

RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL CLASHES IN THE MODERN WORLD:
UNDERSTANDING LATENT ISSUES OF MIDDLE EASTERN WIVES

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

Wives of graduate students from Middle Eastern countries who are accompanying their husbands in studies at universities in the United States (U.S.) are an invisible group that is capable of tremendous influence during their time in the U.S. and upon returning to their home countries. The prospect of empowering them to exercise leadership has potentially important implications on future economic, food, environmental, and world security issues. This thesis sheds light on contemporary development issues regarding gender inequality in the Middle East and brings religious and cultural factors causing friction in the global security context to the forefront of not only academia and scholarly discussion but also public awareness. It is based on a phenomenological qualitative study of the wives of Ph.D. students from the Middle East at TAMU. It illuminates the challenges the wives face as a result of the overwhelming shift from war torn home countries to a democratic society. Ten challenges were identified: a) Language Barrier, b) Affordable Childcare, c) Identity, d) Healthcare, e) Education, f) No Income, g) Transportation, h) Entertainment, i) Halaal Foods, and j) Religious Imposition and other latent issues.

Contemporary development issues in gender inequality identified in this research serve as the foundation for a practical application course designed by a joint effort of the Bush School of Government and Public Service and the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) for graduate students interested in development careers. In the course, students will assess the challenges facing Middle Eastern wives of Ph.D. students at TAMU and propose solutions to remedy these challenges by empowering these women, within their cultural limitations.

The intent of this research is to pave the way for several capstone courses where informed students will find plausible solutions for the challenges that emerge from this research. The need for such courses is evident because there are few capstone courses offered in development work at the Bush School and ALEC. The importance and emphasis of these courses will be in identifying local issues with international scope, where students will gain experience in understanding and addressing cultural challenges. This research will have great impact and utility within academia by producing successful evidence-based programs for a more peaceful and prosperous world.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2015, a serendipitous event brought Dr. Manuel Piña Jr. associate professor in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) and Dr. C. Silva Hamie, lecturer at the Bush School of Government and Public Policy (Bush School) at Texas A&M University (TAMU) together in discussion regarding the plight of the wives of foreign students, specifically from Middle Eastern (ME) countries, at Texas TAMU University (Piña, M., email communication, December 3, 2015). Their discussion led to the realization that there exists both a challenging development issue at the local level with international implications and a need for graduate students pursuing careers in development work to gain practical experience. The challenges experienced by ME wives, a marginalized group in the TAMU community, and the lack of capstone courses for graduate student engagement in development programming activities are well paired needs that supplement one another.

This thesis came to fruition as a result of Dr. Piña's passion for mentoring graduate students who demonstrate a keen interest in international development and Dr. Hamie's vision for a comprehensive capstone courses in development theory and application for graduate students. This thesis will set the foundation for several capstone course projects by providing students a point of intersection in framing the issues and challenges ME wives of Ph.D. students at TAMU experience and pave the way for recommended solutions for the challenges identified.

This thesis follows the chapter method thesis format per TAMU's Office of Graduate and Professional Studies requirements. It will shed light on contemporary development issues

regarding gender inequality in the ME and bring the religious and cultural factors causing friction in the global security context to the forefront of not only academia and scholarly discussion but also public awareness.

This document will be divided into several chapters that offer a comparative context for peeling away the layers of complexity involved in the background of this topic and the problem being addressed. Chapter II will provide a brief overview of Islam and its sects and explore issues of Muslim identity, the veil, and gender inequality in an American sub-cultural environment. Using a metaphorical magnifying glass in Chapter III, the problem and considerable knowledge gap regarding ME wives at TAMU is put into focus. The methods for conducting a qualitative study as well as an open-ended data analysis technique are discussed in Chapter IV. In Chapter V, the results of this qualitative study regarding the wives of ME Ph.D. students at TAMU are presented. The results will tie to the objective of this qualitative study, which is two fold: a) to examine and illuminate the challenges wives of ME Ph.D. students at TAMU experience during their time in the U.S as a result of the overwhelming shift from war torn home countries to a democratic society in the U.S. and b) to create a pathway for graduate students to solve the challenges identified and empowering the wives during their time in the U.S. The intent of this study is to establish the foundation for practical application courses designed by a joint effort between the Bush School and ALEC for graduate students interested in development careers where students gain valuable skills by addressing the challenges identified in this study.

In Chapter V, the challenges investigated will be framed to demonstrate common trends, uncover variations, and address problem areas that merit more attention. This chapter will close the knowledge gap regarding the challenges of ME wives at TAMU and provide a

launching pad for capstone courses in international development, where graduate students will address and ultimately try to solve the challenges identified. This exchange is symbiotic in nature and will result in mutual benefits for both ME wives and graduate students searching for practical experience in addressing international development challenges, particularly in a growing Muslim population in many developing nations. Lastly, Chapter VI offers make meaning of the findings and offers conclusions and recommendations for future studies and several new graduate capstone courses.

Purpose of the Courses

The capstone courses will fulfill the need for connecting development theory to real-world implementation by allowing students to gain practical experience for future development professions. The need for such courses is evident in the fact that there are few capstone courses in development work available at the Bush School and ALEC. Many students, upwards of twenty or more, are interested and apply to the capstone course at the Bush School but enrollment is limited to eight to ten spaces.

This thesis is meant to provide students with a starting point for the course. The emphasis of the course will be on identifying local issues with international scope, where students will gain experience in understanding and addressing cultural challenges, so that they are better prepared for a career in development, especially in regards to gender inequality. In the course, students will assess the challenges facing ME wives of Ph.D. students at TAMU and propose solutions to remedy these challenges by empowering these women with respect to the limitations set by their cultural and religious contexts.

Students will engage in a local hands-on project where their work will benefit the ME wives. Students will gain skillsets in critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and

creativity by gaining insights about the challenges ME wives face at TAMU and in College, Station, Texas and perhaps at other U.S. universities and communities surrounding these universities.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores Islam and its sects and introduces issues of Muslim identity and misconceptions about Muslim women, particularly the veil. It punctuates the complexity of gender inequality inherent in Islamic traditions, which prevail in a U.S. sub-cultural environment.

On an ordinary day on September 11, 2001 (9/11), two commercial airplanes were hijacked by Muslim militant extremists and crashed into the twin World Trade Center towers in New York City. That ordinary day became an extraordinary day as people of a shocked nation tried to understand questions of who, what, and why raced through their minds. This violent attack on U.S. soil defined the next great ideological warfare in the 21st century. Fifteen years have passed since 9/11 and as a consequence of the U.S.' reaction to these attacks, the world seems to be on fire, namely the ideological warfare being waged between the Christian West and the Muslim Middle East. This chaos has resulted in a growing list of fragile and failed states, including Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria.

The war between Iraq and the U.S. ended with the overthrow and execution of a notorious dictator, Saddam Hussein. This seemed to be a victory for the Iraqi people. Unbeknownst to the freedom fighting Americans, a new wave of inter-religious warfare between the two major factions of Islam - Sunni, and Shia/Shiite - was ignited in the region. According to a 2010 poll conducted by the Pew Research Center, Americans' knowledge about Islam is limited and quite poor, with 55 percent of Americans stating that they know very little or nothing at all about Islam (Moore, 2015). This poll is reflective of the

widespread ignorance about Islam and the pervasive and harmful stereotypes that cause social discord. Ignorance propagates fear of the unknown and fear breeds hate.

Sectarianism and the Islamic Spectrum

Sectarianism in Islam plays a major factor in ME geopolitics and has many sociopolitical implications, especially in regard to gender inequality. Understanding this schism in Islam is crucial to understanding how “the current conflagration in Iraq and Syria is spawned, in part, by bitter sectarian differences” (Moore, 2015, p. 228). The U.S.’s disastrous foreign policy is void of proper recognition and differentiation between the two major factions in Islam and focuses on labeling the ‘other’ with as many adjectives as possible to describe an irrational enemy, i.e., radical, extremist, terrorist, and jihadist, all of which contribute to a toxic atmosphere of fear among Americans today. Even when politicians identify the two factions Sunni and Shia/Shiite – , they lack deep understanding and abruptly end with a distinction verbalized only by two Arabic words left undefined. This is one aspect of the knowledge gap this thesis strives to bridge, “this knowledge is vital if Americans are to make prudent decisions regarding support for specific foreign policy positions and decisions regarding Islam and Muslim countries” (Moore, 2015, p. 226).

With over 1.6 billion followers, or 23% of the world population, Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in the world (Desilver, 2013). The five pillars of Islam, a) “monotheism, b) fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, c) the five daily prayers, d) charity, and e) the pilgrimage to Mecca, unite all Muslims, regardless of sect or legal differences” (Moore. 2015, p. 229). However, there is a significant religious divide that dates back to a political disagreement regarding the Prophet Muhammad’s successor following his death in 632 (Moore, 2015). This division resulted in two major factions, a) Sunni, the

majority group and b) Shi'a or Shi'ite, the minority group. The Sunni accept four caliphs, or leaders, as the Prophet Muhammad's successors (Ali, Umar, Hassan, and Abu Bakr). The Shi'a, also known as the party of Ali, recognize Ali as the one and only legitimate successor of the Prophet Muhammad and reject the other three caliphs (Moore, 2015). Ali was Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. The Shi'a believe he had a familial right to lead the Muslim community, much like European monarchies believed only the King's offspring and those of royal blood could inherit the crown. The Shi'a contend that the will of Allah was carried out when Muhammad named, "Ali his successor at a speech at Ghadir Khumm, Arabia on March 10, 632, when he said "He of whom I am the patron, of him Ali is also the patron" (Brown 2009, 131). This sect considers descendants of Ali and his wife Fatima, Imams, who "are infallible religious leaders ordained by Allah and are the only legitimate sources for religious practices and instruction (Moore, 2015, p. 229). This political splinter evolved into a fracture that established significant differences in laws, rituals, theological interpretations and religious practices between the two factions. For example when the Shi'a profess their faith they recite the phrase, "There is no god but God, Muhammad is God's Messenger and Ali is God's Executor (wali)" (Aslan, 2011, p.185). The addition of the phrase with Ali distinguishes the Shi'ite profession of faith from the Sunni version" (Moore, 2015, p. 230), which does not include a phrase about Ali as God's executor. Since Muhammad's death, this sectarianism has hardened with time and is a major source of geopolitical instability in the ME as each faction cycles in and out of political power plays while implementing a varying spectrum of Islamic law, namely Shari'a Law.

Shari'a is an Arabic word meaning "the way," referring to the path to God. Shari'a is comparable to "the concept of natural law as articulated by Aquinas, Grotius, Pufendorf, and

others in the western Christian tradition” (Afsanuddin, 2013, p. 1). It is the application of the literal interpretations of a combination of the holy text in the Qur’an and the *sunna*, the Prophet Muhammad’s teachings. “According to the legal historian Khaled Abou El Fadl, ‘The Shari’ah is God’s Will in an ideal and abstract fashion, but the *fiqh* is the product of the human attempt to understand God’s Will,” (Afsanuddin, 2013, p. 1). This illustrates the distinction between the perfection of God’s Will against the imperfection of a limited human understanding of God’s Will and thus the space in which a plethora of interpretations of religious texts have inevitably surfaced. After the Prophet Muhammad’s death in 632, Islamic law has expanded and changed through the centuries into a multiplicity of legal schools of thought. Asma Afsanuddin, an Associate Professor in Arabic and Islamic Studies at Notre Dame, offers a deeper analysis of these schools of thought and their various manifestations between the two major factions, “in the course of the fifth through eleventh centuries, four schools of Sunni law became predominant; these survive today. It is also during this period that the four sources of Sunni jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*) became stabilized: Qur’an, *sunna* (the sayings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad), *qiyas* (analogical reasoning), and *ijma’* (consensus). The predominant Shi’i school of law (the Ja’fari *madhab*) substituted ‘*aql* for *ijma’* as one of the sources of *fiqh*. In terms of actual legal rulings, there are often very few differences between Sunni and Shi’i schools of law” (p.2). These small discrepancies within the legal realm and between Sunni and Shi’i show how subtle interpretation of religious text may be just enough to establish several different sources of Sunni and Shi’a jurisprudence. This mechanism is one of the primary reasons for the emergence of an overwhelming amount of friction between Muslim majority countries. The sources of tension are as diverse as the Muslim nationalities.

A basic understanding of the Sunni and Shi'a factions and their schools of law, allows for a deeper grasp of the three major types of Muslim groups that comprise the Islamic World today: fundamentalists, secularists, and extremists, which introduces yet another layer of complexity. James Moore's journal article, *The Sunni and Shia Schism: Religion, Islamic Politics, and Why Americans Need to Know the Differences*, provides an excellent overview of these categories. Moore writes:

There are hardline Islamists (fundamentalists) calling for the revival of traditional Islam and the restoration of Islamic values and law as the proper course to combat godless secularism, colonial exploitation, and the encroachment of Western values—feminism, tolerance for homosexuality, rampant materialism—deemed un-Islamic (Aslan 2008; Bukay 2008; De Blij, Nijman, & Muller, 2014). Muslim secularists calling for democratic reform characterized by separation between mosque and state (of course, this is considered heresy by many Muslims), gender equality, and representative democracy that would allow Islam to adapt to modern realities. Finally, there are violent and radical Muslim extremists who call for jihad (a complex term meaning “struggle” or holy war in defense of Islam) to restore the Caliphate (De Blij, Nijman, & Muller 2014). All these groups— fundamentalists, secularists , and extremists—may contain Sunni, Shi'ite, and other sects in their ranks, confirming this truism about Islam: it is an incredibly diverse faith characterized by profound differences in historical experiences, geography, political ideology, racial/ethnic identity, theology, and law. Understanding these differences and the intricacies of religion and politics is of vital national security to the United States. (2015, p. 231)

Although there are pronounced differences between the Sunni and Shi'a sects, Muslims from either branch may identify as fundamentalists, secularists or extremists that are motivated by very different aims. According to Dr. M. Sait Yavuz, Lecturer and Director of Academic Affairs of the Gulen Institute at University of Houston, the extremist group "emerged in 656 in opposition to the Sunni and Shi'a sects and responsible for the birth of the ideology embraced by the Taliban in Afghanistan or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or ISIS. They fight against who they perceive to be infidels" (Dr. Yavuz, personal communication, March 2016). In the Islamic world, this opposition group is shunned by Muslims and known as *khaveraj* or *khareji*, meaning outsiders (Dr. Yavuz, personal communication, March 2016). Being able to identify these different groups in the political sphere and their preferred school of Islamic law may help common citizens and leaders make more prudent decisions about the most appropriate course of action and interaction for stability and prosperity in this global human community in the 21st century.

Muslim Identity

We live in a tumultuous time where identities and ideologies are shifting. In an enlightening seminar, hosted by The Scowcroft Institute of International Affairs at the Bush School in October 2014, Dr. Abdolkarim Soroush, a leading scholar in the Muslim world, explored the role of religion and politics, the dichotomies between them, and how to address the balance of rights and obligations.

He explained that Islam and every religion serve different functions but that there are three predominant purposes to include a) search for truth, happiness, and an established moral code; b) source of identity; and c) source of salvation, a promise that you will be saved if you follow the edicts of the religion. Religion is a means of the interpretation of religion,

i.e., Islam is not the Quran. It is the interpretation of the Quran. The language of religion is created from this interpretation and that language spells out certain duties and obligations. Dr. Soroush then stated that modern politics has produced two ideas that are in direct conflict with religion: a) the idea of rights (political, sexual, civil) and the manner in which they have become dominant over duties and obligations in a religious context and b) the idea of nation-states and the manner in which they have created new identities. Dr. Soroush argues that since religion is not the language of rights, but rather the language of duties, it is in discord with this paradigm shift towards human rights. National identities are new and conflict with the role of religion and religious identity. The example of a Muslim American soldier demonstrates this conflict and the question of whether the individual is defined by his/her national identity (an American) or by his/her religious identity (a Muslim)? Is an individual an American Muslim? An American first and Muslim second? Or a Muslim American, a Muslim first and an American second? For many Americans, their religious identity trumps all other forms of identity, which begs the question of how Americans, who strongly identify with their religion, have the audacity of accusing a Muslim American or American Muslim to be un-American based on their religious beliefs? This is a rhetorical question meant to demonstrate the convoluted socio-political atmosphere many nations face in contemporary times. The solution Dr. Soroush offers is one of reformation for religion to tune itself to harmonize with the post-modern world and tweak the language of religion to be one that accommodates and recognizes human rights. It is an interesting notion, especially considering changes in Christianity, specifically Catholicism where Catholic Bishops have begun discussing acceptance of homosexuals and couples that live together but are not married into the Church instead of alienating them. Dr. Soroush's views reconcile politics

and religion, especially with regard to Islam, which is deeply misunderstood as a result of radical fundamentalists who take religion out of historical context in order to manipulate it to serve as a means to an end.

The Veil

Hijab, veil or scarf refers to some form of head covering worn by Muslim women. This practice is associated with conservative dress, covering of the arms, legs, and body, and varies by country due to regional and cultural differences. A male interpretation of Islam requires women to cover, but contrary to this common belief, a Muslim woman is not required to wear *hijab*, which is a widely debated practice because it is rooted in cultural tradition and its religious basis is unclear. The documentary film *Women in the Middle East: A Veiled Revolution* (Fernea & Gaunt, 1982) demonstrates the ambiguous origin of the *hijab* and various reasons for wearing. One veiled young woman expressed that she wants to emulate the prophet's wife/wives by wearing the *hijab* to express her piety, but an Egyptian feminist stated that women during the Prophet Muhammad's time fought in wars beside the men and without the veil. There are conflicting interpretations about the veil's origins and its place in modern society.

Setting aside the question of the veil's origin, it is important to note that some women who do not wear *hijab* feel that they do not have the deep faith it requires to wear it. It must come from inner conviction. Women who voluntarily wear the *hijab* want to show their devotion to faith while women who do not wear the *hijab* think they lack the inner conviction to do so and are not worthy of wearing it. Thus, it is not surprising to find that in the United States, "only a portion of the female Muslim population wears the *hijab*..., and not all religiously observant women feel that it is required...most Muslim women do agree,

whatever they choose to wear, conservative dress does not represent constriction, repression, or any of the other terms by which Westerners have generally understood the Muslim woman's 'condition'" (Yazbeck Haddad, Smith & Moore, 2006, p. 9). The fact that observing or not observing the hijab is indeed a choice for Muslim women further demonstrates the deep misconceptions that dominate American ideas about what is perceived to be female oppression. This is not to argue that Muslim women are not oppressed, but rather that the source of their oppression is in no way reflected by whether or not they wear the veil.

Veiling is a wedge issue. In a survey conducted by the Pew Research center in 2013, globally, 53% of Muslims expressed that veiling should be a woman's decision. Disaggregated country data show 46% of Egyptians, 45% of Iraqis, 45% of Jordanians, 53% of Palestinians and 90% of Turks, believe women should decide if they wear the veil. There were no reported data on Iran and Syria. See Figure 1.

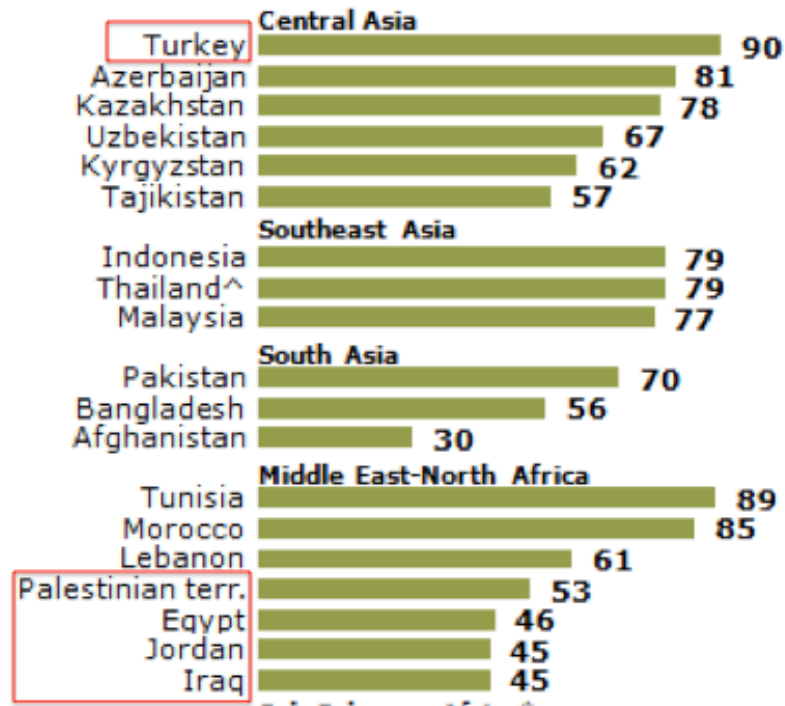


Figure 1. Illustrates veiling as a wedge issue among Muslims in the Middle East (Pew Research Center, 2013)

When disaggregated by sex, the survey showed that Muslim women are more supportive of women’s rights than are Muslim Men. Regarding whether it is a woman’s right to choose to wear the veil, 54% of Egyptian women, compared to 39% of men, and 52% of Iraqi women, compared to 38% of men, supported the right to choose. In Jordan, 49% of women and 41% men acknowledged the veil as a personal choice, while in the Palestinian Territory, 61% of women supported it, compared to 44% of men. In Turkey, the majority of women, 92%, and men, 89%, acknowledged veil choice. There were no reported data on Iran and Syria. See Table 1.

Gender and the Right to Choose to Veil in Public

% of Muslims who say it is a woman's right to decide whether to wear a veil

	Women	Men	Diff.
Russia	76	54	+22
Pakistan	81	60	+21
Uzbekistan	75	56	+19
Afghanistan	40	23	+17
Palestinian terr.	61	44	+17
Tajikistan	65	49	+16
Bangladesh	64	49	+15
Egypt	54	39	+15
Lebanon	69	54	+15
Thailand [^]	84	69	+15
Iraq	52	38	+14
Kyrgyzstan	69	55	+14
Azerbaijan	85	76	+9
Jordan	49	41	+8
Kazakhstan	82	74	+8
Malaysia	81	74	+7
Albania	87	82	+5
Indonesia	81	77	+4
Morocco	87	83	+4
Tunisia	91	87	+4
Turkey	92	89	+3

Table 1. Gender and the Right to Choose to Veil in Public (Pew Research Center, 2013)

Regarding equal inheritance and whether sons and daughters should receive equal shares of inheritance, 28% of Egyptian women compared to 24% of men, and 26% of Iraqi women compared to 18% of men felt that it should be equal between the sexes. In Jordan, 24% of women compared to 27% of men, and 47% of Palestinian women, compared to 40% of men, expressed the right for equal inheritance. Due to Turkey's secular position, the majority of both men and women, 89% of Turkish women as compared to 88% of men, were in favor of equal inheritance rights between sons and daughter. There were no reported data on Iran and Syria. See Table 2.

Gender and Equal Inheritance

% of Muslims who say sons and daughters should receive equal shares of inheritance

	Women	Men	Diff.
Lebanon	48	22	+26
Albania	73	50	+23
Pakistan	64	43	+21
Tajikistan	69	49	+20
Russia	69	55	+14
Bangladesh	53	39	+14
Tunisia	23	9	+14
Kazakhstan	67	58	+9
Malaysia	40	31	+9
Kosovo	80	72	+8
Iraq	26	18	+8
Palestinian terr.	47	40	+7
Kyrgyzstan	50	43	+7
Bosnia-Herz.	82	76	+6
Afghanistan	33	27	+6
Indonesia	79	73	+6
Azerbaijan	63	57	+6
Thailand^	63	58	+5
Egypt	28	24	+4
Turkey	89	88	+1
Morocco	14	15	-1
Jordan	24	27	-3

Table 2. Gender and Equal Inheritance (Pew Research Center, 2013)

Country variations on these issues can be partly explained by the national context and presence of Shari'a law, or God's Will in practice in absolute form. In countries where Muslims prefer their governing laws to be based on Shari'a, support for women's rights are less likely and traditional gendered roles dominate social structures.

In some Muslim majority countries wearing the *hijab* is compulsory by law; violating this obligation brings serious consequences. However, in the context of a democratic society where freedom of choice is exercised, Muslim women do freely choose to wear the *hijab* to express their religious piety, commitment to their personal beliefs, and to escape from the objectification of their bodies. "For many American Muslim women, dressing Islamically is

not about coercion but about making choices, about “choosing” an identity and expressing a religiosity through their mode of dress. Some women say that by veiling they are making a statement against Western imperialism, which sees Muslim piety as a sign of terrorism and against conservative Islam. This seeks to impose a traditionalist understanding of Islam that oppresses women” (Yazbeck Haddad, Smith, & Moore, p.10). The veil is a double edged sword in that it can be both a potent source of liberation for Muslim women or a re-Islamization and return to a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam where women’s rights are not recognized. The outcome depends on sociopolitical and historical context of the society in question.

Gender Inequality in U.S. Sub-culture

The U.S. is described as “the melting pot” where the demographic landscape is as diverse as the country’s physical landscape. The U.S. where a microcosm of every nationality, e.g., Chinatown and Little Italy, can be found in diverse cities all across the country, e.g., New York, Chicago, Miami, and San Francisco. Typically, an ethnic microcosm is homogenous by definition, but when considering the Muslim microcosm in the America, we are confronted with multiple nationalities sandwiched between Islam’s own cultural and sectarian diversity. This results in intra-Muslim divergences that not only manifest themselves in various ways in regards to gender inequality in a U.S. sub-culture but also fuel stubborn animosities between different groups.

According to the Pew research center, a survey report on the world’s Muslims and their views on religion, politics, and society, reflects a conservative preference in regards to women’s rights as they pertain to family and personal status laws. For example, regarding a wife’s position relative to her husband, a majority of Muslims, 85%, expressed that it is a

wife’s duty to always obey her husband. Disaggregated by country, this view is shared by easily over half of each country’s population: Egypt 85% Iraq, 92%, Jordan, 80%, the Palestinian Territories, 87% and Turkey, 65%. There were no reported numbers for Iran and Syria. See Figure 2.

