

Attitudinal Shifts Regarding Gender Segregation Among Saudi Males: The influence of Overseas Study Experiences

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the divergence in attitudes between Saudi students who have lived in the United States for four years or more compared to Saudi students who have not lived outside Saudi Arabia for more than a three-month period. A survey was designed based on the main aspects of Saudi culture for this study as surveys are found to be the most common means for measuring attitudes. Two samples of Saudi students were recruited, one sample included students who have lived in the United States for four years or more, and the other sample consisted of those who have not lived outside Saudi Arabia for more than three months. A statistically significant difference between the two samples was found; students who have lived in the United States for four years or more were found to be more tolerant than those who have not lived abroad for more than three months towards the issue of sex segregation in mixed environments.

Keywords: Inter-Cultural Communication, KASP, Acculturation, Adjustment, Cultural Change.

Chapter 1. Introduction

Introduction:

The presence of Saudi students in the United States dates back to 1947. During that time, the Saudi government transferred 30 students studying at the American

University of Beirut in Lebanon to Texas State University in the US. Four years later, in 1951, Saudi Arabia opened its first Cultural Office in New York whose role was supervising students studying in US schools (Abouammoh, Smith & Duwais, 2014). During the first appearance of Saudi students in the United States, that is, the period from 1947 until before 2005, a few studies have been conducted (El-Banyan, 1974; Al-Khudair, 1978; Shabeeb, 1996). The second period of the Saudi students' presence in the United States was associated with starting the King Abdullah Scholarship Program in 2005. The program, according to Bukhari and Denman (2013) is believed to be the largest funded governmental program around the world. Driven by its need for reformation of the cultural structure, the Saudi government launched the program to send Saudi youth abroad (Alhazmi, 2015; Ottaway, 2012). Since the start of the program, thousands of Saudi students have experienced cultural contact with multiple cultures worldwide. The program allows the Saudi students to study in different countries such as the United States, Britain, Australia, Japan, and China (Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education, 2019). These students might bring potential cultural changes upon their return to Saudi Arabia due to their cultural contact with countries/cultures they temporarily settled in (Taylor, Charles, Albasri & Wasmiah, 2015). By reviewing the relevant literature, an in-depth look at cultural change's possibility appears to have been complex and face several obstacles, such as cultural dimension differences, psychological stresses, and behavioral difficulties.

Since the beginning of the KASP program, a number of studies have been conducted on Saudi students in the United States. Most of these studies followed the descriptive approach and only a few followed the quantitative approach. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches are essential for building an integrated understanding of human phenomena. However, most of the studies on Saudi students have mainly focused on descriptive views. These studies dealt with issues of acculturation and adjustment challenges, focusing on the use of the interviews and then reviewing the most notable topics that appear during the interview with the respondents. These

topics revolve around behavioral difficulties that include language difficulties, weather difficulties, eating difficulties, and psychological difficulties that include attachment from home and family, loneliness, isolation, and racism. These topics are significant; however, it is time to bring a different view of the experiences of Saudi students in the United States. A view that looks at the overall level of experience, examines one element of Saudi culture, and uses a quantitative approach that sees the experience as an objective matter is needed. In this research, the purpose of utilizing the quantitative approach, besides diversifying Saudi students' body of knowledge, was to impart a different perspective about this topic. The application of this perspective occurred by subjecting the KASP program to investigation and trying to inspect its final results on Saudi society regarding the possibility of a change in Saudi students' cultural values as an outcome of living in the United States. Cultural change was among the goals that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia aimed to obtain from establishing this program.

Research Question:

This study focuses on one potential change that Saudi students in the United States may bring back, decreasing Wahhabi's impact on Saudi society; sex segregation. The research question is: Will Saudi male students living in the United States for four years or more report a more tolerant attitude towards mixed-sex workplaces in Saudi Arabia than domestic students who have never lived outside Saudi Arabia for more than three months?

The study involves only male participants because men are the most substantial factor in a woman's inability to work. Saudi culture is a male domination culture in which men play an essential pivotal role in determining women's decisions (Alqahtani & Hizam, 2015; Tønnessen, 2016).

This study uses U-curve theory as a reference in participants' selection. The participants from the United States enrolled in this study fall within the last stage of

the U-curve theory, mastery stage, in which participants have been living in the US for 49 months (four years) or more. Also, by doing so, this study targets undergraduate students who form 49%, the majority of KASP members (Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education, 2019).

