No (21), Part 2 , Oct., 2023, PP. 1 – 42

The Great Divide:

How Americans and Muslims View Each Other

Texas A & M University – Kingsville

By

Nayramin F. Alqahtani Dr. Bennie Green

The Great Divide: How Americans and Muslims View Each Other

Nayramin F. Alqahtani & Dr. Bennie Green

Abstract

The objective of this research was to understand the perception of the American culture amongst Muslims and vice versa. A thorough analysis of reports and research findings of different scholars and social scientists on the topic was carried out to develop a detailed understanding of the facets behind the difference between the American and Islamic societies both within and outside United States. Five interviews were conducted to obtain a generalized view of the respondents on the topic. Majority of the respondent had the same idea about the American culture. Almost everybody believed that the American culture is very different from the Islam culture and it is actually modern and progressive. Majority of the respondents in this research expressed exactly similar ideas when asked about the perception of Islamic culture amongst the Americans. They believed that American are completely ignorant about the real Islamic culture and have very wrong ideas. Even though 20 percent of the respondents said that people are friendly but 100 percent of the respondents' believed that majority of the Americans do not understand Islam.

Keywords: American culture, Muslims, modern and progressive, interviews

المستخلص

هدف البحث إلى التعرف على، وإدراك مفهوم الثقافة الأمريكية بين المسلمين والعكس صحيح. تم إجراء تحليل شامل للتقارير ونتائج الأبحاث لمختلف الباحثين وعلماء الاجتماع حول هذا الموضوع لتطوير فهم مفصل للجوانب الكامنة وراء الاختلاف بين المجتمعين الأمريكي والإسلامي داخل وخارج الولايات المتحدة. تم إجراء خمس مقابلات للحصول على رؤية عامة للمستجيبين حول الموضوع. كان لدى غالبية المستجيبين نفس الفكرة عن الثقافة الأمريكية. اعتقد الجميع تقريبًا أن الثقافة الأمريكية مختلفة تمامًا عن ثقافة الإسلام وهي في الواقع ثقافة حديثة وتقدمية. عبّر غالبية المشاركين في هذا البحث عن أفكار متشابهة تمامًا عند سؤالهم عن تصور الثقافة الإسلامية بين الأمريكيين. لقد اعتقدوا أن الأمريكيين يجهلون تمامًا الثقافة الإسلامية الحقيقية ولديهم أفكار خاطئة جدًا. على الرغم من أن ٢٠٪ من المستجيبين قالوا إن الناس ودودون، إلا أن ١٠٠٪ من المستجيبين يعتقدون أن غالبية الأمريكيين لا يفهمون الإسلام.

The American Culture and the Islamic world:

The vast cultural differences that exist between the United States and the Islamic community have been a very intense and interesting subject of study and research for researcher and social scientists across the globe. The differences and varied perceptions, sometimes contentious and sometimes favourable, of both for each other had always existed but the issues really started getting world attention since the collapse of the cold war, the volatile political situation in the middle east and more recently America's aggressive policies after the 9/11 incident.

Literature Review:

Salem (2008) puts up a very descriptive, vivid and insightful account of the perception of the United States, its policies, its culture and its way of life in the Muslim world. Her study is a thought provoking anecdote that endeavours to deduce and analyse the instigating factors of wide spread anti-Americanism in the world in general and the Arab world in particular (Adelman & Verkuyten,2020).

Her work highlights a historical timeline of this feeling of anti-Americanism that first became noticeable in France in the early 18th century. After USA became the sole superpower after the collapse of the Soviet Union the country's dominance in the world affairs increased tremendously (Dangubic , Verkuyten & Stark,2019). USA started getting looked up to as the only superpower in the world with regards to its economic strength, military might and cultural dominance.

Then came September 11 and the terrorist attack, the first of its kind in the USA. Americans viewed this as an attack on freedom,

democracy and the American way of life. America was riled and the events that followed coupled by the post 9/11 US policies widely instigated a very strong wave of anti-Americanism across the world. Critics of American policies always existed since many decades ago and they were not only comprised of foreign nationals but American citizens who shared a mutual disdain towards their homeland due to the unjust policies as perceived by them (Moss et al.,2017). Many were always prejudiced towards the US in general but many based their criticism on its unfair action and policies. The wave of anti-Americanism that followed 9/11 was largely due to American policies formulated by the Bush administration (Salem, 2008).

FOUNDATIONS OF ANTI-AMERICAN SENTIMENT:

A major facet which is instrumental behind this wave of anti-Americanism as observed by Salem (2008) is the United States' blatant disregard of the Palestinian plight and blind support for the supposedly hostile Israeli policies. Furthermore, irresponsible comments like describing the Israeli Prime Minister Aeron Sharon as a man of peace and saying that Palestinians have no rights to return by President Bush only adds to the flare up of the already volatile situation. Salem refers to some interesting findings by Zogby (2004) that indicates that the general perceptions of the common citizens in some Arab countries like Egypt and Morocco who are officially strong allies of the United States are widely anti-American. The reason behind this stand is not necessarily due to a pathogenic disdain for the American way of life or American values but because of the constant interference of USA in the domestic

affairs of the region, unfair American policies in the Middle East, disregard for Palestinian human rights, blind support for Israel and more recently unjustified invasion of Iraq. Otherwise an appreciation for American culture, the American education system and the American way of life is widely evident in countries like Egypt (Salem 2008).

These are some of the reasons that inspired strong values of a new kind of nationalism amongst the Arab world in general. Popularly referred to as the Pan-Arabism, it allowed the Arab states to present a unified stance against grievances felt by even a single member of the confederation. Tightly bound by a strong Islamic identity, Pan-Arabism was instrumental in spreading anti-Americanism across the entire region (Jikeli,2023). The Arab world maintains that Israeli occupation of Palestine is illegal therefore there is lot of resentment and contention when the US government ensures overwhelming political and economic support to Israel and contributes a lot to its Military armament. This is especially true when Israel is clearly seen violating countless human right charters of the United Nations and the United States routinely cover Israel by disregarding UN resolutions and unfairly using its veto power (Salem 2008).

The American support to the Israeli government as it ordered air strikes in the Palestinian dominated regions sparked wide spread anger and protest in the Arab world and elsewhere. The Arab world refuses to accept the legitimacy of Israel and views them as illegal occupiers of Palestinian state. The close relations of USA with Israel are thus extremely detrimental to the US-Arab relationships. The Arab world fully believes that America has got double standards when it comes to condemnation of human rights violations by the State of Israel (Salem 2008)

Doran in his work comments that the plight of the Palestinians today is largely due to the historical prejudice of the west towards the Middle East and that the state of Israel was created within the Arab world so that the region could be dominated by the western super powers like USA and the UK. The Palestinians and the Arab world view the entire conflict as modern day imperialism of the western superpowers (Salem 2008).

Salem (2008) also highlights the gross discrepancy in the US aid to Israel when compared with other beneficiaries of American economic support. The very need of US aid to Israel is debatable when Israel is supposedly the 22nd richest country in the world. Furthermore the way Israel gets the aid as a lump sum amount unlike other aid receivers and is free from any kind of accountability, speak volumes about it privileged status compared to other states. American economic and military aid has made Israel one of the strong military power and incidents of widespread use of modern sophisticated fighters and tanks in skirmishes with the Palestinians have become routine. All of these generate intense hatred for America and Israel in the entire Arab world.

The invasion of Iraq by coalition forces lead by the United States is a major generator of anti-American feelings in the Arab world. Majority still holds the view that the invasion has led to severe deterioration of the situation and that conditions were far better under the Saddam Hussein regime. Salem mentions a study carried out by Schneider in 2004 where he found that a majority of Iraqis (71%) consider America as illegal occupiers of their country and only 37% believe that US is actually serious about setting up a democratic system

in Iraq. The Arab world in general strongly believes that the invasion, based on false information of the existence of weapons of mass destruction, was solely to get hold of the huge Iraqi oil reserves.

Inhuman treatment of the Iraqi prisoners in prisons like Abu Gharib, constant portrayal of the Arab and Muslims as terrorists in the American media and American selfishness and double standards in supporting autocratic regimes to serve its own interest has only led to the worsening of the situation. The real need of the hour is to increase understanding between the United States and the Muslim world in general, shed the prejudices of the past and ratification of the unfair policies (Salem 2008).

America received tremendous support from the Kurds and the Shia communities during the gulf war. With the assurance of American support they revolted against the Saddam regime. However they support never got realized and they had to face severe reprisals from the Iraqi army forcing many of them to flee to Iran. Such policies of the United States breed lot of resentment and hatred against it (WGBH Educational Foundation 2002).

The election of Barack Hussein Obama as the president of United States was felt like a breath of fresh air across the globe. Millions hoped and aspired for a new era of rapprochement from the United States towards the problems and issues plaguing the world (Skerry 2008). There was much anticipation in the Islamic community both within and outside United States for a different way of doing things from President Obama, more so because of his understanding of Islam. After all, his father was a Muslim and even though he may not be entirely inclined

towards Islamic values, he was expected to be much more understanding than his predecessors of the Islamic point of view. Hopes were raised when Obama directly addressed the Muslim community with lot of compassion and openness during his visit to Cairo and through the electronic media. However pathological mistrust of the Muslim world for American policies returned when Obama expressed his strong commitment to the war in Afghanistan in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in Norway. However Obama was still the closest to understanding Islam in a more practical way and Muslim in the United States overwhelmingly voted for him (Skerry 2008). However there is also a word of caution from Skerry with regards to putting too much expectation on the President. The American system of administration does not give a free hand to the President to function in a highly independent way and there are restrictions and limitations to his power.

The American culture and the American way of life are not always distasteful to the Muslim community. Some aspects are widely appreciated across the world and some not. What according to Skerry (2008) is really deplorable is the fact that American policy makers and intellectuals show a poor disregard towards the cultural sensitivity of others, particularly to the Islamic community both within and outside the country. The policy maker refuse to identify the fact that aspects of American culture or the way of life can in fact affect its relationship with the Islamic community. This insensitivity does not do any good in improving the understanding of the US about the Muslim community.

Skerry (2008), through his research, observed that many within and outside the country attribute the reason for the present state of affairs

to the insatiable materialistic appetite of America. However careful analysis of the situation reveals that record acceptable debt levels and a burgeoning materialistic requirement of the American consumer is what really defines and distinguishes the American way of life from other developed western nations. America has always been a land of opportunity to everyone and the pertinent need that was felt by the policy makers to improve the standard of living of the economically marginalized immigrants led to many becoming homeowners without the means to repay the debts. These policies, once lauded as great instruments of social justice were instrumental in leading the economy to a severe recession that eventually affected the same economically marginalized the most. The intension is definitely not to vindicate the immigrants for the sorry state of affairs in the country or for the aggressive and domineering American policies but to ascertain the fact that the present situation is actually due to short-sightedness of the policy makers and exploitation of human aspirations by the businesses.

