
Ten Years Post 9/11: Using face-Negotiation and co-cultural theory to explore the experiences of a cohort of veiled and un-veiled Middle Eastern Muslim Women in a mid-size urban city

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Abstract

The main objective of this study is to explore the use of face- negotiation and co-cultural theories in establishing how veiled and un-veiled female Muslim college students communicate ten years after 9/11. In this case, this study wants to explore and understand the different ways through which female Muslims negotiate their lives in American society. This is because there may be a lot of negative perceptions about Muslims as they are considered as terrorists who caused a lot of losses of life and properties on September 11, 2001. In this respect, therefore, this study seeks to understand the communication skills used by Middle-Eastern female Muslims as subordinates in a dominant societal structure. The analysis of communication interactions involved in this study takes two approaches: co-cultural communication theory and negotiation communication theory. There is much hope in finding out how female Muslims, despite the fact that they are perceived negatively and as belonging to a terror group, are able to communicate as subordinates in a dominant societal structure. Conducting a study in the United States of America is very good, and it gives hope of accurate and relevant information as this country is very prone to terrorist attacks. In most cases, these interactions occur in their every day lives and at schools. In education institutions, students come from different social, cultural, and religious backgrounds, and hence, the rate of intercultural interaction is very high. Additionally, in the American society, people communicate differently from different cultural backgrounds, and hence, female Muslims usually face challenges in interacting with their fellow society members. It should be noted that inter-cultural communication occurs between members of

different cultural groups. In this case, community members achieve mutual understanding and establish a reciprocal communication or relationship as a result of their identity orientation.

Keywords: face-Negotiation, co-cultural theory, veiled, un-veiled Muslim Women, USA.

1. Introduction and Theoretical Framework

To explore how veiled and un-veiled middle-eastern Muslim female students communicate in post September 11 American society, the research uses the co-cultural theory and the face negotiation theory. Being intercultural communication theories, co-cultural and face-negotiation theory explain why certain cognitions, behaviors, and emotions occur in some intercultural situations and under what conditions.

Co-Cultural Theory

Co-cultural theory pertains to interactions between and among members of underrepresented groups (e.g. women, children, non-heterosexuals, and indigenous people, among others) in a dominant society (Orbe & Spellers, 2005). It tackles the importance of social interaction in empowering the marginalized. In the context of this study, Muslim women are underrepresented in the United States and that communication affects their culture and their power in society.

Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003) defined co-cultural theory as a framework designed to raise awareness about how members of underrepresented groups communicate with others. In addition, it explains how communities communicate their cultures and power in various ways. For instance, a study involving African American women used co-cultural analysis to show how colored professional women in the US negotiate their aesthetic representation in an American dominated culture.

Orbe (1998, cited in Orbe & Spellers, 2005) further explained that situational circumstances affect the way co-cultural group members interact with others. They often have “communication orientations” that are influenced by their “preferred outcomes and communication approaches” (Orbe, 1998b, p.19, as cited in Orbe & Spellers, 2005).

Co-cultural orientations are specific attitudes or viewpoints of marginalized individuals or underrepresented cultural group concerning their daily interactions. These are primarily composed of “preferred outcomes” and “communication approaches.” The former could either be assimilation, accommodation, or separation, while the latter could either be nonassertive (non-confrontational), assertive (self-enhancing), or aggressive (controlling) (Wilson, Hantz & Hanna, 1995, as cited in Orbe & Spellers, 2005). One or more orientations may be assumed by these marginalized cultural group members during their interactions with others. They attempt to assimilate themselves with the dominant cultural groups and they use different orientations when they communicate their cultures (Orbe & Spellers, 2005). Table 1 provides an overview of co-cultural communication orientations.

Table 1. Different Types of Co-cultural Communication Orientations*

		Preferred Outcome		
		Separation	Accommodation	Assimilation
Communication Approach	Nonassertive	Nonassertive Separation Orientation	Nonassertive Accommodation Orientation	Nonassertive Assimilation Orientation
	Assertive	Assertive Separation Orientation	Assertive Accommodation Orientation	Assertive Assimilation Orientation
	Aggressive	Aggressive Separation Orientation	Aggressive Accommodation Orientation	Aggressive Assimilation Orientation

*Source: Orbe & Spellers, 2005, p. 180.

Aside from co-cultural orientations, however, there are still other factors to consider, such as (1) field of experience, (2) perceived costs and rewards, (3) capability, and (4) situational context. Based on these attributes, Orbe and Spellers (2005) identified 26 co-cultural practices adopted by the marginalized whenever they interact with dominant group members. Table 2 presents said co-cultural practices based on their communication approach (Orbe & Spellers, 2005).

