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The role of courage in female leadership

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to one very courageous woman. To my mother, you make me proud to call myself "woman".

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ABSTRACT

Historically, if Saudi women chose to work outside the realm of wife and mother, they had few occupational options. However, the last few years witnessed an increase enrollment of women in senior management and leadership positions in the public and private sectors in Saudi Arabia (Alahmadi, 2011). Saudi women are exposed to different leadership opportunities that were not available to generations before them. Since they are increasingly achieving leadership positions, courage holds even greater importance for women, and by extension, influences how women perceive the role of courage in pursuit of leadership within Saudi society. Literature pertaining to Saudi female leadership is nearly nonexistent and the role of courage as a leadership attribute for successful female leadership is in very short supply.

To fill these gaps in the literature, this study explored the drivers and/or restrainers of Saudi female leaders especially considering the role of courage. It sought to explain how courage helped Saudi women in achieving leadership positions, and how it contributed to their overall success. An exploratory qualitative method using a virtual interview process was used with the aim of gaining insight into the experiences of 10 successful Saudi female leaders. Using a thematic analysis approach, five emergent themes were identified: factors influencing success, challenges, courage definition, courage in action, and recommendations for other women.

Interpretation of the study's findings resulted in three conclusions: (a) the Saudi culture has a great influence, both positively and negatively, on the female participants' leadership success, (b) challenges faced by the female participants are common among women from different societies, and (c) courage plays a pivotal role in the lives of the female participants and is a necessary attribute to achieve leadership success. Future recommendations include investigating factors of the Saudi organizational culture that continue to inhibit females from

assuming leadership roles; seeking perceptions of Saudi males regarding Saudi female leadership in the country; and also exploring characteristics of Saudi family life that supports or inhibits female success as leaders.

Chapter One: Introduction

Leadership and management roles have long been associated with the male gender. Worldwide, the number of women holding leadership positions is very low and less than men (Garcia-Retamero & Lopez-Zafra, 2006). Gender differences and social restrictions due to gender have been evident in all societies. Although the numbers of women in leadership and management roles are greater today than ever before, female leaders continue to face challenges and obstacles when seeking leadership and executive management positions (Garcia-Retamero & Lopez-Zafra, 2006). Sims LeBlanc (1994) describes obstacles for women as "those factors which circumvent or inhibit their entry into jobs, occupations, and organizations; obstacles are seen in the face of inequity" (p. 42). This imbalance or inequality of gender representation is becoming a wide concern especially in the Arab world; i.e. women leadership is by no means a new concept in the Arab countries, especially in Saudi Arabia (Almenkash, Abdulaziz, Shaman, Haijan, & Dagsh, 2007; Doumato, 2010).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the largest country in the Gulf region. Its population is estimated to consist of 28 million people; and women constitute 49.1% of the total population (Alsaleh, 2012). Islam is the official religion and Arabic is the official language. Saudi Arabia is a young nation with deep historical, traditional and religious roots that has rapidly transformed from an empty desert to a modern country, where change began to take place due to the oil discovery and the incorporation of new technologies. Improvements in the educational system, health care industry, and in the overall people's lifestyles started to take place while still maintaining the religious values and cultural practices (Rugh, 2002). As a result, these developments in the country have resulted to introducing Saudis, especially women, to new cultures, concepts, and different social roles.

In such a society that is very patriarchal, Saudi women represent the most traditional and certain roles prescribed to them by society; that is to be a good wife and mother. Some scholars and authors argue that the implementation of the strict interpretations of the Islamic law "Sharia," traditions, and customs can have a negative effect on women roles in Saudi Arabia, which leads to gender inequality (Alsaleh, 2012; Doumato, 2010). Accordingly, "Saudi Arabia has developed a reputation for being more restrictive of women's mobility and public activity than other Arab or Muslim societies due to the implementation of Islamic principles in the society" (Alsaleh, 2012, p. 125). Some scholars believe that the countries where strict Islamic laws are enforced have the lowest rates of education for women and fewer job opportunities (Doumato, 2010).

However, these scholars forgot other critical factors that also have a great impact on the female's status; for instance, the social, economic, and political factors (Alsaleh, 2012). Also, the interpretation of Islamic principles is extremely variable and differs from one Islamic country to another; and has variance implications on the role of women. As Metcalfe (2011) argues, "because of the male domination in the Gulf countries and due to historical events in the region, there is a great misperception and much confusion between what Islam is and what is culturally associated with Islam" (p. 133). Also, Alsaleh (2012) explains, it is the interaction between religious, historical and social factors that has created a central ideology on the role of women in the Saudi society.

Islam values women leadership and views women as an integral part in building every aspect of the society; and there is no proof in the Holy Quran that forbids women from assuming leadership roles (Badawi, 1995). According to the tradition of Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be

Upon Him)[1], "no rule or law exists forbidding women to seek employment; and if an Islamic government prohibits women from working, that government has violated Islamic Law" (Alsaleh, 2012, p. 125). Thus, one might assume that the very small number of visible Saudi female leaders is discouraged by the religion "Islam", whereas obstacles and barriers in the path of Saudi female leaders actually stem from cultural and traditional roots, not religious. According to Fatany (2007) in her Arab News Journal:

> We have to admit that the role of women is still a controversial issue in Saudi society. Hard-liners still insist that the woman's place is in the home. Tribal culture persists among many in society, and changing attitudes are not going to be easy for men or women. For men, it means women's wishes must be considered and respected. It also will require the realization that women in the workplace are a necessary part of our human resource base, not a competitive force but a complementary one. For women, it means that they cannot remain restrained by cultural barriers or dare not speak out or avail themselves of the opportunities offered. The need to change is imperative, and women must realize that they are entitled to enjoy their rights in society (April, 16).

Historically, if Saudi women choose to work outside the realm of wife and mother, they have very limited occupational options. However, they have played a major role in the development of the Kingdom as they hold a unique and powerful position in the domestic life and a growing presence in the social issues of the Saudi community (Alsaleh, 2012). Today, their social status is changing rapidly due to governmental plans that aim at improving educational and employment opportunities for all Saudis, especially women. This ever-changing status of Saudi women has been debated globally in newspapers, magazines, journals, conferences, talk

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[1] (Peace Be Upon Him) is a conventionally complimentary phrase attached to the names of the prophets in Islam. The phrase is also given the abbreviation *pbuh* in writing

shows, etc.. Women's occupational options have expanded in the last few years, but very few women hold leadership positions and most workplaces remained extremely gender segregated and loaded with gender discrimination issues. Traditional gender stereotypes and social gender role expectations in the country play a vital factor in such obstacles challenging Saudi women in the workplace.

On the other hand, Saudi males are not faced with similar gender-related problems because stereotypical masculine characteristics and male social roles do not generally conflict with the workplace or professional environments. According to Garcia-Retamero and Lopez-Zafra (2006), despite the fact that many women are effective in leadership and management positions, other women facing difficulties due to society's view of leadership as being masculine-oriented. Thus, it is crucial to explore the underlying issues contributing to the success and failure of women in leadership positions in Saudi Arabia.

Despite being faced with so many barriers, Saudi women are just starting to be recognized by the government as having a part to play in the country's economic development and political system (Pharaon, 2004). According to a study done at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, Saudi women hold nearly 70% of the bank accounts in the Kingdom, with deposits worth SAR 62 billion. They hold 20% of corporate shares and own 15% of the private companies and 10% of the real estate sector. Further, there are approximately 23,000 Saudi businesswomen (Alturki & Braswell, 2010; Doumato, 2010). Much of this can be attributed to changes in political circumstances.

Furthermore, King Abdullah had opened many doors to Saudi women. He has declared and announced in September 2011 that women would be appointed to the Consultative Council of Saudi Arabia's "Shura Council", which is the most influential body of the country; and that

women would be able to run and vote in the Kingdom's 2015 municipal elections. This step

raised the prospect of women holding ministerial and leadership positions. The role of female

leaders in Saudi Arabia is thus becoming more important than ever to studies of gender and

leadership.

Accordingly, after many years, the growth of political participation by Saudi women has

resulted in a new vision for the leadership role of women in Saudi Arabia; but these

developments have not been without debate and resistance. These strides have been debated

formally by the officials in the country, and informally by Saudi citizens at everyday informal

conversations. The different aspects of Saudi culture and traditions have affected these debates.

That is, arguments about female leadership and the influence of Saudi culture on that leadership

are everlasting (Yamani, 2005).

To understand the struggle facing Saudi women who strove for leadership roles, it is

important to understand how Saudi women leaders achieved leadership success. Considering the

inherent gender-based cultural barriers in the Saudi society, courage is a personal and leadership

attribute that might play a crucial role in how Saudi women leaders respond to the inevitable

cultural challenges to achieve leadership success.

Courage is implicit in most leadership theories (Jablin, 2006; Treasurer, 2009). It may be

crucial and a key factor in the success of Saudi female leaders. While people could argue that

courage has always been important to leaders, the current state of rapid change in the Saudi

society with regards to women leadership status now makes courage a necessary requirement of

successful female leaders. There is little knowledge of the role of courage in successful female

leadership; even less is known about how women define and perceive the role of courage in their

leadership success. Therefore, this study aims to understand the role of courage by examining

and exploring the perceptions and attitudes of Saudi female leaders about the value of courage in their leadership endeavors. The study of courage in leadership is especially significant in an environment of change and development in the women leadership status in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Problem Statement

The last few years witnessed an increased enrollment of women in senior management, leadership positions in the public and private sectors in Saudi Arabia. Thus, as a result of increasing participation of women in different fields of management and leadership roles in Saudi Arabia, there becomes more of a need to research this phenomenon. Recent developments show clear plans of policy makers in Saudi Arabia towards an even greater role for women in public life and into top leadership positions in both public and private sectors. Despite the fact that the leadership role of Saudi women is becoming more visible than ever before, evidence suggests that women in leadership positions are facing a different reality from their male counterparts due to organizational, personal and cultural challenges that may inhibit their leadership success (Alahmadi, 2011).

Cultural barriers can kill ideas, stop development and minimize opportunities. Hence, Saudi women leaders who have the courage and the urge to break all the obstacles are true leaders. It is this researcher's belief that courage is one of the key factors that have made Saudi women able to make their remarkable influence in the society and break many social and traditional norms in order to advance to leadership positions in many fields. Thus, it is important for researchers to attempt to better understand the personal reasons, experiences, and motivations that account for why and how Saudi women are taking these positions, the concerns, and the challenges that come along their leadership paths.

Courage has been a topic of psychological research for decades (Thompson, 2000). However, only recently has the concept of courage received increased attention in its importance to the effectiveness of women leadership. That being said, gaps remain in what researchers know about the role of courage in successful women leaders. Further, little was known about how women leaders perceived and valued courage as a leadership attribute.

Furthermore, most of the Western media have portrayed the Saudi women as leading idle lives (Mill-Rosser, Chapman, & Francis, 2006). It often focuses on less important matters such as driving or the veil as main concerns of women rights, which they could be; but to many Saudi women, other more critical issues, such as work and education, are like the most important. In addition, there is an abundant amount of work regarding the change and improvement in both the educational and work fields in Saudi Arabia, but there remains a gap in the literature on the visible and debatable change in the status of Saudi women leadership.

Thus, there is a necessity for Saudi women leaders' voices in the literature, using their experiences and understanding their perspectives and needs. That being said, this study is by no means aims at demeaning the Saudi women's past as well as their current status in the Saudi society. This study will focus on their leadership movement, one that is currently taking place and is very visible in all aspects of the society. Additionally, this study will clear out any misunderstandings or any lack of knowledge about Saudi women leadership and replace that knowledge shortage with more accurate information, whether positive or negative, from the women themselves by providing an opportunity for these women's voices and experiences to be amplified.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the lived experiences of women leaders

in Saudi Arabia and investigate any obstacles or challenges encountered due to gender bias or stereotyping. Thus, the goal of the study is to develop an in-depth understanding of their leadership experiences and challenges. Furthermore, the study will explore the role of courage as a personal leadership attribute and examine how women leaders perceive the role and action of courage in their leadership endeavors. In order to accomplish the purpose of this study, this study will use exploratory qualitative methods using an electronic interview process.

Research questions. The following questions will guide this study:

1. What are the leadership experiences of Saudi women leaders?

2. What challenges did these women leaders face to achieve their leadership success?

3. How did courage as a leadership attribute impact their leadership success?

4. How did Saudi culture influence their success?

Researcher's Perspective

The main motivation for my dissertation topic is my personal experience and background as a Saudi woman who has lived significant amounts of time both in the United States and Saudi Arabia. In the last few years, I have developed an interest in leadership, and this has been my motivation in investigating the current female leadership status in Saudi Arabia. As a Saudi woman who was born and raised in Saudi Arabia but lived a significant amount of time in the United States to pursue my doctorate degree in organizational leadership, when I thought about a topic or focus for my dissertation, the first idea that crossed my mind was Saudi female leadership. As I observed the status of Saudi females develop, I was interested in Saudi female leadership, and the overall change in their leadership status in the society. Further, as news of the developing status of Saudi females continued, I was encouraged to focus on how the Saudi culture influences female leadership in the society.

People usually ask me about life back home, women's rights in Saudi Arabia, and the reason for being away from home and family. I always respond to them that I have a dream, and I am here to make my dream come true. My goal is to achieve a doctorate and have the opportunity as a Saudi woman to be an effective leader. Within my life, I am surrounded by women who have demonstrated courage and leadership. My mother is one of the great women leaders who worked as a school principal for almost thirty years. In fact, without her inspiration, encouragement, and motivation, I could not have imagined I would leave my family and my country to study abroad. Several reasons would have kept me in Saudi Arabia, such as family, culture, and homesickness. Retrospectively, being courageous to step out of my comfort zone to pursue my dream and my whole experience through this process would play a critical part in my objective to write this paper.

Further, my objective is to give a voice to previously voiceless women in the literature, to increase awareness to the roles of Saudi women leaders, and the changes that are currently taking place and are still influenced by the cultural and traditional perceptions. In addition, just as courage had played a major role in becoming who I am today, I wanted to explore how courage as a leadership attribute affected their leadership success. Therefore, I cannot help but wonder what their leadership experiences are and what challenges they have faced in a traditional country like Saudi Arabia to assume leadership positions.

General Study Assumptions & Limitations

It is important to acknowledge that research evidence is usually created with certain values and assumptions in mind. In the process of designing this study, stating currently held assumptions about the topic is valuable. Assumptions include:

1. There is a lack of interest in the literature on the topic of female leadership in Saudi Arabia.

2. All female participants will share their stories; answer all questions objectively, openly, and honestly for this study.

3. Each female participant experienced some form of cultural barriers, such as stereotyping or gender bias.

4. The female participants of this study may have various leadership experiences, and they all faced different issues.

5. Due to the nature of the qualitative inquiry, a limitation exists as to the ability to capture representative views of all Saudi females. A small sample will be used to explore the individual experiences of the involved women without the intention of generalizing conclusions to the broader population. Also, while practices will be used to minimize researcher bias, the interpretive nature of this research creates a limitation to how the findings can be interpreted. As a Saudi woman, the researcher acknowledges inherent assumptions will influence the study conclusions.

Conceptual Framework

Specifically, the conceptual framework for this study will be derived from conceptualizations of courage that appear in the leadership and organizational literature. Courage is viewed as the guiding light that allows a leader to succeed at building sustainable relationships, empowering others, and developing a high moral sense in self and others (Bolt, 1996; Northouse, 2010). Also, it is courage that allows leaders to envision a new reality, to continue to learn and teach, and finally to make decisions that are predicated on knowledge of the past with a keen eye towards the future. The ability to carry out these endeavors is

intertwined with the person's being, which is further grounded in the person's beliefs, values, and commitments (Trigg, 2006).

The construct of courage as a source for leadership will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. In addition, a background on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will be presented with a discussion of the religion of Islam, the Saudi culture, Saudi education and employment and their influence on women leadership. Research on women's leadership challenges in the workplace in Saudi Arabia will also be presented.

Definitions of terms. The following terms are specific to the dissertation topic:

Courage. The term courage is defined as an accountable behavior that challenges one to confront and perseveres through tough dilemmas and better the lives of others (Treasurer, 2009). According to Badaracco and Ellsworth (1989) courage "is the ability to do and say what one believes to be right, rather than convenient, familiar, or popular; to act on one's vision for his or her organization; it is to resist the many pressures to accede to demands of particular situations" (pp. 201-202). Kennedy (1964) emphasizes that courage is action predicated on "conscience and personal standards of ethics, integrity, or morality" (p. 251).

Culture. Culture consists of seven factors that can help to understand, interpret, and anticipate another culture: personal identity, power differential, attitude to change, the notion of time, communication style, etiquette, and emotional expressions (Malewski, 2005). For the purpose of this study, culture is viewed from the Saudi Arabian cultural context. It is described as the community of participation resulting from a homogeneous Islamic culture (Al-Twaijri, Al-Dukhayyil, & Al-Muhaiza, 1994). The Saudi culture is a highly collective society with a strong family-based orientation where gender roles are clear (Ajarimah, 2001); there is a strong

preference for certainty over uncertainty, with a tendency to place more importance on relationships over tasks (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002).

Feminist theory. Feminist theory "focuses on the effect society has on gender inequalities and how such findings can bring about change in gender roles" (Bankston, 2000, p. 203). Patton (1990) indicates that feminist theory assumes the importance of gender and gender differences. From an Islamic perspective, Vidyasagar and Rea (2004) identified Islamic feminism as "the achievement of space for and by Muslim women, a space of autonomy and a career in a society that inconsistently forbids and permits professional autonomy and women's caring role" (p. 265).

Sharia. Sharia is translated as Islamic law that guides not only religious practices but all aspects of Muslim life. There is extreme variation in how Sharia is interpreted and implemented among and within Muslim societies (Almunajjid, 1997).

Significance

This study intends to address a gap in the literature with respect to the topic of female leadership in Saudi Arabia and to explore the experiences of successful female leaders, from a strength-based rather than a deficit-based perspective. The researcher attempts to highlight the leadership experiences of Saudi women leaders to enrich Saudi women leaders' practices and the outcomes they engender. Although the literature review shows a great deal of discussion about female leadership, literature pertaining to female leadership in Saudi Arabia is nearly nonexistent. Consequently, there is a need for further study to determine the presence, impact, obstacles, and challenges of female leadership in the Kingdom. This need renders this study to be exceedingly significant, especially to Saudi women who strive for independence, political influence, social freedoms, and particularly leadership success.

Moreover, research about the influence of Middle-Eastern culture especially that of Saudi Arabia, on female leadership is extremely limited. Based on underrepresented knowledge in the literature about women's leadership practice in Saudi Arabia, coupled with the limited evidence relative to the role of courage that impact their leadership success, the researcher observes these as further significance for investigating the specific ways in which they experience and perceive courage to survive and thrive across various leadership positions. The literature suggests that courage is the necessary interpersonal attribute that could allow women to thrive and survive as they assume leadership positions (Bennis & Thomas, 2002).

Additionally, courage is an implicit attribute of leadership that is rarely directly explored. What becomes obvious is the lack of information related to the impact of courage on women leadership. This lack of information imposes further research into an area deemed essential for female leaders. Thus, one of the aims of this study is to generate future research into the role of courage in female leadership. Understanding the role of courage in Saudi female leadership is valuable for female leaders who are dealing with the everyday challenges due to cultural and traditional restrictions in the Kingdom.

The researcher believes, as a Saudi woman, using other Saudi women's experiences, is crucial as emphasized by the qualitative practice, the women should be understood through their perspectives and meanings. Evidence within the literature suggests that significant research value can emerge from the experiences of women leaders who have excelled simple beginnings and forged new paths in organizations and communities through their leadership and courageous participation (Walston, 2006).

Consequently, the participants in this study are all high level successful Saudi women leaders from for-profit businesses, non-profit organizations, educational, or government

institutions. Through electronic qualitative interviews and analysis of their leadership experiences, this research focuses on exploring how Saudi women leaders think about, address, and confront challenges, such as stereotypes and gender discrimination, while striving for leadership positions; as well as, their perception of the role and impact of courage in their leadership endeavors.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, an introduction to this research study is provided, which focuses on female leadership in Saudi Arabia and how female leaders define and perceive courage in the context of their leadership success. In addition, the statement of the problem is examined to provide a context from which to understand the issue and to delineate the significance for this qualitative study. The purpose of the study, the research questions are outlined, as well as the conceptual framework is discussed for its relevance to the issue. Finally, this chapter is concluded with a discussion of the researcher's assumptions.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

In Saudi Arabia, women have made significant strides related to developing greater roles for themselves in the workplace over the last decade. Many have forged ahead within society to attain academic degrees and also to fill the leadership ranks of organizational, political, and entrepreneurial occupations. Their leadership status is changing and is becoming more visible in the society than ever before. However, there continue to be specific barriers associated with leadership mobility and success for Saudi women (Almenkash et al., 2007; Doumato, 2010).

The objective of this qualitative study is to look at the experiences of female leaders in Saudi Arabia and examine the role of courage in their leadership endeavors. While much has been written about Saudi Arabia, the focus for this study is Saudi female leadership. The literature on female leadership in Saudi Arabia specifically is very limited. Also, little is known about how courage influences women's leadership potential and success; and gaps remain in the literature on how female leaders perceive and value courage as a leadership attribute.

