Identity Negotiation, Saudi Women, and the impact of the 2011 royal decree: An investigation of the cultural, religious, and societal shifts among women in the Saudi Arabian Public Sphere

Maha Alshoaibi

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Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

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the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Maha Alshoaibi

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ABSTRACT


By

Maha Alshoaibi

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Dissertation supervised by Dr. Erik Garrett

Historically, Saudi Arabian culture has been deeply rooted in tradition, religious customs, family-oriented structures, and gender derived expectations for men and women alike. Saudi Arabian culture emphasizes a patriarchal family structure where men financially provide for their family whereas women are expected to manage internal household duties such as raising children, upholding household affairs, and working within a limited scope of employment. The concept of Saudi Arabian women integrating into the public workforce has been a source of contention and debate for the last several hundred years. Due to recent changes in political and economic events, a royal decree issued in 2011 enforced by the Ministry of Labor has created new opportunities for women to enter into the public workforce within a myriad of employment venues. Through developments such as these, women have been granted greater access to what
Jürgen Habermas has referred to as the “public sphere,” which was previously exclusive to male members of society. In addition, deviations in cultural norms consequently begs the question of how Saudi Arabian women perceive themselves in the workforce, society, within a religious context, and if legislative changes have impacted their personal identity within Saudi Arabian culture. The Identity Negotiation Theory (INT), in conjunction with the idea of the Public Sphere, is leveraged to understand how recent changes in the Saudi legislature promoting the inclusion of women in a variety of spaces has shaped this culture’s perception of intrapersonal and interpersonal identity, and ultimately of the culture itself.
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GLOSSARY

- **Abaya**: A long garment, typically sleeveless and full length, often brown or black and made from camel hair, and worn by Muslim women (Dickie & Pye, n.d.).

- **Alkhawa**: Early relationships between Saudi Arabian tribes, in which one tribe paid another for protection. Literally means *brotherhood* (Al-Sudairy, 2017).

- **Emir**: Title used in the Middle East for someone who serves as a military commander, governor, or other highly ranked military official (Sampaolo, 2016).

- **Fatwa**: An Islamic term referring to a ruling or interpretation regarding a specific point of Islamic law, usually given as a response to an inquiry from a court or individual citizen (Bhutia & Tesch, 2016).

- **Hadith**: A record of the traditions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, held in high regard and respect, and which serves as a critical source for Islamic religious laws. The *hadith* is superseded only by the Qur’an (Cragg, 2017).

- **Ikhtilāṭ**: An Islamic term referring to literally *mixing* or *combining*. In a cultural context, this specifically addresses the intermingling of the male and female sexes (Geel, 2016).

- **Khul’**: Derives from Sharia Law, describes a situation in which a wife remits some payment to her husband in order to be freed from an established marital relationship (Coulson, 2017).

- **Majlis**: An Arab-based governmental council in which citizens of an Islamic state can interact closely with the *emir* (Crystal & Smith, 2017).

- **Mufti**: An Islamic legal authority, which responds to a question from a court or citizen with a formal legal opinion (Mahajan, 2007).
• **Qur’an**: The holy book and sacred scripture of the Islamic faith (Ringgren & Sinai, n.d.).

• **Sharia**: A summary of the fundamental laws of Islam, represents Allah’s commandments and instruction for Muslim society, and their required respective duties therein (Coulson, 2017).

• **Shoura**: Physically means *consultation* in Arabic, represents a council of state or sometimes even a court of law, which maintains jurisdiction over issues arising from both citizens and officials with respect to the government (“Shūrā”, 2015).

• **Sufism**: A manner in which Muslims seek to discover the truth of divine love and knowledge through a personal experience of God (Schimmel, 2017).

• **Tawhid**: Represents the *oneness* of God, and the unity of God, being only composed of one whole and not separate, distinct components (Promeet, 2009).

• **Ulama**: Individuals who are highly regarded in the theoretical and practical comprehension of Muslim sciences. Can also refer to a specific council of religious men who hold governmental appointments in an Islamic-based country or state (“Ulama,” n.d.).

• **Ummah**: Refers to the collective community of Muslims, which are connected by their common beliefs and religion (Sinai & Watt, 2017).

• **Wahhabism**: Members of the Muslim reform movement, which reject any behavior they identify as polytheistic, and seek to return to original Islamic teachings (“Wahhābī”, 2018).
• **Waqf**: An institution formalized by Muhammed, peace and blessings be upon him (PBUH), which allows property to be given for various religious purposes and for the overall public well-being (Lewis, 2000).
Chapter One - Islamic Culture, Economy, and Religion

Historically, Saudi Arabian culture has been deeply rooted in tradition, religious customs, family-oriented structures, and gender derived expectations for men and women alike. Saudi Arabian culture emphasizes a patriarchal family structure where men financially provide for their family whereas women are expected to manage internal household duties such as raising children, upholding household affairs, and working within a limited scope of employment. According to the Islamic religion, women are permitted to engage in economic affairs as long as this type of activity does not disrupt her primary role within the household as wife or mother to her children. Women within Saudi Arabian culture are first called to worship Allah, then to uphold the household environment within their home; any additional labor outside of the household is considered secondary compared to these primary responsibilities (Al-Shetaiwi, 2002).

Over the course of time, women have predominately engaged in limited employment opportunities which either serve their immediate family members, family businesses practices, or contribute to the needs of women and children alike. For instance, until recently Saudi Arabia has encouraged women to engage in occupations such as teachers, nurses, child care providers, doctors, home economic services, and midwives. Over the course of Islamic history, women were also found to contribute to technical or vocational skills such as agriculture, trade, weapon forgery, clothing, and tanning (Al-Shetaiwi, 2002). The Saudi Arabian workforce continues to instill sexually segregated customs with only a small percentage of women working in the labor force due to barriers essential for employment such as lack of transportation, male dominated working environments, social constraints which juxtapose strict Islamic law, lack of
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vocational training, and the absence of childcare services (Wilson, Salamah, & Malik, 2004). According to Saudi Arabian culture, Islam does not discourage women from working but instead provides specific guidelines in order to preserve a woman's dignity and prevent her from acting against Islamic law (Al-Shetaiwi, 2002).

In consideration of this environment and evolving dynamics, the work of philosopher Jurgen Habermas and his notion of the “public sphere” is employed to better comprehend the changing Arabian landscape. In his work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas (1962) introduces the concept of public societal spheres which serve as platforms for individuals to articulate societal needs and create wide-spread social change through discussion and influence of mass public opinion. This work provides a method to frame the challenges Saudi Arabians are facing (in light of the integration of women into the public workforce) within his concept of the public sphere, and other closely linked systems ( economical, religious, etc.). Furthermore, research pertaining to the Identity Negotiation Theory will be utilized to better understand identity paradigms and phenomena in relation to these various spheres (Ting-Toomey, 2015). Through this lens, the developing identities and self-perceptions of the Saudi Arabian female subculture will be analyzed and studied to gain a more holistic understanding with regards to each individual facet of their lives and circumstances, and overall unique identities.

**Saudi Arabian History and Economy**

Islamic beliefs and traditions are fundamentally integrated into the culture of Saudi Arabia, and influence nearly every aspect of society therein. They are implemented under the Islamic Sharia, which is known as the divine code of practices (Vogel, 2000).
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This is carried out through two separate, but linked mechanisms: the Qur’an, and the Sunna. The Qur’an is comprised of words that Muslims believe are directly from God, which the prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him (PBUH), then translated for the rest of humanity. The Sunna essentially contains the words and actions carried out by Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him (PBUH), during his lifetime, and is to be used along with the Qur’an to understand God’s intentions for all mankind and how to apply Sharia Law (Vogel, 2000).

The Saudi Arabian government is based on a monarchial autocratic system, which adheres to Sharia Law. The executive and legislative elements originate with the crown king and supreme council of justice and are then further subdivided among thirteen separate provinces governed by an emir. The primary source of legal direction emanates from Sharia, but other inputs can arise from royal decrees and orders, with the understanding that these are always subordinate to Sharia Law. Saudi Arabia is unique in the sense that it has not attempted to enforce limited sections of the Sharia, but rather embraces the entire Sharia Law as its guiding law for the country and does not try to alter or modernize its interpretation (Peters, 2006).

Saudi Arabia relies on oil revenues, which contribute to both 90% of export earnings and 87% of government revenues (Saudi Arabia, 2017). However, support to the economy also emanates from internal businesses, which are currently dominated by males – only 16% of the Saudi workforce is made up of women. Gender reforms have started to occur (especially beginning in 2010), and Saudi Arabia’s Central Department of Statistics and Information notes that the number of women currently employed has expanded by 48%. Saudi women are now allowed to enter professional positions in the
retail and hospitality sectors and are also able to practice law. In addition, female nationalists can also function in diplomatic services and other miscellaneous positions, such as newspaper editors (Chew, 2015).

Outside of oil commerce, Doumato (2001) notes that the Saudi Arabian private sector is also bolstered by women operating their own business enterprises, participating in private venture opportunities, and working in sectors such as education, healthcare, and government. A great advantage for these women is their willingness to occupy employment positions considered less illustrious by other members of society, putting pressure on the defining norms of existing gender-vocational attributes. A classic example occurred in the capital city of Riyadh during 2003, when over 1,500 women applied for 400 open positions at a major dairy processing plant. Events such as these definitively prove that women are both capable and amenable to engaging a variety of workforce opportunities, regardless of perceived sociocultural esteem, or academic prowess required (Ramady, 2010).

**Significance of the Project**

For the last several years, the Saudi Arabian economy has primarily focused on oil or the petroleum industry for a large portion of its global fiscal revenue. However, with an increase in the global supply of oil throughout the world and the trend towards converting to a digital economy, petroleum prices from the Middle East have begun to grow stagnant (“Economic Realities in Saudi Arabia”, 2017). Without a paramount source of income, the nation’s revenue and budget are at risk, resulting in a royal decree issued by King Abdullah, which created new opportunities for women to enter into the public workforce in 2011.
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Enforced by the Ministry of Labor, businesses which specialize in selling cosmetics, lingerie, abayas, wedding dresses, and female sections of department stores were required to hire an all-female Saudi sales staff otherwise they would be forced to close (Zoepf, 2013). The decree also promotes nationalization of jobs or the replacement of foreign workers with native Saudi Arabian citizens (Renard, 2014). With this new opportunity for women to contribute to the Saudi Arabian workforce, the country has shifted towards utilizing its largest population towards economic growth. According to Bremmer (2017), women statistically outnumber men but comprise less than a quarter of the workforce in Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, women have flourished with educational advancement, where 60% of women are involved or achieved higher education degrees (“Economic Realities in Saudi Arabia”, 2017).

In order for Saudi Arabia to maintain its economic stability, women must be empowered to become a part of the Saudi Arabian workforce in the 21st century (Breemer, 2017). In conjunction with the 2011 royal decree, crown prince and chairman of the council of economic affairs, Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, developed a plan called Vision 2030 focusing on shifting away from an oil-based economy to one which focuses on knowledge and includes women in the workforce. In order for Saudi Arabia to continue its economic advancement, Vision 2030 promotes a 30% increase in female participation within the workforce all the while maintaining the integrity of cultural and religious practices (“Economic Realities in Saudi Arabia”, 2017).

In light of these recent economic shifts, one of the major topics this research seeks to address is the lack of information available surrounding the complex association between the changing workforce trends in Saudi Arabian culture and the way in which
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women involved in that developing paradigm perceive themselves. Due to the impact of the deep-rooted and classical cultural institutions in the Saudi Arabian society, the issuing of the 2011 royal decree is supposed to have had a significant impact on the negotiated aspect of the Identity Negotiation process (Ting-Toomey, 2015). This particular theory captures the relationship of an individual's identity and corresponding personal associations (ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, etc.) to the way in which they perceive and construct their own social identity, and it is based on this framework that the essence of the 2011 event and subsequent impacts will be investigated. In addition, the barriers women must overcome or contend with when integrating into the Saudi Arabian workforce have influenced their concept of self-identity within the context of this newly found freedom.

The concept of Saudi Arabian women integrating into the public workforce has been a source of contention and debate for the past several hundred years. Despite the myriad of influential political leaders in Saudi Arabian society who upheld traditional workforce customs prior to the 2011 royal decree, Saudi Arabian women have voiced their desire for societal change and social equality within the realm of the public workforce. A study conducted by Wilson, Salamah, and Malik (2004) surveyed 1,225 Saudi Arabian women prior to the 2011 royal decree to ascertain interest in participation in the public-sector workforce. The results revealed that the clear majority of participants expressed a desire to enter the workforce in order to fulfill cultural and societal desires, as opposed to merely satisfying financial needs. Although the desire for the integration of women in the workforce was evident prior to economic based legislation, Saudi Arabian women ultimately succeeded in creating socioeconomic change within Saudi Arabian
society through the platform of the public sphere and the power of mass public opinion to influence social changes.

Philosopher Jurgen Habermas developed the notion of what he termed as ‘public spheres’, or individuals within society, who would come together to discuss societal problems with the goal of stimulating political change. During the 18th century, the public sphere was essentially a check and balance system to ensure that the dominate sociopolitical members in society would not negate the needs of the general public. Participatory democracy was achieved through rational-critical debate, where mass public opinion began to influence political action. Saudi Arabia experienced a conflict of interest prior to the 2011 royal decree in which women comprised the majority of the population who tended to favor workforce inclusion, while politicians and the legislature rooted in religious tradition opposed the societal change to an all gender inclusive workforce. Through various public spheres, Saudi Arabian women were given a means to communicate their desire to enter the public workforce, and exercise power over political leaders in order to create sociopolitical change.

Considering the current political and economic changes for women in Saudi Arabia, it is essential to consider how Saudi women perceive this cultural transition towards inclusion and whether their perception influences how they identify themselves within society. According to Al-Shetaiwi, research in Saudi Arabia pertaining to women in the workforce has been limited. Due to social and cultural constraints, women’s employment studies in Saudi Arabia were seen as either an undesired topic of research or of little importance until recently (Al-Shetaiwi, 2002). While various studies have been performed with respect to the Identity Negotiation Theory (INT) in regard to immigration
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processes and adjustments from Saudi Arabia to other countries (Kumar, Seay, & Karabenick, 2015), little research exists surrounding the precise intercultural dynamics of INT domestically to Saudi Arabia, and much less so focused specifically on the female population. As the Saudi Arabian culture continues to shift towards a construction, which presents greater opportunities for women to become more involved in the economic sector of society, it is essential to research how an economic shift in culture has impacted the largest portion of Saudi Arabian society. Furthermore, women have been an under-researched subculture, which deserve attention in order to better understand Saudi Arabian culture as a whole.

Renard (2014) identifies the term “reform discourse” in relation to female Islamic culture as the relationship between a set of institutional behaviors, rules, and regulations compared to the advancing opportunities, possibilities, and women’s participation in society. While Saudi Arabia as a country has promoted female advancement with educational opportunities, there seems to be a disconnect between the number of educated Saudi women and the percentage of those who are using their educational backgrounds within the work force. Research conducted in 2017 states that approximately 60% of women in Saudi Arabia have obtained a degree in higher education while only 10% of women participate in the workforce (“Economic Realities in Saudi Arabia”, 2017). In order to better understand how the Saudi female subculture has embraced advancement in furthering their education yet only a small percentage use their educational backgrounds for labor outside of the household, research is needed to explain the gap between education and employment.
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The significance of these developments has far-reaching impacts beyond the scope of a single individual’s identity. The collective identity of the culture as a composite must be considered, which has the ability to drive even more sociopolitical and socioeconomic changes, which can then in turn repeat the sequence in an indefinite loop. With a person’s identity at the core of how they construct their existence, understanding and appreciating these effects and processes is paramount to better understanding the self in any fashion. The encapsulation of responses also yields insight into future generations as to the nature of influences that may impact their identities, and to what degree. Ultimately, to better understand the individual identity is to better appreciate the entire culture.

Methodology

To begin the examination of the complex dynamics involved in communication and intrapersonal identity synthesis, the overview of Islamic culture, belief systems, and core economic infrastructure were first reviewed. In addition to this, the role of women within the more focused Saudi Arabian geographical region studied, providing the backdrop for the overall evaluation. Consequently, both Habermas’s notion of the public sphere and INT are engaged directly. Each of these elements is uniquely situated to provide insight on this topic and undergird both the study and a comprehensive analysis.

In conjunction with the INT, Habermas’s idea of the public sphere provides a framework in which to study the women of Saudi Arabia and examine their developing identities. The following sections will explore the foundations of the Islamic culture, the basis for utilizing INT, and identify intersections within the public sphere. These structures will be applied to the subculture of women and reveal insights into the ways in
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which their evolving society has affected and influenced their own identities. These insights will then collectively be used to better comprehend and appreciate the Saudi Arabian culture, and offer perspectives into similar global circumstances, and potential future implications.

Chapter Overviews

The second chapter focuses on the relationship between women and the specific attributes of Saudi Arabian culture. Continuing with the theme of intermeshing religion and culture, Saudi women’s gender roles are strictly defined and constrained through the interpretations of the Sharia Law. In general, men largely have significant influence over the female population, especially in the family context of husband and wife. Women have also been largely underrepresented in key areas of society, most notably in regards to family and personal situations – these might include marriage and divorce affairs, childcare, estate and inheritances, and other family matters. However, noteworthy progress has been made to improve women’s right and participation within society and the workforce arenas. These include royal decrees, additional employment opportunities, and extended freedoms, such as the ability to drive independently (DeYoung, 2017).

Specifically targeting the Middle East and North Africa regions, Kelly and Breslin (2010) observe the most significant improvements for women have occurred within the spaces of employment opportunities, educational advancements, and political representation. However, cultural restrictions and conservative ideologies continue to present constant challenges to more rapid advancement. In addition, gender violence and spousal abuse beleaguer social improvement, and are further compounded by limited access to justice and legal systems. Currently, Saudi Arabia is ranked 141 out of 144 in
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terms of the Global Gender Gap Index review (Global Gender Gap Report, 2017).
Women must contend with these various factors while still contesting societal,
occupational, and gender barriers which serve to impede their global progress. This
section examines these collective struggles and sets the stage for the interplay of Ting
Toomey’s Identity Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 2015) and Hoexter, Eisenstadt,
and Levitzion’s Religious Public Sphere (Hoexter, Eisenstadt, & Levitzion, 2002) to
provide a more comprehensive and meticulous study into this collective subgroup of the
Saudi population.

The third chapter introduces the concept of Habermas’s public sphere, in which
the public and private realms of society have a medium in which to interact. In his work,
*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas (1962) defines the public
as relating to the state and government, while private refers to matters involving society,
economy, and the family. Before the eighteenth century in western society, the public
sphere had yet to form into existence. During this period, the public and private were
separated as king and spectators, absent of any intercommunication or interplay. Through
developments such as the literary public sphere, civil society gradually acquired more
access into public affairs, and eventually coalesced into the modern understanding of the
public sphere (Habermas, 1962).

The ideal public sphere existed as a non-physical location where rational-critical
debate can occur and drive needed political action. Habermas’s (1962) work refers
specifically to structures composing the public sphere (coffee houses, salons, etc.) rather
than individual people, revealing a sociocultural approach. Over time, these structures
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supported the evolution of the public sphere from elementary political debate to more critical and thoughtful debate.

From its original conception, however, the public sphere is highly vulnerable to social conditions and the economic environment. With the advent of social media, this is especially apparent as the controlling influences of the private arena shift towards those governing newspapers, media outlets, and television broadcasts. Habermas (1962) has an unfavorable view of these developments and paints a picture of the public sphere regressing back to its anterior form in the early feudal days. However, it is important to recall Habermas’s work is directed towards the western societies; this is, especially in Britain and the United States. In Saudi Arabia, the situation between public and private domains is vastly different, and therefore requires a wholly distinct approach for examination. Furthermore, Habermas’s approach is not focused solely on idealizing the settings of the 18th century and condemning those of the modern era; instead, Habermas reflects on the environment of the current age and what can be done. As Goode (2005) states,

The point of [Habermas’s] *Structural Transformation* is not to provide a history to feed our nostalgic aspirations, and Habermas himself has never idealized the eighteenth-century public sphere to quite the degree that his critics have charged. Instead, it offers us a frame of reference, which may help us to reflect on both the points of connection and the discontinuities between the past and our current predicament. (p. 4)

Thus, the stage is set to begin investigation into the unique *religious public sphere*, which is particularly more applicable in Muslim-based societies.
Chapter four segues the discussion of the public sphere into the context of religious-based societies to define the *religious public sphere*, especially involving the integration of women. The challenge of imposing this additional attribute to the original characterization of the public sphere lies in its origins and motivation. Immanuel Kant, one of Habermas’s key influencers, initially formed his construction of the *public* to represent “authoritative intermediaries such as preachers, judges, and rulers” (Hoexter et al., 2002, p. 2). However, the subsequent development of the public sphere using this basis was largely independent of religious artifacts. In some sense, it would seem inconceivable then to reconcile these two apparently disjointed themes.

In their work *Paths to Early Modernities: A Comparative View*, Eisenstadt and Schluchter (1998) directly confront this uncertainty by noting the deep interconnection between both society and cultural structures. They note:

The first, the so-called “original” modernity, developed in Europe and combined several closely connected dimensions. In structural terms, these included differentiation, urbanization, industrialization, and communication—features identified and analyzed in the first studies of modernization immediately after World War II; in institutional terms, they included the nation-state and the rational capitalist economy; in cultural terms, they allowed for the construction of new collective identities bound up with the nation-state but embedded in a cultural program that entailed different modes of structuring the major arenas of social life. (Eisenstadt & Schluchter, 1998, p. 3)
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From this foundation, society and culture evolve and mature together, not as disconnected entities, but rather “through a continuous interaction between…cultural codes…and their exposure to new internal and external challenges” (Hoexter et al., 2002, p. 2).

The parallels between religious themes and societal patterns show up in other domains as well; an excellent example involves that of the master-student relationship often witnessed in Sufism, a mystical aspect of the Islamic belief system (Schimmel, 2017). An analogous relationship surfaces throughout predominantly Arab societies concerning the establishment of authority, in both religious and political spaces alike. In addition, a cornerstone of the religious public sphere rests on the basis that the Sharia Law is nonpartisan and autarchical; that is, independent from external interpretation. This adds an exceptional quality to the sphere, in the sense that an ideal setting would not garner favor to either the public or private sectors regarding religious components. In practice however, this is often not the case by virtue of differences in practice of Sharia Law from locality to locality. Some control must therefore be relinquished to members of the public in order to resolve disputes that arise and ensure uniformity across the collective populace. The 2011 royal decree is a notable instantiation of such an enforcement from the public sector over the private; but in this circumstance, such recent changes such as these have notably emerged favorably towards the empowerment of women (Hoexter et al., 2002).

Chapter five deviates slightly from the discussion of the philosophical public sphere to concentrate more closely on the impacts and effects of the changing socioeconomic and sociocultural dynamics within the quintessential Muslim woman. This is performed through the lens of identity negotiation theory, or INT, first coined by
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Ting-Toomey (2015) in her iconic work. The identity component of INT refers to “an individual’s multifaceted identities of cultural, ethnic, religious, social class, gender, sexual orientation, professional, family/relational role, and personal image(s) based on self-reflection and other categorization social construction processes” (Ting-Toomey, 2015). The negotiation component of INT refers to “the exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages between the two or more communicators in maintaining, threatening, or uplifting the various socio-cultural group-based or unique personal-based identity images of the other in situ” (Ting-Toomey, 2015).

INT becomes an invaluable tool when considering all the recent changes undergone within the country of Saudi Arabia. Social and personal dynamics are highly complex and require a foundational tool to be utilized in order to achieve comprehension of such situations. In the case of women, this tool is even more essential in light of personal, professional, and cultural changes in roles. From the definition of INT and its corresponding framework of terminology and analysis, the groundwork is made available in which to base analysis of the women of Saudi Arabia affected by the developing circumambient economic and legal conditions.

Chapter six utilizes this framework in conjunction with previous studies of the religious public sphere to critically evaluate the Saudi Arabian woman from all perspectives: (1) how she participates in the new vocational and personal liberties afforded to her by recent legal decrees, reforms, and rulings, (2) her increased role and presence in the private sector, and the ability to engage public entities on political/economic/social issues of concern, and finally (3) the manner in which (1) and (2) have affected the construction of her personal identity and other self-reflexive
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implications. With the religious public sphere operating in a more topical abstract sense and the INT implemented on a much more personal level, these two tools constitute a unique and powerful composite in which to study and investigate the life, communication, and social roles of the Saudi Arabian woman.

Chapter seven culminates the previous chapters’ work into a case study, reflecting on the improvements made in Saudi women’s lives owing to the many recent royal decrees. Beginning with a philosophical foundation built from famous philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Habermas, direct applications are made to individuals through employment of tools such as INT, and both public and religious public spheres discussed in chapters four and five, respectively. The combinatorial INT/religious public sphere developed in chapter six is also emphasized, owing to the complex interrelated nature of religion existent within Saudi Arabia. In the face of criticism, these tools assist with demonstrating that ultimately the rights and freedoms of Saudi women are progressively improving, engendering optimism and enthusiasm for the future.

Conclusion

The combination of the religious public sphere and INT affords a compelling opportunity to examine the dynamic Saudi Arabian landscape, and to more thoroughly appreciate the effects on the subculture of Saudi Arabian women. New advancements for women are occurring at a rapid pace, stimulating the need evermore for increased study into this extraordinary environment. Considering recent articles chronicling the first female robot recognized as an official Saudi Arabian citizen (Zara, 2017), or new provisions to be placed in effect during the summer of 2018 in which women will be allowed to drive (Hubbard, 2017), the justification for this study becomes well-apparent.
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In an area which is currently bereft of such research, the following chapters of this dissertation will provide meaningful and significant insights into the intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of Saudi Arabian women, and ultimately into the collective Saudi Arabian culture itself.
Chapter Two – Women and Saudi Arabian Culture

Introduction

From the framework outlined in the first chapter, the role of women in society can now be analyzed. Saudi Arabian Muslim women have deeply intricate roles throughout society, which must be investigated under simultaneous review of the Sharia and Islamic practices. Under the current Saudi law, all females are required to have a male guardian accompany and authorize them to perform numerous tasks, such as marry, travel, work, and even some medical procedures. In the professional sphere, there have been recent improvements in the ability of women to become more engaged in various environments. For instance, Rajkhan (2014) noted that female representatives are able to acquire lawyer licenses and have become more active in their participation within society. Gender segregation, however, remains a key component of society, enveloping nearly every aspect of both cultural and professional environments. Zoepf (2013) illustrates such an instance in a female-staffed store, in which the Ministry of Labor ruled in January of 2013 “a decision to install partitions, at least five feet high, in all stores that employ both sexes” (Zoepf, 2013, para. 24). Consequently, modern developments in both women’s vocational opportunities and legal rights must be examined against recent historical trends and the collective culture of the country to fully appreciate their significance.