Table 2. Communication Approaches and Co-cultural Practices of Underrepresented Groups

Nonassertive Assimilation (Co-cultural members adopt restraint when dealing with members of the dominant group)			
<i>Emphasizing commonalities – focus on similarities rather than differences</i>	<i>Developing positive face – shows graciousness when communicating</i>	<i>Censoring self – choosing to keep mum amidst insults from dominant members</i>	<i>Averting controversy – changing the subject of communication</i>
Assertive Assimilation (Co-cultural members try to fit into dominant society by downplaying co-cultural differences)			

<i>Extensive preparation</i> – taking time to plan before interacting with dominant group	<i>Overcompensating</i> – wanting to gain status or privilege to avoid discrimination	<i>Manipulating stereotypes</i> – accepting beliefs about others for one’s personal gain	<i>Bargaining</i> – agreement with dominant group to set aside co-cultural differences
Aggressive Assimilation (Co-cultural members doggedly pursue integration into the dominant group)			
<i>Dissociating</i> – self-detachment from one’s learned cultural behaviors	<i>Mirroring</i> – adopting dominant group’s traits to hide one’s identity	<i>Strategic distancing</i> – not joining other co-cultural group members	<i>Ridiculing self</i> – engaging in negative talks regarding co-cultural group members
Nonassertive Accommodation (Co-cultural members use non-confrontational means to make dominant group change its treatment of minorities)			
<i>Increasing visibility</i> – sustaining a co-cultural presence in the dominant group		<i>Dispelling stereotypes</i> – realizing the myths about group traits and behaviors	
Assertive Accommodation (Co-cultural members work with other co-cultural members and with those who are part of the dominant group)			
<i>Communicating self</i> – interacting with the dominant group without pretensions	<i>Intragroup networking</i> – spending time with fellow co-cultural members	<i>Utilizing liaisons</i> – knowing and dealing with helpful and trustworthy dominant group members	<i>Educating others</i> – raising the dominant group’s awareness of co-cultural norms and values
Aggressive Accommodation (Co-cultural members want to become part of the dominant group by using confrontational and authoritative means.)			
<i>Confronting</i> – self-assertion regardless if behavior violates other people’s rights		<i>Gaining advantage</i> – capitalizing on co-cultural oppression to provoke the dominant group	
Nonassertive Separation (Co-cultural members either physically avoid or use subtle cues when dealing with members of the dominant group.)			
<i>Avoiding</i> – exerting conscious effort not to interact with dominant group members		<i>Maintaining barriers</i> – imposing psychological and verbal distance from members of the dominant group	
Assertive Separation (Co-cultural members consciously make efforts to build and promote only co-cultural structures.)			

<i>Exemplifying strength</i> – recognizing co-cultural achievements and contributions to society	<i>Embracing stereotypes</i> – creating a good co-cultural self-concept in view of dominant group’s perspectives
Aggressive Separation (Co-cultural members engage in verbal attacks and misdeeds to disenfranchise dominant group members.)	
<i>Attacking</i> – deliberately hurting the self concept of members of the dominant group	<i>Sabotaging others</i> – deterring dominant group members from enjoying their privilege(s)

*Source: Orbe & Spellers, 2005, pp. 176-177.

Co-cultural theory has a number of assumptions. Firstly, it recognizes the existence of a hierarchy of power in society wherein some groups have greater power accessibility than others (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). In the US, the dominant American cultures have more power accessibility than Muslims and hence it may be very difficult for Muslims to communicate their cultures especially post-9/11.

Secondly, co-cultural theory assumes that dominant groups occupy a higher social and influential position than others (Orbe & Spellers, 2005). This shows that female Muslims are discriminated against in a number of ways because they occupy lower power positions.

Co-cultural theory then is appropriate for this research, as it shows how Muslim women assimilate themselves in a discriminating American society and how they access opportunities and advance in a biased playing field. The said theory also establishes the effects of dominant power on non-dominant groups. In this case, the societal structures of dominant groups work directly and indirectly against underrepresented groups (Orbe & Spellers, 2005).

