PERCEPTIONS AND INTERACTIONS OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS WITH ARAB INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

A Dissertation by

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Dedication

To my wife Thara: You have taken a simple dream and made it my reality. Without your unwavering devotion, commitment, and selflessness, this work would not have been possible. I am unable to express the amount of gratitude and appreciation I have for you in this short sentiment.

I also dedicate this dissertation to our daughters, Rawaah, Leen, and Susan.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand how American students perceived and interacted with Arabs at a Midwestern university. Social capital theory was the theoretical framework used to understand the nature of interactions between American and Arab students. The data were collected by conducting individual interviews with 15 junior and/or senior American students in the business college. Findings indicated that most participants lacked accurate or in-depth knowledge about who Arabs are as an ethnic and cultural people. Participants held many misconceptions about Arabs and their culture. To support the social capital of students and to reinforce the bridging efforts between American and Arab students, the study provided implications for American universities, classroom instructors, and Arab students studying in the U.S.

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CHAPTER 1

International student mobility has become more dynamic than ever with aggressive recruitment efforts to internationalize higher education in many countries. According to the Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange released by the Institute of International Education, there were 974,926 international students in higher education institutions in the United States during the 2014-2015 academic year. In 2015-2016, the number surpassed one million for the first time—an increase of 7% from the previous year to a new high of nearly 1,044,000 students. The growing number of international students confirms the leading role played by the U. S. in international recruitment with twice as many students as the United Kingdom, the second leading host country in the world. International students represent more than 5% of the college student population in the U.S. and the combination of tuition, fees, books, and living expenditures contributes over $36 billion to the American economy. While students from China and India remained the leading countries of origin and accounted for 84% of the growth in international students in 2015-16, Saudi Arabia surpassed South Korea to become the third largest sender of international students to the United States (Institute of International Education, 2016).

The majority of international students comes from developing countries to study in developed western countries (Altbach, 2004). Beaver and Tuck (1998) found the most important reasons non-domestic students enroll in English speaking countries is to improve their proficiency in English and develop social relationships with domestic people (Beaver & Tuck, 1998). The main incentive for studying abroad is the perceived value of a foreign degree, such as better opportunities in finding jobs after graduation, lower tuition costs, and immigration. For many international students, economic and political factors were the most important reasons

preventing them from returning to their home countries (Altbach, 1991). The reasons students seek international education can be classified as push and pull factors (Skinner & Shenoy, 2003). The push factors refer to circumstances that encourage students to pursue their education in countries other than their homeland and include poor education, social injustice, limited job opportunities, and a range of economic and political circumstances. The pull factors refer to attractions that invite international students to study in host countries and include scholarships, high quality of the education, political ties, and the anticipation of finding rewarding jobs in a competitive labor market (Skinner & Shenoy, 2003).

Active marketing helps promote the good reputation of the American higher education system in the Middle East. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, affiliated with the U.S. Department of State, offers advising services through 24 centers in the Middle East. Most of these centers target oil-producing countries in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, and Libya. The advising centers provide face to face advising in addition to virtual advising through the internet to help students from these countries find necessary information to pursue their education in the United States. For example, the number of Saudi students' enrollment increased in the U.S. after receiving the King Abdullah Al Saud scholarship program in 2005 (Leggett, 2013). Besides its goal of preparing its citizens to meet the highest global educational and scientific standards, this governmental scholarship program aimed to encourage Saudi students' cross-cultural interaction with people from different social, cultural, and educational backgrounds (Ministry of Higher Education, 2014).

Research Problem

Most young adults about to start college approach this transition with a mixed feeling of happiness and anticipation (Jackson, Pancer, Pratt, & Hunsberger, 2000). They expect college life to bring them important opportunities for intellectual, personal, and social development. Many of these expectations are realized while other positive feelings characterizing students' precollege life are replaced by negative feelings after spending some time at college (Pancer, Hunsberger, Pratt, & Alisat, 2000). Student experiences at college are often harder and more stressful than what many of them expect (Compas, Wagner, Slavin, & Vannatta, 1986). Students in their first academic year learn to adjust to new requirements, such as independence and coping with a new environment that differs from the one experienced in high school. They usually move away from their families and friends for the first time during this period and live away from their social support system (Rice, 1992). Added to these challenges, students find themselves meeting and studying with new people who share a similar cultural background but also encountering, in the diverse learning environment of college, international students of different ethnicities and backgrounds.

Transition from secondary to university education is a challenging experience for both domestic and international students. In this study, the term domestic students refer to students attending college in their native country, that in this case is the United States. International students refer to students native to countries outside the U.S. enrolled in courses at American colleges or universities. International students are usually admitted under a temporary visa that lasts for as long as they are in school (Skinner & Shenoy, 2003). There is a common expectation that, as part of the college experience, both domestic and international students will develop new ways of thinking, learning, and communicating. The vocabulary of a new academic discipline

will also be as different to domestic students as it will be to international students and getting acclimated to the academic styles of American post-secondary institutions will be equally required to become active and independent participants in their learning (McLean & Ransom, 2005).

Studying abroad can serve different social, cultural, and educational goals for the host country and its students. Studying alongside international students may diversify domestic students' perspectives about other countries and increase their understanding and appreciation for different cultures and languages inside and outside the classroom (Bevis, 2002; Harrison, 2002). Such diversity has the potential to encourage cross-cultural dialogue and foster the educational experiences of domestic students through a friendly learning environment (Ward, 2001). The different educational backgrounds of international students can enrich the academic atmosphere on campus by bringing new knowledge, skills, and perspectives. The presence of international students can also motivate domestic students to attain better social and cultural outcomes, such as helping others, developing new friendships, and improving their interpersonal skills in dealing with and learning from diverse cultural groups of students (Smith & Elliott, 2013). Similarly, when international students return to their home countries, they can serve as ambassadors to promote an exchange of cultural values and understandings between the different countries (Lee & Rice, 2007).

Ethnic diversity on campus provides domestic students with an ideal opportunity for deepening cross-cultural communication and interaction with international students. According to Volet (1997), this interaction is vital to enhancing the culturally sensitive emotional intelligence for building and cultivating positive relationships with diverse social groups. A few studies, such as those by Nesdale and Todd (2000) and Jon (2009), address domestic student

issues and their internationalization at home. Different people use internationalization in various ways depending on how they understand it. Some think of internationalization as establishing new branches of colleges and universities to deliver education to other countries. A few think of it as imparting a universal dimension to the learning and teaching process. Others associate it with international activities, such as partnerships, projects, and the mobility of learners and instructors (Knight, 2005) . Throughout this study, I use internationalization to refer to the mobility of learners and instructors in addition to the creation of new international academic programs and research initiatives. Interactions between domestic and international students foster involvement in social activities with peers from different cultures and lead to a constructive influence on student development (Chang, 2001). Diversity in institutions of higher education creates opportunities for local domestic students to explore cultures they probably know little or nothing about (Andrade, 2009). Domestic students may also benefit educationally from exploring the different opinions international students have about their home country, thereby preparing them to take part in an increasing diverse global community (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002).

Current research sheds light on international student issues but it rarely does so from the perspectives of domestic students (Jon, 2009). For example, many studies address the economic benefits international students bring to higher education institutions (Lee & Rice, 2007). Other research is devoted to understanding the perceptions of international students toward the difficulties and challenges they face (Lee, 2010). Among the topics typically discussed in the literature are acculturation (Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007), discrimination, and negative stereotypes (Lee & Rice, 2007). When researchers do include domestic students, they tend to describe them as facilitators who help in solving obstacles facing international students in their

new environment. Examples of these obstacles include coping with American educational systems, weak English language skills, and feelings of isolation and homesickness (Heggins III & Jackson, 2003; Wedding, McCartney, & Currey, 2009). Unlike most studies addressing international students' issues from their perspectives, this study will try to understand the nature of interaction between international and domestic students but from the domestic students' perspectives.

Lack of interaction, however, between domestic students and international students hinders achieving the social, cultural, and educational goals of international education. Therefore, one of the main challenges facing international students and the focus of this study is their limited interaction with Americans (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998). International students increasingly desire to interact and befriend the domestic students with whom they attend school (Smart, 2000; Ward & Masgoret, 2006) and are frequently disappointed when they are unable to interact with domestic students or cross the hidden barriers that impede establishing cross-cultural friendships. One unintended consequence of this failure that makes it even more difficult to establish rapport is each party assuming the other does not want to initiate relations with them (Le, 2010). Low levels of interaction between domestic and international students limits the benefits both groups can achieve (Ward, 2001). Research suggests these interactions are critical to achieving social, cultural, and academic goals, such as the development of unanticipated and rewarding friendships, exposure to new cultures and ways of thinking, and bringing new perspectives into classroom discussions. (Clark & Maharey, 2001; Halualani, Chitgopekar, Morrison, & Dodge, 2004; Ward, 2001)

However, little is known about the nature of the interactions between American students and international students, especially with Arab students. Even though a number of studies

address the concerns and obstacles of Arab students studying abroad, there is a need to explore these same interactional experiences from the perspectives of American students. This study will shed light on these interactions by examining the perceptions and attitudes of domestic students toward Arab international students enrolled in an urban, public, Midwestern university in the United States. Learning about the perspectives of American students, who represent almost 95% of the higher education population, will potentially inform college administrators about how to increase the frequency and quality of the interactions between these student groups. Improving intergroup relations should make the college experience more rewarding and beneficial for everyone involved.

Theoretical Framework: Social Capital

The purpose of a theoretical framework is to guide the development of study questions and explain a relationship between concepts or ideas (Maxwell, 2013), thus setting boundaries for the study (Merriam, 2009). Social capital theory is often used to view the processes that occur between individuals and their social systems (Putnam, 2002). This theory is an appropriate lens for this study because it can help in describing the nature of interaction between domestic and international students and the challenges that might hinder their interaction on diverse campuses. Putnam (2000) defines social capital as "connections among individuals - social networks and the norms of the reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). Social capital is both a structural phenomenon (social networks) and a cultural phenomenon. This twofold nature of social capital results in problems related to attempts to measure social capital that usually concentrate on one or the other aspect, but not the two together. Many people spend much of their time in the presence of others between work time and family activities. However, preferences of individuals and cultures differ in the way they

socialize with others (Putnam, 2000). Some communities demonstrate more of a tendency for making relationships than others, and the preferred structures of relationships vary. In some, personal networks family and relatives comprise the most important form of involvement; in others, voluntary associations are more important and help in pulling people out of their families (Fukuyama, 1995). Furthermore, socializing consumes an individual's time and may substitute for other activities one needs to do. Participation in social activities and interactions with international students competes with other social (family and friends), educational (study), and life requirements (work) obligations.

Social capital is often associated with trust. Trust and interaction take place between groups with strong social links. The frequent interaction among members of social groups prevents unwanted behaviors and leads to positive externalities generated by high levels of interpersonal trust and social networks. Positive externalities include more respect and social trust (Halpern, 2001). However, social capital might also work in the opposite direction (DeFilippis, 2001). While closed networks provide various benefits to group members, they might act as a lobby working against the interests of other groups and thus restrict benefits the in-group network members can gain from the out-group members (Portes, 1998).

The double-sided role of social capital invites scholars to distinguish between two types of social networks: bridging and bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000). Putnam defines bridging as ties of connectedness that take place between dissimilar social communities (i.e., American and Arab students), whereas bonding social capital is associated with closed networks of homogeneous groups (i.e., American or Arab students alone). Constructive experiences among heterogeneous individuals "will have greater effects on the development of generalized trust than will the relations with individuals who are similar to oneself in term of their

characteristics, attitudes, or behavior" (Marschall & Stolle, 2004, p. 129). Bridging relationships are more likely to produce constructive externalities than bonding relationships. In this regard, Putnam (2000) discussed a distinction between "getting by" and "getting ahead." Bonding social capital includes trust and reciprocity in closed social systems and facilitates the course of getting by in life on a regular basis. On the other hand, getting ahead is facilitated through intersecting relationships that take the shape of bridging social capital. Clearly, this does not necessarily indicate that bonding groups (such as one's friends or family) are negative (Marschall & Stolle, 2004). In fact, most people receive support from in-group network members rather than out-group members (Putnam, 2000).

Individuals who share the same salient ethnic and racial features in addition to other common shared backgrounds develop an in-group bias through which collaboration, trust, and sentiment are smoothly transferred to other in-group members (Marschall & Stolle, 2004). Nevertheless, focus on this similar identity also promotes out-group resentment. Strong social bonds may result in an "us versus them" mindset where group members create close ties and trust but have a tendency to differentiate themselves from other groups or possibly avoid individuals from other groups (Abrams, Hogg, & Marques, 2004). Absence of direct interaction with or continuous knowledge about members of other ethnic and cultural backgrounds may lead to prejudice (Marschall & Stolle, 2004). Conversely, "social interaction among individuals from dissimilar groups and the forging of common cooperative experiences, fosters an identity that helps both diminish in-group bias and to develop inclusion of former out-group members" (Marschall & Stolle, 2004, p. 130). To understand social capital interactions from a domestic student's point of view, I will explore intergroup relations between American and Arab students

in U.S. university classrooms, focusing on whether everyday classroom interactions lead to bridging and bonding relationships across groups.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore American students' perspectives regarding interaction with Arab international students. The growing number of international students in U.S. colleges and universities represents a valuable opportunity for cross-cultural interaction and communication (Volet, 1997). Knowing how American students view Arab students when they are together in the classroom will illuminate the nature of cross-cultural communication within a university context. Such an investigation also has the potential to reveal why open social and educational interactions may or may not be occurring (Cruickshank, Chen, & Warren, 2012; Leask, 2001; Volet, 1997; Wright & Schartner, 2013). It behooves students and instructors to find effective ways of encouraging cross-cultural communication and using student diversity to enrich the experience of both student populations.

To understand American college student exposure to and interaction with Arab students on campus, this study will focus on junior and senior American business majors enrolled in New Century University. New Century University (NCU) is a public, four-year, coeducational institution located in Middletown. The total number of students in the 2014/2015 academic year was almost 15, 000 (New Century University, 2014). The total number of international students was 1,716 students, 962 undergraduate and 754 graduate students. The majority of international students (823) study engineering, followed by 245 students enrolled in the Intensive English Language Center (Personal Communication, July 6, 2015).

