon their return to Saudi Arabia. A discussion of these stakes will help provide a context for comprehending some of the pressures to succeed among Saudi women, as they navigate through challenges to their psychological well-being in lieu of a major life change. So what is at stake in these women's projects? Participants identified the following five stakes as influencing their decisions to migrate and their actions while in the U.S.: 1) employment opportunities, 2) marriage options, 3) family reputation/status, and the 4) potential to change themselves and 5) their country.

Family Reputation/Status

As part of a neopatriarchal structure, the honor/shame system, deployed through the mechanism of reputation, remains an integral way for families to

maintain prominence and status. As mentioned in Chapter 2, structuralists interpret honor and shame as a type of currency exchanged among men regarding the behavior of their women. Because women embody the vessels of honor, they must be both protected and protected against through strict social norms. For this reason, family status and reputation is highly dependent on the behavior and regulation of its women. Sanaa, a graduate student who was one of the first female students to enroll in the new scholarship program, explained how she considers her family in her actions as a female student:

Family reputation is important so whenever someone in the family does something bad, it gets generalized. It is a reflection of the entire family, the immediate family, like the children and the parents, and sometimes even the extended family. Because of this, when you go away (to study) you always have to keep in mind whether or not a particular decision will affect your family. Poor decisions affect the family by making the parents sad or making problems for the siblings. Because the family is connected and everything is related and when one thing happens then it affects almost everyone. That's why people worry about it so much. Because we know it's not going to affect not only ourselves, but our family.

The informants reported that international education compromises honor and reputation because U.S. education systems do not follow social norms which protect women's integrity; women learn in a desegregated classroom, come into regular contact with men, and do not have as many kin supervising their movements.

Additionally, less than 10 years ago, a more conservative ethos in Saudi Arabia discouraged women from studying abroad. Until the last few years,

international education for women was largely considered risky and irresponsible; however, such sentiment still pervades these women's social networks back home. Aicha, a second year undergraduate at OSU, reported that "people back home have this idea that studying abroad is not a good thing. (Studying abroad) hurts our reputation even back home." Malaika, also a second year student accompanied by several siblings, described the criticism her father endures for allowing her to study abroad.

Some of my dad's friends say to him, "How could you send your daughters there without anyone to watch over them? How could you do that?" And even my dad gets angry sometimes when people question his decision and starts to feel stressed, because he doesn't want people to talk badly about him or about me.

Indeed, many of the participants articulated their relative freedom and less stringent supervision as a negative influence on their reputation. Their explanations of reputation in the U.S. echo the fear of unrestrained female sexuality and emphasis on heteronomy found in neopatriarchal societies. Heteronomous people act out of subordination to authority rather than an internalized moral code; in the absence of authority, they are apt to break their socially-prescribed tenets. Aicha rejects these gendered assumptions about her character, asserting her autonomy in her moral decision making process.

(The guys) think "her parents are not here. Her brother doesn't watch her. So she does whatever she wants because no one is watching her." And that's not true because before I do anything, I think about my family and my friends, and then do it. (Men) are always thinking negatively about us; they never think that we are probably good girls.

This quote illustrates a general mistrust of unsupervised women, reiterating their lower moral status. These women do not report receiving the benefit of the doubt, but are often assumed to actively seek out trouble and compromising situations. In other words, their lack of supervision in the U.S. provides them with the outlet to behave in undesirable ways, although all women interviewed reported adhering to their own moral standards.

Although Saudi Arabia's opinion of women studying abroad has gradually changed, some still disapprove of the practice. For this reason, many women realize the potential consequences their behavior has upon their family back home. For the women themselves, these consequences seem to revolve around their future marriage opportunities.

Marriage Opportunities

Because marriage involves an economic and political arrangement between families, focusing on the productive and reproductive capacities of the woman, family and individual reputation matters for a woman's future as a wife and mother. Because single women risk their reputation by studying in the U.S., their marriage options might be limited. Single Saudi women in the U.S. are confronted by a mistrust of their gender stemming from Islamic cultural ideology complimented by a heteronomous paradigm, which extends into their future social expectations and personal aspirations as a wife and mother. Nearly all of my

informants recognized how their international education may influence their marriage options.

I've heard some of the guys say "I'm never getting married to a girl who has studied abroad because I don't know what she did when she was there." Some people don't like us to be over here. Some religious people don't like it. They want a wife who is covered, who dresses in a certain way, talks in a certain way, studies in a certain college.

While this mistrust and diminution in reputation seems to be a source of sizeable frustration and concern for these women, several of the Saudi women also recognize how their U.S. degree helps to narrow down potential suitors, weeding out "close-minded" husbands. While their education and reputation may decrease the quantity of potential husbands, it controls for quality, as defined by the women themselves. In other words, men who share similar values with them are more likely to wed a woman of higher education, and these are the type of men that these women want to marry. Norah, another second year undergraduate student, replied with a smugly defiant response when I asked her if she cared about men not wanting to marry international students.

When they see that we have been to the U.S., a guy in Saudi might not want to get married to a girl who has been here. But I don't care and I'm not concerned about it. Because I don't want (a guy like that) anyways.

By being educated abroad, women can indirectly self-select their marriage partner, as "open-minded men" who value educated women would be more interested in marrying them than "a guy like that." This provides an ethnographic

example for the postcolonial critique of the honor/shame system. In this way, the honor/shame system, which emphasizes reputation, lays a baseline from which women strategize (Kandiyoti 1988). Their decisions to marry are both Kandiyoti's (1988) patriarchal bargains and examples of Mahmood's (2001) agency.

Patriarchal bargains—highly susceptible to sociopolitical transformations such as women's educational opportunities—supply women with the ability to determine strategies within the structure of gender ideology (Kandiyoti 1988). Similarly, international education allows them to “realize (their) own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles” (Mahmood 2001:204), in the arena of marriage. While Islamic ideology underpins the gender norms compromised by international education, women may also claim higher education as their Islamic right. Amina, a graduate student in her mid-twenties, has chosen to obtain a master's degree rather than wed.

I am older (than my married sister) so my father was concerned that getting my masters here will affect my marriage opportunities. I said no, I am not thinking like this. (Continuing my education) is my choice, and he said OK.

Thus, by taking the opportunity to obtain a university degree, these “specific relations of subordination enable” (Mahmood 2001: 211) these women to determine when and who they can marry. In this way, the honor/shame system, within the neopatriarchal structure, acts as both a source of pressure and of agency for these women. Their decision to study abroad enhances the weight and the rewards of these social structures. However, in the dynamic globalized system,

these women are also seeking degrees as a way of modifying traditional measurements of their social worth.

Employment Opportunities

The changing economic and educational situation in Saudi Arabia has compelled many students to pursue a degree abroad. The high unemployment rate, combined with universal access to education, has led these women to seek out a professional edge over other potential applicants by studying in the U.S. American education is often considered superior, with the added benefit of developing English fluency. However, employment opportunities function as both an objective and concern among Saudi female students. Future employment opportunities and professional goals are at stake in their quest for academic success.