Face-Negotiation Theory

To further explore how Muslim women communicate in a terror-phobic American society, the face-negotiation theory is considered. Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003) popularized this notion which assumes that people of every culture are concerned with the presentation of their face. The concept of “face” refers to the public image of an individual who is influenced by cultural norms and values that comprise social interaction. The authors specified the following ideas related to this theory (Oetzel and Ting-Toomey, 2003, p. 600):

- Everyone tends “to maintain and negotiate face in all communication situations”;
- Uncertainties, including embarrassing and discordant situations, cause “face” problems, especially “when the situated identities of the communicators are called into question”;
- Differences in culture, personality, and situation can affect “cultural members’ selection of one set of face concerns over others (such as self-oriented face-saving vs. other-oriented face-saving)”;
- Face issues “influence the use of various facework and conflict strategies in intergroup and interpersonal encounters.”

Consequently, as explained by Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003), the “face” is associated with conflict management styles which “is a combination of traits (e.g. cultural background and personality) and states (e.g. situation) (Oetzel and Ting-Toomey, 2003, p. 601). The authors,

citing Ting-Toomey's 1994 study, defined conflict as "the perceived and/or actual incompatibility of values, expectations, processes, or outcomes between two or more parties over substantive and/or relational issues."

The face-negotiation theory assumes that such conflict happens when the face is threatened, damaged, or bargained over on both emotional and cognitive levels. The former is caused by a confluence of identity of identity-linked vulnerable emotions, while the latter is due to incongruent outcome between personal expectations and actual events vis-à-vis other people's treatment. When dealing with these conflicts, the theory specifies five thematic clusters (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003):

- 1- Face concerns – with reference to self, others, or both.
- 2-Face movements – defending/saving, maintaining, or improving of face.
- 3-Face work interaction strategies – use of verbal and non-verbal strategies to preserve the honor of the face.
- 4-Conflict communication styles – behaviors or tendencies adopted or exhibited during conflict negotiation process.
- 5-Face content domains – pertains to face type or emphasis variability of the above mentioned clusters.

Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003) identified several conflict communication styles. These include; (1) Dominating – a person imposes her/his position on others, (2) Avoiding – escaping from trouble or not wanting to resolve the conflict, (3) Accommodating – concern for the other party's conflict interest, (4) Compromising – adopting a give-and-take resolution, and (5) Integrating – reaching a solution closure where the interests of both parties are addressed.

In expounding on the face content domains, Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003) enumerated the following:

- Autonomy face – a person's need for others to acknowledge one's independence.
- Inclusion face – a person's need for others to realize their worth as an individual.
- Reliability face – a person's need for others to know that she/he is dependable.
- Competence face – a person's need for others to be aware of her/his competencies and intelligence.
- Status face – a person's need for other people's admiration of her/his assets.
- Moral face – a person's need for other people's respect.

Moreover, Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003) pointed out the "individualism-collectivism (I-C)" variable. They explained that individualism pertains to people who view themselves as independent and give premium to their personal goals, while collectivism refers to "individuals who see themselves as part of one or more collectives (family, coworkers, tribe, nation)..." and who are willing to sacrifice their personal interests for collectives' sake (Triandis, 1995, as cited in Oetzel and Ting-Toomey, 2003, p. 602).

For this research, the Muslim women represent the collectivist culture or the "we" identity, while American society comprises the individualistic culture or the "I" identity (Janet, 2007). The conflict arises in the communication process. As for the individualistic culture (American society), there is value for communication openness and self-disclosure (i.e. people tend to be verbally direct) (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2001).

However, such is not the case with the collectivist culture. Muslim women tend to be group-oriented where indirect communication is more common. Coming from an Asian culture where group harmony is more emphasized, direct communication among Muslim women is perceived as a cause of conflict.

In light of the 9/11 tragedy, face-negotiation theory will help analyze how Muslim women negotiate their face in an American dominated society. It will be used to understand how Muslim women in the US mediate their culture to avoid conflict, especially the one perpetrated by terror (Drummond & Orbe, 2010). Understanding the orientation between individualistic and collectivist cultures “is a necessary starting point for facework behavior research” (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003, p. 314).

“Facework” interaction strategies involve different verbal and unspoken ways used in honoring face. Marginalized members of society apply these mechanisms to communicate their culture to others. Such culture has an element of dominance in which the dominating group or culture adopt conflict tactics to make themselves feel superior to others. Conflicts arise in the absence of integration and accommodation between and among cultures.

Furthermore, this theory assumes that people in all cultures strive to maintain and to negotiate face in almost all communication situations, including those described as identity-vulnerable situations. It also notes that the concept of face is quite problematic, as marginalized members prefer horizontal framework shaped by small and large power distances.