Research Questions

The critical question guiding my study is, "What are the perceptions of American college students regarding intergroup relations in a shared classroom experience with Arab students?" Accordingly, the research questions framing my study are:

1. How do American students describe their experiences with Arab students?

2. What are the beliefs and attitudes of American students toward Arab students?

3. What factors influence the development of bridging social capital between American and Arab students?

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Interaction between domestic and international students can achieve different social, cultural, and educational benefits for both sides. However, simply having students from diverse backgrounds and cultures together in the same educational contexts does not necessarily achieve the sought after goals (Marginson, 2002). To understand the relationship between American and Arab students, this chapter sheds light on the contributions of diversity to college life. Stereotypes is the second topic I cover in this section; this topic is covered in order to understand how stereotypes associated with Arabs can negatively influence the interaction between American and Arab students at American higher education institutions. I also discuss social capital as it relates to the networks and relationships formed between homogenous groups (i.e., American students) and across heterogeneous social groups (i.e., American and Arab students). Finally, I discuss the nature of interactions between domestic and international students' in-class and out-of-class experiences and the impact of individualistic or collective cultures on these experiences.

Contributions of Diversity to College Life

The increasing number of international students in the United States makes higher education institutions more diverse than ever before. The presence of international students on American campuses helps U.S. students achieve positive outcomes from diversity, such as fostering cross-cultural dialogue and interaction. International education can serve different social, cultural, and educational goals for the host country and its students. Diversity of nationalities on campus provides domestic students with an ideal opportunity for deepening cross-cultural communication and interaction. Such diversity also encourages cross-cultural

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dialogue and fosters the domestic students' experiences through a friendly learning environment. However, mixing international students and domestic students in the same classroom does not necessarily heighten cross-cultural interactions (Smart, Volet, & Ang, 2000)

Educational Experience

Students attending universities with diverse student populations stand to gain distinct educational advantages. Growing numbers of international students studying abroad increase domestic students' opportunities for diversity and interaction with persons from different cultures. International students enrich the cultural and intellectual capital of postsecondary institutions (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). Ethnic and cultural diversity supplies students with better chances to explore different opinions and circumstances from their own home countries, which prepares them to take part in an increasingly diverse global community (Gurin et al., 2002). Diversity in higher education institutions creates chances for local students to explore cultures about which they may be unfamiliar. Integrating international students with domestic students might deepen an understanding of each other's culture. This can also broaden their respective social networks and support an exchange of ideas, information, and future support between them (Andrade, 2009). The interaction between domestic and international students fosters their involvement in social activities with peers from different cultures and eventually might lead to a constructive influence on both group's development (Chang, 2001). Jon's (2009) study supports this argument because she found international students to have positive intercultural influence on local Korean students enrolled in an international summer program. A number of Korean domestic students acknowledged having biases and stereotypes toward certain Asian cultures, specifically those from developing countries. Yet, these stereotypes changed after the domestic Korean students interacted with international students and learned they shared

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the same conservative beliefs about some social issues such as dating and relationships (Jon, 2009).

Grayson (2007) compared experiences and outcomes of domestic and international students in four Canadian universities. Study participants included 477 international students and 781 domestic Canadian students enrolled in their first year of college. The participants received the same questionnaire that discussed various aspects of their classroom experiences. The response rate was 40%. Both domestic and international students were satisfied with the program. However, domestic students were slightly more satisfied with how the professors taught than international students who were less involved in their classes. On the other hand, international students spent more time studying outside class than domestic students. This was due to language and adjustment obstacles they faced in the first year and so that they could achieve grades close to those of domestic students. In addition, international students were more active in non-academic events and peer involvement compared to domestic students.

Prior Experiences of American Students with Ethnic and Cultural Diversity

Students who experienced interactions with peers from different cultures before attending college were more likely to adapt to a diverse college environment. Moreover, student openness to a cross-cultural college environment influenced the quality of their engagement when they took part in formal and informal activities with international students (Denson & Bowman, 2013). Denson and Bowman explored first-year student views and attitudes toward diversity at an Australian university. They found students who did not have exposure to different cultures in high school felt less confident interacting with international students and had less comfortable experiences. Students who were more open to learning about new cultures perceived their

interaction with international students positively and were more confident to interact in a diverse environment.

Students' precollege experiences with different racial groups shape their attitudes and behaviors at college (Saenz, 2010). Racial separation at American schools, specifically during adolescence, could reinforce negative effects and allow stereotypes about other ethnic and racial groups since students do not have experiences that can challenge their misleading opinions (Sugrue, 1999). Thus, interaction with multicultural campuses is vital since most high school student graduates come from homogeneous neighborhoods and schools resulting in low levels of engagement with diversity. Such little meaningful interaction prior to college life prevents students later from understanding complicated topics from different perspectives (Gurin, 2004).

Many studies have discussed students' high school years, but rarely have these studies made connections between school life and transitions to colleges as linkage to their exposure with diversity. The nature of high schools in the United States (homogeneous and multicultural) results in racial discrimination against low-income non-White races and influences students' experiences with diversity prior to college (Orfield, 2009). Having great proportions of Whites in high schools was negatively related to white students' experiences with multiracial interaction. Furthermore, students' willingness to participate in multiracial activities was influenced negatively for white students who attended high schools with predominantly white students as well as for students of color (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). On the other hand, Hall, Cabrera, and Milem (2011) found attending multicultural high schools was associated with positive students' precollege relations with peers from different backgrounds. Even students' perspectives of forming friendships at college were positively influenced by the extent of

exposure to diversity in high school. Antonio (2004) found many students who had diverse friendships at school were ready to have more friendships with dissimilar students at college.

Racial and Cultural Diversity

Luo and Jamieson-Drake (2013) pointed to the importance of increasing the number of international students in college to encourage interactions among students. Domestic students had better chances of engaging in recurrent international interactions, in addition to gaining more openness to the different perspectives international students bring to classroom discussions. They acquired intercultural awareness as well as tolerance and acceptance of others. They were also more ready to challenge and evaluate their own beliefs. However, Luo and Jamieson-Drake indicated that the number of international students enrolled in a university does not guarantee cross-cultural interaction. When interactions take place, there is always a chance for misunderstanding. Thus, educational institutions have to take a critical role in reinforcing international diversity through a friendly learning environment for international students, such as providing a welcoming and caring learning atmosphere, one free from prejudice and discrimination and providing fruitful cultural experiences for domestic students. Regular contact with faculty, extracurricular activities, and involvement in cultural organizations were also important factors encouraging interaction between domestic and international students (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013).

Support in favor of college diversity is not universal. Rothman, Lipset, and Nevitte (2003) examined whether increased racial diversity in college enrollment enriches the student educational experience and improves social interaction among students of different races. The researchers surveyed almost 4,100 administrators, faculty members, and students from 140 U.S. colleges and universities. Unexpectedly, findings failed to maintain the argument that

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enrollment diversity improves the academic, social, and cultural diversity at American higher education institutions. Participants associated increased diversity with a more negative and pessimistic evaluation of their university experience (Rothman et al., 2003). However, the findings of Rothman and his colleagues were critiqued for their exceedingly simplistic analysis and inaccurate variables used to find educational benefits from diversity enrollment in the U.S. colleges. Funded by anti-affirmative action interests, Rothman and his colleagues have been accused of promoting negative public opinion research to endorse a political agenda (Saha, 2003).

Arab Stereotypes

The interaction between individuals is a reflection of culture and ethnicity (Waterhouse, 1988). Hewstone and Brown's intergroup model suggests that domestic students hold pre-conceived images about different cultures (i.e., Arabs) that judge international students in advance according to stereotypes associated with their specific ethnic group. When cross-cultural interaction takes place on diverse campuses, it can help reduce negative patterns related to stereotyped cultures. Moreover, international students representing these cultures could dispel undesirable notions associated with their ethnicities (Cadinu & Rothbart, 1996).

Negative stereotypes and biases against some cultures prevent domestic students from interacting with some international students. International students have different experiences in the U.S. and Britain associated with their origin home countries. Some of these experiences can be attributed to stereotypes people in the host countries have about other cultures and ethnicities (Lee & Rice, 2007). In his study, Beoku-Betts (2004) found white teachers in Britain suspected educational abilities of African graduate female students and criticized their dialect. Consequently, the students had negative feelings toward interaction with people from the host

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culture. According to the researcher, the faculty behavior stemmed from common views of Africa as an unimportant continent (Beoku-Betts, 2004).

Discrimination against international students influences their interaction with peers, staff, faculty, and the community (Hanassab, 2006). In a study to assess international students' experiences with discrimination in an American university, Hanassab (2006) found students from the Middle East and Africa were stereotyped more negatively than students from other regions. These negative stereotypes stemmed from the September 11, 2001 tragic event and its association with people from Arab and Islamic countries (Hanassab, 2006). On the other hand, international students from developed countries might have negative stereotypes about the culture of the country where they chose to study. Some American students studying in Middle Eastern and South African universities had perceived the region in a distorted stereotype before interacting with local Arab students in these countries. They expected to meet people full of anger and riding on camels amid huge sand dunes. These images of the Middle East are derived from the widespread negative portrayal many people in America have about this region (Lane-Toomey & Lane, 2012).

"Arabs" is a term first used in the pre-Islamic era to depict groups of people who lived in the Arabian Peninsula and Syrian Desert (Patai, 1973). The 'Arab world' and/or the 'Arab nation' are terms used to describe 22 Arabic speaking countries distributed between the Middle East and North Africa (American - Arab Anti Discrimination American - Arab Anti Discrimination Committee, 2009). Many Arab and Western scholars have struggled answering the question, "Who is an Arab?" (Patai, 1973, p. 13). Answers generally include the criteria of those who speak Arabic as their native language , who grow up in an Arab society, who inhabit an Arab country, and who "Cherish the memory of Arab Empire" (Patai, 1973, p. 13). The Arab

countries in the Middle East are: Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Yemen. The Arab countries in North Africa are: Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Mauritania, Somalia, Algeria, the Comoros Islands, Eretria, and Djibouti. Arabic is the main language for these countries, but it is not the only language. Many common features unite the Arab world, such us language, history, culture, and religion. Even though Islam is the religion of the majority, there are thousands of Jewish Arabs and millions of Christian Arabs (American - Arab Anti Discrimination American - Arab Anti Discrimination Committee, 2009).

According to Patai (1973), many Americans have historically stereotyped Arabs due to a lack of knowledge about Arab culture. Moreover, they were viewed as having settled away from history and were mostly unnoticed (Atiyeh, 1977; Suleiman, 1982). These attitudes suddenly changed after the fall of 1973 when the Arab States decreased substantially oil production and shipments to the United States. This event changed the way Arabs were depicted in the United States. Some of the media in America have repeatedly viewed Arabs as enemies who threatened the peace and economy of the United Stated through their caricatures, consequently perpetuating negative stereotypes (Gilboa, 1985). One example of negative attitudes toward Arabs was reported in a study conducted by Sergent, Woods, and Sedlacek (1992); attitudes of 107 freshmen university students had considerably revealed more negative attitudes toward a state when involving an Arab than in the same condition involving objectively another person (Sergent, Woods, & Sedlacek, 1992).Moreover, the tragic event of 9/11 against the Twin Towers in New York City has increased prejudice of some Americans against Arab people (Inayat, 2002). According to a study by Tummala-Narra and Claudius (2013), some Arab students have experienced prejudice in the United States because they perceived a feeling of isolation in the

host country. To reduce this feeling, they felt they needed to clarify their Islamic values to other nationalities, but they were cautious to discuss these issues due to the stereotypes linked to their homelands and religion (Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). Overtime, some of these stereotypes might have changed recently and events in the world might alter existing stereotypes.

Social Capital

Capital is usually associated with benefits, assets, or investment returns. It is connected to one's wealth, as in financial capital. Students have three forms of capital that can help them achieve academic goals: financial capital associated with tangible things such as money for fees and tuition; human capital, such as students and faculty members; and social capital that is a form of interaction among students themselves and between students and faculty members (Roberts, Clifton, & Etcheverry, 2001). Among the three types of capital, researchers have prioritized the importance of social capital for improving a student's academic experiences (Prado, 2009; Tramonte & Willms, 2010).

Social capital includes different aspects of social organizations, such as networks, trust, and norms (Putnam, 2000). It also refers to ties and communication among individuals of the same network and presents an important source of achieving members' goals by creating shared norms, values, and reciprocal trust. When social capital is lost, other forms of capital (financial or human) are not sufficient for making effective cultural and economic progress (Baker, Smith, & Cowan, 2003). Student social capital is shaped by educational institutions and can influence their academic accomplishments (Putnam, 2000). Therefore, student academic experiences are enriched when they are challenged intellectually and academically and when they have social support (Roberts et al., 2001). In other words, students who have social capital are more likely to achieve successful academic and cultural outcomes (Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2011).

Scholars suggest a distinction exists between two dimensions of social capital: formal and informal social capital. Formal social capital refers to participation in formal community organizations (Putnam, 2000) and informal social capital refers to social links between individuals and their personal surroundings, such as friends, colleagues, family, and neighbors (Lin, Cook, & Burt, 2001). Putnam (2000) also distinguishes between two types of social capital and the networks formed by them. He defines bonding social capital as relationships formed between homogenous groups (i.e., American students), whereas bridging social capital is shaped across heterogeneous social groups (i.e., American and Arab students).

Although friendships between domestic and international students represent a prime example of bridging and bonding social capital and an influential structure of positive or high quality interaction, students face obstacles to initiate friendships with each other (Davies, Tropp, Aron, Pettigrew, & Wright, 2011). Some international students have trouble in making cross-cultural friendships (bridging); nevertheless, they persist in their attempts despite receiving little interest from domestic students. Domestic students are less interested in connecting with international students and are more apt to bond with students from their own cultural group (Brown & Daly, 2004). As a result, some international students tend to bond with friends from the same culture or students who belong to countries other than the host culture (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985). Some Arab students in the United States prefer to live an insular cultural environment similar to that back home (Alreshoud & Koeske, 1997). Saudi students, for example, live in small communities in the U.S. and prefer to interact with each other. They recruit their families to live with them and thus have their own organizations and places to celebrate social occasions and perform religious ceremonies. All of these factors encourage Saudi students to replicate the lifestyle they had in their home country. On the other hand, this

bonding behavior leads to less interaction with Americans compared to other international ethnicities. The lack of interaction with the host community might reinforce the unfriendly image the Arab students have about American culture (Alreshoud & Koeske, 1997).

Even though international students seek to establish friendships with domestic students, they sometimes do not make enough efforts and by, default, end up spending time with friends from the same cultural background (Wright & Schartner, 2013). Brown and Daly (2004) explored the nature of social and educational interaction between New Zealand domestic students and international students. Even though both international and domestic students perceived the other positively and associated them with friendly features, their friendships and social interactions mainly consisted of bonding with students from their own ethnic groups. Approximately 50% of the participants mentioned having "a few" friendships from other cultures while 60% indicated building "some" or "many" friendships with students from their own ethnic groups (p. 9). International students had positive attitudes toward domestic student classroom experiences and felt the latter were open to discuss their ideas and initiate debate with instructors, which encouraged them to bridge with domestic students. However, domestic students were less motivated to bridge with the international students and perceived classroom interactions negatively. For example, domestic students were critical of international students remaining "quiet" most of the time in the classroom. Domestic students indicated a lack of awareness in regard to different cultural leaning styles and thus preferred to bond with domestic students who shared similar values and learning styles (Brown & Daly, 2004).