On a more personal level, women are also required to follow dress codes, and adhere to the hijab (a symbol of modesty, privacy, and morality), which requires women to cover their head, face, or body using veiling clothing (The Oxford Dictionary of Islam, 2003). Due to rules such as these and other Sharia regulations, women are often perceived as having a secondary status in society, and thus have encountered difficulties
in communicating and expressing their beliefs (Offenhauer, 2005). However, reevaluations of women’s roles have slowly started to occur, especially with the recent Saudi decree of 2012 in which King Abdullah enabled “women to enter the Consultative Council (Majlis Ashura) and be nominated for candidacy in municipal elections” (Rajkhan, 2014, p. 15). Following this decree, numerous other royal announcements have been declared, which continue to drive the momentum of new liberties and freedom being acquired for females. From new assessments such as these, and the guiding of Sharia Law, women are now in a prime position to begin negotiating their identity and understanding more clearly their evolving role in Saudi Arabian society (Markle, 2013).

**Family Values and Structures**

Of key importance when analyzing Saudi Arabian culture (and ultimately Islam itself) is to appreciate the significance and value placed within the family structures. Positions of greatest power and significance are only available to those of royal blood or marriage relation, reflecting the core value and esteem placed on the familial unit. In a similar fashion, loyalty within the culture is predominantly focused within the family and extended family, with this attribute growing weaker proportionately to the distance of relatives. As discussed previously, women within the family were also expected to display modesty, even requiring women from outside the country to cover their hair and neck at a minimum (Bowen, 2008).

Within the family, children are especially valued. Mothers have essential roles in the development of their children, providing dedicated care and support even amongst other responsibilities or vocations. Both maternal and paternal family members contribute to the growth and development of children, but the paternal side holds the prevailing
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influence. The hadith is notably outspoken regarding the importance of mothers in sharp contrast to the father; when asked, “who is worthy”, the word *mother* is indicated three consecutive times, before mentioning the father on the fourth (Nazlee, 1996). Women are regarded as possessing some of the most critical roles throughout society, with Al-Shetaiwi (2002) stating that a women’s responsibility in her home is “equal to, or more than, the man’s responsibility” (p. 11).

In terms of liberties within romantic relationships, dating and courtship is effectively prohibited, with marriages typically being arranged by elders within the family. On occasion, the participants may have some say in their choice of spouse, but typically the parents or guardians maintain final say in the decision. In the past the wife would generally assume full responsibility for household needs and child rearing, but in recent years it has become more common for the wife to also contribute monetarily to the family income. Currently polygamy is still legal with Saudi Arabia, but Islamic law places stringent restrictions on such a relationship structure (Press, 2010).

Contrary to common Western misconceptions and conservative religious scholars, Islam is quite supportive of women’s rights. As stated in the Qur’an, “Wives have [rights] similar to their [obligations], according to what is recognized to be fair, and husbands have a degree [of right] over them: [both should remember that] God is almighty and wise” (Qur’an 2:228, Oxford World Classics edition). In many instances, literal interpretation and out of context usage have been leveled against women to contest specific liberties. However, the recent emergence of the internet and electronic means to access and study religious documents and texts has caused a transition in Saudi culture. As Hamdan (2005) observes,
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Women are learning to use the so-called, ‘legitimate language’, religious language, a language that cannot be challenged by their male peers to attain their goals. Saudi women are also directed towards studying Islamic law and [Sharia] so they can speak in the name of Islam. This is a powerful way to confront the status quo. (p. 46)

Cultural History and Employment

Women in Saudi Arabia historically participated in three major vocational arenas: medicine, crafting, and weapon making. Overall, her key role was outlined through Islam and the Sharia: first, to serve as mothers and keepers of the household, and second, to all external duties. Examples of such adherents included Muhammad’s, peace and blessings be upon him (PBUH), daughters, who functioned in the roles of animal skinning, material weaving, and material handling. Islam does not specifically criticize women from performing any specific vocational duty; only that their focus should reside with their family and children first. However, Islam does specify several rules, which a woman must observe and obey whenever she leaves the home to participate in the workforce (Al-Shetaiwi, 2012).

The first responsibility is to ensure modesty and refrain from any intermingling with members of the opposite sex. Instructions for this statute originate directly from the Qur’an, in which Allah declares, “Prophet, tell your wives, your daughters, and women believers to make their outer garments hang low over them so as to be recognized and not insulted: God is most forgiving, most merciful” (Qur’an 33:59, Oxford World Classics edition). As described in the first chapter, women are to adorn the hijab to cover their
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entire body and prevent any unveiling to men. Women (and men) are also prohibited from cross dressing using the opposite gender’s clothing (Shaker, 1997).

Secondly, women are required to avoid using a seductive tone when conversing with others. The Qur’an again gives guidance on this issue, stating, “Go at a moderate pace and lower your voice, for the ugliest of all voices is the braying of asses” (Qur’an 31:19, Oxford World Classics edition). This instruction is in alignment with the overarching theme of modesty; Islam encourages women to conduct themselves so that they will be respected and regarded in high esteem within society (Al-Shetaiwi, 2012).

The third necessity is that of the obedience to the husband, especially in the matters of leaving the household. Islam specifically requires that a woman must obtain permission from either her husband (or guardian if she is unmarried) before leaving the household. This notion derives from the significance of the woman’s role in the household, stipulating that she must remain there unless otherwise authorized, or in the exception of an emergency (Al-Shetaiwi, 2012).

The last condition is concerned with travel, specifically between cities. A woman is not to travel alone; instead, she must be accompanied by a legal escort, or unmarriageable kin with whom marriage or intimacy would be considered haram (forbidden by Allah). This provision exists to ensure that the woman has someone to look after her, should she fall ill or suffer some other health condition. It is also intended to protect her and avoid superfluous contact or conversation with strangers along the way. Ultimately in consideration of these restrictions, Islamic researchers and scholars have proposed fields of employment including childcare, medical services, clothing and
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textiles, education, and IT technology as acceptable vocations for women to pursue (Al-Shetaiwi, 2012).

In the previous century, little technical focus was directed to women until 1966 when the Technical Education and Vocational Training (TEVT) was formalized, primarily through sewing and design institutions. Another turning point occurred in 1991, when the General Presidency for Girl’s Education (GPGE) officially acquired control of the TEVT for women, in both public and private sectors. The GPGE’s purpose was to continue to enhance women’s value in industry and society, as well as to fully prepare them for the current needs existing within the country’s labor market. In conjunction with continued education and higher education opportunities, events such as these sparked some of the first major shifts in women’s role within society and the workforce, eventually resulting in dramatic shifts and vocation changes being witnessed even today (Al-Shetaiwi, 2012).

Modern Segregated Workforce

One of the major challenges presented to Saudi Arabian women involves the segregation of the sexes. As one of the key cornerstones of the country, women have adapted to these restrictions and in part have developed an entire subculture specific to their own needs and wishes. This behavior only serves to further reinforce these estrangements, resulting in a complex barrier toward reintegration into society. As Geel notes,

In these women-only public spaces, women undertake activities that are by them and for them, therewith reinforcing the existence of these separate structures. This [institutionalization] and practice of women-only public spaces, as well as its
opposite phenomenon of ‘mixing’ between the two sexes (ikhtilāṭ) however is contested and led to a heated debate. This debate centers around the question of whether and if so, how women should participate in the public domain. (2016, p. 358)

The topic of women’s involvement in the public sphere, and the effect of this situation and subsequent developments on women’s identities are further explored in chapters four and five, respectively. The following deliberation considers the current challenges posed by the gender-divided society, as well as the multitude of reforms advancing gender-integration and women’s rights and liberties.

Major initiatives for gender segregation (especially within the work force) commenced during the 1960’s and 1970’s due to influence from Egyptian and Syrian immigrants and revenue influx from oil sales. In contrast, Hamdan (2005) notes that women’s historic involvement in society was quite prevalent, ranging from politics, social engagements, and economics. However, the additional income from oil sales during this period supported Saudi Arabian infrastructure to develop women-only establishments separate from those fashioned for men. To further these divisions, religious-science studies involving women had only just originated during the 1980’s, leaving the clear majority of newly emerging religious authorities at that time to be almost wholly comprised of male members only. Gender-separation continued gaining traction in the 1990’s, resulting in many of the modern structures (both tangible and intangible) in existence today (Bano & Kalmbach, 2012).

Le Renard (2008) offers some additional insight into institutionalization of sex segregation in Saudi society. Although clear divisions exist between male and female
spaces, considerable advancements have occurred within the realm of female vocations, and as such the female *sphere* of culture should not be regarded as deficient in stature. Inside the capital city of Riyadh, Le Renard (2008) notes that, “female spaces are becoming increasingly wide and diversified, ranging far beyond the private sphere” (p. 612). This is especially true regarding the widely potent educational background of many Saudi women.

An important factor in religious and economic discussions surrounding these topics directly emanates from an individual’s educational background; any person wishing to possess any manner of intellectual status or preach Islamic beliefs and practices to others is generally required to hold a Bachelor of Arts degree, with a PhD being “highly valued” (Bano & Kalmbach, 2012, p. 113). As mentioned in the first chapter, women already have an advantage in this particular arena, with reports of approximately 60% of the population attaining or currently pursuing advanced degrees (“Economic Realities in Saudi Arabia”, 2017). However, Saudi Arabian women are still confronted with a mismatch between educational status and vocational prospects. Women are prevented from studying fields, such as engineering, journalism, pharmacy, or architecture (Baki, 2004). In addition, acceptable labor markets for women such as education, medicine, or media studies are limiting, and result in a pigeonholing effect. Women that aspire to atypical employment opportunities are often “subjected to discrimination and will probably end up working in education or healthcare” (Baki, 2004, p. 6).

Another consideration is the economic dynamics of cities (such as Riyadh) and their impacts on the familial roles. At the beginning of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, the income
present from the booming oil industry reduced the need of wives to financially support
the family. Because of these conditions, women’s participation in Saudi Arabian city
workforces experienced a decline, which then led to further solidification of gender
separation in labor institutions. Without a pressing necessity for dual income, and
therefore an economic incentive for women to pursue additional vocations (whether
traditional or nontraditional), the societal shift resulted in an increased number of women
remaining at home. Studies such as Le Renard’s (2008) provide unique perception into
the development of gender-segregated institutions at the turn of the century, which
contrasts severely against the numerous royal decrees, which would follow in the coming
years.

One unique complication introduced by the segregation of men and women in
business and corporations presents in the medical field. Nursing performance is
considered a predominant indicator of both general health and patient wellbeing and is
often the first line of defense in most medical institutions. In 2010, the World Health
Organization reported that almost every single country in the world was facing some
manner of nursing shortage (WHO, 2010). While typically a female-dominated
profession, nursing is viewed in an unfavorable light with Saudi culture, due to the
possibility of mixing genders, and “expos[ing] female nurses to moral corruption”
(Aboshaiqah, 2016, para. 12). As a result, in a profession already facing a critical
shortage, this predicament is further exacerbated by sociocultural perspectives and deep-
rooted gender fraternization fears. In order to compensate for this lack of involvement,
Saudi Arabia is forced to recruit expatriate laborers to satisfy the country’s healthcare
demands at no small economic expense (Aboshaiqah, 2016).
Hamdan (2005) observes that due to their unique circumstances, Saudi Arabian Muslim women must work together to mutually benefit from their shared experiences and understanding, regardless of their individual “class, race, [or] cultural background” (p. 46). With their educational qualifications and discipline, these women can effectively challenge the span of the public sphere, and inspire rational-critical debate at much higher levels (discussed in more detail in the third and fourth chapters). As Hamdan (2005) states, “These women unite and collaborate with each other to overcome male dominance in their society” (p. 46). Since Islamic principles and Sharia Law undergirds the whole of Saudi Arabian society and culture, thorough understanding and comprehension of these religious texts is necessary in order to combat misguided perceptions of women and their roles throughout the populace.

From a constructive aspect, the existence of gender separate institutions, although often physically separated from men, at the very least provide women a space in which to discuss socio-religious topics. In addition, Bano and Kalmbach (2012) note the immense power of the internet emerging in Saudi culture and society, remarking, “the Internet is recognized as the easiest way to reach women, as well as a space where women’s initiatives meet fewer obstacles” (p. 111). Although lacking in execution of its full potential, women’s profound educational backgrounds and pursuit of advanced degrees also primes them to enter new labor markets, and places pressure on the current status quo. Based on these considerations, the driving force for social reform can be considerably more appreciated.
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**Historical and Cultural Evolution**

In addition to gender constraints, the role of Saudi women in the development of its society is an integral component of this study, since it frames the further analysis of both the *Public Sphere* and the *Identity Negotiation Theory* conducted in later chapters. One of the key motivations for this project is the lack of resources available surrounding the research and transition of women with respect to the Saudi Arabian workforce, its culture, and the way in which women simply perceive themselves. This is confirmed by Al-Rasheed (2013) who notes, “The ‘Saudi woman question’ has not attracted sufficient academic attention due to difficulty accessing the country, which is only gradually being opened up for academic research. Gender remains an unexplored terrain that could benefit from further investigation” (p. 35). However, this same motivation also poses a challenge to appreciating these women’s history, which must be considered throughout the entirety of this investigation.

To appreciate the Saudi women’s modern circumstances, it is advantageous to review the evolution of Saudi Arabia’s history and culture. Originally, many towns and communities existed at great distances from each other, resulting in independent development and governance. Those that inhabited those locations were known as *Haders*, while the nomadic peoples were referred to as *Bedouins* (or literally *desert dweller*). The Haders primarily engaged in farming and trading vocations, while the Bedouins considered these activities inferior, and bargained instead for such items. Although distinct from one another, the Haders and Bedouins shared a special bond known as *Alkhawa*, or *brotherhood* – in this relationship, members of the Haders would hire the Bedouins for security and protection from other tribes. These circumstances
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proved significant for shaping the observed value of a woman, who was viewed as the weaker gender in the midst of tribal conflict. In addition, the largely-patriarchal society lent itself to natural male-dominance; as Al-Khateeb (1996) remarks,

It was assumed that men were physically and mentally superior to women, who were assumed to be weak and emotional. Thus, women should be controlled and protected, remain at home to raise their children, obey their husbands, and perform domestic work. (p. 203)

Unfortunately, these projections transcend the typical respect for age, as customs such as a “mother…[kissing] her son’s hand if he consents to something she asked” (Al-Sudairy, 2017, p. 8) is observed, rather than the elder being shown deference.

From an economic standpoint, women have also played significant historical roles. From the origins of the Bedouin society, women often participated in roles such as textile production, food preparation, and tending to animals. In southern regions, women would often protect farmland from Turkish soldiers, who would try to damage crops using stones and other weapons. Hader women also managed gardens and plants, which could be grown for various recipes, medicinal concoctions, or to sell and generate additional income to the household. Even before the formation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, women clearly possessed a multiplicity of significant occupations throughout the country (Al-Sudairy, 2017). However, the perspectives of women formed early on in these tribal groups led to explicit divides in vocational responsibilities, which still perpetuate even to the present. Thankfully in modern society, a series of Royal Decrees issued by ruling kings would slowly begin to reshape these roles, and even conceive new niches once previously unavailable.
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**Saudi Arabian Royal Decrees**

The country of Saudi Arabia follows a government based on a totalitarian absolute monarchy, in which the king serves as the principal authority. Decisions are largely influenced by senior members of the royal family, with the Qur’an serving as the constitution. Technically all male citizens have the right to directly petition the king through the traditional tribal meeting of the *majlis*, but in practice influence is typically limited to elite members of royal and religious groups. Currently, King Abdullah has functioned as the country’s ruler since 2005 and has introduced a variety of modern reforms through the use of the royal decree (Facey, Clark, Tahlawi, Pledge, & Saudi, 2006). Several of these decrees have produced significant impacts over women’s roles within society, ranging from vocational opportunities, personal liberties, and legal rights.

One of the first major decrees inciting both a cultural and economic stimulation occurred in 2011 by King Abdullah. This decree banned men from selling underwear in lingerie shops and generated an estimated 40,000 jobs for women in the process. The primary intent of the decree was to absolve men from an unbefitting profession, but had the secondary effect of supplying the groundwork for future reforms to follow. Many conservative members of the religious sects resisted these changes, with the Grand Mufti stating, “employing women is a crime and prohibited by Islamic sharia” (James Hider Middle East Correspondent, 2012, p. 33). Regardless of these denunciations, the decree was backed with royal support and began revolutionizing women’s lifestyles and cultural roles across the country.

In 2013, another royal decree provided a radical shakeup to Saudi Arabia’s consultative assembly, known as the *Majilis al-Shura* (Ibrahim, 1995). The council
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consists of 150 total members, 12 of which were previously comprised of women advisors. However, these advisors had limited influence, and were not afforded permission to even address the collective council until late 2012. The royal decree issued in January of the following year guaranteed one-fifth of the seats would go to women, and also enabled females to participate in local elections during 2015. Once again, these changes stirred up protests from conservative religious members who protested vehemently outside the royal palace in the capital city of Riyadh, and openly criticized the royal adviser Khalid al-Tuwaijri for supporting the development. Although the reforms continued to offer women increasingly significant roles in society, one independent Saudi writer commented, "The irony is that the appointed women could not get into the council without permission from their male guardians" (Melly, 2013, p. 32).

Most recently in September 2017, King Salman decreed that women would be able to acquire driving licenses as early as June of 2018. In the royal decree, the king stated, “We refer to the negative consequences of not allowing women to drive, and the positive aspects of allowing them to do so, taking into consideration the necessary Shari'ah regulations and compliance with them” (Stancati & Said, 2017, para. 5). One of these positive aspects was almost certainly motivated by economic rationales, with prominent women’s activist Manal al-Sharif explaining, “[Saudi Arabia] cannot afford keeping the women in the back seat,” (Smith, 2017, p. 5).

An important consideration in each decree is the influence and instruction of Islam, since it both informs and guides the whole of Saudi Arabian society. Ambassador Khalid of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the United States observes that, “The issue of women driving was never a religious or a cultural issue. In fact, the majority of the
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members of the Council of Senior Scholars in the Kingdom agree that Islam does not ban women from driving. This was a societal issue. Today, we have a young and vibrant society and the time had come to make this move” (“Press Release: King Salman”, 2017, p. 26). This is a critical point, since many of the ultraconservative protesters for such changes have appealed to established traditions of the country, and referenced Sharia Law as justification to restrict women from such freedoms. Since Islamic beliefs are a fundamental component of society and cultural, new developments in relation to women’s freedoms and liberties must be in accordance with both the Qur’an and hadith, since these are what constitute the Sharia Law.

Women challenging the driving ban were met with fierce resistance, as was the case of 14 vehicles operated by Saudi women on November 6th, 1990. The female drivers were apprehended by local police and scorned by bystanders nearby the incident. One of the drivers recalls a man shouting at her, “I want to dig a hole to bury you all!” (Hubbard, 2017, p. A6). However, societal and economic changes from this time period until the present day have transformed such resistance. With King Salman’s occupancy of the throne in 2015 and dropping oil prices, the rising need of additional income sources became evident. King Salman’s son, the crown prince Mohammed bin Salman, has also driven considerable new strategies regarding economic reform, which included more extensive involvement of women within the workforce. With additional vocational opportunities opening for women, and their new rights to vote and be appointed to local councils, the once suppressed-subculture is slowly procuring a profound new sense of identity throughout the entire country (“Press Release: King Salman”, 2017).
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**Saudi Arabia Vision 2030**

The Saudi Vision 2030 plan was formally announced in April 2016 by the Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman. This plan outlines a strategic proposal to develop the country’s infrastructure, bolster its economy and reduce foreign dependencies, foster additional trading outside of oil exports. From the plan’s foreword, Prince Salman outlines the key components necessary for success:

All success stories start with a vision, and successful visions are based on strong pillars. The first pillar of our vision is our status as the heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds…The second pillar of our vision is our determination to become a global investment powerhouse…The third pillar is transforming our unique strategic location into a global hub connecting three continents, Asia, Europe and Africa. (Vision 2030, 2018, para. 5)

Other facets of the plan include improvements to military programs, international industrial growth, and modernization of services and bureaucracy.

Especially significant to the program is the impact on the next era of Saudi citizens, namely those of the younger generation. Despite lack of awareness surrounding previously publicized initiatives of the government, the Vision 2030 plan was generally well-received, with Thompson (2017) confirming, “it appeared that the proposal resonated and was welcomed by many young Saudis as an encouraging step forward” (p. 206). With the recent instability of oil prices and the dominant impacts on the Saudi economy, plans to diversify the industrial and energy sectors were encouraging proclamations to the public. In addition, many citizens were also appreciative of the openness surrounding the plan’s announcement, with a Saudi student commenting, “We
never saw this kind of transparency before, not just domestic transparency, but also
global transparency in the interviews Prince Mohammed gave to international
publication”. (Thompson, 2017, p. 207)

Amongst the many developments outlined in the plan, a major point of interest
surrounds the incorporation of women into the modern vision of the country’s evolution.
This opinion and other closely related ideas were ruminated upon by Saudi residents,
with Thompson (2017) reporting the following consensus:

[Citizens] should be allowed to take dual nationality and women should have the
right to drive in order to be given the opportunity to do whatever they want. There
should also be an improvement in the communication networks and no
government blocking of websites solely due to a difference of opinion from that
of the authorities. The government should also compel private companies such as
telecom companies to aspire to a certain level of quality in line with the quality
expected by consumers (p. 214).

As detailed in the previous section, the most recent royal decree of 2017 provides driving
liberties for women as of the summer of 2018, but many of the other requests will take
significantly more time to implement, if even possible at all. Specific concerns about the
network channels and telecom presence are all fundamentally relevant to barriers
impacting general communication across the entire country – these are of particular
interest importance, given the focus on women’s emerging roles in Saudi Arabia.

From a more apprehensive perspective, some have pointed out specific concerns
with the economic focus of the Vision 2030 plan. These encompass both issues of
transitioning into “overt capitalism” (Thompson, 2017, p. 214) and diminishing the
importance of the religious articles guiding society. In addition, some have addressed anxieties about the “government’s focus is cutting costs without ensuring that a reasonable quality of service is provided for citizens” (Thompson, 2017, p. 214). Quelling these fears will be a critical measure to ensuring the overall plan’s success.

Ultimately, time will be the most essential factor in whether the objectives of Vision 2030 are realized. Though the plan has widespread support among the Saudi people, its goals are ambitious and its timeline brief. To accomplish these intentions, both the Saudi government and its citizens will have to work closely together, while remaining cognizant of the needs of all people. As one Saudi man eloquently summarizes,

The most important aspect of the Vision is that it understands that the Saudi individual is the cornerstone of this Vision. In other words, the success of Saudi Vision 2030 is inextricably linked to the success of the Saudi individual. (p. 219)

Conclusion

The circumstances of Muslim women’s roles in Saudi Arabian society, culture, religion, and professional environments is both a highly complex and significant topic, necessary to further comprehend identity reshaping and the overarching trends occurring in the country today. Every scale of detail is required for consideration, from a personal level (acceptable clothing, nuclear family roles, etc.) to larger group dynamics (educational background, religious involvement, etc.), and finally to the country as a composite (changing work dynamics, economic influences and shifts, etc.).

The recent royal decrees have revolutionized the freedoms and liberties women can exercise, which in turn directly impacts their personal and professional capabilities. With these rapidly evolving opportunities, a dramatic expansion in women’s involvement
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is growing in Saudi Arabia, especially in the private sector of operations. Each of these new developments is fundamentally modifying the usual *status quo* of day-to-day lifestyles for Muslim women and demands a renegotiation of once firmly held beliefs and individualities. The subsequent chapters will approach the intricate dynamics existing in this unique environment, through the lens of both the *public sphere* and more applicable *religious public sphere*, and the *Identity Negotiation Theory* (INT). Finally, a complete summation of insights and revelations will be supplied through the aggregation and intersection of each of these tools.
Chapter Three – Habermas and the Public Sphere

Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the societal barriers women must overcome while entering the workforce exists in the juxtaposition between religious conservatives holding fast to the belief that women should not work outside of the home, and the law which now encourages women to contribute to Saudi Arabia’s economy in more expansive capacities (Al-Shetaiwi, 2002). These two opposing sociopolitical perspectives have made it difficult for some women to take advantage of the newly received freedoms under the law due to fear of persecution from strictly conservative religious viewpoints. In addition, practical barriers to attending work such as lack of transportation, necessary employment skills, and support for homecare needs such as childcare or domestic responsibilities are additional factors women must contend with when entering the workforce (Al-Shetaiwi, 2002). Religious considerations such as gender segregation in the workplace and role conflict between household duties and work responsibilities outside the home have also made it difficult for women to fully embrace the societal freedoms now legally granted.

Considering the recent sociopolitical advancements for women in a predominantly Muslim society, it is essential to consider how social change has come to fruition in this fundamentally traditional culture. According to Jürgen Habermas, *public spheres* in society create a forum for the interests of the general public sector to discuss their needs with the goal of political or societal change. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), Habermas discusses how the concept of these spheres were first integrated in a society of people with power (such as kings or lords in the eighteenth
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century) who expressed their agendas or needs while other members of society focused on fulfilling them. In other words, the public sphere was an integration of the public, the needs of many, focused on filling the goals of the private sector, the needs of the few in power. With the scene set in eighteenth century Europe, economic expansion and the integration of capitalism within society led to the Enlightenment, wherein the needs of many were finally able to articulate their desires through discussion and debate. The first politically oriented public sphere occurred in Great Britain during the same century, which enabled mass public opinion to serve as a system of checks and balances. Through this construct, political entities were prevented from solely pursuing their own interests.

