

Transition Experiences of Middle Eastern Graduates in U.S. Universities

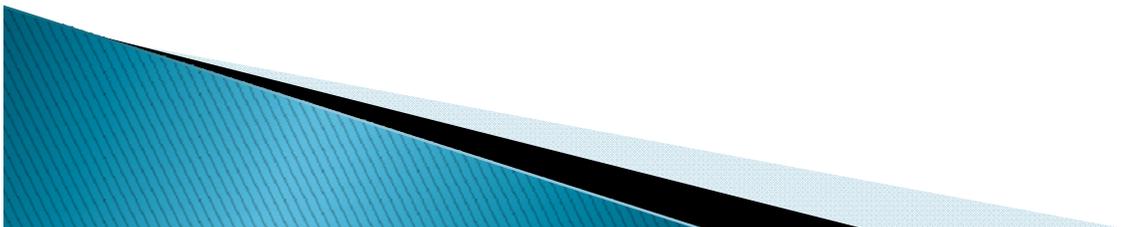
Presented by Fulya A. Marsh
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Aims

- ▶ 1. Give background information on international students
- ▶ 2. Present The Comprehensive Transition Model used to explore the transition experiences of ME graduate students.
- ▶ 3. Present results of Phenomenological Study
- ▶ 4. Discuss future recommendations and conclusions

Background information

- ▶ Number of international students:
 - Peaked in 2002/03: 586,323
 - Dropped to an all time low in 2005/06: 564,766
 - Gradual increase in 2006 / 07 : 582, 984



Current Situation of International Students

During 2009 / 10: # of international students: rose to an all-time high of 690, 923

Contributed approximately \$18.78 billion

- Middle Eastern students: 33,797
- 15, 200: undergraduates
- 12, 302: graduates
- CGS: Turkey and Cyprus: approximately 6,900
- Approximately 19,200 Middle Eastern Graduate students were studying in the U.S.

Purpose

- ▶ Explore and describe the transition experiences of Middle Eastern graduate students studying at U.S. universities



The Comprehensive Transition Model

- ▶ Applies Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) 4 S Transition Model to:
 - Taylor's *Cultural Learning Model* (1994)
 - Furnham and Bochner's *Social Skills and Culture Learning Model* (1986).

BACKGROUND THEORY

<p>Taylor, (1994)</p> <p>Learning to Become Interculturally Competent Model</p>	<p>Participants have prior experience of inter-cultural experiences that influence the learning process, dissonance between the home and host cultures resulting in stress and increased emotions create cultural disequilibrium, they can be non-reflective or reflective while orienting themselves in the new culture. They make use of behavioral learning strategies, if they actively negotiate intercultural understanding then evolving intercultural identity has taken place.</p>
<p>Furnham & Bochner (1986)</p> <p>Social Skills and Culture Learning Model</p>	<p>Social adjustment challenges are a result of students not knowing the appropriate skills and knowledge needed to function in the host culture</p>
<p>Schlossberg, 1995</p> <p>4 S Transition Theory</p>	<p>Focuses on how the individual describes the experience of transition.</p> <p>A transition “describes any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles”</p>

Transition Process

**Schlossberg
(1998)**

“Moving Out”

What comes next?

*Disengagement from
roles, relationships,
routines, assumptions*

“Moving In”

*New Roles,
Relationships,
Routines
Assumptions,*

“Moving Through”

Did I do the right thing?

*Groping for new: Roles,
Relationships, Routines,
Assumptions.*

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

**Schlossberg
(1998)**

Situation

*What set it off?
How does it
relate to one's
social clock?
What aspects
can be
controlled?*

Self

*What personal and
demographic
characteristics does
the person have?