However, their future professions are not only important for their financial stability and independence; they also offer a way for them to destabilize the social importance of reputation and invest in a different measure of self-worth. For Aicha, education provides an alternate standard by which potential employers can judge her character and credentials.

I think by studying in the U.S., my reputation doesn't matter as much because it's my degree that will matter. Having your degree from the U.S. will be something beneficial for companies. First of all, you can communicate in a language other than Arabic, and then (the companies) know you had a good GPA that gave you the scholarship, so that would be a good thing.

These women study in the U.S. to sharpen their competitive edge for their professional dreams. All of the women interviewed plan to return to Saudi Arabia to work in professions pertaining to their degree. They had specific goals and careers in mind, aspiring to work and one day raise a family. Studying in the U.S. enhances their personal experience and professional eligibility, making them a more qualified candidate for employers.

Not only do these women place their reputation and marriage opportunities at stake for their education and future professions, but they also realize their aspirations for a successful career may not come to fruition. These women are painfully aware of the economic crisis and unemployment pandemic in Saudi Arabia. Zainab, a single, first year student in clinical science, recognizes the fact that an education does not guarantee her a position in Saudi's competitive job market.

My mother told me that she met a woman that graduated with my same major and she is still unemployed. So now I am worried that I will not get a job. Most of the jobs are given to foreign people because they pay them lower wages than Saudis. That's why there is lack of jobs in Saudi Arabia. And 70% of young people are without jobs. That's bad.

Reem, a married third-year undergraduate, echoes this concern.

I study radiation health physics, but when I was back home in Saudi I looked for a job and I didn't see anything that matched my educational qualifications... So this is the thing. I'm frightened that I will have to work in something that is unrelated to my degree.

Zainab attributes her concern not only to high unemployment rates, but also gender discrimination in the hiring process.

I have a lot of friends who have a master's degree and they are not employed. They end up staying in their home because there is no job equality between men and women. I am sure they have something in their heart saying "my life is miserable", because there is no equality in jobs. Almost the only available occupation where a woman can work is medicine. That depresses other girls, because only a few girls have the grades for that profession. And there are teachers. Teaching is the most popular job for girls. Basically women can only work in education, medicine, and pharmacy.

Women are graduating from universities at higher rates than men, but gender segregation and social norms restricts them from a wide variety of professional options. The competition for jobs raises the stakes of their U.S. education; they risk reputation and marriage opportunities, while also facing the chance that their education may not land them their dream position, and that what they have put in jeopardy will now matter. However, although these women plan to utilize their education in their future career, many women also cited advantages and rewards of international education on a broader social scale.

Changing Self, Changing Saudi Arabia

The recent rise in popularity of the King Abdullah Scholarship program has been both the product and impetus of social transformations. Women recognize their potential for personal development during their time in the U.S., while also identifying themselves as the vehicles for societal change. The women interviewed expressed pride, excitement, and some concern over their changing selves. The

desire for personal and social change also led many of these women to seek degrees in the U.S., and while they cultivate personal agency and autonomy by exercising their internalized sense of morality, their changed self and its potential for larger change are often seen as threatening to the Saudi status quo.

All of the Saudi women in the study believed that they had changed since their arrival in the U.S., becoming more independent, capable, and self-assured. Several women expressed finding a new sense of freedom during their time here, which they claim to maintain during their return visits to Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, they reported that their time in the U.S. has caused them to question some of their social customs and traditions at home, even directly challenging them. Reem narrates this resistance.

When I came here, I was so happy. So my ideas changed, I feel free here. Now I drive; I have a license. But in Saudi Arabia, I cover my face. I have to wear the *niqab* when I go to school. But I actually changed a little bit. Now in Saudi Arabia, I don't cover my face when I go outside. Many people when they return to Saudi Arabia ask "Why we do we cover our face?" When I was in Saudi Arabia last summer, I told my husband that I wanted to drive. And he said that I couldn't, that they would put me in jail. And I thought "No, but I *can* drive." But really I can't do this thing. But now I feel the same as when I am in the U.S. I am changed. I am not like I was before I came here.

This very challenge to social norms also contributes to compromising reputation. One woman reported that some people in her family and community feared that the U.S. would "turn her bad." Although the women I interviewed did not describe any concern about their ability to reintegrate into Saudi society, several noted that

their family worried about their changed personalities and beliefs. Malaika describes her parents' fear that she will be more likely to break social norms in Saudi, because they did not apply to her in the U.S.

My parents are afraid that I will have different thoughts, I will be used to something here with my different life, and I will return there, they will be more worried. "She has different thoughts. She doesn't like to do this anymore. She used to do this in America, so she will do this again here."

Despite the family's concerns, all of the women regarded their personal transition as a positive force capable of changing society on a broader scope.

In merely six years, the number of Saudi students in the U.S. has more than quadrupled (Alomar 2011), as international education has received more social and professional value. Although the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM) states that the purpose of the scholarship is "to provide our country with qualified individuals capable of achieving the country's goals of progress and development... to provide our students with the best possible educational opportunities at the best educational institutions in the U.S.A." (SACM 2011), many women believe that the government funds their education abroad so they may be catalysts for social and political change in their country.

The participants expressed excitement about the opportunity to improve Saudi Arabia, eager to apply their education. Reem recounted how her husband explicitly linked studying in the U.S. to changing gender norms in Saudi Arabia.

One time we were outside in the desert and he told me to take off my scarf to take a picture. "No, we are not in America! We are in Saudi Arabia! I am not allowed to take off my scarf!" And he said

"We will change this if we go to America!" So we came to the U.S. When I stopped wearing the *niqab* during my visits to Saudi, I told my family, "We can do this! This is good! We can change it." We can change our country actually.

Reem, being married, is the only woman who reported openly challenging gender norms, such as driving and the *niqab*. However, Amina also believes that personal change is a necessary prerequisite for macrolevel transformations in Saudi Arabia.

I believe I came here to change something in my country. So if I go back, and I still act like I did before I came here, then I will not have learned anything from here. Because I know my government isn't sending us here only for education. I think my government is sending us to change something in our personality. Maybe, I don't know, but this is what I believe. So if I return to Saudi without changing anything, what is the purpose of coming here? Only to get an education? No, I don't think this is the only goal from my government. Sometimes when you go to a place, you must see the bad thing and the good thing. And you have to find the good thing from there and bring it back.

These women exhibit how education constitutes a major vehicle for the transmission of transformative values, redefining the Saudi status quo. Their commitment to studying in the U.S. reveals one way in which they act within a hegemonic system for their own interests and believe in their ability to change it, as education is their Islamic right. For these women, their years in the U.S. not only enhance their employment possibilities, but also equip them with the tools to improve their own country.