In support of Saudi Arabia’s economic shift away from petroleum sales and towards utilizing a more indigenous-workforce, King Abdullah issued a royal decree in 2011, which opened thousands of new job opportunities specifically targeted for women. The decree, enforced by Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Labor, mandated businesses specializing in cosmetic services, lingerie sales, wedding dresses, abaya sales, and feminine products to begin hiring an all-female workforce or else face closure of their business (Zoepf, 2013). Businesses complying with the decree were directed only to serve other women or families, adhering to the religious laws forbidding the intermingling of the opposite sex. In addition, if the business was primarily marketed towards women, the windows within the store were required to be covered; if instead the business promoted to families, then the store windows were to remain uncovered (Wilcke, 2012). The decree also gave the Labor of Ministry arbitration over the employment of women in the workplace and did not require women to seek permission from their male guardians to obtain employment. However, this direction met significant
backlash from conservative religious parties, which promoted a revision to the original
decree addressing potential situations where members of the opposite sex could associate
(McDowall, 2014). In order to discourage gender fraternizing within the workplace, the
decree established the following conventions: (1) men and women are prohibited in
secluded areas, (2) businesses must notify the Labor of Ministry how they plan on
enforcing gender segregation in the workplace, (3) women are to have their own
workspace apart from male coworkers, (4) women must have their own bathroom
facilities, and (5) women are not to interact with men unless the male coworker is
identified as a part of the family. These constraints are of important consideration, as they
affect the capability of women to participate in such public spheres.

Regardless of such restrictions present, recent developments (from both the 2011
decree and other recent refinements) clearly stimulated a change in the function of
women within Saudi Arabia, both in their social perception and their overall physical
capabilities. In this regard, the public sphere controlled by the more elite members of
society became accessible to those without direct control, which, Habermas notes, may
underscore some linguistic irony, as a term deemed ‘public’ need not be available to the
general public at all (Habermas, 1962). This newly fashioned forum provided a means
for the ‘general public’ to have access in spaces that were previously suppressed; in the
Saudi Arabian domain, this specifically referred to professional spheres women were now
able to inhabit. To better understand the function of the public sphere within Saudi
Arabia, the initial development and discourse from Habermas are first examined, and
subsequently followed by additional critiques from communication professor Gerald
Hauser.
Development of Habermas’s Public Sphere

The *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* was groundbreaking work in the fields of philosophy and communication, which sought to examine the concept of the *bourgeois public sphere* centered in 18th century Europe. Habermas’s work was greatly influenced by his post-doctoral thesis, and eventually published in 1962 (amidst strong criticism from his Marxian contemporaries). Drawing on influences such as Immanuel Kant, Georg Hegel, and Karl Marx, Habermas envisioned the public sphere to exist as a powerful counterbalance to the existing state and governmental authorities (Randall, 2008).

A key issue of concern was the relationship between the reformed European society and the state during a prosperous phase of mercantilism. The bourgeois, or social order of the middle class, had started cutting away at the overarching state’s control, through independence gained from private commerce and trade. The state depended on these economic provisions to sustain its own existence, but still desired to have its same previous authority. As Habermas (1962) observes,

> Because, on the one hand, the society now confronting the state clearly separated a private domain from public authority and because, on the other hand, it turned the reproduction of life into something transcending the confines of private domestic authority and becoming a subject of public interest, that zone of continuous administrative contact became "critical" also in the sense that it provoked the critical judgment of a public making use of its reason. The public could take on this challenge all the better as it required merely a change in the
function of the instrument with whose help the state administration had already
turned society into a public affair in a specific sense—the press. (p. 24)

The vehicle of these transitions originated with the press, which held the ability to
transmit information rapidly across a nation. This formed initially from mercantile
affairs, primarily around private correspondences and merchant newsletters. However, a
gradual shift began occurring, and news from the press was no longer confined to only
those with pertinent interest—suddenly the information being conveyed expanded to
reach the general public (the bourgeois) rather than merchant capitalists (Goode, 2005).

The effect of this transition held a variety of revolutionary effects, one of the most
prominent being the inclusion of the bourgeois into state and national topics of concern.
In essence, this fueled the continuing tension existing between public (state, government,
authorities) and private (economy, society, families). By constructing an interconnected
network in which both the public and private were now participants, a medium was
conceived that could function as a commonplace for discussion to take place. In support
of this process, the newsletters of the press began containing much more information
outside of the typical economic and state issues; instead, journals and periodicals were
issued containing “critical, openly opinionated articles” (Goode, 2005, p. 7). Habermas
(1962) notes that, “in the guise of the so-called learned article, critical reasoning made its
way into the daily press” (p. 25).

These developments radicalized the notion of the public, a term that had
originally referred to state and government. British, French, and German connotations of
the word shifted to encapsulate a critical or general opinion, with Habermas (1962)
noting that the common English usage of publicity, referring to general matters made
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available to all, was actually taken from the French word *publicité* (p. 26). Ultimately, this evolution would serve to transform the original public sphere into the *literary public sphere*, existing within coffee houses and salons where critical discussion and debate could take place (p. 56).

Another important key concept was the idea of *civil society*, closely linked to the ideas and formation of the private market. As Habermas (1962) defines it, civil society is the “genuine domain of private autonomy [that] stood opposed to the state” (p. 12). A primary source of inspiration for this phraseology was derived from Kant’s philosophy and discussion of morality and freedom. In examination of these topics, Kant argues that the only feasible method for an individual to achieve a sense of *freedom* is to withdraw from *private law* and either enter or establish another “in which his rights are recognized and respected” (Surprenant, 2010, p. 84). This situation is precisely what Kant identifies as civil society, explaining that its most core principle is the concept of *distributive justice*, describing “those things that belong to an individual are secured by public laws enforced by a magistrate, court, or sovereign, in accordance with just principles” (p. 84).

Kant also acknowledges that a purely autonomous society cannot protect the individual freedoms of its members (that is to say, in an anarchistic society); instead, a partnership with a strong, authoritative entity is necessary to enforce laws and promote justice. Habermas reinforces this thinking by condemning the modern western societal complex, which blurs the lines between public and private bodies. He states, “the institutions of the public…have turned during the last hundred years into complexes of societal power, so that precisely their remaining in private hands in many ways threatened the critical functions of publicist institutions” (Habermas, 1962, p. 188).
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Without a clear demarcation of private and public (as was the case in the feudal states of the middle ages), the public sphere cannot continue existing in its traditional form.

Although Habermas borrows many ideas from the Kantian view, he favors those of Hegel and Marx to substantiate more concrete reasoning in lieu of abstractness. Kant’s work describes a civil society with total freedom to support its autonomy, but such a civilization has never presented throughout the course of history. In addition, Habermas also substitutes Kant’s philosophical notions of *pure reasoning* with a more flexible and liberal dialogue, which allows for open-ended discussion and individual hypotheses – the exact type of communication occurring within the literary public sphere (Goode, 2005). Overall, Habermas’s views on the transition from the public sphere supporting rational and critical debate are quite negative. This is in part due to the change in modern politics, and the creation of mass media and communication. Habermas comments that the public sphere does not constitute a physical location, but instead represents a social environment in which conversations and discussions could take place regarding topics such as “art and literature” (Habermas, 1962, p. 31). With the advent of modern technology and living arrangements, these social environments are disappearing, leading to a dissolution of public and private elements.

Alongside of societal issues and infrastructure is the topic of politics, and its involvement with the bourgeois public sphere. This largely rests on the idea of public opinion, which is critically explored by both Hegel and Marx. Through his own work, Hegel concluded that public reason was nearly self-destructive in nature; though a fundamental component of a civil society, it was not enough to constitute *reason*, but instead was devalued to that of common sense. Hegel also declared the status of public
opinion to be *ambivalent*, following directly "from the disorganization of civil society" (p. 119). Ultimately, this existence of disorganization compelled the influence of political action. To prevent the infiltration of these ideas into the public realm, Hegel claimed precautionary measures were required to offset and mitigate such dangers and prevent interest in "freedom of trade [from] blindly…[sinking] into self-seeking aims" (p. 119). As a result, the existence of complementary public and private spheres supporting liberty and equality were rendered impossible.

Marx also assumes a critical view of public opinion, but maintained a different approach. Instead of attempting to prop up the unrealistic construction of such a society, Marx instead exploits the very tenants of the bourgeois constitutional state to "confront it as in a mirror with the social conditions for the possibility of its utterly unbourgeois realization" (p. 124). He railed against the concept of civil society, identifying it with blatant contradictions rather than a harmonious union of interests. As a result of Hegel’s criteria for public involvement to maintain the society, Hegel characterized the bourgeois public sphere as too public-centered, while Marx in comparison classified it as "not public enough" (Goode, 2005, p. 14).

Habermas shares many of these reflections, viewing modern politics and public opinion as nothing more than a manipulation by collective political parties for means of biasing constituents’ opinions. He also cites several examples of public entities infringing on private spheres, including German chancellor and prime minister Otto von Bismarck’s Socialist Law and Social Security Insurance policies (Habermas, 1962). In this manner, “the masses, now entitled to political participation, succeeded in translating economic antagonisms into political conflicts” (Habermas, 1962, p. 146). Habermas regards the
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modern political system to be a farce, absent of critical debate, and consequently dishonest in nature. To resolve these issues, he strongly castigates any attempt to stage publicity or attempt to reduce the eligible voting members of society. Instead, he recommends a return to the foundations of publicity and the core elements of the public sphere, namely rational-critical debate. He summarizes,

The outcome of the struggle between a critical publicity and one that is merely staged for manipulative purposes remains open; the ascendancy of publicity regarding the exercise and balance of political power mandated by the social-welfare state over publicity merely staged for the purpose of acclamation is by no means certain. But unlike the idea of the bourgeois public sphere during the period of its liberal development, it cannot be denounced as an ideology. If anything, it brings the dialectic of that idea, which had been degraded into an ideology, to its conclusion. (Habermas, 1962, p. 235)

Critical Analysis and Influence of the Public Sphere

Since its original publication in 1962, the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* has undergone significant review by a multitude of critics, literary analysts, sociologists, theorists, and many others. Some authors have focused on Habermas’s specific influences, including the methodology when analyzing the public and their role in society. Goode (2005) comments,

A central weakness is that Structural Transformation does not treat the ‘classical’ bourgeois public sphere and the posttransformation [sic] public sphere of ‘organised’ capitalism symmetrically. Habermas tends to judge the eighteenth century by Locke and Kant, the nineteenth century by Marx and Mill, and the
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twentieth century by the typical suburban television viewer. Thus Habermas’s account of the twentieth century does not include the sort of intellectual history, the attempt to take leading thinkers seriously and recover the truth from their ideologically distorted writings, that is characteristic of his approach to seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. (p. 30)

To better understand these critiques, it is necessary to consider the weights of each contributing figure in Habermas’s work and their specific arena of influence.

Kant is well understood as one of the most important philosophers from the past several millennia. A key point of interest for Kant was the subject of metaphysics, of which he drew large inspiration from another famous philosopher, David Hume. One of Kant’s earliest works, and great influence on Habermas, was a work entitled the *Critique of Pure Reason*, published in 1781. Although quite long and full of difficult prose, this work sought to fully comprehend the boundaries and capabilities of logic and reason alone, without any bias from human sensory perception. These subjects of metaphysics are by their very nature abstract topics, covering ideas such as time, space, identity, reality, etc. Coupled with reason, Kant desired a means to sift through the often-contradictory stances of many metaphysical claims, and to arrive at sound conclusions founded on logical arguments and constructs, free of any bias (Denis, 2010).

A significant distinction for Kant was the divide between two important types of knowledge: that of theoretical deduction proceeding observation or experience (i.e. a priori) and that of reasoning proceeding from experiences and observations (i.e. a posteriori). In addition to these definitions exists the truth concepts of *analytic* and *synthetic*; *analytic* refers to something that is true regardless of its environment (e.g. all
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wives are married), while *synthetic* describes something true based on its meaning or surroundings (e.g. grass is green). The feasibility of analytic truths has been contested by many philosophers (including Quine and others), but Kant firmly believed them to exist. These concepts undergirded a significant contribution of Kantian philosophy to the fields of epistemology and metaphysics, culminating in the conception of the *Transcendental Arguments* (Pereboom, 2018).

This philosophy served as a compelling point for Habermas in his development of the public sphere. The Transcendental Arguments were founded on the idea of *a priori* arguments cascaded through the logic of deduction. Kant sought to prove that an argument of deduction in the presence of concepts deemed *a priori* were justified and free from bias of sensory perception. Hume instead argued that this position was impossible for several elements of metaphysics, claiming that several of the notions could not be sustained without some kind of sense-input.

In Hume’s view, a concept can only be validated by finding a sensory experience, that is, an *impression*, in particular the one that is the ‘original’ of that idea, which must resemble that idea. But because, for example, any attempt to find an impression of causal power turns out to be fruitless, Hume concludes that this idea does not legitimately apply. (Pereboom, 2018, para. 2)

Countering this viewpoint, Kant classified these types of considerations as failures of “empirical deduction” (Pereboom, 2018, para. 2), and thus relegated such attempts as existing outside of the scope of human experience.

Continuing along the line of empiricism, Habermas attempted to focus his philosophy towards a more naturalistic end, moving his Critical Theory “away from its
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strong transcendental framework, exemplified in the theory of cognitive interests with the unmistakably Kantian language of object-constitution” (Bohman & Rehg, 2017, para. 12). In this manner, Habermas “undermines both of the traditional Kantian roles for philosophy: philosophy as the sole judge in normative matters and as the methodological authority that assigns the various domains of inquiry to their proper questions” (Bohman & Rehg, 2017, para. 13). Unlike his predecessors, Habermas held the unique position of integrating his theories and ideologies with the social world, attempting to frame his perspectives considering historical contexts and modern society. This gives rise to an effective position in his work, as noted by Bohman and Rehg (2017) who argue that, “By recognizing both modes of integration, one avoids the pessimism associated with theories of modernity whose one-sided, primarily instrumental conception of rationality misses the cultural dimension of modernization” (para. 14).

An additional point of context is the inspiration from Marxian contexts on Habermasian thought. Karl Marx is understood to be one of the most influential contributors in history in terms of economics, political theory, and social perspectives. His ideas surrounded the conflict of class-struggle and economic disparity, and he is often hailed as one of the principal founders for modern social science. Specifically concentrating on capitalism, Marx described a worker who is completely disjoint from the complementary aspect of his work (i.e. the product), to the point where he or she becomes disjointed even from himself or herself. Ultimately Marx claims, this develops into a cascading degradation across other workers and even society itself, leading to wholesale isolation of entire communities. In retaliation of this effect, the worker is left
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with no other option but to resist and attempt to dethrone his or her capitalist rulers, resulting in the well-known struggle of the *bourgeois*.

In consideration of this vantage point, the context of Western Marxism is contemplated in which,

Concepts of ideology and hegemony…explain the increasing stability of Western democracies within a dominant social democratic welfare model of capitalism where the voters, and especially the labour movement, were seen as incorporated into, and increasingly complicit with, ‘the system’ through growing consumerist prosperity and a welfare state. (Garnham, 2007, p. 204)

This conception is motivated by the understructure of capitalism, where workers are subjected to conditions that yield their owners with the maximum possible dividends, effectively manipulating workers for increased profits. In the modern Western Marxist state, the media is especially responsible for encouraging these perspectives among members of society, and ultimately quelling any resistance through an exchange with consumerist aspirations. With this societal dimension devoid of the once fervent struggle for “working class radicalism” (Garnham, 2007, p. 204), the battle is instead turned to the political-cultural realm, which is precisely where Habermas places his focus. According to Garnham (2007), “It is in this new left, neo-Marxist context that we need to understand Habermas’ early work and in particular *Structural Transformation* and the concept of colonization” (p. 204).

Following Marx, a final noteworthy influence on Habermas’s work was a fellow German philosopher by the name of Georg Hegel. Hegel refined a philosophical construct known as the *dialectic*, which originally referred to a process of investigation
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used to determine the factuality of reasoned arguments. Under the Socratic Method, the
dialectic provided a narrative of queries designed to extract the truth of a situation, and to
expose weaknesses or discrepancies in another’s position. In Aristotle’s time, the
dialectic became a tool for “any rational inference based on probable premises”
(Dialectic, 2016, para. 1). Kant further concentrated the term to refer to any philosophical
fallacy having the appearance of a valid or rational assertion. Finally, Hegel recast the
definition to include,

The necessary process that makes up progress in both thought and the world
(which are identified in Hegel’s idealism, although the idea that processes in the
world unfold in a way that mirrors the processes of reason is as old as Heraclitus).
The process is one of overcoming the contradiction between thesis and antithesis,
by means of synthesis; the synthesis in turn becomes contradicted, and the process
repeats itself until final perfection is reached. (Dialectic, 2016, para. 1)

This idea is reflected through the lens Hegel viewed a society; one of a constant evolving
and dynamic “Spirit” (Douglas, 1997, p. 550), through which each individual is
encompassed and influenced. Unlike Kant, Hegel viewed the Spirit as a parallel notion to
that of the progression of an argument, much like that described by the Socratic Method;
as time continues, so does the improvement of the argument. In a similar fashion, the
Spirit develops in the same manner as the dialectic – an argument is proposed (the thesis),
along with counterarguments (the antithesis), which combine together into a new
proposition including elements of each (the synthesis). This gives further rise to the idea
of a form of historical determinism, from which Hegel believed all of history could be
reconstructed through fundamental logical reasoning, without need of any other resource (archaeological, anthropology, etc.) (Douglas, 1997).

Habermas likened his own philosophical development in a similar fashion, transitioning away from the transcendental thought to more grounded, applicable ideas, especially in the realm of communication and language. This is especially evident in the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, where Habermas focuses critically on the evolution of the printing press and literary public sphere throughout 18th century Europe.

As Douglas (1997) emphasizes, Habermas’s “paradigm shift toward intersubjectivity” (p. 552) focuses his philosophy of the lifeworld into a dimension “resultant of interactions, the product of particular speech acts. This is the proper domain of communicative action” (p. 552).

An important discourse on Habermas’s original ideas in the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* is also worth mentioning, especially in light of the implications it provides in regard to the modern era. Emden and Midgley (2013) offer credence to Habermas for “[introducing] a rich concept of the public into the fields of political philosophy, legal theory, discourse analysis, and intellectual history” (p. 42).

However, many of these innovated structures pose difficult questions, such as the natural boundaries for Habermas’s public and private entities, as well as the division of those constituting the public sphere itself into natural ethnocentric groups, or even those with common fundamental socioeconomic or political ideologies.

Emden and Midgley (2013) note that Habermas’s original conception of the public sphere carries “weak features of the modern liberal state” (p. 43), and question where there might be other avenues towards reevaluating such concepts and
considerations. Returning to the Kantian and Hegelian idea of the *dialectic*, the first notion of Habermas’s public opinion is examined. According to Emden and Midgley (2013),

Opinion is both the first articulation of the emergent public and also a very weak category of critical reflection, subject to instability and communicative distortion. It is perfectly fit for dialectical analysis, containing contradictions that lead to the undoing of opinion as a force for critical reflection. (p. 43)

The difficulty of opinion is its nature of fluidity, and evolution across the various entities of government, populace, and individual. In his work, Habermas attempts to categorize the means of public opinion into their positive and negative components; i.e. into those which move a society forward and towards unity, and those which spread discord and dissonance.

The communication process in which opinions are formed is characterized by Habermas (1996) in his work *Between Facts and Norms*,

[The] public sphere can best be described as a network for communicating information and points of view… the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specific public opinions. Like the lifeworld as a whole, so, too, the public sphere is reproduced through communicative action…it is tailored to the general comprehensibility of everyday communicative practice (p. 360).

Of somewhat dissenting thought includes those of authors Tocqueville and Mill, who were fundamentally liberal in their perspective of governmental involvement. On key issues such as “religious belief, childrearing practices, or aesthetic taste” (Emden &
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Midgley, 2013, p. 44), they felt that the government should be dispassionate and uninvested. Habermas considered both authors as maintaining too liberal of a perspective and possessing narrow focuses on limited issues that ignored the public sphere as a whole unit. In his perspective,

Liberals like Tocqueville and Mill, therefore, who favored the process [of public opinion] devalued its consequences. This was because the unreconciled interests … which flooded the public sphere were represented in a divided public opinion and turned public opinion … into a coercive force, whereas it had once been supposed to dissolve any kind of coercion into the compulsion of reason.

(Habermas, 1962, p. 113)

Unfortunately, this perspective ignores some important contributions from Tocqueville and Mill’s perspective of liberalism, including the emphasis on the subject of majorities and minorities existing within the public sphere. Some see this as a defect of Habermas’s original work on the public sphere; though novel, the idea of working towards complete unification is lofty, if even pragmatic at all. The more liberalistic points of view considered here develop a more sober understanding of societal structures, and the natural grouping of individuals into representative associations.

A final noteworthy critic includes the topic of the components of the public sphere themselves; namely, the general public or private constituents forming Hegel’s civil society. In contrary perspective to that presented in Habermas’s Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, an American writer by the name of Walter Lippmann offered the following opinion of the general public:
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We must assume that a public is inexpert in its curiosity, intermittent, that it discerns only gross distinctions, is slow to be aroused and quickly diverted; that, since it acts by aligning itself, it personalizes whatever it considers, and is interested only when events have been melodramatized as a conflict. (Lippmann, 1982, p. 108)

In Habermas’s perspective, the public sphere provided a means for rational critical debate, constructed from individuals engaged in their environment and working to advance it further. In essence, this willingness to hold ideals and opinions is in fact what drives the very fibers of the public sphere itself; without this spark of enthusiasm and clashes of ideas, the sphere would be bereft of fruitful conversation for which to develop new ideas and refashion old ones. However, Habermas does share similar convictions when faced with a public of modern society. In these situations, such societies are “marked by what he described as a degeneration of the public sphere” (Habermas, 1962, p. 27). In this regard, Habermas (1962) shares a Marxian perspective of the bourgeois ruling the industrial complex “marked by the matrix of commodity exchange and social labor” (p. 27).

Vernacular Discourse in the Public Sphere

Following Habermas’s *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, a scholar by the name of Gerald A. Hauser produced a publication entitled, *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres* (1999). In this work, Hauser argues that the conceptualization of the public sphere in terms of Habermas’ model neglects the concept of rhetorical discourse that occurs when independent functioning members of society address problems within their world. A specific point of contention surrounds the
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Habermasian concept of the public sphere’s normative decorum in regard to the individual; Hauser claims that this perspective omits the consideration of natural discourse within rhetorical communication, and often does not permit for minority voices to partake in conversation. Hauser also notes that vernacular interchanges such as values, beliefs, opinions, and personal attitudes influence communicative exchanges, and therefore must be taken into account when discussion takes place in a public community.

When unique and independently thinking members of society congregate to address a certain matter, they are often prone to maintain diverse opinions surrounding possible resolutions. Habermas’s theory proposes communicative action, in which the public sphere can formulate a rational consensus within the context of political communication. Hauser instead reminds his readers that political communication often cannot conclude in such harmony because the concept of politics is fundamentally rhetorical in nature. As an alternative to the proposition of a public sphere defined by a group of individuals united by common interests, Hauser asserts the viewpoint of the public composed of “interdependent members of society who hold different opinions about a mutual problem and who seek to influence its resolution through discourse” (Persuit, 2013, p. 37).

Moreover, Hauser further asserts that Habermas’s theory of collective action assumes idealistic communication, where competent individuals set aside their differences to engage in rational informed conversation. Hauser contends that communication within a public sphere cannot always be rational and devoid of ideological bias from its members. Within the supplied definition of the public sphere, Hauser argues that Habermas’s model neglects rhetorical discourse and unrealistically
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portrays the public sphere as one functioning body of similar argument, background, and thought. Hauser offers a modified model, specifying that the rhetorical public sphere should instead consist of diversity, flexible boundaries, practical judgment, and embrace understanding without consensual agreement (Hauser, 1999).

To better illuminate his alternative perspective on the rhetorical public sphere, Hauser critiques the Habermasian public sphere ideology by addressing assumptions he believes Habermas has neglected. A specific point of dispute within Habermas’s model involves the marginalization of public spheres, which existed in opposition to the bourgeois public sphere. Hauser proposes that the bourgeois public sphere fails to address the topic of individualism depicted by the smaller spheres and public forums out of alignment within the dominantly larger public sphere. Hauser argues that to fully comprehend the quintessential nature of rhetorical transformation within society, opposing views of thought must be thoroughly accounted and investigated (Hauser, 1999).

Following along with this theme, the illusion of a unitary public sphere neglects the complex structure and process of multiple public spheres emerging to partake in discussion. Hauser further refutes Habermas’s principle of disinterest, which proposes that social judgments designated to influence the global public opinion should be dispassionate. Hauser responds to this concept by suggesting that all communication must be interested, because individuals purposefully construct arguments based on their audience’s readiness to understand, respond, *kairos* (timing), and decorum (Hauser, 1999).
On a more personal level, Hauser discusses the interactions and motivations of those members comprising the rhetorical public sphere. He claims that individuals are emotional creatures who weigh the consequences of public decisions, and ultimately consider whether those decisions will align with their own personal agendas or beliefs. Hauser concludes that stifling self-interest within discussion eliminates productive qualities within rhetorical discussions. Furthermore, he claims that the Habermasian public sphere inhibits general ingress when the most rational, generalized argument within the group is favored and becomes the conclusive consensus among the group. Hauser posits that there are no absolutes or criteria for forming arguments, and instead advises “good reasons are the operative basis for the actual state consensus forged through the heteroglossia, or myriad situated meanings, of a public sphere” (Hauser, 1999, p. 56). Finally, Hauser refutes that generalizable arguments and idealized speech fail to address topics of diversity within the public sphere, and therefore neglects the very nature of rhetorically localized discourse in and of itself (Hauser, 1999).