Theoretical Framework:

This study builds upon two main theories: U-curve and acculturation. The U-curve theory role will be a reference for the participants' selection regarding the length of stay. Saudi Students in the United States participated in this study will be in the mastery stage. The U-curve theory defines the mastery stage at 49 months or more (Hung-Wen, 1999). The participants from Saudi Arabia will be within the three-month period; they have never been abroad. The results interpretation will be in light of the three possible scenarios that may result from the acculturation of two groups: acceptance, adaptation, and reaction. More detailed explanations of these two theories will be in Chapter Two.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Acculturation Theory:

Acculturation is a phenomenon where cultural-behavioral alterations may occur within both hosts and newcomers; however, the host culture is more likely to be the dominant power impacting the other enormously (Berry, 1997). In 1954, the Social Science Research Council described acculturation as a shift in a culture emerging from direct cultural transmission between two or more cultures (Hansen, Shneyderman & McNamara, 2018). When two cultures interact, there is no doubt that cultural diffusion borrowing, or conflict will arise (Trimble, 2003). "Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups"

(Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits 1936, p. 149).

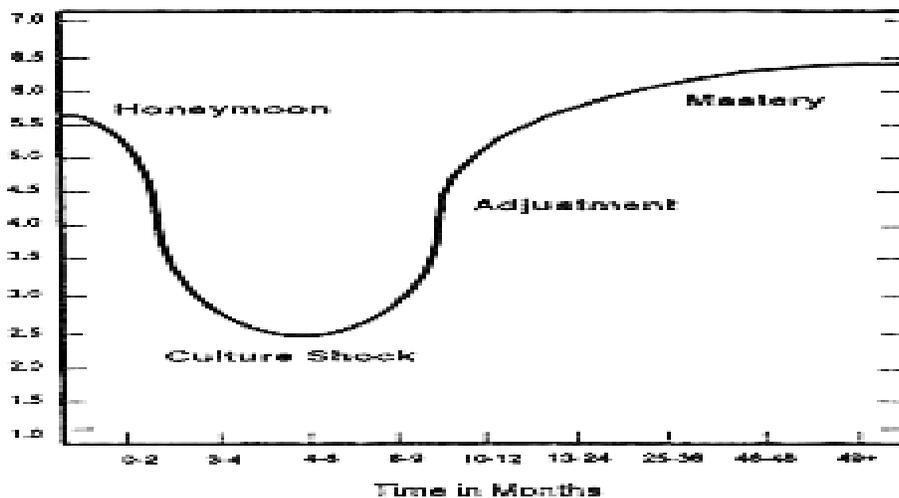
There are three types of cultural patterns resulting from acculturation at the group level. The first is acceptance. In this pattern, the new culture takes over the original culture's values leading to cultural and heritage loss. In this case, the transformation happens deep in the inner values of the affected culture. The second is adaptation. In adaptation, both cultures combine and create a harmonious cultural pattern. The harmony between the two cultures either generates a reconciled cultural pattern or a mutual model where both cultures share some values and, at the same time, maintain some original cultural aspects, while living in a peaceful environment. The third pattern involves reaction. Due to the interaction of cultures, the result may be oppression or rejection of one culture by the other. In the latter situation, a contra-acculturative would be formed as a psychological reaction. In such cases, contra-acculturative is either compensation of a sense of inferiority or a desire to return to the original culture (Redfield, Linionu & Herskov, 1936).

U-Curve Theory:

The role of time can be understood through one of the most common theories in the domain of intercultural communication: U-curve Theory. Adjustment to a new culture is an element that occurs in people (students, workers, refugees, etc.) who find themselves in new cultures. The U-curve, commonly-known as Lysgaard's U-curve model, is a theory that seeks to explain how people adjust to new cultures (An & Chiang, 2015). It refers to the adjustment curve, which traces how a person interacts with the host culture (Markovizky & Samid, 2008). For international students, the adjustment to a new culture allows them to settle into the learning institutions with ease. A fast and smooth adjustment to the foreign culture will enable people to function effectively in the new cultures (Louis, 1980). The U-curve model allows the description of the cultural adjustment process that foreigners experience to alter their original cultural-based beliefs in order to adapt to the host culture

(Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). The theory notes that there are four stages of cultural adjustment. The four stages are; the honeymoon stage, the culture-shock stage, the adjustment stage, and the mastery stage. The phases occur progressively, and new elements of integration characterize each stage (Black & Mendenhall 1991)