It is worth noting, however, that married women expressed significantly less concern over their reputation and employment opportunities, although they

also indicated a strong obligation for social action. One might assume that their stakes are less than single female students, as they have already fulfilled some cultural expectations and have more future financial security. Also, their actions are not subject to as much scrutiny because their sexuality is not unrestrained, but attached to their husband. Such a distinction between marital statuses carries significance for an analysis of these women's social determinants of psychological well-being in the next chapter.

Chapter Conclusion

The social values and norms deployed by neopatriarchal structures determine the stakes for these women's educational and personal experiences in the U.S., constituting the underlying framework for the costs and benefits of studying abroad, under which they navigate through their international educational endeavors. While studying in the U.S., these women must keep in mind their family's status/reputation, their future marriage opportunities, their future employment opportunities, and their ability to change themselves and their nation. Their future success hinges upon these stakes, which exert pressure on these women to be successful. In other words, these stakes circumscribe their purpose, their choices, and their actions in the U.S., as they strive to maintain personal well-being necessary for academic and personal success, which will be discussed in the next chapter. An initial consideration of these stakes helps elucidate how neopatriarchal structures undergird their experience and contextualizes distressful

challenges, as well as sources of support, as they manage their personal well-being in the U.S.

Chapter 6: Results and Discussion- The Challenges

Chapter Introduction

Having described the structures and stakes which permeate Saudi women's experience in the U.S. in the previous chapter, this chapter will consider challenges these women face in maintaining mental well-being and accessing psychosocial support. Grounding my analysis in the stories of female students, it soon became evident that, although these women recounted different motivations for international education, had various positive and negative experiences with it, and utilized different methods for maintaining good mental health during their time at OSU, several challenges emerged in all their accounts. Most of the women posited these obstacles as requiring careful social navigation and adaptation in lieu of their position as international Arab women. Under the aforementioned stakes posited by neopatriarchal structures, female Saudi students described that they must 1) face new and changed responsibilities; 2) identify and access sources of social support, while 3) being vulnerable to rumors, danger, and distress, in order to attain their goals of success in their international experience and education. This chapter will investigate these challenges as components of these women's experience under the stakes described in Chapter 5, focusing on how women navigate through sources of distress and negotiate support in lieu of their changing sense of self in a transnational environment.

Facing Responsibilities

All of the women I interviewed described their new responsibilities as a challenging obstacle that they discovered upon their arrival in the U.S. These responsibilities function as a source of stress, but also create a sense of empowerment and freedom. The nature of this change in responsibilities roots itself in neopatriarchal family structures and gender roles.

Several of the informants described the specifics of their changed responsibilities in regards to transportation and household duties. Women reported now being responsible for household tasks, such as cleaning and cooking, shopping for necessities, going to school, and taking care of their male guardians, mostly brothers and uncles. However, all of their discussions about their responsibilities highlighted the absence of physical family assistance. Aicha, among others, contrasts her responsibilities in Saudi and the U.S.

(In the U.S.) you have to do everything by yourself. Back home you have some family or friends to help you with all that. And we don't have to take responsibility that much back home. We do have some responsibilities, but not as much as when you're (in the U.S.) alone.

Saba, a single master's student living with her brother, notes that she now must do everything for herself.

In Saudi, you are with your family. They will help you because you live with them. In Saudi, when I returned from my day at the university I would just go to sleep, take a nap and then wake up and study. My mother prepared dates, snacks, coffee for me. Here, no. I will have a nap, but when I wake up there is no lunch, there is nothing. Back home, everything is ready. It's easy, the life is easy there.

These women clearly contrast the weight of shared responsibilities in Saudi Arabia with their single shouldering of tasks in the U.S., indicating the communal reciprocity women enjoy amongst their kin. Most of the women interviewed stated that life in Saudi Arabia is easier and less stressful, although the married women reported otherwise. One woman explained that if “(you) are married, the husband will do everything. But if (you) are alone, yeah (you) must do everything.” This indicates that marriage splits the responsibilities, acting as a buffer against a sometimes overwhelming amount of tasks in an unfamiliar environment.

Many of the women reported feeling distressed by their new responsibilities. The duties of their gender, as an honorable daughter and sister who manages many household tasks, plus their obligations as a student, and the challenges of a foreign environment compound into a type of role strain for these women. As discussed in Chapter 2, role strain refers to the process of meeting standards and the difficulty involved in satisfying them or the inability to do so, and takes two forms: role overload and role conflict (Mirowski 2003).

The case of physical, practical responsibilities in the absence of extended family assistance can cause distress from role overload, as many demands can overwhelm their capabilities. Indeed, nearly all of the women admitted they felt overwhelmed for extended periods of time while in the U.S. Two other women reported that they knew other students who had returned home because they could not handle the demands of home and school. Malaika, a single undergraduate

student living with her brother and sister, describes how she must shoulder all the responsibilities, despite the presence of her siblings.

(My father) will feel more comfortable if he feels like my brother is responsible for me and my sister. However, this is hard because I'm doing everything by myself. Everything. Actually he's not doing anything, not even for himself, but my dad will feel more comfortable because he is here with me, even though he knows that he doesn't help out. Because of this, I do everything by myself. So this puts me under a lot of pressure. I think (depression) was a serious problem for me because of this.

Being responsible for others or bearing the load of household tasks was a common theme among single women accompanied by consanguinal male kin. However, other women did describe a more equitable relationship in the allocation of duties, stating that the physical support of their male escort made it possible for them to be successful in school. In this way, the presence of male kin both mitigates and aggravates role overload for these women, depending on the degree of shared responsibilities and exchange of psychosocial support.

In addition to role overload, role conflict also presents a source of stress in these situations. As previously discussed, strict social norms govern women's acceptable and appropriate behavior in Saudi Arabia. However, educational and practical demands compromise these. For example, women learn in co-ed classrooms, and are required to interact with male students, both Saudi and American, and often commute to class unaccompanied. Their identity as a temporary transnational woman, as both a student-visa holder and a Saudi citizen, creates an intrinsic conflict in expectations. The women did not directly narrate

role conflict as a source of distress, but instead used the idiom of reputation in illustrating these competing demands. Aicha, who is studying a male-dominated major, claims that:

My reputation is a huge responsibility. I am here alone so I have to have good reputation. I have to do well just because I don't want someone to talk about my family or my reputation or my appearance or my brothers.

Because her subject of study requires her to interact with a lot of men, she reports constant battles with rumor and gossip, which compromise her reputation and appear to distress her significantly. Clearly, this gossip stems from a discrepancy between the demands of her education and what is considered honorable in her native society. Furthermore, her comment illustrates the generalizability of reputation, and how her behavior affects the honor and reputation of her male kin. She goes on to reject other's perspectives of her role conflict.

Because (being moral) is how we were raised. If you were raised in a certain way and you come here, you are still the same person but you have new responsibilities.

Her statement indicates that she does not agree with others' opinions that she compromises her honor for her degree. Here she asserts her autonomy and agency, citing an internalized sense of morality and a stable sense of self in lieu of competing transcultural pressures. She has been raised under certain moral standards, "a sequence of practices and actions" (Mahmood 2001: 214), which shape her desires, behaviors, and sense of self. She has internalized and

reproduced these behaviors—with slight necessary modifications required by her education—in the absence of direct control.

