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Leader Identity Construction among Saudi Women Academics:
How Does Readiness Matter?

By Tahani Ibrahim Alharbi

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of

Birkbeck, University of London

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2023

Dedication

To my soulmate, Ahmad

To all women who suffer in silence.

To all PhD students who are battling mental illness.

To Adam and Louise, my therapists.

I could not have done it without you.

Acknowledgment

First and foremost, praises and thanks to the God, the Almighty, for guiding me toward my goal and providing me with strength throughout my research.

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List of Abbreviations

HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher education institutions
HoD	Head of Department
KASP	King Abdullah Scholarship Program
GASTAT	The General Authority for Statistics- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
KAUST	King Abdullah University for Science and Technology
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MoE	Ministry of Education
UK	United Kingdom
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council- (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman).
LDR	Leader Developmental Readiness

Abstract

This study focuses on Saudi women's construction of their leader identity, specifically within the context of political and sociocultural constraints. Women in Saudi Arabia (KSA) account for 49 percent of the population (GASTAT, 2016) and 45.4 percent of academia (Ministry of Education, 2018a). However, only 3.3 percent have attained top leadership positions in the public sector (GASTAT, 2018a). Research suggests that sociocultural constraints may affect Saudi women's developmental readiness to hold high-ranked leadership roles (Kattan et al., 2016). It is therefore important to view leadership practises through a contextual lens, to gain insights into the unique experiences leaders encounter in leadership roles (Radomski, 2014; Avolio et al., 2009b; Antonakis et al., 2003; Osborn et al., 2002; Steers et al., 2012; Lord et al., 2001).

Accordingly, this study will adopt the social constructionism paradigm in its construction of the leader identity through narratives. The main argument in this study is that women's academic advancement as leaders in KSA is entangled with sociocultural constraints, suggesting that leader identity is fundamentally intrapersonal. This study reviews leadership developmental readiness literature (Avolio, 2016) and the role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders (Eagly and Karau, 2002), and applies a social identity lens to developmental leadership readiness in the context of KSA.

Qualitative research methods were employed to facilitate an in-depth understanding of each participant's unique lived experience. The study consisted of two phases, the first completed in January 2017, and the second a year later. Participants in the first phase were thirty Saudi women academics who attended a women-only leadership development programme. Fifteen of these women participated in the second phase. Semi-structured interviews were conducted; the data captured Saudi women's self-concept concerning their readiness to hold prominent leadership roles. The effect of new socio-political reforms in KSA was explored in phase two, including and if and how they affected the women's self-perception as leaders.

A narrative analysis using a combination of categorical content and structure analysis was employed (Lieblich et al., 1998). The categorical content analysis highlighted main themes from participant narratives, while the structural analysis analysed the story as a whole. Key themes from the categorical content analysis regarding the factors that shaped women's leader identity developmental readiness included self-readiness, higher education (HE) organisational readiness and sociocultural context readiness.

The holistic content analysis identified three leader identity narratives. Stories of leader identity construction emerged from the analysis of the phase one and two interviews with Saudi women academics and which formed three narratives. These were: the "I am not a leader"; "I am a leader: capable and motivated", which indicates a steady narrative. Progressive narrative "Ambivalent leader identity to I am a leader narrative", "Being a leader was not a choice of mine, now it is", "I am not a leader narrative to I am a leader", and regressive narrative "why not to it is only a show". Participants' stories revealed the ways in which subtle, institutionalised gender practises stemming from the sociocultural context shaped Saudi women's leader identity construction, which contradicts the study's previous argument. Some participants misplaced their gender identity in favour of academic identity, concealing leader identity unless positive social identity had been constructed.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Women's underrepresentation in leadership positions is a global phenomenon (Toh & Leonardelli, 2012), and Saudi Arabian higher education (HE) is no exception (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017; Abalkhail, 2017). This topic has recently attracted scholars, mainly Saudi scholars, to investigate women's status in the country. Alongside extensive research on women in leadership is a corresponding dearth of theories and empirical studies that address leader identity construction from a gender perspective in the Middle Eastern context, particularly Saudi Arabian HE ((Abdalla and Al-Homoud, 2001); (Elamin and Omair, 2010)and Omair 2010; (Marmenout, 2009); Sheikh *et al.* (Sheikh et al., 2013), which is mainly very diverse and complex.

As the literature suggests, the development of leaders is context-dependent (Day 2000; Reichard and Johnson 2011; (Thompson and Reichard, 2016). However, most of the scholarship in leadership, and in women's leadership specifically, is focused on North America and Western Europe (Metcalfe and Mimouni, 2011; Smith et al., 1989; Syed, 2010). Thus, the current study does not address the issue of women in leadership generally, but specifically within a particular context where discrimination on social-cultural grounds has been widespread (but within which progress is beginning to be made).

To fully understand how women's self-perception as a legitimate leader might change and what factors affect their readiness to develop, one must shed light on the religious, sociocultural identity and political context of KSA.

1.1 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: An identity lens

It is vital to uncover how these contextual factors have shaped the Saudi's identity by creating multiple identities from within. In order to understand the various factors that contribute to the status of Saudi women, it is important to understand Saudi multiple identities and how they affect the gender-based narrative (Le Renard, 2008).

The following figure explains what constitutes the Saudi multiple identities and what external factors might have an effect on reshaping these.

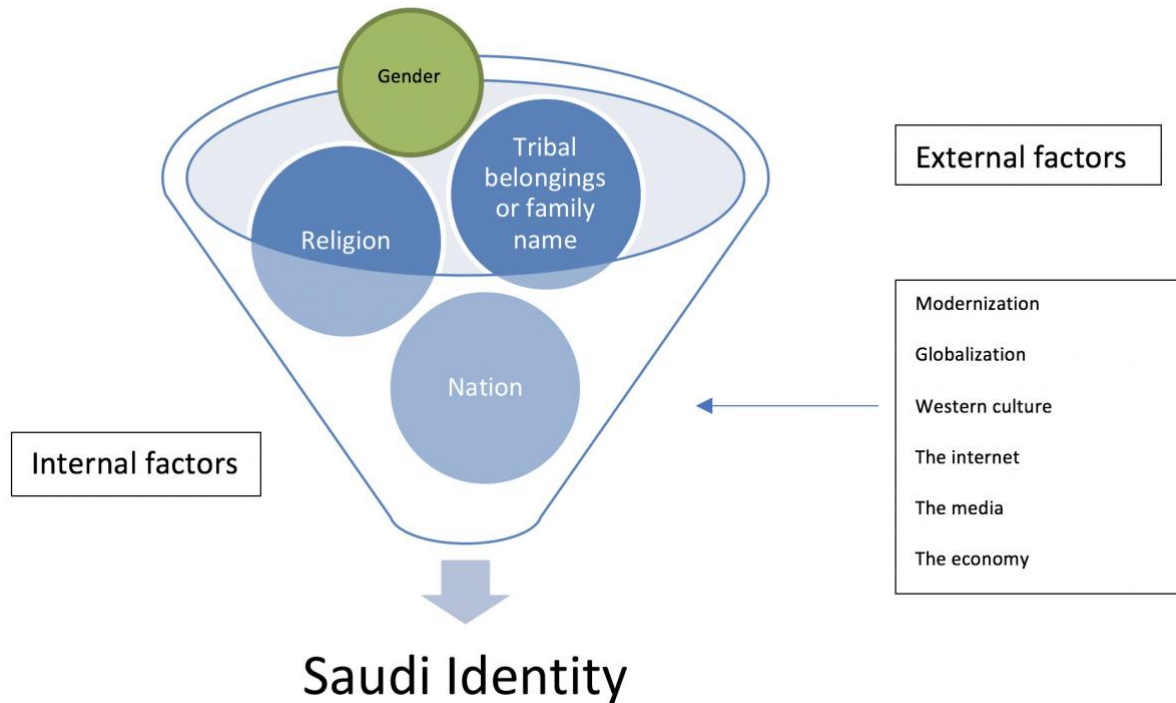


Figure 1: Saudi multiple identities (adapted from (Thompson, 2019b).

1.1.1 National identity

KSA has developed a complex identity throughout its history. It was built on embedded Arab and Islamic cultures and tribal affiliations. In fact, one cannot ignore the multiplicity of civilisations and cultures that influenced KSA, pre-Islam and during Islam, until the unification of the kingdom.

According to (Yamani, 2000), Saudi's national identity has been formed by three main influences. First, and most importantly, is the monarchy of the Al-Saud dynasty (the ruling royal family of KSA). The family of Al-Saud has established and maintained its power through the name that has been given to the country. Additionally, they have established relationships with the existing tribes and religious groups.

Second, is the formation of organisations based on bureaucracy. Third, Yamani (2000) refers to “national political culture”, which she argues was built around Najdi culture and Wahhabism (p, 29). Wahhabism is a conservative school of a Sunni Islam that adheres to a literal interpretation of the Quran and the Sunnah (Muharrem Hilmi Özev, 2017).

However, Yamani’s ideas were a source of debate in Saudi scholarship, considered biased by some (Al-Rashed, 2005); yet, the identity of what was later named Saudi was in fact developed way before the establishment of the state. It was based on Arab traditions in accordance with the tribal nature of the people living in the Arabian Peninsula, and by religion.

In his book *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, Giddens defined nationalism as “the existence of symbols and beliefs which are either propagated by elite groups, or held by many of the members of regional, ethnic, or linguistic categories of a population and which imply a community between them” (Giddens, 1981). According to (Khan, 2019), the situation in KSA seemed fitting to be understood through Giddens’s definition. He argued that Wahhabism ideology provided the validity of the rulers (Khan, 2019). In alliance with this notion, (Nehme, 1994) argued for enforcing the Wahhabism school of Islam, as one of the main factors in maintaining national identity—Wahhabism called for the return to the fundamentalist values of Islam, promoting the idea of social rules obedience.

On the other hand, there is a threat to Saudi national identity due to globalisation, forming what (Sallam, 2018) refers to as “global identity or a global citizen” causing a sense of national identity diffusing into a more global identity masked by Western culture. This may make people feel more united and allow them to share their similarities rather than their differences.

Research to date has tended to focus on the Saudi state’s Wahhabism as an ideology (Muharrem Hilmi Özev, 2017; Rich and MacQueen, 2017), rather than a holistic view

of the Saudi identity and how the dynamics of national identity, sub-identities and religion have underpinned the gender ideology imposed on women in KSA, affecting their status in the society and accordingly their identity.

1.1.2 Religious identity

The official religion in KSA is Islam, and Sharia (Islamic law) is the legal system (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). In KSA, as in many countries, religion is the building block of how people behave, think and live. People often refer to religion as the origin from which they draw their attitudes and beliefs. (Thompson, 2014) refers to it as the “ruling ideology” of the kingdom (p. 10). Saudi Arabia is a “religiopolitical” state (Champion, 2003); where religion shapes people's sense of self, sense of collective and national identity (Nevo, 1998).

As the Quran is the constitution and Sharia is the law foundation, religion shapes all aspects of the country, to the extent that non-Muslims are not permitted to hold Saudi nationality (Nevo, 1998). The idea of “religious pluralism” is not acceptable in Saudi society. The state imposes religious practises and customs in all aspects of life, for example, forcing stores to close during prayer time (Radwan, 2020)(Radwan, 2020).

Developing religious identity in KSA is inherent; when you grow up in a religious country, your religious identity is embedded in you. In the last two decades, Saudi's have not given much thought to the religious context in KSA; very strict religious education is taught and embraced from a very young age.

According to Song (2019), religious identity motivates and challenges Saudi women's gender identification. As Saudi gender identity is prescribed by Islamic principles, women with a compliance self-view see themselves as upholding these norms. Those who oppose these norms claim that these norms are irrelevant to Islam. In the framework of KSA's legal and social conventions, women's religious interpretations help to strengthen their own sense of gender identity, which indicates their

autonomy. Song's findings show that gender norms interact with other social identities, such as race, culture and religion, shaping women's behaviour (Song, 2019).

1.1.3 Tribal identity

Following the previous discussion, although tribal identity is still visible in the life of tribal Saudi's, it has "been tamed" according to Yamani (2000, p. 26), and dissociated from the national identity. Since the societal transformation starting from King Abdullah's ascension to the Saudi throne, policymakers have been more transparent in their policy-making. Many events in the Arab world (such as the Arab Spring in 2011) as well as international and national pressure have played a role in the political change that has begun.

Although tribal voices and presence were always evident in KSA, tribalism came back to the surface upon King Abdullah's reign, with claims for greater involvement in the national narrative and role in society (Maisel, 2014).

One of the main reasons for this recurring power of tribal identity is the weakening of the state at that time (Kinninmont, 2013; Al-Kuwari, 2019). Additionally, social media and the internet provided open space that allowed individuals to be heard; and changed the way interacted with their citizens (Maisel, 2014), which allowed the tribes to re-engage, using these new means to their advantage. Tribal identity and relatedness have come to form part of "the symbolic language" of the Saudi state (Samin, 2019) 203).

In contrast, (Kinninmont, 2013) claims that Saudi's national identity overpowers their tribal affiliation because the state is built on more robust identity, such as the religious identity, which the state tried to embrace in order to impose its power and strengthen its position within the already established tribal identity. This is evident in their alliance with the Wahhabi movement and the very strict implementation of religious identity in all aspects of Saudi life. A vivid example of the use of religion by the state

to justify its legitimacy is the king's title as "The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques " (Al-Saud, 2012; Kinninmont, 2013).

1.1.4 Gender identity

Gender equality in KSA is considered taboo ((Alnowaiser, 2016) due to the interplay between Islamic traditions and tribal culture within the society (Èzbilgin and Syed, 2010). However, many scholars have argued that the gender inequality practises in KSA are more cultural restrictions than religion-based traditions (Kauser and Tlaiss, 2011; Hamdan, 2005).

In fact, even the country's policymakers were "hesitant to fully embrace any development that appears to threaten" this cultural state when negotiating women's rights (Al-Munajjed, 2010). Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) claimed that pledging Saudi women's rights is "not a religious issue as much as it is an issue that relates to the community itself that either accepts it or refuses it" (Almashabi and Nereim, 2016).

Sociocultural norms define the role women play in society and shape the policy that imposes a gender segregated labour force, which hinders females from accessing the decision-making leadership loci in the public domain (Al Alhareth et al., 2015).

There are many factors that profoundly affect the status of women in KSA. However, it is difficult to distinguish how the various factors interact with each other. It is a very complex situation that has been going on for years. Family, society, Islam, politics and tribal factors intersect in forming Saudi women's experience.

The social and cultural characteristics of Saudi society are an important factor in signifying that the attitude is changing towards women's advancement, including more involvement of women in the workplace, especially in the younger generation (Elamin and Omair, 2010). However, women's status in KSA is far from ideal.

Considering the fact that Saudi law and Islam are interweaving (Sian et al., 2020), it is important to investigate if Islam is the source of women's marginalisation from the political scene in KSA. According to (Nazir and Tomppert, 2005), the interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah according to the strict Saudi/Wahhabi school of Islam disadvantages women in comparison to men. This is mainly due to the initialisation of a rigid version of Islam by the state, based on a literal meaning of the Quran and Sunnah ((Doumato, 1992)—affecting women's status on various levels: politically, professionally and culturally.

An interesting study by researchers at the University of Chicago [Partially sponsored by the Harvard Kennedy School Evidence for Policy Design program and the Human Resources Development Fund of KSA] (Bursztyn et al., 2018) argued that the phenomenon of “pluralistic ignorance” (coined by (Katz and Allport, 1931) mediated life in KSA, as a country with a tight culture going through fast development and numerous changes. The Encyclopaedia of Social Psychology states that “pluralistic ignorance occurs when people erroneously infer that they feel differently from their peers, even though they are behaving similarly”(Prentice, 2007). The University of Chicago study argued that in tight cultures, individuals tend to behave in a way that feels safe within their out-group. To illustrate, when an individual assumes that their point of view is far from the perceived norm, they tend to conform to the social norm and peer pressure over what they believe in, in order to be accepted. This leads to what might be a systematic prejudice affecting women's status.

The next section will shed light on some of the practises that were imposed on Saudi women by the society and the law, which have influenced their status in the country.

1.1.4.1 Parental influence

In KSA, the family is the core and the building block for all society. Its importance stems from it being the basis of one's identity and a robust support system. Islamic teachings hold the family as a sacred entity. The parents have a special position in Islam, which is rarely confronted.

Parents influence the mentality and judgements of their children and raise them to act in a certain way. Previous literature suggests a positive correlation between readiness to develop as a leader and parenting style (Bass, 1990). Some studies have indicated that children who are raised under authoritative guidance have a greater degree of success orientation, confidence, a focus on the self, a belief in internal control, a sense of personal accomplishment, and reliance on the self (Pratt et al., 2004).

For example, (Avolio et al., 2009a) studied twins raised in the same house and found that modest rule-breaking conduct may have a major impact on future leadership occupancy. Parents with an authoritative style (i.e. teaching their kids to follow rules) provide support and guidance that may be positively associated with their child becoming a leader in the future, as they teach their kids how to face problems and explain why rule-breaking is an issue. This study had some limitations, including the fact that the sample was composed entirely of homogeneous males from the same state; a more diverse sample is required to confirm the findings. Nonetheless, it attempted to comprehend the influence of parental style on children's ascension to leadership.

1.1.4.2 Male domination

KSA is a largely masculine culture that often places societal obstacles in the way of women reaching leadership positions (AlMunajjed, 1997; Al-Munajjed, 2010; Hofstede et al., 2010).

However, (Walker, 2004) claims that in the case of all-women colleges such as Al Nour College, male-dominated barriers are far from true. This, in her opinion, challenges the idea that obstacles to women's development as leaders exist due to male domination in the country. However, Walker's findings do not reflect the truth about the real suffering of women in the country; the study reflects a narrow-minded perspective that neglects the right for women to be seen or heard. Surprisingly, the

author asserted that although the college is all-women, men are responsible for top roles in leadership.

Women and men in academia have equal numbers of staff and the same wages at the same levels; discrimination may therefore not be explicit, but rather subtle and systemic. It becomes visible in the decision-making and authority levels as well as opportunities for promotion and appointments in leadership roles.

1.1.4.3 Male guardianship

In KSA, a male guardianship system was present until 2019. Within this system, which was a complex interaction between laws and traditions, a woman was to be dependent on a male member of her family for her entire life. This formed an imbalance of power favouring men by allowing them to consent—or not—to letting their women work, travel or receive medical care (Abalkhail and Allan, 2015). Although the male guardianship system attracted heated debate in the media, very few scholars have extensively researched it. It is evident, however, that this single law hindered women's leadership progression (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017; Alharbi, 2015).

The guardianship system came to an end in 2019 by the royal decree allowing women over the age of 18 to travel without anyone's consent (Rizvi and Hussain, 2021). However, the system continues to have implications for many aspects of women's lives in KSA due to the hindrance of women for many years, resulting in women being absent from politics, economic and educational equal participation (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017).

To conclude the previous points, parental influence is evident in the motivation of a child's readiness to develop as a leader. In addition, social rules and religious traditions influence Saudi regulations and have an effect from an early stage of life on women's self-perception as leaders. These rules are imbalanced between the genders, which might add more challenges to women's education and career choices.

1.2 Saudi women in HE

Women in Saudi Arabia account for 49 percent of the population ((GASTAT, 2016) and 44.6 percent of academia compared to males (GASTAT, 2021b). However, only 3.3 percent of Saudi women have made inroads into top leadership positions in the public sector (GASTAT, 2018a). Despite Saudi women possessing their own individual identities, they share a common sociocultural status, which may affect their developmental readiness to hold high-ranked leadership roles (Kattan et al., 2016). Admittedly, there are a lot of factors that affect the identity construction of Saudi women academics, many of which come from the importance of others and socio-political context regarding self-identification.

The debate over why women are still diminished in powerful leadership roles is ongoing (Eagly & Chin, 2010). Accordingly, women must navigate complex, gruelling, endless barriers to obtain high leadership positions (Guerrero, 2011, cited by (Schwanke, 2013)). Accordingly, these barriers to leadership and the importance of empowering women to attain and retain leadership positions have attracted many researchers seeking an explanation (Madsen et al., 2012; Madsen, 2012). Many Western scholars have approached this controversial, complex issue from different perspectives over the past decades (Chliwniak, 1997; Vanderslice and Litsch, 1998; AlDoubi, 2014; Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016; Tessens et al., 2011). A significant amount of literature has also studied the challenges confronting Saudi women seeking leadership opportunities (AlDoubi, 2014; Al-Kayed, 2015; Alomair, 2015; Al-Tamimi, 2004; Bawazeer, 2015).

Despite this growing interest in addressing the obstacles causing a lack of women in top managerial positions (Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016), not much has been accomplished in practice, and women are still excluded from leadership roles in HE (Schwanke, 2013; Al-Kayed, 2015), especially in the Middle East (Hutchings et al., 2010). Many scholars acknowledge that, in male-dominated organisational cultures (such as KSA), women are the least preferred leaders and experience unequal opportunities accessing higher leadership positions (Carli and Eagly, 2012).

In the context of KSA particularly, much of the research on female leaders has been aimed at identifying the challenges they face on the leadership ladder from different perspectives.

In the context of Saudi HE, research is thin. Much of the research up until now has been review papers (i.e. descriptive in nature) (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017; Alomair, 2015; Alsubhi et al., 2018; Hamdan, 2005; Jamjoom & Kelly, 2013a; Parveen, 2014). These reviews have not solely focused on women in KSA; they include literature from the GCC (e.g., Alomair, 2015) and the Middle East (e.g., Alsubaie and Jones, 2017).

Some literature has been published on the advancement of Saudi women in leadership positions in HE (Alghofaily, 2019; Alsubhi et al., 2018; Alsubaie and Jones, 2017; Alomair, 2015; Gorondutse et al., 2019; Abalkhail, 2017; Abo Khodair, 2012). This literature suggests that gender inequality in leadership positions is evident in Saudi HE, and that social class and family background may add additional burdens ((Abalkhail, 2017). However, few papers and studies have been published in high-quality journals, and even fewer focusing on empirical investigation of the subject.

According to (Dirani et al., 2017), KSA is experiencing fast changes in all aspects. Power has gradually moved to the younger generation, which has affected the openness to others and loosened the very conservative administration. This has led to noticeable changes in the political, social, economic and educational systems.

In the case of Saudi women academics, recent statistics (Rheault, 2007) do, however, show a substantial change in perception towards the vital role Saudi women play in advancing the country's socioeconomic state, regardless of the imposed limitations. This has resulted in a growing number of women attaining top-ranking leadership positions in the county. Whether women in KSA are prepared to be leaders when the opportunity arises is therefore increasingly important to understand and is the issue this study will focus on, through the lens of leader identity development and the specific issue of leader readiness.

1.3 Motivation

The researcher had the inspiration for this study while working for a Saudi university. As a Saudi woman academic, the researcher observed numerous social constraints, as well as a high level of qualification, awareness, and eagerness on the part of women seeking to develop as leaders. This prompted the researcher to conduct an in-depth examination of why women are still barred from senior positions in Saudi Arabia, with a few notable exceptions.

This research investigates leadership identity within this context, using an in-depth qualitative approach to explore whether and how contextual factors related to either gender or culture might be a crucial element to affect Saudi women's self-perception as future leaders.

1.4 Research aim

This research aims to give a voice to women academics in KSA to speak up about their experience in navigating the labyrinth of leadership, as (Eagly and Carli, 2007). It also seeks to uncover which factors women perceive to shape or reshape their leader identity. This research does not, however, aim to investigate the reality of the situation regarding women in leadership in KSA. Rather, its main focus is to understand what happens from within—that is, how the participants construct their leader identity.

The few studies that have been done in this area have focused on assessing the challenges women encounter as leaders (Thompson, 2015; Al-Ahmadi, 2011a; Abalkhail, 2017; Hamdan, 2005). This study, on the other hand, intends to uncover subjective experiences relating to how the interplay of multiple identities affects how women view themselves as leaders.

This study, in line with (Parker and Dt, 1996; Ayman and Korabik, 2010)(Ayman and Korabik, 2010), challenges the practice of applying Western leadership models and theories globally. It provides an in-depth investigation of the deeply rooted contextual

factors that shape the experiences of Middle Eastern women and especially in Saudi, which might be neglected in mainstream (Western) research. To achieve this aim, this research will uncover how women make sense of their leadership experiences within the context of segregated HE.

1.5 Research objectives

Per the previous discussion, studies addressing Saudi women senior leaders' experiences in HE are scarce. This study will bridge the gap in the literature by uncovering women academic's leader identity construction within this context in which explicit cultural-social and systemic barriers persist.

This study is the first to explore how the appointments of the first officially recognized female dean in a public university in 2017, have changed Saudi women academic's view of themselves as future leaders. It also analytically investigates what shapes women's experiences in their advancements to top leadership positions in the country.

An in-depth qualitative approach explores whether and how contextual factors related to either gender or socio-culture might be a crucial element to advance Saudi women's self-perception as future leaders.

In order to fully understand the lived experiences of Saudi women academic's advancement into senior leadership positions, it is important to understand the ways in which their gender, religion and tribal identities intersect with their leader identity to shape their perceptions and experiences of senior leadership.

1.6 Research questions

The original research questions posed at the outset of this thesis were revised after the completion of data collection and analysis, and an identity lens was added to deeply uncover the experience of the Saudi women leaders.

Women in KSA have encountered several sociocultural constraints in pursuing their aspirations for leadership. However, the new political vision of empowering women in the country has embraced a collective adaptation, and it is assumed that political reform, and cultural and institutional change will follow. Yet, the question to be asked is what about readiness in women themselves?

Therefore, the research questions that underpin this research study are as follows:

1. How do Saudi women academics perceive leadership in Saudi HE?
2. What is the role of Saudi women's developmental readiness in their leadership identity construction?
3. How do narratives of leadership experience shape the construction of Saudi women's leader identity in regard to recent reforms in Saudi HE?

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

According to the literature, paths to leadership in organisational contexts differ according to the context in which leadership is unfolding. Yet, most scholars assert that as individuals claim leadership, the individuals who emerge as leaders are those who have been granted support, trust and recognition of others in the organisation. Emerging as a leader predicts “the degree to which a person fits with the identity of the group as a whole” (Morgenroth et al., 2021).

The theoretical framework that informed this study rests on the premise that social norms and gender practises shape individuals’ identity positioning (see (Zhao and Jones, 2017)) and that “individuals will choose identity positioning that is congruent with social norms and conventions”(p. 1).

The present study suggests that social context as a foundation of meaning-making can predict how much individuals depend on previous gender views when evaluating female leaders.

For leader identity to be positively constructed, individuals must see themselves as leaders and be seen by others as well. Leadership is a context-dependent process that evolves from the interaction between members (leaders and followers) in a group (teams, institutions, societies and nations).

In this study, we view leader development as identity construction, in which self-perceptions or identity have “profound effects on how we feel, think, behave and what we aim to achieve” (van Knippenberg et al., 2004). The study adopts the concept of *identity* rather than the *self* for empirical and conceptual reasons. First, empirically this research will use the term “possible identities” rather than “possible selves”, acknowledging that identities are changeable and that they are negotiated constantly,

producing collective identities congruent with the personal and social role they adopt at that very moment (Oyserman & Destin, 2010). Second, from a theoretical perspective, using the term “identity” is advantageous because it links the identity-based model to a broader set of issues, such as gender and leadership, as we articulate next (Oyserman & Destin, 2010).

This study adopts three perspectives in explaining women leaders’ identity construction when they emerge as leaders. The first one is identity theory, which purports that the roles that individuals assign to themselves and how they think of themselves is key in their leader identity formation (i.e. their motivation to lead and ability to lead) (Banaji and Prentice, 1994; Lord and Hall, 2005). Second, social identity theory asserts that outer-group membership is more important than how individuals view themselves (van Knippenberg and Hogg, 2003). Third, role congruence theory provides a lens through which to understand the incongruence between the role of a woman and the leader role (Eagly and Karau, 2002). According to Eagly and Karau (2002), women face greater criticism than men owing to their gender role being violated. While previous theories have implied that incongruity might vary depending on the nature of the leadership position, this theory goes a step further by proposing that incongruity varies based on the kind of leadership setting.

Leadership roles that encompass female-typical characteristics, such as involvement and thoughtfulness, contradict those requiring male-typical characteristics, such as being powerful or influential (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Men’s personal attributes tend to be in line with the qualities broadly deemed typical of leaders, such as “aggressive” and “agentic”; women’s attributes, on the other hand, tend to oppose these leadership characteristics; this incongruence results in women being judged more harshly in their leadership roles (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

It is important to understand how this incongruity between women and the leader role affects women’s leader identity formation and what other factors might shape

this role. In addition, it is important to understand what possible selves will result and whether social change affects the incongruence between these roles.

2.2 An overview of the main themes

Leadership scholars have been assessing the role of the self and others in the process leadership development, with the aim of forming a more comprehensive view of how leaders can be developed within an organisation (Day and Dragoni, 2015) and the vital role social change plays in this process (Day and Harrison, 2007). However, when viewing leader identity construction, many scholars acknowledge the gender dynamics element as an existing gap in the leadership development field (Day, 2011; Day and Sin, 2011; Day et al., 2004; Murphy and Johnson, 2011; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014; Harms et al., 2011). This study proposes to bridge this gap.

In this study, leader development is viewed as identity construction. The literature on identity leader development has distinguished between two types of self-identity: intrapersonal (personal) and interpersonal (social). The meanings attributed to intrapersonal self-identity are built upon one's view of self independently from others, which is the identity theory approach (Banaji and Prentice, 1994; Lord and Hall, 2005). In contrast, interpersonal self-identity is the construction of one's identity as a part of *out-group* membership, which is the social identity approach (Hogg, 2001; van Knippenberg et al., 2004), or *in-group* relations via shared characteristics (such as race, gender and religion), which is the self-categorisation theory approach (Turner et al., 1979). A growing number of studies have adopted the interpersonal self-identity approach (e.g. Day and Harrison, 2007; (DeRue and Ashford, 2010; Ibarra et al., 2010; Hogg et al., 2012b; van Knippenberg and Hogg, 2003; Day and Harrison, 2007). However, in the context of KSA, it is important to consider the sociocultural context as a crucial element to investigate identity leader development.

Identities are fluctuating and transformational entities (Seidler, 2010), and individuals can hold multiple self-identities (Turner et al., 1987; Reicher, 1982; Banaji and Prentice, 1994); social context determines which identity is constructed in a specific

situation (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Thomas, 2011; Seidler, 2010). Furthermore, from a gender perspective, “there is much stronger evidence for the impact of [culture] on the development of leadership among women” (Murphy and Johnson, 2011). However, research examining leaders with regard to their own self-view and within a specific context is scarce (van Knippenberg, 2012b, 2012a).

The main argument in this study is that women’s academic advancement as leaders in KSA is entangled within a context of embedded sociocultural constraints, which suggests that leader identity is fundamentally intrapersonal. Consistent with (van Knippenberg, 2012b), this study proposes that one’s self-view as a leader might be more important than being part of a group. Thus, this study incorporates literature on leader identity development (Ibarra et al., 2010; Lord and Hall, 2005) and leader developmental readiness (Avolio and Hannah, 2009, 2008; Avolio, 2016; Best, 2010; Graue, 2006; Reichard and Walker, 2016; Shebaya, 2011) through a gender lens (Skinner, 2014) to empirically investigate how leader identity is constructed within the context of political and sociocultural constraints. It is further assumed, based on the findings of (Avolio, 2016), that the leadership developmental readiness golden triangle of “the leader, context, and those being impacted by the leader’s leadership” (p. 7) is an important influence on leader advancements and for Saudi women’s self-view as leaders.

2.3 Conceptual framework of women’s leadership

Leadership has been widely investigated over the last several decades. Traditionally, leadership research has focused on traits, distinctive styles, contingencies (Bryman, 1996), and the new leadership approach, “such as shared leadership, e-leadership, and environmental leadership” (Bryman, 2004). In the nineties, diversity in leadership started to gain academic attention

However, debates over why women are still diminished in powerful leadership roles are ongoing (Eagly and Chin, 2010). Many Western scholars have approached this controversial, complex issue from different perspectives over the past decades

(Chliwniak, 1997; Vanderslice and Litsch, 1998; AlDoubi, 2014; Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016; Tessens et al., 2011).

For example, the “glass ceiling” metaphor has often been used to describe women’s and ethnic minorities’ underrepresentation in leadership roles. The glass ceiling indicates that women and minorities might advance to a certain level in the organisation, yet, beyond this, they will face an invisible barrier that hinders them from advancing any further, especially to top positions within the organisation (Morrison et al., 1987). According to (Baxter & Wright, 2000), as a woman progresses up the organisational ladder, the obstacles she faces become more and more difficult compared to men.

There have been claims that the metaphor of a “glass ceiling” is inaccurate, since it suggests that there is a secure and ordered ladder that is eventually stopped by an invisible barrier (Acker, 2009; Eagly and Carli, 2007). Instead, (Eagly and Carli, 2007) came up with the “labyrinth” metaphor, indicating that women must navigate a complex, gruelling, endless maze of barriers to obtain positions of authority (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Guerrero, 2011, p. 382, cited in (Schwanke, 2013)).

Alternatively, (Acker, 2009) proposed the concept of “inequality regimes”, designed to help understand the complicated interwoven practises that result in the persistent inequalities that appear in all types of organisations, including those at the top. (Acker, 2009) suggested that race, ethnic and class processes cannot be ignored, and that understanding gender processes is inextricably linked to processes that may also be characterised as class or race-related (p. 201).

Despite this growing interest in addressing the obstacles causing a lack of women in top managerial positions (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016), not much has been accomplished in practice, and women are still excluded from leadership roles in HE (Schwanke, 2013; Al-Kayed, 2015), especially in the Middle East (Hutchings et al., 2010). Many scholars acknowledge that, in male-dominated organisational cultures

(such as KSA), women are the least preferred leaders and experience unequal opportunities in accessing higher leadership positions (Carli & Eagly, 2012). As the phenomenon of women's inclusion in leadership is subtle in different sectors, each scholar comes to view it differently (Carli & Eagly, 2012).

Recently, numerous nations have enacted legislation to boost the number of women in senior leadership positions (Terjesen & Sealy, 2016). The benefit of gender balance has been proven to have a positive impact, and the importance of gender diversity is ever-growing (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Teague, 2015; Catalyst, 2014). Gender and leadership literature has recognised women as more successful leaders in the 21st century; they tend to be more democratic, participatory, transformative, municipal and against immoral choices than they have previously been (Gipson *et al.* 2017; Goethals and Hoyt, 2017 cited in (Wijaya Mulya & Sakhiyya, 2020). This highlights the need to examine both the causes of, and possible solutions to, the consistently unbalanced proportion of female leaders at the top.

Therefore, it is important to understand leadership in the context where it is unfolding; leadership in KSA is not the Western context in which most theories have been based. According to (Antonakis & Day, 2017), differences in culture can extend to differences in leadership, as leadership can be construed inconsistently across cultures.

The reason that leadership must be looked at through the lens of society is that people's behaviour is determined by their culture, so if the culture differs, so do the organisational and leadership practises (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Moreover, leadership is a complex social phenomenon; it occurs within social groups that bring their taken-for-granted knowledge and perceptions when enacting its practices (Steers *et al.*, 2012; House, 2004).

Thus, for a group of people who share the same cultural values and practices, culture will interact with leadership from the socio-organisational perspective of any

particular institution and leadership practices would change consequently as values and beliefs change. Although, it is arguable that most leadership and management theories should be applicable globally (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Yet, (Eacott, 2011) claims that as leadership is seen as a social activity, it should be approached at a deeper level in order to understand what is not immediately observable and therefore not easily measurable.

Recently, the Saudi government's Vision 2030, introduced in 2016, established goals for increasing women's participation in senior leadership positions from one percent to five percent (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016b). Despite developments and changes in society and public policies in the kingdom, leading to positive shifts in the attitudes and status of members of society towards women, there is still a gap between women's potential, abilities and aspirations and what exists in practice. Accordingly, numerous organisations (in the private and health sectors) have adopted a variety of purportedly "feminist" policies raising the number of women in front-line positions. These efforts have empowered some women to join the workforce, raising the proportion of their participation from 20.5 percent in 2019 to 33.2 percent by the end of 2020 (GASTAT, 2021a). The number of women rising to leadership positions in Saudi HE, however, has remained consistently low.

Women's delayed advancement to senior leadership positions might be a result of the deeply rooted gendered culture of organisations, especially when it comes to religious-based organisational culture, such as in the Saudi HE system. Gendered preconceptions about leaders and their contributions to successful leadership are widely held in this system (Ayman & Korabik, 2010).

Leadership research in HE continues to be dominated by top-down studies concerning leaders in senior roles (Kezar, 2012; Bryman, 2004). Only recently has the approach turned towards investigating bottom-up leadership (Kezar, 2012). Therefore, the formation of an individual's leader identity (e.g., Day and Harrison, 2007; DeRue and

Ashford, 2010) is an important area to study that might have an impact on leadership development processes (top-down), and leadership role practises (bottom-up).

Consequently, to study women's leadership self-identity, incorporating various studies on women's self-concept is key in order to fill this gap in leadership research (Day & Dragoni, 2015). This framework will allow an understanding of the importance of developmental readiness in promoting the self-concept of leaders, even when it clashes with their social identity.

2.3.1 Leadership: a definition

A person's self-concept is mostly imperceptible since it occurs inside the individual's mind and is processed surreptitiously. Individual's behave in accordance to others' assessments and their own perceptions of themselves (Hall, 2004).

As a result, the term "contextual leadership" emerged. The concept of "leadership" emerged from the social construction embedded in a unique organisation (Osborn et al., 2002). (Osborn et al., 2002) claim that existing leadership research lacks a complete overview of the phenomenon; in that sense, they argue that this makes theoretical and empirical studies in leadership too narrow in focus. They assert the need to view leadership as a circumstantial phenomenon rather than abstract. The contextual surroundings in which the act of leadership evolves or the approach that is taken to investigate it play a major role in leadership practice and process.

Day (2000) suggests that leadership is a multifaceted interaction between individuals and environments. According to (Marmenout, 2009), "two common denominators exert a strong influence on most of the countries within the region [Middle East]: the first in terms of language (Arabic), the second in terms of religion (Islam)" (p. 4). In the Middle East, political and economic institutions are heavily influenced by religious beliefs, ((Hutchings et al., 2010); this adds another level to the contribution of this study.

In addition, as acknowledged in the previous section, context plays a major role in developing women as legitimate future leaders in KSA. (Murphy & Johnson, 2011) recommend adopting and emphasising the importance of addressing the effects of social expectations on the leader development process. In addition, studying these embedded cultural expectations could expand our understanding of why women experience obstacles to their career progress (Eagly & Carli, 2007a). (Murphy & Johnson, 2011) claim that improving understanding of how these expectations influence leadership development, as well as the challenges and solutions of minority groups seeking leadership positions, will better inform prospective leaders and leadership development practitioners on how to deal with these possible barriers. Moreover, (Murphy & Johnson, 2011) acknowledge that “factors such as race, socioeconomic status, or appearance might hinder one’s development into a leader in the early years, potentially causing detrimental effects on leadership development in adulthood” (p. 468).

Most leadership development literature in the West has focused on individual, interpersonal communication. Researching a more collectivist society requires a focus on leadership development as an experience bound by the role of outsiders who might dictate the way it emerges. This is a critical element in the context of the readiness of a leader.

2.4 Leader developmental readiness

It is clear to all organisations that having effective leaders, particularly individuals with robust leadership efficacy, leadership behaviours and cognitive complexity (Reichard & Walker, 2016), is essential for maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage. (Avolio, 2016) reported that around 35 percent of training expenditure in large organisations is devoted to leadership development, highlighting the prioritisation of having effective leaders. However, the question of how to equip a leader with desirable competencies (i.e., to “develop” the leader) (Reichard et al., 2017), and how to ensure that the leader is “ready” for development is not straightforward. For this reason, for the past two decades, multiple scholars have been examining the concept

of leader developmental readiness (LDR), which is directly rooted in the more general and underlying construct of “developmental readiness” (Avolio, 2016). In this section, two prominent views on LDR are outlined, critiqued, and compared, namely those of (Hannah & Lester, 2009) and (Day et al., 2008). In turn, the value of conceptual models for LDR is discussed, and the core features of (Reichard & Walker, 2016) model are outlined.

2.4.1 Prior approaches to leader developmental readiness

Despite being a concept that entered the literature almost two decades ago (Avolio, 2004), it is only in recent years that scholars have sought to define LDR in an explicit way. Due to these initial attempts to define the concept of LDR, (Reichard & Walker, 2016) observed that a pair of contrasting but complementary approaches have emerged.

The first approach is that of (Hannah & Lester, 2009), which views LDR as consisting of an individual’s “ability to develop”, their “motivation to develop”, and their “support for development” as someone in a leadership position. Noteworthy, Reichard and Walker (2016) drew attention to the implications of this view of LDR, particularly the issue of what “ability to develop” and “motivation to develop” consist of in this context (e.g., self-awareness as an “ability” and leader developmental efficacy as an element of “motivation”). At the same time, it is interesting to note that other researchers, including (Anderson & Isabelle, 2017), have recently examined the “ability to develop” and “support for development” aspects of LDR from the standpoint of the so-called capability approach, which was initially proposed by (Sen, 1980). This highlights the depth and rich interpretability of this particular view of LDR, and, most importantly, emphasises the definitional difficulties that surround the construct. An implication of this is the identification of diverse factors that influence LDR, which is a point presented elsewhere in the literature (McDermott et al., 2011).

Regarding the second, contrasting approach to LDR, (Reichard & Walker, 2016) drew attention to (Day et al., 2008) work, which defined LDR as referring to the extent to

which an individual is prepared to learn and benefit from a developmental experience, and to differentiate between typical performance and maximum performance. Although the first and second definitions share key features, particularly in terms of their view that LDR is an individual-level construct, (Reichard & Walker, 2016) noted that they differ in one especially significant way. On the one hand, (Hannah & Lester, 2009) approach views LDR as a form of readiness that relates specifically to leader development, whereas on the other hand, Day, Harrison and Halpin's approach views LDR as a form of readiness that relates specifically to leadership experiences (Day et al., 2008). Nevertheless, both approaches emphasise the fact that a leader's internal state when embarking on leadership development (i.e., their "readiness") strongly influences the degree to which the development initiative will be successful (Reichard & Beck, 2017).

Even though the abovementioned differences may seem minor, the work of empirical researchers in the leadership development field highlights the immense value of clear, consistent and, ideally, universal definitions and theoretical frameworks for key concepts. For example, (Saxena et al., 2018) sought to evaluate LDR in a sample of medical students ($n = 46$) based on survey data, which highlights the criticality of having a well-defined and valid construct for generating generalisable, reliable, and reproducible results. For this reason, several researchers have developed conceptual models for LDR, a topic which is discussed in the next section.

2.4.2 Conceptual models for leader developmental readiness

Given that contrasting approaches, definitions and theoretical conceptualisations exist for LDR, paired with the fact that leader development is essential (Steele & Day, 2020), a range of conceptual models have been proposed for this construct in the literature. Many of these frameworks seek to serve as standard models that researchers can use to coordinate future studies and to ensure that the empirical measurement of the construct takes place in a reliable and valid way.

For example, Reichard and Walker's (2016) conceptual model of LDR attempted to combine the aforementioned approaches of (Hannah & Lester, 2009) and (Day et al., 2008), thereby offering an integrative foundation for future discussions of LDR. Although the model is limited by its conceptualisation of the LDR process as linear rather than cyclical, this limitation is acknowledged by the researchers (Reichard and Walker, 2016). Furthermore, it is important to recognise that all models, particularly those developed in the social sciences, are intended only as representational estimates of real-world phenomena (Frigg & Hartmann, 2020).

A fundamental achievement of Reichard and Walker's (2016) conceptual model of LDR relates to its success in the following two areas: first, synthesising the core ideas from (Hannah & Lester, 2009) and (Day et al., 2008) into a single model; and second, remaining open to future adaptation and updating the model based on empirical findings. Regarding the second point, it is notable that, in (Reichard & Beck, 2017), adaptations were made to the conceptual model based on state-of-the-art findings in the literature. For example, several new constructs were integrated into the 2017 version of the conceptual model compared to the 2016 version, including mindfulness, developmental networks, and psychological capital for leader development (Reichard & Walker, 2016; Reichard & Beck, 2017).

Significantly, this study utilises (Avolio, 2016) leadership developmental readiness conceptualisation in distinguishing three key components, namely, self-readiness, context readiness and institutional readiness, to understand the experience of Saudi female academics in senior positions and for their self-view as leaders.

The motivational component of LDR focuses on establishing a leadership identity (e.g. "I am a leader"), motivating oneself to lead, developing leadership self-efficacy (LSE), and establishing learning goal orientation (LGO). However, there is a caveat: the person must be capable of development. Metacognitive capacity and self-awareness have an influence on the actual success of leader development activities when combined with motivating objectives (Reichard and Walker, 2016). Additionally, the

presence of a supportive context serves to inspire and assist leadership advancement. The purpose of this research is to analyse the facets of LDR that contribute to an individual's motivation to develop. We conceptualised the motivational elements of LDR as having a general readiness to develop, self-regulation ability, resilience (Reichard and Walker, 2016), maintaining a leader possible self (LPS) (Vogelgesang & Avolio, 2011; Lester et al., 2011), and motivation to learn (Reichard *et al.*, 2017). Motivation to develop is critical to consider from a leader development standpoint since it is more malleable than the ability components of LDR.

To illustrate this point, Vroom's expectancy theory of motivation (1964) suggests that individuals might be motivated toward a certain act (readiness to develop) if they believe that the outcome is desirable. Having said that, individuals may be less inclined to put out effort if they do not believe their efforts will result in desired outcomes (Vroom, 1964).

When thinking about gender perceptions of leadership identity, it is reasonable to investigate how a social psychological framework may be applied, and to look into gender and organisational leadership, so as to provide a more comprehensive understanding of why women may be believed to have less leadership potential than men. The social identity approach will be discussed as another layer to the theoretical framework that has gained a substantial amount of empirical support in the next section.

The study of groups and leadership has seen an increasing use of the social identity approach in organisational settings. Yet, the role of gender is ignored in social identity research (Douglas & Sutton, 2010). The goal of this thesis is to fill this leadership gap by using the social identity approach and the method described above to look at people's views of leadership as a gendered self-construct.

2.5 Conceptual framework of identity (possible selves): the self and the social

Our self-perceptions grow and solidify over the lifespan (Erikson, 1994). Identity has been researched for over a century in sociology and psychology studies; however, it has only recently gained attention in organisational studies (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003).

The perspectives of self-concept and social identity have been adopted in leadership development research, particularly in the work of Hogg and his colleagues (Hogg, 2001; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). The conceptual framework of the social identity approach incorporates “a number of compatible social-cognitive, motivational, social-interactive, and societal level theories in order to explicate the relationship between self-conception and group and intergroup phenomena” (Abrams and Hogg, 2001; Haslam, 2001, cited in (Hogg & Knippenberg, 2003); (Hogg, 2001). This framework expands on the original theory of social identity (Turner et al., 1979; Abrams & Hogg, 1988), social categorisation theory (Tajfel, 1978), self-categorisation theory (Turner et al., 1987) and additional associated theories of social identity processes (Brewer, 1991). The social identity theory concept is that membership in a group supports a person’s self-definition, which affects leadership emergence (Hogg, 2001; Hogg & Knippenberg, 2003; Lord & Hall, 2003). (Hogg, 2001) claims that individuals define themselves in terms of collective qualities within a group in which they belong, whereby the individualised and interpersonal associations of leadership become less prominent. “The former delineates one’s personal identity and personal self, whereas the latter delineates one’s social identity and collective self” (van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003).

Drawing from social identity theory, many leadership scholars have asserted the importance of adopting an identity lens to understand leadership dynamics in which leadership is viewed as a collective process of relationship between leaders, peers, and followers within the social groups to which they belong (Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2004; Komives et al., 2013; Lord & Hall, 2005; Karellaia, N Guillen, 2011; Erkutlu & Chafra, 2015; van Knippenberg et al., 2005; Moorosi, 2014; Durham, n.d.; Hogg, 2001).

Furthermore, leadership development researchers have emphasised that leadership identity is a core element of leadership development (Day et al., 2008; Lord & Hall, 2005). In addition, (Day & Lance, 2004) pointed out that the integration of leader identity into a person's self-schema is vital in leader development. "Leader development has been described as enhancing the fit between the requirements of the leader role and the personal identity of the leader" (Hall, 2004, cited in (Day & Harrison, 2007)). When it comes to building leadership abilities, understanding one's own leadership identity is one of the most crucial initial steps.

Any leader assigned to a formal leadership role informally experiences an identity shift. As the leader develops from novice to intermediate to expert, each stage requires a different set of knowledge and capabilities (Lord & Hall, 2005), and an identity shift results (Ibarra et al., 2014a).

The identities of leaders within HE are created and shaped in a social collective context (Blackmore, 2006), yet when gender is added to the equation, things become more complicated (Morgenroth et al., 2021). Gender roles in HE are still traditional and limiting (Blackmore, 2006).

The issue of women's lack of representation in the top leadership roles that this study investigates has been interpreted in research by several constructs with several explanations. Previous studies have tended to attribute gender disparities in leadership to societal barriers created by preconceptions, prejudices and discrimination (Eagly and Karau, 2002; (Ryan et al., 2016)

It is necessary to understand how these subtle forms of stereotypical and discriminatory acts affect women's identity to pursue leadership motivation. To explore these themes, this study adopts the social identity approach, providing a deeper understanding of interpretations of identity construction, how individuals identify themselves through social processes in different settings, and the role of gender in the process.

2.6 Conceptual framework of gender

Leadership identity literature has failed to focus on gender which has reinforced the assumption that leadership is gender neutral, contributing to the lack of studies and theories on women's leadership development (Stead & Elliott, 2009; Bryans & Mavin, 2003). In the early 20th century, there was a debate between leadership scholars about whether gender as a construct had any relationship with leadership effectiveness. In other words, was the underrepresentation of women in top leadership positions based on gender differences in leadership style, behaviour or effectiveness? It is very important to understand these issues in order to uncover the factors that have contributed to the prolonged exclusion of women from leadership.

More than a trait of individuals, gender is an institutionalised system of social practises for constituting males and females as different in socially significant ways and organising inequality in terms of those differences (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 1999, cited in (Ridgeway, 2001), p. 637).

Recent literature calls for a de-gendered organisation to minimise the gap between women's emergence as leaders and their male counterparts, yet it is very early to call for that in KSA. HE in KSA is gendered in various aspects. First, gender segregation is institutionalised in the system, and medical schools are only taught by male faculty members. Men and women are not allowed to socialise or even meet face-to-face. Conferences and symposiums are segregated most of the time—sometimes both genders can attend but only via video conferencing or when physically separated. Second, there is a division in university specialities and accordingly career choices; for example, in some universities, King Abdul-Aziz University (KAU) for example, nursing school and the faculty of home economics are women-only, whereas the faculties of environmental design, earth sciences and marine sciences are for men only. Third, regarding authority versus responsibility—although gender segregation should give women the advantage of being leaders in the women-only departments, strangely, men are leaders for both. Women have only provisional positions with very little

authority. All these gendered practises were based mainly on the roles men and women were assigned in society by social identification (i.e. categorisation).

2.6.1 Leadership style

When investigating the differences in leadership between genders, two opinions surfaced from the literature. The first one indicated that there is a difference between women's and men's leadership, and the other one excluded gender from the equation.

(Eagly & Carli, 2003) assert that to understand women's advancement into top leadership roles, it is important to first understand "what behaviours characterise effective leaders" (p. 808). This question returns anyone to the ambiguous nature of leadership as a construct. (Eagly & Carli, 2003) use situational theories of leadership to explore this further. They noted that per situational theories, many contextual factors play a role in determining what constitutes effective leadership behaviours in varying situations. For example, even if two leaders occupy the same role, these behaviours vary from institution to institution, depending on the subordinates' trust, relationship with the leader and the nature of the task (Chemers, 1997). Moreover, (Locke, 2014) argues that predicting whether a person will perform successfully as a leader depends on the nature of the job and the individual's capability to develop leadership skills. (Day & Antonakis, 2013) argue that leadership emergence and effectiveness are intertwined and related: the leader who can emerge, be recognised in a group of people and gain trust in various social practises is highly likely to be effective.

Over the long history of this research, these arguments have given rise to the qualities approach or personality trait theories, which hold the stance that certain personality traits distinguish leaders from others. These theories have influenced our understanding of the leadership phenomenon (Hogue & Lord, 2007; Offermann et al., 1994). According to (Locke, 2014) and (Miscenko & Day, 2016), perceived inherited leadership characteristics, such as intelligence, charisma, kindness and honesty, might

be associated with the *emergence* of the leader (or the opportunity to act as a leader) but fail to influence leadership *effectiveness*. As style is one determinant of leaders' effectiveness, any gender-based differences regarding style may affect how people perceive women leaders and accordingly if they are able to advance into leadership (Carli & Eagly, 2012).

Second, the gender-specific school of thought states that there are inherent differences between men and women, and therefore, they should be placed in varied roles in society (Kauser & Tlaiss, 2011). In the early 1990s, studies on women's leadership were interested in investigating if women and men led differently, and if this was a possible explanation of why there were few women in leadership. On the one hand, some scholars claimed the position that women and men lead in a similar way (for example., Carli and Eagly, 2012; Eagly and Johnson, 1990). On the other hand, scholars such as (Loden, 1985; Helgesen, 1990; Rosener, 1990) argued that women and men lead differently. Other scholars have argued that these studies showed no clear-cut differences between the sexes ((Loden, 1985; Helgesen, 1990; Bedeian et al., 1976). According to (Burke & Collins, 2001), the literature was not conclusive and the number of studies was limited. In addition, they claimed that "these differences although statistically significant, are small" (p. 244). Furthermore, "More accurately stated, gender differences in leadership style are not due to fundamental differences between men and women, but stem from gender differences in status, power, or other factors usually associated with gender. Empirical evidence for both positions accumulated through the years, contributing to the confusion" (Van Engen & Willemsen, 2004).

In this vein, Eagly and Johnson (1990) conducted a meta-analysis reviewing 162 studies from 1961 to 1987 that explored sex differences in leadership style. This meta-analysis investigated all three classes of leadership studies, namely (a) laboratory experiments, (b) assessment studies and (c) organisational studies. Their analysis addressed the assessment of leadership styles of people not chosen for leadership roles (assessment studies), and the use of student participants (laboratory

experiments). women tended to lead in an interpersonal-oriented style and men in a task-oriented style. In contrast, no sex differences were evident in these two leadership styles in organisational studies (Carli & Eagly, 2012; Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Yet, when considering all three classes of leadership, women demonstrated a democratic and relatively interpersonal style of leadership in contrast to men who adopted a more autocratic, task-oriented style. According to Eagly and Johnson (1990), “consistent with stereotypic expectations about a different aspect of leadership style evidence is found for both the presence and the absence of differences between the sexes”. In their review, Eagly and Johnson (1990) asserted that although it documented a difference in leadership style between the sexes, it did not include the effect of the difference on the leaders’ effectiveness. “Whether men or women are more effective leaders as a consequence of their differing styles is a complex question that could be addressed meta-analytically only by taking measures of group and organisational outcomes into account along with measures of leadership style” (Eagly and Johnson (1990), p. 249).

A subsequent meta-analysis focused on studies reported in peer-reviewed journals from 1987 to 1999 conducted by (Van Engen & Willemsen, 2004). This meta-analysis followed the one conducted by (Eagly & Johnson, 1990), with the difference that this study included charismatic and transformational leadership styles (by Bass and Avolio, 1994), which were newly theorised at the time of their review. Their analysis showed no clear evidence for sex differences in how leaders behave. Furthermore, their analysis confirmed (Eagly & Johnson, 1990) findings, in that “sex differences in leadership styles are contingent upon the context in which male and female leaders work, as both the type of organisation in which the leader works and the setting of the study turn out to be moderators of sex differences in leadership styles” (Van Engen & Willemsen, 2004).

Although there is a long-held assumption that men are better leaders than women, empirical evidence suggests that this assumption is far from definitive. Traditional researchers, such as Birnbaum and Mintzberg (1992), believed that the leadership

field is genderless (Grove & Montgomery, 1999; Chliwniak, 1997; Carli & Eagly, 2012). However, some scholars believe that there are differences in leadership traits and behaviours between the two genders (Broverman et al., 1972; Eagly et al., 2000; Williams & Best, 1990). In addition, Williams and Best (1990) argue that there is a significant association between sex role ideology and economic-social expansion, yet, as shown by the meta-analysis investigation of sex alterations in social behaviour, (Eagly & Wood, 1988) assert that “[these] aggregated sex differences are in fact extremely small” (p. 3).

Despite the different views of scholars regarding the sex differences (or lack thereof) in leadership styles and their subsequent impact on effective leadership behaviour, there is an agreed-upon understanding that it is context-dependant and that studies addressing this issue must consider this issue carefully (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Van Engen & Willemsen, 2004).

Eagly and Carli (2003) asserted that “women are more likely than men to lead in a style that is effective under contemporary conditions”. Moreover, they argue that under-evaluation of women results from prejudice against their capability to lead, specifically in male-dominated organisational settings.

More recently, leadership positions have been redefined to be more in accordance with the female gender role. Reduced prejudice and discrimination against women is one of the altered gender norms (Johnson & Hoyt, 2012). Researchers have found that women’s leadership style (empathy, attentiveness, and collaboration) is more aligned with academic leadership discourse than it was in the past (Blackmore, 2002).

Nonetheless, the important question to be asked in this study is whether the difference in style indicates difference in effectiveness. If we adopt the view of researchers who have concluded that there are no clear differences in leadership style that lead to lack of effective behaviour to lead. Then, why women are still unfavourable as leaders.

Although, (Chliwniak, 1997) “defined leaders as individuals who provide vision and meaning for an institution and embod[y] the ideals toward which the organisation strives” (Grove & Montgomery, 1999). (Grove & Montgomery, 1999) argue whether this is a true portrayal of leaders, then why are females seen as poor prospects for major leadership posts? Are women less efficient leaders? (p. 1).

Role congruity theory provide an explanation of this question stating that there is an incongruity between the gender role stereotypes and expected leader characteristics which will result in prejudice (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). In short, “people thus tend to have dissimilar beliefs about leaders and women and similar beliefs about leaders and men” (Eagly & Karau, 2002) .

2.6.2 Stereotypes (Social role theory)

Throughout history, “leadership has been construed as primarily a masculine enterprise, and many theories of leadership have focused on the desirability of stereotypically masculine qualities in leaders” (e.g., Eagly and Carli, 2003, p. 808(Eagly & Carli, 2003). (Eagly, 1987) argues that sex differences are “product[s] of the social roles that regulate behaviour in adult life” (p. 7). This theory explains the dissimilarities between women’s and men’s behaviour, which Eagly (1987) relates to the role of social expectations. According to Eagly’s *social role theory* of sex differences and similarities in social behaviours, people in society behave according to widely held gender role specifications. This theory proposes that, in any society, most perceptions of behavioural differences in male and female roles result from cultural stereotypes that explain gender roles. This explains why there is a division of male and female labour and why society perceives certain jobs as fit for one gender rather than the other (Eagly, 1987; Eagly et al., 2000).

Consistent with stereotype research (Kite et al., 2008), social role theory proposes that the two genders align with *agentic* versus *communal* traits (Eagly, 1987). Communal attributes are those such as “caring”, “supportive”, “compassionate” and “sympathetic”, and are attributed primarily to women. Agentic qualities, more

strongly ascribed to men, include “aggressive”, “ambitious”, “dominant”, “forceful”, “independent”, “self-sufficient”, “self-confident” and “prone to act as a leader” (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Although there exist other traits that might be differentiated by gender, Eagly and Karau (2002) argue that communal and agentic attributes, in particular, are directly related to the rise of prejudice against women, which influenced the emergence of the “role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders”. These gender-based stereotypes differentiate between gender roles in education, work and social life and affect identity and behaviour accordingly ((Jones, 2020).

Based on these arguments, social role theory suggests that this stereotyping results in segregation in the labour market to match these stereotypes. Thus, people link occupational success in certain jobs with personal attributes related to the sex of the dominant group. These expectations explain why society perceives male-dominated jobs as more masculine and why women are more likely to occupy jobs with perceived feminine qualities (Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Eagly & Steffen, 1984).

If women’s underrepresentation in leadership positions is not because of the lack of effectiveness or their different style of leadership, then the question to be asked is what explains women’s exclusion from top leadership positions?

As this thesis acknowledges the role contextual factors play regarding the issue of underrepresentation of women in leadership, the following section will provide an overview of research from the Western/European context.

2.6.3 Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders

When a person steps outside of the stereotypical assumptions associated with their group, they are subject to prejudice (Eagly and Carli, 2003). As pointed out by (Dinh et al., 2014), it is important to uncover the gender dynamics in context-specific domains—in this case, to better understand the experiences of women in leadership roles. Many scholars have explored factors affecting leadership processes, such as

culture. To fully recognise what hinders women from reaching elite positions in organisations, it is essential to understand the impact of gender relations.

Building on social role theory, Eagly and Karau (2002) proposed *role congruity theory*, which states that females in leadership are subjected to two kinds of prejudice as a result of the contradiction between their gender role and the expectations of the leadership role. First, people associate leadership roles with masculine attributes; women leaders are typically perceived as less capable because their gender role stereotypes do not match these masculine attributes. Second, women leaders who demonstrate leadership conduct that fits the role's requirements are judged as less favourable, as a result of the incongruity between the projected female gender role and the leadership role.

These two types of bias result in women's hindrance to attaining leadership positions and lead to extra obstructions for women to be successful leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Role congruity theory, therefore, might explain some of the bias that prevents women from entering leadership positions, and these prejudicial views of leadership might shape Saudi women's experiences when perusing their motivation to lead.

2.6.4 Women's leadership identity

For women and minorities, developing a leader identity is challenging (Murphy & Reichard, 2011). It has been suggested that women's access to leadership positions might be influenced by gender role socialisation from as early as childhood (Johnson & Hoyt, 2012). Girls' self-perceptions of not being prototypical leaders, based on society's stereotypical expectations of females, may have a negative impact on women's confidence, self-esteem and subsequently leadership development. In addition, gender roles not only alter women's leader identities, but also add other layers of societal challenges created by prejudice and discrimination (Johnson & Hoyt, 2012).

The HE literature on gender and identity often falls into the trap of treating women as a homogenous group, distinct from men (Blackmore, 2002, 1999). This may reinforce conventional gender norms and could therefore hinder women from discovering their individuality (Haake, 2009). As a result, greater women's representation in leadership might lead to a quicker pace of achieving gender balance in the organisational leadership culture (Blackmore, 2006).

When viewing leadership and identity literature through a gender lens, many complexities are added. According to Haake's (2009) qualitative study of academic department heads, an overarching trend was found in which gender was a progressively more important element in leaders' identity formation the longer leaders were in their roles (Haake, 2009).

Social identity development literature is mostly concerned with leadership prototypes of both self-concept and that of others (Avolio et al., 2009b). Recent research has argued against the perspective of viewing leadership prototypes as fixed, suggesting that leadership prototypes are dynamic and context-specific, which means that they may be shaped and reshaped in response to the limitations or difficulties facing leaders (Lord et al., 2001; Avolio et al., 2009b).