Degree of Adjustment



The U-curve of cross-cultural adaptation (Source: Hung-Wen, 1999)

Honeymoon Stage:

Many foreigners find the honeymoon stage exciting (Gammel 1998). In this stage, thrilling events occur. The person moving into the new culture does not have time to diagnose the cultural elements of the host people fully. Students during this stage engage in learning about the school, their classroom schedules, and the geographical layout of the school and the local community. They are interested in learning about exciting places to visit, such as museums, monuments, shopping malls, and other areas of interest. It is also in this phase that the students make their first contact with members of their host culture (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). The new students are eager to make new friends, who usually guide them around. In cases where there are language barriers, the first people of contact are critical in guiding the newcomers. The people in this stage are learning about essential elements of the new culture, such

as diet, currency conversions, transportation, and other mundane activities (Black & Mendenhall, 1991).

However, at the end of the honeymoon stage, the excitement declines, and they enter a new phase where they start to feel overwhelmed by the new culture (Markovizky & Samid, 2008). The new stage is known as the culture-shock stage.

Culture-shock Stage:

In this phase, people want to build more meaningful relationships. However, it may not be easy to develop friendships quickly due to underlying cultural differences (Torbiorn, 1982). The local are also apprehensive of the foreign culture and want to understand as much as they can about the foreigners before they extend their friendship (Torbiorn, 1982).

Further, frustration develops in this stage as foreigners begin to feel alienated from their friends and family. They begin to feel alienating as they settle down and have more free time, which allows them to take a closer look at their surrounding environment and understand the local culture more deeply. In this stage, people start to understand the new elements of the local culture. In this stage, foreigners also start to identify new elements of the culture and begin forming perceptions regarding the new culture (Tobiorn, 1982). The phase also requires an adjustment of the foreigner's culture, and they have to adjust their behaviors and adopt the elements of the local culture (Markovizky & Samid, 2008). For example, in this stage, people may find that they are struggling with communication, especially if they have strong accents which may cause the locals hosting them to struggle to understand what is being communicated.

The excitement begins to fade, as the foreigners become accustomed to the local culture.

For students, the schoolwork may begin piling up, causing them to become more

frustrated. Additionally, elevated expectations begin to cause frustrations if they are unmet, and the foreigners must adjust their expectations, and these experiences become frustrating. Foreigners also can become bitter towards the local culture, as they find changes too much to handle.

Adjustment Stage:

The adjustment stage allows frustrations to decline as foreigners get used to and appreciate the host culture (Usunier, 1998). It is also characterized by increasing knowledge and satisfaction as foreigners learn how to operate in the new culture. People becoming apprehensive about the local culture and realize that they need to embrace it. For students, this is the stage where they begin to become more familiar with the local culture and lose the selective perception about the host culture that they gained and start to sufficiently acclimate to it and master how to act correctly based on the social standards of the host environment. The familiarity allows them to lower their expectations and become more realistic about the local environment (Usunier, 1998; Townsend, 2007).

Mastery Stage:

The final stage, mastery, involves the total embracement of the host culture (Black & Mendenhall, 1991). At this stage, the language and communication aspects have improved immensely to match the local culture. The accent may have changed significantly to match the host culture's accent. Foreigners also begin to understand the actions of the local culture and embrace them, which reduces the frustration that they may have been experiencing. Students in this stage have also made friends and feel part of the host community. Foreigners embrace the local cultures and enjoy being in the host culture more. There is a higher tolerance for the new elements of the host culture, especially the strange elements (Black & Mendenhall, 1991). For students, this is the stage where they experiment with the dishes and elements of the

cultures that they were reluctant to try. The visitors also teach the host culture interesting factors of their culture.

Sex Segregation in Workplaces:

There is a justifiable need to enhance the structure of the Saudi economy, especially in terms of women's participation (Alqahtani, 2012). Women are a large part of the population, and their failure to engage in economic activities means that nearly half of the population does not contribute to economic growth and development. Cultural and religious differences and intolerance hamper the success of measures taken to enhance Saudi economy. "Legislative, social, educational, and occupational constraints prevent women from fully participating in the Saudi labor market" (Saqib, 2016, p. 90). The regulations that prohibit women from engaging in or making economic and political decisions causes them to be economically dependent, which

robs them of their independence. Consequently, many women contend with unhappy marriages (Alqahtani, 2012).

