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DISCOURSE, IDENTITY, AND CULTURE IN DIVERSE ORGANIZATIONS: A STUDY OF
THE MUSLIM STUDENTS ASSOCIATION (UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA)

By

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BA, University of Montana, Missoula, MT, 2007

Thesis

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Discourse, Identity, and Culture in Diverse Organizations: A Study of The Muslim Students Association (University of Montana)

Chairperson: Dr. Greg Larson

This study examined the relationship between discourse, identity and culture within the diverse membership of the Muslim Students Association, University of Montana. Previous organizational identity research has discussed how identity is fluid, how identity regulation occurs between the organization and membership, and that identity is formed through discourses. Additionally, the literature also shows us how these identity influencing discourses are themselves influenced by culture. This study expands the literature through an exploration of the identity formation of organizational members who share Islam as a religion within a culturally diverse MSA. This study utilizes a poststructuralist lens to explore the discursive identity formation of MSA members in the University of Montana within a diverse setting of multiple cultures and nationalities represented.

The research questions for this study were explored using interview data and participant observation data which were collected over the course of six months. A total of 15 participants were involved in the interviews including organizational leaders and regular members while the participant observation involved members present during two organizational events.

Results indicated that MSA members viewed and communicated differently between groups outside of the organization and with each other. Results centering on how members viewed and communicated with others show that members conduct themselves under the assumption of a perceived negativity towards the membership. Members also balanced the different expectations between their own religion/cultures and American society. The results focused on how members communicated with each other presented how members emphasized the primacy of religious identity, downplayed diversity within the organization when it came to religious practices, and coped with undesirable differences by framing involvement as temporary and by utilizing national/cultural peer groups.

This study expands on the current literature in a few ways. First, the notion of identity as fluid in nature and multifaceted was examined within the context of the study. Current Western-postmodern interpretations of identity were problematized considering the singular nature of the identities represented within the MSA. Second, the study looked at how organizational identity is largely defined by how members balance the tensions that exist between the various influences they draw from. The results of balancing tensions shape the organizational identities of members and in this section. Finally, a potential shortcoming of the current culture-in-context approach to explaining cultural communication is examined as I consider the examples of members being non-negotiable with their practices. With these contributions the study extends and complicates the ways in which we consider the literature on identity, discourse, and culture

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE, ISLAM, REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Introduction and Rationale

Every Friday, a group of men gather in a basement in a house located a block from the University of Montana campus. They greet each other and proceed to take their places around the basement to await the approaching sermon. On some days only a few come and on certain occasions up to 60 people show up (Russel, 2008). While this location might seem an unusual choice for a place of worship it is a step up for the organization that before had to resort to using different venues as places of worship for the students they serve and accommodate. The organization, the Muslim Students Association (MSA) at the University of Montana, has over 80 students and was founded in 2002 by a group of students wanting to meet a perceived need for an organization where Muslim students can socialize and organize events centered on their interests and religious occasions. Individuals from all over the world make up the membership of the MSA and they bring with them a diverse set of cultures and worldviews. In this study, I examine the relationship between the membership that is simultaneously unified under a religious affiliation yet diverse in its makeup.

Identity-regulation occurs within organizations with diverse memberships (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002; Zanoni & Janssens 2004; Litvin, 1997; Dickens, 1994) in that the discourses articulating members' identities are continuously influenced by the mutually constitutive process that occurs between organizations and their members. Discourse here refers to "a connected set of statements, concepts, terms, and expressions which constitutes a way of talking or writing about a particular issue, thus framing the way people understand and act with respect to that

issue” (Watson, 1994, p.113; Barker, 1999, p.32). The mutually constitutive process refers to how members’ discourses and organizational discourse either reify or reinforce each other. Zaidman (2001) asserts that culture is one of the factors influencing these discourses articulating members’ identities. Identities in this sense, refers to the constructs of resources and rules that provide a base for the self (Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998). Members of different cultural groups position themselves differently within a context and this difference is due to the discourses influenced by different cultures.

To examine the relationship between cultural identities within diverse memberships, I conducted a study of the MSA of the University of Montana. Building upon Zaidman’s assertion that culture influences our discourses, I explore how culture affects the formation and management of members’ identities within the context of the organization. Underlying my approach to the study is my goal of locating and analyzing culturally-influenced discourses, how they affect members’ notion of identity and how they affect members’ participation within a diverse organization. By diversity I mean diversity in terms of national origin and/or ethnic-cultural backgrounds. The context of the study has some unique characteristics, such as the presence of diverse cultures and a strong religious influence, that are not be accounted for in the literature and therefore it might be necessary to discuss some of the issues and influences that relate to the MSA. By conducting this study, I present and analyze the organization’s unique context and specific nuances that might be pertinent to the study of culture and discourse. Furthermore, we gain a better understanding on how organizations acknowledge or address such diverse memberships.