To emerge as a leader, one must identify oneself as a leader (self-identity) and grant their support from others (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Social context is important to consider when investigating leader identity development (Ibarra et al., 2014b). Examining how leader identity is shaped by expectations from peers, subordinates, organisations and society is essential (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011; Holland et al., 2006; Bagnoli, 2004). In light of leadership stereotypes, the literature shows that women are perceived less favourably in stereotypically masculine roles or workplaces (Heilman, 2012; Eagly & Karau, 2002).

These prototypical characteristics of the leadership role also affect women's self-perception as leaders. According to *self-categorisation theory* (Turner et al., 1987), the

degree to which individuals identify with the rules and expectations connected with a group is affected by whether individual members see themselves as typical or representative of the group. Accordingly, in-group membership determines the degree to which individuals are inclined to accept the group's values as their own, and subsequently determines their behaviour (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Kleef et al., 2007). As a result, if the stereotype of a certain job or profession aligns with an individual's social identity, they will be more willing to join and remain in it (Olkkonen & Lipponen, 2006). In contrast, "people's beliefs that colleagues misidentify them influences their well-being and interpersonal relationships at work"; this triggers what (Meister et al., 2014) refer to as "internal identity asymmetry" (p. 41). As per (Meister et al., 2017) study, "internal identity asymmetries are more likely to occur during professional (e.g. taking on a leadership role) transition points in a woman's career" (p. 25).

In addition, *identity fit theory* (Peters et al., 2012) introduced the concept of "fit", arguing that context might trigger one social identity over the other depending on which one fits better. This suggests that the motivation, identification or engagement of women in leadership (which is considered more masculine) would likely be low (i.e. not a good fit).

Women report a decrease in their professional identity, as well as a decrease in ambition and career drive when they are in an occupation that they feel unfit for, due to the masculine characteristics associated with the role. In their two studies of women surgical trainees, Peters et al. (2012) claimed that women misidentified themselves with the traits of being a successful surgeon, as a result of a personal lack in the hyper-masculine attributes they attached to the job. Not only did these women tend to express more professional disidentification, they also expressed a larger desire for career departure than their male counterparts, which might be explained by the gender-based lack of fit.

As one of the main explanations, some scholars argue that women have trouble balancing their professional and home commitments. According to (Morgenroth et al.,

2021; Peters et al., 2012), this issue might be associated with the fact that women sense a lack of fit with leaders. This results in lower levels of identity compatibility and, accordingly, women will have a harder time balancing their professional and personal lives.

It is important to consider, when trying to understand Saudi women's leader identities, how these prejudicial views of leadership might limit Saudi women's capability to see themselves as prospective leaders.

2.7 Conceptual framework of cultural tightness/looseness

The theory of cultural tightness-looseness looks at societies from the perspective of the strength of their social norms and intolerance of aberrant behavior (tightness), or comparatively easygoing social norms and a greater degree of acceptance of aberrant behavior (Gelfand et al., 2006; Gelfand, 2018).

Cultural tightness-looseness theory argues that tight cultures embrace and enforce rigid norms and rules, and consequently do not accept deviant behavior. Loose cultures, in contrast, tend to have a more adaptable set of rules and norms, and are more tolerant of deviant behaviour. A number of factors determine the degree to which social rules are rigidly observed and enforced within societies, namely, historical occurrences, environmental considerations and systems of socialisation.

This theory has been harnessed to analyse how cultures differ in their values, attitudes and behaviors. Tight cultures are frequently correlated with greater degrees of compliance, traditionalism and social regulation, whereas loose cultures are often linked to individuality, lack of conformity, diversity and creativity.

Saudi Arabia is, is viewed as a tight culture with robust social norms and low levels of tolerance for deviant behaviour. This cultural tightness is the result of a conservative construal of Islam and the country's traditional social values, which highlight the importance of conformity, compliance and modest behaviour.

Saudi Arabia's cultural tightness may also present obstacles for women when it comes to accessing positions of leadership and taking advantage of opportunities for professional development. In the workplace setting, women can encounter discrimination and find it difficult to create a network or construct relationships with their male co-workers. Which affect their construction of leader identities, therefore adding this element to the theoretical framework will provide an important aspect in understanding women leadership advancement in such cultures.

2.8 Social change

Given recent advances in female leadership, organisations must adjust their approach to diversity. Scholars and practitioners alike have taken notice of these developments and have acknowledged the impact of gender dynamics on organisational culture and structure.

On the other hand, the rise of women's inclusion into leadership roles, according to Terjesen and Sealy (2016), has led to more robust leader identities, influencing more women to see themselves as future leaders. In addition, as leadership is a contextual phenomenon, more women in top leadership posts lead to the male-dominated boards to be improper resulting from a shift in social identities.

"as leadership is created by and creates images (Fisher and Fowler, 1995). The gender targets put women in these roles, leading society to deem the social identity of an all-male board as increasingly unacceptable and re-imaged" (Terjesen and Sealy, 2016).

As gender inequality practises are deeply rooted in the Saudi culture, new reforms in the country were essential, particularly those focused on women's inclusion. The Saudi government set up new policies to ensure equal representation of women in all aspects, including the economy, politics and everyday practises. However, according to a new book released following the new reforms, based on research by the Institute of Public Administration, there are "challenges facing Saudi women in leadership

positions in government agencies”(Al-Rabia & Al-Hadithi, 2018).The authors have argued that there are four types of women’s empowerment in Saudi Arabia today.

Real empowerment is attained when women in senior leadership positions possess both high-quality competence and extensive experience and are given the necessary authority to carry out their roles.

Restricted empowerment occurs when women in high-level jobs are skilled and experienced, yet their authority is restricted, so their appointment is purely symbolic.

Passive empowerment involves assigning women to key positions in the nation, not for their ability but, rather, to demonstrate that the institution promotes equal opportunities for women. The study argued that this type of empowerment might have an inverse impact since women’s inability to succeed could be generalised for other Saudi women leaders.

Mock empowerment refers to women’s apparent, but ingenuine presence in media, meetings, conferences and TV. This is what the author calls unpleasant and provides an inaccurate perception of “symbolic token gender representatives” (Kanter, 1977 cited in (Terjesen and Sealy, 2016).

2.9 Identity-based leadership developmental readiness

This section offers a comprehensive research review of cultural and gender factors in leadership and their importance in improving our understanding of leadership, that this research employed.

An overview of each concept and how it is conceptualised in this research will be examined. Afterwards, the main theories for the study of leadership will be reviewed, highlighting the key outcomes that address gender or culture. This study acknowledges that sociocultural context is vital in the study of individuals (Ayman, 2004). (Wibbeke, 2010) asserts that “we simply do not exist outside of a cultural and

social context” (p. 17). Arguably, gender and culture are intertwined in relation to leadership. However, “because in the leadership literature very few studies have examined their joint effects” (Ayman and Korabik, 2010), gender and culture will be reviewed separately.

In the context of KSA, it is important to consider the sociocultural context as a crucial element that shapes Saudi women’s experiences. Research studies have proposed that within one individual, multiple self-identities may overlap (Turner et al., 1987; Reicher, 1982; Banaji and Prentice, 1994). Accordingly, research on culture and identity proposes that culture determines which identity is constructed in a specific situation (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Thomas, 2011). Additionally, from a gender perspective, “there is much stronger evidence for the impact of [culture] on the development of leadership among women” (Murphy and Johnson, 2011). However, research on leaders regarding their own self-view and within the specific context in which they are situated is scarce (van Knippenberg, 2012b, 2012a).

The main argument here is that women’s advancement as academic leaders in KSA is entangled within a context of embedded sociocultural constraints, which suggest that leader identity is fundamentally shaped by an intersection of faith, ethnicity, gender and race. Consistent with the role congruity theory of prejudice (Eagly & Karau, 2002), women have been under the presumption of holding less leadership qualities than men, in which have led them to be underprivileged to acquire leadership positions or even regarded negatively when they have and practice the necessary leading skills compared to men (Eagly et al., 1992; Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Arguably, intersectionality theory might offer a fruitful perspective to this research (Fenstermaker, 2013; Crenshaw, 1991; Acker, 2006). Subsequently the framework of intersectional identities will be kept in mind when investigating identity saliency and how Saudi women construct their leader identity. Literature that has applied an intersectionality lens to women’s leadership research is limited, according to (Atewologun and Singh, 2010).

Investigations concerning gender, leadership and identity are all intricately linked, providing a better understanding of how gender influences the leadership identities of leaders. In combining gender with other minority social identities, this study predicts that Saudi women may become symbolically invisible, overlooked for being part of the “others”. It is important, however, to understand that in the Saudi context, religion and tribe are two of the most central indicators of identity. Each of these frameworks indicates a degree of variation in fully understanding the extent to which leader identity is internalised within the organisational context.

Literature on leadership identity has overlooked the importance of understanding the self-perception of an individual with regard to leadership, since most of the literature is focused on other people’s views of leaders (in promotions, style or behaviour) (Hertneky, 2008). This research investigates how Saudi women academics come to see themselves as leaders and what conditions are important in the process.

Chapter 3 Context of Saudi Arabia

3.1 Introduction

The historical, religious, political and sociocultural setting of Saudi women has been rarely empirically researched, resulting in a vague picture of the experience of women in KSA. This literature review will shed light on Saudi contextual factors that might affect women's leadership readiness and identity.

Previous studies on women leaders have focused on their invisibility compared to their male counterparts. They have provided explanations such as stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination as the main challenges women face in their experience (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2012). Barriers to women's professional choices have often been attributed to organisational culture preventing or challenging women's road to leadership higher status.

For Saudi women, the situation is different. The presence of more externally imposed barriers, such as sociocultural and religious impositions, affects women's leader identity, which makes the struggle even more difficult to overcome.

These rationalisations offer a "point of departure" for this study. Viewing the issue through an identity lens allows us to understand, at the individual level, how these elements of the Saudi context may or may not contribute to the women's readiness for leadership.

(Day, 2000) suggests that leadership is an interaction between individuals and environments. In addition, as acknowledged in the previous section, context plays a major role in developing women as legitimate future leaders in KSA. (Murphy and Johnson, 2011) emphasise the importance of studying embedded cultural gender expectations to expand our understanding of why women experience obstacles to their leadership progress.

(Murphy and Johnson, 2011) claim that understanding how expectations influence leadership attainment, as well as the challenges of women seeking leadership positions, will better inform prospective leaders and leadership development practitioners on how to deal with these possible barriers. Moreover, leadership development in adulthood may be negatively impacted by an intersection of socioeconomic position, ethnicity and gender in the early years ((Murphy and Johnson, 2011).

This literature review will provide an overview of the cultural context in which detailed studies on females' leadership advancement tactics in Saudi HE do not exist (Alomair, 2015). Very few studies have even superficially addressed this issue (Taleb, 2010; Al-Dabbagh and Assaad, 2010; Altman et al., 2015; Marmenout, 2009), resulting in a gap in the literature.

Consequently, whether leadership development might be an opportunity for Saudi women to gain recognition remains an open question. The recommendations from scholars exploring the challenges and barriers confronting Saudi women leaders have only scratched the surface of this issue (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Al-Kayed, 2015). In this section, we will review the literature concerning contextual factors affecting Saudi women's leader identity construction.

The chapter is organised into several topics covering the context of KSA, including a discussion regarding the gendered nature of education in KSA. This will build a foundation for our investigation of the HE system and women's academic leadership. Following this, an extensive review of the literature concerning women's leadership development will be introduced. It is important to note that most of the literature has focused on the barriers affecting women's path to leadership. This literature was viewed in light of the leadership developmental readiness theory, in which the self, institution and sociocultural context is critically reviewed. Following that, the attitudes of Saudi male's towards women's leadership will be examined. Finally, given the profound recent changes in Saudi women's social roles and visibility, the review will

identify the various societal transformations that might be important influencing factors in women's self-view as future leaders.

3.2 Education in KSA

To understand what factors affect women's self-perception as leaders, it is vital to understand and analyse how the education system is constructed.

Saudi's consider Islam more than a religion as Nehme (1994) claims, Islam has influenced organisational structure. As previously discussed, this is a significant contributor in forming Saudi cultural identity.

It is important to acknowledge that the intellectual schools of Islam vary extensively in their interpretations of the Islamic texts. However, the educational system in KSA stems from the strict Wahhabi school of Islam (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2015); therefore, education adopts strict morality and ideology, including gender segregation. According to (El-Sanabary, 1994), KSA is the only country that has segregated educational systems, governmental structures and physical facilities. This likely affects women's self-perceptions in various ways.

3.2.1 Gender segregation

The education system in KSA is characterised by gender segregation. It is necessary here to be explicit about the meaning of sex segregation in the Saudi context—men and women who are not related should be kept apart. This is contrary to the Western view of sex segregation in the literature, which refers to “the division of labour between the sexes”, which is perpetuated by gender stereotypes and expectations (Cejka and Eagly, 1999). Gender segregation in KSA is institutionalised in the system and is obligatory by law.

Historically, sex segregation in KSA did not exist (Le Renard, 2008; Alwedinani, 2017; Hamdan, 2005), and there is no unified understanding of why or when this phenomenon started (van Geel, 2016). Several scholars have proposed various

possible explanations to tackle its origin. (Hosen, 2018) attributes it to the fact that KSA was historically not colonised by Western colonisers, which preserved the religious, political and sociocultural spheres (Prokop, 2003).

Many authors have claimed that this concept of institutionalised segregation of the sexes in KSA stems from Islam, and specifically Wahhabism's strict Islamic ideology (Hodges, 2017; Meijer, 2010). Connecting segregation to a sacred element of women's lives led them to happily follow and rarely confront or question it—leading to identity acceptance.

Some suggest that Islam was not the basis of many of these gendered practises imposed on women, and that communication between the genders was not prohibited in the Arab tradition either before or after Islam (Le Renard, 2008). Additionally, according to Hamdan (2005), Muslim women in the Arab world were involved in various professions and economic activities in society. This indicates that social customs and gender roles are primarily based on tribal traditions rather than Islamic teachings (Yamani, 2005).

Politically, following the discovery of oil, it became economically viable for the government to create separate female-only institutions, in alliance with the strict Wahhabi thoughts at the time. This promoted a certain “discourse on the status of women and their place in Saudi society” (Le Renard, 2008). Another possible explanation for this is that the sudden change in the economic state after oil affected the need for women's employment, which is considered a sign of wealth and privilege (Le Renard, 2008). Upon reading about the history of girls' education in the country, it is fair to say that girls' inclusion in the educational system was initiated by King Faisal and his wife Queen Mona with their efforts in Jeddah city with the Dar-Al-Hanan private school in 1956 (Yizraeli, 2012), followed by the first-state school in the 1960 (Bowen, 2014).

Gender segregation, according to Alhazmi and Nyland (2013), as a concept and practice, stems from the culture—it represents the construction of the Saudi identity through its manifestation in history, tribal and religious ideology. For example, according to Alhazmi and Nyland (2013), gender segregation stems from the “symbolic meaning of women’s honour” (Song, 2019). This ideology has led to the topic of gender segregation being prohibited from the public discourse until recently (Hamdan, 2005). According to (Gross et al., 2012) the segregation is a form of “women’s subjugation” (p. 91), which stems from the idea of women’s inferiority inherited in societies, as proposed by Mill (1869).

Other scholars have claimed that gender segregation was not evident in Saudi cultural history and that it is “partly an invented tradition” (Le Renard, 2008). (Alwedini, 2017) point out that the restrictions imposed on women in KSA in the form of segregation was not evident in all Saudi regions, for instance, it wasn't a part of the Hijazi culture..

Thus, segregation has affected women’s self-perception in many ways. (Song, 2019) investigated the experience of 10 Saudi female students in the United States who had moved from the gender segregated educational system in KSA to a mixed-gender educational system with mixed social interactions. The study investigated how cultural gender norms affected women’s respect and modesty by analysing how Saudi women’s gender identification changed in Western mixed-gender encounters.

One of her findings uncovered that Saudi females used “shyness and fear of judgement” as a way to construct their gender identity in the mixed-gender environment. Song interpreted that these practises were a respect for Saudi women's idealised image. She claimed that “Saudi women’s adherence to these norms often leads to their nonparticipation in classroom and social interactions, and a deeper ambivalence is indicated when they seek social and academic opportunities through active participation” (p. 405).

In conclusion, as discussed previously, spatial segregation is a cultural tradition and is considered one of the main challenges facing women's leadership emergence and career advancement in KSA, regardless of background, region or religious and tribal affiliation. This has resulted in the invisibility of women in the public space in the country. In the next section, an overview of women's status in HE and the structural challenges they face on their path to leadership is provided.

3.2.2 Gender differences in access to HE

There are 30 public universities in KSA, geographically distributed among the regions of the Kingdom. Education in governmental universities is free, with a monthly payment for each student during their studies. Some universities offer single-sex education, such as Princess Norah Bint Abdul Rahman University (a women-only university).

Gender inequality is apparent in the access to and type of education available to men and women in KSA (Alsuwaida, 2016). For women, education perpetuated the image of the traditional gender role, which was imposed by society in accordance with Sharia law (Alsuwaida, 2016). For example, Faculty of Human Sciences and Design at King Abdulaziz University which is a women-only faculty with five departments which is childhood studies, food and nutrition, fashion and textile, interior design and furniture and family sciences.

Based on the gendered expectations of Saudi society, women's access to some fields of study was limited. Additionally, the curriculum of girls' sections was different and old (AlMunajjed, 1997). Gender role expectations and patriarchal views did not only manifest in the segregated nature of education, but also in the subject choice (Alwedini, 2016a). For instance, King Abdulaziz University's Faculty of Marine Sciences does not accept female students.

In a study on the opportunities and challenges for Saudi women in technology and scientific fields at university level, (Islam, 2014) argued that men still dominated

certain fields in KSA, such as architecture, science, technology, engineering and agriculture. Accordingly, women and men learn activities that suit their expected roles. For instance, at the university level, women are directed to study “soft” courses such as the social sciences, education, languages, nursing, art and humanities, which are perceived to lead to jobs that do not require physical strength. Due to the fact that women are only encouraged to work in professions such as education and healthcare, this limits women's employment choices elsewhere (Islam, 2014).

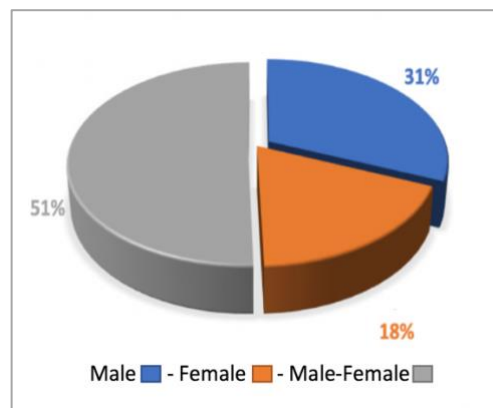


Figure 2: Educational programme distributions by gender in Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Education, 2018b).

In Figure 2, the reader can see that the available programmes for females only is 18 percent compared to 31 percent for males. This shows that women in KSA do not have the opportunity to chase such majors, nor do they aspire to be leaders in these fields (Ministry of Education, 2018b). Considering the nature of the Saudi culture, where gender segregation is pervasive in daily social practices that define country and self-identity (Alhazmi and Nyland, 2013), the low availability of women-only programmes makes it difficult for women to achieve fair training and study opportunities in the country.

This makes it even more challenging for women to be identified as eligible leaders. As a woman, being qualified in a job or attaining leadership readiness to develop as leader is not enough to pursue their ambition to leadership. Therefore, minimising their visibility as well might be a key factor of hindering their leadership advancement.

These statistics in Saudi HE do not reflect the reality of the situation, as the segregation of gender in the main stream literature refers to the accumulation of one gender in a certain profession (horizontal segregation) and at a certain level (vertical segregation) perpetuated in the “glass ceiling” concept (Clarke, 2011; Eagly and Karau, 2002; Hoyt, 2010). The context of Saudi HE is different, because even though women have their own separate facilities, they still defer to men in their decision-making. As the literature states, an employee’s motivation is influenced by their position within an organisation. Women will be less motivated and more likely to leave if they have less appealing opportunities, supporting the gender stereotype of men being superior to women (Hoyt and Murphy, 2016). Based on the statistics in **Error! Reference source not found.**, Saudi women, although having fewer options for academic specialties, enrol in HE at nearly equal the rate of males (GASTAT, 2020a).

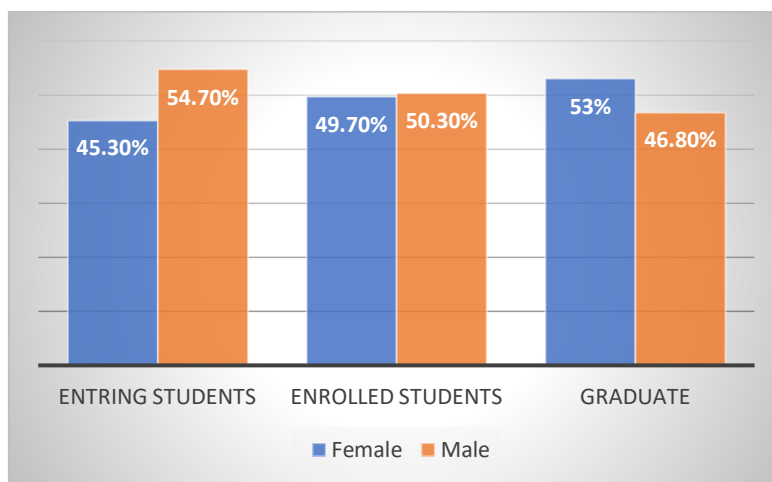


Figure 3: Female and male student rates in HE in 2018 (GASTAT, 2020a).

3.3 Saudi HE (employees)

HE practises and processes are gendered and employ patriarchy as an extension of the educational system discussed previously. These practises affect promotions, access to resources (publication, labs) and decision-making (setting goals, visions, decisions).

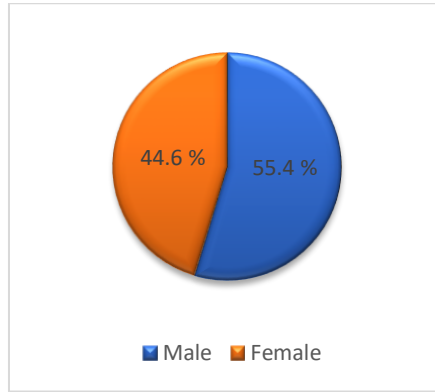


Figure 4: The percentage of Saudi faculty members by gender in 2019 (GASTAT, 2021b).

Figure 4 shows that the percentage of female Saudi faculty members is 44.6 percent. (GASTAT, 2021b). Yet the percentage of female and male faculty members with master's and bachelor's degrees is almost equal. However, the percentage of Saudi female academics declines in comparison to males at the PhD level, with women holding only 33.5 percent of PhD degrees compared to men, as shown in **Error! Reference source not found.** (GASTAT, 2020a). This results in vertical segregation, manifested as a "glass ceiling" for women imposed by the organisational structure.

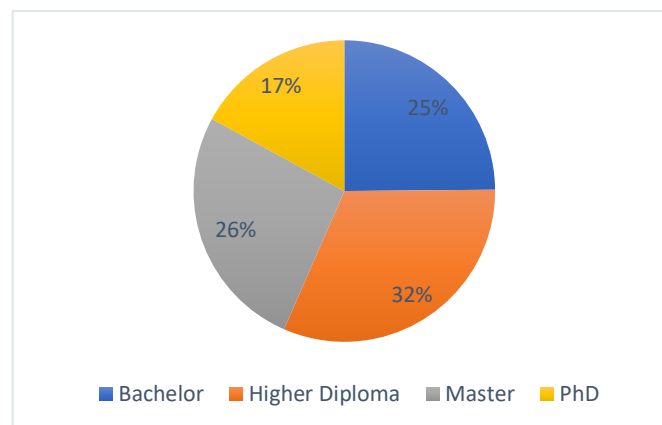


Figure 5: Relative distribution of Saudi female academics in relation to Saudi Men according to academic qualification (GSTAT, 2020a).

Many factors have an impact on the role of women in the HE system. Many of the rules and procedures are informally applied, and the distribution of jobs favours men over women. Almost every decision is made by men. This creates an issue in the organisational structure and forces the implementation of what is called “dual-level leadership”.

3.3.1 HE Organisational Structure (Dual-level leadership)

Due to the segregation of men and women in HE in KSA, all the administrative and faculty members of the women-only colleges are female (Al-Bassam, 1984). The administrative organisation of the female institutions in KSA is quite unique among Middle Eastern institutions—they are considered administrative and academic sub-units within the main units of the male departments, as shown in Figure 7.

This forms what is referred to as a dual-level leadership system (or what Almengash *et al.* [2007] refer to as men-women leadership style) in academia, which is a by-product of the gender segregation system. This system, as discussed previously, forms the main barrier to women’s empowerment in leadership, specifically in Saudi HE, where the power and decisions are mainly centralised in the men’s department, leaving only provisional roles for women in the same position.

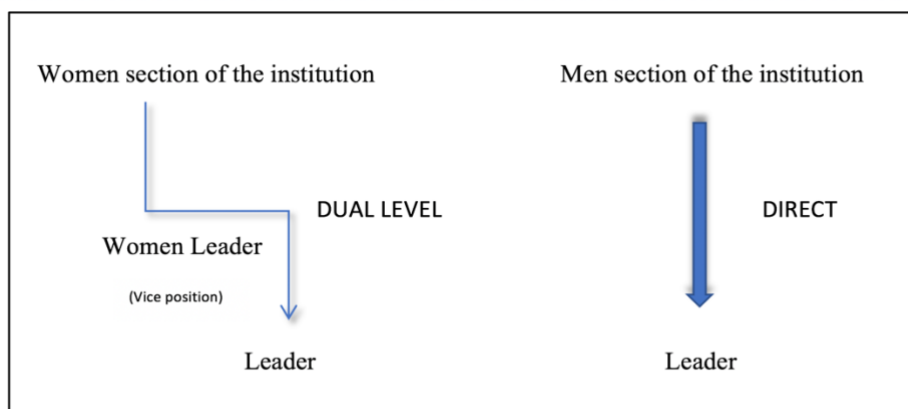


Figure 6: The administrative organisation in HE institutions (developed by the researcher).

This phenomenon leads to women leaders being only partially involved in administrative, decision-making processes, even those concerning their all-women departments (Al-Kayed, 2015; Al-Ahmadi, 2011b).

The dual-level leadership of both male and female administration leads to several organisational problems, affecting the female division's ability to accomplish effective and efficient administrative duties. Some of the effects include slow work procedures, lack of coordination, conflicts and disputes, delays in work achievement, centrality of the decision-making process in male higher administration and ambiguity in defining roles and responsibilities (Almengash, 2009), forming one of the main barriers women leaders face institutionally as per the findings of (Abo Khodair, 2012) study. This dual-level leadership act emphasises discrimination and a patriarchal system with centralisation of decision-making and remoteness from male administration (Almengash et al., 2007).

The study of (Almengash et al., 2007), which focused on understanding the nature of (men-women) management of HE institutions and its suitability for efficient progress of the system, was part of a larger project known as "Plan for the Future of University Education in the Kingdom of KSA" (AAFAQ), sponsored by the Ministry of HE. The AAFAQ aimed to prepare a long-term plan for all HE institutions in the Kingdom, with the objective of improving positive aspects and facing both current and future challenges (Ministry of Education - Higher Education, 2015). This shows progress in HE leadership, in that it is no longer based on gender preference for males but equal opportunity for women who have attained the necessary qualifications. However, a long time has passed without seeing real change in accordance with this project. Additionally, the study was not available publicly—upon contacting the main author, we were notified that a non-disclosure agreement was signed and that only the abstract is available.

3.4 Women's leadership in Saudi HE

Scholars point out that there has been slow progress for women into leadership positions in HE, despite the progress they have made in education and employment (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017; Abalkhail, 2017). However, in recent research, scholars have shifted their dialogue towards an opportunity discourse affected by the new reform in the country (Kattan et al., 2016). Acknowledging that the situation in the Kingdom is rapidly and drastically changing, the following section will provide a critical analysis of the literature in the context of the new reforms.

Additionally, this study focuses on the women's own experience and perception (identity), which is scarce in the context of Saudi (to the researcher's knowledge). It is vital to acknowledge the previous studies that have addressed issues that have shaped the leader identity of women in the Kingdom, affecting their readiness to reach top leadership positions.

3.4.1 Challenges facing women academics in leadership (exclusion)

Despite high qualifications and sufficient experience, compared to men, Saudi women are less preferred as leaders in HE (Abalkhail, 2017). Many barriers impede women from accessing leadership positions in academia (Al-Ahmadi, 2011a; Al-Jaradat, 2014; Al-Tamimi, 2004; Alghofaily, 2019).

These barriers can be categorised into three main gender-based leadership obstacles (themes): personal (micro level), institutional (meso level), and sociocultural (macro-level). This classification, which is related to the leadership developmental readiness construct and to recent literature on women and leadership (Avolio and Hannah, 2008; Eagly and Karau, 2002). In reality, these barriers may affect each other; they are not linear factors, rather, they are connected and intertwined, shaping and reshaping women's identities.

3.4.1.1 Personal challenges in relation to self

Many exclusion practices have contributed to Saudi women being reluctant to pursue their leadership aspirations. Personal barriers to academic leadership for women are described as: “all personal factors and characteristics which have a negative impact on the practice of [the] academic leadership role successfully” (Abu Khdaib, 2012). According to Al-Shihabi (2008), “individual or self-challenges refer to women’s personal characteristics that disfavour them in practicing leadership roles” (Alsubhi et al., 2018)—for example, perceiving themselves as less competent than men or lacking in leadership potential.

Personal challenges can be categorised as obstacles in relation to self (such as motivation to lead, capability, experience and self-efficacy) and obstacles that occur in relation to others (such as discrimination, personal networks, role model availability, mentoring, family responsibility and training). It should be noted that this relationship is not linear, as sometimes they interact and affect each other.

3.4.1.1.1 Motivation to lead

Nowadays, Saudi women academics are attaining high qualifications and more are entering the workforce (Varshney, 2019; Abalkhail, 2017; Kattan et al., 2016). Similarly, they are more motivated to lead (Gazzaz, 2017). However, they are confronted with a set of challenges, and some of these could come from within. Many scholars who studied Saudi women’s career advancement have eliminated the notion that women did not reach the top because they are unable or less motivated to lead than men (Alghofaily, 2019). Interestingly, (Alghofaily, 2019) study found a division among respondents when it came to their motivation to lead. Participants who cited lack of motivation as a personal challenge were attributed with the widely held stereotype of women being more accepting (disclaimers) and not as competitive as men since childhood. This led them diminish their self-view as leaders. However, it can be argued that all the reasons the participants listed were in part cultural ones, reinforced by the society’s gender role stereotypes. However, (Alghofaily, 2019)

discussed an interesting paradox based on age. She stated that “on closer inspection it seems that those in senior positions tend to disagree that women lack motivation to lead while those in junior positions indicated the lack of motivation” (p. 25).

3.4.1.1.2 Capability to lead

When comes to leadership, motivation alone is not enough; it must be aligned with having the ability to lead. More importantly, Alghofaily’s (2019) study eliminated the fact that the ability to lead is gender-based. All respondents in the study eliminated Saudi women’s ability to lead as a challenge. In fact, Alghofaily revealed that respondents were resentful of the question.

According to (Kattan et al., 2016), education can contribute effectively to raising the ability to lead and accordingly being a successful leader. Additionally, she asserted that training can positively affect women’s ability to lead. According to Hodges (2017), previous research has suggested that “women’s own view of their ability to exercise leadership effectively is somewhat negative” (p. 36). Thus, becoming a leader appears to be less important among many women in different cultures because of individual factors, such as the tendency to choose an easier lifestyle rather than authority, as in the case of women in KSA who struggle to develop as leaders (Hodges, 2017).

However, Ghamdi (2016) argues that questioning Saudi women’s ability to lead is in fact based on “the negative stereotypes regarding women’s ability to lead, traditional beliefs that inspire a lack of trust in women, and an unwillingness by HE leaders to discuss this issue” (Ghamdi, 2016).

Self-confidence (self-efficacy)

According to Abu Khdair (2012), women leaders in KSA attributed personal challenges as the barrier least holding them back, and specifically lack of confidence as the least impactful of all. That being said, the participants in the study referred to stress and tensions related to the job and family restrictions when travelling for work as the

greatest hindrance. This is consistent with (Al-Kayed, 2015) findings highlighting that for Saudi women, role demands, and extended hours of work were the number one barrier.

Nevertheless, Abu Khdair raised age as an important factor in this finding, consistent with Alghofaily's (2019) study. She argued that due to the fact that 70 percent of the participants were between the ages of 36–40 years and that 45 percent had more than 21 years of work experience, in her opinion, this might have led to the high levels of confidence in their abilities.

Other studies have found that self-confidence does affect women's self-perception as leaders is (Almaki et al., 2016b; Alghofaily, 2019). Low confidence discourages one from seeking developmental opportunities or experimenting with new challenges.

There are many reasons for this lack of confidence; first, there is a lack of decision-making responsibilities. Many universities in Saudi HE leave absolute power in the hands of males, leaving very little responsibility in the hands of the women (Almengash, 2009; Alsaigh, 2007). Accordingly this will form a sense of discouragement and might alter women's advancement (Almaki et al., 2016b), or reduce their confidence to lead (Alghofaily, 2019).

In her qualitative study (Alghofaily, 2019), interviewed fifteen Saudi women academic leaders. Lack of self-assurance in their leadership was the first barrier identified. The participants addressed several emotions describing their confidence using words such as "fear, reluctance and hesitation" to lead. Additionally, they ascribed this to the long subordination to men holding them back.

Second, is the lack of experience in leadership posts. In fact, Alghofaily's (2019) study found that women leaders in senior roles were more motivated and confident. Therefore, lack of experience may contribute to an absence of affirmation (Abu Khdair, 2012). Although many studies have categorised lack of training as an institutional barrier, (Alghofaily, 2019) participants argued that they perceived it as a

personal obstacle. They argued that a lack of training opportunities contributed to them feeling not ready to lead.

Third, there is a lack of interest in leadership (Alghofaily, 2019). “It has been suggested that self-selection may contribute to the current lack of women in senior roles, in that women may simply choose not to participate where they perceive they do not fit in” (Peters, Ryan, Haslam and Fernandes, 2012). Accordingly, this hints at the ideas that question women’s motivation to lead and readiness to reach top roles in leadership.

However, several studies have found that personal challenges hindering women’s advancement are in total a result of organisational challenges (Abu Khdair, 2012; Almengash, 2009; Alsaigh, 2007; Almengash et al., 2007).

3.4.1.2 Personal challenges in relation to others

Other personal factors that also impede women from pursuing leadership positions include discrimination, such as having their physical, mental, and intellectual competence questioned (Almaki *et al.* 2016).

Similarly, there are some arguments that women lack the ability to use their positional power to its full extent, as well as the ability to implement tactical leadership practises and adjust to transformations in the organisation, as well as deal with long working hours (Al-Jaradat, 2014). However, these assertions are questionable, as many successful leaders around the world are women.

Work-life balance (role-conflict)

Family is the centre in the society of KSA, and the extended family is as important as the nuclear family. In KSA culture, individuals should show “commitment” to all family members. As a result, caring responsibilities seem to present a barrier to Saudi women leaders (AlDoubi, 2014; Alghofaily, 2019).

Traditional division of gender roles perpetuated men as providers and women as caregivers (Eagly and Carli, 2007), and the Saudi context is no exception (Gazzaz, 2017). According to the former Deputy Minister for Girls' Education, Norah Al Faiz (2013), as Saudi men are perceived to be the main breadwinners, women are portrayed to be mainly housewives. Thus, in perusing opportunities in work, women face challenges to balance their home responsibilities (Thompson, 2015). Being a women requires more obligations especially in the Arab culture (Almansour and Kempner, 2016).

According to role incongruity theory, being a leader creates a conflict for women between their social role and their leader role—the higher the degree of this incongruence, the higher the conflict (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

According to (Abalkhail, 2017) study, Saudi women's profession choices are determined by religion and family as well as patriarchy—she refers to these as organisational factors (Abalkhail, 2017). For women leaders, in addition to the burden of the leadership position, she is obligated to perform multiple roles, including wife and a mother. Balancing these multiple roles produces identity conflict among women leaders (Almaki et al., 2016a).

(Al-Kayed, 2015) studied women leaders in KSA and found that sixteen out of nineteen participants saw that their decision to be a wife and a mother did not itself interfere with their career advancement nor their aspiration. The women argued that it depended mainly on their husband's mindset regarding women's role expectations and how supportive they were to their motivation. However, they claimed that cultural restrictions affected their work and the limited their opportunity; for example, to travel to continue their education, due to male guardianship laws.

In contrast, the findings of Baker *et al.*, (2007) revealed that women were not facing discrimination and cited the new policy adopted by Saudi HE to expand women's participation in education and workplace. "One could argue that such efforts have

significantly contributed in diluting the rigid attitudes towards working female in KSA” (Elamin and Omair, 2010).

Interestingly, according to (Eagly and Carli, 2007), well-educated women face more pressure in regard to family responsibility and their involvement in the care of their children than other women with less career potential. This cultural pressure to spend “quality time” with their children has led Saudi women leaders to feel guilty, especially when progressing in their career due, even if they had no problem balancing their time between family and profession.

This view supports Al-Kayed’s (2015) study, which found that long working hours was one of the most crucial challenge women experienced (Almaki et al., 2016a). Yet, ironically, her findings suggested that long working hours did not affect the way women leaders balanced their domestic duties and work. (Al-Kayed, 2015) also showed that work–family balance was not a major barrier for Saudi female leaders, similar to the findings of (Al-Ahmadi, 2011a); hence, the study’s results suggest that access to servants offers the support system needed to ease this pressure (Al-Kayed, 2015).

A study of work–family conflict experienced by women entrepreneurs in Singapore, however, contradicts this explanation. In that study, 82.4 percent of women participants used domestic maids to help with household obligations, but such support from others did not diminish work–family conflict (Lee Siew Kim and Seow Ling, 2001).

A major weakness in (Al-Kayed, 2015) study is that the researcher claimed that it was qualitative, even though the data were processed and analysed using SPSS, which is a quantitative programme. By focusing on statistical analysis, the researcher may have overlooked additional explanations, which is one of the key benefits of qualitative research. Another issue is the limited and specific context, as the informants were only from one region of KSA (two public universities in Riyadh), which could have

influenced the results. In addition, linking the availability of housemaids with work–life balance could significantly limit the available literature and points to participants’ economically privileged backgrounds, which cannot be generalised to all Saudi women.

In contrast, a qualitative case study, using a phenomenological approach, studied the challenges that Muslim women academic leaders faced in their leadership position using semi- structured interview (Almaki et al., 2016a). The researcher asserted that interviews demonstrated conflicts between work and family priorities as being a barrier to progress with the women’s leadership aspirations.

In an interesting discussion, Hodges (2017, p. 41) argues that Saudi women are not identified as a “natural inhabitant of leadership positions”, in relation to men. Because of the male-dominated culture, Saudi women see themselves as not fit to the role. These factors affect how women shape their identity, feel or see themselves as workers rather than leaders and as inferior to men (i.e. enforcing gender stereotypes). Thus, challenging these factors could lead women to feel more likely to be visible as leaders when they are ready to be (Hodges, 2017).

Role models, mentoring, training and networking

One of the important areas to highlight is the lack of role models and mentoring programmes available, contributing to women’s poor career progression. Women’s leader identity may be compromised if they are unable to approach informal professional networks, as it is evident that connecting with others may help women rise to higher leadership positions (Ely et al., 2011).

For example, if mentoring programmes were provided for women leaders where they could seek advice in a decision-making environment, it would help women who aspire to be leaders to receive training and be prepared for their leadership positions (Hodges, 2017). Interestingly, as men hold the senior roles, when it comes to career advancement, male mentors are more likely to help women move ahead (Ibarra et al.,

2010). Accordingly, women-only networks might be not sufficient for women's progression (Harris and Leberman, 2012; Clarke, 2011; Moorosi, 2020). According to (Ely et al., 2011), women and men differ in their networks' establishment. While women tend to be easier to connect with on a personal basis to gain friendship and social support, men tend to be more resourceful and pragmatic in their relationships and establish functionally distinct networks, gaining instrumental access from other males (Ibarra, 1992). Thus, the development of strong, trustworthy connections with powerful males, which are frequently required for advancement, is important. Therefore, settings in which women in KSA are restricted to women-only networks, training and mentoring might hinder women's advancement to powerful positions compared to men.

In line with previous arguments, (Almaki et al., 2016a) claimed that leadership advancement programmes, women's only programmes, lack of good quality leadership training and the low opportunity to acquire expertise were obstacles for Saudi women. However, the researchers failed to address the number of participants in the study from the two universities that the paper collected data from (University of Putra Malaysia and King Abdul-AL Aziz University in KSA), which is a weakness of the study (Almaki et al., 2016a).

Role modelling is important in providing a powerful image that younger women can look up to. In Saudi Arabia, younger women's lack of women leaders' role models is challenging (Omair, 2008). Yet according to Parveen (2014), for younger Saudi women, the recent political participation of Saudi women in the Shura Council [An advisory council to the Saudi King] forms a vivid image of authentic Saudi women leaders involved in the highest leadership positions in the country. This might positively affect Saudi women's motivation to lead. She claimed that this image may also contribute to the loosening of Saudi society's persistent traditional perceptions toward women leaders. As a matter of fact, Gazzaz (2017) identified two effects of role models: not only do younger women need an obvious image of female leaders, but they also need their support to succeed. Few role models result in few mentors (Gazzaz, 2017).

To conclude, the previous discussion highlights the importance of personal barriers in women's advancement to leadership positions, however these are not as important as institutional barriers. Al-Ahmadi's (2011) study highlights an important outcome in that regard, as her study acknowledged that personal barriers were the least of the factors to hinder the pursuit of women to obtain positions of leadership. This result was confirmed by other studies (Abu Khdair, 2012; Almengash, 2009; Alsaigh, 2007; Almengash et al., 2007), which found that women leaders in KSA had the capability to lead except for the barriers imposed by the institutions and the culture.

3.4.1.3 Institutional barriers

As well as personal challenges, women are subjected to several external factors affecting their career advancement, such as the ones imposed by institutions. Many studies have acknowledged the strong influence the norms and values of the national culture have on organisational culture in many societies, especially in collectivist cultures (Hofstede et al., 2010; Fitzsimmons and Stamper, 2014; Gerhart, 2009).

Numerous institutional challenges were identified in the literature concerning women academics' access to leadership. As Abo Khodair (2012b) argues, organisational barriers form one of the most significant challenges female leaders in Saudi HE are currently facing. Institutions can be a liability for women's mobility to senior roles; this can manifest in terms of organisational structure or culture.

(Al-Ahmadi, 2011a) claims that organisational, cultural and individual factors challenge women leaders seeking top senior positions. The main barriers in their study were structural challenges, including centralised organisational structures, limited power and a lack of resources, empowerment, authority and involvement in the decision-making process.

For Saudi HE, at first glance it may appear that the spatial segregation implies that women would have equal representation in the positions of power; on closer inspection, however, this is not the case. Previous studies (Almengash, 2009;

Almengash et al., 2007; Abu Khdair, 2012; Abalkhail, 2017; Alsaigh, 2007; Abo Khodair, 2012; Al-Kayed, 2015) have shown that although women in HE institutions hold leadership roles, their roles mostly entail supervision characteristics. Furthermore, women leaders lack legitimate power and authorisation, and they are mostly excluded from decision-making and strategic planning. There is considerable authority overlap between the women's and men's departments, which the current study refers to as "dual-level leadership" (discussed in 3.3.1), resulting in limited power in the hands of women.

Abo Khodair (2012) conducted a quantitative study investigating the challenges facing 213 Saudi women academic leaders and found that centralisation of decision-making into the hands of male departments over female departments was the main institutional barrier these leaders faced. Abo Khodair attributed this to the lack of trust in women leaders' ability and skills.

In a similar vein, (Abalkhail, 2017) conducted a qualitative study on Saudi women leaders investigating the factors affecting women's advancement into leadership and what opportunities were available for them. Semi-structural interviews with 22 female leaders from two public universities, King Saud University (13 participants) and King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah (9 participants). Her study revealed that the challenges facing her respondents were mostly institutional ones. The study's results showed that the selection process, gender segregation, discrimination and lack of training were holding women leaders back.

Lack of training opportunities was identified as a factor in the studies of Abu Khdair (2012), Al-Ahmadi (2011) and Al-Kayed (2015) as well. Abu Khdair (2012) argued that Saudi women leaders require training in terms of decision-making skills, designing strategic plans, the ability to manage conflicts in the institution alongside negotiation, as well as the ability to manage any emerging crises in the institution. Al-Kayed (2015) found that participants reported that dealing with subordinates was the second most important challenge—she suggested that training in communication skills and

management capability might overcome this challenge. In addition, Al-Ahmadi (2011) found that a lack of high-quality training was an important hindrance for providing women with the essential tools for progression.

In Abalkhail's (2017) study, although the respondents indicated that advancement opportunities in various management skills were available to both genders, they were limited in terms of not being targeted toward women leaders or prompting them into leadership. In addition, they indicated that they had missed some opportunities for attending training abroad, due to the limitations imposed on them by the male guardianship system. It is important to note that although the restrictions on women's travel have been eased in the Kingdom, the cultural and religious aspects might still be a hindrance in some families.

Almengash (2009) contends that the men-women leadership system has led to many issues hindering women leader identity. In the same regard, Alsayeg (2006), Almobaireek's (2006) and Bobshait's (2006) studies found that even being a women's college dean does not mean that a woman's authority will be respected; female deans in that study were excluded from essential decisions in their universities and not allowed to attend council and committee meetings.

A recent study classified institutional barriers women encountered as gender- and non-gender-based barriers (Alsubhi et al., 2018). The following section will highlight institutional obstacles in the way of Saudi female academics from a gender perspective.

Gender segregated HE system

The Saudi context in academia is unique in that education is a gender-segregated system. According to Hodges' (2017) study, segregation in the workplace became a part of the culture, hindering women and enforcing their invisibility in public spheres. This resulted in forming "duplicated" facilities and buildings for women and men (Albaker et al., 2017).

For women, it led to fewer opportunities to hold leadership positions, since men held the power and leadership positions in any organisation. As a result, out of fear for their reputation, women saw themselves as less capable than men in leadership positions, and thus disregarded the idea of being a leader (Hodges, 2017).

An interesting discussion around gender segregation (Jamjoom and Kelly, 2013a) suggested that women's institutional seclusion and limited social engagement with men made it challenging for women to enter the workforce sufficiently prepared, and greatly reduced their ability to develop or to manage. Additionally, they stressed that as gender segregation is a "cultural symbol" for Saudi society, stemming from religion and Arab traditions, "the establishment of an all-women's university further entrenches the notion that women should be cloistered from men" (Jamjoom and Kelly, 2013b). The reason for gender-segregated HE, as per Abalkhail's (2018) study, is that women's purity is seen as a representative of honour, which should be protected.

The notion of all-women universities and colleges may appear paradoxical globally (Renn, 2014), and Saudi HE is no exception. While it offered the only option for Saudi women's education in the past, it also offers women a safe space to be visible and to freely express themselves in the present. It could be argued that it also contributes to the invisibility of women in larger social and public spaces. Furthermore, women-only institutions, logically, should be managed by women, yet this is not true. Men dominate almost all higher decision-making positions over women.

(Almengash et al., 2007) compared the situation in the Saudi HE leadership structure and men-women administration, with some of the successful women-only international colleges. The study addressed many factors that made these organisations more successful in their leadership. One of the main factors was that they were led independently by women. Women leaders had complete authority over budget, strategy planning and human resources management, in addition to a very clear organisational structure with clear lines of authority. These were not settings in which dual-level leadership occurred.

Almengash *et al.* (2007) study presented two options to tackle the dual-leadership issue in female colleges in HE. The first option was to maintain the current situation with improvements to the policies and regulations to give more power to the women's administration over decisions, employee and finance. The second option was to grant full independence of women's departments and colleges to be led solely by women. Almengash *et al.* (2007) concluded that, achieving a goal where young women feel that HE institutes are nourishing them depends on cultural acceptance, serious investment and time. Thus, the first option seemed most feasible. However, it is worth noting that given more women leaders are nowadays qualified to lead and societal transformation is happening in the country, (Almengash *et al.*, 2007) study might be old in this regard, as the Saudi society has been constantly changing in the past decade and empowerment of women is increasing due to the recent reforms (Rizvi and Hussain, 2021).

However, Hamdan's (2005) study, which focused on education, viewed gender segregation as a possible enabler for Saudi women to access leadership positions, which conflicts with many other studies that have reported that women perceive gender segregation as a constraint to their career progress (Al-Munajjed, 2010; Kattan *et al.*, 2016; Vidyasagar and Rea, 2004; Doumato, 1999; Le Renard, 2008; Metcalfe, 2011; Omair, 2010). (Doumato, 1999) asserts that "separate education facilities [can] provide some jobs for women, but at the same time, they validate segregation as a social system when segregation itself is a model of inequality" (p. 582). This leads to many discriminatory practises, as we discuss next.

Discriminatory practises in leadership selection processes

Women's underrepresentation in leadership is wholly or partially an effect of "selection bias" (Ryan *et al.*, 2016). They argue that the negative attitudes that lead to discrimination regarding women's promotion into leadership relates to gendered stereotypes that limit men and women to certain tasks (p. 450).

Previous studies revealed that recruitment to senior leadership roles has formed a challenge for women leaders in Saudi HE. As per the dual-level management system applied in the institutional *structure*, leadership positions are mainly male-dominated. According to (Abalkhail, 2017) study, participants revealed that women were excluded from leadership positions despite having a valuable higher level qualification, capability and degree. The study attributed this to religious interpretations implied in the organisational *culture*, leading to recruitment being controlled by discriminatory practises (Abalkhail, 2017). Participants suggested that these gender-based discriminatory practises favouring men as leaders was socially constructed and not included in universities' policies.

This finding was also supported by (Hodges, 2017) study, in which almost 75 percent of the interviewees stated that they faced discrimination when it came to promotions and advancement opportunities based on their gender. Interestingly, respondents identified that "individual's relations and family networks" were more important than qualifications when it came to leadership recruitment. She argued that "class and status may be as important as gender in determining access to leadership positions for women" (p. 42).

Not only is internal organisational culture a persistent hindrance to women's advancement, the external culture also affects women's leadership. In fact, organisational culture is influenced by the values of the socio-culture itself (Kattan et al., 2016). Accordingly, the next section will discuss the influence of culture on women's experience of leadership in KSA.

Leadership styles

Women's leadership styles may be impacted by discriminatory behaviours, as a consequence of stereotypes (Vinkenburg et al., 2011; Eagly and Karau, 2002; Eagly et al., 2003).

To understand the context of Saudi HE, (Taleb, 2010) performed a qualitative study using a case study approach to investigate the leadership style of seven women leaders in a single-sex (female) organisation using in-depth semi-structured interviews. Her study examined women's self-perception of their style of leadership and what constituted a successful leader in KSA's HE in their opinion. Taleb chose her sample to represent goal-oriented visionary leaders implementing meaningful change at their institutions.

Her findings identified that having a shared vision was an important trait a good leader should possess. Additionally, her interviewees demonstrated that successful leadership and effective collaboration and communication were intertwined. In sum, an effective leader should be people-oriented and a hard worker (i.e., communal characteristics), recognising leadership as a social process rather than a task-oriented one.

Further findings showed that female leaders in the study implemented transformational leadership styles that emphasised being a role model, committed, possessing a charisma to empower others, providing support and collaborating with followers to develop their capacity and motivate them toward a shared vision. While gender stereotypes do seem to still exist, the findings suggest that conventional views about gender and leadership are being challenged. Taleb's study, although it appears to be concerned with gender and leadership research, neglected to explore the connection between the leader's gender role identification and sex and the impact on their followers' views of leadership styles. While other studies found that most people prefer leaders with more masculine traits, even in feminine leadership roles, this contradicts the findings of Taleb's study, perhaps because it was carried out in a women-only institution.

Taleb's findings suggest a view of leadership that is shaped and reshaped by a male-dominated context. The absence of equality and the fact that men lead even in all-female institutions was argued by one of the respondents: "when asked whether she

could think of a successful 'female' educational leader, Leader D ironically mentioned that 'because the Saudi education system has always been a single-sex system, you will most certainly notice the absence of "male" role models.' She did, however, acknowledge the existence of many successful female educational leaders who seemed to have adopted democratic and transformational styles of leadership while featuring predominantly feminine qualities of leading" (Taleb, 2010). In alignment with that argument, traditional researchers, for example Birnbaum and Mintzberg (1992) believed that the leadership field is genderless (Grove and Montgomery, 1999; Chliwniak, 1997; Carli and Eagly, 2012). In addition, it is important to acknowledge that implying that certain behaviours are more suitable to men or women is a form of gender stereotypes (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

While it is true that Taleb acknowledged that her findings suggested that interviewees adopted a stereotypically feminine style of leadership, it could be argued that her study failed to be sensitive to the other external factors that may have offered explanations for what constituted and preserved this perception. Although she argued that her research could shed light on the influence of gender on leadership, an understanding of the implications of her findings for understanding the persistence of gender inequality in Saudi HE would be an added value to the research.

Additionally, she only softly touched upon the context of the research and the fact that it was an all-female institution—in my opinion this element would be very rich as it is a unique and overlooked one. Additionally, the multiple identities the participants held that might have affected their experience and leadership behaviour was not taken into consideration in Taleb's study.

The study of (Hentschel et al., 2019) provides an interesting finding that might explain Taleb's results. (Hentschel et al., 2019) conducted an experimental study of 628 American males and females tasked to rate (men, women and themselves) on two primary dimensions of gender stereotypes (agency and communality). Although acknowledging that traditional gender stereotypes persist, despite recent social

reform. There was no difference in men's and women's self-characterisations of instrumental competence or independence; nevertheless, women felt themselves to be less capable of successfully leading and asserting themselves than males in leadership. Their study asserted that self-stereotyping does exist, and that women themselves might attribute some stereotypical attributes to themselves or other women.

This is important to note, as it raises questions about how these gender stereotypes might affect women's self-perception as leaders.

3.4.1.4 Sociocultural and religious context

This section investigates how cultural values affect women's participation in leadership. Saudi culture is a religious one, endorsing patriarchal values, leading to gender inequality (Taleb, 2010). These norms and values act as an obstruction to women's journey to leadership, as previous studies have suggested (Alghofaily, 2019).

A typical leader in KSA is a man. This perception was first influenced by the tough tribal life in which women stayed in the tent taking care of the kids while men travelled to fight for lands, water or power; afterwards it was further approved by religion.

According to (Hofstede, 1994), culture is a mental set of programming that allocates the members of a community into certain classifications that make them identifiable from others. National cultural analysis of KSA has revealed that Saudi cultural dimensions include high power distance, collectivist society, highly masculine, high uncertainty avoidance and low long-term orientation culture (Hofstede, 1994).

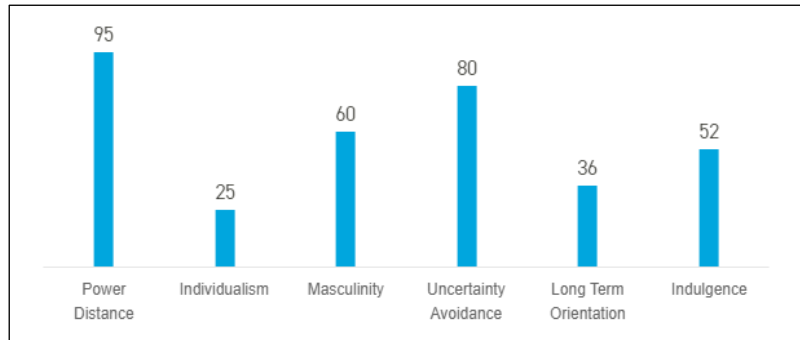


Figure 7: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions for KSA (Hofstede Insights, 2021).

A collectivist culture means that Saudi's self-perceptions are affected by their in-group membership. In addition, Saudi society is a masculine one; this is reflected in the unequal distribution of roles between men and women, enforcing the "traditional gender role attitudes" regarding the roles men and women should play in society (Horst, 2014).

This research argues that all gender equality practises which hinder women advancement are socially constructed—it is totally dependent on the culture it comes from. The values, perceptions and attitudes of the leaders or the decision-makers is shaped by culture. Organisations and individuals do not exist in a vacuum; they are cultural entities that have been informed and formulated by the people that work for them or that built them.

Billing and Alvesson (2000) asserted that conventionally, leadership is associated with masculine traits, suggesting that women's leadership is not valued profoundly. Resolving conflicts is usually done using power, as seen in masculine societies, for instance. This is contrary to the use of negotiations in the feminine culture, where problems are solved through compromise. Considering the general perspective of leadership in KSA, the feminine leadership style might not be suitable in this environment. Yet there is a need for women leaders as they will be more fitting in some environments such as in HE because of gender segregation (Alghofaily, 2019).

Women have achieved a considerable amount of teaching positions, yet their appearance in leadership positions is rather rare (Taleb, 2010). (AlDoubi, 2014) conducted a narrative qualitative study, which explored the lived experience of six Saudi women leaders in acquiring leadership positions in the HE context. (AlDoubi, 2014) (2014) identified four organisational barriers: faculty members' deficiencies, gender segregation, and a "lack of true involvement in decision-making, [and] power over resources", (p. 145). However, all the informants cited sociocultural stereotyping toward women as the primary explanation for these barriers, contradicting (Al-Ahmadi, 2011a) findings. Religious values, educational schemes, women leaders' lack of authority and resistance by their male counterparts were also highlighted. A possible explanation for this conflict is the implementation of new policies by decision-makers in the country, which, as (Al-Ahmadi, 2011a) points out, might have increased Saudi society's awareness of the roles that women play in national development.

Patriarchal culture in KSA normalised the view of the leader as being a man, enforcing stereotypical assumptions of men and women and as a result women's roles and abilities. These social pressures and gender stereotypes that women are subjected to may prevent the formation of appropriate values and attitudes essential for managerial work ((Jones, 2020). As a result, they might distort Saudi women's self-confidence, which limits their effectiveness in leadership positions (Abu Khdair, 2012).

3.4.2 Internal and external factors that shape leadership identity

Al-Kayed (2015) conducted a qualitative study, looking into Saudi women academic leaders' challenges by interviewing nineteen Saudi women—most of the participants perceived men as more privileged. Participants claimed that men had more opportunities and acquired high education long before women, and accordingly had more experience. This led them to be more efficient in decision-making. Another point raised by the interviewees was "social fear" of prejudice and injustice regarding their leadership competence and resulting in their lack of confidence not only in claiming the leadership role but also in their decisions when granted the leadership

responsibility (p. 40). This also was confirmed by (Al-Ahmadi, 2011a) study, which found that society's prejudicial views of women's leadership (e.g., being afraid to take risks) made them less effective leaders.

According to (Gazzaz, 2017), Saudi women leaders might face what she refers to as "internal oppression", leaving them reluctant to claim leadership opportunities. She relates this oppression to the society in which women are situated. In her opinion, Saudi culture has enforced the traditional role of women as the utmost important role, affecting their self-representation and identity.

An interesting study that relates to this study, who investigated identity and leadership development for empowerment of female academics in KSA using a narrative approach. Although the study shows that women empowerment is still in its early stages in KSA, yet women leaders are developing numerous identities on of which regards to their leader identity. The thesis reports that the resistance to the women being leaders is still prevalent in the academic organizations, stemming from masculine perceptions of the society. Which hinders their appointment to leadership positions to gain the skills and the experience needed for such roles, as all resources and support is given towards men (Al-Jahani, 2021).

Due to all previous factors Saudi women leadership identity tends to shape and stretch as a coping mechanism to gain acceptance and success in their leadership roles. Although, personal traits such as confidence and self-esteem are considered important in developing leadership identity, yet in Saudi HE institutes where men leaders are dominant, organisational and societal support considered to be vital in developing leadership identity amongst Saudi women. As leadership is ongoing process by its nature, the researcher stated that a cycled nature is present in the results going between identity and leadership without an evident or a major starting point, however it can be influenced by many factors that could impact the leadership journey.

Contextual factors affecting Saudi women's development into positions of power in academia are important to understand as they inform the culture within which women exist (Thompson, 2015; Abalkhail, 2017). Drawing on the Saudi political, religious and sociocultural context that has been discussed in previously, many factors have contributed to the lack of women's advancement as leaders in academia (K., 2020). Most significantly, studies have pointed out that the traditional stance toward women leaders that is imposed by society persists (Alomair, 2015); for example, male guardianship and spatial segregation (Al-Kayed, 2015; Baki, 2004).

(Hodges, 2017) study focused on the barriers that faced women becoming leaders in KSA. The study adopted a qualitative approach to gain deep understanding of the barriers from women's own perspectives. This study indicated that social barriers were one of the key factors that prevented women from proceeding to be leaders. These social barriers included stigmatising women as being weak and not fit to be leaders.

(Hodges, 2017) used a snowballing technique to recruit participants from different work sectors (private and public sectors) and different organisations to prevent the clustering of participants, which ensured a sample with different backgrounds and various views. However, this might have affected the results of the study as each organisation might have unique underlying factors, and the experience of women who aspire to be leaders may vary across sectors. Thus, the sampling approach in this study was questionable. Moreover, face-to-face interviews might be the best method to examine the stories of women who aspire to be leaders; however, this study was conducted using phone calls and skype. As such, it may have missed some critical information that could not be collected during phone calls, such as body language or emotional distress (Hodges, 2017).

3.4.3 Saudi men's attitudes towards female workforce participation

Building upon sociocultural values and gender discriminatory practises embedded in the workplace, some scholars argue that others' attitudes towards Arab women's (particularly Saudi women's) labour force participation might restrict or enhance their career development (Kausar and Tlaiss, 2011; Mostafa, 2003; Elamin and Omair, 2010; Metcalfe, 2007). In a similar vein, (Elamin and Omair, 2010) examined Saudi men's attitudes towards female participation in the workforce. The sample for this quantitative study consisted of 301 randomly selected Saudi men from the Eastern Province. (Elamin and Omair, 2010) used the recent version of the *Multidimensional Aversion to Women Who Work Scale* to examine Saudi men's attitudes towards Saudi women workers. The majority of participants were married, employed, degree holders and 18–25 years old ((Elamin and Omair, 2010).

The study revealed that the Saudi men held very conservative, traditional, patriarchal views of women, whom they stereotyped as incapable of holding leadership positions and having the primary duty to take care of household responsibilities and raising children. However, single, young, unemployed and university-educated Saudi men exhibited lower discriminatory attitudes towards working women ((Elamin and Omair, 2010). (Elamin and Omair, 2010) findings confirmed the prevalence of the traditional general public view in Saudi society which labels woman as only housewives. For instance, according to the 1999 census, only five percent of women were employed, and these were confined to the education and health sector (Shukri, 1999, cited in (Hamdan, 2005).

(Elamin and Omair, 2010) identified age as the main predictor of Saudi men's attitudes. This finding was confirmed in a study conducted in United Arab Emirates which identified a shift away from traditional attitudes toward women's leaders among the younger generation (Mostafa, 2005). Moreover, (Elamin and Omair, 2010) argued that the generation gap detected in the findings reflected social change and a promising future for Saudi women in the workplace.