The limited degree of cross-cultural interactions is also partly explained by domestic students who perceived the increased presence of international students on campus as a threat (Dalglish & Chan, 2005). Moreover, in some cases domestic students may find it difficult to

interact with international students and are likely to feel anxious when interaction takes place. There may also be a heightened sense of threat when linguistic differences come between domestic and international students (Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002). International students associate intergroup anxiety with unfavorable feelings, such as doubt, discomfort, and confusion (Stephan & Stephan, 1985).

Interactions between Domestic and International Students

Several factors influence the nature of the interactions between domestic and international students. These factors include, among others, in-class experiences and out-of-class experiences. In-class experiences discusses the impact of individualistic and collective cultures in addition to language barriers on student experiences. On the other hand, out-of-class experiences sheds light on students group-work and university residence.

In-Class Experiences

Academic engagement and learning preferences of international and domestic students play a key role in understanding the nature of their interactions. The different cultural backgrounds of college students restrict individual learning styles and group behavioral patterns (Altbach, 1991; Ma & Schoeneman, 1997; Unruh & Obeidat, 2015). While international students tend to study in peer groups that reinforce their social connections (Cameron & Meade, 2002), domestic students prefer to study alone to achieve their educational goals (Ramsay, Barker, & Jones, 1999). Unlike many international students who come from collective cultures, domestic students in individualist cultures such as Australia, New Zealand, and America ask questions in class and get engaged in arguments with their instructors (Ward, 2001; Yuan, 2011). They believe it is a student's responsibility to learn in individualistic communities where teachers act as facilitators of learning rather than authoritative sources of knowledge. Colleges

in individualistic cultures support learning climates where students engage in arguments and initiate learning (Ma & Schoeneman, 1997).

Individualistic vs. collective cultures. Culture is a system of common values, beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge that people use to communicate efficiently in their social life. Cultures can be classified as collective or individualistic communities (Triandis, 1994). These communities are used to study cross-cultural interaction by concentrating on individuals' conceptions of self and its role in a certain society, significance of goals, identity in individualist or collective communities, individual gains, and measures of achievement (Hofstede & Bond, 1984; Triandis et al., 1986). Triandis (1994) defined collectivist culture as a group of values, beliefs, and attitudes connecting individuals to shared social interests inherent to that community. In collective cultures, there is no distinction between the goals of individuals and group goals; personal goals are sacrificed if this distinction is made (Ma & Schoeneman, 1997). In contrast, individualistic cultures prioritize individual independence, privacy, self-determination, and freedom of individual decision making (Darwish & Huber, 2003). Many American students who belong to an individualistic culture are driven by their own goals and what each can independently achieve (Ma & Schoeneman, 1997). Thus, when Arab students study with American students, their cultural backgrounds influence the way they interact in different educational settings.

Students in collective communities receive information from their teachers who symbolize a valuable source of knowledge and authority. At the same time, the personal opinions of students are not always appreciated (Auyeung & Sands, 1996). When they study abroad, most international students prefer to assimilate with new cultures and not get involved in debates or the asking of questions. Many believe their behavior inside the class will determine

the way students from new cultures perceive them and if this perception is negative, it will decrease their chances to interact with domestic students (Bartol, Tein, Matthews, & Martin, 2003). International students from collective cultures emphasize the importance of distance when dealing with their teachers. Thus, they are careful to ask suitable questions and not interrupt their teachers to avoid wasting class time. They also use silence to show respect to their instructors and maintain formal relations with them (Jon, 2009; Ward, 2001; Yuan, 2011).

Language barriers. Language proficiency is a crucial factor facilitating the development of educational, cultural, and social adjustment (Senyshyn, Warford, & Zhan, 2000). Lack of English proficiency is one of the main barriers determining international students' success (Andrade, 2006; Bocher & Furnham, 1986). Of the four basic language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), international students have the most difficulty with listening and speaking. Improving these two skills can be best achieved by encouraging domestic students to communicate with international students in formal and informal settings (Briguglio & Smith, 2012). In their study of international students in New Zealand, Ward and Masgoret (2004) found students with low English language proficiency had limited interaction with the host society, including students on campus and with the community outside the campus. In contrast, students with high linguistic proficiency interacted with host nationals inside and outside the college.

Limited language proficiency reduces the confidence and educational outcomes of international students. For example, many Asian students had problems associated with their language mastery in U.S colleges (Jackson & Heggins III, 2003). This led to a loss of confidence in their ability to communicate with other students and the larger campus community (Jackson & Heggins III, 2003). In another study, Huang (2006) reported Chinese students as being highly proficient in reading and grammar skills on the Test of English as a Foreign

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Language (TOEFL). However, weak oral communication and listening skills prevented Chinese students from participating in class discussions. Pronunciation and vocabulary were especially problematic areas. In this study, many Chinese students lived with friends and colleagues from their home country and communicated mostly in Chinese (Yuan, 2011).

Wright and Schartner (2013) conducted a study to track adaptation and social interaction for 20 international postgraduate students enrolled in a 1-year program in a British university. Data were collected twice; once at the beginning of the first month of the academic year and the second time after eight months. In the beginning, listening was the main challenge due to difficulty in the use of slang, understanding accents, and the speed of domestic student speech. Because speaking was another challenge for international students, they avoided speaking directly with instructors and relied instead on email communications. Even when international students had the chance to engage in informal discussions with domestic students, they tended to interact with students from their own ethnicity. They attributed this behavior to perceived cultural distances, difficulty in expressing their thoughts, and the expectations they would speak English fluently (Wright & Schartner, 2013).

Out-of-Class Experiences

Participation in a dynamic university atmosphere is vital to student development. In order to encourage interaction and social relationships between domestic and international students, several educational institutions around the world have established peer-pair and group programs to match partners in out-of-class experiences. However, a study by Summers and Volet (2008) indicated that domestic students were less motivated to take part in diverse groups and this lack of enthusiasm increased the longer they studied in non-diverse groups.

Group work. Even though domestic and international students reported having negative perceptions toward cooperative and group work before being part of such activities, both experienced positive feelings about each other after participating in group activities (Li & Campbell, 2008). This attitude stems from the nature of assignments where student performance is evaluated as a group in addition to negotiating time and responsibility between students working in groups. Moreover, Wright and Lander (2003) found in their study that, in general, international students were quieter and more reserved in diverse groups compared to groups with only international students. Cruickshank, Chen, and Warren (2012) explored the nature of the interactions between domestic and international students involved in group work in an Australian university. The study included 42 undergraduates in their third year: 14 international and 28 domestic students in a 13-week Arts and Education program. The majority of students (38 out of 42) commented positively on the planned group work. Most of the international students noticed the advantages gained from interacting socially with their domestic peers and how the group work encouraged them to talk and participate on an equal basis. As a result, it helped them to gain confidence in diverse groups. The program also facilitated establishing friendships among mixed group participants in a stress-free environment. Interestingly, domestic students learned more about English grammar from international students who developed their understanding of the spoken language and related cultural issues (Cruickshank et al., 2012).

According to Astin (1985), students learn and develop more when they get involved in groups in the college campus environment. Smith and Elliot (2013) investigated the value of interaction between international and domestic students in a mentor program in an Australian

university. They found the program helped mentors to interact with both domestic and international students. The majority of the participants (94%) stressed the importance of interaction in developing a better understanding of students from different cultural backgrounds. Attending this mentor program helped both domestic and international students increase their social interaction in a less formal setting and created new horizons to foster their intercultural engagement. However, international student mentors were more interested in developing the societal part of advising and in increasing interaction than their domestic peer advisors (Smith & Elliott, 2013).

International students involved in university group programs placed more importance on interaction with peers from their own or similar cultural groups than domestic students in Volet and Ang's 1998 study. In their study at the University of Toledo in Ohio, Sherry, Thomas, and Chui (2010) found 60% of the international students felt that domestic students did not understand their cultures at all or else knew little about them. Moreover, 50% of them students declared having good friendships with other international students.

When students are less interested in interacting with others from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, it is the college's responsibility to create a space for intercultural engagement (Gresham, Symons, & Dooey, 2013). Facilitators have to be mindful about planning activities that extend beyond the comfort zones of domestic and international students. To achieve this goal, Gresham, Symons and Dooey (2013) initiated extracurricular sessions in the Curtin Business School in Australia. After three attempts to lure domestic students to participate by offering extrinsic rewards, the student volunteers failed to recruit new people to join the session. Later, they were able to recruit only those who anticipated that intercultural interaction would present personally worthwhile experiences to take part in the program.

Eventually, domestic and international students became engaged in positive discussions and developed mutual understandings about each other. Also, international students attended classes more regularly after anticipating the impact of interaction with domestic students who were intrinsically motivated (Gresham et al., 2013).

University residence. College housing provides domestic and international students an ideal chance to enhance their cross-cultural social activity and friendships at the early stages of their college life, although this closeness does not always lead to good relationships (Nesdale & Todd, 2000). Involvement strategies can be effective in achieving this goal. Smart, Volet, and Ang (2000) conducted a study on an Australian students' residential village. The study included freshmen students admitted to the university residence from both genders, and different nationalities and races. Each residence included six to eight bedroom apartments with a shared kitchen, living room, and bathrooms. Even though these arrangements were difficult to make, students developed good relationships, social coherence, and put aside racial stereotypes (Smart, 2000; Smart et al., 2000). A survey showed they would not have voluntarily chosen these culturally diverse groups even though they showed an increased tendency to make friendships in the first stages of their college life. Additional studies have shown that first impressions about a new environment are predictive of attitudes towards people of a different culture and patterns of social interaction (Foley & Clawson, 1988).

Todd and Nesdale (1997) worked with 76 domestic and international students living in the same dorm at an Australian university. The study targeted three areas of student life— cultural interaction, knowledge, and acceptance—that promoted intergroup activities: the orientation program and university tutorials. To increase the contact opportunities, every floor in the dorm included an equal number of domestic and international students. The researcher

administered a questionnaire seven months later to evaluate cultural interaction, knowledge, and acceptance. The questionnaire compared differences between an experimental housing group, which included Australian domestic students and international students, and students residing in other colleges. Results showed the Australian students in the experimental housing were more likely to interact with the international students. They were also more familiar with cultural issues and more motivated to participate in activities that encouraged cultural interaction. Australian students in the experimental program showed that they valued the importance of intercultural friendships in that they attempted to develop intercultural relations until they succeeded in establishing friendships. However, Todd and Nesdale (2000) discussed three important factors for the success of intergroup involvement that administrators and educators should endorse. The program assumed that, "the more intervention programs overlap or coincide with the full range of a student's daily routine… the more likely it is to be successful" (p. 71-72). The success of such programs depends on student leadership skills and commitment. Finally, positive student involvement and active participation determines the program's success level.

CHAPTER 3

Research Design and Methodology

To understand the cross-cultural relationships between American and Arab students at a Midwestern college from the perspective of domestic students, this study used a qualitative research design. A qualitative research design helps to understand how individuals interpret the meaning of their experiences from their own perspectives (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research design facilitates studying phenomena in their natural settings and analyzing it from the perspectives of research participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This chapter covers the details of research design and methodology procedures for this study. The research design consisted of research context, description of study participants, data analysis and interpretation, research quality, and researcher positionality.

Research Context

This study was conducted at New Century University (NCU). NCU is a public, four-year, coeducational institution located in Middletown. There were 15,000 students enrolled in 2015. Of this total, there were 1,716 international students--962 undergraduate and 754 graduate. The majority of international students (823) studied engineering, followed by students enrolled in the Intensive English Language Center (245). There were 446 Arab students--382 undergraduate and 64 graduate. The largest portion of Arab students came from Saudi Arabia (406) and these students received support from the King Abdullah scholarship program (Leggett, 2013). A breakdown of Arab international students according to country of origin is included in Table 1.

Table 1

Arab International Students at New Century University in spring 2015

Country	Undergraduate	Graduate	Total
Egypt	6	3	9
Jordan	6	5	11
Kuwait	9	0	9
Lebanon	4	0	4
Libya	2	0	2
Morocco	1	1	2
Saudi Arabia	352	54	406
Syria	2	1	3
Total	**382**	**64**	**446**

Research Participants and Selection Process

Study participants were selected through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling helps researchers develop deep understanding and gain insights about the phenomena they study. A major advantage of purposeful sampling is selecting information-rich cases to study intensively. Patton (2002) argues that information-rich cases are those that help a researcher "to learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p. 230). For this study, information-rich cases were American students who had the opportunity to interact with Arab students during their undergraduate life. The purposeful selection of participants helped me understand in greater depth the nature of the interactions that took place between the two groups (Creswell, 2012).

More specifically, I used criterion purposeful sampling because it identified participants who best reflected the purpose of the study and were in a position to answer the research questions by providing rich information about the nature of interaction between American and Arab students (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 1990). The criteria for selecting participants who best provided relevant and comprehensive information included American students whose first language was English, who were born and raised in the U.S, who were not of Arab ancestry, who were undergraduate students in their third or fourth academic year, and who had attended one or more classes with Arab students.

To locate these participants, I contacted the associate dean for academic operations and undergraduate programs at NCU business school who sent an email to all junior and senior American students (1428), inviting them to participate in the study. Students who responded to the invitation emailed me directly. Then I conducted the interviews in a place and a time agreed upon by participants and me. American students in the business school were the majority whereas Arab students did not constitute more than 10% of the school population, a factor that increased the possibility of American students' interaction with them. In addition, I used snowball sampling to locate additional participants who may have had important information or perspectives relating to the study (Patton, 2002).

I conducted face-to-face interviews with 15 junior and/or senior American students in the business school (13 female and 2 male). The sample size in purposeful sampling is "determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 202). Thus, I stopped gathering information when saturation was reached; that is, when

the interviews presented repeated information and no new knowledge was gained (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Padgett, 2008).

Data Collection

The primary data source used in this study was face-to-face individual interviews. Interviewing domestic students was the strategy I used to gain insights about the nature of the interactions between American and Arab students. Merriam (2009) recommends the importance of interviewing when a researcher does not have access to "observe behavior, feeling, or how people interpret the world around them" (p. 88). In qualitative research, interviewing tends to be less structured than asking sequential questions and relies more on open-ended questions that help participants talk about the world from their emic perspectives. To achieve this goal, I selected the most suitable interviewing strategy suggested by Patton (1990) and Merriam (2009) that served the purposes of my study.