In this chapter, the literature about Saudi Arabia will be reviewed to understand the background within which to look at women's status in the Kingdom. Thus, this chapter is organized into the following areas: a brief introduction on Saudi Arabia, the factors impacting female leadership in Saudi Arabia including a discussion of religion, culture, education, and employment and their effects on Saudi women status. Also, included is a brief review of the feminism theory; and feminism from an Islamic view. Using an Islamic feminist perspective to view the Saudi women's leadership roles will help in understanding this study's objectives.

This chapter also includes a review of the literature on courage and how it may affect leadership. A full description of courage and the definitions of the construct will be examined.

Direct studies from the organizational and gender literature related to female leadership and courage will also be reviewed. Literature has been selected based on its relevancy to these topics from scholarly publications that were published within the past 5-25 years, including journal articles, doctoral dissertations, and other peer-reviewed documents.

Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a relatively young country that was founded in 1932 by King AbdulAziz Al-Saud (Hamdan, 2005). The Kingdom is the largest country in the Gulf region and covers about 900,000 square miles. It is located between Africa and Asia; it borders the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, and Yemen (see Figure 1). The Saudi Arabian government system is a monarchy ruled by the Al-Saud family with the assistance of a council of ministers (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2014). As of 2014, the population of Saudi Arabia was 28 million people, almost all of whom were Arabs and Muslims; and women constitute 49.1% of the total population. Its capital city, Riyadh, is the largest with a population of 5.4 million followed by Jeddah with 3.5 million and Mecca with 1.5 million, with about 68% of its population between the ages of 15 to 64 (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2014). Arabic is the official language and Islam is the official religion (Pompea, 2002). The Saudi law is derived from Islam, and its constitution is ruled by an interpretation of Islamic law *Sharia*. All of the policies are developed and applied by the government (Almunajjed, 1997; Long, 2005; Pompea, 2002). Sharia law deals with crimes, politics, and economics, as well as personal issues such as marriage, divorce, and diet.

Figure 1. Map of Saudi Arabia. Adapted from *Maps of World*, n.d.,
Retrieved from http://www.mapsofworld.com/saudi-arabia/
majorcities.html. Copyright 2016 by Maps of World. Reprinted with
permission.

In reviewing the history of events that transformed Saudi Arabia into a modern and rich

country, the first and main contributor was the discovery of oil and the wealth that accompanied

it during the 1950s that increased its contact with the West (Almohsen, 2000; Pompea, 2002).

The rapid movement of modernization in Saudi Arabia has resulted in various societal changes.

These include vast improvements in the education, health care, and employment of the Saudi

citizens (Almohsen, 2000). The discovery of oil was a major catalyst that transformed the

kingdom in various respects by enabling the government to develop programs for improved

transportation, telecommunication, electric power, water, and education (Pompea, 2002).

Pharaon (2004) described the condition of Saudi Arabia in the twenty-first century as the

following:

Present day Saudi Arabia is one of the largest market economies in the Middle East. It is

difficult for both Saudis and foreigners to stand back and realize the true extent of

infrastructural development in the Kingdom over the last half a century. From virtually nothing, Saudi Arabia now has a world-class infrastructure network. The revenue from oil has been wisely invested into the modernization of the country in all sectors of the economy. However, Saudi Arabia is facing many challenges as it treads into the twenty-first century. The significant growth in its young population, a substantial decrease in its per capita oil wealth, and its excessive reliance on foreign labor, all contribute to destabilize its impressive developmental path. Furthermore, with the sudden spotlight on Islam and Muslim societies, and in particular the plight of women, it is hardly surprising that the Saudi society is suddenly squirming under this close scrutiny and torn between admitting the desire to progress and emancipate its women and defending its failure to do so. (p. 351)

Women in Saudi Arabia

"Saudi Arabia has developed a reputation for being more restrictive of women's mobility and public activity than other Arab or Muslim societies due to the implementation of Islamic principles in the society" (Alsaleh, 2012, p. 125). Some scholars believe that the countries where strict Islamic laws are enforced have the lowest rates of education for women and fewer job opportunities (Doumato, 2010; Metcalfe, 2011). According to the Global Gender Gap report published by the World Economic Forum in 2006, there are four major areas to measure the extent of inequality between males and females (Mokhtar, 2007). They are economic participation, educational opportunities, political empowerment, and health matters. It was found that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia ranked last in a group of 115 countries, specifically in the areas of economic participation and political empowerment (Mokhtar, 2007).

Another survey carried out in 2005 by Gallup World Poll in eight countries, namely Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, Morocco, and Lebanon solicited opinions regarding the question of whether women should hold leadership positions in the Cabinet and National Council in Islamic nations. The majority agreed where highest percentages of affirmative answers were found in Lebanon and Turkey. Only in Saudi Arabia, the majority disagreed (Newport, 2006). In fact, attitudes toward female leadership in the Islamic nations are changing for better except for Saudi Arabia (Keddie, 2005). Keddie (2005) stated that "differences in gender status in the Muslim world are greater in modern times than they were in the past" (p. 54).

In Saudi society, gender-segregation is practiced from a very early age in the schools and the workplaces. It is believed that even though Saudi Arabia never really accepted the idea of equality between the genders, there has been a major change in the role of women in the Saudi society (Pharaon, 2004; Yamani, 2000). With modernization, research has indicated that the focus on women issues and rights in Saudi Arabia have increased especially with modern education, ease of travel, globalization, and oil wealth (Rugh, 2002; Yamani, 2000). "Education has been one of the major vehicles for the transmission of external values and is bound to have an uneasy relationship with existing social and familial standards" (Yamani, 2000, p. 49).

Now, many educated Saudi women are working and holding leadership positions in same-sex schools, banks, businesses, etc. (Doumato, 2010). However, this does not come without resistance, controversy, and debates. "Change in Saudi Arabia always comes slowly, as there are many vested interests in the maintenance of the status quo" (Rugh, 2002, p. 53). In fact, resistance to change in women's status in Saudi Arabia does not stem from the sexual segregation within the society because there are many unsegregated private organizations in the

country; rather, it comes down to individual Saudi families (Pharaon, 2004). Some women will find support from their families for pursuing their educational and career goals while other families do not support it (Pharaon, 2004). "The men of the new generation have to decide on their attitude toward the role of women. They are still dominant and have to choose either to continue to restrain the aspirations of their sisters, wives, and daughters or encourage them to develop the aspirations that education has afforded them" (Yamani, 2005, p. 409).

Nevertheless, the dynamic of women is reshaping the Saudi society today (Doumato, 2003; Pharaon, 2004). It is believed that the pace of change in women status in Saudi Arabia is about to radically escalate because the younger generations are eager and willing for change (Pharaon, 2004). One of the major influences for this change is the return of the female students who have lived abroad and were exposed and influenced by the western cultures (Long, 2005). In reality, there is a change-willingness gap between women who have studied abroad and women who have not had the chance to pursue their education abroad (Le Renard, 2008).

Indeed, changes are taking place in the status of Saudi women, particularly in their leadership practices. For example, the first Saudi female pilot was hired by a private company in 2004; and in 2009, Nora Al-Fayez was appointed the first female Saudi Minister. She became the Deputy Education Minister. Also, King Abdullah made history in 2011 when he appointed 30 women to the Consultative Council. Further, women were recently eligible to vote during the next council meeting in 2015. Further, Doumato (2010) states that "access to justice for women, may soon improve because the Ministry of Justice announced in 2007 that it will allow women to act as judges, lawyers and legal consultants to other women" (p. 4). These significant strides in the Saudi society opened the doors for Saudi women leaders and allowed the privilege to be part

in all of the social arenas. Such encouraging attitudes at the apex of government in Saudi Arabia testify to the promising future for Saudi female leadership.

In the following section, arguments and discussions on the impact and the roles of religion, culture, education and employment on the Saudi women status will be presented due to their clear influence on the Saudi female leadership status.

Factors Impacting Saudi Female Leadership

Several factors directly impact the possibility of a woman assuming leadership roles. Islamic beliefs and traditions and Saudi culture itself influence the aspirations and opportunities for females. How female children are educated and whether they are prepared for the workforce has also contributed to the current employment status of women. Each of these factors is explained in depth below.

Islam. The word Islam is derived from the Arabic word *Salam* which means peace in English (Long, 2005). The Quran and the Sunnah—the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him)—are the guides for all Muslims in all personal and business matters (Almunajjid, 1997). More than a religion, Islamic principles inform every aspect of life, and the objective of the Muslim is to build a society of health and peace by practicing the will of God in word and deed (Ali, 2008; Almunajjid, 1997). Islam as a religion is based on the Five Pillars of Islam: (a) *Shahada*, which means there is no god but Allah, and Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him) is his messenger; (b) *Salat,* the ritual of praying five times a day; (c) *Zakat*, giving of alms; (d) *Sawm*, fasting from sunrise to sunset during the month of Ramadan; and (e) *Hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca in the month of Duh Al-Hijjah for whomever is capable physically and financially (Pharaon, 2004).

The argument goes that Islam does not guarantee equal rights for women and men and that Islam is the major factor that limits women's rights in Saudi society (Metcalfe, 2011). However, Alsaleh (2012) believes that these scholars forgot other critical factors that also have a great impact on the female's status; for instance, the social, economic, and political factors. In addition, the interpretation of Islamic principles is extremely variable and differs from one Islamic country to another; and has variance implications on the role of women. As Metcalfe (2011) argues, "because of the male domination in the Gulf countries and due to historical events in the region, there is a great misperception and much confusion between what Islam is and what is culturally associated with Islam" (p. 133).

Islam values women and views them as an integral part in building every aspect of society (Alsaleh, 2012). Muslim women, either single or married, under Islamic principles, enjoy full economic independence and have full rights and privileges to control their belongings and properties without any disturbance from anyone (Alsaleh, 2012). Additionally, a woman in Islam has the full right of choosing her spouse and without her approval, the marriage contract is considered invalid (Alsaleh, 2012). These Islamic values are not clearly understood by many in the world, and certainly some women within Muslim cultures do not experience their full rights due to cultural traditions. Arguments regarding this misperception between religion and culture will be discussed in details in the following section.

Scholars have found evidence of gender equality in the Quran and discussed that there is more in the Quranic verses and Islamic history to advocate gender equality than there is to counter it. For instance, the Quran asserts that "all humans are the children of one man (Adam) and one woman (Eve) and that we all share the same lineage" (Alsaleh, 2012, p. 124). Moreover,

in the Quran, there are many verses ensure that Islam clearly maintains that as human beings, both genders are given equal rights because they have the same origin (Alsaleh, 2012).

For example, many Quranic verses assert that educational attainment is necessary and mandatory for both males and females. Alsaleh (2012) states, "It is obvious through the direct study of the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet, men and women in Islam are allowed to have equal access to knowledge" (p. 125). That being said, women have the right to participate and contribute in the socio-political system under the Islamic principles (Alsaleh, 2012).

Based on the Islamic principles, leadership is not a result of divine ordination, but rather an attribution built on a foundation of trust and acceptance from followers (Ali, 2011). Muslim scholars believe that effective leadership is important for prosperity and the preservation of faith and the well-being of the Muslim societies. Islamic principles advocate the notion that valid leadership is beneficial to society, civic duty, and legitimate only through reciprocal relationships and shared influence toward common goals (Ali, 2011).

Many verses in the Quran assert that women have the privilege to be part of the political decision-making process. According to Alfaruqi (1988), "It is clear that the Quran not only recommends, but is even insistent upon, the equality of women and men as an essential characteristic of a Quranic society" (p. 38). Badawi (1995) has concluded that there is no evidence in the Quran and the Sunnah which support the prohibition of women leadership. He stressed that historically Muslim women have acted as leaders and the custodians of Islam referring to Prophet Mohammed's (Peace Be Upon Him) wife Khadija, a successful businesswoman and leader of her time (Badawi, 1995). "According to the tradition of Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him), no rule or law exists forbidding women to seek employment; and if an Islamic government prohibits women from working, that government has violated

Islamic Law" (Alsaleh, 2012, p. 125). Thus, Islamic principles have historically proven to be tractable and beneficial to Muslim women. However, modern legal reform or rational law has not really supported Muslim women in legal situations (Badawi, 1995).

The Islamic practice of leadership based on a consultative decision making, which is found in the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet as the concept of *Shoura*. Shoura means that the leader or the person in charge consults with his or her followers for input in the decision-making process (Branine & Pollard, 2010). However, the influence of Arab tribal culture and traditions have clashed with the Islamic principles of consultation and consensus, resulting in the prevalence of an authoritative leadership style which conflicts with Islamic ideals (Branine & Pollard, 2010).

Although Islamic principles fundamentally form the values of the Muslim societies, their application and interpretation are influenced most by traditional, cultural, and national values and norms (Alsaleh, 2012). In fact, Alsaleh (2012) argues that "culture is solely responsible for the oppression and repression of women in the Islamic nations ignores the dynamic interaction between culture and religion over time" (p. 123). Le Renard (2008) pointed out that many Saudi women proclaim that there is nothing in Islam to support inequality among genders, and the argument goes that the culture of Saudi Arabia should be respected because people in this country are happy with the way their lives are structured.

Saudi culture. Culture can be defined as "traditions of thought located within social structures" (Jenks, 1993, p. 2). Culture can also be defined in general terms as the common ideas or theories about the prevailing thoughts and behaviors that are shared by a group of people (Jaeger, 1986). Further, culture is influenced by educational level, economic status, and environmental factors (Jenks, 1993). Culture is also a tool that provides the individual with

power or limits it (Jaeger, 1986). Additionally, culture consists of seven factors that can help to understand, interpret, and anticipate another culture: personal identity, power differential, attitude to change, the notion of time, communication style, etiquette, and emotional expressions (Malewski, 2005).

Culture is viewed from the Saudi Arabian cultural context is described as the community of participation resulting from a homogeneous Islamic culture (Al-Twaijri et al., 1994); a highly collective society and a strong family-based orientation (Ajarimah, 2001); and a strong preference for certainty over uncertainty, with a tendency to place more importance on relationships over tasks (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002). In the Saudi culture, gender roles are clear; assertiveness and ambition are valued; and the virtues of aiding others, modesty, and solidarity are espoused (Ajarimah, 2001).

In fact, Saudi Arabia can be characterized as a country struggling between the forces of change imposed by modernization, technology, and industrialization, and stability within the historically conservative society as influenced by the Islamic values and cultural norms (Long, 2005). It is almost impossible to distinguish between the impact of Islam as a religion and the culture within Saudi Arabia (Long, 2005). As Doumato (1999) states:

> Because of the ideological relationship between religion and state, it is crucial that the monarchy appear to rule in partnership with the scholars designated by the rulers as being best able to interpret Islamic law and to appear to engage them in forming public policy. (p. 577)

However, most of the rights Saudi women are asking for, such as higher education and equality in the labor force, are not against the Islamic religion, but instead, go against traditions and Saudi cultural beliefs and practices. Prior to Islam, the traditions and other cultural norms of

the tribal community in the Arabian Peninsula have devoted to the conservative tendency towards women in Saudi Arabia (Alahmadi, 2011; Alajmi, 2001). Dahlan (1994) pointed out that:

> Tradition, paradoxically, embodies both positive and negative aspects. At any rate, distinction should be made between religion and tradition. Tradition should be respected when it conforms to religion. If not, as in the case of some societal behavior, then tradition must be evaluated and reconsidered. However, tradition still plays a major role in restricting and protecting women in the light of public interest. (p. 169)

Many scholars describe how Saudi women's roles are affected by cultural values rather than being dictated by Islamic laws (Doumato, 1999). Traditionally, men viewed their roles as providers and protectors, while women's role was taking care of and managing the household and raising the children (Almunajjed, 1997). Obviously, the woman's role in Saudi Arabia is prescribed by society, culture, and the strict interpretation of Islam by focusing on her role as a wife and mother (Mill-Rosser et al., 2006).

As previously mentioned, gender segregation is a strict Saudi cultural and social norm. Doumato (2003) asserted that "segregation of unrelated men from women is held as the highest social value and given the force of law in every aspect of public life" (p. 241). All schools are segregated, and men and women are not allowed to work in the same buildings, companies, or institutions (Doumato, 2003). Although gender segregation restricts Saudi women from many outlets and activities, it allows them a measure of freedom as Le Renard (2008) states:

> Many young women prefer to work and study in segregated spaces, for various reasons: to feel more "comfortable" and "relaxed," according to their own words, as they are used to frequenting female spaces most of the time; not to have to wear their "hijab" (head

cover) all day long; for religious reasons; or because their family or husband prefers so. (p. 626)

Sex-segregation is practiced in other Muslim societies, but the degree that it is practiced in the Kingdom is entirely different than most other Islamic nations. One main reason this degree of segregation exists in the Saudi society might be because Saudi Arabia never experienced colonialism or might be that this practice has been incorporated into the social structure and the public policy of the country. However, people use such cultural practice as an outlet for their religious values. For example, allowing a woman to drive is acceptable under Islamic law, but because some people argue that allowing women to drive will lead to problems such as sexual harassment, they consider allowing women to drive as a practice that goes against religious values. Some scholars believe that women in Saudi Arabia are and will continue to be represented as a symbol and icon of the culture, traditions, and religion of the Kingdom (Pharaon, 2004).

Nevertheless, this is slowly changing (Long, 2005). Saudi women are becoming "more visible within national media and national state" (Le Renard, 2008, p. 617). With today's increased financial needs and the influences of modernization and globalization, the idea is considerably changed as the number of educated women working outside the home is increasing, who are also sometimes the main source of income for their families (Long, 2005). Furthermore, since unsegregated private institutes are not prohibited by Saudi law, many qualified young women leaders are currently working and looking for jobs in such institutes; for example, international companies, banks, and hospitals; and want to live an independent professional life like western women (Doumato, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, one of the major factors that have transformed the Kingdom and advanced the women's social, educational and economic status in the society was the discovery of oil that enabled the government to develop programs to increase the funding of women's education and to increase job opportunities (Pompea, 2002). Many studies describe modernization as a process that affects the role of women in Saudi society through the spread of education and the opportunities for economic independence (Almohsen, 2000).

Education of women in Saudi Arabia. Before 1932, education for girls and women was taking place at homes and teaching revolved around the Holy Quran. In 1960, King Faisal funded and supported education for girls (Almunajjed, 1997) that was focused mainly on teaching religion, traditional roles, and cultural values (Rugh, 2002). Even with its basic practice and objective, girls' education faced great resistance and disagreements because Saudis feared that it could change the foundation of the cultural norms and the moral values of the girls. However, during the next decades, women's education developed vastly. The first university for women opened in Riyadh in 1979 in the fields of art and commerce (Hamdan, 2005).

The government provides educational opportunities and free scholarships for both males and females. Recently, the number of schools, colleges, and universities for women significantly increased (Alsaleh, 2012). By the year 2000, there were seven universities and 141 colleges for both males and females (Rugh, 2002). At present, education is mandatory for both genders; and women make up 58% of college students and out-performed males in higher education (Doumato, 2010). "Between 2001 and 2011, the net enrollment rate of boys at the primary education level increased from 84% to 96.7%, compared to an increase from 82% to 96.5% for girls" (Alsaleh, 2012, p. 126). The number of female students has continued to grow despite the fact that there has not been an increase in the employment opportunities (Doumato, 2010).

For the past ten years, Saudi Arabia has been responding to national and global demands for improving higher education, with the intent of encouraging "political participation, promoting economic growth, increasing foreign-direct investments and expanding employment opportunities, especially for women" (Almubaraki, 2011, p. 428). For instance, in 2006, the King launched the King Abdullah Sponsored Program to sponsor Saudi males and females studying abroad in the USA, UK, Canada, Australia, China, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea, and Singapore among others. The Ministry of Higher Education of Saudi Arabia is sending women abroad to pursue their bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees to further their studies in different majors and disciplines (Hamdan, 2005; see Figure 2).
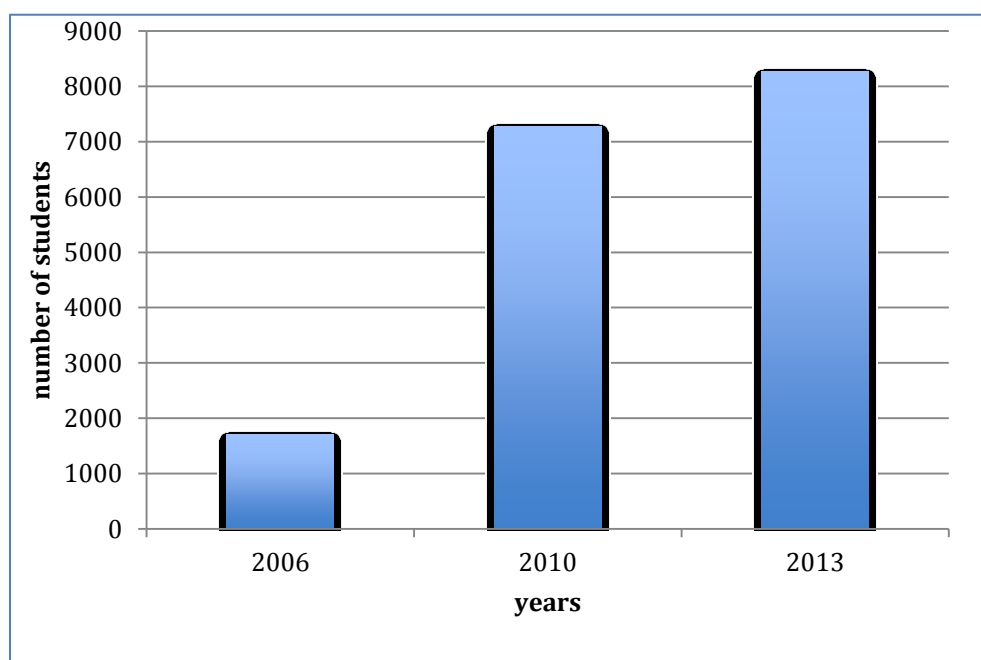

Figure 2. Number of Saudi female students abroad.