Noting that the intercultural conflict of identities is a key concern of communication researchers around the world, the theory analyzes how different cultures can reach a consensus and develop a mutual coexistence. Thus, if co-cultural theory applies, then we would expect the negotiation of face to favor the dominant group. The subordinate group will have to give up a lot more to allow for a consensus to be reached. This study serves as a litmus test for this theory (Dai, 2009).

In order to provide a theoretical and empirical foundation of the study, a number of articles, journals and books were used.

Gudykunst & Mody (2002) summarize the state of both research and theory in intercultural and intercultural communication. According to them, intercultural communication usually involved face-to-face communication between people from different national cultures. Co-cultural theory of communication is based on subdued group theory, where there are social hierarchies in society, and standpoint theory, where some people hold specific positions in a society. This book is imperative in this study as it outlines through co-cultural communication and negotiation theory the experiences of female Muslim students in the United States by indicating how they are perceived, especially after 9/11.

Gudykunst (2003) examines the variations of communication across cultures. Cross-cultural usually involves the aspect of comparing communication across cultures. On the other hand, intercultural communication is whereby people from different cultures communicate. This book explains how different cultures manage conflicts vetted upon them and communicate inter-culturally. This is very important in this research as it explains how female Muslims schooling in American colleges are able to manage conflicts of perceptions, especially after the September 11, 2011. Through intercultural communication, different cultures are able to express themselves and hence manage the conflicting perceptions that may be presented.

Gudykunst (2005) examines The function of cultural communication in intercultural communication theory is to ensure that there is a maintained balance between forces of community and individualism. According to the author, individuals in marginalized or minor cultures are usually presented to a number of cultural conflicts, which they are able to manage and effectively communicate through negotiation theory. In this case, female Muslim students in United States' colleges experience difficulties in communicating their cultures and cultural identities as a result of how they are perceived after the September 11, 2001. This book is therefore found to be contributive in this study.

Guilherme & Glaser (2010) discuss the aspect of intercultural mobility is very recurrent, especially with the current advancement in technologies. As a result of this mobility, intercultural dialogue between attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions are generated. There exist multicultural conflicts especially in areas where a certain culture is less dominant. These conflicts hinder the proper functioning of that culture in that area, and hence, criteria should be sought on how to end the conflict. In this case, this book provides wide information on intercultural communication and negotiation theory by explaining the experiences of minority cultures in an area of dominant societal structures.

Littlejohn & Foss (2007) assert that wherever there is a human element, communication is pervasive. Intercultural communication theory helps individuals by understanding things they do not know by unearthing not only relevant information about the communication but also the role played by the communication. In this respect, female Muslim students in US colleges use negotiation theory in managing intercultural conflicting perceptions. This book indicates that the major root of intercultural conflict is on the basis of identity management on both cultural and individual levels. This books is therefore of great significance to this study as it contributes to negotiation theory.

Urban & Orbe (2007) gives an exploration of how international students' communicative practices are affected by their position in particular areas. According to the author, international students do not communicate their culture effectively as they are perceived as inferior to others. This article contributes squarely to the topic of the study as it indicates what female Muslim college students experience in the United States of America. Despite the fact that international students continuously communicate and interact, co-cultural theory explains their experiences during the communication and interaction processes.

Dai (2009) investigates the method or process whereby intercultural personhood interacts with identity negotiation is heavily. Intercultural communication process is basically determined by identity negotiation. Individuals in a cosmopolitan area usually strive to negotiate for the identity of their cultures, but this may be problematic bearing in mind that there are different cultural perceptions. This article hence contributes to the topic of the study by outlining the experiences of minority cultures in a dominant society. Identity negotiation of the female Muslim community in the United States is hindered by the way these individuals are perceived by Americans, especially after the bomb blast in September 11, 2001.

Drummond & Orbe (2010) explores the United States' dominant perspective of race and ethnicity. Additionally, the way different people from outside America come to understand and adapt to the labels that are directly related to the racism and ethnicity perspectives is

examined. Through co-cultural and identity negotiation theories, it can be argued that international immigrants and, more specifically, female Muslim individuals in this country are faced with a lot of conflicting perspectives, especially after the bomb blast. As a result of the aspect of racism, they are unable to communicate or experience difficulties in communicating their cultures in the society.

Oetzel & Ting-Toomey (2003) examines culture individualism or collectivism directly and indirectly affects conflict styles. This was concluded after a study that was conducted in testing the hypothesis on face negotiation theory that face is an explanatory mechanism that influences conflicts on people's behaviors. The study shows that face is a representation of personal highly praised sense of positive picture especially in social interaction. This article is helpful in this study in that it clearly explains how face negotiation theory is an organized and descriptive framework of conflict behavior.