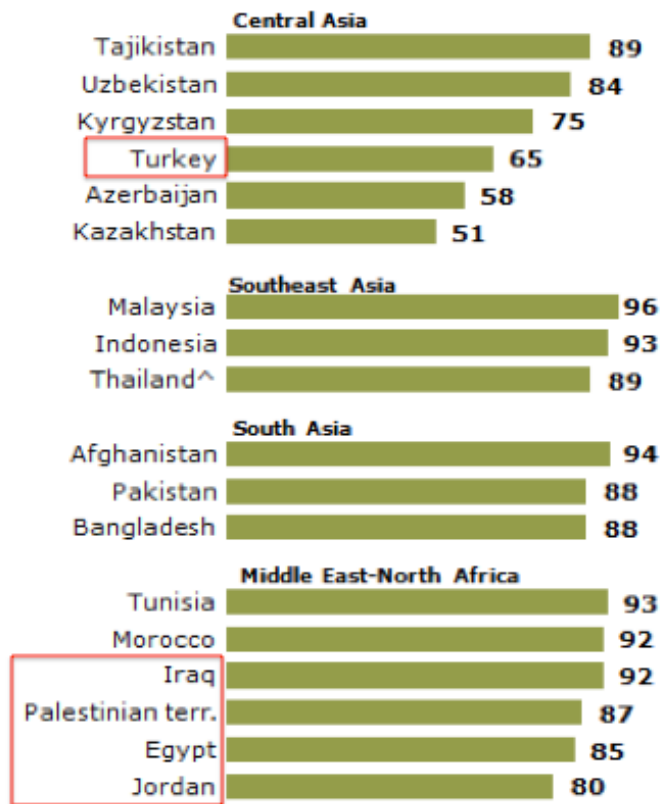


Figure 2. Illustrates responses regarding a wife’s duty to always obey her husband (Pew Research Center, 2013)

There was no establishing consensus among Muslims in regards to a woman’s right to initiate divorce, whether sons and daughters have equal rights to inheritance, and a woman’s right to choose to wear the veil in public. The Pew report states, “In 13 of the 22 countries where the question was asked, at least half of Muslims say a wife should have this right.”

Disaggregated by country, with the exception of Turkey, this view is less than half: Egypt 22%, Iraq 14%, Jordan, 22%, the Palestinian Territories 33%, and Turkey, 85%. There were no reported numbers for Iran and Syria. See Figure 3.

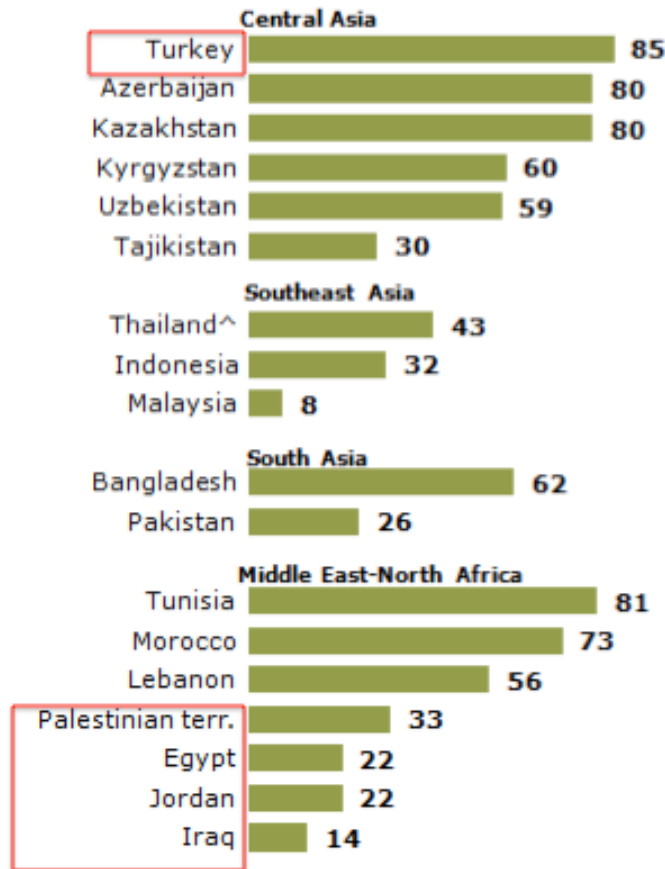


Figure 3. Illustrates veiling as a wedge issue disaggregated by country (Pew Research Center, 2013)

Similarly, when asked about inheritance, the Pew report stated, “In 12 of the 23 countries... at least half of Muslims say that sons and daughters should have equal inheritance rights. Most Muslims in Central Asia and in Southern and Eastern Europe hold this view, including 88% in Turkey.” Disaggregated by country, this view is again less than half: Egypt 26%, Iraq 22%, Jordan, 25%, and Palestinian Territories, 43%. No numbers were

reported for Iran and Syria. The wide range of results demonstrates how contingent attitudes towards genders equality are greatly influenced by the social and political context in which Muslims live (2013, Pew). See Figure 4.

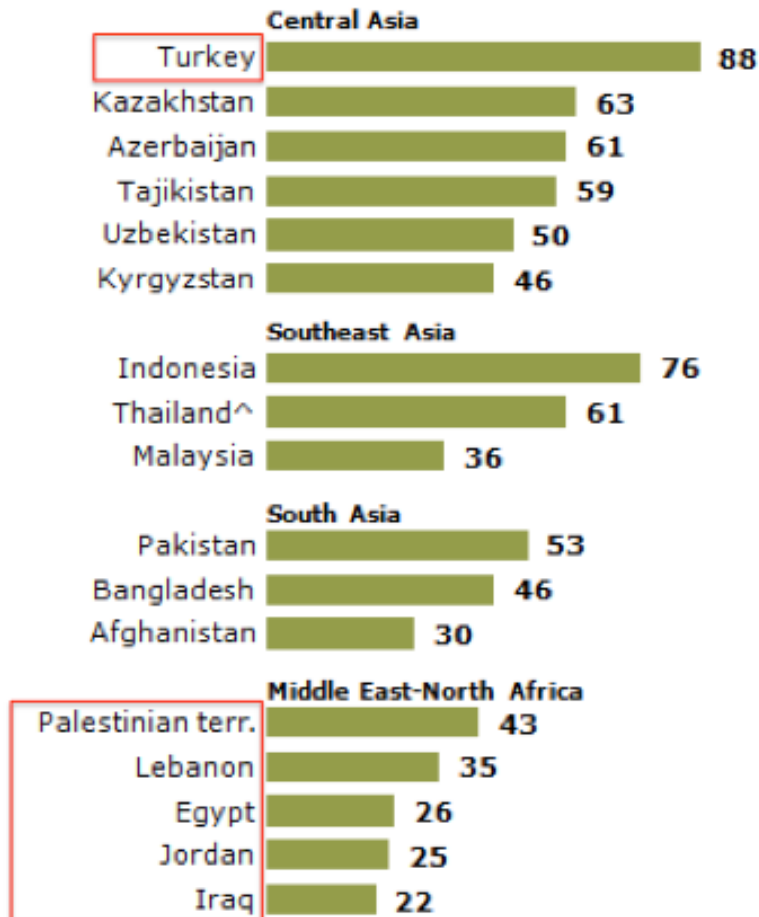


Figure 4. Illustrates Muslims view on sons and daughters and equal inheritance rights (Pew Research Center, 2013)

According to Asma Afsanuddin (2013), an Associate Professor in Arabic and Islamic Studies at Notre Dame, “in the United States, where Muslims are governed in their public lives by secular federal and state law, issues concerning marriage and occasionally divorce

are typically decided on the basis of traditional Islamic law as interpreted by imams (prayer leaders) of local mosques and/or community leaders and scholars” (p. 3). The concept of “separation of church and state” presents a dilemma for Muslim Americans, whose communities do not distinguish a separation between the religious and political contexts within the social and personal spheres. For Muslims, living in a secular society is inconsistent with religious principles. For Muslim Americans, there exists an internal tug-of-war match between secular governing laws and Islamic social/personal status laws. This is because Islam does not only codify a path for the faithful to follow, but also prescribes codes for social, civil, and political life. The challenges presented by this inconsistency between a democratic/secular governing body and Islamic law pertaining to social and personal conduct are so widespread and increasingly difficult to resolve that Muslim organizations were established to help Muslim communities in the U.S. reconcile these differences. One such organization is the Fiqh Council of North America (FCNA). It conducts “juristic research that focuses on resolving the ever-increasing modern jurisprudential issues in accordance with the pristine objectives of Islamic law and the general welfare of the entire community (Afsanuddin, 2013, p. 3).

Muslim immigrants to the U.S. may no longer be bound to their origin country’s rules of law, specifically Islamic Law, which does not recognize gender equality. However, the inherent culture and religious traditions by which they lead their lives are so ingrained that even in a democratic context, gender equality is not recognized. The concept of honor/shame societies illustrates this fact. In honor/shame societies the honor of a family, especially the male kin, rests on a woman’s chastity. She has no control over her own individual honor and serves as a vessel for carrying the burden of honor for her entire family. When a woman has

violated her family's honor by breaking any of the "honor" rules, e.g., dressing immodestly, interacting with a male outside of her family, interacting with another female associated with dishonor, or loses her virginity (usually by rape), she is killed by her relatives. A woman's male kin may restore the family's tarnished honor by carrying out an "honor killing." Although sometimes a mother may commit the act, in order to protect the honor status of the family.

Honor/suicide act is an alternative to an "honor killing" where a woman is forced to commit suicide because she has dishonored her family. A woman is expendable and if she violates her family's honor she is no longer beneficial to the family. In some cases one female kin's dishonor to the family may result in all the females being dishonored and therefore all are killed for the crime of one. Honor killings are an example of gender inequality inherent in Islamic traditions, which continue to be practiced regardless of the country in which Muslims reside. This practice transcends the rule of secular law and transfers into the Muslim microcosms in the U.S.

In a 2015 study, "Honor Violence Measurement Methods," commissioned by the U.S. Department of Justice and conducted by the Westat corporation, four types of honor violence were identified: a) forced marriage, b) honor-based domestic violence, c) honor killing and d) female genital mutilation. The report estimated that there are between twenty-three to twenty-seven honor killings every year in the U.S., the majority of them being committed because the young women have become "too Westernized" (Helba, Berstein, Leonard, & Bauer, 2015). In recognition of International Women's Day, on March 8, 2014, the Associated Press reported that although "Jordan's parliament passed a law that allows Jordanian women married to foreigners to pass on their nationality to their children," women

still have much to gain in rights because, “domestic violence and ‘honor killings’ still happen.” In 2013, 26 women in the Palestinian Territories, West Bank, and Gaza were murdered in the name of “family honor-“ by their relatives. The documentary film, *Honor Diaries* (Ali & Shore, 2013) explores this pervasive issue and women’s rights advocates fight to end this horrific practice.

CHAPTER III

PROBLEM

This qualitative case study addresses two problems unique to College Station, Texas: a) the fact that challenges experienced by ME wives, a marginalized group in the TAMU community, have never been identified and, therefore not addressed and, b) currently there is a lack of international development capstone courses for graduate student engagement in practical learning opportunities.

According to the Institute of International Education's Open Doors Regional Fact Sheet, the number of students from the ME in the U.S. increased by 11.9% in 2014/15 to 96,615 (IIE, 2015). At TAMU's main campus in College Station, there are 4,516 graduate students, with approximately 400 from the ME region. Despite the increasing presence of international students at U.S. universities, there exists an invisible group, i.e., the wives of ME Ph.D. students at TAMU. This unseen group is capable of tremendous influence during their time in the U.S. and upon returning to their home countries. Literature concerning this invisible group is almost nonexistent, which suggests that a new and untouched research frontier regarding ME wives accompanying their student husbands to universities in the U.S. awaits further exploration. The West's weak grasp of the ME narrative and insistence upon imposition of its own politically motivated narrative has established impervious boundaries between the Western and ME worlds, which are now colliding into one another.

This thesis will present a phenomenological qualitative study of the wives of ME Ph.D. students at TAMU, illuminating the challenges they face as a result of several factors, including the overwhelming shift from war torn or authoritarian home countries to a

democratic society in the U.S., their gendered role within their cultural context, and limitations tied to their religious identity. In regards to the gender gap and women's rights in the ME, "while previous research [has contributed] to the advancement of women's issues in the region, there still exists a considerable knowledge gap on what actually works across the various political systems in the ME. Further work in this area would help bridge that divide and hopefully lead to greater gender equality in the region" (Shalaby, 2013, p.17). Within the purview of international development, this thesis will examine and unearth contemporary development issues pertaining to gender inequality in the ME by identifying and evaluating the underlying causes of the challenges the wives of ME Ph.D. students at TAMU experience during their time in the U.S. This examination is of great significance because of the potential influence ME wives may have on their educated husbands who share equal potential in realizing opportunities for closing the gender gap in the ME. The prospect of empowering the wives of ME Ph.D. students may have numerous implications for future economic, food, environmental, and world security. However, the first and most crucial step towards empowering a marginalized group is to understand the context under which this group functions. For the ME wives, this context is tied to religious, cultural, and gendered identity.

Religion

Religion offers people a foundation for a worldview and provides guidance on how to live a happy, fulfilling life. It is powerful because it explains the unexplainable, life after death, and consequences of one's actions. Religion also offers people an identity, a sense of community and belonging. It can also be a potent source for female subordination. Is Islam oppressive against women or is it the cultures that have been absorbed into the religion based

on historical, political, and social context that discriminate against women? Islam is notorious for what the West perceives to be oppressive treatment of its women by restricting them to domestic functions and yet radicalized females committing acts of terror have become an alarming reality. Could this be another form of oppression? Could feelings of isolation, being undervalued as a female, and limited to a primarily domestic role lead to subscribing to extreme ideologies? Could the opposite be true, where radical interpretations of Islam are a pseudo-source of empowerment for females to assert their faith by becoming a suicide bomber, an ultimate expression of sacrifice? Do these radical ideologies offer these women something larger than themselves to fulfill in the ultimate display of faith? Although beyond the scope of this research, these questions are worth contemplation.

According to the Pew Research Center (2015), “while the world’s population is projected to grow 35% in the coming decades, the number of Muslims is expected to increase by 73% – from 1.6 billion in 2010 to 2.8 billion in 2050” (para 2). This projected growth is due to higher fertility rates among Muslim women, about 3.1, than compared to non-Muslim women, at about 2.3. This may be indicative of the lack of reproductive rights for Muslim women and in family planning matters. With over 1 billion Muslims worldwide, “Muslims have the youngest median age (23 in 2010) of all major religious groups, seven years younger than the median age of non-Muslims (30)” (Lipka & Hackett, 2015, para 5). This makes Islam the fastest growing religion in the world. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the appeal of Islam in order to address the new wave of ideological warfare dominating the international political landscape.

Whether in the U.S. or ME, Muslim communities conduct their lives according to Islamic law, which primarily governs personal status, or family law with respect to marriage,

divorce, inheritance, paternity, and child custody (Afsanuddin, 2013). Personal status law is an area in which Muslim women's rights are severely restricted, not only as a result of male interpretations of religious texts, but also due to pressure from, "members of their communities, who see women's challenges to traditional male-centered cultural and religious values and practices as ill-timed, misguided, and in the service of [Western] imperialism" (Moghissi, 2001, p. 596). In the Muslim sub-culture found in the U.S., Muslims' views on such topics as marriage, divorce, polygyny, and gender roles vary greatly because of an incredibly diverse amalgamation of ethnic and cultural origins of immigrant and U.S. born Muslim communities. This diverse demographic spectrum reflects contrasting views within the faith itself.

According to Muhammad Abduh, a prominent Egyptian intellect of the late 18th century, there are two aspects of Islamic law: a) contingent and b) non-contingent, which must be considered when Islamic law undergoes legal reform in Muslim majority societies (Afsanuddin, 2013). The non-contingent aspects refer to matters of worship, which are indisputable. The contingent aspects refer to matters considered worldly transactions that are broadly founded upon principles of Shari'a. For example mercy, justice, and equity are worldly transactions that depend on the social and political context in which they occur, and thus are part of *fiqh* or different human interpretations (Afsanuddin, 2013). An entanglement between contingent customary practices and non-contingent traditions characterizes Islamic law in practice as it relates to the social and legal status of Muslim women. A number of customary practices are tied to non-contingent Islamic law, but should be reexamined and reformed based on their true contingent nature and the idea of *ijtihad*, or independent legal reasoning (Afsanuddin, 2013). This is key for ending discrimination against women based on

obsolete religious concepts and reforming Islamic laws that reflect social circumstances in the modern world.

For example, on the issue of marriage, in Islam, a man is permitted to take up to four wives. This is not about supporting polygamy but rather a form of social insurance, a safety net for orphans of war. During Islam's beginnings there were many tribal wars and women lost their husbands and were left to fend for themselves. The Qur'an addresses this issue and instructs Muslim men to care for and provide for the widows of war. However, there was the condition that if a man cannot treat all the wives he takes equally, to include providing separate homes, then he should not take more than one wife. Additionally, there are Qur'anic verses that permit women to exercise their input in a marriage contract by including a clause that forbids their husbands from taking additional wives. Established Islamic laws that discriminate against women and deny them their rights are the result of a convenient cherry-picking strategy from male interpretations and implementation of the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad. In order to empower women, religious literacy and female interpretations of religious texts are essential to changing customs and traditions and reforming religious ideology from oppressing women to respecting them instead.

The Arab Spring, or wave of revolutions demanding democracy, was a promising movement that began with Tunisia in 2010 and spread across several countries in the Islamic world in 2011, including Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, and Jordan. The Western status quo erroneously assumed that the Arab Spring would bring drastic leaps towards achieving women's rights in the region. In 2013, Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy hosted a conference on the Arab Awakening. Prominent female figures from the Arab world attended. Nabila Hamza, president of the Foundation for the Future expressed that

women's rights, "have fallen by the wayside of the revolution. The rise of Islamist movements in the region has hijacked gender equality in many countries. Revolutions in the world don't necessarily lead to gender equality" (Shalaby, 2013, p. 8). Obtaining gender equality in a historically- and culturally-rich region will vary greatly in each country. However, there is a disturbing underlying mechanism at work that not only deters any gains for women under a previous regime, but also uses women as a means to an end. Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, assistant secretary general, head of media and communication, League of Arab States (Jordan), agrees and contends, "women have participated in the Arab Spring uprisings in many Arab countries— peaceful participation demanding democracy and social justice. The Arab woman was never a participant in acts of violence. Yet, some of the extremist Islamic movements have used women's passage into the common framework to make them part of their plan to destabilize society. This phenomenon is new to Arab society"(MENA, 2014, p. 2). This phenomenon is a force to be reckoned with as the lines between religion, politics, and identity continue to blur in the ME.

Culture

It is argued that Islam does not oppress women, but that cultural limitations do. At Rice University's 2013 Arab Awakening conference, consensus among scholars reflected that, "another major step toward female empowerment in the region would be to redraw the dividing line between custom and religion. This distinction has been blurred for decades throughout the region...Islam has had little to do with gender inequality in the Arab world and there is a need to distinguish between religion and social norms and customs if Arab women are to be granted fundamental rights" (Shalaby, 2013, p.16). This holds true within a culture and between two clashing cultures, the West and the ME. In the U.S., ME women are

quite misunderstood and "cultural stereotypes of Arab-American women tend to collapse religion and ethnicity into synonymous components of culture, portraying them as veiled Islamic traditionalists" (Belk & Sobh, 2009, p. 208). Stereotypes about oppressed veiled women give way to misconceived notions of a misogynistic faith that restrains its women. In their book *Muslim Women in America: The Challenge of Islamic Identity Today*, Yazbeck Haddad, Smith, and Moore offer the contrary and contend that since its inception hundreds of years ago, Islam has granted women rights to education, to vote, conduct business, and to retain their family name even after marriage, which are all ironically rights that women in the West have fought for to obtain in their own society (2006). In fact, depending on their socio-economic class, Muslim women enjoy a very comfortable lifestyle in their home countries. Many families hire help, nannies, maids, and cooks, to carry out domestic responsibilities, which allows the wives to have the time to establish their careers and maintain a healthy family life balance. The ME wives who are accustomed to this type of lifestyle have an incredibly difficult time adjusting to strictly becoming a housewife, a reduced role, when they accompany their husbands to the U.S. to support them in their Ph.D. studies.

Karamah, "dignity" in Arabic, is a non-profit organization based in Washington D.C. and concerned with the legal rights of U.S. Muslims, Muslim women in particular. Karamah's mission statement highlights the importance of education and that "women will be empowered to transform archaic, culture-based interpretations of women's status in Islam, to the betterment of themselves and their communities" (Afsanuddin, 2013, p. 6). Karamah's efforts on matters related to women's rights have been criticized for being too 'modernist' and influenced by Western secular feminism. Other influential religious leaders, have endorsed their activism and juridical interpretations as valid and responsible examples of

ijtihad by learned female and male scholars. (Afsanuddin, 2013). Even legitimately established Muslim organizations face significant challenges from the wide spectrum of religious authority figures within the Muslim community. This makes the task of reforming antiquated Islamic laws and changing gender-based discriminatory customs a particularly daunting challenge.

Gendered Identity

Gender roles are a social construct. They define responsibilities between men and women in social and economic activities, access to resources, and decision-making authority. Biological roles are fixed, but gender roles can and do shift with social, economic, and technological change.

Since gender is a social construct, cultural and social norms regarding gender roles are deeply ingrained in, “attitudes, societal institutions, and market forces, [therefore] political commitment at the highest international and national levels is essential to institute the policies that can trigger social change and to allocate the resources necessary for gender equality and women’s empowerment” (Grown, Gupta, & Ke, 2005, p. 27). Equal access to education for women and girls is essential for igniting the forces that will bring about cultural change. Currently, Arab women face significant challenges in accessing education, employment, literacy and even the feminization of poverty where a household could be relatively wealthy but the women are poor due to the power dynamics in the household. Arab women are also facing a new and unforeseen challenge: identity (MENA, 2014). How women see themselves and the source of their own dignity and respect is pivotal in fostering any type of gender equality. If a woman does not perceive herself as an equal to a man and worthy of equal rights, then gender parity will never be obtained.

A 2014 United Nations Development Programme report revealed that, “90% of Jordanian women justify wife beating. As shocking as this figure is, it is merely the tip of the iceberg when it comes to self-defeating and destructive views held by some women in the region” (Askoul, 2015, para 1). The origin of women’s low self worth can be traced to customs and traditions that stem from cultural attitudes rather than religion. For example, when performing ablution before prayer certain acts make the process invalid. These acts include urination, sleeping, or vomiting, to name a few. In the case of a mother preparing for prayer and perhaps caring for a baby after the ablution process, the urination of a baby girl would invalidate the mother’s ablution (Askoul, 2015). This claim is completely baseless in Islam. However, cultural beliefs are fused into religious acts with one specific goal: to degrade the female gender. This toxic core belief system dominates women’s psychological health where their sense of self-esteem is completely rotted. How can a woman establish an identity when she lacks basic self-esteem? Rana Askoul, founder of Changing Pink, a ME-based initiative seeking to empower women in the region, calls for “initiatives that seek to reconstruct the understanding of basic values such as human rights, self-respect, and self-worth [which] are desperately needed at the grass-roots level, irrespective of gender, but more so for women,” (2015) because women face obstacles that hinder the whole of humanity.

The challenges outlined above are dominant issues for ME wives and quite overwhelming. These grand challenges will connect to periphery problems identified by ME wives in College Station, Texas. The periphery problems may seem trivial, but they reflect a microcosm of a larger, more stratified and complex system of unjust forces at play.

CHAPTER IV

METHOD

This qualitative research study is phenomenological in nature. According to Merriam (2009) phenomenology, “has a focus on the experience itself and how experiencing something is transformed into consciousness... phenomenology is a study of people’s conscious experience of their life-world” (Merriam, 2009, p. 25) and daily social interactions. This phenomenological qualitative study is highly descriptive and provides insight into the challenges experienced by ME wives of Ph.D. students at TAMU.

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to whether the findings are credible and match reality given the data collected (Merriam, 2009, p.213). Trustworthiness can be verified using several methods, such as triangulation or an audit trail. As established by Goetz and LeCompte (1984), triangulation is a “means of refining, broadening, and strengthening conceptual linkages” (Berg, 1989, p. 5) which ensures trustworthiness. Reliability and transferability refer to, “the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (Merriam, 2009, p. 220) and “the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (Merriam, 2009, p. 223). To ensure trustworthiness, reliability and transferability, the researcher implemented the following qualitative techniques, triangulation, peer debriefing (conducted by Dr. Silva Hamie), and an audit trail, where a substantial sample size of twenty ($N=20$) participants, provided incredibly rich data for thick description.

Before interviewing the researcher provided a consent form and disclosed all pertinent information regarding my research topic and the purpose of the interview as well as

ensuring confidentiality to the participants, which put them at ease and allowed them to comfortably share their views. The researcher has triangulated data by conducting interviews with twenty participants ($N=20$) from six different nationalities in College Station, Texas. The data collected was compared to the wide range of literature explored in regards to this study. The researcher has also collected email exchanges, and audio recordings of interviews conducted with all participants. The interviews were transcribed and amounted to approximately 190 pages of interview data. The transcribed interviews for four Iraqi participants, one Jordanian, and one Egyptian participant, were cross-referenced with the translator's transcriptions of the interviews, (Susan Khalid, translator, 2016).

The diverse nationalities included in this study speak to the dependability of the findings, as the categories identified hold true across all participant views among all six nationalities. Additionally, the recorded interviews allowed the researcher to capture salient points that may have been overlooked during the interviews and allowed for deep analysis for inferences from the data. The interviewing style was semi-structured, which allowed the researcher to follow up with questions that formulated naturally as the discussion flowed. The researcher prepared seventeen general questions and asked the same questions in several ways to ensure consistent answers from the participants were received. Dr. Hamie conducted a peer debriefing in order for the researcher to cross-reference her interpretations from the data and ensure that the findings were consistent within the context of the data collected.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

This research study is credible because data were collected using audio recordings for true inference and analysis via the triangulation method where the researcher assessed the data in the context of the interviews as well as the extensive literature review, reflections and

observations from the researcher's own unique experiences in Middle Eastern culture, and open ended data analysis. This interdisciplinary approach provides several pathways to test the credibility of the data collected.