Currently, over 100,000 Saudi students are studying in the United States; and women make up to 43% of all Saudi students (Ministry of Higher Education, 2015). Figure 2 shows the total number of Saudi females studying abroad in the years of 2006, 2010, and 2013. According

to the numbers adopted from the Ministry of Higher Education (2015), it shows proof of the increasing enrollment of females in higher education (see Figure 2).

Employment of women in Saudi Arabia. Although Saudi women have come a long way in their educational development, present barriers and threats to their employment continue to exist; such as the cultural and traditional norms (Le Renard, 2008; Pharaon, 2004). Not until the 1970s did Saudi women start to enter the workforce (Alrawaf, 1990). There was great resistance to this change in the Saudi society because people believed women working outside the home would have a negative impact on the ideology of the family and society. Allowing women the freedom to work in different sectors of the society is considered among the critical issues in Saudi Arabia (Doumato, 2010). The majority of working women are in the education and health sectors (Doumato, 2010; Le Renard, 2008; Pharaon, 2004).

Due to the existing obstacles, women compose only 15% of the Saudi workforce (Doumato, 2010). Because of the social norms, women are limited to choose their desired professions, and most of them work in the public sector. In fact, women still exist as a large population of underutilized labor (Pharaon, 2004) because "lack of foresight and planning in the education sector has left the country unprepared for increasing numbers of educated women" (Mill-Rosser et al., 2006, p. 7). According to the *Central Department of Statistics* 2015 for the Saudi Labor Force, there are an increased number of the total female employees in both the private and public sectors in the country (Saudi Labor Force, 2015). Figure 3 shows a comparison of the total numbers of male and female employees in the Kingdom. Despite the increasing numbers of total female employees, there is a huge gap in employment between the genders.

Among the factors that contributed to the gap in employment between men and women in Saudi Arabia is the lack of support from women's families who have conservative attitudes towards women working outside the home (Le Renard, 2008). In fact, family support impacts Saudi women's confidence and motivation to work and aspire to management and leadership positions (Clarke, 2007). Family customs and aspects of the social organization of the family are the most fundamental, the most important, and the most resistant to change when it comes to Saudi women working outside the home.
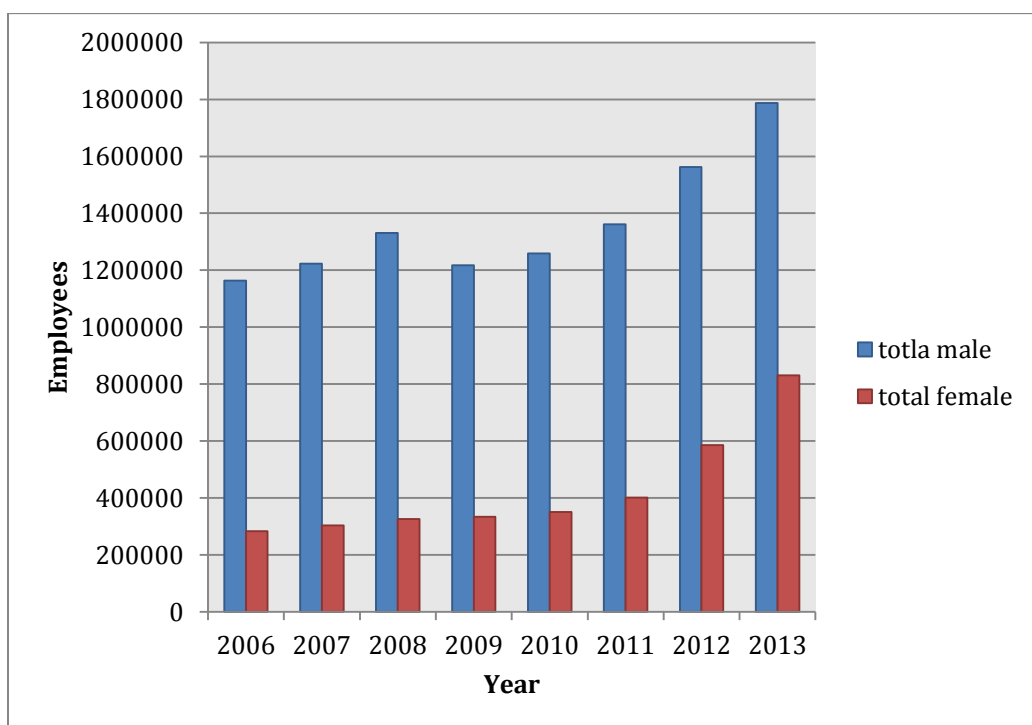
Figure 3. Numbers of male and female employees.

Vidyasagar and Rea (2004) noted that "although literacy rates were higher among women, and there were some professional opportunities available, the constitution prevents gender equality by restricting their freedom to travel, to education, and to work by requiring the agreement of a male relative" (p. 262). Hutchings, Metcalfe, and Cooper (2010) studied four key obstacles for women undertaking international assignments: "corporate resistance, foreigner

prejudices, women's own disinterest, and a lack of family and/or other support mechanisms" (p.61).

Another factor is gender stereotypes which impact women employment in areas where men dominate (Doumato, 2010; Le Renard, 2008; Metcalfe, 2011). The very fact of their gender presents social challenges that discourage them from freely pursuing higher education, employment, and career goals. In fact, this applies to women in western societies as well. For instance, in reviewing the literature on gender and employment, Berthoin and Izraeli (1993) states that "probably the single most important hurdle for women in management in all industrialized countries is the persistent stereotype that associated management with being male" (p. 63). Moreover, transportation is another barrier to Saudi women who aspire to work outside the home because they are not allowed to drive (Almunajjed, 1997; Doumato, 2010; Pharaon, 2004).

Specifically, Al-Lamki (1999) summarized the main obstacles for women leaders as the following:

1- Limited higher education opportunities.

2- Discriminatory appointment and promotion practices.

3- Traditional attitudes of male leaders towards working women.

4- Male-dominated sectors.

5- Male resistance to women in management.

6- Absence of policies and legislation to ensure participation of women in leadership positions.

7- A lack of professional networking.

8- A lack of female role models.

9- A lack of professional leadership and management development programs.

10- A lack of empowerment.

11- A lack of a sufficient number of quality day care centers.

12- Dual responsibilities of traditional and professional roles, balancing traditional and professional roles and family obligations as a wife and a mother.

In reviewing the literature on leadership and gender, these obstacles and challenges are faced by other women in different societies as well; and they are not unique to Saudi Arabian society. As Shimanoff and Jenkins (1991) found that:

Research has demonstrated that there are far more similarities than differences in the leadership behaviors of women and men, and that they are equally effective. Still, women are less likely to be preselected as leaders, and the same leadership behavior is often evaluated more positively when attributed to a male than a female. (p. 504)

Additionally, there are other factors that may affect Saudi women's ability to pursue leadership positions or to exercise their leadership capabilities successfully. These factors are related to their social conditions and to their overall personalities, such as lack of courage, lack of self-confidence, fear of responsibility, difficulty of balancing professional responsibilities and family obligations, the sense of isolation in the executive position, as well as physical and health issues and psychological pressures (Alahmadi, 2011). Indeed, Alahmadi (2011) asserts that "women are exposed to socialization, educational and social pressures that may inhibit the foundation of values and attitudes appropriate to leadership roles that prevent the effectiveness of some women in leadership positions" (p. 153). Studies show that in the absence of structural support, women employees face role struggle because of the challenge of creating a balance between work and family responsibilities (Al Halawani & Abtsam, 2002). Alahmadi (2011)

indicates that "feelings of struggles and suffering among women increase because of this dual role and the accumulation of the sense of marginalization, inferiority and lack of self-confidence" (p. 153).

In a study conducted by Alajmi (2001), the highest ranked personal characters identified by the study's participants as impacting female leaders in Saudi Arabia are energy, courage, self-confidence and independence; whereas, taking initiative, risk-taking, and relationships ranked the lowest. In another study by Alahmadi (2011), the findings of a survey to identify the challenges faced by 160 Saudi female leaders in the public sector indicate that the highest ranked challenges are workplace structural challenges, lack of resources and lack of encouragement and empowerment, whereas cultural and personal challenges ranked last, opposing the common perception.

Despite the challenges mentioned above, opportunities for women have increased during the last ten years (Le Renard, 2008); many Saudi women have forged ahead to start their own businesses and establishments, and many became employees and leaders in unsegregated companies and organizations. Doumato (2010) states that "although the social forces militating against women in the public and private sectors, Saudi businesswomen own nearly 20,000 companies, and women's investments amount to about 21% of the total volume of private sector investment in the Kingdom" (p. 16). Now, many women are running their technology companies, beauty salons, jewelry shops, export and import companies, and furniture factories, thus making a great impact on the economy (Pharaon, 2004). However, there is no existing data on how many women hold leadership positions in Saudi Arabia, but there are great examples and role models for all Saudi women who aspire to leadership positions.

Lubna Suliman Al-Olayan is an excellent example of a successful Saudi businesswoman and leader. She is considered to be one of the most influential businesswomen and leader in the world. She was listed as one of the top 100 most influential people of 2005 by *Times* magazine, and she was listed as the 86th of the most powerful women in the world by *Forbes* in 2014. She is connected to eight Board Members in eight different organizations across nine different industries.

Another example is Princess Ameera Al-Taweel, who has gained global recognition in recent years as a prominent spokesperson for reforms in Saudi Arabia. In 2013, she was listed as the 59th of the most powerful Arabs. She is a chairwoman and CEO of Saudi-based Time Entertainment Company and the chairwoman and co-founder of a non-profit organization Tasamy. She is a prominent women's rights advocate and has appeared in the global media to speak out against the status of women in Saudi Arabia and the broader Middle East and North Africa. She created the first women leaders network in Saudi Arabia, and she supports a wide range of humanitarian interests in Saudi Arabia and around the world.

Saudi Arabian organizational leadership. Speaking of women leadership in Saudi Arabia, it is important to understand the organizational leadership within the context of the Saudi culture. Leadership is not a new concept. It has been studied from various perspectives by scholars from a variety of academic disciplines (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Leadership can be defined as the process of developing a relationship within organizations whereby people can fulfill a common purpose through the collective achievement of common goals and objectives (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).Generally speaking, leadership is influenced by and influences the culture in which leadership practice occurs, specifically within the context of an organizational environment (Northouse, 2010).

Large, small, governmental, and non-governmental organizations in Saudi Arabia operate within a strong set of cultural norms and guidelines and Islamic principles, impacting every aspect of Saudi society (Branine & Pollard, 2010). This impact has led to many social practices that prescribe roles, traditions, and relationships that inform familial structures, and attitudes, norms, practices, and beliefs about work, family, and organizations. A manager's organizational leadership style and approach within the Saudi cultural context closely resemble the ways in which the leader interacts with family members, with a strong awareness of positional status within the hierarchical structure of the organization (Ali, 2009).

The values of the organizational leadership in Saudi Arabia are derived from both Islamic principles and the historically cultural values. The Islamic principles emphasize fairness, honesty, and courtesy, and consider work and self-reliance as obligatory, and manifestations of worship (Ali & Al-Owaihan, 2008). Saudi leaders integrate Western and Saudi cultural values (Ali, 2011), and believe that successful leaders demonstrate integrity, consideration, charisma, competence, and a future orientation (Abdalla & Al-Homoud, 2001), all of which are closely aligned with Islamic ideals (Ali, 2011). In fact, Armstrong (1992) asserted that democratic practices also align closely with Islamic values and principles.

In Saudi organizations, relationships are considered more important than performance, merit, and organizational goals (Hunt & Al- Twaijri, 1996). Saudi leaders have a strong work ethic and are committed to their personal relationships (Ali, 2009; Hunt & Al-Twaijri, 1996). As of the followers, respect, freedom of expression, feedback, truthfulness, and courtesy are of most importance (Bies & Moag, 1986). Organizational leadership in the Kingdom is significantly shaped by the Saudi cultural heritage. Cultural values, beliefs, and norms are instilled into the workplace that include strong group membership, respect for position and seniority, dedication,

and acceptance of ambiguity (Hunt & Al- Twaijri, 1996).Organizational justice is another core value, which can take the form of fairness in the distribution of resources and outcomes; and consistent treatment of individual employee (Bies & Moag, 1986). Saudi leaders typically use a top-down approach to direct organizational change efforts and that most value employees for their loyalty and ability to follow directions, tending to focus on political interests rather than implementation issues (Jreisat, 1990).

Feminist Theory

Reviewing the concept of the feminist theory within the context of this topic is critical because such discussion could assist the reader in understanding the psychological possibilities related to women leaders and the role of courage in their successful leadership. In general, feminist theory "focuses on the effect society has on gender inequalities and how such findings can bring about change in gender roles" (Bankston, 2000, p. 203). According to Bankston (2000), feminist theory usually emphasizes on two different basic levels. At the micro level, it deals with the family and the relationships between men and women. For instance, this level focuses on the relationship between the husband and wife or on the children within a family as they deal with gender roles set up within the family. On the other hand, at the macro level, feminist theory focuses on the effects of gender roles in society as a whole.

Similarly, in reviewing the studies of human relationships and other societal practices, Patton (1990) indicates that feminist theory assumes the importance of gender and gender differences. Feminist studies could focus on women's involvement in politics, economics, or other aspects of the society that define empowerment or involvement of any one group (Bankston, 2000). Thus, the basic premise in the feminist theory is that patriarchy and

subordination of women in male-dominated societies must change in order to achieve equality of both genders.

Rupp (1981) defined feminism as "a worldview that ranks gender a primary category of analysis or explanatory factor for understanding the unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources in society" (p. 283). In essence, feminism can be considered a limiting factor or an opposing force to female leadership. West (2010) used a somewhat different definition; it is the essential notion that women are people, or in other words, it is the commitment to achieving equality of the genders.

Feminism is considered a relatively recent term for the politics of equal rights for women (Rai, 2010). Generally, feminist issues range from access to education, employment, child care, contraception, and abortion to equality in the workplace, changing family roles, protection for sexual harassment in the workplace, and the need for equal political representation (Rai, 2010). Therefore, according to Rai (2010), without feminism there would be no female leadership as feminism paves the way for female leadership. In other words, women must first be given their basic rights and treated equally before aspiring to attain leadership positions.

Feminism in Islam. For the purpose of this study, feminism from an Islamic perspective is also reviewed. Basically, it involves the revision of the Islamic interpretations using different understandings and voices. Also, it is the use of Islamic principles to justify actions and reactions. As previously indicated, Islam makes up major aspects of the Saudi people's lives and governs the day-to-day life; and "Islam gives a place of great honor to the whole of humanity" (Pharaon, 2004, p. 353). However, due to the many interpretations of the Islamic principles, "the traditional and religious scholars sometimes ignore the context and select certain verses from the

Quran to prove their point of view; all sorts of pre-Islamic and non- Islamic influences had affected the thinking of Muslim jurists" (Pharaon, 2004, p. 354).

From the Western perspective, feminism does not actually speculate the needs and issues of the women in Islamic nations. For instance, most of the time concerns, such as driving is brought up as a major issue of women's rights in Saudi Arabia. Conversely, Muslim women have other more critical issues, such as education and work. Deo (2006) stated that "Western feminism has frequently misunderstood Muslim women's rights, which have led to the degradation of their status and curtailment of their rights; and any discussion of feminism in the Arab world must also take religion into consideration" (p. 106).

Indeed, some scholars point out that women's issues in the Islamic nations are a cause for confusion because of the different interpretations of the Islamic principles, and the situation has not been helped by the western perspective of feminism (Karmi, 2005). As Keddie (2004) explained that:

> Part of the problem is that the struggle for women's rights in the Muslim world, as in other non-Western regions, has often been attacked as a Western colonialist phenomenon. Associating women's right struggles with subservience to the West makes these struggles more difficult. It also helps account for intellectual efforts in the Muslim world and elsewhere to demonstrate that Islam and the local culture were originally and fundamentally egalitarian. (p. 27)

Feminists in Muslim societies started by first aiming on improving women's roles in society, focusing on issues, such as education, health care, and economic needs. "Although these issues are social in nature, they were political, as well, because they touched on those realms usually controlled by those in power" (Keddie, 2004, p. 28). In fact, these feminists recognized

that "the only weapon they can use to fight for human rights in general, and women's rights in particular, in those societies where religion is not separate from the state, is to base political claims on religious history" (Mernissi, 2005, p. 37).

Furthermore, human studies indicate that human rights do not conflict with Islamic principles. The argument goes that the religious institutions are patriarchal (Yamani, 2005). In fact, women's issues are an essential part of Islamic teachings; and many feminists depend on the Islamic sources, the Quran, for their rights, freedom, and equality. The Quran has always granted women economic independence and social rights; for example, "women had inheritance, property, and wealth rights in their own names even after marriage, without obligation to contribute that wealth to their husband or their family" (Vidyasagar & Rea, 2004, p. 262). In the context of Saudi Arabia, Yamani (2000) asserts:

> The current social circumstances of the country have caused an identifiable strand of Saudi women to make Islam the vehicle for expression of feminist tendencies. They have, in an alluring way, sought their sense of power, their sense of identity, their freedom, and their equality with men through the basic precepts of Islam. (p. 263)

In a study conducted with Saudi women doctors, Vidyasagar and Rea (2004) identified Islamic feminism as "the achievement of a space for and by Muslim women, a space of autonomy and a career in a society that inconsistently forbids and permits professional autonomy and women's caring role" (p. 265). Additionally, they found that the Saudi society is struggling with creating a balance between cultural traditions and the power of modernization, thus resulting in social improvements that are controlled and yet encouraged. In fact, this contradiction has resulted in a necessity for women in the Kingdom to understand and define

their experiences, roles and "search for an authentic identity coherent with traditional Muslim culture, yet consistent with women's goal of increased opportunities" (Yamani, 2005, p. 405).

Female Leadership Development & Style

Female leadership theories suggest that women's leadership style is different from men's. Some scholars describe it as inclusive, open, consensus-building, collaborative, and collegial (Carless, 1998). A study by Loden (1985) conducted a study to differentiate the leadership style of males and females found different leadership traits for both genders. In this study, Loden (1985) characterized the female mode of leading as cooperative, collaborative, low-control, intuitive, and empathetic issues. On the other hand, Loden (1985) identified the male style of leading as competitive, authoritarian, high-control, and unemotional in solving problems. Furthermore, there is evidence in the literature verifies that women leaders exhibit masculine traits while leading, and it also expands the description by suggesting that female leaders are understanding, helpful, expressive, and socially sensitive (Carless, 1998).

The literature also suggests that the leadership development needs and experiences of females may be different because there are gender differences in the leadership styles and career development needs (Indvik, 2001). In Indvik's (2001) research indicates that female leaders must spend a great deal of time and energy than their male counterparts to be promoted in higher rank positions. Also, Indvik (2001) emphasizes that leadership development opportunities for females are affected by their access to resources as well as cultural values, and gender norms.

However, Gilligan (1982) noted a contradiction in that the characteristics that traditionally have been defined as positive for females, such as their care for and sensitivity to the needs of others, are viewed as negative attributes, especially when evaluated by their male counterparts. To extreme feminists, however, claimed that all they need is equal power and

rights, similar to those already claimed and attained by their male counterparts. Thus, for a female to aspire to leadership or executive position, she must prove herself and be superior to any male competing for the job (Miller, 2000).

Bolman and Deal (2011) agreed that women's leadership style is different. They claimed that women bring a female advantage to leadership, emphasizing that modern organizations need such an advantage, which includes concern for people, nurturance, and willingness to share information. There are many more styles of leadership for females, just as there are for males; every individual has his or her style in leading. There is no one female leadership style adopted by all the women in key positions around the world (Bolman & Deal, 2011). Eagly (2013) argued that women's focus on relationships, natural ability to work collaboratively, and their desire to lead from the middle are valuable attributes for today's leaders. Trigg (2006) suggested that women like their male counterparts should be educated intellectually and ethically as leaders who will contribute their passion, vision, and commitment to improve the wellbeing of the community and the world.

A study by Tarr-Whelan (2009) identified five advantages of having more women in top management and leadership positions in the workplace, including the following: (a) achieving higher profits, identifying risks and threats, and a greater ability to survive financial crises, (b) establishing policies that contribute to individual and public health concerns, (c) a stronger balance of work and family responsibilities, thus leading to higher productivity and quality of life, (d) increased commitment to both family and work responsibilities, and (e) creating a management that reflects the twenty-first century leadership traits such as teamwork and participative decision making.

Globally, women still face systemic biases and discrimination when assuming leadership positions and they continue to be underrepresented in decision-making positions in many different aspects of the societies (Trigg, 2006). Bolman and Deal (2011) analyzed the contributing factors that had kept women from attaining leadership positions. They are:

1. Stereotypes associate their leadership style with lacking characteristics of successful leaders.

2. Women are faced with conflicting expectations, such as being both powerful and feminine.

3. Women face discrimination evident in ancient fairy tales and modern films. For instance, Shakespeare described a strong woman as dangerous until controlled by a stronger man.