What are his
psychological
resources?*

Support

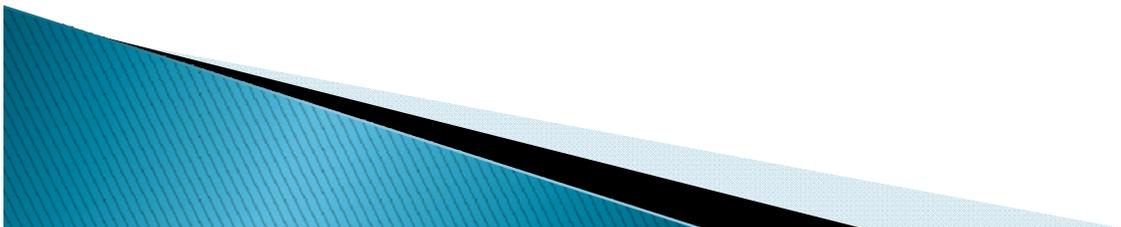
*What type of
support does he
have?*

Strategy

*What coping
strategies does
he use?*

Research Question

- ▶ What are the initial transition experiences of Middle Eastern graduate students studying at a University in the U.S.?



RESEARCH DESIGN

- Employed a phenomenological design
- Told Middle Eastern Graduate Students stories to make sense of their lived experiences.
- Collected data from:
 - 3 Face-to-face, in-depth, interviews lasting 60 – 90 min.
 - Field notes
- Member checks enhanced the credibility of transcripts and analyses
- Three (3) iteration code mapping process
 - Themes developed
- Purposive sampling

Participant	Gender	Age	Country	Been here for	Degree	Major	Marital status	Previous job experience	Work here
Belal	Male	23	Iraq	1 – 6 Months	MA	Engineering	Single	Yes	No
Diba	Female	24	Turkey	1 - 6 Months	MA	Engineering	Married	Yes	Yes
Esso	Female	25	Turkey	1 - 6 Months	MA	Statistics	Married	No	No
Khaled	Male	29	Kuwait	18 - 24 months	PhD	Design	Married	Yes	Yes
Leo	Male	33	Lebanon	1 - 6 Months	MA	Masters in Fine Arts	In a relationship	No	Yes
Mehmet	Male	28	Palestine	18 - 24 months	PhD	Computer Science	In a relationship	No	Yes
Serdar	Male	25	Iraq	1 – 6 Months	MA	Engineering	Single	Yes	No
Zeynep	Female	30	Iran	1 - 6 Months	MA	Masters in Fine Arts	Married	Yes	Yes

Moving Out

Moving In

Situation

- ▶ Family dependant
- ▶ Educational situation very different from U.S.
- ▶ Social life very active
- ▶ Had previous job experience but...

- ▶ Positive first impressions
- ▶ Unaware of U.S. education system
- ▶ Role change
- ▶ Culture-shock
- ▶ Feeling isolated.

Self

- ▶ Determined ,
- ▶ family reliant,
- ▶ dissatisfied

- ▶ Self-reliant,
- ▶ adaptable,
- ▶ culture- shocked,
- ▶ intimidated.

Strategy

- ▶ Get foreign higher education, enroll in “good” university

- ▶ Observe then act, be reflective, consult counselors,

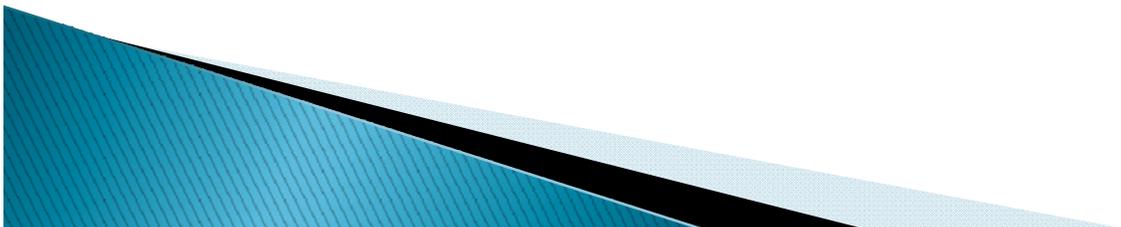
Support

- ▶ Family, friends, government officials: financial support

- ▶ Cohort members, Professors, administrative staff, people from their country

Family dependant

- ▶ *I come from a culture where people, where you never leave your family. Your family never leaves you, you're never asked to leave the house. (Leo, 33)*
- ▶ *like a prince [or princess] (Serdar, 25)*