A very high degree of consumerism is prevalent in the American society. People from all over the world come to America to realize their dreams and make it big. All of this these requires a continuously high level of growth in the American economy and a persistent need for resources. Furthermore the American system and values are designed in such a way that individual needs are very high. A simple example could be the dependence of the average American family on their automobiles. Possessing number of vehicles is not a status symbol but a necessity to commute to work and to travel around. The system has evolved in such a way that dependence on public transport is discouraged. Probably this is

the reason why public transport is not that developed compared to other nations. Clearly there are major shortcomings in the American way of life and policy makers along with the critics are intelligent enough to realize the same. Change is an option but is definitely not an easy one to make, given the excellent quality of life that the American system guarantees (Skerry 2008).

Critics and opponents of the American campaign in Iraq allege that the real reason behind the campaign is the American greed for the huge Iraqi oil reserves given the country's incessant need for energy. This could be just one reason but definitely not the sole reason as observed by Skerry (2008). The American commitment to Israel is another reason which is just as important as oil.

Abdallah (2003) argues that Arabs and the Muslim communities across the globe are highly cynical of the American policies and adventures in the Middle East. The frustration of the Arab community with the American stand in the Middle East has attained significant proportions in the recent years. The author believes that this deep seated disillusionment could be a factor that is encouraging terrorist activities against the United States.

The disillusionment with America is mainly because of its unjustified and blind support to highly provocative and unfair Israeli policies. Other factors like supposedly unfair American sanctions imposed on Arab nations, illegal and unjustified occupation of Iraq and rampant air strikes against Arab nations causing extensive civilian causalities severely damage Arab-American trust and relationships. The Arab community also sees lot of hypocrisy in American policies when it

supports regimes in the Middle East that routinely suppress its people, destroy democracy and extensively violate human rights. The author believes that many of these issues are actually legitimate and justified and progress is only possible if USA acknowledges and condemns unfair Israeli policies, withdraws from Iraq and desists from supporting autocratic regimes in the Middle East (Abdallah 2003).

Al-Arian (2004) through her work states a strong belief in the Arab world about America. The popular perception there is that America is general is highly disrespectful towards the Arab culture. This sentiment primarily emanates from continuous and unconditional support of Israeli policies by the United States. Furthermore conspiracy theories are rife in the Muslim world that seems to establish a hand of the CIA in engineering the 9/11 attacks with active support from Israel (Al-Arian 2004).

Many policy makers and thinkers in the United States draw comparison of the Cold war with the war against Islamic terrorists. A new term called “Islamo-Fascism” has emerged to describe the situation, which is extremely offensive to the Islamic community (Skerry 2011).

However there are major dissimilarities between the cold war and the current struggle in the Middle East. During the cold was the adversary was the Soviet Union that actually identical western ideals like the states. They were just different in their political systems. The present struggle of the United States is with an entity which is culturally very different from USA. Furthermore they also have a track record and history full of violence and antagonism towards the United States (Skerry 2011).

Changing Attitude Towards The United States:

Then came 9/11 and things changed dramatically. Thinkers who routinely opposed American excesses joined hands in protecting the very virtues they opposed. Thinkers who opposed each other before came together in upholding the American values as the ideal for the Islamic community. Thinkers who routinely criticized Feminist movements in the US became apostles of gender equality for the Islamic world. These obsessions with upholding the American idealism in front of the Islamic community made the American society oblivious to the fact that America is the largest consumer of pornography and that nothing could be more derogatory for a women (Skerry 2008).

The September 11 attacks and the establishment of the fact that radicalized Muslim terrorists were behind the act, resulted in violent reprisals against the Muslim community in the United States. One such individual who found herself at the receiving end of the public ire was Tammie Ismail, who is a teacher at an Islamic school in Chicago. Tammie was born and brought up in America and never in her life did she encounter such hatred towards are religion. She had to restrict her movement and remained in her house for her own safety. However the phase was extremely frustrating for her and she decided that she needs to be proactive and do the bit at her level to dispel the myths and misconceptions. With this objective in mind she headed to a nearby catholic school along with her students and interacted with the Christian students there. She was pleasantly surprised to see the participation of the students in the interactions and it was a wonderful exchange of ideas

between the individuals from different communities trying to learn and understand each other's culture and point of views (Northam 2002).

The cultural difference between the Islamic community and USA can be widely attributed to the insensitivities that have occurred before. The failure to consider the cultural difference between communities may actually obscure facts that may go a long was in establishing a commonality and thus bridging the widening gap. Furthermore a natural desire to understand why Islamic communities think the American way of life is imperfect and wasteful could actually help understand the intricacies in a much better way (Skerry 2008).

Skerry (2008) also emphasize on the fact that American definition of Moderate Muslims scaled by American standards is highly ineffective. Culture plays a role here and the difference could be due to the different beliefs. Someone who does not qualify as a Moderate Muslim may actually support democracy upholds human rights and denounces terrorism. The reason why he may not qualify as the so called moderate Muslim is because of a difference in his cultural values when compared to the American values. So what really should be avoided is this pre-occupation of looking for moderate Muslim as determined by a scale based on American values (Skerry 2008).

Chiozza (2004) through his extensive work established that Islam as a whole or the Islamic community is particular is not incompatible with American values or American way of life as suggested by other researchers. His study on the contrary revealed a deep seated respect of the Islamic communities for American progress, innovation, technological advancement and popular American culture (Van der Noll

& Saroglou,2015). Other significant work by scientists like Norris (2002), Inglehart (2002) and Tessler (2002) project similar findings. The real bitterness of the Islamic world towards America is actually because of policies in the world affairs and the Middle East (Chiozza 2004).

The current situation is actually unique because of the unprecedented levels of anti-Americanism that exists today in the Islamic world. The belief that American hate Muslim is deeply rooted in the Islamic world. In the United states negative portrayal of the Arabs in Particular and Muslims in general is extensive in popular print and electronic media since the 9/11 incident. The situation is such that an average American has stated to view every Muslim with suspicion (Chiozza 2004).

The Gallup poles of 2002 highlight a pathological hatred and distrust for USA prevalent in the prominent Islamic countries. The results show that 70% of the population in Iran, 62% of the population in Jordan, 51% of the population in Morocco, 68% percent of the population Pakistan and 64% of the population in Saudi Arabia harbours a strong dislike towards the United States. The worst opinion towards the United States is particularly evident in those Middle Eastern states that have a strong Palestinian influence and where the political situation is the most volatile. Given the sorry state of affairs in these regions many tend to agree with the argument given by Samuel Huntington in 1996 where he predicts an impending class of the civilizations. He strongly argues through his work that western ideals and the Islamic point of view are absolutely irreconcilable and that it will lead to violent political reprisals (Chiozza 2004).

foundations for anti-muslim sentiments:

Some common misconceptions and stereotypes about the Muslims and the Islamic community in general are extremely derogatory and ill placed largely due to the lack of understanding of the Islamic culture and Islamic ways of life.

A common misconception with the religion of Islam being completely different from Christianity and Judaism is widespread. However all three religions are conjugated with their belief in the same God (WGBH Educational Foundation 2002). All of these religions have strict doctrines and it's often the Islamic doctrines that are highlighted and targeted by media and presented in a very bad light. Also widespread is the belief in the western world that Islam is highly prejudiced and oppressive towards women. However it is worth noting that Islam does advocate the right of the women to education, inheritance and freedom to choose life partner (WGBH Educational Foundation 2002). Most modern Islamic states give women equal rights to education, work and vote but cultural and social beliefs may have some ramifications. Some Islamic cultures may propose abhorrence of fashion for women, which they belief instigate sexual promiscuity and moral corruption. Countries like Saudi Arabia have excellent provisions for women in terms of access to excellent education and work environment but make it a compulsory requirement that women wear a veil called Hijab and are debarred from driving (WGBH Educational Foundation 2002).

Some other derogatory perceptions of the Islamic community by the western world like Muslims hating everybody who is a non-Muslim

and that they are a fanatical and violent community is troublesome. On the contrary majority of the Muslims are as vocal as anybody else in denouncing and condemning acts of violence and terrorism. History is witness to the fact that Muslims have been more tolerant to Jews and Christians then they had been to the Muslims (WGBH Educational Foundation 2002). Some even argue that Muslims are very medieval in their thinking and that they fail to appreciate and embrace modern western ideals. But real facts tell a different story. Islam is spreading at a very fast rate in America and the country has been a home to around 6 million Muslims who have flawlessly adopted western ideals and the American way of life (WGBH Educational Foundation 2002).

The term "Jihad" evokes a sense of violence in minds of the general population now days, thanks to the misinterpreted presentation its meaning by the American media. The real meaning of Jihad as interpreted by a devout Muslim is the internal struggle that a person undergoes to uphold his or her morality and in true essence it has got nothing to do with any form of terrorism. The projection of the term as synonymous to terrorist activities against non-Muslims is utterly misguided and unwarranted (WGBH Educational Foundation 2002).

Quran may actually talk about war to defend or even expand the faith but the holy book never supports or condones acts of violence against non-believers. The differences between the western world and the Islamic communities were gross exaggerated by early explorers and colonists who often gave fanciful and strange accounts of the Islamic societies. The trend continues in modern times when media giants like

CNN selectively airs few Palestinians celebrating the 9/11 attacks but casually ignoring thousands who severely condemned the violent terrorist acts. This kind of irresponsible conduct fuels public uproar and makes people see an entire community in a very bad light; something they never deserved (WGBH Educational Foundation 2002).

There have been some recent controversies regarding the wearing of Hijab by Muslim women in the western societies. Hijab is like a headscarf that covers a woman's head, hair, neck, and ears—leaving only the face showing (Williams 2007). Many in the west believe that it symbolizes oppression of women. However wearing a hijab is quite prevalent amongst the second generation Muslim women who were born and raised in the United States. Williams (2007) argues that the Hijab allows these women to create a niece for them and helps them uphold their unique identity and independence from a non-Muslim American culture (Williams 2007).

Americans cherish their freedom and are extremely liberalized with their thinking. American loves their independence and love to have choices. They are not restricted with their sexuality and love to explore anything and everything. America has the highest rates of marriages and divorces in the western world and the liberty to deal with sensitive issues like abortion could be viewed as extreme even by many advanced western standards. The Clinton incident and a gross degradation of moral values in the broken American families were widely debated and people like Judge Robert Bork even went to extreme of questioning the very legitimacy of America (Skerry 2008).

Stereotypes Of Americans As Held By Muslims:

Just as misconceptions and misunderstandings are rife in the American society about the Islamic world, the opposite is equally evident in the Islamic societies. Most in the Islamic countries believe that all Americans are rich with complete disregard for family values and where female sexuality has been widely commoditized. These are typical stereotypes that are been shaped by the inaccurate portrayal of western societies in movies and media (Global Connections 2002). On the contrary large sections of the American population are economically marginalized and are struggling to survive on charities.

USA, largely due to its alliance with Israel and its disregard for the rights of the Palestinians is perceived as a Hippocratic state. Islamic communities see a glaring discrepancy in the US stand of upholding its ideals of democracy and freedom. They believe that America is only interested in safeguarding its self-proclaimed ideals aboard when it sees a gain for itself (Global Connections 2002).