Oetzel & Ting-Toomey (2001) assert that conflict in society is an inevitable aspect but the most important thing is to understand how to manage these conflicts. In most cases, intercultural conflicts more often than not start varied expectations on the basis of appropriate or inappropriate conducts in the scene of conflicts. This book is a challenge to the conflicting communities, especially Muslims living in the United States of America in knowing how to manage these conflicts. The fact that intercultural conflicts affect both physical and mental health explains what Muslim society in the US feel.

Zimmermann (1995) examined the perceptions of intercultural communication adaptation of the international students schooling in the United States of America. Most students from all countries are enrolling in US universities in large numbers, and hence, there are a number of communication conflicts that occur. This article indicates that international students are in most cases unable to communicate their cultures and identity in such a country where they are the minority. This article is very important in this study as it clearly indicates the perceptions of international communities living in the United States.

Simpson & Carter (2008) identified that Muslim women in the rural areas of the United States face a lot of problems because of their religion, especially in health care provision. Three themes are identified in the study conducted in this country. Gender relations were defined in terms of religion, and hence, Muslim women were perceived by the service providers as strangers who should not be equalized with the natives. The whole problems arose in the process of communicating cultures and identities. This article is very significant in this study as it casts more light on the experiences of Muslims in the US.

Orbe & Spellers (2005) define co-cultural communications as the interaction among minorities in a society. These underrepresented groups of people in a dominant community usually have problems in communicating their cultures and identities. This book explains three communication orientations that are used by underrepresented groups: Non-assertive assimilation—underrepresented people usually behave in a formal manner in order avoid some stereotypes, assertive accommodation, and assertive assimilation. This book contributes largely to the topic of the study by clearly indicating how the underrepresented communities communicate their cultures.

Orbe & Spellers (2005) explore the communication strategies that are used by non- dominant groups when interacting with the dominant group in a society. It is clear from the article that

non-dominant groups face a lot of problems when interacting within a dominant society. It is indicated that the following communication strategies were used: idealized communication, self-censorship, extensive preparation, confrontational tactics, and avoidance. This article contributes to the topic of the study in that it clearly explains the communication strategies used by female Muslims in the American society.

Janet (2007) investigates and examines the struggle involving Arab women who have newly immigrated to the United States in deciding how to wear the American fabrics while at the same time retaining their culture, manner which is acceptable by them, language, and religion. This article indicates the conflict that arises in making a decision of whether to wear a hijab in this country as a way of identifying themselves. This article contributes largely to the topic of the study in that female Muslims in the United States face problems in identifying and communicating their culture.

Shaeab & Gonzaga (1997) exploring adjustment problems and concerns for Saudi and Arabian students who go to pursue college education in Washington. The study used Michigan International Student Problem Inventory. The study used questionnaires to collect data from 150 Saudi and Arabian Gulf students who were drawn from six colleges and universities mainly from Easter Washington, although 103 useable questionnaires were returned unanswered. Questionnaires were analyzed to check of adjustment depended on length of stay in United States and whether adjustment varied on gender, martial status, age, and others. The study had a number of findings. First, Saudi and Arabian Gulf students view English languages as the major difficulty in their adjustment. Second, was social personal, living-dining, academic records, orientation services, and others in respective order. Third, the length of stay did not affect adjustment as student with longer stay and problems in some areas more than new students. Third, female students had major problems in academic records.

2. Research Rationale

It is important to conduct a study on the experiences of female Muslim immigrants ten years after the September 11, 2001, bombing in the United States since international communities face a lot of challenges in trying to negotiate for their cultural identity and communicating it. By conducting this study, I will be answering imperative questions for communication management at institutions of higher learning. These answers might help to improve the interaction of international communities, especially in countries where racism and ethnicity are still prevalent. Once this work is complete, it will be extended to the lecturers and government in order to give them an insight into the problems facing this group of immigrants. The important work of others inside the bracket of the study topic will be considered in this study. I will make sure that I present a very professional paper in the chosen field by providing accurate, adequate, and convincing information about the experience of female Muslim immigrants ten years after the September 11, 2001 incident in the United States.