The level of trustworthiness for this research article is sound with the exception of translator bias for six out of the twenty interviews collected, and the snowball sampling method used. Due to the closed nature of Middle Eastern cultures, in regards to interaction with women, snowball sampling was the most effective method for the researcher to reach and meet with women willing to participate in this study. The snowball sampling method introduces participant bias and may have limited the selection of women available and willing to participate in this study. Additionally, for six of the twenty interviews, an Arabic translator had to facilitate the interviews. For these six interviews with Arab women, a language barrier was evident between the researcher and the participants, which introduced the possibility of translator bias, another source for unintended inconsistency. Since the researcher was unable to directly communicate with these six participants and depended on the translator's interpretations, internal reliability was limited. Where necessary, the researcher took measures to ask for clarification from the translator, however the translation process from one language to another carries the risk of losing nuanced details and meanings.

According to TAMU's International Student Services website, as of Fall 2015, there are 4,516 international graduate students, representing 126 countries, currently enrolled. From these 126 countries, six ME nationalities have been identified for this study, from the Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, and Turkey. Of the 4,516 graduate students and six target countries, 1 student is from Palestine, 25 are from Iraq, 46 from Egypt, 14 are from Jordan, 92 are from Turkey, and 183 are from Iran.

A qualitative study consisting of a purposive sample of twenty ($N=20$) wives of ME Ph.D. students attending TAMU was conducted. Individual and group interviews were conducted in College Station, Texas. As defined by Van Maanen (1979) qualitative research is “an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (Merriam, 2009, p. 13). The raw data collected from the interviews conducted provide the necessary depth in framing and extrapolating themes common among different ME nationalities as well as variations between them.

Data Sources and Procedures

A research proposal for this study was prepared and submitted to the TAMU Human Research Protection Program Internal Review Board. Approval for conducting this qualitative study was awarded on February 11, 2016. The purposive sampling criteria included twenty ($N=20$) females, who are wives of ME Ph.D. students at TAMU and have lived in the U.S. for six months or more. The purposive sample was determined based on enrollment data obtained from the International Student Services Department at TAMU and included one ($N=1$) to five ($N= 5$) women, from each nationality selected. This sample consisted of an array of nationalities to include Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, and Turkey. Dr. Silva Hamie, lecturer in International Affairs at the Bush School connected the researcher to an Arabic translator, i.e., the opinion leader, in the local Arab community. Dr. Hamie is a first generation Lebanese immigrant to the U.S. The researcher conducting this study, Shiva Thompson, who was born and raised in Iran emigrated to the

U.S., with her family, at nine years of age. Ms. Thompson is fluent in Farsi and has access to the local Iranian community network in College Station.

As the first point of contact the translator connected the researcher with the first participant who expressed initial interest in participating in this case study. The researcher met and interviewed the first participant; developing a rapport in the process. The next sets of interviews were facilitated through this first contact, who is a key informant. This key informant identified other potential participants within her community that fit the purposive sample criteria. The ability of the researcher to introduce herself to the participants by association with the key informant helped develop credibility and legitimacy for the participants. As for the Turkish and Iranian communities, the researcher accessed contacts within each community through the Raindrop Turkish House Foundation in Bryan, and the Turkish Student Association and Persian Student Association at TAMU. The researcher identified individuals who fit the purposive sample criteria mentioned above.

This process was highly exploratory and the researcher's ability to create a comfortable and safe environment for participant discussion was integral to successfully collecting data. The researcher's own dual cultural background, Iranian American, was a decisive advantage for maneuvering the complexity involved in this qualitative process. Some challenges to consider included connecting with wives who may be reluctant or socially isolated as well as overcoming a husband's objection to his wife's participation. Techniques for how to address these obstacles were considered.

To connect with reluctant wives, the researcher identified the opinion leader in the community, i.e., the Arabic interpreter, and an informant, the first participant, and developed a rapport with these individuals in order to gain the trust and respect of others who may also

be reluctant. The opinion leader was able to persuade socially isolated women to participate by informing them of the benefits in how their lives may improve as a result of participating. The opinion leader then coordinated individual interviews in order to accommodate the participants' preferences for meeting.

Due to cultural taboos and religious sensitivity a mix of individual and group interviews were implemented to respect cultural and religious rules of conduct. The sample size was twenty ($N=20$) women, and between one ($N=1$) and five ($N=5$) women from each nationality previously identified. The numbers of participants from each nationality were three Egyptian, five Iranian four Iraqi, three Jordanian, one Palestinian, and four Turkish. Interview size ranged between one ($N=1$) to three ($N=3$) female participants, for a total of eighteen interviews. Interviews were one hour to one and a half hours in duration. A total of seventeen questions were asked. The types of questions asked included demographic, opinion/values, experience/behavior, and interpretive, in order to collect relevant data and facilitate conversation among participants.

The selection of questions framed the tone of the interviews (See Appendix D). However, when opportunities were present, follow up questions were asked to probe further in order to allow for a natural conversation flow and maintain the intent of the research. Before the researcher conducted the individual and group interviews, all participants were made aware about the intent of the interview as well as their confidentiality and protection of identifiable information. The location and logistics for conducting these interviews were determined based on the participants' preferences in order to ensure comfort and openness. Interviews were conducted in the participants' homes. Leading questions and responses were collected using a combination of field notes and voice recordings. There were no cultural and

religious constraints that prevented the researcher from using these traditional methods of data collection. All participants agreed to allow the interviews to be recorded. Follow up interviews for data clarification and validation purposes were scheduled as necessary.

Data Analysis Procedures

After collecting the data from the interviews, the researcher reviewed the information in order to extrapolate themes based on emergent design and ground theory as established by Lincoln and Guba (1985) on qualitative research methods. These criteria and research techniques ensured a sample that relates to the research question, which set the foundation for the practical graduate course by framing the issues and challenges ME wives are experiencing during their time in the U.S.

According to Merriam (2009) there are several roles the researcher can take on while collecting data during interviews, complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant, or complete observer (pp. 124-125). For this qualitative study the researcher assumed an observer as participant role where, “the researcher’s observer activities are known to the group; participation in the group is definitely secondary to the role of information gatherer” (Merriam, 2009, p. 124). While carrying out the interview questions the researcher observed the physical setting, the participants themselves, the conversation and all interactions throughout the experience. This involvement allowed the researcher to triangulate her research findings and provide a broader and more accurate perspective to the data collection method. This contributed another layer to the manner in which the researcher made inferences about the information while mining through the raw data.

After completing interviews with Arabic speakers, the translator transcribed all recorded data into Arabic first and then into English, while the researcher transcribed

recorded interviews with Farsi speakers into Farsi first and then into English, both into a word document. The researcher also transcribed recorded interviews conducted in English with Turkish women into a word document. The researcher then used open coding to identify emerging themes from each interview. As established by Corbin and Strauss (2007) there are three phases for coding qualitative data where “*open coding* is what one does at the beginning of data analysis; it is tagging any unit of data that might be relevant to the study. *Axial coding* is the process of relating categories and properties to each other, refining the category scheme. In *selective coding*, a core category, propositions, or hypotheses are developed” (Merriam, 2009, p. 200).

After identifying descriptive codes the researcher reflected on the data to identify a common thread between each of these open codes. The researcher then applied analytical coding and established cross cutting categories that encompass variations of the emerging themes identified between nationalities. The terms used for each category identified were pertinent to the research question and determined through the researcher’s interpretation of the data. The categories identified pertained to the challenges of the ME wives. The ten periphery challenges connected to macro challenges previously discussed in chapter two. These periphery challenges include: a) Language Barrier, b) Affordable Childcare, c) Identity, d) Healthcare, e) Education, f) No Income, g) Transportation, h) Entertainment, i) Halaal Foods, and j) Religious Imposition and other latent issues.

After each category was established, the researcher used open-ended data analysis to quantify the data collected from each one of the seventeen primary questions used in the study. These categories were used to conduct a frequency count of the number of responses that apply to each theme. These categories were coded and assigned to each response in order

to determine the frequency of responses associated with that particular theme. After determining the frequency count, the researcher then used proportions to demonstrate the percentage of responses associated with each theme identified. This technique further supported the qualitative portion of this case study by both allowing the researcher to discover key challenge areas common among the sample group and quantifying open-ended responses in order to provide a visualization of the data collected and to reach a broader audience, whether in academia or the general public.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

The objective of this thesis is two fold: a) to examine and illuminate the challenges wives of ME Ph.D. students at TAMU experience during their time in the U.S as a result of the overwhelming shift from war torn home countries to a democratic society in the U.S. and b) to create a pathway for graduate students to solve the challenges identified and empowering the wives during their time in the U.S. The intent of this research is to establish the foundation for a practical application course designed by a joint effort between the Bush School and ALEC for graduate students interested in development careers where students gain valuable skills by addressing the challenges identified in this study.

After conducting twenty ($N=20$) interviews with ME wives from six different nationalities, Egyptian, Iranian, Iraqi, Jordanian, Palestinian Territories, and Turkish, ten primary periphery challenges were identified. The ME wives' nationalities were well represented. See Figure 5.

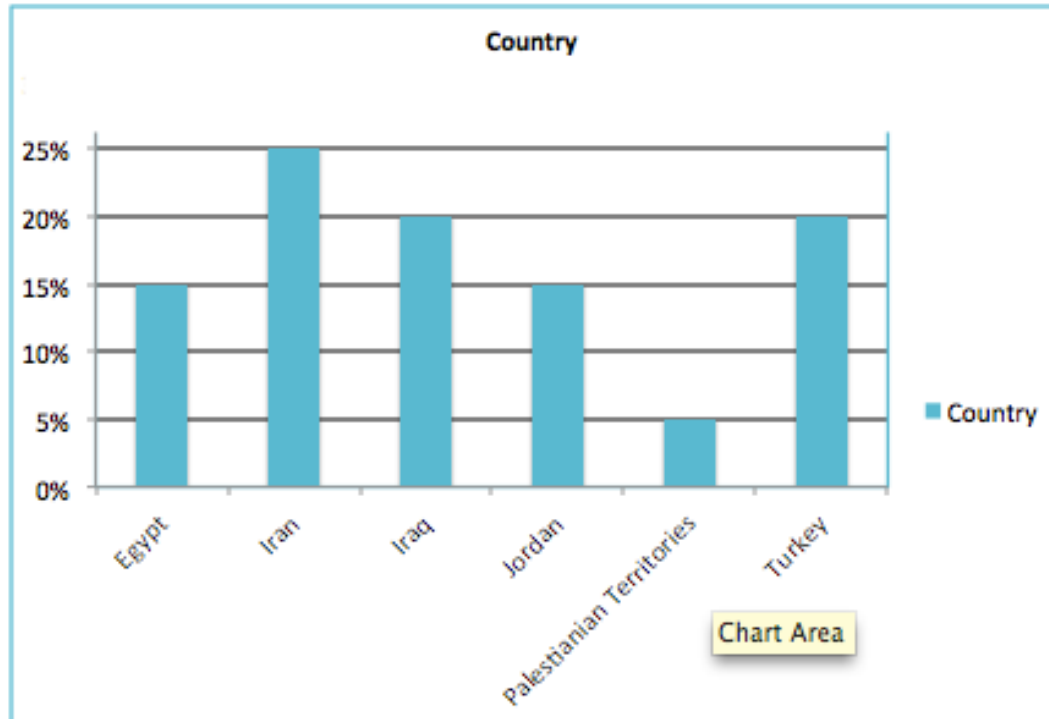


Figure 5. Illustrates the six nationalities represented by ME wives in this study

The periphery challenges identified include: a) Language Barrier, b) Affordable Childcare, c) Identity, d) Healthcare, e) Education, f) No Income, g) Transportation, h) Entertainment, i) Halaal Foods, and j) Religious Imposition and other latent issues. See figure 6.

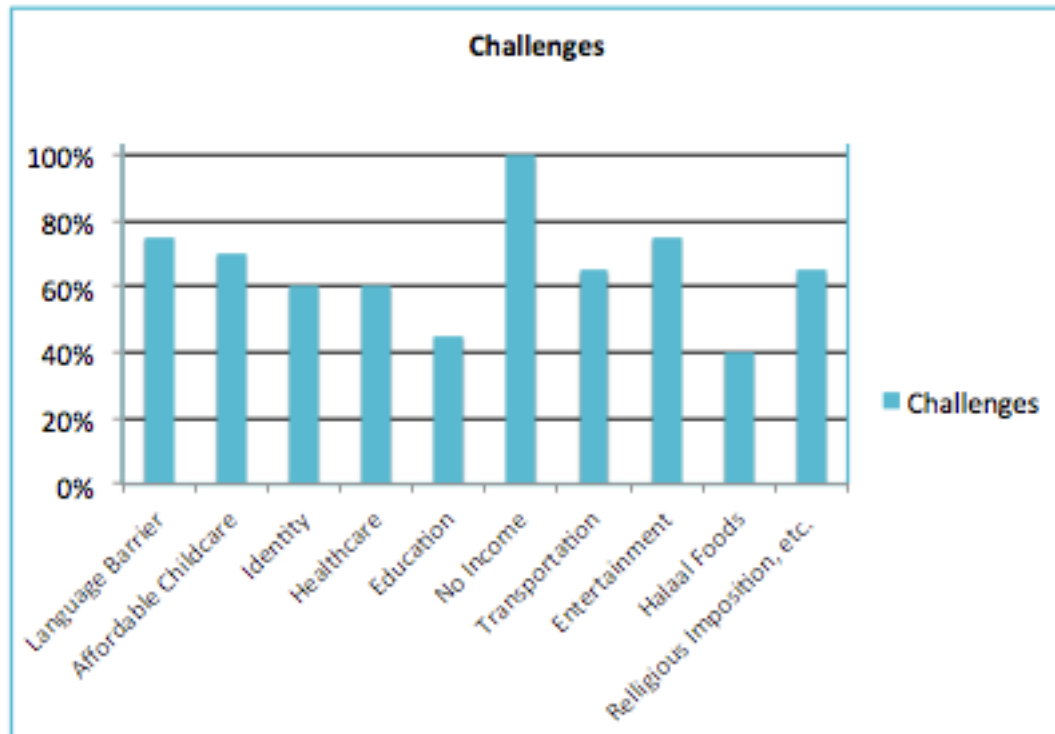


Figure 6. Illustrates the ten periphery challenges experienced by ME wives

In the remainder of this chapter these challenges are investigated and framed to demonstrate common trends and variations. Open-ended data analysis was used to quantify the data collected from each one of the seventeen primary questions used in this study. A visualization of each question and common challenges identified between the ME wives can be found in Figures 7-21 within this chapter.

Language Barrier

Communication is of utmost importance in any capacity, whether professional or personal. There is plenty of space for miscommunication within one's own language, but what of those for whom a new language means a significant communication barrier? Such is the case for ME wives. Out of twenty participants, fifteen women identified English

proficiency as a significant challenge in their lives even though some have been in the U.S. for more than two years. See figure 7.

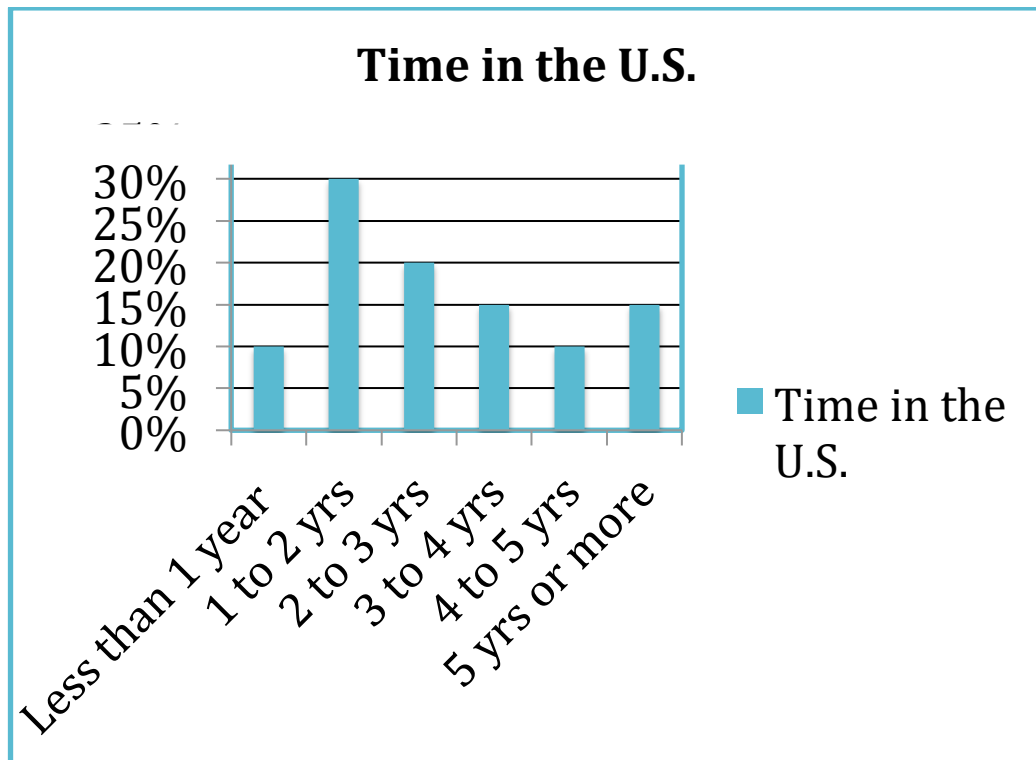


Figure 7. Illustrates ME wives time in spent in the U.S.

Two participants with three children each shared that language is a challenge. With the help of an Arabic translator, a Jordanian wife who has been in the U.S. for three years expressed, “I can explain what I need by pointing. And I’m not embarrassed because they always try to help me and understand what I am saying” (Jordanian wife, personal communication, Interview #18, April, 2016). An Iraqi wife candidly said:

I didn't think I needed to learn English because I have three kids and I felt like I was too busy with them and I could handle going to the store like Target or HEB with my simple language. But I would like it, if there is a professional place that provides daycare for the children and classes for me to improve my language.

(Iraqi wife, Interview #15, personal communication, March 2016)

Their role as wives and mothers severely limits their opportunities for improving their English language skills. Another participant, of Turkish origin, who has lived in College Station for over six and a half years expressed her frustration through broken English:

I have been here for 6.5 years. Long time for me. But unfortunately I am very sad about my English. My English is not enough for communicate the people. If I were back to 6.5 years ago, I was studying a lot, English. Because I have American friends and other international friends, I want to tell them many things about myself, about my country, about my culture, but right now it is very limited for me. (Turkish wife, personal communication, Interview #2, February 2016)

The language barrier significantly hinders the quality of life and experiences for the ME wives in the U.S. They cannot communicate their cultures or understand American culture. The majority of participants expressed that they thought once they live in the U.S. for a year or longer their language would improve but due to their visa status, which does not permit them to work, they are confined to the home and have limited interaction with other

people. This severely affects the amount of language immersion they receive. An Iranian wife shared:

You really have to immerse yourself in the environment. And with the F-2 visa status I'm just in the house all the time. You can read books, watch movies, but you don't get to practice your speaking skills, it's different. (Iranian wife, Interview #9, personal communication, March, 2016)

Another Iranian wife stated that there is a significant learning curve between written English, spoken English, and listening skills:

True that we've taken the TOEFEL and GRE and our English scores are good but there is still a big difference between text and speaking. Like when I first came here I felt like I was deaf and dumb. It was a feeling like this. (Iranian wife, Interview #10, personal communication, March, 2016)

For ME wives, this lack of English proficiency is stressful and creates feelings of inadequacy, a lack of confidence, affects self-esteem, and results in an increased dependency on their husbands, who are extremely busy with their academic pursuits and equally stressed but for different reasons. This language dependency and inability to communicate with others is a source of female subordination for these wives and affects their marriages, some of which are new marriages.

The majority of women expressed that English language proficiency is a significant benefit for them even upon their return to their home countries, especially in regards to job opportunities. An Iranian participant explained, “In Iran if you can put English fluency in your resume it is a huge point. It’s so important” (Iranian wife, Interview #10, personal communication, March, 2016) and makes you very marketable, particularly in countries with weak economies. When asked what is important for them and what they value, a Turkish wife shared, “To be able to tell people that this religion is a tolerant religion. I would like to spend my life informing and educating people about Islam as much as I can” (Turkish wife, Interview #12, personal communication, April 2016). But the English language barrier severely limits the ME wives’ ability to interact with Americans or people from other countries.

A Jordanian wife shared her experience in a salon where she tried to explain why she wears hijab to the hair stylist. When she stated that she does not have to wear the headscarf in front of blood relatives and that it is worn in front of strangers, she was bombarded with more questions and confusion, “they were like ‘strangers? What do you mean by strangers?’ So I don’t know, I just like try to explain it but they don’t get the idea behind that. They think that it is not your choice” (Jordanian wife, Interview #6, personal communication, March 2016). Since their English is not proficient, it is difficult for ME wives to communicate why they wear hijab and how it ties to their religious identity.

Out of desperation some women risked losing a lot of time by going back to their countries in order to improve their English first, ironically enough, and then try to return to the U.S. One participant shared an anecdote about her friend:

A friend in the Iranian community said that's what she did. She came here, and her English wasn't very good. She had a single entry visa so she went back to Iran and applied again. It took about eight months and while she was waiting she went to English classes there. Then she came here and her English was much better and she applied and tested to go to University here and was successful. People do these things. Here it is so expensive to go to English classes, at the Academic building, especially for people with no income. I think the resident rate was \$3000. (Iranian wife, interview #11, February 2016)

This language challenge limits the influence of ME wives both in the U.S. and in their home countries. They cannot express themselves, explain their culture, religion, what life is like in their country, or have a cross cultural exchange with American people. There is also a lack of confidence and fear in practicing and learning English because they do not want to make mistakes and have people think that they are uneducated women when the exact opposite is true; they all have a minimum of a bachelor's degree from their respective countries.

Affordable Childcare

In ME culture and most other cultures outside the West, the extended family plays an important role in raising children. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and close family friends all help young couples, especially new mothers, raise their children. The ME wives ages ranged between twenty-two through thirty-six. See Figure 8.

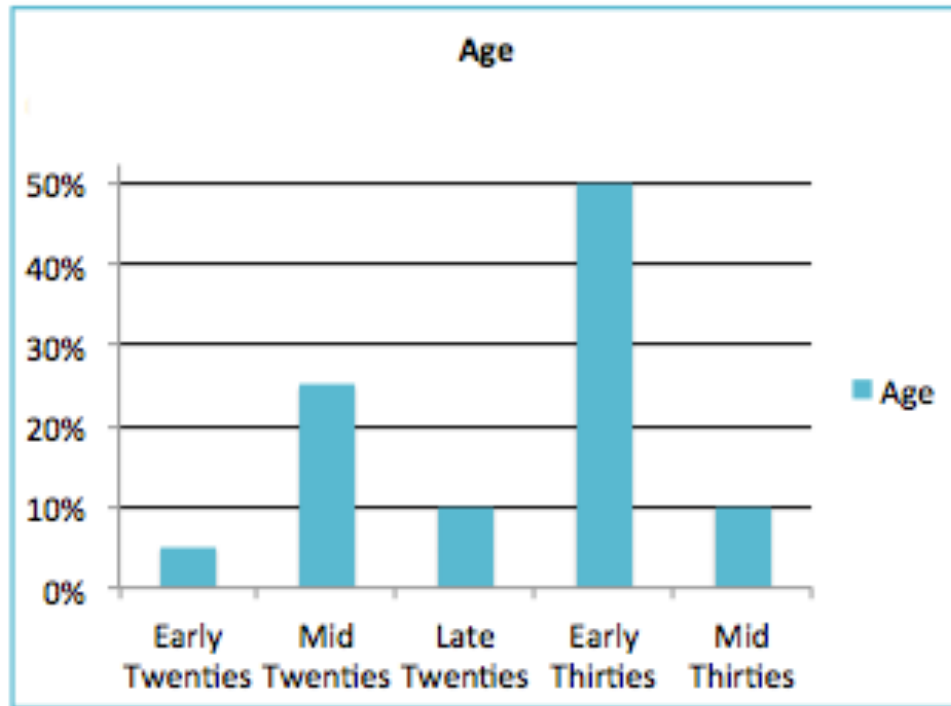


Figure 8. Illustrates ME wives age range

Fourteen of the twenty ME wives have children, some with toddlers, others with newborns. The number and ages of their children varied. See figures 9 and 10.