Art and culture:

Art and culture have no boundaries and can be a great assent in bridging the wide gap between the American society and the Islamic population. Art can take any form and can be instrumental in negating the misconceptions that the American and the Islamic societies harbour for each other. A beautiful painting, a soul rendering piece of music or a though provoking movie could touch the soul of anybody on both sides of the fence and bring communities together. It can go a long way in understanding each other's culture and for real connoisseurs of art, the origin of the artist will always be irrelevant.

The creative media is extremely commercialized and well developed in the United States and it has a strong influence over the American society. Unfortunately the rich and diverse Islamic art and culture is practically non-existent in the American media. The American music, television and the movie industry has a wide global presence and influence but any real interest in the Islamic culture or its depiction in Hollywood movies is rarely seen (Schneider & Nelson 2012).

The US government has formulated many initiatives to bridge this cultural gap but in true sense it vastly lacks behind the European nations in promoting and supporting art and culture in the Islamic community. A tiny insignificant fraction of the aid actually reaches the Muslim world and is virtually non-existent in the Middle East and North Africa (Schneider & Nelson 2012).

Equally regrettable is the fact that very little art and culture from the Islam world is exported to the United States. The art and culture of the Islamic world is a rich mosaic of soulful poetry, rich paintings and excellent literature and can be very effective in removing the negative stereotypes associated with the Islamic community. The art and culture is capable of presenting the real inherent openness of the Islamic community to the American society and can be good in educating the Americans that there is a different facet of the Islamic world that no way matches with the popular perceptions put forward by the American media through its extensive coverage of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. On one hand America promotes freedom of speech and culture but on the other hand American support is almost nil for Islam art and culture. It must be understood that artists all over world harbours free will and

radical thinking. So it will be the artists in the supposedly radicalized Muslim world who will be the pioneers in bringing about a change in the outlook of the conservative society there (Schneider & Nelson 2012).

However it is also encouraging to note that awareness has been growing tremendously within the artistic community in the States and their Islamic counterparts in the Middle East. Both groups acknowledge the tremendous power of art and culture to remove negative image the Arabs have in front of the Americans. Thanks to the rapid development of the media infrastructure in the Middle-east exchange of cultural ideas and thinking's has increased between the United States and the Muslim communities at the individual and non-governmental level (Schneider & Nelson 2012).

Current Study:

So it can be inferred that majority of misconception emanate from lack of understanding of each other's culture and a negative portrayal of the commonly held stereotypes by the electronic media. The real road forward is to put sincere efforts to understand the stereotypes develop a sound understanding of each other's culture and popular ways of life. My research project examined the concepts of the Americans and Muslims towards each other's culture in an attempt to better understand the reasons of conflicts.

Methods:

The methodology adopted to carry out this research can be divided into two sections. The first step was to carry out extensive secondary research on the topic. A thorough analysis of reports and research findings of different scholars and social scientists on the topic was

carried out to develop a detailed understanding of the facets behind the difference between the American and Islamic societies both within and outside United States. Numerous discussion and brain storming sessions were conducted with friends and interested individuals to discuss and interpret the collected articles and reports. The objective was to develop a solid mental picture of the issues that will eventually help in dealing with the problems. Enough time and effort was given to thoroughly understand each and every article and shortcuts were strictly avoided. The idea was to read the entire articles rather then quickly go through the summary or conclusion. The analyses of individual papers were interspersed with sufficient time intervals so that all the information can be assimilated and confusions could be avoided.

The second part of the methodology involved conducting the interviews and field observations. Five interviews were conducted to obtain a generalized view of the respondents on the topic. The composition of the interviewees was diverse to ascertain maximum coverage. Analysis of the interview findings helped determine if the views expressed by them are at odds with the findings and understandings of the secondary research.

Results:

The responses from the respondents were properly recorded, analysed and are presented below.

The respondents came from different backgrounds and most of them are attending school. Some have kids at home and all of them are Muslims. All of them are socially active and relatively young as illustrated in table 1 and figure 1.

Table 1: General characteristics of the respondents.

Respondent	Education	Religion	Kids
Respondent 1	Studying English	Muslim	No kids
Respondent 2	Sociology Major	Muslixm	4 kids
Respondent 3	Human Ecology	Muslim	No kids
Respondent 4	Not attending school	Muslim	1 Kid
Respondent 5	Attending school	Muslim	2 kids

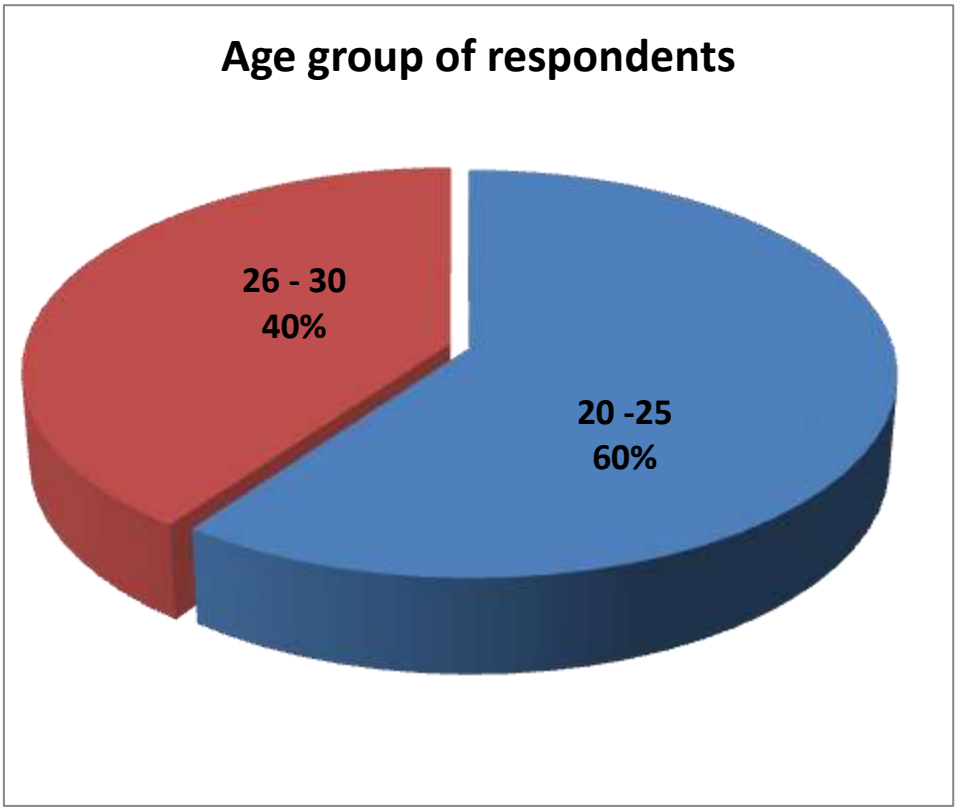

Fig 1: Age group of respondents.

Figure 2 illustrates the responses with regards to the perception of the popular American culture amongst Muslims.

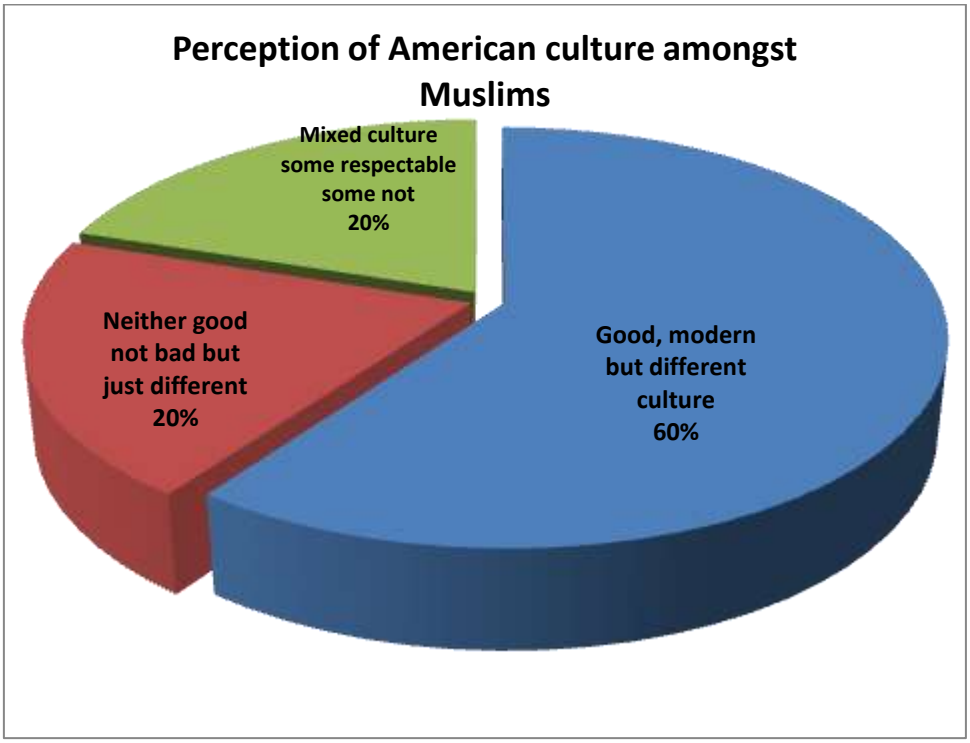

Fig. 2: Percentage of the American culture amongst Muslims

Figure 3 highlights the perception of the Islamic culture amongst the Americans.

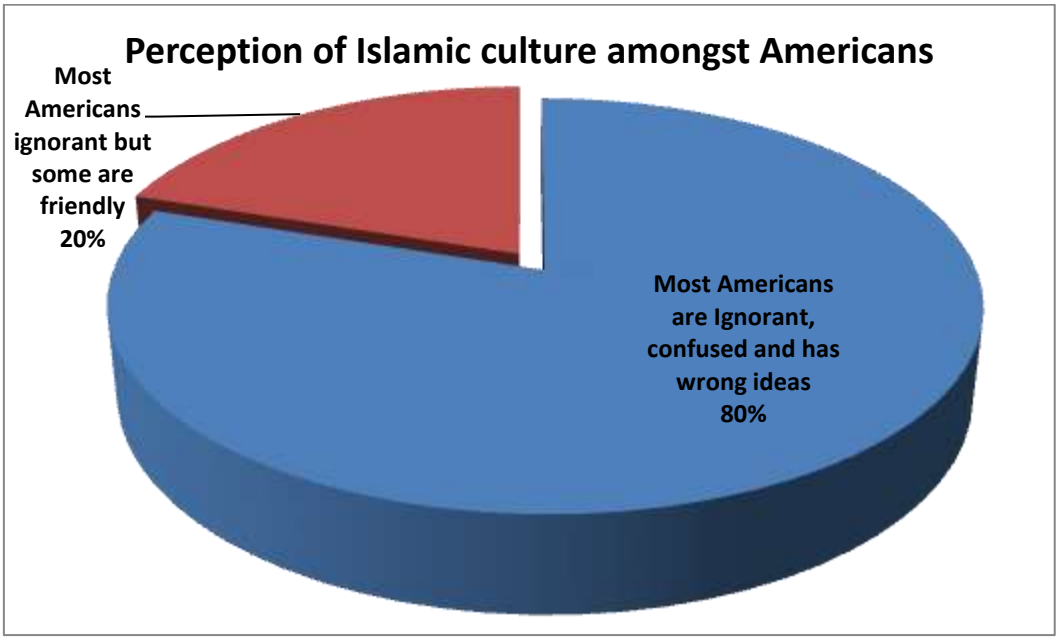

Fig. 3: Perception of the Islamic culture amongst Americans

Figure 4 illustrates the view points of the respondents with regards to the possibility of uniting the Islamic and American culture.