In consideration of these major points of contention, Hauser submits his own definition to a rhetorical public sphere which can be summarized as “a discursive space in which individuals and groups associate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment about them. It is the locus of emergence for rhetorically salient meanings” (Hauser, 1999, p. 61). The realm in which the public sphere functions within society consists of the fine balance between individual, professional, and specific interests while calling these ideas to action (Hauser, 1987).

Regarding politics, Hauser asserts that political speech would be impossible without discourse and a platform, and consequently the public sphere can be used to fuse
rhetorical communication with action. Hauser defines several precursors for the public sphere to operate effectively, with the most critical point targeting general *admittance*. The public sphere must be accessible to all people; otherwise, those individuals are forced to succumb to the interests of the institutional forces around them. Individuals within the public must also be able to access information in order to form their own opinions leading to informed discussions. Not only must information be accessible, but individuals must also have access to the means in which information can be transmitted; in modern society, individuals should have access to the mass media in order to deliberate current areas of discussion. Lastly, the public sphere must have institutional guarantees to remain established, be discursive in nature, and allow for individuals functioning within them to deliberate as well as form their own truths through the use of communication and/or action (Hauser, 1987).

In summation, Hauser seeks to utilize the foundations of Habermas’s public sphere, but also to concurrently address perceived disparities within those definitions and interpretations. In response to criticism to his work from several academic professors, Hauser contends,

Both Cloud and Hogan raise the more serious concern with whether I have offered a method for assessing the quality of public spheres and the public opinions that emerge from them. If one starts with an a priori definition of what "the public" or "the public sphere" should look like, or if one desires definitive statements about the way publics and public spheres behave under specific conditions, then their indictment carries weight. However, my project was to begin mapping how publics and public spheres act under the conditions of lived
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democracy. That required suspending assumptions about an idealized public or public sphere to inquire about how actual publics and public spheres functioned. In this respect I adopted an empirical attitude by looking at what rhetors who engaged an issue argued and how active members, of society responded. In large measure, that attitude is basic to the method of the study, as I discuss at some length in my final chapter. (Hauser, 2001, pp. 219-220)

Hauser is primarily concerned with the modes of rhetoric and communication within the previously defined Habermasian public spheres, and seeks to formulate a refined collection of assumptions, which are more inclusive of the specific political discourse present in those spheres. Through this framework, he identifies six critical issues. Firstly, he claims that “The idealized universal public sphere conceals the ways in which particular, often marginalized public arenas form and function” (Hauser, 1999, p. 46). Secondly, he cites that the vision of a unitary public sphere “neglects the lattice of actually existing public spheres” (p. 48). Thirdly, concerning the principle of disinterest for those included in the public sphere, he states that it “excludes those sub-spheres whose members are decidedly interested” (p. 49). Fourthly, Hauser identifies that rationality, which is generalizable “contributes to the exclusionary character of the public sphere by constraining open access” (p. 51). Fifthly, “The norm of warranted assent to be achieved by generalizable arguments is contrary to the particularity of public issues” (p. 52). Lastly, referring to Habermas’s model of the public sphere specifically, Hauser claims that it “is at odds with condition of diversity that define civil society” (p. 53). Through composition of these key concerns, Hauser purports what he refers to as the rhetorical public sphere, which aims to resolve the discontinuities in the original
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Habermasian model of the public sphere by concentrating specifically on the communication within the sphere (i.e. their respective vernacular).

**Evolution and Future of the Public Sphere**

In Emden and Midgley’s (2013) *Beyond Habermas: Democracy, Knowledge, and the Public Sphere*, the topic of the public sphere is explored beyond the 18th century mercantile European setting to the modern governmental structures of the modern era. These include the 1950’s environment of German society in which Habermas developed his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, and into the late 90’s and early 21st century. They also highlight the intricate nature of societal government, and the complex relationship between both itself and the public sphere. Specifically, they note, is the bilateral direction of influence; neither government nor public sphere reigns superior over the other.

The significance of this relationship lies in the morphology of the government over time. With the interrelatedness of the public sphere and government defined, the development in one side will then have a corresponding proportional impact to the other. Emden and Midgley (2013) emphasize the change in news broadcasting over time, highlighting the mere “dozen news reports a day” (p. 20) in the 1960s, shifting to the nearly endless cycle of today’s broadcast network, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This massive increase in media coverage has notable impacts on the public sphere, both in the manner in which information is transmitted and spread, as well as the line of communication channels between the media networks and the government itself. In times of critical events, such as national security, inclement weather, or political scandals, the
modern media is capable of providing nearly real-time updates on evolving developments.

This rapid growth of media expansion is accompanied by both positive and negative considerations. With this massive influx of information being reported and transmitted each day, the difficulty of ensuring quality and factual material becomes exponentially difficult. In addition, Emden and Midgley (2013) cite the risks of “unofficial briefings and leaks of documents or information” (p. 21), owing largely in part to the accessibility of media outlets and social networks. Other dangers include the increasing demands on the rate of response to information. As news reports have shifted from daily updates to minute-by-minute reports, a corresponding expectation has grown for governments, and other agencies and entities to respond equally as fast. This, Emden and Midgley (2013), deem as “spin” (p. 22), and provide the following insight:

In one interpretation “spin” treats the affairs of the state as soap opera. What a journalist or reporter needs is a “story” that develops day by day in a manner that repeats the same facts but with a new twist: in short, a new episode every day, perhaps for a period of four or five days until the story is exhausted but occasionally for longer. “Spin” is an attempt by government to write the next episode of the “story” for the media, and thereby steer it in a desirable direction from the point of view of the government, rather than let the media determine the next episode and the direction in which it goes. The dangers inherent in this approach, which may set a higher value on the “story” than its truths, are self-evident. (p. 22)
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In this respect, both the government and those constituting the public sphere must be increasingly on guard to resist making hasty, uninformed decisions before consulting the full scope of evidence available.

These challenges are not without their complements, however. The greater accessibility of the media has enabled virtually anyone inside the public sphere to become involved and affect individual change. Personal websites, often referred to as blogs, also host attainable opportunities for private individuals to attract large followings and distribute opinions; Emden and Midgley (2013) note a blog by the name of _Guido Fawkes_, which was ranked the “most influential political [blog] in the UK…and…ranked Guido Fawkes as the number one political blog in the UK” (p. 21). This enormous availability of digital resources to interact with the media has revolutionized the public sphere and serves as an important consideration for current events occurring in Saudi Arabia.

Another critical point of the modern relationship between the government and public sphere lies in the choice and filtering of specific news to report. A conflict of interest can arise between the importance of certain information, and the concern for ratings and popularity. Often, to incur additional views and interest, news outlets can sensationalize and exaggerate topics, which can lead to misinformation among the public. Social media outlets have shown to be especially culpable to these types of behaviors, with individuals repeating misleading or even fake news stories in much the same way as a virus spreads in a biological system. Moreover, the decision to prioritize certain stories of interests leaves other potentially important information (e.g. governmental changes, public policy, etc.) suppressed from the view of the public, contributing to ignorance of
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current affairs. Coupled with the menace of misinformation, this product of the modern era lends understanding to Habermas’s critical view of the present day social-industrialist complex (Habermas, 1962).

Continuing along the same line as the media, an important factor in the increased *publicity* of modern times derives from the rapid growth of the Internet. Emden and Midgley (2013) denote the affected constituents of the public sphere under a new terminology, which they define as a “recursive public” (p. 99). The term *recursive* hails from programming methodology, in which a defined process calls itself (rather than another process) a discrete number of times. Emden and Midgley (2013) employ this description to define a public which is formed through some common element of interest or concern, the same element of which also helps bind the group together and maintain its strong interrelationships (hence the terminology of *recursion*).

The idea of the internet affecting the public sphere is a representation of a much larger theme – the relationship between technology and communication. In the setting of the current modern century, it is infeasible to consider only previous philosophies and classics to comprehend complex societal conditions and situations. The influence which technology currently holds is nothing short of profound, and has tremendous impacts on societal constructs, from the government, to industry, down to the very individual.

Thankfully, the impacts of such developments have not superseded the previous learnings and intuitions resulting from the conception of the public sphere. Though the media’s existence in entirely new forms of technology (computer chips and websites as opposed to the inked surfaces of the printing presses of the earlier centuries), today’s general public must still be viewed through the same lens as that used during the early
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20th century. The public sphere represents an imaginary social construct, much as the new definition of the evolving public serves today. Each must be considered and requires “a kind of imagination that includes the writing and publishing and speaking and arguing we are familiar with” (Emden and Midgley, 2013, p. 105).

Conclusion

Regardless of the existing opposing viewpoints, both Habermas and Hauser (among many others) contribute invaluable ideas towards the abstract notion of the public sphere. Defining an abstract framework to encircle the complex dynamics existing within society between public and private entities was a revolutionary idea and has even awarded Habermas with such accolades as the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), the highest achievable award in German research (Müller-Doohm, 2014). Hauser has meticulously reviewed these ideas, and further refined the specific attributes of the public sphere relating to its internal vernacular and specific political communication.

Originating from roots in Hellenistic society, this theory seeks to characterize a stable and productive public sphere, and subsequently acknowledge its general degradation in modern day western society. With respect to Saudi Arabian culture, a dramatically different perspective is witnessed, especially in the previous few decades. Rather than members being omitted from representation or access to such spheres, media reports and journal articles demonstrate a society offering a more inclusive environment by the day. However, a critical topic, which is absent from the aforementioned authors and their groundbreaking work, is the matter of religious involvement. Unlike western society, Arabian society deeply integrates religious elements into everyday life, so much
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so that attempting to separate the two for analysis would prove at the very least detrimental, if not completely counter-intuitive. A wholly new perspective is required to examine such a society, which is the subject of the religious public sphere in the following section. Following from the infrastructure of concepts developed in this section, the religious public sphere can much more effectively examine the dynamics of the Saudi Arabian landscape, and provide insights, which also subsume the impact of the religious components in play.
Chapter Four – The Religious Public Sphere

Introduction

Contrary to their Western counterparts where public and private spheres in society often operate autonomous to one another, predominantly Muslim societies blur the lines between the two social spheres due to the commonality of religion. As a result, Habermas’s notion of the public sphere requires a reconstruction to more effectively analyze the Saudi Arabian region and its intimate coupling with the Islamic religion. In their work entitled, the public sphere in Muslim Societies, authors Hoexter et al. (2002) develop the concept of the “religious public sphere,” which derives from Habermas’s public sphere, but instead focuses on the incorporation of religious elements and their unique connections between the private and public communities.

The intimation of the religious public sphere within Saudi Arabia has been deeply rooted in historical religious events and significant religious entities present in society. These include the Sharia or Islamic law, waqf, or charitable works guided by divine intervention, and the Sufi brotherhood movement (divine Islamic practice to acquire religious enlightenment). At the forefront of these three principles, the Sharia Law ultimately serves as the primary foundation of the religious public sphere. This sphere extends well beyond the legal and political sectors of society into the social values and norms used to keep global social order (Hoexter et al., 2002).

Of critical importance is the constituent elements of the religious sphere itself; namely the belief system which undergirds it. Swinburne declared the axiom that beliefs are “real mental states” (Swinburne, 2001, p. 38); that is, although disparate from tangible physical sensations, beliefs are still directly linked to them. In this sense, rather
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than adding an additional layer of abstraction to the conceptual notion of the public sphere, the religious public sphere instead provides a direct, tangible connection to the composing social makeup (Fârte & Gheorghe-Ilie, p. 153). Due to the integration of religion as a paramount social structure in all facets of Saudi Arabian society, the development of the public sphere cannot be characterized as a unique entity independent from the Muslim faith. In addition, Hoexter et al. (2002) observe the religious public sphere in Muslim society resides in a constant state of flux, owing to the internal conflicts between traditional religious principles and the dynamic social conflicts arising over time.

Women occupying the religious public sphere continuously face the challenge of redefining their identity in the midst of surrounding religious and social conflict. The movement towards the integration of women within the religious public sphere initiated with the assimilation of mass education for women in the 1960’s (Al-Rasheed, 2013). This scholarship began to raise the awareness of gender equality in light of social feminist movements occurring within Western society. During the 1970’s when the oil trade was profitable, and women were restricted from economic and political sectors of society, women began to publish, teach, and use the media to communicate their perspectives, despite exclusion from the public sphere (Al-Rasheed, 2013). With modern technological advancements, Muslim women began reevaluating their social identities and were afforded the ability to communicate their social, political, economic, and cultural perspectives to the masses, both internally and externally to Saudi Arabia. As Benhabib shrewdly notes, “There is no necessary incompatibility between the religious
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faith of many who participated in these movements and their modern aspirations!” (Benhabib, 2011).

Even with the support of these advancements, the permanent integration of women into the religious public sphere has not progressed without conflict. When Saudi Arabian women were permitted to join the more public workforce beginning in 2011, they continued to experience resistance assimilating into public society with these newly found freedoms. Despite an increase in employment opportunities for Saudi Arabian women over the previous years, economic marginalization has continued to take place, owing in part to prejudice from religious conservatives, and role conflict stemming from religiously defined gender-specific responsibilities.

Furthermore, Al-Rasheed (2013) notes that the exclusion of women in Muslim society has been historically rooted in patriarchy, and suspicion that social changes could potentially generate threats to the defined gender-subordination. Saudi Arabia identifies as simultaneously a patriarchal and capitalist state, which can drive the private sector to support radically different objectives depending on the needs of the country. In one instance, the private sector may decide to promote patriarchal social constructs, or if economic needs present, may elect instead to drive continued integration of women within the public sphere (Al-Rasheed, 2013).

From these fluctuating interests of the state, dependent upon a variety of complex factors, women are either intermittently represented in the religious public sphere or excluded all together. According to Al-Rasheed, “…Saudi women remain hostage to the project of a masculine authoritarian state negotiating its survival and legitimacy on the basis of remaining faithful to the tenets of religious nationalism and the ulama ideologues
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who support it” (71). As a result, the nebulous nature of women’s functions within the religious public sphere warrants further investigation to better understand their specific roles throughout the evolving Saudi Arabian society, both from a religious-cultural standpoint and in terms of their fundamental self-perception.

Justification of Religion in the Public Sphere

Before examining the role in which religion performs inside the public sphere, a Suitable case must be developed for its fundamental inclusion. Many arguments can be made for the involvement of religion, some based solely off of its nontrivial acceptance among general societies, but also from the vantage point of the moral and ethical perspectives it carries. Epstein (2014) highlights Habermas’s more recent work, citing Between Naturalism and Religion (published in 2008) as a bridge between scientific and religious concepts. Instead of relegating either as unimportant or nonfunctional, Habermas argues in favor of a softer side of naturalism, which emphasizes societal characteristics of normativity and the interrelationships cultivated between people (further explored in Chapters Five and Six). On the religious aspect, Habermas underscores its importance throughout history, and both its enrichment of society as a composite and its countering ability against modernist capitalist trends.

In Between Naturalism and Religion, a specific focus includes a reframing of post-metaphysical thought, which is heavily influenced by philosopher Immanuel Kant. Habermas, however, moves away from the Kantian transcendental analysis, and instead maintains the perspective of employing reason within a physical construct; that is, in light of historical and societal contexts. This is an imperative viewpoint when indulging religious modes of thought, as these are especially vulnerable to devolving into abstract
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thought. Grounding philosophies into a tangible environment provides a practical manner for religion to enter the scene. Habermas considers this against the significance of scientific thought, and debates, which should carry higher precedence. Rather than justify one viewpoint ahead of the other, he proposes a complementary angle, offering that neither is fully self-sufficient without the other. He states,

We can learn something from the confrontation with reality only to the extent that we are at the same time able to learn from the criticism of others. The ontologization of natural scientific knowledge into a naturalistic worldview reduced to 'hard' facts is not science but bad metaphysics. (Habermas, 2008, p. 207)

Much in the same way religion functions as a counterbalance to the dangers of unbounded capitalism, a parallel can be drawn to balancing the over-objectification of the natural world. Such a process runs into danger of the total reduction of one’s very individuality, resulting in a movement of dehumanization. While still a highly subjective topic, Habermas (2008) makes the strong claim, “The ontologization of natural scientific knowledge into a naturalistic worldview reduced to 'hard' facts is not science but bad metaphysics” (p. 207). In effect, he asserts that attempts to remove religion entirely from the secular sphere is ultimately futile, as “even secular arguments derived from the Greco-Roman, philosophical concepts of autonomy and individuality are themselves invested with meanings of Judeo-Christian origin” (Epstein, 2014, p. 424).

It is in this manner that Habermas encourages the integration and exploration of religious thought within the public sphere, justifying his claim of its overall value to a society. These can be especially desirable in the political sphere, where ethical and moral
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considerations can suffer in favor of industrialism and commercialism. Habermas does not suggest that these different approaches be fully accepted and integrated by secular citizens, but rather that they are not cast aside as “archaic relics of premodern societies persisting into the present” (Habermas, 2008, p. 138). However, he also claims that mere tolerance is not sufficient to reaping the benefits of religious consideration. Instead, Habermas asserts that tolerance “provides no basis for seriously considering religious justifications, thereby threatening the formation of more inclusive epistemic and political communities” (Epstein, 2014, p. 424). To translate these ideals into societal benefit, secularists must “acquire a cognitive predisposition of hermeneutical openness to the content, meaningfulness, and existential import of religious justifications” (Epstein, 2014, p. 424). In this manner, Habermas is more focused on the elements of the religion itself rather than its individual believers, and thus identifies the critical points of interface between these components and those resisting their examination.

The Role of Religion in the Public Sphere

Of initial interest is the Habermasian perspective of the invocation of religion into the public sphere. Since his first initial work The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1962), Habermas has since produced another text entitled Habermas and Religion (2013), in which he critically reviews the modern role of religion within the contemporary world. Specifically, he underscores its importance and emphasizes its capacity with respect to critical thought, challenging many of the initial themes present in his first work. Additionally, he confronts the popular notion of progressive secularism, the process in which religious structures are formalized and maintained, such that they are institutionally secularized (Dobbelnaere, 2004).
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Proceeding this new work was a publication in the *European Journal of Philosophy*, in which Habermas starts to develop his initial commentary of the inclusion of religion in the public sphere. He observes locations where religion holds great prominence, specifically citing the U.S., Israel, Afghanistan, and other Middle Eastern countries. Habermas comments on the influence religion has over political action, and addresses philosopher John Rawls’s notion of *public reason* to answer several pressing topics. These include inquiries ranging from how the role of religion and its corresponding constituent communities are affected by the constitutional separation of church and state, to the question of what the true motives are of opponents to the liberal standard of ethical citizenship. Ultimately, Habermas concludes some ambiguity in part to the ability of the state (i.e. the public) to control and influence religious citizens through legal and political systems, and acknowledges that “the liberal state faces the problem that religious and secular citizens can only acquire these attitudes through complementary learning processes, while it remains a moot point whether these are ‘learning processes’ at all” (Habermas, 2013, p. 4).

To appreciate Habermas’s critique, an understanding of Rawls’s political philosophy is beneficial. The idea of public reason is rooted in Kantian origin, which is concerned with the way in which a person deliberates a specific issue at hand while excluding irrational or illogical motivations for making those decisions. Rawls extended this notion to a pluralist society, in which those of disparate backgrounds of morality or philosophy could accept the justification for a given position. This is not to be confused with *private reason*, which involves specific interests surrounding a certain subset of society (e.g. a political party, corporation, etc.).
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In his work entitled *A Theory of Justice* (1971), Rawls establishes the conception of *justice* in contrast to *legitimacy*. A legitimate political system provides only a nominal standard of morality and ethical citizenship, while by contrast a just political system represents the supreme standard—that is, the composition that signifies the highest moral order. Following this groundwork, Rawls then describes the corresponding *basic structure* of society and its encompassing public reason to portray the influences, which affect political issues. In *Political Liberalism* (1993), Rawls states that constituents’ doctrines of faith should be excluded from “justification of political authority and from public deliberations” (Bailey & Gentile, 2015, p. 5). This mode of thought has received a great deal of criticism, especially due to the significance religious thought and traditions can occupy in society. As Bailey and Gentile (2015) note:

[The] exclusion may be so strict as to infringe on their moral integrity or so controversial that they could not accept it, even were their own religiously based conclusions to coincide with those made according to it…the exclusion of religious reasons seems to involve an overly negative estimation of the contributions that religions make to society. For it seems to presuppose that religious reasonings necessarily cause political conflict, such that stability can be maintained only be restricting citizens to nonreligious reasonings, or at least to deny that religious reasonings make valuable contributions to political society—for instance, in terms of citizens’ participation in politics, their shared allegiances to the state, or their reaching consensus over issues. (p. 5)

Habermas contends that religion need not be considered irrational or illogical, and can instead perform a valuable role in civil society; that of motivation and inspiration to
survive and flourish in the midst of hardship and trying times. However, Habermas also acknowledges that certain restrictions must be satisfied in order for a religion to productively *cohabitate* the political sphere: the religion must be distinct from the state with its own independent order, natural and social sciences must operate freely in the sphere of reason, and the religion must be congenial within the plurality of other existing religions. Should these stipulations be met, Habermas argues that the religion can then extend its political influence in a constructive and practical manner (Junker-Kenny, 2014).

With the presupposition then that religion can indeed purvey social and political domains, the subsequent philosophical consideration is the specific responsibility its doctrine possesses in the public sphere. The philosopher Paul Ricoeur defines this participation in the tensions between religious and moral realms, specifically between love and justice, graciousness and vengefulness, subsequently resulting in one’s moral constitution. A specific example of the interplay of love and justice is identified in a biblical origin, of which Ricoeur states:

*Would it not be the role of love, then, to contribute to the reduction of the gap between this universalism ideally without restriction and the contextualism in which cultural differences prevail? The biblical world…offers examples, since then become paradigmatic, of this extension of culturally limited spheres outward toward an actually universal acknowledgement. The Old Testament’s repeated call to the people to include in their hospitality “the alien, the orphan, and the widow among you” (Deut. 16:11, etc.)—in other words, the “other” beneficiary of*
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hospitality—presents us with a first example of the pressure exerted by love upon justice. (Junker-Kenny, 2014, p. 297)

In short, the origins of morality can be found within the Kantian roots of justice and practical reason. In these demonstrations, the religious undertones serve to perceive the virtue of the entire human race under the guide of “God’s universal salvific will” (Junker-Kenny, 2014, p. 301). As Junker-Kenny (2014) summarizes eloquently, “Even before they appear in contemporary social theories as moral agents and as citizens in the public sphere, humans are invited to hear the message about themselves that they are images of a God who hopes on them” (p. 301). From this perspective, the religious component of the public sphere can be seen as an inseparable element, which is intimately woven among its constituents in social, moral, political, and philosophical influences. In the specific setting of Saudi Arabia, these truths require cogent analysis of Chapter Three’s notion of the public sphere to fully appreciate their capacity of influence, and concluding effect on those composing those spheres.

Religion, Gender, and the Public Sphere

As detailed in the first and second chapters, the implementation of Sharia Law in the modern-day society of Saudi Arabia has established a gender-segregated culture, which generally prohibits the inter-mingling of sexes. To advance the understanding of the religious public sphere within Saudi Arabia, it is necessary to consider the role of the Islamic faith in the development of gender segregated public spheres. The profusion of these spheres in part stems from conservative Islamic views and movements, which promoted internal social change within the country, especially during the latter portion of the 20th century.
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In the 1970’s, Saudi Arabia’s economy flourished with an increasing global demand for oil. However, this activity inherently coupled the country to outside social influences, predominantly from Western countries. Liberal perspectives relating to female roles in society galvanized Juhayman al-Otaybi and a group of like-minded conservative rebels to hold the Grand Mosque of Mecca hostage. The rebels claimed that outside social influences had influenced a culture of immorality among citizens and that Saudi Arabia needed to return to a state of purity (Ochsenwald, 1981). This uprising resulted in perturbations of conservative perspectives surrounding the involvement of women within the public sphere, and resulted in the development of designated areas for women-only to gather.

Conservatism regarding strict gender public spaces was further enforced after witnessing US women operating army trucks during the Gulf War. Observation of these activities recharged the conflict of Islamic laws and women’s rights within Saudi Arabian society. In the process of reasserting itself as a more purely-based Islamic government, Saudi Arabia reinforced strict gender segregation laws, especially within the public sphere. Originating in the early 2000’s, the concept of segregated public spheres within public places was introduced within a religious forum (Salhi, 2017).

The new emphasis on conservatism bolstered the creation of mosques with multiple floors, designed to prevent interactions with the opposite sex. The creation of gender-segregated mosques was created to inhibit the idea of *ikhtilāt*, or the intermixing of sexes. With the growing culture of a gender-specific public sphere institutionalized by religious political movements, deviation from the *ikhtilāt* has not been met without resistance by Saudi religious scholars. For instance, scholars such as Saad al-Shithri
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believe that the concept of ikhtilāt may advance towards a massive evil or general societal corruption (Meijer, 2010, para. 20). On the other hand, less conservative views from scholars such as Ahmad bin Qasim al-Ghamdi believe that Islam law does not condone the mixing of genders in public places, such as an office, school, etc. (Van Geel, 2017).

The Religious Public Sphere in Saudi Arabia

Within Saudi Arabia, Islamic statutes and traditions serve as both the cornerstone of the religious public sphere, and regulative force driving contemporary societal constructs. Interpretation of the religious public sphere within Saudi Arabia requires an inspection of the prevailing religious infrastructure, which helps govern social norms among the ummah, or body of believers. The Sharia Law and corresponding hadith texts undergird the Saudi legal jurisdiction, and serve as a symbol of Saudi culture. These religious elements have existed as focal points of topic among the participants within the religious public sphere. If social order among the ummah is ever called into question, Sharia experts (the ulama) are sought for council to assist with resolution, and to maintain the integrity of the Qur’an. Depending on the interests of the religious public sphere, religious scholars’ interpretation of Sharia Law has either garnered support from the ummah, or instead generated discourse from conflicts of interest. Regardless of whether the ulama’s vested role of preserving the integrity of Islamic law matches the concerns of the surrounding public sphere, the ulama’s interpretation of the Qur’an influences discussion and climate of the religious public sphere (Zaman, 2002).