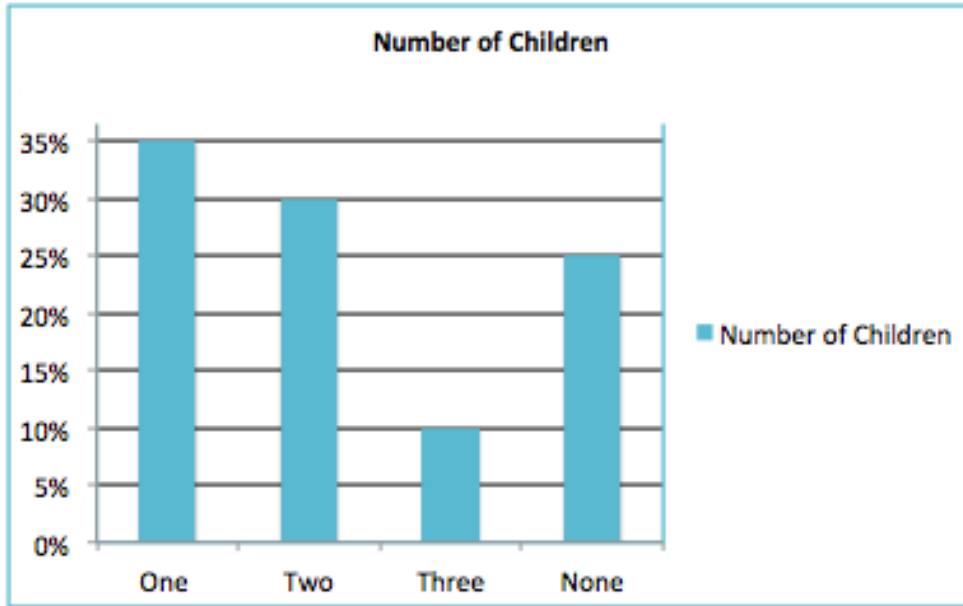


Figure 9. Illustrates ME wives' number of children

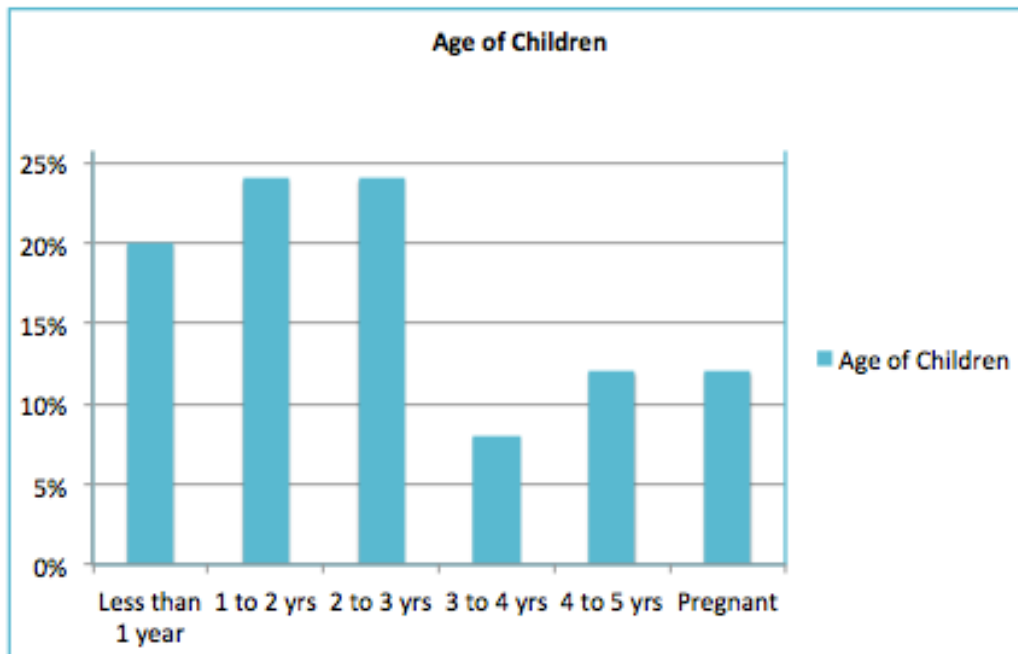


Figure 10. Illustrates the ages of ME wives' children

These ME wives are severed from their family network and have found themselves in a foreign country with no extended family close by to help them raise their children. An Iraqi wife explained the importance of family support in caring for her three children:

The most difficult challenge is my kids and I'm missing my mother in law and my mom. I have three kids, I spend the whole week with them, because my husband is so busy with his studies... you can have new energy to be with them, I want to MISS them. (Iraqi wife, Interview #15, personal communication, March 2016)

When asked what they would like to change about their lifestyle, a clearly exhausted Jordanian wife with three children, two toddlers and a three-month-old baby, answered, "Get some rest from the children" (Jordanian wife, Interview #18, personal communication, March 2016). An Iraqi wife echoed the importance of support from extended family:

Also my family lived with me in Iraq so I can drop off my kids with my mom if I needs to. Here in the U.S.A. I don't have my family with me so if I need to do something for myself I should provide daycare. (Iraqi wife, Interview #13, personal communication, March 2016)

Although there are many benefits to family support in caring for children, several wives, including Egyptian, Iranian, Iraqi and Jordanian wives, also expressed the disadvantages to this tradition, which concerned the kind of influence and unsolicited advice that in-laws or parents may exert on couples. A Jordanian wife elaborated on this subject:

Over there maybe your father-in-law or mother-in-law, can have influence in your business. They can get involved in your life, give you an opinion, you can do this better this way, and you need to follow to show respect but here you can do whatever you want to do and you are far away from that. (Jordanian wife, Interview #18, personal communication, March 2016)

In regards to childcare, the advantages and disadvantages of the family network are evident where each scenario brings a different set of outcomes for the ME wives. Without a close-knit family network present in College Station, the next best option is affordable childcare, which is incredibly difficult to find for ME wives, who do not have an income. There is a long waiting list for quality daycare programs that are in high demand. An Iranian wife with a newborn explained the process:

You have to register a year in advance. It is the same for those who are graduate students and have children. The daycare at the university is completely full and you have to wait your turn next year. It is very expensive too. (Iranian wife, Interview #8, personal communication, March 2016)

A Turkish wife with a special needs child confirmed, “A couple of them have high ratings and I was put on a one-year waiting list. I think when people get pregnant they go and get on the waiting list” (Turkish wife, Interview #3, personal communication, March 2016). Affordable childcare is a crosscutting issue related to the ME wives’ lack of income, separation from their extended families as well as their isolated lifestyle in the College

Station community. Essentially these ME wives are prisoners in their own homes, spending the entire day with their children, with no time for themselves, waiting for their husbands to return from campus. This monotonous lifestyle affects these women's psychological well-being and reinforces gender roles.

Several Egyptian, Iranian, Iraqi, and Turkish, women described their worries regarding raising their children in the U.S. and the lack of exposure to the cultures of their country of origin. An Egyptian wife admitted her future worries:

The other thing I worry about is my daughter. I am afraid to raise her here. Everything is open so there is a lot of freedom here and I don't like this, maybe she will learn things from school and will want a boyfriend and this is not acceptable in our culture. I am afraid to stay here since the culture is so different. (Egyptian wife, Interview #17, personal communication, April 2016)

Contrary to this view an Iranian wife explained:

In Iran children are raised a certain way, here it is different, it is another way. There are some good things about how it is done in Iran and some good things about how it is done here. I would like for my child to be independent. In Iran children are very dependent on parents and the family. (Iranian wife, Interview #8, personal communication, March 2016)

This concern is a common theme for immigrant Muslim women in the U.S. In their book *Muslim Women in America: The Challenge of Islamic Identity Today*, Yazbeck Haddad, Smith, and Moore explore this issue and confirm that there exists, “unique challenges [for] Muslims raising their children in America, a Western culture with values and norms that do not necessarily mesh well with Islamic tradition” (Yazbeck Haddad, Smith, & Moore, 2011, p. 284). The conflict between raising your children and instilling your country of origin’s culture in them while living in a secular country is a common narrative for immigrant families; desperately trying to connect with their ‘Americanized’ children, who are also struggling to establish their own unique bicultural identities.

Identity

As previously discussed, Dr. Abdolkarim Soroush, a leading Iranian reformer and Rumi scholar, offers insights on religion and politics, two opposing forces, in the geopolitical landscape of the ME. He argues that, “establishing an equilibrium between the Islam of truth and Islam as an identity is one of the most difficult tasks of religious intellectuals” (A. Soroush, personal communication, October, 14 2014). Dr. Soroush’s argument is evident in every interview conducted with each ME wife. See figure 11 for the distribution of religious affiliation between the ME wives.

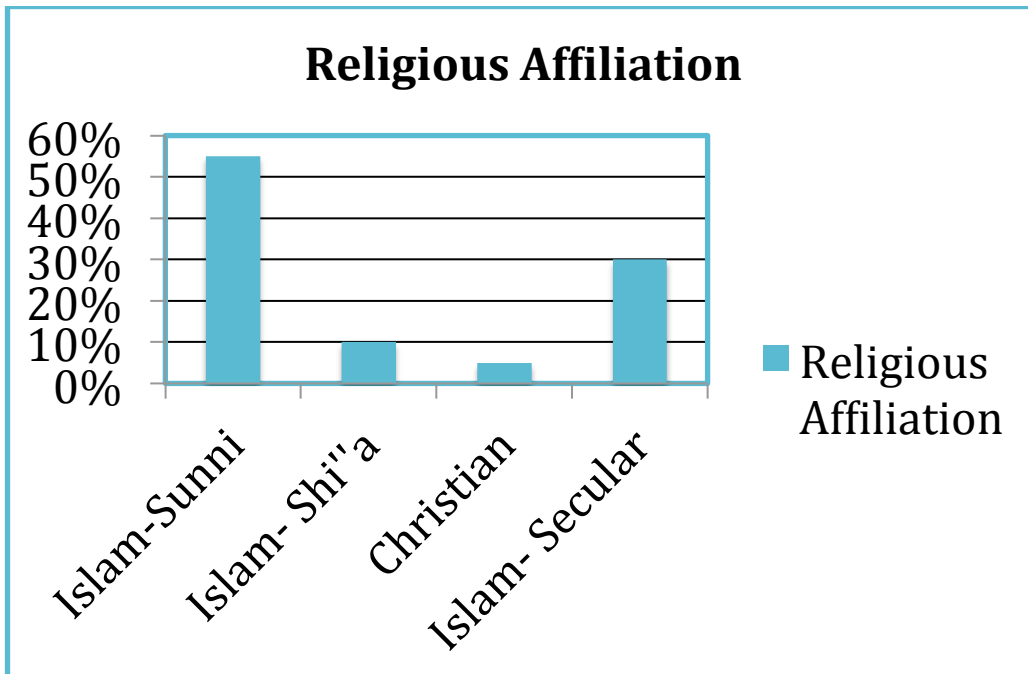


Figure 11. Illustrates ME wives religious affiliation

For Muslim women their identity is intensely intertwined with their faith in God, their religious obligations, and their relationship with their families. An identity separate from faith or family ties or a value system independent of these two factors does not exist. Religion and identity are mutually exclusive, “Just think about anything in your life that you feel like you are defining yourself with it. For instance, your family, that is part of your identity, you are attached to them” (Turkish wife, Interview #3, personal communication, March 2016) stated a Turkish wife, who struggled to define herself and establish her identity in an American context. When asked how often they are in contact with their extended family, the majority of women confessed that it is a life line and daily habit for them. See figure 12.

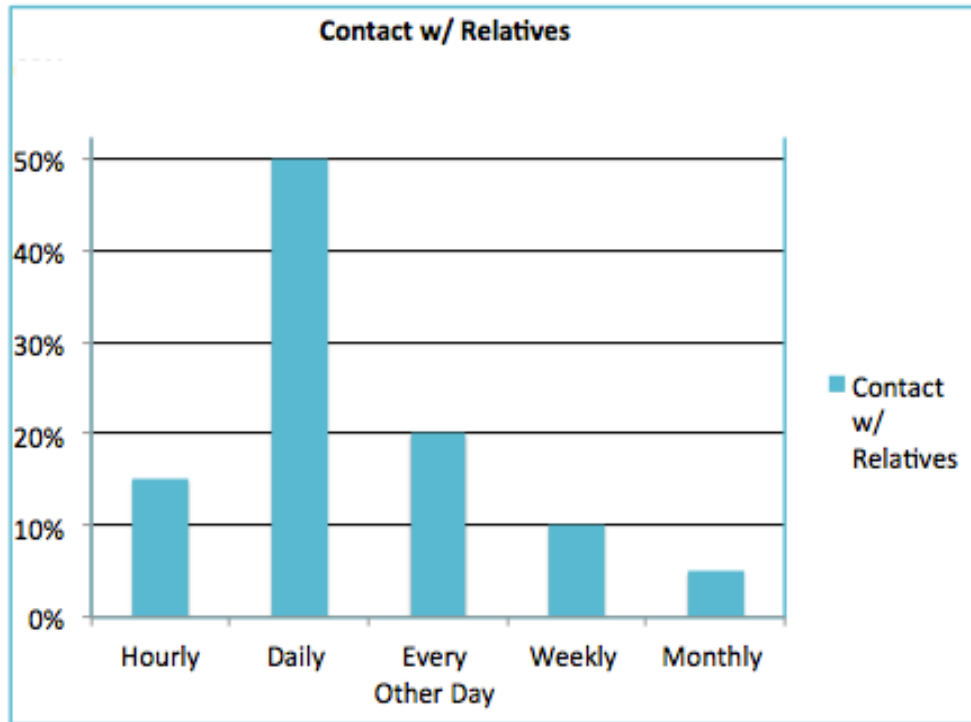


Figure 12. Illustrates ME wives contact frequency with extended family

Twelve out of twenty women stated that they wear the veil. When asked why they wear the veil or how they would explain it to someone who is curious, all interviewees expressed the importance of applying religion to every part of their lives, pleasing God, fulfilling their religious duties per the Qur'an, and demonstrating modesty by wearing the veil by choice and when they have the conviction to do so. In regards to religious duties, an Egyptian participant stated that wearing the veil is important to her because:

It is part of my religion, it is part of what I believe. It is one of the important parts that I don't want to let go of. And like when it comes to me it's something that's off my shoulders. I have a lot to worry about like praying and fasting and dealing with people very nicely...and a lot of things and [hijab] is one less thing, one small thing

off my shoulders. (Egyptian wife, Interview #5, personal communication, March 2016)

In regards to the veil in Turkey, radical secularism made wearing the veil forbidden in public spaces such as universities or government offices. When asked how being denied the veil made her feel, a Turkish participant argued:

You know identity matters, I feel like your personal freedom is really important. It doesn't matter if you are Muslim, Christian, Atheist. A person has the right to do whatever, believe whatever, as long as are not harming others. Banning your headscarf is not so different than banning your short skirt, to my understanding. Ok? If that girl wants to, and feels like it, as long as she's not hurting anyone, she can do what she wants. In the same way I should be allowed to wear my headscarf. (Turkish wife, Interview #3, personal communication, February 2016)

This challenge not only holds true for women who wear the veil, but also for Western women who may own a scantily clad wardrobe. The crux of the issue is that women and their bodies are a source of great debate whether in ME society or Western society.

In regards to wearing the veil in an American context, Muslim women struggle to fit into an existing Muslim subculture, (Yazbeck Haddad, Smith, & Moore, 2011). In contrast to radical secularism in Turkey, pacifist secularism in the U.S. poses its own unique problems. An Egyptian wife shared that her two sisters, one older and the other younger than her, do not wear the veil. They wore it for some time but took it off after years of wearing hijab. When asked why her sisters stopped wearing the veil, the participant answered:

The older one, she always had it on the back of her mind and part of it was being harassed here. She didn't like the part about being different; looking different... She used to live in Memphis, that's where she didn't like it. That's where most of the harassment was and of course she doesn't want to look different. (Egyptian wife, Interview #5, personal communication, March 2016)

The social alienation experienced by Muslim women who wear the veil in the U.S. causes some to reconsider the reason they wear the veil and the fact that they are no longer able to blend in, attracting unwanted attention, which defeats part of the purpose of wearing the veil.

When asked if they have ever been approached by anyone about why they wear the veil, an Egyptian participant expressed that she encountered this often and dealt with it differently each time:

The first couple of times it was just mixed feelings. I was fine, I didn't feel intimidated or anything, I just didn't want to be the person responsible to explain something this big. Cause I'm just like a tiny dot in everything. I don't know everything about the religion to explain it that good to someone that doesn't know anything about it. I don't want to be responsible for something like this and I didn't know what to say that first time because my first interaction to talk to someone who has no idea about it.

I can talk to people that have different views, because we have the same background, and not the same beliefs. That was the first time and I think the last

time I was asked about this was at the hairdresser and she asked about it and I explained that like it was just my explanation about it, it wasn't THE explanation. I talked to her about how it's like protecting something, like if you have some sort of special gold or some kind of special jewelry, you are not going to just leave it out there and you put it inside a box and have an alarm in a museum. That's how I explain it. When I thought about it after that, it wasn't maybe the best explanation, but it was mine and that's what I felt about it. This is why I get mixed feelings because like this is what I believe and at the same time I don't want her repeating that thing because I don't want to be responsible for that. (Egyptian wife, Interview #5, personal communication, March 2016)

The explanations for wearing the veil are as diverse as the Muslim women who choose to wear it. This reflects the fact that the veil is a personal choice and not forced upon Muslim women, even though by religious standards the Qur'an commands that Muslim women cover themselves when they are ready to do so. Depending on the country of context this religious duty is optional or mandatory, as is the case in the Islamic Republic of Iran. All five Iranian wives interviewed do not wear the veil. This significant difference between Iranian women and Arab women is partly due to the oppressive and theocratic Iranian regime and the fact that wearing hijab is mandatory and expressing your opinions results in being arrested and jailed. An Iranian wife gave her view:

In Iran you are born Muslim, raised in a Muslim family, and all the relatives are Muslim, we haven't had exposure to much else or something that it different," shares an Iranian participant, "Here there is a difference between something that is an

obligation or mandatory and being able to decide and choose for yourself. When you have come to the conclusion that a religion or beliefs are truly for you then you really have a connection and roots to it. But if it is forced on you from the beginning and you must accept it, it is not the same. (Iranian wife, Interview #8, personal communication, March 2016)

This observation rings true throughout the Iranian immigrant community in the U.S. and establishing an identity divorced of religion and a belief system forced upon you is a significant challenge for Iranian women.

When asked about her lifestyle in Iran and how it compares to the U.S., one participant immediately described the mandatory veiling requirement and explained, at length, how it affected her views about the veil or *hijab*:

It is quite different. In Iran we are required to wear *hijab*, and a different set of beliefs. Here we have the same beliefs but with a different style/way. For example in an Islamic country like Iran there is a certain dress code for wearing *hijab*, here I wear *hijab* but I don't accept it with the scarf. I wear conservative clothing that covers my body and don't show too much skin but I don't accept the scarf on my head or cover my hair. With respect to beliefs and faith, it is the same beliefs and faith I had in Iran, with the exception of wearing *hijab*.

This is a free country, and if you wear a headscarf people will look at you more because the majority of people, 90%, don't wear *hijab* and 10% do, well that 10% will be looked at and paid more attention to. So I felt like it wasn't necessary for

me in this country. Why should I bother myself, I like to be free and comfortable. I feel like if I don't cover my head then I can better connect with the people here. Since I had decided to come and be freer, I like to really learn the culture here.

Since I am here I want to immerse myself in its diversity and I feel like if I cover my head then there may be a distance created. So without a headscarf I can make better connections. When you don't wear a scarf your religion is not obvious to other people and they won't ask you what your religious beliefs are. But if you wear a headscarf others know you're a Muslim right away and they label you. So I prefer not to wear it and go to the religious events at the mosque here and have my own beliefs, but I like to blend into the majority. In Iran it is the same, I must wear the scarf to blend. (Iranian wife, Interview #11, personal communication, March 2016)

There is a clear distinction here between Arab women, who are proud of being Muslim and want to show people who they are and inform people about Islam while Iranians prefer to keep their beliefs personal and not advertise it to the general public. This is yet another implication of the effects of an oppressive Islamic State on the population. Iranian people are fatigued from religious rhetoric and wholly reject the State's brand of Islam, which creates an identity crises loaded with confusion and angst.

Due to widespread Islamophobia in the U.S., Muslim women who wear hijab are experiencing an increasing amount of discrimination. This was evident in the stories of discrimination several women shared regarding the veil:

Sometimes I wear black, all black, they look at me like ‘oh..she is this or that...’I feel bad. I think they should respect me. However I wear it. Don’t look at just the outside, look inside me. They just don’t understand. They don’t like this. They fear this. Because when you see in social media, the abaya, the black hijab, so they think I am not good. (Jordanian wife, Interview #6, personal communication, March 2016)

A Palestinian wife first alluded to the discrimination she has endured before delving into the details:

Well, sometimes, there are a few things that make you uncomfortable. Like once I was at the mall, at Macy’s, one of the girls, she was in a group, she looked at me and said ‘I don’t like Muslims’. She wasn’t talking to me directly; she was talking to her group. (Palestinian wife, Interview #6, personal communication, April 2016)

A Jordanian wife shared her travel experience at U.S. airports:

Something I want to tell you is that because of the media when we are in the airport, I feel afraid. I have a sister in New Mexico and when I travel to see her for a couple of months, I think they have this judgment. I think I stand for like 10 minutes while they are checking for everything, name, date. My husband was looking to see what was going on. They just try to find something in your papers. Just to check you all the time because they feel afraid or something like this and

they have this strange look, like here in Houston. I don't know, I think that is because of media. (Jordanian wife, Interview #6, March 2016)

A Jordanian wife shared a story about her friend's disturbing experience at an apartment complex in College Station, which touched on not only the level of ignorance of common citizens but also law enforcement:

Once my friend told me that her neighbor, when he saw her wear hijab he just feel angry he looked at her in a bad way and he started to be very angry and say something. I don't know what he said. But he is angry at her. When they call the police and tell them, our neighbor do that, the police just tell them that you have to have a gun in your own so if he do something, they can protect. So they just move. (Jordanian wife, Interview #6, March 2016)

A Palestinian wife echoed a similar experience about her friend:

Once a policeman said to my friend's husband... ah she was in the car with her husband and the police was talking with her husband and said 'why don't you have a gun in your car? At least when somebody come to harass your wife because she is wearing this, maybe you should have something to defense her'. Ok that's not what we think about. (Palestinian wife, Interview #6, March 2016)

Given the prevalent stereotypes about Muslims, the police officer's recommendation was preposterous, a Muslim man using a gun to protect his veiled wife; this does not solve

any of the issues at hand. On some level, these negative experiences for Muslim women who choose to wear the veil are an attack on their identity. The religious discrimination they encounter shapes their impressions of an intolerant West and may even degrade their religious identity when faced with repetitive episodes of harassment. The challenges Arab women face, “are not only connected to education, unemployment, illiteracy, the imbalance in equality and equal opportunities, or even the feminization of poverty. Arab women are now facing a unique challenge: the challenge of identity” (MENA, 2014, p. 2). While Islamophobia is an attack on the Muslim woman’s identity, circumstances for Muslim women are further complicated in the post modern era, which is rife with internal conflict as three major groups, fundamentalists, reformers, and extremists, with overwhelming differences in ideology and theology, compete to establish a majority (Moore, 2015). The range of views on the veil and how it ties to the Muslim identity is as diverse as the country of origin and context of the socialization processes to which these women were exposed. Indeed an Islamic reformation is well overdue to reconcile the conflict between religious and national identity.

Healthcare

Even after the passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010, access to quality healthcare continues to be a contentious debate in the U.S. Many participants in this study offered their opinions about the complicated and poor quality healthcare system in this country. Several ME wives were healthcare professionals in their country of origin and were awed by the expensive and yet mediocre healthcare system in the U.S. An Iranian wife who was a doctor in Iran shared her critique:

Yes coming from a medical background, I can tell you that the healthcare system here is totally political. It doesn't really have to do with whether the candidates want to establish a good healthcare system in society or not. For you, medical assistance is not very easily accessible. For example going to the emergency room, finding a good dentist, it's like anything you want to do has question marks all over it. If you want to go get a check up, they ask why, if you get a check up and your cholesterol is high then it goes into your file and becomes some kind of precondition and the next thing you know your insurance bills are higher because of it. In Iran, Canada, Europe this doesn't exist. When I came here I noticed it and thought 'wow, this country doesn't have one of the most basic things, access to healthcare, as part of their minimal welfare system or public good'. You know? (Iranian wife, Interview #9, March 2016).

Five participants had exceptionally challenging personal or family health issues and shared these difficulties in heartbreaking detail. An Egyptian wife explained that her husband and daughter have health insurance, but that she does not because she had a miscarriage during her second trimester of pregnancy:

I had a DNC surgery 6 months ago, so after that they raised it from \$40 a month to \$400 a month and I got out of the plan. We've been trying to have a baby for a year and a half now but I have had two miscarriages. One of them was big, I was about 13 weeks and I had to have the surgery. And then the health insurance skyrocketed after that. (Egyptian wife, Interview #4, personal communication, March 2016)

A Turkish wife talked about her difficult pregnancy that resulted in a premature baby girl, who is now almost three years old but suffers from severe developmental challenges.

We have Medicaid and my daughter is covered. She was born prematurely; I was on bed rest for 11 weeks and then another 5 weeks in the hospital after giving birth. Her medical bills were covered but mine were not. It was so bad. I wish no one experiences that. The medical system sucks, it is awful. I have never seen such a terrible system anywhere. I have been to other countries and their system is not perfect but it is better than here. (Turkish wife, Interview #3, personal communication, March 2016)

Another Turkish wife expressed the medical complications she endured within six months of moving to and living in the College Station.

My daughter has Medicaid but I don't have health insurance. I had a kidney problem when we first came here. I dropped a stone. It was really hard. It is good to forget the hard things. We don't have any Medicaid or enough money to pay insurance. When we apply, the people in the office tell us 'you cannot have Medicaid for yourself because you are not a refugee. This is interesting also. I won the green card, I should have more rights or at least the same rights as refugees. And most of these ladies their husbands are going to school and they don't have any healthcare. It is so expensive to pay health insurance. In Turkey we had private health insurance and you can go to hospitals that were public or

private. We have the government insurance that is also available and also the private company insurance. We cannot afford health insurance here right now.

(Turkish wife, Interview #1, personal communication, March 2016)

An Iranian wife who is a new mother shares her experience about her pregnancy and after giving birth to her daughter, who is four months old.

No, I don't have health insurance. When I was pregnant and going to give birth, I had insurance because my child was going to be a citizen. But after birth I no longer have insurance now. I could get the University health insurance but the monthly rate is very expensive. (Iranian wife, Interview #8, personal communication, March 2016)

An Iranian wife explained her frustrations about the lack of access to quality medical care and how perplexing it was for to discover how medical practice in Iran is actually superior and that the only exception is that the facilities and infrastructure in the U.S. is better.

But if I need to go to see a doctor, I have a lot of issues with this here. I have an issue with hair loss and going to see a doctor is incredibly expensive and this situation is making me very unhappy. In Iran, anytime you needed medical care I could easily go to a specialist for my ailment. Here, fees for just a simple doctor's visit is expensive. Prescription drugs, all of it is problematic. Iranian doctors are much better than the doctors here. Their diagnosis is much better. The only thing that

is better here are the facilities. If someone comes to America for healing, it would be just for the facilities reason. A lot of my friends have said that the doctors here have given them poor diagnosis. One girl had been told that she has bladder cancer and scared her about dying soon but she got a second opinion from a doctor in Iran and it turned out that she just had a urinary tract infection. I don't know why their doctors are like this. My husband was saying these doctors are the terrible ones that barely passed their exams in medical school. In Iran medical school in Tehran is a monster, only the best and brightest study there. (Iranian wife, Interview #10, personal communication, February 2016)

The experiences of ME wives with the U.S. healthcare system offers critical insights about the shortcomings of the most powerful country in world with a broken health care system that does not invest in its citizens' basic health, let alone people considered 'aliens' in this country. The most embarrassing discovery is the lack of access to healthcare for new mothers, which demonstrates a lack of prioritization for maternal health, especially for women who hold a non-resident visa status. A newborn baby birthed in the U.S. is considered an American citizen, and yet the baby's 'alien' mother's health is not considered important to the baby's development.