3. Research Objectives

The objective of this research is:

To explore the use of face- negotiation and co-cultural theories in establishing how veiled and un-veiled female Muslim college students communicate ten years after 9/11.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Sample

With this study's focus on the experiences of Middle-Eastern Muslim women as a minority group in the US post-9/11, the researcher has opted to adopt a qualitative data gathering method and qualitative data analysis tool. Interviews with fifteen Middle-Eastern Muslim women will be conducted. These exchanges will be recorded and transcribed. The examination of the transcripts will be done through grounded theory using co-cultural theory and face negotiation theory. According to Gray (2009), the interview transcripts should be ordered in a chronological order. The data will have to be read twice to ensure that all relevant concepts are clearly understood. The next step will be labeling all related data. To facilitate analysis, common themes will be ascertained from the transcripts. The themes will be further assessed to determine its respective co-cultural and face negotiation categories.

4.2 Presentation and Analysis of Results

As previously stated, this paper's research questions are (Appendix 1): (1) What challenges do Middle-Eastern Muslim women face in the U. S.; and, (2) How are they able to overcome these challenges to assimilate or blend into the American society? To determine the answers to these questions, the researchers adopted both co-cultural and face-negotiation theories to understand the behaviors, perspectives, and responses of minority groups like Middle-Eastern Muslim females, as they interact with dominant groups in the U. S. The co-cultural theory underscores the nature of interactions between and among underrepresented groups in a certain society, while the face-negotiation theory focuses on how the marginalized represent themselves or negotiate their collective "face" to a host environment, i.e., American society in this case.

4.3 Methods Used for Data Gathering and Analysis

Conducting in-depth/ semi-structured interview was the primary methodology used for this study. The female Muslim interviewees were determined through non-probability snowball sampling and mainly involved college students. Some claimed visiting the U. S. for the first time while others were "returnees" who had stayed in the country for years before going back to the Middle East and had decided to live in the U. S. again. Said snowballing technique involved a series of referrals from initially identified interview participants. The exchanges were recorded and later transcribed.

The interview questionnaire contained seven major categories: introduction, perception questions (based on face negotiation theory), veiled dynamics (non-verbal communication), language dynamics (verbal communication), co-culture questions (based on co-cultural theory), health and stress questions, and demographics. A set of 38 questions was formulated and served as a guide during the conversation.

The interview transcripts were repeatedly read and were subjected to examining similarities and differences among the interviewees with regard to their personal behavior and

perspectives about living in the U. S. As well as how they interact with other people, particularly members from the dominant group. Moreover, the transcripts were assessed based on co-cultural communication practices and face negotiation categories.

5. Interview Outcomes

Fifteen Middle-Eastern Muslim women, who most grew up in the Middle East and few were exposed to the U. S. culture since an early age, were interviewed. The youngest of the group is 19-year old Hanan, while the oldest is 50-year old Ekbal. Both women and 10 others (Arnam, Amany, Hend, Hadeel, Marwa, Nawal, Nouf, Noha, Samyah, and Reem) were from Saudi Arabia. Two interviewees, Lamya and Nihad, arrived from the United Arab Emirates (U. A. E.), while Dinanb described herself as a citizen of Kuwait.

With regard to their educational background, over half of the interviewees are college graduates, including four women (Samyah, Nawal, Amany, and Hadeel) with master's degrees, four (Nihad, Nouf, Arnam, and Marwa) pursuing the same achievement. Lamya, Noha, and Reem are working towards finishing college, while three women completed high school (Hanan, Dina, and Hend). Only Ekbal, who is the oldest, is unable to study further after graduating from middle school.

Many of these women are recipients of scholarship grants and whose principal objective of coming to the U. S. is to secure a good education. Not a few interviewees were like Nihad who emphasized the difference between education in the Middle East and education in the U. S. in terms of teaching or manner of instruction: "... the way of education there and the way of education here is rather different...it's not totally different because the way of teaching is different, but the material is the same."

In addition, a few like Ekbal already have a family while the others have a sibling or other relatives who have been already staying in the country for decades. Some visited the country previously before returning to study.

All interviewees have had negative experiences because of their accent as a foreigner, their being a Muslim, and as a veiled woman. They also considered their stay as productive, either as a student or as a mother (e.g., Ekbal). Except for a few like Hanan whose professors belittled her for being a non-native English speaker ("...you would never be good as the natives"), a number of interviewees revealed fondness for their school environment and their workplace for not discriminating against them. What proved to be a challenge to them, however, was dealing with people outside the university premises, particularly with the "uneducated" who often provoke them to react.

5.1 Muslim Women's Face-Negotiation and Co-Cultural Communication Approaches

Based on the interview transcripts, the insights and experiences of Middle-Eastern Muslim women in America reflect both face-negotiation and co-cultural communication theories. There are similar elements in these two theoretical frameworks that help present the situation or conditions of this particular underrepresented group.