In a descriptive study, (Hamdan, 2005) identified additional challenges facing Saudi women's progression. She argued that it was not only sociocultural beliefs that hindered women's development; the political and economic state of the country were also major drawbacks. In addition, (Hamdan, 2005) stressed that the exclusion of women from the community limited their academic and career choices.

Religion

Many religious practises in KSA assert the role of women as being in the house and taking care of the family. These practises also encourage male leaders, lower the voice of women, and prohibit the mixing of men and women. Previous studies have stated that religion is key factor that hinders women's leadership development; religion generates a patriarchal society that fuels beliefs in the inferiority of women and the superiority of men (Pavan, 2015).

Hamdan (2005) and Elamin and Omair (2010) argue that Saudi society mistakenly connects women's issues with Islam. Hamdan (2005) states that history proves that Muslim women actively contributed in every aspect of life—political, social and economic—and therefore, the practice of excluding them is relatively extraneous. (Hamdan, 2005) supports her argument with many examples from the Qur'an and Prophet Mohammed's quotes which verify the vital role of women in Islamic society. She also cites evidence from Islamic history: the Prophet Mohammed's wife, Aysha, led 30,000 soldiers and negotiated various political matters; Khadija, the Prophet's first wife, was a preeminent Muslim entrepreneur; Fatima, his daughter, was politician; and Sukie'na, his granddaughter, was a famous mathematician. This suggests that sociocultural influences are more responsible for women's situation nowadays.

However, one cannot exclude religion completely. According to (Hodges, 2017), religion influenced cultural behaviours in a way that hindered women from acquiring leadership positions. Religion imposed authoritarian roles over women to stay at

home and made men the breadwinners in Saudi society, which hindered women from acquiring leader positions (Hodges, 2017).

It is argued that women's status in Islam has, for a long time, been associated with Arab traditions, and this has allowed many of the practices and beliefs around women's work or social lives to be misinterpreted and accordingly has added more constraints to women. Islam has different schools of thought that allow for different opinions, especially regarding matters that are unclear or new. A revisit of the Islamic traditions is needed at this point in time and a separation between the Arab traditions and the Islamic teachings must be made. Most religious men constantly change their Fatwa's when a new political decree is issued, for example, "although the majority of senior religious scholars approved the move, some traditionalists are not happy. One Saudi cleric was also suspended after he said women should not drive because their brains shrink to a quarter the size of a man's when they go shopping, according to Reuters" (Ellyatt, 2018). Therefore, a complete reexamination is indeed necessary.

Tribalism (social class)

According to Al-Awaji (1971), "the principle characteristic of the KSA culture lies within the centrality of the family in the social structure of the tribe, the village, and the town" (cited in (Ardichvili and Dirani, 2017)). In Saudi society "tribal ties" still exist, and they are significant. It is a sense of pride to a Saudi, that he or she comes from a tribal family. The first question people ask when introduced as Saudi, is "which tribe you come from?"

Women in KSA face an intersectional prejudice. However, very few studies have scratched the surface of the issue. Some hidden references to this issue is mentioned.

In KSA, although the male guardianship system has been eased, men still hold strong opinions about whether women should be working outside their home. For example, (Bursztyn et al., 2018) conducted an interesting study which investigated if perceived

social norms had an impact on Saudi men's perceptions of their wives joining the labour force.

The study was conducted in two stages based on trials and a survey. The first stage was an experiment targeting 500 Saudi married men from Riyadh; they attended a 30 participant session with others from the same geographical area and social setting (Bursztyn et al., 2018). The second stage was based on a survey. Interestingly, 87 percent of the participants in the experiment supported women working outside their home discreetly. Yet when asked what they believe other men, even from their own social network, for example, their neighbours, think about women's participation in the workforce, 75 percent of the participants underestimated the level of support from other men. This indicates what the study referred to as a "misperception of social norms".

In addition, the researchers wanted to find out if knowing how others responded would change the perceptions of the participants. Accordingly, the researchers divided the participants into two groups, half of the participants were randomly chosen and were given feedback with the results of the survey. In the final stage of the experiment, the participants were asked to choose between receiving an online gift card or being signed up to a specialised job searching application for Saudi women. Thirty-six percent of the group whom they received the feedback from the researcher were more willing to sign up their wives to the job search application; in contrast, only 23 percent of the participants in the control group chose the job search service.

Finally, in a follow up with the participants four months after the main experiment, the researchers found that correcting Saudi men's beliefs about others' points of view led to their wives being more likely to apply for or attend a job interview.

This study may help in understanding how social norms and others' views might play a role in women's progression, yet it is also worth noting that this study provided another lens through which to view the situation in collective cultures.

3.5 Saudi women's leadership: Government initiatives

Women in KSA have been experiencing a growing involvement in top leadership roles such as senior management in both the public and private sectors. This is as a result of increased enrolment of women in varying levels of education and varying employment fields in addition to other aspects of public life in KSA (Metcalf, 2009).

The government of KSA is adopting a vision for female empowerment by initiating plans to develop their roles in HE (Al-Ahmadi, 2011a; Abo Khodair, 2012). This is highlighted by the government's focus on women's empowerment in its development plan, Vision 2030 (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016a). This plan prohibits discrimination based on gender, not only to empower women but as a simple consideration of equality. It encourages women's participation in the workplace as an economical power that was overlooked for years (Al-Munajjed, 2010; Al-Ahmadi, 2011a; Abu Khair, 2012).

This shows progression in the notion of leadership in that it is no longer based on gender preference for males but, rather, equal opportunity for women who have attained the necessary qualifications, leading to an increased number of Saudi women in leadership positions following this open support from the government.

However, despite the dramatic improvements in the role of Saudi women in society over the past few years, there is a need for endorsement of Saudi women's equal access to leadership opportunities, which men monopolise (Al-Munajjed, 2010; AlDoubi, 2014; Al-Ahmadi, 2011a).

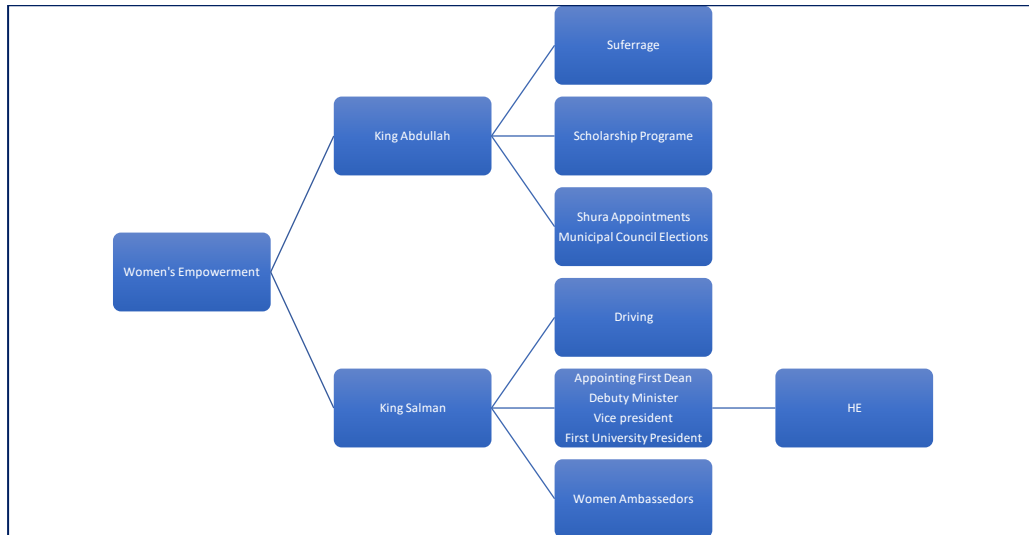


Figure 8: Saudi women’s empowerment opportunities: government initiatives (developed by the researcher)

Globalisation and advancements in technology, as well as economic status, have led to a drastic transformation of women’ status in Saudi’s traditional Wahhabi society. The societal transformation puts pressure on policy makers on different levels: embracing national identity over tribal identity (while keeping it intact and allowing them to feel included); protecting the image of Islam (converting from the strict Wahhabi school to a more modern relaxed school); opening up to globalisation and technology; opening the borders to tourists, allowing more open communication with the world while preserving culture; and empowering women with inclusion in the workplace while at the same time respecting traditions, social norms and religion. It is necessary to understand the period that shaped Saudi cultural background and altered women’s status in the country, which is discussed next.

3.5.1 King Abdullah’s reform

King Abdullah came to the throne in 2005, committing to diversity and reforming the country towards women’s progression. The first step was the appointment of Noura Al-Fayez to be the first female Saudi deputy minister (Ministry of Education) (Yamani, 2008; Alsubaie and Jones, 2017).

The introduction of a scholarship programme benefited a diverse range of women in King Abdullah's era. King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) ran from the year 2005 until 2020. The main purpose of launching this programme was to meet the need for high qualified Saudi faculty members, to fill the gaps in the HE system (Pavan, 2013). However, many scholars have asserted that the view of King Abdallah is to allow Saudi's to bring knowledge and to be exposed to the world, developing the country into more globalised one (Mustafa and Troudi, 2019; Hamdan, 2013; Kinninmont, 2017; Alqudayri and Gounko, 2018; Pavan, 2013).

It is important to highlight that this programme did not favour men over women—it created an opportunity for women to gain qualifications as well as living experiences of other cultures. For that, the programme was the focus of some heated debates in the beginning, in the light of the societal norms and the conservative religious views (Alqudayri and Gounko, 2018).

Saudi's were sceptical of the effect that travelling abroad would have on their children; being exposed to a more liberal, free society has led many families to be cautious regarding accepting the new change (Alqudayri and Gounko, 2018). On the other hand, the topic of women travelling was by far the most heated one, from the social constraints to the religious views. Accordingly, a male guardian (a father, brother or son) must accompany women. The programme as a result sponsored the girls' families and added these requirements in order to allow girls to pursue education. Male guardians were similarly supported by the government if they desired to complete their education as well, and the government provided financial assistant for both the female student and her male guardian while overseas.(Mustafa and Troudi, 2019; Al-Sudairy, 2017).

The programme gave working-class students equal chances to explore the world and catch up with their upper-class peers, resulting in equal possibilities for the two groups to rise in various grades.

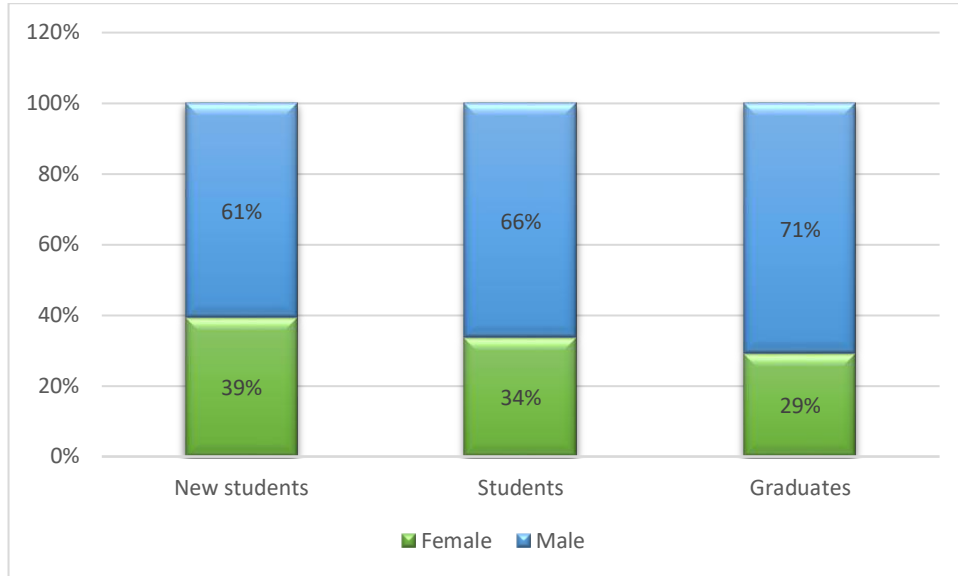


Figure 9: Studying abroad students in the KASP program (2019).

Probably the most significant change for women’s leadership in KSA occurred in September 2011, when King Abdullah granted Saudi women the right to vote, and in 2013 when he appointed 30 women (20 percent) as members of the Consultative Assembly (Shura council) (Al-Kayed, 2015; Islam, 2014). Additionally, women were not segregated; rather, they participated with the King and his Crown Princess and their male counterparts (Al-Sudairy, 2017; Alsubaie and Jones, 2017).

These unprecedented appointments marked the first step in making women’s voices heard politicly by allowing them to participate in the legislative process. Moreover, in the same period, three females were chosen as deputy chairpersons for three committees in the council (Al-Qahtani, 2013, cited in (Al-Kayed, 2015), and this number grew to six women in 2014 (Al-Arabia News, 2016).

The right of women to vote and to stand as candidates at municipal elections from 2015 was yet another notable advancement. For the first time, 37 Saudi women won seats out of over nine hundred candidates (Al-Sudairy, 2017; Alsubaie and Jones, 2017).

This depicts a new norm of confidence in the women in KSA to handle public matters and to be leaders. There have been recent developments that point to a strategic direction being taken by policy makers which is aimed at offering greater roles for Saudi women in the public sector as well as in top leadership positions in public domains.

However, despite the substantial step toward women's leadership in KSA, a lot is yet to achieve. This has continued during King Salman's reign.

King Salman's era

There were serious reforms that led to a change in perception before King Salman's era and MBS's new vision, such as the KASP program and the unprecedented appointment of women in leadership positions.

Yet since 2017 (during the present study), a process of transformation from the conservative to modern Islam has been initiated by the new King, which has led to a leap forward in empowerment for women in the country. Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman announced changes that would enable women to attend sporting events and theatres without a male guardian, effective from September 2017 (Topal, 2019).

In addition, MBS have initiated the new 2030 vision of the Saudi government, which aimed to diversify the Saudi economy by easing the dependency on oil production. These reforms have been fuelled by a recognition that Saudi women are an essential component of their country's path to achieving their Vision (Alluqmani et al., 2017). This has re-enforced the extensive representation of women as leaders in the kingdom (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016a). In addition, it has gradually changed perceptions and cultural acceptance of women working in fields which were previously male-dominated.

According to The World Bank (Women, Business and the Law 2020), KSA has made the most progress globally toward gender equality since 2017, increasing by 38.8 points.

KSA has done the most to enhance women’s status, especially with improvements in women’s mobility, marriage, sexual harassment, retirement age, and financial activities (The World Bank, 2020). Additionally, a pay indicator in 2021 changed its score to 80 out of 100, up from 70.6 in 2020, see **Error! Reference source not found.** (The World Bank, 2021).

2020	
Mobility	Eliminating limitations on getting a passport and travelling overseas.
Workplace	The right of a woman to reside where she pleases and to leave the marital home.
Marriage	Criminal sanctions on workplace sexual harassment.
Parenthood	Banning job discrimination on the basis of gender.
Entrepreneurship	Women are allowed to assume the position of head of home, thus freeing women from the need to follow their husbands.
Pension	The protection of pregnant workers from discriminatory dismissal.
2021	
Pay	Eliminated all restrictions on women’s employment, previously deemed dangerous, as equal to men in choice of employment opportunities. Saudi Arabia lifted bans on women’s night work.

Table 1: Women, Business and The Law indicators 2020-2021 (The World Bank, 2020 - 2021).

Being a young country with a young government MBS has created an ongoing debate among many taken-for-granted conservative religious practises within the society (Algethami and Nereim, 2019). King Salman’s era has changed the view of women’s participation “from right-based to development-oriented women’s empowerment” (Topal, 2019). During his era, many reforms benefited Saudi women.

The male guardianship system is believed to have been one of the main factors that caused the low proportion of women driving and receiving employment and education in KSA. In August 2019, a royal decree eased travel restrictions, such that women above age 21 can now have a passport and travel without a man’s consent. In addition, regarding employment and education, guardian permission is no longer required (The World Bank, 2020; Abueish, 2020).

Another major milestone was a royal decree appointing the first Saudi woman to assume a significant diplomatic position; Princess Reema Bint Bandar Bin Sultan was appointed ambassador to the United States in 2019 (Culbertson, 2019). She was

followed by Amal Yahya al-Moallimi, the second female ambassador to Norway in 2020, and the third ambassador to Sweden and Iceland, Inas Al-Shahwan in 2021 (Reem Krimly, 2021). In addition, thirteen women are currently on the Human Rights Council board, with half of the council seats now occupied by women (Abueish, 2020).

While Saudi HE has made some progress, it has not shifted as much. The first female dean position to be held in a public university was awarded to Professor Dalal Nemenqani at the University of Taif’s Medical School in 2017. As the first female president of a mixed-gender institution, Professor Lilac al-Safadi assumed the position of President at Saudi Electronic University in 2020 (Abueish, 2020).

Although KSA has made significant progress in recent years toward achieving gender equality in the country (see Figure , it ranks 147th out of the 156 nations ranked in the Gender Gap Index by the (World Economic Forum, 2021), which places the country in fifth lowest place—15th in the Middle East and North Africa region among 19 countries. However, KSA is ranked 97th for educational attainment which is a relative advancement. Regarding enrolment in tertiary education, women scored higher than men at 69.9 percent, with score of 1.05 in female/male ratio.

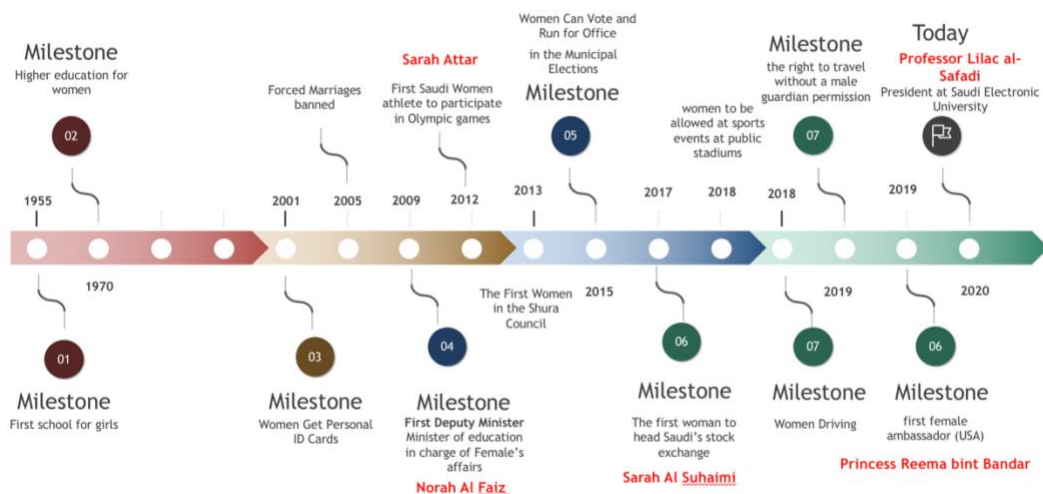


Figure 10: Women's Rights in Saudi Arabia: A Timeline (developed by the researcher)

On the other hand, women's labour force participation is 23.3 percent, and women represent only 6.8 percent of managers in KSA, forming a 93 percent gap. Additionally, there are no female ministers at all. This indicates that if women's employment rate is already low, equal results in leadership or management roles are more uncommon (World Economic Forum, 2021).

According to (Ross, 2008), more women joining the workforce will affect their status on three levels. First will be the individual level, with more positive women's self-view and identity. Second will be the social level, as increased involvement will strengthen women's social networks. Third, on an economic level, their visibility, presence and involvement will increase the country's awareness of their contribution to economic development and, therefore, its willingness to take further measures toward their empowerment.

3.6 Conclusion

The literature concerning the context of KSA is paradoxical. No one can ignore the fact that the status of women in KSA is unique and complex. Internal and external factors that shape leader identity arise from the context within which women exist and have a profound effect on their self-perception.

This literature review has explored many factors that affect Saudi women's readiness to view themselves as leaders. First, there are sociocultural factors; given the fact that KSA is a collectivist culture (Gelfand et al., 2006), social identity is important to understand. This suggests that a primary influence on an individual's self-view is their kinship or family background (i.e., tribal identity).

Second, KSA is founded on a religious basis, therefore religion is a key factor. Religious identity is embedded in Saudis' minds, laws, organisations and behaviour. Following this, religious tradition was institutionalised within the HE organisational structure, creating a gender-segregated environment which amplified women's invisibility.

Additionally, it is important to note that starting from HE, Saudi women began to have different access to educational choices than men. Although women graduate in higher number than males, their employment rate is lower. Women's entrance into leadership roles is mainly connected to their appearance in the workforce.

Although gender segregation might indicate that women's leadership participation would be equal to men in HE, this was not the case, as HE institutions have adopted a dual-level leadership system, in which men hold all decision-making positions. This has formed institutional challenges for women and might affect their leader identity.

It is evident in the literature that sociocultural context has had a profound effect in Saudi women's choices, employment and leadership, despite the fact that women are finally taking a huge leap forward in equality. Women need to understand how to navigate the barriers they face and inspire others to change, while holding onto their deep-rooted sociocultural identity. However, women are still stained by social gender stereotypes in KSA, which often view women as less favourable because of their gender regardless of their capabilities, style of leadership, behaviour or other leadership qualities.

3.7 Gaps in the literature:

Previous literature shows that studies addressing the lived experiences of Saudi women working in higher education are scarce (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017; Hamdan, 2005;). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to allow female academics in Saudi Arabia to share their experiences of aspiring to and attaining leadership roles. This is the first study to examine how the appointments of the first female leaders in 2018 has changed the ways in which Saudi female academics perceive themselves as future leaders. The study will also analytically investigate the factors that shape women's experiences in their advancement to top leadership positions in the country.

This study addresses the ongoing debate about how other diversity agenda can be considered in studying leadership especially in patriarchal social systems (such as, ethnicity, political orientation, religious beliefs), and assert the need for a new critical reframing of diversity to advance research in academic leadership. The study also notes the need for a critical reframing of diversity to advance research on academic leadership by highlighting recent empirical and theoretical work that can inform a new approach to advancing equity for women in academia.

While much research has been conducted that investigates the low proportion of women in positions of power, a new line of research is needed that focuses on countries like Saudi Arabia, which has only recently (i.e. 2017–2018) acknowledged women as potential leaders. Compared to the development of theories addressing women's exclusion from top leadership positions, little attention has been paid to developing methodological approaches to addressing the issue of women's nascent advancement to leadership positions in countries like Saudi Arabia (Milligan, 2016).

Day et al. (2014) and Day (2011) claim that time an important in the leadership development field. It is imperative that we understand the vital role that time plays in the leadership process (Day and Harrison, 2007), yet the dearth of longitudinal studies in the leadership field has been acknowledged by many scholars (Day et al., 2004; Day, 2011; Day and Sin, 2011; Harms et al., 2011; Murphy and Johnson, 2011; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). The proposed study aims to fill this gap. Approaching leadership development in two phases will add another level of analysis to the current research, which is vital to developing both conceptual and practical understandings of the patterns that shape the identities of female leaders (Day and Harrison, 2007).

Leadership is a collective process that cannot be practiced in a vacuum. It depends on the context where it is situated. Following (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017) recommendations for future research in the field of Saudi women in leadership, the present research has utilised a narrative approach to better understand women's identity construction.

Such research is critical, as the recent changes justify the need for rigorous studies to investigate Saudi women's readiness to take up leadership opportunities. In addition, this study adds nuance to the concept of readiness for leadership, which has been established in previous studies, by exploring how preconceptions of gendered practices may affect readiness for leadership and plays part in women leader identity construction.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the qualitative methodology adopted in this research is explained and justified, which is linked to the research aim, objectives and theoretical framework. This study sought to address this need by using narrative qualitative research to study the lived experiences of previous and current Saudi female academic leaders.

The first section of this chapter addresses the philosophical stance (i.e., ontology, epistemology) underpinning the methodological approach philosophy, which is constructionism for the former and Interpretivism for the later. Next, the research design and narrative approach to studying life experiences are discussed and narrative approach to studying life experiences, which is a useful approach for learning about the lived experience of women in a specific (i.e., non-Western), less-studied context. Within this, the research strategy, research methods (interviews and observations) and the research processes are discussed, followed by a discussion of the data analysis methodology and the rationale for using narrative analysis. Thirdly, this chapter examines key considerations involving qualitative research, reflexivity, trustworthiness, and the positioning of the researcher. Given the stakes/context involved (activism, etc.), the importance of ethics runs through everything I did as part of this research. While this should be inherent in my description, and illuminated as part of the overall research process, a separate section is devoted to these ethical considerations (section 4.8).

4.2 Philosophical Stance

This section will specify the researcher's philosophical underpinnings to inform choices concerning epistemology, ontology, research paradigms and methodological positions (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Research philosophy can be defined as ‘an over-arching term relating to the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge’ (Saunders et al., 2009). Research philosophy refers to the assumptions and set of beliefs that the researcher holds about reality, knowledge and values, which can be viewed through ontology, epistemology and axiology respectively. These philosophical assumptions can affect the way researchers approach and design their research (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2007; Bahm, 1993). Therefore, it is important to be very clear about the philosophy from the beginning.

It is essential to recognise that a research philosophy should be derived from both ontological and epistemological perspectives; each has distinct implications for how we view reality and knowledge (Saunders et al., 2009). Each position is important for answering different research questions and determining the research design and method the researcher decides to adopt. Accordingly, it is critical to clearly determine what position fits the research and how it aligns with the researcher’s view of the social world.

By choosing to conduct qualitative research, it is further assumed that many realities are being embraced and that the researcher must introduce these views through the individuals they study, thereby ‘presenting different perspectives’ (Creswell, 2007).

(Merriam, 2009) states that qualitative research mainly adopts an interpretive inquiry. It assumes that reality is not definite and that it can be observed through the ‘eye of the beholder’. (Merriam, 2009) also states that the term constructivism is used interchangeably with interpretivism.

Each paradigm involves three main fundamental philosophical underpinnings: ontology, epistemology (philosophy), and methodology (practice) (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). These elements guide researchers and readers to clearly identify the purpose as well as the contribution to the findings. According to (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), four main paradigms inform the way we think about

research: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory (and related ideological positions) and constructivism. Certain ontological and epistemological stances constitute each paradigm and inform how we approach the research. This has implications for how the focal phenomenon of this research is viewed. Based on the evidence from this research, I argue that Saudi culture is undergoing radical change, specifically regarding women’s roles in leadership. This thesis philosophical underpinnings is outline in (Table 2: Thesis philosophical underpinnings, (Adapted from Creswell, 2007, p. 17; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). This will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

Philosophical Stance	Ontology The nature of reality	Different constructed multiple realities Constructionism
	Epistemology The nature of knowledge	Knowledge is socially constructed depending on where we come from (culturally dependent) Subjective - interpretivism
Approach	Methodology (strategy)	Qualitative (Interpretive)
	Design	Two rounds of interviews
	Reasoning	Inductive
	Methods	Interviews and Observation
	Analysis	Narrative

Table 2: Thesis philosophical underpinnings, (Adapted from Creswell, 2007, p. 17; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003)

4.2.1 Epistemological Position: Subjective – Interpretivism

Epistemology is an approach to understanding ‘how we know what we know’ (Crotty, 1998b) and is based on the philosophy of how knowledge is acquired (Brinkmann, 2018). Epistemological assumptions are concerned with ‘what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge’ (Bryman, 2012). Epistemology can be understood in the context of how we view the social world in relation to how we view natural science. Researchers adopting a positivist epistemological position assert that knowledge is to be discovered, ‘found or seen’, mimicking natural science (Bryman, 2012; Brinkmann, 2018). In contrast, interpretivist epistemology assumes that ‘knowledge is constructed’ by people, and that there are profound differences between social actors and ‘objects of the natural science’ (Bryman, 2012; Brinkmann,

2018). The researcher's epistemological standpoint will embrace the theoretical perspective and inform the strategy selected.

(Saunders et al., 2009) state that axiology is 'a branch of philosophy that studies judgements about values'. It is concerned with the role of the values the inquirer holds throughout the research process, how they make judgements about the research's ethical issues and moral concerns, and how they research knowledge (Bahm, 1993).

In qualitative research, the researchers 'admit the value-laden nature of the study and actively report their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field' (Creswell, 2007). In simple terms, axiology focuses on the way the researcher's values impact the research and how these value-bound assumptions affect the research outcomes (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). It is therefore very important that the researcher acknowledges and reflects on their feelings and beliefs that led the research process and analysis (Bryman, 2012).

This research is based on the interpretive epistemology, which is part of the constructionism paradigm that recognises the constructed meaning as the 'discursive and relational nature of fieldwork and research, and which is sensitive to the operations and dynamics of power' (Cunliffe, 2008; Sandberg, 2001; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Thomas and Linstead, 2002, cited in (Nicholson and Carroll, 2013).

In 1883, Wilhelm Dilthey emphasised exploring the *lived experiences* of the people being investigated in terms of the meaning they created (Delanty and Strydom, 2003; Hatch and Yanow, 2005). He argued that due to the contradiction between explanation and understanding, distinctive ways of examining natural and social realities must be considered (Crotty, 1998a). Dilthey's thoughts inspired the 'neo-Kantian' theorists, whose beliefs were present in Weber's work when he adapted their thoughts into in-depth explanations of the relationship between understanding and explanation. Weber developed the concept of interpretive sociology, which arose from Husserl's perspective on phenomenology (Delanty and Strydom, 2003).

(Brinkmann, 2018) goes further in arguing that ‘the philosophies of qualitative research are not just different sets of abstract principles but also different embodiments of modes of living and acting’. Accordingly, as leadership is a social phenomenon, it can be practised and perceived differently in different contexts. Hence, its processes occur within social groups who bring their taken-for-granted knowledge and perceptions when enacting its practices (Steers et al., 2012; House, 2004).

Interpretive epistemology assumes that meaning attached to social entities is not something that can be discovered; rather, it is subjective and is constructed by both the participants and researcher. It is best suited to a deep understanding of experiences and their underlying meanings experienced by individuals in a specific context. Moreover, this subjective epistemological stance helps to obtain a clear critical understanding of the unique experiences of the research participants (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

The interpretivism approach arose as a reaction to the positivist paradigm, which was concerned with measuring and explaining the natural sciences. In contrast, interpretivists shifted towards interpreting the social reality in order to uncover the meanings that lay in everyday activities (Crotty, 1998a). According to (Crotty, 1998b), interpretivists view constructivism from an epistemological perspective. This theory is founded on the premise that people acquire knowledge and its meaning subjectively as a result of exposure to various experiences, as opposed to believing in the existence of an objective world.

4.2.2 Ontological Position: Social Constructionism

Ontology is concerned with what the researcher views as reality in nature, and whether reality is objective or subjective. The objective reality position is referred to as objectivism, which acknowledges that the social world exists without any influence of social actors and is awaiting discovery. By contrast, the position that acknowledges social actors as central to our understanding of reality, and that everything around us

is based on our consciousness and perceptions, is the constructionism position of reality (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Bryman, 2012). In simple terms, ontology answers the question 'what is': what do I believe about the world? What constitutes a fact? (Gray, 2014). Unlike objectivism, which adopts the position of disconnecting social phenomena from their social actors, this research adopts constructionism **ontology**, acknowledging that reality is not absolute; it is constructed socially through human experience (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Ontological assumption embedded in the interpretivist perspective holds that reality is complex and exists as a form of meaning constructed by human beings according to their interactions with it. While the epistemological perspective is an approach that aims to understand 'how we know what we know' (Crotty, 1998b), the ontological approach holds an assumption of 'what is' (Gray, 2014).

The social constructionism approach as a qualitative ontological paradigm underpins this study. This section will examine why a social constructionist ontological position has been chosen for this study of the identity construction of female Saudi academic leaders. Firstly, social constructionism as a concept will be discussed. Secondly, it will then be appropriate to build up a comprehension of what comprises the 'social' in social constructionism. Thirdly, how this ontological approach informed how the research was conducted and approached will be discussed, before finishing with a discussion on the impact social constructionism has had on how my fieldwork was conducted.

(Berger and Luckmann, 1966) initiated the concept of social constructionism in their book, *The Social Construction of Reality*. They argued that this new concept is 'non-positivistic' in its assumption about knowledge and reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). By contrast, constructivists contend that all expressive reality is 'socially constructed' and that our knowledge of the world is theory-laden and takes place within a conceptual framework that we created as a result of our communication with the world (Crotty, 1998b; Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

Social constructivism is the foundation of various theoretical approaches, which vary according to their strength in relation to the social constructionism concept. These include interpretivism – which can be sub-categorised into phenomenology, symbolic interactionism and hermeneutics (Crotty, 1998c; Berger and Luckmann, 1966) – and critical theory and post-structuralism in its relation to ‘relativism’ (Crotty, 1998c).

From the gender-role dynamics perspective of this research, social constructionism assumptions have implied that biological sex differences ‘do not have a fixed meaning across cultures; rather, it is societal expectations that produce and maintain inequality between genders’ (Wood and Eagly, 2002, cited in (Weyer, 2007). Constructivism implies the assumptions that multiple constructed realities exist and are shared among individuals in which they have been affected by social human interaction (Bryman, 2012).

In contrast, they contend that all expressive reality is ‘socially constructed’ and that our knowledge of the world is theory-laden and takes place within a conceptual framework, which we created as a result of our communication with the world (Crotty, 1998b; Berger and Luckmann, 1966), that meaning is constructed and cannot be created (Crotty, 1998b).

Social constructivism was the foundation of various theoretical approaches, which varies according to its strength in relation to the social constructionism concepts. First, interpretivism can be sub-categorised into phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and hermeneutics (Crotty, 1998b; Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Second, critical theory and post-structuralism vary in their relationship to ‘relativism’ (Crotty, 1998b).

Interpretivists have been criticised by some positivist scholars who questioned interpretivist research values from different aspects. First, critics pointed to the theory’s inability to be generalised, due to the limited number of sample or case studies, and the fact that it is mainly context-dependent (Leitch et al., 2010; Mack, 2010; Heracleous, 2004; Gray, 2014). However, Williams (Heracleous, 2004) claims

that research findings using the interpretivist paradigm can be generalised in three different ways: absolute generalisations; statistical generalisations, in which an illustrative sample can apply to the whole population; and moderatum generalisations, where aspects of a phenomenon act as a representative of wider sets of features. His argument suggests that interpretivism can adopt moderatum generalisations within the limits of the inductive barriers where we cannot 'generalise from a small number of cases to unknown cases' and ontological complications in which generalisation can only 'apply within one category' (Williams, (Heracleous, 2004).

Another criticism was that interpretivism was 'not radical enough', in that it could not lead to any changes in the phenomenon being studied (Mack, 2010). However, understanding people's perceptions may lead to changes in knowledge associated with sociology or psychology, or perhaps even go beyond that to form a basis for better integration to modify upcoming research.

Finally, the interpretive perspective may be time-consuming as well as complicated, as it relates to human behaviour. However, it can also reflect a unique reconstructed understanding of an individual's social practices and behaviour in its approach of interpreting the meaning behind their social processes in specific phenomenological contexts, which will lead to a better social life.

4.2.3 The Philosophical Position of this Study

Qualitative research methods were used in this study to facilitate an in-depth understanding of each participant's unique experience. A growing interest in the use of qualitative research methods in the study of leadership has been noticeable since the latter half of the 19th century (Bryman, 2004). This interest was a result of acknowledging that quantitative methods failed to investigate complex and embedded phenomena (Conger, 1998; Lowe and Gardner, 2000).

This study adopts the social constructionism paradigm to construct leader identity through narratives. It recognizes that reality is socially constructed, and knowledge is subjective and can only be interpreted through social interactions, and that the meaning derived from research is also subject to subjective interpretation. This is evident in the analysis of the leadership experiences of Saudi women, as the researcher seeks to understand the stories they tell and the leader identities they construct.

Furthermore, this study builds upon the ideas of Berger and Luckmann (1966) (as cited in Atewologun and Singh, 2010) by asserting that identities are shaped by social constructs. The use of interviews and observations as a methodology aligns with this paradigm. Adopting the social constructionist perspective provides a 'dynamic view of identity construction in the research context that reflects how individual, organisational, and socio-historical influences reflexively interrelate at a moment in time' (Jaros, 2012, cited in (Zhao and Jones, 2017)).

A qualitative approach to gender and leadership goes beyond the narrow overview of competence and motivation by allowing us to widen our spectrum to include human subjectivity, and to gain more in-depth insights into the complicated, socially constructed experiences of female Saudi academics. The research employed an inductive approach to identify the themes of influence in the participants' narratives, which were subsequently used to validate and modify the proposed research framework. Gender in social constructionism extends beyond biology and is instead constructed and reconstructed by narrative aspects perpetuated through social structure and cultural norms (Burr, 2015).

As much of the leadership literature does not adequately consider context, applying the constructivist approach allowed the researcher to be more sensitive regarding the underlying social constructed meaning behind the narrative in the participants' interviews. Moreover, as 'leadership in itself is also seen as a socially constructed narrative process' (Auvinen et al., 2013), this approach seemed the best fit.

4.2.4 Reasoning: Inductive

As mentioned in the literature review discussion, there are few, if any studies that addressed leadership identity construction and experiences in higher education for Saudi women. Accordingly, this research used inductive reasoning as a way to interpret the data and conduct the research. The inductive approach uses the data gathered and analysed through the research process as a basis for building the theoretical framework. This method of inquiry acknowledges that both the participants and the researcher are well-informed. The participants can assume 'that people in organisations know what they are trying to do and can explain their thoughts, intentions, and actions'. Similarly, the researcher 'can figure out patterns in the data, enabling [them] to reveal concepts and relationships that might escape the awareness of the informants, and that [they] can formulate these concepts in theoretically relevant terms' (Gioia et al., 2013).

4.3 Methodological Approach and Rationale

A methodology refers to 'the theories and analytical framework for the research, and the "methods" as the specific means by which data are collected' (Somekh and Lewin, 2011). Many scholars have stressed the importance of aligning the selection of the research type with the problem being investigated (Creswell, 2014b). Researchers need to fully comprehend the research problem and to determine which research design is most suitable for answering the research question in leadership research in particular, and any research in general (Brooks and Normore, 2015; Creswell, 2012). According to this conceptual paradigm, the researcher will select the methodology that best defines the choice of preferred research method, as it represents the tools that will be used for the data collection based on the research question or hypothesis in order to realise the study findings (Gray, 2014; Crotty, 1998b). In addition, it is crucial that the researcher be aware of their own worldview and how they perceive truth and knowledge creation and to choose their methodology accordingly (Somekh and Lewin, 2011). As mentioned earlier, this research uses a qualitative method.

4.3.1 The Qualitative Research Method

A qualitative methodology allows the researcher to provoke data derived from the chosen research methods (e.g., interviews). Unlike quantitative methodology, where numbers and variable relationships are presented, qualitative methodology is concerned with understanding individual interactions within a specific setting (Silverman, 2015). A qualitative method was chosen because it uses words to describe a phenomenon. A quantitative method, by contrast, aims to statistically measure a phenomenon (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993). Consequently, a qualitative method helps in explaining those variables that are based on the quality and nature of an attribute, and the meaning people attach to their actions and situations. There is no mathematical and statistical involvement (Merriam, 2009).

Qualitative research methods also offer a relational view of the phenomenon based on the social actors' relationship and interactions; there is no one reality to be discovered, but there are modes of action to be understood (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993). These unique experiences are better captured through research conducted in the setting in which these phenomena operate (Cohen et al., 2002). In studying the leadership identity construction process, (DeRue and Ashford, 2010) stated that:

'Claims or grants of a particular [leader] identity may be acceptable within a specific context or regarding specific issues, but in other contexts or regarding different issues, those same claims or grants may be outside the zone of acceptance and, thus, may be met with resistance'.

Therefore, qualitative methods are more suitable for communicating an individual's subjective experience and understanding the socially constructed meanings attached.

The research design for conducting a leadership study must be suitable for obtaining an in-depth understanding of the specific area being studied and to investigate the research question being addressed (Brooks and Normore, 2015). As leadership can be a disputed (Jones, 2011), and relational domain to study (Marchiondo et al., 2015), a

qualitative approach can offer a deep and complex understanding of the interactions and processes involved in leadership within a specific social or cultural setting (Herrmann et al., 2013; Krizek, 2003; Bryman et al., 1996).

Unlike a quantitative inquiry, the qualitative approach is concerned with the meanings participants assign to themselves, and how they feel regarding certain situations. It emphasises their perceptions, behaviour, attitudes and identities (Cohen et al., 2013; Silverman, 2015).

As leadership is a socially constructed phenomenon (Alvesson and Svingsson, 2003), qualitative research is ideal for understanding the socially constructed meaning for individuals within the leadership process (Bryman, 2004; Merriam, 2002). Therefore, as this study examines the leader identity construction of female Saudi leaders, how they view the world and how they interpret and make sense of their experiences (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Holland et al., 2006; Bagnoli, 2004), a qualitative methodological approach is suitable for answering the research question and tackling the research problem (Merriam, 2002).

Adopting a qualitative approach is best suited for addressing a research problem where the researcher 'does not know the variables and needs to explore them from the participants' perspectives' (Creswell, 2014a).

Acknowledging the relational nature of identity construction, this research uses in-depth, qualitative studies to understand the form and nature of claiming and granting leadership identity construction process. DeRue and Ashford (2010, p. 641) assert that 'qualitative methods that involve observational [...] and/or narrative [...] techniques will be particularly valuable in capturing what may only be a semi- or unconscious process of acting and reacting to others. Thus, the qualitative method allowed the researcher to understand women's identities and their experiences more fully in leadership positions. It also allowed them to determine what sense can be made from female

voices towards their leadership identity, and what they said and understood about leadership positions in a male-dominated environment.

This research aims to uplift women's voices in academic circles in order to examine gender equality issues in leadership. More importantly, it will contribute to raising awareness of the experiences of Saudi women and generating an enabling environment for women, with more supportive HE institutions. This is particularly important in contexts such as Saudi higher education, where women still face significant barriers to participation, so this research will contribute to breaking down some of these barriers. Although this is a relatively small-scale study, it uses two rounds of interviews to conduct the study, particularly during the profound social changes that Saudi Arabia is undergoing detecting the change/if occur to women leader self-view as leaders.

4.4 Research Approach: Narrative

Narrative research is 'a way of understanding experience' based on a 'collaboration between researcher and participants over time in a place or series of places, and social interaction with milieus' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2002). Since this qualitative study sought to understand the stories of Saudi women regarding their experiences in accessing leadership positions in higher education, and the expected social role and gender stereotypes they fulfil, a narrative inquiry was a suitable approach.

'Narrative research has many forms, uses a variety of analytical practices, and is rooted in different social and humanities disciplines' (Daiute and Lightfoot, 2004, cited in (Creswell, 2013a). Narrative inquiry can be used in research as a methodology or as an analysis tool, in other words, either for a narrative data analysis or an analysis of the narrative (Creswell, 2013a).

The narrative approach to analysing data intends to give a voice to those who are usually not heard. It emphasises the way individuals experience and make sense of their everyday lives (or certain phenomena). Western scholars nowadays

acknowledge the effect of culture on the way people experience reality. People from different cultures might experience the same phenomenon in different ways. Similarly, people from the same culture might experience different realities as well.

(Polkinghorne, 1998) views narrative as a key system through which the very meaning of existence can be created. This aligns with the notion that narrative is invariably associated with human experience. Thus, narrative research primarily centres on how people can generate a sense of meaning from their experiences through the written or spoken word. As this research aims to uncover how women in Saudi Arabia make sense of their own experience of leadership inclusion, a narrative analysis seemed the best fit.

A narrative analysis will capture the stories that the women tell, the experiences they experienced and how it affects their worldview.

4.5 Research Design

Qualitative research is primarily concerned with exploring individuals' realities of the world and the context in which the research is conducted. It is a data-driven research approach, and its strategies are adaptable, whereas specific signposting research strategies can be inflexible. The main focus of a qualitative study is on renegotiating what constitutes reality (Mason, 2006). Accordingly, the researcher will have adopted a few designs before the final one emerges. Statement about how your methods is a frank discussion of the twists and turns, messiness, and pragmatic constraints of conducting qualitative research as a scholar reaches a potentially suitable research design.

The research initially aimed to address the effectiveness of training as a mediator to change women's self-perception (e.g., confidence, self-efficacy) toward viewing themselves as future leaders regardless of sociocultural constraints. This strategy seemed convincing as the researcher intended to target one of the Academic Leadership Centre programmes run from a national leadership centre in Saudi Arabia

formed by the government with the aim of developing second-generation leaders in higher education. However, access was a problem for two reasons: firstly, as a scholarship faculty member, the researcher did not have a chance to nominate herself or to at least have access to the invitations that were sent to the faculties asking for nominees; secondly, the centre denied permission to conduct the research due to tight scheduling. There was no suitable leadership development training programme open for registration at the time of data collection.

Based on this experience, the researcher tried to register with another training centre in one of the universities in Saudi Arabia, which offered a leadership development programme targeting female academic leaders. An overview of the main agenda for the session was requested, which was not provided until two days before the workshop. The training centre permitted me to participate in the training programme and provided details on the content of the training sessions and a list of the participants. Additionally, they contacted the trainer on the researcher's behalf and informed her of my presence and the reason for attending the workshop.

Using the list provided, the researcher tried to contact as many participants as possible before the workshop began. I sent them an invitation to participate in the research via email; I also attached the information sheet and the consent form. Three participants had been approved to participate prior to the commencement of the programme, yet most of the participants had no clue as to what my role was in the training session.

As the training workshop did not meet the standard to influence change in the participants' mindset, the researcher decided to neglect the studying of the effect of the programme toward what influenced these participants to attend leadership development programme is probably their motivation to make meaning of these skills they will attain upon attending. Accordingly, I altered one of my research objectives, which is assessing the impact of the leadership development intervention. The research procedure for data collection was as follows.

In the first stage of data collection:

- The researcher attended a leadership development programme.
- The researcher invited the female Saudi academics who attended the leadership development programme to take part in the study.
- Face to face, semi-structured, informal interviews were conducted during the first stage of the study.

The data collected from the interviews and field notes were valuable in providing contextual knowledge regarding the women's readiness for holding high-profile leadership roles.

In the second stage:

To align with the new reforms in Saudi Arabia and the approach of the study, the researchers conducted a second round of semi-structured interviews with the same participants one year after the initial data collection. This decision was made because the evolving status of women, particularly in leadership, presented a promising area for further investigation. The first round of interviews was conducted in 2017, followed by a second round in 2018.

Informed by the basic qualitative approach, it is both important and necessary to explore the women's self-view as well as their experiences with the leadership development process. This will deepen the understanding about what influences their leader identity formation process as well as the role of themselves and others in the process.

4.5.1 Participants and Sampling Strategy

The participants consisted of 30 out of the 35 Saudi female academics who attended an on-campus, women-only, leadership development programme. The participants represented various social categories, held different positions in different departments, and were diverse in both age and ethnicity; however, they all aspired to

be leaders. The attendees, who were both leaders and aspirational leaders, represented various social categories and ethnic groups and came from both conservative and liberal backgrounds as shown later in Table 3.

4.5.1.1 Women-only leadership development programme

Participation in the programme was open to all female academics and was free of charge. The programme was one of many organized by a development centre at a Saudi government university, which aimed to develop the academic staff based on the university's strategy and their training requirements.

The programme trainer was a Saudi female academic who held a high-level leadership position. The researcher also participated in the programme. On the final day of the workshop, the researcher introduced herself and her research to the other participants and invited them to participate. This was a perfect time as the participants were very passionate about the topic and still fresh.

The researcher approached the participants to set a date for the interviews. Thirty out of the 35 agreed to participate, and consent forms and information sheets were emailed to them after the programme.

4.5.1.2 Application Process of the training programme:

Online registration was available approximately three to four weeks prior to the start of the training programme. Details about the programme were available as well, including the training objectives and the name of the trainer. However, nothing was communicated regarding the detailed agenda or the programme topics. One week before the programme started, registration closed, and the nomination process began for attending the programme. Once all eligibility criteria were met by a candidate, they would receive an acknowledgement by SMS, which would include the location and other useful information. On finalising the completed list of participants, the administrative team contacted the trainer for the handouts and arranged catering.

4.5.1.3 Eligibility Criteria for the training session

Priority in attending the programme was given to academics at the university. If any places were remaining, faculty members from other public and private universities were welcome to attend. The final attendees were chosen based on whether or not they had already attended this programme and whether or not they have exceeded three workshops per term; a 'no show' to any of the centre's programmes might affect their attendance eligibility.

The programme took place on-site, which offers participants the opportunity to spare time to develop themselves away from their demanding job.

Surprisingly, after the programme, many of the participants expressed their disappointment in the quality of the training. Therefore, the researcher decided to use this workshop only as a parameter for the transition state and to represent the degree of developmental readiness that the participants showed.

Additionally, in line with (Miscenko et al., 2017), this study argues that a 'leader development programme presents a new set of identity meanings, which motivates participants to re-construct their currently held meaning of leader identity, and this will manifest in changing the strength of leader identity (i.e., identity change)'. Accordingly, the poor quality of the programme raised the need to alter the research design plan as stated by the informants of the study.

4.5.1.4 Sample selection criteria

According to (Jones et al., 2014), developing sampling criteria is essential to ensure the participants are selected according to the purpose of the research and in order to effectively answer the research question. They identified sampling criteria as 'those variables, characteristics, qualities, experiences, and demographic most directly linked to the purpose of the study and, thus, important to the construction of the sample'. In addition, justification of the research context is a noteworthy element in defining the research purpose, not just participants selection (Jones et al., 2014).

Accordingly, In order to investigate the process of women leadership developmental readiness, this study was intended to capture this readiness in a leadership development programme where leader identity construction could be clearly detected (Moorosi, 2014).

(Avolio and Hannah, 2008) state that 'leaders with greater clarity over their self-construct will have a firm starting point that will enable them to further adjust their self-construct in response to new experiences'. Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory of Motivation might be applicable in explaining the participants' motivation to attend the development programme. Vroom's theory suggests that individuals might be motivated toward a certain action if they believe that the outcome is desirable.

The leadership development programme was purposefully designed to target Saudi women. The programme's quality was an overlooked element from the researcher when trying to search for a data collection site. However, the programme itself was not important with regard to actual data collected. What was more important was the fact that the attendees were ready to develop as leaders or were at least curious about it.

4.5.2 Informants' profiles:

	Name	Academic ranks	Age	Ethnic group	Orientation	Social class	Region	Leadership position	Employment Gender composition	Social Status
1.	Lama	Asst. Prof.	35-40	Bedouin tribes	Liberal	Upper class	Western	Past	Dual	Single
2.	Mona	Associate Prof.	35-40	Yemen Immigrant	Stable	Middle class	Western	-	Dual	Married-kids
3.	Suha	Associate Prof.	40-45	Bedouin tribes	Conservative	Upper class	Western	-	Dual	Married-kids
4.	Siba	Asst. Prof.	40-45	Asian Immigrant	Conservative	Upper class	Western	Current	Unassigned	Married-kids
5.	Rema	Prof.	60>	Hijazi	Liberal	-	Western	Past	Mono	Married-kids
6.	Layan	Asst. Prof.	40-45	Asian Immigrant	Conservative	Upper class	Western	-	Mono	Married-kids
7.	Sara	Associate Prof. to Prof.	40-45	Hijazi	Stable	-	Western	Past	Dual	Married-kids
8.	Roa	Associate Prof.	50-60	Hijazi	Libera	-	Western	Current	Mono	Married-kids
9.	Wed	Associate Prof. to Prof.	40-45	Bedouin tribes	Liberal	Upper class	Western	Current	Dual-Mono	Single
10.	Shahad	Asst. Prof.	35-40	Hijazi	Liberal	Middle class	Western	-	Dual	Married-kids
11.	Hetaf	Asst. Prof.	50-60	Hijazi	Liberal	Upper class	Western	Current	Mono	Married-kids
12.	Lina	Demonstrator	30-35	Bedouin tribes	Liberal	Middle class	Eastern	Past	Dual	Married-kids
13.	Noor	Lecturer to Ass. Prof.	30-35	Bedouin tribes	Conservative	Upper class	Eastern	Past	Dual	Married-kids
14.	Layla	Lecturer	30-35	Bedouin tribes	Liberal	Middle class	Western	Past	Dual	Married-kids
15.	Tala	Asst. Prof.	35-40	Asian Immigrant	Conservative	Middle class	Western	-	Mono	Married-kids
16.	Yara	Asst. Prof.	45-50	Asian Immigrant	Conservative	Upper class	Western	Current	Mono	Married-kids
17.	Haya	Associate Prof.	45-50	Bedouin tribes	Liberal	Middle class	Western	Current	Dual	Married-kids
18.	Maria	Lecturer	30-35	Bedouin tribes	Liberal	Middle class	Western	-	Dual	Married-kids
19.	Dana	Associate Prof.	40-45	Bedouin tribes	Liberal	Middle class	Western	Current	Dual	Married-kids
20.	Saja	Asst. Prof.	45-50	Bedouin tribes	Liberal	Middle class	Western	-	Dual	Married-kids
21.	Deem	Lecturer to Ass. Prof.	30-35	Bedouin tribes	Liberal	Upper class	Middle	Past	Mono	Married-kids
22.	Lamis	Lecturer	30-35	Bedouin tribes	Liberal	Middle class	Western	Current	Dual	Married-kids
23.	Ruba	Asst. Prof.	30-35	Hijazi	Stable	Upper class	Western	Current	Dual	Married-kids
24.	Rawan	Associate Prof.	35-40	Hijazi	Conservative	Upper class	Western	-	Dual	Married-kids
25.	Rahaf	Associate Prof.	30-35	African roots	Conservative	Lower class	Western	Current	Dual	Single
26.	Aya	Lecturer	30-35	Bedouin tribes	Conservative	Middle class	Western	Past	Dual	Married-kids
27.	Alaa	Asst. Prof.	30-35	Asian Immigrant	Stable	Middle class	Western	Current	Dual	Married-kids
28.	Tara	Demonstrator	30-35	Bedouin tribes	Conservative	Lower class	Western	Past	Dual	Married-kids
29.	Jana	Lecturer	30-35	Hijazi	Liberal	Middle class	Western	-	Mono	Married-no kids
30.	Zuha	Associate Prof.	45-50	Bedouin tribes	Liberal	Middle class	Western	-	Mono	Married-kids

Table 3: Participant profiles (Demographics)

Table (3) provides a short summary of each informant. These profiles provide the setting for understanding the participants' experiences. It is important to note that in the table region represents where the participants' universities are located, not their origin. Twelve participants were aged 30–35, 5 were aged 35–40, six were 40–45, Four were 45–50, 2 were 50–60 and only one was older than 60. Pseudonyms names were used instead of numbers to gives deeper meaning when addressing the narrative.

The informants formed a mix of three leadership positions from the higher education system. First, women with a “formal absolute” leadership position (i.e. an absolute positional authority conferred by the title “Head of the Department” or “Dean”) were defined as leading both male/female departments with complete authority. It is noteworthy to state that Saudi women in academia had not achieved far (absolute)

positions at the time of the first interview. Second, a “formal legitimate” leadership position (i.e. a legitimate positional authority conferred by the title “Head of the Department” or “Dean”) were expressed as leading female-only departments located in women-only colleges or departments without a male equivalent, such as the nursing college at King Abdul-Aziz University. Third were “formal deputy” leaders (i.e. those with a provisional facilitator position which manages female departments, though under the authority of a male department). This third title usually comes with no or restricted authority (i.e. that of a figurehead), where all decisions come from a male department. Not until very recently were women in mixed-gender departments at Saudi universities eligible for deputy leadership positions only. Up to then, only men were considered eligible for deanship.

4.6 Data Collection

My fieldwork in Saudi Arabia lasted for four weeks between December 2016 and January 2017. All participants were purposely sampled Saudi female academics who attended a leadership development programme.

The study argues that individuals who are engaged in formal or informal leadership development interventions have a high degree of motivation to develop as future leaders. If this motivation to lead is integrated with the ability to lead and the support of context, which constitute the components of leader developmental readiness, this will positively influence their opportunities to enhance if not accelerate their leader development (Avolio, 2016; Reichard, 2016). Data collection consisted of two main types: participant observation and interviews.

4.6.1 Observations (preliminary sensitization)

Nietfeld (2015) described observation as the initial tool to derive explanations for social phenomena, as observed in their natural and normal contexts. However, there are ethical issues to consider, and observations’ relevancy may not be easily

generalised in time or space beyond the context in which the phenomena were observed (Flick, 2013).

The researcher initially attended a three-days training course on leadership development at a Saudi university. Since the researcher is a Saudi woman who works in the same field as the attendees, the researcher was essentially invisible to the participants. This meant that their natural behaviour could be observed and possible biases could be reduced, as participants can behave differently if they know they are being observed ((Lichtman, 2006). The researcher took field notes on how the attendees engaged in group discussions as part of their training (the nature of these field notes is explained in more detail below). Since the observation occurred in a natural setting, the researcher was able to gain a realistic understanding of the behaviours between individuals and their different attitudes ((Lichtman, 2006). In addition, observing behaviour over a prolonged period, as this study setup ensured, supports the gathering of valuable data and a deep understanding of participants' experiences (Bryman, 2004; Herrmann et al., 2013).

Before the researcher attended the training program, the training centre was notified about the objective of the study, as described in the research design section (4.5). In turn, it informed the researcher of the course content and expected attendees. The centre also informed the workshop facilitator, on the researcher's behalf, of the nature of their participation in the program.

On the first day of the course, before the sessions began, the organiser gave consent for the data collection after being thoroughly informed about the research objectives, the role of the researcher and their position as a Saudi academic who is a university colleague of the attendees. The participants then gave retrospective consent at the end of the training programme when they were made aware of the researcher's data collection, the purpose of the study, its methods and ethical considerations, as discussed in section (4.8). The participants were given the option to withdraw their data from the study if they did not feel comfortable with the observation; if they did

not take that up, they were assured that their data would be anonymised. A total of 30 out of the 35 attendees agreed to participate in a follow-up interview, and consent forms and information sheets were then emailed to them.

During the training course sessions, the researcher took field notes, documenting relevant information such as the content of the discussions, participants' interactions, non-verbal cues, and the overall atmosphere of the sessions. The field notes were taken in real-time and were descriptive, capturing the essence of the course without imposing any interpretation. Those field notes were then used to inform the development of the research focus and the interview guide. By reviewing the notes, the researcher identified key themes, patterns and areas of interest that could be targeted in the interviews for more in-depth exploration.

Beyond that, the field notes were not analysed further, and they are not included in this thesis because they served only as a preliminary data collection method to guide the research process, rather than a primary data source for the study. Moreover, the field notes' observational data may have contained identifiable information, so their exclusion from print helped to ensure that the researcher could maintain participants' anonymity and confidentiality. The focus of the thesis is instead on the data collected through interviews.

In terms of bias, however, it must be noted that although the researcher had been studying abroad, the researcher was employed at the same institution where the data were collected, which may have influenced her overall comprehension of the circumstance (Parry et al., 2014). To combat such bias, the researcher adopted a passive participant viewpoint, in which she did not contribute to the training course content or discussions. The aim was that she would remain unseen to the attendees while taking notes and that she would also remain well aware of her function as a passive observer (Lichtman, 2006). In addition, when the researcher took field notes, she maintained a clear boundary between her observations and interpretations (Al Arkoubi, 2008).

4.6.2 Interviews (primary dataset)

Interviews as a qualitative research instrument have become increasingly dominant among scholars over the last decades as they enables researcher to understand the views and perspectives of individuals, which reflect their lived experiences (Kvale, 2006). For this study, interviews were the main data collecting tool and aimed to collect in-depth reflections regarding the experiences of women who work in higher education institutes in Saudi Arabia. A semi-structured interview with open-ended questions was developed in order to give the interviewee a chance to drive the conversation.

The methodology employed in this study involved two distinct types of interviews. The first type comprised informal and unstructured interviews, which were conducted with the aim of establishing rapport with the participants. These interviews were not recorded and did not form part of the data corpus for the study. The second type of interview, which constituted the primary data source for the analysis, was conducted in a formal and semi-structured manner.

Firstly, during the training session, informal conversational interviews were conducted with some of the attendees, separately and confidentially, both before and after the programme. These discussions were spontaneous and were intended to build a rapport with the participants and to get an overview of why they attended the course. Informal interviews usually tend to be unstructured and unplanned, thus recording or taking notes is not an option without written consent (Johnson and Christensen, 2008). Moreover, informal interviews during or near an event (in my case, the informal interviews took place during the leadership programme) to build rapport with potential participants (Denzin and Lincoln, 2012). As the interviews were informal, the attendees were more likely to explain why they attended the leadership programme. This is in contrast to formal interviews, which aim for results that concern interpreting the facts (Denzin and Lincoln, 2012).

Since my study concerns uncovering the in-depth experience of the participants, informal interviews were used to build a relationship between the researcher and the participants. Thus, these interviews were only used as a milestone for the formal interview, and more importantly, no data were collected.

The second form of interview was formal, semi-structured interviews, which lasted 60–90 minutes each. The research methodology consists of two stages, the first of which had been completed by January 2017. Semi-structured interviews with 30 participants (following attendance of the leadership development programme), were carried out during the first stage. The data collected in this stage proved valuable in providing contextual knowledge regarding female Saudi academics' self-perception of their experiences, as well as their readiness for holding highly visible leadership roles. The interview format had three foci based on Avolio's golden triangle of leader developmental readiness: 'the leader, context, and those being impacted by the leader's leadership' (2016, p. 7). However, I approached these three elements through the self-view of each of the interviewees. I interpreted this multifaceted identity-based view of leader developmental readiness in the context of Saudi Arabia, generating different insights in the interview format. In addition, being a female Saudi academic myself help building a trust with the participants to share their experiences.

A second stage of data collection was implemented one year later, and the same participants were tracked. This decision was made since the status of women in the country, particularly in higher education, had undergone significant changes. As a result, the researcher conducted a follow-up interview to determine if there were any changes in the participants' self-perception towards leadership. Fifteen participants were interviewed in the second stage, ten of them in person and five online, bringing the total number of interviews conducted to 45.

As (Schmuck, 2006) states that simply conducting interviews can miss, or fail to acknowledge some behaviours that could be detected or revealed through observation. Therefore, observing the interview setting could enable the interviewee

to participate more actively, through for example capturing participants' emotional cues. This helps the researcher and the participants to facilitate the 'meaning-making' process of extracting knowledge from the interview (Klenke, 2008, p.121). The interviewees' responses were carefully thought out in terms of both their content and delivery. Paying close attention to the way they expressed themselves might reveal their genuine emotions. And therefore the researcher took notes during and after the interview process noting any observations.

For example (for more details refer to 6.1.4), when the researcher interviewed Rahaf, the only Black participant, she seemed frustrated and a sense of disappointment were detected, this was appeared as she tightened her lips, and a sigh sound reflected her frustration combined with a tense posture, as she described the way her secretary treated her despite her position. She stated that "my secretary never seemed to accept anything from me. She explicitly refused to do some of the work that I assigned to her. At first it was very difficult for me". On the other hand, continuing the conversation a positive feeling were sensed, Rahaf smiled in a way that suggested success, as she continues to mention that "I've developed a personal relationship with her, and then she became much better".