There are three main strategies for conducting open-ended interviews: highly structured, unstructured, and semi-structured (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 1990). Due to the strict nature of the highly structured interview, a researcher may not have access to explore a participant's understanding of the phenomenon of interest and their unique way of explaining the world. This type of interview is based on assumptions that participants share the same vocabulary as the researcher and would elucidate the vocabulary and questions in the same way. On the other hand, the unstructured or informal conversational interview requires more flexibility and skill to follow different perspectives and comprehend apparently unconnected information. Unstructured interviews also consume much time in gathering information and researchers might feel lost if they have to take extensive notes during the interview. Semi-structured interviews, the approach I used in this study, give researchers more flexibility in forming questions because

they utilize a combination of more- and less-controlled questions. The interviews were guided by a protocol prepared in advance that covered all anticipated issues. Furthermore, the semi-structured interview format helped me respond to changing conditions and be more spontaneous when interacting with the participants who might bring new meanings and thoughts to the study (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Thus, participants were free to elaborate and switch between different topics and shape the conversation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). However, I tracked the interview questions to cover a core set of questions I needed to discuss with all participants. Each interview was conducted in a place and a time agreed upon by participants and me. I include a list of interview questions in Appendix B.

Audio digital recording was the technique used in collecting interview data. This technique helped me concentrate on participants' responses and ask probing or follow-up questions that prompted them to elaborate on the things they said. I strived to capture interviewees' exact words because verbatim accounts are essential for data collection (Patton, 1990). Tape-recorded interviews also made the transcription process more accurate because software allowed me to slow down the customary pace of spoken speech. As an international student, it was difficult for me to comprehend all of a respondent's words the first time I heard them. Thus, audiotaped interviews were valuable because much of my transcribing was completed later on. Moreover, audiotaping gave me a chance to take notes during the interview. Note taking helped in formulating new questions and facilitated analysis later on about what was discussed (Patton, 1990).

Piloting Questions

In order to find out if the interview questions served the purpose of the study, I piloted my interview questions (Merriam, 2009). This provided me with necessary practice and helped

to improve the wording of some questions. If the influence specific wording may have on interviewees is overlooked, "the answer may make no sense at all-or there may be no answer" (Patton, 2002, p. 312). In addition, participants might suggest questions I have not thought about that might enrich my data collection. One person volunteered to be interviewed and his responses were digitally recorded. I took notes about his physical responses to make sure everything was reported. I transcribed the interview and shared it with the participant for more accuracy and to avoid any misunderstanding. Necessary modifications took place to maintain the clarity of questions for future respondents. For example, if there was a leading question, I replaced it with another that was more objective.

Data Analysis

Analysis of qualitative data is a complicated process of meaning making and moving in non-linear directions. Data analysis aims to discern answers, themes, or categories related to the research questions (Merriam, 2009). Analyzing data is an ongoing and interrelated process that begins directly after conducting each interview rather than waiting until data collection is completed (Creswell, 2007). Data analysis includes, "working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 159). I began the process of data analysis during the interviews, paying attention to phrases that required further clarification or follow-up questions. During the interview sessions, I took notes and reread them before listening to the audio-recorded interview.

The first phase of data analysis was to take verbatim accounts of the data and break down each transcribed interview into single segments, concepts, and ideas. I then assigned preliminary codes with symbolic meaning to the data segments (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). To

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achieve this goal, I read and analyzed the data carefully to construct initial codes and labeled them using simple phrases to make links between codes (Charmaz, 2008). Using the constant comparative approach, I sorted and analyzed the categories. This approach allowed me to compare data and codes to find similarities and differences, which resulted in sorting some initial codes into new and broader codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The second phase was axial or analytical coding that allowed me to generate patterns of codes based on comparing and sifting different initial codes. I refined these codes into larger but more inclusive pieces of data by sorting the data into thematic categories that emerged inductively and supported them with quotes based on the participants' opinions and perspectives (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). I continued this process until I successfully captured broader and more comprehensive themes that allowed the coding schema to be finalized and applied to the theoretical framework along with my own perceptions and intuitions. Finally, I developed a matrix of major and minor themes that are represented in the headings in my Findings section.

Research Quality

In order to convince readers my research was worth paying attention to, I implemented three strategies to ensure the quality of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The following sections explain how I achieved credibility, dependability, and transferability.

Credibility

Credibility refers to trustworthiness and can be carried out through triangulation, member checking, and peer review to increase the plausibility of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers triangulate various sources of data to uncover and elucidate "commonalities and differences" about the same topic (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2011, p. 99). Triangulation verifies the accuracy of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Of the four types of triangulation--

investigator, data, method, and theory triangulation--data triangulation was the type I used in this study. This helped me compare findings and check the consistency of data between two or more participants who had different points of view about the same theme (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Different points of view about the nature of cross-cultural interactions, for example, were not indications the data were invalid. More likely, they suggested that various data had "captured different things" and as the researcher, I had to "understand the reasons for the differences" (Patton, 1990, p. 467).

Member checking was another strategy I implemented. Member checking or respondent validation revealed any misinterpretation on my part in accurately representing the participants' ideas (Merriam, 2009). It was also an important method to identify sources of my own biases (Maxwell, 2013). Member checking is the most critical method for "establishing credibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). For Lincoln and Guba, member checking allows participants to correct errors in the transcripts, recall additional thoughts and ideas, summarize what participants said, and approve the researcher's overall interpretation of the data. Thus, I contacted participants to determine if my conclusions matched their thoughts and to identify any inadvertent misinterpretations of data (Lapan et al., 2011).

Peer review or peer examination was the third useful technique I implemented to increase the credibility of my study. This strategy involved a graduate school colleague to scan and assess my analysis of the data. This helped in determining whether my findings were linked to the data and if there were any glaring interpretative biases (Merriam, 2009).

Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to dependability or reliability as the consistency of findings with the collected data. To obtain dependability, I used rich, thick description to

address participants' different point of views and maintain the consistency of the study findings with their individual realities. Analysis of transcribed interviews helped in revealing any implicit themes. In addition, comparing different American students' perspectives across individual interviews gave me the opportunity to compare data and to ensure the reliability of evolving themes (Patton, 2002).

Transferability

Transferability or external validity refers to the applicability of the study findings to new contexts and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). To enhance transferability, I described in sufficient detail the research context and participants (Lapan et al., 2011). Such a rich description allows readers to see how the finding of this study are relevant to their own conditions (Peshkin, 2000). The inclusion of different perspectives, settings, and data collection methods have the potential to increase the transferability of the study findings (Creswell, 2007; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Thus, detailed description allow other researchers, academics, and policy makers to determine the extent to which the findings of this study are transferable to their unique contexts (Tracy, 2010).

Ethical Considerations

Research ethics include issues such as participant privacy and informed consent to ensure their rights as human subjects are protected (Creswell, 2009). Informed consent to participate in the study was obtained prior to the beginning of each interview. I informed participants that participation was voluntary and withdrawal from the study was permissible at any time. The consent form explained the purpose of the research and how participant confidentiality was protected by avoiding identifiable comments or data in the findings or any future published works. Moreover, pseudonyms were given to participants instead of their real names.

Pseudonyms were not only given to protect the participants' identities but to ensure "that the researcher himself or herself is trustworthy in carrying out the study in as ethical a manner as possible" (Merriam, 2009, p. 234). Approval from the WSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained before conducting the study (see Appendix A).

Researcher Positionality

Prior to enrolling in WSU, I taught English for 12 years in the Middle East. For a long time, my dream was to travel, study in the U.S., and experience the western lifestyle. In 2013, I enrolled in an Ed.D. program in Educational Leadership at WSU in Wichita, Kansas after meeting a doctoral graduate from WSU in Oman. Studying in WSU was a good opportunity to learn about an open university culture with all its encouraging advanced knowledge, equality, and respect for students, domestic and international. Living and working in three Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, were new and valuable experiences but moving to the United States to live and pursue my education has been a completely novel experience. I have always believed that meeting and working with people from diverse cultures provides new opportunities to see life from different angles and understand the way non-Arabs comprehend Arab culture. I also enrolled at WSU for an opportunity to improve my English language skills by interacting with native speakers and developing new connections outside of my local or regional social networks.

My work experience in the Arabian Gulf allowed me to interact with colleagues from different nationalities. Previous work experiences with colleagues from English speaking countries such as Australia, Great Britain, Canada, and the United States left me with a muddy impression about western people that was likely to influence my data collection and analysis. Even though they were friendly, the way American students interacted with me here in the U.S. was similar to what I experienced with American colleagues in the Arabian Gulf. They smiled

when we made eye contact, showed respect, but tended to give short answers and avoid long conversations. This experience prompted me to believe, for a while, that Americans did not like interacting with Arabs. At the beginning of the doctoral program, my preference was to study the nature of interaction with American students from the Arab point of view. However, to gain new insights about the same topic, I switched the study lens to explore the nature of cross-cultural interaction between American and Arab students from the domestic students' perspective. By doing this, I hoped to reveal any biases or misconceptions I held as an Arab student.

Since I am an Arab international student, it was important for me to be aware of my personal beliefs when collecting and analyzing data. Thus, I bracketed certain subjectivities I might bring to the study. My personal subjectivities about this study included a preconceived notion that American students were cautious to interact with Arab students due to differences in cultural and religious background and because of negative stereotypes stemming from terrorist acts associated with Arab people and Islamic culture and religion. For Maxwell (2013), the goal of qualitative research is not to reduce a researcher's impact on the data. Accordingly, I was aware of my preconceived notions about the way American students interacted with Arab students and the way I analyzed participants' experiences.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore American students' perceptions of and interactions with Arab students at a Midwestern university, hereafter referred to as the New Century University (NCU). The findings are derived from individual interviews conducted with 15 junior and/or senior American students in the business college (13 female and 2 male). Four of the 15 students were first-generation college students and 14 had travelled outside the U.S. for tourism or with parents who worked abroad for a while. One student was homeschooled. To assist in locating participants who might meet my selection criteria, the associate dean for academic operations and undergraduate programs at NCU business school sent an email to all junior and senior American students (1428), inviting them to participate in the study. Students who responded to the invitation emailed me directly. Then I conducted the interviews in a place and a time agreed upon by participants and me. Most of participants were from the Midwestern region (10), three were from the South, and two were from the West. Nine resided in urban areas and six were from rural areas. Three students were online students and 12 were full time students on campus. The age of participants ranged from 19-45 years.

This chapter presents five themes and nine subthemes. The first theme, "Attitudes toward Diversity," discusses American students' exposure to diversity at school and their anticipation of having a diverse campus. The second theme, "Types of Interaction," covers students' experiences with interaction inside and outside of class. The third theme discusses the obstacles hindering more frequent or smoother interactions between students. This theme is divided into three subthemes: "Hesitant to Interact," "Language Barriers," and "Misconceptions." The fourth theme, "Altered Perception," compares the perception of

American students before and after interacting with Arab classmates. The last theme, "Improving Relationships between Arab and American Students," discusses the openness of American students to improving their relationships with Arabs and the curiosity they had about their culture.

Attitudes toward Diversity

American students had the chance to explore different cultures in their K-12 school environments. Most of them had colleagues and friends from different cultural backgrounds other than the U.S. Because of this prior exposure to colleagues and friends from different cultures, they had some expectations to meet international students at college. They anticipated having a diverse campus and expected to encounter new perspectives and knowledge about people from other cultures.

Exposure to Diversity at School

The majority of participants had some level of exposure to diversity in elementary and/or secondary school that allowed them to meet people from Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, and the Middle East. One student mentioned she studied with students from Germany, Finland, and Japan. Another added, "We had students primarily from East Asia. I have friends from Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and some students from Egypt and Lebanon. I also met Nigerians and, of course, Indians." A third student mentioned knowing students from "European countries, China, and South Korea." When I asked one student about the nationalities of students she had met, she clarified, "It is like what nationalities I didn't meet? I met about everyone, every type."

A few students did not have exposure to diversity before college life. One had been homeschooled and lived in a small town where the vast majority of residents were Americans, while the other two studied only with American students. One student explained that local

demographics prevented her from meeting international students at school. "I didn't have international students at school because I am from South Georgia; we are either white or black." Another participant stated that she did not interact with international students: "Not in first or secondary, not in the middle school, or high school. It was not until I attended my first community college. That was in Illinois. I was assuming they were from different countries, but I was not sure about that." The participant continued, "I think here [NCU] was the most exposure I've had to international students.

Foreign exchange programs in high school provided students with new knowledge about unfamiliar cultures and languages. One student stated, "We had interaction. There was a lot of learning about culture and customs because we were explaining Ohio and America for foreign exchange [students]. In return, they explained their customs for holidays or in general." High school was a good place for many participants to experience diversity. As one participant stated, "I went to Sincere High School, which is the most diverse school in Middletown and maybe in the state." The presence of international students in high school increased the opportunity for American students to meet students from other countries. In some schools, the percentage of students from other countries was high. As one student indicated, "I would say around 10% of the students in school were from the Middle East. My high school was very diverse and I have colleagues from all over the world." Another student added, "Around 20% of my graduating class was from Russia, which is a different culture because there are around five countries there today." Exposure to diversity at school helped many students develop good social relationships with international students and learn about different cultures directly from its people. One student shared, "I remember that social life was similar to here [NCU]. It was a diverse class and

there were a lot more facts about other countries, not what you read in the textbooks, but the actual truth."

School activities played a key role in increasing the frequency of interactions between American and foreign students, which also resulted in building social relationships outside of school. According to one student, school "did a nice job hosting events such as ice cream socials that allowed us to interact outside of class without any kind of supervision. We played together on swim team and football. We had kind of private visits at home." Some of these visits were to Arab Muslim families where students still remember their first impression when meeting a Muslim woman covering her head with a scarf [hijab]. "The face was all exposed for women. The first time was very different from anything I'd ever seen. I know about that from school." She added, "I was friends with a Muslim girl in sixth grade. Her parents dressed traditionally. Her mother was covered. I was curious about her appearance because it was different."

Anticipation of Having a Diverse Campus

Most students came to NCU with high expectations of encountering international students on campus. These expectations originated from their social networks, friends, or family members (e.g., brothers or sisters) who were already enrolled in the university. One participant explained,

> It was the main perception I had about NCU that it has a lot of international students. I live down the street from campus. We go frequently to festival-type events that are always here at NCU. I know a lot of them here who are my age and older.