Although many women described their new responsibilities as difficult and sometimes exhausting, they also viewed them as a positive challenge for personal development and confidence. “In the U.S. you learn a lot. You learn to be strong and responsible for yourself.” Several women mentioned that they feel like they can face any challenge because their time in the U.S. has cultivated their confidence. According to Latifah, these responsibilities are a logical consequence of their freedom in the U.S. She comments that “(Saudi female students) want to have all this freedom, but when (they) get it, it is work. It’s so confusing, but with freedom comes responsibility.” For Latifah, freedom requires individuals to assume responsibility for themselves, for their own actions and outcomes. Latifah’s comment provides an example of Mahmood’s (2001) agentic self; she realizes her own desires and projects through self-discipline within a less restricted social context. In essence, I argue that although unsupervised, these women are still compelled and capable of attending to their responsibilities due to a deep internalization of social values and expectations.

As evidenced by these women’s accounts, new responsibilities can cause distress, while also acting as a source of pride and achievement. Role overload and role conflict in meeting various transcultural expectations can be mitigated or exacerbated by physical and emotional support from family escorts. Furthermore, the absence of their immediate family may require these women to shoulder far

more than they did in Saudi Arabia. Their removal from kin support networks intensify the amount of responsibilities, cultivates self-confidence, but also causes them to feel vulnerable and isolated.

Being in a Vulnerable Position

All of the women interviewed reported feeling more vulnerable in the U.S. than Saudi Arabia. The women identified three areas in which their vulnerability causes concern: 1) physical safety; 2) psychological distress (depression and anxiety); and 3) rumors, gossip, and reputation. This section will employ Sharabi's (1988) theory of neopatriarchy, particularly in reference to gender thought and ideology, as an analytical tool to understand these women's narratives of vulnerability while studying abroad.

Being Vulnerable to Danger and Dishonor

Women as at once dangerous and in danger underpin their perceptions of vulnerability in the U.S. Within the honor/shame system, women must be protected from danger or dishonor by their male kin (Ortner 1978, Abu-Lughod 1986, Mernissi 1975, Baxter 2007). Such vulnerability has been internalized, as evidenced by their accounts. Three women reported feeling less safe from physical danger in the U.S. than in Saudi. Norah explained that her vulnerability to danger is the foundation for differences in gendered behavior and activities.

We (as women) can't do as much stuff. Men, if they go to parties or something, there will be drunk people and they can defend themselves. I won't be able to defend myself if something

happened. But men would be able to defend themselves because they are stronger.

Another woman explained that she did not go to certain places because of the presence of men “who do not follow the rules.” There is concern over the possibility that these women will encounter males who are up to no good.

Stranger-danger is compounded by a more open opportunity for them to meet men with dishonorable intentions. Amina acknowledges that “(her) brother is afraid for (her) if (she) knows someone romantically, that he will not love (her) and just want to play with (her).” Several women also mentioned that their families felt fearful for their safety and honor. Although a few of these women noted that the media gave their families false ideas of the real dangers in the U.S., most noted that their family’s dishonor weighed heavily on them and that they considered the welfare of their family in their day to day decisions. Malaika describes her frustration with her father’s concern.

My dad will just be more comfortable, he will feel like my brother is here. And for me it’s like making my dad feel that he cannot leave me alone. He feels better that my brother is here with me. It is like he doesn’t trust me. I understand he is afraid because I am a woman and there are people who might hurt me, but at the same time he doesn’t give me his trust. This is really having a negative effect on me.

In Saudi Arabia, a woman remains under the guardianship of their father until marriage for protection from her dishonor, and by extension, the family’s status (Altorki 1986, Almonajjed 1997, Yamani 2000). Outside of the family unit, they face the risk of peril and shame. Their vulnerability to danger and dishonor

illustrates the explicit theory of women's status, which suggests that women must be protected from naturally aggressive men (Mernissi 1975). However, as evidenced from these women's accounts, there are more factors at play in determining their vulnerability.

Being Vulnerable to Rumors

A fundamental distrust of women, particularly single women, emerges from their narratives. These women are aware of others' perceptions of their actions, and expressed frustration with this distrust. Their reports of reputation, gossip, and rumor dovetail with the theories of women's status as described by Mernissi (1975) and Abu-Lughod (1986) under the micro-structures of neopatriarchy (Sharabi 1988). The social ethos and judgments surrounding women's actions function in two ways. Saudi women describe it as both a source of distress, but also as an outlet for agency.

The apparent distrust reported by these women manifests in more self-regulation in comparison with their male counterparts. These women claim to be hypervigilant about the implications of their actions on their reputation.

Whenever guys go and have fun its normal. They go and hang out with their friends and do whatever they do. It's OK because they are guys. Whenever we want to do something it's like "no they are girls they are..." and we become afraid because we don't want guys to see us. They will talk behind our backs or say something about us. They always assume we are doing bad things, because we are alone. I always worry all the time, you don't want (people who would talk about you) to see you doing something "questionable", even if there is nothing wrong with what you are doing.

This mistrust of women's actions illustrates a fundamental assumption of their lower moral caliber, as explained by Mernissi (1975) and Abu-Lughod (1986). They are not given the benefit of the doubt because of their gender. Furthermore, such conjecture about their actions and motives creates unfounded rumors and compromises their reputation.

On account of their gender and their new position outside of direct patriarchal control, Saudi women in the U.S. are more exposed to the violence of rumor. Zainab describes the basis for her increased vulnerability to the suggestion of scandal.

There are a lot of rumors (in the U.S.) because in Saudi Arabia, women are separated from men and when they come here people from Saudi will talk about it. "She was talking to that man! She was standing close to him!" And they will say bad things about her. While it is normal to speak with an American person, it is like forbidden to speak to a Saudi man.

Single Saudi women in the U.S. are unrestrained and unbridled, meaning they may move about relatively freely, but also have not channeled their sexuality into the only acceptable outlet—marriage. In other words, because of their less supervised presence in a desegregated environment, there exists the possibility for them to deploy their sexual instinct outside of the mandated social order of Islamic principles.

Significantly, none of the women interviewed mentioned that men were also subject to gossip about their actions. When they described their friendly or

professional exchanges with males, they always posed it as a threat to their reputation, but never described any community judgment of the males involved. In other words, it is the woman who takes the fall. The gendered judgment in their narratives not only suggests the continuation of women's inferior moral fiber, but also the regulation of their *qaid* power through surveillance and rumor. Several women described this gendered blame as constantly distressing, as something they must always take care to prevent.

I don't like people talking about me, no one does, but it hurts because you try so hard to not do the things they think is wrong and then something as simple as talking to a guy or anything—that's something bad. So that ruins my whole reputation just because I talked to a guy or with a guy. So that hurts because, but what I try to do is I try to ignore it, but I mean, between me and myself, and I, I just keep thinking about it and cry sometimes because it hurts.

