

# Example of term paper on islamic women in american culture

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



## **Islamic Women in American Culture**

Comparison of American and Arab cultures is often boiled down to religion differences. Few sources emphasize attempts of missionaries to impose Christianity during colonization of Islamic territories. Islam was significantly distorted as well as the role of Islamic women in the society (Haddad, 2005). In this paper I tried to represent a contemporary view on Islamic women and suggest an optimal communication path towards them. There are several differences between Islam and American women.

The most topical issue is the role of women in Islam culture. Islam is perceived as a religion which appreciates and encourages female role of housewife and mother. Traditionally, Muslim women fulfill these functions. The second distinctive feature of Islamic women is hijab. Arab men could also observe hijab. In addition, women attitude towards religion and traditions significantly varies depending on upbringing (including hijab). Hijab observance is mandatory for women during the fast (Shameem, n. d.). For American individualistic culture hijab observance is often considered as abuse of human rights. However, for Islamic women hijab means privacy. For this reason wearing burqa is a voluntary decision but not an obligation. Emphasized privacy makes impact on the way how Islamic women communicate within American society.

In accordance with Hofstede (n. d.) research, one of five dimensions determining different cultures is power distance. Ramona, who is from Arabian origins, described the power dynamics in her family. She told that her father has his own chair, sits at the head of the table and has his own cabinet in the house while her mother does not have neither chair nor her

own room (“ Engaging in Nonverbal Communication”, n. d.)

This example reflects the order of things in a traditional Islamic family showing strong masculine approach. Interestingly, masculinity index (MAS) in both cultures is very similar (American MAS equals 62, Islamic – 52). Other dimensions are distinguished significantly, thus individualism index in American culture is the highest in the world (91) while Arabian equals 38. This means that Americans value personal achievement rather than obedience to religion postulates or compliance with traditions. As it was mentioned before, power distance in Arab world is double higher than American (80 versus 40). This parity reflects the attitude to authority both in a social and in family relationships. Index of uncertainty avoidance in Islamic culture is essentially higher than that of Americans’. It means the attitude towards risk and ability to cope with different situations (Hofstede, n. d.). Hofstede (n. d.) analysis is a useful tool to have an idea of the particular culture and people who represent this culture. It gives the general view of a nation greatly helping communication.

Islamic women are often depicted as swathed and intimidated, and sometimes ignorant, illiterate, mistreated and segregated. Indeed, many of Westernized Muslim women are highly educated or are skilled professionals in different spheres, including architecture, psychology, science, medicine, jurisprudence, and engineering. Our knowledge of Islamic world and Islamic women in particular is biased. Certainly, this makes an impact on the way of intercultural communication we exercise (Haddad, 2005).

On the contrary to existing opinion, American Muslim women are not forbidden to work and realize their social functions as professionals. When

doing this research I discovered that Islamic culture and religion perception in American society is essentially distorted. In accordance with disclosure of one of American Islamic woman, Hoda, they take advantage from women primary functions being supported by their husbands. American Muslim women had adapted their lives to lives of average Americans. Muslim husbands respect them and cherish. They have the possibility to combine their family and professional life (“ Making Family Time Happen”, 2011). I was amazed when I got to know that there is a feminist activity in Islam which is aimed at struggle against Islamic traditionalist view of Islamic women. Thus, social role of women depends on Islamic society but not initially Islam.

It is crucial to know peculiarities of non-verbal communication of Islamic world in order to communicate effectively. Islamic culture in the USA changes with every generation coming. The second generation of Islamic women is significantly different from the first one in behavior and obedience to the rules. Williams (2007) stated that second generation of Islamic women has dual identity which is half-Arab and half-American. Hijab observance refers to Islamic part of identity and using the possibility to study and work is a privilege of living in American society (Williams, 2007).

In general, it is important to have individual approach when communicating with Islamic women. Despite of existing stereotype opinion, modern Islamic women could not identify them with Islam or take an active part in business and social life.

One should be careful when communicating Islamic women especially if he or she is not aware of non-verbal signs. For example, looking down in Arab

culture is referred to politeness and respectful attitude towards interlocutor. On the contrary, direct eye contact is considered offensive. In American culture looking straight at your interlocutor means that one is honest and sincere. Besides, Americans and Arabs have different interpretation of personal space. Americans require much personal space while Arabs do not. Having big families and living together in one house, they tend to stay as close as possible to other people everywhere. However, it does not relate Islamic women. Usually, it is not acceptable to shake hands or even stay in one room with Islamic women. Despite of being very hospitable, Arabs consider inappropriate sharing food with other people when dining out. Using left hand to pass items is not appropriate as well because left hand is associated with personal hygiene only (“ Working with Students”, n. d.). Some scholars consider American and Islamic cultures as individualism versus collectivism, informal approach versus formal approach; and ascribed behavior versus personal achievements (Zaharna, 1995).

**Taking into account all said above, one should bear in mind possible implications for intercultural communication.**

First, appreciation of cultural differences and impartial attitude is important. There is no “ right” or “ wrong” religion or culture; all of them have certain preferences.

**Second, knowing cultural differences help identify them in time and reduce the risk of misunderstanding between communicating parties.**

Third, one should take into account the way of delivering messages. For example, if Americans prefer concise and precise formulations while Arabian people would appreciate exaggeration as more appealing expression.

Fourth, it is not necessary to change one's own communication style to achieve efficient communication. It is necessary to work with a cultural style of people from different cultures.

Finally, one has to take into account that differences in culture may cause ethical issues. Hence, learning cultural norms may be helpful for development of balanced relationship between American and Arabian people (Zaharna, 1995).

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