Education

All ME wives had bachelor's degrees at a minimum, several had Master's degrees and a few had PhDs or Medical degrees. See Figure 13.

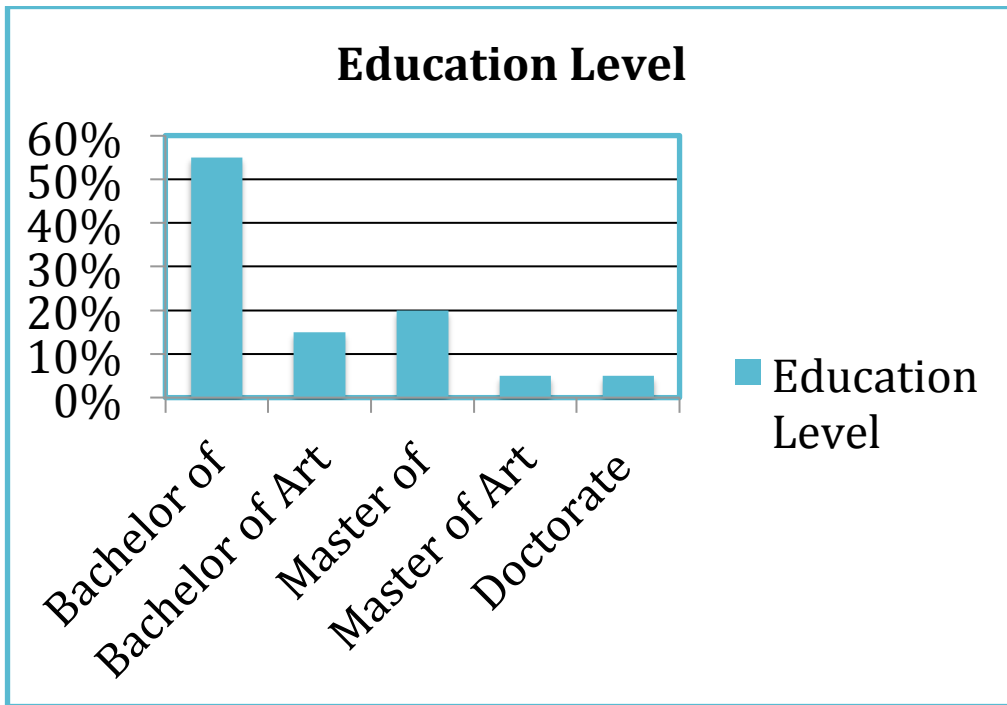


Figure 13. Illustrates ME wives education level

Nine out of twenty wives expressed that they aspire to continue their studies and obtain at least a Master's degree during their time here in the U.S. But many women felt discouraged to pursue another advanced degree due to several challenges, the English language barrier, childcare responsibilities or facing especially stringent admission requirements at TAMU.

An Iranian wife detailed her aspirations for pursuing an education at TAMU and the obstacles she faced in this endeavor.

We came here in September and I haven't gone anywhere. I have been studying for the GRE. I applied to a PhD program last year but didn't get accepted and now I can't apply again because my husband will finish his degree before me now so I

don't have the PhD option anymore. We wanted to finish together. Now we don't have this option so I decided to try for a Master's. Here education is valued differently as compared to Iran. For example, here you can get your master's and find a job, easily, and make a lot more money than someone who has a PhD in Iran. Most Americans prefer to get their master's and start working and make money, than to pursue a PhD. My problem is with the university. Some of the departments compare internationals to the native speakers when it comes to acceptance into their program. Some departments don't do this, they judge applicants in their own separate groups, Americans, and Internationals. (Iranian wife, Interview #7, personal communication, February 2016)

Another Iranian wife confirmed the exceedingly strict admission requirements for her field of study.

A&M is so difficult to get into. I had great scores and they didn't admit me. I still don't understand why. The second time I applied, they told me to go work as a volunteer and get some experience to improve my application. I went and tried to find a volunteer position and they told me since I am F-2 visa status I am not allowed to volunteer in the lab. They said you can come observe, that's it. I went and did this too and would show interest, attend seminars, etc. The faculty member would see me and my presence. But still I wasn't admitted. (Iranian wife, Interview #10, personal communication, February 2016)

A Jordanian wife pointed at the numerous obstacles she faces and hinted at the disappointment she feels about the kind of life she agreed to when she committed to supporting her husband by accompanying him to the U.S. while he pursued his Ph.D.:

You get married and you come here and you can't see anything anymore. The other thing is that you don't work and it is very hard to study and especially here at A&M and it is hard to get accepted into the Master's work. (Jordanian wife, Interview #6, personal communication, March 2016)

Wives with children stated that if they could find quality childcare that is affordable then they would continue their studies and pursue another degree in the U.S. The English language barrier and lack of access to childcare are two cross-cutting challenges that hinder ME wives from pursuing an advanced degree at an American university, which holds considerable value in their home countries. This is a lost opportunity not only for these women but also for the U.S. and the wives' countries of origin.

An advanced degree from the U.S. translates to better opportunities for ME wives upon their return to their home countries, where they can impart change regarding gendered perceptions of females in their professions by becoming high caliber professionals in their respective fields. ME wives make great sacrifices by abandoning their careers and their lives in their home countries in order to accompany their husbands to the U.S. and support them in obtaining their PhDs. This reinforces the gendered idea that a man's education and career is valued above a woman's, especially if she is ultimately expected to bear and rear children.

All twenty cases beg the question of whether the husband's of ME wives would reciprocate and support their wives, if they were to pursue advanced degrees in the U.S.

No Income

All participants in this study expressed that they do not have an income and depend on their husband's graduate student income to survive. See figure 14.

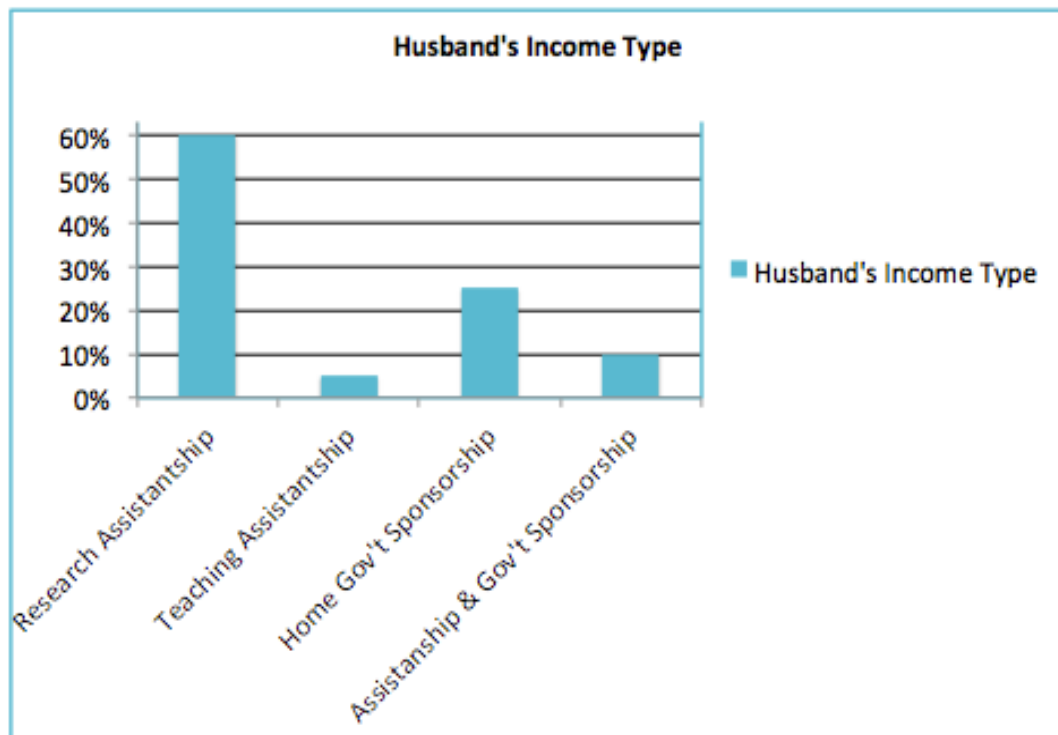


Figure 14. Illustrates type of income provided by ME wives' husbands

All ME wives are well educated and most women worked before coming to the U.S. with their husbands. The ME wives sacrifice a significant amount of time in support of their husbands and for their sake of their marriages, which range from less than one year to over nine years. See figure 15.

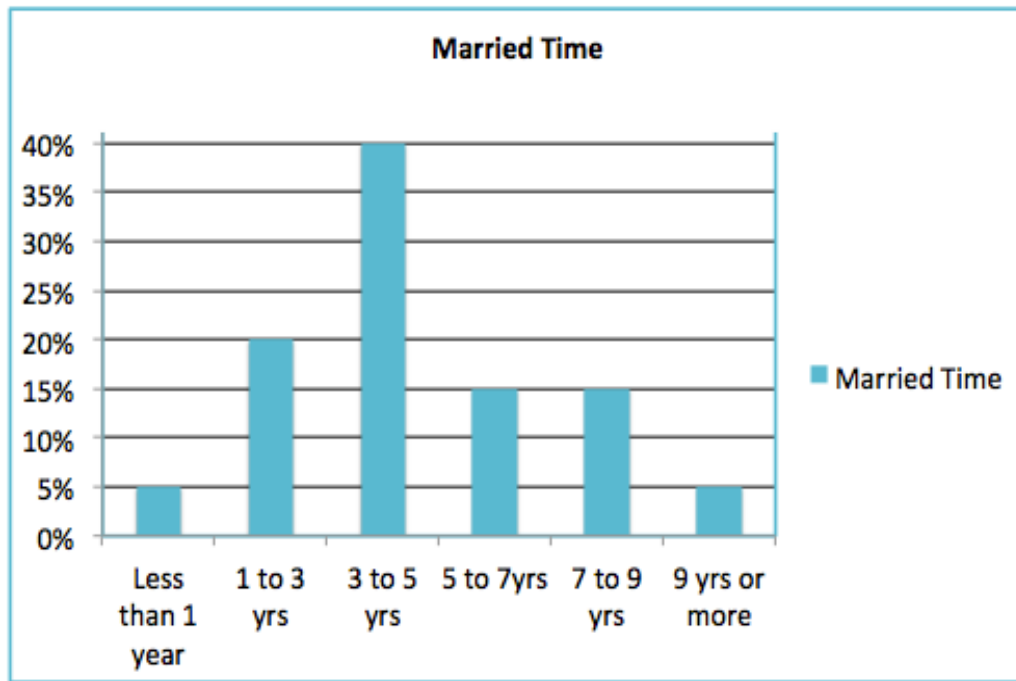


Figure 15. Illustrates ME wives length of marriage

Now, due to their F-2 visa status, they are not allowed to work and have become housewives. They hold either bachelor or master’s degrees in engineering, veterinary science, economics, nursing, physics, marketing, etc. and were productive members of society in their home countries. When they came to the U.S. they are confined to the home, one participant expressed how offended she was when an employee at International Student Services told her to enjoy her time here when the problem is that she just has too much free time.

Many ME wives shared their disdain for spending all of their time at home. As this Iranian wife protested:

My husband is getting his PhD, which is great but I feel like I am wasting my time here. I never had the idea in my head that I will be a housewife like my

Mom. I like to be active in society. When I have kids, I wouldn't want them to think that I am uneducated and don't do anything. I want to be a mother who is productive and knowledgeable about the society I am living in so that I can be friends with my children and teach them how to navigate it for themselves. (Iranian wife, Interview #11, personal communication, February 2016)

An active Turkish wife who has a degree in childhood development shared her frustrations with being reduced to a housewife:

I would be able to do a Master's or PhD in Turkey or I could work but here I am just a housewife and just have to stay home. I don't like. I don't like being home so much. That's a hard challenge for me. (Turkish wife, Interview #12, personal communication, March 2016)

An Iraqi wife echoes the same frustrations about the drastic change from working and being productive to being also exclusively confined to the home, "over there in Iraq, I was working and here I am a housewife and stay at home with the kids. It is hard for me to be able to work or study because I am here with my husband" (Iraqi wife, Interview #13, personal communication, March 2016). Another Iraqi wife sarcastically declared, "If I preferred to be a housewife then maybe I would not have gone to university at the beginning at all" (Iraqi wife, Interview #14, personal communication, March 2016). An Iranian wife reflected on her circumstances and regretfully declared, "Sometimes I think if possible, maybe I wouldn't have come here. Sometimes it is so hard to not see my father and mother

and family. I have these thoughts a lot that I wish I hadn't come" (Iranian wife, Interview #10, personal communication, March 2016).

Another Iranian wife thoughtfully shared the common conundrum among international spouses in College Station:

I wish they would offer good classes and activities for women who are spouses here so that they don't sit at home all day. Everyone who comes to this country, Japanese, Chinese, anywhere, they are educated people and forced to sit around for 2, 3, 5 years with nothing to do" (Iranian wife, Interview #11, personal communication, March 2016).

An Egyptian wife voiced her concerns about how constricting her financial situation has been, "The most important thing is the salary for my husband. It is too low. We are not able to go out, travel somewhere or do some activity because the income is too low" (Egyptian wife, Interview #17, personal communication, April 2016).

For ME wives, being a housewife is yet another source of psychological stress. They have limited social interactions, they are severed from their extended family, do not have a strong command of the English language, they are isolated, and do not have their own income. When asked if there are any challenges experienced in the U.S. that they do not face in their home country, a young Jordanian wife who is pregnant with her first child quickly mumbled, "Challenges? For me, I think nothing, maybe my husband and money is my problem... I think we are good here. There are no challenges at all" (Jordanian wife, Interview #6, personal communication, March 2016), where she accidentally disclosed

marital challenges and quickly attempted to dismiss it by recanting. No income, especially for women with children, creates severe financial dependence on their husbands, who receive an insufficient salary as graduate students and carry different stressors and worries with them. This is another source of increased marital strain and cause of unintended female subordination within a marriage.

Transportation

Thirteen out of twenty participants expressed that transportation is a significant challenge for them. Many couples have only one car and the majority of the time the husband must use the car to drive to the TAMU campus. One participant was pregnant with her second child while pushing a stroller with her and walking a few miles to the grocery store or to a school in the middle of the summer in Texas. An Iraqi wife shared the details:

How to deal with the kids by myself? Because I have two boys and they are so hyper and noisy and active. The first one, he was in Pre-k and I didn't have a driver's license so I couldn't drive. Then I got pregnant with the second one and the challenge was dropping off my older one at school and walking, pushing the stroller while I was pregnant. It was so miserable and so hot in Texas. (Iraqi wife, Interview #15, personal communication, March 2016)

When asked what they would change about their lifestyle, an Egyptian wife, pregnant with her second child, first mentioned her language barrier and then mentioned transportation:

The next thing is to be able to drive a car because I am stuck at home. If something happens suddenly, I get sick, or my daughter needs help, I cannot do anything, I will have to wait for someone to come. (Egyptian wife, Interview #17, personal communication, April 2016)

Additionally some wives do not know how to drive, have not yet obtained their driver's license or are simply afraid to drive, especially with young children in the car with them. Excerpts from several participants demonstrate their frustrations:

I would like to learn how to drive a car so that it will help me be more independent, but the problem with that is that I need my husband to help me learn how to drive. This will not work, he doesn't have a lot of time to spend with me, and my family is not here for me to leave the kids with while my husband teaches me how to drive. (Iraqi wife, interview #16, personal communication, March 2016)

A Turkish wife did not have much need for a vehicle when she lived in Turkey, but living in Texas brings an entirely different transportation requirement.

I do not know how to ride a car. I have a license but I did not drive much in Turkey. I took the company bus or carpool. Here I am trying to learn and practicing it. When we just came here and did not have a car, my husband and I wanted to go to the market and we walked for over an hour. (Turkish wife, Interview #1, personal communication, March 2016)

An Egyptian wife had become so accustomed to her monotonous routine and even apathetic about her transportation challenge but shared some insight about how transportation works in her home country:

Oh yes I forgot! I get used to the challenges and do not think about it. I am working on getting my driver's license. They are very strict about it and there are rules, unlike Egypt, I got my license just by knowing people, which is bad.
(Egyptian wife, Interview #4, personal communication, March 2016)

An Iranian wife innocently expressed her lack of knowledge about procedures in the U.S., "And another thing is the challenge of learning how to drive. Where can you go to learn? In Iran we knew where to go but not here" (Iranian wife, Interview #11, personal communication, March 2016).

The wives' inability to drive or lack of confidence to drive in the U.S. are symptoms of several issues tied to their lives back in their home countries, the first of which is the rule of law, and lack thereof. In Egypt for example, life is chaos and people are struggling to survive by any means necessary. Acquiring a driver's license is not a organized affair where a citizen properly learns how to drive, but rather achieved by knowing the right person who can obtain a license for you regardless of whether you know how to drive or not. The wives' lack of confidence to drive in the U.S. is an indication of their severe dependence on their husbands to provide transportation as well as the English language barrier challenge, where these women may not be able to communicate their questions to an instructor or learn and understand all U.S. traffic laws. Lack of income and the cultural challenge for Muslim

women to enroll in driving school classes with a female instructor only, since a male instructor may be considered inappropriate, adds another layer of complexity to the transportation challenge. Some women explained that they had access to public transportation in their home countries, but that this is not the case in College Station. Although TAMU has an established bus transportation program, it is severely lacking when considering off-campus routes and the fact that only TAMU students are permitted to use the bus, which yet again limits ME wives' options. This challenge is a reflection of the overall poor public transportation system in the U.S., especially in Texas where life is impossible without owning a vehicle.

Entertainment

All ME wives are well educated and were previously working professionals in their home countries before accompanying their husbands to the U.S. As the spouse of an international student at TAMU, these women currently hold F-2 visa status which severely limits their activities. They cannot work, pursue another degree, open a bank account, obtain a credit card, or even volunteer, especially on campus, if it is considered 'work' by some obscure rule or regulation. An Iranian wife explains:

When you are F-2 visa...it is like you have come and you're just alive and that's it, you can't do anything else. America is more cultured. People from all over the world come here and it is more technologically advanced and stronger. It is the #1 country in the world. I didn't expect this country to be this tough on spouses who come here and to be this limited. (Iranian wife, Interview #11, personal communication, February 2016)

Since ME wives are severely limited in their activities and are either caring for their children or waiting for their husbands to return, they have no alternatives for occupying their time. The ME wives' current circumstances is a rude awakening compared to their lifestyles in their home countries. See figures 16 and 17 for compare and contrast.

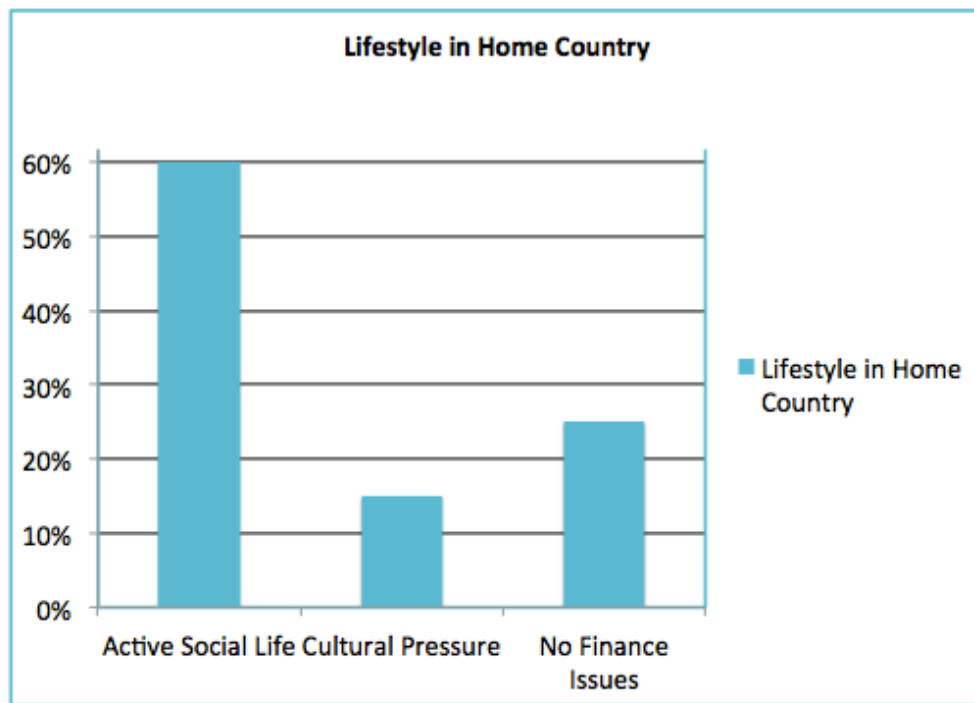


Figure 16. Illustrates ME wives lifestyles in home country

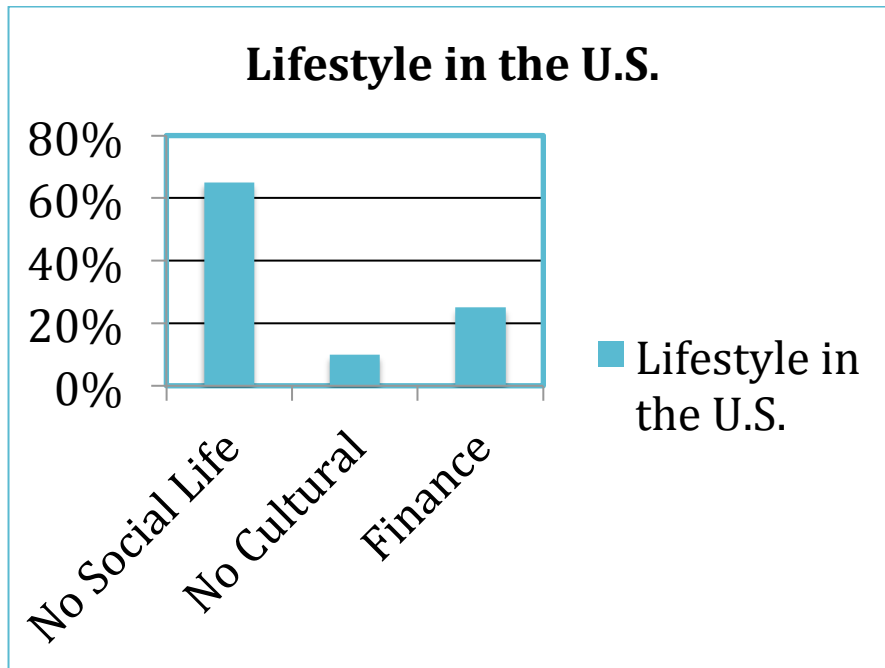


Figure 17. Illustrates ME wives lifestyles in the U.S.

In light of these hardships, the only saving grace may be the reduced cultural and social expectations they faced in their origin countries. While the isolation they bear is challenging the women shared what they appreciate and enjoy about living in College Station. See figure 18.

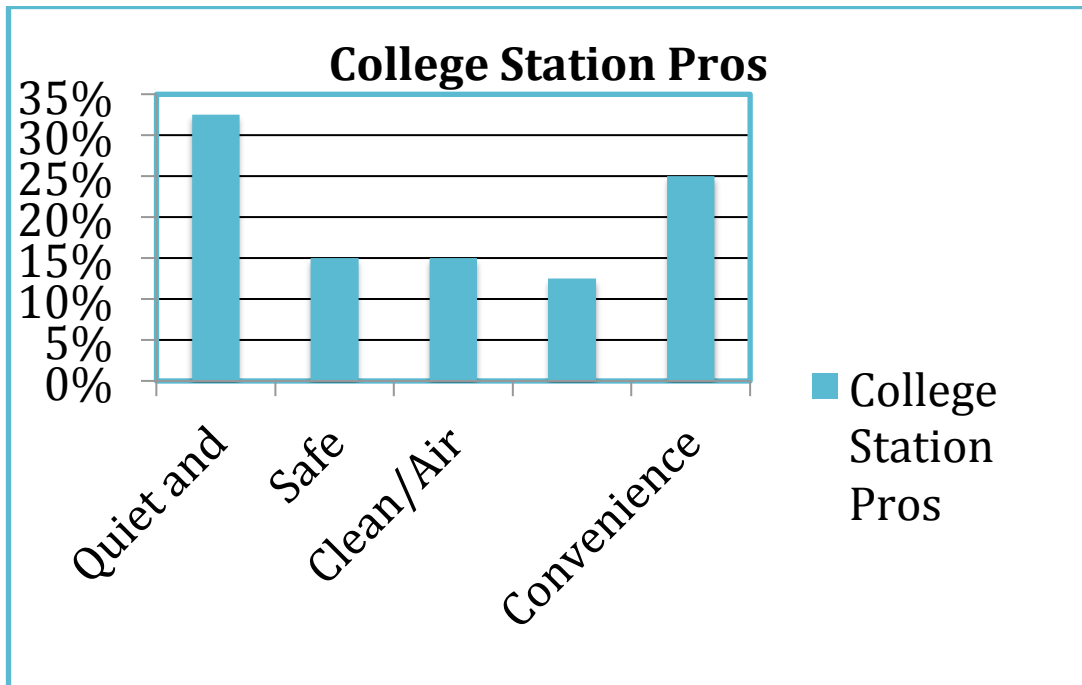


Figure 18. Illustrates ME wives responses to the benefits of living in College Station

All participants expressed that they would like more entertainment options and family friendly activities in College Station. Due to the transportation issue, activities in surrounding cities, such as Houston or Austin, are inaccessible for the ME wives. When asked what kind of activities or entertainment they prefer, several ME wives mentioned private facilities for swimming, “maybe I can do something especially for women. A gym, swimming classes, massage,” (Jordanian wife, Interview #18, personal communication, April 2016). Several other wives shared this preference and suggested many other changes. See figure 19.