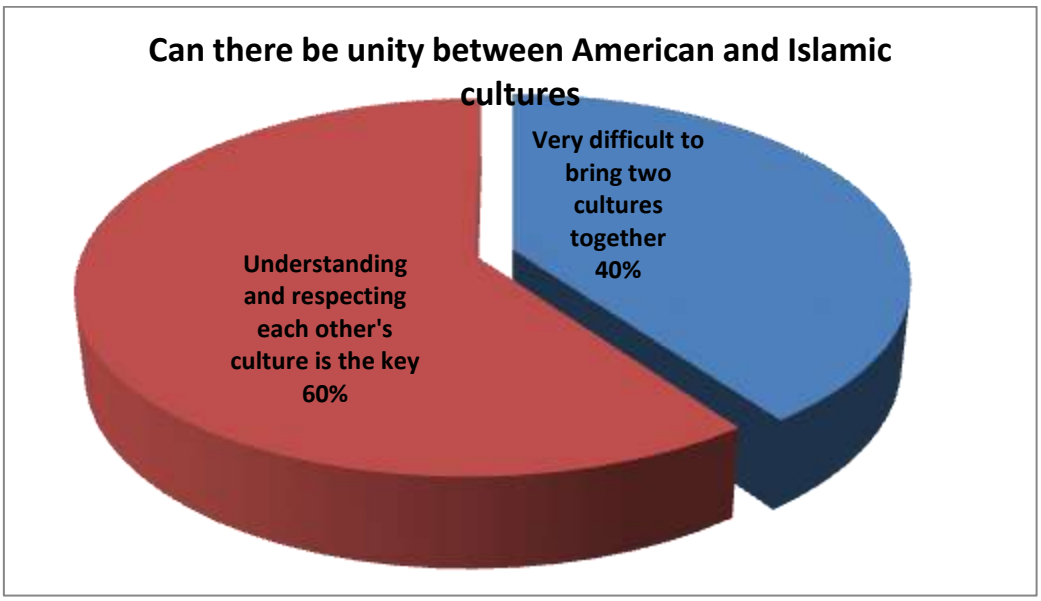

Fig 4: Unity between Islamic and American cultures.

Figure 5 illustrates the overwhelming responses of the respondents in a particular direction when they were asked if there is any similarity between the Islamic and American cultures.

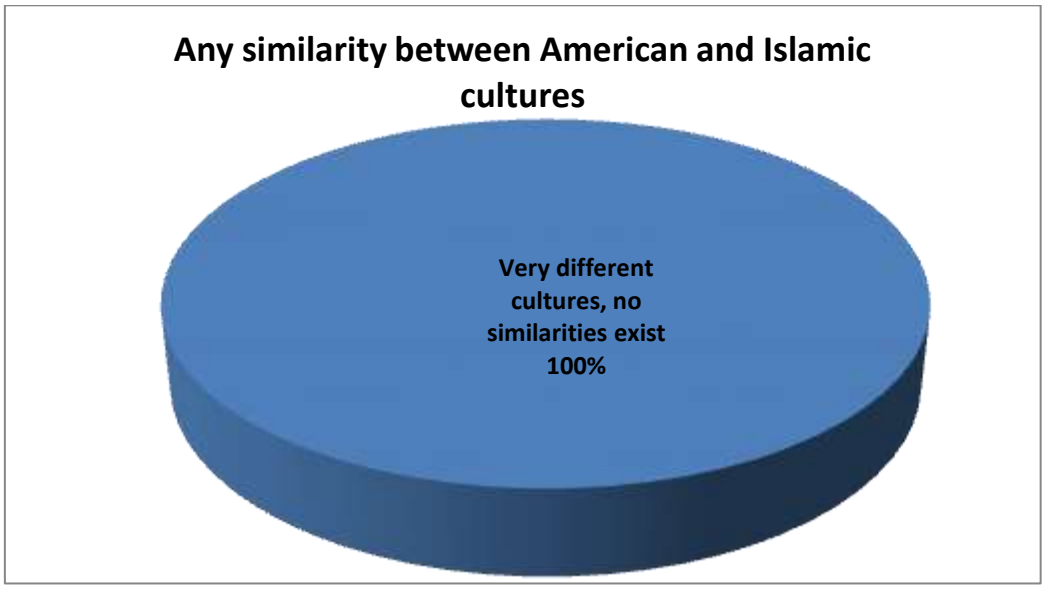

Fig. 5: Similarity between Islamic and American cultures.

Figure 6 nicely depicts the differences and diversities between the Islamic and American cultures.

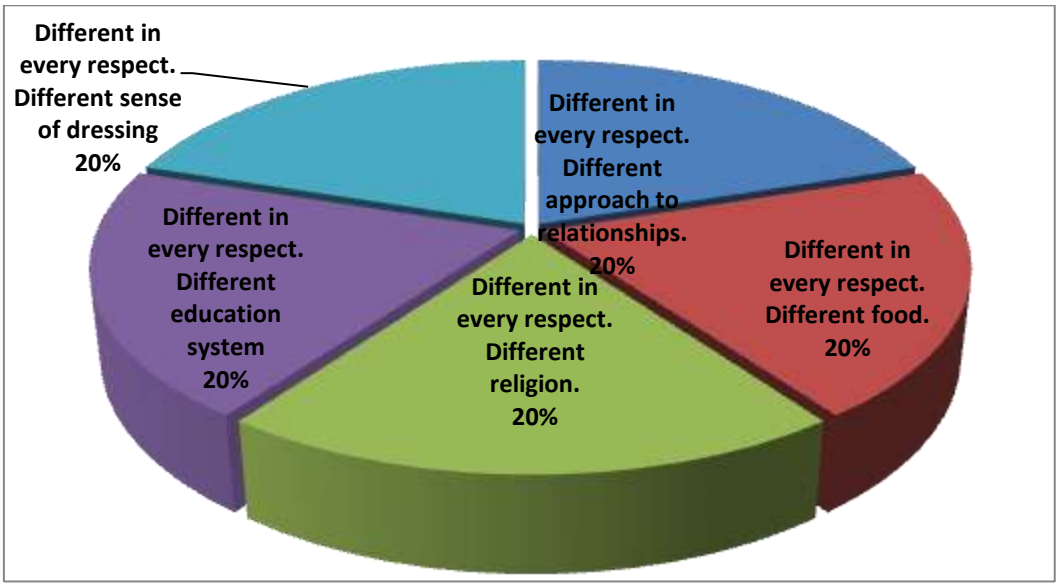

Fig. 6: Differences between Islamic and American cultures.

Figure 7 illustrates the influence of American culture on the respondents and their future plans with regards to settlement and employment.

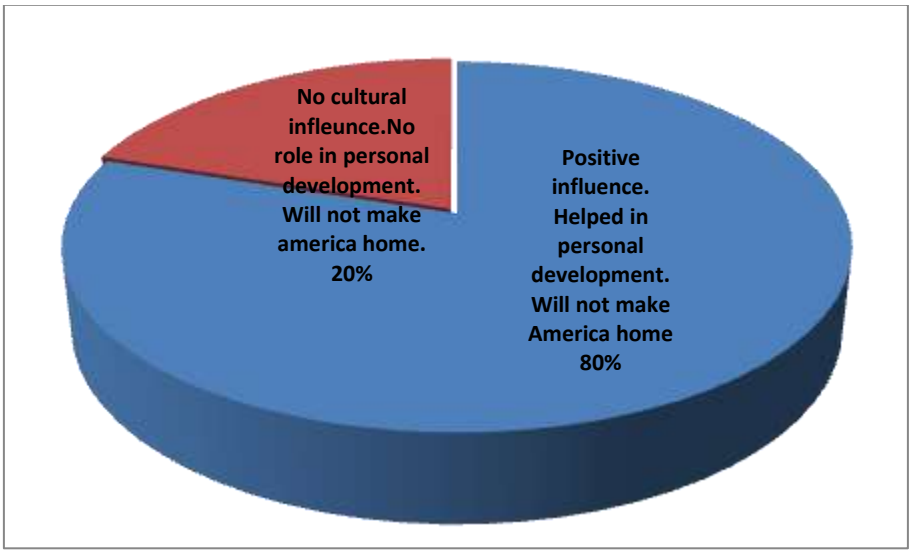

Fig. 7: Influence of the American culture and future plans

Figure 8 is highlights the opinion of the respondents on the characteristics of the American society.

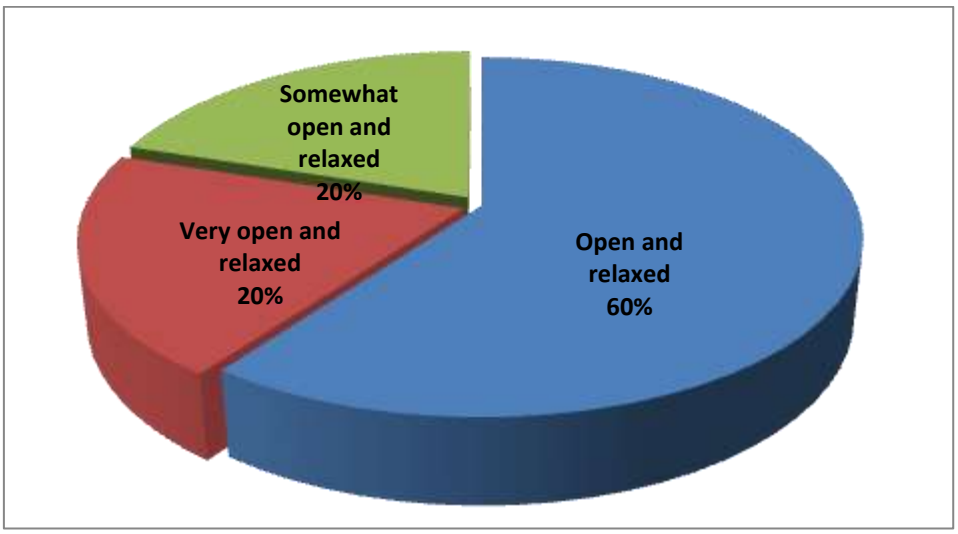

Fig. 8: Characteristics of the American society.

Figure 9 is a nice depiction of the initial impression of the respondents on United States and subsequent transformations in the same if any, because of the cultural influence.