This might suggest that she is a resilient and able to learn from difficult situations. She has already processed her disappointment and moved on to thinking about what she has learned from this experience. Paying attention to interview responses were helpful in identify underlying emotions and attitudes. And such context helped inform the interpretive analysis and the ability to understand the interview transcripts, adding a complementary value of the interview process (Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2013).

In addition, this process helps to understand the contradictions in the narratives, as evidence suggests that contradictions in narratives stem from self-identity conflicts that deal with multiple realities that seem to be real from the interviewee's perspective (Richard, 2016). Therefore, the researcher observed the participants

closely during the interviews in order to make sense of conflicting narratives. Notes made during the interviews shed light on a new element that had not been previously proposed in the study framework: the effect of ethnic categorisation on shaping the experiences of Saudi women.

Both the interviews and field notes were valuable in providing contextual knowledge regarding the women's readiness for holding high-profile leadership roles.

4.7 Pilot Study

A pilot study is a preliminary investigation that supports research in its early stages. While conducting a pilot study, a researcher hopes to detect any areas of the research process that require development (Morrison et al., 2016). This allows the researcher to examine and adjust the study design, process, conceptual framework and analysis techniques to make sure they are all feasible for the final research (Yin, 2011). A pilot study may also improve the researcher's understanding of the object under study, meaning they can better tailor the research methods for its investigation (Maxwell, 2005).

Chiefly, a pilot study allows the study tool to be tested, in hopes of verifying its validity, by presenting it to a small sample that resembles the actual study sample (Creswell, 2013b; Yin, 2011). Factors that may require adjustments include the wording of the interview guide, the interview setting, its timing and the clarity of the questions asked, to ensure the researcher is getting the greatest return from the interview time (Creswell, 2013b).

In the current study, three female Saudi academics, two in a senior position and the other expecting to be promoted, participated in a pilot study to evaluate the interview guide. As a result of the pilot study, the researcher was able to make necessary amendments. Firstly, the interviews provided an opportunity for the researcher to confirm the questions were appropriately worded in Arabic and that the intended meaning was clear.

Secondly, the participants provided feedback on the questions' sensitivity to the context being studied, and three questions were altered as a result. For example, one of the participants suggested removing the questions around social class, ethnic background and social connections (*wasta*) as she thought they held the potential to make participants feel uncomfortable. Meanwhile, another participant indicated that the discussion around social class, ethnicity and favouritism was important and relevant, suggesting that it could not be overlooked without compromising the validity of the study. Based on the mixed feedback, the researcher decided to include these topics in the study despite the potential sensitivity, but elected not to explicitly address these topics unless the participants brought them up first. If they did, the researcher would then take steps to minimise the potential harm or discomfort to the participant while addressing the relevant issues. With the same aim, the researcher decided to mention at the beginning of the interview that the confidentiality and privacy of participants were protected and that pseudonyms would be used when reporting the findings.

Thirdly, in the pilot interviews, the researcher evaluates the interview's timing and practiced managing its flow. It seemed common when exploring the participants' experiences for the interview to veer off-topic. The pilot study allowed the researcher to anticipate this and develop strategies to redirect and refocus the conversation. In addition, the pilot study allowed the researcher to practice how they would react if an interviewee asked a surprising question, or asked about their opinion or experience, which was helpful later on in interviews.

The final points to note are that the pilot interviews generated an unexpectedly significant amount of data, which led to the conclusion that fewer participants (30) than first planned (50) would provide sufficient data for an informative analysis. The other key outcomes were changes to three questions, the order of the questions and the wording of the interview guide to make all of them clearer.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Qualitative research involves human participants. It is essential to be certain that the researcher acknowledges every step of the research process to ensure the protection of the participants from any harm that they might face when participating in the research. This section will provide an overview of the ethical considerations that have guided this research, including confidentiality, data collection, informed consent and ethical approval. According to (Klenke, 2008), ethical considerations in qualitative studies must be rigorously evaluated from beginning to end, which is important for this research since the participants will be revealing private information to the researcher during the interviews.

4.8.1 Ethical Approval

The researcher obtained ethical approval from Birkbeck, University of London to conduct this study. This ensures that the researcher will follow the ethical doctrines for conducting a qualitative study, such as protection against any harm to participants by reviewing the informed consent, anonymity, and data collection processes throughout the research. The researcher also needed external ethical approval as the data collection took place in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, ethical approval was obtained from the university where the data collection took place to approach and interview the participants who work there. Additionally, confidentiality and protection against harm were ensured.

4.8.2 Confidentiality

Data confidentiality is one of the main ethical considerations when conducting research and can have legal ramifications. (King and Horrocks, 2010) state that participants have the right to assume that the information they provide will be protected, will not be made public, and will not contribute to any other research unless agreed upon prior to commencement.

Additionally, due to the nature of interviews in qualitative studies, the anonymity of the participants must be preserved. (King and Horrocks, 2010) also argue that keeping data confidential does not necessarily ensure anonymity. This is due to the fact that there is always the potential for research participants to be accidentally identified. If the sample size is small or the sample characteristics are unique, it may still be possible to identify an individual from the data even after identifying information like names and addresses have been deleted. Therefore, in order to safeguard identities, each participant was approached independently and privately to inform them about my study, since they could easily identify each other if they were approached as a group. I also assigned changed each participant's name, position and institution to prevent them from being easily recognised.

In practice, after the second set of interviews, it was clear that some of the participants had already achieved leadership positions (there were only six female leaders in educational institutions in Saudi Arabia at the time of data collection, and some of them participated in this study). Those who were promoted as leaders were hesitant to participate in a third round of interviews as they might risk being identified (at that time, some female activists in the country were being jailed, which might have affected their willingness to participate further). Therefore, the researcher cancelled the third set of interviews to protect the participants from any reprisals.

4.8.3 Information Sheet and Informed Consent

Due to the qualitative approach used in this study, the researcher carefully designed the information sheet, which informed participants about the purpose of the study and the implications that needed to be addressed prior to the interviews. As per the observations during the leadership development course, the researcher ensured that the process of obtaining retrospective consent is transparent, respectful, and clearly documented. The participants were fully informed about the study and that they have the option to withdraw their data at any time.

The information sheet contained a brief description of the study, as well as how the data will be handled and analysed, confidentiality issues, and ensuring the participants' right to withdraw at any time (Ciesielska et al., 2017). The information sheet also assured the participants of their anonymity and stated that no harm will befall them as a result of taking part. According to (Connor et al., 2018), empowering participants prior to and during interviews would enrich the results since they will feel that they can express themselves freely. They also stressed that participants should not simply be treated as data sources. Therefore, the researcher emphasised that the participants could review their answers and analyses after each interview set and reiterated that they were not obliged to participate and that they could withdraw at any time.

4.8.4 Emotional Protection

The importance of safeguarding participants against any potential harm was highlighted previously. However, qualitative interviews will mean interactions between the interviewer and interviewee. Additionally, as my research touches upon an emotional field that is caused by the underestimation of efforts that some women might feel, I explained to my participants that they should feel able to terminate the interview should they experience distress. Moreover, I also observed my own emotions during the interviews and was ready to terminate to protect the participant should it be necessary. (Prior, 2015) argues that emotional reactions are a valuable source of qualitative data as they add credibility to the story of the interviewee. He also emphasised that the interviewer should behave constructively and objectively when talking with interviewees about sensitive issues. I therefore tried to treat emotional reactions as valuable data while ensuring that no distress was caused.

4.8.5 Data Collection and Storage

One of the main ethical principles when conducting research is to ensure that data and personal information does not lead to the participants being directly or indirectly identified. Therefore, after obtaining consent from the participants to record their

interviews I encrypted the recordings on a separate hard drive to limit accessibility. I also assigned pseudonyms for each data collecting sheet for those who rejected to be recorded. In qualitative research, direct quotations are often used, and researchers need to be extremely cautious when handling this type of information to avoid confidentiality breaches (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). Therefore, I ensured that no identifying information was included whenever a quotation is mentioned.

4.9 Data Analysis Methods

4.9.1 Interview transcription:

“Transcription is a powerful act of representation. This representation can affect how data are conceptualized” (Oliver et al., 2005). Among qualitative researchers, transcription is not simply a process of converting audiotaped recordings and observation field notes into a tidy, written text (Gibbs, 2018) but also aims to capture interviewees’ sociocultural constructions of meanings, supporting the researcher’s ability to interpret the data (Nascimento and Steinbruch, 2019). According to (Oliver et al., 2005), this involves a process of deciding how to transcribe interviews in order to fully understand the participants’ stories and the researcher’s role, as well as achieve the aim of the research.

In this study, although interviews were conducted in Arabic (the participants’ main language), some interviewees answered questions in a mix of English and Arabic at times. The researcher speaks both and so they could transcribe all interviews, which enabled them to become fully immersed in the data, understand the participants (Seidman, 2019) and start compiling initial thoughts for the data analysis (Gibbs, 2018). This approach, albeit time-consuming for the researcher, was also beneficial due to the delicate nature of the study, given that it protected the interviewees’ anonymity and confidentiality, and it enabled the researcher to ensure the accuracy of the transcription.

Following the guidance of (Gibbs, 2018), the researcher determined the extent of transcription to conduct according to the purpose of the research. The researcher decided to transcribe all the verbal texts in Arabic (ensuring participants' diverse accents/dialects could later be understood) and included vivid non-verbal information, such as facial expressions, informal question asked and body language, without making assumptions about what was significant. The researcher started transcribing interview data as soon after an interview as possible, incorporating color-coded information from their notes on the non-verbal communication. At the time, they recorded any early interpretations or themes that had emerged. This process was aimed at assisting the researcher to analyse interview data later on and capturing the nuance of participants' views. The transcripts were shared with and verified by the research participants, none of whom indicated that they wished to add or amend any of the content, as stated later in study validity (see section 4.10.1).

Having produced a huge amount of transcribed text, the researcher then decided to translate quotations that were relevant to illustrate themes in the findings. Furthermore, key findings and quotes for the thesis were translated from Arabic to English by the researcher, who is proficient in both languages and also familiar with the culture and context under study. To verify the accuracy of the translated texts, a Saudi faculty member who is fluent in Arabic and English, has a contextual understanding of the phenomenon under study, and was informed of the aims and objectives of your research validated the translations of three anonymized transcripts.

4.9.2 Narrative analysis

Narrative analysis using a combination of categorical content and holistic content analysis was employed during this study (Lieblich et al., 1998). The former, highlights the main themes from participant narratives, while the latter analyses the overall story. The focus of this narrative analysis was to understand how the identities of female Saudi leaders are shaped and reshaped through narrative in light of the new reforms in the country (see section .

First, analysing the participants' accounts revealed several factors that shaped their readiness to become leaders. Some of the key themes identified from the data's categorical content analysis included self-readiness, HE organisational readiness and sociocultural context readiness. This analysis is reflected in Chapter six of my finding below.

Second, Female academics often develop many potential leadership identities concurrently as they position themselves differently in their narratives. Holistic narrative content analysis of the narratives from the first and second round of interviews revealed five key narratives. Firstly, steady storyline '**I am not a leader narrative**' and '**I am a leader: capable and motivated**' narrative. Secondly, progress narrative holistic plotline of '**Ambivalent leader identity to I am a leader Narrative**', and '**Being a leader was not a choice of mine, now it is**' narrative. Thirdly, the regressive storyline, '**The why-not narrative to it is only a show**'. This analysis is reflected in Chapter seven of my findings below.

Contradicting the researcher's previous argument, the participants' stories revealed how subtle, institutionalised gender practices stemming from the sociocultural context shaped leadership identity construction. Some participants have substituted their gender identity in favour of academic identity, and only reveal their leader identity when an appropriate social identity is constructed.

4.9.3 Categorical Content Analysis:

Data analysis focuses on identifying themes or patterns that emerge from the data and help make sense of them (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Creswell, 2014a). In this study, the first stage of data analysis involved intensive reading of the interview transcripts line by line in order to identify any patterns (open coding) among the participants' answers. This was useful to generate some initial themes, which were developed further as the data analysis process continued (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). The focus of the thematic analysis was on fully understanding the lived experiences of

the participants and the hidden meanings behind their words, as well as how each participant interpreted each question.

4.9.3.1 Coding process

The researcher started coding inductively by noting down some initial themes after reading through the transcripts several times to be familiar with the data. Then, they transferred the transcripts to NVivo and began to identify patterns and relationships among the data. The researcher based the overall coding scheme on the leadership developmental readiness framework and identity theory, which were the foundations for the interview guide, having emerged both from the my overall interest and been refined via the initial observations and pilot interviews as central to my study.

Initially, open coding was adopted to extract and segment the observable themes that emerged from the interview transcripts. An iterative approach of moving between data, theory and findings (Locke et al., 2022) as used to undertake the data analysis as well as the theory formulation and application processes.

The researcher read and re-read the identified codes and referring back to the transcripts to expand the validity and reliability of the data (see section 4.10 for details). While doing so, they aimed to uncover any similarities and differences between the themes, while staying open to opposing opinions that appeared in the transcripts. Furthermore, the researcher remained open to adjusting emergent coding categories based on interpretation, knowledge of the literature and respondent interpretations. The researcher moved from concrete data to a conceptual understanding by iteratively moving between coded data and theory (Gioia et al., 2013). The following outlines the analytical steps undertaken in more detail.

Name	Files	References	Created on	Created...	Modified on	Modified by	Color
<input type="radio"/> am no looking for manage...	1	1	18 Jan 2019 at 15:00	T	18 Jan 2019 at 15:00	T	
<input type="radio"/> came back and am no loo...	1	1	18 Jan 2019 at 14:59	T	18 Jan 2019 at 14:59	T	
<input type="radio"/> context specific	5	10	21 Sep 2017 at 18:51	T	16 Nov 2017 at 18:02	T	
<input type="radio"/> culture	6	6	21 Sep 2017 at 19:25	T	17 Nov 2017 at 14:30	T	
<input type="radio"/> do others see you as a lea...	17	20	21 Sep 2017 at 18:57	T	17 Nov 2017 at 17:08	T	
<input type="radio"/> FAMILY	10	12	29 Sep 2017 at 18:...	T	17 Nov 2017 at 16:15	T	
<input type="radio"/> Parental influence	5	6	25 Oct 2017 at 21:53	T	16 Nov 2017 at 15:56	T	
<input type="radio"/> WORK	2	2	29 Sep 2017 at 18:...	T	7 Nov 2017 at 19:51	T	
<input type="radio"/> Dual level leadership	15	20	21 Sep 2017 at 19:27	T	17 Nov 2017 at 16:15	T	
<input type="radio"/> +ve experience+why	4	4	24 Oct 2017 at 19:10	T	8 Nov 2017 at 20:21	T	
<input type="radio"/> does'nt exist	4	4	27 Oct 2017 at 20:06	T	16 Nov 2017 at 17:48	T	
<input type="radio"/> Double work	2	2	26 Oct 2017 at 19:16	T	14 Nov 2017 at 20:...	T	
<input type="radio"/> lack of trust	1	1	11 Oct 2017 at 14:46	T	7 Nov 2017 at 19:51	T	
<input type="radio"/> miss communication	2	2	11 Oct 2017 at 14:39	T	7 Nov 2017 at 19:51	T	
<input type="radio"/> Visibility	7	8	10 Oct 2017 at 18:39	T	15 Nov 2017 at 15:52	T	
<input type="radio"/> we operate differently	1	1	26 Oct 2017 at 02:...	T	7 Nov 2017 at 19:51	T	
<input type="radio"/> Employee Benefits	12	12	29 Sep 2017 at 18:...	T	17 Nov 2017 at 16:15	T	
<input type="radio"/> Family influence	5	7	21 Sep 2017 at 19:23	T	16 Nov 2017 at 17:46	T	
<input type="radio"/> FREE NODES	0	0	27 Sep 2017 at 13:50	T	16 Nov 2017 at 14:18	T	
<input type="radio"/> Administrative Hierarchy	5	5	28 Sep 2017 at 13:...	T	7 Nov 2017 at 19:51	T	
<input type="radio"/> Fear the unknown, othe...	0	0	30 Oct 2017 at 21:03	T	30 Oct 2017 at 21:03	T	
<input type="radio"/> MEDICAL SCHOOL	4	4	27 Sep 2017 at 13:50	T	17 Nov 2017 at 14:24	T	
<input type="radio"/> Policy makers decision	1	1	8 Nov 2017 at 20:11	T	8 Nov 2017 at 20:11	T	
<input type="radio"/> Refused to be identifi...	1	1	8 Nov 2017 at 20:00	T	8 Nov 2017 at 20:01	T	
<input type="radio"/> shocked by reality	1	1	28 Sep 2017 at 13:...	T	7 Nov 2017 at 19:51	T	
<input type="radio"/> unforeseen leadership s...	1	1	30 Oct 2017 at 20:...	T	7 Nov 2017 at 19:51	T	
<input type="radio"/> الاستهتار الوظيفي لبعض الآ...	1	1	14 Nov 2017 at 14:54	T	14 Nov 2017 at 14:55	T	
<input type="radio"/> الوصاية المجتمعية	1	2	16 Nov 2017 at 14:17	T	16 Nov 2017 at 14:25	T	
<input type="radio"/> How far would you to achi...	9	9	9 Oct 2017 at 20:18	T	17 Nov 2017 at 15:14	T	
<input type="radio"/> Identity conflict	1	1	30 Oct 2017 at 20:...	T	7 Nov 2017 at 19:51	T	
<input type="radio"/> Identity transition	5	6	27 Sep 2017 at 16:20	T	15 Nov 2017 at 14:28	T	
<input type="radio"/> leader identity	3	10	21 Sep 2017 at 18:41	T	7 Nov 2017 at 19:51	T	
<input type="radio"/> Leader's leader	4	4	24 Oct 2017 at 19:35	T	15 Nov 2017 at 17:18	T	
<input type="radio"/> Leadership Definition	23	67	21 Sep 2017 at 15:13	T	17 Nov 2017 at 16:07	T	
<input type="radio"/> Leadership role	16	20	10 Oct 2017 at 15:45	T	17 Nov 2017 at 13:21	T	
<input type="radio"/> Leadership style	2	2	11 Oct 2017 at 14:13	T	7 Nov 2017 at 19:51	T	
<input type="radio"/> Mentor	9	9	26 Oct 2017 at 02:31	T	17 Nov 2017 at 15:14	T	
<input type="radio"/> not aleader narrative	1	1	18 Jan 2019 at 15:04	T	18 Jan 2019 at 15:04	T	
<input type="radio"/> orgnization	8	11	21 Sep 2017 at 19:09	T	17 Nov 2017 at 14:41	T	
<input type="radio"/> POWER	1	1	15 Nov 2017 at 14:33	T	15 Nov 2017 at 14:33	T	
<input type="radio"/> Religion	21	23	21 Sep 2017 at 19:25	T	17 Nov 2017 at 16:15	T	
<input type="radio"/> selection process	18	21	21 Sep 2017 at 19:11	T	17 Nov 2017 at 16:15	T	
<input type="radio"/> Self branding	1	1	17 Nov 2017 at 14:55	T	17 Nov 2017 at 14:57	T	
<input type="radio"/> Self identity	3	5	3 Jun 2017 at 19:23	T	15 Nov 2017 at 14:29	T	
<input type="radio"/> Capabilities	22	69	10 May 2017 at 15:52	T	17 Nov 2017 at 16:15	T	
<input type="radio"/> Goal Orientation	23	42	3 Jun 2017 at 19:21	T	17 Nov 2017 at 16:00	T	
<input type="radio"/> Identity, Why	11	12	3 Jun 2017 at 19:19	T	16 Nov 2017 at 14:11	T	
<input type="radio"/> Leadership efficacy,co...	12	19	30 Oct 2017 at 20:...	T	17 Nov 2017 at 16:15	T	
<input type="radio"/> Self-Awareness	16	29	3 Jun 2017 at 20:02	T	17 Nov 2017 at 16:15	T	
<input type="radio"/> Self-Motivation to deve...	15	28	3 Jun 2017 at 19:20	T	17 Nov 2017 at 13:56	T	
<input type="radio"/> Self-Regualtion	3	3	3 Jun 2017 at 20:02	T	7 Nov 2017 at 19:51	T	
<input type="radio"/> Training	20	40	9 Oct 2017 at 20:25	T	17 Nov 2017 at 17:30	T	
<input type="radio"/> Who you are	21	21	10 Oct 2017 at 15:42	T	17 Nov 2017 at 15:59	T	

Figure 11: Excerpts of Nvivo initial coding.

A plethora of codes were generated as the data collection proceeded. There were changes in the scope of the research, and the assumptions held at the beginning of the study were revised. This reshaped the researcher's outlook and also added a new angle to the investigation.

Therefore, the researcher decided to following Braun and Clarke's (2006) widely used guide for reflexive thematic analysis in categorical analysis, the following six steps were followed as described in Figure 12. The first step was data familiarisation, which involved reading through the transcripts several times. Having personally conducted the interviews was very beneficial while reading through the transcripts.

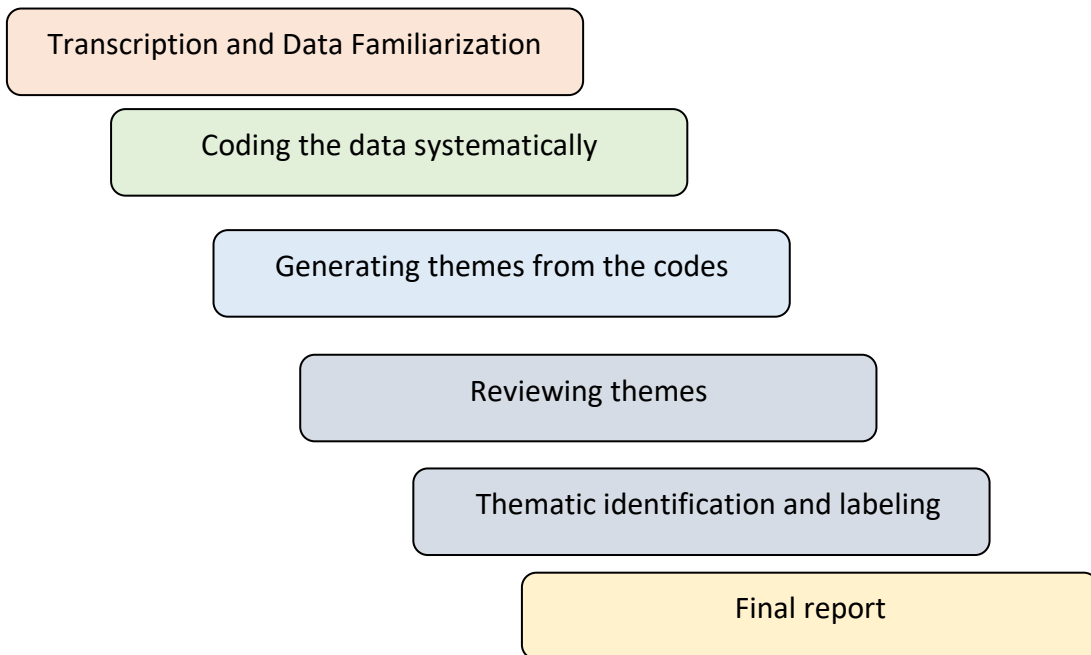


Figure 12: Steps of categorical analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

At this stage, notes were taken regarding patterns and interesting ideas and phrases (refer to Figure 13). The interview transcripts were then transferred into Nvivo for digital handling. Although there are some issues with the compatibility of the software with the Arabic language, it proved a useful tool to help manage the large amount of data generated from the interviews, and the researcher opted to use NVivo as an initial guide for organising the coding process.

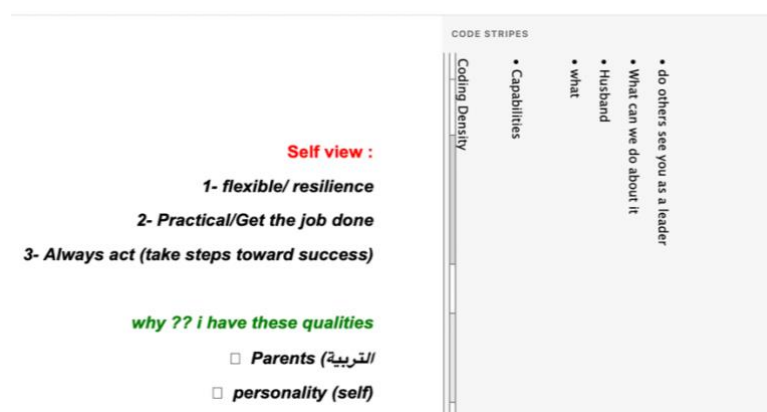


Figure 13: Patterns and some initial thoughts in Nvivo in one of the participants transcripts.

After carefully comparing the accuracy of the transcripts to the audio recordings, the transcripts were scanned for initial ideas and for the researcher to be more familiar with the data (refer to Figure 14). It is noteworthy to mention that initial coding was done in Arabic then later translated into English to stay as close as possible to the participant's voice. The study identified the most significant codes, as demonstrated by the following example regarding *Religion*.

The participants had diverse religious beliefs. Although according to their experiences, the vast majority of respondents believed that religion does not prevent women from pursuing leadership roles. Yet, the inherent holiness of discussing religion has posed an unexpected issue for many people, who thought they must approach this subject with extreme caution. The researcher sensed this controversy during the interviews and it became more clear with reading transcripts. Re-reading the data several time with this in mind. The researcher ought this disagreement to the religious backgrounds of the interviewees, which the researcher later labelled as conservative, semi-conservative (stable), and liberal religious views (for more details refer to section 6.1.5)

The text in Arabic (interview transcripts)	The translated text into English
لمى : لا هو المجتمع العائق.. مو الدين العائق..	Lama: "religion was never a barrier: society is"
سهى: "التشريعات الدينية يعني، مافي شي يمنع بالضبط انه المرأة تكون قائدة مستحيل أنا ما سمعت شي، لأ ما سمعت، قرأت كثير في الشريعة، قرأت كثير، قرأت عن حقوق المرأة، وقرأت عن حقوق الرجل، ما قريب ولا حاجة انه يمنع المرأة من الاختلاط او انها تكون قائدة إلا في الإمامة يعني في الصلاة، بس هو دا اللي أنا اعرفه، انه المراه لا تؤم الرجال في الصلاة، لكن غير كده أنا ما سمعت شي تاني. ولا قرأت يعني"	Suha: "I don't think that religion is preventing women from being leaders; it is impossible. I have been reading a lot of books about Islam from many scholars. There isn't one single book that mentioned that women should not be mixing with men or that they shouldn't take leadership roles except during prayer.
اية: صراحة، ما أبغى أفتي، بس في حديث سمعته يقول إنه لا يفلح قوم ولوا امرهم امرأة أو شيء زي كذا. هذه وجهة نظر الشريعة، وما أقدر أتدخل فيها كثير في الحقيقة. أنا أشوف إنها مو كل شيء، يعني في الوزارات والمناصب الحكومية ماله داعي، أشوف إنه ما تناسب المرأة لأنها طبيعتها مختلفة، بس كعضو في مجلس الشورى، أشوف إنه ليش لا؟ بالعكس، هنا يفهمونا أكثر، المرأة تفهم المرأة أكثر،	Aya: "To be honest, I do not want to declare a fatwa about it and I cannot enter into it much, [but] there is this hadith I heard about that says a woman cannot lead Muslims or something similar. This is from the point of view of Sharia, and I cannot interfere with it much from reality. I mean, from what we see, I feel it is not everything. I mean, why, in things like the ministry and so, I feel, no, given the nature of women, it is not appropriate for a women to be a minister, but as a member of the Shura Council, I feel why not? On the contrary, they understand us more. Women

وتقدر توصل مطالبنا أكثر كعضو في مجلس الشورى، بس ما شفت منهم أي فائدة لحد الآن	<i>understand women more. They can communicate our demands more as members of the Shura Council, although up to now I have not seen any benefit from them.</i>
--	--

Figure 14: Data familiarisation.

The second step was the initial coding of the data. After completing an analysis of the complete dataset and identifying intriguing data items, such as religion as described above, the process of constructing initial codes started in Nvivo using three participants' Arabic transcripts initially to make sense of the data and the developed themes. The scripts were read thoroughly, and the data were coded in English. The researcher was vigilant for recurring themes in the transcripts. In constructing themes pertaining to Saudi female readiness for leadership, the researcher referred to notions gathered from the literature and was open to any novel themes that were established.

To provide an illustration, the subtheme 'Negative experience: Dual-level leadership' was formed by recognising words and phrases that seemed to serve as the foundation for a recurring trend (theme) in the data. Among those were 'always subordinate to a male leader', 'men cannot accept a female leader', 'lack of trust of the selection process', 'exclusion', 'double the effort' and 'vagueness', which were aggregated into the theme of organisational context readiness for female leadership in the organisational context (see Figure 15).

Women's leadership and the organisation (Organisational context readiness)		
Cede	Initial Coding (What are the factors that shaped this experience)	Data excerpts
Negative Experience Dual-level leadership	Women are always is a subordinate to a male leader	Shahad: "Here the exception is that a woman is appointed to a leadership position, and if you notice the woman is always a subordinate to a male leader , rarely, you find a man working as a subordinate to a women leader, But in general at the university, the Dean is a man and his deputy is a women, I mean, it's basically that he leads us [women], and we don't lead them. The frustrating thing is that the head of the department is a man and he leads both female and male departments. While in the female department they call her a supervisor , and she only handles managerial stuff. So when I had offered the supervisor of the department. I refused, later I had a position that supervise students, both genders and then that was a little satisfaction to me."

	Men cannot accept a woman leader.	Nawal H: 'I have not been a leader to male subordinates, but recently, I met one of my friends who had been appointed to a leadership position. The men she is leading cannot accept that they will take orders from a woman. They are in a constant state of rage when they talk to her or even see her, and she is suffering because of this. She is wondering why they treat her like this, although she treats them similar to any leader she trained under them.'
	Lack of trust (selection process) Exclusion	Mona: 'I have noticed that if you are not known for the male department, your chances of getting a position is limited. Sometimes, there would be people who are more suited or more experienced. Yet, they don't know about them and they lose their chances to be appointed. For example, when we are having a departmental meeting, the HoD (men's department) never listens to what we have to say, even if he does not have the logistics of the decision he is making. His word is the final decision. He has authority above all of us.'
	Double efforts	Noor: 'When facing any problem, the first move is to go to the department's coordinator (a job in the women's department). She has no authority; she only communicates with the HoD or the Dean about the problem I have. The final decision is only in the hands of men (HoD or the Dean), and there is no direct communication between the faculty member and the decision maker. Imagine how much time this cycle takes for a single issue to be resolved.'
	Vagueness	Amal: 'There is vagueness in dealing with the male department, even though we have an electronic system. Yet, you must keep calling them to check on their account if you have any job you want done. This makes it frustrating sometimes when you can't reach the HoD by phone or by email. Although I am very conservative, I wish sometimes that we are not segregated (lord, forgive me), that I can go to the HoD's office and sort things out myself. I bet it would be a much easier process then.'

Figure 15: initial coding of the data.

During phase two of coding, the researcher produced as many codes as possible, which were incorporated into the themes already formed (see Figure 16, Figure 17).

طبيب: هل سبق لك تلك منصب قيادي قبل كده؟ رئيسة لجنة؟ رئيسة قسم؟ أي مثلا بزم، يعني أي منصب **Informal** شئ يعني سواء يعني تصنيه حتى لو

شوفي، إزا ممكن حد يعني نقول كذا، إزا من أيام المدرسة، أفكر اني أنا مثلا كنت دائما، فإفكر لما كانو يقولوا راندة الفصل؟ وللا اللي وقت اللي تسكت البذات ومش عارف ايش، **العريفية**، العريفية بالزبط، فمثلا كنت هذي يعني تعتبر قائدة في الفصل، يعني انتي العريفية يعني انتي اللي ماسكه زمام الأمور على قولهم، أه، مثلا كنا على مستوى لجنة الإذاعة في المدرسة، كنت مثلا أنا دائما رئيسة اللجنة، أنا اللي أقدم البرنامج **Presenter** أرتب وأخطط وأسوي وطبعاً يعني أنا الـ دائما

III، بعد كده لا جو الجامعة تغير على تماماً؛ لأنه الأنشطة في الجامعة غير في المدرسة، الأنشطة في الجامعة إزا؟ يعني قولي في المدرسة أحياناً كان كانوا الأليات بشرفوا من الكويسة وكذا ويتوفاها، ما المنصب، ما **Selectivity** تسمي له مزه زي...؟ في الجامعة لا هي أنشطة، إزا ما انتي انطرحتي وأيرزتي في أنشطة الجامعة ما كنت فاهمة لها **Interest** نفسك ما هاد، ما كنت يمكن مزبوط، وركزت في دراستي، قلت خلاص أنا في الدراسة، خلاص والدراسة تعرفي احنا كليه عليه طول النهار انتي يعني كنا في مكة من تلمية إلى أربعة أنا شغالة كل يوم، يعني أنا بكالوريوس من جامعة أم القرى، فمن 8:00 إلى 4:00 فيها وما **Interest** شغالة كل يوم، فما في مكان للأنشطة أصلاً، وما كنت إهتمت صراحة، فعلى مستوى الجامعة مرة كنت بعدة عن اللجان

طبعاً بتدينا الماستر برضو حياة تانية، و برضو انتي مشغولة في بحثك وبتديك، فلأنا على مستوى وأنا طالبية على مستوى الدراسات كلها ما مسكت يعني لجنة ولا شئ، يمكن بالممكن أحياناً يعني حتى لو كان أحد يعرض حاجة كده وفيها خيار، أهد نوعاً ما عشان ما أبغهاها تاتر على مستوى الدراسة، يعني أنا كنت حاجة الدراسة هو دا حين الهدف، ما قدرت اني مثلا يمكن في ذلك الوقت أجمع عاينهم، **طبيب** معمل **focus** بين أهداف، كان الدراسة هدف، قلت لا خليني

طبيب ايش مفيومك للقيادة؟

شوفي أنا القيادة، في رأيي إنه انتي مو كمنصب، يعني شُهبة؛ إنه انتي تديري يتم على **professional** أعضاء بحثك لإنجاز عمل بطريقة فائقة، يعني طريقة أكمل وجه في وقت؛ أنا أحب السرعة نوعاً ما، يعني حتى مو أرسل لك

المفروض الأحد، **Ready** أحب أكون **Deadline** لا قبل الـ، **Deadline** وتسلم، أنا أحب من يوم الخميس شغلي جاهز وكامل ومخلص، سلمته أو ما سلمته (أنا) فلما اتشرف للقيادة إنه أنا زي كنا، أدير **Deadline** بين يعني ما استلقي الأمور سواء إن كان لوحدي أو مع نفس ما أدري، هو القيادة مفروض يكون صحيح، لودي، بس أنا عشان أقول لك، سريرة نوعاً ما أحياناً **team** عندها عشان أهد، بس هو طبعاً لا، عشان كذا أخذ دورات **team** اتخبط حكاية الـ **teamwork**، **teamwork** أحاول، مع إنه أحياناً دايماً في العملي تعلم البينات إنه **Teamwork**، بس أنا في حقيقة الوضع عندي مشكلة مع الـ



Figure 16: Initial coding using Nvivo

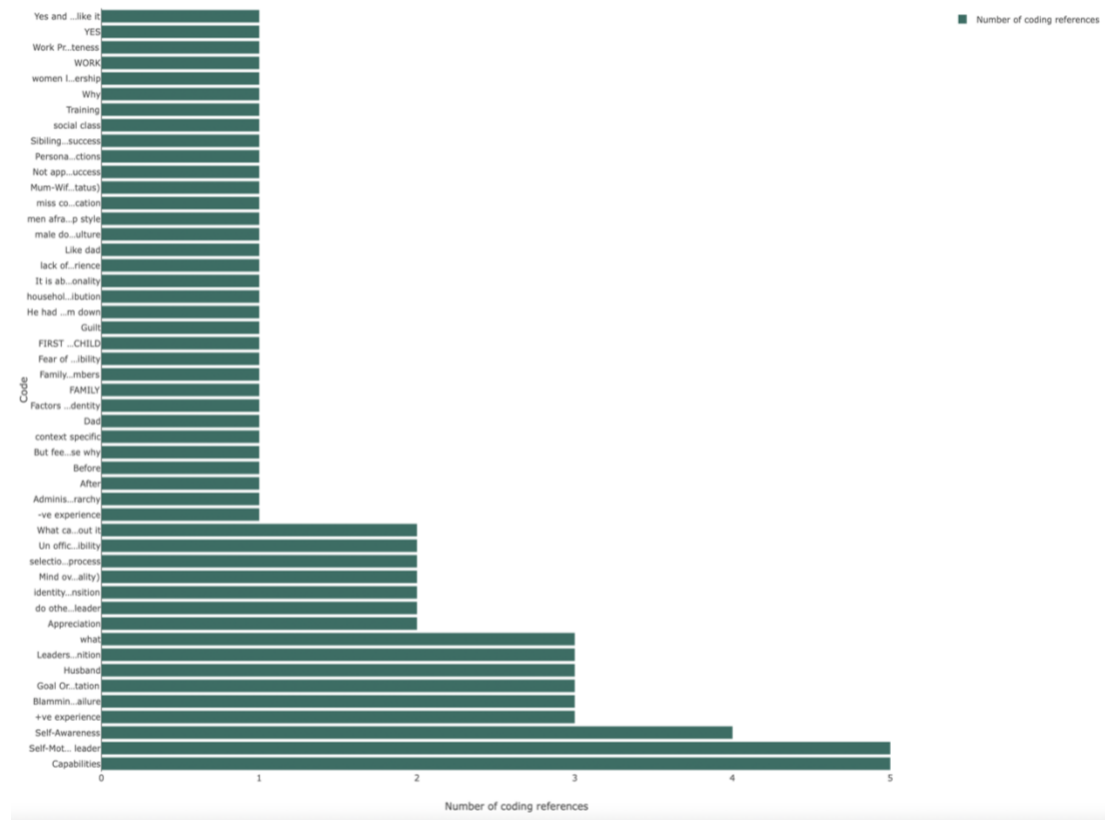


Figure 17: sample of initial coding using Nvivo for one participant.

In the third step, the researcher set out to investigate the connections between the various codes, themes, and thematic levels. Following that, step four involved revisiting the themes and evaluating their consistency and coherency, as well as whether they correctly reflected the encoded data (refer to Figure 18). This step was important to determine whether the themes were a good fit for the data and whether any information was overlooked during the coding. Based on the review, the researcher then went back and made adjustments and additions to the coding work. This iterative approach is key since coding is an active process that evolves over time.

Sample of thematic level	Sample of thematic level	Sample of themes	Sample of codes	Sample of excerpts from the interview transcripts
Leadership self-readiness	Motivation to Lead	Motivated	Visibility	<p>Mona: “ I love to be in a position; it gives you visibility to be seen and heard about. Your network will expand; for example, now, as an assistant professor, people in the decision-making might have never heard of me. Yet, when I become HoD, they will. This will open doors for me to develop further”</p> <p>Shahad: “sometimes you need to be in a position to be heard”</p>
			Spiritual (as in religion modesty is important this participant tried to distance herself from asking for the position, for the sake of it)	<p>Mona “The most important revenue is servng others. Every day will come upon you, you will help someone, so being a leader would definitely raise my morale”</p> <p>Siba “if God is willing, if our Lord is pleased, and I have got any nomination, I do not have any objection to do it. On the contrary, I mean, I told you I do not like to be bossy, but I can see that I can do many good things if I got a position. I can assist others, I can help develop my organization, not because I like positions.”</p>
			The title itself	Mona “I like people to see me as a leader, I think everyone likes to hold a position. I am one of those, I just like being with a leadership position”
			Power	Amal: “ Do you want to be a queen? Of course yes. If someone asked me if I want to be a leader. I would probably be hesitant to take upon more responsibility. But if I had to and my superiors choose me for a position. I would accept and learn how to do it”.
			A born leader	Siba “to be honest, I was offered many positions. Among them HoD and even Vise-Dean, a lot of people I met consider me a natural leader”
			Enforcing change	Shahad: “The leadership position is not required for its own sake, I have always prevented to take on a leadership role and I refused many offers, until I have known that I can make the change”.
		Hesitant postponing	Balance	Mona: “I have little kids in primary school, I think leadership now would take a lot of time and effort that I think my kids need it more. I think I am postponing thinking about it until at least they can handle my long hours away”

				Suha "I love my job, yet, at this moment, my family is more important"
			Dinosaurs	Siba "senior member of staff: or as we call them; dinosaurs. They are more experienced, for sure. Yet, their way of thinking and their attitude toward positions is a very, very big obstacle for us. Firstly, they resist change. They have mindset of that positions are rights. If they held a position for quit sometime, this means they deal with it as their right or private property and this of course is wrong. This attitude becomes like a generational war, causing resentment and jealousy for us. Not yet, you are young, you are new, you do not have experience. This forms an intergenerational conflict. And it is very hard in HE as they were also our teachers"
			Dual-level leadership	Lama "having all the power in the male-department is really frustrating, although I describe myself as a conservative woman. Yet, I prefer having the opportunity to drop by the HoD rather than waiting for him to pick up the phone" Suha : "a ship can only have one captain, if it has more than one, it going to sink. The role of the women's department supervisor is very not clear. I don't say that she does not have any authority, yet, the final decision has to be from the HoD which is the male-section. That is dualism which leads to longer duration of the decision" Siba : "As a health colleges, the Conflict is a clear. Why is it that we are affiliated academically to the dean, who is the male department, and administratively to the Vice Dean, female section, so we have two bosses. The problem comes clear with the issues that overlaps, such as things that either none of the academic side nor the administrative part or the ones that have both. In addition, the female department does not have their own budget, accordingly, matters such as; maintenance, bidding and procurement takes very long time. Not only that, because men are not allowed in the female buildings, the university tries to provide a team of female (electricians, maintenance and construction) for day to day and small problems, yet, if they needed a more experienced or more heavy work men can come in the night and I think it's such a painful bureaucracy."
			Having bigger goals	Saja "I think that I have a leader trait, yet, for now, I prefer to put this goal on hold, and focus on my promotions. Cause I think that having a position especially if you do not have the authority. Would be more headache and time-consuming than rewarding"
		Refusing leadership	Organisation	Suha : " I do not have a tendency to hold a position in our department specifically . In my opinion, leadership is not about a position. I can be a leader in life, in my family,, , I mean, everywhere you can be ,, people work together, coexist with each other, in everyday communication, there has to be a leader. And I remember when I was a student at the university, involuntarily, I find myself that I am leading my classmates "
			Parenting	Shahad : "Two months after I returned from maternity leave, he was offered a position related to my specialization, so I refused at that time because I was breastfeeding, so I would go to the university for my lectures and return in order to be with my son. As well as before the birth of my son, I had another leadership offer but I turned it down."
			Family	Amani

Figure 18: sample of generating themes from codes.

Step five then involved defining and naming themes clearly (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Four emergent themes were developed from the data analysis of the 30 interviews. To confirm the robustness of the data analysis process and ensure the resultant codes were supported by relevant text, after completing the coding processes, they were repeated twice manually, once with a peer colleague from the pilot study. Nvivo was useful to graphically represent the connections within the text from the interviews, but manually re-reading and re-coding the interview transcripts lent even further support to the study's emergent themes.

The final step of the process was writing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The next chapters provide an in-depth examination of each theme identified, and the methods are discussed further in terms of how they linked the theoretical framework with the information contributed by participants in response to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

4.9.4 Holistic Analysis

In the second stage, narrative analysis was used to understand the meaning that participants derive from their experiences, as (Somekh and Lewin, 2011) describe it:

The purpose of narrative analysis is to reveal the ways individuals make sense of their lived experience and how its telling enables them to interpret the social world and their agency within it. More often the focus is not on revealing the "truth" of the stories. The approach to analysis is determined by the research questions, the researcher's epistemological position and his/her experience in connection with the research topic(s)'.

The narrative approach pays particular attention to time, as its focus is on the individual and how changing events and relations affect their experience of the world (Clandinin and Connelly, 2002; Riessman, 2008)

Unlike other textual analyses, which take short pieces of text in isolation, holistic analysis considers a text in the context of the larger narrative and thereby captures its meaning more accurately. While in narrower approaches the categories used to analyse a text are limited to those that can be employed on a few sentences, the holistic approach includes those that require an understanding of the themes

pervading the entirety of the narrative, and that lose their meaning when detached from it (Lieblich et al., 1998). (Josselson, 2011) describes the narrative approach as unique because “it endeavours to explore the whole account rather than fragmenting it into discursive units or thematic categories. It is not the parts that are significant in human life, but how the parts are integrated to create a whole—which is meaning” (p. 226).

(Elliott, 2005) describes two perspectives that holistic narrative analysis uses. Literary approaches classify the narrative according to its (literary) genre as an “epic, comedy, or tragedy” (p.46), which helps define its meaning through a prototypical structure. Such approaches acknowledge how the cultural environment equips people with narrative forms to help make sense of their experiences (McAdams, 2006). The alternative approach to holistic analysis is more concerned with the development of the storyline, and how this fluctuates or stabilises as the story unfolds. It is this later approach that describes my study, in particular through utilizing the phase 2 follow-up interviews of my data collection.

The second stage of the present study adopted a holistic perspective to analyse how Saudi women leaders’ identities have evolved over time. The focus on temporality enriches the analysis as both the content (as outlined above) and the development of the narratives are considered. The approach thus becomes more encompassing, allowing changes in the narrative paths of the women’s identities to be detected more precisely and understood with greater clarity (Lieblich et al., 1998).

During this stage the researcher acquainted herself with the data, and by listening to the interviews repeatedly, ascertained the overall theme and form. The principal goal was to characterise the form accurately and track the development of the women leaders’ identities. While narrative analysis is multi-dimensional, the holistic approach to it emphasises the overarching coherence across the dimensions. The identities of the subjects are illuminated not only through the texts’ contents, but also through the formal structure that holds them within the whole (Lieblich, 1998; Beal, 2013).

During the readings of the transcripts the plots were extracted and any temporal changes to them noted. Ultimately, the narratives' paths were assigned to one of three categories describing their progression – progressive, regressive, or stable – respectively indicating steady, declining, and constant development of the stories (Lieblich, 1998, p. 89). During this process it is important to attribute due significance to events that shape the narrative's development and closure (Polkinghorne, 1995). Plotlines are useful devices in this context, as the visual representation clarifies the chronological and thematic links among the events interviewees consider important (Beal, 2013).

With intensive reading of the transcripts, overarching themes composed out of the participants' own interpretations of their experiences took shape. The cycle of reading and re-reading, in the light of emergent themes Josselson (2011) describes as a hermeneutic cycle – each time the researcher's interpretation develops and new connections are revealed. After immersion in the data, the procedure adopted adhered to Beal's (2013) recommendations. Events associated with a change in the leader's identity were manually highlighted on a straight line denoting the chronology. Underneath the line, data elements relating to the marked identity changes, and any connections to the narratives, were recorded. These life-course schematics were initially drawn for four participants. One of the goals here was to form a consistent pattern from the text that made sense chronologically (Riessman, 2008). By placing these significant leadership-related descriptions of events on a concise visual model connections between events are made more apparent.

Text sections describing events or periods the author considered significant were noted together with their connection to identity and leadership. Descriptions of experiences and inter-relations to other actors were given particular attention. These passages were then categorised into five leader narrative groups: 1) *I am not a leader*; 2) *motivated, yet sceptical*; 3) *why-not? [be a leader]*; 4) *I am a capable and motivated leader*; and 5) *being a leader is not a choice of mine*. Once these narrative groups were established, the passages were re-read, focusing on inter-relationships and searching

for shifts in the voice or location/perspective of the subject that described different experiences of the particular leadership group. As this process unfolded the interconnections between the five categories emerged, and what began as quite well-separated groups revealed underlying relations that showed them to be more enmeshed in relation to the stable, progressive, regressive narrative arches. The holistic perspective is particularly sensitive to the underlying connectedness of different human experiences, as it focuses on the relational aspects of passages within the complete narrative, which guards against treating the categories as mutually exclusive or artificially distinct.

During reading, several aspects of the interviewees thoughts and emotions were carefully noted as part of this holistic narratives (Perrier et al., 2014; Smith & Sparkes, 2008). The idioms and phrases they employed (for example; “a turning point” or “I struck a brick block”); any reference and portrayal to particular stages or emotional periods of their lives (for example; “this made me believe that there is hope at the end of the tunnel”); statements that expressed decisions or reidentification (for example; “I may have had doubts previously, but now I am having second thoughts”, “a ship can only have one captain”); and changes to the tone/mood of the narrative (for example; “I never thought that one day someone would come and tell me that I am or was their role model”). These holistic, temporally informed, narratives for the findings in chapter 7.

In addition, engagement with Aya as part of the narrative progression, have impacted her views regarding leadership. She stated in her narrative that :” **I was surprised after our first meeting when I went back home and checked the hadith and discovered that although it was an authentic hadith, many people neglect the context of it**”. This indicates the fruitful of using holistic techniques in detecting how participants reflexivity affected the progress of their narrative.

4.10 Quality Checks: Validity, Reliability, Reflexivity

Positivists often criticize qualitative research, claiming it is flawed because it cannot address their own conceptions of validity and reliability (Shenton, 2004). As a result, (Silverman, 2015) suggests that methods for increasing the rigor of qualitative research should be employed. This section discusses quality checks techniques employed in this research to ensure rigour.

4.10.1 Validity

Rather than assuring that study results accurately reflect reality, validity in qualitative research focuses on detecting potential threats, addressing them, and correcting them wherever feasible. To guarantee that the results reported can be trusted, the qualitative researcher must identify and overcome possible validity issues (Gibbs, 2018). The following are potential challenges to the study's validity, as well as efforts made to ensure trustworthiness of the findings .

Firstly, respondents validation or member checking were conducted with research participants in order to ensure that the finding conform accurately to the experiences of the participants, especially that some of the participants didn't consent for the interview to be recorded (Silverman, 2015). Each participant was presented with the transcript of the first-round interview prior to the second round of the interviews. The participants were given the opportunity to change any of the material presented and to add whatever they believed it might be valid. However, none of them expressed a willingness to add anything.

Secondly, prolonged engagement; which can be described as being familiar long enough with the culture of the organization in which the participant is situated (Silverman, 2017; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In this regard, the researcher identity as a female Saudi academic was a critical factor in gaining credibility and legitimacy with the research participants. Additionally, the researcher has established rapport with the participant being from the same culture and speaking the same language. On the

organization culture level, the researcher was familiar with the culture having worked in the same university.

However, (Silverman, 2017; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) argues that the research findings are at risk of being compromised by the researcher prolonged immersion in the study setting. The researcher, being a female Saudi academic, was very thoughtful about complications regarding confirmation bias being too immersed in the culture, as mentioned by (Kvale, 2006), who stressed the significance of overlooking 'manipulative potentials'. One key concern while conducting this study was the strict observance of Saudi culture with regard to my religious and political views. I was asked for my opinion at different interview settings when mentioning multiple Islamic views regarding women as leaders. One participant specifically mentioned a saying of the Prophet Muhammad and said that I should look it up first (the saying indicates that Muslims should not be led by women). I was extremely reluctant to express my own opinion because this was confidential information with political repercussions.

Thirdly, expert panel and peer debriefing (King and Horrocks, 2010; Shenton, 2004), which entails defending analytical choices against a constructively critical and qualified researchers in the field. The present study was accepted by three conferences (The 10th Developing Leadership Capacity Conference (2018) and The British Academy of Management (2017 and 2019)) and presented in two. In addition, multiple engagement through seminars and PhD conferences were conducted. Suggestions and questions raised during these sessions have broaden the researcher perspective and improved the research quality.

4.10.2 Reliability

There are several techniques to ensure that your analysis is as consistent and reliable as possible (Gibbs, 2018).

Firstly, the researcher used transcription checking to establish the consistency of the data (Gibbs, 2018). The researcher transcribed and translated the data which allowed

emersion with the data and ensuing those different dialects in the participants' narrative were accurately translated and interpreted.

Secondly, the researcher has employed code cross-checking through Collaboration on analysis means you can check the work of one researcher against another and thus minimize researcher bias and get a measure of the reliability of coding. A co-worker who works at the same university in which the data has been collected was presented with third of the interviews for analysis and discussion. As she is an Arabic speaker, it was easy for her to make sense of the data. The clarity of the coding process and understanding and the researchers' ability to code the content consistently were evaluated (Gibbs, 2018). This process was important, and the discussion were valuable in enhancing the coding strategy.

4.11 Reflexivity and Positionality

Qualitative researchers may be impacted by their research, particularly when studying identity in social circumstances. Burke (1991) claims that studying identity is challenging and emotional since it includes exploring very personal and possibly sensitive areas of an individual's life. In societal circumstances when people are disadvantaged or oppressed, this is particularly true.

In addition, qualitative research is engaging and emotional, forcing the researcher to interact with their own feelings and experiences, according to Holliday (2007). When studying identity, the researcher may have biases or assumptions about the people or subject. Thus, the researcher must approach the study with sensitivity and self-awareness and take measures to protect their emotional and psychological wellbeing.

'Reflexivity is the self's way of taking account of both internal self-standards and external self-relevant feedback from one's current role performance to influence that role performance in ways that make the new self-relevant feedback consistent with the internal self-standards' (Riley and Burke, 1995); the striving for consistency between one's self-in identity theory. Therefore, any research project must include a

reflexivity exercise must be included as this will enable researchers to rationalise the interplays between how the research process affects them and how they affect the research process accordingly (Holliday, 2007). This will be thoroughly discussed in the following sections on research positionality and reflexivity.

4.11.1 Reflexivity: Personal Disclosure

As a Saudi woman who lectures at an educational institute and is interested in the field of female leadership, the researcher tried to minimise any personal feelings towards this research by following an objective process in order to reduce the risk of any biases that might emerge as a result of her background.

Conducting this research was an iterative process, which she realised while studying female leadership development in the Saudi higher educational context for this study. The research started with presupposition that self-identity is more important to develop as a leader than being part of the group. However, the data proved otherwise. The researcher came to realise that upon communication with the participants and upon any attempt to ask a question regarding their own motivations, every time this attempt was a failure if it did not somehow include another individual in the conversation, such as a father, mother, husband, government official or even a leader. In addition, recent changes and studies have proven that a change in the new generation's perception is promising (Yamani, 2000).

Similarly to Shamim (cited in (Holliday, 2007)), the role of 'friend of a friend' was more meaningful to the people in my research setting. In fact, one participant inquired as to whether additional participants were required and suggested that she invite her friends who attended the course with her to join in my study. Additionally, since the study participants were academics, several of them had prior experience performing doctorate research, accordingly, they were aware of the process and positively supportive.

While conducting fieldwork, the flow of the interview protocol was altered to suit the participants' individual experiences. Being involved in the process of gathering the data and preliminary analysis, the researcher encountered many paradoxes, which affected the way they engaged with the study. Some participants' interviews contained many contradictory narratives which had to be carefully addressed. As (England, 1994) argued, 'the openness and culturally constructed nature of the social world, peppered with contradictions and complexities, needs to be embraced, not dismissed' and that 'it ignites the need for a broader, less rigid conception of the "appropriate" method that allows the researcher the flexibility to be more open to the challenges of fieldwork' (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1988; Opie, 1992, cited in (England, 1994) 243).

The researcher was eager to understand the main elements that were unique or most apparent in each participants' experience, as most of the participants highlighted how they felt either being part of a group or outsiders in their own department. Many noted that the head of their department, especially their tribal affiliation, might be an influence on their pursuit of a leadership role. This is particularly important as departments are gender segregated.

Due to the sensitive nature of some of the participants, the interviews occasionally felt like counselling sessions. The researcher became overwhelmed during the initial analysis. As an insider with numerous open wounds, she had witnessed and experienced all these gender stereotypes and discriminations rooted in the culture.

In the second round of interviews, I also appreciated both the potentiality and vulnerability of the people in response to the rapid and dramatic social changes that have been implemented throughout Saudi higher education.

I designed this research to be longitudinal. However, although I intended to conduct three rounds of interviews, many factors, such as time, the number of participants and political issues as well as participants safeguarding prevented this.

Correspondingly, having interviewed a wide range of participants of various ages, ethnicities and political backgrounds, this has led me to appreciate the social identity of each participant, whose choices must be respected, even if they were contradictory to the mainstream feminist ideology. These iterative knowledge exchanges between the researcher and the participants go deeper than presenting oneself as open-minded and non-judgemental; there is something deeper at stake which, no matter what you do, it will come to define your interaction. The reflexive examination of this study go beyond one's conduct in a research project and should consider the positionality of the wider research discipline. For example, I did not expect one participant to say that she has no interest in being a leader, particularly as the research was conducted in a setting in which it was expected that everyone attending the leadership development programme was ready to become a leader.

Accordingly, some participants' transcripts had shaped and re-shaped the research design and assumption along with the research process and the theoretical framework adopted at the beginning of the research as part of the researcher reflection.

4.11.2 Researcher positionality

In terms of researcher positionality, it is important to emphasize that the researcher is a Saudi Arabian woman who is currently studying in the United Kingdom but plans to return to Saudi Arabia following this study. This is because the researcher's background and identity may influence their perspectives and experiences and may impact how they approach the research and interpret the data (see Appendix D).

Before commencing the fieldwork, the researcher took an 'insider' position as an academic and speaking the same language (Arabic) as the participants. Being a Muslim as well, exposed the researcher to experience all the political, social, cultural circumstances that the participants face. However, from the first interview conducted, the researcher identity was reshaped. The researcher recognized that, in some ways, she is an 'outsider'. Each participant had unique lived experiences and different variations of what we call 'the norm'. For example, being a Muslim woman, the

researcher's interpretation of Islam and how it has guided her life and experiences is different. Coming from a Hanafi Islamic school, which is very different from Wahhabism, which has a stricter view of Islam. McNess *et al.* (2013, cited in (Milligan, 2016) situate this renewed interest in insider-outsider perspectives with:

'A call for a more complex understanding of the relationship between the researcher and the researched and the ways in which all involved might situate themselves as "insiders" or "outsiders" – or both ... [there is] the need for an updating and re-envisioning of how we conceptualise being an insider or an outsider in the research process.

This should not only include a better understanding of how more traditional boundaries, such as nationality, language, ethnicity, culture, gender and age, interact with each other but also a recognition and understanding of various ontological, epistemological and disciplinary boundaries that might be encountered and how these might impact on the generation of new knowledge'.

It should be mentioned that the researcher constantly assessing integrity, completely aware of her own biases and position within the research. A realization of the driving force behind this study was understood and that the researcher motivation toward the study and the passion to understand the setting as well as the narrative of the participants was evident.

4.12 Summary

Qualitative research methods were used in this study to facilitate an in-depth understanding of each participant's unique lived experience. The study investigates Saudi female academics' leadership developmental readiness from an identity lens, who are often prevented from accessing leadership opportunities (Al-Kayed, 2015). Research into academic leader identity development has predominantly identified how social structures influence and constrain the agency of those involved in academia (McLean et al., 2012). This reflects the sociological underpinnings of much of the research in this area (McKenzie, 2018). This study introduces identity theory on gender in leadership literature focusing on subjective individual experiences and personal meaning-making. This was investigated through 30 semi-structured interviews of female academics in Saudi higher education striving for leadership roles. Changing identity positioning over time was captured in these two rounds of interviews. The methods section set out the precise actions that were undertaken,

coupled with the rationale for their selection when conducting an empirical investigation, including the compilation of a dataset, generating findings and drawing conclusions. In this study, the methodology comprises four main components: data gathering methods, the research design, the participant selection processes, and the data analysis strategy adopted.

Chapter 5 Findings

5.1 Introduction:

This chapter analyses the data collected from narrative interviews with 30 Saudi women academics who aspire to, currently hold, or have held senior leadership positions in Saudi higher education (HE). The data were collected from two sets of semi-structured interviews – thirty face-to-face in the first round and ten face-to-face and five online in the follow up interviews, to share their experiences of what it means to be a senior woman leader in Saudi HE.

This chapter is structured into two sub-chapters, following a combination of categorical and holistic content analysis (Lieblich et al., 1998). A categorical content analysis has produced several themes mentioned or conveyed in the participants' narratives regarding participants readiness to develop as leaders. Consequently, merging this categorical analysis with a holistic analysis technique takes into account the whole experience of redefining the leader identity if it occurs. A change in identity was noted when it was explicitly mentioned by the participant (for examples, see section 4.9.4).

It's vital to note that compared to phase one, phase two data is much more sparse. For example, since around half of the original sample has already completed the second stage of the study. The second stage mostly served as a follow-up interview in which we discussed whether or not participants' perception of leadership had changed since phase one.

This process is described next to further illustrate how the data is organised and help in the reading of this chapter. From there, the study participants are introduced. The data were grouped according to four key themes that emerged from the literature, as supported by the participants' narratives and the research questions (Table 4).

In light of the leader developmental readiness framework (Avolio and Hannah, 2009, 2008; Avolio, 2016; Best, 2010; Graue, 2006; Reichard and Walker, 2016; Shebaya, 2011) and leader identity development literature (Ibarra et al., 2010; Lord and Hall, 2005), a gender lens (Skinner, 2014) is used to assess the interviews' intersectional findings between leadership, identity and Saudi literature.

Table 4: Key themes of categorical content analysis.

Four Key Themes	Sub-themes
Key theme one: Saudi women academics' social construction of leadership	Leadership development (training)
Key theme two: Leadership self-readiness	Motivation to lead Ability to lead
Key theme three: Socio-cultural context readiness: Multiple identities	Race, gender, and social class (socio-culture) Faith and spirituality (religion) Social networks (tribalism) Relationships: Parental influence Balance Mentors/role models Networking Others' perceptions
Key theme four: Organisational readiness: Professional identity	Stereotypes Dual-level leadership Selection process

5.2 Data analysis process:

The analysis process involved two rounds of interviews. The first round was intended to capture the leadership developmental readiness of 30 Saudi women attending a leadership development training programme. Each was asked the same 20 open-ended questions, which were developed based on the leadership developmental readiness literature noted in the first stage of this research (Appendix B). The first phase yielded the questions along the way through an inductive approach, so they were suitable to examine rising potential themes further. The research aim was to ask a wide variety of questions to elicit themes that were both directly connected to the study objectives and resonated with the participants' experiences. Based on the first round of interviews, the researcher decided what topics would form the foundation of the second round of interviews, which were devoted to exploring the subjects'

thoughts on the issues they raised, as well as their perceptions regarding the ongoing social reform in KSA. The second round also better emphasised more prominent themes, which developed into a narrative analysis of each participant's story.

Data analysis, as discussed earlier, is presented in two chapters. The first chapter (chapter 6) is "Categorical Content Analysis" and is divided into four parts. The first part provides a short summary of each informant. These profiles provide the setting for understanding the participants' experiences. The second part underlines the evolving themes from the data. The third section synthesises common narratives about various identities that emerged throughout the interviews (i.e. the narrative analysis). The fourth section discusses the second round of interviews based on select results that confirm that the research participants accurately reflected the lived experiences of Saudi women academics.

The second chapter (chapter 7) is "Narrative Holistic Content Analysis" and discusses the stories of Saudi women of constructing and reconstructing leader identity between the time from phase one and the second interviews. Three narratives were uncovered from analysing the two phases, Steady narrative ("I am not a leader" and "I am a leader capable and motivated narrative"), progressive narrative ("Ambivalent leader identity to I am a leader Narrative", "Being a leader was not a choice of mine, now it is", "I am not a leader narrative to I am a leader narrative"), and cyclical narrative ("why not narrative to it is only a show narrative"). Following the discussion of each narrative a plotline was drawn to demonstrate each Saudi women's account of leader identity construction following new reforms in the country.