4. Women face a disadvantage in that they still do the majority of the housework and child rearing. This phenomenon explains why fast-track women are less likely to marry and if they do marry, more likely to divorce. Women's progress is reflected in a slow attitudinal change, a shift in cultural views, and an increase in support systems, such as maternity leave and daycare for working mothers. Women make up over half of the population, and most organizations cannot sacrifice their tremendous talent (Bolman & Deal, 2011).

Nonetheless, there has been a significant increase in the number of women leaders, especially in developed countries, because of improvements in the economic, political, educational sectors as well as in cultural attitudes and beliefs (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003). For example, today, there are women senators, governors, mayors, business owners, managers, and chief executives of major corporations in the United States. Whereas, in some societies, especially in developing countries, show that women are less qualified than men and are not well prepared to attain high-rank positions (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003).

Vinnicombe and Singh (2003) found that the reason there are fewer women in leadership positions is that women lack leadership skills. However, the argument goes that women have to be given the opportunity to lead before their leadership skills can be fairly assessed. Onyeizugbo (2003) suggests that culture has embedded a belief in the social structure that women are inferior to men, and culture plays a major role in the formation of leadership characteristics.

Another scholar argues that the problem of a low percent of women in leadership results from the lack of encouragement, support, and access (Solheim, 2000). Additionally, Solheim (2000) claimed that "because there are so few women in top leadership positions, they lack the well-established support systems that men enjoy" (p. 19). Women should be motivated, encouraged, and supported in the workplace in order to become successful leaders (Lamsa & Sintonen, 2001). Also, women who assume high leadership positions should have courage and stamina (Treasurer, 2009). According to Treasurer, Adelman, and Chon (2013), part of the solution for women leaders to beat gender inequality or other social challenges is through the intended application and access of courage. They assert that courage is a teachable and learnable skill that is particularly important for women who aspire to leadership positions.

Additionally, it is suggested that leadership opportunities for women can be increased by establishing programs such as family planning, childcare, and other socio-economic plans to give women time and freedom to pursue their careers and leadership aspirations (Indvik, 2001). "Everyone, irrespective of gender, should have a fair chance of career development and changing the inequalities among the genders is an ethical challenge for both women and men" (Lamsa & Sintonen, 2001, p. 4).

Courage

Before courage can be described as an important leadership attribute, an understanding of its linguistic origin is useful. Understanding the linguistic origin of courage and its definition allows one to determine the highly personal nature of courage. The word courage is derived from the Latin word *cor,* that means heart (Jablin, 2006). *Andreia* is the Greek word for courage meaning manliness. In the German language, *tapfer* and *mutig,* mean courageous (Tillich, 1952, p. 6). In simple terms, the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (1996) defines courage as "bravery; the state or quality of mind or spirit that enables one to face danger, fear, or vicissitudes with self-possession, confidence, and resolution" (Soukhanov, 1996, p. 430). According to Badaracco and Ellsworth (1989) courage "is the ability to do and say what one believes to be right, rather than convenient, familiar, or popular" (p. 201).

Tillich (1952) identifies courage as a human value rooted in a one's entire existence. Additionally, he suggests that courage is necessary to self-affirmation and the courageous person acts by a desire to reach higher levels of self-actualization. Likewise, Goud (2005) defines courage as the "energizing catalyst that allows one to overcome fear and find the way toward self-actualization" (p. 102). May (1975) claims that courage is not just a virtue but one upon which all virtues and values are established. Similarly, courage is described as the first virtue of the theory that courage enables the person to display and show the other virtues (Treasurer, 2009). These descriptions of courage suggest a highly personal nature to courage.

One may only think of courage as physical bravery, but there are many other forms of courage. May (1975) divides courage into four types: physical courage, moral courage, social courage, and creative courage:

- *Physical courage.* The simplest and the most common type of courage is physical courage. This type of courage has been associated with bodily strength, protecting oneself, and saving others.

- *Moral courage.* Moral courage stems from one's internal sensitivity. May (1975) explains this type of courage as centered on one's ability to appreciate another's suffering or injustice by taking an action to correct the situation or to draw attention to the situation.

- *Social courage.* The nature of this type of courage according to May (1975) requires the establishment and sustaining of deep-rooted relationships. It is the ability to risk one's self to develop and sustain an authentic relationship with another.

- *Creative courage.* May (1975) refers to creative courage as the most important. It is the ability to discover new arrangements upon which a new way of doing things will occur; i.e. to create something that did not exist before. He explains that creativity arises out of one's struggle with doubt and uncertainty. This type of courage involves confidence and risk-taking by risking the comfort of the present for unknown future.

Other scholars, such as Bangari and Prasad (2012), divide courage into moral courage and physical courage. They define moral courage as "steadfast moral conscientiousness" (p. 47); i.e. to correctly distinguish the right from the wrong without fear or avoidance when confronted with decision dilemmas. Physical courage, on the other hand, is the courage to stand up for what one assumes to be morally right; "going to the extent of facing hardship (fortitude), and exercising self-control over temptations and weaknesses of various kinds (temperance)" (p. 47).

According to Goud (2005), confidence plays a major role in developing and sustaining courage. He defines confidence as "belief and trust in one's capabilities and it is the primary

source in countering fears, risks, and the safety impulse" (p. 110). Thus, it is impossible to understand courage without addressing fear because one shows or develops courage in the face of risk, challenge, or danger (Goud, 2005). However, Naughton and Cornwall (2006) argue that courage is not equivalent to fearlessness but rather is a characteristic of courage. From Wheatley's (2010) point of view, "to be fearless is to face the reality of one's situation and to recognize what one can realistically achieve" (p. 5).

 "I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear" (as cited in Durando, 2013, "Mandela's Best Quotes," quote 9). As also Rajmohan Gandhi, a grandson of Mahatma Gandhi said "It is not that Gandhi did not know fear. But what's more important is that he stood up and acted, despite the fears within him" (Rudolph, 1963, p. 100). Evidence of this courage is also present around us in many ordinary examples in our daily lives.

Goud (2005) indicates that "the movement from courage to fearlessness is based on mastery, experience, and competence" (p. 106). The lack of appropriate and necessary skills, competencies and experience may produce fear rather than fearlessness. In fact, this is critical in understanding courage because it recognizes the internal and external impacts on courage as opposed to representing courage as a fixed personality trait. However, the question goes, can courage be developed and acquired? Or is courage teachable and learnable?

Terry (1993) emphasizes that courage is neither taught nor learned, it is experienced. He explains that:

> Courage is lived in response to events and the times, quickened as responsible action in the face of experienced inauthenticity. Courage is created out of itself in a spontaneous relational act. We can recognize it, describe it, discern it; we cannot predictably induce it.

It is its own generator. Nor is it cumulative. One act of courage does not make the next

one easier or more likely, because the nature of the courageous act must evolve as that

which calls it forth evolves. A habit of courage ceases to contain courage. Courage lives

on the frontier of risk, not in the comfortable of the familiar. (p. 253)

Similarly, Bangari and Prasad (2012) examined an important aspect of courage that it is not a

trait one is born with; instead, it is consciously practiced on a daily basis.

However, other scholars argue in the organizational literature that courage is teachable

and learnable (Jablin, 2006; Treasurer et al., 2013). Positioning courage within the domain of

human needs for growing and reach achievement makes it understandable as a skill or attribute

that can be learned and mastered and which can be embraced in a wide range of everyday

practices (Jablin, 2006). Thus, courage is a commonly accepted psychology-related construct that

is emerging within the organizational literature.

A review of the organizational literature with respect to courage found a definition by

Kilmann, O'Hara, and Strauss (2009) that identifies a courageous act in an organization as

having the following aspects: (a) free choice in deciding whether to act, (b) evidence of

significant risk of being in danger, (c) assessment that risk is reasonable, and the act is

considered justifiable, (d) constitutes pursuit of worthy aims (i.e., performance success,) and (e)

proceeds with mindful action, despite fear. The following section presents detailed arguments

and discussion from the organizational literature on courage as an important attribute for

successful leadership.

Courage and Leadership

Over the years, many scholars have written about characteristics and traits that make one

to be a successful leader. The list of characteristics is long. However the one that appears to offer

hope for emerging leaders is courage. According to many authors, courage is a foundation for successful leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Northouse, 2010). Bolt (1996) agrees with these authors and goes on further to specify courage as the "hallmark of a true leader" (p. 169); it gives the leader innate ability to create a vision, challenge the status quo, and hold into potentials. Bomstein and Smith (1996) add that leadership is a process whereby one crucial ingredient is courage. Other scholars have claimed that courage is to a certain extent flexible and adjustable state or skill that is influenced by environmental factors in organizations, and have proposed that leadership is one factor that may be specifically powerful in supporting followers' courage (Hannah, Sweeney, & Lester, 2007).

As previously indicated, courage is the first virtue that provides the person to show the other virtues (Treasurer, 2009). This definition of courage is similar to how Tichy and Bennis (2008) examined and explained the character concept as an important quality in understanding courage in leadership. Indeed, Tichy and Bennis (2008) placed character concept and courage within the framework of making good decisions in leadership. They defined character as "having moral compass", which means setting "the standards for what is right and what is wrong in arriving at a decision or exercising wise judgment" (p. 3). Courage is a key and integral part of carrying out that decision or to make a wise judgment (Tichy & Bennis, 2008). They further agree that most circumstances in today's business world do not require physical courage, but rather demand "quiet courage" or moral courage as defined by Tichy and Bennis (2008) "the courage to make the inner journey, recognize and embrace what is right, and take the hard road, despite all the obstacles because it is the right thing to do" (p. 3). From their perspective, Tichy and Bennis (2008) explain that leaders with character are those who inspire trust, commitment, and confidence in their followers; whereas, leaders with character and embrace moral courage

"honor commitments and promises, display leadership by example, admit and learn from their mistakes, speak with conviction because they believe what they say, and are open to opportunity and risk" (Tichy & Bennis, 2008, p. 3).

Moral courage has always been associated with authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bangari & Prasad, 2012). Authentic leadership is a term that has come to be used in more recent leadership research, which has begun to identify authentic leadership as an ideal amongst leaders in organizations and societies (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Authentic leadership has been defined as "a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development" (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wemsing, & Peterson, 2008, p. 94). Jablin (2006) identified the actions of the moral courage in the twenty-first century that are critical to maintaining the leader's integrity and authenticity. These actions involve admitting mistakes, acknowledging vulnerability, rejecting conformity, taking a stand against injustice, and supporting creative ideas (Jablin, 2006).

Additionally, authentic leaders are perceived by followers as being high in moral courage and self-awareness, as well as carrying out balanced and wise decisions and judgment, practicing openness, and transparency (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). In fact, the argument goes that these actions should not only have organizational learning effects, but also influence the context in ways that support followers' moral courage. Indeed, courage is the critical leadership characteristic that differentiates authentic leaders from other leaders. In reviewing the literature in the field of organizational communication, Jablin (2006) observed that probably "the most common type of courage displayed by leaders and followers is speaking out" (pp. 102-103).

However, other scholars argue that leaders who exhibit both high moral and high physical courage demonstrate the ideal leadership (Bangari & Parsad, 2012; Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996). These scholars demonstrate that such leaders do what is right as per universally accepted norms and values, and they are not controlled by boundaries of narrow nationalism for instance to encounter basic human values and other universally acceptable norms and truths. They are, indeed, described as the saviors in a crisis, and their leadership practice is entirely focused on the ultimate empowerment, liberation and well-being of their followers (Bangari & Parsad, 2012; Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996). In fact, very few leaders actually demonstrate these traits and follow such standards.

Some examples of such leaders of all time are Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa and Nelson Mandela (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). The two main characteristics according to some scholars that set these leaders apart from others: (a) they are change agents and challenge the prevailing status quo and try to improve the circumstances or situations to the best of their abilities; and (b) they are truly concerned about their followers, exploring ways to empower them, and to ultimately bring self-respect and self-worth into their lives (Bangari & Parsad, 2012; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

The literature on leadership and courage has also proposed that self-commitment, self-control, and challenge are the necessary ingredients for courage (Maddi, 2004). Supported by other studies of management communication, Jablin (2006) argues that "if one acts in a courageous manner, he/she must be extraordinarily committed to a group, organization, community, principle; and that this courage is commonly expressed by speaking out" (p. 100). Hornstein (1986) views managerial courage as "the expression of ideas that are different from the current consensus" (p. 29). To support this claim, Hornstein (1986) asked managers to report

"instances where they took unpopular positions and spoke out, despite potential cost because they believed their views were in the organization's best interest" (p. 28).

Furthermore, the evidence from the literature suggests that the ultimate goal of demonstrating courage in the context of leadership is to have a meaningful interpersonal impact while managing challenging issues and difficult circumstances. As Thompson, Grahek, Phillips, and Fay (2008) assert that the practice of courage in the context of leadership demands the interpersonal experience of integrity and modesty; and claim that in speaking out, making unexpected decisions, modeling, recognizing, and rewarding appropriate courage in their followers, leaders will bring organizational integrity to life.

Similarly, Baldoni (2009) agrees that courageous leaders benefit organizations by providing the backbone to the organizational environments. Consequently, this evidence indicates that courageous leaders are not only invaluable to their followers but also are of value to their organizations by serving as models of effective leadership. Bennis (1997) adds that leaders need the courage to deal effectively with the present while anticipating and responding to the future, which is also vital for organizations to survive with the unknown future.

In fact, lack of courage to do the right thing is one commonly observed drawback in the context of leadership. Ultimately, it is courage that becomes the guiding light that allows leaders to succeed at building sustainable relationships, empowering others, and developing a high moral sense in self and others. Also, it is courage that allows leaders to envision a new reality, to continue to learn and teach, and to make decisions that are centered on knowledge of the past with a keen eye towards the future. After all, the ability to practice these leadership endeavors is connected with one's being which is further acquainted in the person's beliefs, values, and commitments.

Courage and Female Leadership

Within the common organizational research, there is limited, yet convincing evidence and arguments directly related to women's leadership and courage. Bennis and Thomas (2002) theorized extensively about the indicators and predictors of impactful leadership, which also advocate the above-mentioned arguments, and suggested that a leader adopts courage by finding the meaning in negative circumstances and by conquering difficult challenges. They distinguished such leaders as those who manage to appreciate power and wisdom from their most difficult experiences, thus emerging stronger and more committed toward being successful leaders (Bennis & Thomas, 2002). Indeed, courage in leaders may be developed by consistently confronting challenging circumstances that require one to access strength and courage immediately to make critical or tough decisions.

Because of the inevitable challenges existed within the realm of female leadership, women face more obstacles on how to access courage than male leaders. Bennis and Thomas (2002) explain these particular challenges as "crucible experiences" and opportunities to self-reflect and assume the necessary risk in making valuable decisions to become a stronger leader. Crucible experiences for women often arise when their male counterparts choose to alienate them; and cultural biases often create additional obstacles for women leaders (Bennis & Thomas, 2002). In fact, there are several ways that women may specifically access and adopt courage to overcome obstacles in their leadership paths.

For instance, Bennis and Thomas (2002) assert that women must confront offensive comments and other undermining actions from their male counterparts to demand and establish an effective level of respect while at the same time maintaining relationships and a sense of integrity. Further, by shifting to more active approaches to dealing with resistance from others

the authors suggest that women can manage to courageously "carve a place for themselves" (p. 64) and in most cases overcome for instance gender discrimination or sexism that marginalizes them.

Accordingly, Bennis and Thomas' (2002) theory on leadership crucibles shows that women must seek ways to resolve or transcend difficult circumstances through courage to ultimately emerge as effective and successful leaders. It is perhaps the crucible experiences that allow women leaders to embrace courage to "emerge stronger, more focused, and more determined to change the status quo that excluded and marginalized them" (p. 61).

Through extensive research for over a decade, Treasurer et al. (2013) identified four types or ways of courage that are important to successful female leadership development:

1. Trying courage, it means taking the initiative to do something unpopular despite hesitancy and fear.

2. Trusting courage, it involves being vulnerable and open to create trustful relationships between the leaders and the followers.

3. Telling courage, it means being "truth-teller" by speaking up, sharing ideas, asking questions, and providing constructive feedback.

4. Taking-in courage, it involves being able to listen to feedback without feeling vulnerable or punished because feedback is vital to growth and development.

In fact, Treasurer et al. (2013) asserts that it is courage that allows women leaders to counter fear, assess risk, try new things, build trust with others, openly assert their ideas, and to be receptive to constructive feedback to become more successful and impactful leaders.

Moreover, in researching the intersection of female leaders and courage within the business literature, it showed that there were certain characteristics inherent in these particular

women that distinguished them from their male-counterparts. For example, after ten years of

original research related to organizational leadership and training, Walston (2006) concluded

from the testimonies of courageous women leaders that they "step up to the next level and design

their steps rather than allow outside influences dictate who they are or what they should be" (p.

44). This evidence introduced to the fact that courageous women leaders stood apart from their

counterparts and led in ways that exhibited more resolute behaviors or orientations versus

complying with status quo. However, determination of what a courageous action is and how

much courage is expected are influenced by the person's own beliefs, values, and preferences

(Rate, 2005). These values can vary based on one's gender; national, community, or family

culture; and life stage (Rate, 2005).

Particularly, Walston (2006) argues that the topic of courage is as especially important

and more significant for women in today's business world based on the current situation which

includes balancing family and career, reentering or exiting the workplace, political finesse,

woman-to-woman conflict, and the ways women who stand in their originality are judged.

Indeed, this theory bears similarities to that of Bennis's and Thomas's (2002) as these scholars

similarly revealed that courageous women actively confront challenges toward self-possession

while practicing successful and powerful leadership.

Chapter Summary

Ultimately, these arguments render it important to add a qualitative study to the existing

body of literature that may explore and inform the role of courage in successful female

leadership and explore how women perceive, define and successfully apply courage within their

leadership practices. Further, understanding the role of courage in the leadership of successful

women may help in providing tools or means for organizing and developing educational

programs, workshops, and seminars for women who aspire or practice leadership. Specifically, exploring courageous women who defy cultural norms and stereotypes of a controversial society in today's world with strong religious roots can serve to help young women of any cultural background find the courage to step forward and provide leadership in their communities and organizations to improve the quality of life for all.

Chapter Three: Methodology

As discussed in the previous chapters, women in Saudi Arabia are exposed to different leadership opportunities that were not available, or particularly acceptable, to generations before them. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the leadership experiences of women leaders in Saudi Arabia and investigate any obstacles or challenges encountered due to gender bias or stereotyping. Thus, the goal of the study was to develop an in-depth understanding of their experiences and challenges. Furthermore, the study explored the role of courage as a personal leadership attribute and examined how women leaders perceived the role and action of courage in their leadership endeavors. In order to accomplish the purpose of this study, exploratory qualitative method using a virtual interview process with the aim of giving voice to and gaining insight into the experiences of successful Saudi women leaders was used.

Research Questions

In order to give voice and gain insight into the stories of women leaders in Saudi Arabia, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the leadership experiences of Saudi women leaders?

2. What challenges did these women leaders face to achieve their leadership success?

3. How did courage as a leadership attribute impact their leadership success?

4. How did Saudi culture influence their success?

In light of the research questions, the first question aims at exploring participants' stories and enables them to relate personal experiences, thoughts, and opinions pertaining to their leadership experiences. In the second question, the aim is to explore and put into perspective what the individual woman is experiencing and feeling in regards to the challenges faced including gender bias and stereotyping. In the third question, the goal is to learn about the role of

courage and how they define and perceive courage as a personal leadership attribute. Finally, the fourth question hopes to provide insights into how the Saudi culture affected their success. How women leaders view themselves and their leadership roles within the Saudi Arabian society is valuable in understanding the changing societal expectations of Saudi women.

In this chapter, the researcher provides a detailed explanation of the (a) research design and rationale, (b) research population, (c) data collection/instrumentation, (d) data analysis procedures, (e) validity, (f) reliability, and (g) ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rationale

A qualitative research is typically accomplished by using four basic approaches that include: observation of subjects, analysis of existing text and documents, personal interviews, and recording and transcribing (Creswell, 2009). The qualitative research design is known for its flexibility that is possible for a research or a study involving interviewing the subjects (Creswell, 2009). This exploratory qualitative study adapted the interview process by using a virtual process to solicit the stories and responses from Saudi women leaders from for-profit businesses, non-profit organizations, educational, or government institutions. The design and methodology were appropriate because leadership experiences enabled the exploration and understanding of the Saudi women leaders' perspectives.

There is very little research on female leadership in Saudi Arabia and as a result, this qualitative study exploring Saudi women's experiences provided a platform for their perspectives and voices to be heard. According to Patton (2002), "Qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases; and this increases the depth of understanding of the cases and situations studied but reduces generalizability" (p. 14); and "a qualitative design needs to remain sufficiently open and flexible

to permit exploration of whatever the phenomenon under study offers for inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p. 255). Thus, this study is exploratory in that the data speak for itself to represent all the different voices of the study. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) discussed that qualitative research is composed of the use of multiple empirical materials, including personal experiences, life stories, interviews, cultural and historical materials, observations, and interactions, all of which described meanings to individuals to get a better understanding. In this study the perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of a particular situation were the primary sources of knowledge. From the data returned from the women leaders, this study will become an emergent one that adds valuable insight to the rapidly growing status of Saudi women leadership and the overall field of leadership.

Researcher's Role

Patton (2002) explains, "The criteria you choose to emphasize in your work usually depend on the purpose of your inquiry, the values and perspectives of the audiences for your work, and your own philosophical and methodological orientation" (p. 551). What we know is because of who we are, where we come from, where we are now, what we learned throughout the years, from whom we learned it and how, what we do with this information, and how we apply it. In my case, my own background is the source of questioning.