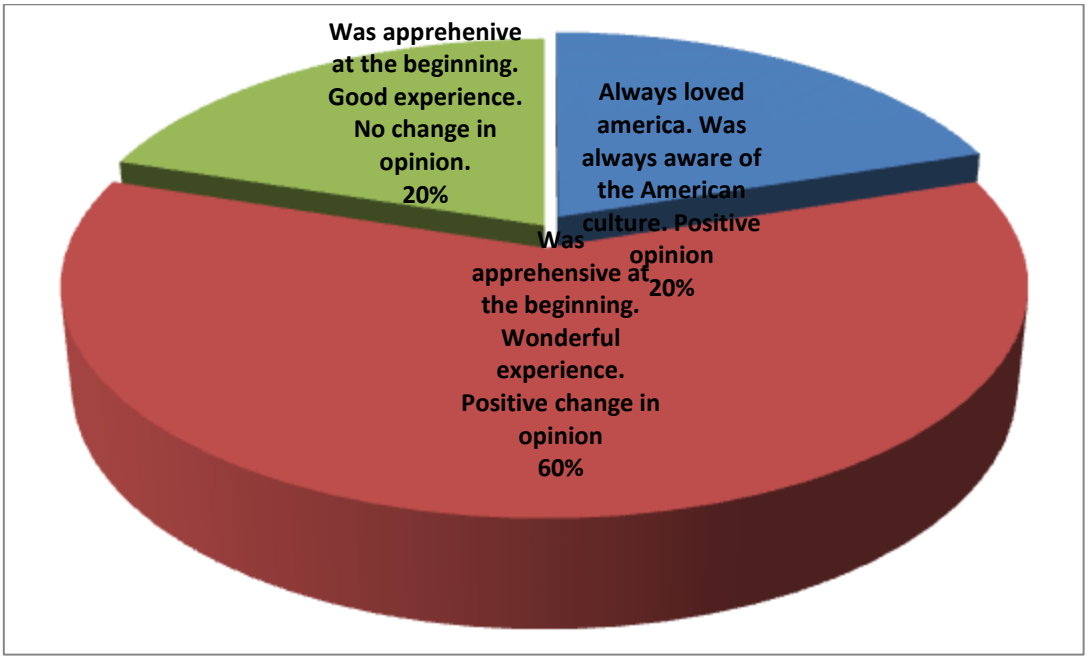

Fig. 9: The American influence on the change of opinion.

Figure 10 illustrates the responses of the interviewees when asked if different cultures in the United States judge each other.

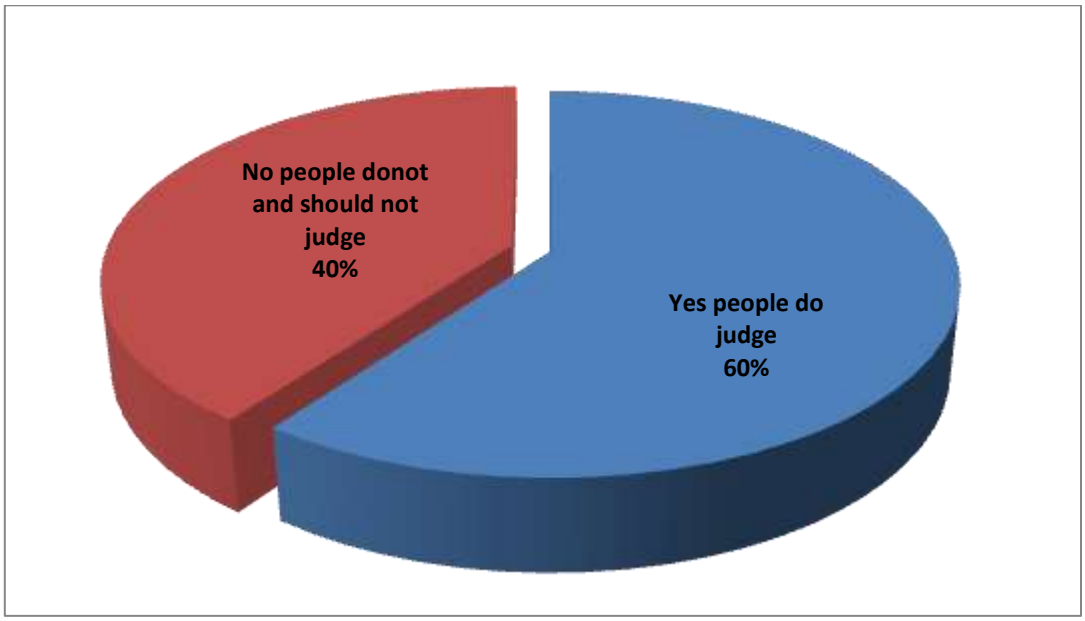

Fig 10: Judgemental interactions between cultures.

Figure 11 illustrates the overwhelming responses of the respondents when asked if they advocate exchange of ideas between different cultures and if people from different culture learn about each other.

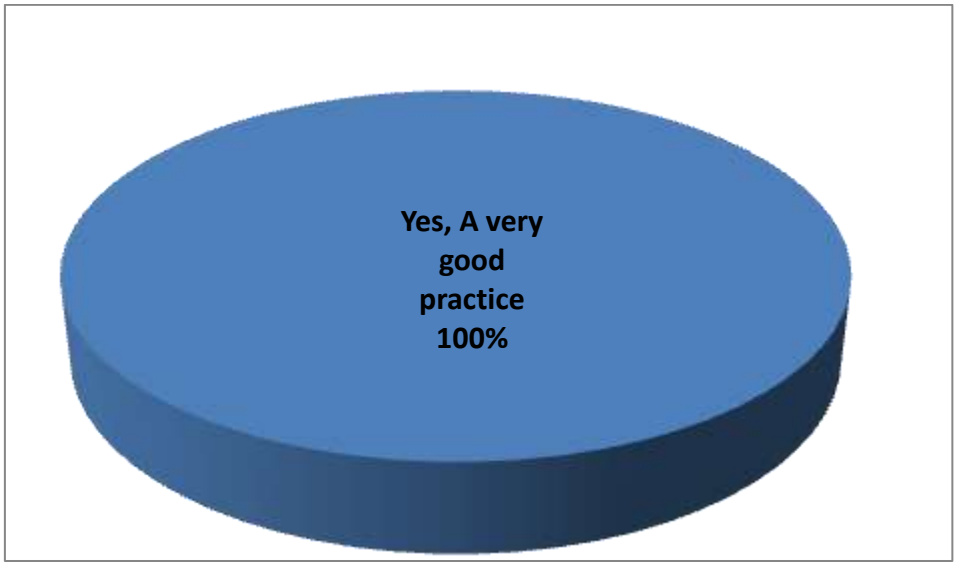

Fig 11: Importance of cultural exchange.

Discussion:

The objective of this research was to understand the perception of the American culture amongst Muslims and vice versa. From the responses of my respondents it can be clearly observed that the views and thoughts expressed by them are in good agreement with the findings from the secondary research. To have strong and significant opinion on the subject matter it was important that all the respondents belonged to a relatively young but matured age group when they are socially very active and sensitive to developments around them. All the respondents in this study were in their 20s or early 30s (Fig. 1) and expressed strong and thought provoking opinions on the subject matter.

Majority of the respondent had the same idea about the American culture. Almost everybody believed that the American culture is very different from the Islam culture and it is actually modern and progressive (Fig. 2). We have already come across this view point in our secondary research when several writers have commented in their articles that many Muslims actually appreciate the American achievements and developments and the American way of life. It's just the policies they are not happy about.

During the secondary research one particular issue that was established time and again by different writers was the lack of American understanding of the Islamic culture. Different researchers commented that there is hardly any cultural exchange between the American and Islamic cultures and majority of the Americans have very negative and wrong ideas about the Arabs in particular and the entire Muslim community in general. Majority of the respondents in this research

expressed exactly similar ideas when asked about the perception of Islamic culture amongst the Americans. They believed that American are completely ignorant about the real Islamic culture and have very wrong ideas. Even though 20 percent of the respondents said that people are friendly but 100 percent of the respondents' believed that majority of the Americans do not understand Islam (Fig. 3).

Reconciliation and unity between the American and the Islamic culture is a dream for many and this can make the world a better place to live. However it has been observed in the secondary research that this is a mammoth task and would require cooperation from all sections of the society and would largely depend on the will of the Governments. A clear understanding of each other's culture can be very effective in reducing lot of tensions and removing negative stereotypes. Majority of the respondents (60%) who took part in this research had similar views and believed that understanding each other's culture can actually bring lots of peace and harmony. However the other substantial 40% of the respondents believed that given the current situation and difference between the cultures it will be a very difficult task to undertake (Fig. 4).

All the respondents were united in their views when asked if there exists any similarity between the Islamic and American cultures. The respondents were also very diverse when they enumerated the differences between the Islamic and American societies. This is also in agreement with the findings of the secondary research when many writers described the completely different outlook of the American societies towards everything as compared to the Islamic societies (Fig. 5 & 6).

An important endeavour of the research was to highlight the influences of the American society on the life of the respondents. Majority (80%) believed that there has been a positive influence on their life and that they have developed personally and professionally in the USA (Fig. 7). This actually showed that understanding of the American culture by the Muslim respondents brought goodwill and they were able to appreciate the American ways in a much more constructive manner. This once again establishes the fact as expressed by many that cultural understanding between the two cultures is the key to bring peace and harmony.

All the respondents completely agreed on the fact that the American society is very open, frank and relaxed and it gives lots of independence to the people unlike the Islamic societies (Fig. 8). Majority of them (80%) expressed that they were afraid and apprehensive when they first arrived in the United States but as days went by it was a nice and wonderful experience for all of them (Fig. 9). This seems to be in agreement with the findings of other researchers which state that many Muslims love the American way of life.

However it is unfortunate that people from different cultures judge each other and this becomes even more harmful when the judgement is based on insufficient knowledge. As already established, majority of the Americans are ignorant about the Islamic cultures and their view points, mostly negative, are shaped by incorrect stereotypes propagated by the media. So if Muslims are judged based on such ignorant and baseless understanding of Islamic culture it will only breed more discontent and mistrust. Majority of the respondents believe that people do judge in America and this is once again in agreement with the observations made by many researchers we came across, during the secondary research (Fig. 10).

Is has become clear from the secondary research that the only way forward is to create more and more avenues for interaction between the American and Islamic societies. The only way by which negative stereotypes can be removed is through cultural understanding of each other's cultures. This requires the will of the people and the will of the Governments. The depiction of each other's popular culture in the American and Islamic media can generate lots of understanding and appreciation for each other's cultures. The respondents of this study expressed very similar views and they were unanimous on their agreement with the fact that understanding and experiencing different cultures is a very good and extremely progressive practice that can create peace, progress and harmony (Fig. 11).

CONCLUSION:

This research was an endeavour to understand the perception of the American culture and the American way of life amongst the Muslims and vice versa. The study tried to explore the real points of contention between the American and Islamic societies and identify the real issues. The study, that involved extensive secondary research and detailed interviews, yielded good results where the respondents expressed similar views as observed during literature reviews and background study. From the secondary research and interview results, it can be inferred that even though there are many differences between the American and Islamic cultures, Muslims and Americans end up appreciating each other's values when they manage to understand each other's cultures and get a chance to interact with each other. The real need of the hour in the present scenario is a substantial increase in the cultural interaction between the American society and the Islamic world.