The narrative analysis employed in this study uses a combination of categorical and holistic content analysis approaches (Lieblich et al., 1998). The analysis process started by reading, analysing, and re-reading the interviews, which helped understand individual participants' experiences. However, analysing the participants' accounts pointed to several shared factors that shape their leader identity developmental readiness. The categorical content analysis then helped highlight four key themes

from the participant narratives: leadership self-readiness, HE organisational readiness, socio-cultural context readiness and the social construction of leadership. In turn, the holistic content analysis examined the stories as a whole to comprehend what shapes Saudi women leaders' identity. This led to three narrative storylines that uncovered leader identity.

These two analysis steps were essential to the researcher's capturing of the development of leader identity regarding the contextual elements that shape women's leadership experiences, such as barriers, aspiration, and capabilities. Ultimately, this enabled the examination of the data in its entirety. In addition, being an insider researcher added value to the data analysis process, as it allowed the researcher more in-depth insight that empowered the data interpretation. The participants were also cooperative and provided many details that they thought the researcher would understand, leading to enriched narratives.

The narrative plotline was not linear, yet, participants have shown multiple identities which were narrated in regard to their experience before and after reforms in the country regarding women status.

Chapter 6 Categorical Content Analysis

The analysis of the narrative profiles and the collected data revealed several themes. While each participant had her unique story, all their experiences provided many shared themes. These themes were categorised around leader developmental readiness theory. The first is the participants' social construction of leadership, secondly; leadership self-readiness, which involves motivation to lead and ability to lead. Thirdly, is context readiness, and the final key theme is the readiness of the organisation.

6.1 Phase one – first round of interviews (main dataset):

This section discusses categorical content analysis for the first round of interviews which answers the second research question, "What is the role of Saudi women's developmental readiness in their leadership identity construction?". Although the interview questions were structured around leadership developmental readiness theory, some other themes appeared in the participants' narratives, such as; social construction of leadership.

6.1.1 Key theme one: Saudi women academics' social construction of leadership:

This key theme emerged from the first round of interviews with 30 Saudi women academics which answer the first research question, "how do Saudi women academics perceive leadership in Saudi HE?". As leadership is considered a phenomenon that is contextually shaped (Fairhurst and Grant, 2010; Meindl et al., 1985), it was important to begin the interviews by asking the participants what it means to be a leader or about their understanding of the concept of leadership in the academic setting. The informants defined leadership in a variety of ways, depending on their own perceptions of the phenomenon and prior experience with it (Appendix E). Still, most of these were set in the broader concept of social interaction or an influential school of leadership. Many informants also asserted that leadership is more or less about teamwork. Accordingly, this theme on Saudi women academics' perceptions of leadership examines how the social categories of race, gender and social class interact

to affect their experiences. It is linked to Research Question 1 “How do Saudi women academics perceive leadership in Saudi HE?”. The following analysis is divided into three sub-themes (see Table 3) demonstrating how the participants articulated their understanding of what it means to be a woman in a senior leadership position in Saudi HE.

Most of the participants asserted that leadership is not about the position (role) and that a leader can earn a position by working as a team member and earning his/her colleagues’ trust. For instance, Shahad said, “Leadership is a *responsibility*, not about giving orders.” Similarly, Layan said, “I prefer that I be the unknown soldier who supports the team to achieve the task.” Further, in her interview, Heba 2 stated, “In my view, the quality of the work you are doing is more important than only holding a position.” This implies that in Saudi Arabia, women adopt an influential school of leadership, and that the participants’ social constructions and underlying assumptions about leadership are mostly affected by their social identity. These findings confirm that leadership is a phenomenon that is informed by cultural values, rather than the authority inherent to the leadership titles themselves. In fact, most storylines suggested that most participants were reluctant to lead.

Most women in Saudi Arabia lack complete authority when in leadership roles, so adopting this view makes sense. It mostly implies satisfaction regarding achievements, even without authentic out-group appreciation, leading to a position hereafter referred to as that of a *figurehead*, or “a person who is in a high position in a country or an organisation but who has no real power or authority” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2021). As the participant Lamis implied, “There is a lot of leadership capacity in women; they only lack the job title, yet they do the same job as men.” By the same token, the teamwork leadership idea might be justified by the collectivist nature of Saudi culture in which being part of a group and achieving a satisfaction about collective goals could provide them with the satisfaction toward their leadership. Accordingly, the women leaders suggested that leading as part of a team gave them more authority than power itself, although some said that power is

important as well. Being an academic and trying to get things done may further exacerbate this notion of not wanting to occupy a position without power, but rather to collaborate to accomplish an institution's goal.

As academics, the women here attained a certain level of education for which positional power is not important, but what about when it offers no authority? A lack of authority implies having no power over others; as such, it is necessary to develop a certain strategy so subordinates still cooperate and agree to get the job done. It is also noteworthy that some committees and managerial work in departments come with no financial reward, which makes leaders hesitant to accept positions from those departments.

Although the majority of participants regarded leadership as a collaborative endeavour in which the role itself is secondary to cooperation and the work's outcome, exceptions do exist:

Mona for example liked to consider her work a professional speedway. Indeed, she found a problem with working in a team, unlike the rest of the participants. She asserted:

Leadership is about getting things done with a team or without. I know leadership should be with a team, but as I tend to do things in a speedy way – for that reason, I avoid working with a team to get things done as fast as possible, which is totally wrong. Knowing this leads me to try to attend training programmes on this issue. I also encourage teamwork in my students, but it is a problem I have. I admit it.

Mona said leadership is all about teamwork, she believes that her leadership is a work-in-progress. She sees a problem that she needs to solve, which implies responsibility and therefore ownership over her leadership position.

Lama had a completely different view from all other participants: she argued that most literature about leaders has only a one-sided, positive view of them. What about the dark side, she wondered? She said in her interview:

I sometimes wonder if you always must have what it takes to be a leader....[Lama was discussing the Steve Jobs film and how, he lacked ideal morals, had poor manners, and was self-centred]. He eventually utilised the people around him to go to the top. Honestly, if you come back to the people who reached the top ... of course, I don't like it.... If I am a leader, I will not be like this. Well, what I want to say, not all of that is inside the books, right, and sometimes, I mean, I see what he has done is wrong, but in the end, he reached the top and became a better leader. Sometimes the end justifies the means and makes you reach, reach, and reach the top! Exploitative people can be leaders as well because life is not perfect. People have bad and good in them, whether we admit it or not.

Lama also suggested that humans desire power and that leadership is a way to satisfy this desire, asserting that “everyone wants to have power and control”. When asked if she saw herself as a future leader, she stated:

Mm, I might say I do not want it ... but I feel it. I will tell you honestly, I think that power is satisfying. It is human desire. I don't want to say that I love responsibility – I do not. I feel it is a lot of pressure. But I think I would like to be number one, to be the leader. If you offered a leadership position to anyone, he/she would say yes directly, even if he/she convinced him/herself otherwise. Maybe ... not always.

Some other interviewees tended to project their experiences on others to justify unwanted or non-mainstream views (i.e. those not accepted by Saudi culture). Shahad mentioned that she had dealt with some leaders who were “power-hungry, not wanting to delegate tasks to others”. This is consistent with traditional leadership literature – specifically that on social role theory – that perceives women as softer and more cooperative, caring, and sympathetic to others’ well-being. In contrast, men are considered more assertive, ambitious, and direct. These gender-based stereotypes differentiate between gender roles in work and social life, and affect identity and behaviour accordingly (Eagly, 1987). The participants’ narratives confirmed the place of traditional social roles, as they reported multiple qualities typically associated with the feminine leadership style to themselves. Consistent with Taleb (2010) findings, showing that female leaders implement a transformational leadership style, the participants’ narratives further emphasised being a committed role model, possessing a charisma to empower others, and supporting, caring, and collaborating with followers to develop their capacities.

6.1.1.1 Leadership development (training):

In the preceding study design, a question about training was added to examine the effect of training on women’s leadership identities. However, when analysing key theme one and its sub-themes, the participants’ social constructions of the quality of

professional development programmes, especially on leadership preparation, emerged. The respondents appeared to value training programmes as well as informal approaches to knowledge. Still, nearly four out of five participants expressed dissatisfaction with the course materials of the trainings they had attended. For instance, Lama claimed, "Although I liked the trainer, the training programme was a waste of time to me, a bit like old-school information." According to Mona, the leadership training course she had attended lacked communication about what she specifically wanted to benefit from. She claimed that it was all about "time management", and that although she thinks her "strong personality is what might make [her] a leader", she asserted that she was motivated to learn more about "how to overcome [her] fear of taking over a leadership role". She further elaborated that having the ability to lead does not encourage her to handle the role or teach her how to manage the weaknesses of a leader.

Suha also told that learning different leadership strategies might prevent leaders from making mistakes: "But, with strategies, one has to learn them in order to not misrepresent and sabotage the institution in which he works." This view is consistent with (Kattan et al., 2016; Abu Khdaib, 2012) and (Al-Kayed, 2015), which asserted the importance of training to advance women's confidence in claiming leadership. The research participants from (Alghofaily, 2019) similarly indicated that they had poor training that they referred to as "not enough", which might affect their leadership development. Moreover, the participants of this study suggested that they strongly think that insufficient training opportunities show unwillingness from decision makers to consider them for higher roles. Still, Wed and Ruba both had an opportunity to attend many leadership development programmes which they considered more valuable. Wed said, "I found leadership programmes which are mainly concerned with women leaders to be useful, and they helped me a lot when in [a leadership] position."

Some of the participants were more focused on the benefits of training programmes, as opposed to their disadvantages or lesser qualities. Some participants raised an important point on the networking skills that these kinds of professional programmes

can offer. Sara asserted, “I have attended many workshops around the subject which were informative. The experiences that we shared and the techniques in conflict situations helped enlighten me on building a good network from the leaders that you meet.” Other informants asserted that women-only programmes were important, as they provided them a sense of solidarity, support, and affiliation. As Suha said, “I felt that we are all in this together, and sharing information is very useful.”

In general, the participants’ self-assessment of leadership training programmes varied greatly. These findings indicate that the training programmes that they attended did not equip them with the necessary knowledge and abilities for leadership. The interviews revealed that the content was not adequate for their present needs either. However, the programmes did offer an atmosphere in which they could see leadership as a life opportunity, develop time management skills, network with other female leaders, and learn from their experiences, as seen in Figure 19.

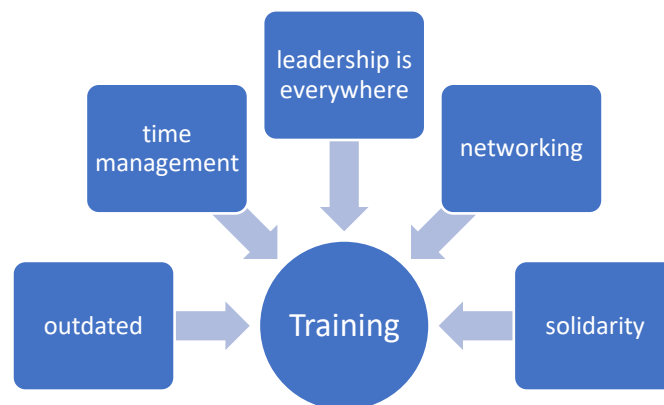


Figure 19: Participants’ perceptions of leadership training programmes

It is important to note that the participants negative reflection on the programme quality was the motivation for the researcher to change the study design, as mentioned in the methodology chapter. Participating in the leadership development programmes was only a determination of the readiness Saudi women informants might have to develop their leader identities.

Furthermore, according to (Alghofaily, 2019) findings, participants' lack of training chances negatively affected their readiness to assume leadership roles. This is not the case in this study. The quality of the training programme and participants' leader identity are unaffected by one another.

Although women-only leadership training was seen by the participants as an opportunity to facilitate networking and a sense of belonging, it somehow hindered their opportunity to advance. Thus, all decision-making opportunities are handed to men. Yet, many of the participants stated that they prefer not to interact with men due to social restrictions or sanctions. A few other women's narratives closely resonate with the above-described experience.

6.1.2 Key theme two: Leadership self-readiness:

The data analysis revealed that leadership self-readiness was a significant characteristic of Saudi women academics. Given that the women interviewed were academics who had participated in a leadership development programme at a higher education institution, this suggests that some level of readiness for leadership development already exists.

The leadership self-readiness theme features three sub-themes based on leadership developmental readiness theory (as introduced in section 2.4), (Avolio, 2016). The results reported in this section are based on the same sub-themes: motivation to lead and ability to lead.

6.1.2.1 Motivation to lead: Is leadership a part of me?

The majority of the participants showed high levels of motivation to lead. They also provided different explanations as to what motivates them. Results showed that motivation to lead arose as a theme in almost all participants' narratives (Appendix F). Nonetheless, conversations generated three distinct narratives: informants who were

motivated to lead, those who were less motivated and those who refused to be leaders (Gazzaz, 2017; Alghofaily, 2019).

For some participants, motivation came as a result of someone else's affirmation of them as prospective leaders. For example, in Mona and Suha's case, teachers acknowledged them as leaders from an early age, and trusted them with small leadership tasks. This provided them self-identification as leaders early on in life. In the same manner, Haya was motivated by senior leaders, while parents had a key role in motivating Layla, Shahad and Tala's leadership.

Participants identified sub-themes on what inspires them to lead, including visibility, spirituality, power, being a natural leader, and enforcing change.

Visibility as a subtheme came up to support participants motivation to lead, yet, this motivation appears to be influenced by the fact that it was a way of communicating their opinions in an administration where male and female administrations collide. As Shahad stated: "sometimes you need to be in a position to be heard". Mona explained this idea further, she argued that being in a leadership position will help her in expanding her network and will make her visible to decision makers:

I love to be in a position; it gives you visibility to be seen and heard about. Your network will expand; for example, now, as an assistant professor, people in the decision-making might have never heard of me. Yet, when I become HoD, they will. This will open doors for me to develop further

Lama addressed that power might override responsibility and that she is not motivated to lead unless she is appointed by her superiors, for example, said:

Do you want to be a queen? Of course, yes. Suppose if someone asked me if I want to be a leader. I would probably be hesitant to take up more responsibility. But if I had to and my superiors chose me for a position, I would accept it and learn how to do it.

Other participants distance themselves from claiming their position as a leader, although they were motivated to lead, as Siba, for example stated that:

If I have got any nomination to hold a position, I will not object. On the contrary, I mean, I told you I do not like to be bossy, but I can see that I can do many good things if I got a position. I can assist others, I can help develop my organization, not because I like positions."

The participants found that dual leadership seemed to be affecting their motivation negatively. They often referred to it as a cause for confusion, conflict, and unnecessary wasting of time. As Suha argues:

“a ship can only have one captain, if it has more than one, it going to sink. The role of the women’s department supervisor is very not clear. I don’t say that she does not have any authority, yet, the final decision has to be from the HoD which is the male-section. That is dualism which leads to longer duration of the decision”

6.1.2.2 Ability to lead:

In analysing the narratives in this study, the participants asserted their own qualities and leadership capabilities. They even mentioned certain qualities that make them capable leaders: for example, a strong personality, assertiveness, fairness, precision, charisma, resilience, sympathy, hard-working and ambition (Appendix F). A quote from Layla illustrated additional qualities: “I think what makes me stand out as a leader is that I try my best to be fair in assigning the tasks, and in the time allocated to it, as well as the rewards.”

Some participants also mentioned having signs and abilities of leadership from a young age (e.g. agency). Mona explained that she considered herself a leader from early childhood, though this ambition gradually faded when she reached university due to the number of activities she participated in and her wanting to focus on her studies: “Since I was little, I have always been a leader. For example, I was on the school’s broadcast committee, always selected by my teachers to be chairperson of a committee, arranging, planning, and presenting.” This could illustrate the role of validation from others in the process of leader identity formation from a young age, as illustrated before in the previous section (6.1.2.1).

Many participants, when asked if they see themselves as leaders, asserted that they do not like to be in a leadership position itself but rather help others – even those that mentioned a strong ability to lead. Interestingly, the participants were hesitant to claim their leader identity; they tried to distance themselves, indicating that leadership positions should be granted by others, not are not a claiming process. As

outlined in the literature, to emerge as a leader, claiming and granting must occur (DeRue and Ashford, 2010). For example, claiming of a role, granting oneself the ability to claim it, to be seen as one.

However, from the narratives, some women state that modesty is one of the main things that should be respected, so it might affect the claiming process. Sara illustrated this point vividly:

The leaders who I worked with had a vision for me. I did not think about it at that time and did not aspire to it at all. I mean, I was not thinking in the first place of being in [such] a position, but when they told me, I knew, I mean, people felt that I am a leader by nature. Everyone saw this ambition in me, a high ambition, but not high because of the fact that I wanted to hold a position. No, I wanted to achieve goals that serve the organisation, serve the community, and serve the student.

Although the women asserted their own leadership capabilities and expressed awareness of their qualities, some participants were very proud to narrate their achievements or claim their prior positions. For example, Siba said, “People I work with always call me charismatic. I am strict, yet democratic. I have never upset anyone.” Haya commented:

One of the people I worked with when I worked as vice HoD told me that I have the ability to contain others, and resilience. I feel my calmness is a necessary characteristic in a leader, [and] although I am full of passion, I do not sympathise with the university regulations and decisions.

Ruba also said, “The most important thing I hear from others about me is that I am a hard worker.” Lastly, Tala raised the importance of following specified training in matters relating to leadership skills: “I feel I am interested in a course in delegation, what you delegate, when to do it and to whom. I want to know how to do it right.”

Surprisingly, previous literature has excluded Saudi women’s ability to lead as a challenge to their leadership (Alghofaily, 2019). Instead, certain studies have shown that Saudi women leaders are capable of leading despite institutional and cultural obstacles (Abu Khdaib, 2012; Almengash, 2009; Alsaigh, 2007; Almengash et al., 2007), and that doubting women’s ability to lead might relate entirely to traditional stereotypical views (Ghamdi, 2016). In contrast, (Hodges, 2017) reported that Saudi women have a poor view of themselves in regard to their capacity to lead, and choose

a simpler role over power. However, the current study illustrates a different view that the participants aligned with in reporting their strong leadership abilities (Ghamdi, 2016; Alghofaily, 2019; Abu Khdair, 2012; Almengash, 2009; Alsaigh, 2007; Almengash et al., 2007). As opposed to (Hodges, 2017), they were very keen to lead and believe in their abilities. Viewing these findings from a social identity lens highlights that although women have strong beliefs in their abilities as leaders, their social identity is more salient, in which mostly the claiming and granting of their identity as leaders comes from their out-group. Validation from others was also a key theme that other literature has overlooked.

6.1.3 Key theme three: Socio-cultural context readiness: Multiple identities:

A socio-cultural context appeared in all participants' narratives, indicating that it is a very important theme that had a great effect on the women's leadership self-views. The purpose of this section is thus to identify sub-themes for further exploration into the participants' social constructions of their faith, ethnicity (tribalism), gender and social class in shaping their experiences as leaders. Saudi women's multiple identities:

As stated earlier in this research, identity is a sum of several factors influenced by both individual and collective selves. Saudi women are often away from the public scene for long periods of time, and frequently face imposed disadvantages and discriminations, leading to invisibility. This research thus shines a light on the notion that being a woman might be challenging, since the distinctions between women based on ethnic origin and culture, among other factors, might otherwise be neglected given their role in Saudi society. Saudi culture, as previously discussed, in reconciling the paradoxes of religion and tradition, has created an unsettling self-image. Its identity changes, in accordance with adaptation to the global cultural scene, has consequences on various aspects of Saudi women's social identities. This study explores the respondents' perceptions of their ethnicity, gender, and religion, as well as how these factors intersect to shape Saudi women's perceptions and influence their senior leadership experiences.

6.1.4 Ethnicity:

Although the majority of the participants were discrete and chose not to give their names or countries of origin, Rahaf, expressed her ethnic origins outright. The intersectionality of race and gender seemed to affect Rahaf's experience greatly, 'the only reward I want when I am a leader.' This indicates the strength of her pride in her non-Saudi national identity.

However, her narrative analysis reflects having to work harder to be more visible, and so her skills and personality increased her chances of reaching senior leadership. Rahaf stated that:

Although I am recently employed, I tried to get to know the environment and prove myself. I do postgraduate and training courses in human development in different centres and institutions inside and outside. I think my reputation is good at the university.

Rahaf's story is an example of a positive social construction of the meanings she ascribed to what it means to be a Black Saudi woman leader. She further stated, "My concept of leadership is to make my voice heard; my self-satisfaction is the only reward I want when I am a leader." Even so, it is noteworthy that Rahaf refused to be recorded for both her interviews, even when ensured that anonymity was key and that the recording was strictly confidential.

She also indicated that she finds that her family name negatively affects her pursuit towards a leadership position. For instance, she discussed a situation in which her secretary refused to acknowledge her authority as leader, and was not comfortable working with her:

My secretary never seemed to accept anything from me. She explicitly refused to do some of the work that I assigned to her. At first it was very difficult for me. I tried to say something to her, and I've developed a personal relationship with her, and then she became much better.

The respondents in this study used several strategies to identify their ethnicity. Still, their gender identity was more salient, as they, as women, had experienced prejudice regardless of their ethnic background. Almost all participants, like Rahaf, agreed that their family name affected their pursuit toward leadership. Women's invisibility to

decision makers might be considered an important element in this regard, making family names more vivid rather than ethnicity.

Tribal identity was also salient in many of the participants' narratives and seemed to affect how they view themselves as leaders. Organisational structure and practice seemed to be rooted in deep loyalty to the tribe. Rahaf mentioned, "One of the most important problems we have is tribalism, and it persists in the community. An aspiring person can break through, but these attitudes do affect us for sure." Tara similarly addressed the issue of the leader selection process based on social categorisation. She stated that among universities from different regions, it is highly likely that the leader is from the same families or tribes that exist in the area:

In our society here, yes, your tribal identity means everything. For example, when it's a city or a region where your tribe resides, the chances of you being a leader or holding a higher position will be guaranteed if you are from the same tribe. For me being out of my tribal region, I wouldn't know anyone. Of course it's impossible.

Aya, a tribal woman, had a different experience at her university:

Generally speaking, being from the same region, city or tribe undeniably gives you a preference to be appointed in a leadership position. Yet, from my experience at our university, which is mostly tribal, the master who was appointed is young [in his thirties] and not a tribal person, nor is he from the city. Yet, everyone loves and respects him.

It is important to note that the university master is appointed from the King directly, which might explain this point.

Saja was sensitive to this topic as well. She explicitly stated that she feels that due to political tension with the ruling family early in Saudi unification, individuals from her tribe are excluded from powerful positions in the country. She also addressed that her tribe members, when holding a leadership position, prefer to have a team from the same tribe:

In our society, of course, have you ever heard of a politician or minister that is from [her tribe's name]? I identify myself as having a very strong tribal identity, but I try not to let it control or interfere with my work, unlike others who might have everyone in their team have the same tribe name.

Ruba had a different experience. She addressed that discriminatory acts based on ethnicity did not affect her experience as a leader, though they did affect her identity and sense of self as a child born to an immigrant mother:

When I was a child, it affected me. I was classified under a specific category. You're Egyptian, Saudi, Indian. Now, as a leader, I did not feel it. It's probably unconsciously present in the minds of the people that I'm interacting with, but they don't express it.

These gendered practices, which become important when selecting women for leadership roles, might be due to the invisibility of women to decision makers. Accordingly, family name might be more relevant than ethnicity.

Yet, Wed sees a bright future. She claimed that these gendered practices are fading out, and that people are becoming more aware of the social change happening:

The popular belief in our community is that if you are in any way close to the person who made the decision, that's the thing which raised your chances of holding any position. However, today we see appointments at different levels of the state, so I do not think that the main influence is favouritism.

However, Shahad mentioned a valid point in that family name and origin are important factors in government selections on the national level, due to a recently implemented quota: "We all agree that nationally, your family name and your region make a big difference. I think it is a matter of the quota that must be reached."

6.1.5 Religion: a debated barrier

Although social relationships perpetuated in tribalism shaped many of the participants' narratives, especially in their promotion to leadership positions, the most apparent social identity was religion.

Religion emerged as a profound sub-theme in all 30 interviews. All participants agreed that religion was not a factor regarding the attainment of their leadership positions, but many institutionalised religious thoughts and ideas have a deep influence on women leaders. The main code that came up in the Saudi academics' stories was *Ikhtilat* [the concept *Ikhtilat* is the opposite of gender segregation; it is the mixing of men and women], as academia is segregated based on religious beliefs. Previous

literature has discussed the role of segregation in minimising women’s visibility (e.g. Abalkhail, 2017; Hodges, 2017). Yet, this present research offers a deeper analysis of how conservative religious thoughts affect women seeking leadership positions.

The participants’ views on religion differed. The majority agreed that religion in nature is never a hindrance for women to achieve leadership aspirations, according to their experience. For Lama, “religion was never a barrier: society is”. In addition, the inherent sacredness of discussing religion has created an unusual problem for many participants, of being very careful about how they touch upon this topic. However, views on the extent to which these ideas vary depended on the informants’ religious backgrounds, which the researcher introduces as conservative, semi-conservative (stable) and liberal. The participants might interpret religion as either an outside influence (law, politics) or an inside predictor (beliefs, family, and culture). Liberal views were assigned to participants who discussed religion apart from its political implementation, or when they rejected strict religious views and believed that societal traditions have labelled some practices as religious to apply it freely and ensure its acceptance. Meanwhile, those with conservative views adopted the strict values of applying religion in social and political spheres, and hesitated to discuss new reforms if they have no clear religious guidance. The stable view was added as a neutral view between the two aforementioned classifications.

6.1.5.1 Liberal views:

Participants with liberal views asserted that misinterpretation of Islamic teachings was mainly a result of societal norms and traditions. Suha stated:

I don't think that religion is preventing women from being leaders; it is impossible. I have been reading a lot of books about Islam from many scholars. There isn't one single book that mentioned that women should not be mixing with men or that they shouldn't take leadership roles except during prayer. A woman can't lead the prayer; other than that, religion is not a barrier for men and women to work together.

Siba, who came from an immigrant background, stated:

I think as long as the woman is being consistent with her performance, respectful, professional and has the right charisma, there is nothing wrong with her working in any institution. There isn't any evidence

that women shouldn't be working. In fact, during the Prophet Mohammed's time, many Hadith were narrated by Aisha, his wife, and he used to encourage people to ask her about Islamic matters. Men and women were equal, and they did not say that you cannot trust a woman, saying they have half a brain and half a religion as some scholars now claim.

The views of Saja, a self-described tribal woman, added another angle to the matter. She explained that women might be deliberately hindered when they are motivated to be in a top leadership position; women leaders might even be silenced or ignored after gaining a position of power:

*Depending on the position you hold, for example, if you take up a position in education and try to make updates to certain things that are not as conservative as they are now, they will say that you tend towards liberalism and secularism. You are going to be in an impossible place to satisfy all parties, and if you assume a position, you must be under certain leaders, which sometimes leaves you in an embarrassing position of having the title but none of the associated duties. For example, if you are in a position in the Shura Council, **your opinion will not be heard as you wish**. That's why I always think that it is necessary to advance from different positions of leadership, from the bottom to the top.*

Layla had the same experience:

For me, religion is only a valid excuse that people might use when wanting to hinder women from advancing. For example, [they might say] that mixing with men is no good, or that women who stay at home are better Muslims. My family uses this a lot.

6.1.5.2 Stable (less conservative) views:

Other participants stated that there is a debate in Islam on the very essence of why women are less favourable as leaders. The first discussion raised concerns about the hijab [In this case, the hijab refers to a veil covering the whole face]. Most conservative beliefs in Saudi Arabia are based on the morality of women not who don't wear the hijab, with women in leadership positions considered immoral if they do not wear it or do not wear it properly (e.g. showing some hair beneath it). Mona, as a stable (not very religious) woman, stated:

I feel that as long as the woman in leadership is respectful [morally] and wearing her hijab, whether she is covering her face or not, whatever suits her best and [she] feels comfortable doing – I don't think it is in any way [immoral] as long as she is in a public place. Though, I am not very informative on religion.

Mona was hesitant to state her opinion regarding mixing with men if necessary, as part of a leadership role plainly without making the declaration of "I am not very

informative on religion”, this might be due to the fact that Islamic teaching adheres to the concept that one should not speak in God's tongue or face retribution.

The participants’ opinions illustrated the concern towards stereotypes about women being unable to lead, which coincide with conservative interpretations of Islam to form a barrier against Saudi women. These begin as early as the time that girls are allowed to go to school. This gives women the idea that education is only permitted when it favours conservative views in which women only need the minimum education to be mothers and raise their children well. This poses a boundary that affects to what extent their career roles might progress. They in turn promote the image of education as attached to mothering, rather than encouraging women to achieve and seek motivation. To illustrate this, Mona argued:

In the present it is applicable to driving cars, which is variously debated. Religious men will argue that it is forbidden based on religion, yet other people will argue that religion never prevented women from driving. They will base their argument on that women at the time of prophet Mohammed were riding camels, so it is not an act of shame! Women in rural areas are driving cars these days!

She then stated:

Religion is always a cover for patriarchy in Saudi Arabia. For this reason, people must revisit Islam before adopting these ideas.

Suha, who could not complete her dream of becoming a medical doctor, due to it being a mixed gender profession which conservative religious interpretations regard as being inappropriate for women, however, declared:

I think it is a contradiction. In fact, there is no evidence that Islam is against women working, even for people who say women should not be working in the medical field as a doctor or a nurse because of [Ikhtilat]. It was mentioned in our books that women used to be part of the army at the time of Prophet Mohammed, and they used to treat the injured soldiers. Our books mentioned many names of female figures who were known to participate in battle, such as the famous poet Al-Khansaa. I wonder when it was that the scholars decided that a woman’s voice is provocative and it’s a sin to speak out loud, whereas women used to chant poems.

Zuha, of tribal heritage, had the same experience:

Not allowing women to pursue a career in the medical field only because they will work with men [Ikhtilat] is complete nonsense. I remember when I wanted to enter nursing school, my dad told me, “No one will marry you. You will mix with men and be on call and stay late sometimes in the hospital.”

A few other stories mentioned this idea of participants who wanted to pursue a career in the medical field but were not encouraged to do so by their families as a result of social stigma based on strict religious views.

6.1.5.3 Conservative views:

Layan addressed a point that was only hinted at in other interviews: the fact that women's main job is to take care of the kids and that, religiously speaking, women are provided for. Although, interestingly, Layan felt that she was taking on a man's point of view rather than a woman's:

Men are responsible for everything in the house both legally and religiously. For instance, at any moment in time, I am free to choose to quit my job and be at home. I believe that men in this society are oppressed, since they must work even if the job pays low wages. They're patient because they don't want to starve their children. Women work because they want to. We like having jobs and a position, but we're not obligated to do so. I simply work for my own self-motivation.

Men around me state that we shouldn't compete for positions, since we aren't ultimately responsible for household finances. That is their argument. In reality, [a woman] doesn't need the work since someone else does pay her bills. This is maybe the reason for the disparity in some regions in the country. Because males are legally bound to support you, your salary is yours only. However, I am not arguing that all men fear God and are pious. Instead, ladies must think clearly and strive for greatness in order to build a lovely family; that is their true job.

I'll never forget when my [Western] supervisor visited our university and expressed surprise; he stated that women here "occupy more leadership roles than we [referring to his Western colleagues] do". For instance, there is no income disparity between us. You know, these things have to be taught to girls to demonstrate that we, too, have excellent things.

Aya raised a very different view towards women in leadership roles; she was very hesitant to say if it is acceptable according to religion or not. She said that if she does that means declaring a fatwa (a legal opinion or decree handed down by an Islamic religious leader, Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, 2021) which she avoids :

To be honest, I do not want to declare a fatwa about it and I cannot enter into it much, [but] there is this hadith I heard about that says a woman cannot lead Muslims or something similar. This is from the point of view of Sharia, and I cannot interfere with it much from reality. I mean, from what we see, I feel it is not everything. I mean, why, in things like the ministry and so, I feel, no, given the nature of women, it is not appropriate for one to be a minister, but as a member of the Shura Council, I feel why not? On the contrary, they understand us more. Women understand women more. They can communicate our demands more as members of the Shura Council, although up to now I have not seen any benefit from them.

When later asked for her opinion if she were nominated for a position as a minister, Aya stated:

In our society, women will have to comply with what suits us as a society, because the minister will have to visit places, whether it is men's departments or departments for women. I feel that, from my point of view, she can be a deputy minister for girls' departments only.

To discuss the previous section, when children grow up in any religious country, a religious identity is embedded in them. Developing a religious identity in Saudi Arabia therefore, is by far inherent. In the last two decades, strict religious views in Saudi Arabia didn't stem from religion itself but from tribal and social setting, as stated in the context of Saudi Arabia earlier. These strict interpretations of Islam were a result of tribal thoughts and Arab traditions as well (Yamani, 2009), despite very strict religious education being taught and embraced from an early age. Accordingly, the study participants constructed their leader identities through an interaction of multiple identities such as tribal identity that shape their self-view as leaders, and indeed, religion is a main part of this.

There are debates about whether women are legitimate leaders which stem from different interpretations of Sharia law, as well as that acknowledge the context in which this knowledge is exerted, as (Wadud, 1999) claimed. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that intellectual Islamic thoughts vary extensively, resulting in paradoxes in social and political spheres as globalisation expands. The findings of this study in particular align with (Song, 2019), who stated that religious identity is an important factor in the construction of leader identity. The participants' narratives asserted this notion, though upon further investigation, their views varied. This has raised the question of what causes these variations. Interestingly, tribal women mostly reflected liberal views of religion, although they did assert that strict religious practices that view women as inferior to men are imposed by tradition rather than the core values of Islam. The informants' narratives mirror the heated debate in the Muslim world of women's right to pursue careers as leaders in political and public spheres as well. Similarly, many scholars have argued that the gender-unequal practices in Saudi Arabia are more cultural restrictions than religion-based traditions (Kauser and Tlaiss, 2011; Hamdan, 2005). Even so, Hamdan (2005) and Elamin and Omair (2010) have noted that religion is perceived to promote patriarchy in Saudi society. These mixed interpretations of the Islamic texts, the Qur'an and Sunnah, led to many practices that

encourage gender inequality, one-sided career progression and the misrepresentation of women in leadership, which is inaccurately associated with religion.

Saudi Arabia as a state applies strict Wahabi Islamic thought (Baker *et al.* 2007). Yet, it is important to acknowledge that intellectual Islamic thoughts vary extensively throughout the different regions, as discussed earlier ((Elamin and Omair, 2010). The standards for public conduct are highly respected while cultural and religious aspects are embraced as a whole (Al Alhareth *et al.*, 2015). This explains the liberal and less conservative views adopted by some of this study's informants.

While religion is important in Saudi Arabia, (Welsh *et al.*, 2014) and other studies have revealed that women themselves, their tenacity, determination to succeed, higher education and family provide some of the key reasons for their success. It is these factors amongst others that this research seeks to investigate as contributing to Saudi women leaders' success. Indeed, adhering to these socio-cultural practices, as emphasised everywhere in the country, acts as a means of gender segregation. This has led some Saudi women to adopt conservative views and integrate them into the core of their identity (Thompson, 2015). This study thus considered women who accept and abide by these strict views more conservative.

Another interesting observation was that women with more relaxed and less conservative religious views mostly came from tribal descent, while more conservative views came from small cities and those of migrant descent. The researcher's interpretation is that these views stem from the women's ancestral social identity pre- and post-state, as people of tribal decent were in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia prior to its formation as a country and the evolution of Wahhabi thought. In turn, migrant families have come to the state and integrated with Saudi society, where they were introduced to conservative thoughts that later affected their descendants and their thoughts.

6.1.6 Socio-cultural identity:

The participants constructed their own individual worlds and identities in connection to a socio-cultural context. They found their own leader identity to be situated across different cultural norms and social pressures, as shown throughout their narratives. The society theme especially appeared in almost all narratives, but it was interesting to uncover how those narratives differed in the amount of pressure exerted by opposing views. Even so, all participants' demonstrated how society has affected women leadership, which renders the generational gap an important sub-theme for consideration. For instance, Ruba said:

Saudi society, as Saudi's constantly assert, is a society with a unique state. Saudi society has a unique case, but the unique case exists in the minds of the individuals who live in Saudi society, not in Saudi society itself. There are many people now who have returned [from studying abroad] with a different way of thinking and ideas than [are prevalent] in Saudi society. Saudi Arabia has changed. People are beginning to realise that women have the right to occupy prominent positions in the Shura Council. You have a significant number of women who have positions in the Shura Council and voice their opinions, and therefore I believe that this is growth in this area.

Tala provided an interesting argument of why she thinks that women excel in some departments rather than others. In particular, she noted "adaptation", or social acceptance, as being key:

In terms of society, the difficulties that women confront as leaders, whether at the organisational level or in top administrative posts at the state level, are many. It could simply be a matter of how superiority should not be for a female, as I believe I stated, and as I believe they stated at all levels, which means that our faculty is healthy on that side, as evidenced by our head of department, a woman with a lot of men working for her, and we have good dynamics in that ward.

*Our Dean for Development is a woman, and everyone respects her views, but when we had a meeting with someone outside the institution and they did not accept her, I said to myself, "**What's acceptable at our college is not universal yet.**"*

We didn't have a problem – maybe at the start, adjusting to it at the start. From when we were students, we all studied and worked together. The course directors were sometimes female or male; there was no difference.

However, this underrepresentation in leadership posts does not apply to women who worked and studied in a mixed environment, mainly the health field. This could be attributed to two things: 1) exposure, and 2) that conservative views oppose mixing with men is lessened.

The participants asserted that origin is an important factor in society as well that might be referred to as stereotyping. This could in turn lead families to form a religious adaptive strategy to accept this fact.

6.1.7 Relationships:

In the participants' narratives, relationships seemed to be an important element, as many indicated that the attitudes of others are important to their leadership self-view, whether they came from their early life or in- or out-group relations.

6.1.7.1 Parental influence:

Parental influence was apparent in almost every participant's narrative, especially from the father, unlike partners' support (only four participants, Siba, Tara, Hetaf and Noor, mentioned their partners). For Shahad:

The family has a very effective role. I owe a lot of things to my dad. He was always a person who believes that his children can do anything in life, particularly his daughters. I was educated in a house of open dialogue and discussions, where everyone was encouraged to read and pushed to do the things they wished to do.

Suha said:

My father encouraged us to go to college, and he was a very liberal parent, never suggesting that we shouldn't choose a specialisation. This was about when I was thinking about enrolling in medical school, and the city in which I was residing at the time didn't have a medical school. Mom wasn't enthusiastic about the idea, and she did not like it. After I had completed one semester of college, I said that I wanted to become a doctor. When my family and I went to the other city where I was registered in medicine, they stayed while I checked in for my schooling and then, when I did not obtain a place in the student housing, I returned.

Some participants thought that support from their husbands took the form of not standing in their way as they achieved their goals. As Tala stated, although her husband works in academia, "my mum and dad were always the supporters. For my husband, I cannot say that he supports me but at least he does not stop me".

When it comes to demonstrating the support they receive from their husbands, this idea of "at least he does not stop me" resonated with half of the respondents. This demonstrates the significant consequence of male guardianship in moulding identities

in ways that resemble the traditional view of women as wives and mothers first. Mona directly addressed what was only implied in almost every narrative regarding the participants' main support:

Unlike my father, who sacrifices and pushes me forward, my husband would always say, why is it at our expense? You as a wife should sacrifice a little of your ambition for me and the family, so we also will not be harmed. So, I try my best to arrange my work until someone takes over, and then withdraw from the work to my family life. So, of course, social life affects me as a woman, especially for one who has young kids.

Haya addressed an important point regarding her experience, as she did not have any support from her husband due to the educational gap between them. Saja, meanwhile, provided a detailed overview of why she thinks a husband is not as supportive as parents or siblings:

I face some difficulties, as I should always be present at home. It is a social norm that the view of the Middle Eastern husband of the Middle Eastern wife is that he always wants her next to him, especially if he does not occupy a high position in his work and is kind of jealous if my education level is higher than him. And the other is jealousy if the woman interacts with men more than women at work, especially if I contact men outside of work time. The third point is that because I keep learning and doing my research from home, this does not satisfy my husband, as he thinks that this time should be spent managing family responsibilities instead. On the other hand, my mother and my sister are really proud of me, because they are not in the same house and they do not share or sacrifice their time for me, as my work is exhausting, since I work from morning to night without any naps or rest.

Rahaf raised an important argument about how societal expectations might challenge unmarried women on their way to success:

For my father, he was the biggest support in my career choices and my wish to proceed with my higher education abroad. My mother was a little opposed because I wasn't married and that might reduce my chances of getting married.

Conclusions from previous studies (e.g. Rotundo *et al.* 2009) echo this result. Parenting style influences children's position as future leaders as well. Styles such as supportive discipline and responsive parenting assist children in acquiring traits that prompt them to assume leadership positions where they demonstrate that same behaviour (Rotundo *et al.* 2009).

6.1.7.2 Work-life balance:

In addition to mentioning not having strong support from their spouses, many participants also addressed work-life balance in their interviews. Categorising its sub-

themes under social influences reflected how most of the respondents' narratives tended towards their family responsibilities given their husbands' long work hours, for example. Balance was mainly affected by others' expectations, especially the husband's (Hodges, 2017; Al-Ahmadi, 2011a).

A healthy work-life balance was a challenge for many respondents, especially as they work in academia, meaning a leadership position comes with an academic duty and family responsibilities. It is worth noting that several participants mentioned social events and obligations as one of the main codes, yet very few mentioned sacrificing their own time to manage conflicts. Several elements that they mentioned in relation to work-life imbalance, however, were family-related duties, including spousal, childcare and social responsibilities.

Some of the participants introduced different strategies to achieve a healthy work-life balance. Still, none of those strategies were suggested by their organisations; they were things that the participants had to manage themselves. Siba, for example, stated that her strategy was to separate work from home: "I don't take work home. When I come to work, I forget the house so that I can rest my head, because you end up thinking of the two of them, so you neither get this nor get that." Sara said:

I do my work at times when my husband is not at the house. I finish my house chores first. I go to sleep early and wake up at three in the morning, to finish my work until the morning.

Wed introduced a spiritual aspect: "I rely on spiritual satisfaction. This is one of the aspects that helps the person by giving him positive energy and charging him so that he can continue and be generous in his work." As for Tala:

I don't accept phone calls after five. WhatsApp, okay. But I will check it at my convenience. I had to be in the WhatsApp group of the department and different committees. I am against it, but I felt that everyone is doing it, so I had to. I like to rely on emails, documented and saved for every need. Unfortunately it doesn't work with everybody the same way; not everybody uses it.

Lastly, Lamis said:

The most important thing is that I do not postpone anything. I do every task on time and I try to complete it at work time if I can. I set a time for my family, a time for my vacation and I totally enjoy it and separate it from work. When I am on my own time, I forget that I am a working woman.

6.1.8 Key theme four: Organisational context readiness: Professional identity

The data analysis revealed several recurring contextual themes that captured the women's leadership readiness, categorised into three streams: 1) those who work in a gender-neutral workplace, mainly in medical colleges; 2) those who work in women-only colleges or departments, but recently partially transferred to mixed-gender leadership; and 3) those who work at colleges with mixed-gender leadership.

Gender segregation appeared in most of the narratives of those who work in a segregated workplace, perpetuated by the rule of dual (mixed-gender) leadership (discussed in section 3.3.1). This system has caused many women to give up full authority for figurehead positions without formal power or recognition.

Another sub-theme that appeared in the narratives was invisibility, women are invisible to decision makers to be appointed to positions of power and men, who are leaders, are invisible for women to communicate with.

Not discussed here are the unwritten rules that exclude women from leadership, though not by law or rejection for participation in decision making (refusal of position by choice), even in their own sphere which is mainly segregated.

On the other hand, it is ignorance of the underlying issue of diversity and inclusion in the organisation. For decision makers (i.e. men), few women should be in leadership or have aspirations. Siba's quote below highlights this issue:

As a health colleges, the Conflict is a clear. Why is it that we are affiliated academically to the dean, who is the male department, and administratively to the Vice Dean, female section, so we have two bosses. The problem comes clear with the issues that overlaps, such as things that either none of the academic side nor the administrative part or the ones that have both. In addition, the female department does not have their own budget, accordingly, matters such as; maintenance, bidding and procurement takes very long time. Not only that, because men are not allowed in the female buildings, the university tries to provide a team of female (electricians, maintenance, and construction) for day to day and small problems, yet, if they needed a more experienced or more heavy work men can come in the night and I think it's such a painful bureaucracy.

6.1.8.1 Positive experience: Mixed-gender and women-only environments:

There were two narrative storylines when the women described their experiences in their organisations: positive and negative. In particular, most Saudi women in a mixed-gender environment reported positively on their work environment. This is first due to visibility. According to a vice dean of a co-ed colleges, visibility is an important factor in easing women's chances to develop. Roa argued:

In most of the departments, all male colleagues respect the females, on the basis that they see them here [referring to the college], and they see them in the hospital, and in all the meetings they are present. Accordingly, this caused a high appreciation of women as partners [who are] highly valued, appreciation of their opinion, appreciation of their work, appreciation of their achievements. I work with five vice deans [men] and the dean, a man as well, and I have never complained.

Second is the normalisation of women leaders in mixed-gender environments, which positively influences women academics' leader identity and encourages a healthy work environment. Some participants argued that having confidence in women as leaders lets other women feel confident in themselves and their decision makers, According to Tala:

Our head of the department is female, and this is the second time that we have a female in our leadership, and she has full authority over the department. This normalised having a woman as a leader.

In our faculty, we have no such problem of appointing women as leaders. I am grateful that here in our faculty we are resilient, and all women academics here are capable and have high leadership skills. Once one woman in our faculty led three department as their head at the same time.

This highlights the importance of role models, as discussed later in section (6.1.8.4).

Another interesting point appeared in the narratives of women from mixed-gender faculties, which suggested that leadership is inherently for men. In explaining the situation, Yara asserted that women in her workplace have their positions, because they hold expert power and knowledge, and that they taught men who subsequently had to "respect the situation". Still, she noted that "that does not mean that they are not waiting for those women leaders to leave in order for things to go back to normal". This result confirms the literature, which described that prejudice might be a result of gendered organisations and in turn affect leader identity (Ely et al., 2011). Still, here the situation is slightly different: the participants from mixed-gender organisations

were women leaders who had held their positions for a long time and were accepted by others. However, that did not sit well with some participants, who perceived their situation as temporary or limited to certain conditions. This might be interpreted in light of Eagly and Karau's (2002) role-congruity theory, which states that females in leadership positions are subject to bias, as people perceive leadership roles as masculine attributes, and women are less likely to fit this role based on gender stereotypes.

6.1.8.2 Negative experience: (Dual-level leadership):

Women of Saudi Arabia have suffered for a very long time from a lack of self-awareness, due to limitation in their decision-making responsibilities associated with them being leaders.

Noor raised important issues when she discussed her experience as a vice dean, such as fear of failure or blame due to the limitations of her authority. She stated:

He [referring to the dean] is responsible for me, and for everything I am responsible for. I know that I have limits in every order. I need to know my limits regarding the people and places under my responsibility. I need to know my limitations to not have troubles and to not do less than expected.

Negative experiences also appeared in the narratives of participants from mixed-gender departments, and were negatively associated with the participants' self-perception as leaders in many gendered practices. Lack of trust, exclusion, vagueness, miscommunication and double efforts were the most dominant sub-themes. For example, Mona reported that lack of trust caused women to lag behind:

The other thing is that, for example, when we are having a department meeting, the HoD [men's department] never listens to what we say. Even if we do not have the logistics of the decision he is making. His word is final; he has authority over all of us.

This quote also makes clear that exclusion is attributable to most power and authority being held by men in mixed-gender organisations. This hinders women from stating their opinions and claiming their own leadership identities.

In this regard, another sub-theme emerged: miscommunication. Rahaf specified:

Women do not have a chance to voice their opinions. Additionally, the dean [a man] is the true leader. The vice dean [a woman] is only an observer.

This creates an issue where colleagues do not see women leaders as practising and performing their leadership to their utmost ability. This is linked to yet another sub-theme, time efficiency. Noor said that double effort in a mixed-gender environment is time exhausting, and women do not have power of authority at all:

The final decision is only in the hands of men [HoD or the dean] and there is no direct communication between the faculty member and the decision makers. Imagine how much time this cycle takes for one matter.

The sub-theme vagueness also arose, especially in segregated organisations where authority is held by one department. The women felt that they cannot comprehend whose work process is being done. Lama explained:

There is vagueness in dealing with the male department, although we have an electronic system. Yet, you have to keep calling them to check on their account if you have any job you want done. This makes it frustrating sometimes if you cannot reach the HoD by phone or by email. Although I am very conservative, still, I wish sometimes that we are not segregated – Lord, forgive me – that I can go to the HoD office and sort things out myself. I bet it is going to be a much easier process.

Lama highlighted that a mixed environment is better for knowing the work process, despite opposing her religious identity to get the work done. Based on social identity theory, as discussed in the literature review, the participant's leader identity here was more salient than her religious identity (Hogg, 2001; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). This also aligns with (Lord et al., 2001; Avolio et al., 2009b) perspective of leadership prototypes as dynamic, according to context. Amal's leader identity here was reshaped in response to the limitations or difficulties opposing her, in turn disregarding her other, religious identity.

6.1.8.3 Leadership roles selection process:

Selection process for leadership role were mainly attributed to favouritism by many respondents. To clarify, these acts are acceptable by the society in which they unfold. It clearly makes life easier if one is from a certain social class or has a specific family name. Notably, Layan said:

My best friend, now she's on the Shura Council. That's evidence that the ladies are achieving high positions. Even I do not know how she got that position; she has never held a position before, she has never really risen up or been promoted. She is not even working a government job; she has been doing activities for kids and stuff like that. So, I do not know on which basis they chose her. In general, she is a well-known public and social personality.

When asked why she thinks her friend got offered this very high position, Layan added, “Frankly I think this is beyond my scope.”

Wed had a completely different view:

When my years of experience increased, and now since I could nominate people for jobs, I knew that specific rules regulated this nomination process. The criteria are that leaders are selected by decision makers, regardless of their experience or if they are newcomers. At the most fundamental level, decision makers, whether the dean of the college, department heads or department supervisors, pick persons they feel will be well-suited for future roles.

Supervisors and coordinators might have other responsibilities to test their capacity to move up the ladder. Also, each faculty's updated biography gives a complete image for those looking for higher opportunities.

I think our university is among the first to allow computerised nominations for some administrative positions. And I assume they are thinking about applying this system for possible higher-level leadership positions. If I am not mistaken, I also believe that other Saudi governmental universities use an electronic nomination system. It allows you to specify why you think this person is better for the job.

Wed's argument for a selection process was not related to process clarity. This stems from the fact that her narrative came from a segregated organisation, where all authority is held by men, making the selection process biased by nature. Siba, for example, stated:

Ew, they always say, promotions come from above, no one knows. No, frankly, we don't have news. I mean, you can run for a position, they come and say we choose you, who chose you, on what basis did they choose you. You will never know.

The participants' responses highlighted unfair selection in regard to a mixed-gender environment. However, there were two major sub-themes that extended the discussions: favouritism and invisibility.

6.1.8.3.1 Favouritism:

As discussed later (refer to section 6.1.8.5), most of the participants mentioned that leadership promotions were mostly associated with favouritism rather than merit. For instance, Shahad said:

When you're successful, everyone believes you're close to the decision maker where you work. So, you get respect and admiration from everyone. But if you have a problem, they won't talk to you, so you must accept it to be both ways.

6.1.8.3.2 Invisibility:

Additional results showed that women are less visible because of segregation in mixed-gender organisations. Mona stated:

I have noticed that, if you are not known in the male department, your chances of getting a position are limited. Sometimes, there would be people who are more suited or more experienced. Yet, they don't know about them, and they lose their chance to be appointed.

Lama raised another point mentioned in many narratives but in different settings, which is the Hijab. She claimed, "If a woman covers her face she might not run because they see that she will not be able to communicate with them."

Although most of the participants mentioned that the leadership selection process is vague, and mostly associated with favouritism rather than accomplishment, some also acknowledged social media and applying new electronic systems in their universities for promotion and leadership appointments as factors that minimise these practices. Electronic technologies influence gendered organisational practices that may be quantified and referred to in the event of legal claims.

Few other themes emerged in the organisational context, for example; the role of mentors, role models, networking and peers perception in shaping women's leadership progress.

6.1.8.4 Mentors/Role models:

Only four participants talked about their mentors, slightly more talked about role models. They addressed that family members (such as father in Hetaf, sister in Rema's case) or public figures (such as Margaret Thatcher in Wed's story, Steve Jobs in Lama's narrative) act as their role models. The participants indicated that having role models is not just about inspiring younger women, but also helping them succeed.

Based on the responses provided by the study participants, it was evident that having role models serves a dual purpose. The participants suggested that while role models can be a source of inspiration for younger women, they also play a significant role in supporting and facilitating the success of individuals within their professional networks. Through their own experiences and achievements, role models can serve as a source of guidance and motivation for others.

6.1.8.5 Networking: the invisible force of tribal and family influences

Social networks in Saudi Arabia are an important means of forming relationships. Mainly, they are based on social class (wealth, power), social group (tribe or family) or connections (who you know). These invisible forces govern organisations, as per the participants' interviews. They leverage one's contacts and thus the things one can do, in relation to official activities, such as obtaining employment or a promotion.

Networking was a frequent topic in the participants' interviews, as required for progress into leadership positions and subsequent promotions to higher roles. Networking arose in the form of gaining more experience and becoming more visible through volunteering, attending development programmes and training others. Another common theme that appeared in the narratives was the Arabic term *wasta*, whose closest English meaning is *cronyism*. Essentially, *wasta* is when something is obtained by partiality rather than merit.

Lama indicated *wasta* as a matter of obligation, therefore, she views voting for a leadership position as useless:

I think I am against democracy because voting does not guarantee fairness. I will tell you an example: My father once was a candidate for a position. To me personally I thought that others were more suitable and experienced, yet, for sure I voted for my father. This is our society. Even if my friend was nominated, I will vote for her. I do not think we can call it bias. I can refer to it as obligation. It is all about connections, even if we had criteria for selection. To be honest, I do not think it is wrong; it is what it is, this is our culture. I think it is about trust. The person I know is better than the one I do not.

Lama believes that democracy is flawed as “voting does not guarantee fairness”. She provides an instance in which her father was a candidate for a post, and that she voted

for him despite believing that other candidates were better qualified. She argues that this is a prevalent tendency in their culture, where individuals vote based on their connections rather than candidates' qualifications. Lama claimed that this is not prejudice, but rather a responsibility. Even if selection criteria were in place, she implies that social networks would still play a substantial influence.

6.1.8.6 Peers' perceptions:

One of the questions that the participants were asked was, "Do others see you as a leader?" the majority of the informants indicated that others view them as leaders. Some indicated that this was since their childhood, such as Mona:

Mona: 'Since I was little, I have always been a leader. For example, I was at the school's broadcast committee, always selected by my teachers to be a chairperson of the committee, in charge of arranging, planning, and presenting at school teachers would easily recognize your abilities.'

In addition, Suha indicated that in her family, she always been seen as a leader. As for Shahad, she argues that she finds senior women academics and male colleagues to be more supportive than her peers women academics:

I think my colleagues see me as a leader to some extent, such that when there's an issue, they would ask me for my opinion or invite me to participate in discussions on the topic. Immediate peers wouldn't tell me to my face, but those from other faculties or male colleagues, they tell me all the time. The women colleagues, some of whom were my seniors, did tell me that they really like me and see potential in me.

Wed addressed her experience of being in different positions on different levels in only seven years, which indicated the view of her as a leader by decision makers. She stated:

I believe that they do see potential in me; the majority of the leadership positions for which I was nominated were newly established, which led me to believe that the decision makers in the girl's department, the decision makers in the boys' department and the people in the university's elite positions think that this [Wed] is the person best suited for this position.

6.2 Phase two: Follow-up interviews:

The second round of interviews was important to further reveal the identity constructions that were captured in the first round, such as understanding why certain identities are selected and when. Insight into social context change is helpful in

uncovering this intersectionality. This section answers the fourth research question, How do recent reforms in Saudi HE affect women's self-perception as future leaders?

Throughout the second round of interviews with 15 women from the 30 previously interviewed, the researcher identified and interpreted cultural and social shifts in Saudi society. Achieving a cultural transformation in attitudes and practices towards more female leadership involvement is a challenging and enduring aim. This research thus focused on the participants' experiences with leadership development during this period of social transformation, as well as their future aspirations in regard to leader identity.

The findings from the first round of interviews were presented to the research participants to confirm that they accurately reflected the lived experience of Saudi women academics.

In this stage, half the participants agreed to participate in the second interview. The findings showed that the participants' perceptions were more optimistic about Saudi Arabia's social change following the Vision 2030.

The second interview data will be discussed in detail in the following chapter to capture the change in perception among Saudi women academics regarding their leader identity construction and this section only captures one theme that profoundly emerged in the follow up data.

6.2.1 Vision 2030:

Vision 2030 came up as a theme in almost all participants narrative. To them, it represented more opportunities and more women being empowered in the country. To Mona, "Vision 2030 focused on the full participation of Saudi women at all levels". She added that she was delighted to have been nominated for a leadership role. She explained that the choice was made in part due to her qualifications and suitability for

the post, and in part because the university's decision makers wanted to join the national trend toward electing more women leaders.

Similarly, Layla noted that Vision 2030 has encouraged women to invest more in their potentials, as they have more opportunities than before. She stated:

"I believe the future is brighter now than it was before Vision 2030, when women, especially in academia, considered a Dean or Head of Department job a dream. Now, even if only partially, this dream has come true for some of us."

As for Dana who had to reject a leadership position out of fear of social exclusion. She claimed that:

"Appointing so many powerful women to positions of authority across the kingdom is, in my opinion, a powerful statement about the importance of women and the Kingdom's ongoing commitment to ensuring that more women rise to positions of power. Which, I pray, will raise her visibility and inspire her to continue to pursue these positions".

According to Deem and Sara, this future plan provides them with the proper atmosphere and services that support the accomplishment of their national responsibilities. As they have been assigned to positions of leadership at this moment.

Maria was hesitant about assuming a leadership position in the earlier interview. When questioned about her current viewpoint. She said:

"I may have had doubts previously, but now I am having second thoughts. I am astounded by how quickly things have changed around here (at the university), even though the changes are not yet substantial, it is noticeable especially regarding women's voice in a leadership positions".

Vision 2030 represented more opportunities and more women being empowered in the country (i.e. becoming role models). There were also many university presidents who competed to be *the firsts* as women deans, HoDs or vice presidents. Yet, some of the participants did not have any idea of the ongoing changes regarding women leadership in Saudi Arabia and in higher education in particular. Still, all participants acknowledged the general political and societal change in Saudi Arabia, where their universities operate. There was a common consensus that Saudi society is processing an unprecedented period of change, which seems to be accelerating for many reasons. The first is that Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy. It has a single

government and patriarchal social structure which implies that changes, even against its very culture, can somehow be granted simply by royal decree. However, Saudi Arabia's only religion is Islam, and it applies Islamic traditions in every aspect of its institutional structure. Such a tight culture, while a constraint in one regard, in another makes it easier for people to apply change and accept it.

Saudi Arabia is also home to different ethnic groups, though several mainly came to the country for religious reasons, which serves as a unifying factor. Ethnicity has thus never been an issue in Saudi Arabia, at least until recently (Yamani, 2008).

It is important to note that one of the women contacted for this study was appointed an HoD leadership position for both male and female departments. That was very promising for this study to investigate the experience of the women who had made it to the top and how they make sense of it. However, despite many attempts, the researcher was unable to contact this potential participant. As such, several appointments were made with other women in similar positions. Interestingly, these women leaders all came from the medical field. Looking deeper, Saudi Arabia's first ever woman dean, Professor Dalal, was from a medical school (Al-Taif University) as well, posing a very interesting finding. Although greater investigation is needed on these women's self-views, same-gender practitioners are preferable for women in Muslim religious communities, such as Saudi Arabia, especially when it comes to providing access to private examinations (Aldeen, 2007; McLean et al., 2012). However, need allows for exception in Islam: Islamic law forbidding cross-gender physical contact has long been forgiven on the condition that it is a medical necessity if a same-gender physician is not accessible, or there is a life-or-death decision at hand (Aldeen, 2007; McLean et al., 2012). This necessity creates a visibility paradox, as women in tight religious cultures are allowed to work directly with men in a non-segregated workplace due to their health care needs. This promotes their visibility in this male-dominated culture, and might affect their leadership promotions.

Another possible reason is that the medical field has long been considered a respectable profession in Saudi Arabia. This social perception stems from the fact that medicine is a highly compensated career. However, Saudi society does not perceive nursing in the same regard as doctoral careers. According to (Alwedinani, 2016b) on the subjects Saudi women choose in HE, the participants tended to take societal perceptions into consideration when choosing their academic subject choice. Therefore, they often studied majors that were more socially accepted out of fear for their reputation. For example, although the work environment for physicians is similar to that of nurses, the two professions are perceived differently in Saudi Arabia. Nursing is more associated with lower pay than medicine, and the tasks associated with it, which many feel are servant-like, contributes to its low perception. (Alwedinani, 2016b) added that nursing is frequently associated with non-Saudi expatriates as well, offering another element to this view.

The present study is consistent in this regard, as many participants indicated that their first choice as graduates was medicine, they later changed their major or enrolled under a different programme. One of the participants even had to withdraw from a nursing major because of her parents' views. Social acceptance is thus key to women ascending to leadership positions.

A theoretical approach to the social identities of women in leadership roles can explain how women in the Saudi medical field fit the out-group identification of a leader. Specifically, they fit the standards of both men and society: to greater society, these women are intelligent, necessary and hardworking (all stereotypes about the medical field); for men, the decision makers, they create less trouble, follow the rules of the game and are respectful, as they are more visible.

Chapter 7 Narrative Holistic Content Analysis

7.1 Introduction:

This chapter analyses the narrative interviews of 30 Saudi women academics on their way to leadership positions to explore their leadership development experiences, in order to answer the third research question, “how do narratives of leadership experience shape the construction of Saudi women’s leader identity in regard to recent reforms in Saudi HE?”

While the previous chapter’s categorical content analysis was critical in establishing the themes that affect women’s leadership experiences, on its own, it did not reflect the full story. This chapter thus assesses the data holistically, employing holistic content analysis to ascertain how Saudi women’s leader identities are shaped processually. This resulted in five narrative storylines that reveal the leaders’ identities. The researcher chose to use narrative analysis to give the story the life it represents. The participants’ identities leaned more towards dissolving in social identity as well, though the plurality of individual experiences became evident during the analysis.

The discussion of this chapter’s findings emphasises excerpts from the participants’ leadership experiences to demonstrate some of the most important anecdotes. It is important to note that during the analysis, some informants adopted more than one narrative, or even all five (Smith and Sparkes, 2008; Polkinghorne, 1995).