To survive in America or in a culture different from the Middle East, most of the interviewees

showed both self-face and mutual face, which allowed them to protect their rights as a human being. They also adopted non-assertive and assertive communication approaches. Their preferred outcomes, however, varied. As suggested by Orbe and Spellers (2005), who are the proponents of the co-cultural theory, the underrepresented members of society negotiate their space in the dominant culture. In this case, Middle-Eastern Muslim women interviewees showed different communication orientations and preferred outcomes.

Many study participants used to have high expectations about the U. S. prior to their stay in the country. These expectations, however, were violated when proven wrong as what Amany and Hadeel experienced. These women's views, before coming to America, were influenced by mainstream media. In Amany's case, American movies made her think that people in the U. S. "...are very friendly, very, very friendly." However, this changed when she arrived in Boston, a place that she described as "the high rudeness in the States. They are very rude especially if they hear your accent..." Hadeel's perspective was likewise shaped by the stories of other Arabs who had been to the U. S. Like Amany, she credited the movies for the image she had of the U. S.: "And because of Hollywood, they bring a lot of, you know, aspects in our life, I was saying 'Oh my god, anything can happen at the States.'" In addressing these concerns, Amany stood her ground: "I'm convinced that I don't want to change my accent. I don't have to change my accent to be American. I'm proud." These situations prove the strong conviction Muslim women have when it comes to their culture.

Some of the issues and challenges they faced and continue to face include discrimination, difficulties of living independently, communication or language barriers, and application of learned values in American society. Samyah observed that Muslim foreigners are not viewed as potential friends, thus: "...I think it's easier to have a friend from other nationalities than American students. I don't know why but they leave immediately after the class. They don't sit with the students." She also recalled being treated "inferiorly", i.e., "They don't give you the full attention that they gave the person before you."

On her part, Noha related her difficulty in terms of "living alone and being subject to a lot of distractions...difficult to behave like a disciplined..." Closely linked to her experience are Nawal's issues whose distraction for living independently is caused by homesickness: "For me, it's missing the family and sometimes when we have our holidays, let's say like Eid or Alhaj...I feel a little bit down, but I miss them..." Noha added though that America "makes you reinstate your identity and exposes you to so many different things and the freedom to do as you please." Such a situation led her to be more critical or judicious as a decision-maker. Living in the U. S. did not make her disregard her religion and culture. She acknowledged though that "...it's a difficult process but it's worthwhile." It is apparent that Noha opted to apply self-face orientation and assertive separation communication strategy to preserve her values and beliefs as a Muslim woman living in a non-Islamic society.

Hadeel admitted that she had to overcome communication barriers, aside from keeping intact the values she acquired as a Muslim woman. Doing this, however, proved to be a major difficulty: "...I can't take my background and put it in new culture and say I can live in it, so I'm trying to adapt from this culture a little bit. I changed my lifestyle a little bit so I can...I can be living normal." Consequently, Hadeel had to adopt some superficial changes, starting with her veil: "I want to be blending with people. I don't want people notice me as a black

thing walking.” Thus, for Hadeel, assimilation and a mutual-face approach are keys to her survival in the US.

Said face-negotiation and co-cultural methods likewise apply to Hend who initially had problems with not wearing a veil (or *abaya*). Hend noted the “big difference between the cultures.” She explained that Islam influences the life of people in the Middle East and compliance to the rules is strict, but this changed somehow when it comes to how she presents herself physically to other people in the U. S., i.e., without the veil. She emphasized differences in religion as more prominent. She then disclosed that the individualist culture in America had some personal benefits, for it made her “more confident” when it comes to taking care of life’s necessities.

In Arnam’s view, there are people in the U. S. who are simply curious about the cultural differences, but they “are just accepting and...The differences, and sometimes they say it like when I just talk about my country and other stuff, they say that ‘We are people, we are the same. There’s no, like, big differences. Mostly I am wearing different types of clothes but we are still same people.” In this case, both members of the dominant and marginalized groups adopt “emphasizing commonalities” as a co-cultural practice. Likewise, both parties present a mutual-face that allows symbiotic or mutual respect for each other’s differences.