Educational system back home

- ▶ *They divide the study [into] two semesters... In the first semester we take ... six topics, and three of these topics [would change] in the second semester... And there is a midterm exam and a final exam, and the final grades will depend on the midterm and the final exam. Like 50% for the midterm and 50% for the final exam. The [passing grade] in my country is 50%. This is the main difference...*
- ▶ *... the courses are already selected by the Administration of the University. It is not selected by the students. (Serdar, 25)*

Social Life Back Home

- ▶ *Mehmet said socializing is “one of the major [events] back home.” (Mehmet, 28)*
- ▶ *I didn't go outside, just once a week, to theatres or to get something for the house. I didn't have any job, friends. (Esso, 25)*
- ▶ *“What I am, they don't like and they don't approve of. I cannot be what they want me to be.” (Zeynep, 30)*

Previous Job Experience

- *It's like, a lot of things need to be changed from the way that I see, I tried to change what I can, but since I am only BSc [holder], there's [people with] Masters and Ph.D.s so nobody hears me, nobody listens to me. That's the problem that I faced. (Belal, 23)*
- *First they didn't give me job right away. And I said I can work like three days without money, just for learning. (Diba, 24)*



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Self

- *[My father] was very proud. Even my mother, I mean, "I'm gonna be a Doctor." That was another motivation for me, to make them proud. (Khaled, 29)*
- *This is my destiny. (Esso, 25)*
- *[Everyone's wish was] to leave, and get a better education, or just leave, period. (Mehmet, 28)*
- *I always used to think that going out of [my country] will help me to grow, and growing my profession, when I come back to [my country], I would have better opportunities. (Zeynep, 30)*

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Strategy

- *People, think and pay more attention to those studied out of [my country]. They know them more educated than those studied in [my country]. (Zeynep, 30)*
- *My TOEFL exam was not very good, I studied almost one year to get a good grade but I couldn't. I just got 69 in the exam. I applied to many universities, but they didn't accept me because my TOEFL score is low. (Esso, 25)*
- *I think [this university is] **good** because I got the research assistantship position. If I applied to like **very good** university, I wouldn't be able to [get an assistantship] because the competition is at a very high level. (Diba, 24)*

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Support

- ▶ My mother and father was very happy for me to go to the U.S. to get my MA or Ph.D.
- ▶ some of people were like so happy for me. People from the university they were so proud of me (Leo, 22)
- ▶ [My government scholarship] is a contract. I have to go back and work. So it's like a job position. They offered me a position with the condition that I got a PhD. (Khaled, 29)

Successes & Challenges

- ▶ *It was late at night, it was very dark and I just could not believe that I'm going to get in the taxi and I'm leaving, leaving all these people behind me... It's hard to think, all of a sudden, all these years I've been with these people and I'm getting in this car and I'm leaving...It's not much as you are worried about yourself, you're worried about them you think, "Are they going to be alright without me?" (Mehmet, 28)*
- ▶ *The last week was the hardest week for me. Because during this last week I received my passport, my tickets, and all these things and they told me that I [had] to leave in one week. It was so fast, nobody expected that. (Belal, 23)*

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Situation (in the U.S.)

- ▶ *“Oh, wow! There are streets in the university too, cars and parking lots and people on bikes.” (Mehmet, 29)*
- ▶ *The main problem is that the [education] system is totally different here. (Belal, 23)*
- ▶ *missed the orientation and thinks it’s “kind of disadvantage” (Diba, 24)*
- ▶ *It's more like being in the moon. It's more like an abandoned town. No one knows you no one's talking to you (Mehmet, 29)*

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Self

- ▶ *I never [ask] someone for help... It's not easy to ask [for] help from someone. (Belal, 23)*
- ▶ *I[was] looking forward to work with one professor, this specific professor that interviewed me and I am here because of him. He left. He's a Yale graduate, and I ... (Leo, 33)*
- ▶ *Even though I felt a “little bit upset” at first, university was my “last chance so [I thought I had] to obey their plan” (Esso, 25).*