Data indicates that women in Saudi Arabia are overwhelmingly wasted power. For instance, only 6% of Saudi women work in the labor market, making Saudi Arabia one of the countries with the smallest contribution of women to the economy (Alqahtani, 2012; Chulov, 2017). 80% of working women are in the education sector, and 16.9% are in the medical industry, while just 0.8% work in the private sector (Alqahtani, 2012).

Saudi Arabia has explored various ambitious measures to enhance women's contributions to the labor force market (Saqib, 2016). However, these measures have not helped improve women's involvement in the Saudi labor force. In 2017, the General Authority for Statistics in Saudi Arabia indicated that the unemployment rate among males in Saudi Arabia does not exceed 6%, while it is 34.5% among

women (Williams, Al-awwad, & Alfayez, 2019). Therefore, there is still massive untapped potential. The government should implement more further measures to overcome these obstacles. These steps include:

1. improving the educational system
2. improving the regulations of the labor market, which do not create equality between men and women
3. shedding light on the positivity of women's participation in the labor force (Saqib, 2016).

One of the most significant steps that Saudi Arabia has taken to bring about changes in the social and economic levels was through King Abdullah Scholarship Program. Since the beginning of King Abdullah Scholarship Program in 2005, thousands of Saudi students have benefited from American educational institutions (Taylor, Charles, Albasri & Wasmiah, 2015). These days, more than 50000 Saudi students' study in various American states, representing 60% of the total Saudi students enrolled in the program (AlAsiri, 2019; AlShehri, 2018; Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education, 2019).

Chapter 3. Method and Results

Method:

Participants/Procedure:

This study used a survey to answer the research question. Participants in this study were 199 Saudi citizens, divided into two groups; 93 participants from Saudi Arabia, and 106 Saudi students living in the United States. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling. The purposive sample strives to target individuals of a particular nature for inclusion in the study (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015). Students participating in this study are exclusively Saudi international students in the United

States. To find whether there is a significant difference between the attitude of both groups toward working women in mixed environments, a t-test of two-tailed unpaired groups was performed. Data was analyzed using SPSS computer Statistic software.

The survey was sent to two professors at Taif University in Saudi Arabia. They were asked to distribute it to their students and to share it with professors from other regional universities in Saudi Arabia. Regarding the sample from the United States, the survey was sent to the presidents of three Saudi student associations: Fresno State University, Indiana University- Purdue University Indianapolis, and Indiana Tech University, they were asked to distribute the surveys to members of their associations. Data collection occurred between March 1, and March.

The final data for both samples included only male participants because men are the most influential factor in a woman's inability to work. As described in Alqahtani and Hizam (2015) the culture of Saudi Arabia is a culture of male domination in which men play an essential pivotal role in determining women's choices. Even if they are willing to work, Saudi women cannot exceed the restrictions and powers that men create. These restrictions and controls are not only a significant impediment to a woman's ability work, but also ownership her decisions (Tønnessen, 2016). In other words, the focus of this research is the extent of the cultural shift that studying abroad may have on the primary element of resistance toward Saudi women aspiring to obtain their legitimate rights. After all, these rights that the government supports through its recent decisions include allowing women to drive, to travel without a guardians' permission, and to stay in hotels without guardians, as well as prohibiting and not allowing marriage for people under the age of eighteen.

Sample from Saudi Arabia:

The sample from Saudi Arabia included only those who not lived outside Saudi Arabia for more than three months. The participants were selected this way to limit

the control group for this study to find the effect of the living abroad variable. Accordingly, the U-curve theory helped determine the length of time on which participants from Saudi Arabia would be excluded.

According to the theory, living abroad for three months falls within the honeymoon stage. During the honeymoon time, the other culture would have an impact on someone. However, three months is not enough time to develop a stable attitude toward full adoption from the American culture. So, participants from Saudi Arabia, who answered that they had lived outside Saudi Arabia for more than three months were excluded from the study. After sorting the data to only include the targeted sample (living abroad variable and sex status), the sample size of participants from Saudi Arabia was 78.

Seventeen of the participants from Saudi Arabia were from the South of Saudi Arabia, two from the East, one from the North, forty-three from the West, and fifteen from the Central region. Ages ranged from 18 to 44 years (mean age =22). Four individuals were married, and

seventy-four were single. Sixty-seven individuals were Bachelor students, and six were Graduate students, and five were Associate degree students.