At any given time in Saudi history, the presiding ruler is tasked with ensuring the integrity of the Sharia to protect Islamic morals and beliefs. Political influence that rulers contributed to the religious public sphere was historically proportional to their
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involvement with the preservation of social rules, as interpreted by the Sharia. Public acceptance of political leaders was largely attributed to the interpretation of the ruler’s success in championing accepted ideologies under Islamic law (Al-Shetaiwi, 2012). In this manner, the religious element of the public sphere can be observed to be inextricably tied between both private and public members, yielding firm justification of the concatenated religious public sphere.

Outside of the king’s specific rule, the ulama also function in a noteworthy role within the religious public sphere. While striving to uphold and advocate Islamic law, the ulama has maintained considerable historical influence over political leaders and movements. To uphold Islamic law to the highest standard, rulers would often seek the assistance of the chief ulama at the time, or expert of the Sharia, to issue decrees founded on scholarly interpretation of Islamic laws. Decrees also served as legal efforts to provide resolution regarding controversial Islamic doctrine, such as those mentioned in the latter section of chapter two (Facey et al., 2006). Although political rulers in Saudi Arabia were not directly responsible for interpreting Sharia Law among the ummah, their legal enforcement of Islamic law unquestionably impacted the public sphere’s religious overtones, giving further rationalization of the religious prefix to the public sphere (Zaman, 2002).

Owing to the complex nature of the relationship between religion and politics, an inescapable query arises of whether the Saudi political system or Islamic law has certain dominance over the other. In Saudi Arabia, the topics of religion and politics cannot be deliberated without making reference to both elements. Dating back to 1744, one of the first documented relationships between a religious scholar and political ruler emerged to
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form a cohesive sociopolitical influence. At this time, the Arabian Peninsula housed several nomadic tribes who turned away from the Islamic faith and a principle concept of the faith referred to as *tawhid*, or monotheism. A prominent religious scholar at the time, Muhammad Ibn Abd-al Wahhab, concluded that without state’s advocation of Islam, the faith would be lost among its people. Furthermore, Wahhab also declared that if the state was not regulated by the religious law, this could ultimately destine the government for corruption and eventual demise (Crawford, 2014).

Territorial expansion on the basis of spreading the message of Islam to non-believers propelled Saudi Arabia to increase in size, and officially become recognized as a state in 1932. Half a century later in 1992, the creation of foundational laws legalized Islamic law into jurisdiction of the monarchy, which also included the following concepts: the constitution for Saudi Arabia would be the Qur’an, Sharia Law would be implemented as the criminal law for citizens, and the government would make decisions based on the prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him (PBUH), and holy book. Although religious scholars have performed critical roles in the influence and development of intuitions and infrastructure composing the country, the state’s economy, foreign affairs, and response to secularism during the 1970’s required additional political involvement to solidify its platform on such topics (Diemen, 2012).

With increasing modernization and secularism from surrounding nations, the Saudi government augmented its jurisdiction over religion to validate decisions made towards those ends. Conservative radicals frustrated with the state’s utilization of religion to justify modernistic decisions began exhibiting formal protests, such as the seizure of the Grand Holy Mosque in Mecca in 1979 (Ochsenwald, 1981). Actions such as these
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naturally provoked the question of whether the state was truly protecting the Islamic faith. Under scrutiny of religious scholars and its citizens, the state recaptured the mosque and returned to *Wahhabism*, a purely conservative doctrine of Islam. Over the course of the next several decades, topics concerning modernization (such as whether women should be a part of the Saudi workforce) have created tension between religious conservatives and the monarchy. Although the political jurisdiction over religion has changed over the years, the state has the legal authority with the collaboration of religious scholars to represent Islam in all facets. The synergistic relationship between religion and politics demands that one cannot serve its purpose without necessarily involving the other. Islam cannot be enforced without the backing of the state, and the state cannot address the country’s needs without considering Islamic law. Rulers such as King Abdullah have discussed the separation of religion with foreign policy, but more liberal contemplations were met with backlash from religious conservatives (Diemen, 2012).

Though the religious public sphere has experienced many transformations in light of challenging and persisting socioreligious issues, a consistent component, which has transcended time is the dominant philosophy of the ummah. The ummah represents the embodiment of the religious public sphere designed to uphold the moral principles of Islam. Through this construction, the ummah creates unity among members through social constructs established in religious law, and secures political equality through foundational core beliefs, which are applicable to all constituents. The concept of the ummah marries the sociopolitical and religious aspects of society, and forms a community with the common vision of Islam as its basis. As Hoexter et al. (2002) assert,
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The picture that emerges from the contributions to this volume is that of a vibrant public sphere, accommodating a large variety of autonomous groups and characterized by its relatively stable but very dramatic nature. The community of believers was the center of gravity around which activity in the public sphere revolved. Its participation in the formation of the public sphere was a matter of course; its well-being, customs, and consensus were both the motives and the main justifications for the introduction of changes in social and religious practices, in the law and policies governing the public sphere. The independence of the [Sharia] and the distribution of duties toward the community between the ruler and the `ulama’, established very early in Islamic history, were crucial factors in securing the autonomy of the public sphere and putting limits on the absolute power of the ruler. (pp. 151-152)

The evolving relationship between the ummah, the ulama, and other political leaders over the course of time has transitioned the religious public sphere into a focused, autonomous forum for the entire Saudi Arabian community (Hoexter et al., 2002).

Conclusion

The recent royal decrees issued by the Saudi Arabian government have dramatically reshaped the country’s social, political, economic, and even religious structures and influences. These developments press the need for analysis and investigation to determine the underlying roots of such changes, and also to predict and prepare for future transitions. As demonstrated since the official inauguration of Saudi Arabia into statehood, social, religious, and political elements are nearly inseparable and must be jointly considered. The concept of the public sphere developed in chapter three.
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by Habermas (1962) supported the understanding of the way in which the *public* and *private* members of society come together and discuss important issues. In Saudi Arabia, however, this definition is insufficient to fully incorporate all components in play. The religious factors and influences must be considered, as these are tightly coupled in almost every pivotal issue of modern day society. As a result, the nomenclature of a *public sphere* is therefore also inadequate – to truly encapsulate the society and its “critical public debate” (Habermas, 1962, p. 54), a new term must instead be considered: the *religious public sphere*. 
Chapter Five – The Identity Negotiation Theory

Introduction

The recent employment freedoms Saudi Arabian women have acquired under the 2011 royal decree raises the question of how the departure from thousands of years of cultural norms has impacted the subculture of women in Saudi Arabian society. One type of analysis, which is capable of garnering insight into this issue, is intrapersonal communication. Examination of this subject yields investigation of how internal factors, such as self-directed thoughts and emotions, influence a person’s behavior (Weiner, 2000). Specific examples of internal factors which could influence how people view themselves could include their past experiences, education or knowledge, religious or cultural beliefs, attitudes, motivation, and skill sets in life.

In addition, interpersonal communication evaluates how other people can influence self-perception (Weiner, 2000). For example, when others share their views, thoughts, or feelings about another person, this can affect how an individual perceives herself or himself. The 2011 royal decree significantly affected Saudi Arabian tradition and culture, which warrants investigation into the effects of women’s changed role in the workplace – more specifically, an investigation in how the economic decision to include women in the workplace has affected how Saudi women perceive themselves in society given a deviation from archetypal cultural norms. This is also important to consider in terms of the culture-structure itself – the collectivist style of culture in Saudi Arabia differs from the strongly individualistic type in western societies. Ting-Toomey (2005) in the Matrix of Face notes that this specifically affects identity negotiation and conflict
resolution process, where “collectivists tended to value long-term, give-and-take relational concessions and counter-concessions” (p. 3).

Prior to this inspection, it is important to define more thoroughly what identity is and how internal and external factors can influence self-perception. Psychologist Erik Erikson began to investigate concepts of identity in the 1950’s while researching the psychosocial development each person experiences in life. Erikson proposed that during the adolescent period in life (approximately between the ages of 12-18 years old), adolescents grapple with the concept of identity. This is essentially a sense of self and how the individual integrates within the society around them (McLeod, 2013). Fearson (1999) expands upon the definition of identity by relating it to a social construct characterized by membership rules, personal attributes, and a person’s expected behaviors and/or social features that distinguish an individual, such as their views, dignity, honor, or pride. The process of forming one’s identity occurs when a person begins to explore what they value in life, their belief system, and objectives they personally would like to accomplish (McLeod, 2013).

As discussed previously, the societal change of allowing the Saudi women to enter into the work force seems to indicate a process of women negotiating their perceptions of self. Druckman (2001) explores the concept of identity negotiation by explaining that identity is a multi-dimensional concept where every individual develops a personal, social, ethnic, professional, and national identity. He further discusses how societal conflicts with an individual’s personal interests and values can lead to the process of identity negotiation where the individual must then come to a place of reconciliation within themselves to form their social identity. When an individual is
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unable to resolve conflicts between personal beliefs and societal changes or expectations, this can lead to the concept of role confusion or uncertainty of how the individual views themselves within society (McLeod, 2013). In order to better understand whether the societal change to Saudi Arabian culture influenced how Saudi women perceive themselves, additional investigation must be performed.

Identity Negotiation Theory Inception

The roots of the Identity Negotiation Theory (INT) originate from a work by Gudykunst and Tsukasa (1986) entitled The Influence of Cultural Variability on Perceptions of Communication Behavior Associated with Relationship Terms. In this paper, the topic of identity formation and development within a group is addressed among considerations of both intergroup and interpersonal relationships. Specifically emphasized is the importance of recognizing both an individual’s personal identity and simultaneous group identity without compromising either one.

This subject gives rise to a rich context of intra- and interpersonal issues, ranging from group expectations, identity conformity, and the process of negotiating membership. The coinage of the term Identity Negotiation stems from Swann (1987), where he states, [Behavioral] confirmation formulation seemed to illuminate only a portion of what was happening in our studies…targets had their own ideas about themselves and social reality, and at least on occasion, they took active steps to ensure that perceivers shared those ideas. Social reality was not simply constructed by perceivers acting alone; it was negotiated by perceivers and targets acting together. (p. 1038)
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In this case, the *perceiver* represents one person who attempts to influence another person (the *target*) to modify their behavior in accordance with the *perceiver’s* expectations. Conversely, the idea of *self-verification* occurs when the *target* is able to convince the *perceiver* of behaving in accordance with the *target’s* beliefs and convictions. Ultimately these two competing notions result in a tension, which resolves in a negotiation process, establishing behavior expectations from the participants in a group (Swann, 1987).

Druckman (2001) addresses the notion of the negotiation process itself, since he claims, “social identities are rarely a subject of negotiation” (p. 282). In response to this challenge, he suggests seeking elucidation in the field of sociological conflict. When individual groups maintain opposing viewpoints or *ideologies*, a natural trend is to attempt to resolve these differences through negotiations. The dissimilarity in magnitude of the ideologies is directly proportional to the intensity in which conflict over values can manifest. If negotiation succeeds, and extreme perspectives and members can be reconciled to more moderate viewpoints, the magnitude of conflict will deescalate, but the group cohesion will also weaken. In the contrapositive, if negotiation is *not* successful, conflict and tension will remain heightened, but group cohesion will also increase proportionally. This complex process results in the core premise of the negotiation process Druckman (2001) refers to as “negotiated identities” (p. 282).

Of additional importance is the way in which competing ideologies are presented. If differences in beliefs are not forthcoming by group members, the negotiation process is often limited or even completely ineffective (Druckman, Broome, & Korper, 1988). In addition, notable distinctions exist in methods of the negotiation – namely those of *settlement* and *resolution*. A *settlement* is often a resolution arrived at through an act of
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compromise; that is, one or multiple parties make concessions to reach an acceptable result for all members present. A resolution pursues an agreement, which is reached by locating a solution integrating all parties’ ideologies. Throughout the resolution process, parties engage in intricate problem-solving behavior, which may ultimately change their fundamental beliefs and/or acceptable criteria for an agreeable outcome. While significantly more complicated than the settlement process, it has been observed to foster more durable results and generally stronger group dynamics (Kressel, Frontera, Forlenza, Butler & Fish, 1994).

In short, both the nature of the ideologies present, and the way in which they are negotiated between members of one or more groups are critically important when evaluating group dynamics. When culture and religious beliefs are incorporated, the individual differences can become even more polarized which can produce more intensive conflicts between participants. The observation of the resolutions of these conflicts (if any) is also significant, as it can signal the longevity of the solution and the internal stability of the group accepting it. As Druckman (2001) insightfully notes, “the negotiated interests and the group’s values are inextricably intertwined” (p. 283). These foundational observations and perceptions conclude in the driving motivation behind the INT.

Axiomatic Foundations and Structure

In Ting-Toomey’s (1999) Communicating Across Cultures, the formalized version of the INT was first introduced and detailed along with ten pivotal assumptions. These assumptions were combined with interdisciplinary research to provide a multifarious structure applicable across a wide range of cultural and social environments.
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Following in Ting-Toomey’s (2005) *Identity Negotiation Theory: Crossing cultural boundaries*, the INT was further amended to include “five boundary-crossing identity dialectical themes” (Ting-Toomey, 2015, p. 3) and “three identity negotiation competence outcomes” (Ting-Toomey, 2015, p. 3). The boundary-crossing themes added included (a) identity security-vulnerability; (b) inclusion-differentiation; (c) predictability-unpredictability; (d) connection-autonomy; (e) identity-consistency across time (Ting-Toomey, 2015, p. 3). The identity negotiated outcomes represented (a) feeling of being understood; (b) feeling of being respected; (c) feeling of being affirmatively valued (Ting-Toomey, 2015, p. 3). Collectively, these additional measures and more robust definitions culminated in the modern definition of the INT employed by researchers active in sociological studies in present-day. Applications of study include those of significant cultural changes, especially by immigrants or underrepresented groups within a country – see studies such as that performed by Collie, Kindon, Liu, and Podsiadlowski (2010) in *Mindful identity negotiations: The acculturation of young Assyrian women in New Zealand*.

The primary ten assumptions further revised in *Identity Negotiation Theory: Crossing cultural boundaries* are given in an abridged format below:

1. The core dynamics of people's group membership identities (e.g., cultural and ethnic memberships) and personal identities (e.g., unique attributes) are formed via symbolic communication with others.
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2. Individuals in all cultures or ethnic groups have the basic motivation needs for identity security, inclusion, predictability, connection, and consistency on both group-based and person-based identity levels.

3. Individuals tend to experience identity emotional security in a culturally familiar environment and experience identity emotional vulnerability in a culturally unfamiliar environment.

4. Individuals tend to feel included when their desired group membership identities are positively endorsed (e.g., in positive in-group contact situations) and experience differentiation when their desired group membership identities are stigmatized (e.g., in hostile out-group contact situations).

5. Persons tend to experience interaction predictability when communicating with culturally familiar others and interaction unpredictability when communicating with culturally unfamiliar others.

6. Persons tend to desire interpersonal connection via meaningful close relationships (e.g., in close friendship support situations) and experience identity autonomy when they experience relationship separations--meaningful intercultural-interpersonal relationships can create additional emotional security and trust in the cultural strangers.
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7. Persons tend to experience identity consistency in repeated cultural routines in a familiar cultural environment and they tend to experience identity change (or to the extreme, identity chaos and turmoil) and transformation in a new or unfamiliar cultural environment.

8. Cultural-ethnic, personal, and situational variability dimensions influence the meanings, interpretations, and evaluations of these identity-related themes.

9. Competent identity-negotiation process emphasizes the importance of integrating the necessary intercultural identity-based knowledge, mindfulness, and interaction skills to communicate appropriately, effectively, and adaptively with culturally dissimilar others.

10. Satisfactory identity negotiation outcomes include the feeling of being understood, respected, and affirmatively valued (Ting-Toomey, 2015, pp. 4-6). Each of the ten assumptions represents an integral component of the INT, which must be understood both individually and collectively before applying the theory to a social situation.

The first assumption describes the respective membership identities of those participating within a group, especially those of which derive from cultural heritage and lifestyle. Satisfaction of (1) occurs when individuals are cognizant of each other’s unique backgrounds, and are open to consideration of different value-systems. In both assumptions (2) and (3), the importance of security and inclusion is stressed, originating
from assimilation into an unfamiliar environment. These situations can result in heightened vulnerability for a person, which can affect both their anxiety and reactions to surroundings. Assumptions (4) and (5) concentrate on the validation and inclusiveness a person can experience when their membership identities are represented or perceived favorably, and inversely the separation or detachment they may feel if those identities are instead devalued or rejected. Assumption (6) details the complex issues encompassing the effects of relationships on one’s personal autonomy of their identity – this can be greatly impacted through the comprehension and application of specific vernacular elements, such as verbal and nonverbal norms, emotional expressions, communication styles, etc. Following this, assumption (7) links back to assumptions (2) and (3), concerning the influence of environment on identity shifts. Successful intercultural communication requires understanding and fulfillment of specific identity needs, and the degree of openness to which those needs are recognized. Assumption (8) embraces a magnified view of the cultural settings from a collective to interpersonal view, and identifies the specific factors, which can modify the evaluation of identity-related themes. Finally, assumptions (9) and (10) define the necessary conditions required for successful identity negotiation, which is ultimately founded on positive interactions between individual group members.

This panoply of assumptions encircling the diverse array of identity behaviors, modifiers, and satisfactory outcomes concatenated with the five boundary-crossing identity themes and three identity negotiation competency outcomes conclude in the detailed synergy of the INT, which possesses the capability of analyzing complex ethnic, social, and cultural dynamics across an extensive plethora of individuals and
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personalities. Through the framework of the INT presented here, the unique developments present in the Saudi Arabian subculture of women can be investigated and examined in order to reveal holistic insights into their specific subculture, and transformational identity-roles extant across economic, political, and cultural domains.

Implications of the Identity Negotiation Theory

Druckman in his *Negotiation and Identity: Implications for Negotiation Theory* reexamines the concept of social dynamics, and evaluates the process in which a social identity is, in fact, actually *negotiated*. Several of these findings include similar statements to those put forth by Ting-Toomey in her INT theorization, including axioms (3) and (4) (feelings of acceptance by culturally similar groups and positive endorsement, respectively). A key point involves situations in which group members have opposing viewpoints from one another, and strong convictions about them. Druckman (2001) emphasizes that values and interests should not be thought of as “independent sources of conflict” (p. 282), but instead should be understood to be interrelated.

In this manner, if subsequent attempts to negotiate the difference or conflicts in beliefs should fail, a polarizing effect can take place, which serves to solidify relationships between likeminded individuals, but simultaneously widen the gap between the extreme positions in the group. Conversely, should negotiation be successful, unity is reduced between individuals but results in a more overall cohesive group dynamic. Through this process, Druckman (2001) explains, group dynamics can “[alternate] between escalating and de-escalating phases” (p. 282). While these basic exchanges are understood, both in theory and in the laboratory setting, the “long-term effects on identities, and on the related issue of intergroup relationships” (Druckman, 2001, p. 283)
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is not well understood. Such topics are of critical concern, especially in evolving societies such as Saudi Arabia – implications for long-term interrelationships is vital, especially in a traditional family-oriented culture.

The specific process of negotiation in the setting of group conflict has two possible avenues, discussed previously in the Identity Negotiation Theory Inception section within this chapter. These include either the possibility of settlement, or resolution. Druckman specifically highlights the impact from each process on one’s identity, and the long-term values of each. In particular, he underscores the value of resolution, stating,

Parties may develop and change the criteria for evaluating possible solutions, define new alternatives, or reframe the problem (see Walton and McKersie’s 1965, integrative bargaining model). This is usually a vigorous process that benefits from creativity and depends for its success on a willingness to share information about sensitive matters. It has been found to produce more satisfying and durable agreements than the settlement approach. (Druckman, 2001, p. 283)

In addition, Druckman (2001) also indicates the benefits to identity, citing that the resolution process confronts issues of “values, interests, and needs” (p. 283). The consideration of such details leads to more genuine strategies of negotiating, which avoid undesirable compromises in identity (and thus leading to further issues in the future). However, he also notes the difficulties of specific types of identities in the resolution process, clarifying that some “make it more difficult to engage in problem-solving activities and, as a result, conclude negotiation with a resolution.” (Druckman, 2001, p. 284).
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As discussed in the resolution process, specific types of identities can make negotiation more challenging. Druckman defines two major classifications of identity, which often appear in sociological research: durable identity and fluid identity. Durable identities are those, which are “less subject to change with changing circumstances” (Druckman, 2001, p. 284), as compared to those of fluid identities. Much as the name suggests, fluid identities are much more flexible, and can shift depending on the group dynamics present. In order to examine these behaviors, several laboratory studies have been conducted, especially with the presence of college students (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993). These studies confirmed the presence of fluid identities, especially in the context of political parties, athletic teams, and other similar provisional groups. In addition, the results revealed the specific variables held varying degrees of influence over the negotiation processes, including “pre-negotiation experience (occurring just before negotiation), time pressure, the other’s concession rate, accountability to constituents, audiences as in the distinction between open and closed deliberations, objectives suggested in the task instructions, [and] others” (Druckman, 2001, p. 284). The biggest question raised by this study is whether the presence of such impacts was due to the nature of the fluid identities, or some other unknown variable.

The implications of these types of identities are significant on multiple levels, including smaller localized groups, to large-scale populations and entire countries. From the previous section, it was determined that the resolution process typically offered the most effective solution to the identity negotiation process, and avoided unwanted long term identity impediments. However, the process of resolution also requires a willingness to consider new and creative solutions, possess an empathetic attitude toward others, and
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hold genuine conversations regarding core values and desires. In terms of a durable identity, accomplishing such goals may be very challenging, if not unattainable altogether.

These findings are not intended to suggest that durable identities have no value within a social setting. Druckman (2001) notes that, “durable citizen identities provide a source of stable support for continuing military campaigns” (p. 286). The process of identity negotiation must then consider both the relationship between durable and fluid identities, and consider the specific environment in which they are operating. This can be observed even during conflict, as the longer the conflict continues, the more likely the participants are to discard durable identity features and accept compromise in a fluid nature. Druckman (2001) summarizes, “the challenge for negotiation theorists is to model the way that identity moderates the relationship between mobilization for collective action in conflict and negotiating flexibility” (p. 286).

A natural segue from the identity typification is the proliferation of the identities themselves. Druckman (2001) defines this classification as the spread, which refers to:

How widely similar identities are shared in a population. It is indicated by the number of citizens who share a national (or ethnic) identity, but can also be indicated by the salience of a group as reflected in its activities”. (p. 286)

This designation is especially important in countries attempting to mitigate insurgencies or radical groups. In essence, a relationship exists between the groups seeking change, and the prevailing administration currently in power. From the standpoint of the revolutionaries, some understanding must be held of the willingness of the administration to concede specific points in order to minimize disruption. The necessary action to be
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generated by the group must be accordingly proportional to this level. From this, Druckman (2001) claims “[focusing] on the conditions for responsiveness, this analysis highlights spread as an important precondition for negotiation or influence on concessions in negotiations between collective actors” (p. 286).

Identity Negotiation Theory and Application in Saudi Arabia

Navigation of the vast degree of sociopolitical changes over the course of Saudi Arabian history reveals that a Saudi woman’s role in society has morphed into an entirely new subculture all together. Rajkhan (2014) argues that modern Saudi women are participatory, inclusive, and have an actively prominent role in society more so than ever before. With a more of a dominant role in society, Markle (2013) contends that Saudi women are now situated to wrestle with their identity and perception of self, inside of their new-found roles. The globalization of Saudi Arabia, technological advancement, and exposure to international influences have sparked societal changes that have impacted a Saudi woman’s access to new experiences in society. These mass societal changes are inescapable, and demand a response from those living in this new cultural era. Furthermore, these developments also raise the question of how Saudi women perceive themselves on a personal level and develop a true sense of self amidst the rapidly shifting societal climates.

Limited research exists surrounding Saudi Arabian women’s formation of identity in the presence of their dynamic environment, but some researchers have launched initial investigations into this topic to better understand the subculture’s present-day development. For instance, a study conducted by Journiette (2014) interviewed several young Saudi Arabian women regarding their perception of self-identity within the
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modern world. One young 20-year-old Saudi native expressed that women in Saudi Arabia should not be perceived as prisoners, but rather a powerful community who control their own lives. In addition to her insights, the study participant chose not to define herself using a national identity, electing instead that her personal interests and feelings should be the defining measure of who she is as a person. Another young Saudi woman in her 20’s relayed that her personal choices in life should define how she “expresses [herself]” (Journiette, 2014, p. 27) and how others “see [her]” (Journiette, 2014, p. 27).

Other study participants defined themselves as multifaceted dependent upon the public or private environmental context, personal preferences, religious overtones, national identity, and situation. Journiette’s (2014) study concluded with the insight that the development of self-identity was an evolving process influenced by the choice of self-expression and the hope that women could become more actively contributing members of society. Globalization and the evolution of technology in Saudi Arabia were also considered to be contributing factors that influence the sense of self for Saudi women (Journiette, 2014). As previously described in INT theory, Saudi women must negotiate their previously developed perceptions of self and experience a change in their identity to successfully assimilate into their progressive society.

The 2011 royal decree by King Abdullah afforded multiple public employment opportunities for women to engage within the public workforce. Traditionally, women had limited opportunities to work outside of family or domestic related employment venues. With recent expansions into socioeconomic affairs, women can establish additional vocational identities for themselves previously thought unattainable. Studies
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surrounding the manner in which Saudi women discern themselves inside of the workforce currently have largely been recognized as unexplored territory. Although information regarding this topic is sparse, some researchers are observing the importance of identity development within the public vocational setting, especially when related to the specific changes in the Saudi woman’s subculture.

Le Renard (2008) makes mention of the expansion of female spaces for women to congregate outside of the private sphere. Such spaces provide opportunities for Saudi women to share their thoughts, beliefs, values, and ideas within a public forum of other women they are not directly related to. The exposure to a myriad of diverse female backgrounds and personalities offers new perspectives on life as a woman performing a variety of roles and responsibilities. The new medium for conversation can spark diversity that some Saudi women may have never had the opportunity to experience. In turn, the expansion of female designated spaces within the public sphere has given women a chance to develop their own self-identity, and to bolster a public identity as a cumulative subculture within Saudi Arabian society.