Significantly, none of the married women I interviewed expressed concern for their reputations or reported being the subject of destructive rumors. I suggest two theoretical reasons for this: 1) these women do not have to worry about the effects of their reputation on their future marriage opportunities, and 2) their sexuality is attached to their spouse, posing minimal threat to the social order. In this way, marriage minimizes their vulnerability to rumors and its distressing effects, while also allowing more freedom in their interactions.

Women's vulnerability to both physical and emotional danger and rumors illustrates the explicit and implicit theory of women's status, respectively. Both theories appear to compose a social ethos deployed in these women's experiences,

where women are considered to be in danger and also dangerous, or morally questionable. Women must be protected from naturally aggressive men, but also must be prevented from deploying their sexual initiative and *qaid* power.

Furthermore, the neopatriarchal emphasis on heteronomy emerges from their narratives. Heteronomy is a micro-level characteristic of the neopatriarchal condition, in which people behave appropriately out of subordination to control, rather than an internalized moral compass (Sharabi 1988). This distrust and subsequent gossip about women illustrates this concept at work. Some people in their community assume they will “do bad things” and “think negatively about (them),” never believing “(they) are good girls,” simply because they are not under direct familial control.

In their narratives, we see an apparent conflict between heteronomy and autonomy. Several women reported always looking over their shoulder and acting out of concern for what others’ think about their character. The women quoted above believe that their behavior is not immoral or wrong, but they realize others will think otherwise. For this reason, the autonomous self—an internal moral conscience—clashes with a heteronomous social paradigm, causing these women to not consider their actions for the sake of their own conscience, but for the approval of others. Their self-knowledge of their autonomy has not yet been fully socially accepted, manifesting in frustration and anxiety as they negotiate the conflict between their own sense of right and wrong and their desire for an

esteemed reputation in the community. The existence of an autonomous self within neopatriarchal heteronomy deepens the potential for distress and delineates avenues for support, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The participants in this study were all aware of the societal paradigms regarding their behavior, and all felt that reputation as a regulatory apparatus did not accurately reflect their autonomous concept of morality. Additionally, all the participants mentioned that they disagreed with the social emphasis on reputation and community judgment, while others stated that minimizing the deleterious effects of rumor and reputation was one of their personal objectives for changing Saudi society. According to Zainab, they are “trying to change this thing in Saudi.”

But I don't care about what people say, I mean I do care; it makes me sad to hear these things because you've worked hard your whole life having a good reputation. I don't need to justify myself in front of these people because I don't care about them. It's just I care that they are talking. I care that they are affecting my reputation, that's it. I don't care what they say because I don't believe what they say. I know who I am and where I come from.

Norah continues on this trope.

I find that it's stupid, because not everything you hear is true and you can't judge a person on their looks only, but by what is inside them.

Amina rejects reputation in her relationships with others.

If I know someone who has done something bad in their past, this will not affect their relationship with me. It's in their past. Everyone will do something wrong at some point in their lives. No one can do right all the time.

An alternative set of standards for measuring moral worth and individual goodness emerges from their accounts. They assert their autonomy by relying on their sense of self and conscience rather than on community opinion, in which they place little stock, other than acknowledging its power of social consensus. Furthermore, women seem to be redefining moral standards for themselves, employing agency by “realizing their interests against the weight of custom” and relying on their autonomous self in the absence of regulatory structures (Mahmood 2001: 204).

Although their gendered vulnerability to the rumor mill is an area which these women desire to change, the reality of their position serves as a source of distress and a challenge to their psychological well-being by shaping their options for seeking psychosocial support in a time of need. Options for psychosocial support during their time in the U.S. are extremely critical, as these women are isolated from their larger nuclear and extended family, thus more vulnerable to depression, severe homesickness, and anxiety.

Being Vulnerable to Distress

Women’s exposure to danger and to rumors upon their arrival in the U.S. is intensified by their vulnerability to distress. Considering their vulnerabilities, their responsibilities, and their stakes, the danger of depression and anxiety presents yet another obstacle to their success, often times foiling their achievement of academic standards. Although these factors combine to cause significant strain, the women emphasized in their narratives that the absence of their social network exacerbated feelings of distress by making them feel exposed and isolated.

Accounts of depression and anxiety emerged in nearly all of the interviews, particularly among the single women. Additionally, all of the women I interviewed mentioned that they personally knew of at least one female friend who struggled with severe enough depression and anxiety to return home. When questioned about their most concerning health problems, all of the women, with the exception of one, responded that psychological distress was most relevant to their experience in the U.S. The theme of psychological distress due to separation from their family is common and creates a chain reaction by influencing their other aforementioned vulnerabilities. That is to say, their distance from their family not only makes them vulnerable to distress, but also puts them at risk of rumor and danger—as they are less supervised in the U.S—and also exacerbates distress from role overload; the absence of their family determines their psychological well-being in myriad, but interconnected ways.

According to psychosocial experts, social networks help buffer and minimize the harmful effects of distress. Indeed, women identify themselves as more vulnerable to depression than men, mainly because of their past position as firmly within the family unit. Amina describes this gendered vulnerability to distress.

I think women are more vulnerable to these problems than men. Because in Saudi Arabia, the girls are close to the family, while the boys are always travelling and going out with their friends. But the girls are not, because people are concerned about the girls' safety and honor in my country. If I want to go with my friends to travel outside of the country, I must take a relative with me. But my

brother, he can go by himself. So that's why they have less problems because they did this back home. They go alone.

Although male students were reported to struggle with homesickness, depression, and anxiety as well, most of the females believed that they experienced these problems more intensely than their male counterparts. Most of these women are accompanied by a male guardian, usually a brother, as mandated by the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission. Regardless of the presence of a single family member, it seems to be their distance from the family unit as a whole that ferments the potential for distress. Heli, a married woman in the U.S. with her husband and children, describes this.

In my opinion, if they came alone or with their brothers, I think they will have these problems. I think it is more with girls than with boys because she is alone and you know your brother is not like your husband. You can't talk with him about everything and even though he shares the apartment with you but maybe he goes with his friends and he never asks about you. He leaves you alone. He doesn't care. He doesn't help you. So they feel like they are alone, truly alone.

Amina narrated a similar point from her first-hand experience with depression. As most of these women live with many siblings and sometimes their extended kin, a single male guardian does not mitigate distress in the same way as an entire network of easily accessible family support.

I'd say the worst part of my depression was knowing that I was alone. Because when we lived in Saudi Arabia, my brother was busy with his education and his friends. So when we came here, we lived closed with each other but sometimes I didn't know how to deal with my brother. I had to talk with him formally, I have to deal

with him formally. When I go back to my apartment here, I feel sad, because no one is in the home, only me and my brother. And sometimes my brother goes to his room and sleeps or does some internet chatting with his friends. This is making me feel sad because I like noise. I like the people around me. So that is my problem. Actually the first few months were hard for me because I missed my family and I didn't have any friends here. This made me cry all the time. All the time. I've never felt sad for a long time like this—three or four months—before. I think this was a serious problem for me.