Another student remembered visiting the library on campus for high-school projects. "I toured NCU when I was looking for a prospective college. A lot of my friends from school ended up going to NCU, so it doesn't surprise me." Stated another student, "I have a better understanding

because my sister is ahead of me by two years. So, I have that idea from my sister. There are more than expected even though I expected to find quite a few."

For some students, it was not unexpected to have international students on campus. They attributed the amount of diversity on campus to the school's geographical location in a metropolitan area, which encouraged many international students to study in Middletown. Clarified one student, "I expected NCU to have a lot of international students. Since the city is in the middle of America, it would be kind of a hub for international exchange students to come here, especially to learn English." Her personal experience as a resident of Middletown confirmed her expectation: "Driving around Middletown, you can see a lot of foreign shops, so I assumed there would be a lot of foreign international people."

While some students expected coming into contact with many international students, others were astonished after observing the number of international students on campus. One student expressed her initial reaction toward the number of international students. "I was surprised we had many students who came from different countries to study here [NCU]. I only expected to have international students who moved with their parents to live here." Another student noted, "I think there are a lot more than I expected because it is just NCU. If I went to other state university, I would expect to see many international students, but at NCU, I was surprised." Other participants wondered how international students learned about the university. They assumed international students could have chosen alternative institutions to attend elsewhere in the U.S. or in Europe. Questioned one student, "I wonder how they heard about us? That was the main thing. I just was wondering how they found out about us. When I think of other cities or countries, I think of London." Another confirmed,

To be fairly honest, I imagined all the students would be from Middletown. It was very surprising. I was shocked. The first thought that came to mind was if somebody was from another country, how did they find NCU? We are just a little place on the map and there are universities everywhere.

Students expressed positive feelings about going to school with many international students because this allowed them to learn about new cultures and languages. Clarified one student, "I feel like I am well educated about southeastern Asia cultures. I want to know more about European and the different types of Russian cultures because I feel we have many students from there." Interaction with Arab students was a good opportunity for some to know more about international business, as one student stated. "I see it as an advantage, especially as a business person. If I end up working for an international company, I will be able to understand the culture a bit more, like the professional mores of their culture." Participants believed meeting people from different places was what made NCU an interesting place to be. Some students believed it was good to study on a diverse campus because it added to the university's good reputation and because they did not want to be "limited to that bubble of white Americans." Said one, "Other students ideally are giving me new ideas and new thoughts. Unfortunately, I don't have these interactions as often as I would like, but they are still there." Another student confirmed, "I would be disturbed if I went to campus and just saw people from Middletown."

However, a couple of participants had neutral or uncomfortable reactions about having international students on campus. Declared one student, "It doesn't really bother me knowing that international students are here. I don't really have a problem with that." Another student appreciated the diversity but had mixed feelings about it: "I feel it is both encouraged and discouraged … I want to see more cultures but, at the same time, it's nice to have your own

culture around if you are not going to live with your parents." Others preferred having a larger number of domestic students because, "It's easier when you don't have cultural barriers."

Types of Interaction

American and Arab students had opportunities to interact with each other inside and outside the classroom. There were minimal interactions with Arab students inside the classroom because of several factors such as the tendency of American students to sit with other American students, the role of instructors as interactional facilitators, and gender preferences. Out-of-class interactions were influenced by student social life priorities and personal experiences when visiting Arabs in their houses.

In-Class Interactions

Interactions between American and Arab students were limited inside the classroom. American students' preference to sit with other domestic students in classroom determined their interactional opportunities. The role of instructors as interactional facilitators was another factor that influenced students' communication. And the gender preference of some American participants when socializing with Arabs played a key role in reinforcing such interactions.

Cultural clustering. In many classes, the seating preferences of Arab and domestic students reduced the likelihood for cross-cultural interactions. Described one student, "I sit in front surrounded by American students. The Arab students are usually in the back. They sit in the back maybe because they don't want to be called on or because they are more comfortable there." Another student confirmed, "I don't want to generalize this, but students sit in specific spots. Like the Arabs sit in the back while the Chinese sit in the middle. It is usually maybe the American students who sit in front." Participants believed that Arab students sat in the back so they could see everything or because "they are comfortable to be around the people who speak

the same language." Explained another student, "If you need help because you are not comfortable with English, you will ask them in your home language." One student thought this was a natural behavior for students studying in a foreign country. She stated,

> I am picturing myself going to another country where whatever they are speaking is my second language and we are both in the middle of class. I would probably rather be next to people I can relate with a little bit to feel more comfortable. Because if I am by myself with another demographic sitting there, that would make me kind of nervous.

The situation for Arab students was not different from European students who tended to sit in separate groups as well. One student explained, "We have a group of students from France in our class. They form a group with only themselves and as Americans, we got ourselves in another group." Observed the student, "We didn't interact because it's more familiar being with people from the same background. It is how humans are. We'd rather go with someone who is familiar rather than someone who's not."

Some participants had a minimal number of in-class interactions with international students. Instructors assigned group projects to students and the students usually worked with the students sitting next to them. One student reported that the tendency of American students to sit beside other American students made cross-cultural grouping uncommon. Sometimes, instructors mixed students from different ethnicities to encourage interaction between them. To avoid language barriers that might hinder achieving class assignment properly, American students preferred to work with other domestic group members. As one student explained,

> I want to be the one who takes the leadership role. I want everyone to do their part and if we have a language barrier, that is kind of a caution to me and I worried about it. So, it is

kind of a preconceived thing, like 'Oh, God, I've got someone in my group who might

not be pulling their weight.'

If a domestic student had an American classmate whom they knew from another class, they

would automatically go to them. Clarified one student, "Because in my mind I know them, they

are credible, I know their character, and I know they do well at school. So why would I take

time figuring out how to work with a stranger when I can take the easy route of people I already

know?"

Instructors as interactional facilitators. Students reported that instructors rarely

mentioned having Arab or international students in class. One student commented, "I don't think

so. Instructors were teaching us directly from the first day. They wanted to know that all

students attended the class. They assumed students will know each other within the passage of

time." Agreed another student, "The only thing instructors would do is have us introduce

ourselves on the first day. If a student with a different color skin talked, you will notice. But

instructors don't call them out and say: 'We have an international student.'" Another student

added, "It was not an important issue because we all are students, we are all taking the same

education in class. So, there was no significance of introducing Arab or international students."

International students were introduced in class only if they were visiting students or had

transferred from another place. One student mentioned, "If we got someone transferred to NCU

from another country, our professor would introduce the student to the class." Confirmed

another student, "If somebody like an international student not from here is visiting for the day,

the instructor would say, 'You might not have seen him before, he is just here to see the

campus.' Otherwise, they don't call them out."

A few instructors introduced international students when it was materially related to the curriculum and they wanted students to provide different perspectives to the class discussion. One student mentioned that his professor asked a student, "You are not from America. What is your perspective about that? Can you explain to the class because there are many Americans who haven't travelled to other countries?" Another student confirmed, "We have a chapter about different global marketing situations. So, she would ask a German student how it was different in Germany."

Most participants explained that classroom interactions and discussions were mainly confined to material-related topics and did not address personal or cultural issues. Stated one student, "We talked about whatever the teacher has assigned. So, it wasn't one-on-one interaction, it was a classroom interaction." Another student added, "We don't talk about their children or about their life." Cross-cultural interactions were more likely to occur when the topics discussed in class had an international dimension. American students felt that international students brought new perspectives to class and improved their understanding about the nature of work in other countries. One student stated that one of her classes was full. "There were about 70-75 students. The most diverse class I've ever been to." She reported having a "great professor who did a great job of bringing people out, like pulling information and getting everyone involved. It was a great class because everyone was constantly talking." In addition, the quality of questions Arab and international students asked brought new perspectives to class content. Commented one student, "They ask questions nobody [American students] thinks of. So, it is interesting when they come up with these questions."

Gender preferences. The preference of participants to interact with Arab students varied according to Arabs' gender. Some female participants preferred to interact with Arab females while others preferred to interact with males. For some American participants, it was easier to interact with Arab females because they did not feel as intimidated compared to the Arab males. On the other hand, some American female participants desired to communicate with Arab men because the way they dressed resembled other American students whereas Arab women covered their bodies and sometimes their faces. One student mentioned she always "worried that women might think I am starring at their head dress." She added, "There is one woman who works at a restaurant where I work. She has a headscarf and I was afraid to talk to her until she came and talked to me." Another student commented, "It is easier to initiate interaction with Arab male students compared to females because I feel they [the females] don't want to speak with us and it was easier to reach out to the males because they weren't shy."

A first-generation Asian American student preferred to interact with international students. She approached them easily and sought to interact with them in places such as the cafeteria because "I know there are a lot of international students there. Like, 'Oh, are you from here or here?' If there was an event over the weekend, I would ask, 'Are you going to that?'" This student explained, "I feel on a deeper level, we share the same culture." This student experienced difficulty interacting with white American males because she believed they were reluctant to socialize with Asian American females. She believed that being an Asian American would minimize her opportunity to find a job compared to other Americans. Commented the student,

If you are a white man in the business school and you apply for a job, you are automatically a top choice. Being a woman puts you down a notch and being an Asian

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woman puts you down another notch. I can't imagine being an Asian or Arab woman in the business school because of where that will put you compared to a white man.

Out-of-Class Interactions

American student participants had an insignificant amount of interactions with Arab students outside of class. They sometimes met to work on projects at home and had occasional conversations in the library but rarely socialized in public places. Cross-cultural interactions did not extend beyond asking for directions about how to find something or someplace or asking their colleagues for recommendations about courses and professors.

Unless it pertained to a class requirement, the American students in this study did not routinely interact with international students. Clarified one student, "Just if we have a class project. I am so busy and my mind is so focused on the things I want to do, I don't really feel the need." Another student confirmed, "We have a study group that meets on Sunday with one international student. At least he came and we all talked and socialized and no one felt out of place."

Social life. American students had their own preferences when it came to selecting their social surroundings. They preferred to spend time with familiar people who shared the same cultural background. One student explained, "Americans are very cliquey, liking their own group and resisting change or outside ideas. I think a lot of that stems from American culture being resistant to change and pro-America." Added the student, "I think Americans are not big risk takers." Another student questioned, "Why would I step out of my comfort zone if I already have a group of people? We have our common habits and routines so why would I meet new people with a different lifestyle?" One student shared, "I am not the kind of person who will start a conversation with a stranger. I just want to go to class, finish my coffee, and get my

studying done." Confirmed another student, "I am busy and when I go out, I try to get things done. Then I have to go home because I have two kids and I also work."

Only one student mentioned having an Arab friend with whom he hung out on occasion. The student stated, "His name is Ahmed. We text back and forth and meet once every two weeks. I feel I know more about him [personally] but not so much about his culture or country." Added the student, "So, I have questions that are more about him versus the whole country [Jordan]. I ask him questions about particular issues to get an idea of how his country sees certain things."

Visiting Arabs in their homes. Visiting Arabs in their homes allowed one male American student to learn more about Arabic culture and traditions. He described his visit to an Arab home to work on a class assignment: "I got there, took my shoes off at the front door, and noticed two of his friends on the couch smoking a hookah. It was the first time I had seen this." He continued,

> While I was working with him, he left the hookah and had his roommate serve us coca-cola. I've never asked my roommate to do that. They are very welcoming. His roommate made us tea, which I have never had with milk in it and then we sat down with these little cups. He served from a big golden thing and at the end, his roommate came and served us water before I left.

A female student experienced several good opportunities to socialize with international students in the dorm. She believed the dorm was a good place for cross-cultural interactions because the students there "feel both groups are away from home--American students from faraway cities and Arab students from their country." She added, "The dorm likes events that expose people to each other." As a result, it allowed American students to be "exposed more and

possibly become friends with each other as they become more comfortable with international students. Living together can help expose Americans to other cultures," explained the student.

Obstacles Preventing Interaction

To understand the nature of interaction between American and Arab students, it was important to discuss obstacles that prevented interaction between them. Both groups seemed to be hesitant to communicate with the other because they did not want to step outside their respective comfort zones. The language barrier was another factor hindering fluid communication between students. In addition, misconceptions of Arabs held by Americans diminished the likelihood of improving academic and social communication.

Hesitancy to Interact

Participants discussed the mutual hesitancy of American and Arab students to initiate interactions with the other. This hesitancy seemed related to perceptions and presumptions about the other that closed off avenues of communication rather than opening them. One student stated, "When talking to Arab students, I feel they are reluctant, hesitant, and not encouraged to talk more. The same thing can be said about us [Americans] because we don't have many common topics to talk about." Commented another student, "They go, 'Oh, hi' and then just ignore you for the rest of time."

Similar to other international students, Arabs kept to themselves in closed groups that made it difficult for American students to penetrate these groups. Clarified one student, "You are only one individual which makes it hard. Because they already are a group, you hesitate about approaching or joining them." This hesitancy also shaped American student expectations about the willingness of Arab students to communicate with them. One student stated, "People in class sit together. So, I don't think either Arab or Greek students will go outside their group to

meet the other." Agreed another student, "They don't open the door and let someone bring his friends in. They stick to people they already know and are comfortable with." Another student noted, "I have observed that many international guys interact only with each other and don't want to socialize outside their groups."

Other participants attributed this hesitation to the first impressions international students might have about Americans. One student stated, "Americans can be seen as rude, very independent, and very local. So, if they are not used to that type of person, then it might be difficult for them to talk to us because we might be seen as scary to them and vice versa."

Some Americans were cautious not to offend Arabs by asking inappropriate questions or making insensitive comments. One student stated, "Americans live in a culture today where you can say the wrong things and you can offend somebody. And I think there is a lot of pressure not to offend anybody when you are really just curious." Another student agreed. "I think, at first, I was walking on eggshells because I was afraid of hurting someone's feelings. I didn't know what to do so I just talked like normal. It takes that kind of interaction to humanize people." Some American students might have inadvertently scared off or offended international students because of their limited knowledge about other cultures. Clarified one student, "I think it's more just ignorance. I don't want to scare them. I am kind of loud and not shy so when I come up, I can make them uncomfortable."

Language Barriers

American students faced linguistic difficulties communicating with international students. They felt language barriers prevented them from understanding international students, which caused misunderstandings and delayed the completion of class projects. One student complained,

It took more time because I had to explain myself multiple times, each time giving the same answer. Someone would ask me a question and I had to repeat the answer six times. Or someone would ask me a question and I would answer it and then they would ask it again later the same way.

Misunderstandings arose for American students when Arab groups socialized and spoke in their native language. Commented one student, "If they are speaking Arabic and you are the only one sitting there who speaks English, you can't help but wonder, 'What are they saying?' 'Are they talking about me?' "What's going on?'"