Al-Asfour, Tlaiss, Khan, and Rajaeskar (2017) conducted a qualitative study using a phenomenological approach to examine the perspectives of Saudi Arabian women who were working in a diverse range of industries. Among the 12 interviews, several barriers for women in the workforce were identified, including: limited career choices and opportunities for advancement, increased levels of stress due to lack of resources to create a balanced family-work environment, the absence of transportation services, gender profiling and discrimination, lack of child-care services, and an overall feeling of inequality in the work place.
Research participants expressed frustration for a lack of autonomy, and independence regarding job advancement in the workforce. In addition, some participants also expressed a sense of role-conflict from the lack of resources provided to women managing simultaneous familial and vocational responsibilities. One such participant described her battle to solidify her identity as a mother and as a working-woman in the public workforce, stating:

Working mothers have many factors to consider in order to succeed in their marriage and work. In Saudi society, like many other Arab societies, the woman is still considered to be the backbone of the family in well-known norms and expectations. In order to have a balance between family and work, a working-woman needs a supportive husband and children. Without their support, it is impossible for a woman to juggle all of their duties. (Al-Asfour et al., 2017, p. 191)

Saudi mothers who have entered the workforce must construct a new professional identity for themselves in addition to restructuring their relational roles within their familial home environment. As described in the INT, several identities within unique contexts comprise the personal identity one attributes themselves to. If role conflict between these areas of life cannot be resolved, continued stress or even the elimination of identity development altogether can ensue. Conversely, if work-life balance can be achieved through supportive measures, potential benefits could range from increased self-esteem, general health improvements, and a collective empowerment of the Saudi women’s subculture.
In addition to role conflict outside of the workplace, Saudi women must navigate their professional roles amidst gender discrimination within the workplace itself. One Saudi woman described how she desired to move up the corporate ladder within her current organization, but was rebuffed because her Saudi male coworkers would refuse to speak with her. She described that this form of discrimination was cultural, and despite the discrimination she felt in the workplace, she is hopeful that traditional perspectives regarding women in the workplace would dissipate when additional women enter the private and public workforces (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). Gender discrimination within establishments creates yet another obstruction for women to grapple with when developing their professional identities. In the face of these stressors, the INT suggests that women have the potential to form negative professional identities of themselves if they are unable to find peace or overcome discriminatory practices within their place of employment.

Despite the many cultural challenges Saudi women are currently enduring in professional capacities, the study performed by Al-Asfour et al. (2017) reflects that a large group of Saudi women see themselves as successful, and remain hopeful that the changing social climate will eventually clear obstacles that limit their growth. According to an article by Zoepf (2013) examining how Saudi women regarded themselves after working for a female owned lingerie shop, women expressed their desire to work, to be associated in a respectful profession, earn an income, and support their families. One Saudi woman interviewed who manages the lingerie shop relayed her experience of feeling trapped within her own home until her new employment venue “…gave me the
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chance to go on with my life” (Zoepf, 2013, para.3). Another 30-year-old sales woman named Hana claimed, “I found myself through working” (Zoepf, 2013, para. 33).

Other respondents provided additional background into their personal circumstances and impacts of service. A young woman named Alanood, although experiencing initial reluctance from her family, entered the workforce initially to overcome feelings of boredom, depression, and isolation from the outside world. In her interview responses, she depicted how her emotional health had transformed from a life of dullness to one of purpose after entering the workforce. In addition, another Saudi woman described how her engagement in employment improved her emotional health, gave her life structure, and influenced her social life as well:

Since starting work, five months earlier, she’d begun to feel happier and more energetic. “This gives a sort of discipline to my day,” she said. “I go out. I have goals I need to achieve. At the beginning, I was afraid to talk to anyone. But then I started to open up to people, and I’ve started to feel better”. (Zoepf, 2013, para. 29)

The engagement of women in the public sphere has not only provided opportunities for financial advancement, but also established an environment for personal exploration of self within a vocational environment.

Despite numerous strides for woman’s equality rights that Saudi women have overcome in previous years, obstacles still confront Saudi women in the workplace with daily frequency. Specifically considering identity formation within a professional working environment, Saudi working women are at risk for experiencing differentiation due to stigmatization, mistrust among coworkers (especially their male counterparts),
emotional vulnerability, feelings of being misunderstood, disrespected, or under-valued. To overcome these challenges, these women have demonstrated perseverance for equality by continuing to participate in a largely male-dominated workforce. From a positive perspective, beneficial workforce group identities can be formed within a supportive working environment, which can promote feelings of emotional security, inclusion, trust, respect, and value (Ting-Toomey, 2015).

Outside of cultural changes in the workplace, access to higher educational opportunities has become substantially more attainable for Saudi women. Alsubaie (2017) describes how Saudi Arabia has been ranked as the fifth most improved country for education in the world. With the government’s support and endorsement of Saudi women seeking higher degrees in education, access to areas of society once previously restricted have become available. Although some educational institutes in Saudi Arabia have compelled female students to occupy gender-stereotyped fields such as medicine and education, women have been permitted to study abroad to pursue interests, which might possess less local support (Hamdan, 2005). With the promotion of educational advancement, women can establish educational (and eventually vocational) identities if they desire to use their educational knowledge in the workforce, ultimately expanding the collective boundaries of their personal, professional, and educational existences.

In addition to educational options, Saudi women also enjoy more opportunities to immerse themselves in realms of politics, owing in part to newfound access to sodalities once excluded from. Beginning in 2012, King Abdullah opened the doors for women to participate in a Consultative Council and serve on the ballot for municipal elections (Rajkhan, 2014). In 2013, 30 women became members of the Shoura Council (a formal
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advisory board) for the first time in Saudi history. Councilwoman Fawzia Abalkhail fights for women’s rights and opportunities for women to gain skills within society so that they may find structural health in life (Radwan, 2018). With a new-found influence in political affairs, Saudi women are encouraged to develop a political stance and formulate their personal values, with the knowledge that their political beliefs can now influence societal norms.

Recently, King Salman issued a decree in September of 2017, which grants Saudi women the right to obtain their driver’s license starting June 2018 (Stancati & Said, 2017). Saudi Ambassador Prince Khaled clarified under the new decree that women would be allowed to drive their own vehicles alone and would not require a man’s permission to obtain a vehicle licensure under the law (Stancati & Said, 2017). With the freedom to travel, geographical limitations for women’s involvement within the country of Saudi Arabia will be drastically eliminated. In addition, female dependence on their male counterparts for relocation will also diminish, thus further encouraging female autonomy and overall independence. According to a Saudi working saleswoman named Shuruq Sami, the new driving laws, “…will allow women to take care of themselves and cut costs” (Stancati & Said, 2017, para. 10). Environmental opportunities for exploration and experiences can have a profound effect on an individual. Research into such impacts surrounding a woman’s identity after possessing transportation capabilities poses a significant opportunity for future study.

Technological advancements of the internet and social media provide yet another opportunity for women to reveal insights into their personal identity as participatory members in a modernizing society. According to Bano and Kalmbach (2012), the online
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community is a space where a woman’s involvement faces considerably lessened resistance in comparison to public forums. Online female communities need not worry about the *Hai‘a* (religious police) monitoring conversation or censoring expression owing to anonymity that such online forums provide. Technology affords an additional framework for women to discuss their gender-specific needs and ideas with one another in a safe and non-judgmental space. Moreover, technology has created a global forum for women’s rights to be shared and promoted across the world. With fewer restrictions to regulate conversation, women have the freedom to develop or modify their identity and how they view life in the digital age.

**Conclusion**

The sociocultural climate over the previous decades has administered Saudi Arabian women the freedom to participate in an extensive array of social venues once exclusive or restricted. Benefitting from recent or improved inclusion of areas spanning the professional private and public spheres, digital forums, politics, higher education, and transportation, Saudi Arabian women can devise more diverse identities within such fields. Though prior research into the Saudi woman’s intrapersonal and interpersonal identity transformation has been limited, recent studies are beginning to explore this unfamiliar topic. Despite continued cultural barriers professional women face in the workplace, personal interviews have revealed that many women believe their professional identity has provided them with a new enjoyable interest, a healthier emotional state, financial freedom, social confidence, daily structure, life goals, and a new-found purpose in life (Zoepf, 2013).
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Owing to additional freedoms in which Saudi women can express themselves in different subsets of society, the process of *Identity Negotiation* has extended into personal, professional, ethnic, national, religious, and social arenas (Druckman, 2001). Throughout these processes, women must be cautious of localized resistance from such developments to avoid complications of role-confusion or uncertainty of self (McLeod, 2013). However, interview responses and insights from Saudi women participating in pioneering societal roles provides initial evidence that such developments are trending toward a more wholesome and positive sense of self. Ultimately, the study of such developments is an indispensable harbinger of Saudi Arabia’s prosperity as a whole; from an intrapersonal level in its subculture of women, to a grander scale involving all of the complex social, political, and economic relationships, which compose its entire civilization.
Chapter Six – Intersection of the INT and the Public Sphere

Introduction

Habermas’s notion of the public sphere naturally raises questions of identity – if a previously constrained forum of communication is made accessible to those once barred from it, a process of re-evaluation in terms of identification and status will occur almost immediately. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas (1962) states:

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. (p. 27)

As noted in *The public sphere in Muslim Societies*, the public sphere in a Muslim-based society is significantly different from that of its western counterpart which Habermas described (Hoexter et al., 2002). However, the impact this has on the identity negotiation process is evident, regardless.

The primary impetus behind the public sphere was to provide a means in which the government processes could be aligned with the needs and desires of the common populace. The situation examined here is quite unique in this regard, in that the influence for change arose from beyond internal motivations, and included economic catalysts as well. Ultimately this resulted in new opportunities for women, which by the very nature of the event culminated in new definitions for their lifestyle. While not necessarily representative of the collective ‘public sphere’ of opinion in this situation, it still required
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a renegotiation of once previously immutable traditions and occupations. As a result, the women affected are placed in a fascinating set of circumstances – while taking advantage of the new freedoms made available to them, they also have the capability to transform their fundamental presence in society, by means of redefining their own identities.

In alignment with goals outlined in Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030, the country has shifted its sociocultural and sociopolitical climate to achieve a countrywide vision for the future. The royal decrees preceding these countrywide goals for the future have shaped social change and shifted the dynamics within the Saudi public sphere. Sociopolitical changes have resurfaced timeless socioreligious conflicts, thus placing the religious public sphere in a constant state of flux (Hoexter et al., 2002). As mentioned in previous chapters, Saudi Arabian women are no longer idle bystanders looking into the religious public sphere from the standpoint of confinement and isolation. Legislature has granted women direct access into religious public sphere and the opportunity to develop identity in societal realms once deemed inaccessible. Together, both the religious public sphere and Ting-Toomey’s (2015) INT function as invaluable tools to review and better comprehend the evolving Saudi landscape.

Motivation for an Intersected Study

The process of constructing an individual’s identity is multidimensional, where personal, social, ethnic, professional, and national identity formation all compose the essence of an individual’s perception of self (Druckman, 2001). For example, in the first time in the kingdom’s history, women were granted the right to vote and run a campaign in municipal council elections (Basil, Ap, Elwazer, & Najarian, 2015). Influence in
The intersection of the INT and the public sphere opens the door for women to formulate, promote, and pursue their political identity within the public religious sphere.

In the case of 20-year-old Saudi native Ameera, an interview from a study conducted by Journiette (2014) revealed that her political identity shaped how she perceived herself, her beliefs on how others viewed her, and ultimately how she expressed herself in daily life. Ameera constructed her social identity by forming her own political opinions regarding countrywide affairs. Politics also influenced Ameera’s perception of self-expression, as well as her manner of communication, both of which are reflected in her statement on social media, “What I am saying is true so I have to say it—no matter what” (Journiette, 2014, p. 28). This comment pays homage to McLeod (2013), in which he defines identity formation truly beginning when an individual explores their moral belief system, values, and personal accomplishments they aspire to achieve. Ameera’s moral beliefs were illustrated later in the interview, during which she revealed that her moral compass was founded in Islamic religious teachings combined with what she conceived as truth based on her own subjective experiences. Ameera maintained the strong conviction supporting freedom of speech within her religious identity by expressing, “…we are equal, everyone should express what they want, what they have in mind” (Journiette, 2014, p. 30).

An essential concept to identity formation that was researched in Ting-Toomey’s (2015) INT cultural boundary crossing themes conveyed that an individual needed to experience feelings of being understood, respected, and valued to develop successful identity negotiation. For Ameera, she felt as though she could express herself amongst her family or friends but could not communicate her opinions in public due to societal
conflicts and the incessant shifting religious societal values. This dichotomy between societal norms and an individual’s values can either lead to reconciliation of a societal identity or role confusion if a place of resolution cannot be achieved (McLeod, 2013). An instance of such a dilemma was displayed by a young woman named Dina, who responded to a Twitter social media post conducted by the New York Times following the decision to grant women the right to vote for the first time in Saudi elections. In her response, Dina expressed her personal identity conflict within the religious public sphere and within her own personal life.

He is married to four women and completely preoccupied with them, and he doesn’t allow me to travel with my mother. I suffer a lot, even in my social life. He controls it completely and doesn’t allow me to have friends over or go to them. He forces me to live according to his beliefs and his religion. I can’t show my true self. I live in a lie just so that I wouldn’t end up getting killed. (El-Naggar, 2016, para. 18)

Dina clearly expressed a deep internal conflict within her personal life and an inability to form a social, personal, or religious identity due to fear of her own personal safety. As previously discussed by Swann (1987), social reality and identity formation were achieved when perceivers’ and targets’ competing perceptions resolved in negotiation, and expected behaviors for each member within the group were realized. In Dina’s situation, the perceiver was her husband who modified his target’s (Dina) behavior to align with his personal religious expectations of her conforming to religious norms and seclusion. Furthermore, from her statement to the New York Times, the INT suggests that Dina suffers from role confusion due to her surrounding environment and influences.
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Expanding from her interpersonal conflicts, she was also not provided the opportunity to develop a societal identity within the religious public sphere owing to an inability to explore a personal identity within the confines of her marriage.

Although Dina was prevented from the opportunity to explore a personal and social identity within the religious public sphere, other Saudi women are discovering a place of resolution for their unique identities amidst socioreligious changes. In one instance, an 18-year-old Saudi woman recognized the developing importance of vocational identity formation for women, stating, “Women now are doctors, engineers, scientists, entrepreneurs working with men and having a value, and this is all in the past seven years or so. We are advancing. We are moving forward. We just need patience and a chance” (El-Naggar, 2016, para. 33). Other Saudi women have embraced their new identities within the religious public sphere and feel comfortable expressing their desire for opportunities to develop their individuality within additional social realms. As an illustration, a Saudi woman interviewed by the Cut magazine discussed her dream for freedom and an opportunity to pursue her interests within her beloved country.

I love where I live, it’s a beautiful city with rich heritage, but everything has changed since the advent of the religious awakening. I don’t like the contempt for women, and I want political representation. Women want the right of leadership and freedom. I want to be able to travel alone, go out and establish normal relationships with friends. I want to feel like I’m a human being, not a breakable commodity that’s for sale. I’m human. (Roy, 2017, para. 24)
Cultural and Sociopolitical Sphere’s Interaction with Identity

Development in the surrounding cultural climate has been met with bittersweet perspectives. The multitude of women participating in social and cultural revolutions provides inspiration to others to become active and reinforces the significance of women’s influence in their community. However, this optimism has been sporadically counteracted with halfhearted and uncompassionate responses from some representatives of the Islamic religion. In one instance, Nouraie-Simone (2014) describes a no-fault divorce law, *khul’*, instituted in Egypt which enabled women to relinquish any financial responsibilities required by their spouse and thereby receive freedom and independence from the relationship. In order to diminish support for these laws, conservatives launched a campaign with the moniker “Suzanne’s Laws” with the intent of implying that the legislation was primarily driven by one specific person and not representative of the general popular opinion.

The model of group dynamics and process outlined by Erez and Earley (1993) captures the complex interactions taking place within such an environment. Their process model culminates in a feedback loop, which determines the success or failure of group interaction outcomes. In the specific situations presented here, the relative cultural norms currently present result in a resistance to transition away from established rules and regulations, and ultimately maintain the understood status quo. This is precisely the outcome realized in the case of the Suzanne’s Laws, where the representative authorities observed a potential liability to preserving matrimonial norms and constructed a safeguard to retaliate against it.
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For women affected by such opposition, the internal conflict develops into a myriad of contentions. One such effect is the struggle between individualist and collectivist affiliations. The Saudi woman’s quote provided in Roy (2017) reveals this exact dichotomy, beginning with “I love where I live” (para. 24), but also stating “I don’t like the contempt for women, and I want political representation” (para. 24). In Ting-Toomey’s (2015) INT assumption (4), she notes that individuals can “experience differentiation when their desired group membership identities are stigmatized” (p. 4). Drawing this categorization in line with Erez and Earley’s (1993) notion of the group’s feedback loop, the authors suggest that “[i]f the outcomes suggest a frustration of self-motives…then an individual will search for new affiliations.” (p. 154). This behavior is witnessed in many Islamic-based states, including groups such as the non-governmental organization (NGO) based out of Egypt.

Saudi women within the political sector are hopeful that their new presence in related political affairs will lead to societal advancements for women’s rights. A powerful demonstration originates from Saudi princess Reema bint Bandar al-Saud, an entrepreneur and advocate for women in the workplace. In a statement to the Arabian Business, she voiced that intricate issues concerning women’s rights are currently being addressed – a woman’s ability to drive and attend soccer matches are quick victories, but certainly not the end to the woman’s rights in campaigns, conversations, and advocacy. In addition, the first woman elected into a senior post authority and the vice-president at a General Sports Authority in Saudi stated that concerns for women’s safety such as domestic violence, career paths in the working industry, as well as building a healthier
female population are all female rights issues that are presently being discussed within the political realm (“Saudi Arabia working”, 2018).

With political advancements opening the doors for Saudi women to explore a myriad of cultural experiences, opportunities such as the exploration of the self, societal, and personal identity formation are conceivable. In a practical example, domestic violence concerns were once considered a private issue within one’s household, and that male counterparts solely controlled domestic relations within the family infrastructure. In modern society however, Saudi politicians have enacted new laws and penalties for those who inflict physical or sexual violence within a person’s home or workplace (Usher, 2013). Supporting this transition, the kingdom’s Shura Council placed the regulation to protect against abuse into effect, which subsequently enabled penalties for domestic violence crimes including time in prison and financial fines for violations (Kader, 2016). Although the male guardian system often inhibits women who are typically victims of domestic violence, activists and politicians are beginning to address the guardianship regulations, which inhibit Saudi women from seeking protection in such cases. According to Dr. Valerie Hudson, professor at Texas A&M University and the Bush School of Government, a country’s stability and peacefulness cannot be measured by its wealth, political or ethnoreligious identity, but rather “how well its women are treated” (Asquith, 2017, para. 15).

Saudi Arabian politicians with female representation are also addressing the boundaries and limitations domestic violence laws fail to address. With advancements towards physical, sexual, emotional, and psychosocial safety, Saudi women can begin to develop a political identity beyond just one of woman’s rights issues, but also to include a
personal familial identity within a safe environment. Sameera Al-Ghamdi, a social worker experienced with numerous domestic violence cases, stated, “When we are confronted with a society that assigns a certain sacred status to its culture and specific traditions, we start by demanding basic rights” (Alsharif, 2008, para. 21). Ting-Toomey’s (2015) INT cultural boundary crossing themes further support this idea by eloquently referencing how successful identity formation across all cultures and ethnicities demand security, predictability, and consistency within a group setting and on a personal level. Without the fear of abuse, and allaying concerns that domestic violence will not be restricted to an isolated family-matter, women are afforded favorable circumstances to develop their identities within an emotionally stable and healthy environment.

In addition to these political developments, other efforts have finally expunged the driving ban, allowing women to legally drive motor vehicles for the first time beginning in June 2018. Politically in alignment with Prince Mohammed’s Vision 2030, women will now have more opportunities to engage in the workforce in light of the removal of such significant transportation barriers. Although this cultural change may require some settling-time before significant societal impacts can be observed, familial dynamics, economic changes, and social implications are expected to be considerably impacted. Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal describes the driving ban as an issue of woman’s rights and “…an issue of rights similar to the one that forbade her from receiving an education or having an independent identity” (Bowerman, 2016).

From a woman’s perspective, Shuruq Sami, a handbag saleswoman in Jeddah, declared, “My life would definitely improve if I could drive. It will allow women to take care of themselves and cut costs” (Stancati & Said, 2017, para. 10). Shuruq explained that
approximately half of her salary she earned at the handbag shop was dedicated to transportation costs, including paying a shared driver to transport her to and from her place of employment (Stancati & Said, 2017). The ability to operate a vehicle enables Saudi women such as Shuruq to develop both social and economic independence within the vocational setting. Another young Saudi woman, Elham Almas, a product development manager from Dammam, shared her collective emotions upon learning about the removal of the driving-ban on women.

I was sipping tea sitting in my living room working on my open mic event, trying to make my own change here. It’s an underground thing, but hopefully it will be legal here one day. My WhatsApp suddenly went crazy. Messages all over, everywhere. The men on there were so supportive and welcoming and congratulating us. When I saw those messages, I felt weird, shocked, scared and happy — a mix of emotions. I thought it was a joke at first, a terrible one. I’ve been fighting for this, and finally it’s here. I didn’t think I’d live to see it. I honestly don’t know why I felt scared. It’s taboo, and now suddenly it’s legal. How would the country react? It’s scary; it’s a bold move. Women went to prison a few years back for this. And now look. They’re true heroes. (Mekhennet & Miranda, 2017, para. 20-21)

Women’s rights victories as expressed by Elham or personal accomplishments people aspire to achieve as described by McLeod (2013) are essential components in identity formation. With renewed physical and social accessibility into the religious public sphere, women are empowered to establish new aspirations, values, and personal
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accomplishments they might seek to achieve, all of which serve as essential components towards identity formation in spite of progressive societal changes.

**The Confluence of Religion and Identity**

An additional publication put forth by Nevo (1998) entitled *Religion and National Identity in Saudi Arabia* entails the deep association between religion and identity within Saudi Arabia. Nevo articulates this relationship as a multifaceted assembly, insomuch as supporting the very existence of the government and simultaneously driving the identities of its people. Two specific methods are cited for the development of the Muslim religion inside the country of Saudi Arabia:

(a) The resources and apparatus of the state were used to promote Islam, as in the time of the Prophet and the first four Khalifas; (b) Islam was mobilized to protect the state. Saudi Arabia is a modern manifestation of the latter. (Nevo, 1998, p. 34)

From this description, it can be understood that religion occupies of source of more importance than simply as one of many participants in the formation of identity; instead, religion contributes to the very identity of the entire nation, undergirding the entire governmental architecture.

Nevo (1998) highlights the complex nature of religion throughout the country, identifying three specific components: “the Islamic, the Arab and in the narrow, local sense, [and] the national (which still consists of traditional factors such as tribe, extended family or geographical region)” (p. 34). Not all of these components, Nevo explains, necessarily operate synchronously. In addition, the influence of each component can vary from country to country, making it much more difficult to examine each element independently from one another against a common baseline. In addition, other conflicts
can arise owing to the means of association – throughout Saudi Arabia, there is understood to exist some division between the ummah, the collective whole of Muslim believers, and the population of Saudi Arabia itself. In one description, Saudi Arabia has been described as “a state, but not a nation. Using Islam as its source of legitimacy, the nation [ummah] is more outside the state boundaries of Saudi Arabia than inside it” (Nevo, 1998, p. 35).

From this illustration, the challenges of identity association are made clear. An individual is faced with multiple demands of their loyalty, both to the state in which they reside, as well as the network of believers on which their very state is defined. This is nothing short of an arduous affair, requiring deep appreciation for the country’s roots. However, this picture is not wholly subjective; legalistic undertones are also present. As Nevo (1998) clarifies,

By definition, a non-Muslim cannot be a Saudi citizen. The idea of religious pluralism has neither meaning nor support in many segments of the population, and religious norms and practices are encouraged, promoted, and even enforced by the state. The Saudi constitution is the Quran, and the [Sharia] is the source of its laws. (p. 35)

In essence, identity is also tied on a constitutional level, requiring strict adherence to the religious sacred texts and following of their instruction. Unlike western societies where nationalism is deeply rooted in “love of society and state” (Nevo, 1998, p. 35), Saudi Arabia maintains a unique parallel of this appeal, being justified instead through its religious constitution. Nearly a century ago, the founder of Saudi Arabia declared that “Two things are essential to our State and our people…religion and the rights inherited
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from our fathers” (Nevo, 1998, p. 36). In its modern society, these principles still hold fast. This religious nationalism is a significantly foreign concept to many of those occupying western cultures and necessitates a shift in mentality to appreciate its fundamental differences.

Furthermore, the concept of a check and balance system, similar to that present in the United States, can also be observed in Saudi society. This is achieved through the mutual relationship between the ruling power and the Muslim religion itself. One scholar, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab argued that “without the coercive power of the state, religion is in danger, and on the other hand, without the [Sharia] the state becomes a tyrannical organization” (Nevo, 1998, p. 37). This alliance between religion and state has demonstrated to be a powerful ally, even overcoming that of military might. In addition, it also lays the framework of balancing principles, which stabilize the governmental system. From the perspective of identity, this provides yet another layer of intricacy to the individual.

In terms of specific doctrine, Wahhabism, named after Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, is a highly conservative and fundamentalist form of Islam practiced in some areas of the Middle East. It is understood to promote the dominance of men and the rule of Islamic territory. Unfortunately, the concept of this religious sect faces distinct challenges with respect to the Saudi government. The original conception of Wahhabism was highly political, maintaining a dual form as both a “militant reform movement and as a state religion” (Nevo, 1998, p. 40). This composition survived its inherent discrepancy in definition through the previous “amorphous, dynamic and expansionist” (Nevo, 1998, p. 40) structure of the Saudi state. However, compared to the previous century, the
modern Saudi government is significantly more established, and continually confronts these differences directly. As a result, recent changes to religious policy by Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman indicate the government’s attempt to mollify Wahhabism to a gentler, more accepting form of ideology. These include provisions to allow women the ability to secure driving licenses, enter public places once previously restricted (e.g. sport stadiums, etc.), and the further integration into Saudi industrial and commercial vocations.