Who I am has played a major role in all my choices throughout my life. I chose to examine this topic as a result of my personal background and experiences. I believe that my education, experiences, and being exposed to a different culture had played a major role in choosing this topic. In fact, these factors enhanced my awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity to the issue being addressed in my study and assisted me in working with the participants (Creswell, 2009). Patton (2002) indicates that the researcher should have the appropriate

experiences and education, as in my case these had a direct bearing on my perceptions of Saudi women's who aspired to leadership positions.

The role of the researcher takes on a more important impact in qualitative research; and the researcher's experiences may create bias and assumptions that may affect the data collection, data analysis, and reporting the findings (Creswell, 2009). Reflexivity is important to consider for how my and the study's participants' perspectives informed the issue at the center of this study (Patton, 2002). In some ways, the participants were both participants and co-researchers. Thus, the researcher must pay attention to these perspectives to produce authentic and reliable reporting of the participants' experiences and voices (Patton, 2002). The goal of a qualitative research "is not to completely eliminate subjectivity (the researcher's or the subjects'), but more fully clarify the role of subjectivity in the context of the phenomenon under study" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 8). Indeed, researcher reflexivity can be used as a tool for analysis in qualitative research and reinforces the value and perspective of feminist research methodologies (Patton, 2002).

Merriam (1988) suggests that the basic instrument in qualitative research is the researcher, "all observations and analyses are filtered through one's worldview, one's values, and one perspective" (p. 39). Therefore, it becomes necessary to limit one's biases and bracket one's preconceptions, and assumptions (Merriam, 1988). To prevent any potential bias and on behalf of authentically representing the participating Saudi women's experiences and voices, every effort was made to eliminate personal involvement with the subject material, to recognize the need to be open to the thoughts and perspectives of others, and to set aside my personal experiences in order to understand those of the female participants in this study. To achieve these

goals, I identified my assumptions pertaining to my role and the qualitative study as the following:

1. As a researcher I expect that experiences and education will influence data collection, analysis, and reporting for this study.

2. Qualitative research seeks to capture the experiences of the directly involved participants. In addition, this type of research is concerned with the multiple realities of human experience.

3. This study, which seeks to explore the experiences of Saudi female leaders and the role of courage in their leadership success, is well suited to an exploratory approach.

4. As a qualitative researcher, I am the research instrument and all interpretations are filtered through my worldview. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify how I arrived here. Interest in Saudi female leadership developed approximately four years ago, and as a witness to the growing leadership participation of Saudi women in the Saudi society. I became aware that through my literature search, there was little research on this topic, and as a result, I began looking at myself as a Saudi woman who aspires to become an effective leader.

5. Further, through the literature review, I found that courage is a highly personal and leadership characteristic. Most importantly, as a researcher, I am eager to learn and uncover the role of courage in successful female leadership; and how women participants perceive and define courage as a leadership attribute. While I have read many articles and books on the topic of courage, it is clear to me that the role of courage in women leadership is yet very limited.

Population, Sampling Procedures & Sample

The target population for this study consisted of female leaders who occupy executive-level positions within organizations in Saudi Arabia. Ten female leaders from Saudi Arabia were invited to participate in the study. A summary of demographic information collected from the ten research participants is provided in the findings. Participation was voluntary, and all participants' identities are protected. The number of women leaders included in this study kept small in order to make the research process manageable. "There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p. 244). The purpose of limiting the number of participants was to generate information-rich data. According to Patton (2002), "the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than the sample size" (p. 245).

Sampling procedures. Purposeful sampling method was used to locate subjects whose stories can answer the research questions and meet the research objectives. This method delivered useful information from the selected female participants to help with understanding the research problem (Creswell, 2009). The following two purposeful sampling strategies were used: criterion and snowball sampling (Creswell, 2009). To be included in the study population, the women leaders had to be a Saudi female leader who had managed an organization that represented at least 20 employees. For the purpose of this study, I defined a leadership role as a situation in which one had either been a supervisor or manager of ten or more people or had been a significant leader on a large project.

Furthermore, the other criterion was that the female participant held a leadership position for at least two years. My rationale for this was these women would have had sufficient

experience or opportunities to encounter and overcome enough challenges and to speak to

consistent perspectives of the role of courage in their leadership endeavors. Also, the participant

must have access to electronic media, which includes a computer network as this was a

requirement for all communication between the participants and the researcher who is located in

the United States, as well as for conducting the actual electronic-interview process. Whereas, the

snowball sampling strategy was used to identify other female participants who were interested in

the study, were willing to share their leadership experiences, and met the aforementioned criteria

(Creswell, 2009).

Huberman and Miles (2002) wrote that the small sample sizes are relevant for this type of

study. According to Robson (2002), saturation occurs in qualitative research when the collection

of more data tends to provide no additional knowledge. The sample size for this particular study

was ten Saudi female leaders who were willing to write about and share their leadership

experiences. A few participants were recruited via email. Others were suggested by friends who

were colleagues of the researcher's friends. Initial contact with the participants was done via

email (see Appendix A). The participants were given a brief summary of the study including

some qualifying statements to determine the eligibility of potential female participants as well as

a voluntary request to participate in the electronic interview. The first qualifying statement stated

if the participant is a Saudi female leader who has managed an organization that represented at

least 20 employees. The second qualifying statement stated if the participant holds a leadership

position for at least two years. If a participant meets the sampling criteria and agrees to

participate in the study, then she can press on the link provided in the email to the interview

questionnaire which included the aim, purpose, full description of the study, any foreseeable

risks or benefits to participating, confidentiality of information, a statement that participation was

voluntary, and an explanation of who to contact for answers to research questions (see Appendix A). These female participants answered both open and close ended questions by giving detailed responses. Participation in the study was on a voluntary basis, and there was no compensation, incentive, or anything else provided for their cooperation.

Data Collection Procedures

Data-collection procedures involved an electronic, virtual interview process. Details of the protocol are explained below.

Virtual interview process. This study was designed as a qualitative study to explore the stories and gather information from the successful female leaders to answer the research questions. The research effort involved conducting electronic interviews, accumulating data, analyzing data, and determining trends from the data collected (Creswell, 2009). The interview process is a flexible and adaptable way to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2009). Thus, gathering information using a flexible method was more reliable. This study involved asynchronous electronic interviews, as participants were located in Saudi Arabia, which made face-to-face interviews not possible. The researcher generated useful qualitative conclusions through the electronic interview process and data analysis. Content analysis was an important part of the procedure after the data was collected. The content of the data was reviewed to discover common themes and trends.

The interview data was gathered using a web-based process including a survey administration tool Qualtrics. An original interview questionnaire developed by the researcher was used (see Appendix C). The interview questionnaire was divided into two sections: demographic characteristics for a profile of the participants, and the actual interview questionnaire. The interview questionnaire included eight items. Considering the research

questions, the interview questions were developed and drawn from the empirical literature on leadership and courage. The questions were designed to elicit an in-depth description of Saudi female leaders' experiences coping with challenges they encountered in their leadership experiences; and their perspectives on the role of courage in their leadership endeavors. Qualitative online interviews provided the researcher with in-depth information, relevant to participants' experiences of and perspectives on a particular topic (Creswell, 2009). The specific interview questions were validated by several individuals with content expertise regarding leadership, courage, and Saudi culture.

The researcher used a web-based survey tool Qualtrics to administer the interview questionnaire online. The goal of the virtual interviews was to "generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements" (Riessman, 2008, p. 23). Most importantly, participants were allowed to conduct the online interviews and describe their experiences in the comfort of their home environments, whenever they felt ready. This was advantageous to make the participant comfortable while answering the online interview questions, especially when a participant revealed sensitive personal experiences and events. Further, the female participants gained greater anonymity when writing and were not directly observed by the researcher. If participants shared their stories and perspectives with direct observation by the researcher, then a true picture of the experience being researched might not be captured. Thus, the difficulty of expressing sensitive stories or personal experiences was considered.

Data Collection Process. Each qualified participant was asked to click on a link sent in an e-mail provided by the researcher. By clicking on the link, participants were immediately connected to a brief introduction to the study, the informed consent form (see Appendix B) and the electronic interview questionnaire. On the first page of the questionnaire, the participants

provided their consent by clicking on the "agree" button. Once the agreement was obtained, participants proceeded to complete the interview questionnaire using their computer keyboard and mouse. The survey tool stored the data for each participant's responses and was downloaded at the end of the study. All data gathered was secured by password protection.

The next section of the questionnaire captured the demographic characteristics of the women leaders. The information obtained in this section included age, educational level, years of work experience, the title of the position currently held, the focus of current organization or business, work responsibilities, the number of years in the present organization, and the number of employees (see Appendix C). The data from this part of the electronic interview was used to provide a profile of the Saudi female leaders who participated in the study. The last section is the actual interview questions (see Appendix C). The interview questions are listed below:

1. What is your leadership story? Going back to the time when you first started working, please tell me how you got to where you are today (i.e. the trajectory of your leadership). Was there a particular person or event that prompted your journey?

2. What do you think about the role of Saudi cultural influences on female leaders? For instance, do you think high positions of power and leadership are culturally gendered? Or have you had experiences at work when your femininity was a factor? Explain.

3. How would you define courage?

4. How does/has courage worked for you, in the context of your role as a leader?

5. Could you please share one or two experiences of heightened challenge during your tenure as a leader? For example, tell me about a time when you needed to deal with obvious gender discrimination or balancing career and family. Describe

6. What personal or leadership characteristics or abilities did you use to overcome each of those heightened challenges?

7. When reflecting on these experiences of heightened challenge, what other thoughts might you have about the role of courage in leadership?

8. What recommendations would you provide to young Saudi females who are striving towards a leadership position?

Participants were asked to complete the interview questionnaire at their earliest convenience. Participants were given three weeks to complete the questionnaire to allow them to answer the questions with as much detail as possible and to produce accounts of sufficient depth and breadth. All data collection was considered complete once all the ten participants completed the interview questionnaire.

Interview Validity and Reliability

To ensure internal validity of the interview questions, a professor in the Organizational Leadership Department at Pepperdine University served as a peer examiner. Then, the interview questions were piloted with two Saudi females (researcher's friends), in order to ensure that language was clear and to identify any issues in regards to answering the interview questions online. Furthermore, a pilot study was conducted to identify the length of the time needed to answer the interview questions.

An additional goal of the pilot study was to ascertain any problems that might arise during the actual research study (Glesne, 2006). The pilot study was used to ensure the reliability and validity of the interview questions and to make adjustments if needed (Maxwell, 2005). The researcher reviewed the transcripts of the pilot data, and the participants were asked for feedback

on the interview questions. Some minor modifications were made to the questions and/or format based on the pilot process.

Data Analysis Strategy

Maxwell (2005) stated "any qualitative study requires decisions about how the analysis will be done, and these decisions should inform, and be informed by, the rest of the design" (p. 95). The data collected from the interview questionnaire were analyzed by using a thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method was also used to capture "the complexities of the meaning within a textual data set" (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012, p. 11). Using thematic analysis, the data was coded using HyperRESEARCH™ software to find and describe explicit and implicit ideas within the data collected (Guest et al., 2012) to create a comprehensive analysis of the reported perspectives from participants through a thorough examination of the interview scripts.

It is important to keep in mind that researcher judgment is crucial in determining what constitutes a theme. Braun and Clarke (2006) argued that the "keyness of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures, but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question" (p. 82). The analysis was driven by the nature of the data. Therefore, I reported my research data via an inductive, data-driven approach (Richards & Morse, 2013). Furthermore, I identified themes from the "explicit or surface meanings of the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p 84).

As outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), my analysis proceeded via the following six steps:

- *Step 1: Familiarizing oneself with data.* As the researcher, I read each transcript three times to familiarize myself further in the data and to begin the process of searching for patterns, trends, and meanings that emerged from the data. The interview responses collected from the survey tool Qualtrics were transferred electronically into HyperRESEARCH™ qualitative research software to code the responses for each interview question. HyperRESEARCH™ was used to assist in organizing all eight sets of responses from the eight interview questions and to find common themes and patterns.

- *Step 2: Generating initial codes.* Once I finished working analytically through the entire data set and had identified interesting aspects in the data items, I began the process of creating initial codes using HyperRESEARCH™ software. The responses were coded according to the interview questions they represented. All scripts were carefully read, and data were coded. The researcher stayed alert for consistent themes reflected in the responses. The researcher drew from concepts compiled through the literature review in developing themes related to Saudi female leadership.

- *Step 3: Searching for themes.* Once I finished coding the data, I began the process of considering how different codes may have combined to form central themes. At this phase, I began to think about the relationships among codes, among themes, and between different levels of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

- *Step 4: Reviewing themes.* During this step, I engaged in the process of reviewing the themes, in order to ensure that they adequately captured the coded data. Memos and notes regarding each code were created in the database to assist in the process of creating themes and categories.

- *Step 5: Defining and naming themes.* During this step, I defined and further refined the themes and analyzed the data within. At the end of this phase, I was able to define clearly what each theme was about and gave each theme a title. By analyzing the data, five emergent themes were identified, and a set of 24 subthemes were derived throughout the study and used during the final data analysis of all eight interview data sets.

  Once the process of coding, creating subthemes, and aligning text to codes in the software was completed, the cycle was repeated two times with a peer examiner to ensure the reliability of the data analysis process and to ensure the resulting codes were supported by the relevant text. The software also provided tools to visually represent linkages within the text of the different interviews, providing further support for the emerging themes of the study.

- *Step 6: Producing the report.* During this step, I wrote a detailed analysis in the following chapter for each individual theme and considered how each theme fit into the overall story that I told about my data, in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Internal Study Validity and Reliability

Researchers have a responsibility to ensure their research is valid, reliable, and ethical. Validity asks the question: "What is it about this inquiry which would render it transparently faithful enough to enable me to act upon its findings?" (Lincoln, 2001, p. 25). In other words, how do researchers know their work is both rigorous and meaningful? Validity refers to whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about (Richards & Morse, 2013). Huberman and Miles (2002) cited Maxwell as saying, "Descriptive validity is the first concern of most qualitative researchers" (p. 45). Descriptive validity deals with the accuracy of the findings and

"issues of omission as well as commission" (Huberman & Miles, 2002, p. 47). The findings cannot be distorted or made up (Richards & Morse, 2013).

In this study, the interview protocol was first validated and piloted with members of the target population. In addition, the validity of the findings depends on honest responses to the interview questions by each individual participant. By providing anonymity to the subjects, it is assumed that the responses were true-to-life and enabled for an accurate interpretation of the landscape of the female participants.

Reliability. As with validity, reliability concerns the consistency or stability of a measure (Richards & Morse, 2013). A reliable tool is the one that repeatedly renders similar results. Thus, reliability focuses on how accurate the testing instrument is at providing real scores (Robson, 2002). Thus, to ensure reliability, the researcher provided detailed information about the study's issue and purpose, the researcher's role, the participants' roles and selection criteria (Creswell, 2009) as well as conducted a pilot process to ensure the reliability of the interview tool.

Qualitative inquiry involves an interpretation of data and thus, a rigorous and reliable analysis process is critical. Using a transparent process that included researcher reflexivity, peer-review and detailed documentation of the coding processes supports the study's internal validity.

Ethical & Legal Considerations

This research involved adult women and the risks for participating in this virtual interview process posed minimal risks to the subjects. It qualified as Exempt Research under Category 2 (45 CFR 46) (see Appendix D & E).

Informed consent. The participants were informed of the title of the study, the purpose of the study, information about the researcher, and the length of the interview questionnaire, and that the research will be published in a dissertation. Before completing the interview

questionnaire, the participants were given the opportunity to read the informed consent. The written consent form states that participation in this study is voluntary and that the participant has the right not to participate. Therefore, the information provided in the consent form enabled the participant to make a decision about participation in the study. It asks the participants not to add any identifying elements, names, or other information that could identify their interview, as all responses are anonymous, confidential, and protected per IRB guidelines. Additionally, the informed consent states that the participants can withdraw during the data collection process at any time, or they may omit any question that they do not wish to answer.

Using an online administration tool provides a way for the subjects to be anonymous to the researcher. Thus, any concerns about privacy and anonymity can be minimized. Although there may be some concerns about discussing their perspectives, the questions and topics of the research are not considered political so that if a breach of confidentiality were to occur, the subjects would not be exposed to any civil or criminal challenges. Interpretation of the stories and presentation of perceptions were presented in the aggregate without any personal identifiable information. There are no adverse reactions in response to participating in the research as this study does not pose any physical, psychological, social or economic harm.

Use of a survey administration tool ensures the security of data. The data collected through this tool was downloaded and backed up in a secure location. The data files are stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's home computer for two years following the completion of the study and then destroyed per IRB guidelines.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 explained in detail how the researcher conducted this qualitative study. This chapter presented an introduction to the methodology, along with the research design, research

population, and issues of data collection and analysis. Issues related to validity, reliability, and

ethical considerations were also provided. The remaining chapters will discuss the results,

implications, conclusions, and recommendations of this qualitative exploratory study.

Chapter Four: Findings

Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore the personal leadership experiences of Saudi women. Specifically, the researcher aimed to describe the motivations, challenges, and barriers faced by women leaders as reported narratively by the participants themselves. Furthermore, the study explored the role of courage as a personal leadership attribute and examined how women leaders perceive the role and action of courage in their leadership endeavors. The information presented in this chapter details the results of both the demographic data and the qualitative survey responses collected from ten Saudi female leaders that met all criteria.

The chapter will first discuss the demographic findings of the participants. Data from the qualitative survey responses will then be presented, which emerged using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method. From an analysis of the scripts of the interviews, emergent themes across the eight interview questions were identified. Sample responses in the explanation of each theme were provided, and the subthemes for each theme were presented from most to least number of occurrences. The participants' quotes were left unedited, in keeping with the methodology requirements.

Demographic Findings

Of the ten female participants, two were under 25 years of age, four were between 26 and 35, three were between 36 and 45 years of age, and one was between 46 and 65 years of age. Four of the participants have a Bachelor's degree, and six have a Master's degree. In addition, three of the participants have 5 years of work experience, two have 15 years of experience, one has 8 years of experience, one has 16 years of experience, one has 2 years of experience, one has 3 years of experience, and one has 23 years of work experience (see Figures 4-6).