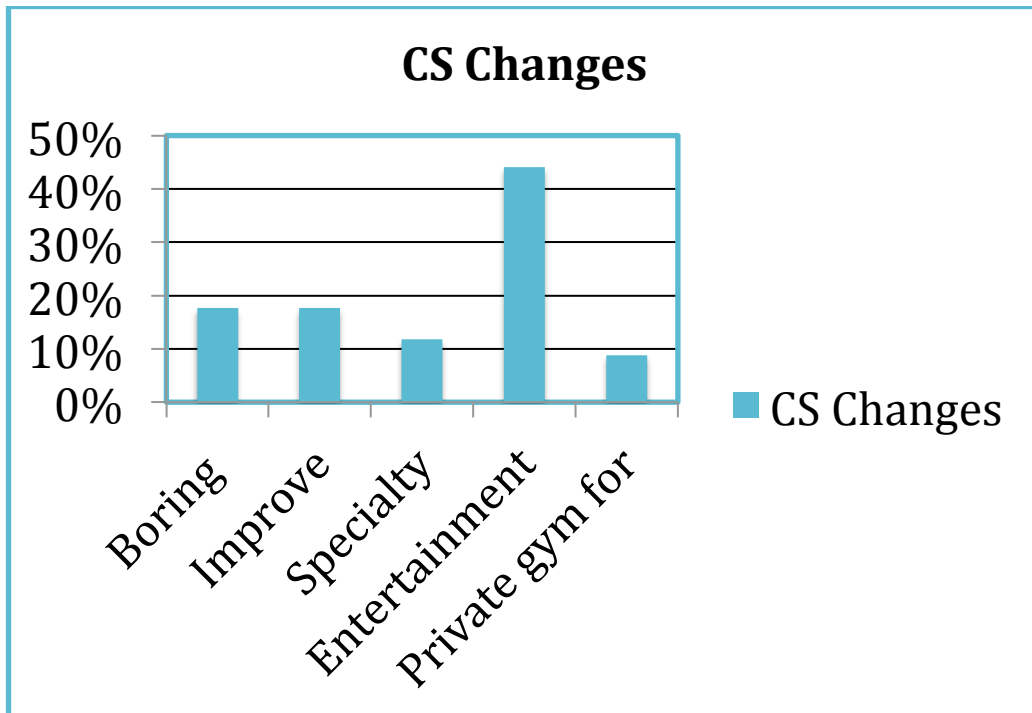


Figure 19. Illustrates the changes ME wives would like to see in College Station

An Iraqi wife shares similar confirms:

Maybe a private exercise program for women. Swimming for example. Sometimes the mosque rents the middle school swimming pool and it has happened maybe twice in five years. A private salon. I don't like to go to the salon and a man is next to me and sees my hair or getting my eyebrows done. (Iraqi wife, Interview #15, personal communication, March 2016)

Many participants offered creative long-term ideas about how they wish to spend their enormous amount of free time:

More entertainment places, and places for children. When one of my family members come here, I would like to take them to the zoo or aquarium. Something like this. I would like to exercise or go to a gym, where I can exercise without hijab. Another thing she said about swimming. I would like to swim. (Jordanian wife, Interview #6, personal communication, March 2016)

An Egyptian wife explained that College Station is outgrowing its humble beginnings quickly:

I would like to have more events done by the city. More events for different cultures, because of the university there are a lot of different cultures here. More family oriented places...More malls, having one option of everything really sucks. The variety is small. It is not a small town anymore, it is getting bigger and bigger. Activities, soccer, swimming, and just having a monthly issue of all the activities going on. The classes for children are just five weeks and then you are on your own for the rest of the year and when they do have classes opened there is a lot of people wanting to sign up and it is crowded and not everyone is allowed to get in. (Egyptian wife, Interview #5, personal communication, March 2016)

An Iranian wife discussed the lack of social interactions with Texans and how she would like this to change:

In general we have not have any friendships or interactions with Texas families here. In Ohio we had a Mom and Dad. The University in Toledo had a host family program. This would be awesome if it is also started here! (Iranian wife, Interview #9, personal communication, March 2016)

An Iraqi wife mentioned cooking as a hobby and how she uses Facebook to blog about her culinary skills, “Yes it is, on facebook. Because all the social media and all the pages. When you try to make your day busy you want to show others. It is called Baghdadi cuisine” (Iraqi, Interview #15, personal communication, March 2016).

An Egyptian wife provided insight into the plight of the single international men who are students at TAMU:

There are a lot of single international guys here and they don’t know how to cook or don’t have time to cook and some of them are getting upset stomach because of eating out all the time. So what if we provided meals with a phone service and we can deliver the food to them? (Egyptian wife, Interview #4, personal communication, March 2016)

An Egyptian wife expressed her interests in finding new hobbies, “I would love to have some hobbies. That’s what I’m trying to do, learn how to do something, knitting, quilting, cupcake decorating, anything” (Egyptian wife, Interview #4, personal communication, March 2016).

An Iranian wife provided a detailed vision of a future community center maintained by international spouses:

I wish at every university, they would have programs for international students and create some kind of community center. If someone is a hairstylist, or knows how to sew, bake desserts, has some other kind of skill, to have a skill exchange. There is a lady I know who ran her own coffee shop in Iran. I don't mean have permission to work, because I know that is not allowed, but to just have access to things you need within your own community. We have talked about this and wanted to start something but have been too scared since we are all F-2 visa status. We would like to have permission to cook Iranian food together and provide it to single students here that don't know how to cook. It would be a great service. Both to keep the ladies busy and to help others in the community. (Iranian wife, Interview #11, personal communication, February 2016)

The ME wives all have a variety of ideas and skillsets to exchange, but they live in isolation due to their F-2 visa status and suffer from many restrictions and lack of options. As one of the Iranian wives suggested, a community center would solve issues ranging from language immersion, where the wives would practice their language within a multi-cultural community and learn from another, to occupying their time and forging meaningful relationships.

Halaal Foods

Halaal refers to actions or items permissible for consumption according to Islamic law. Halaal can apply to foods and beverages as well as daily activities (Halaal Choice, 2011). In Islam there is a body of religious law that dictates how foods should be prepared and consumed. This concept is similar to Jewish laws concerning foods, i.e. kosher and the specific manner in which foods must be prepared and consumed (Judaism 101, 2011).

Kashrut is the body of Jewish law dealing with what foods we can and cannot eat and how those foods must be prepared and eaten.

For Muslim families in College Station finding halaal foods is a problem. Not only are halaal food ingredients difficult to find, but also going out to restaurants for dinner has proven to be another challenge. As one Turkish wife stated, “when we go out to eat we have very little selection of halaal food” (Turkish wife, Interview #12, personal communication, March 2016). Several wives explained that they are Muslims and since cannot find halaal food locally they, “have to go to Houston to find ingredients. Especially meats, they must be halaal” said an Iraqi wife (Interview #14, personal communication, March 2016). There is a new Arabic store that recently opened in Bryan, however it is quite expensive and these low-income families have no other option but to travel to Houston and stock up on their primary halaal food needs. For a town with a substantial international student population and for a university as large and diverse as TAMU, a lack of access to halaal foods is a significant reflection of the community’s poor awareness and sensitivity to the Muslim population’s needs.

This lack of awareness intensifies all of the other challenges, language barrier, childcare, transportation, etc., and alienates the international community, especially Muslims,

and forges an impression that they are not welcomed or cared for in this country. These underlying impressions could result in an array of repercussions to include a growing anti-American sentiment abroad.

Religious Imposition and Other Latent Issues

Thirteen out of twenty participants expressed their frustration and disappointment with their attempt to connect with the church communities in College Station. Many churches offer English classes, music as well as art programs, but the wives soon discovered that these services came with certain conditions. When asked about their experiences with the church programs, several participants shared their stories:

Yes, Christians here are the same. If someone doesn't have faith then you have to go pray for them. The churches are so active, Chelsea has tea time on Thursdays and invites all the internationals to read the Bible and they individually ask you what your opinion is about it. I went a few times then I saw that they want to convert me and decided not to go. (Iranian wife, Interview #10, personal communication, February 2016)

An Egyptian wife honestly disclosed her motivations for attending English courses at a local church:

I wanted to improve my English so I went to the courses offered at the church and it happened only once in a week for one hour. The topics covered were not useful to

me either so I stopped going because I don't think I could get much benefit from it. (Egyptian wife, Interview #17, personal communication, March 2016)

A Turkish wife searching for genuine friendship felt that:

You can find friends from church and organizations but when you meet them from there and they are talking about religion and trying to convince you. You know what I mean. This is not the right way. You just want to be friends and talk about normal things like your friends in your own country. This is a handicap I think. You can find friends from there, you can improve yourself in lots of things in terms of language and lifestyle learning and how to live in the US in better conditions. But when they are talking like that you cannot look at them just as your friend and be yourself. I can make the same to them and try to convince them also but this is not in the picture of friendship that I see. (Turkish wife, Interview #1, personal communication, March 2016)

An Iraqi wife candidly explained why she did not find interaction with the local churches very helpful:

The churches they teach you very simple things and then talk about the Bible mostly so you do not learn what you need and every day conversational things, for example, when you go to the doctor. We need good information that is useful. I went to the Grace Bible Church once a week and the first hour of the class they are

just talking about the Bible. We are not against this, it is just not useful. I think they know everybody is from different cultures. We know the Bible stories, but it is our version from our religion. So I do not need to know about this. I need to know words for conversation. (Iraqi wife, Interview #16, personal communication, March 2016)

In their effort to break out of their daily routine and isolation, the ME wives tried to immerse themselves into the community, meet people and build relationships through the churches in College Station, however they encountered an atmosphere that was not conducive to their needs. The churches' priority to educate internationals about Christianity caused more harm than good and created an uncomfortable environment where the ME wives often felt that Christian people are trying to convert them when they already have their established faith and values. When asked what they value and what they hold important in their lives the women expressed that they follow moral codes as prescribed by Islam and that they wish to inform non-Muslims about the goodness of their faith. See figure 20.

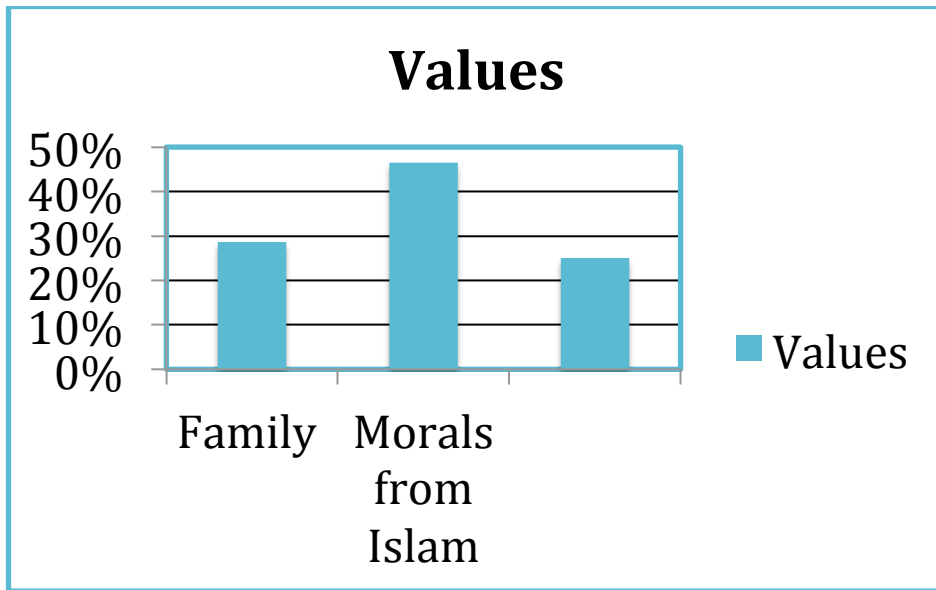


Figure 20. Illustrates ME wives values

This periphery issue connects back to a macro issue previously discussed regarding the West’s narrative and imposition of their belief systems into the ME region. When asked about what the Egyptian people wanted when the Arab Spring first began and if it was indeed a democracy, an Egyptian wife provided invaluable insight and answered at length:

I think it was that initially it started by asking for a different person and then it moved, no we want a better system, in order to have a better person in charge. Instead of putting another dictator in charge, we want a different system. And then the worse thing happened. I think the worse thing that happened is when it came time to choose the person to be in charge, we didn’t even find the right people. We didn’t find the actual people to choose from. So we had to choose from one person from the old regime, and he was literally part of the old regime and

the other one was a new regime. So we tried the new one and the new one sucked so we went back to the old one again because no one was running against him that was.. you know, the one you know is better than the one you don't know...People who knew the truth knew we were not ready for a democracy. You cannot take a country and change it radically like that. We are looking for a way to pave the way to a democracy but not a democracy right away.

Even if you bring someone from the outside and put them in, which should never happen, it will not work. People will not adjust to this. It will take time. It will take a lot of generations to build this up. This is all we want, just a start to pave this way. Nothing happened and now we are back to square...well I think we are at negative five, not zero. (Egyptian wife, Interview #5, personal communication, March 2016)

From the West's perspective democratic values, freedom and liberty, are necessary ideals for a prosperous society, however this ideology is not a perfect fit for the multitude of histories and country contexts in the ME region. The Syrian refugee crisis is yet another case and point regarding the ramifications of outside actors meddling in internal conflicts. When asked about what the solution to the refugee crisis may be, a Jordanian wife, whose country is experiencing immense pressure due to the crisis, firmly stated:

I think they should let them solve their problems internally. Don't get other countries or other people to get inside the country because once they get in everyone wants their own privileges, if the country has oil, they want to come in and

take the oil. So I think every country should solve its problems internally. With refugees you can't just turn them away, that's not good. But that's it; I think they should solve their political issues internally. And I think that people are not prepared for good democracies because you see in Jordan and Syria we have political issues and even if we have the right to vote, you don't vote for the good person you vote for the bad person because they have some monies or your relative, if they are your relative you have to vote for him even if he is not qualified. We are not prepared for democracy; we have some issues to solve before we have this whole experience. (Jordanian wife, Interview #6, personal communication, March 2016)

A Turkish wife shared a shocking fact about the refugee crisis in Turkey and the government's strategy for dealing with the situation:

We have a refugee problem from Syria, lots of people are coming to our country and they can give votes. It is a really strange thing to understand. They cannot even spoke Turkish or even understand it but they can give votes. They can vote. Because they changed that rule also to get votes from refugees. I don't know, people are saying 2 million, but I think it is at least 4 or 5 million. (Turkish wife, Interview #1, personal communication, March 2016)

Even as a secular state, Turkey struggles with political corruption and upholding democratic values. Democracy in practice varies between countries, whether developed or developing, where the degree of democratization lies on a broad spectrum and is contingent

upon the informal socio-cultural codes of conduct practiced. The internal issues the Jordanian wife referred to is beyond corruption, it is 'clientelism', a socio-cultural system tied to historical and cultural challenges and presents unique challenges to creating a democracy. According to Lindberg, 'clientelism' is "an informal political system based on personalized rule and organized through clientelistic networks of patronage, personal loyalty and coercion," Lindberg argues that clientelistic institutions create an informal privatized State and erode democracy by impeding on vertical and horizontal accountability across the political machine (Lindberg, 2013).

America prides itself on being a 'melting pot' of cultures where according to the Bill of Rights; every individual has the freedom of speech, religion, assembly, and pursuit of happiness. However, Islamophobia and a lack of public facilities for Muslims threatens the most basic of freedoms guaranteed by the constitution for temporarily immigrant populations in the U.S. Several ME wives shared that there are a lack of public spaces for prayer. Since Muslims pray five times a day, when they are in public they must have proper facilities to use for prayer, otherwise they must schedule their activities around prayer times, which proves to be difficult and limits Muslims to their homes. This is the case for the ME wives:

In Turkey we have a lot of mosques or masjids everyone but here we don't have. For example, when we go to a shopping mall we don't have a place to pray. Sometimes we have to use the fitting rooms to pray in. So that is kind of a problem here.

(Turkish wife, Interview #12, personal communication, March 2016)

An Egyptian wife admits that due to the negative perceptions about Islam, she prefers to pray in her home and avoid having to do so in public:

Maybe when I pray, I am not able to pray in front of someone, for example outside in the park. If I need to pray. I don't feel good to pray in front of people. Nobody talked to me but you feel there might be some emotion in their face if I did that. I prefer to pray in my house but if they trust in us then I would feel comfortable to pray in front of them. (Egyptian wife, Interview #17, personal communication, April 2016)

When asked about people's perception of Islam and how they feel about the manner in which Islam has been vilified due to extremist groups, many wives expressed the ignorance they have endured and wished they could change, "I would like to learn English very well...I would like to tell people more things about Islam and that it is not a terrorism religion" (Turkish wife, Interview #12, personal communication, March 2016).

When asked what is important and what they value, an Iraqi wife stated that demonstrating what Islam is really about to people is of utmost importance for her:

I need to show my morals to the US and I need other Muslim women to go to the Mosque and the Muslim traditions and show to the others because they need to know what we do. Like they go to church. We are good and we have good values and

good personality. We need to show all this to them. (Iraqi wife, Interview #14, personal communication, March 2016)

A Turkish wife that has witnessed the almost exclusively negative reporting about Islam in the media explained the beauty of her faith and the frailty present in all people:

Our Prophet says that if you kill someone, you have killed the entire world, you have killed humanity, so one life is equal to all lives in our religion. In Islam you are not supposed to hurt people, not even mentally. If they were true Muslims they would not kill people they would avoid doing these things. This is not part of Islam. You know, the Ku Klux Klan? They were Christians and killed many black people. Bad people don't have a religion, I think. In history, people from all religions have killed people. Christians, Jewish, Israel is Jewish and they kill Palestinians and this is a kind of terrorism. Even though we try to tell people that Islam doesn't allow this kind of terrorism. All people see on TV is that these attacks are by terrorists. We are less than television; our voice is only a few and we cannot reach a lot of people the way TV can. It will be hard to tell many people that Islam is a good religion. People will just think that Islam is terrorism. So as Muslim people we should be very careful about how we behave here to show people that Islam doesn't tolerate terrorism. (Turkish wife, Interview #12, personal communication, April 2016)

The ME wives were eager to share their insights about what they have experienced as a consequence of being a Muslim and relished the opportunity to be listened to and heard.

When asked why they participated in the interview, an overwhelming majority stated that they wanted to help and more than enough free time to do so. See figure 21.

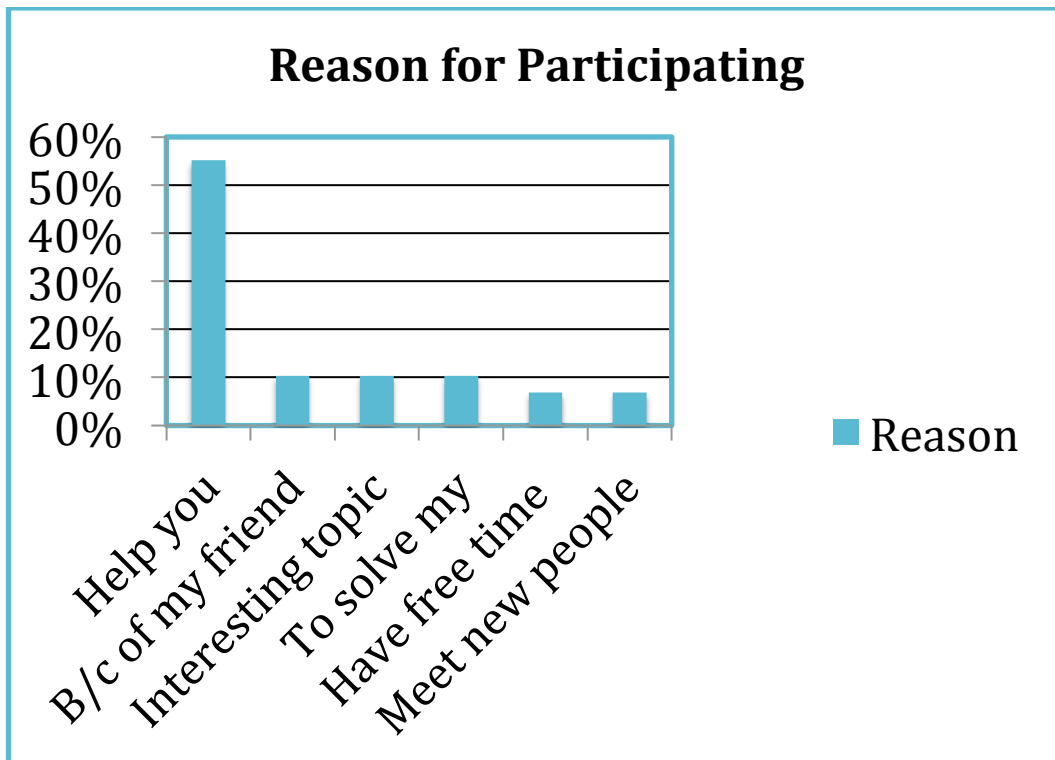


Figure 21. Illustrates ME wives reasons for participating

More importantly, the ME wives were well aware of the negative and narrowly understood perception of Islam and happy to provide much needed understanding. They also felt that the media, especially U.S. media, does Islam a disservice by sensationalizing every terrorist attack and not investigating the deeper, more important questions about the religion. According to James Moore, of Cleveland State University, “research indicates that Americans know very little about Islam and stereotypes about Islam and Muslims are

pervasive and harmful” (Moore, 2015, p. 227). The experiences and consensus among ME wives demonstrates that non-Muslims have little awareness about Islam and that their knowledge is limited to what they are exposed to through mass media. These issues infringe upon the diversity and cultural inclusion that makes America so wonderful. In America, democracy, a beautifully complicated political experiment, continues to change and transform. Even though America has had over two hundred years to build its democracy, it is still quite imperfect.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The objective of this thesis is two fold: a) to examine and illuminate the challenges wives of ME Ph.D. students at TAMU experience during their time in the U.S as a result of the overwhelming shift from war torn home countries to a democratic society in the U.S. and b) to create a pathway for graduate students to solve the challenges identified and empowering the wives during their time in the U.S. The intent of this research is to pave the way for several capstone courses designed by a joint effort between the Bush School and ALEC for graduate students interested in development careers where students gain valuable skills by addressing the challenges identified in this study.

A basic understanding of the historical and religious context of Islam, especially the Sunni and Shi'a factions and their schools of law was introduced in Chapter II. It is important to possess a basic understanding of these concepts in order to appreciate the importance of the results presented in Chapter V. A deeper grasp of the religious, cultural and gendered context under which the ME wives carry out their lives is the first and most crucial step towards empowering a marginalized group in both a local and international setting. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the appeal of Islam in order to address the challenges identified.

There is a severe lack of gender awareness in education and general ignorance about Islam and ME culture, especially in regard to the implementation of development programs. The researcher intends to facilitate increased awareness and academic exchange concerning ME gender issues in development and cultural awareness by making this research available

to ALEC and the Bush School faculty as a launching pad for several capstone graduate courses in development theory and practice.

This qualitative study consisted of a purposive sample of twenty ($N=20$) wives of ME PhD Students attending TAMU. The purposive sample criteria consisted of females, who are wives of ME Ph.D. students and have lived in the U.S. for six months or more. The ME wives were from six different nationalities, Egyptian, Iranian, Iraqi, Jordanian, Palestinian, and Turkish. In depth analysis of the interviews conducted revealed ten major themes common among the six different ME nationalities. These periphery challenges included: a) Language Barrier, b) Affordable Childcare, c) Identity d) Healthcare, e) Education, f) No Income g) Transportation h) Entertainment i) Halaal Foods j) Religious Imposition and other latent issues. This chapter offers a summary of these periphery challenges, how they apply to macro challenges, and recommended solutions. See figure 22 for a concept map of these challenges.

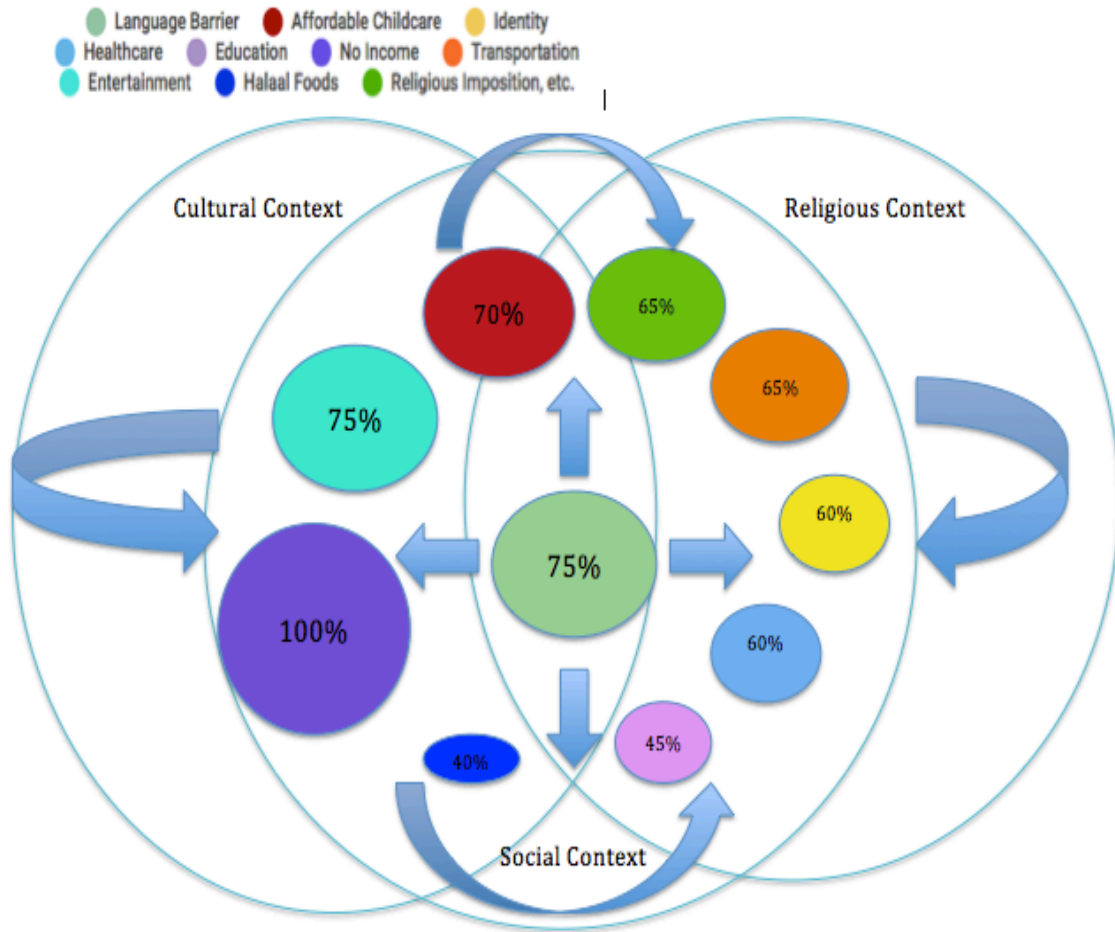


Figure 22 illustrates a conceptual map of the challenges of the ME wives

This concept map illustrates the contexts in which the ten periphery challenges are embedded: religious, cultural and social stratum. Each color-coded sphere represents a specific challenge, as shown by the key, and the number of participants whom identified this issue unique to their lives, as shown by the percent values. The arrows pointing in several directions signify that the language barrier challenge in particular is a cross cutting issue. However all ten challenges are both significant and interrelated, as the outer arching arrows illustrate.