Amina also remarks that her isolation from her family increases the amount of time it takes her to deal with a personal problem or challenge.

When I am with my family and my friends, and I have a problem, it stays with me two days. But here, maybe one week. Because I don't have my family here. Because I am very, very close with my family.

Her comparison about confronting problems amongst her family in Saudi and by herself in the U.S. shows the positive buffering effect family can have on an individual's psychosocial well-being. Furthermore, Zainab suggests that her relationship with her family helps her navigate through life's obstacles, providing assurance and support.

Your whole life you were living with your family and suddenly one day you are away from them for the first time in your life. That's difficult. I just feel lost sometimes. You need support to fall back on. I need back up. I feel like I need back up. The first time my mother traveled alone without my dad, she said "I felt my back falling apart, he was my back up". Now I feel the same thing. Sometimes I just feel lost.

Aicha describes women's battle with distress in the U.S., contrasting causation between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. Similar to several other women's opinions, she also "thinks that in Saudi Arabia, they don't feel depressed like they do here.

Back home, they feel depressed if they face a problem or something, but (in the U.S.) it's different." Saba agrees. She believes that "depression (*el-iktiab*) is a big topic not only for (them), but any person who changes place and lives in a different culture." A difference in psychosocial resources and context can account for the geographic difference in their adaptation to distress. According to Sarason et al. (1994), the situational context in which the supportive efforts occur influence the perceived outcome of social support. According to these accounts, the situational context of their education in the U.S. intensifies the perceived intensity and duration of distress. The psychosocial resources of social support and self-efficacy are temporarily put under pressure as they navigate through new responsibilities, perceived vulnerabilities, and isolation.

As illustrated by accounts of their experiences, these women's vulnerability to distress in the U.S. mainly stems from the absence of their family. The presence of large family networks subsidizes stressors and problems by providing stability, supervision, practical assistance, and psychosocial support. Because they cannot cope with these challenges in geographic proximity to their family, these women must actively seek out alternative sources of psychosocial support.

Seeking Support

In the absence of physical support and protection from family, Saudi women must navigate alternate sources and modified methods for receiving

psychosocial support from their social network. Their susceptibilities as transnational women weigh on them, as they risk their honor and reputations outside of the direct control and protection of their families. In a position of increased vulnerability and responsibility, these women described different strategies and sources for support. Their accounts of seeking support exhibited the comforting and constraining functions of social integration on their psychosocial well-being under the metanarrative of the neopatriarchal family. This section illustrates how their presence simultaneously within, but removed from, their family can both intensify and relieve psychological distress and social pressures.

Unsurprisingly, most of the women in this study described a positive, supportive relationship with one or both of their parents and some of their siblings. Several even contributed their academic and personal success to the support of their kin. Saba recognizes that the presence of her brother—her male guardian—greatly attributed to her ability to stay in the U.S. through her studies and not return home because of depression.

Because even my brother, he encourages me. This is maybe the number one thing that makes me successful. My brother. Seriously! It would have been so difficult without him here.

Although Saba was the only woman who openly described a highly supportive relationship with her male guardian, other women reported that their family in Saudi Arabia helped them with their problems “when (they) felt miserable; (their) family is there for (them) and to help (them).”

Although the “neopatriarchal condition” (Sharabi 1988) fosters the perpetuation of familial reputation, honor, and shame, the emphasis on the family as a network of loyal support also cultivates trust and advocacy. Norah explained her relationship with her mother in this way:

If I think there might be a rumor going on about me, I'll just go talk to my mom at the beginning, if I'm worried. And it could be something stupid, that I think might become a problem. And she'll be like “so what?” Because she will help me (with a rumor). She will know. I'll tell her what happened and she will know if it could be a big deal that we need to worry about. When people start talking or bad stuff happens and maybe it's like something stupid and not a big deal and I think it's a big deal. My mind works a lot. And she'll know if I'm overreacting or worried for no reason. She might clarify it to me. If some people start talking about me or start saying stuff that I know is wrong, I can go tell her that it is not true. She will be like “ok”. At the beginning, she would know what is going on and if it starts to get bad she might go talk to them. Or she could talk to my dad. If something really happened big, they would know it's not true. Like one of the girls, Aicha, said that when they see that she has been to the U.S., a guy back there won't get married to a girl who has been here. And she might tell her mom that people are saying that something happened. So she knows that when she hears it, it's wrong.

As illustrated here, this trust manifests itself in intercepting potential rumors that might harm individual or family reputation. Her account contrasts aforementioned narratives of mistrust of women; Norah feels like her mother can help her intercept these rumors before they do too much damage. Her account dovetails nicely with Sharabi's (1988) discussion of heteronomy versus autonomy. It appears that among some of these women, a trust of women is beginning to prevail against a general distrust of their gender, which is enveloped in the movement from paradigms of heteronomy to autonomy. Regardless of having minimal supervision

or controlling authority, Norah's mother believes and trusts her daughter's sense of morality as embodied and internal. Aicha described a similar situation with her family in regards to rumors and reputation.

My family knows the things they say are not true. They know I respect where I come from, my background, my culture, my religion, my ethics and my parents trust me too. If they didn't trust me, they wouldn't allow me to go all the way here... My family is what matters and that is who I am. Whenever something bad happens I go to my mom because she is always there for me.

Both Norah and Aicha articulate an internalized sense of right and wrong in which their families have confidence. In other words, rather than thinking that she is making the right choices only because she is supervised by a male guardian, these women claim that their families have confidence in their autonomous moral decision making.

By contrasting the narratives of women who seek their family's support and women who do not, it appears that the women whose families recognize and trust their daughters' autonomy and morality enjoy more beneficial and supportive relationships with their kin. The psychosocial resource of trust, support and acknowledgement of autonomy encourages these women to seek help and advice from their parents during a time of vulnerability. In this regard, their geographically distant social integration within the neopatriarchal family can provide a safe haven for support, trust, and protection, buffering against the negative sources and consequences of distress.

Unfortunately, social integration does not always result in positive supportive relationships among that integrative network (Mirowsky et al. 2003, Smith et al. 2008). Due to the destructive nature of rumor and the pervasive functioning of the honor/shame system in lieu of their transnational vulnerabilities and psychosocial challenges, a few women found themselves constrained, limited, and pressured by their social network. Much of this isolation and inability to disclose their problems revolves around their loyalty to their family, the emphasis on their family members' reputation, and their family's heteronomous perspective. That is to say, some women have no one to turn to for support if they encounter a problem with a family member. Several women reported having difficulty disclosing personal family problems to their kin or other family members. Malaika discusses her support options for the conflicts with her father and brother. Malaika reported experiencing a lot of "negative effects" from her fathers' mistrust of her actions and intentions.