REFERENCES

Abdallah, Abdel M. 2003. “CAUSES OF ANTI-AMERICANISM IN THE ARAB WORLD: A SOCIO-POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE.” MERIA, Volume 7, No. 4. Retrieved April 12, 2013 (http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2003/issue4/jv7n4a6.html.)

Adelman L, Verkuyten M. 2020."Prejudice and the Acceptance of Muslim Minority Practices: A Person-Centered Approach". Soc Psychol (Gott).;51(1):1-16. doi: 10.1027/1864-9335/a000380.

Al-Arian, L. 2004. “Perceptions of U.S. in the Arab World.” Wrmea.com. Retrieved April 13, 2013 (http://www.wrmea.com/component/content/article/264/8946-arab-american-activism.html)

Chiozza, Giacomo. 2004. “Love and Hate: Anti-Americanism in the Islamic World.” Retrieved April 14, 2013 (http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/politics/seminars/chiozza_f04.pdf.)

Dangubic M., Verkuyten M., & Stark T. (2019). Tolerating Muslim religious practices in Western Europe: A multiple-acts-multiple-actors approach. Manuscript in preparation.

Jikeli, Gunther. 2023. "How Do Muslims and Jews in Christian Countries See Each Other Today? A Survey Review" Religions 14, no. 3: 412. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030412

Moss A. J., Blodorn A., Van Camp A. R., & O’Brien L. T. (2017). Gender equality, value violations and prejudices towards Muslims. Group Processes and Intergroup Relations, , 1–14. 10.1177/1368430217716751.

Northam, Jackie. 2002. "Reaching across the divide. NPR." Npr.org. Retrieved September 1, 2013 (http://www.npr.org/news/specials/sixmonths/muslim.html)

Skerry, Peter. 2008. "American Culture and the Muslim World. Brookings." Brookings.edu. Retrieved April 14, 2013 (http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2010/0630_muslim_world_skerry.aspx.)

Salem, Sumra. 2008. "Anti-Americanism in the Middle East." Globalaffairs.es. Retrieved September 14, 2013 (http://www.globalaffairs.es/en/anti-americanism-in-the-middle-east/.)

Schneider, Cynthia P. and Nelson, Kristina. 2012. "Mightier than the Sword: Arts and Culture in the U.S.-Muslim World Relationship." Brookings.edu. Retrieved October 22, 2013 (http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2008/06_islamic_world_schneider.aspx.)

Van der Noll J., & Saroglou V. (2015). Anti-Islam or anti-religion? Understanding objection against Islamic education. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, , 219–238. 10.1080/1369183x.2014.931219

WGBH Educational Foundation. 2002. "What are some typical misperceptions and stereotypes Westerners hold about Islam and the Middle East, and vice versa?" Retrieved November 07, 2013 (http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/questions/types/index.html.)

WGBH Educational Foundation. 2002. "What have been the role and effects of US foreign policies and actions in the Middle East." Retrieved November 10, 2013 (http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/questions/uspolicy/index.html)

Williams, Rhys H. and Vashi, Gira. 2007. "Hijab and American Muslim Women: Creating the Space for Autonomous Selves." Sociology of Religion 2007, 68:2 269-287. Retrieved November 14, 2013 (http://socrel.oxfordjournals.org/content/68/3/269.full.pdf)

APPENDIX 1

Interview Questions

Q: How are you?

Q: what is your name?

Q: How old are you?

Q: Are you going to School?

Q: Do you have kids?

Q: How do you feel about the American culture?

Q: How do you think Americans view Islamic culture?

Q: How can we as people bring unity to the two cultures?

Q: How are the cultures the same?

Q: How are the cultures different?

Q: Where do you see yourself in five years and how does the American culture influence your decision?

Q: Do you feel the way society views things here is more relaxed?

Q: When you first came to America what do you think and how has your opinion changed?

Q: Do you people from different cultures judge each other?

Q: Do you feel that it is positive to practice and experience other cultures so you understand them better?

APPENDIX 2

Tables

Table 1: General characteristics of the respondents.

Respondent	Education	Religion	Kids
Respondent 1	Studying English	Muslim	No kids
Respondent 2	Sociology Major	Muslim	4 kids
Respondent 3	Human Ecology	Muslim	No kids
Respondent 4	Not attending school	Muslim	1 Kid
Respondent 5	Attending school	Muslim	2 kids

APPENDIX 3

Figures

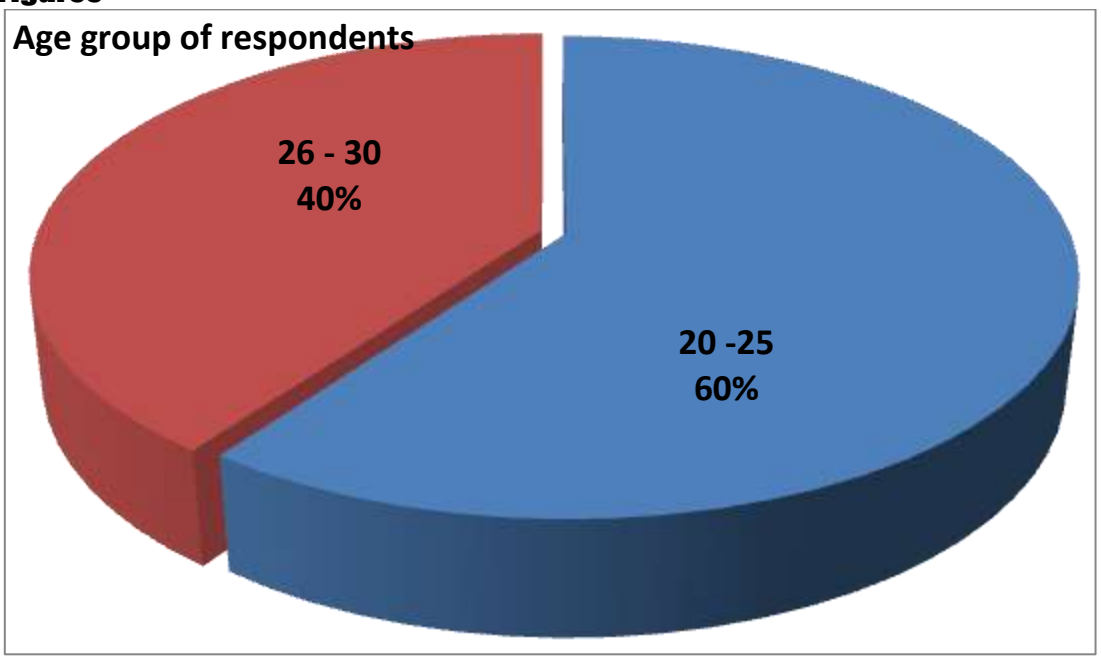

Fig 1: Age group of respondents.