Language Barrier

In the purposive sample of twenty ($N=20$) ME wives, 75% indicated that English as a second language is a significant challenge for them. As reluctant housewives, these women are isolated and live sedentary lives. As spouses, they are bound to the home due to their restrictive visa status and have minimal interaction with their neighbors or community. They do not have the same exposure to English language immersion as their husbands who attend classes and spend their days on campus. The wives strive for perfection and prefer to speak English without committing any mistakes, however their language skills suffer due to their fear of committing grammatical mistakes and difficulty in developing listening skills for varying regional English accents. The ME wives searched for and attended English classes offered through different organizations in the Bryan/College Station community, however these efforts were to no avail. Many wives stated that the English classes they attended were poor quality and were not classified for different proficiency levels, too expensive e.g. TAMU Academic Building was a rate of \$3,000 for the semester, or at local churches where their religious beliefs were challenged by conversion attempts, or overcrowded with limited enrollment space, e.g. courses at Blinn College.

There are international implications to consider for English language proficiency. As Muslim women, the wives struggle to find a sense of belonging in a foreign land where they cannot express themselves and converse with others about their culture, life in their home countries, and their religious practices, which is especially important for Muslim women who choose to wear the veil. Being unable to properly communicate their cultural identity in the communities they live in during their time in the U.S. reinforces mainstream social

stereotypes about uneducated, oppressed Muslim women who are forced to wear the veil against their will.

In an effort to address this language barrier issue, the researcher explored options by contacting several TAMU organizations and departments. This investigation brought a to fruition a promising solution. In collaboration with Sahar Zubairy, the International Student Services, International Spouses Forum program lead, and Dr. Miranda Walichowski, advisor to Bilingual Education Student Organization (BESO) at the College of Education and Human Development, a new English as a Second Language (ESL) program will commence in Fall 2016. The students at BESO speak English as well as another language and are studying education, which is a perfect match for the language needs of the ME wives. These student teachers could earn academic credit for their work with the ME wives. The BESO group expressed interest in creating a program to teach English as a second language. The researcher has relayed these developments to the email distribution list of the ME wives in order to gain useful feedback to design a beneficial language program. The researcher advises future graduate students to continue this dialogue and ensure that a language program has been established for the ME wives through BASO.

Another resource for consideration are online English courses through programs such as Duolingo, where ISS may provide workshops on how to utilize these applications. English proficiency can help these women communicate, educate, and inform their community about Islam and their cultures during their time in the U.S. Upon returning to their home countries, proficiency in English can help ME wives obtain jobs in aggressive competitive economic environments and foster much needed development in sectors that coincide with their areas of expertise, e.g. engineering, veterinary science, biotechnology.

Affordable Childcare

A lack of access to affordable childcare was a common challenge among ME wives and a crosscutting issue related to the English language barrier. During their time here, many couples began to start families.

Some wives became pregnant with their first child and did not have their extended family to support them during a time of many 'firsts.' Several women experienced very difficult pregnancies and relied solely on their mostly absent husbands, who were occupied with their Ph.D. programs. These difficult pregnancies affected the wives' ability to attend English classes regularly. After having children, the previously inadequate income became even more thinly spread as young couples tried to balance expenses for their children and all other costs of living. A severely limited income not only hindered ME wives from attending English classes, but also access to quality childcare services.

These women's role as wives and mothers robs them of opportunities for improving their English language skills. This observation is not limited to the language barrier for ME wives, but rather a symptom of larger social challenges for women of any nationality or country to include the U.S., where new mothers do not receive paid time off when they decide to start a family. The biological responsibility of a mother to her infant often leaves women with a narrowly defined role in the family unit and in greater society. For ME women, Muhyi (1959) argues:

The decision that faces the [ME] woman is even more difficult than that which faces the man. At one extreme she may accept the sequestered, protected, and relatively comfortable life typified by the generation of her mother; at the other extreme she may seek a career, demand independence, and fight for complete equality of the sexes. (p. 51)

This still holds true today and the ME wives' isolated lives is a testament to their gendered condition where they have limited choices and make unconditional sacrifices for the good of their families. ME mothers shared that they often struggle with disciplining their kids and never enjoy quality time for themselves or with their busy husbands.

Although affordable childcare is difficult to find in College Station, the researcher discovered a possible alternative solution, the Jobs for Aggies job board, a free resource provided through the Student Employment Office at TAMU. The job board is a site where on-campus and community employers may post job ads for part-time work for currently enrolled students at TAMU. Employers include families that need a professional babysitter or nanny. Students pursuing degrees in child development, special needs, nursing, or other related studies may be the ideal target employee demographic for ME wives to hire. On the Jobs for Aggies job board, ME wives can post an ad for childcare and offer a reasonable hourly wage that is at least minimum wage. In their job ad, ME wives can provide detailed requirements and request references in order to vet potential student employees. Students interested in such positions may gain valuable experience by caring for the ME wives' children. This has the potential to become a permanent arrangement for several years, both because the students will be attending TAMU for at least two years and also because the ME wives will be living in College Station until their husbands complete their Ph.D. degrees. This arrangement could be an option for the childcare challenge and allow ME wives time away from their children, time for themselves and date nights with their husbands, which would support a healthier marital dynamic, and immensely improve their quality of life.

Identity

The geopolitical landscape of the 21st century is marked with a host of internal conflicts surrounding identity and reconciling religious identity, which tied to faith, with national identity, which tied to the political sphere; this is particularly evident in the ME context.

Islam is not just an identity, but also dictates governance, a philosophy, and a pathway to truth in all aspects of life. The multidimensional aspects of Islam has reached a heightened level of tension with democratizing forces in the ME; destabilizing the entire region. For Muslim women, the current state of affairs are incredibly complex with many identity issues and gender related obstacles to overcome. For Muslim women, religion and identity are not mutually exclusive. The ME wives' identity is defined by their faith in Allah, or God, their religious duties, and family responsibilities. Duty to the State and patriotism is not included in this identity equation. This socially constructed ME identity is in discord with a secular country such as the U.S. There are many aspects of a Muslim woman's identity that clash with the Western identity, the first of which is the veil, for those who choose to wear it. Dr. Lila Abu-Lughod, professor of Anthropology and Gender Studies at Columbia University, warns that:

We need to work against the reductive interpretation of veiling as the quintessential sign of women's unfreedom, even if we object to state imposition of this form, as in Iran or with the Taliban. It must be recalled that the modernizing states of Turkey and Iran had earlier in the century banned veiling and required men, except religious clerics, to adopt Western dress. (Abu-Lughod, 2002, p. 786)

Common assumptions about veiled women must be addressed and debunked. As many of the interviews reflect, Muslim women who choose to wear the veil face discrimination and harassment in the U.S., where Islamophobia is rampant. Several women shared that their sisters who wore the veil for years abandoned it after enduring much mistreatment in the U.S. Iranian women offered a different experience. All Iranian women chose to abandon the veil in the U.S. because it is not a mandatory requirement by law, as is the case in Iran, and also because Iranian women struggle with Islam as an established identity due to the forceful theocratic rule they experienced in their home country. A forceful religious rhetoric dominates life in Iran, where the government censors information and keeps a tight control of Iranian citizens, and as a result Iranians, especially women, have not developed the desire and conviction to be devout Muslims, wear the veil, and identify with Islam as a way of life.

In Muslim countries the veil allows women to deter unwanted attention from men, blend into the backdrop of public spaces and uphold their religious values. The veil symbolizes piety, a special relationship these women have with God, and is very much part of their identity. In the U.S. veiled Muslim women face a general public with a misconstrued understanding of the veil and often feel that their identity is under scrutiny and attack in public. This scrutiny attracts unwanted attention and defeats the purpose of the veil. The ME wives themselves are perfectly capable of addressing myths and stereotypes about the veil, however their lack of English proficiency hinders them from informing non-Muslims about what the veil means to them, their identity, and their reasons for wearing it.

Healthcare

Healthcare in the U.S. is still a broken system for the average citizen, let alone visiting nationals from other countries. In the case of the ME wives, most did not have access to healthcare due to a lack of income and their husband's low student income. Some women were expectant mothers when they first arrived into this country, who had access to healthcare since their baby was going to be an American citizen, but immediately after giving birth these new mothers no longer had access to healthcare. ME wives who were healthcare professionals in their own countries argued that the healthcare system in the U.S. is politically driven and that the fact that the cost for most medications, simple surgeries and diagnostic tests are sky-high is a testament to this.

A few women experienced post child birth complications and one ME wife had a premature baby. A lack of access to proper health care plans complicated these situations as hospital bills piled up and financial pressures overwhelmed these families. Such critiques reflect the many shortcomings of the U.S. healthcare system and offer profound insight into how the most powerful country in the world is lacking in one of the most basic public goods; investment in the health of a nation. Since Capitol Hill is continuously dominated by bipartisanship and complete gridlock, a long term solution to the health care problem in this country is not likely to occur in the near future. However, a short term solution for consideration can be explored through the International Student Service center at TAMU could create and offer a workshop on healthcare options through Planned Parenthood, Children's Health Insurance Program, Medicaid, or other programs for which ME wives may qualify. This healthcare workshop will help ME wives understand their health insurance

options on a low income and how to navigate these different programs to best benefit them and their families.

Education

All ME wives have undergraduate and post graduate degrees, from their countries of origin, in fields ranging from biomedical engineering to journalism and early childhood development. The American university system is the envy of the world and highly valued because university degrees are a product of specific educational institutional standards incomparable to most other countries and therefore held in high regard. The ME wives are highly educated and wish to obtain an additional higher degree from a U.S. university. This is essential for those from post-conflict countries such as Iraq, Egypt, and Palestinian territories that experienced an enormous intellectual loss due to war and internal conflict. In 2007, the Iraqi Minister of Higher Education, Abduldhayab al-Aujaili, spoke to the 'brain drain' effect in Iraq, "196 university professors have been killed and more than 100 abducted since the U.S. invasion. The violence frightened thousands of others away. According to other reports, some 170 Iraqi scientists were also assassinated in the past four years" (Saoud, 2007). Efforts to replace the loss of intellectual capacity is evident in testimonies from several ME wives who shared that their husbands are being sponsored by their country of origin's government, which meant that they will return home after their husbands complete their Ph.D. program.

The 'brain drain' phenomenon that plagues post conflict countries is also an opportunity for women to participate in their country's development. By the same token, ME wives should be empowered to take advantage of the time they have committed to supporting their graduate student husbands and also pursue a higher degree. Two returning citizens with higher degrees from a U.S. university is a better long term investment for a country's future

than one. However, the English language barrier coupled with the women's roles as wives and mothers denies them the chance to continue their studies while they are in the U.S., which is not only a lost opportunity for ME wives but their home countries as well. The proposed recommendation is to first address the English language barrier and affordable childcare challenges previously discussed in order to solve the education challenge.

No Income

With the exception of two ME wives, all women in this study held an F-2 or J-1 visa status, which is a specific designation for spouses of international students. This visa status does not permit spouses to work and severely limits their activities, which forces most of these women to transition from being active and productive members of society in their home countries to becoming housewives in the U.S. They do not have any income and heavily dependent on their husband's graduate student salary as a research or teaching assistant. For couples with young children, the financial pressures are immense.

For the ME wives, having their marital role reduced to being a housewife introduced a new type of emotional and psychological stress. Several women shared that when they expressed discontent with their monotonous routine to their husbands, their complaints fell on deaf ears and they felt ashamed and guilty for sharing their trivial problems with their overworked husbands in the first place. One ME wife with a toddler had a miscarriage and it was easy to deduce that this occurred due to the marital tensions from financial and psychological stress she endures daily. Her miscarriage was at twelve weeks, the middle of her second trimester, and resulted in an emergency surgery and ultimately very high medical bills. The ME wives' financial dependency on graduate student husbands who cannot support

their families on an insufficient salary is a significant source of marital tension and reinforces the gendered dynamic between the male as the 'bread winner' and female subordination.

Transportation

The majority of the participants described transportation to be a challenge for them. Most families have one car, which is used primarily by the husband to commute to campus. Perhaps the ME wives could coordinate with their husbands and transport them to the TAMU campus in order to have access to the family vehicle for the remainder of the day, however cultural limitations or marital dynamics may not permit the wives to carry out such an arrangement. Even if families had the luxury of owning two cars, some wives do not know how to drive, do not have a driver's license, or are afraid to drive especially if they have young children. ME wives, who are not afraid to drive, lack the income, language skills and confidence to enroll in traffic school to learn. Additionally due to cultural factors some wives may be limited to enrolling in driving classes with strictly female instructors. This challenge brings the poor transportation options in College Station, and the U.S. into focus. Growing Texan cities, such as College Station, Austin, and Houston, offer limited transportation options, which often leave people stranded or confined to their homes. In College Station the TAMU bus system is available to students only, this is especially enforced for off-campus routes. University policy should be adjusted to permit spouses of international students to use the buses as well and perhaps issue a spouse of student ID for verification. The city of Bryan could also consider implementing a transportation program through Greyhound and offer bus passes at discounted student rates.

Entertainment

The ME wives' English language barrier, lack of affordable child care services, inadequate transportation options, no income and F-2 visa status all contribute to leading quite a sedentary life. These women's activities mainly consist of domestic duties of either caring for their children or cooking and waiting for their husbands to return from campus. They do not have many alternatives for occupying their time. All participants expressed that they would like more entertainment options and family friendly activities in College Station. For example, the International Spouses Forum (ISF), a new service provided through International Student Services (ISS) could introduce a host family program where families in the Bryan, College Station community may host dinners or coffee night events and invite international families to their homes for cultural exchange. ISS could also disseminate a monthly newsletter to inform spouses of cultural workshops, seminars, Bush School symposiums, MSC film night, art gallery exhibits and other events on campus.

Many women mentioned how much they wish they could exercise. TAMU could issue spouse student IDs to allow spouses to also enjoy the facilities of which their busy graduate student husbands do not even have the time to take advantage. A private female only exercise program and swimming classes at the TAMU recreation center could allow Muslim women who wear hijab to exercise freely and without any violation of their faith. The local mosque could also create summer programs where they rent out swimming pools at local schools for women and their young children to use at their leisure.

The ME wives come from diverse backgrounds and have a variety of skillsets to exchange, but they live in isolation and are ignorant of their options. As one of the Iranian wives suggested, a community center would solve many issues. ISS could collaborate with

the Aggie Moms Club and the Raindrop Turkish House Foundation, a nonprofit Turkish cultural organization in Bryan, to further expand the International Spouses Forum program and establish a spouse community center with an established spouse leadership that is run on a volunteer basis. This multi-cultural community center could be set up to facilitate the exchange of goods and services on a volunteer basis and host monthly ladies night activities. The center could obtain a food handling certificate so that ME wives can congregate and learn about the culinary aspects of one another's cultures, while providing meals to single international students in their own communities. The community center could introduce a wide variety of hobbies ranging from baking, a book club, art, and musical classes. They could provide services, such as play dates for children of the same age, workshops for new mothers and infant care or Arabic classes for young children whose mothers are concerned about preserving a dual language home. This multi-cultural community center could be a home away from home and could be only as effective as the community of women that come together, as there is great potential for building a wonderful multi-cultural exchange.

Halaal Foods

For Muslim families in College Station access to Halaal foods is a problem. HEB's halaal options are limited to chicken and restaurant halaal food selections are scarce. The U.S. boasts of its diversity and multi-cultural demographics, which leads one to assume that different needs are met without question. However, this is not the reality for Muslim families, particularly in regards to procuring halaal foods. One solution to consider is to begin a dialogue with the local mosque and inquire about creating a 'bulk order group' that lists families in the area requesting halaal food and procuring it at a bulk rate from ME shops from surrounding cities such as Houston or Austin. A more long-term solution to consider

may be using economies of scale and apply the ‘bulk order group’ strategy for supporting an affordable ME foods store in Bryan.

Religious Imposition and Other Latent Issues

Professor of Anthropology and Gender Studies at Columbia University, Dr. Lila Abu-Lughod, provides insight about the West’s involvement in ME affairs, “we need to be vigilant about the rhetoric of saving people because of what it implies about our attitudes” (Abu-Lughod , 2002, p. 787). Her words could not ring any truer as the ideological phenomenon of democratizing the ME is as evident in today’s headlines as it is in this research study where ME wives expressed their discomfort with local churches attempting to convert them to Christianity. Western ideologies have brought prosperity and peace to historically western societies, however this ideological formula is not prescriptive for the ME region. With respect to Islam and the historical and sociocultural context of the ME, Muhyi (1959) contends:

The religion of Islam is not merely a body of religious doctrine and practice; it is also a form of social and political organization. When the devout [Muslim] scrupulously follows the rules of prayer and fasting, he is expressing at the same time his devotion to God and his allegiance to an ideal of society. In no small measure the Christians of the ME share the same attitude. Most of the Christian sects have distinctive and highly elaborate rituals, but they are also communities of persons who conceive of themselves as governed by religious law. In the ME there is no clear distinction between religious and secular life. (p. 49)

This argument is one of many reasons why ideological change and imposing democracy in the ME is disastrous and has resulted in countless power vacuums and a rise in

increasingly radical forms of Islam, e.g., Afghanistan, Iraq, Egypt, Libya, and Syria. A better dialogue between academia and think tanks on U.S. foreign policy in Washington is desperately needed to change political rhetoric from the ‘white knight’ complex to an informed and rational player in world politics. Sound changes in foreign policy will have immense ripple effects for the people of the ME, especially women who should be empowered within their own terms and cultural contexts.

Recommendations

The outcome of this research study resulted in a) examining and illuminating the challenges wives of ME Ph.D. students at TAMU experience during their time in the U.S as a result of the overwhelming shift from war torn home countries to a democratic society in the U.S. b) creating a pathway for graduate students to solve the challenges identified and empowering the wives during their time in the U.S. and c) establishing the foundation for practical application courses designed by a joint effort between the Bush School and ALEC for graduate students interested in development careers where students gain valuable skills by addressing the challenges identified in this study.

The researcher has discovered a new research frontier where graduate students will consider the challenges identified and further investigate the depth of these challenges by conducting new qualitative research and expanding on these initial findings. The new capstone courses, taught by ALEC and Bush School instructors, will provide graduate students an opportunity to apply development theory and enable students to gain practical experience in designing and implementing development programs. Graduate students will use this qualitative case study and the suggested solutions as a reference point for participating in a local hands-on project where their work will benefit the identified

demographic in need, which will foster reciprocal exchange among students and the ME wives.

The challenges these ME wives face are common across the six different nationalities featured in this study and may be transferable to not only other ME nationalities but also wives of all international students pursuing a higher degree at TAMU. Specifically, nine of the ten periphery issues a) Language Barrier, b) Affordable Childcare, c) Identity d) Healthcare, e) Education, f) No Income g) Transportation h) Entertainment and i) Religious Imposition, may be applicable to wives of all international students at TAMU, however further research is required to confirm these assumptions.

For the ME wives in College Station, gender equality can be achieved through inclusive empowerment efforts. A starting point is this capstone graduate course, where graduate students can empower ME wives by helping them gain access to the right resources to solve their own challenges. The TAMU community will continue to grow in the coming years and the initial challenges may grow exponentially and branch out exponentially. Therefore these ten challenges and other unforeseen problems may be further explored through several capstone courses intended for developing action-oriented solutions and promoting evidence based policies that are informative and effective at a local, national and international level.

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APPENDIX A

English Consent Form

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM CONSENT FORM

Project Title: **Religious and Cultural Clashes in the Modern World: Understanding Latent Issues of Middle Eastern Wives**

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Shiva Thompson, a researcher from Texas A&M University. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. If you decide you do not want to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits you normally would have.

Why Is This Study Being Done?

The purpose of this study is to shed light on contemporary development issues regarding gender inequality in the Middle East (ME) and bring the religious and cultural factors causing friction in the global security context to the forefront of not only academia and scholarly discussion but also public awareness. This study will help the participants gain access to resources that could assist them in addressing the challenges they face during their time here in the U.S.

Why Am I Being Asked To Be In This Study?

You are being asked to be in this study because you are a wife of a Middle Eastern Ph.D. student at Texas A&M University, who has lived in College Station, Texas for at least 6 months and are from one of the following countries, Palestine, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, and Iran. This criteria qualifies you for the study.

How Many People Will Be Asked To Be In This Study?

Thirty people (participants) will be invited to participate in this study locally. Overall, a total of thirty people will be invited at ten study centers in order to achieve the minimum number of participants needed, twenty, to complete the study. The location of the study centers will be determined by the participant, who may choose where to conduct the interview for this study.

What Are the Alternatives to being in this study?

The alternative to being in the study is not to participate.

What Will I Be Asked To Do In This Study?

You will be asked to participate in an interview describing your experience and lifestyle while living in the U.S. and the types of challenges you may be facing. Your participation in this study will last up to 60 minutes per interview and includes one visit with a possibility of one follow up visit for confirming the information given during the first interview.

Example template:

First Interview: Visit 1 (Week 1)

This visit will last about 60 minutes. During this visit the researcher will conduct an interview.

Will Photos, Video or Audio Recordings Be Made Of Me during the Study?

Language for Required recordings: English, Arabic, and Farsi

The researcher will take an audio recording during the study so that she can refer to your answers after the interview and conduct an analysis on the information you have provided. If you do not give

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permission for the audio recording to be obtained, you can participate in this study, however the benefit to you will be limited due to the researcher's limited ability to remember all the information you provided during the interview.

Language for Optional recordings: English, Arabic, Farsi

The researcher will take an audio recording during the study so that she can refer to your answers after the interview and conduct an analysis on the information you have provided, only if you give your permission to do so. Indicate your decision below by initialing in the space provided.

_____ I give my permission for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

_____ I do not give my permission for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

Are There Any Risks To Me?

The things that you will be doing are no more/greater than risks than you would come across in everyday life.

Although the researcher has tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions asked of you will be stressful or upsetting. You do not have to answer anything you do not want to.

Are There Any Benefits To Me?

The direct benefit to you by being in this study is to enhance your quality of life in the community and becoming empowered by having access to social services provided by charity organizations or religious entities in the Bryan/College Station community. These benefits will be realized as a result of the study serving as a foundation for a practical application course designed by a joint effort between the Bush School of Government and Public Service and the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) for graduate students interested in development careers. Graduate students in this course will engage in designing solutions to address the challenges you, as the participant, have identified in this study.

Will There Be Any Costs To Me?

Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

If you suffer any injury as a result of taking part in this research study, please understand that nothing has been arranged to provide free treatment of the injury or any other type of payment. However, all needed facilities, emergency treatment and professional services will be available to you, just as they are to the community in general. You should report any injury to Dr. Manuel Piña Jr. 979-862-1978. You will not give up any of your legal rights by signing this consent form.

Will I Be Paid To Be In This Study?

You will not be paid for being in this study.

Will Information From This Study Be Kept Private?

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The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher, Shiva Thompson, the Principle Investigator, Dr. Manuel Piña Jr. and the co-Principle Investigator, Dr. Silva Hamie, will have access to the records.

Who may I Contact for More Information?

You may contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Manuel Piña Jr., Associate Professor, to tell him about a concern or complaint about this research at 979-862-1978 or m-pina@tamu.edu. You may also contact the co-Principle Investigator, Dr. Silva Hamie at 979-458-8034 or silva.hamie@tamu.edu

For questions about your rights as a research participant; or if you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, you may call the Texas A&M University Human Research Protection Program office by phone at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636, or by email at irb@tamu.edu.

What if I Change My Mind About Participating?

This research is voluntary and you have the choice whether or not to be in this research study. You may decide to not begin or to stop participating at any time. If you choose not to be in this study or stop being in the study, there will be no effect on your medical care, employment, evaluation, relationship with Texas A&M University, etc.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Information about you will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law. People who have access to your information include the Principal Investigator and research study personnel. Representatives of regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) and entities such as the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program may access your records to make sure the study is being run correctly and that information is collected properly.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I agree to be in this study and know that I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. The procedures, risks, and benefits have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered. I know that new information about this research study will be provided to me as it becomes available and that the researcher will tell me if I must be removed from the study. I can ask more questions if I want. A copy of this entire consent form will be given to me.

Participant's Signature

Date

Printed Name

Date

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INVESTIGATOR'S AFFIDAVIT:

Either I have or my agent has carefully explained to the participant the nature of the above project. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the person who signed this consent form was informed of the nature, demands, benefits, and risks involved in his/her participation.

Signature of Presenter

Date

Printed Name

Date



APPENDIX B

Arabic Consent Form

Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program

الموضوع: الديانات و تنوع الثقافات في الوقت المعاصر وتأثيراتها على زوجات رجال الشرق الاوسط

انتم مدعوة للمشاركة في دراسة البحث التي أجرتها' الطالبة (شيففا تومسن) والتي هي طالبة بحث في جامعة تكساس Texas A&M University

المعلومات الواردة في هذا التقرير هي كفيلة لجعل المشترك له' حق الاختيار بالأشتراك في هذا البحث أو لا.

إذا قرر الشخص الأشتراك في البحث سوف'يطلب منه' التوقيع على هذه الأستمارة, أما في حالة رفض الشخص المشاركة في البحث لن يكون هناك أي عقوبة أوخسارة أي منفعة كان يتمتع بها سابقاً.

ماهو الهدف من هذه الدراسة: هو تسليط الضوء علي قضايا التنمية المعاصرة بشأن عدم المساواة بين الرجل والمرأة في الشرق الاوسط ,وجلب العوامل الدينية والثقافية مما تسبب إحتكاك في سياق الأمن العالمي ليس فقط علي السياق الأكاديمي والمناقشة العلمية وإنما محاولة توعية الرأي العام ولفت نظر الرأي العام لها هذه الدراسة تساعد المشتركين فيها للوصول الي الموارد التي من شأنها مساعدتهم على التصدي للتحديات التي 'يواجهونها خلال فترة تواجدهم داخل الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية.