Furthermore, information about the title of a current position, the length of time in current position, the focus of current organization, and number of employee in the current organization for each female participant is outlined in Table 1.
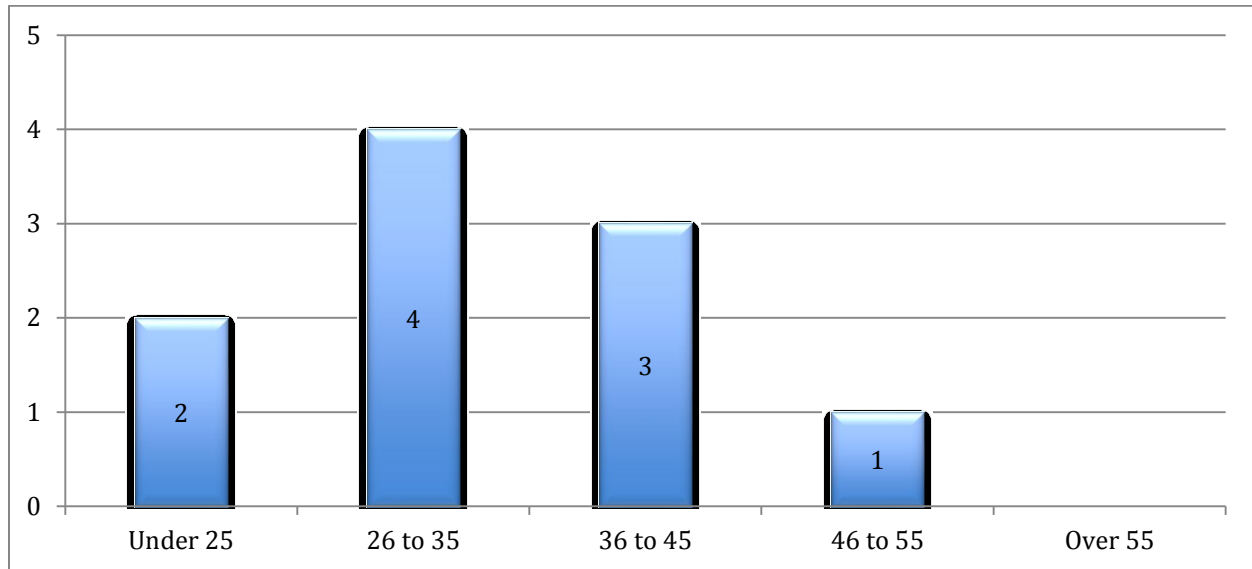
Figure 4. Age of participants ($N = 10$).
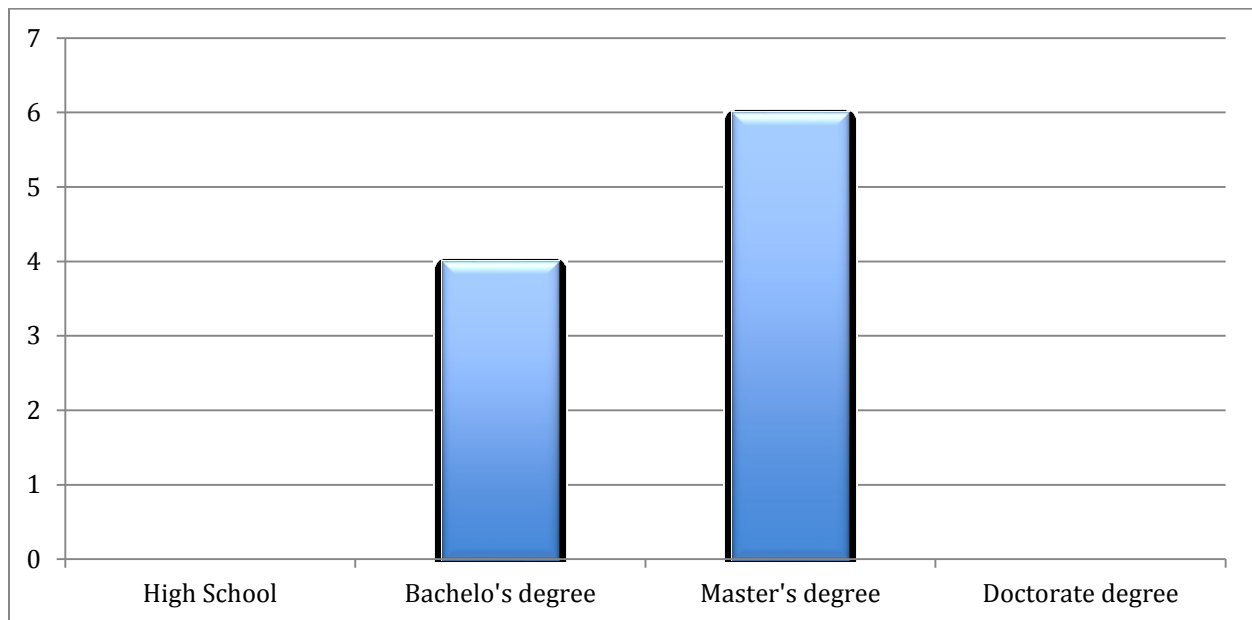
Figure 5. Educational level of participants ($N = 10$).
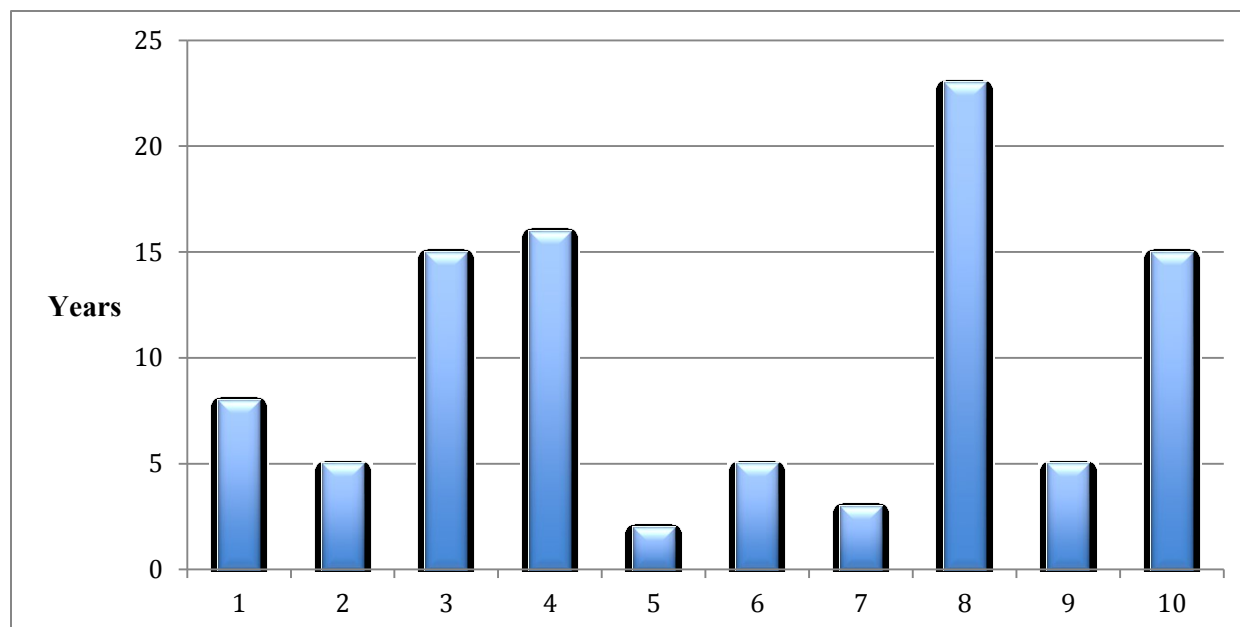
Figure 6. Years of work experience.

Table 1
Current Position Information for Each Participant

Subject	Title of position	Time in position	Focus of organization	Number of employees
1	Operations Analyst	1	International development	10000
2	Project Manager	3 months	Business development	200
3	Managing Director	1	Real estate development	40
4	Principal	9	Education	70
5	Specialist	1	Business development, management consulting	+200
6	Financial Supervisor	1	Banking	160
7	Head of Follow-Up	6 months	Communication	2000
8	Business Owner	6	Beauty & fragrances	85
9	Manager of Public Relations	3	Business development	140
10	Strategy and Program Management Officer	4	Financial institute	1000+

Qualitative Survey Findings

This qualitative study utilized a virtual interview approach in seeking answers to the research questions. This approach consisted of selecting appropriate participants, conducting data collection through eight virtual interview questions, and then analyzing the findings. Personal experiences of the female participants were solicited through asking open-ended questions that allowed participants the opportunity to share their perspectives.

Upon completion of collecting responses, each question's responses from all the participants were reviewed, and key emergent themes and subthemes were identified (see Table 2).

Table 2
Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Factors Influenced Female Leadership Success	• Education • Perseverance • family-support • experience • supportive management • challenges give women better opportunities • working for a start-up • starting own business • adapting cultural traditions into work
Challenges	• gender discrimination and stereotypes • cultural influences • work-family balance • working and leading under pressure
Courage defined	• determination to succeed • risk-taking • self-awareness
Courage in Action	• determination to succeed • self-confidence • decision making • risk-taking
Recommendations	• perseverance • self-confidence • sharing experiences • choosing the right workplace

Five themes with 24 subthemes were derived throughout the analysis of all eight interview data sets. Direct quotes from the participants and excerpts are provided in the discussion of each theme.

Theme 1: Factors Influenced Female Leaders' Success

From the ten participant responses to the first interview question "What is your leadership story? Going back to the time when you first started working, please tell me how you got to where you are today (i.e. the trajectory of your leadership). Was there a particular person or event that prompted your journey?" nine subthemes were identified in the analysis. These factors were: (a) education, (b) perseverance, (c) family-support, (d) experience, (e) supportive management, (f) challenges give women better opportunities, (g) working for a start-up, (h) starting own business, (i) adapting cultural traditions into work. Table 3 shows an outline of the codes and the number of occurrences of the first interview question responses.

Table 3
Factors Influenced Female Leadership Success

Factors	Number of Occurrences
Education	5
Perseverance	4
Family-support	3
Experience	3
Supportive management	2
Challenges give women better opportunities	2
Working for a startup	1
Starting own business	1
Adapting cultural traditions into work	1

Education. Few participants described education as an important factor to achieve leadership success. One participant discussed the importance of education in her leadership achievement:

From the moment I was studying for my bachelor's degree at a University, I always knew that Public Relations are what I wanted to do in the future. From the very first moment I enrolled into University I worked on getting my PR certificate. This certificate would open for me many business job opportunities in the future.

Another participant reported that "I started working in the banking industry in the customer service department. Then I received a scholarship to get my master's degree in finance. After that, I received a promotion to work for the financial department. Two years later I became a supervisor of the department". One participant said, "got my MBA abroad and now working as a project manager". Another participant indicated "I have also taken some leadership courses from which I have benefited a lot". In the words of one participant, "After graduating I started my personal university journey by starting in an area that I was not interested in and moving to an area where I was more passionate about, I graduated after 4 years, during my last year internship I was labeled by one of my teachers as outstanding which was a huge booster in my future".

Perseverance. Responses that fell into the category of perseverance related to the personal passion and drive of the participant to pursue a leadership role. For example, in the words of one participant, "I fought to present my work and defended it and faced a lot of criticism, but with my perseverance I got what I hoped for. Now I lead the team and meet our chairman and VPs in regular bases unlike any other male or female in the organization". Another participant described, "Being the only female in a team of highly experienced men for the past 5 years I worked hard and struggled more than any of my team to prove my capabilities". One

participant expressed, "I had nurtured and grown a fast-track career for my-self with my first organization over a period of almost ten years. The earlier part of that stint, I'd managed to successfully gain the respect that wasn't initially offered to me as a woman leader in a vastly male-dominated industry". Another participant expressed, "After getting the acceptance, and finally employed, I had this strong motivation carried with me, and gave most of my time to work. I spent so much dedication and was recognized by many in the organization. This pushed me higher in the scale".

Family support. Few participants discussed family support as a critical factor in their leadership success. In the words of one participant:

To start, I can say that my father played an important role in my life. He encouraged me and supported me to be a leader because I was his elder daughter. He created the roots of leadership in me. He used to discuss economic, cultural, political, and social matters with me. All these factors have inspired me and I really see that my confidence is because of him. It has enabled me to make decisions and participate in decision-making and job privacy.

Another participant stated, "I was raised in a family that promoted that each member must participate, we were encouraged to take summer jobs when we were at a young age to learn how to be responsible and always have an active role in our family". Another participant expressed, "Of course I would not have reached here today without the support of my family and friends even though there were many misunderstanding and complications when I first started".

Experience. Some participants described that building work experience as a critical factor in pursuing a leadership role. In the words of one participant:

I stumbled after university to many other jobs that didn't serve directly into what I

studied. I worked with a university for a year, and then an office manager at an ID

company then an area sales manager for a big company, all of these positions trained me

in marketing, management and customer services.

Another participant stated, "I've been working for 8 years. And currently I'm working at the

same organization for the last 5 years. I was a junior with less experience when I first joined

them. But with time I was able to acquire the needful knowledge and skills to be in a

leader/supervisor position". A third participant said, "I first started as a vice principal in a very

well established school and after 2 years I became principal... I have been a principal now for 11

years working in the best schools in my region and working with the Ministry of Education, I

have experience in the top international educational programs and I am certified".

Supportive management. Two participants explained that choosing the right company

and supportive management are critical in achieving leadership success. As one participant

described, "I was motivated by the trust of my last manager. He gave me a leadership role and I

succeed with it. I would say it embraced the leadership within me. The healthy work

environment and supportive managers helped me a lot to reach my goals and strengthen my

personality". The second participant stated, "I worked my way into leadership positions at a very

early age by choosing the right organizations that were multinational companies with a foreign

interest that offered opportunities to women alongside men".

Challenges give women better opportunities. Two participants reported that they did

not allow challenges to pull them down. Instead, they use these negative experiences as

opportunities to come out stronger and be successful leaders. As the first participant believes that

"challenges give people the opportunity to be more creative… so the overall challenging

atmosphere in our society has pushed women to be creative in their work in the financial sector, educational sector, and in all sectors where we can see Saudi women have reached executive and leadership positions". Also, the second participant shared her perspective, "a challenge not only does it make you successful but it teaches you how to be independent and to have courage to fight for what you want to make a difference and to prove to others that Saudi women are capable of doing whatever they would like".

Working for a startup. Only one participant indicated that working for a startup was a major factor for her leadership success. As she stated, "Starting my career in a startup, I had the opportunity to accelerate my learning curve and career advancement. Starting out as an analyst in projects, I moved to setting up an entire unit and recruiting for it".

Starting own business. One participant described her leadership experience and the reason that encouraged her to start her own business. In her words:

In my first organization, I confronted rudeness and gossip. My female manager not only discouraged me from leading in a way that was genuine, but was afraid to work from her own truth. I just felt more and more that I couldn't be my total self as a woman manager in this environment, although I found certain aspects of my job very rewarding. Ultimately, I made a decision to reinvent my path of leadership that would align my deepest interests and values with my work. I resigned and I felt a sense of freedom and established my own beauty agency.

Adapting cultural traditions into work. One participant explained how adapting the culture into her work to be a successful female leader. As she described:

I worked for a PR Company when I graduated for events planning and then I slowly narrowed my focus down to advertising whilst keeping the cultural aspects giving the fact

that I am in Saudi. I wanted to look at matters from a positive perspective and to have new fresh ideas. This required adapting the culture and tradition into my work to represent Saudi female business leaders today like myself. Therefore, I focused on maintain the culture with a bit of spice. This technique not only helped me but helped other Saudi women to get out on the field and discover their hobbies and talents to become successful women in the future.

Theme 2: Challenges

The extracted codes from the following two interview questions "What do you think about the role of Saudi cultural influences on female leaders? For instance, have you had experiences at work when your femininity was a factor? Explain" and "Could you please share one or two experiences of heightened challenge during your tenure as a leader? For example, tell me about a time when you needed to deal with obvious gender discrimination or balancing career and family. Describe" were integrated into the second theme "challenges". Four subthemes were identified in the analysis. These challenges were: (a) gender discrimination and stereotypes, (b) cultural influences, (c) work-family balance, (d) working and leading under pressure. Table 4 shows an outline of the codes and the number of occurrences of the second and fifth interview questions' responses.

Table 4
Challenges

Challenges	Number of Occurrences
Gender discrimination and stereotypes	14
Cultural influences	13
Work-family balance	3
Working and leading under pressure	1

Gender discrimination and stereotypes. Despite their leadership success, almost all of the participants discussed gender discrimination and stereotypes as one of the challenges that they experience in their roles as female leaders. As one of the participants shared her job interview experience:

One time I was being interviewed for a leadership position, and the interviewer was asking me questions like: are you pregnant or planning to get pregnant anytime soon? Will you be able to travel? Or will you have to be at home in a certain time? These questions made me feel uncomfortable and discriminated, because these questions are personal and it shows that these candidates have fewer opportunities to get the job.

Another participant described the challenges she faced when trying to gain respect from her male colleagues:

I recall a time when I first applied to my current organization; I was thrust directly into a leadership position. I was determined to stay and tried to gain respect of my directors. I did this by example and direct communication. But so many times I had to stand up for myself by confronting my colleagues who were unwilling to show mutual respect. They'd try to override my authority and sometime they'd talk over me in meetings. I just couldn't ignore them! So I aimed to offer collaboration and eventually they saw that they couldn't wear me down and they began to work with me.

Also, one participant talked about her experience with gender discrimination in the workplace, "I was told flat out in my career at least 4 times that I was being passed up for a promotion or new position because it was in a function that required a man". Also, another participant stated, "Power is usually associated to men over here. Most positions are already occupied by them". Another participant shared her perspective, she indicated:

Unfortunately, there aren't many that I would consider actual leaders in the sense that they've moved beyond gender issues. Meaning, leaders in their industry and not amongst their gender. The one that comes to mind is Lubna AlOlayan who was able to move beyond that gender issue. Her attitude is simple towards cultural issues and people with gender issues.

Also, two participants shared their stories related to gender stereotypes, as one participant reported, "The repeated story has been when a man from a different company walks into the meeting room to meet me and my team and instead of acknowledging me in my position as a leader he automatically assumes I am the secretary". The other participant described her experience, "My favorite story that continues until today is the fact that when I travel on a business trip and people see my title but cannot tell from my name what my gender is, I am by default considered a Mr.".

One of the participants also shared her personal experience with gender stereotypes before assuming a leadership position. In her words:

> Before entering the leadership field, a far relative proposed to me but when he found out my plan to be a leader he decided not want to marry me anymore. This was kind of tough for me but I am very happy that we did not get married because after working I found many other opportunities and met people with bigger dreams and goals in life.

However, two participants expressed that gender-related issues do not exist in their international organizations where they offer equal opportunities for both genders. As one participant stated, "Since I am working in an international organization, where they ensure that the gender issue does not exist". The other participant indicated:

In my perspective, I don't see a difference between male and female in terms of leadership especially in the private sector. Now, it's just a matter of how capable he or she is, so it depends on the person's qualifications, skills and efforts. However, the Saudi culture imposes certain conditions on the woman to work harder in order to prove herself.

Moreover, few participants expressed that gender discrimination and gender inequality are global issues and not only an issue in Saudi Arabia. As one participant expressed, "Female leaders in Saudi do not operate on a level playing field with their male counterparts but then again, neither do women in every country in the world. The equality for women in the workplace is a real battle globally and culture does play a role in every country as well". Another participant said, "I think female leadership is not only an issue in Saudi, it's a world issue"; and she added "there are many challenges in leadership for females across the globe. I'm sure it's more challenging in Saudi Arabia as this role only just started its baby steps by letting woman participate in areas they were never considered for". Another participant shared her perspective regarding this issue:

Gender is a controversial issue from my perspective. Gender discrimination is found everywhere not only in the Arab region or in specific Saudi. Throughout history, most of the leaders were men. This is just how life has become but there will always be development with time. For example, back in the days, the men were the breadwinners whereas women would stay at home and do house chores. However, things have changed now; more women are out in the business world and held very important positions all around the world.

Another participant described:

Meanwhile, some people are not convinced that the woman should attain a leading position and they have a preexisting attitude or view towards women, regardless of their competence and positive effect in their work. These people give many reasons and speeches that justify their point of view and they prove its truth.

Cultural influence. Few participants explained how the cultural traditions and norms in the Saudi society had a great influence in female leadership success. In the words of one participant, "In Saudi Arabia I believe that the culture has an influence on female leaders. Traditions and norms play a major role…women do not reach there easily, they have to struggle a lot and face many cultural and traditional obstacles to get the positions they want". Another participant stated, "Unfortunately, it is our culture, customs, traditions... that guide us. And it all goes back to the fact that the woman in Saudi Arabia doesn't understand her rights. In such a male-dominated society, there will be sensitivity and resistance to female leadership". Additionally, one participant indicated that a man's support is important to be successful, "I believe that in our culture a woman can't be successful without the support of a man (father, brother, or husband). From my personal experience, the first man who supported me was my father; and he continued the support until I got married. I think this is a key issue for Saudi women to succeed".

Another participant explained the gender segregation in the workplace as a cultural practice, "segregation in the work place between men and women was not the result of cultural norms or the nature of work. It was the result of a legal mandate that most, if not all employees where I work resisted for a long time". As another participant reported, "During training courses, coworkers tend to request that those courses would be given to a female-only group, or a male-

only group. I have once requested for them to be mixed, hence reflecting the work life. Most coworkers disagreed".

Moreover, few participants expressed that Saudi women status is slowly changing in the society, and women have to exert more effort than men to prove her capabilities. In the words of one participant:

Although women development in Saudi may seem slow but we are definitely going steps further but with time. I can relate this to myself, when I first started working and gained my success in the press and media, I was discriminated slightly for posting my pictures out in the public but today it has become almost totally normal. I truly believe that if a woman has a certain goal to reach, she will reach it even if it might take time and power.

The other participant indicated, "I do believe that Saudi Woman have started in achieving and announcing their role but it will take time to catch up with other leading countries which are still having their own struggles with female leadership". In the words of another participant, "In our society, the woman is always under the microscope. So it is important for a woman to prove her capabilities and her efficiency to reach to a higher position. It is also true for the man, but the woman should exert more effort to prove her capabilities at each stage to reach a stable superior position".

Despite the cultural challenges, few participants expressed that there is an improvement in the society towards female leadership and the number of Saudi female leaders is increasing. In the words of one participant:

Among the Saudi female leadership improvement, there has been an accumulation gaining ground in the culture. The positive experiments of women have changed the

woman's role and her leadership. This success creates incentives to change some traditions of the society towards Saudi women.

Another participant reported, "I personally think that we are moving towards a stronger female presence, and hope for them to occupy leadership positions". Another participant stated, "Thankfully, we are a society that has started to develop. It started to look at women in a different way". Further, one participant indicated, "Saudi women have achieved concrete success in both the private and public sectors; and if there is a desire to succeed, then persistence is the way to success". Another participant said, "there are very well known successful Saudi female leaders, and there are unknown ones, and the number is increasing".

Work-family balance. Three participants discussed balancing work and family life as one of the challenges that they experience in their roles as female leaders. The first participant reported:

At the beginning of your career it always come first and you tend to make it your priority, but as I gained the experience and confidence in my career I realized that I didn't spend valuable time with my children forgetting that they are the main reason in my career path, so I changed and made my children always come first.

The second participant shared her experience:

My second son was born and my maternity leave was 30 short days so I went back and I was given the responsibility of vice head of the steering committee so I ended up working from 6-8 daily and missed out on mile stones with my newly born child. After it was over I couldn't get that time back and made my children a priority…whatever I'm doing it can wait if my kids.

Another participant described her challenge with balancing work and family, in her words, "I have always struggled to balance life and work and I don't think there is a prescription for how to do it, but it can be difficult. My work calendar is my calendar. However, being confidence and determined helped me to do it all!"

Working and leading under pressure. Only one participant discussed the pressures that come with her leadership position as a challenge that she experiences in her role as a female leader. In her words, "In my case, I wasn't confronted with major barriers in my workplace other than working and leading under pressure. For example, big projects, tight due dates…etc.".

Theme 3: Courage Defined

From the ten participant responses to the third interview question "How would you define courage?" three subthemes were identified in the analysis. They are (a) determination to succeed, (b) risk-taking, and (c) self-awareness. Table 5 shows an outline of the codes and the number of occurrences of the third interview question responses.