I know if I tell my friend she will not do anything about (my problem) and my dad will not understand me. I know it doesn't even matter what I say to my dad because he has these thoughts (about my correct behavior) and I know I will not change his mind. So for me it's really badly affecting me especially that my brother is here with me, because I feel like I cannot speak to either of them about it.

It should be noted that Malaika appeared visibly upset during this conversation, legitimating the reality of her concerns with disclosure and support and communicating a sense of powerlessness to change her situation. According to Mirowsky (2003), powerlessness refers to the inability to achieve important or

desired outcomes in one's life and the awareness of this reality. Additionally here, her father's non-acceptance of her autonomous decision-making and his intrinsic mistrust of her actions compounds her frustration by his exclusion from her support network. That is to say, his mistrust weighs heavily on her, but she will also not receive psychosocial support from him. Malaika feels incapable to change her father's opinions and thus does not seek him out for psychosocial support, but her disclosure to her friends cannot yield any positive changes. Other women echoed her sentiment, not feeling comfortable telling their friends about their family issues because of rumor and reputation.

We are not used to talking about our brothers or sisters or family members in front of people. We feel bad about this because what will people say about us speaking poorly of our family? They will say "oh she was talking about her brother in that way" and think that he must not have a strong personality or something.

Once again, this explanation illustrates the ways in which women are charged with maintaining their male kin's honor, occupying both a position of power and submission. However, the women were unclear whether their loyalty to their male kin prevented them from disclosure, or whether their own reputation was more at risk. In this way, women may suffer frustration, aggravation, hostility, and repressed anger from being forced to conform to constraints and socially legitimated demands that delineate access to psychosocial support.

The question of reputation and rumor also delimits the nature of their friendship support network. All of the women except Malaika preferred to seek the

help and advice of family members before they sought solace from their friends.

Similarly, Amina does not fully trust her friends with her problems, secrets, or insecurities.

I'm not sure if it's better talking to my family or friends because I have experiences with my friends that have not been good. Ok, I love friends, but it's like I put up a wall. I don't say it to my friends because I've had a bad experience about that. I said something to my friend and my friend broke my trust. It's not always that they tell people, but they change their opinion of me. They think bad things about me. They change the way they think of me. I don't like it.

Amina expresses frustration in their judgment. For her, some friendships represent another source of social discipline, where her actions are judged and measured against a standard of morality or norms. Other women felt that their friends didn't care or were incapable of helping them in a bind. Saba believes that friends are actually a barrier to recovering from depression or anxiety.

Sometimes you hang out with them, and they make you feel worse. They are not conversable. Or they don't help you. Some of them, they don't care about you. You are depressed, for yourself, but they don't care. You will do whatever you want, they don't even care. They won't talk to you, or ask what happened to you, "why are you upset?"

In this way, Saba argues that isolation amidst friends can contribute to distress.

Soraya, a single mother, agrees that seeking solace from friends is not always fulfilling.

When I'm depressed I don't know what to do and it's really hard complaining to your friends. Your friends won't like it each time you complain. "Oh I'm stressed out. Oh I'm sad." They won't like

it. They don't want you to be sick all the time. They want you to be cheerful and funny.

As evidenced by their accounts, support from family precedes help from friends in preference, partially because their family cares more for their well-being.

Furthermore, several women expressed pressure to seem happy and carefree in front of their friends.

Women try not to show it, that much, probably because women want to keep things to themselves or inside or they are patient, but it is hard always trying to show people that you are happy, or that you're fine, when inside you are not. Because there are problems that you do want to talk about but you don't want to talk about it to them so what you do is put a smile on your face to stop them from asking you.

For this woman, her performance of well-being underscores a hesitancy or refusal to confide in her friends, although they are concerned about her.

Under the structures of neopatriarchy, these women must carefully navigate their sources of support. The honor/shame system, through the vehicle of reputation and rumor, constrains and determines avenues of potential support. Furthermore, within the neopatriarchal condition, family remains central to identity, loyalty, and reciprocity (Sharabi 1988). This fact is reflected in these women's accounts of psychosocial support, as many of them first seek out family members for help and generally enjoy their trust. However, they can also feel frustrated by their family and community's refusal to acknowledge their agency and autonomy, leading to distress and limiting their avenues for support. Furthermore, individuals outside of the kin network cannot be always be trusted,

care to offer support, or capable of facilitating change. From these women's narratives, we can see how accessing psychosocial support in a transnational context is not always straightforward, but dependent on the nature of their supportive relationships, level of trust, and ability to help.

Chapter Conclusion

The stakes under which these women study and live in the U.S. mold their experiences of maintaining mental well-being. The themes discussed above describe the obstacles and challenges these women must navigate while in a liminal position of transnationality. In the U.S., these women face new and sometimes contradictory demands, and must negotiate between the expectations of their culture and family while remaining psychologically sound in order to achieve their goals. Furthermore, the assertion of autonomy and agency in their everyday interactions functions as both a psychosocial resource, as they rely on their moral conscience, and avenue for distress, as they encounter people who place little confidence in their unregulated ability to be "good girls". Their intensified responsibilities and heightened vulnerabilities foster the need for psychosocial support, but their separation from their family makes accessing this support less straightforward. The navigation of psychosocial support remains under the metanarrative of neopatriarchy, with the vehicles of reputation and heteronomy determining their actions and solicitations for comfort and guidance.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Recommendations and Applications

Saudi Arabian international student women face a wide array of obstacles on their road to success during their education at OSU. Many of these women recounted periods of intense distress or expressed visible frustration and anxiety, while others enjoyed a relatively easy transition into their life in the U.S. Although this research did not investigate the prevalence of distress or mental illness among this population, chronic distress does increase risk of mental pathology (Mirowsky et al. 2003). As illustrated in the research, women's separation from family support, increased responsibilities, heightened vulnerabilities, as well as transnational pressures and stakes for their future, may amalgamate into chronic distress which can interfere with psychological well-being and personal success. For this reason, an evaluation of the social determinants of mental health warrants critical and practical suggestions for prevention and treatment of potential problems. The following are recommendations and applications for institutional psychological support provided by OSU as identified by Saudi women themselves.

Only a handful of the women interviewed had sought professional psychological assistance in dealing with their distress. Because mental health is a nascent discipline in Saudi Arabia, many women are not familiar with psychological services, how to access them, and ways in which these services can help. Mental health problems remain highly stigmatized and misunderstood,

inflicting shame on the individual and their family. Additionally, as fear of rumor and concern for reputation determines these women's access to psychosocial support among their community, confidentiality and anonymity in the institutional help-seeking process is of utmost concern to these women. In international student orientation, an explanation of OSU's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) philosophy should be provided, with special emphasis on issues of confidentiality and anonymity within the system and a more general overview of mental health risks, symptoms, and therapies.