Sample from the United States:

The sample from the United States included only male participants who have been living in the USA for more than four years. Considering the goal of this study was to examine the impact of cultural adoption on Saudi Arabia, the selection of the participants from the United States was based on the last stage of the U-curve theory, mastery stage. The mastery stage requires four years, according to the theory's timeline. Thus, participants from the United States must have been living in the United States for four years. After sorting the data to include only the targeted sample (living abroad variable and sex status), the sample size of participants from the

United States was 45 participants.

Six of the 45 participants from the United States were from the South of Saudi Arabia, fifteen from the East, two from the North, twelve from the West, and ten from the Central region. Ages ranged from 20 to 43 years (mean age =27). Fourteen individuals were married, and thirty- one was single. Thirty-one individuals were Bachelor students, and fourteen were Graduate students.

Instrument:

To answer the research question, I created a semantic scale survey of seven items where participants answered the question: What is your impression about a Saudi girl working in a mixed environment? Each item had two opposite poles indicating a positive or negative impression. For example, participants were asked whether they think that a woman who works in a mixed environment.

Results:

Will male Saudi students living in the United States for more than four years report a more tolerant attitude towards mixed-sex workplaces in Saudi Arabia than domestic students who have never lived outside Saudi Arabia for more three months?

The t.test shows that the difference between groups is statistically significant. The mean of the 45 Saudi students who have been living in the United States for more than four years was 66.37, SD =16. The mean of the 78 domestic participants who not lived outside Saudi Arabia for more than three months was 57.80, SD=20.65, $t(121) = 2.39$, $p = 0.01$. Therefore, Saudi students in the United States reported a more tolerant attitude towards mixed-sex workplaces in Saudi Arabia than domestic students who have never lived outside Saudi Arabia for more three months.

Chapter 4. Discussion

The Results Provide Evidence of Kasp's (King Abdullah Scholarship Program) Ability to Change Saudis' Attitude on Saudi Working Women in Mixed Environments. As The Results Revealed, Saudi Students Who Have Lived in America for Four or More Years Showed Significantly More Tolerant Attitudes Toward Mixed Environments Than Their Saudi Peers Who Have Not Lived Outside Saudi Arabia for More Than Three Months. A Thoughtful Consideration of These Results Indicates Many of Possibilities That May Be Behind This Shift That Contributed to The Saudis in America Adopting This Tolerant Attitude.

Connecting the results of this study to the three patterns that result from acculturation at the group level (Reaction, Acceptance, and Adaptation) can draw three likely conclusions. First, the pattern of Reaction does not apply to Saudi students participating in this study. The pattern of Reaction would be supported by a psychological reaction of the rejection that Saudi students came to feel toward American culture because of bad experiences in the United States after exposure to racism, for example. Such events would cause Saudi students to isolate themselves and refuse all Americans and Western values-society due to compensation of inferiority sense or a desire to go back to the original culture. In this case, the result would be a tendency to reject women's work in mixed environments to have a less tolerant attitude than the results showed.

This result would have the Saudi students maintain their prior beliefs. The findings do not support this trend.

Second, when looking for evidence of the Acceptance pattern, one might find that no longer oppose women working in mixed environments. However, before beginning to explain the results based on the Acceptance pattern, it is necessary to highlight that Redfield, Linton, and Herskov (1936) pointed to complete cultural and heritage

losses among this scenario. Within the limits of this study, this criterion applies only to what has been studied, which is the position of the Saudis on women's work in mixed environments. This research studied one aspect of Saudi culture related to the relationship between men and women, precisely sex segregation. It considers that the position of the Saudis on sex segregation is a genuinely religious and heritage-cultural belief stemming from the deep foundations of Saudi Islamic and Arabic identity (Al- Qahtani & Hizam 2015; Abu-Lughod 1989; Bajunid & Elias, 2017; Feghali 1997; Salamah, 2016; Wagemakers, 2016).

It is possible to say that the students have given up their original opposition to having women work in mixed environments. The current view can be a result of a profound shift in inner values because of living in the United States. This is in line with the acculturation at the group level that the theory predicts with the Acceptance pattern. In the Acceptance pattern, the theory hypothesizes that foreigners will assimilate "not only to the behavior patterns, but the inner values of the culture they have come into communication with" (Redfield, Linton & Herskov, 1936. p. 152). Such a profound transformation can be seen in the previous literature. Indeed, Bilal (2017), and Heyn (2013) found that studying in the United States enabled Saudi students to build or rebuild their beliefs and values. For example, one of the values mentioned the most was students' ideas and beliefs about women (Bilal, 2017; Heyn ,2013). One participant said that "I think women have the right to work everywhere just like men have this right" (Heyn, 2013. p. 109).