The reserved behavior of international students inside the classroom such as being shy and introverted, discouraged American students from interacting with them. One student commented that foreign exchange students were "Very nice but I feel they were scared and afraid to speak English. They are not confident speaking English and I feel that sometimes they don't understand us because we speak fast." The cultural shock of moving to a new country might play a key role in their reserved behavior. Explained one student, "Everyone is speaking a different language and you don't understand what's going on. I understand the reason why because there are few of them compared to a large quantity of American students." Some students reflected on their personal experiences and attributed these linguistic issues to educational practices used in other countries, especially the tendency to focus more on writing competency than verbal fluency. Stated one student,

I know that when I went to South Korea, they learned text, English text. They read it perfectly fine and when it comes to messaging on Facebook and using other social media, they can respond very quickly. But when it comes to a conversation, it takes them awhile to understand what we are saying because they have never practiced person-to-person

conversation. They focus more on textbook English and dialogue practice is not that much. It might have something to do with their educational system.

Language presented a challenge for American students when they interacted with their international professors as well. Stated one student, "My professor has a wealth of knowledge and I want to understand what he says but I can't understand most of it. His accent is very thick even though he is very smart." She added, "But I spend a lot of time looking at his mouth just to see if I can understand him. The lips don't help me understanding him, unfortunately [laughter]. I am just trying hard."

A female participant drew informal correlations between language proficiency and how smart Arab and international students were. She stated, "Anybody who doesn't speak English or who has a thick accent that is hard to understand, we automatically assume they are not as smart as us or don't understand us." The student realized this was not true but her difficulty understanding international students prompted her to think this way. She clarified, "It is just hard to interact with people who don't speak the same language because your brain will automatically tell you they are stupid when they are totally not. They can be the smartest one in the world you know."

Misconceptions

American students revealed limited knowledge about Arab culture and religion. For example, Arabs were assumed to be wealthy people. The appearance and status of women generated other misconceptions frequently expressed in the interviews. War and conflict were dominant images that surfaced for students whenever the word Arab was mentioned.

Wealth. Wealth and oil was a perception some Americans had about Arabs. A few students thought Arabs possessed great wealth because many of their Arab classmates had

governmental scholarships and owned expensive cars. One student stated, "At our university, some Arab students were very, very, wealthy students. They were the ones driving fancy cars; just insanely wealthy, insanely nice cars." The student added, "I think that developed a misconception for me because when I see an Arab international student, I feel now they are probably loaded with money." Another student affirmed this impression. "I know a couple of Arab students who have very nice cars. Like they drive very nice cars. People who drive $100,000 cars around campus, you don't see that very often." Continued the student, "I think some of them are well off but not all. They are similar to Americans; some of them are rich, and some can live comfortably even without working." Along these lines, another student commented, "I think of the Middle East as oil. A lot of pictures on social media show a really wealthy side. They seem to have nice cars and very nice houses. These people are really rich." One student described a party she attended for an Arab student:

> We got into that big huge building with that ping-pong table and they had an open bar which was nice. Even the bar alone can tell you how wealthy this person was and they also had a hookah. They had a dance floor. Next to it, there was plenty of food. He was the only one in Manhattan I have ever known was. I didn't know whose birthday it was. We heard about this project and went there. I think it was for a Saudi Arabian prince charging $20 a ticket and my friends were in and I was in. I didn't interact with any Arab in that party.

Appearance and environment. A few participants associated Arabs' appearance with turbans or a head wrap for men and Hijab and Burqa for women. Stated one student, "They [men] always wear that head wrap. Some people wear all black and they only show their eyes and some only wear the head pieces." On campus, students felt they could recognize Arab

students from their appearance. One student described their appearance this way: "Just like dark hair and the clothes they are wearing… it was kind of flashy, they wore a lot of cologne, and they have big name brands on their shirts." Another student commented, "We have a guy from the Middle East. He wears really tight jeans with flip-flops. That's something you don't see in South Georgia--skin tone and black hair."

Others thought of the harsh Arabian environment where people live in the desert and wear unfamiliar clothes. Explained one student, "I think of it not as city or suburb. It is a desert." She added, "I think of women covering their bodies. I've only seen that once in my life and it was in one of my courses. I think it was a Burqa. I have never seen anything like that in my life." Another student thought of an Arab as "a guy with one of those white and red scarfs on his head and men in white robes."

The status of women. A majority of participants commented on gender separation and the status of women in Arab culture. One student explained, "I heard from a couple of people that in some places, women are not looked at as high as men." Students reported that the way women were portrayed in the media was far from flattering. Women were portrayed as oppressed, lacking civil rights, and controlled by male members of the family. One student stated, "They just don't have any rights, basically. I don't think I was really aware of it." Arab women were pictured as victims of a patriarchal society and of less value than men. Another student explained, "From the media, when you hear a bad story, you know like women get raped. They are expected to cover up their bodies more. There is a movie, *Wadjda*, that I watched for my class." Continued the student, "It was about Saudi Arabia and it talked about how women are not allowed to go outside without covering their face. I don't agree with that and they are also not allowed to drive themselves." Another student commented, "All of what I know is from

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that movie and the director. She was female and had to sit in a van and Skype her crew because she couldn't go outside and tell them what to do."

Two students were knowledgeable about why women covered their heads and bodies. They were aware the custom derived from Islamic religious principles and they accepted the practices for Muslim women as long as the women willingly complied. One student explained,

If women are doing that because it's their choice and it's in their religion and they want to do it, then that is great. But if they are doing it because there is a psycho guy in charge deciding to cover everybody up, then that's not okay.

Another student explained, "People wear the hijab because of Islam and they dress modestly but many Americans have a misconception about this."

Other students expressed confusion about the cultural and religious concepts behind women's appearance. One student questioned, "The wardrobe is odd to me, the way they get dressed. They don't shame women but I don't understand why they cover themselves. I mean, women are naturally beautiful. Why are they covering them up?" Continued the student, "Is it to protect their women? If so, then I don't understand it. I think they [women] should have the freedom of choice." These gendered images invited some participants to search the internet for information and read books to learn more about the realities of Arab life and culture. One student stated,

Me and a couple of class members are considering going to Dubai, so we've done some research about it and how it is perceived, especially by a white woman. I did a little research about that and it was clear it is not like that. If you are not dressing properly, you will get attention. So, it is better to dress accordingly. I just read something on

Facebook that said it is how they live and it is a strong value to be covered. It is the women's choice but they are not forced to do it.

War and terrorism. War and conflict were the primary features most participants associated with Arabs. When asked about Arabs in the interview, one student stated, "I think of conflict in the Middle East and how that region has had a lot of conflict for years and how America has a lot to do with that. War and oil and deep, old, religious values." Another student stated, "I feel like any country associated with the Middle East is associated with being Muslim and automatically being a terrorist state, which is really hard to experience." For some, the benefits America received from being involved in the region played a role in these conflicts. Commented one student,

> I think we [Americans] have our allies and our enemies and we pick and choose primarily based on oil. We would fight any country that might weaken our global image as the most powerful country in the world or conflict with the idea of the U.S. being a global superpower.

For the majority of participants, media played a key role in reinforcing negative images about Arabs, particularly those associated with the events of September 11. One student stated, "What's there in the media is obviously not good. They say bad things all the time about extremists." One student commented about the impact of media on shaping the popular image of Arabs: "The media news always pursues negative things and never anything good." She criticized, "It is never that international students boost our economy. You know, NCU went down in the number of international students. Why is that?" One student mentioned watching videos about 9/11 in high school. She stated, "I believe we did cover 9/11, watching videos and stuff like that. It was part of a history class in high school when it was first covered. I think it

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was my U.S. government class." She continued, "It was an obligatory class and 9/11 was probably covered in other history classes. They showed us in class a video taken by firefighters who were inside the building."

An Asian American student felt white Americans tended to think of certain cultures as being full of terrorists. She stated,

White Americans insist if you are from a general area then you are associated with terrorism, which is ridiculous. We don't associate white school-shooters with terrorism but we associate the .01% of Muslims that perform these terrorism acts and just associate the whole religion with that.

This myopic view was confirmed by another student: "I have many friends who think that Arabs or anyone who resembles an Arab in appearance should be checked before entering our country. They think all major air attacks on planes in the U.S. have been carried out by people of Arab descent." She wondered, "If you search people of a certain nationality, you just open the door for tons of discrimination. What comes next? Are you going to search anyone who wears a crucifix or someone who has a bunch of tattoos?" Regardless of war and political unrest in the Middle East, some students were sympathetic to the Arab people living through tumultuous times. Stated one student, "Families in Syria got bombed every day and they don't have enough food to survive. They need to feed their families. That's why refugees risk their lives when they travel in small boats to find shelter and food."

The generosity of these attitudes was not universal, however, and it was difficult for some participants to think of Arabs in a context separate from the events of 9/11. One student recalled what happened on that day as a child. "Before, I'd never heard of the word terrorist or bomb or

TSA [Transportation Security Administration]. After that, it was all I'd hear. Before that, I'd never heard of a country called Iraq but after, that was all I heard." He added,

> When you hear your country is hurt, you feel you are the good guy and how we have to get the bad guys. Then I'd hear of the American military in 2003, how we went into Iraq to invade the country. Then people started associating headdress, garment, or hijab as being associated with terrorism. I would say, 'Nobody wants these people in the country, these people are terrorists.' I can't think of these people away from either the state violence or conflict.

Interestingly, Asian Americans also faced discrimination after 9/11 because to undiscerning American eyes, Asian Americans resembled Arabs and Muslims in appearance. One such student remembered what happened to her father when he went to work the day after 9/11. She stated, "His equipment, like his big tool box, was thrown outside of the building. My father's manager apologized for that behavior but justified this kind of racism on what has just happened." The student explained, "My father is a Hindu from Pakistan. If he was a Muslim, things would have been worse."

Arabs as people of color. Some white students lumped Arabs in with other people of color who posed a threat to their safety. One student commented, "I hate to admit it but if I am walking down the street by myself and there is a group of Arabs or black people, I am going to feel scared because this is what I see all the time." The student added, "I automatically think, 'Oh, this is an international student. Are they terrorists? Do they have a gun on them? Are they are going to shoot me because I am a white female?'" The sense of feeling threatened was different when the international student was not an Arab. One student commented, "If it's an Asian or Chinese student, I don't feel like I have a threat. But if I see someone in a turban or

what they [Arabs] wear, I have a negative image against them specifically or the blacks." In contrast, one Asian American student thought black people did not believe distorted stories about Arabs. Explained the student,

> Because they have been oppressed if not more than Arabs and Muslims in America, the whole terrorism idea has not necessarily been localized to just America. It has always been associated with Arabs and the Middle East. The oppression and racism against black Americans is here and they face it every day just as well as Arab students.

Arabs and Muslims. Most participants considered Arabs and Muslims to be synonymous and they could not distinguish between ethnicity and religion. Thus, they tended to think of them as belonging to the same kinship group. One student commented, "I feel I am not very educated about different religions, cultures, and ethnicities. So, I feel I want to lump everybody under the same tent and call them foreigners or foreign students." Another confirmed, "I think we tend to put them in one category. I don't know why we do that but we do."

Americans with limited knowledge about Islam and Arab countries were prone to confuse important distinguishing characteristics. When students were asked to name some Arab countries, they often named non-Arabic Muslim countries. Answered one student, "I believe they are from Iran, I am not sure, but I feel they are Arabic." Another stated, "Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, and Jordan." He then questioned his answer: "Is Pakistan an Arab country?" Another student answered, "I think India is an Arab country, and Sri Lanka."

Community politics. The different political orientations of American students about Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. worked to encourage or discourage interaction between American and Arab students. The influence of local community norms and worldviews could make the

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efforts of educational institutions to bring mutual understanding and coexistence among students of different ethnicities and cultures more difficult. Because of the timing of this study, the 2016 presidential race between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump was a topic that influenced Arabs images among the study participants.

The prevailing values and beliefs in the larger society shaped some of the misconceptions held by the majority American students about other ethnicities. For instance, one student mentioned, "We grew up to believe what our parents believed in. I never use the N word but it's my dad's favorite word." The student elaborated,

> I remember reading an article in the news about the university. They were talking about the Chapel, which was intended to be for any person from any religion and how people from outside the university community came in and tried to block anyone who was not Christian. That wasn't university students who did that; that was the community surrounding it. We had protesters who came from the outside community but we don't want them here. They went to the chapel and tried to say no one but Christians can be here.

Because of the political environment in the U.S. at the time I collected my data, some students feared the upcoming 2016 presidential election would make things worse for Arab students in the U.S. One student shared,

> I am afraid that all international students will face discrimination and prejudice after this election, especially Arabs and Muslim students. Our presidential male candidate [Donald Trump] and his party are igniting prejudice against minorities and certain nationalities. Whether he wins or loses, there will be a lot of prejudice against people of color. The situation will be much worse for people and students from the Middle East.

Another student confirmed, "I haven't seen any backlash against Arabs or Muslims but I won't be surprised because Trump supporters jumped on that wagon. I have my worries but I won't be surprised if some violence takes place against Arabs." Some students associated discrimination against Arabs and minorities with the level of education Americans received. One student shared, "Discrimination is more of an issue for people who are not educated. I think our male [presidential] candidate wants to be involved in the Middle East to remove our enemies."

Altered Perceptions

This theme addresses changes in the perceptions of American students regarding Arab students. Participants had several preconceived notions about Arabs and their culture. However, spending time with Arab students either inside the classroom or in places outside the classroom contributed to changes in the image held by American students about Arabs. Exposure to Arab students in and out of the classroom helped American students to realize that much of what they heard about Arabs and their culture was not accurate. A few participants felt it was better to learn directly from Arabs themselves, not from external resources such as the media. To varying degrees, constructive interactions ignited the curiosity of some participants to know more about this controversial culture and its people.

Arabic language, history, and great scholars in various fields of science were among the first things that occurred to one student when the topic of Arabs came up. She stated, "I think about the Arabic language, the Arabian Peninsula, and the literature I've read about trade and how money used to come and go through the peninsula. Also, I think of Algebra because of when I was in trade school." Another student voiced, "It's super cool to know someone who speaks two languages; it is kind of a novelty to talk to people who know more than one language."

Another student reported having more positive thoughts about Arab students once she started meeting them in class. She stated, "My preconceived notion about them was they were wicked smart already and didn't need to spend as much time studying as I did." Some students thought Arabs in the Middletown were highly educated because they occupied important professions. One student questioned why "all the specialist doctors I go to are Arab." He wondered if something special about the culture encouraged people to succeed.