7.2 Narrative positioning and the construction of multiple leader identities (Redefining leader identity):

Women academics concurrently develop many potential leader identities as they position themselves in their narratives. Although the preceding chapter focused on the themes from participants’ individual tales as they related to the study questions, the holistic data analysis revealed there were a few narrative arcs across those themes as a whole.

Stories of leader identity construction emerged from the analysis of the phase one and two interviews with Saudi women academics and which formed three narratives. These were: the “I am not a leader” (two participants); “I am a leader: capable and motivated” (three participants), which indicates a steady narrative. Progressive narrative (“Ambivalent leader identity to I am a leader narrative”(four participants), “Being a leader was not a choice of mine, now it is”(two participants), “I am not a leader narrative to I am a leader”) (two participants), and regressive narrative (“why not to it is only a show”) (two participants).

7.2.1 Steady Narrative Holistic Analysis

This section will present data from the first round and second round of interviews in which participants narrative remain constant in constructing their leader identity across the two phases. This was apparent in the very strong views around accepting and refusing leader identity which specifically was vivid when it comes to conservative religious views.

Five stories showed a narrative plotline of a steady line of holding onto this idea of leadership and identity. Three whom constructed a positive leader identity (Rema, Wed and Roa) and two participants (Zuha and Tara) showed leader identity rejection.

This was regardless of the social change around them and indeed the training they had participated in. Due to space constraints and to highlight the comprehensive analysis conducted, only two representative narratives of each will be presented here.

Three Saudi female academics narrate their experiences as non-leader in both the first and second round of interviews and two in which the constant line reflect their leader narrative, one of each will be discussed in detail. The analysis was done following holistic narrative analysis as previously discussed (see section 4.9.4).

7.2.1.1 “I am a leader: capable and motivated” narrative:

A steady “I am a leader: capable and motivated” narrative was detected in the data. Three participants (Rema, Wed and Roa) presented a strong leader identity based on capability and motivation throughout the first and second interview. This was, however, a smaller subset compared to the subsequent steady narrative. I will now present Rema’s account as an indicative example.

Rema:

Phase one:

In Rema’s case her leader identity combined with her professional identity was not congruent with the social conservative views regarding women’s education and employment at the time of her holding a senior leadership position. However, her social inner circle of family was more important to her leader identity and encouraged her to move forward. Despite facing significant opposition and threats to her life, her courage and commitment to her cause helped to inspire many of her students and colleagues. Rema's story highlights how a woman can emerge as a leader in a conservative society by being “bold”, by standing up to what she believes in, despite significant obstacles and opposition from society through the support of her family and husband.

My family has always valued education and believed that women should be encouraged. My mother fought tirelessly to send us to Egypt so that we may pursue medical and dental education, which was unavailable in our home country. We were able to earn our bachelor’s degrees in Egypt because she got our extended family to help us financially.

Her family and specifically her mother was the source of the courage that she built and which was apparent during our first interview. Her mother “fought tirelessly” for her to pursue her education in Egypt. Rema’s gratitude to her mother were sensed in her conversation as well as her strong sense of self which was a catalyst to her leader identity development. Moving on, Rema talked about what internal characteristic she

had that made her the leader she is; she mentions “courage”. Which she felt was needed especially in her conservative male-dominated society.

Certain internal traits, such as courage, are important for leadership. If a person is not inherently bold, it is difficult for them to develop this trait via training. Leaders must be bold; else, they may struggle to achieve progress and advance.

Rema was one of the first female leaders appointed in a health school as a vice dean when it was first launched [Although this could be an identifiable information, the participant in the consent form explicitly stated that she does not mind her name to appear in the thesis, yet, for matter of consistency I chose not to add her real name]. She went to Egypt for her bachelor’s degree, as there was no dentistry school at the time in Saudi Arabia, and then to Toronto for her PhD. Her story explains how the incongruity between the role of a woman and of a leader might induce prejudice. This bias was very strong in Saudi Arabia at that time, as perpetuated by religion. Rema represents the women who fought for their status against all the societal pressure. She stated:

When I was a vice dean for a medical school, I was completely shielded. Because it is a community-accepted position. However, when they opened the [...] school and there were no men available, I was appointed as a coordinator for the [...] school position, as they called it at the time. And because I oversaw both the male and female departments, that’s when "All hell broke loose". I was viciously attacked in mosques, on leaflets and on cassettes. How come a female became head of a male department? And it was a very ugly attack; you would see cassettes with my name on them. Some religious figures at the time went so far as to attack me from the mosque’s pulpit.

Rema defined herself as a leader “**Vice Dean**” from the beginning positively, her strong sense of leader identity was perpetuated throughout her whole narrative despite social expectations. Yet, moving on her narrative uncovered more complex multiple lived realities being managed within her cultural setting. Rema’s narrative discussed how she was “**shielded**” being in a medical school. This could explain the necessity of having same-gender physicians, especially in tight male-dominated culture, in which Rema referred to as “**a community-accepted position**”.

Following that, Rema was appointed to a leadership role in which she had both female and male subordinates and that was when as she argues “All hell broke loose”, Rema described her experience of obtaining a leadership position as something chaotic or disastrous happening to the society where she located. Rema was **“viciously attacked”** even in a sacred place such as mosques, the attack on her went on to the level that there were religious lectures on cassettes warning the community of her actions.

Rema stated that she **“survived”** due to her family’s support and especially that of her husband formed the main encouragement for her to keep going and pursue her goals:

However, I survived because my husband was extremely supportive and understanding. He was severely harmed, and he continues to feel the pain from those years. Nonetheless, he was encouraging. My extended family, too, was extremely supportive; they are laid back and don’t give a damn about what society says. Being in the male sector, that got me down; the vigorous attacks, nothing other than that.

Rema’s narrative showed many of the aforementioned barriers, such as conservative religious views, and societal expectations about a woman’s role and its incongruity with leadership roles **“Being in the male sector, that got me down; the vigorous attacks, nothing other than that”**. Yet, her story showed that family support was key, she says they **“don’t give a damn about what society says”**. A possible explanation for this might be that Rema’s narrative was shaped by a generational factor: since she grew up in a liberal, upper-class family, she was not exposed to stereotypes about women’s societal role especially within her inner circle.

Let’s face it: upper positions in the Kingdom are not available for women to begin with, such as deanships. Therefore, women do a better job for their subordinates than men, as they don’t have to please the decision makers to advance. For example, maybe you have noticed that many deans are trying to please the master, hoping that they will become the vice president one day. As a result, they may obey him about something that frustrates the staff or that is not in the best interests of the college, simply because they seek a higher position.

Rema also raised the very important issue of visibility. She argued that women know deep inside that they have no chance to advance to elite positions **“Let’s face it: upper positions in the Kingdom are not available for women to begin with, such as deanships”**. Therefore, she argued that women are better leaders for their subordinates **“as they don’t have to please the decision makers to advance”**. Rema's claim that leaders are chosen unfairly is an intriguing one, and one possible explanation is that favouritism plays a significant role in the appointment process. That women in lower-ranking positions are better leaders for their teams and departments because they know they have no prospect of moving up.

Phase two:

Rema’s second interview had a sense of pride of the achievements that has been obtained in the country. Rema’s interview was very emotional this time, unlike before where emotion was touched by bitterness. In the second round she mentioned:

Now, our graduates from the first few bachelor’s degrees have become deans. Thus, they insisted I take a photo with them. I sat and four deans from various schools surrounded me; I posted it on social media. One of my brothers was delighted. He is a very successful businessman, and he was overjoyed to see me in this position. He congratulated me and brought a cake. She is the mentor of these four deans, he explained. There is support available, not only from the small family, but also from the larger family. Without the support of their husbands, married women would be in dire straits ... they would be unable to advance in their endeavours, which is critical.

Rema has conveyed a beautiful image of her sitting between four deans from different schools in which they were graduates when she was at position. Rema was very touched when telling this story by how much other people look up to her and that nowadays she is comfortable to post her picture with them confidently unlike before. She also stated that her brother was very proud and celebrated this achievement, which she really appreciates.

I am very touched by every achievement for women in Saudi, every time I see an appointment in the TV, or even among my students and colleagues who we went together through loads. I feel very

proud. One of my colleagues have been appointed to leadership post in the Shura Council. I know we are still at the beginning, but it is promising what is happening. Now I see women everywhere, it is Saudi women's era.

Rema's had positively talked about the new reforms happening in the country. The construct of visibility has been mentioned again as she mentions "**Now I see women everywhere**". Rema was very proud when she talked about how her students and colleagues were appointed to top leadership positions in the country, such as Shura Council. She concluded that "**it is Saudi women's era**".

Here in the medical school specifically, women now are HoD, Vice Deans in the college. They come to me for advice sometimes. One of the most important things, for me, is the amount of time I hear people around me saying "you are our role model". It's unbelievable, including non-Saudis. Just yesterday, someone stopped me and said, "you are our role model." I humbly replied, "I am nothing, I am just... I was born in a good time." Another colleague came up and said the same thing, "you are our role model here." Of course, our graduates, both males and females, always use this word with me. Leadership is role modelling. If you are a good leader, you will hear that word so much in the future. It's intentional. I never thought that one day someone would come and tell me that I am or was their role model. But with time, you start to hear it a lot.

In her college, Rema was a role model. As she explained and as the researcher heard from participants in the same faculty. Her story inspired many of her students to self-view themselves as leaders as she was. Rema believes in supporting and encouraging other women who want to be leaders and creating a more inclusive and equal environment for women leaders in her university and in the country as a whole.

7.2.1.2 "I am not a leader" narrative:

There was, however, another contrasting steady narrative across the data set. A very distinct "I am not a leader" storyline that recurred throughout the interviews.

In the first round of interviews, almost one-third of the participants demonstrated a professional leader–identity detachment. Some associated negative thoughts with leadership, which led them to reject leadership positions all together. The researcher

conducted an additional inquiry to ascertain the cause of this occurrence, which revealed that the “I am not a leader” narrative is a coping mechanism to preserve one’s social identity.

In the second round of interviews, two participants (Zuha and Tara) have demonstrated a stable narrative of rejecting leader identity, regardless the reforms happening in the country. Here a narrative of Zuha’s story will be presented.

Zuha

Zuha comes from a middle-class tribal family from the Western region in Saudi Arabia. Her family encouraged her to always be successful in her education, especially her dad. Growing up she participated in many school activities in which she felt that she had leadership skills and was motivated by this to achieve a leadership role. When she graduated high school, she wanted to be a doctor, yet her family were against this decision for reasons of religion and society (being from Bedouin tribe). So she choose to apply for a science college that she felt was very close to medicine and graduated as one of the top in her class and accordingly was appointed as a demonstrator in the college by excellency. She got married at an early age to a man from the same tribe and had two children. She described her husband as a committed [religious] man. She describes her career in academia as very convenient in which she feels proud of her achievement and her role as mother and wife. In her narrative she also believed that her job in the university gives her a sense of achievement and prestige among her extended family [tribe] as everyone looks up to her. It is noteworthy to mention that she works in a women-only faculty which she implies important.

Phase one:

When asking Zuha why she thinks women cannot be ministers, for example, she was hesitant:

To be honest, there is this matter that has always been in the back of my mind, and you might go check if it is true, the prophet's hadith, "Never will succeed such a nation as makes a woman their ruler.

Zuha's narrative showed that she was not very sure about what this hadith entails or the exact interpretation of it. As such, Zuha preferred that women be leaders only in women's departments and not lead other men as per the hadith. Although most of the participants related these stereotypes to Arab societal norms and traditions, their narratives showed hesitations to clearly state the women role as a leader for both genders as acceptable.

Zuha, whose family did not support her decision to become a doctor because of the stigmas associated with such a job in their conservative religion said:

Not allowing women to pursue a career in the medical field only because they will work with men [Ikhtilat] is complete nonsense. I remember when I wanted to enter nursing school, my dad told me, "No one will marry you. You will mix with men and be on call and stay late sometimes in the hospital."

Zuha emphasizes the absurdity of excluding women from pursuing jobs in the medical industry only on the basis that they will work alongside males. She relates how her father dissuaded her from enrolling in nursing school out of concern that it would hinder her chances of getting married. Her wrestling with this view, highlights the complexity of even a steady "I am not a leader" narrative.

Phase two:

In the second interview with Zuha she hesitantly acknowledged that the recent developments in Saudi Arabia regarding women's leadership have been encouraging, creating what appears to be new opportunities for women to take on leadership roles. However, Zuha's narrative did not change much between the first round and second round of interviews: "I must admit that my personal beliefs and values have not changed significantly in this regard". She told a story of the perspective regarding women in higher

leadership. In Zuha's case holding a conservative religious identity combined with tribal identity caused diminished leader identity, even if capability and aspiration was evident. This has created a distorted image of leadership only when it involves interactions with men.

Sitting with my family watching TV for example. I feel very ashamed and uncomfortable while looking at these women standing with many men around her [in a meeting or reception]. Is this an acceptable change? I do not think so. One even shakes hand with a man!

I turned into my husband and said "I cannot ever imagine myself at this place". I cannot forget that look on his face while he was looking at that woman, he mumbled "it is the end of time"¹.

This is not me. We are Bedouin and I still deep in my heart struggle with the idea of assuming a leadership position leading other men and reconciling it with my Islamic beliefs and values. I believe in this hadith of women should not lead. This is a personal issue that I continue to struggle with, and it is not something that can be easily resolved by external factors or developments in society or policy. Even though I may not see myself as a leader, I still recognize the importance of having diverse voices and perspectives in leadership positions, and the positive impact this can have on our society, yet, only among other women.

This shows the effect of tribal/religious identity. Zuha started her story by stating that while watching television with her family "I felt ashamed" looking at women leaders.

This is a very strong feeling which indicates a dissociation of her leader identity while being "uncomfortable", due to the presence of her family around her.

When going through her story she mentions "I turned into my husband" mostly for validation of the issue of being 'ashamed' continues and she felt that a comment of distancing herself from this position/view is needed "I cannot ever imagine myself at this place".

¹ Anas bin Malik narrated that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "There shall come upon the people a time in which the one who is patient upon his religion will be like the one holding onto a burning ember." Grade Hasan (Darussalam), Reference: Jami' at-Tirmidhi 2260, In-book reference: Book 33, Hadith 103, English translation : Vol. 4, Book 7, Hadith 2260. <https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi:2260>

Yet, the evaluation she awaited from her husband came as what she pointed out as “that look on his face” that look that was accompanied by “**it is the end of time**’ tells much about stereotyping women’s role as being invisible. Not only that leadership is a man’s role but also that if a woman wants to be leader then it must be behind a closed door. In this image conservative religious view of mixing with men as being a shameful and abnormal behaviour shattering all the values of such a tight culture or possibilities for woman leadership. It is then when Zuha tried to distance herself from this image: “**This is not me**”.

Causing her leader identity refusal was her religion identity but as well as her tribal identity “**we are Bedouin**”. This story invoked questioning Zuha’s choices that leadership is not something *I do not want* rather claiming leader identity that matches her religious/tribal identity of not “**leading other men**”.

7.2.2 Progressive Narrative Holistic Analysis:

This section presents data from the first and second round of interviews in which participants’ narratives show a positive development in constructing their leader identity across the two phases.

This section focuses on the transformation of Saudi women identity and the evolution of their leadership identity through time. It describes the experiences of women who did not first see themselves as leaders but subsequently accepted the role. Appointing women in different fields in Saudi Arabia has made leader identity more acceptable.

[7.2.2.1 Ambivalent leader identity to I am a leader Narrative.](#)

The progressive narrative is about a group of five respondents' journey from hesitancy to confidence as they assumed the leader identity. The discussion with Maria made this point abundantly clear which will be discussed in detail as an indicative illustration.

Maria

Maria is 35 years old and is a Saudi Bedouin tribal lecturer that comes from a middle-class family and lives in the Western region. She was the middle child therefore she felt she was not the centre of attention in her family. Yet, she was from a family of divorced parents at the start [they returned together] which affected her. Her family was very keen for having educated children and she says her parents provided good support and encouragement to have a good education.

Phase one:

I am [..]², a wife and a mother to a 6 year old boy, I am studying [..] and have no intension to be in a leadership position! Leadership is how to control other people or employee in order to make specific Goals realistic and make achievements, it simply is not me.

Maria, although identifying herself by her profession in the start, followed her identification as being a wife and a mother. In Saudi Arabia, the societal notion of womanhood is related with being a stay-at-home mother rather than a professional woman, much less a "leader".

Numerous individuals were scared to state explicitly why they reject a leadership role. This could be explained in part by the long-held preconceptions that women are inferior to males and that their place is at home raising children, highlighting the bigger role that mothers play in raising their children and caring for their spouses.

A leader in my home for my family, yes, leader in my job, no, simply because there is lots of responsibility and you don't have full authority.... On the other hand, I will be a leader in my home, because I am responsible for my family.

Maria stated the previous notion clearly in her narrative, for example: **“there is lots of responsibility and you don't have full authority”.**

2. (her profession) omitted for reasons of the risk of being identified

The issue of women having only provisional positions with very little authority. All these gendered practises were based mainly on the roles men and women were assigned in society by social identification (Eagly, 1987; Eagly et al., 2000).

Maria argues **“She can’t lead her life, how can she be a leader!”**. She also claimed that being a mother gave her the impression that her family responsibility was more important, and that there is no point being something she has no power to master or change.

Saudi Women needs to have her freedom first from her religious thoughts and Men guarding her life , she should ask for her rights, right for live alone, right to travel alone, right to drive a car , after succeeding in accomplishing all these rights, she is welcome to have whatever leader position she is looking for.

In Maria’s case, her leader identity was denied due to a lack of authority over the responsibility. Her story exemplifies the obstacles societal Saudi women must overcome to achieve equality and autonomy before they can seriously consider positions of leadership at the organizational level. Maria argues that Saudi women must be liberated from male guardianship and religious conservatism before they can consider being leaders. For her to excel and attain higher positions, societal gender-based restrictions on women's freedom must be removed.

I don’t think if I claimed a leadership position that I will have the support of men leaders in my organization. Men think they have the priority to lead over women, even in Germany [where she studied her PhD.] I didn’t meet until now a women leader , not in hospitals not in Universities not in City hall or supermarkets

Maria also thought that upon achieving a leadership position, men will not be supportive and that they think that leadership is a man’s job and therefore she will struggle with that. Here Maria is raising the issue that gender-based discrimination against women leaders still exists and not only in Saudi but that even in Germany. Her narrative invokes male superiority over women in leadership. Another line of Maria’s story continues to make examples regarding the lack of role models across various

sectors which might also be another reason why she might refuse leader identity, which is invisibility.

I think the deeply embedded values in our culture can change, but need a lot of time and efforts, if we start today maybe we will have a result in a hundred years.

In the end Maria claimed that shifting cultural barriers opposed against women can be achievable, yet, the process of making it happen might be slow and difficult. She argues that it is time to change and there is a lot to be done for women to gain recognition in the country.

Phase two:

In the first interview, Maria was dubious about pursuing a leadership position owing to cultural constraints (such as the right to drive, travel, and live alone), organizational barriers (such as lack of power and lack of role models), and the fact that family is more essential. When presented with a transcript of her previous interview and asked about her current viewpoint, she stated:

I may have had doubts previously, but now I am having second thoughts. I am astounded by how quickly things have changed around here [at the university], even though the changes are not yet substantial, it is noticeable especially regarding women's voice in a leadership positions.

Maria previously detached herself from a leader identity. Yet, in her second interview she revisited these assumptions, this might be related to the change she noticed in her university regarding women leadership in which she will elaborate on later. Maria mentioned women "voice" as leaders as something she noticed a development in, yet, Maria's view on this point is still regarded as tentative. Following that, Maria talked about family responsibility, she argued that:

I consider the greater respect for working mothers and their efforts to be the most significant social development. In the past, people saw a woman's work as less significant, but now it is viewed as a

benefit to the family and is given higher value. Maybe the current financial status in the country plays a role in accepting more women in the workplace.

Maria feels that the significant change in society is the advancement of women's roles. The social role of women as a benefit to the family has consequently lowered expectations for why women are more likely to hold jobs with perceived feminine attributes and the male dominance of jobs such as leadership. Another point raised by Maria is that women's work nowadays is necessity rather a luxury as a result of shifting social and economic circumstances. In the past, women's employment involvement was restricted, and they were often expected to prioritize household obligations above professions.

For instance, I worked with a female Head of Department one of the firsts in the University's history. On the one hand, I view her as a model for women leaders and our department in constant development due to her effort. On the other hand, her leadership is equivalent to that of men who came before her. She has helped other women in the department and assists the working woman and appreciate their responsibilities. The fact that her children are no longer reliant on her is, in my opinion, the driving force behind her enormous success, since it has freed her up to devote more time and energy to her career. It is then when I saw Prof (...) that I started to believe that this is the right time for me to seek an opportunity of leadership.

Maria mentions another story of her boss, a woman HoD which is one of the first leaders to be appointed to this position in leading both male and female departments. Maria admired her leadership style and the way she encouraged other women academics as well as the advancement she introduced in their department. Maria finally found her role model that she worked next to and admired. Maria explained that the main driver that excelled their HoD as a leader in their department is that her children are independent now and she will not feel guilty taking up more responsibility, it was at this time that Maria was constructing her positive leader identity.

7.2.2.2 “Being a leader was not a choice of mine, now it is” narrative

The second progressive narrative, was “Being a leader was not a choice of mine, now it is”. This resonated with two respondents (Dana and Rahaf). In first round of interview, Dana and Rahaf were self-ready to develop as leaders. They both have indicated a strong motivation to lead (having already had some leadership posts) and recognised their skills to develop.

Yet, even when opportunity arise, social identity (tribal in Dana’s and ethnic in Rahaf’s case) clashed with the construction of their leader identity. This narrative refers to the concealed force and constraints that leaves these women with no choice but to decline leadership as a professional identity, whether due to family pressure, tribal heritage, or origin.

In their follow up interviews, new reforms and social changes, have led them to construct a positive leader identity being able to see themselves as leaders. Dana’s story will be discussed as a representative narrative

Dana:

Phase one:

I consider myself someone who has struggled a lot against the odds. Being from a village outside Jeddah, I couldn't specialize in a scientific field there. So, I moved to the city (Jeddah) to pursue a scientific major. I used to stay with a family we know in Jeddah until the afternoon and then go back to my family every day. Alhamdulillah, I made it. But I always saw myself reaching further and having more ambitions. I had some goals in mind that I was determined to achieve, and I did achieve them, thanks to Allah. Sometimes, those goals seemed almost impossible, but my inner feeling told me that I would achieve them, and I did.

Dana’s narrative showed how persistent and courageous she is in perusing her motivation “**I consider myself someone who has struggled a lot against the odds**”. She noted that despite living in a remote location where there are no science schools, she pursued her growing motivation for higher education, stating, that she always

envisioned herself going higher and having bigger dreams. Dana's determination although seemed "**almost impossible**", did come true.

Dana then mentioned another story of hers, on how an opportunity of elite leadership position in the country was proposed to her but that she had to decline.

For example, in my experience, I registered for the municipal elections, which delighted my father. Then I felt that people were not pleased that I applied for the position because I was a professor, fearing that I would win all the votes.

Dana applied for the municipal elections, the first round of elections. It is noteworthy to mention that the right of women to vote and to stand as candidates at municipal elections was first granted to women in 2015.

Dana explicitly discussed how her father was delighted at first that she applied for this position. Yet, other people in her community, she argues were not. She attributes this to the fact that she is "**a professor, fearing that I would win all the votes**" distancing gender as a cause to this treatment.

I thought that men might need it; they might need it more for the financial gain than for the community service. I only thought of it as a service, regardless of the financial return. I was determined to be the first female to serve on the municipal council, and there were several other women vying for the position.

After that, Dana argues that her motivation to lead reflected her desire to serve her community and prove that women could be effective leaders. Dana as well implied that men in her community applied for this position for other reasons, such as financial gain. Dana was "**determined to be the first female to serve on the municipal council**". Dana continued to discuss more details of the story and how "**Some customs and traditions may force a person, out of respect for their parents, to withdraw from certain things that may be extraneous to this society**".

One day, after many negotiations, I decided to quit the elections and I told my father that I was going to quit. He said to me you do not have to, yet I know what will happen to him if I did not. I said that as long as (...) was around, I would have no opportunities; nonetheless, I struck a brick block. Even if I won the elections, how am I going to communicate with them? On the other hand, the picture wasn't clear about the working hours and what exactly I was required to do, especially during the sessions, and what is my role as a female would be. The mechanism wasn't clear, so I pulled myself out.

Dana's narrative refers to subconscious enforcement to decline leadership as a professional identity. She shared how her tribal heritage influenced her aspirations to be a leader, that she had to give up her chance of being the first elected female candidate in the municipal elections due to societal pressure. In her narrative she communicated several reasons why she decided to withdraw from the election, such as the male-dominated political arena, favouritism as well as concerns about communication and unclear expectations for her as a female leader.

I found out later that all the ladies started pulling out. I did withdraw my name, because of a certain candidate (...) who started sending people to my father to speak to him, demanding he withdraw his daughter from the election.

Dana stated that all female candidates for this leadership opportunity withdrew. At this point in the conversation, she has made it clear that she views the position as problematic and that cultural pressure from males in her town against her father to consider removing her name from the election. When I asked if the other candidate was from the same tribe as her, she continued: **"yes, he is from the tribe, and he wanted the position badly"**.

Dana continues to explain the situation:

My father never asked me to withdraw, but he was surprised that people acted that way. He won and I decided to withdraw because I needed to continue to represent them, and I wasn't sure how to do that if I won. It was not clear to me what was expected of me in terms of attendance and meetings.

Dana stated that her father felt the pressure from his tribe, yet he did not ask her to withdraw. Dana's narrative indicates that she left the elections due to the pressure and uncertainty she faced in this male-dominated arena where she will be the first of the women in the position. She stated that one of the reasons that she left the elections was that she wanted to maintain her relationship with her community and that she was not sure how to do it especially in this small village via such a leadership position.

Phase two:

In the follow up interview with Dana, who had to reject a leadership position out of fear of social exclusion, she claimed that:

Appointing so many influential women to positions of leadership throughout the kingdom is, in my opinion, a turning point and a powerful statement about the importance of women and the Kingdom's continuous commitment to ensuring that more women attain positions of power. Which, I hope, will elevate her stature and encourage her to continue pursuing these roles. I can now envision myself as a member of the Shura Council, and although I once aspired to serve on the municipal council, I now have high hopes.

Dana constructed a positive leader identity in the follow-up interview. She explicitly stated that now she sees herself in one of the highest positions in the country the Shura Council as she stated, **"I can now envision myself as a member of the Shura Council"**.

In addition, she argues that new reforms and appointments of many women in the country is a **"turning point"**. Dana's use of the term "turning point" suggests that the appointment of influential women to leadership positions is a pivotal moment in the country's history, one that may have far-reaching implications for the status and empowerment of women in society. The term also implies that this change is a departure from the past, suggesting a positive change in her account in regard to social change happening in the country and a fundamental shift in the way women are viewed and valued.

7.2.2.3 I am not a leader narrative to I am a leader narrative:

Most participants who rejected leader identity did so due to religious beliefs that women in Islam should not lead. An example is Layan's narrative.

Two narratives of (Layan and Aya) will be discussed as part of the progressive narrative. The decision of providing both examples is that this narrative provided a radical view from rejecting to accepting leader identity. Variations in both participants were clear. Aya, holds a tribal identity strongly while on the other hand Layan holds a strong ethnic identity. Both social identities albeit strong were diminished when combined with strong religious views from both participants. Religious identity was more salient than other social identities and resulted in rejecting leader identity in the first interview.

It is important to highlight that this is a much stronger swing than the other two progressive narratives in which socio-cultural unreadiness related to different social identities than religion, which were the main force behind this choice of leader identity detachment (professional identity (organisation not ready) and social identity (tribal in Dana's and ethnic in Rahaf's)).

During follow up interviews, reforms in the country have had changes not only in women's status but also in the social discourse of modern Islam in the country (see section 3.5.2). This has altered participants' views and allowed for positive construction of leader identity. Layan's and Aya's narrative is discussed in the next section.

Layan:

Layan is 44 years old, works as Assistant professor and comes from an Upper class, conservative, Asian immigrant family from the Western region in Saudi Arabia. Layan comes from a highly educated family in which her mother had a PhD and her father was the first in his field to have a PhD. She mentioned that even her grandmother had

a master degree, despite the fact that in those days there wasn't much available at the end of the colonial era.

Phase one:

Layan's narrative mentioned her descent in many areas and that she was always perceived as not authentic Saudi:

May Allah have mercy on my grandmother, who was always asked where she was from originally because we all do not look like Saudis. So she would tell them that originally my father, grandfather, great grandfather are all from here. They would say, 'Actually, your grandfather, great grandfather...' and she would reply, 'Actually, my grandfather is from heaven.' But he came down here, so of course everyone was shocked. Adam (peace be upon him) came down to this world for a short time, and with the permission of Allah, we will all return to our original homeland, which is paradise.

Layan detached herself from leader identity, mainly due to conservative religious thoughts, in her first interview she stated that:

Actually, I always prefer not to officially hold a position. I am one of those people who do not want to be the college dean or the director of something. I prefer to be the unknown soldier who stands up and takes on the task and supports others to the end. That's what I prefer.

Allah Almighty revealed His book and His teachings clearly without any dispute, but there were some things that were left open for interpretation. In some areas it works and in others it doesn't, depending on the circumstances and the nature of the people, because the religion and the fundamental legislation do not change, but the things that are left for interpretation can change depending on the situations. We all know the hadith that Muslims should not be led by women, it is very clear.

Layan offered another explanation to her rejection of leadership, that since women do not contribute financially to the household in Islam, they should not hold positions of authority:

However, this concept of not having to provide for the family should provide women with internal tranquillity. That they are not meant to fight and strive for high positions if they are not required to.

Nonetheless, it is appropriate that men do so. Women work because they want to. We like having jobs and a position, but we're not obligated to do so. I simply work for my own self-motivation.

The second explanation is that a mother's job is to raise children and that being a mother is what true leadership means:

Ultimately, the goal is reform and building, to make our country better, not for personal greatness. We want to create a good generation, not just to be told "yes sir" by everyone. In the end, it's the mother who is the greatest leader. My mother-in-law, God bless her with health and well-being, had (more than 10) sons and daughters. On Eid, all her children and grandchildren are by her side, kissing her hand. Who is the leader here? In religion, who is the greatest? The mother!

The interpretation of leadership and the things that are always hearing depend on the current trend, but I believe that leadership has always been for women.

Layan argues that society should be reformed to establish a better nation and generation. Layan believes the mother is the greatest leader in religion and in her family. She claims that women have always led and that their role as moms and caregivers is underappreciated.

In addition, Layan revealed that society imposes many barriers against women leaders as caretakers and nurturers.

I think women face a lot of pressures in society because, as I mentioned earlier, they are half of society and they raise the other half. So, they have greater responsibilities than men, who only must focus on themselves.

Layan emphasizes once again that leading is not about having authority but about doing what needs to be done. She explains that even those who do not occupy official positions of leadership may nevertheless make a difference by, for instance, encouraging female students to develop strong moral convictions and achieve academic success in their profession. Here Layan is constructing a professional and social identity and detached herself from leader identity.

Leadership doesn't mean that you hold the position of leadership, it means that you ultimately achieve the goal that you desire. For example, if my goal is for female students to have good ethics, such as honesty and to excel in my field of (her speciality), it's not necessary for me to be the actual leader, the important thing is that I achieve the result that I desire in my goal.

Phase two

Layan's second interview revealed why she would now consider a leadership position and a leadership identity. She mentioned that new generations of immigrants had lessened their national identity unlike the first generation, she discussed that:

There were many country-fixers in the past. They studied abroad and earned masters and doctorates, but they were loyal to their country and wanted to help it. The new generations who studied in the country don't share our love and loyalty. I don't know what the problem is or what happened. although the difference in civilization was much greater between here and abroad back then, but there was a tremendous sense of belonging to one's country and identity, in which materialism and appearance didn't matter much. Maybe because their goal wasn't superficial things like parties, fashion, and appearances as it is now.

Layan underlines the generational gap between those who went abroad and returned with a strong sense of patriotism and a desire to help their nation and those who studied at home. She claims the cultural differences between the nation and the rest of the world was considerably larger. However, national pride and identity were greater before. Layan implies that people were concerned with more than fashion and social events. Layan worried about younger generations' lack of loyalty and changing values. Thus, Layan recognizes the need for strong leadership to support and inspire others with similar goals.

Therefore, this may make me say that I may have to take a leadership position, to support those personalities who have the same goal as me and, in the end, the important thing is that our country, our college, our daughters, and our students are in good hands.

Layan declares she is ready to assume leadership for the previous reasons. The expression "in good hands" indicates a feeling of duty and accountability for

maintaining the prosperity and welfare of the nation. Overall, the statement indicates a willingness to act and contribute to the community's improvement.

Our department head is a woman, and this is the second time we have had a female HoD. We don't have any problem with women leadership, we have full authority here at the College. In my position as the director of (...), my boss is a woman who is also the college's deputy director for (...). We have flexibility, and all the women here are excellent and great leaders. One of them oversaw three departments under her management. Women built our college, three female leaders founded it and held all positions until their students now took their place in management.

Following that Layan has discussed how she now sees women everywhere in the organisation, she mentioned that her HoD now is a woman for the second time and that their college had great women leaders since its establishment. Her statement **“we have full authority here at the College”** indicates agency in which she included herself as part of the in-group as a leader which reflects her positive leader identity.

Aya:

Aya is 33 years old, works as a Lecturer comes from a Middle class, conservative, tribal family from the Western region in Saudi Arabia. When starting to tell her story, Aya acknowledged the role of her family in her advancement and especially her father. She stated that she wanted to study medicine, but it wasn't available in her city, it was only in a nearby city [which is two hours driving], so **“I wanted to go there”**. She addressed that her family **“may not have wanted me to go because it was far, and I would need to find a place to stay, but they never said no. They just presented the positives and negatives and left the decision up to me. In the end, I decided to go to [her city] University and study computer science. There was no pressure from them, even if they didn't want me to study medicine. It was just presented in a different way”**.

After graduation, Aya applied for two jobs: one as a teaching assistant at her university and the other at a Technical College. The Technical College offered high salaries and benefits, but had difficult working hours. She was selected for both jobs and received conflicting advice from family members. Eventually, Aya chose to be a teaching

assistant, which caused some disagreement among family members, especially her brothers. When the probation period started, Aya was still unsure about their choice. However, after their father spoke to the family, everyone agreed to support the author's decision.

Aya's story demonstrates a conservative tribal identity in that her family weighed in on her college degree and employment choices, particularly the distance between their home and the university she planned to attend. That is because driving was banned for women during that time.

Phase one:

Aya's narrative of rejecting leader identity as in many of the participants' narratives arose based on the prophet's hadith, "Never will succeed such a nation as makes a woman their ruler" (Prophet Muhammad, PBUH; Sahih Bukhari, (Sahih al-Bukhari, n.d.) as she argued in her first interview that:

To be honest, I do not want to declare a fatwa about it and I cannot delve into it much, [but] there is this hadith I heard about that says a woman cannot lead Muslims or something similar. This is from the point of view of Sharia, and I cannot interfere with it much really. I mean, from what we see, I feel it is not in everything. I mean, leadership for women in things like the ministry, I feel, no, given the nature of women, it is not appropriate for a woman to be a minister, but as a member of the Shura Council, I feel why not? On the contrary [it is important], it is they understand us more. Women understand women more. They can communicate our demands more as members of the Shura Council, although up to now I have not seen any benefit from them.

Aya was reluctant to even consider the possibility of women in leadership positions because of the hadith, whose meaning she was uncertain about. She was careful to determine the religious stance of women in leadership positions "I cannot delve into it much". Aya used the phrase "it is not appropriate" to identify a women's job as a Minister. On the other hand, she believed that membership in the Shura Council is crucial since it may assist in bringing other women's issues to the attention of the country's

decision-makers. When later asked for her opinion of why she thinks a position as a minister is not appropriate for women, Aya stated:

In our society, women will have to comply with what suits us as a society, because the minister will have to visit places, whether it is men's departments or departments for women. I feel that, from my point of view, she can be a deputy minister for girls' departments only.

Aya argues that women should adjust their behaviour to fit societal norms. She confirms her in-group identity and her acceptance of this viewpoint by referring to the society as "us." Aya said the minister will have to go to different departments, whether they're for men or women. Aya says that it is more socially acceptable for a woman to head an organization for women, she also added:

For example, if a Saudi woman is a Minister of Health, she will be visiting hospitals, meeting with men, I feel that a woman's nature does not suit it. Our society will not easily accept that a woman is the one in charge, not that she is responsible for a subject, but we are talking about field visits, things like that. I feel it's a bit difficult for her. But if she is a deputy for something, responsible for a department, that would be better, of course, so that one can directly speak with her and face her. But this is what I see.

Aya implies throughout her narrative that women do not belong in positions of power that demand them to work with men. A Saudi woman Minister in the field of health, for instance, would be expected to travel to hospitals and meet with male colleagues. Aya implies that a woman's biological make-up makes it difficult for her to be in such a position and carry out such duties. Her narrative suggests that society may not readily accept a woman in a position of power, particularly in a role that involves interacting with men. The speaker does acknowledge that it may be more acceptable for a woman to be a deputy position instead, as this would not require as much direct interaction with men.

Phase two:

Aya was promoted to Assistant professor at this stage. In her second interview, she stated that:

I was surprised after our first meeting when I went back home and checked the hadith and discovered that although it was an authentic hadith, many people neglect the context of it. The Prophet (peace be upon him) questioned a group of Persians who had arrived in Medina, "Who is the king of Persia?" "A woman," said one. The Prophet then commented, "Never will succeed such a nation as makes a woman their ruler". The context of this hadith makes it a political prophecy about the fall of the Persian Empire, which came true many years later. This is not a law that broadly bans women from holding public office. All my life I was living on this hadith and I heard about it everywhere, I was in shock for couple of days.

In the follow up interview Aya was keen and enthusiastic to talk about what she found following our conversation. She stated that she revisited the hadith that she was not sure about and that she found that it has a specific context as per women leadership. This caused her to question her long standing position that women cannot lead in Islam.

Following that she stated that one of the first women to be appointed as Deans were from her university. She argued that that happened due to the new generation of visionary young leaders.

I believe the transition began with increasingly open-minded youthful decision makers such as our Master. This has begun with MBS's Vision 2030. For a new phase of women leaders to assume a more prominent role, the generation of those involved in decision-making must change.

When asked if she now would consider a leadership position, she stated that "I would, I think I am". Aya constructed a positive leader identity, she stated that:

Every change is challenging at first because it's hard for all people to accept drastic change from the top of tightness to the top of openness. Society needs more time as it accepts the presence of women in a place of leadership. Yet, I feel it is more acceptable. Do you know that women can now work as lawyers at the Ministry of Justice and to contribute to the judiciary and the resolution of cases.

7.2.3 Regression Narrative Leader Identity:

Regarding their perception of themselves as leaders, these regression narratives continued to fluctuate ambivalence to rejecting leader identification. They also expressed extra concern over the country's new reforms on women's empowerment. Two Saudi women (Suha and Noor) fit the decline narrative.

In this category of leader identity narratives, crossing the organizational barriers and promoting to leadership role was constructed as a regressive plotline. This reflected a prevalence of un-fit to the leadership role and a decline in the self-view of being a leader despite the social change. These regressive narratives were recognized from the data set in both phase one and phase two as ambiguous and unsettling stories, especially when the concerns that participants described with women leadership experiences were persistent and unresolved.

7.2.3.1 The 'why-not' narrative to 'it is only a show'

This section represents some informants' alternating accounts of uncertain to negative leadership self-view mainly due to the organizational barrier.

The "why-not" narrative to "it is only a show" is a type of storyline that some of the research participants in this study used to explain their fluctuating perception of their own leadership abilities. At times, these participants expressed uncertainty about their leadership skills, which they attributed to various organizational barriers or challenges that they faced. However, at other times, these same participants dismissed their leadership abilities as being insignificant or unimportant, suggesting that their leadership was merely for show or not taken seriously by others. This narrative reflects the complex and sometimes contradictory ways in which individuals think about their own leadership potential and the impact of organizational factors on their self-view. Overall, this section highlights the challenges that individuals face in developing and maintaining a positive and consistent leadership self-image within complex organizational contexts.

Suha is 45 years old and is an associate professor, she is conservative from a Bedouin decent. Suha discussed how her father encouraged and supported her pursuit of education. Despite a lack of medical schools in her city, she insisted on becoming a doctor and her father supported her decision. The siblings were expected to attend school unless they were severely ill and felt proud to show their good grades to their parents. In gratitude for their support, the speaker and their siblings would give their academic certificates to their parents. Overall, the text highlights the importance of parental support and encouragement in pursuing education.

From the beginning, my father encouraged us to pursue education and was a very democratic father. He never told us not to enter a specific field of study. I remember wanting to study medicine, but in the city, I was in, there was no medical school. So, I had to travel to another city to enrol in one. My mother was not happy about it only because I am a girl, but I insisted on becoming a doctor. They even travelled with me to the other city to help me enrol, but when I couldn't find accommodation, I had to return home. So, from the beginning, my parents supported us in pursuing education. We could only miss school if we were sick. My siblings and I were thrilled to present our excellent marks to our parents. We wanted them to be proud of us academically. Our parents were our main support, even though we earned the credentials. We would offer our certificates to our parents to thank them."

Phase one.

In the first interview, Suha discussed in her narrative the issue of dual-level leadership in her university and that it was one of the reasons that made her hesitant to claim a leadership role, Suha explicitly stated that **"Frankly, I don't think that I would want to be a leader in the institution in the near future, but leadership is not about the position...."**, she continued to argue that the reason she rejected leader identity is the unclear role of HoD and lack of authority for women leaders in the institution:

A ship can only have one captain, if it has more than one, it going to sink. The role of the women's department supervisor is very not clear. I don't say that she does not have any authority, yet, the

final decision has to be from the HoD which is the male-section. That is dualism which leads to longer duration of the decision.

Her continuous narrative tried to find an explanation for this organizational exclusion of women leaders. One of the explanations she provided is that it is due to society and traditions not religion, Suha stated that:

I don't think that religion is preventing women from being leaders; it is impossible. I have been reading a lot of books about Islam from many scholars. There is not one single book that mentioned that women should not be mixing with men or that they should not take leadership roles except during prayer. Religion is not a barrier for men and women to work together.

Suha could not become a doctor since it is a mixed-gender profession that fundamentalist religious views consider improper for women. However, Suha declared that there is no evidence in Islamic tradition to support this viewpoint and that Muslim women have had for long participated in different fields even with men such as battles and poetry:

I think it is a contradiction. In fact, there is no evidence that Islam is against women working, even for people who say women should not be working in the medical field as a doctor or a nurse because of Ikhtilat. It was mentioned in our books that women used to be part of the army at the time of Prophet Mohammed, and they used to treat the injured soldiers. Our books mentioned many names of female figures who were known to participate in battle, such as the famous poet Al-Khansaa. I wonder when it was that the scholars decided that a woman's voice is provocative and it's a sin to speak out loud, whereas women used to chant poems.

She also said that she would not want a leadership position, but rather a promotion. Her professional identity was more visible than her leadership identity, in this regard. As she continued her story, it potentially uncovered her reason for this belief:

I'm optimistic that discrimination will change. I mean, I see these signs [that] the new generation are starting to feel that favouritism is injustice. Injustice indeed. One time I did a task and other people claimed it and didn't write my name when sending it to the male department and I kept silent. My boss knows that this is my work, maybe he doesn't know, although this is a mistake. I mean, the leader should know that this is the product of my work. I started to see people announcing their work

because of this, and that's why the president knows that this person works well. And who works silently – unfortunately, these days no one knows about them.

The factors that made Suha perceive her leadership identity as less apparent stemmed from a lack of trust in the organisational gendered procedure, as well as her university's mixed-gender system. For example, she stated that doing one's work silently would not guarantee anything, which led her to feel discriminated against in her college.

Phase two:

In the follow-up interview, Suha presented a sceptical narrative "it is only a show", regarding new reforms in the country. She implied that women leaders are often appointed as a formality and lack actual power and authority:

Do you think it is real. In my opinion most of these women were appointed only as a show. In reality they are doing the same old tricks. No real authority for them. One time I attended a meeting with a women head of department and one of the men professors [her subordinate] said that these ideas she is presenting is not feasible and that she is new and do not know much about their department and asked the secretary (a man) to help her make sense of the situation first before making any judgment. Every other man in the room seemed to agree with him, surprisingly even most women who were very few. Me and two other women academics. While I was really hesitant with the idea of leading this incident made me hate it even more. Why should I do this to myself, I am happy the way I am. You can change policy but it is very hard to change people. Especially old people.

Suha shares a personal experience of witnessing a male professor dismiss a female HoD's ideas and question her knowledge and expertise in front of others, with most of the men in the room agreeing with him. Surprisingly, even most of the few women present shared this view. Suha expresses her frustration with the situation and hesitates to take on a leadership role, as she feels it is difficult to change the attitudes and behaviour of older people.

Suha's account uncovers no internal barrier preventing them from becoming leaders. Yet, she rejected leader identity toward professional identity. Suha's narrative

concluded that the change in people's attitude toward female leaders is distant, particularly in the current organizational context. Even though women currently hold positions of power, organisational culture caused her to reject the leader identity stating that "While I was really hesitant with the idea of leading, this incident made me hate it even more. Why should I do this to myself? I am happy the way I am, focusing on doing more research and seeking promotion to professor. You can change policy, but it is very hard to change people, especially old people."

7.3 Narrative plotline of leader identity construction:

The study used graphical representations to map the plotlines for each interviewee to demonstrate Saudi women's leader identity construction following new reforms in the country (Gergen and Gergen, 1986; Cooper and Mackenzie Davey, 2011; Lieblich et al., 1998). The data revealed four distinct plotlines based on the comparison between narratives in the initial and follow-up interviews (see Figure 21).

The first group of narratives of leader identity remained consistent between the two phases. This group of stability narratives were (*I am a leader narrative*) and (*I am not a leader narrative*), each narrative remained unchanged through both interviews.

The second group of narratives were progressive. In the first interview one of the plotlines was ambivalence about leadership regarding religious identity, the other one was affected by social identity in which it rejected leadership due to that. Lastly a narrative of rejecting leader identity due to religious (Layan) and social identity (Aya). In the second phase these narratives showed a progressive shift in which each of the narratives showed a tendency to accept leader identity.

Thirdly, is a group of narratives in which women decline from uncertainty in regard to claiming leader identity and then shows a rejection of the leader identity which was labelled regressive narrative, '*The why-not narrative to it is only a show*'.

The study drew upon individual stories to illustrate these distinct stages and forms of narrative plots. These groups of narratives went on to develop a steady, progressive, and regressive plotline.

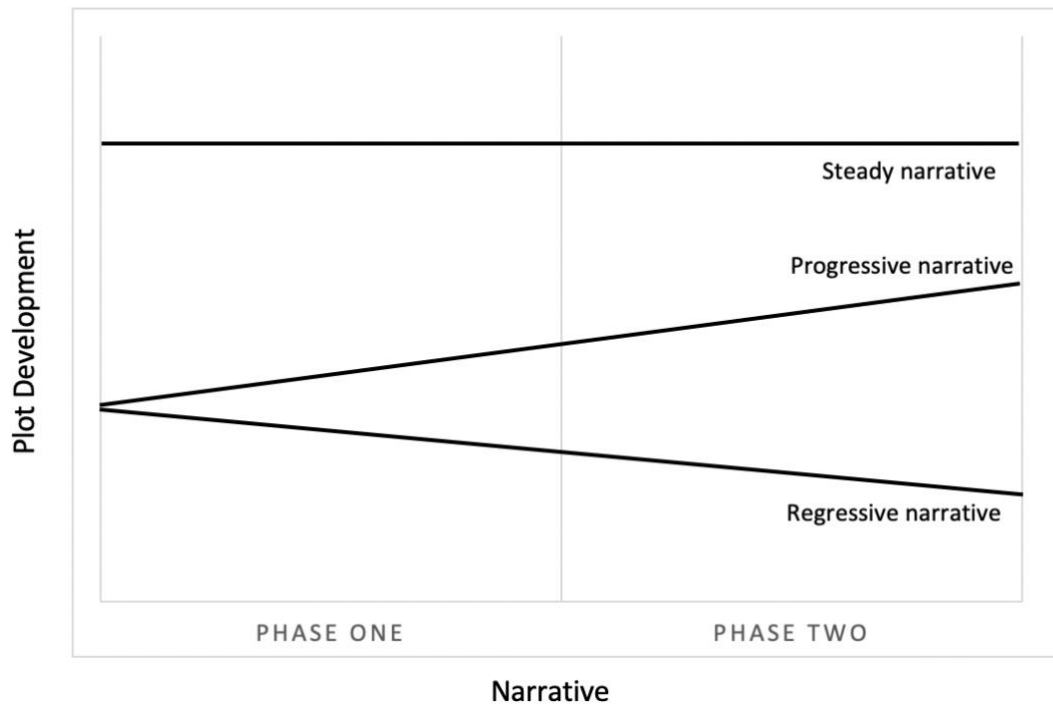


Figure 20: Narrative plotline of leader identity construction.

Holistic Narrative Analysis		Participants/Quotes	
		Phase one	Phase two
Steady Narrative Identity	<p>"I am not a leader" narrative.</p> <p>[Two participants]</p>	<p>Tara, when asked if she sees herself as a leader. Her narrative indicated that she hold a strong views regarding women leadership. She stated: "a women should not be a leader, that is a fact. I cannot trust a women who may want to lead and especially other men. I think this addresses her lack of faith and modesty".</p>	<p>Tara, I think these new ideas and the vast change have poisoned many of the mind of women around me who are in pursuit of their aspiration will not be hesitant to destroy their families. One of my friend who her husband refused that she takes upon a leadership role who is mixed with men has asked him for divorce!</p>
	<p>"I am a leader: capable and motivated" narrative.</p> <p>[Three participants]</p>	<p>Wed, when asked what skills she thought made her the leader she is, she stated: "Numerous abilities have brought me here: dedication, devotion, fairness, organisation, hard work, and a vision for progress and a goal of one's own, particularly in academia. otherwise, you will be unable to assist the institution for which you work in pursuing or achieving its goals and values".</p> <p>"I believe that people who are at the level of senior management or if we refer to them as decision-makers see potential.</p>	<p>In the second interview Wed had been appointed to a professor, she was still holding a leadership position, a higher one. She discussed: The vice dean of my college is my biggest supporter. In addition to being selected for an administrative position within my college, I was nominated for a leadership position outside of it. However, after I explained the situation in detail, she was receptive and gave it extensive consideration. Without thinking of her professional or personal interests, she informed me that another colleague could take my place on the other assignment for which I was nominated. She believed that the second</p>

		<p>Otherwise, I would not have held multiple positions in the span of seven years, all newly-created positions in which no one had previously worked and I came in to fill the vacancy”.</p> <p>“The fact that I am a very organized person who works well within teams and adheres to deadlines is, I believe, what led to my nomination in the first place. I didn't think administration was for me at the time, I consider that to be the starting point. But I've learned that this is where I can learn and grow and make a difference, so I've been putting in the time and effort to get here”.</p>	<p>nomination outside of the college would be more advantageous for me. It was a great opportunity for me to prove myself for a higher position that I hold now and very proud of”.</p>
Progressive Narrative Identity	<p>“Ambivalent leader identity to I am a leader narrative”.</p> <p>[Four participants]</p>	<p>According to Ruba's narrative in the first interview, her desire not to be in a leadership position was influenced by favouritism in selection process towards male colleagues.</p>	<p>Ruba who has been appointed a Vice Dean following our first interview, pointed out that: “I can say that the recent developments in the country have inspired me to pursue a leadership position should the opportunity present itself”.</p> <p>Ruba discussed that having seen many women leaders appointed to top posts, some of whom came from as she described “resembles me”.</p> <p>“A colleague who resembles me was recently promoted to a position of leadership. I am confident that she has no ties to the decision-makers. I am pleased for her, as I am confident, she deserves this post. In addition, this made me believe that there is hope at the end of the tunnel. Shortly after that I was appointed a Vice Dean”.</p>
	<p>“Being a leader was not a choice of mine, now it is” narrative”.</p> <p>[two participants]</p>	<p>One of the storylines of the narratives of rejecting the leader identity is being from a minority group. Rahaf, for example, was hesitant in the initial interview to even think about a leadership role due to her minority status, even though she had a lot of experience.</p> <p>Rahaf mentioned, “I think it is very hard for me to achieve a leadership position, yet I might be appointed from the men's department, even though they have never been in contact with me.” Being from a minority group, Rahaf tried hard to gain knowledge and formal leader capabilities. Still, she believed that her origins might be a hinderance.</p>	<p>She claimed, “I am really eager to be a leader,” in the second round. After experiencing so many microaggressions and instances of not being supported in my current capacity, I can't even begin to think what it would be like to be in a leadership position”. She continued, “I think now I have more experience and knowledge, having seen many women from different social classes gaining this opportunity, made more optimistic about the future, though, I am afraid that when it happens, it will happen only to achieve diversity and might not be supported when in position. Time is required for these matters”.</p>
	<p>“I am not a leader narrative to I am a leader narrative”</p> <p>[Two participants]</p>	<p>Both narratives were discussed in the findings</p>	
Regressive Narrative Identity	<p>“Why not narrative to sceptical narrative”.</p> <p>[Two participants]</p>	<p>As for Noor, leadership is not something she wishes to seek. The sense in her conversation was that claiming leadership positions comes with a consequence.</p> <p>Noor raised important issues when she discussed her experience as a vice dean, such as fear of failure or blame due to the limitations of her authority. She stated: “He [referring to the dean] is responsible for me, and for everything I am responsible for. I know that I have limits in every order. I need to know my limits regarding the people and places under my responsibility. I need to know my limitations to not have troubles and to not do less than expected.”</p>	<p>When asking Noor about her opinion if these new appointments have made her more keen to be a leader, she stated:</p> <p>“I am really pleased with the progress being made in HE regarding women leadership, but I have never seen an announcement for a leadership position before or now. In our university, appointments are often made from the top down; the decision-makers determine who will succeed them. Since there is no notice, you cannot nominate yourself. It was a surprise when I was initially selected for the Vice Dean job. No one informed me, nor the person next to me or the person before me. Everything just occurred. I believe that if an announcement is</p>

		<p>Noor said that double effort in a mixed-gender environment is time exhausting, and women do not have power of authority at all:</p> <p>“The final decision is only in the hands of men [HoD or the dean] and there is no direct communication between the faculty member and the decision makers. Imagine how much time this cycle takes for one matter.”</p>	<p>made, stronger applicants will apply, and the university will have a diverse group of people at the top, as opposed to those with similar backgrounds.”</p> <p>When asked about why does she think this happened, she argued that: “Rather than being eligible for this position of leadership, I believe the code states that we will accept you if we know you. Perhaps there is someone else who would be a better fit for the position. Being an excellent scholar, educator, or expert is not a prerequisite for leadership. Ability and experience are key factors. It is not clear how nomination occurred; therefore it is questionable. That is why I was not comfortable doing it.”</p>
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Figure 21: Additional representative examples of each Holistic Narrative Storyline.

Chapter 8 Discussion

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher synthesises and discusses the findings of the current study. The discussion and interpretation of this study are organised around the three main research questions to examine how female academic leaders construct their identities in the Saudi Arabian HE context. It consolidates the relationships between the findings, the literature review and the conceptual framework.

This research sought to investigate leadership identity as a link between individuals and society via a narrative enquiry through a social identity lens to examine how female academic leaders construct their identity in the Saudi Arabian HE context, in which obvious gender-based cultural–social and institutional obstacles remain. The study aim was to understand the significance of social identity (Hogg et al., 2012b; Hogg, 2001; Tajfel and Turner, 2019), gender (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Eagly and Carli, 2007) and tight culture (Gelfand, 2018; Toh and Leonardelli, 2013; Gelfand et al., 2006) in Saudi women leader identity shaping and reshaping. The results of this study add to the expanding body of knowledge regarding women’s leadership development research, broader leadership debates and gender in the leadership field via the analysis of women academics’ narratives. The results answer these three research questions:

1. How do Saudi female academics perceive leadership in Saudi HE?
2. What is the role of Saudi women’s developmental readiness in their leadership identity construction?
3. How do narratives of leadership experiences shape the construction of Saudi women’s leader identity with regard to recent reforms in Saudi HE?

8.2 Categorical Content Analysis

Common themes emerged in the findings, which were categorised according to leader developmental readiness theory. The first research question was addressed by Key Theme One, which examined how participants construct leadership with regard to the socio-cultural context. The second research question was addressed by Key Themes Two, Three and Four, which are titled, respectively, “socio-cultural context readiness”, “leadership self-readiness” and “the readiness of the organization”.

8.2.1 First research question: How do Saudi women academics perceive leadership in Saudi HE?

As leadership is considered a contextually shaped phenomenon (Fairhurst and Grant, 2010; Meindl et al., 1985), it was important to begin the interviews by asking participants about their understanding of the concept of leadership in the academic setting.

Leadership was understood differently by each respondent, reflecting their unique perspectives and life experiences (Appendix E). While many of the participants emphasised the importance of teamwork in their leadership, these examples were nonetheless grounded in the larger context of social interaction or an influential school of leadership (Gautrey, 2014).

Accordingly, this thesis regarding Saudi women academics’ perceptions of leadership examines how the social categories of race, gender and social class interact to affect their experiences.

Most of the participants asserted that leadership is not about the position (role) and that a leader can earn a position by working as a team member and earning the trust of colleagues, as illustrated by the interview responses in chapter 6, Section 6.1.1. This implies that in Saudi Arabia, women adopt an approach aligned with the influential school of leadership and that the participants’ social constructions and underlying assumptions about leadership are mostly affected by their social identities ((Murphy

and Johnson, 2011). These findings confirm that leadership is a phenomenon informed by cultural values rather than the authority inherent in the titles of leadership. In fact, the results suggest that most of the participants were reluctant to lead.

Most women in Saudi Arabia lack complete authority when in leadership roles, so adopting this view makes sense. It implies satisfaction with achievements, even without authentic out-group appreciation, leading to a position hereafter referred to as a *figurehead*, or “a person who is in a high position in a country or an organisation but who has no real power or authority” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2021). As the participant Lamis implied, “There is a lot of leadership capacity in women; they only lack the job title, yet they do the same job as men.”

By the same token, the teamwork leadership idea might be justified by the collectivist nature of Saudi culture, in which being part of a group and achieving satisfaction with collective goals could provide women with satisfaction about their leadership. Accordingly, the women leaders suggested that leading as part of a team gave them more authority than power itself, although some said that power was important as well. Being an academic and trying to accomplish things may further exacerbate this notion of not wanting to occupy a position without power but rather collaborate to accomplish an institution’s goal. These ideas touch upon several theories related to leadership and power dynamics in organisations. In this way, the collectivist element of Saudi culture connects to the notion of social identity theory, which proposes that people acquire a sense of identity and purpose from belonging to a community and attaining common objectives (Hogg, 2001; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). This is accordingly reflected in leadership (Antonakis and Day, 2017).

In addition, a sense of identification through self-categorisation emerges from membership in a group, whereas due to a need for social acceptance or a belief that others are more knowledgeable, members of a group often adopt the behaviour patterns of a “prototypical person”, a phenomenon known as conformity (Turner et al., 1987; Hogg, 2001).

Although as this suggests, the majority of participants regarded leadership as a collaborative endeavour in which the role itself is secondary to cooperation and the work's outcome (Davis, 2008), few exceptions do exist. The participants' narratives confirmed the place of traditional social roles, as they reported multiple qualities in themselves that are typically associated with the feminine leadership style. Consistent with Taleb's (2010) findings showing that female leaders implement a transformational leadership style, the participants' narratives further emphasised being a committed role model, possessing the charisma that empowers others and supporting, caring and collaborating with subordinates and peers to develop their capacities. This is consistent with traditional leadership studies as well – specifically with regard to social role theory, which perceives women as softer and more cooperative, caring and sympathetic to the well-being of others. In contrast, men are considered more assertive, ambitious and direct. These gender-based stereotypes differentiate between gender roles in work and social life, and they affect identity and behaviour accordingly (Eagly, 1987).

8.2.1.1 Leadership development (training)

The focus on leadership development specifically further illuminates this research question on how Saudi women perceive female leadership. Most participants were disappointed with the quality of their training programme, despite the fact that they all emphasised the necessity of training to equip them with the knowledge necessary to lead and claim leadership roles. This is consistent with (Kattan et al., 2016; Abu Khdair, 2012) and (Al-Kayed, 2015), who all asserted the importance of training in advancing women's confidence with claiming leadership.

The research participants in (Alghofaily, 2019) study similarly indicated that they had poor training, referred to as “not enough”, which might have affected their leadership development.

Moreover, the participants of this study suggested that they strongly think that insufficient training opportunities show unwillingness from decision makers to consider them for higher roles, this idea was confirmed by (Ely et al., 2011).

Some participants raised an important point on the networking skills that these kinds of professional programmes can offer.

Furthermore, according to (Alghofaily, 2019) findings, participants' lack of training opportunities negatively affected their readiness to assume leadership roles, which was not the case in the present study. The quality of the training programmes and participants' leader identities were unaffected by each other.

Contrary to expectations, women-only leadership training was seen by the participants as an opportunity to facilitate networking, a sense of belonging and solidarity; it somehow enhanced their willingness to advance. Many of the participants stated that they prefer not to interact with men due to social restrictions or sanctions.

A possible explanation for these findings is that institutionalised gender segregation in Saudi Arabia has roots in conservative Islamic traditions (Hodges, 2017; Meijer, 2010b). By associating segregation with something religious, women came to accept their gender role and seldom challenged it. Relatedly, this finding could be explained by cultural tightness–looseness theory, in which deviations from Islamic beliefs in the workplace are considered disruptive and are thus not permitted (Gelfand et al., 2006).

Some previous findings are compatible with our results when viewed from a global perspective. Women who have participated in leadership development programmes designed specifically for women have stated that the courses helped them build professional networks and increased their self-awareness and confidence, which allowed them to advance (Harris and Leberman, 2012; Clarke, 2011; Moorosi, 2020). Furthermore, leadership training specifically designed for women is crucial for helping

them build a more robust self-image and fosters stronger relationships with other women (Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002; Chuang, 2019).

For example, the findings from a longitudinal case study of results of the national New Zealand Women in Leadership (NZWIL) training course show that the programme has been effective. On a personal level, it enhanced participants' confidence, abilities and network building, as well as providing continuous developmental readiness for leadership. The data suggest that women's empowerment may play a role in fostering a more equitable culture within an organisation (Harris & Leberman, 2012).

Opposing views suggest that women-only training might encourage prejudice and reinforce gender stereotypes and may also prevent women from learning from men and working collaboratively to improve workplace practices (Seo et al., 2017).

8.2.2 Second research question: What is the role of Saudi women's developmental readiness in their leadership identity construction?

This section discusses the categorical content analysis of the first round of interviews, which answered the second research question, "What is the role of Saudi women's developmental readiness in their leadership identity construction?" The discussion around the concept of leadership developmental readiness is categorised into three themes: self, context and organisational readiness.