Table 5
Courage Defined

Definition	Number of Occurrences
Determination to succeed	6
Risk-taking	4
Self-awareness	3

Determination to succeed. Six participants discussed having a determination to succeed as an important component in their understanding of courage. These participants expressed that in order to be successful; one has to have the drive, energy, and strength necessary to achieve one's goals. As one participant expressed, "Courage could definitely be about standing up for

yourself to reach where you are today". Another participant defined courage as, "Standing up for what you believe in without losing who you are". One participant believed that courage is "The ability to stand up for what you believe without being affected by external factors". Another participant noted that courage is "having the ability to pursue your dreams and aspirations in light of very hard and strict cultural and legal norms that give men an extra push or easier path in their professional career". Further, one of the participants defined courage as "the ability to keep going even when all odds are against you. It is the strength people need to persevere". Another participant described, "Courage for me is about having a goal in mind that keeps you moving forward".

Risk-taking. Four participants described risk-taking as an important component in their understanding of courage. As one participant defined courage as, "taking action even when I am out of my comfort zone and it involves taking a real risk". Another participant defined courage as, "not to be afraid to speak up". Also, one of the participants described courage as taking a risk and she added, "Not everyone has courage to step forward especially in Saudi. As a women, working out in the field was definitely not easy because there were many risks that I had to take to stand up for my career". Another participant simply defined courage as "fearlessness".

Self-awareness. Three participants discussed self-awareness as a key component in their understanding of courage. In the words of one participant, "courage is staying true to one's self, keep being optimistic, and never get stuck in the reality of gender inequality". Another participant indicated, "Courage for me is when believing in myself and in my abilities to reach what I want". The third participant defined courage as "doing what you think is right".

Theme 4: Courage in Action

The extracted codes from the following interview questions were integrated into the fourth theme "courage in action". How does/has courage worked for you, in the context of your role as a leader? What personal or leadership characteristics did you use to overcome each of those heightened challenges? When reflecting on these experiences of heightened challenge, what other thoughts might you have about the role of courage in leadership?

From the ten participant responses to these questions, four subthemes were identified in the analysis. They are (a) determination to succeed, (b) self-confidence, (c) decision-making, (d) risk-taking. Table 6 shows an outline of the codes and the number of occurrences.

Table 6
Courage in Action

Courage in Action	Number of Occurrences
Determination to succeed	8
Self-confidence	6
Decision-making	3
Risk-taking	2

Determination to succeed. Few participants discussed having a determination to succeed as a critical factor in their ability to be courageous in their leadership roles. As one of the participants reported on how courage has worked for her as a leader:

As a successful Saudi business leader, courage has taught me to stand up for my dreams and goals in order to go forward in my life. I had to give up many factors in my life to reach where I am today which I definitely do not regret. No one ever said that reaching to success is easy but there is definitely no harm in trying.

Another participant noted, "If I did not have courage, I would have not pursued a career in a male dominated industry where you are persecuted in more ways than one". One participant indicated, "Courage allows me to take action where others fail to do so, to have a strong leadership voice and to question the status quo where necessary". Also, in the words of one participant, "No matter what pressures or barriers I face, I have to achieve my goals and I have to do whatever it takes in order to make that happen". She added, "Courage helped me to step forward and voice my opinions despite push back from others". Also, one of the participants expressed how courage is important to all leaders. In her words:

> Courage is an essential attribute to all leaders it gives you the drive, energy, and ambition necessary to achieve one's goals. It's an important component to me to have a vigorous work ethic and being driven to achieve my goals, no matter what obstacles stood in my way.

Another participant discussed the importance of courage to be a successful leader:

> It's that essential drive toward success for leaders. Being successful in leadership is about how you communicate with your people, how you encourage them. How you motivate them; it's about giving them a sense of hope and direction that although setbacks are inevitable.

Also, one of the participants indicated how courage is significant to make a difference in the world. In her words, "The role of courage in leadership is one of the most important factors. Look at the leaders around the world today, they would not have reached where they are today if they had not taken a step forward to make a difference". She added, " Let's look at Martin Luther King for example, he had the courage to stand up in front of thousands of people to speak on

behalf of the rights of the black society and community. This is what I would see as courage, standing up and fighting for better change to serve peace and better change".

Self-confidence. Some of the participants discussed confidence as a critical factor in their ability to be courageous in their leadership roles. The participants expressed that having a confidence and a good understanding of their strengths supports their leadership success. According to one participant, "Courage gives me the confidence in myself. I always remind myself that I am here because I deserve to be here; and if I am not tough and able to hold my own self, I won't be able to effectively do my job". Another participant noted, "I'm a believer that to succeed it has to start from within. Courage is a personal struggle in finding yourself". Also, one participant expressed, "Courage is my key to be a leader. Once I believe in my abilities and competences, I became more confident and stronger". In the words of another participant, "I didn't really care what others were saying, as long as I could defend my work in any circumstance". Another participant noted on how courage has worked for her as a leader, "…to speak up and carry myself with dignity and letting my work and intellect speak for itself". In the words of another participant, courage is "an extra motive not to accept the status quo, but also not to use it as an excuse".

Decision-making. Three participants discussed that decision making as a critical factor in their ability to be successful in their leadership roles. According to one participant:

> Courage has worked for me with decision making to invest with worldwide companies for future changes. Also, having courage is making your own decisions without having any others interfere just because of the fact that you are Saudi women. This is how I worked, I did not view myself like the weaker gender because I am a woman but the total opposite, and I took this as a challenge which is where it brought my success today.

Another participant indicated that courage helped her to "reasonably make bold decisions and be assertive and firm". Also, one participant noted, "It is very important to have courage to speak up and make yourself clear and assertive".

Risk-taking. One participant discussed risk-taking as an essential factor in her ability to be courageous in her leadership role. According to one participant "Being fearless, I use fear in order to continually challenge myself to take risks, push boundaries, and make bold decisions". Also, one participant noted the importance to learn from mistakes to be a successful leader. In her words, "Life is about experiences you learn the most from your mistakes so don't take mistakes lightly they are what make you who you are today".

Theme 5: Recommendations for Success in Leadership

From the ten participant responses to the last interview question "What recommendations would you provide to young Saudi females who are striving towards a leadership position?" four subthemes were identified in the analysis. They are (a) perseverance, (b) self-confidence, (c) sharing experiences, and (d) choosing the right workplace. Table 7 shows an outline of the codes and the number of occurrences.

Table 7
Recommendations for Success in Leadership

Recommendation	Number of Occurrences
Perseverance	7
Self-confidence	3
Sharing experiences	1
Choosing the right workplace	1

Perseverance. Few participants discussed perseverance and persistent as critical factors to achieve leadership success. The participants reported that, in today's challenging business environment, it is important for females to have the courage to achieve their goals. As one of the participants expressed:

I would definitely recommend Saudi women to chase after their dreams and prove to the society that we are just as capable of reaching success just like everyone else around the world. If more and more Saudi women stand up and come out as leaders, the perspective of our region could totally change to the better. So go out there in the field and show us your leadership skills girls!

Another participant noted the importance to keep trying, "Keep trying and be patient and optimistic and ambitious". Also, one participant expressed, "Put all your efforts into it, and always hold on to what you believe is most suitable". Another participant suggested, "Go for it. Don't let anyone limit you- but be the professional woman in pursuit of great aspirations and don't use excuses". In the words of another participant, "Go for it. Step up to the plate. Put your hand up. Ask for things you need and don't ever be afraid to take on challenges and always step out of your comfort zone".

One of the participants talked about the importance of discussing this subject to all Saudi females. In her words:

Discussing the female leadership status specifically in Saudi Arabia and the world in general is an important issue. It's a very interesting subject that it deserves to be explored. I believe no one has given this topic the proper attention. Still, we Saudi women are not known to the world in terms of what our capabilities are. We do have capabilities and we

do have women who really can set great examples. To all young women I say never give

up, be ambitious, be brave, dream big and don't let anyone hold you back.

Another participant added, "My hope is that Saudi woman achieves her role in the society and

her effectiveness; and not to be deterred by her cultural heritage".

Self-confidence. Three participants emphasized self-confidence as a critical factor for

female leadership success. One participant reflected on the importance of learning from

mistakes. In her words:

Be confident in your action always learn don't be ashamed to make mistakes and always

make sure you stick to following the best leader ever who is our prophet peace be upon

him. Lead by actions not by words!

Another participant noted, "Trust what you know, be truthful, be passionate and take every

opportunity you are given! Always look for an open door and don't be afraid to go through it".

Also, one participant expressed, "I would advise them to have courage and not be shy of saying

what they feel especially if they felt any discrimination".

Sharing experiences. One of the participants emphasized the importance to share

experiences. As she stated, "I think it is important that women share their experiences and

mentor the younger generation, especially since we are still a minority".

Choosing the right workplace. One participant indicated the importance of choosing the

right company and the right manager to be successful. In her words, "Choose your company and

manager carefully. Where you work and who you work for will set a job apart from a career".

Chapter Summary

Through the use of both demographic data collection and a qualitative interview

questionnaire with open-ended questions, the findings in this study provided an insight in regards

to the role of courage in female leadership. In the following chapter, the conclusions and implications of these findings will be discussed in details such as suggestions for initiatives to improve women leaders' status as well as a comparison of the current data with the literature presented in Chapter 2. In addition, limitations and recommendations will also be discussed.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This chapter will begin with an overview of the issue investigated, the purpose of this study, the conceptual framework and the methods used. Following will be an analysis and evaluation of the findings presented in chapter 4. Specifically, this chapter includes conclusions and implications drawn from the research findings and the review of the literature, and recommendations for future research that might contribute to the current understanding of the role of courage in female leadership. Then the chapter concludes with the limitations of the study and closing comments.

Overview

The last few years witnessed an increase enrollment of women in senior management, leadership positions in the public and private sectors in Saudi Arabia (Alahmadi, 2011). Their leadership status is changing, and is becoming more visible in the society than ever before but there continues to be specific barriers associated with their leadership mobility (Almenkash et al., 2007). Despite being faced with so many barriers, Saudi women are just starting to be recognized by the government as having a part to play in the country's economic development and political system (Pharaon, 2004). Thus, as a result of increasing participation of women in different fields of management and leadership roles in Saudi Arabia, there becomes more of a need to research this phenomenon. The current study was conducted to explore and investigate the potential drivers and/or restrainers of Saudi female leaders. According to Garcia- Retamero and Lopez-Zafra (2006), despite the fact that many women are effective in leadership and management positions, other women facing difficulties due to society's view of leadership as being masculine-oriented. Thus, it was crucial to explore the underlying issues contributing to the success and failure of women in leadership positions in Saudi Arabia especially considering

the role of courage. Consequently, this study aimed at creating a venue where the Saudi female leaders' voices and perspectives could be heard.

Since Saudi women are a growing segment of achieving leadership positions (Le Renard, 2008), courage might hold even greater importance for women, and by extension, might influence how women perceive the role of courage in leadership. Only recently has the concept of courage received increased attention for its importance to the effectiveness of women leadership but gaps remain in what researchers know about the role of courage in successful women leaders. Further, little was known about how women leaders perceived and valued courage as a leadership attribute. Thus, this study focused specifically on the role of courage as a leadership attribute, how it helped Saudi women in assuming leadership positions, and contributed to the overall success in their leadership roles.

This study was based on the premise that courage would appear to be an important quality both for female leaders who are assuming leadership positions and for the female leaders who are dealing with the everyday challenges such as gender bias and cultural restrictions (Bennis & Thomas, 2002). Thus, this study provided information for continued research into the female leadership, in particular to examine how women and other minorities experience courage as an important leadership attribute. The study's results are significant in that the results can begin to support in providing tools or means for organizing and developing educational programs, workshops, and seminars for women who aspire or practice leadership. Specifically, exploring courageous women who defied cultural challenges of a controversial society could serve to help young women of any cultural background find the courage to step forward and provide leadership in their communities and organizations to improve the quality of life for all.

Previous literature was reviewed for this study from several fields associated with Saudi female leadership and courage to support and illustrate the research questions and purpose. This study focused on four research questions:

1. What are the leadership experiences of Saudi women leaders?

2. What challenges did these women leaders face to achieve their leadership success?

3. How did courage as a leadership attribute impact their leadership success?

4. How did Saudi culture influence their success?

In light of the research questions, the first question aimed at exploring the participants' stories and allowed them to relate personal experiences, thoughts, and opinions pertaining to their leadership experiences. In the second question, the aim was to explore and put into perspective what the individual woman was experiencing and feeling in regards to the challenges faced including gender bias and stereotyping. In the third question, the goal was to learn about the role of courage and how they defined and perceived courage as a personal leadership attribute. Finally, the fourth question aimed to provide insights into how the Saudi culture affected their success.

The literature review process and conceptual foundation began with an exploration of Saudi Arabia followed by a discussion of the literature surrounding the factors impacting Saudi female leadership and how religion, culture, education, and employment affect Saudi women status. These factors directly impact the possibility of Saudi women assuming leadership roles. For instance, Islamic beliefs and the Saudi culture itself influence the aspirations and opportunities for females to assume leadership roles. It is almost impossible to distinguish between the impact of Islam as a religion and the culture within Saudi Arabia (Long, 2005). Prior to Islam, the traditions and other cultural norms of the tribal community in the Arabian Peninsula

have devoted to the conservative tendency towards women in Saudi Arabia (Alahmadi, 2011;
Alajmi, 2001).

Furthermore, how female children are educated and whether they are prepared for the
workforce has also contributed to the current employment status of women. "Education has been
one of the major vehicles for the transmission of external values and is bound to have an uneasy
relationship with existing social and familial standards" (Yamani, 2000, p. 49). Many studies
describe modernization as a process that affects the role of women in Saudi society through the
spread of education and the opportunities for economic independence (Almohsen, 2000). With
today's increased financial needs and the influences of modernization and globalization, the idea
is considerably changed as the number of educated Saudi women working outside the home is
increasing, who are also sometimes the main source of income for their families (Long, 2005).

Moreover, the literature review also included research of the feminism theory and
feminism from an Islamic perspective to view the Saudi women's leadership roles and help in
understanding this study's objectives. Reviewing the concept of the feminist theory within the
context of this topic was critical because such discussion could assist the reader in understanding
the psychological possibilities related to women leaders and the role of courage in their
leadership success. In general, feminist theory "focuses on the effect society has on gender
inequalities and how such findings can bring about change in gender roles" (Bankston, 2000, p.
203). However, feminism from this Western perspective does not actually speculate the needs
and issues of the women in the Islamic nations as Vidyasagar and Rea (2004) define Islamic
feminism, "the achievement of a space for and by Muslim women, a space of autonomy and a
career in a society that inconsistently forbids and permits professional autonomy and women's
caring role" (p. 265).

Also, research focusing on courage and how it may affect leadership was reviewed. Full description of courage and the definitions of the construct were examined. Courage is described as the first virtue of the theory that courage enables the person to display and show the other virtues (Treasurer, 2009). One may only think of courage as physical bravery, but there are many other forms of courage. May (1975) divides courage into four types: physical courage, moral courage, social courage, and creative courage. Confidence plays a major role in developing and sustaining courage (Goud, 2005). He defines confidence as "belief and trust in one's capabilities and it is the primary source in countering fears, risks, and the safety impulse" (p. 110). Thus, it is impossible to understand courage without addressing fear because one shows or develops courage in the face of risk, challenge, or danger (Goud, 2005). However, Naughton and Cornwall (2006) argue that courage is not equivalent to fearlessness but rather is a characteristic of courage.

Direct studies from the organizational and gender literature related to female leadership and courage were also explored to explain their appropriateness for this specific study. Within the common organizational research, there is limited, yet convincing evidence and arguments directly related to women's leadership and courage. Bennis and Thomas (2002) theorized extensively about the indicators and predictors of impactful leadership, and suggested that a female leader adopts courage by finding the meaning in negative circumstances and by conquering difficult challenges. Walston (2006) argues that the topic of courage is as especially important and more significant for women in today's business world based on the current situation which includes balancing family and career, reentering or exiting the workplace, political finesse, woman-to-woman conflict, and the ways women who stand in their originality are judged. Indeed, this theory bears similarities to that of Bennis's and Thomas's (2002) as

these scholars similarly revealed that courageous women actively confront challenges toward self-possession while practicing successful and powerful leadership.

In summary, the purpose of the literature review was to explore the different fields that influence Saudi women's leadership while building a foundation and context of information to further explore, in depth, the participating women leaders' views and perspectives of the phenomenon.

The outcome of this study was intended to explore how women leaders experienced and perceived courage in their leadership success. These perceptions and views represent the Saudi women leaders' voice, where the researcher's goal was to authentically present their leadership experiences. The researcher believes, as a Saudi woman, using other Saudi women's experiences, was crucial as emphasized by the qualitative practice, the women should be understood through their own perspectives (Patton, 2002). In fact, the researcher attempted to highlight the leadership experiences of Saudi women leaders to enrich the women leaders' practices and the outcomes they engendered. Further, the resulting discussion for this study will explain recommendations for future study.

The participants were selected through a purposeful sampling strategy combining criterion and snowball sampling techniques (Creswell, 2009). The participants were all high level successful Saudi women leaders from for-profit businesses, non-profit organizations, educational, and government institutions. Ten women leaders shared their leadership experiences and their perceptions on the role of courage in their leadership success through electronic qualitative interviews. With the use of electronic interviews, the participants answered both the demographic questions and open ended interview questionnaire. The interview questionnaire included eight items derived from empirical literature on leadership and courage. By analyzing

the data, five emergent themes were identified and a set of 24 subthemes were derived throughout the interview and analysis process. The five core themes were:

1. Factors Influencing Female Leadership Success

2. Challenges

3. Courage defined

4. Courage in Action

5. Recommendations

To place the discussion of themes within context, a summary discussion of the leadership experiences of these ten women is provided first.

Discussion of Key Findings

In this section, the five core themes are summarized into three main categories. First, the two themes, factors influencing female leadership success and challenges are discussed in the first category *leadership experiences*. Second, the two themes, courage defined and courage in action are discussed in the second category *courage in the lives of female leaders*. Finally, the last theme recommendations for other females who are striving towards leadership success is discussed in the last category *recommendations for female leadership success*.

Leadership experiences. The ten participating Saudi female leaders brought a variety of experiences to the study including their personal background, how they achieved leadership success and words of wisdom for aspiring female leaders. Females between the ages of 26 to 45 comprised the largest segment of the female participants. All of the female participants had either a bachelor's degree or a graduate degree. A substantial range was noted in the number of years of work experience that the female participants had, with experience ranging from 2 to 23 years. The length of time in their present leadership position ranged from 3 months to 9 years.

Furthermore, the female participants represented different areas of professional work such as business development, banking and finance, real estate, communication, and education. Almost all of the female participants reported that they are working in male-dominated industries.

When extrapolating from the interview findings, there was no simple formula for these female participants to attain leadership success. However, all of the female participants discussed different factors that influenced their leadership success. The most prevalent subthemes generated from the female participants' stories were education, perseverance, and family support. Five of the female participants reported education as a major factor to attain high-level leadership positions. Several of the female participants specifically attributed their leadership success to their high level of perseverance and believed this factor is extremely important. They stressed the importance of working hard and persistence as major components of success. These two components were also frequently mentioned as recommendations to future female leaders from the participants as well. Few of the female participants indicated how their families played a major role in achieving leadership success and their families were their foundation for support and internal guidance. In fact, one of the participants stressed that a woman in the Saudi culture cannot be successful without the support of a man and she indicated that it is a key issue for Saudi women to succeed.

Furthermore, according to the results of this study, all but two of the female participants had experienced some form of gender discrimination and stereotyping at some point in their career paths. Many of the participants reported perceiving bias treatment by others, which occurred on a variety of levels. However, they reported that they never allowed these discriminatory practices to limit their leadership opportunities or hold them back from being successful. Many of the female participants in this study described themselves as calculated risk-

takers who had the courage to challenge the status quo and remain committed to their principles, despite whether or not others agreed with them. All of the female participants in this study had an unabashed drive, determination and energy to achieve their goals and be successful; and courage and persistence were noted by the great majority of the female participants to be the primary tool for overcoming challenges.

Additionally, it was noted from this study results that the Saudi society and culture play pivotal parts in shaping women's status, expectations, and aspirations for the future. The results reflected that the female leaders considered Saudi Arabia a male-dominated society, with males holding higher leadership positions in the country. Most of the female leaders suggested that the cultural barriers they had encountered in their careers were directly linked to their gender. Although women have made significant strides toward gaining occupational equality with men in the country, bias regarding women's role in society and the ability to serve in leadership positions hinders their opportunities for advancement. Most of the participants reported that they have had to and continue to work harder than their male colleagues to prove their capabilities. They believed that women have to demonstrate their qualifications on multiple levels in order to get recognized for their achievements. According to two female participants they used these negative experiences as opportunities to come out stronger to prove their capabilities and be successful leaders. They believed that being an optimistic leader means that you approach challenges as opportunities to learn and grow.

In fact, several of the female participants believed that gender inequality is a global issue and not only an issue in the Saudi society; and some stated that the Saudi society's views towards women status has changed and the number of female leaders is increasing. Few female participants also tried to be more optimistic about women's issues by highlighting the success of

other Saudi female leaders' journeys. They strongly believed that their progress in the society was being recognized.

Courage in the lives of female leaders. Despite the variety of leadership experiences of the female participants, there was a great deal of consistency in how they defined courage and how specifically courage was promoted in their leadership journeys. The findings of this study highlighted three major components that defined courage as expressed by the female participants. They were determination to succeed, risk taking, and self-awareness. These participants expressed that in order to be successful; one has to have the drive, energy, and strength necessary to achieve one's goals. Also, several female participants described risk-taking as an important component in their understanding of courage. Fear was never an option for these participants; they proclaimed that they would refuse to allow anyone or anything stand in the way of pursuing their dreams and being successful. Furthermore, few participants described being true to oneself and believing in oneself as essential components in their definitions of courage. These participants believed that it was important for female leaders to act with integrity and passion, to listen to their instincts, and to lead from the heart.