Self (Culture Shock)

- ▶ *I was fearful of the culture and the people around. I didn't know how to approach people. (Mehmet, 29)*
- ▶ *I was intimidated... I was scared (laughs); I saw [the professors] you know, different people, different backgrounds... They sounded very challenging to me, impressing them, [would be more difficult]. (Khaled, 29)*
- ▶ *[When I first came here] I was more free and tried to be what I am, and try to experience things I never would have experienced when I was in [my country]. And so I was like a "wild" person (laughs) trying to experience everything I couldn't experience in [my own country]. (Zeynep, 30)*

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- ▶ *Like when I [took] a class for the [first] time, I didn't listen to the professor, my first lecture. I just **looked around** the place. Because I feel everything is strange, even the chair that I was sitting on. Everything is new. (Belal, 23)*
- ▶ *It was too much for me, the experience here, suddenly coming from [my country] to here, everything is different, I have anxiety, I used to [take] pills, I used to **go to the counselors** and someone was helping me, you know, there were lots of things out of my control. It was too much for me. (Zeynep, 30)*

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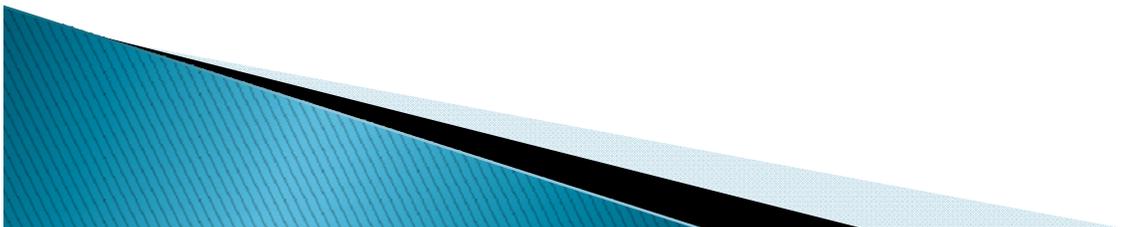
- ▶ *My advisor helped me with my visa and all the other stuff. He really helped me very much. He is a very nice person I like him. Now he is like a "**father**" figure for me. I really feel he is a good teacher and a good person. (Zeynep, 30)*
- ▶ *Everything was set up before we came as our sponsors had contacted the **international center** to arrange everything. (Serdar, 25)*
- ▶ ***Students from our country** took us around "in the car and we just go around town and saw everything." (Serdar, 25)*

Challenges

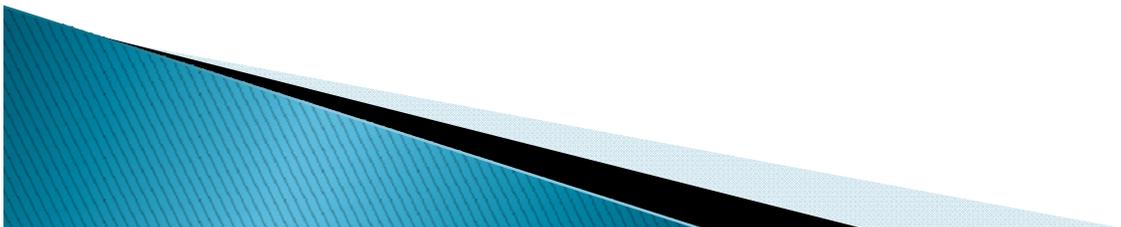
- ▶ *the environment is different, the food is different, and the people are different, place different. I mean everything [seemed] different at the same time. (Belal, 23)*
- ▶ *It wasn't easy for me in my first year, you know, moving away to a new place, nobody around. (Khaled, 29)*

Discussion

- ▶ coming from a culture that was very family-oriented, where respect, abidance, and honor were key elements – **include in curriculum**
- ▶ were older / had not experienced having to take on a lot of responsibility, individuality, or independence / were eager to take advantage of their new found freedom – **initiate a buddy system**