Secondly, CAPS service-providers must remain sensitive to the socioreligious values and norms in which these women are embedded. Specifically, women cited that personal questions regarding boyfriends and family problems were offensive and often irrelevant to their plight. Another woman suggested that having a Muslim counselor on staff with Qur'anic knowledge would be particularly helpful. Although there is a Sunni mosque within a few blocks of OSU, few of the women I interviewed attend it regularly, although all reported that they seek solace in their religion when upset. A religious aspect of institutional psychological support services may encourage women to seek professional help, while offering them religiously relevant solutions, explanations, and advice.

Finally, on a more general level, the results of this research help to dispel stereotypes and misconceptions of Arab women among educational administrators and health providers. The potential for psychological distress is not only the result

of the oppressive weight of neopatriarchal social ideals and restrictions, but rather the confluence of their own changing and personal values, their family and community's expectations, their desires for the future, and their negotiation with all of these. In sum, an investigation of social determinants and transnational experiences regarding psychological wellbeing adds complexity to a situation commonly steeped in monolithic and antiquated perceptions. An examination of the complexity of experiences of distress and well-being provides points of inquiry and avenues for deepening understanding of the reality of Saudi international students' lived experience, which is integral in serving and accommodating this growing population.

Summary and Discussion

This research has illuminated the social determinants of mental health among Saudi international student women at OSU. The data from these ethnographic interviews illustrates the ways in which women must navigate among the demands of two distinct social contexts during their university education. This thesis has examined the sociocultural and historically specific influences impacting the psychological well-being of Saudi female students at OSU.

This research has described the structures, the stakes, and challenges involved in Saudi women's international education projects. According to these women's accounts, neopatriarchy remains especially powerful in regards to gender norms, honor/shame, reputation, and paradigmatic perspectives on human

behavior. Through these arenas, neopatriarchy forms the basis of the stakes which these women assume in pursuing an international education. By studying in the U.S., Saudi women may compromise their personal and familial reputation and risk (but also determine) marriage opportunities in order to attain a professional advantage, develop their own sense of self, and change their nation. These potential stakes and concerns for their future circumscribe their lived experiences at OSU, as described by their narratives. The stakes exert pressures and expectations, while also providing an outlet for self-interest and agency in patriarchal bargains.

Their narratives illustrate also how these women are reshaping the stakes and goals of their international education. By negotiating and reforming these stakes, they are re-operationalizing measures of moral, social, and personal worth according to their personal priorities and value systems. In this renegotiation, how they interpret and prioritize these stakes may determine how they cope with challenges of studying in the U.S. In other words, their own understanding and investment in certain stakes influences the degree of intensity, consequences, and advantages of their international experience. The stakes not only underpin their experiences and add gravity to the importance of their success, but their investment in certain stakes governs what they consider to be a challenge, concern, or support, which then determines their experiences of well-being or distress.

Specifically, these women claim what is allowed to them under their hegemonic structure in order to realize their own self-interest; for some of them,

their choice for international education carries self-acknowledged implications in their marriage opportunities and future professional life. Although these stakes open an avenue for self-determination, these competing pressures necessitate a renegotiation of self, identity, and standards for behavior and morality, which can be a significant source of confusion and distress, but also an avenue for personal transformation and empowerment.

Under these stakes, women confront and navigate their changing selves by assuming new responsibilities and navigating sources of psychosocial support while being vulnerable to danger, rumors, and distress, as they remold standards of morality and act as autonomous individuals outside of direct control. The results of this body of research have illustrated the ways in which neopatriarchal values and norms burden these women. Significantly however, threads of agency and autonomy are woven throughout their narratives. Postcolonial feminists have argued that women are not passive vessels for honor and shame within a hegemonic system, but actively rework, redefine, and internalize its values which direct their interactions, behavior, and desires (Mahmood 2001, Kandiyoti 1988, Abu-Lughod 1986). Indeed, the narratives of the women in this study confirm this. These women are autonomously acting in their own self-interest which is structured by, but also contends with, the force of neopatriarchal tradition. A renegotiation of stakes and a reinterpretation of psychosocial challenges alter and challenge the existing gender ideologies.

On a macro theoretical level, the nature of these challenges to their mental health can be interpreted as both a contentious and accommodating engagement between agency and heteronomy. The assertion of their autonomy in some ways stands in direct conflict with the weight of neopatriarchy and the authority of the gender contract. As transnational women away from their family, an internalized conscience largely directs their actions. Although the honor/shame system still factors into their decisions, they employ their notions of right and wrong, having redefined them in a transnational context of contradictory expectations and demands. In this way, their moral behavior challenges ideological constructions of gender, which implies that women by nature have questionable integrity and provides the basis for neopatriarchal regulation of gender norms.

Their agency within neopatriarchy's transition—from heteronomy into autonomy—both distresses and empowers them. The continued acceptance of gender stereotypes confounds their deployment of agency. They continue to be questioned and watched and must act under the weight of distrust and skepticism. The presence of continued distrust causes frustration, but also constrains viable avenues for help seeking. That is to say, family and friends' degree of acceptance of their autonomy determines the quality of psychosocial support and advocacy they can receive. On the other hand, their personal development while at OSU, from meeting responsibilities, acting morally, and succeeding academically, allows them to realize their own potential and become more self-confident in their own moral judgment.

A discussion of women's narratives has clarified the sociocultural foundations of experiences of distress and support during a major life change. Knowledge of the underpinnings of these experiences is fundamental to understanding psychosocial characteristics of individual and collective life worlds as embedded within specific sociocultural positions. These social determinants—structures, stakes, challenges, and supports—provide richer understanding of how the connections between the individual and society can manifest specific forms of psychosocial distress and support.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

1. What is your definition of mental health? What characteristics does someone with good mental health have?
2. What was your goal in coming to the US?
3. Describe your responsibilities in SA before you came. How is your life in the US different?
4. How do you think your time here will affect you when you return to SA? Your relationships? Your family? Your job and marriage opportunities?
5. Do you think you will change? How? What does your family think?
6. What expectations does your family have of you?
7. How do you perceive yourself?
8. How do others perceive you?
9. Do others' opinions of you influence how you think about yourself?
10. What are your plans after you return to Saudi Arabia?
11. Why do Saudi Arabian women drop out of university here?
12. Have you ever experienced al-iktiab or waswasa?
 - a. What was it like?
 - b. Do you know someone who has?
13. What do you think causes mental illness?
14. In your opinion, how can someone recover from al-iktiab or waswasa or anxiety?
15. If you were suffering from one of these things, what would you do?

- a. Whose responsibility is it to make you feel better?
16. Can you describe the differences between Arab men and Arab women's experiences at OSU?
17. What do your friends and family think of you studying in the US?

Appendix B: List of Research Participants

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Marital status</u>	<u>Education level</u>
Zainab	single	undergraduate
Malaika	single	undergraduate
Norah	single	undergraduate
Selma	married	graduate
Heli	married	graduate
Soraya	divorced	graduate
Remi	married	undergraduate
Sanaa	single	graduate
Latifah	single	undergraduate
Amina	single	graduate
Saba	single	graduate
Aicha	single	undergraduate