لماذا يطلب منك ان تكون ضمن هذه الدراسة:

'يطلب منك ذلك لكونك من الشرق الاوسط وكونك زوجة طالب دكتورا يدرس في جامعه تكساس موجودة في مدينة كولج ستيفن لمدته لاتقل عن ستة أشهر وكونك تنتمين لواحدة من الدول التالية: (فلسطين , العراق سوريا ,المملكة الأردنية الهاشمية و ايران) وبذلك تكونين مؤهلة لهذه الدراسة .

كم عدد الأشخاص الذين سيطلب منهم المشاركة هذه الدراسة؟

سيكون عدد المشاركين المطلوب مشاركتهم في هذه الدراسة ثلاثين شخصاً محلياً . عموماً 'سيدعى ما مجموعه' ثلاثون شخصاً في عشرة مراكز من أجل تحقيق الحد الأدنى لعدد المشاركين .عشرين مشترك لأستكمال الدراسة. وسيتم تحديد مكان وجود مراكز الدراسات من قبل المشاركين، الذين قد'يختارون لإجراء المقابلة الشخصية لهذه الدراسة .



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ماهي البدائل للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة

البديل هو عدم المشاركة في هذه الدراسة .

في حالة المشاركة في هذه الدراسة ماهي متطلبات المشاركة

سوف يطلب منك أن تشارك في مقابلة تصف تجربتك ونمط الحياة التي تعيشونها في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية وأنواع التحديات التي قد تواجهكم . ومن الجدير بالذكر أن مدة المقابلة تستغرق ما يصل إلى 60 دقيقة وسوف تكون مقابلة واحدة تشمل زيارة واحدة مع إمكانية متابعة الزيارة لتأكيد المعلومات الواردة خلال المقابلة الأولى.

اللغة المطلوبة للتسجيل : الإنجليزية، العربية، والفارسية

التسجيل الصوتي مطلوب أثناء المقابلة حيث يمكن من خلالها أن يشير الباحث إلى إجاباتك بعد المقابلة وإجراء تحليل على المعلومات التي قدمتها. إذا كنت لا تُعطين الإذن للتسجيل الصوتي في المقابلة ستكون الاستفادة محدودة بسبب قدرة الباحث محدودة لتذكر كل المعلومات التي قدمتها خلال المقابلة.

أعطي إذن مني للتسجيلات الصوتية خلال مشاركتي في هذه الدراسة البحثية _____

لا أعطي إذن مني للتسجيلات الصوتية خلال مشاركتي في هذه الدراسة البحثية. _____

هل هناك اي مخاطر للمشارك بهذه الدراسة ؟

ليس هناك اية مخاطر بالنسبة للمشاركين لكن في بعض الاحيان تكون الأسئلة مُرهقة أو مُزعجة ويكون للمشارك الحق في عدم الاجابة علي هذه النوع من الاسئلة .

ماهي الفوائد التي يحصل عليها المشترك من خلال اشتراكه في هذه الدراسة

الفائدة من الأشتراك بهذه الدراسة هو أن تصبح لك فرصة الحصول على الخدمات الاجتماعية التي تُقدمها الجمعيات الخيرية أو الهيئات الدينية . وهذه الخدمات التي تحصل عليها هي نتيجة الجهد المشترك بين

**Bush School of Government and Public Service and the Department of
Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC)**

لطلبة الدراسات العليا المهتمين في مهن التنمية ومن خلال هذه الجهود المبذولة والنتائج التي يتوصل لها الباحث من هذه الدراسة حيث يتم الوصول الي حلول للمشكلات التي يواجهها المشتركين في هذه الدراسة .



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هل سيكون هناك أي تكاليف يتحملها المشترك من خلال إشتراكه في هذه الدراسة

بجانب الوقت الخاص للمشارك ليس هناك أي تكاليف يتحملها المشترك من خلال إشتراكه في هذه الدراسة .

✚ من الجدير بالذكر إنه إذا كان المشترك قد تعرض لأصابة اثناء المقابلة فعليه التقييم انه لا يوجد أي علاج خاص أو مصاريف إضافية قد تعطى له غير الخدمات المتوفرة لكافة المواطنين بصورة عامة. جميع الأصابات يجب إعلام الدكتور (Manuel Piña Jr. 979-862-1978).

✚ من الجدير بالذكر ان توقيع المشترك علي هذه الدراسة لا يجعله يفقد اي حق من حقوقه .

هل هناك مقابل مادي للاشتراك بهذه الدراسة ؟

كلا ليس هناك مقابل مادي للاشتراك في هذه الدراسة .

هل المعلومات التي سوف تُطرح في هذه الدراسة ستكون محاطة بالسرية

المعلومات والتجارب الشخصية التي يتم التحدث فيها بين الباحث والمشارك سيتم الاحتفاظ بها بسرية تامة وليس لأي شخص الحق في الاطلاع عليها، فقط الأشخاص الذين لهم الحق في الاطلاع هم :

Shiva Thompson, The Principle Investigator Dr. Manuel Pina and the co-Principle Investigator Dr. Silva Hamie .

من هو الشخص الذي يمكن الاتصال به في حاله وجود أي سؤال أو إستفسار؟

تستطيع الاتصال بالمسؤول Dr. Manuel Pina على الرقم 979-862-1978 أو البريد الالكتروني m-pina@tamu.edu

أو الاتصال Dr. Silva Hamie على الرقم 979-458-8034 أو على البريد الالكتروني silva.hamie@tamu.edu للإبلاغ عن أي شكوي أو شكوك حول الدراسة.

للاستفسار حول حقوقك أو شكوي أو شكوك كمشارك في هذه الدراسة يمكنك الاتصال على

979-458-4067, الخط المجاني 1-855-795-8636 أو على البريد الالكتروني irb@tamu.edu



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ماذا لو غيرت رأيي في المشاركة في هذه الدراسة

المشاركة إختيارية ولك القدرة على إختيار المشاركة أو عدم المشاركة. وأيضاً يمكنك عدم البدء أو التوقف بأي وقت، وهذا لن يؤثر على أي ضمان صحي ، عملك، تقييمك وكل ماله علاقه مباشره بالجامعة.

السرية

سيتم الاحتفاظ بالمعلومات عنك بسرية إلى الحد المسموح به أو يقتضيه القانون. الناس الذين لديهم إمكانية الوصول إلى المعلومات الخاصة هم

- The Principal Investigator and research study personnel.
- Representatives of regulatory agencies such as the Office of the Human Research Protections (OHRP) and entities such as Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program.

وهؤلاء سيكون لهم الحق في الأطلاع على التسجيلات للتأكد من سير الدراسة بالشكل الصحيح والتأكد من أن المعلومات التي جُمعت صحيحة .

بيان الموافقة

أوافق على أن أكون في هذه الدراسة، وأعلم أنني لن أستسلم أية حقوق قانونية من خلال توقيع هذا النموذج. وقد تم شرح الإجراءات والمخاطر والفوائد بالنسبة لي، وتمت الإجابة على جميع أسئلتني. وسيتم توفير المعلومات حول هذه الدراسة البحثية لي وأن الباحث سيقول لي إذا يجب إزالتها من الدراسة. كما يمكنني طرح المزيد من الأسئلة إذا كنت أرغب في ذلك. وسوف أستلم نسخة من هذا النموذج .

Date

Participant's Signature

Date

Printed Name



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شهادة الباحث

أشهد أنه تم تبليغ المشترك بكافة الأمور المتعلقة بهذه الدراسة وقد تم الأشاره الى طبيعه هذه المقابله والفوائد التي يمكن الحصول عليها نتيجة نجاح البحث بالإضافة الى السلبيات التي يتضمنها وعلى اساس ذلك تمت موافقة المشترك على التوقيع .

Date

Participant's Signature

Date

Printed Name



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APPENDIX C

Farsi Consent Form

چالشهای مذهبی و فرهنگی در جهان مدرن : درک مسائل نهان همسران در خاورمیانه

شما دعوت شده اید که در پژوهشی که توسط شیوا تامپسون، پژوهشگر دانشگاه تگزاس ای اند ام ، انجام می شود شرکت کنید. اطلاعات در این فرم برای کمک به تصمیم گیری شما فراهم شده که آیا می خواهید در این پژوهش شرکت کنید یا خیر. اگر تصمیم به شرکت در این پژوهش بگیرید از شما درخواست می شود که این رضایتنامه را امضا نمایید و اگر تصمیم به عدم شرکت در این پژوهش بگیرید، هیچ جریمه ای برای شما نخواهد بود و هیچ حقی از حقوق معمول شما صلب نخواهد شد.

چرا این پژوهش انجام می شود؟

هدف این پژوهش نشان دادن مشکلات ناشی از پیشرفت های اخیر، در مورد نابرابری جنسیتی در خاورمیانه و نمایش عوامل دینی و فرهنگی موثر در ایجاد آن در زمینه امنیت جهانی، نه تنها برای فضای دانشگاهی و مباحثات علمی، بلکه برای آگاهی عموم مردم است. این پژوهش به شرکت کنندگان کمک خواهد کرد تا به منابعی دسترسی یابند که می تواند به آن ها در حل چالش هایی که در دوران اقامتشان در آمریکا با آن مواجه می شوند، کمک کند.

چرا از من خواسته شده است که در این پژوهش شرکت کنم؟

از شما خواسته شده که در این پژوهش شرکت کنید زیرا شما همسر (زن) یک دانشجوی دکتری از خاورمیانه هستید که برای مدت حداقل شش ماه در کالج استیپن تگزاس زندگی می کند و از یکی از کشورهای فلسطین، عراق، سوریه، اردن و ایران هستید. این معیارها شما را واجد شرایط برای این پژوهش کرده است.

از چند نفر برای شرکت در این پژوهش درخواست خواهد شد؟

از سی نفر (شرکت کننده) دعوت خواهد شد که در این پژوهش به صورت محلی شرکت کنند. در مجموع، از سی نفر در ده مرکز تحقیقاتی دعوت خواهد شد که در این پژوهش مشارکت نمایند تا حداقل تعداد شرکت کننده، بیست نفر، به منظور تکمیل این پژوهش به دست بیاید. محل مرکز تحقیقاتی توسط فرد شرکت کننده مشخص خواهد شد. شرکت کننده می تواند محل انجام مصاحبه برای این پژوهش را تعیین نماید.



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چه راه دیگری جز شرکت در این پژوهش وجود دارد؟

راه دیگر به جز شرکت در این پژوهش شرکت نکردن در این پژوهش می باشد.

چه کارهایی در این پژوهش از من خواسته خواهد شد؟

از شما درخواست خواهد شد که در یک مصاحبه شرکت کنید و در مورد تجربیات و سبک زندگی و انواع چالشهای مرتبط با زندگی روزمره خود در امریکا صحبت کنید. هر مصاحبه حداکثر یک ساعت به طول خواهد انجامید و شامل یک جلسه مصاحبه و یک جلسه پیگیری احتمالی برای تأیید اطلاعات داده شده در مصاحبه اول خواهد بود.

مثال :

مصاحبه اول : جلسه اول (هفته اول)

این جلسه حدوداً یک ساعت به طول خواهد انجامید و در آن پژوهشگر مصاحبه را انجام می دهد.

ایا فیلم یا عکس یا صدای من در طول مصاحبه ضبط خواهد شد؟

زبان مورد نیاز برای ضبط: انگلیسی، عربی، فارسی.

پژوهشگر در حین پژوهش صدایتان را ضبط خواهد کرد تا پس از مصاحبه به آن رجوع کرده و اطلاعاتی که شما ارائه دادید را مورد بررسی قرار دهد. اگر شما اجازه ی ضبط صدا را ندهید، می توانید در این پژوهش شرکت کنید اما به دلیل محدودیت پژوهشگر در یادآوری همه اطلاعات ارائه شده توسط شما، مزایای این پژوهش برای شما کمتر خواهد بود.

زبان برای ضبط کردن اختیاری: انگلیسی، عربی، فارسی

در صورت تأیید شما، پژوهشگر در حین پژوهش صدایتان را ضبط خواهد کرد تا پس از مصاحبه به آن رجوع کرده و اطلاعاتی که شما ارائه دادید را مورد بررسی قرار دهد. تصمیم خود را با امضای جملات زیر تعیین نمایید.

_____ من اجازه ضبط صدای خود در حین شرکت در این پژوهش را می دهم.

_____ من اجازه ضبط صدای خود در حین شرکت در این پژوهش را نمی دهم.



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آیا برای من خطری وجود دارد؟

خطر تمامی کارهایی که انجام خواهید داد بیش از خطرهای زندگی روزانه نیست .

با این وجود اینکه پژوهشگر به دنبال دوری از خطرات است، شما ممکن است احساس کنید برخی از سوالات برای شما ناراحت کننده یا استرس زا هستند. شما مجبور نیستید به سوالاتی که نمی خواهید پاسخ دهید.

آیا برای من مزیتی وجود دارد؟

شما در صورت انتخاب با اختیار دسترسی به خدمات اجتماعی شامل کلاس های زبان انگلیسی و خدمات مراقبت از کودکان که توسط موسسات خیریه و نهادهای دینی در جامعه برایان/کالج استیشن ارائه می شود، به صورت مستقیم از شرکت در این پژوهش بهره خواهید برد. این مزایا به عنوان حاصل این پژوهش که به عنوان پایه ای برای یک کلاس عملی کاربردی به کار می رود، محقق می شود. این کلاس ها محصول اقدام مشترک میان دانشکده دولت و خدمات عمومی بوش و دپارتمان رهبری، تحصیلات و ارتباطات کشاورزی برای دانشجویان تحصیلات تکمیلی علاقمند به ترقی شغلی طراحی شده است. دانشجویان تحصیلات تکمیلی در این کلاس درگیر طراحی راه حل هایی برای حل چالش هایی که شما، به عنوان شرکت کننده، در این پژوهش شناسایی کرده اید، خواهند شد.

آیا برای من هزینه ای وجود دارد؟

علاوه بر زمان شما، هیچ هزینه دیگری برای شرکت در این پژوهش نخواهند بود.

اگر شما از مصدومیتی که حاصل شرکت در این پژوهش است رنج می برید، لطفا درک کنید که هیچ گونه تمهیداتی به منظور فراهم کردن درمان رایگان این مصدومیت و یا هرگونه پرداخت مالی دیگری، اتخاذ نخواهد شد. با این وجود، تمامی تجهیزات مورد نیاز، درمان اضطراری و خدمات حرفه ای برای شما مهیا خواهد بود، همانطور که به طور کلی برای جامعه مهیاست. شما باید هرگونه مصدومیت را به دکتر مانوئل پینیا از طریق شماره تلفن 979-862-1978 گزارش دهید. شما با امضای این فرم رضایتنامه هیچ کدام از حقوق قانونی خود را از دست نخواهید داد.

آیا برای شرکت در این پژوهش به من پولی پرداخت می شود؟

شما برای شرکت در این پژوهش پولی دریافت نخواهید کرد.



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آیا اطلاعات کسب شده از طریق این پژوهش محرمانه نگه داری می شود؟

موارد ثبت شده در این پژوهش به صورت محرمانه نگه داری خواهد شد. هیچگونه مشخصاتی که شما را به این پژوهش مربوط کند در هر گونه گزارشی که امکان انتشار داشته باشد ذکر نخواهد شد. مدارک مطالعاتی محفوظ خواهد بود و تنها پژوهشگر، شیوا تامپسون، پژوهشگر اصلی دکتر مانتول پینیا و پژوهشگر اصلی دیگر، دکتر سیلوا هامیه به مدارک دسترسی خواهند داشت.

برای کسب اطلاعات بیشتر با چه کسی می توانم تماس بگیرم؟

شما می توانید با پژوهشگر اصلی، دکتر مانتول پینیا، دانشیار، از طریق شماره تلفن 979-862-1978 یا ایمیل m-pina@tamu.edu تماس گرفته و او را در جریان نگرانی ها و شکایات خود درباره این پژوهش قرار دهید. همچنین شما می توانید با پژوهشگر اصلی دیگر، دکتر سیلوا هامیه از طریق شماره تلفن 979-458-8034 یا ایمیل silva.hamie@tamu.edu تماس برقرار نمایید.

به منظور پرسش درباره حقوق خود به عنوان مشارکت کننده در پژوهش، یا در صورت داشتن هر گونه سوال، شکایت، و یا نگرانی درباره پژوهش، می توانید با مجموعه حفاظت از موضوعات انسانی دانشگاه تگزاس ای اند ام از طریق شماره تلفن دفتر 979-458-4067، شماره تلفن رایگان 866-795-8636 یا ایمیل irb@tamu.edu تماس برقرار نمایید.

در صورتی که نظرم درباره شرکت در پژوهش عوض شد؟

این پژوهش داوطلبانه است و شما اختیار شرکت یا عدم شرکت در این پژوهش را دارید. شما می توانید در هر زمان تصمیم به شروع نکردن یا توقف شرکت در این پژوهش را بگیرید. عدم شرکت یا توقف شرکت در این پژوهش، هیچگونه اثری بر خدمات درمانی، شغل، سنجش، ارتباط با دانشگاه تگزاس ای اند ام و غیره نخواهد داشت.

بیانیه رضایت

من موافقت خود را با شرکت در این پژوهش با دانستن اینکه هیچ گونه حقوق قانونی را با امضا کردن این فرم از دست نخواهم داد اعلام می دارم. روند، مخاطرات و مزایا برای من توضیح داده شده و به سوالات من پاسخ داده شده است. من می دانم که اطلاعات جدید درباره این پژوهش هنگامی که در دسترس قرار گرفت برای من مهیا خواهد شد و پژوهشگر در صورت نیاز به حذف من از این پژوهش مرا مطلع خواهد ساخت. اگر خواستم می توانم سوالات بیشتری بپرسم. یک کپی از تمام فرم رضایتنامه به من داده خواهد شد.

امضای شرکت کننده ----- تاریخ ----

نام شرکت کننده ----- تاریخ ----



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استشهاد پژوهشگر

من یا مامور من به دقت ماهیت پروژه فوق را برای شرکت کننده توضیح داده ایم. من بدین وسیله گواهی می دهم بر اساس اطلاعات من، شخصی که این فرم رضایتنامه را امضا کرده است از ماهیت، مطالبات، مزایا و مخاطرات مربوط به شرکتش در این تحقیقات آگاهی یافته است.

امضای مجری	----	تاریخ	----
نام مجری	----	تاریخ	----

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions

The selection of interview questions include:

- What is your name? Age?
- Where are you from?
- What is the level of education you have obtained?
- How long have you been married?
- Do you have children? How many? What are their ages?
- Do you have an income?
- What is your religion? (Sect? Sunni or Shi'a)
- What are your values? What is important to you? Why?
- How long have you been in the U.S.?
- Do you have contact with your relatives back home? How often?
- How do you feel about the U.S.?
- Describe your lifestyle back home. How does it compare to your lifestyle in the U.S.?
- Are there any challenges you have experienced in the U.S. that you do not face back home? Vice versa?
- If you could change anything about your lifestyle, what would it be?
- Why did you agree to participate in this interview?
- What do you like the most about being in College Station and A&M?
- What would you like to change about being in College Station and A&M?



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APPENDIX E

Letter of Translational Assurance- Arabic

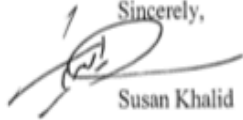
Dear Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program,

1/22/2016

This letter is to provide translational assurance guaranteeing the fidelity of the English-to-Arabic translation and transcription of the interviews conducted by the researcher, Shiva Thompson, as well as the consent form document related to the research thesis titled "Religious and cultural clashes in the modern world: Understanding Latent Issues of Middle Eastern Wives".

I conducted the translation of the consent form from English to Arabic. I will be accompanying the researcher, Shiva Thompson, to interviews conducted with participants who are native Arabic speakers and are not proficient in English. I will be translating English to Arabic and Arabic to English during the interview as well as transcribing the data collected. I am an immigrant to the United States and have lived in College Station, Texas for 5 years. I was born in the US, and I am a native Arabic speaker of 37 years and can attest to the accuracy of this translation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SK', written over a horizontal line.

Susan Khalid

APPENDIX F

Letter of Translational Assurance- Farsi

1/20/2016

Dear Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program,

This letter is to provide translational assurance guaranteeing the fidelity of the English-to-Farsi translation of the consent form document related to the research thesis titled "Religious and cultural clashes in the modern world: Understanding Latent Issues of Middle Eastern Wives".

I am a graduate student pursuing a master of science in construction management at Texas A&M University. I conducted the translation of the consent form from English to Farsi. I was born in Ahwaz, Iran and I am a native Farsi speaker of 24 years and can attest to the accuracy of this translation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'MR Farzad', written in a cursive style.

Mohammad Reza Farzad
MS Construction Management
Department of Construction Science
College of Architecture
Texas A&M University

APPENDIX G

Email Recruitment Template

Email Template for Iranian participant recruitment:

Dear fellow Iranians,

My name is Shiva Thompson and I am a Master's student at Texas A&M. I will be graduating this May and currently conducting research for my thesis, which is titled **"Religious and cultural clashes in the modern world: Understanding latent issues of Middle Eastern Wives"**.

The topic I will be investigating concerns the wives of Middle Eastern PhD students and the kinds of challenges they are faced with here in College Station and in their home nations as a result of cultural and religious differences.

I have identified 6 different nationalities to interview. These nationalities include, Palestinian, Iranian, Turkish, Iraqi, Syrian, and Jordanian. If possible, I would like to interview Iranian women who have been here for at least 6 months, with their husbands and/or children and do not work or study at Texas A&M University. The direct benefit to you by being in this study is to enhance your quality of life in the community and becoming empowered. The interview would take place at your preferred location and will not take more than one hour of your time. You are not required to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering. We could even set up group interviews with pairs of 2 women. Attached is a consent form in Farsi with all the important details for this study.

The results of this study will serve as a foundation assessment for a course on development programs for students interested in international development. This course will be a joint effort between the department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications and the Bush School of Government and Public Service. The course will be for graduate students interested in development careers. In the course, students will assess the challenges facing ME wives of Ph.D. students at A&M and propose solutions to remedy these challenges by empowering these women with respect to the limitations set by their cultural and religious context.

I would greatly appreciate your participation in this research and to help me help our misunderstood community, especially during this unfortunate eventful time in history where Muslims and the Middle East are greatly misunderstood.

Please contact me as soon as possible via email at thomp731@tamu.edu or phone at 979-492-4507.

With sincerest thanks,

Shiva Thompson
MS International Agricultural Development
Department of Agriculture, Leadership, Education, and Communication
Texas A&M University



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IRB Expiration Date: XX/XX/2017

Email Template for Iraqi, Syrian, Jordanian, and Palestinian participants identified by community opinion leader:

Dear Jane Doe,

My name is Shiva Thompson and I am a Master's student at Texas A&M. I will be graduating this May and currently conducting research for my thesis, which is titled **"Religious and cultural clashes in the modern world: Understanding latent issues of Middle Eastern Wives"**.

The topic I will be investigating concerns the wives of Middle Eastern PhD students and the kinds of challenges they are faced with here in College Station and in their home nations as a result of cultural and religious differences.

I have identified 6 different nationalities to interview. These nationalities include, Palestinian, Iranian, Turkish, Iraqi, Syrian, and Jordanian. I would like to interview, you, as you qualify as a woman who has been in the U.S. for at least 6 months, you're your husband and/or children and do not work or study at Texas A&M University. The direct benefit to you by being in this study is to enhance your quality of life in the community and becoming empowered. The interview would take place at your preferred location and will not take more than one hour of your time. You are not required to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering. We could even set up group interviews with you and a friend, who qualifies. Attached is a consent form in Arabic with all the important details for this study.

The results of this study will serve as a foundation assessment for a course on development programs for students interested in international development. This course will be a joint effort between the department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications and the Bush School of Government and Public Service. The course will be for graduate students interested in development careers. In the course, students will assess the challenges facing ME wives of Ph.D. students at A&M and propose solutions to remedy these challenges by empowering these women with respect to the limitations set by their cultural and religious context.

I would greatly appreciate your participation in this research and to help me help the misunderstood Middle Eastern community.

Please contact me at your earliest convenience via email at thomp731@tamu.edu or phone at 979-492-4507.

With sincerest thanks,



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Shiva Thompson
MS International Agricultural Development
Department of Agriculture, Leadership, Education, and Communication
Texas A&M University

IRB Number: IRB2016-0016
IRB Approval Date: XX/XX/2016
IRB Expiration Date: XX/XX/2017

Email Template for Turkish participant recruitment:

Dear RainDrop House Representatives,

My name is Shiva Thompson and I am a Master's student at Texas A&M. I will be graduating this May and currently conducting research for my thesis, which is titled **"Religious and cultural clashes in the modern world: Understanding latent issues of Middle Eastern Wives"**.

The topic I will be investigating concerns the wives of Middle Eastern PhD students and the kinds of challenges they are faced with here in College Station and in their home nations as a result of cultural and religious differences.

I have identified 6 different nationalities to interview. These nationalities include, Palestinian, Iranian, Turkish, Iraqi, Syrian, and Jordanian. If possible, I would like to interview Turkish women who have been here for at least 6 months, with their husbands and/or children and do not work or study at Texas A&M University. The direct benefit to you by being in this study is to enhance your quality of life in the community and becoming empowered. The interview would take place at your preferred location and will not take more than one hour of your time. You are not required to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering. We could even set up group interviews with pairs of 2 women. If the women who are interested in participating do not speak English, we can work to find a translator to help facilitate the interview. Attached is a consent form in English with all the important details for this study.

The results of this study will serve as a foundation assessment for a course on development programs for students interested in international development. This course will be a joint effort between the department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications and the Bush School of Government and Public Service. The course will be for graduate students interested in development careers. In the course, students will assess the challenges facing ME wives of Ph.D. students at A&M and propose solutions to remedy these challenges by empowering these women with respect to the limitations set by their cultural and religious context.

I would greatly appreciate your participation in this research and to help me help the misunderstood Middle Eastern community.



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Please contact me at your earliest convenience via email at thomp731@tamu.edu or phone at 979-492-4507.

With sincerest thanks,

Shiva Thompson
MS International Agricultural Development
Department of Agriculture, Leadership, Education, and Communication
Texas A&M University

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