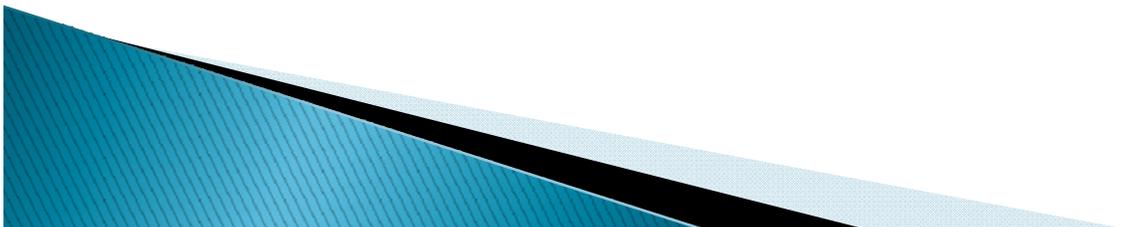
- ▶ Came from a very different education system – **provide more information re: passing scores, selecting courses, interacting with professors etc.**
- ▶ Had limited previous job experiences – **training on time management, conflict resolution,**
- ▶ Preferred to seek support from people from their own country – **create a critical mass of highly visible supportive people from their country.**



- ▶ initially experienced culture shock from misunderstanding or being unaware of the cultural issues – **include cultural training**
- ▶ felt intimidated and scared by Professors, as they had such high regards towards all of them – **knowing a little about students before they meet them, using their names etc. help ease student's anxiety.**
- ▶ mid-year enrollees needed more support – **provide orientation sessions**

Limitations of the Study

- ▶ Amount of time to find volunteers
- ▶ Limited sample set (8 ME graduate students from a Mid-western research intensive university)

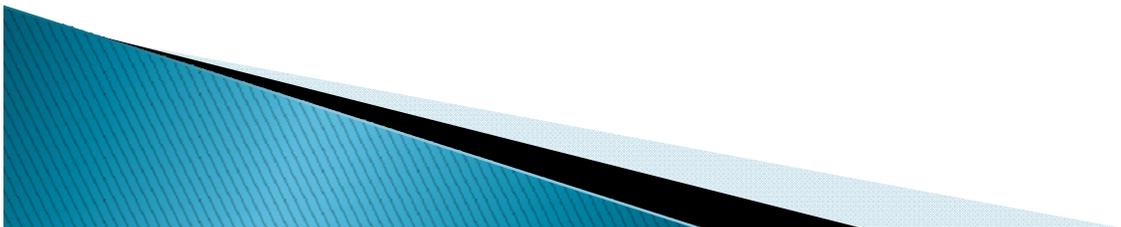


Implications for Practice

- ▶ 1. better understand the experiences,
- ▶ 2. improve recruiting, orientation, and the graduate student experience
- ▶ 3. Create comprehensive orientation programs
 - ▶ a. incorporate cultural seminars
- ▶ 4.. provide opportunities to observe classes and see how students and professors interact.

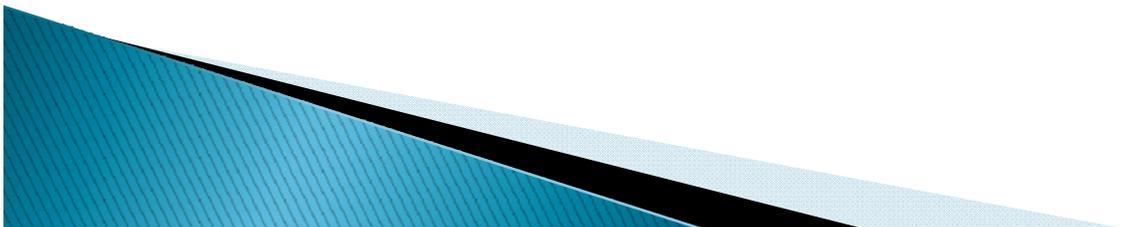
Implications for Further Research

1. Conduct additional interviews
2. Focus on one particular department
3. Study across institution types
4. The transition experiences among married and single Middle Eastern graduate students can also be investigated.



Questions?

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