Just under half of the participants reported a decline in the influence of the media after they began learning about Arabs. They felt they more accurately understood the actual situation of Arabs in the Middle East. Stated one student, "I feel it changed a little bit. The misconceptions are a little more cleared out. You can realize how rational they are." Another student stated, "Slowly over my years here, misconceptions just deteriorated and disappeared. This is because I have been exposed to too much." Explained another student, "I think interacting with Arabs destroys the perception the media has. The media is always betraying a culture as a bad guy but that's not always true." After talking to Arab students in the library, a couple of participants were surprised to learn that Arabs could be friendly. One student stated, "I thought they were scary at the beginning. I thought they would treat me as a subordinate or someone less than them, or maybe be sharp when they spoke." These students attributed their initial perceptions to what they had seen on TV. Added one student, "All the movies I watch about Arabs portray them as evil people. I remember bad Arab characters in movies about Jason Bourne, Indiana Jones, and James Bond." Continued the student, "A lot of the people were from Saudi and they were always the bad people, blowing things up or stealing stuff."

One students felt empathy toward Arab students and wanted to support them if they faced any discrimination. Stated the student,

When I learn that a student is an Arab, I want to help them grow and defend themselves in this kind of culture. I don't know if they face this kind of racism, but it does exist and I want to fight it even if I am the one attacked. I want to be on their side.

Changes in attitude stemmed from constructive personal experiences with Arabs. One student visited a classmate at home to work on a project and observed that, "Arabs are very friendly and welcoming. I felt like I was at a restaurant while I was working." Another student recalled her experience going through a divorce and the support she received from Arab friends. She said,

I think of war when I think of anything Arab but one of those guys owned the shop I worked in. I was going through my divorce and he called to see if I needed anything. 'Do you need money, tuition paid, or money for your daughter? If there is anything I can do, just call me.' I thought that was a huge step.

Students expressed being more comfortable working with Arabs in the future after being in class together. One student stated, "Studying with Arab and international students makes people different from me less scary. With business, you have to deal with people who are different all the time. I think this also helped to think differently about them." Students felt their cross-cultural interactions with Arabs prepared them to work with people from diverse cultures. One student stated, "I view the content and interaction from a completely different perspective and a different approach. I am very open because of my different background." When I asked participants if their interactions with Arab students added value to their college experience, one answered,

I believe so, especially with my degree in international business. You can learn how other countries do business. If you work with a company in the Middle East, you can ask

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your friends and classmates how business is done in that country. You can learn tricks on how to do business in other countries and I think that helps a lot.

In general, participants gained a better understanding of everyday Arabian life and culture and were surprised to learn that Arabs have numerous opportunities to have fun and enjoy their free time. One student stated, "It provides clarifications about who they are and what they are about. It makes you see they are just people." Another clarified, "When I meet with people from different countries, I get to learn more about what actual life is like in their countries. We assume those countries are at war all the time." Continued the student, "I was surprised when a friend told me they go out to watch movies and attend concerts. 'Hey guys, do you have that?' Because we have a very limited view of what's happening there. We assumed they were always at war." In addition, some students realized Arab countries varied according to their conservative or liberal lifestyles. One student stated, "I continue to learn that each of them is different. For instance, Jordan and Lebanon are more progressive Arab countries and countries like Saudi Arabia and Yemen are stricter." For a few students, interacting with Arabs did not change or add any ideas. Stated one student, "One good person won't change my ideas. Another clarified, "Honestly, if someone said 'Middle East', I would still think of the same thing." Another added, "I don't think I've had enough exposure to change the way I think."

On an educational level, most participants observed similarities and differences between American and Arab students. Both ethnic groups had the same end goal in mind: they were in college to study and graduate. However, as one student described it, the way they "go about it is just different. It is really a personal thing, maybe not even related to culture but more how you want to tackle it." American students wanted to get a degree and enjoy the journey at the same time. Explained one participant, "I am going to college so I am going to party a lot. That's the

American mindset." Another student confirmed, "Americans go to college as a step in their life." In comparison, Arab and international students were perceived as taking things more seriously and putting in more effort. As one student informed me, "They are going out of their country to study so it is a bigger deal for them." Another student attributed this diligence to the influence of culture. Explained the student, "Arab students probably work a bit harder because they kind of have to because they travelled all this way to go to school. They don't just go down the street. As a rule, they work harder." Limited English language proficiency and a desire to get good grades might explain the extra time Arabs spent studying. Explained a participant, "Students from the Middle East are more rigorous. High scores show they grasp the concepts we study in class. They study more because they struggle to understand English words."

Improving Relationships between Arab and American Students

American students believed their relationships with Arab students could be improved. To achieve this goal, they offered suggestions about how to foster greater interaction between both sides. While their interactions with Arabs were relatively limited, American participants were also curious to learn more about Arabs and their culture.

To open doors for diversity and remove barriers, some students saw international food festivals as helpful ways to initiate interaction and introduce each group to the other. Stated one student, "A food fair, because college students love food. If you provided food from different ethnic backgrounds, it might get conversations started about more than just the food such as what their culture and religion are like." Another student thought about pairing American students with international ones. Suggested one student, "To break up the groups, the professors should encourage it more." Another student added, "A great idea for the professors is to make random selections that take students out of their comfort zones." "For some, improved relations was a

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matter of listening less to the media and more to the students themselves. Stated one student, "Anything that increases exposure to the culture such as music, food, clothing, and activities. That would help."

Interactions with Arab students encouraged some participants to seek more knowledge about Arab culture and religion. Among the cultural issues, students were curious about women and the hijab. One student mentioned having a conversation with an Arab woman pushing a baby in a stroller. She played with the baby and afterward sat down to drink coffee with the woman. She said, "I had a lot of questions that I apologized for. I asked many questions about her religion. I was really curious to know more about the hijab because that is something you don't see in the U.S." Students searched for information about the hijab that explained the purpose of wearing it. One student stated,

> I saw something online that said the reason women covering themselves is similar to what happens when a piece of candy falls to the ground. If the candy is covered, you can pick it up and eat it but if it wasn't wrapped, you don't want to eat it because it has gotten dirty. The hijab has something to do with staying pure.

Another student searched the Bible to learn about the significance of wearing the hijab. One student found, "It is mentioned in the Bible, so then I made an assumption that there is something in the Quran about women covering their head. So, they go with it."

Participants were also curious to know how Arab students perceived American culture. Commented one student, "I asked how they liked American culture versus their own culture. What were some things that surprised you about Americans?" Some participants who had not travelled internationally wanted to know more about other cultures. They assumed Arab students in the U.S. must be curious to know about American culture. Clarified a student, "I really

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wanted to study abroad but it didn't work out. I wanted to study abroad because I wanted a different cultural experience. I assume that by coming here, they want the same thing." Another student wanted to know more about "what the home life is like in the Middle East compared to Western culture." Asking questions of Arab students encouraged Arab students to ask questions about American culture. One student described a conversation with an Arab woman: "I had a lot of questions about her home country and she asked me a lot of questions about American life, so it was interesting to have that conversation." Another participant had questions about the different dialects spoken by Arabs. He asked me, "You are from Jordan, which I am curious about it. Do all Arabs speak the same language or do they speak different dialects?" Another student wondered about Arab food: "I want to know more about the different foods. Almost every restaurant here in town is run by a Lebanese. I find this really interesting."

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Implications

In this chapter, I discuss conclusions and implications of the study. The conclusions are based on an analysis of the findings and interpreted through the lens of social capital theory. In addition, I present implications of the study relevant to U.S. universities, the instructors who teach in them, and Arab students enrolled in these institutions. The purpose of this study was to understand how American students perceived and interacted with Arabs at a Midwestern university. Overall, the American students who participated in this study lacked accurate or in-depth knowledge about who Arabs are as an ethnic and cultural people. Participants held many misconceptions about Arabs and their culture. The majority had only vague images of Arabs and mostly associated them with undesirable characteristics that stemmed from their social networks and environmental influences such as parents, peers, community, and media. They thought of Arabs and the Middle East as a region consumed by war and terrorism where people lived in a desert, wore turbans and hijabs, and inhabited patriarchal communities where women did not have even basic human rights. Because of these assumptions, Americans were hesitant to approach Arabs or build social relationships with them. Additionally, language barriers and instructors' passive roles inside classrooms did little to challenge these preconceived notions. That said, certain themes emerged that helped me understand the perceptions and interactional behaviors of American students such as a lack of common ground, a cycle of misconceptions, and lost opportunities with potentially receptive Arab students.

Lack of Common Ground

Diversity encourages cross-cultural dialogue and fosters the cultural growth of domestic students by promoting an open and friendly learning environment. However, mixing

international students and domestic students in the same classroom does not necessarily heighten cross-cultural interactions (Smart et al., 2000). Even though the majority of American students recognized the importance of having Arab students on campus, only four of the 15 participants interacted with them. Most of their interactions took place in educational contexts such as classrooms or the library and focused on academic rather than social purposes. Off-campus social relationships between American and Arab students were occasional and depended on their personal traits. Although a few American students were open to learning about Arabs and their culture, most were not interested and preferred to spend their time with other domestic students. They did not anticipate receiving any benefits from socializing with Arabs and were candid about identifying obstacles and misconceptions that prevented them from approaching them. These obstacles and misconceptions diminished the likelihood of engaging in constructive interactions. The findings in this study support prior research suggesting that low levels of interaction between domestic and international students limits the benefits both groups can achieve (Ward, 2001).

The impression of most Americans was positive about the presence of Arabs on campus. Twelve of 15 participants felt it was important to study with students other than Americans because exposure to international students would enrich their college experience. Few, however, interacted with them on more than a superficial level. American students who anticipated beneficial outcomes from befriending Arab students extended themselves beyond their familiar social networks to meet new people with new perspectives about life, work, and culture. Among the rewards they sought was an improvement in their social skill when interacting with Arabs and learning more about Arab lifestyles and social standards. Furthermore, business students believed interacting with Arabs provided them with useful background information about how

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businesses operated in the Middle East, knowledge that could come in handy if they pursued future positions in international companies. They also anticipated an increase in their work prospects abroad compared to their peers who did not have an opportunity to communicate with people different from themselves. This finding is supported by Gurin et al. (2002) who found ethnic and cultural diversity supplied students with greater opportunity to explore opinions and circumstances different from those in their own home countries, a valuable lesson that prepared them to take part in an increasingly diverse global community.

A Circle of Misconceptions

Many of the American students had previously studied with students from other nationalities in public schools and anticipated exposure to diversity on campus. Living in Middletown and surrounding towns had allowed them to visit the NCU campus with family members and a few had even used the library to complete research projects assigned by their schools. NCU's central location also helped local community members, including high school students, attend activities and events that took place on campus all through the year. Even though most of them expected to meet Arab students, some were surprised to see so many. Some participants had assumed that NCU's size and location in the Great Plains would not attract international or Arab students. From their perspective, a more prominent location would be the first choice for international students. They were surprised to learn that many international students were encouraged to study and live in a quiet and affordable place such as NCU. It is therefore understandable that anxiety was often the first reaction of students about the presence of many Arabs and international students. American students preferred to meet people they were already familiar with because they sought to establish recognizable social networks to compensate for the old social systems they left behind in their hometowns. Most held inaccurate

beliefs about the sensitivity of Arabs to cultural politics, wealth, the status of women, war, terrorism, Arabs as people of color, and confusion between Arabs and Muslims.

Some participants expected Arabs to perceive them as rude because they tended to speak loudly to others and might ask inappropriate questions of Arabs who could easily misinterpret their intentions. Culturally, Americans learn to speak out and express themselves openly when talking in public. To reduce the chance of Arab students forming inaccurate assumptions about how American students perceived them, study participants elected not to socialize with Arabs or risk asking questions that could potentially offend them. Instead, participants preferred spending time with other American students who shared the same cultural background. They did not want to go out of their comfort zone and meet Arabs who had different social and cultural backgrounds.

Unlike most Arabs, American students worked either on or off campus to earn money to go to school. Some also had other priorities such as taking care of their children and supporting their families. Arab students usually had more free time because many were full-time students or supported by scholarships from their governments. Because American students often had little time to meet other students face-to-face or have virtual discussions on Blackboard, they chose to invest their limited free time with familiar group members. This finding is supported by Fukuyama (1995) who found that socializing consumes an individual's time and may substitute for other activities one needs to do. For several American students, participation in intercultural activities and interactions with Arab students competed with important social, educational, and work responsibilities.

Individuals who share the same salient ethnic and racial characteristics in addition to other common shared backgrounds may develop an in-group bias through which collaboration,

trust, and sentiment are smoothly transferred among other in-group members (Marschall & Stolle, 2004). Unfortunately, a focus on similar identity tends to promote out-group resentment. Strong social bonds may result in an "us versus them" mindset where group members create close ties and trust but have a tendency to differentiate themselves from other groups or avoid individuals from other groups (Abrams et al., 2004). Absence of direct interaction with or continuous knowledge about members of other ethnic and cultural backgrounds may lead to prejudice (Marschall & Stolle, 2004). In this regard, a handful of participants were uncomfortable that President Trump's speeches might be reviving discriminatory calls against certain cultures, religions, and minorities in the U.S., especially Arabs and Muslims. They expressed concern that his speeches were negatively affecting the way American students viewed the presence of Arabs on the NCU campus.

Because a few Arab students had scholarships from their home countries and drove expensive cars, several Americans thought of all Arabs as wealthy people. In fact, the wealthier students mostly came from oil-producing countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait. Yet, the case was different for students from other Arab countries who depended on family financial support or were self-funded to complete study requirements in the U.S. American students tended to generalize their beliefs about wealth and background to all Arab students based on these well-off examples they had known or heard about.

The status of women was another misconception associated with Arabs that prevented American students from approaching Arab men. Some students believed that religious principles forced Arab women to wear traditional clothes such as the hijab and burqa unwillingly, while others were confused about the philosophy of wearing clothes that covered the natural beauty of women. Even though most students thought it was a restriction on women's freedom, one

participant admitted that Muslim women covering their heads should not be considered too strange because Christian women such as nuns did the same. Female study participants tended to believe Arab women were considered less important than men, a belief that made them hesitant to talk to Arab men. The popular image of Arab men as perpetrators of violence in the Middle East also kept them apart. Several students admitted choosing not to interact with Arab females because of their modest appearance. They could not avoid gazing at their head covers and did not want to appear rude when asking what might be considered inappropriate questions about their hijab or burqa. Stereotypical images about the status of women were spread through movies such as *Jason Bourne* that displayed Arab women as victims who did not have even basic human rights. Reading and searching the internet helped American students to understand the different perspectives associated with Arab and Muslim modesty. This was similar to Cadinu and Rothbart (1996) who found that cross-cultural interactions on campus reduced negative patterns related to stereotyped cultures. Moreover, international students representing these cultures could take steps to dispel undesirable notions associated with their ethnicities.