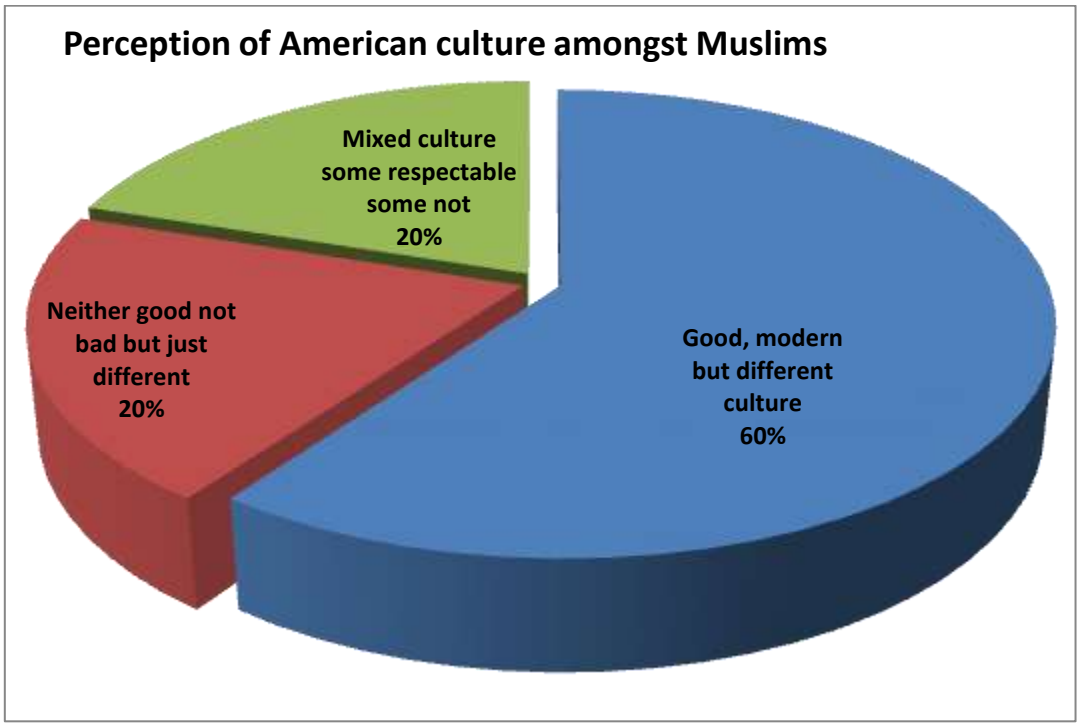

Fig. 2: Percentage of the American culture amongst Muslims

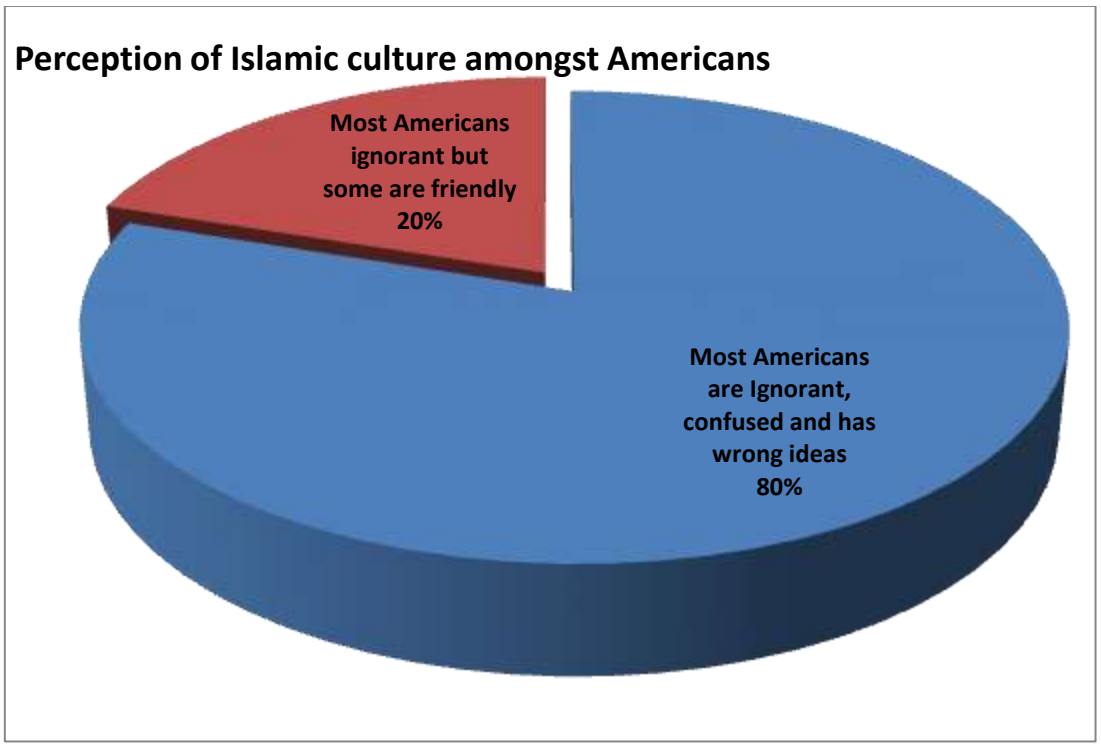

Fig. 3: Perception of the Islamic culture amongst Americans

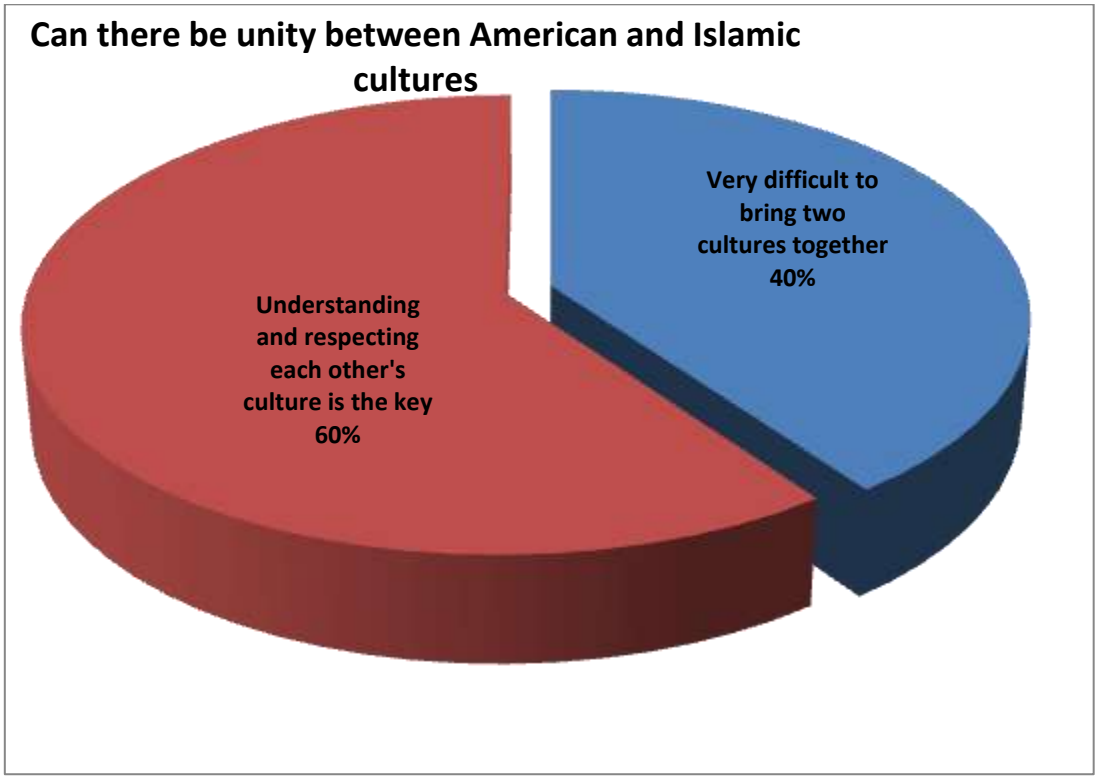

Fig 4: Unity between Islamic and American cultures.

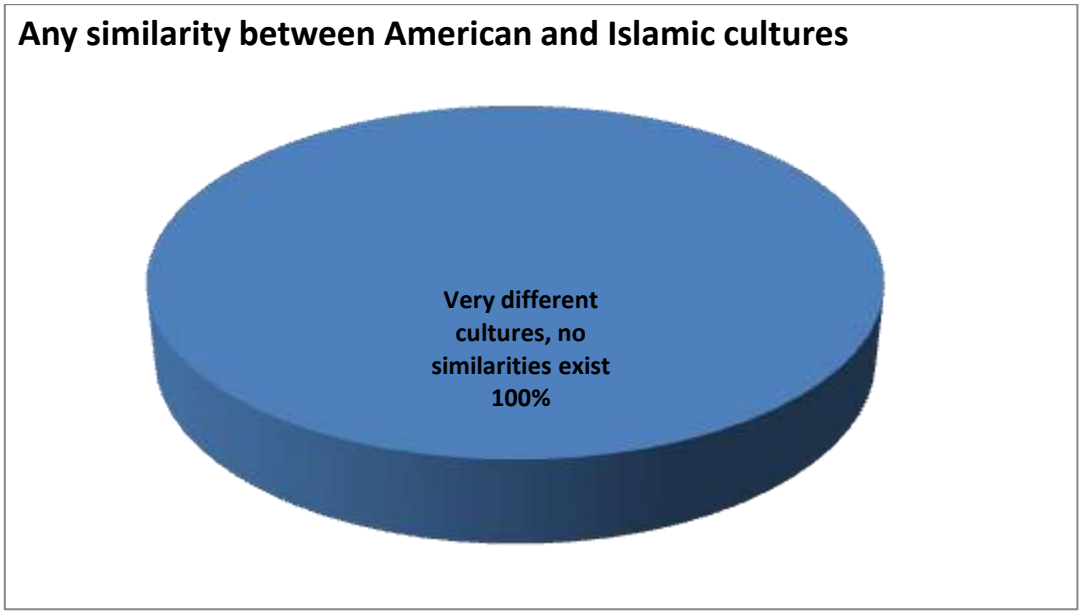

Fig. 5: Similarity between Islamic and American cultures.

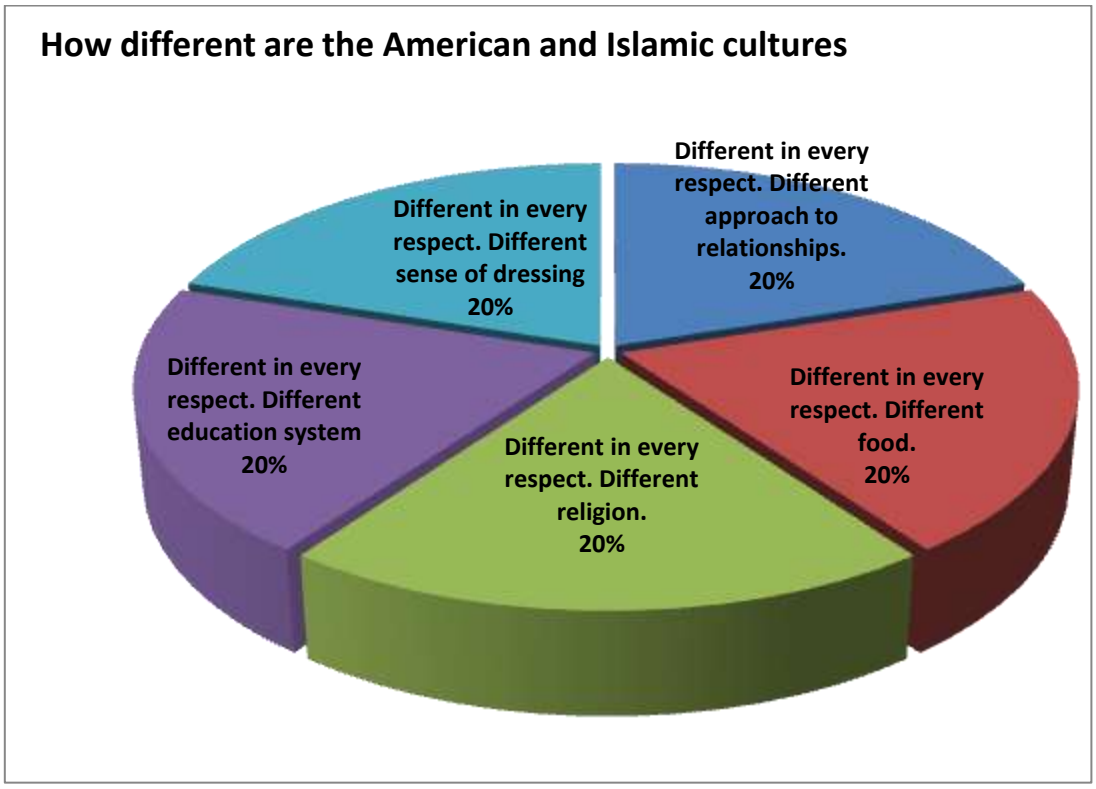

Fig. 6: Differences between Islamic and American cultures.