These profound changes in cultural values and beliefs lead to talking about mental programming. Because they were programmed at an early age, most of our values and beliefs are not rational (Hofstede, 1980). It is possible to say that the experience of studying abroad enabled Saudi students to review and to question some of their values and ideas from their original culture, including their attitude towards women working in mixed environments, as the results of this study showed. This

interpretation can also be supported by the notion of mental programming, precisely the collective level, in which people can change through the environment around them. According to Alhazmi and Nyland (2010) for Saudi men, perceptions about women are associated with fear and hesitation. These two perceptions stem from the sex segregation on which they were brought up culturally and religiously. The feeling of fear and doubt stems from the fact that the man has the conviction that women are weak and cannot defend themselves in the event of an assault that may take her life, which is essential.

Simultaneously, some men are "not confident" enough to control their sexual desires without social maintenance" (Alhazmi & Nyland 2010, p. 9). Studying abroad may allow the students to test some of their fears and hesitation regarding the relationship between men and women.

Living in a society where males and females interacting and working in everyday life as happening in American society does not mean forbidden actions are going to occur as Wahhabis ideology states. This interpretation is in line with what one Saudi student said about his experience living abroad:

I had a certain idea about [women's role], like, working outside home ... but when I came here and saw women's life, yes certainly women don't live in paradise, but in the end, she could be herself [what she wants to be] in one way or another" (Alhazmi, 2010, p.16).

Third, it appears that Saudi students in America have been able to create daily interactive spaces to connect with Americans; these spaces depend on shared values and interests. These shared interests and values, as the theory states in the Adaptation pattern, work meaningfully for individuals from both cultures to provide common cultural grounds and events of occasionally meeting (Redfield, Linton & Herskov, 1936). To clarify, the tolerant attitude the students reported in this study can be assumed to be a success of the acculturation process they went through. The

harmony of opinions and ideas that occur in daily life between Saudis and Americans can facilitate the adaptation of Saudi students and make them feel that they live in a reconciliatory environment, hence the success of the acculturation process. This interpretation is consistent with a previous study by Al Musaiter (2015). It found that shared similar values with people of the American culture encourage Saudi students to communicate effectively. For example, Saudi students in the United States succeeded in using cultural-common with Americans to create a thriving communicational environment. One of the things that Americans and Saudis have in common is their enthusiasm for sports. One Saudi student relied on his passion for sport as a successful strategy for creating a good relationship with American society members, which, in turn, facilitated harmony with American people-culture (Al Musaiter, 2015). Another student found in talking about religion a way to create a mutual space that allowed him to have a good relationship with American people (Al Musaiter, 2015). Despite the profound differences between Islamic religion and Christianity, the student found a mutual relationship between him and religious students (Al Musaiter, 2015). There was an atmosphere of respect and friendly discussion between him and people who have an obligation to their religion, even if they were from a different religion. This is consistent with prior studies (Gareis, 2012; Hinchcliff-Pelias & Greer, 2004) that mutual interests and values allow international students to form friendships with people of the host culture and not to feel alone during the time living overseas. Hence, helping them adapt to the host culture and decreasing acculturative stress.

Conclusion

There were two main goals and contributions from conducting this study. The first was to verify the possibility of changes in Saudi students' (KASP members) cultural values occurring from the acculturation due to studying abroad. The second was to add a quantitative dimension to the studies of Saudi students in the United States.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has invested hundreds of millions in international education to bring about cultural change via its students who study in several countries around the world. Despite the cultural differences between Saudi Arabic and the American culture, Saudi students deal with acculturative stress while studying abroad. This study revealed the King Abdullah Scholarship Program has the ability to change the attitude of Saudis towards Saudi women working in mixed environments. This thesis revealed that Saudis who have lived in the United States for more than four years showed a more tolerant attitude toward mixed-sex environments than Saudis who did not live out Saudi Arabia for more than three months.

The present study addresses a gap in literature regarding Saudi international students in the United States by focusing on one aspect of Saudi culture; sex segregation, in contrast to previous studies that focused mostly on Saudi students' experiences in general. Empirically, the present thesis subjected KASP's ability to bring about cultural change to examination.

Additionally, the present study adds to literature related to Saudi students through the use of quantitative statistical approach, focusing on the attitude of Saudi on sex segregation at the group level, unlike previous studies that mostly used the descriptive method through personal interviews to collect data.

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