However, some interviewees would either keep silent or defend their stance when provoked. Each of these reactions portrays mutual-face and self-face scenarios. In the context of co-cultural communication, the former is exemplified by assimilation (i.e., attempting to conform to the dominant group), while the latter showed assertive separation (i.e., exerting an independent position concerning one’s minority representation). An interviewee, Amany, exhibited such assertive separation when she would rather answer, “I’m from Saudi Arabia” when other people would ask, “Where are you from?” She explained that she is proud of her origins and that she is mindful of her goals unlike other foreigners who would rather stay in the U. S.: “...I’m here for studying and I want to go back. I’m not from the people that they want to stay here.” Furthermore, Amany conveyed dismay over the kind of treatment minorities received from Americans, particularly those she met in Boston: “They are very rude.” When probed further, Amany manifested self-face defensive moves. This was in particular when she decided to “answer back” when provoked.

On the other hand, there are Middle-Eastern Muslim women like Dina who have opted to assimilate the longer she stayed: “You learn how it works and you get used to it just by time. It gets better.” She and some other interviewees favorably regard living in the U. S. Arnam, a working student, yearned “to live another experience” and liked living in America “because they are open...It’s because of the people here.” She acknowledged, however, that she needed “to explain certain things... like praying or wearing a veil” due to the “total different culture” of the U. S. Another interviewee, Ekbal, who stayed in the U. S. for 13 years before 9/11 happened, described her U. S. stay as “comfortable” and a learning experience: “I didn’t have an idea to be honest because most of my life, I lived in Saudi. But when I moved here, I like it. It’s very nice...it’s amazing. You’ll learn a lot.” Both of these women had accommodation as their preferred outcome for their non-assertive communication approach. Nonetheless, they have opted to retain cultural attributes that make them unique. Ekbal would engage in

dispelling stereotypes that media tend to create by sharing with her friends her cultural information about Saudi Arabia. Clearly, this condition depicted a mutual face approach.

When asked what she thought of other people's opinion about Middle-Eastern Muslim women, Marwa revealed her indifference: "...if someone wants blame the Arab or blame the Muslims about the troubles that affect the world or they cause war or something like that...I don't care." Such attitudes like Marwa's give little importance to the values of the dominant group. It echoes Amany's strong stance about maintaining her individuality and her culture. Thus, for Middle-Eastern Muslim females who already have strong convictions and already developed personality before coming to the U. S., using self-face strategy and assertive separation helps them cope with the challenges of living on foreign shores.

None of the interviewees, though, had been involved in an aggressive position just to communicate their opinions or perspectives. However, some like Amany would "answer back" if reproached; although this course of action was learned after feeling anxious for not being able to defend themselves and protect their rights.

6. Discussion of Results

The interviews were quite extensive. Questions were asked about the subjects' views about the U. S. prior and after their arrival, as well as how they adjusted themselves to resolve critical, cultural, and personal issues. Not a few disclosed having difficulty adjusting to U. S. culture. As mentioned earlier, the challenges include discrimination, distraction and homesickness while living alone, communication and language issues, and integration of Middle-Eastern Muslim values with American culture. Not a few interviewees also expressed disappointment that the media-generated images and expectations of the U. S. that are not real. Some, though, admitted preference for the comfort and the learning process offered by the United States.

In all these situations, it is noteworthy to consider the merits of the theories used to appreciate and understand how Middle-Eastern Muslim women cope in a non-Islamic society. Face-negotiation and co-cultural communication theories complement each other. On one hand, face-negotiation provides an opportunity to learn about how female Muslims present themselves to non-Muslims, while co-cultural communication enables them to learn how to interact with others without engaging in aggressive methods in order to blend or survive in U. S. society. Moreover, the discussions reveal the difficulty of these women to identify exactly how other people perceive them both as a veiled and un-veiled Muslim woman. This situation is essentially co-cultural and face-negotiation as well on the part of the members of the dominant group. The seemingly aggressive stances of those who marginalize Muslims are due to the fact that they have succumbed to media-assisted stereotypes about Muslim women and the Islamic population. The women interviewees are aware of the differences, but these did not stop them from holding on to their religious beliefs and values they have acquired as Middle-Eastern citizens.

7. Implications of Study Findings

The study is a pioneering approach in terms of merging two theories that support or explain the conditions of marginalized sectors in a dominant society like the U. S. The findings of

this research could benefit scholars who are interested in learning about how Middle-Eastern Muslim women negotiate their identity and space in a foreign culture. This could challenge their personal convictions that have been shaped by their religion and culture.

Aside from exploring the possibility of adopting the two theories in dominant groups, it would also be interesting to find out how these paradigms would apply to intra- and inter-group dynamics, i.e., how members of the underrepresented sector present their face and interact with fellow marginalized individuals, particularly those who have opted to fully assimilate themselves in the culture of the dominant group.

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