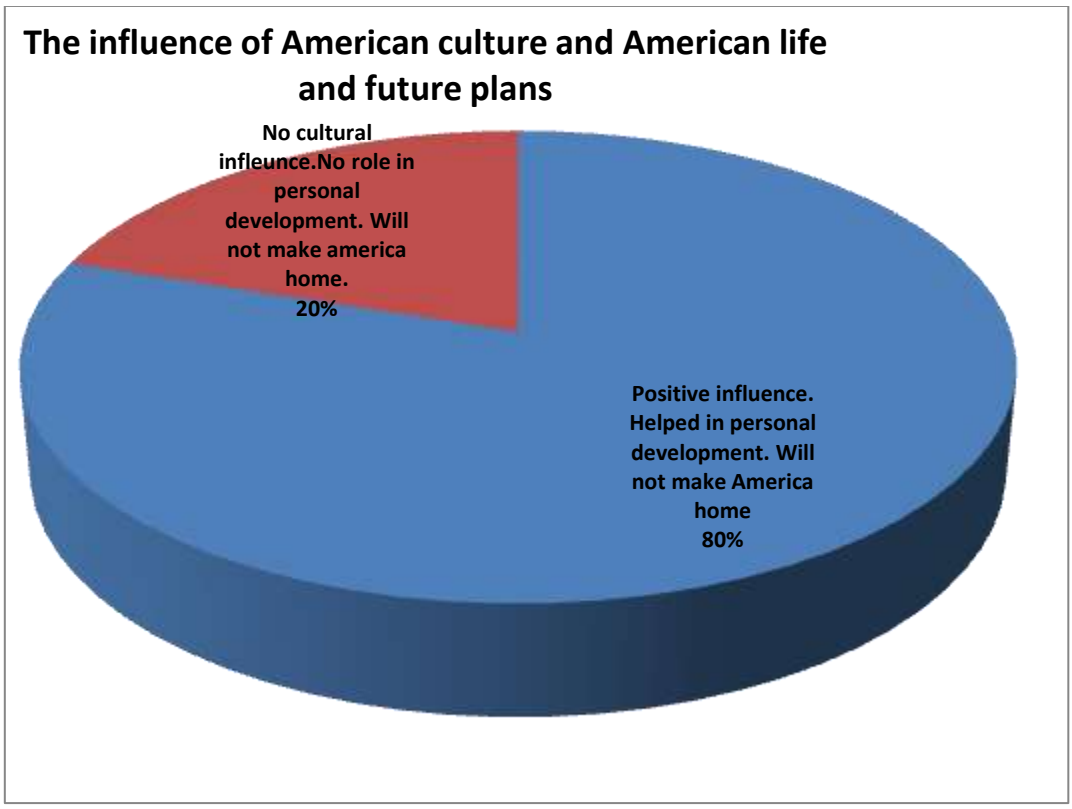

Fig. 7: Influence of the American culture and future plans

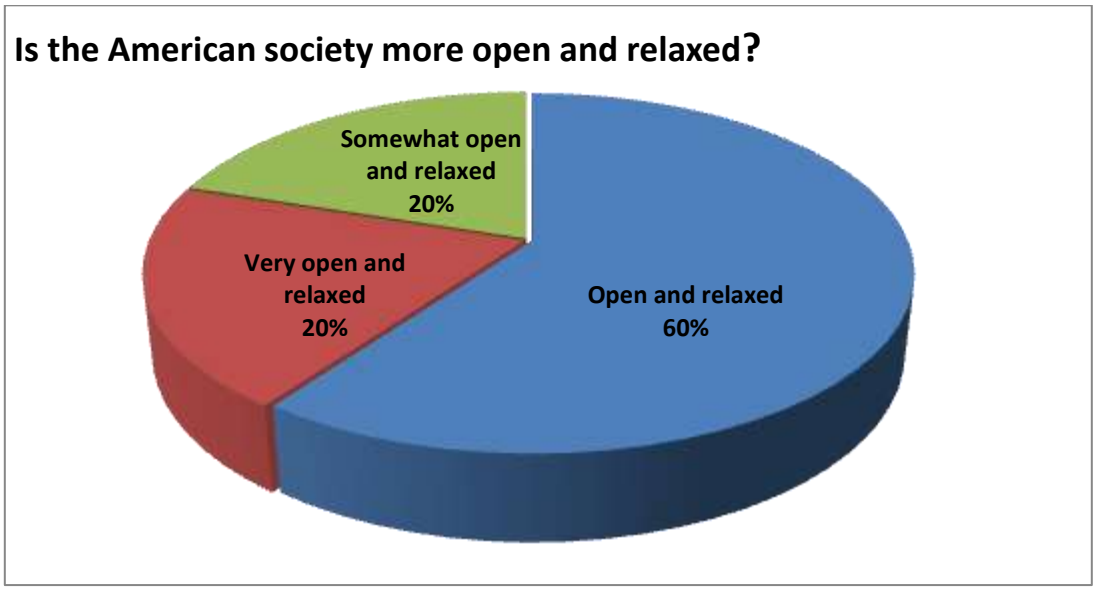

Fig. 8: Characteristics of the American society.

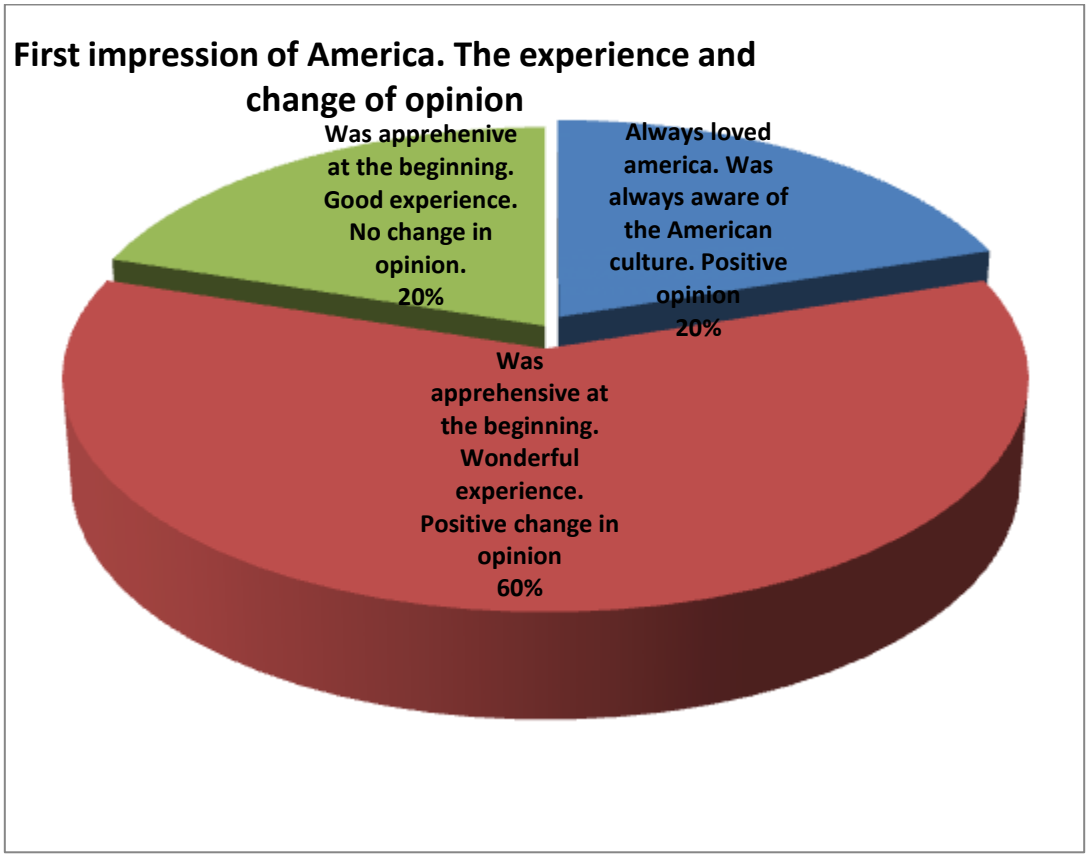

Fig. 9: The American influence on the change of opinion.

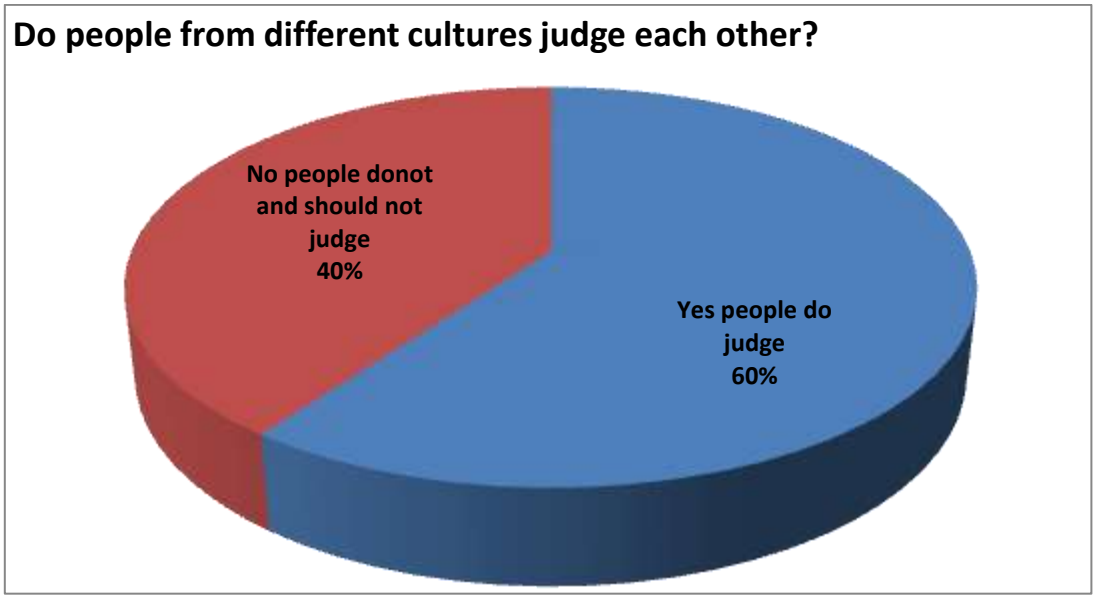

Fig 10: Judgemental interactions between cultures.

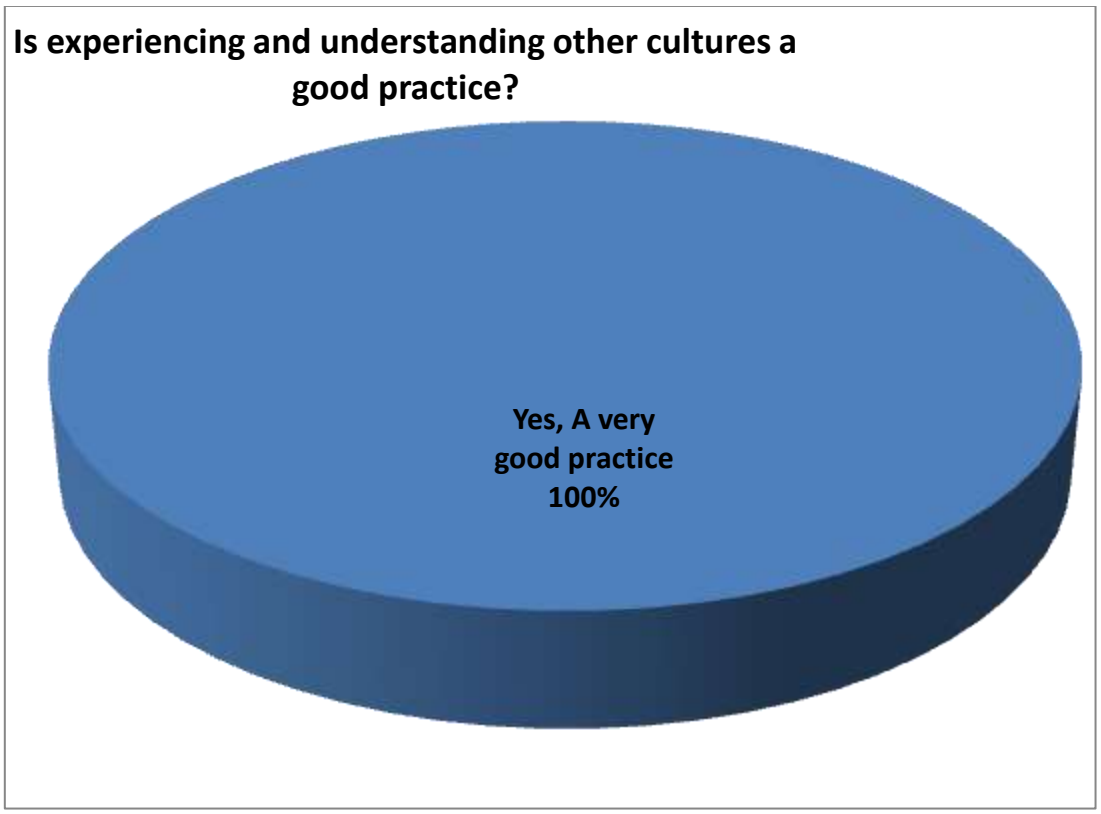

Fig 11: Importance of cultural exchange.