

ABSTRACT

AN EXPLORATION OF ARAB MUSLIM WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES: A CASE STUDY
OF EXPERIENCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND COMMUNITIES IN THE POST-9/11
ERA

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The terrorist attack events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan impacted many lives in the U.S. and the world. These events impelled me to go back to school after sixteen years as a stay at home wife and mother, leading me to four amazing Arab Muslim women from Yemen, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco. The purpose of this study was to make meaning of the experiences these women had in different educational settings and communities in the U.S. post-9/11. This study provides a thick and detailed description of the interpretation of participant experiences, which involved the process of exploring principles of crystallization while immersed in the data, ongoing

dialogue with participants, and the use of NVivo 10, a qualitative analysis software tool to organize and code the interviews. This study suggests that the lack of knowledge about Arab and Muslims due to limited interaction causes uncertainty, anxiety and hostility. This study also suggests that one of the main reasons for the negative perceptions, stereotypes, bias and discrimination toward Arab Muslim women is because the larger American community is not well-informed about the vast differences in their cultural and religious traditions. The predominantly biased, inaccurate, and incomplete reporting by Western media make these negative perceptions and behaviors more pervasive in the post-9/11 era. The participants perceived that opportunities found through communication, such as the media providing access to share their stories of suffering and injustice, as well as hopes and dreams, can enhance understanding about Arab Muslim women and change negative perceptions in the larger American community. In addition, reading and utilizing the advances in technology like the Internet, blogs and social media to become more informed about culture and religion are important in increasing knowledge that can reduce harmful attitudes and behavior. Finally, the participants perceived that communication plays an important role in dealing with the challenges they face as Arab Muslim women, and in forming positive relationships in different school settings and communities in the U.S. post-9/11 era.