8.2.2.1 Leadership self-readiness

Findings suggest that Saudi women professionals are ready to lead, based on their capabilities and motivations, according to leadership developmental readiness theory (Avolio and Hannah, 2008; Reichard, 2016). This supports that the notion of leadership self-readiness matters, even within a constraining context for female leadership like Saudi.

Participants reported being highly motivated to lead. To them, the motivation to lead began at an early age as a result of affirmation from teachers and parents. This

provided them with self-identification as leaders early in life. Participants also identified sub-themes around what inspires them to lead, which included visibility, spirituality, power, being a natural leader and enforcing change. Informants presented reasons for their leadership motivations. One was that becoming a leader increased their visibility, allowing them to be heard and network with other leaders. In contrast, women in departments with dual-level leadership were less motivated; they reported that redundant tasks caused them uncertainty, led to disagreements and unnecessarily consumed too much time.

In addition to expressing ambitions for leadership, the participants also indicated having a personal ability to lead. Some even argue that this trait was seen in them from an early age. In analysing the narratives from this study, it became apparent that the participants asserted their own qualities and leadership capabilities. They mentioned certain characteristics that make them capable leaders, including a strong personality, assertiveness, fairness, precision, charisma, resilience, sympathy, strong work ethic and ambition (Appendix F). This could illustrate the role of validation from others in the process of leader identity formation starting at a young age, as illustrated in Section 6.1.2.1.

Despite this, many participants were asked if they see themselves as leaders, many of them – including those who mentioned a strong ability to lead – asserted that they did not enjoy being in a leadership position, but they did aspire to help others. Interestingly, the participants were hesitant to claim their leader identities; they tried to distance themselves, indicating that leadership positions should be granted by others, rather than a claiming process. As outlined in the literature, to emerge as a leader, claiming and granting must both occur (DeRue and Ashford, 2010), such as by, for example, claiming a role and granting oneself the ability to claim it.

While all the women asserted their own leadership capabilities and expressed awareness of their qualities, some participants were exceptionally proud to narrate their achievements or claim their prior positions.

Surprisingly, previous research has excluded the ability of Saudi women to lead as a challenge to their leadership (Alghofaily, 2019). Instead, certain studies have shown that some Saudi women are capable of leading despite institutional and cultural obstacles (Abu Khdair, 2012; Almengash, 2009; Alsaigh, 2007; Almengash et al., 2007), and doubting a woman's ability to lead might be entirely related to traditional stereotypical views (Ghamdi, 2016). In contrast, (Hodges, 2017) reported that Saudi women have a poor view of their capacity to lead and thus choose a simpler role over power. However, the current study illustrates a different view that the participants aligned with in reporting their strong leadership abilities (Ghamdi, 2016; Alghofaily, 2019; Abu Khdair, 2012; Almengash, 2009; Alsaigh, 2007; Almengash et al., 2007). As opposed to (Hodges, 2017), they were very keen to lead and believed in their abilities.

Viewing these findings through a social identity lens highlights that although Saudi women have in the study were motivated to lead and hold strong beliefs in their abilities as leaders, their social identities are more salient, and therefore the claiming and granting of their identity as leaders comes from their out-group (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Validation from others was also a key theme that has been overlooked by other studies (Blackmore, 2006).

8.2.2.2 Socio-Cultural Context Readiness: Multiple Identities

Leadership is a social phenomenon; it can be practised and perceived differently in different contexts. Hence, it is process that occurs within a social groups that brings their taken-for-granted knowledge and perceptions when enacting its practices (Steers et al., 2012; House, 2004). Therefore, it is important to understand leadership in the context in which it is unfolding.

The socio-cultural context emerged in the narratives of all participants, showing that it was a crucial subject that had a significant impact on the women's leader identities. The purpose of this section is thus to discuss the intersectionality of religion, ethnicity (tribalism) and gender in shaping Saudi women's experiences and social constructions of their identities as leaders.

As stated earlier, identity is the sum of several factors that are influenced by both individual and collective selves. Saudi women are often away from the public scene for long periods of time and frequently face imposed disadvantages and discrimination, leading to invisibility. This research thus shines light on the notion that being a woman is challenging in part because the distinctions between women based on ethnic origins and cultures, among other factors, might otherwise be neglected, given their role in Saudi society. As previously discussed, in reconciling the paradoxes of religion and tradition, Saudi culture has created an unsettling self-image. Its identity changes in accordance with adaptation to the global cultural scene, which has consequences for various aspects of Saudi women's social identities. This part of the discussion explores the respondents' perceptions of their ethnicities, gender and religions, as well as how these factors intersect to shape Saudi women's perceptions and influence their senior leadership experiences.

The intersection of multiple identity will inform the social identity lens to the leadership developmental readiness theory. In which the saliency of multiple identities at different times would affect the construction of leader identity.

This study argues that how women leader's develop in tight culture is somehow linked to the readiness of the context in which leadership is unfolding.

Ethnicity

Although the majority of the participants were discreet and chose to not give their names or countries of origin, one Black Saudi woman, Rahaf, declared her ethnic origins outright. The intersection of race and gender seems to have significantly affected Rahaf's experiences and sense of leader identity.

Rahaf's story showed a negative social construction of the meanings she ascribed to being a Black Saudi woman leader. Even though, Rahaf was repeatedly assured that her privacy would be protected and that recordings would be held in the strictest confidence, she still refused to permit recording of either interview. Although not

explicitly stated, Rahaf's story implied that her family name hindered her visibility for leadership positions, as evidenced by an incident involving her secretary (see Section 6.4.1). Her story reveals that she had to work harder to improve her image and skills in order to be recognised and promoted to leadership positions. Almost all participants, like Rahaf, agreed that their family names affected their pursuit of leadership. Women's invisibility to decision-makers might be considered an important element in this regard, making family names more pertinent than ethnicity.

The respondents in this study used several strategies to identify their ethnicity. Tribal identity was also salient in many of the participants' narratives and seemed to affect how they viewed themselves as leaders. Still, their gender identity was more relevant, as each of the women had experienced prejudice towards women, regardless of their ethnic background.

Role incongruity theory and social identity theory of leadership might explain this (Eagly et al., 1992; Eagly and Karau, 2002; Hogg, 2001). Suggesting that leaders whose attributes are less congruent with the prototype of an effective leader are evaluated as less favourable leaders. According to theory, a cultural stereotype that equates leadership with male gender roles can give the impression that women are less eligible for leadership positions, despite the fact that the intersection of race and gender might confound these perceptions further, which is evident in other Western contexts (Fenstermaker, 2013; Crenshaw, 1991; Acker, 2006). In Saudi HE, however, where women continue to be excluded from positions of authority and endure bias and discrimination, these distinctions diminish, leaving gender identity more prominent than other social identities. Gender may still be a more salient factor in determining the emergence of women's leadership. This is because gender roles are more culturally pervasive and closely related to leadership than race.

One argument that emerged from the narratives is that recent changes in the country have resulted in the obvious social inclusion of all ethnicities, and there has been an effort to foster diversity at high levels. Additionally, it has been reported that the

government is instituting nationwide quotas to enhance leader selection fairness practices.

Evidence was provided in one of the participant's stories stating that their university's recently appointed Master was a young non-tribal outsider. It is essential to note that the university master is appointed directly by the king, which may offer an explanation. In addition, this might also be explained by the changing culture that new decision-makers are trying to accommodate with regard to changing long-standing practices governing the appointment of leaders.

This can be understood in light of tightness–looseness theory. Quotas are recognised as an effective tool for fostering diversity in the leadership roles of cultures that are considered tight. In these societies, authorities are less likely to rely on voluntary compliance with cultural traditions and are more likely to use legal consequences to ensure conformity. In addition, people from tight societies are more likely to be amenable to authority-mandated reforms (Toh and Leonardelli, 2013).

Religion: A debated barrier

It is not unexpected that religion was central to all informants' narratives. The data revealed that while religion was crucial to social identity construction, a near-majority had distanced themselves from religion because it was a barrier to their leadership advancement.

Institutionalised religious ideas have a weighty influence on women leaders. Given that academia is segregated based on religious beliefs in Saudi Arabia, the main code that arose in the Saudi academics' stories was *Ikhtilat*.

Previous studies have discussed the role of segregation in minimising women's visibility (e.g. Abalkhail, 2017; Hodges, 2017). However, the present study offers a deeper analysis of how conservative religious thoughts and practices affect women seeking leadership positions.

The participants' views on religion differed, with the majority agreeing that, based on their experiences, religion is by nature never a hindrance to women reaching their leadership aspirations. Lama stated that "religion was never a barrier; society is". In addition, the inherent sacredness of discussing religion has created an unusual problem for many participants, who were cautious about how they touched upon this topic. However, views on the extent to which these ideas vary depended on the informants' religious backgrounds, which the researcher introduces as conservative, semi-conservative (stable) and liberal. The participants interpreted religion as either an outside influence (law, politics) or an inside predictor (beliefs, family and culture). Liberal views were assigned to participants who discussed religion apart from its political implementation or when they rejected strict religious views and believed that societal traditions have labelled some practices as religious to ensure their acceptance of it being applied freely.

Meanwhile, those with conservative views adopted the strict values of applying religion in social and political spheres and hesitated to discuss new reforms if they had no clear religious guidance. The stable view was added as a neutral viewpoint between the two classifications just discussed.

Some previous studies addressing factors that hinder women's leadership development have concluded that religion is a key factor in this regard. They asserted that religion generates a patriarchal society that fuels beliefs in the inferiority of women and the superiority of men (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). In contrast, participants with liberal views asserted that misinterpretation of Islamic teachings was mainly a result of societal norms and traditions.

The participants' opinions illustrated concerns about stereotypes of women being unable to lead, which coincide with conservative interpretations of Islam to form a barrier against Saudi women that begins as early as the time girls are allowed to go to school. This gives women the idea that education is permitted only when it favours conservative views, and women need only the minimum education to be mothers and

raise their children well. This erects a boundary that affects the extent to which their careers might progress. An image of education is promoted that sees women's education as attached to mothering rather than encouraging them to seek and achieve their motivations.

A few stories mentioned participants who wanted to pursue careers in a medical field but were not encouraged by their families due to a social stigma based on strict religious views.

In summary, when children grow up in any religious country, a religious identity is embedded in them. Therefore, the development of a religious identity is inherent in Saudi Arabia (Marmenout, 2009). In the last two decades, strict religious views in Saudi Arabia did not stem from religion itself but, rather, from tribal and social settings, as stated earlier in the context of Saudi Arabia (Pavan, 2015). These strict interpretations of Islam were also a result of tribal thought and Arab traditions (Yamani, 2009), despite very strict religious education being taught and embraced from an early age. Accordingly, the study participants constructed their leader identities through an interaction of multiple identities, such as their tribal identity, that shaped their views of themselves as leaders; indeed, religion is a crucial part of this.

Debates about whether women are legitimate leaders stem from different interpretations of Sharia law, as well as from acknowledgement of the context in which this knowledge is exerted, as (Wadud, 1999) claimed. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that intellectual Islamic thoughts vary extensively, resulting in paradoxes in the social and political spheres as globalisation expands. The findings of the present study are particularly aligned with (Song, 2019), who stated that religious identity is an important factor in the construction of a leader identity. The participants' narratives asserted this notion, though upon further investigation, their views varied. This raised the question of what caused the variations. Interestingly, tribal women mostly reflected liberal views of religion, although they asserted that strict religious practices viewing women as inferior to men are imposed by tradition rather than the

core values of Islam. The informants' narratives mirrored the heated debate in the Muslim world around women's rights to pursue careers as leaders in the political and public spheres as well. Similarly, many scholars have argued that unequal gender practices in Saudi Arabia are more cultural restrictions than religion-based traditions (Kausar and Tlaiss, 2011; Hamdan, 2005). Even so, Hamdan (2005) and Elamin and Omair (2010) have noted that religion is perceived as promoting patriarchy in Saudi society. These mixed interpretations of the Islamic texts, the Qur'an and Sunnah, have led to many practices that encourage gender inequality, one-sided career progression and the misrepresentation of women in leadership, which are inaccurately associated with religion.

Saudi Arabia, as a state, applies strict Wahabi Islamic thought (Baker et al., 2007). However, it is important to note that intellectual Islamic thought varies extensively throughout the different regions, as previously discussed ((Elamin and Omair, 2010). The standards for public conduct are highly respected, and cultural and religious aspects are embraced as a whole (Al Alhareth et al., 2015). This explains the liberal and less conservative views adopted by some of this study's informants. These results confirmed the view of (Ysseldyk et al., 2010) who stated that religious identity should not be tackled "as constant across groups, [and that] consideration of varying religious ideologies could reveal important differences concerning both individual and intergroup processes" (p. 65).

While religion is important in Saudi Arabia, (Welsh et al., 2014) and other researchers have revealed that women themselves, their tenacity, determination to succeed, pursuit of higher education and families provide some of the key reasons for their success. It is these factors, among others, that the present study sought to investigate as contributing to Saudi women leaders' success. Indeed, adhering to these socio-cultural practices, as emphasised everywhere in the country, acts as a means of gender segregation. This has led some Saudi women to adopt conservative views and integrate them into the core of their identity (Thompson, 2015). This study thus

considered women who accept and abide by these strict views to be more conservative.

Religion influences the self-concept and social identity of individuals from the perspective of social identity, in which religious beliefs and practices may provide a sense of meaning, purpose and belonging, and assist in influencing values and attitudes (Ysseldyk et al., 2010). This is all due to the nature of religion and how significantly embedded it is in the lives of Saudis.

Another interesting observation was that women with more relaxed and less conservative religious views were mostly of tribal descent, while more conservative views came from small cities and those of immigrant descent. The researcher's interpretation is that these views stem from the women's ancestral social identities pre- and post-state, as people of tribal descent were in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia prior to its formation as a country and the evolution of Wahhabi thought. In turn, immigrant families came to the state and integrated with Saudi society, where they were introduced to conservative thoughts that later affected the immigrants' descendants and their thoughts.

Socio-cultural Identity

The socio-cultural context indicated an important factor in relate to the construction of Saudi women leader identity. This theme appeared in almost every women narrative.

According to Al Alhareth et al. (2015), in Saudi Arabia, sociocultural norms affects women's access to leadership opportunities. Saudi women is impacted by several complicated elements, such as family, society, Islam, politics, and tribal traditions. Despite the fact that the social and cultural elements of Saudi society are changing, with a larger participation of women in the workplace, particularly among the younger generation (Elamin and Omair, 2010). These multiple identities intersect to shape women leadership advancement.

This study extends the understanding of leadership developmental readiness by adding the socio-cultural aspect to it. Literature on leader identity development emphasise that self-readiness is an important aspect in attaining leadership opportunity and when combined with an organisational culture that support this development, a leader identity is likely to emerge (Reichard and Beck, 2017, Reichard and Walker, 2016).

In a tight culture such as Saudi Arabia, culture impose a strong influence in the shape of social norms that affect individuals self-view (Gelfand et al., 2006; Gelfand, 2018). Accordingly this high degree of social control affect how people behave and view themselves.

Social identity refers to the part of an individual's self-concept that is derived from their membership in a social group. Cultural tightness can affect social identity by shaping the norms and expectations of the group, and by influencing how individuals view themselves and others within the group . The identities of leaders within HE are created and shaped in a social collective context (Blackmore, 2006), which is affected by the inter-relational with their in-group and the wider society. The social identity theory concept emphasis that a person's in-group membership affects their self-perception as a leader (Hogg, 2001; Hogg & Knippenberg, 2003; Lord & Hall, 2003).

Therefore, relationships in participants narrative affected how they view themselves as leaders. One of these relationships is parental influence, many participants have indicated the support of their social group and family to be a major factor in their advancement. Yet, fathers support seemed to be the most important rather than partners support.

Conclusions from previous studies (e.g., Rotundo *et al.*, 2009) echo this result. Parenting style influences children's positions as future leaders. Styles such as supportive discipline and responsive parenting assist children in acquiring traits that

prompt them to assume leadership positions where they demonstrate the same behaviours (Rotundo *et al.*, 2009).

Moreover, in terms of relationships, the narratives revealed a theme of work-life balance. This theme was most prevalent when discussing husbands' support, as many women indicated that they lack the necessary support from their husbands. Moreover, some have stated that only allowing them to work constitutes support. Balance was mainly affected by others' expectations, especially the husbands', as supported by other studies (Hodges, 2017; Al-Ahmadi, 2011a).

Furthermore, based on (Al-Jahni, 2021) women reported that the support they expected did not match their anticipation. For that, they had to sacrifice, on a personal level, many factors such as time with their families, to focus and gain leadership positions. Thus, many women disregard their leadership development due to the lack of support. Surprisingly, women leadership support can be evident from early age and could be impact negatively on women perception towards their leadership roles as many family members and society seems to overlook women carriers based on expected societal gender roles, which supported the present findings.

While many respondents found it challenging to achieve a work-life balance as they work in academia, where leadership responsibilities include both teaching and research, this finding, although supported by many studies (Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Eagly & Steffen, 1984), was not a significant factor in the construction of women's leadership identity. Nonetheless, several participants shared how they tried to balance their time, even if this meant experiencing stress, to fulfil their role and family obligations

According to role incongruity theory, if women's social role and leader role are not aligned a conflict in identity might occur (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

8.2.2.3 Organisational Context Readiness—Professional Identity

The theme of organisational context readiness discuss the effect of dual-level leadership concept in shaping women leader advancement. Through data analysis, several recurring contextual themes emerged that captured the readiness of women for leadership roles. These themes were categorized into three streams: firstly, those who work in workplaces where gender is not a significant factor (non-segregated), primarily in medical colleges; secondly, those who work in women-only colleges; and thirdly, those who work in colleges where gender segregation present.

Gender segregation was detected as the main theme affecting leader developmental raediness. This was edvident in many studies previously, (Almengash, 2009; Almengash et al., 2007; Abu Khdair, 2012; Abalkhail, 2017; Alsaigh, 2007; Abo Khodair, 2012; Al-Kayed, 2015). These studies in alighment with the current study addresses that gender-segregation and the way it is institutionalised in Saudi HE, affected women leaders self-view.

Moreover, Al-Jahani (2021) study shows that in a patriarchal system, women find difficulty in advancing their leadership carrier development and opportunities. As communicating with their superiors is difficult considering the segregated organizational environment. Yet, in gender decrementing organisations women tend to focus on other areas, for example conducting studies, rather than developing the carrier, especially for leadership positions which supports the finding in this study.

This result confirms the literature, which suggests that prejudice might be the result of gendered organisations and, in turn, might affect leader identity (Ely et al., 2011). Still, here, the situation is slightly different: the participants from mixed-gender organisations were women leaders who had held their positions for a long time and were accepted by others. However, that did not sit well with some participants, who perceived their situations as temporary or limited to certain conditions. This might be interpreted in light of Eagly and Karau's (2002) role-congruity theory, which states that females in leadership positions are subject to bias because people perceive leadership

roles as masculine attributes, and, based on gender stereotypes women are less likely to be able to fit this role.

The Leadership Role-Selection Process

Many respondents ascribed favouritism primarily to the selection process for leadership positions. Clearly, according to the informants' narrative belonging to a particular social class or having a specific surname might influence women advancement.

Abalkhail and Allan (2016) explored *wasta* (favouritism) as a phenomenon that might affect women's leadership advancement. Previous literature has also emphasised the role played by social networks in earning women top leadership positions (Kausar and Tlaiss, 2011; Singh et al., 2006). Yet, in the Arab context, research on the relationship between social networks and gender in management is scarce. Also, research on *wasta* as a context is very limited (Abalkhail and Allan, 2016). Moreover, promotion based on social networks maintains gender and racial disparities in organisations (Acker, 2006).

In-group favouritism can be explained by social identity theory, (Tajfel, 1978) demonstrated that in-group favouritism is evident in Saudi HE in the leadership selection process and promotions, which are often based on tribal identification. Yet, it can also explain out-group prejudice among other groups based on gender and, in Amal's case, can intersect with tribal identity. Rahaf said, "An aspiring person can break through, but these attitudes [referring to favouritism] do affect us for sure."

Additional results showed that women are less visible because of segregation in mixed-gender organisations.

Mentorship, role models, networking and the opinions of one's peers emerged as significant determinants of whether a woman would ascend to a leadership position within an organisation, which will be discussed.

Mentors/Role Models

Surprisingly, only four participants specified that they had academic mentors. Some mentioned family members or public figures as mentors. This is also evident in the literature: aspiring female leaders receive less social support in constructing their leadership identity. This is the result of a few role models who are helpful in self-identification as leaders of the younger generation (Ely et al., 2011; Ibarra, 1999).

However, it is more challenging for Saudi women to find mentors and role models due to the gender-based limitations that they face throughout their careers, which highly reflect other women's leadership aspirations. In line with previous literature in the KSA (e.g. (Gazzaz, 2017)), the participants indicated that having role models is not just about inspiring younger women but also helping them succeed. However, as long as a situation exists that there is a lack of role models, Saudi women will continue to have few mentors (Gazzaz, 2017).

Networking

In many of the interviews, the participants discussed the importance of networking in their leadership advancement. While this is a common practice everywhere, as per previous literature (Ely et al., 2011; Day, 2000), It is of particular importance in the Middle East (Alotaibi, 2021; Abalkhail and Allan, 2015). Organisational culture in Saudi Arabia is based on the *wasta* system, which governs hiring and advancement (Al-Hussain and Al-Marzooq, 2016; Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). Most of the participants saw visibility as necessary for them to be appointed to certain roles by their male counterparts, who held most of the decision-making power.

Saudi women view *wasta*, despite their belief that it is an unfair practice, as a powerful tool to help them advance in their careers and achieve their goals in response to the barriers that are imposed against them in HE institutions. Based on (Al-Hussain and Al-Marzooq, 2016) study, almost 60% of Saudi women respondents find *wasta* unfair, yet 56% see it as an advantage that might aid in achieving leadership roles in

traditionally male-dominated fields. Moreover, 54% view *wasta* as an equitable networking strategy that supports women's progress. (Al-Hussain and Al-Marzooq, 2016), explained this contradiction through cognitive dissonance theory, which suggests that dissonance occurs when a person's actions run counter to their values and attitudes. If the action is rewarded, however, it may be excused.

This finding is consistent with (Hodges, 2017), who highlighted that only some women can become leaders due to their network and family status in Saudi Arabia, which indirectly suggests that the family plays a huge role in acquiring leadership positions. However, the researcher did not further explore this theme. Now discussed here, the role of the family can be explained by social identity theory, as in-group favouritism, as well as undefined group membership, certainly exists in the process of advancing as a leader.

However, favouritism causes one's leader identity to shift according to the context of an individual's in-group membership. For example, Layla indicated, "I might not have had a position if my last name was different," even though this was only her perception (i.e., there is no evidence to support this idea). Interestingly, some tribal participants referred to people of their tribe, even unidentified, as their cousins, which vividly indicates much about collectivist tribal social membership.

Another provocative finding emerged when Lama indicated that voting for a leadership position does not work, and *wasta* and family ties will have more sway in the selection process than any other factor. This view is supported by (Al-Hussain and Al-Marzooq, 2016) study.

Peers' Perceptions

To ascertain how the participants' identities had been shaped or re-shaped by others' views of them as leaders, as well as to understand the perceptions the women had of the people with whom they work. A question was raised regarding how women self-view themselves concerning others. This was thus an attempt to see if the informants

thought of any discrimination that might have accompanied their development as leaders.

Most of the participants indicated that family, teachers and decision-makers view them as leaders. Some participants, such as Shahad, stated that she finds support from her male colleagues but not to the same degree as her female counterparts. As discussed in Section 6.1.8.6, others' views shape women leaders' identities at all levels, whether in their organisations or in greater society.

8.3 Narrative Holistic Content Analysis

This section discusses the findings from the narrative holistic analysis, which answers the third research questions, 'how do narratives of leadership experience shape the construction of Saudi women's leader identity in regard to recent reforms in Saudi HE?'

Following the categorical content analysis, a second stage of holistic narrative analysis was used to examine what types of leader identity narratives Saudi women constructed about their leadership development experiences. This process identified a wide range of storylines, including steady (I am not a leader, I am a leader: capable and motivated), progressive (Ambivalent leader to I am a leader, Being a leader was not a choice of mine, now it is, I am not a leader narrative to I am a leader narrative) and regressive (why not narrative to it is only a show) leader identity narrative types following social change in the country.

Far from demonstrating uniform experiences of women leadership, these findings illustrate that whilst Saudi women academics encountered a common set of developmental readiness elements, they wove complex and very different narratives about their personal experiences. Furthermore, many of the different types of narratives that they constructed align with social identity theory and role incongruity theory.

These considerable variations in leader identity narrative categories reflect a complex interplay between an individual's unfolding leader developmental readiness and leader identity. In particular, whilst each of the three components of leader development readiness types (self, socio-cultural and organisational) were perceived as salient by all Saudi women academics, some were more influential than others in shaping particular types of narrative. In the participant narratives of leadership practice, 'invisibility' narratives highlighted their leader identity and demonstrated how it was impacted by their social identity. Identities are fluid, changeable and socially formed. That means a person's sense of who they are and how they fit into the world is not fixed but rather dynamic and malleable in response to their experiences and the culture in which they find themselves (Ibarra and Barrbulescu, 2010). Identities are comprised of self-identities and social identities, in which meanings are ascribed to a person, both by themselves (based on one's observable traits and the ways in which others interpret those traits) and by others (based on one's social roles) or by a combination of both (multiple) identities (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Gecas, 1982; Ibarra and Barrbulescu, 2010). Furthermore, identities are formed via stories told at various points in time as stated in the narrative literature (Smith and Sparkes, 2008; Polkinghorne, 1995).

8.3.1 Steady Narrative Holistic Analysis

In this section, a discussion of narratives which have remained consistent in leader identity construction through both phases of interviews will be provided. Two steady narratives "I am a leader: capable and motivated" and "I am not a leader" were detected in the data. The former appeared in the story of three participants (Rema, Wed and Roa), whereas the latter emerged from two informants' stories (Zuha and Tara).

'I am a leader: capable and motivated' narrative

Participants who constructed a positive leader identity throughout the first and second interviews were Rema, Wed and Roa. They each presented a strong leader

identity based on capability and motivation (self-readiness), social support (socio-cultural readiness) and being from mixed colleges, mainly medical schools (organisational readiness).

Rema, Wed and Roa presented a high motivation to lead as well as the ability to lead. This was seen from a self-view or others' views (such as followers and leaders), which shaped their leaders' identities on all levels, whether in their organisation or in the larger society. Accordingly, their leader identity was more salient than their social and professional identities.

Al-Ahmadi's (2011) study highlights an important outcome in that regard, as her study acknowledged that personal barriers were the least of the factors to hinder women's pursuit of leadership positions. This result was confirmed by other studies (Abu Khdaif, 2012; Almengash, 2009; Alsaigh, 2007; Almengash et al., 2007), which found that women leaders in KSA had the capability to lead except for the barriers imposed by the institutions and the culture.

Interestingly, these women leaders all came from the medical field. Looking deeper, Saudi Arabia's first ever woman dean, Professor Dalal, was from a medical school (Al-Taif University) as well, a very interesting finding. Although greater investigation is needed into these women's self-views, same-gender practitioners are preferable for women in Muslim religious communities, such as Saudi Arabia, especially when it comes to providing access to private examinations (Aldeen, 2007; McLean et al., 2012). However, need allows for exception in Islam: breaking Islamic law forbidding cross-gender physical contact has long been forgiven on the condition that it is a medical necessity if a same-gender physician is not accessible or there is a life-or-death decision at hand (Aldeen, 2007; McLean et al., 2012).

This necessity creates a visibility paradox, as women in tight religious cultures are allowed to work directly with men in a non-segregated workplace due to their health care needs. This promotes their visibility in this male-dominated culture and might

affect their leadership promotions. It also creates a positive professional identity in regard to women's social identity. Building on role incongruity theory, women in the medical field accordingly are received as favourable leaders as they fit the leader prototype that is accepted by the society (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

Another possible reason for constructing a positive professional identity among informants is that the medical field has long been considered a respectable profession in Saudi Arabia. This social perception stems from the fact that medicine is a highly compensated career. However, Saudi society does not perceive nursing in the same regard as doctoral careers. According to (Alwedinani, 2016b) study on the subjects Saudi women choose in HE, the participants tended to take societal perceptions into consideration when choosing their academic subjects. Therefore, they often studied majors that were more socially accepted out of fear for their reputation. For example, although the work environment for physicians is similar to that of nurses, the two professions are perceived differently in Saudi Arabia. Nursing is more associated with lower pay than medicine, and the tasks associated with it, which many feel are servant-like, contribute to its low perception. (Alwedinani, 2016b) added that nursing is frequently associated with non-Saudi expatriates as well, offering another element to this view.

The present study is consistent in this regard, as many participants indicated that their first choice as graduates was medicine, and they later changed their major or enrolled in a different programme. One of the participants even had to withdraw from a nursing major because of her parents' views. Social acceptance is thus key to women ascending to leadership positions (as discussed later in Dana's narrative).

A theoretical approach to the social identities of women in leadership roles can explain how women in the Saudi medical field fit the out-group identification of a leader. Specifically, they fit the standards of both men and society: to the larger society, these women are intelligent, necessary and hardworking (all stereotypes about the medical field); for men, the decision makers, they create less trouble, follow the rules of the

game and are respectful, as they are more visible. Although this study results does not align with findings from (Alwazzan and Rees, 2016) which asserts that participants, whom are 25 female medical academics, argues that they feel overlooked for leadership and that informants from “women-only” faculty perceived it as more accepting of women. It is aligned with the current study that leadership progression is dependent on the organisational intersecting identities of gender, culture and generation. We argue that in this study, although cultural influence seemed to affect all women’s leadership advancement, it affected women in dual-level leadership more.

Another aspect to be discussed is the fact that all three women who constructed positive leadership identity were from less conservative (in religious views), upper class social structure. Although class is beyond the scope of this study. It confirms other studies in which found out that family status, in the form of connections, positively affect women advancement in leadership (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017; Al-Hussain and Al-Marzooq, 2016).

‘I am not a leader’ narrative

The second steady line narrative that was stable through both interviews was the ‘I am not a leader narrative’. This narrative was evident in 10 out of the 30 participants of this study in the first phase. Participants demonstrated a professional leader-identity detachment and some even associated negative thoughts with leadership. leading them to reject leadership positions altogether. The researcher conducted an additional inquiry to ascertain the cause of this occurrence, which revealed that the ‘I am not a leader’ narrative is a coping mechanism to preserve one’s social identity due to uncertainty (Hogg, 2007; Jaspal, 2015). In this study’s participants leader identity detachment could be understood as a from a hidden feeling of powerlessness over one’s future.

However, in the second round of interviews, only two participants remained constant towards rejecting leader identity (Zuha and Tara).

(Peters et al., 2012) argued that the present dearth of female leaders can be attributed to self-selection, with women opting out of positions where they do not feel welcome because they do not fit in. This implies that women question their own motivation to lead and their readiness to reach top leadership roles. It is noteworthy that this narrative arose from participants who attended leadership development programmes and some who already held leadership positions, which, as suggested in the previous chapters, may reflect their developmental readiness for holding a leadership identity. Upon further investigation, this seems to be related to multiple intersecting identities that are all distanced from self-readiness.

To illustrate, the interviewees seemed to reject their leader identities mostly due to aspects related to their social setting/identity rather than their own motivation to develop their capabilities. This shows that social identity overpowers leader identity, causing it to diminish or be postponed. The respondents used this 'I am not a leader' coping strategy to ease into the mindset that it is their choice not to be a leader and thus that they are choosing to be part of the group rather than giving in to self-fulfilment.

The storyline of the diminishing leader identity arises when one's leader identity clashes with another of one's identities, especially one's religious identity.

The clash between leader and religious identities resulted in a stable narrative of rejecting leadership regardless of the social change happening in the country.

However, in the second phase of this study, a positive social change has happened in regard to women leadership advancement. These reforms were applied to various aspects of Saudi women's social status (refer to section 3.5.2 for more details). One of the main, that is relevant here, is the appointments of first Dean who supervise both male and female department. Following that, a series of various appointments to Vice Deans, Vice Presidents and even an Acting President in a mixed gender University (King Abdulaziz University) Dr. Hana bint Abdullah Al-Nuaim. These progressive narratives will be discussed in the next section.

8.3.2 Progressive Narrative Holistic Analysis

This section examines the data collected from two sets of interviews that showed a promising upward trend in participants' leader identification over time. This positive social identity has become more accessible due to the appointment of women in a variety of sectors in Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, most women who did not identify themselves as leaders at first came to construct leader identity.

As stated previously, people construct their identities, either independently (personal identity) or via membership in established social groups (Sets and Burke, 2000), in terms of the values and beliefs that these societies represent (social identity) (Turner *et al.*, 1987).

The progressive narrative in leader identities in the findings can be explained by (Stets and Burke, 2014) discussion of change in the salience of identity, which describes when one's perception of the significance of several identities shifts. (Stets and Burke, 2014) argued that when situational or contextual circumstances alter, as with changes in one's socio-cultural context or interactions with others, an alteration in identity salience might be triggered. They discussed this in regard to the notion of 'closed' and 'open' social structures based on Serpe (1987) and Serpe and Stryker (1987, 1993, p. 77). In contrast to a 'closed' structure, in which people have little agency over how they express their identity, an 'open' structure gives people flexibility in identity construction. Depending on the degree of 'openness' of the social structure in which the identity was integrated, identity salience changes. Applying this notion to the broad context of tight and loose culture related to the current study (Gelfand *et al.*, 2006; Gelfand, 2018), we find the same results.

In the current study, a shift occurs in the societal expectation of the role of female leaders in the country in phase two interviews compared to phase one. This shift, albeit slight, came about when an opportunity was presented that allowed women the chance to identify themselves as leaders, especially when they were self-ready to engage in development opportunities (Stets and Burke, 2014).

The progressive narrative follows the journey of eight women who started off hesitant about assuming the role of a leader but eventually constructed positive leader identity. It is important to note that all women informants who participated in the study showed strong self-readiness to lead, which was perpetuated in a motivation to lead and the ability to do so.

The progressive storylines of the eight participants can be grouped into three narrative categories. The first narrative explores the ambivalent leader identity (four participants), where there is uncertainty regarding socio-cultural and HE organisation commitment to women leadership. The second narrative is 'Being a leader was not a choice of mine, but now it is' (two participants), in which informants had to give up leadership due to societal pressure based on their gender or tribal affiliation. Finally, the third narrative highlights how some individuals initially rejected leader identity mostly as a result of conservative religious beliefs. However, as participants progressed through their journey, their narrative shifted towards more positive leader identity construction (two participants).

Ambivalent leader identity to I am a leader narrative.

The ambivalent narrative is a result of a combination of socio-cultural and organisational un-readiness. In the first interview, for example, Maria was uncertain about pursuing a leadership position owing to the lack of authority women hold in society or institutions. Maria's narrative shares a disappointment regarding a combination of cultural constraints (such as the right to drive, travel and live alone), organisational barriers (such as lack of power and lack of role models) and the fact that family is more essential, which leave women powerless.

Maria's narrative was challenging the situation of women being authoritative figures while having no authority over their basic rights. Constraints facing women do not exist merely on an organisational level, as Maria argued. Instead, they have their roots in the larger society, for example, male guardianship and religious conservatism.

Therefore, Maria's story emphasises the need to eliminate societal gender-based restrictions on women's freedom for her to excel and achieve higher positions. Thus, this un-readiness in the organisational and socio-cultural context manifested in gender-role expectations and bias towards women resulted in Maria's reluctance in the first interview to adopt a leadership identity as it seems unfit as per identity fit theory (Peters *et al.*, 2012) (see section 2.6.4). When women are in a profession where they feel unsuitable, owing to the gender stereotypes associated with the position, their professional identity tends to decline in regard to their social identity. This can also be explained using a leader developmental readiness theory perspective (Reichard & Walker, 2016), which states that a supportive context might predict the motivation to develop as a leader.

In Saudi Arabia, the societal notion of womanhood is related with being a stay-at-home mother rather than a professional woman or 'leader'.

Numerous individuals were scared to state unequivocally why they sought a leadership role. To my mind, this was due to the long-held preconceptions that women are inferior to men and that their place is at home raising children, highlighting the bigger role that mothers play in raising their children and caring for their spouses.

In this storyline of ambivalence, the individual's leader identity was denied due to a lack of authority over responsibility. Furthermore, they believed that their role as a mother was more significant, and they saw no point in pursuing something they lacked the power to master or change.

Despite the societal shifts that were stated in the storyline resulting in lessening cultural obstacles for women in the country, it was cautioned that bringing about such changes might be a prolonged and challenging process.

In the second round of interviews, after reforms were implemented in the country, causing both socio-cultural and organisational change in regard to women in leadership, leader identity became more salient in the participants' narrative (Stets

and Burke, 2014). These new reforms caused Maria and Ruba to re-evaluate their previous beliefs. Maria mentioned that women in leadership now have 'voice' in her organisation. This might be the cause for the alteration in her thoughts, which indicated more readiness in the organisational context as well as socio-cultural readiness.

Maria stated a change in thoughts regarding the gender-role women hold now in the country, which she attributed as a catalyst of both the change in the organisation and in women's self-view.

One of the main influences on Maria's perception was the appointment of a female leader at her department who leads both male and female departments (at a medical college). Maria's narrative shows an admiration of her boss's leadership style and pride about the progress she has made in the department. This boss has become Maria's role model and has inspired her to construct her own positive leader identity.

This image of the successful woman leader in Maria's perception made it possible for her to view herself as a leader. This is aligned with leadership and identity literature which established that a person's self-view as a leader affects their motivation to enact leader identity and their motivation to develop as leader (DeRue and Ashford, 2010; Lord and Hall, 2005).

'Being a leader was not a choice of mine, but now it is' narrative

The second progressive narrative resulted from a lack of sociocultural readiness. Three informants (Dana and Ruba) have described being unable to choose their leader identity due to societal pressure despite their readiness to do so.

This shows a conflict between social (family pressure, tribal or ethnic identity) and leader identity in which women rejected leader identity.

Dana echoed some of this view in questioning how her relationships would change as part of her leadership transition: 'I am afraid that during my leadership role, it's possible to lose people that I've had relationships with all my life.' She addressed a very important point concerning the intersection of leader and social identities. She indicated that when the two are in conflict, the choice is obvious and that she prefers to 'fit in' rather than 'lead'. Interestingly, Dana held a leadership position at the time of her interview, though her narrative indicated that her position in the group was more important to her (Heilman, 2012).

Dana, for instance, was eager, motivated and equipped with the leadership skills necessary for advancement. She also got the opportunity to pursue her lifelong ambition of winning the municipal election. Despite her father's encouragement, she argued that she had to opt out from the elections due to societal pressure towards her father and by extension towards her.

Based on (Al-Hussain and Al-Marzooq, 2016), In the past, Saudi society viewed mixed environments negatively. For a woman working in such a setting, societal constraints not just on her but also on her family would hinder her job advancement.

When she decided to run for municipal elections, her opponent (a man) started to pressure her father to make her give up the elections. Although she explicitly stated that her father never ask her to withdraw her name, she did.

When a conflict arose between her social identity, represented in her tribal identity, and her leader identity, her social identity became more salient, and Dana withdrew from the elections. Dana was convinced that it was not the time. Ambiguity regarding the role of the first women to be elected was one of the reasons she stated. In addition, she argued that it is a men-only club that is governed by favouritism and bias against women. All women running for office withdrew from the elections before they even started.

It is important to note that the higher the position, the more barriers women face (Morrison et al., 1987; Baxter and Wright, 2000). In male-dominated organisational cultures, women are the least-preferred leaders and have unequal access to higher leadership positions, according to previous literature (Carli and Eagly, 2012), encountering prejudice and discrimination (Eagly & Carli, 2007). These unfavourable images of women leaders along with discrimination will lead women to reject their leader identity and to favour their social identity as exemplified by Dana's experience. Although she was supported by her family, she and her family chose to reject leader status out of fear of social exclusion, especially regarding their tribal identity.

Other literature (Ely, 1994; Sealy and Singh, 2010) supports the explanation that in institutions with few women in leadership positions, women's social identities reflect prevalent gender stereotypes. As a result of internalising aspects of gender roles, women may exhibit gender-stereotypical behaviour, causing them to reject their identity as leaders.

In a Saudi-context study, Alghofaily (2019) confirmed that men continue to be preferred as leaders, particularly at the top of the organisational hierarchy. In particular, women who internalise this belief of incongruity to leadership are less likely to claim the role (Eagly and Karau, 2002), inducing them to engage in identity negotiations regarding their membership in this in-group and posing a risk of leader identity detachment (Powell et al., 2002).

Another reason that Dana indicated for choosing not to pursue the elections is that she 'found out later that all the ladies started pulling out', indicating that lack of social networks and the male-domination of the role made it difficult for her to assume leadership status. According to (Ibarra et al., 2013; Sealy and Singh, 2010), the progress of women in leadership is impacted by social networks. Consequently, a gender discrimination disadvantage is likely to occur if women are less able to access such male-dominated networks (Ibarra et al., 2005). This results in an overall lack of

women in senior positions, which serves as a key barrier to women attaining higher-level roles (Sealy & Singh, 2010).

It is clearly stated in the first phase that rejection of leader identity in Dana's narrative was mainly in regard to maintaining a positive social identity, especially preserving tribal identity. These negotiations became more evident upon social change happening in the second phase.

Dana saw herself more as a leader as a result of social change, therefore reclaiming her leader identity. According to Dana's narrative in phase one, her story incorporated a degree of motivation and leadership skill in addition to organisational readiness and the ability to assume the job. Although Dana has offered some justification for why the institution is not ready, this was merely due to sociocultural unreadiness.

According to the leader developmental readiness concept, an individual is likely to develop as a leader if their motivation to lead is combined with their ability to lead and the support of context (Avolio, 2016; Reichard, 2016). The main component in leader development readiness theory indicates that organisation context is key. However, when this theory is combined with a tightness/looseness culture theory, socio-culture becomes key in the individual's readiness to develop as it fuels organisational culture, which is proven in Dana's narrative. The impact of cultural norms and expectations affects one's aspirations for leadership. By seeing more women in leadership roles, Dana may feel more comfortable challenging traditional social norms and expectations that may have previously limited her advancement. The appointment of more women to positions of power may help to shift cultural attitudes and promote more inclusive and diverse perspectives on leadership.

Organisational context has been identified as a critical factor in leader development readiness theory. However, integrating a tightness/looseness cultural theory into this framework (Gelfand et al., 2006; Gelfand, 2018), Dana's story demonstrates how important socio-cultural factors are in shaping an organisation's culture and the

individual's readiness to develop. One's aspirations to assume a leadership role are influenced by one's culture's norms and expectations. Dana felt more confident in questioning old societal conventions and expectations that may have restricted her progress once more women were appointed to positions of power. Dana believes that this represents a significant statement about the importance of women and the kingdom's commitment to promoting women in positions of power, which affected her leader identity status.

From a social identity standpoint, having more women in positions of power via social transformation helps to promote more favourable opinions of women's leadership. Dana's confidence and feeling of self-worth were reinforced by this experience, despite the fact that she had to overcome bias and hostility because of her tribal background and gender. In addition, building on role incongruity theory, these new appointments are weakening gender stereotypes and promoting more inclusive attitudes towards women in positions of authority, affecting their self-perception as leaders (Hogg, 2001; Knippenberg et al., 2004).

I am not a leader narrative to I am a leader narrative

This section contains a discussion regarding the progressive narrative from rejecting to embracing leader identity. Participants who held a conservative religious belief that women in Islam should not lead tended to reject the leader identity.

Religion as a social construction shaped Saudi women's narratives regarding their leader identities, especially when their religious identities were strong. There is debate whether women are legitimate as leaders that stems from different interpretations of Sharia law. Regarding Saudi women's involvement in the political world and leadership, it is thus necessary to acknowledge certain paradoxes that have shaped the discourse around this topic. The most controversial one is the idea that women are highly unpreferable as leaders in Islam. This arose in many of the participants' narratives based on the prophet's hadith, 'Never will succeed such a nation as makes a woman their ruler' (Prophet Muhammad, PBUH; Sahih Bukhari,

7099). While society's acceptance was important for leader identity for some participants, religion outweighed it, especially in conservative thought.

In Layan's narrative, she distanced herself from leader identity mainly due to conservative religious thoughts: 'I always prefer not to officially hold a position'. Layan's narrative as well as Aya's mentioned that religion states that women are not to lead in Islam, based on the hadith mentioned above.

Although Layan, in contrast to Aya, did not include gender in the equation, it is important to note that Layan comes from a medical school in which she was always surrounded by women leaders. Her thoughts around rejecting leader identity were based in an avoidance of being held accountable out of fear of doing injustice to others. She mentioned that a true Muslim is a person who tries to make the community a better place regardless of whether they are in a leadership position or not.

Here Layan is constructing a professional and social identity and detaching herself from any leader identity. It is important to note that conservative religious identity outweighs any other social identity, such as ethnic identity in Layan's case and tribal identity in Aya's case.

From the perspective of social identity, religious beliefs and practices may provide people a feeling of meaning, purpose and belonging and may help influence their values and attitudes (Ysseldyk et al., 2010). Religion strongly influences the self-concept and social identity of individuals in Saudi Arabia due to the nature of religion and how highly embedded it is in the life of Saudis.

In tight cultures such as Saudi Arabia, religion is key in shaping one's social identity. Religion reinforces cultural beliefs and practices by contributing to the prevalence of strict social norms and societal pressure in close-knit cultures. Therefore, people in cultures such as Saudi Arabia may feel a strong obligation to adhere to religious norms

and expectations in order to be accepted and avoid sanctions, resulting in leader identity detachment.

Although Layan's ethnic identity was noticeable throughout phases one and two of her narrative, it was less prominent than her religious identity in phase one. In phase two, when social change is apparent and there is less conservatism in the country's religious discourse, ethnic identity becomes more prominent, and a positive leader identity is constructed.

Layan noted that her feeling of duty to her country and the fact that she sees younger generations of immigrants losing their national identity as a result of globalisation compel her to assume the position of leadership as a role model for the younger generation if no one else qualifies. This act could be a 'social-normative motivation to lead'. Identity conflict may make women construe leading as a duty and thus increase their social-normative motivation to lead (Keating et al., 2014; Karelaia and Guillén, 2014).

Despite the fact Layan's college has had women leaders in the past, this was overlooked in her first interview due to her previously held strict religious beliefs. Layan's self-perception as a leader in comparison to her social identity became clearer in her narrative in phase two, as she argued that now she sees women everywhere in the organisation. She noted that her HoD is a woman for the second time and that their college has had exceptional women leaders since its establishment. Since she now sees herself as part of the in-group as a leader, her comment that 'we have full authority here at the college' supports her self-view as a leader.

In Aya's narrative, although she addressed the hadith previously discussed as the main reason why she thought women should not lead, she really was not sure about what the hadith means and what its wording is.

In Aya's first account, the topic of women in leadership appeared to be problematic. She was cautious in her explanations of the religious stance on women as leaders. She

distanced herself from the subject by stating, 'I cannot delve into it much', which might be an indication of fear of social exclusion.

Although Aya's first interview appears to reject leader identity based on religion, looking under the surface, it was only a matter of cultural identity and adhering to social norms and expectations, which was evident when she said regarding women as members of the Shura Council, 'I feel why not?' yet stated regarding a woman's job as a Minister, 'It is not appropriate'.

According to Aya, females should modify their actions to conform to cultural standards. Her use of the pronoun 'us' to refer to the society demonstrates that she is part of the in-group and agrees with this perspective.

As being in the Shura council is a prestigious, high-level leadership role, Aya accepted it. In spite of the fact that the Shura Council is a mixed environment and women might have to travel to attend its meetings if they are not from the same city, Aya regarded it as acceptable and necessary, which is a contradiction in her account. Aya confirms the national discourse of the country prior to reforms, in which women were visible only in the Shura Council and very few other positions.

She provided an explanation that women members of the Shura Council are better able to communicate other women's demands. Aya's story demonstrates a conservative tribal identity rather than a religious one, which she hinted at in the beginning of her story (reading the prophet's hadith).

Aya's narrative implies that women may face greater resistance to assuming leadership roles that require them to interact with men. She also argued that a deputy position, which would involve less contact with men, might be more suitable for a woman. This could be a result of the male guardianship system, cultural norms that place women as inferior to men and the expectation that working women are always to defer to a higher leader (a man), thus hindering their leadership advancement (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017; Alharbi, 2015). This aligns with both cultural tightness and

role incongruity theory, in which gender-role expectations are strictly applied (Gelfand et al., 2006; Gelfand, 2018) and women are perceived unfavourably in comparison to men as leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

In phase two, Aya's narrative constructed a more positive leader identity following the reforms in the country. Aya redefined her leader identity in regard to her social identity. Multiple social identities, such as religious and tribal identities, were constructed in the first interview, causing Aya's rejection of her leader identity. Gender, tight societal norms, religion and tribal affiliation all interact to shape leader identity, according to previous studies (Al-Jahani, 2021). These social structures often work against women's leader identity, constraining its construction to some extent (Alvesson & Billing, 2009), especially in tight cultures (Gelfand et al., 2006; Gelfand, 2018).

Aya's religious identity underwent a transformation in phase two of the study. Aya's long-held assumptions about her religion were questioned, leading her to re-evaluate her beliefs. In particular, her reference to a hadith that rejected women's leadership was challenged when she discovered that its context was specific to a certain political situation. She stated, 'All my life I was living on this hadith, and I heard about it everywhere. I was in shock for couple of days'. This realisation caused Aya to re-evaluate her beliefs and embrace a leader identity, as she stated that she believed 'I would, I think I am'. This transformation in Aya's religious identity can be viewed through the lens of social identity theory, which suggests that individuals derive their self-concept from the groups to which they belong and that these identities can shift and change over time as a result of experiences and interactions with others (Tajfel & Turner, 2019; Turner et al., 1979). In this case, Aya's encounter with new information challenged her previous assumptions and led to a shift in her religious identity, which in turn influenced her perception of herself as a potential leader.

Role incongruity theory suggests that female leaders within the same context may be viewed as a form of role congruity, in which individuals are more likely to be chosen

for leadership positions if they conform to stereotypical expectations. The fact that Aya stated that her university has one of the first women to be appointed as deans may be viewed as a form of role congruity. She argued that that happened due to the new generation of visionary young leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

According to social identity, social comparison is key in identity formation (Turner et al., 1979). According to social identity theory, individuals compare themselves to others in their social group and use these comparisons to evaluate their own abilities and value (Tajfel & Turner, 2019; Turner et al., 1979). Aya's narrative suggests that the emergence of more open-minded decision-makers has created a sense of optimism and empowerment among women who aspire to leadership positions. By seeing others who are successful in breaking gender barriers and assuming leadership roles, women may feel more confident in their own ability to do the same. This process of social comparison and identification with successful leaders can contribute to the development of a more positive and inclusive collective identity, which can in turn promote gender equality and women's self-concept as leaders.

8.3.3 Regressive Narrative Leader Identity

This section contains a discussion of the regressive narratives of the study participants. As an illustration, Suha's narrative, which shifted from uncertainty towards to rejection of leader identification, is addressed.

The participants who had regressive narratives' were also concerned about the country's new reforms regarding women's empowerment.

The 'Why not' narrative to 'It is only a show'

This section presents some informants' accounts of alternating positive and negative leadership experiences, which were mainly due to the organisational barrier.

An explanation of regressive identity can be found in a development of the social identity theory of leadership based on Hogg's uncertainty-identity theory (Hogg & Smith, 2007; Hogg et al., 2012a; Hogg, 2007). Uncertainty is a phenomenon that is influenced by both situational context and an individual's sense of self. This means that the experience of uncertainty can be unpredictable, as different social contexts may have varying effects on individuals, depending on their unique characteristics and perspectives (see (Hogg, 2007) for more details). Hogg's uncertainty-identity theory argues that when people are feeling uncertain about their perceptions, values or emotions, they feel uncomfortable and anxious and accordingly seek to reduce this uncertainty.

Suha is 45 years old and is an associate professor; she is conservative and from a Bedouin background. In the case of Suha's narrative, although she revealed a motivation to lead and has the skills required to lead and the support of her family, her organisation was not ready to support her development, causing uncertainty about being a leader in her institution because of dual-level leadership (see section 3.3.1 for discussion of the concept). Suha argued, 'Frankly, I don't think that I would want to be a leader in the institution in the near future.'

Suha's self-concept certainty regarding leadership is challenged by a number of contextual factors, according to her further explanation, causing her rejection of the leader identity. These factors include socio-cultural context (i.e., tradition and societal norms that portray gender-role bias, such as gender segregation) that is currently institutionalised in the organisation (such as the ambiguity in the role of HoD).

Suha distanced religion as an influence in these institutional and socio-cultural gender discrimination practices. Her uncertainty continued to show in her story of wanting to become a doctor yet feeling she could not pursue her dream. She explained that that happened because of societal gender-role stereotypes that had been imposed through conservative views of religion regarding mixing with other men outside of her family (except her father).

There is a lot of uncertainty in Suha's narratives about the sources of the barriers imposed upon women by society: 'I think it is a contradiction'. According to (Hogg, 2007), feelings of uncertainty can be temporary and may disappear once the source of the uncertainty is resolved. However, new uncertainties may arise, or people may actively seek them out. Intellectually resolving uncertainty, such as by identifying with a group, may not lead to emotional resolution. The person may still be uncertain but about different things.

This is also evident in phase two of Suha's narrative, during which her uncertainty persisted and intensified. Suha began to raise doubts and express opposition towards the social reforms taking place in her country, despite the fact that more women were assuming leadership positions. She expressed an opinion that these new reforms are unreal and 'only a show', suggesting that women in leadership positions are often given these roles as a symbolic gesture and do not possess genuine power or authority.

Suha recounted an incident where she witnessed a male professor belittling a female HoD by dismissing her ideas and questioning her knowledge and expertise in front of others. To Suha's surprise, most of the men in the room agreed with the professor, and even some of the women present shared his view. This experience left Suha feeling frustrated, and she expressed her reluctance to assume a leadership role, believing that it would be challenging to change the attitudes and behaviour of older individuals.

Suha's account does not reveal any personal barriers that prevent her from becoming a leader, yet she refused to embrace a leader identity and instead focused on her professional identity. Suha's story suggests that changing people's attitudes towards female leaders is still a distant goal, especially within the current organisational culture. Despite the fact that women currently hold positions of power, Suha was discouraged from pursuing a leadership role due to the incident she witnessed. She expressed her frustration, stating, 'Why should I subject myself to this? I am content

with the way things are. You can change policies, but changing people is very difficult, especially older individuals’.

Suha’s decline in leader identity can be attributed to both the negative experience she witnessed and the social and gender stereotypes that may have influenced her perceptions of leadership. Suha was uncertain of social change because of persistent organisational gender-role stereotypes favouring men.

This incident she discussed caused Suha to question her self-perception as a leader. Suha’s regression in her narrative can be explained through social identity theory, which suggests that individuals tend to identify with groups that they perceive as more favourable or desirable. In Suha’s case, her negative experience witnessing the treatment of the female HoD may have caused her to question the desirability of identifying with a leadership group that was not supportive of women.

Role incongruity theory may also provide an explanation for Suha’s reluctance to embrace a leader identity. According to this theory, individuals may perceive leadership roles as incongruent with gender stereotypes, leading to a perception that women are less favourable leaders compared to men. Suha’s experience witnessing the belittling of the female HoD may have reinforced these gender stereotypes and caused her to question whether she was capable of assuming a leadership role.

Suha’s rejection of the social reforms was mainly because she could not see them happening in her institution and because, due to that, she felt disappointed and devalued, which caused her to adopt a professional identity and distance herself from any leader identity.

From a social identity theory perspective, individuals seek to reduce uncertainty through identification. That means that in order to lessen or shield their identity from uncertainty, people tend to seek out new groups to join or strengthen their identification with groups to which they already belong (in Suha’s case, professorship).

8.4 Summary

This chapter provides a summary of the thesis' key findings and examines their relationship to existing leader identity and gender research. The purpose of this paper is to determine how the study addresses knowledge gaps by analysing the degree to which it supports, challenges and expands our understanding of how leader identity is constructed in a rapidly changing social context and the way it intersects with various social identities.

In the context of key bodies of literature identified in this thesis, such as leader developmental readiness, social identity theory, role incongruence theory, and the tightness/looseness culture concept (Gelfand, 2018; Gelfand et al., 2006), this paper examines each of the research questions and the results associated with them. In conclusion, this study's findings demonstrate the significance of giving credence to subjective leadership experiences of Saudi women academics in tight cultures.

The results of a categorical content analysis indicate that Saudi women academics exhibit self-readiness to develop as leaders (motivation and ability to lead), based on the theory of leadership developmental readiness.

With regard to the organisational context, positive experiences were reported in both mixed-gender and women-only environments, while negative self-view as a leader was associated with dual-level leadership.

The importance of organisational processes such as mentoring/role model, networking, and providing opportunities for leadership development cannot be overstated in facilitating a shift towards a leader identity (Ibarra et al., 2013). However, when institutionalised gender bias exists within a tight culture, the situation is different. Women need to both perceive themselves and be perceived by others as leaders in order to take on leadership roles (Shollen, 2018).

Despite this, Miscenko and Day (2016) argue that negotiating leader identity within the workplace can create tensions for women, particularly in traditionally masculine positions such as leadership. As a result, according to social identity theory, women may reject a leader identity in order to maintain their self-concept, especially in situations such as dual-level leadership.

A tight/loose culture context provides a lens through which we understand the readiness of the socio-cultural context.

When an individual is situated in a tight culture where there are a limited opportunities for expressing different aspects of themselves, as a result of societal values, norms or gender-role expectations, an identity conflict might be constructed.

The notion of salience in identity is connected to the concept of tight/loose cultures, in which freedom to decide on one's own identity construction options is more relevant to loose than to tight cultures (Gelfand et al., 2006; Gelfand, 2018). People may feel restricted or dissatisfied when they believe they cannot express themselves freely in a certain situation, and identity conflict arises.

According to (Al-Hussain & Al-Marzooq, 2016), historically, mixed-gender environments were viewed unfavourably in Saudi society. Women who worked in such settings faced societal limitations, which not only hindered their own job advancement but also impacted their families. However, in this study, a contradictory result has been found. Women in mixed-gender professions, especially the health sector, were more ready to develop as leaders due to social acceptance and their visibility to decision makers.

In their study, Al-Hussain and Al-Marzooq (2016) asserted that being from a wealthy and high-status family would positively influence a woman's advancement in the form of 'wasta' (connections). They indicated that wasta is much more important for a woman than for a man, especially if she is ready (motivated and able) to advance, because it provides opportunities that she cannot gain otherwise. This is apparent in

the case of Dana, whose village and tribal background negatively affected her advancement. In contrast, Rema, who came from a prestigious family, got all the support she needed. According to (Al-Hussain & Al-Marzooq, 2016), individuals with privileged backgrounds may receive favourable treatment based solely on their name, as their reputation and social connections often give them an advantage in job applications within their networks. This means that they may not necessarily need to rely on their *wasta* for assistance, as the influence of their name may already work in their favour by default. Such preferential treatment is often based on mutual benefits between the advantaged individuals and those in positions of power.

In light of the above explanation, tribal ties can be a barrier too. In Rema's case, where she come from non-tribal background and a high-status family, the situation was different than for Dana.

The results of a narrative holistic analysis indicate that, following social change that involves the role of women leaders becoming more apparent and accepted, negotiating leader identity might happen, as we found out from the data.

In narrative studies, the researcher is responsible for accurately presenting and analysing the accounts provided by the respondents. The researcher acts as the narrator and draws conclusions based on the data collected from interviews. Narrative inquiry allows for the analysis of socially constructed variables that occur naturally within real-life narratives, providing insight into the complex processes affecting leadership, identity and culture among Saudi women academics (Al-Jahani, 2021).

Therefore, building on leader development readiness theory, role incongruity theory and social identity theory, findings from the narratives in phase two uncover how the intersection of various social identities affects the construction of leader identity as follows (see Figure 23).

In the first case, a steady narrative of 'I am a leader: capable and motivated' is constructed when social identity support is present from high family status and from

society and the woman leader is participating in a prestigious and necessary profession such as in the health sector. Participants were self-ready, organisational ready and context ready, all of which supported the construction of a positive leader identity.

Alternatively, a very strong constant narrative of 'I am not a leader' may cause a person to reject leader identity regardless of social change when there is an intersection between leader identity and conservative religious views. Religious identity accordingly outweighs other forms of identity and causes leader identity rejection.

However, this strong 'I am not a leader' narrative sometimes progressed towards constructing a positive leader identity (I am a leader) when religious identity was lessened in the participants' narratives due to reforms. Examples of this include ethnic identity in Layan's case and tribal identity in Aya's case. In these cases, another element also came into play, which is that women's role as leaders was perceived more favourably as per role incongruity theory.

The second set of narratives reflected a progressive shift in attitudes towards leadership. In the first interview, one narrative expressed uncertainty about leadership due to religious identity, another rejected leadership due to social identity, and a third rejected leadership based on both religious and social identities. However, in the second phase, all three narratives showed a tendency to accept a leader identity.

In the third case, there were two instances of regression where women initially felt hesitant about embracing a leader identity and ultimately rejected it. This was categorised as a regressive narrative caused by the organisation's failure to adopt social change and its continued devaluation of women as leaders. As a result, these women adopted a professional identity (promotion) and distanced themselves from a leader identity.