Additionally, the findings of this study shed light on how courage has influenced female leaders' success and how it has supported them during challenges they have experienced in their leadership roles. The most prevalent subthemes generated from the female participants' stories were determination to succeed, self-confidence, decision making, and risk-taking. Most of the female participants emphasized how important courage was for them to walk with confidence, take big risks, have a voice, and to believe that they are equal to their male counterparts with respect to their leadership skills and abilities. They described that they recognize that challenges and setbacks are part of life but that they make it a priority to seek proactive results no matter

what obstacles they face. Moreover, some of the female participants emphasized that courage is important and an essential attribute to all leaders to be a successful and to make a difference in the world.

   Recommendations for female leadership success. The female participants in this study had much advice for other females aspiring to leadership success. While these female participants came from a wide variety of career paths, had a variety of educational backgrounds, were of varying ages, and were from public as well as private occupations, there was a great deal of consistency in their advice for aspiring Saudi female leaders. Overall, the recommendations focused on self-worth and self-confidence, having courage, being persistent, having a vision, being a lifelong learner, making mistakes, and being risk-taker. There were four overarching subthemes for the recommendations: perseverance, self-confidence, sharing experiences, and choosing the right workplace. Almost all of the female participants emphasized the importance to have courage and being persistent as important factors to achieve leadership success in today's challenging business environment; and to stand up for things that they believe in, regardless of the setbacks and others' opinions. Overall, these female leaders were optimistic toward developing their leadership status and were committed to remain persistent until they achieve their goals.

Study Conclusions

   After an in depth analysis of the findings, three conclusions for this study were identified. A discussion for each conclusion is presented below including the implications for both practice and scholarship.

1. The Saudi Culture has a great influence, both positively and negatively, on the female participants' leadership success.

2. Challenges faced by the female participants are common among women from different societies.

3. Courage plays a pivotal role in the lives of the female participants and is a necessary attribute to achieve leadership success.

Conclusion 1: The Influence of the Culture

The study's findings reflect various perspectives about issues related to the cultural influence on the female leadership. According to the female participants' views, the aspects of the Saudi culture have influenced their leadership success in different ways during, both in their personal and professional lives, and this influence has two different ways. The positive influence is the support that the Saudi female leaders experience from their families, especially their male relatives such as fathers, brothers, and husbands. In fact, family support impacts Saudi women's confidence and motivation to work and aspire to management and leadership positions (Clarke, 2007). Family customs and aspects of the family are the most fundamental, the most important, and the most resistant to change when it comes to Saudi women working outside the home. As Pharaon (2004) noted that resistance to change in women's status in Saudi Arabia comes down to individual Saudi families and some women will find support from their families for pursuing their educational and career goals, while other families do not support it. This conclusion also aligns to Yamani (2005), "the men of the new generation have to decide on their attitude toward the role of women. They are still dominant and have to choose either to continue to restrain the aspirations of their sisters, wives, and daughters or encourage them to develop the aspirations that education has afforded them" (p. 409). Therefore, women's leadership success depends on how strong family support is. Most of the female leaders who participated in this study respected their family support and this factor was vital to achieve leadership success.

Furthermore, most of female participants in this study increased their status by holding higher leadership positions that were not available for them before by obtaining educational degrees to develop their knowledge and skills. As Yamani (2000) noted "education has been one of the major vehicles for the transmission of external values and is bound to have an uneasy relationship with existing social and familial standards" (p. 49). Thus, education appeared to be a primary factor for females to attain high-level leadership positions.

On the other hand, there is a negative influence of the Saudi culture on the female participants' leadership. Some of the female participants in this study indicated the Saudi cultural aspects have also a negative impact on their leadership status. The findings of this study reflected that the female participants considered Saudi Arabia a male-dominated society, with males holding higher leadership positions in the country. As indicated by Le Renard (2008) although Saudi women have come a long way in their educational development, present barriers and threats to their employment continue to exist; such as the cultural and traditional norms. Gender stereotypes still exist and remain in place that would limit woman's opportunities to obtain high leadership positions in the country. Most of the female participants emphasized that females have often had to work harder to prove their capabilities to achieve leadership success. This conclusion aligns to Rugh (2002) "change in Saudi Arabia always comes slowly, as there are many vested interests in the maintenance of the status quo" (p. 53).

Most of the female participants tried to be more optimistic about their status in the Saudi society by highlighting the success of their leadership experiences in addition to remain determined and persistent to overcome the cultural challenges. Also, some participants believed that their progress in the society was increasingly being recognized and appreciated. These participants suggested that changes in the culture and people's perspectives are taking place but

need more time for the female leadership status to develop. Additional research could focus on how Saudi males perceive the role of Saudi female leadership in the country.

Although the Saudi culture has a great influence on the female leadership status, it is imperative to note that the female participants in this study never indicated the impact of the religion on their leadership status. It seems that they have clear distinction between religion and culture contrary to common assumption, that the very small number of visible Saudi female leaders is discouraged by the religion "Islam". This conclusion aligns with some scholars who described how Saudi women's roles are affected by cultural values rather than being dictated by Islam (Alsaleh, 2012; Doumato, 1999).

Conclusion 2: Challenges are Common among Women

Overall, the study's findings show that there has been advancement in Saudi women's status in the workforce. However, the study also shows that gender-segregation, gender discrimination, stereotypes, and work-family balance are prevalent challenges within the realm of Saudi female leadership. The very fact of their gender presents social challenges that discourage them from freely pursuing higher education, employment, and career goals. This aligns with Bennis and Thomas' (2002) theory on "crucible experiences". These experiences for women often arise when their male counterparts choose to alienate them and cultural biases often create additional obstacles for women leaders. However, some participants emphasized that they do not allow challenges to pull them down. Instead, they use these "crucible experiences" as opportunities to come out stronger and be successful leaders.

In fact, this applies to women from different societies as well and is not unique to Saudi women. As Trigg (2006) noted, globally, women still face systemic biases and discrimination when assuming leadership positions and they continue to be underrepresented in decision making

positions in many different aspects of the societies. Also, consistent with Onyeizugbo (2003) who suggests that culture has embedded a belief in the social structure that women are inferior to men; and culture plays a major role in the formation of leadership characteristics. This conclusion also aligns with Berthoin and Izraeli (1993) "probably the single most important hurdle for women in management in all industrialized countries is the persistent stereotype that associated management with being male" (p. 63).

At present, women remain underrepresented in the high-positions of leadership. In further research, scholars can examine how organizations can change and improve the closed mindset of viewing the male as the dominant gender and believe that women can have the same leadership characteristics. Also, there is a question whether or not researchers and scholars should continue looking for a reason for this issue in gender stereotypes of leadership. As feminists claimed that all they need is equal power and rights, similar to those already claimed and attained by their male counterparts (Miller, 2000).

Conclusion 3: Courage is Pivotal and Essential

The main purpose of this study was to explore the role of courage as a personal leadership attribute and examine how women leaders perceived the role of courage in their leadership endeavors. After analyzing the data, the findings reveal that courage is proving to be a vital component of female leadership success. All of the female participants in this study defined the importance of courage as a core leadership attribute. Their description of courage is closely aligned with the leadership scholars (Bolman & Deal, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Northouse, 2010). Also, as Bolt (1996) specifies courage as the "hallmark of a true leader" (p. 169); it gives the leader innate ability to create a vision, challenge the status quo, and hold into potentials.

Moreover, some participants described courage as "standing up, speaking out, risk-taking, fearlessness, and taking action". Consistent with Jablin (2006) "the most common type of courage displayed by leaders and followers is speaking out" (pp. 102-103). Understanding the nature of courage implies coming to terms with fear. According to Badaracco and Ellsworth (1989) courage "is the ability to do and say what one believes to be right, rather than convenient, familiar, or popular" (p. 201). Courage only comes into play when one is confronted with risk and fear and does not occur when one is feeling secure. As defined by Goud (2005) courage is the "energizing catalyst that allows one to overcome fear and find the way toward self-actualization" (p. 102), which directly speaks to the refusal to allow one's fears to become limitations.

Female Participants' statements, such as "it involves taking a real risk", "not to be afraid to speak up", "there were many risks that I had to take to stand up for my career", and "being fearless, I use fear in order to continually challenge myself to take risks, push boundaries, and make bold decisions" tap into the risk-taking aspect of courage. Based on these descriptions of several participants, as well as what is implicit in the leadership literature, it is difficult to separate courage and risk-taking in the context of female leadership ventures, and by implication, successful Saudi female leaders are probably best defined as risk-takers.

The findings also reveal that self-confidence is an important component of the female leaders' personalities and has supported them during challenges they have experienced in their leadership roles. Self-confidence is needed to survive and thrive in the face of risk. This aligns with Goud (2005) confidence plays a major role in developing and sustaining courage. Also, consistent with Treasurer et al. (2013) part of the solution for women leaders to beat gender inequality or other social challenges is through the intentional application and access of courage.

Additionally, the findings suggest that some of the female participants adopted courage by finding the meaning in negative circumstances and by conquering difficult challenges to emerge stronger and more committed toward being successful leaders. This is consistent with Bennis and Thomas' (2002) theory on "crucible experiences" that allow women leaders to embrace courage to "emerge stronger, more focused, and more determined to change the status quo that excluded and marginalized them" (p. 61). By implication, courage in female leadership may be developed by consistently confronting challenges that require one to immediately access strength and courage to "carve a place for themselves" (Bennis & Thomas, 2002, p. 64).

After all, the study's findings reveal that most of the female participants experience creative courage. May (1975) refers to creative courage as the most important. It is the ability to discover new arrangements upon which a new way of doing things will occur; i.e. to create something that did not exist before as the case with Saudi female leadership. He explains that creativity arises out of one's struggle with doubt and uncertainty. This type of courage involves confidence and risk-taking by risking the comfort of the present for unknown future. This evidence introduced to the fact that these women leaders experience creative courage and stood apart to counter fear, take risk, try new things, and openly assert their ideas versus complying with status quo.

Study Recommendations

The findings of this study show that there are still some underlying issues contributing to the success of Saudi women in leadership positions. Although the female participants achieved leadership success, almost all of them faced different challenges during their career paths. However, these challenges did not prevent them from achieving their dreams. In fact, the different aspects related to Saudi culture in this study should be used from a positive perspective

to encourage and motivate the Saudi women to improve their status in the society. Recommendations to current Saudi female leaders is to seek ways to educate, mentor, or coach the younger generation of Saudi women on how to cope and overcome challenges as they venture into leadership positions. This process will allow Saudi women to discuss and bring awareness to increase their contributions within the society. Furthermore, all women must become more courageous in discussing the gender stereotyping and discrimination they face in their careers. Without awareness and discussion, these challenges that may arise will not be resolved.

The role family plays and how they support their daughters, wives, or sisters to become successful leaders needs on-going discussion and encouragement. Thus, a major role for all Saudi families is to support their daughters to improve their education, to understand their needs and ambitions with respect to morals in order to develop their personalities as future leaders. A future recommendation would be to conduct a similar study but focus on the impact of family support on female leadership success. Is there a correlation between family support and Saudi female leadership success? Furthermore, it would be interesting to explore the characteristics or the factors of the females' families that support or inhibit their success as leaders to bring awareness to increase their support toward their daughters, wives, or sister.

It is obvious to this researcher that many organizations within Saudi Arabia need to modify the organizational structure in order to offer equal opportunities for females who are aspiring toward leadership position. Furthermore, organizations in the country must take into consideration the needs of all employees and break the glass ceiling of stereotyping and gender discrimination. Future research investigating and understanding the Saudi organizational culture will assist in changing the underrepresentation of females being accepted as leaders in the Saudi

organizations. Thus, a future recommendation would be to conduct a study focusing on investigating the factors of the Saudi organizational culture that may inhibit females from assuming leadership roles, and how to improve them?

The findings of this study reveal a strong connection between female leadership and courage. Understanding the role of courage in female leadership is useful for guiding academic programs on leadership as well as the design of programs, workshops, and other tools for assisting current female leaders. Particularly, courage is an important concept for programs designed for aspiring females who want to pursue high leadership ventures. Positioning courage within the domain of human needs for growing and reach achievement makes it understandable as a skill or attribute that can be learned and mastered and which can be embraced in a wide range of everyday acts (Jablin, 2006).

Limitations and Study Validity

A first limitation of this research study involves the qualitative research methodology. Thematic analysis can be associated with a lack of transparency whereby it can be challenging for the reader to be sure how and at what stage themes were identified. Detailed and rigorous steps were taken to provide full transparency. A second limitation associated with qualitative inquiry involves the interpretive nature of the research. Reflexivity as a researcher in my formulation of themes retrieved from the data throughout collection and analysis was repeatedly practiced. On behalf of authentically representing the female participants' experiences, every effort was made to eliminate personal involvement with the subject material. Thus, to ensure validity, the responses to the interview questions were interpreted and a true-to-life landscape of the findings was created.

A third limitation of this study has to do with the data collection procedures. While the study involved virtual interview process, body language was not observed in this study as the interviews were not conducted in a face-to-face setting. However, due to the sensitivity of the topic, the choice of a virtual, textual process was necessary to make the women comfortable with participating. Further, the participant was provided with complete anonymity when writing and expressing sensitive stories or personal experiences.

Another important limitation and assumption for this study is that results cannot be generalized to the larger population of Saudi women leaders. The findings are bound by the 10 individual women and their own experiences. The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of Saudi female leaders in an in-depth way rather than establish a statistically significant argument about the issue being explored (Patton, 2002). Thus, the purpose of this study was aligned with this sampling limitation. Although the sample population in this study does not allow for generalization of the study's results to the broader population of Saudi female leaders, the results will be used to inform future research with this population and may help inform individuals and influence organizational practices and policies.

Closing Comments

In conclusion, it is appropriate to include a discussion of my personal reactions as a researcher of the female leaders' experiences in this study. Undoubtedly, my experiences as a woman who aspires to be an effective leader color my reactions to what I experienced during this research study. I also think that what I had previously believed about female leadership and courage was reexamined as a purpose of doing this project. Much of what I experienced while conducting this study and learning of its results has impacted how I become an effective female leader. I was both surprised and concerned at the themes that emerged. One of the main reactions

I had to the findings surrounded the issue of the challenges that still exist within the realm of female leadership. I had imagined it was less challenging. At the same time, I felt a very personal reaction to the women's positivity and how they described the role of courage in their leadership experiences.

Furthermore, this research helps in revealing Saudi women's stories and makes a small dent in the gap within the literature. I wanted to provide a voice to my fellow Saudi women so that their perspectives could be heard. The female participants volunteered to participate and their willingness showed me that there are stories to be told. I believe that the opportunity for Saudi women to participate in leadership outside the home is in an active process of change and improvement. It was imperative to share these stories of woman whose status and roles are changing in order to benefit, not only Saudi women, but women of any cultural background. I hope by hearing these women's stories, that other women will find the courage to step forward and provide leadership in their communities, organizations, and families to improve the quality of life for all.

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APPENDIX A

Initial E-mails to Potential Participants

My name is Aliah Aljowaie and I am a current Doctoral Candidate in Organizational Leadership at Pepperdine University, in the process of completing my dissertation work. As a Saudi woman, I am very interested in the role of courage for women choosing leadership roles. The purpose of my study is to explore the experiences of Saudi women leaders in Saudi Arabia and investigate the obstacles or challenges encountered due to gender bias or stereotyping. Also, my study will explore the role of courage as a personal leadership attribute and will examine how women leaders perceive the role and action of courage in their leadership endeavors.

If you are a Saudi woman leader who has been in a leadership role in an organization that represents at least 20 employees, hold a leadership position for at least two years, and have access to electronic media, which includes a computer network, you may be interested in participating in this study. For the purpose of this study, a leadership role is defined as a situation in which one has either supervised or managed ten or more people, and/or has been a significant leader on a large project.

Data will be gathered using an electronic process. No personal identifying information will be collected and you will have complete anonymity. The Qualtrics questionnaire consists of a few demographic items and 8 open-ended questions. I anticipate it will take less than an hour to complete it. I encourage you to provide personal examples, stories, and anecdotes to explain your responses to the questions. Hearing your stories may help inspire other women in their own professional development.

Link to questionnaire:
https://pepperdinegsep.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_8cA8tzWKIFLf4gt

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in my research study, your participation and time is greatly appreciated.

Warm Regards,

Aliah Aljowaie

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Aliah Aljowaie a doctoral candidate in Organizational Leadership at Pepperdine University. Aliah is currently in the process of recruiting individuals for her study entitled, "The Role of Courage in Female Leadership." This research activity is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a dissertation. The professor supervising Aliah's work is Dr. Kay Davis. Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything that you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read this document. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experiences of women leaders in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the study will explore the role of courage as a personal leadership attribute and examine how women leaders perceive the role and action of courage in their leadership success.

PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT

If you agree to voluntarily to take part in this study, you will be provided with a link to an online survey that consists of eight open-ended questions. It should take no more than 60 minutes to complete the survey. You do not have to answer any questions you don't want to, click "next" or "N/A" in the survey to move to the next question.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Participation through the on-line process enables you to be anonymous. No identifying information is being captured.
Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If there were a breach in the collection process that provided identifying information, this would not be published or presented. No individual names or other personally identifiable information will be used. To minimize any risks I will use coding techniques to protect your response data and store all digital and hard copy files in a locked location only accessible by the researcher. I will retain these records for up to 3 years after the study is over.

INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION
I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact **Dr. Kay Davis, Dissertation Chair, at kdavis@pepperdine.edu** if I have any other questions or concerns about this research.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant or research in general please contact Dr. Judy Ho*, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional School Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University 6100 Center Drive Suite 500 Los Angeles, CA 90045, 310-568-5753 or gpsirb@pepperdine.edu.

APPENDIX C

Interview Questionnaire

Table C8
Demographic Questions

1. Your current age:

   o   Under 25

   o   26 to 35

   o   36 to 45

   o   46 to 55

   o   Over 55

2. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

   o   High School

   o   Bachelor's degree

   o   Master's degree

   o   Doctorate degree

3. How many years of work experience do you have?

4. What is the title of your current position?

5. Please indicate your length of time in your current position.

6. What is the focus of your current business/organization?

7. Number of employees in current organization.

8. Please indicate your current work responsibilities.

Table C9
Interview Questions

1. What is your leadership story? Going back to the time when you first started working, please tell me how you got to where you are today (i.e. the trajectory of your leadership). Was there a particular person or event that prompted your journey?
2. What do you think about the role of Saudi cultural influences on female leaders? For instance, do you think high positions of power and leadership are culturally gendered? Or have you had experiences at work when your femininity was a factor? Explain.
3. How would you define courage?
4. How does/has courage worked for you, in the context of your role as a leader?
5. Could you please share one or two experiences of heightened challenge during your tenure as a leader? For example, tell me about a time when you needed to deal with obvious gender discrimination or balancing career and family. Describe
6. What personal or leadership characteristics or abilities did you use to overcome each of those heightened challenges?
7.   When reflecting on these experiences of heightened challenge, what other thoughts might you have about the role of courage in leadership?
8. What recommendations would you provide to young Saudi females who are striving towards a leadership position?

APPENDIX D

IRB Approval Letter

PEPPERDINE

Pepperdine University
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, CA 90263
TEL: 310-506-4000

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: October 19, 2015

Protocol Investigator Name: Aliah Aljowaie

Protocol #: 15-08-022

Project Title: The role of courage in female leadership

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Aliah Aljowaie:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chairperson

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives

APPENDIX E

IRB Human Subjects Training Completion

CITI Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI)

Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research Curriculum
Completion Report
Printed on 3/1/2012

Learner: aliah Aljowaie (username: aliahaljowaie)
Institution: Pepperdine University
Contact Information Department: Ed.D in Organizational Leadership
     Email: aliah.aljowaie@pepperdine.edu
Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research: This course is for investigators, staff and students with an interest or focus in **Social and Behavioral** research. This course contains text, embedded case studies AND quizzes.

Stage 1. Basic Course Passed on 03/01/12 (Ref # 7571611)

Elective Modules	Date Completed	Score
Introduction to the Responsible Conduct of Research	02/29/12	no quiz
Research Misconduct 2-1495	03/01/12	5/5 (100%)
Data Acquisition, Management, Sharing and Ownership 2-1523	03/01/12	5/5 (100%)
Publication Practices and Responsible Authorship 2-1518	02/29/12	4/5 (80%)
Peer Review 2-1521	02/29/12	4/5 (80%)
Mentor and Trainee Responsibilities 01234 1250	02/29/12	5/6 (83%)
Using Animal Subjects in Research 13301	03/01/12	4/8 (50%)
Conflicts of Interest and Commitment 2-1462	03/01/12	5/6 (83%)
Collaborative Research 2-1484	03/01/12	5/6 (83%)
Human Subjects 13566	03/01/12	11/11 (100%)
The CITI RCR Course Completion Page	03/01/12	no quiz

For this Completion Report to be valid, the learner listed above must be affiliated with a CITI participating institution. Falsified information and unauthorized use of the CITI course site is unethical, and may be considered scientific misconduct by your institution.

Paul Braunschweiger Ph.D.
Professor, University of Miami
Director Office of Research Education
CITI Course Coordinator

Return