The significantly conservative characteristics of this belief system have challenged the position of women throughout several decades in the country of Saudi Arabia. The default position of Wahhabism promotes the strict practices Saudi women follow, including the punctuality of prayer, specific clothing to be worn, and the subservience to their male guardians. Many of these positions have relaxed, especially in previous years, with the progressive changes implemented through the various royal decrees and Vision 2030 implementation. Nevo (1998) notes the royal family’s efforts to alleviate the harsher aspects of this ideology, as a “[means] to substitute the declining and anachronistic militant nature of Wahhabism” (p. 41). Economic stimulations and other national pressures have encouraged these developments, all of which hold large influences on the identity transformation of Saudi women (Nevo, 1998).

The danger of extremist acceptance of Wahhabism is captured in the appearance of ultra-conservatist and fundamentalist groups, which remain starkly opposed to the recent freedoms awarded to the subculture of Saudi women. Nevo (1998) describes the difficult situation encountered between state and militants, explaining:
The regime is well aware that a by-product of such a policy is the imminent emergence of fundamentalistic groups, inside and outside the Saudi establishment, who regard state religion as too lax and [endeavor] to reinstate the original, puritan spirit of Wahhabism. As noted, the monarchy, by and large, prefers to negotiate with Islamic dissidents of that sort by adopting a tough position and by force, not by reconciliation with them and making the state religion more radical. (p. 41)

The challenges of such a position are well documented by Druckman (2001) in his identity studies, nothing that the process of resolution is typically far more successful than that of settlement. In the case of resolution, the differences between two groups are mitigated and harmonized through a process of open mindedness, problem solving, and empathetic discussions of values and beliefs. The settlement negotiation process instead forces compromise, which can lead to eventual identity issues. The topic of fluid and durable identities should also be considered here, as persons subscribing to the fundamentalist often occupy the less flexible durable position. As a result, the only suitable manner for confronting such a stance may be the settlement process held by the government.

Royal decrees have also supported the effectual shift of Wahhabism to continue justification of the Saudi government. Examples include the “Provinces’ Statute” (Nevo, 1998, p. 47), which sought to integrate the various Saudi regions into a greater holistic unit, and to further consecrate the ruling power of the government. These changes also resulted in the development of the “Consultative Assembly” (Nevo, 1998, p. 47), also known as the majlis al-shura, guiding the king and serving as a royal council. It is
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intriguing to witness a legislative unit, which was originally intended to guide the kingdom and modernize the country, now also supports the right of women to serve within it – an act underscoring the very nature of unity (Melly, 2013).

**Women, Identity, and the Religious Public Sphere**

In Saudi Arabia, however, it is not sufficient to consider the sole concept of the public sphere – as Chapter Four asserts, the revised religious public sphere, coined by Hoexter et al. (2002) must instead be contemplated. While considering the developments proposed by Habermas (1962) and other philosophers, and the effects of their philosophies on the subculture of Saudi women, the religious components are so intricately connected that they cannot be overlooked during discussion. The Islamic faith constitutes the very fabric of Saudi society, guiding the governmental organization of rulers, councils, foreign relations, societal constructs, employment, and even the very apparel worn by citizens described in Chapter Two. As a result, the religious public sphere and its association with identity development is a key cornerstone of this case study, and its importance is further detailed in Chapter Six.

Hoexter et al. (2002) clarifies the importance of religion, specifying that the Sharia Law serves “not only as a practical guide encompassing the moral values and norms of the public order proper to the [ummah] but also as a symbol of cultural identity” (p. 13). The tight coupling of religion to the notion of wholesale societal characteristics is an important observation when concentrating on the micro scale of individual identities. A woman’s identity is therefore influenced far beyond primitive binary interpersonal and intrapersonal spheres; it is also affected by the religious guidelines and practices exemplified by the Prophet Muhammed’s, peace and blessings be upon him (PBUH), life.
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To ignore these associations would be a gross neglection of a significant religious, cultural, social, and personal component of any Saudi woman’s life.

A direct application emerges in Journiette’s (2014) case study, providing invaluable insight into how five Saudi Arabian women perceived their identity amidst vast social changes in the religious public sphere. For some young women, such as 20-year-old Ashra, identity formation was not necessarily associated with geographical location; instead, a person’s identity was more closely connected to an emotional response concerned with personal interests and surroundings. In alignment with Weiner’s (2000) discourse on internal thoughts and emotions discussed in Chapter Five, Ashra’s conceptualized her identity as “…what I love and what I’m interested in, not where I come from” (Journiette, 2014, p. 23). Based on this discovery, the perspective that socioreligious constructs of Saudi women in the religious public sphere are limiting self-expression no longer confine identity formation. Instead, social change has provided the opportunity for this Saudi woman to explore identity outside of predetermined gender roles previously imposed, through the aid of governmental support (Journiette, 2014).

Other interviewees (such as Ameera) expressed that her personal beliefs and choices created a simultaneous intrapersonal and interpersonal perception of self. Ameera voiced that Saudi women had limitless opportunities to establish personal identities in life due to new freedoms made available within society. Furthermore, she believed the integration of women into the religious public sphere, including women in politics, has actualized feelings of freedom to express who they are intrinsically as Saudi women. With the compelling statements “It’s because it’s my right to speak” (Journiette, 2014, p. 20) and “…because we are equal, everyone should express what they want” (Journiette,
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2014, p. 20), she offers clear indication that Saudi women have a platform within the new religious public sphere to explore and publicly express themselves in fashions previously unachievable.

Shifting social dynamics have also provided other Saudi women with insights surrounding identity formation’s inclusive yet dynamic experience. In the case of 21-year-old Saudi women Nadia, she expressed that she never held the desire to question her personal beliefs, morality, or values. However, Nadia recognized that evolution is an instinctive part of life, which can lead an individual to re-examine core ethics and beliefs. As a result, Nadia contributed unique insight wherein a newly contemporary society did not necessitate a loss of cultural heritage. Instead, she believed that multiple identities (e.g. cultural, religious, and national) could be negotiated and linked with another corresponding aspect to form a wholly unique individual.

You know, some people don’t like this. They are like feeling that they are losing their identity that their culture is vanishing. But I don’t think that, I think it’s in a good way, people are changing but in a good way—they are still holding on to their beliefs. (Journiette, 2014, p. 37)

As Druckman (2001) describes in the INT theory, identity formation is a multidimensional process in which multiple identities collectively construct the whole person. For Saudi women like Nadia, there is optimism that one’s cultural heritage can be preserved while re-evaluating other identities (Journiette, 2014).

Another example of valuable introspection is demonstrated by a 23-year old Saudi woman named Fatma. During her interview, she acknowledged that several identities comprised her perception of identity formation and that “…every single one of them
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[has] its own rights and every single one [has] a duty to do” (Journiette, 2014, p. 43). She expressed later in the interview that she needed to have control over all of her individual identities in order to fully express herself.

Fatma also believed that identity formation was shaped by the individual and people they are surrounded by. Within the religious public sphere, Fatma has publicly expressed herself through the field of culture and performing arts. Fatma explained to interviewers that though she has met resistance from society and the government when engaging directly in the public sphere, she compared herself to a “huge bomb” (Journiette, 2014, p. 44) by bravely having her name publicly associated with her artistic contributions. Solely for being female, Fatma expressed that she was threatened and chastised on multiple occasions to contribute her works anonymously for the sake of her own physical and emotional safety. Despite this controversy, Fatma argued that she sought to slowly integrate her self-expression publicly and relay the following message, especially to women:

First of all, find yourself. Lots of people don’t know who they are. Because if someone knows himself, he will know why, for what, he is here in this life, what he should do. And I believe if you know what you should do, you will do a huge favor to yourself and the society and to the religion. (Journiette, 2014, p. 44)

In short, Fatma conveyed the importance of identity formation serving a crucial function in any contributing member of society (Journiette, 2014).

While reviewing each questionnaire and personal interview, Journiette (2014) arrived at the conclusion that, from a Saudi woman’s perspective, identity formation was a dynamic and evolving process, which ultimately flourishes in the company of other
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people. The synergy between each participant’s collective identity (identity within a group) and personal identity constituted an ego identity, which could stimulate downstream societal impacts. She also determined that identity formation and negotiation was inevitable for the Saudi women interviewed, owing in part to the vastly changing societal climate in which they resided.

Another key element, which surfaced for participants, was an overall desire to serve as actively contributing members of society, who could take part in molding the future of Saudi Arabia. Across all participants, each shared the common belief that globalization had significantly affected the cultural dynamics of their respective communities. Despite the ongoing changes, each Saudi woman conveyed that self-expression was a choice, which fundamentally contributed to identity formation. Though participants demonstrated their beliefs surrounding freedom of expression in the public sphere, the more abstract notion of identity formation inside the overarching religious public sphere remains a highly complex topic.

In Nadia’s case, she directly communicated her conviction that Saudi Arabia could preserve individuals’ religious identities among more liberal societal changes. Furthermore, participants displayed identity negotiation behaviors, offering the potential for future research to indicate whether more significant identity transformations followed. According to Doumato (1992), when a person modifies their individual values, subsequent held societal traditions can become subject to change. Consequently, modulations in traditions, such as the historically symbolic figure of the Saudi woman, can effectively alter the concept of national identity.
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Journiette’s (2014) concludes her study with the determination that Saudi women will not be content to stand idly by and simply accept the society created by their forefathers. However, these women also are unwilling to surrender their traditions and sacred beliefs. Further research is necessary to understand fully how Saudi women will balance their new identity within the religious public sphere, while still upholding the traditions that make their culture incomparably unique.

Identity Through Communication in the Religious Sphere

The rise of digital communications has ushered in a new realm of context in which women can express their ideas and share their personal identity among an extensive audience online. The development of social media has given Saudi women a forum to express themselves both personally and anonymously with other members. To better understand this unfamiliar environment and its potential impacts on communication, Guta and Karolak (2015) conducted a study in which identity negotiation and formation were explored, specifically among young Saudi women expressing themselves using such communication methods. Participants revealed that in order to explore topics considered unsuitable in society, such as talking about the opposite sex, they would employ nicknames or generate multiple social media accounts in order to discuss these socially forbidden areas of interest. Beyond these findings, some responders expressed that they could also form a completely new social identity for themselves and would reveal this new identity dependent upon the audience present (Guta & Karolak, 2015). For instance, one woman divulged that she created two separate social media accounts; one designated for communication solely with her family, and the other intended for interactions with her friends.
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You know teenagers the way they speak to each other and the posts and things like that. There are certain things that I don’t want my family to see. So I have my family to be…Maybe different statuses, different biography about myself. I think it would be just different, something just for the family and something else for my friends that I would share. (Guta & Karolak, 2015, para. 30)

Women who utilize social media to construct multiple identities bypass the identity negotiation process of settlement or resolution discussed by Kressel et al. (1994) owing in part to the ability to isolate personal interests and group’s interests from one another. The anonymity of technology has created a social realm for Saudi women to embody multiple social identities used to express or even camouflage their personal beliefs. One Saudi woman expressed the difference she perceived expressing her opinions online as opposed to communicating her thoughts in a public arena.

Yes in this aspect [social media] helped, you can still express yourself. And as I said before, you can use a nickname and have more freedom to express your opinions. Indeed it is the same opinion and same personality, you won’t change your opinions or your personality, actually when you say it you express yourself more, but when you write in your name, no, you have limits, I will reach here and that is it, I can’t really cross certain boundaries. (Guta & Karolak, 2015, para. 46)

The privacy available online affords social protection for women to explore topics otherwise inhibited by cultural or societal norms. Furthermore, gender segregation boundaries are bypassed through use of social media, and thus a new social dimension between unrelated men and women has been constituted. A specific concern rose from Guta and Karolak’s (2015) study posited the risk of women becoming to be so engrossed
by their online identity that their offline identity would inevitably become distanced or isolated. McLeod (2013) discussed the topic of role confusion and how individuals must be cognizant of potential conflicts over the course of life in order to avoid uncertainty in themselves. In consideration of these challenges, the study concludes sanguinely that social media websites have effectively supplied Saudi women a platform to express themselves uninhibited and without fear of intimidation or social pressure (Guta & Karolak, 2015).

In conjunction with online communication, linguistics performs a distinctive role alongside identity formation within the religious public sphere. In particular, the employment of the Saudi Arabian vernacular serves a distinctive position in supporting the construction of a Saudi woman’s sociocultural and gender identity. To understand these impacts in more detail, several studies have been conducted by experts in the field investigating specific topics of interest. One such survey administered by Ismail (2012) explored variants of the Arab language among men and women in Saudi Arabia, and the corresponding relationship between language and identity formation across genders.

Two types of speech patterns are predominantly observed within Saudi Arabia, the most prevalent of which is Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), primarily acquired through traditional education and used in formal settings including television, religious sermons, public speeches, interviews, legal matters, and radio broadcasting. In contrast, dialectal Arabic is exercised in colloquial settings, especially among family members and informal social situations. Native Arabic dialects invoke a hierarchal status, which directly relates to one’s social status and ethnic identity within society. To investigate this, Ismail (2012) interviewed both men and women to specifically explore how
language reflected sociocultural identities among the Saudi population. Saudi women were observed to use more dialectal vernacular forms of Arabic, suggesting restricted social interactions due to gender segregation practices. Conversations with others primarily consisted of close familial networks, indicating a continuing exclusion from the public forums. In addition, cultural gender-norms continue to affect women’s social cultural practices, such as using MSA in more formal public settings. Ismail (2012) concludes the interviews with the determination that linguistics not only indicates male and female access to the public sphere, but also a person’s social reality and cultural identity within society. With the dynamic social changes that have transpired over the last several years, additional sociological research will be necessary to more thoroughly determine how communication among Saudi women has shaped their sociocultural identity within the accessible religious public sphere.

Communication centered around women’s rights has risen in popularity over the last few years and reshaped the idea of gender identity formation among women within the Kingdom. The increase in younger members of the Saudi population, social media developments, and women’s rights advocacy has challenged traditional sociocultural norms for women within the religious public sphere. In order to comprehend female gender identity formation and inclusion within the religious public sphere without neglecting recent societal transitions, focused studies such as that performed by Al-bakr, Bruce, Davidson, Schlaffer, and Kropiunigg (2017) are essential.

In this particular survey, Saudi university students were interviewed regarding their opinions on current gender roles for women. Of the 4,455 surveys distributed to four prominent Saudi universities, students responded with the following results: 75% of
women believed that social changes regarding women’s rights issues would take place within the next 5 years (in comparison to 49% of male participants), 39% of females stated that they believed women should partake in the political realm (in comparison to 15% of male participants), 56% of females strongly agreed that women should be placed in leadership positions (in comparison to 30% of male participants), 84% of women expressed tenaciousness to overcome female work related challenges (in comparison to 65% of men), 65% of women stated that they viewed the transformation of gender roles in Saudi Arabia as a personal opportunity and should be a part of a new wave of Arab modernization (in comparison to 61% of male participants), whereas only 18% of women responded that transformative gender roles in Saudi Arabia would be considered a burden to their lives (in comparison to 28% of male participants) (Al-bakr et al., 2017). Overall, the survey revealed that a majority of students regarded the transformation of gender roles moving away from traditional gender norms was a part of the modernization process of Arab countries, including approximately 73% of women and 72% of men responding that they wanted to be a part of this modernization process (Al-bakr et al., 2017). In other words, more than half of both male and female respondents believed that changing gender norms in Arab countries was a constructive and beneficial transformation for their country.

Although the responses from this survey (and others similar to it) reflect the perspectives of the young educated Saudi population, strong traditional gender roles remain heavily ingrained in society. The disparity between current culture and modernization of gender roles for women in Arab countries has left several Middle Eastern societies in a state of challenging identity negotiation. One woman from
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Morocco, whose Arab country has also undergone recent gender equality changes, offered her opinion that gender roles are,

No longer anchored in tradition, but not in modernity either. We are between the two without knowing where to place ourselves...we have not fully grasped that if we believe ourselves to be the same, equal, in everything, that this means a redistribution of [gender] roles. (Britton, 2017, para. 25-26)

Conclusion

In Saudi Arabia, the government supported Vision 2030 promotes women’s empowerment and inclusion within society through the promotion of political efforts designed to grant greater responsibility to women in the vocational, educational, political, and professional settings. Time and additional investigation will effectively reveal whether Saudi Arabian society embraces gender identity changes for women creating behavior expectations of group members as described by Swann (1987), or instead descends into calamitous role confusion. In both regards however, the INT and religious public sphere are necessary tools to evaluate these transformations and fully grasp the scope of impacts made upon Saudi women across the country. Using these constructs and the constituent components, which they are founded on, effective inquiry of the situation is made feasible.

The recent societal developments indicate positive movements in a variety of arenas within women’s rights, and new vocational opportunities offer modernized independence previously considered impossible. The interplay of analyses present in this section demonstrate both the convoluted nature of a Saudi woman’s identity, and the scale in which investigation must be performed in order to achieve a holistic approach to
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the topic. In summation, the use and refinement of such studies will serve as a necessary foundation to understanding these complex issues, and ultimately improve the manner in which women and men alike can appreciate their roles and influence within the entire country of Saudi Arabia.
Chapter Seven – Women and the Royal Decrees: A Case Study

Introduction

Political catalysts such as Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 and mandated royal decrees have promoted the country to make tremendous strides towards female inclusion, especially in the religious public sphere. The crown prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammad bin Salman, with the help of his advisors, has created several country-wide goals related to economic, societal, familial, and political advancements for the kingdom by the year 2030. Across all its various efforts, the most prominent objective of Vision 2030 is to improve the lives of women living in the country. Prince Mohammad bin Salman specifically states in this countrywide vision that building a prosperous, preferred country includes “…unlocking the talent, potential, and dedication of our young men and women” (“Vision 2030”, 2018, para. 14).

The realization that the kingdom had untapped educated resources which could benefit the economic and social infrastructure of the entire country serves as one of the key drivers for women’s rights advancements. One of the subset goals of Vision 2030 related to women’s rights and economic advancement includes an increase in women’s participation in the labor industry by an estimated 22-30% (“Vision 2030”, 2018). In pursuit of meeting this goal, additional societal barriers hindering female inclusion into the workforce are beginning to be addressed. According to Mr. Philip Alston, a voluntary expert who participates in data collection with the UN Human Rights Council, Vision 2030 is an opportunity to promote gender equality and meet the increasing demands for equal rights Saudi women have been pleading government leaders about for years.
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Vision 2030 recognizes that Saudi women represent a significant asset, which is currently under-utilized, and subsequently recognizes women’s rights aligns in the same direction. The 2012 decree enabling allowing women to work in the retail sector transformed the lives of millions of women who were finally able to access restricted employment opportunities. In a like manner, so too should the current economic transformation lift existing restrictions on women’s economic and other independence (“UN Human Rights Country Page: Saudi Arabia”, 2018, para. 10).

A Society in Flux

Research has begun to reveal the true impact Vision 2030 has implanted on the lives of females and their integration into the public sphere of society. As reported by the Global Gender Gap Report conducted in 2017, Saudi Arabia was identified to have made the largest strides for gender equality improvements over the last 10 years in comparison to other countries in the region. The General Authority for Statistics (GAS) in 2017 found that Saudi women comprise 40% of civil service employees in the public sectors of the workforce. Furthermore, the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 2017 determined that a 22% female participation rate currently exists in the workforce, in contrast to the 14% rate from 1990 (Al-Munajjed, 2018). International Women’s Day on March 8th, 2017 investigated female advancement in the labor force by observing that women now own 25,000 small to medium size companies, 86% of working women have positions in the governmental education sectors of society, 40% occupy positions in the medical field, and 50,000 women possess commercial registrations for their businesses (Jiffry, 2017). Economic advancements in alignment with Vision 2030 have not been without societal barriers for female participation in the labor force. In order to overcome these barriers,
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which restrict female participation sectors of public society, royal decrees by the Saudi crown prince were issued to continue closing the gender gap of the socioreligious public sphere.

Royal decrees have functioned as critical stepping points for female inclusion in society, much like the directives described in the Vision 2030 effort. These operations have culminated in woman’s rights advancements within a myriad of public sectors throughout society. Specific victories noted during the previous 5 years include the ability for women to attend sporting events, serve in the military, obtain legal defense against sexual harassment and abuse, engage in the labor force, and most recently, drive motor vehicles as of June 2018 (Platoff, 2018). Other notable advancements for women’s rights include female representation in legislature (especially the first female Supreme Court judge), maternity leave promotion for females in the labor force, and the ability to attend public events, such as concerts or the cinema (Pudney, 2017). Such transformations were all made possible through royal decrees and forward-thinking mentalities of those ruling the Saudi Kingdom.

The Architecture of Change

As detailed in Chapter One and Two of this dissertation, Saudi Arabia’s government consists of a monarchy predominantly ruled by familial successors of King Abdul Aziz ibn Sa’ud, the first King of Saudi governing from 1932-1953 (Ansary, 2015). The Qur’an serves as the nation’s constitution, upon which the government regulates societal order based upon the Sharia, or Islamic law. Saudi Arabia has been divided into 13 provinces, which are then governed by relatives or princes selected by the King
himself ("Government and Political Conditions", 2010). These elements collectively comprise a brief outline of the mechanisms driving the Saudi regime.

In 1992, a checks and balance system was created to promote Islamic foundations within government, which included the Basic Law of Governance (also known as the Basic Law), the Shura Consultative Council Law, and the Regional law. The Basic Law dictates that the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, or practices associated with the Prophet Muhammad, serve as the Kingdom’s constitution, both of which remain the primary sources of the government’s authority (Ansary, 2015). The Shura Council has been associated with the legislative branch of government and serves as an advisory board to the King concerning issues unique to Saudi Arabia ("Majlis Al-Shura", 2018). The council ensures that Saudi citizens have a voice with national policies and surveillance of government agencies within the kingdom (Ansary, 2015). Finally, the Regional Laws separate the country into separate regions, so citizens can maintain administrative and financial autonomy under the Islamic shari’a (Ansary, 2015).

The legislative branch, also known as the regulatory branch in Saudi government, derives its existence from the Sharia, and maintains a regulatory enforcement consisting of the King, Council of Ministers, and the Shura Council (Ansary, 2015). Legislative terms such as qanun (law) and musharr’i (legislator) are closely associated with Western statues or governmental structures – to differentiate Saudi’s legislative system’s deeply rooted ties to Islam, words such as nizam (regulation) and marsum (decree) are used instead to draw reference back to the Sharia (Nevo, 1998). Royal decrees are first drafted by the King and his council of advisors, including members of his cabinet or Shura Council (Allen & Chenoweth, 2016). Criteria for law enactment must first ensure that the
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proposed law originate from a sound basis in Sharia law, and also be approved by the king himself.

Recent royal decrees discussed in Chapter Two were instituted by King Salman, and have helped contribute to female advancement in economic, political, societal, vocational, and individual realms. The impact of Vision 2030, legally endorsed and motivated by the royal decrees, cultivates inquiries on how these profound societal changes have influenced the manner in which Saudi women reformulate their identity in the new public religious sphere. As Bundagji (2014) affirms, “Increasingly, the issue of women's participation in all levels of decision-making institutions such as legislatures, parliaments, governments, boardrooms, and C-suites is a matter of global concern” (para. 2). She further notes the important role of politics in the path forward, asserting,

Without political will, change and reform will not take place - certainly not in Saudi Arabia. In fact, the country's reform history in areas of women's empowerment is mainly credited to political will. It took a royal decree to give Saudi women the right to education decades ago and to criminalize domestic violence last year. (Bundagji, 2014, para. 7)

The social and cultural impacts of these developments is of critical importance globally and serve as the fundamental crux of this case study defending the advancement of women throughout the Kingdom.

Societal Impacts and their Philosophical Foundations

One study conducted to help answer these inquiries was performed by Journiette in 2014 and was explored in more detail in Chapters Five and Six. To summarize, Journiette's (2014) study essentially investigated the concept of identity construction and
self-expression among five young Saudi Arabian women using personal interviews and empirical data collection. Emphasis was placed upon the relationships created between the interviewee and her surrounding environment. Questions were created using the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire model to provide a framework in which to analyze the level of identity exploration and commitment to self-interpretation. Qualitative methods focused on switching between inductive and deductive research approaches with the purpose of drawing new conclusions regarding this predominantly unexplored emerging topic. Interviews were conducted in English within public sectors of society specifically designated for women for safety purposes.

Other topics discussed within each interview included the following: how others perceived their identity and self-expression, online expression, dreams or aspirations for future endeavors, gender roles, gender stereotypes, relationships between family members and friends, and self-reflection on aspects of life deemed of personal importance. Answers were then categorized as either individual identity that had been achieved, foreclosed, or in a state of moratorium or diffusion based on Marcia’s 1966 concept of identity statuses of development. In-depth analyses were also used to interpret answers and conversation provided by interviewees. In turn, anonymity was also provided for the personal safety of interviewees due to the possibility of government interference or bias surrounding any answers deemed controversial to positions held by current government officials (Journiette, 2014).

Identity construction was disclosed to be created through a complex negotiation process, owing in part to the dynamic and evolving nature of present-day society. Other findings revealed that identity formation enshrined a progressive and continuous process
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in light of the interviewees’ surrounding environment. These discoveries maintain roots in previous work conducted by psychoanalyst Erik Erikson during the 1960s. Erikson referred to the nature of one’s personal identity as the “unmistakable figure of an individual, the sum of its characteristic features and group affiliations” (Conzen, 2010, p. 391).