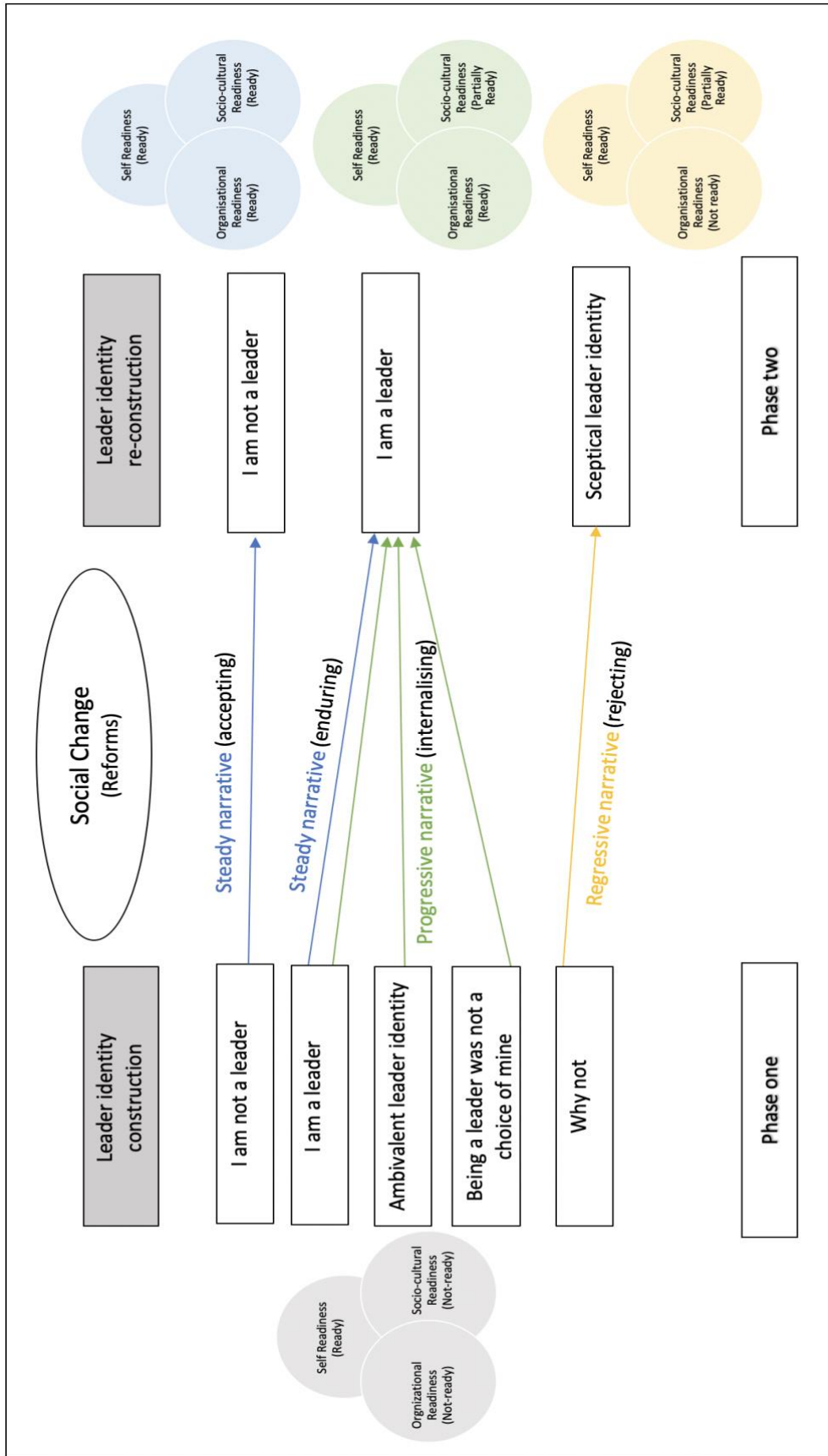


Figure 22: Model of Saudi women's leader identity construction (developed by the researcher)

Chapter 9 Conclusion

9.1 Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how female academic leaders construct their identity in the Saudi Arabian HE context when obvious gender-based socio-cultural and institutional obstacles remain.

On the surface, narratives of female Saudi academics appear to indicate that they have accepted the traditional gender roles that have been institutionalised in the HE context. However, upon further investigation, negotiations of multiple identities (religious, tribal, social) have affected Saudi women self-view as leaders and, specifically, their social identity.

The study adopts the social identity approach, which provides a deeper understanding of the interpretations of identity construction, how individuals identify themselves through social processes in different settings and the role of gender in the process.

Gender identity is a key factor in minimising women's leadership advancement when it comes to a mainly gender-segregated HE system (Hodges, 2017; Meijer, 2010). However, in this study, leadership advancement, as was evident in the example of the advancement of women in the medical field, is dependent on women's readiness to advance into top leadership positions.

9.2 A brief summary of what has gone before

Globally, leadership is still male-dominated (Ely et al., 2011), despite the fact that the number of women in top positions is rising (Elliott & Stead, 2018). Research on women in leadership has focussed on organisations and how gender inequality practices are still hindering women's advancement into leadership (Elliott & Stead, 2018). These institutionalised prejudices towards women, which favour men, create imbalances

and frequently affect the identification of women as leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ibarra et al., 2013).

Organisational culture has been identified in the literature as the main obstacle that prevents women from pursuing leadership ambition (Al-Kayed, 2015; Al-Ahmadi, 2011b). However, in the setting of a tight culture like that of KSA, women's experiences reflect a number of other socio-cultural obstacles, including culture, tribal affiliation and religion (Gelfand et al., 2006; Gelfand, 2018).

A scrutiny of previous studies showed a gap in understanding how the socio-cultural context affects the identity of female leaders when pursuing leadership in a segregated, male-dominated context.

First, this study bridges this gap by investigating the leadership identity of Saudi women in the context of HE. Some studies have explored the numerous challenges female academics face when pursuing leadership. However, these studies have neglected the effect of these barriers on women's self-view as leaders. In addition, the literature on leadership, in the context of women, discusses Western, mostly North American, women. Thus, conversations about Saudi women have often led to a conflicting comparison of the state of women in the West and in Arab countries.

Second, leadership is a social phenomenon; it can be practiced and perceived differently in different contexts. Hence, leadership occurs within social groups, the members of which come together with their taken-for-granted knowledge and perceptions and enact leadership practices (Steers et al., 2012; House, 2004). Therefore, it is important to understand leadership within the context in which it is unfolding. The literature overlooks the varying and unique contexts of Saudi women, which is another gap that this study bridges.

Third, previous studies in the context of Saudi Arabia mainly treated women as a homogeneous group, whereas this study represents the distinct experiences of

women that have not been reflected on before, thereby shedding light on those experiences.

Nowadays, Saudi women are highly qualified, having the same rate of academic achievement as men. Despite this, HE institutions still have a persistent gender imbalance in senior leadership positions, and adequate advancement has not been achieved to represent women's educational progression in terms of leadership positions. Moreover, despite recent advancements in women's status in the country and new appointments of women to leadership roles, women still face obstacles in their progress in HE. As a consequence, there are many more men than women in leadership roles. This is mainly manifested in dual-level leadership, with the centralisation of male administrators and their remoteness over women leaders in the same departments (Almengash et al., 2007).

The literature concerning the context of Saudi Arabia in women's leadership studies is paradoxical. It is impossible to deny that the status of women in Saudi Arabia is quite different from and more complex than that of women in other parts of the world. Admittedly, there are numerous factors that influence the way Saudis construct their identities. Many of these stem from the importance placed on others and on the socio-political context (other factors) in developing one's self-identification.

As a result, an introduction to Saudi Arabia's historical context was necessary to comprehend the data. As previously stated, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established as a unified state in 1932. Tribal, religious and regional identities served as the foundations of this entity and shaped Saudi society. To date, studies have mostly focussed on the relationship between the Saudi state and Wahhabism (Rich & MacQueen, 2017) rather than on a holistic view of Saudi identities (Yamani, 2000) and how the dynamics of these multiple identities have shaped the gender ideology that is so opposed to women in Saudi Arabia, affecting their status in society and, consequently, their identity.

This Islamic identity served as the foundation for the Saudi state's higher education system, where gender segregation was the only way to allow girls to pursue their education in a manner acceptable to the religion and society at the time.

In the 1980s, the economic boom that followed the discovery of oil had an effect on women's work attitudes, perpetuating the image of women as housewives and men as breadwinners and emphasising the notion that women's labour was no longer required. However, women were required to work in education and health care, which increased the number of women in these two fields more than in most other fields, in which women were already scarce. Education was accepted by society and religion as a profession for women because it was segregated by gender; thus, any woman could pursue this career, and a need for female teachers was created. On the other hand, women were encouraged to enter the healthcare sector, although it was not usually favoured by society and religion, because there was an unequal opportunity for work and study since few women were pursuing it compared to education.

That period lasted until the country's economic crisis. After the rise of globalisation, an increased openness to the world, and the information revolution, a generation of female Saudi novelists emerged who were profoundly influenced by issues of identity.

A clear conflict has materialised over Saudi society's identity as a conservative Islamic nation which seeks to establish and preserve the Islamic community's identity as a fundamental reference point as opposed to a liberal Islamic nation which seeks to enhance the Islamic identity in Saudi society. To summarise, the conflict between the liberal free and current wave that seeks to strengthen the reference of modern Islam and march in Saudi society and uphold its call for diversity affected the identities of Saudi women.

At the same time, the ascension of King Abdullah was a major influence in favour of women's empowerment, offering more leadership opportunities for women and launching the KASP program. King Salman and his Crown Prince Vision 2030 began a

new era with numerous appointments of women to key leadership roles in Saudi Arabia and abroad as ambassadors. This not only increased the number of women in senior management but also women's confidence in themselves as leaders, which provided inspiration and role models for other women.

While it is true that women have made progress at all levels, higher education in Saudi Arabia has been one of the slowest systems to adjust to change, thus maintaining its gender-segregated settings. Only in Saudi Arabia is education conducted with a total separation of the sexes.

Gender segregation, as a concept and practice, has its roots in Saudi Arabian culture, and it symbolises the building of the Saudi identity via historical, tribal and religious expression (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2013). However, how social segregation between men and women came about is a subject of dispute (Song, 2019). Some Saudis believe that Saudi women's social roles and gender expectations stem from Islam, and they push for strict isolation. On the other hand, some others argue that today's gender standards are based on cultural practices around women's honour, which fit with the current political objectives. Therefore, the family's interpretation of Islam and tribal traditions determines the key elements of a woman's social position (Yamani, 2009; Song, 2019).

Separate and gender-segregated cultures, such as Saudi HE, are tough to study when it comes to equality, and changes in the public and political spheres affect the mentality and the conventions in conflicting ways, making it even more challenging for women to be identified as eligible leaders. When it comes to attaining leadership, it is not enough that a woman is professionally qualified or developing readiness to become a leader because men have the power to make the leadership decisions. Therefore, effective leadership attainment requires a high degree of visibility.

Previous studies have claimed that women in Saudi HE have faced many challenges in their advancement to leadership. It has been proposed that women's delayed

advancement to senior leadership positions might be caused by the deeply rooted gendered culture of organisations, especially when it comes to religious organisational culture, such as that prevalent in the Saudi Arabian higher educational system (Al-Ahmadi, 2011a; Al-Jaradat, 2014; Al-Tamimi, 2004; Alghofaily, 2019).

In conclusion, the reader unfamiliar with the Saudi context may feel disoriented and encounter numerous contradictory events and analyses. This is because there were numerous political, social, religious and economic factors that influenced how women's status varied dramatically over time. This study contributed to the Saudi Arabian literature by elucidating the contextual socio-cultural factors that influence women's readiness to develop as eligible leaders in Saudi Arabia.

9.3 The present study

Organisational cultures in Saudi higher education are embedded with conservative norms that stem from culture, tribes and religion. However, this study has combined these previously separate elements when investigating the leadership identity construction of women in HE by using a narrative approach. An analysis of women's narratives has uncovered several challenges that affect women's self-perception as leaders.

This study was based on the hypothesis that women's academic development as leaders in Saudi Arabia appears to be constrained by ingrained societal restrictions, implying that leadership identity is largely internal. This study also suggested that self-perception as a leader may be more significant than group membership. Avolio (2016) stated that the golden triangle of 'the leader, context, and those who are touched by the leader's leadership' (p. 7) has a key effect on leader advances and Saudi women's self-view as leaders. Thus, using a gender lens (Skinner, 2014), the current researcher empirically investigated how leadership identity develops within the context of political and socio-cultural constraints.

Data analysis has uncovered that Saudi women working in HE construct their leadership identity through an intersection of multiple identities that shape their self-view as leaders, which, in some cases, discourages them from thinking of themselves as leaders. This answers the first research question, 'How do Saudi women academics perceive leadership in Saudi HE?'

One of the main determinants of Saudi women's self-view as leaders is social acceptance; women neglected their leadership identity in favour of academic identity because the latter is more accepted by the culture.

In addition, while the majority of study participants have shown a motivation to lead from a young age, combined with the capability to lead, they lacked proper training, mentors and role models. However, it is important to note that favouritism in selection and promotions was also evident in how they constructed their future identity as leaders, giving up having this position and reinforcing societal expectations of the incongruity between gender-role beliefs and their role as leaders.

Most of the participants stated that traditions and family seemed to hinder their progress. This was stronger regarding husbands than regarding fathers, who have been a strong supporter in most of the participants' narratives.

The recognition of this interplay between these various identities revealed diminished leadership identity to be a coping mechanism applied to maintain women's out-group membership. These identity negotiations were interwoven within the narratives, yet upon the second round of interviews, many of these negotiations took different turning points shaped by new reforms happening in the country towards women's involvement in leadership. Almost half of the participants interviewed in the second round had a more positive leadership identity than they did in the first round of interviews. This study investigated how the various challenges affected the construction of the women's leadership identity, how these women make sense of their situation and how they interpret the challenges.

Findings also show that religion was very strong in Saudi women's narratives, yet its actual effect varied greatly. Regardless of the misinterpretation of religion, participants used Islam both to support leadership identity and to argue against it. For example, women who adhere to Saudi leadership and gender standards and adopt a conservative view that males are more suitable to lead claimed that they are mandated by Islamic principles; others who oppose these norms argued that they are irrelevant to Islam. The opposing side is considered to be liberal by community standards. Ultimately, Saudi women's religious interpretations strongly shaped their sense of leadership identity, which determines their autonomy under religious restrictions.

It is mainly men who have the authority to promote a woman to a leadership role. However, they might never have worked with each other, and all the reports about the woman's capability and performance come from the perspective of a single gender, which might result in a conflict for power.

The findings also demonstrate that Saudi women who work in a more open organisational structure that allows women to interact with men (such as the health sector), advance more quickly and have higher self-identification as leaders. This might indicate that congruity between gender and leader roles helps women to escalate in their leader roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Leadership identity construction among female academics in Saudi Arabia can be affected by leader developmental readiness, especially in the context of Saudi HE. This study contributes to the literature by viewing leadership identity construction within a male-dominated context, showing how these subtle and institutionalised segregations affect leadership identity formation, which appeared through the women's contradictory narratives. This answers the second research question, 'What is the role of Saudi women's developmental readiness in their leadership identity construction?'

The identity being constructed is dependent on the setting. Narratives of female academics in Saudi Arabia reveal that their self-perception as leaders is shaped by the social and local context. Social identity, when more salient (operative), overrides any other level of identity. When social identity is in conflict with leadership identity, the latter diminishes. This was apparent in the narratives of female Saudi academics, which demonstrated five key constructs of leadership identity: first, the steady narratives 'I am not a leader' and 'I am a leader: capable and motivated'; second, the progressive narratives "Ambivalent leader identity" to "I am a leader", 'Being a leader was not a choice of mine, but now it is', and "I am not a leader" to "I am a leader"; and third and finally, the regressive narrative "Why not" to "It is only a show".

These narratives of leadership experience shape the construction of Saudi women's leader identity, which is the third research question that this study aimed to uncover: 'How do narratives of leadership experience shape the construction of Saudi women's leader identity in regard to recent reforms in Saudi HE?' This finding is consistent with Zhao and Jones (2017), in which social identity shapes individuals' identity positioning in that they will be hesitant to adopt an identity that is incongruent with social standards.

Each identity is linked to some of the barriers that were found in previous studies and have been previously discussed in the chapter on findings. The negotiations of identity were as follows:

- The 'I am not a leader' narrative happens when there is a clash between leadership identity on the one hand and social identity and (mostly) religious identity on the other, causing Saudi women to reject leadership identity.
- The 'Ambivalent leader identity' narrative occurs mostly due to institutional barriers towards professional identity.
- The 'Why not' narrative occurs when the participant's leader identity is less salient than their professional identity, which indicates less motivation towards being a leader; however, this is mainly due to social constraint.

- The 'Being a leader is not a choice of mine' narrative stems from the participant's tribal identity.
- The 'I am a leader: capable and motivated' narrative occurs with social identity support from family.

It is important to note that the participants' self-views as leaders shifted between the first and second rounds of interviews. In the former, there were no women holding authoritative leadership roles in the country. However, between the two rounds, several appointments were made, which enriched the data findings and confirmed that social context is an important determinant in mediating leadership identity construction. This is connected with the last research question, which shows the recent reforms positively affected women's self-perceptions as future leaders.

One important factor that impacted Saudi women's self-perception as leaders was the significance of social networks and personal ties in Saudi Arabian culture, which affected its organisations. The participants expressed discontent with the overall gendered practices within HE, especially in terms of the concentration of power within the departments dominated by males, which affected their leadership identity.

The findings of the study suggest that Saudi women's ability to claim and grant leadership roles is context specific. Gender segregation among some faculties in the university plays a vital role in hindering women's visibility as legitimate leaders. At the organisational level, dual-level leadership has affected women's self-perception as leaders, according to the participants' narratives. Women are less likely to advance due to their lower visibility. They are also more likely to be retained in the lower ranks. In addition, gender segregation created the sceptical narrative in this research, as it made women hesitant towards being a leader as there no place for them to practice their leadership.

Higher education in Saudi Arabia is categorised as being gender segregated, which stems from the social culture forming the social identity of individuals. This

segregation shapes most aspects of professional identity construction for its members. Women's identity is constructed through taken-for-granted rules that have formed the Saudi culture and are institutionalised in the system. While there is growing evidence that new socio-political reforms in Saudi Arabia are changing perceptions towards accepting more women in elite positions, there is a long way to go for the social acceptance of female academics.

Gendered practices in organisations affect women's claim (leadership identity) and grant (social identity) process. When social identity is more salient in any situation, professional identity and, specifically, leadership identity diminish. There is a clear incongruity between the role of women and that of a leader in HE; however, this, in part, is determined by the setting and can be explained by social identity. Visibility and social acceptance are key in validating both women's roles in the institutions and their leadership identity saliency. For example, women who work in medical colleges have self-perception clarity as leaders, which is demonstrated in the confidence and assurance that they maintain over their leadership identity.

Some participants somehow lost their self-/mother identity as their academic identity increased. However, leadership identity was hidden, and participants rarely talked about it until asked. This was probably because they preferred to introduce themselves with the former (academic identity) rather than the latter (leader identity).

9.4 Original Contribution of the Thesis

This section highlights the research contribution of the study by discussing its theoretical contributions and its practical contributions.

9.4.1 Theoretical contributions of the study

Leadership identity construction among female academics in Saudi Arabia can be affected by leader developmental readiness (Avolio & Hannah, 2008, 2009), especially in the context of Saudi HE. This study contributes to the literature by viewing women's

leadership identity construction within a male-dominated context, demonstrating how these subtle and institutionalised segregations affected women's leadership identity formation, which appeared through their contradicting narratives, which answers the second research question. Although narrative approaches are widely accepted, it is limited in Saudi context. The originality of data, method and methodology adapted allowed for better explanation of data.

Another theoretical contribution to this study is adding a gender and cultural lens to the study of leader developmental readiness. Avolio and Hannah (2008, 2009) assumed that a leader is developmentally ready to advance based on their motivation to lead and having the capability to do so and support of the organisation. However, this was not the case in the Saudi HE, in which socio-cultural context play a role as well. That is there is shown to be limitations to this theory in what are described as 'tight' cultures within tightness-looseness theory (Gelfand, 2018; Gelfand et al., 2006).

This study also contributes to social identity theory, in regard to how multiple social identities such as gender, ethnicity/tribal and religious intersect to affect women leader identity construction.

There is a dearth of background and published research on leadership, leader identity and leader developmental readiness in the context of KSA or within higher education sector. The few studies available have not yielded conclusive findings or empirical results that can adequately represent an understanding of Saudi women's leadership development. This study contributes to the literature by uncovering women academics' leader identity construction within the context of Saudi higher education, in which explicit socio-cultural and systemic barriers persist.

The study contributes to the leadership literature by exploring the effect of dual-level leadership, one of the most significant barriers to women's self-perception as leaders. Although previous research has touched on some of the barriers affecting women leaders, it has not addressed dual-level leadership structures (a concept coined by the

researcher to reflect the women and men departments leadership in HE). This form of leadership is a by-product of gender-segregation practices in Saudi HE.

9.4.2 Practical contributions of the study

This study identified several barriers at the organisational level affecting women's leadership identity, such as lack of available leadership and context-specific training for female leaders and insufficient mentoring and role models. Reference to this study will influence policy makers and HE institutions to conduct more high-quality leadership development programmes, as these contribute to women's leadership progression. In addition, transparent selection processes for leadership positions is a critical area to take into consideration to ensure fair representation within an organisation. Moreover, the dual-level leadership practice must be evaluated for its applicability and procedures, particularly after being eased in some of the in some university departments.

An important contributing element of this study lies in its timing. The research began in 2017, when female leadership in Saudi Arabia was scarce. However, by the second round of interviews, women had gained high leadership positions, and gender equality had become prevalent in society following MBS's 2030 Vision. This study accordingly has addressed how reforms have affected Saudi women academics' view of themselves as future leaders. It also analytically investigates what shapes women's experiences in their advancement to top leadership positions in the country.

One of the most significant contributions of this study is that it established a link between the challenges faced by Saudi women and the impact of these challenges on leader identity. This study laid the groundwork for future research focussing on the barriers to the formation of women's leader identity and how different barriers may affect the development of women leaders differently, thereby increasing our understanding of female leadership in these critical times.

This study focuses on Saudi women's own experience and perception (identity), which is scarce in the context of Saudi HE. It also gives an opportunity for women academics in KSA to share their experiences of aspiring for and attaining leadership roles in HE.

9.5 Limitations and areas for future research

The limitations faced by this study resulted from the nature of the study, sensitivity and low sample data. Given the nature of all qualitative research, generalisations are often limited.

This study of Saudi women academics could, at first glance, be considered context-specific research. However, it is at its deep core transferrable into various other settings in which gender-stereotypes occur. It would be interesting to apply the study in other countries with similar cultures as Saudi Arabia would be much encouraged for future research.

In this study, the field notes supplied little credible data (see section 4.6.1) particularly given the researcher's brief stay in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and her residence in the United Kingdom at the time. On the other hand, given the study's complexity, lengthy participant observation in courses or seminars may greatly enhance the data and provide a more in-depth knowledge of the participant's experience (Herrmann et al., 2013; Bryman, 2004). Including watching leadership in practice via the doings and sayings of Saudi woman leaders as they interact with others.

Although the author did the second round of interviews after the reforms in the country, yet leader identity remains an important field of research to uncover the readiness of women to be leaders and how it may conflict with their other identities such as tribal and religious identities post reform. As according to this study new socio-political reforms in SA are changing perceptions toward accepting more women in elite positions; a longitudinal research to track the effect of the social change on women leader identity would be valuable. Longitudinal research will be an important element to uncover the process of leadership identity formation within HE to gain a

deeper and more nuanced representation of women leaders. As part of this, an investigation of the experience of the newly appointed women's leaders in the country, would be important to investigate. Especially in these times where Saudi women are in need to hear these role models of women's experiences.

Another additional line of research is to include the men's views towards the changes in women leaders in Saudi Arabia (Elamin and Omair, 2010). This would uncover the possibility and the acceptance of Saudi women to be leaders in the future. And better uncover the barriers that might be in the way of women. Thus, the author encourages including them for future studies.

In addition, research addressing Saudi women leadership styles would add to the leadership literature. Especially women who have recently been appointed to supervise both men and women departments and their subsequent impact on effective leadership. Acknowledging that leadership is context-dependent this type of studies would be important to be investigated

Studying the leadership styles of Saudi women who have recently been appointed to supervise both men and women departments, and their subsequent impact on effective leadership, would be a valuable addition to the existing leadership literature. Given that effective leadership is context-dependent, such studies would be important for gaining a deeper understanding of leadership in tight cultures (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Van Engen & Willemsen, 2004; Gelfand et al., 2006; Gelfand, 2018).

Chapter 10 List of References

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Appendices

Appendix A

KSA as a context

As this study settings are situated in the Kingdom of KSA, it is important to understand the country's historical, political, economic, sociocultural and religious factors in order to uncover the contextual factors that affect women's leadership readiness to develop as eligible leaders in HE KSA. Causing the changing and multiple social and personal identities of women raised within the context of KSA.

Despite KSA's position in the world, due to the location of the two holy cities in Islam (Makkah and Madinah) and the being one of the world's largest oil producer (Walker, 2004). Scholarly concerning KSA has always been very much conducted by Saudi scholars or other scholars who lived in the Middle East. In other words, KSA has since quite a while ago stayed shut to outside researchers, with a chosen few scholastics permitted into the kingdom over the previous decade, this was the case until recently (Dirani et al., 2017).

However, in recent years this case is no longer applicable. According to (Dirani et al., 2017) KSA is experiencing fast changes, in all aspects. Power has been gradually moved to the younger generation; this has affected the openness to others and loosens the very conservative past administration. This has led to noticeable changes in the "political, social, economic and educational systems have come about in less than fifty years".

In this chapter, the literature concerning the historical context of KSA will be reviewed. This is in order to understand the myriad of factors shaping and re-shaping women's self-view as future leaders.

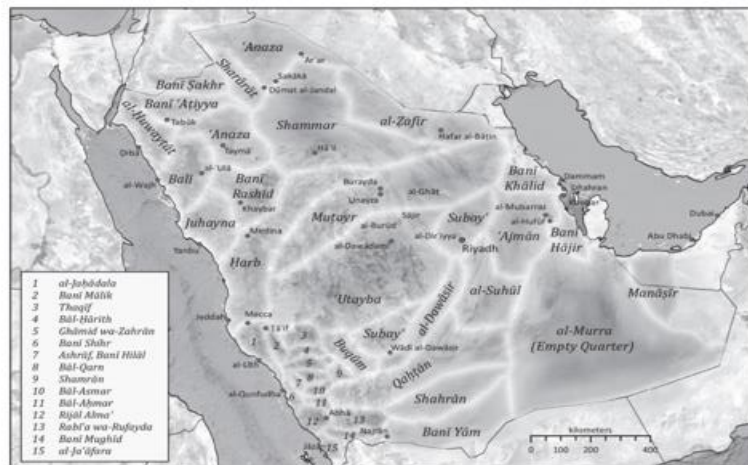
The Kingdom of KSA: Historical and political establishment overview

The Kingdom of KSA is the largest country in the Arabian Peninsula, forming 80% of the area (Bowen, 2008). The inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula have had a strong identity based on Islam for generations. KSA is a contemporary Muslim country that values its Arab history and traditions (The Embassy of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2020).

The Kingdom of KSA arose in the 18th century out of “an arrangement between religion and political power” (Al-bakr et al., 2017). A joint partnership between a religious figure, Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, with Muhammad bin Saud undefiled the first state based on Islamic religion (The Embassy of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2020).

The current modern state of KSA is considered to be the third state that inherited the first and the second Saudi state. After the unification of the country in 1932 (third state) by Ibn Saud (the founding King) and throughout the last century, the economy and society underwent radical change (Al-bakr et al., 2017). Depend on two main elements: “the monarchy and Wahhabism”, which have been in a “symbiotic relationship” (Muharrem Hilmi Özev, 2017).

The Kingdom of KSA is one of the largest countries in the Middle East, located in the southwest of Asia. It has a population of approximately thirty-four million people (GASTAT, 2020b). It covers the land from the Arabian Gulf to the Red Sea (see Figure 0-1). KSA is occupying an important place in the world especially for Muslims all around the world, with the presence of the two holy cities, Makkah and Madinah, in where the prophet Muhammad was born in the former and died in the latter. All Muslims around the world face Ka’ba when they pray five times a day.



Map 1. Approximate boundaries of Arabian tribal territories before the establishment of the modern Saudi state, along with toponyms significant for this study.

Figure 0-1 map of KSA showing Tribal territories. Source: (Samin, 2019).

(Yamani, 2000) in her book “Changed Identities: The Challenge of the New Generation in KSA”, categorized the Saudi population into three categories: the first generation of Saudis, those who were born in the 1930s, at the beginning of the political reform of the Saudi state. This generation “lived a traditional, tribal existence, as the state was just beginning to develop national institutions and identity” (Al-bakr et al., 2017). The second generation was born in the 1950s and who experienced the Kingdom’s petroleum exploration era “bore the fruits of political integration, oil wealth, increasing access to education, and expanded contact with the West” (Al-bakr et al., 2017). The third generation, born in the seventies and eighties, were exposed to the western culture throughout media platforms as well as unstable economic status that was heavily dependent on oil prices instabilities.

KSA is a young country in which youths account for the vast majority of the population. Based on the last demographic survey conducted in 2016, 72% of the country ranges between 15-64 years old (GASTAT, 2018b). As (Yamani, 2000) argues, young generations significance to shaping the future of the country is undeniable and will shape the political atmosphere in the next decade. As a result, the young Saudis are dealing with shifting gender roles, that came with new changes in the country (Al-bakr et al., 2017).

Oil-production influence; economic overview:

KSA's oil production boom has had an effect on women's social status. It is believed that petroleum as a source of main income has an impact in lowering the level of democracy and a changeable economic status in many countries. This mainly will lead to un-balance gender relation in the shape of patriarchy (Ross, 2012). There are two reasons for this un-balance: firstly, these nations would be more rich, providing mainly low taxation to the population which lead to men (who are the main labour force) will have more salary resulting in them being the main breadwinners in such nations, minimizing women's need to work and therefore having their own independency. Secondly, the export-oriented industrial jobs will be less, therefore, less opportunities for women's workforce participation (Ross, 2012).

(Moghadam, 2005) argues that the heavy reliance on oil economy negatively impacts women employment, for example; KSA. Not only that the dependence on oil affects the employment of women negatively, yet, traditional gender roles and policies might also affect their workforce participation.

Saudi socio-cultural overview:

Although rapid and drastic changes in the Saudi state in the infrastructure, services and organization. Yet, on the social level, tribalism's presence is still vivid in all aspects of the Saudi society and its influence might even affect, professional, martial, and educational choices (Thompson, 2019a).

Looking at it from the outside KSA looks as an ethnically and religiously homogenous country (Long, 2005). However, it is naive to treat Saudi's as a monolithic group. While some scholars propose that a heterogenous culture (groups of divergent sets of customs and beliefs) is a loose culture, others suggest that being more diverse means that rejecting ingroup members will be costly (Triandis, 1989).

A prominent characteristic of collectivist societies is that people are expected to follow collective rules and role definitions. Heterogeneous societies tend to have comparable norms and values of the in-group (Toh & Leonardelli, 2012). In contrast to homogeneous civilizations, the unpleasant choice that ingroup members may have to make if an in-group member deviates from ingroup standards is for that person to be excluded from the ingroup. An individual will accept collective self, the more he relies on his community. "Tightness may result from too much looseness, and looseness from too much tightness. Thus, culture is dynamic, ever changing" (Triandis, 1989). In this regard, KSA is considered a collectivist culture, where individuals' loyalty to their 'in groups' membership is vital for their collective identity (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Following this, KSA is considered to be an ethnic and culturally diverse country (Al-Hassan, 2006). To an insider this diversity can be seen throughout the regions of KSA. As each of these regions holds centuries of distinct rich cultural heritage, distinguishing tradition, distinctive dialect, dress code, culture, custom dance and marriage celebrations, some of it also differ in their religious beliefs and tribal affiliation and gender relations (Yamani, 2009), long before being a Saudi state (Long, 2005). Each region should be treated as a "social construct" rather than a location.

The following section will discuss the ethnic categorization resulted from being part of these different regions. This is important in order to understand the different social identities shaping women's identity as leaders.

[Ethnic categorization:](#)

Historically, KSA was the land of nomadic tribes or Bedouin tribes especially concentrated in the middle of the country, yet, nowadays these nomadic tribes have become a minor group due to the civilization of the country, yet, their descendants are forming the majority of Saudis preserving their own tribal identity. However, the diverse cultural heritage of KSA leads to it being a place for diverse ethnic Saudis (Al-Ghadeer, 2009; AlMunajjed, 1997).

For example, the western urban region, where this study situated. Forms a distinct ethnic group, which is known as Hijaz (Abalkhail, 2017). A mixed of tribal and a non-tribal immigrant (pilgrims descendant) were living there. This was due to it being the gateway to the two holy cities Makkah and Madinah. Many Muslims used to migrate to those two city for religious purposes forming a more diverse community (Yamani, 2009). According to Yamani, the Hijazi identity still maintaining its strong sense of identity stemmed from being the land where Islam emerged. For this reason, Saudis in Hijaz are an ethnic group composed by a varied collection of people from across the globe in the west area (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2015).

Another example, in the eastern oil-rich region, the minority Shia (religious group) is situated (Yamani, 2008; Matthiesen, 2014; Khan, 2019), they were proposed through their own efforts for the industrial economic development (Long, 2005).

Although, before being unified under the Saudi state, these regions were politically independent. Yet, after the unification of the country these regions have kept their ethnic variety and cultural differences, which are frequently reflected in the Saudi social identity (Yamani, 2009).

Many reasons led to that misreading of the Saudi demography; first is subsequently to the formation of Saudi state in 1932, the Najdi/Wahhabi culture become the most predominant one, masked all other existing cultures. It formed the national dress code and institutionalized in the structure of the organizations, abolishing regional traditions. This was used in order to apply a sort of soft power to the new identity of KSA (Muharrem Hilmi Özev, 2017). This led to that tribal identity for Saudi's up to date holds deeper meaning as a Real Saudis.

Secondly is the projection of the media out or inside the country always as a monolith that is hard to differentiate, represented in the uniform manifestation of appearances, with all women wearing black robe like garment and veil and men wearing clothes

(abaya in Arabic) and men wear a similar white ankle-length robe-like garment (thobe in Arabic)(Buchele, 2008).

Thirdly, the fact that most Saudi culture and tradition have long been unwritten and only orally communicated through citizen, making this very hard for an outsider to read and analyse (Lily, 2018). According to (Long, 2005), one proper explanation is “physical isolation”, since Saudi were in different isolated parts shattered in the land, this affected their culture, how they view themselves and the world, making their in-group/out-group membership vital for their survival and giving them a sense of identity, safety and belonging, avoiding being vulnerable to the outside world (p.3).

Tribe/Kinship:

Arab culture is heavily emphasized of being part of tribes as a matter of bonding and honour (San Martin et al., 2018). Questions have been raised about the meaning of the “tribe”. It could be possible when you hear the word tribe, that the image of low class, savages, uncivilized society to be appeared. But that not the case in Saudi, referring to the social concept of kinship and family history. Tribe can be seen as a socio-cultural phenomenon represent pride, history, culture and position in a certain land (Al-Hassan, 2006). Tribe/Kinship is used interchangeably in the thesis as it does not only refer to the Bedouin tribes but to all regional distinctive social bonding and in-group relatedness and membership.

The history of tribe in the Arabian land goes far before the-Islamic times, according to (San Martin et al., 2018; Losleben, 2003) due to the harsh environment of the desert families used to gather in groups forming a clan, and different clans form a “tribe”. This unsafe environment led people to depend on each other in matter of survival and protection forming the tribal structure (San Martin et al., 2018).

Tribes usually refer to families before they tied to a nation, yet, in the case of KSA, the state has preserved their identity in order for them to be a powerful allies and sideliner with the state insuring their members loyalty. In KSA, the ruling family itself is from a

tribal decent (Thompson, 2019b), that has resulted in the manifestation of the harmony between the state and the tribalism (Kostiner, 2016). As (Yizraeli, 2016) argues, the ruling family has protected tribalism, through a matrimony in which Ibn Saud (the first ruler of the Saudi state) used this method as a form of bonding and unification with other tribes (Stenslie, 2012; Maisel, 2015). In addition to the tribal chiefs' recruitment and allowance (Yizraeli, 2016).

Nowadays, these kin-related groups has substantial part of the Saudi national identity construction process. However, they have been marginalized for generations and overshadowed by other pillars of Saudi society as the country has shifted toward being a civil society, especially religious and liberal voices (Maisel, 2015). Thus, the number of the tribes and which is the largest is not the main focus of this study, yet, their influence on Saudi's social identity is vital. And accordingly, to women's status in the country.

It is vital to acknowledge that 'tribe' is not a homogenous in concept. Tribes have different value systems with varying degrees of conservative and liberal tendencies. In regard to empowering women, different tribes treat women differently based on their values. For example, tribes in the west region tend to be more flexible with women's education and public appearance as well as mobility. This comes to the fact that they have more tendency to be more liberal are a result of their openness to other global cultures. In contrast, other tribes who are located in the middle of the country tend to be more in control of women's freedom (Yamani, 2000).

The concept of tribes is more concerned about the in-group out-group relationship and membership and how these fluctuation between the sense of collective/self-identity is more salient. This helps to understand the factors affecting Saudi women self/identity.

As Hofstede analysis report KSA to be a collectivist society. Suggesting that loyalty, pride, respect and agreement to the in-group membership (society) is crucial to

Saudi's (House et al., 2002; Samin, 2008), favouring relationships, networks and social interactions over rules and regulations. For example, professional relationships is bound by in-group membership and seen as a family-like connections, which affect employment and promotion choices (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2001).

As a result, social identity plays a part in many aspects of Saudi's employment and political life. Politically, (Yizraeli, 2016) illustrates that tribal affiliation is manifested in the members' selection of Consultative Council (Majlis al-Shura), (particularly third term) and the municipal council elections appointments.

In the professional arena, tribalism is also expressed in the habit of hiring employees for government jobs on a basis of tribal affinity. This is a common practice in Saudi society, though these practices is undeclared, yet, it is evident by unwritten rules and informally communicated by tribe groups. Most Saudis to date rely on them, sometimes unconsciously. According to (Abalkhail, 2017) as a Saudi, your position in an organization can be determined by your family name. Her study's findings show that in Saudi organizations, the family name which represent support and social networks is essential.

Therefore, individuals who are coming from a privileged background were more accessible to resources and more able to develop and ascend in their positions than others from a less advantaged background (Al-Rasheed & Al-Rasheed, 1996; LONG & MAISEL, 2010). Your last name will identify who you are, your position in the society's hierarchy, your level of loyalty to the state, your connections, heritage, land and history and accordingly other's attitude toward you (Elamin & Omair, 2010). i.e. how authentic you are as a Saudi (Long, 2005).

Following this argument, nowadays, tribe as a concept lost its urge. Tribal behaviour and norms is still practised in different levels between its group (Thompson, 2019a). Keeping the tribal identity somehow hidden into the Saudi national identity. This resulted in, a common mindset among today's generation looking at their tribal roots

as a source of “affirmation, self-representation and accounts” (Maisel, 2014; Thompson, 2019a).

Although tribal identity might suggest the tribe structure itself, but what it means here in this study is the family ties and backgrounds. The term is used interchangeably with the family position in the society.

Previously discussed family and kinship connections existing in the Arab Saudi culture, shaped a form of special social network connection in what so called “Wasta” or favouritism (Abalkhail & Allan, 2016; Syed et al., 2018). The Wasta influence work as well as family ties and it is a gap in the gender and management literature in the Arab context. (Lackner, 2016) and (Hutchings & Weir, 2006) on the other hand, claims that Wasta as a social construct is not merely connected to the Arab tradition per se, she argues that it is practised as well in other regions such as China and the western context as well in the form of reciprocity. Wasta is a term that refers to interpersonal networks using your personal connections or family ties as form of loyalty in order to accomplish a desirable objective (Le Renard, 2014; Hutchings & Weir, 2006; Syed et al., 2018).

Den Hartog and Dickson (2012) argues that favouritism would play a role among in-group members in tight cultures in most aspects of social life. This might involve favouring; family, kin, friends or people that share same religion or ethnicity (Dickson et al., 2012). As well as, discriminating (or alienating) people from out-group membership. These networks that was formed out of kin-related or social linkage is vital specifically in the context of KSA, it can take a broad scope of activities, yet, it is not always about attitude. It entails collectivism ideologies that is inherit in the society of KSA (Abalkhail & Allan, 2016).

It is noteworthy to clarify that the practice of tribal identity in KSA currently is far from literal meaning, it became manifested as a way of performing rather than an indication of specific regime. In fact it has stretched to include tribal and non-tribal groups following certain collective values through norms and behaviour. Akers' argues that

tribal concept in KSA today is “a mental construct based upon descent, maintained through endogamy and exhibited through tribal markers and behaviour’ (Akers 2001, p. 168).

Despite the fact that Saudi’s until today have a very pride in their tribal affiliation and membership. Some young individuals in the country looks at it as a negative sight, bringing more racism and disunion to the rest of the Saudi population (Thompson, 2019b), this could be noticed through social media platforms (Samin, 2008).

Appendix B

INTERVIEW FORMAT

Intro:

- Tell me more about yourself
- Biography (family, work), life story
- Why have you attended this programme? (Are you holding a leadership position?)
- How would you define Leadership?

Body:

1. Self

- a. Motivation to lead
 - How do you see yourself in 5 years?
 - How do you plan to achieve this goal?
 - What might keep you from achieving it?
- b. Capability
 - Do you see yourself as a future leader?
 - Why? Or Why not?
 - Do you think others see you as a future leader?
 - What abilities they see in you, which support this aspiration? Can you give me some examples?
 - Tell me about a time that you took the lead on a challenging task (whether formally or informally)
 - Have you succeeded, why or why not?
 - What are the leadership skills you demonstrated?
 - Have you delegated effectively?
 - Who have you coached or mentored to achieve this success?
 - Have you met any critical incidents? Would you please tell me the story?
- c. Leader Development efficacy.
 - What do you think you need to develop to be an effective leader/or to grant a leadership role? You can think of a role model in your field or Department?
 - What are the steps you are taking to develop your leadership capacities?

2. Context

- a. Family:
 - What are the roles and status for you as a female in your family? (listen for who's the breadwinner and the role of men if she didn't mention it ask it).
 - What is the level of education your (parents/husband) received?
 - What kind of support you received from your family? Why?

- b. Gender:

Some people think that being a woman in high-visible leadership positions conflicts with some religious and community legislation?

c. Religion:

Do you think religion affect Saudi women in their pursuit of leadership positions?

d. Culture:

- Imagine that you are a researcher, and you got the task to write a report about what effect does Saudi culture have on women academic leaders? What would you write?
- What are the challenges facing Saudi Women leaders? How did you overcome them?
- Do you think any of these can influence or hinder you as a woman in Saudi Arabia to be leader and why? (social class (tribe), sex, ethnic identity, social status, connections, wealth, household task distribution (to have a clue about husband support))
- Do you think the deeply embedded values in you culture can change? How? How is that going to affect you?

e. Organisation:

- Do you feel that you are valued at your organization? Why? if not, Why not?
- How do you get a leadership role in your organization (selection process)? In the country for example the 'Shura' council? Is it fair?
- Are there any tangible rewards available to you if you achieved a leadership role, if not, why do you think then you will claim for it? Or others do?

f. Peers:

- If you claimed for a leadership position, do you think your peers will support you? Why?
- What about your male leader? How?

3. Leader's leader:

- As a female academic, how often do you communicate with your male leader? Can you give me some examples?
- How in your opinion that might affect your promotion as a future leader?

4. Workshop Impact:

- What have you gained from attending this training course?
- What part of the workshop you think is applicable to you career?
- Do you think these attributes you gained from the programme will be part of your leadership development process? How?
- Do you think the information you gained from attending the workshop might be sustainable, in another word, will last for a long time?

Closing:

- Anything else at all you want to say or expected we would ask but haven't?
- Any closing thoughts?

Appendix C

Information sheet – English Version

Leadership identity formation among Saudi Female Academics: Does leadership Development Intervention Matters?

I would like to invite you to participate in this study which is part of my PhD research. I am inviting Saudi women academics during their attendance of a leadership development programme to take part in this study. Participation in this research is voluntary; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in anyway.

Please carefully read this information sheet, before you decide whether or not you would like to take part. Please feel free to contact me, if you would like to request more information.

The purpose of the study:

The aim of this study is to examine the process of Saudi women academics' leadership development following their attendance of women-only leadership development intervention.

I am specifically interested in women leaders in Saudi Higher education with various facets of their leadership development process (e.g. leader identity formation, leader developmental readiness, the impact of leadership development interventions). The research will also examine how leadership development process is shaped by expectations from self, dyads, subordinates, organization and society.

The study design:

The study will be composed of two stages:

- In the first stage:
Face to face, unstructured, informal interviews (in breaks, before the start, after the workshop time) and general field notes (during the training session) will be carried out at the first stage of the study which will take place during the leadership intervention. The data collected in the first stage, from interviews and field notes, will be valuable in providing contextual knowledge regarding women Saudi academics' readiness for holding a high-visible leadership role.
- In the second stage:
According to the longitudinal approach of the study, a second stage of collecting data will be implemented, data will be collected at this formal stage through semi-structured interviews through three intervals following the attendance of the leadership development programme, each interval will be separated from the other with three-month period.

The requirements of taking part:

If you decide to take part in this study you will be asked to sign a consent form. I will then discuss the interview procedure with you and arrange to interview you in a private place (for confidentiality reasons) on the premises where you work (or at a suitable venue in the university if you prefer).

The interview will take approximately one hour and be based on your own experience and it will be designed to be flexible so as to meet your needs. The interview will be digitally-recorded, subject to your permission.

As a volunteer, you are free to cease your participation in this study at any time and to have research data relating to you destroyed without giving any reason up to 1st September 2017.

Possible benefits and risks:

The data I get from the study will contribute to an enriched understanding of Saudi women leadership development **process** and the factors that shape this process (the leader, the context, gender dynamics), you can expect much of your interview to focus on these aspects.

The only consequence to participate in this study is that you will be donating around three hours of your time in a nine months. There are no foreseeable risks to taking part in the research.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

The information collected is strictly confidential and will be detained securely until the study is completed. While a de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes (through publication and conferences), your anonymity will be safeguarded at all times.

Your name or the name of the organisation where you work will not be revealed in the research findings. I will check carefully that none of the quotations used [in publication, thesis] makes a speaker recognizable, any information that could directly or indirectly identify individuals will be removed.

The UK Data Protection Act 1998 will apply to all information gathered within the interviews and held on password-locked computer files. No data will be accessed by anyone other than me; and anonymity of the material will be protected by using false names. No data will be able to be linked back to any individual taking part in the interview.

Data analysis/reporting of the data:

I will use NVivo (computer software package) to facilitate the qualitative data analysis process in order to make sense of the data, all data for analysis will be anonymised. The data analysed will revolve around the impressions and interpretations of the researcher. However, you can also take an active role in identifying key themes emerging from the data, if they would like to.

In reporting on the research findings, I will ensure that there is no way to trace individual responses back to the person who provided them.

I will use false names when writing reports about this study and if you would prefer I will also make up some information about you so no one will be able to guess who you really are. Moreover, you will be sent a summary describing the key findings of the research as soon as its finished. I will change detailed information to more generic information (the name of the department in the job title will be removed to a more general job title etc.) I will not include actual names and locations that the participant may mention, if these could link back to the participant.

However, identifying some information about your gender (female), occupation (academic) as well as geographical area (western region) are important elements in my research, please specify whether you would like this information to be identified or not.

Funder of the study:

My PhD is support with a scholarship from King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Cultural Bureau in London. The King Abdulaziz University will receive a copy of the thesis after completion and receive information about the place where data was collected. All interview transcripts and field notes will remain in the custody of the researcher and will be kept securely at all times. The researcher will collect, analyse and report the data without compromising the identities of the respondents.

Contact details:

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact me using the following contact details:

Tahani I. Alharbi
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Birkbeck, University of London
Malet St
London WC1E 7HX
talhar03@mail.bbk.ac.uk

If you have any concern, or have any complaint about any facet of this study, you can contact my supervisor using the details below:

Professor Helen Lawton Smith, FAcSS, FRSA
Professor of Entrepreneurship
Director, Centre for Innovation Management Research
Principal Investigator, TRIGGER
Department of Management
Birkbeck, University of London
Malet St
London WC1E 7HX
Tel: 44-2076316770
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Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for considering taking part in this study.

Appendix D

Information sheet – Arabic Version

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

أهدي سعادتكم أطيب تحياتي وتقديري، نظراً لحاجتي لاستكمال متطلبات الحصول على درجة الدكتوراه الخاصة بي أود أن أدعوكم للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة الموجهة للأكاديميات السعوديات اللواتي حضرن برنامج تنمية المهارات القيادية.

يُرجى قراءة المعلومات التالية بعناية قبل أن تقرري ما إذا كنت ترغبين في المشاركة أم لا. ولا تترددي في الاتصال بي في حال حاجتك إلى المزيد من المعلومات. علماً بأن المشاركة في هذا البحث طوعية؛ واختيار عدم المشاركة لن يعود بالضرر عليك.

الغرض من هذه الدراسة:

الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو التعرف على جوانب عملية تنمية المهارات القيادية الأكاديمية للسيدات السعوديات في أعقاب مشاركتهن في برنامج تنمية المهارات القيادية.

علماً بأن الدراسة موجهة بشكل خاص للقيادات النسائية في التعليم العالي السعودي بمختلف جوانب ومفاهيم عملية تنمية المهارات القيادية لديهن (مثل تشكيل هوية القائد، والاستعداد التنموي للقائد، وتأثير تدخلات تنمية المهارات القيادية). سيعكف البحث أيضاً على دراسة كيفية تشكيل عملية تنمية المهارات القيادية من خلال التوقعات الذاتية، والتوقعات من المرؤوسين والمؤسسات والمجتمع.

متطلبات وشروط المشاركة

في حالة موافقتك المشاركة في هذه الدراسة سوف يُطلب منك التوقيع على استمارة الموافقة، وبعد ذلك سأقوم بمناقشة إجراءات المقابلة معك، والترتيب لمقابلتك في مكان خاص (لأسباب تخص الدراسة) في مكان العمل الذي تعملين فيه (أو في أي مكان مناسب في الجامعة إذا كنت تفضلين ذلك).

ستستغرق المقابلة حوالي ساعة واحدة وهي تركز على خبرتك الخاصة، وسوف يتم إعدادها بمرونة لتلبية الاحتياجات الخاصة بك. علماً بأنه سيتم تسجيل المقابلة بعد أخذ الإذن منك.

باعتبارك متطوعة، فإنه لديك كامل الحرية في التوقف عن المشاركة في هذه الدراسة في أي وقت والحصول على بيانات ومعلومات البحث المتعلقة بك والتي سوف يتم سحها دون إبداء أي سبب حتى 2017/9/1.

القوائد والمخاطر المحتملة:

سوف تساهم البيانات التي سأحصل عليها من هذه الدراسة في إثراء فهم عملية تنمية المهارات القيادية للمرأة السعودية. ولا يوجد أي مخاطر متوقعة للمشاركة في البحث.

السرية وعدم الكشف عن الهوية:

تخضع المعلومات التي يتم جمعها للسرية التامة، وسوف يتم حفظها بشكل آمن حتى تكتمل الدراسة. ويمكن أن تستخدم نسخة من هذه البيانات غير محدد هوية صاحبها لأغراض بحثية أخرى (من خلال النشر والمؤتمرات) وسيتم الحفاظ على عدم الكشف عن هويتك في جميع الأوقات.

اسمك أو اسم المؤسسة التي تعملين بها لن يظهر في نتائج البحث. وسوف أتأكد بعناية أن أيا من الاقتباسات المستخدمة [في المنشور، الأطروحة] لا يجعل من السهل التعرف على المتحدث، سوف يتم حذف أي معلومات من شأنها أن تحدد، بشكل مباشر أو غير مباشر، هوية الأفراد.

يسري قانون حماية البيانات في المملكة المتحدة لعام 1998 على جميع المعلومات التي يتم جمعها في المقابلات ويتم حفظها على ملفات الكمبيوتر محمية بكلمة مرور ولن يتم الوصول إلى أية بيانات من قبل أي شخص غيري. وهوية المادة ستكون محمية باستخدام أسماء مستعارة، ولن ترتبط أية بيانات بأي فرد آخر شارك في المقابلة.

تفاصيل الاتصال:

إذا كان لديك أي استفسار أو تريد الحصول على أي معلومات عن الدراسة، يرجى الاتصال بي باستخدام التفاصيل التالية:

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لكم جزيل الشكر على استقطاع وقتكم لقراءة نشرة المعلومات السابقة و التفكير في الموافقة على المشاركة في الدراسة.

Appendix E

Researcher positionality

I am currently a lecturer at a large public university located in the west of Saudi Arabia. My path to achieving my academic dream was not straightforward. I attained a bachelor's degree in Biochemistry at university. I have always wanted to make a difference in life, to stand up for the unfortunate and the minorities. I was the president of the student union and volunteered in every social office in the university.

I come from a conservative tribal family; yet I am lucky that they are supporting me, and I am privileged to have an understanding husband. Yet, it is not all about me. It is about my own choices, about the right for every woman to make their own choices, even if they were not as privileged as I was.

My interest in researching women rights in leadership has grown with me. I believed I had the natural characteristics of a leader, but with limited visibility. Entangled in many constraints, lots of women have had to bury their dreams and to hang their certificates on the wall, waiting for somebody to recognise or approve them.

Appendix F

Saudi Women Academics Motivation to lead.

Motivation to Lead		
code	2 nd order themes	code
Motivated	Visibility	<p>Mona: " I love to be in a position; it gives you visibility to be seen and heard about. Your network will expand; for example, now, as an assistant professor, people in the decision-making might have never heard of me. Yet, when I become HoD, they will. This will open doors for me to develop further"</p> <p>Shahad: "sometimes you need to be in a position to be heard"</p>
	Spiritual <small>(as in religion modesty is important this participant tried to distance herself from asking for the position, for the sake of it)</small>	<p>Mona: "The most important revenue is servng others. Every day will come upon you, you will help someone, so being a leader would definitely raise my morale"</p> <p>Siba: "if God is willing, if our Lord is pleased, and I have got any nomination, I do not have any objection to do it. On the contrary, I mean, I told you I do not like to be bossy, but I can see that I can do many good things if I got a position. I can assist others, I can help develop my organization, not because I like positions."</p>
	The title itself	Mona: "I like people to see me as a leader, I think everyone likes to hold a position. I am one of those, I just like being with a leadership position"
	Power	Amal: " Do you want to be a queen? Of course yes. If someone asked me if I want to be a leader. I would probably be hesitant to take upon more responsibility. But if I had to and my superiors choose me for a position. I would accept and learn how to do it"
	A born leader	Siba: "to be honest, I was offered many positions. Among them HoD and even Vice-Dean, a lot of people I met consider me a natural leader"
	Enforcing change	Shahad: "The leadership position is not required for its own sake, I have always prevented to take on a leadership role and I refused many offers, until I have known that I can make the change".
	Hesitant postponing	Balance
Dinosaurs		Siba: "senior member of staff: or as we call them; dinosaurs. They are more experienced, for sure. Yet, their way of thinking and their attitude toward positions is a very, very big obstacle for us. Firstly, they resist change. They have mindset of that positions are rights. If they held a position for quit sometime, this means they deal with it as their right or private property and this of course is wrong. This attitude becomes like a generational war, causing resentment and jealousy for us. Not yet, you are young, you are new, you do not have experience. This forms an intergenerational conflict. And it is very hard in HE as they were also our teachers"
Dual-level leadership		<p>Lama: "having all the power in the male-department is really frustrating, although I describe myself as a conservative woman. Yet, I prefer having the opportunity to drop by the HoD rather than waiting for him to pick up the phone"</p> <p>Suha: "a ship can only have one captain, if it has more than one, it going to sink. The role of the women's department supervisor is very not clear. I don't say that she does not have any authority, yet, the final decision has to be from the HoD which is the male-section. That is dualism which leads to longer duration of the decision"</p> <p>Siba: "As a health colleges, the Conflict is a clear. Why is it that we are affiliated academically to the dean, who is the male department, and administratively to the Vice Dean, female section, so we have two bosses. The problem comes clear with the issues that overlaps, such as things that either none of the academic side nor the administrative part or the ones that have both. In addition, the female department does not have their own budget, accordingly, matters such as; maintenance, bidding and procurement takes very long time. Not only that, because men are not allowed in the female buildings, the university tries to provide a team of female (electricians, maintenance and construction) for day to day and small problems, yet, if they needed a more experienced or more heavy work men can come in the night and I think it's such a painful bureaucracy."</p>
Having bigger goals		Saja: "I think that I have a leader trait, yet, for now, I prefer to put this goal on hold, and focus on my promotions. Cause I think that having a position especially if you do not have the authority. Would be more headache and time-consuming than rewarding"
Refusing leadership	Organisation	Suha: " I do not have a tendency to hold a position in our department specifically . In my opinion, leadership is not about a position. I can be a leader in life, in my family,, , I mean, everywhere you can be ,, people work together, coexist with each other, in everyday communication, there has to be a leader. And I remember when I was a student at the university, involuntarily, I find myself that I am leading my classmates"
	Parenting	Shahad: "Two months after I returned from maternity leave, he was offered a position related to my specialization, so I refused at that time because I was breastfeeding, so I would go to the university for my lectures and return in order to be with my son. As well as before the birth of my son, I had another leadership offer but I turned it down."
	Family	Amani

Saudi Women Academics Capability to lead.

Capability to lead		
code	2 nd order themes	
Capable	Strong personality + From young age (agency)	Mona: 'Since I was little, I have always been a leader. For example, I was at the school's broadcast committee, always selected by my teachers to be a chairperson of the committee, in charge of arranging, planning and presenting. At the university, no activities, if you were not involved and showed yourself what this is. I would not be interested in the university's activities. I did not understand it, and I focussed on my studies instead. After that, the university atmosphere completely changed me, activities at the university are not; I mean, at school teachers would easily recognize your abilities.'
	Assertive	Amal: 'As much as I love teamwork, and I think we all as a team have the same goal, I am also very assertive. I turned my desk into a web-station where my team can come and finish their work. Commitment is very important to me, so I do send reminders and I manage my team very well.'
	Treat others fairly	Layla: 'I think what makes me stand out as a leader is that I try my best to be fair in assigning tasks, allocating time and giving rewards.'
	Precise	Suha: 'I am very precise at my work.'
	Charismatic	Siba: 'People I work with always call me charismatic. I am strict yet democratic. I have never made anyone upset.'
	Resilient Sympathetic	HayaK: 'One of the people I worked with as Vice HoD told me that I have the ability to contain others and am resilient. I feel that my calmness is a necessary characteristic as a leader. Although I am full of passion, I take university regulations very seriously.'
	Hard worker	Nawal H: 'The thing I hear most about from others is that I am a hard worker.'

Saudi Women Academic Perception of Leadership

Definition	Theme/code	Reference	Main theme
Tala: 'I believe in leadership as a way to change, and for that, I think I can make the change. Even if I am not holding the title, I don't care if I take the credit for it or not.' Siba: 'Leadership is not about being bossy! I don't like the word "boss".' Mona: 'Leaders don't gain their importance from their position.' Wed: 'Leadership is a responsibility rather than a position; I always think of the duties and the tasks before I try to enforce my power.'	Not a position	9	(Influential School of Leadership)
Siba: 'I like to stress that leadership is about the team; the leader only plans and motivates the team.' Sara: 'Leadership is teamwork.' Suha: 'Leadership means that there is a leader and a teamwork. If the leader is working alone, it is not leadership.' Amal: 'Leadership is about being a team.' Roa: 'My success as a leader is a success for the whole team.' Nawal H: 'The main idea of leadership for me is teamwork.'	Teamwork	7	
Sara: 'The leader must exercise resilience and have wisdom while making decisions. The leader must know how to act in different situations.' Tara: 'The leader must be resilient and diplomatic.' Shahad: 'The leader must be flexible.'	Resilience	3	
Roa: 'Leadership is gathering people's hearts and guiding them towards strategic goals for the institution that you belong to.' Noor: 'The leader must be well aware of everything, be present at all times and be knowledgeable about the people he leads.'	Leading their hearts (engagement)	3	
Dana: 'My understanding of leadership opposes that the person issues orders and the rest respond to it. They have to work as a family.'	Family	2	
Dana: 'A leader is in the position to serve people.'	To serve	1	
Amal: 'Leadership is positional; no one can learn it. It comes with experience.'		1	Positional

Balance		
Code	2 nd order themes	
		Women's leadership and the organisation
		Lamis: 'The work affects my life in a positive way and never in a negative way. It gives me
Cede	2 nd order themes (What are the factors that shaped this experience)	
Positive Experience		Roa: 'I have never been affected by men existing in my life, be it my father, my husband, my boss, the HoD, the Dean, or the other Vice Dean.'
(Mixed-gender environment)	Challenge to control the men	Amal: 'Since our faculty was first established by women, they were more influential because they came first with expertise and knowledge. This makes it hard for the men. The men had to respect this situation. Just because they have been taught by those women from day one [they were the only academics back then], it did not mean that they were not waiting for those women leaders to leave for things to go back to normal. That was our destiny only because the school was started by strong women who built it from scratch and changed numerous concepts. Yet there are some challenging areas, such as the Head of the Department, which is a very important position when it comes to making decisions.'
Women-only faculty		Hetaf: 'There are two types of men in leadership: one who is thoughtful and appreciative of women and, frankly, a collaborator to the extreme and the other one who is conservative in his roots. The latter does not want to talk to women (based on religious or cultural reasons). He will respect you when he feels that you are being formal (sending emails instead of making telephone calls). You have to convince him with your leadership abilities being a woman. If the man needs to give 10% of his effort to convince someone with his opinion, you as a woman must give 50% of your efforts in doing the same. One you convince him, even if he is a conservative man, he will be the first one to ask you for your opinion and consult you. No one would be able to change his mind.' Yet, for women leaders, they change and have mood swings. One moment she trusts you and the other she does not.
Negative Experience		Shahad: "Here the exception is that a woman is appointed to a leadership position, and if you notice the woman is always is a subordinate to a male leader , rarely, you find a man working as a subordinate to a women leader, But in general at the university, the Dean is a man and his deputy is a woman, I mean, it's basically that he leads us [women], and we don't lead them. The frustrating thing is that the head of the department is a man and he leads both female and male departments. While in the female department they call her a supervisor, and she only handles managerial stuff. So when I had offered the supervisor of the department. I refused, later I had a position that supervise students, both genders and then that was a little satisfaction to me."
		Nawal H: 'I have not been a leader to male subordinates, but recently, I met one of my friends who had been appointed to a leadership position. The men she is leading cannot accept that they will take orders from a woman. They are in a constant state of rage when they talk to her or even see her, and she is suffering because of this. She is wondering why they treat her like this, although she treats them similar to any leader she trained under. Social networking is key. To be honest with you, if the woman has the ability to talk to men, that gives her an advantage in running for a leadership position. Yet, there is one exception: this woman is supported (she hints towards having been appointed due to favouritism rather than merit based on her social networks). In my point of view, it is unjust when the woman doesn't want to communicate with the men and run for a leadership position because she will not be able to deal with them anymore. That way, she is being unjust to herself and to her subordinates, because she will not be able to offer her services and communicate with them. I hope it will not be as common as it is now in the future.'
Dual-level leadership	Lack of trust (selection process)	Mona: 'I have noticed that if you are not known for the male department, your chances of getting a position is limited. Sometimes, there would be people who are more suited or more experienced. Yet, they don't know about them and they lose their chances to be appointed.
	Exclusion	For example, when we are having a departmental meeting, the HoD (men's department) never listens to what we have to say, even if he does not have the logistics of the decision he is making. His word is the final decision. He has authority above all of us.'
	Double efforts	Noor: 'When facing any problem, the first move is to go to the department's coordinator (a job in the women's department). She has no authority; she only communicates with the HoD or the Dean about the problem I have. The final decision is only in the hands of men (HoD or the Dean), and there is no direct communication between the faculty member and the decision maker. Imagine how much time this cycle takes for a single issue to be resolved.'
	Miscommunication	Rahaf: 'Women do not have a chance to voice their opinions. Additionally, the Dean (who is a man) is the true leader; the Vice Dean (a woman) is only an observer.'
	Vagueness	Amal: 'There is vagueness in dealing with the male department, even though we have an electronic system. Yet, you must keep calling them to check on their account if you have any job you want done. This makes it frustrating sometimes when you can't reach the HoD by phone or by email. Although I am very conservative, I wish sometimes that we are not segregated (lord, forgive me), that I can go to the HoD's office and sort things out myself. I bet it would be a much easier process then.'