The events of 9/11 and the association with people from Arab and Islamic countries invited study participants to think of Arabs as a threat to America. Media reinforced unwanted images about Arabs by concentrating on war in the Middle East and attributing any terrorist acts to Arabs. Consequently, a number of American students viewed Arabs and terrorism as two faces of the same coin. The same finding was supported by Hanassab (2006) who found that students from the Middle East and Africa were stereotyped more negatively than international students from other regions.

Some students associated Arabs with people of color. For example, one student thought of Arab and African American males as a threat to their safety, especially if they were walking

nearby or heading in the same direction on campus. Conversely, one Asian American pointed out African American students expressed empathy towards Arabs. Their own history of suffering and discrimination invited African Americans not to believe what was said about Arabs because they experienced similar conditions for decades. For these students, it was okay for white American to believe those negative images about Arabs but not African Americans.

Arab and Muslim were synonymous for most participants who used the terms interchangeably to describe the same group of people. American students seemed to lack knowledge about the difference between Arabs and Muslims and were confused about their different countries of origin. Based on this confusion, most Americans considered the Muslim countries of Pakistan and Iran to be Arab countries. Others went farther and named India, which is neither Arab nor Muslim, an Arab country. Limited knowledge about Arabs and Muslims was the reason behind labeling as Arab anyone who resembled an Arab in appearance or color.

Lost Opportunities

Most participants had exposure to diversity at an early stage of their academic life in public schools. This exposure allowed them to meet students from different parts of the world, including those from the Middle East. In some schools, domestic students attended growing up, international students reached almost one fifth of the school population. However, interactions with students from other nationalities were relatively limited and rarely led to friendships due to any number of factors. These factors played different roles in hindering the building of constructive relationships between the groups and included language barriers, social clustering, and instructors' role in class. These factors are intertwining because the nature of each barrier intersected with the other to reinforce other unwanted notions about how Americans perceived Arabs.

Similar to other international students, Arab students concentrate more on grammar, reading, and writing than speaking and listening. One participant recalled her visit to Korea where she noticed that Korean students were good in using mobile phones to text friends or their computers to send and receive emails. However, they were less proficient when it came to oral conversations with Americans. Participants noticed that although Arab students initially seemed confused about what was expected of them in class assignments, by the next class they had successfully completed the homework. Language barriers were sometimes associated with intellectual abilities of Arabs. Some Americans hated repeating or explaining themselves several times for those Arabs who did not immediately understand their roles in class projects. Moreover, some Americans assumed that Arabs were dumb and stupid just because they could not understand English.

Cultural clustering of Arabs in class was a main reason why interactions were hindered. Because of the language barriers, some Arabs tended to select seats in the back of class and preferred to be surrounded by other co-nationals most of the time. Many participants justified this behavior and thought they would act the same way if they were studying abroad with students who spoke a different language. Several participants viewed this behavior negatively by assuming Arab students did not want to mix or initiate contact with them.

International students such as Asians tended to sit in the middle of class whereas Americans sat in the front seats and invited them to think of Arabs as less competent compared to themselves. Many participants mentioned that American students occupied the front seats followed by Asian students such as Chinese who sat in the middle, which effectively separated them from Arabs and served as an indicator of their social and academic status. Because of student clustering in class, American and Arab students tended to work on class projects with

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peers from the same culture who already sat next to them. This behavior reduced the possibility of cross-cultural interaction between both cultural groups. Even when American students had the option to work with foreign classmates, they preferred working with Americans in order to sidestep any language issues that might have prevented completing assignments on time.

The situation for Arabs was not different outside the classroom. They congregated in large groups with fellow Arabs either in class or in their free time on campus. This behavior discouraged their American classmates from joining their conversations because speaking in Arabic left them feeling isolated and unwelcomed. Arabs used their native language to compensate for their displaced social system, which they left behind in their home countries. An advantage to Arabs of socializing only with Arab classmates was not having to exert the effort required to interact with Americans.

Instructors had an important role in reinforcing students' interactions in class. However, most instructors began the semester by immediately teaching the course content without taking time to introduce students to each other. Instructors treated students in a business-like manner, assuming they were there to receive knowledge and without taking into consideration differences between students' academic or cultural backgrounds. Instructors occasionally introduced Arab students to the class when there was a content related reason or when an instructor wanted to introduce a different perspective into the class discussion. Instructors might also introduce international students if they had transferred from another institution or if they were visiting for just one day. Participants mentioned that instructors did not routinely introduce international or Arab students because they did not think international students deserved different treatment than domestic students. Instructors treated all students the same who could learn equally well under the same educational conditions. By doing so, they neglected or were not aware of differences

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between students of dissimilar social and educational backgrounds. Disregarding these differences would initiate mistaken assumptions about how Arabs acted in class and thus eliminate constructive interactions.

Societal influences about Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. also hindered academic institutions such as NCU from getting rid of stereotypes associated with Arabs. Most participants were concerned about the impact of Donald Trump's speeches that revived discrimination against certain cultures, religions, and minorities in the U.S., especially Arabs and Muslims. They explained that during the 2016 presidential campaign, President Trump made antagonistic comments about Arabs and Muslims in his speeches. His speeches echoed in the community by encouraging discrimination against Arabs and Muslims. Unfortunately, several participants thought the tone and content of his speeches affected the way some Americans viewed the presence of Arabs on the NCU campus.

Openness to Improving Relationships

The misconceptions held by American students about Arabs gradually vanished when constructive links between the two sides took place. The circle of negative assumptions about Arabs diminished when a few students went beyond their initial perceptions and engaged in unplanned conversations with Arabs in class, the library, or off campus. For example, when one female participant struck up a conversation with an Arab woman in a coffee shop, she was surprised and delighted that the Arab women welcomed her questions about the lives and treatment of women in the Middle East. The Arab woman seemed to be curious as well and had many questions about American culture she had been hesitant to ask because of these invisible barriers between the two sides. Interestingly, the American student had been homeschooled. Based on her personal experience, she assumed that others would be curious about Arabs in the

same way they were curious about her experience being homeschooled. By overcoming her hesitancy and daring to cross cultural barriers, she discovered there was much to talk about with the Arab woman. For an American student like her who had not yet travelled outside the U.S., college was like internationalization at home. It compensated for what she had missed by staying in the U.S. without having to spend the money or time to travel. Even though the study suggested American students shared strong bonding social capital, even minimal interactions between Arabs and Americans seemed to be important for American participants in that the bridging opportunities it provided served to change the way they perceived Arab students. It also suggested that more interactions would create additional opportunities for developing bridging social capital. Participants who had interactions with Arab students wanted to clarify their positive experiences with Arabs to their friends, colleagues, and social networks. Thus, more frequent interactions with Arabs would influence the quality of relationships Americans have with them.

A few students had the opportunity to visit Arabs in their homes. One participant had this type of experience during elementary school and a second participant had it in college when he worked with an Arab classmate on a class assignment. The American student experienced Arab hospitality from his colleague and his roommate who served them refreshments while they studied together. This experience helped the American student learn more about Arab traditions when dealing with guests in their homes and left a good impression. At the same time, he was able to observe cultural differences such as the Arab custom of showing respect and generosity to guests.

For many participants, Arabs were not at all different from Americans; each wanted to live, work, and raise their children in a good environment. The commonalities they shared with

Arabs enabled them to perceive them as fellow human beings with the same goal in mind--to study and graduate from college. However, the way Arabs pursued this goal was different. Arabs left everything behind to come to the U.S. to study. In contrast, the lives of Americans living in their own country were filled with numerous other priorities. They also realized that because of language obstacles, Arabs needed more time and effort to master the same academic content in class. Passing all courses successfully meant something special to Arab students. Arabs took school seriously and were ready to sacrifice much to complete college. Some American students, on the other hand, wanted to study and have fun at the same time.

Some participants felt empathy towards Arabs and wanted to defend them from discrimination. They wanted to open doors for more interactions with Arabs in the future. They believed that exerting more effort was key to having fruitful communication as well as being open to diversity without having preconceived notions get in the way. Some wanted their children to explore the world and let members of each culture tell about themselves through personal experiences rather than adopting inherited notions about the other from society or images promoted in the media.

Implications

In this section, I discuss the implications derived from the findings and conclusions of this study. These implications are intended to support the social capital of students and to reinforce the bridging efforts between American and Arab students. The implications I discuss are relevant to American universities, classroom instructors, and Arab students studying in the U.S.

American Universities

The increasing number of international students enrolling in American colleges and universities encourages greater interaction among students. However, having Arabs and Americans in the same educational context does not guarantee cross-cultural interaction (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013). When students are less interested in interacting with others from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, it is the college's responsibility to create a space for intercultural engagement (Gresham et al., 2013). Misconceptions and unwanted assumptions may influence the quality and frequency of interactions. Thus, it behooves universities to find effective ways to support campus diversity by actively establishing friendly learning environments for international students. These environments should provide a welcoming and caring learning atmosphere for international students that is free from prejudice and discrimination. They should also provide fruitful cultural experiences for domestic students. Cultural events could introduce Arabs students and culture to American and other international students. The informality of food fairs would also be a good way to attract students and initiate conversations about each other.

When college students become involved in cross-cultural interactions early in their careers, friendships with students from other nationalities are likely to give them deep insights into foreign cultures and the world around them. In addition, these experiences would increase tolerance and dispel stereotypes associated with certain cultures. Making these connections later on might not be as beneficial. When students spend their first year at university without interacting with students from other ethnicities, they may be less motivated to go beyond their comfort zones or make the extra effort to meet new people, especially if they come from different cultural backgrounds.

Classroom Instructors

It is important for instructors to understand the backgrounds of students from different cultures. Arabs belong to a collective culture and they have expectations about how they should act in class based on their academic experiences and the educational system they were exposed to in their home country. Thus, they prioritize listening to their instructors because they think of them as the most important sources of knowledge (Darwish & Huber, 2003). Arguments or asking questions usually has to be for important purposes, unlike Americans who may ask questions to make sure they understand the content or to express an opinion. If instructors become more aware of these differences, they may eventually understand why Arabs tend to be silent, act in a reserved manner, and cluster in the back of class. This awareness could also help them break the ice between Americans and Arabs and improve the opportunity for mutual growth and learning. Beginning each semester by having students introduce themselves to each other and discuss what countries they are from could break down initial barriers and open lines of communication. Instructors also can help students go beyond their comfort zones by pairing students of different backgrounds in classroom projects or when completing tasks outside of class. Moreover, opening discussions about the different educational systems of students at the beginning of each semester would help each group avoid inaccurate assumptions about the other and make constructive educational and social links instead.

Arab Students Studying in the U.S.

Arab students should not expect American students to initiate bonding with them without being willing to step outside their own comfort zones. Travelling to the U.S. to study in a college or university implies having sufficient background about the new environment and culture. When Arabs decide to leave their home country to study abroad, prospective students

should search and collect enough data about the host country and its citizens. Upon arrival, they should express themselves and be open to new academic and social contexts. Thus, they had best keep the door open to Americans and American ideas, encourage Americans to ask questions, and engage in conversations about different issues even if they face partial failure in the beginning. Arab newcomers can learn from the experiences of other Arabs who have spent more time in the U.S. In addition, improving English language and communication skills would help Arabs bridge with Americans and build constructive educational and social links.

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APPENDICES

Consent Form

WSU | WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

Department of Counseling, Educational Leadership, Educational and School Psychology
Box 142, Wichita, KS 67260-0142

Interview Consent Form

Purpose: You are invited to participate in a study that will explore American students' perspectives regarding interaction with Arab international students at a Midwestern University.

Participant Selection: You were selected as possible participant in this study because you are an American student attending a Midwestern university with Arab students. Approximately 15 individuals are sought to participate in individual interviews.

Explanation of Procedures: In my data collection procedure, I am planning to have an individual interview with each American student. If you decide to participate, the interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes. You may be asked to participate in a follow-up interview. At the interview, you will be asked a few questions concerning your perception about Arab students attending classes with you at a Midwestern university. With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview so an accurate transcript can be created which will facilitate data analysis and assist me in reporting accurate findings.

Discomfort/Risks: There are no risks, discomforts, or inconveniences expected from your participation in this study. However, if a question makes you uncomfortable, you are under no obligation to respond. You also can skip any question you do not wish to answer.

Benefits: The purpose of this study is to explore American students' perspectives regarding interaction with Arab international students at a Midwestern University. The results of this study will illuminate the nature of cross-cultural communication within a university context. This study hopes to help students and instructors find effective ways of encouraging cross-cultural communication and using student diversity to enrich the experience of both student populations. Results may be published in journals and presented at conferences so I can share with others what is learned from the study.

Confidentiality: Any information obtained in this study in which you can be identified will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. A pseudonym will be assigned in my study to maintain your confidentiality. All the audio-recorded interviews will be

stored in a secure online password protected location. These data collected digitally will be retained for a minimum of three years.

Refusal/Withdrawal: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will <u>not</u> affect your future relations with Wichita State University and/or myself. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw at any time.

Contact: If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me Bilal Obeidat at (316) 308-3681 (cell phone) or my advisor Dr. Eric Freeman, (316) 978-5696 (office phone). If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject you can contact the Office of Research and Technology Transfer at Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount Street, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that:
- You have read (or someone has read to you) the information provided above,
- You are aware that this is a research study,
- You have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to your satisfaction, and
- You have voluntarily decided to participate.

You are not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

_____
Printed Name of Subject

_____ _____
Signature of Subject   Date

_____
Printed Name of Witness

_____ _____
Witness Signature   Date

Appendix B

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself with your name, year of study, and major?

   Other background information: Where did you grow up? What do your parents do for a living? Are you a first-generation college student? Have you traveled to other countries?

2. Prior to coming to NCU, had you ever been in school with students from other countries? If so, describe who those students were and what those experiences were like.

3. Did you expect to find international students at NCU? Explain.

4. Since coming to NCU, describe your classroom experiences with students from other countries. Describe any experiences you have had socializing with students from other countries.

5. Before coming to NCU, what did you know about Arab people?

6. Have you found some of your beliefs and ideas about Arab people to be stereotypes?

7. Do instructors or professors ever mention having Arab or other international students in class? If so, what kinds of things do they say?

8. Tell me about your in-class and out-of-class interactions with Arab students?

9. Have your in-class and out-of-class interactions with Arab students added something of value to your college experience? Have these interactions taken anything away?

10. How would you describe similarities or differences between American and Arab students?

11. Is there anything else you would like me to know about the interaction between American and Arab students at NCU?