This term ultimately derives from Aristotle’s idea of the logical Law Of Identity, a concept based in mathematical origin to define the essence of an object. In his treatise *Metaphysics*, Aristotle differentiates between the terms of identity and oneness through the following explanation provided by Kirby (2008),

Put another way, identity is expressed in terms of a two-place predicate: \( x \) is identical to \( y \), where \( x \) might be the inventor of bifocals and \( y \) is Ben Franklin. Oneness, in contrast, is expressed in terms of a one-place predicate: \( x \) is one, or, the inventor of bifocals was one [individual]. But when Aristotle says that Socrates and Callias are one in form, as their account is one, he is making use of a two-place predicate…and if this is the case, we may understand him to be making the claim that substances of the same species are one, in the sense of being identical, whose matter is one. (p. 15)

The limitations of such a definition arise from the metaphysical frame of reference employed, which would restrict the concept of such an identity in consideration of the fluctuating changes occurring in one’s life. However, some characteristics are relatively stationary, to the point that Conzen (2010) suggests, “one recognizes…oneself and other beings that are constant in the change of time” (p. 391). Thus, a human-identity is possible, with a foundation rooted in characteristics, which are innate to any one person.
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This development is only a narrow perspective of the idea of identity, however, to which Conzen (2010) clarifies, “It makes a difference whether, as a social scientist, I examine the ‘role pattern’ of selected groups of subjects or, as a psychotherapist, put myself in the archaic fears of a psychotic patient in the face of ego loss” (p. 391). These two viewpoints constitute the external and internal definitions of one’s personality (i.e. interpersonal and intrapersonal), which Ting-Toomey discusses in great deal in her 2015 work Identity Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 2015). The ten core assumptions supporting the INT are described in complete detail in Chapter Five.

Erikson believed identity to subsist upon three key elements: “equality, continuity, and social reciprocity” (Conzen, 2010, p. 392). This is effectively composed of an “accumulated confidence that the unity and continuity seen in the eyes of others corresponds to an ability to maintain internal unity and continuity” (Erikson, 1980, p. 107). The intrapersonal component was investigated at great length by philosophers such as Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato (among others). Modern studies of identity and self-actualization focus heavily on the sociological perspective of these constructs, which emphasizes the interpersonal relationships necessary for identity formation and stabilization. These ideas are explored by social scientists such as Ting-Toomey, but find applications in works by great thinkers such as Habermas, Kant, Hegel, and Marx.

These prospects come full circle when the public sphere and religious public sphere are considered in terms of identity construction. In The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, Habermas (1962) notes that,

Women and dependents were factually and legally excluded from the political public sphere, whereas female readers as well as apprentices and servants often
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took a more active part in the literary public sphere than the owners of private property and family heads themselves. (p. 56)

Such behavior is recognized in Saudi Arabia by examining the statistics of women, which confirm approximately 60% of women are pursuing or have completed advanced education and degrees (“Economic Realities in Saudi Arabia”, 2017). The influence of the surrounding environment in this way directly affects the identity development of those participating women, who elected to seek higher education amidst vocational restrictions and political challenges. Furthermore, the scholarship acquired by this subculture also founded a direct path into the public sphere, through Kant’s conception of publicity.

The nucleus of the public sphere existed within the academic institution, but Habermas (1962) notes that the “public sphere was realized not in the republic of scholars alone, but in the public use of reason by all who were adept at it” (p. 105). To achieve this end, the idea of publicity must first be invoked, of which Habermas (1962) declares,

The public use of one’s reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men. The private use of reason, on the other hand, may often be very narrowly restrict without particularly hindering the progress of enlightenment. Each person was called to be a ‘publicist’ a scholar ‘whose writings speak to his public, the world. (p. 106)

Women in Saudi Arabia continue to succeed in this mechanism through their activity in the political realm of society. The 2013 royal decree enabling women to participate in the Majlis al-Shura supported this effort and supplies a voice for women to advance their personal rights and roles within society. This progressive integration into the Saudi
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political realm provides an arena for Habermas’s (1962) “rational-critical debate” (p. 107), and further affords women a place in the political public sphere.

**Women and Entrepreneurship in the Public Sphere**

With the integration of Saudi women working in the public sphere, the need for societal economic growth has shifted towards a liberating movement, which invites social and personal change. Alkhaled and Berglund (2018) investigated the relationship between the concepts of empowerment and emancipation by interviewing Saudi women entrepreneurs and their journey towards freedom from gender constraints. Of particular interest in this research article were the case studies, which revealed how female entrepreneurship aided in the development of identity constructs.

The qualitative dataset analyzed was collected from a longitudinal study consisting of 26 female entrepreneurs (13 from Saudi Arabia and 13 from Sweden for comparison) between the years of 2010 – 2016. Life stories surrounding entrepreneurship were collected from 13 Saudi Arabian women through observational study, face-to-face interviews, recorded interviews, phone interviews, and Skype interviews. Women were asked about their journey towards empowerment and emancipation through their business endeavors, logistical questions pertaining to how their business was established and currently operates, identification of barriers towards their entrepreneurship, strategies to overcome said barriers, and process towards inspiring other women to liberate themselves from gender norms. Insights were drawn from the collective group of 26 interviews as well as two personal narratives to provide deeper analysis of overarching themes (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018).
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Alkhaled and Berglund (2018) incorporated a four-step analysis to examine themes and patterns, which emerged in the interviews. Bilingual researchers were utilized to not only translate but also record interviews from Arabic into English. After interviews had been transcribed into English, thematic analysis techniques were adapted to evaluate both implicit and explicit examples of emancipatory actions; examples were then reviewed with literature findings. Narrative examination during this stage of analysis revealed that respondents regarded entrepreneurship as a way to “break free” from patriarchal constraints and a route to achieve freedom (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018, p. 885). Other emerging themes through narrative exploration included the following concepts: entrepreneurship provided liberation from subordination, women self-empowerment through their business’s ownership, and emancipation of self as well as for other women.

During the third stage of review, Alkhaled and Berglund (2018) focused on two individualized narratives (Rama from Saudi Arabia and Sandra from Sweden), which encapsulated the themes which emerged from the other 26 interviews. Follow up interviews were then conducted with the two women to draw deeper insight into past experiences (such as childhood and interpersonal relationships) which had an influence on their entrepreneur endeavors. The final stage of analysis involved the application juxtaposition strategies between the Swedish and Saudi narratives examined. This strategy gave way to new insights and perspectives on a cultural and individualized level. For example, gender-equality discrepancies in Saudi Arabia, despite new political movements towards female inclusion in the workplace, were highlighted by reviewing Swedish workplace gender-quality regulations. Finally, each life story was reviewed in
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the context of a journey through the three phases of subordination, empowerment, and personal emancipation (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018).

Prior to selecting the two narratives, the overarching theme of subordination emerged from the 26 interviews conducted. Women revealed that they felt “trapped” (p. 886) by familial duties derived from patriarchal family structures within their country; this in turn which added a layer of complexity to their road to entrepreneurship (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018). The following barriers identified within the workplace were also reported as factors which served to reinforce gender-constraints: limited opportunities for professional development, male-dominated businesses, exclusion from certain forms of business (in Saudi Arabia, women are excluded from working in engineering and oil companies), and exclusion from opportunities to advance their career solely based on their gender.

Upon reflection, several women from Saudi Arabia described how their personal development, educational advancement, and extensive work experience were the first steps towards overcoming subordination within the workplace. Personal conflicts between a desire to “do more” yet feeling “trapped” within gender-constraints was emphasized among interviews and throughout the two personal narratives (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018, p. 886). Women were able to move out from under their subordinate roles and into positions of self-empowerment through their entrepreneur pursuits. Saudi and Swedish women both reflected on how familial support systems, educational advancements, and entrepreneurial networks were the keys to breaking away from gender norms in the workplace. Self-employment allowed for women to feel free and create entrepreneurial identities for themselves; which later enabled them to empower other
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women through employment opportunities and sociopolitical efforts to create gender-liberating changes within their public spheres. Female entrepreneurs within both countries emphasized “giving back” or “freeing others” amongst the movement for social change for women in the workplace (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018, p. 890).

One interview with a 32-year-old Saudi woman named Rama revealed her emancipation efforts to create societal change by establishing businesses, which employ other Saudi women and enable them to have a political voice through a reputable platform. Rama also believed that sociopolitical movements, which support women in the workplace could influence the Ministry of Education to change school curriculum in favor of rearing young women towards the workforce. The in-depth personal narrative offered by Rama reveals her experience through the three stages to entrepreneurial freedom within the context of Saudi Arabian societal constraints (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018).

Rama, a 32-year-old native female Saudi citizen, began her journey towards entrepreneurship in a patriarchal household, which offered no room for dreams outside of the typical Saudi female responsibilities. At the age of 17, her desire to attend a university was rejected; she was placed into a family-arranged marriage, conceived two children, and was integrated into the role of a standard housewife. Shortly after marriage, Rama explained to her husband that she wanted to expand her knowledge outside of the household environment and advance her career in the public realm. Rama relayed in her interview that she met resistance from her husband when inquiring about business school. During this conversation, he claimed that it would be an inconvenience to take her.
In response to this challenge, Rama requested to work at a local hospital where her husband worked and reluctantly he agreed for her to apply. Rama expressed how her new job at the hospital increased her self-confidence and provided her with financial freedom. She was quickly promoted in her role and soon after was forced to decide between keeping her job or maintaining her marriage. Rama’s husband had argued that her new position was distracting her from the primary duties of a wife under Islamic law. Rama described her desire to maintain her newfound independence through the workforce, and subsequently filed for divorce.

Unfortunately for her, Rama discovered that, in retaliation, her husband refused to allow her to see her children. According to Rama, the judge, which determined the legal custody over her children “took for granted that as I work, and I work in a mixed environment, I have no right to keep my children” (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018, p. 887). The personal narrative shared by Rama illustrates concepts of subordination from a societal level within her patriarchal environment. Resistance towards aspirations of higher education, gender norms enforced within her relationships, and cultural biases held within the legal system served as barriers for Rama to achieve her goal of emancipatory entrepreneurship. Upon reflection, Rama expressed that she would dedicate her life towards proving that she could become more than a housewife, and that losing the custodial battle over her children would not be in vain.Shortly after, she moved back into her father’s home and signed up to take business administration and marketing classes at a university (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018).

Rama quickly transitioned through the phase of subordination to one of empowerment under her father’s roof. Rama expressed that her father was supportive of
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her dream to run an all-female business, which created an environment conducive to her entrepreneurial pursuits. After overcoming societal barriers, which inhibited her early business pursuits, Rama opened her own marketing business with her sister, which she could only describe the feeling as, “I’m free” (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018, p. 889).

Although Rama felt empowered by creating a successful marketing business, she recognized that her entrepreneurship would not be possible without the familial support of her father. She reflected that if she had not been under her father’s guardianship, she would have been placed under her older brother’s authority and would most likely be forced to remarry to uphold family honor. The support of Rama’s father was vital towards her transition into a position of empowerment. Rama’s successful business inspired her to establish a production company dedicated towards filming documentaries of successful female entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia. She explained her reasoning for starting this project, stating:

I want to empower Saudi women, encourage them to develop themselves, to believe in their abilities and work hard to achieve their goals, and show them that they can live their lives freely outside of the boundaries of the home. . . Truly my role is to support women in general and specifically Saudi women. . . The message I want to reach our society is that we women can do a lot of things and we are different from what other communities and countries think of us, even other Middle Eastern countries. . . The other goal is for my community’s self development. . . I want this to be in my role, developing the nation’s young women who build our country. (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018, p. 891)
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Rama’s documentaries serve to encourage other women to aspire for freedom in entrepreneurship and inspire others to reevaluate gender norms within society. From a feminist standpoint, Rama had hoped her life story would encourage other women to strive for independence without any form of dominating patriarchal presence in their lives (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018).

At the conclusion of the study, Alkhaled and Berglund (2018) draw inferences from the 26 interviews and explored emerging themes in more depth. For instance, the concept of subordination in interviews extended beyond personal constraints for several women and was viewed as a concern that needed to be addressed on a societal level; entrepreneurship was offered as one of the solutions to equalize societal gender norms and have an influence towards societal reform. Interviews revealed that this desire for societal reformation should not be held on just an individual level but should encompass others towards the transformative emancipatory process.

Once additional women have been reformed, transformation of societal structures and powers can take place with the objective of collective freedom for all. To make changes on a societal level, Saudi women revealed during their interviews that the transition to entrepreneurship required risk, vulnerability, and hope for emancipation to change their lives. Although several women expressed feeling free, or even of freeing other women, Alkhaled and Berglund (2018) explained that true societal freedoms for all women cannot take place until practices which promote empowerment follow an emancipatory approach to resolving societal limitations. In other words, empowerment solely extended through entrepreneurship is at risk for overlooking emancipatory practices of “activism, politics, social movements, artistic avenues” (p. 894), which are
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also necessary for societal change (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018). Entrepreneurship has established a platform for Saudi women to exercise their ideas for emancipatory reformation; but narratives such as Rama’s life story reveal that the process to emancipatory freedom is often complex, dynamic, and time consuming. Although entrepreneurship has provided freedom from societal norms on a vocational level, other forms of reformatory activities outside of entrepreneurship should also be considered to approach female emancipatory efforts from several distinct perspectives (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018).

This article provides context for some of the current progressive changes for Saudi Arabian women working in the public sphere. Entrepreneurial identity formation was once an idealized dream for many women and now has become a reality for several female business owners. Saudi women have revealed that entrepreneurship has now become a tool to empower others away from traditional societal norms and enables them to exercise their voices on a more public level. The vocational reformation within Saudi Arabia has subsequently promoted both economic and social growth among women, along with the re-examination of patriarchal societal norms.

**Critical Evaluation and Response**

Criticism of Saudi Arabia and its stances towards women often do not adequately consider the role of religion within the society, or do not acknowledge the current trend of improvements for women within recent decades and especially years. In comparison to some western societies, the thought of regulating one’s behavior and clothing styles can seem iconoclastic and overbearing, when this is merely an articulation of the culture’s common belief architecture. The primary drivers for the advancement of women’s rights,
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both presently and in the future, should be focused not on mere differences between countries, but instead on the individual expressions of the women residing within them and the personal liberties afforded to them.

Modification of interminable beliefs is a difficult process, especially when those with the greatest political capacity traditionally hold highly conservative viewpoints. However, Saudi Arabia has made tremendous strides to this end, which can be verified through a cursory examination of royal decrees issued within the past decade alone. A multitude of women, such as those participating in Journiette’s (2014) study, have indicated their enthusiastic outlooks in regard to their increasing freedoms and hopefulness for continuing trends in the future. The Vision 2030 plan similarly supports this progression, aiming to improve the integration of women within key vocations of society. Quite simply, it seeks to improve the overall lives of all Saudi citizens, stating, “Together we will continue building a better country, fulfilling our dream of prosperity and unlocking the talent, potential, and dedication of our young men and women” (“Vision 2030”, 2018, para. 13). The culmination of positive innovations and transformations such as these paint the picture of a country seeking constructive and valuable improvements, rather than one frozen in antecedent ideologies.

Committees such as the UN’s Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) have disparaged cultural traditions, such as that of the male guardianship system. In a recent review, the CEDAW stated it was “concerned about the persistence of the male guardianship system,” (Couprie, 2018, para. 4) and demanded “immediate abolition of this system by a Royal Decree, and to implement severe sanctions against all administrations, businesses or entities which would continue asking women for their
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guardian’s permission” (Couprie, 2018, para. 4). These comments do not consider renovations made around this topic, such as women’s rights to “launch their own businesses and benefit from (governmental) e-services without having to prove consent from a guardian” (Saudi women to start own businesses, 2018, para. 3). It also neglects a momentous recent development with the lifting of the driving ban against women. TIME magazine confirms, “Saudi women drove to work and ran errands on Sunday, relishing the freedom to move about without relying on men after the kingdom lifted the world’s last remaining ban on women driving” (Batraway, 2018, para. 1). Blanket statements without consideration of recent developments and overall trends do not accurately reflect the conditions of the country, and also ignore the voice of its own people. While Saudi Arabia still has a long way to go, with respect to its civic policies towards women from even 30 years ago has immense progress forward and continues to do so to this day.

Conclusion

Saudi Arabia is a society filled with rich cultural history and a unique position within the global climate. With the advent of recent economic developments, challenging foreign policies, and new technological innovations, the topic of equality and advocation for those in less favorable positions has become a topic of greater and greater importance. In the last several years (and decades), a variety of social, political, and cultural changes have emerged in Saudi society, which have refined and expanded the roles of Saudi woman within their individual communities. The Saudi government has defended these advancements, issuing royal decrees and unveiling countrywide programs to ultimately improve the lives and well-being of all its people. Women including those in Journiette’s (2014) study provide concrete evidence of these changes on an individual scale and serve
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to refute claims from other groups declaring Saudi Arabia to be suppressing its citizens. These changes have consequential impacts across all spheres of society, and unequivocally place women within new roles of their society’s religious public sphere, all the while fundamentally reshaping their identities and what it means to be a Saudi woman.
Chapter Eight – Conclusion and Future Work

This dissertation seeks to illuminate the dramatic impacts of the Saudi Arabian royal decrees on the lives of its female subculture through the lens of the Identity Negotiation Theory (INT) and philosophical constructs such as the public sphere. The complex essence of the role religion plays within the Saudi society results in an insufficiency of Habermas’s original construction of the public sphere, and therefore gives rise instead to a new abstract concept: the religious public sphere. Together with the INT, these two unique and compelling tools are invaluable in examining both the lives of many individual women and collective subculture as a composite whole.

The first chapter reviewed the Saudi landscape through its historical, cultural, and economical constituents, supplying the reader with a thorough background of the country before tackling more sophisticated topics. The significance of the project was also detailed, describing the motivation behind many of the country’s changes as well as the previous conditions women had to contend with in the various employment sectors. Economists wholeheartedly agreed; for Saudi Arabia to continue as a strong economic presence in both the Middle East and global landscapes, women must be encouraged in more prominent vocational roles (Breemer, 2017).

The second chapter segued into the specific relationships between women and their respective environments – vocational, cultural, and familial. Indeed, women are the literal backbone of the Saudi society, serving critical roles in each of these arenas, and proclaimed as “equal to, or more than” (Al-Shetaiwi, 2002, p. 11) even the man’s own responsibilities. Women were also described as being highly educated, with a huge percentage of their population receiving advanced educational degrees and similar
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pursuits. With crucial roles and significant potential to contribute much more than their current society was allowing, this chapter set the scene for the subsequent royal decrees to follow. These decrees would equip women with a wide range of new capabilities, including political roles, vocational opportunities, and even transportational means such as the ability to drive their own vehicles (DeYoung, 2017). In addition, the country’s declaration of the Vision 2030 plan continues to accent the transition into a more accepting culture, one highlighting the specific strengths and assets of its female citizens rather than their relegation to a strict subset of physical capabilities.

Chapter three described a core philosophical element of the dissertation, which consisted of Habermas’s public sphere. In this abstract construct, the public and private members of society are connected in a unique environment allowing them to interact. This space was not intended to be a physical location, but rather existed in the environments of coffee houses, salons, and other meeting places where rational-critical conversations could take place. Originally separated almost exclusively, the public and private groups eventually integrated through the enlarging audience of the press and developments such as the literary public sphere. Combined with related elements such as Hegel’s civil society and Hauser’s vernacular voices, the public sphere offers a foundational for additional topics to come, particularly the religious public sphere in chapter four (Habermas, 1962).

Chapter four concentrated on the refinement of Habermas’s (1962) public sphere explored in chapter three into the more applicable religious public sphere. Kant, who served as a primary influence for Habermas’s work, did not consider religion in his development of the public, nor did his predecessor when compiling The Structural
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*Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). As a result, the application of these concepts to Muslim-based countries was missing a critical component and required a renovation of the theory to be pragmatic. Hoexter et al. (2002) embraced this challenge, creating the work entitled *The public sphere in Muslim societies*, which served as a valuable resource in this chapter’s developments. It is interesting to note that later in Habermas’s life, an additional work was produced with the title *Habermas and Religion* (Habermas, 2013). Unlike *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Habermas, 1962), this text affirms the importance of religion and even highlights its influence in critical thought (Dobbelaere, 2004). Habermas argues for the importance of religious consideration even in secular society and highlights the potential value it brings through ethical and moral principles. He also discloses the societal benefits from serious examination and analysis of religious elements and submits that a public sphere without religion is not only disadvantaged, but nearly an impractical construct in modern society.

Chapter five momentarily digressed from the philosophical discourse of the previous two chapters, and engaged the more personal INT. Much like the religious public sphere, the INT is another invaluable mechanism which is employed to evaluate the changing conditions of Saudi Arabia. Interpersonal and intrapersonal behaviors and relationships were discussed, revealing the complicated processes of negotiation in which both an individual and a group develop an identity. The INT itself subsists of ten essential assumptions, which describe group membership dynamics, individual identity development, inter- and intrapersonal communication, and the overarching identity-negotiation process. This framework can be applied to a wide array of women, offering
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additional insights to their lives, perceptions of their environments, and the impact of changes occurring around them (Ting-Toomey, 2015).

Chapter six finalized the respective developments of the religious public sphere in chapter four and the INT in chapter five and combined them together to more effectively analyze recent developments across Saudi Arabia. The rationale for doing so was motivated by authors such as Druckman (2001) who emphasized the multidimensional nature of an individual’s identity, thereby requiring a multifarious approach to sufficiently address its many intricacies. In a society with rapidly evolving dynamics, the subject of identity holds interest of urgently important appeal. Women who only a decade before were strictly limited to specific occupations and allowable public spaces are now able to participate in legislation, hold employment in public and familial spaces, and even manage their own transportation without supervision. These developments, while encouraging, possess tremendous influence in the identity formation of those affected by them. Many of these topics are explored through socioreligious perspectives, in which women’s vocational, political, and religious perspectives can be considered simultaneously. The INT is employed to address the various interactions with identity development, while the religious public sphere provides the context in which these changes are occurring. The use of these tools together demonstrated a novel approach to study women in this situation and articulated the cornerstone in which this dissertation resides upon.

Chapter seven engaged each of the previous chapters into a full-fledged case study, determining the scope and overall impact of the enacted royal decrees on the individual lives of Saudi women. Philosophical foundations were considered, along with
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the unique intersection of tools described in chapter six to effectively consider the whole of Saudi Arabian society. A specific study by Journiette (2014) was reviewed and served to reveal insights into identity developments and considerations of the current political climate and outlook on future advancements to come. The study results were cross-examined against both the INT and religious public sphere and utilized to conclude the continuous improvement of women’s rights and liberties within the country of Saudi Arabia.

**Significance and Directions for Future Work**

The most significant potential for future work could arise specifically from individual case studies and surveys distributed to women across Saudi Arabia over a specified period of time (ensuring a longitudinal dimension). The longitudinal aspect to qualitative research studies has the benefit of increasing the validity of such a study by confirming the generalized locus of results over a chronological trend. Research regarding Saudi Arabian women remains sparse, but with the dynamic nature of the modern culture offered to its citizens, longitudinal research can be utilized to better understand how Saudi females perceive themselves amongst the current trending cultural changes. Although limited research projects deviate from structured interviews, consideration for unstructured interviews should be contemplated in longitudinal case studies so respondents can lead conversation to individualized ideas of importance relative to the season of life respondents currently are in. Furthermore, longitudinal studies, which follow Saudi women, can determine conceptual trends and patterns unavailable through singular data collection.
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As indicated in previous chapters, research pertaining Saudi Arabian subculture has predominately focused on male perspectives and accomplishments. With the new voice Saudi women have obtained; the transformative process involving female empowerment must be analyzed to fully grasp the developmental growth within this subculture. Studies such as those conducted by Journiette (2014) revealed a wealth of information from various responders and have the potential to yield convincing evidence for internal changes occurring across the country. A more focused study, such as one of women specifically involved in political vocations, could inform even more insightful details surrounding women’s involvement and roles within the country, as well as their individual perspectives on such careers.

Studies involving personal interviews typically require substantially more effort to perform but possess immense potential to reveal insights among responders. Given adequate resources and time, interviews could be transcribed into written words, which can then be analyzed further. An expansive array of opportunities is available for such analysis, including but not limited to: description and conceptualization studies, substantive and formal theorization, and more fundamental theory testing. Recorded data can also be described categorically to produce a multitude of identifiers, ranging from causes, hierarchies, and contexts, to consequences, contingencies, and covariances. The quality and meaningfulness of such a study is inherently dependent upon the qualitative analysis performed and the data quality itself, but with a strongly coded foundation, pool of respondents, and motivated analyst, could serve to introduce compelling revelations in the complex and dynamic environment of the Saudi Arabian female subculture.
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Focus groups also provide an additional opportunity to benefit from investigation of women’s ideas surrounding current events. Subcultural group dynamics can provide in-depth perceptions, insights, feelings, and opinions among Saudi women in a unique setting, which can reveal observations not discovered in previous one-on-one interviews. Group interviews also possess the ability to uncover understanding into the specific relationships participants have with one another, which would be especially compelling in light of the recent changes undergone within the country. At this point in time, no focused literature currently exists documenting Saudi women’s opinions of other Saudi women with respect to their combined changes in vocational and identity transformations.

The integration of technology into Saudi Arabian society has served as an essential tool for both research and a preliminary understanding into the developments of the lives of Saudi women. Progressive research in this field could flourish especially from investigating the social dynamics, which are present in the cybersphere of social media, by both Saudi men and women. Online surveys could potentially benefit from the anonymity they provide to respondents, including participants who may be less willing to show up in a physical interview due to personal comfort or other constraints.

Attitudes pertaining to recent societal advancements for women, such as the ability to drive and hold dominant political positions, could also be studied to comprehend the rapidly changing subculture. Owing in part to the accelerated growth of female achievements in the sociopolitical arena, specific studies in this area have been largely nonexistent. Research efforts, such as those previously described, supply an area devoid of examination, offering valuable benefit to both the entire country of Saudi
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Arabia and its female constituents. Revelations from such studies could also assist the country with its continuing future goals, such as defining practical objectives for Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 plan.

A final area of new research could be conducted around the political polarization of guardianship laws and female independence. In the present day, Saudi women are in possession of many new freedoms once previously restricted, as described in many of the chapters within this document. Several research articles exist describing frustration with the existing guardianship laws, which also hold an impact on the development of women’s identity formation. This particular subject could benefit immensely from additional research and enlightenment and could even serve to improve the current relationships that exist. Related research into social media movements such as the #EndMaleGuardianship movement could illuminate future implications for Saudi women within a shifting cultural society (Norris, 2016).
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