Rationale

There a number of contributions the study presents to the organizational communication literature on culture and discourse as well our practical understanding on cultural groups and their relationship with diverse organizations. The first is the study's contribution to our understanding of how cultural groups promote certain cultural discourses within organizations. In a diverse organization such as the MSA, there are cultural differences that can affect their participation. In the case of cultural groups, individuals will bring a diverse set of cultures, histories, and traditions that might be expressed or interpreted in different ways (Reinsch, 1996; Zaidman, 2001). This research builds upon the conclusions of the literature and further our understanding of how cultural groups promote their cultural values and discourses within organizations. Secondly, this study provides a context to examine previously not accounted for in the literature. I am studying the MSA where the membership is culturally diverse yet unified through a common religion. Religious values and cultural values converge within this unique context and this would be an eye-opening experience considering the lack of coverage of similar organizations. A fresh context generates added perspectives on the ideas and concepts outlined in prior literature. Thirdly, this study's findings will assist the MSA with information they could incorporate into their communication with the diverse membership. For instance, they will be better informed in their efforts to communicate in ways that meaningfully acknowledge their members' cultures yet remain aligned with the religious values that influence the organization.

In this section, I have presented the importance of this study and outlined the rationale for conducting it. Having covered those areas, I will discuss the theoretical framework that frames this study on cultural and organizational discourses through an investigation of the literature surrounding this area of research. Specifically, I examine the literature on discourse-centered

approaches and intercultural/multicultural communication. The literature review will also include a section on Islam and a background on how the religion is important to the context of study. After the review of the literature, I will present the guiding research questions for this study. Next, I will elaborate on my proposed methodology and the participants of the study. Finally, I will present the results of the study and discuss the implications of the research.

Review of Relevant Literature

Discursive Approaches to Identity and Organizations

To provide a basis for the study, I will review the relevant literature on discursive approaches to identity and organizations by first discussing how identity is fluid (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Meisenbach, 2008; Zanoni & Janssens 2007) and multifaceted (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Secondly, I will examine how identity regulation occurs between the organization and membership (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002; Tracy and Tracy, 1998; Tracy, 2000; Zanoni and Janssens 2007) and third, this section will discuss how identity is formed through discourses influenced by culture (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Zaidman, 2001; Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998; Deetz, 1998; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002; Zanoni & Janssens, 2007; . Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Watson, 1994; Barker, 1999) Later, I will cover some of the literature on intercultural/multicultural communication as it pertains to the study and finally a discussion on Islam and its relevance to the context will be presented.

Identity as Fluid and Multifaceted

Identities are not static in that they may change or shift based upon the mutually constitutive process between discourses and organizations (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Meisenbach, 2008; Zanoni & Janssens 2007). In an article by Meisenbach (2008), the author argued that identities are not stable and can be shifted. In a study of a fund-raising organization the author

found that for organizational members to obtain empowered organizational identities they would have to shift the ways they frame their participation as well as how they positioned themselves within the organization. As the discourses articulating these identities would change, remaining with “static” unchanging identities would be problematic as this might present threats to those identities of the organization’s members. Individuals may also move or progress within (or between) organizations and with that movement into a new role, individuals will seek out discourses that are more favorable to that role. For example, a member who moves up to the leadership level will likely see a shift in their expressed discourses on the organization and issues surrounding organizational policy or procedure.

Beyond discussing how identity is conceptualized as being fluid, it is also relevant to consider how the tensions between the different facets of identity are addressed. In their discussion on how research characterizes identity, Tracy and Trethewey (2005), concluded that researchers found it difficult to not resort to a dichotomy-type view of identity (Hochschild, 1983; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987; Ashforth & Tomiuk, 2000). An example of this is seen in a study by Ashforth and Kreiner (1999). In roles that are perceived as less attractive, an organization’s members are encouraged to separate between organizational life and home life. In addition, members intentionally do not perceive their own “real” identity within the same context of their “organizational” identity. Attempting to move beyond the dichotomy, Tracy and Trethewey (2005) present an alternate perspective of identity where identities are instead crystallized. This view of a crystallized identity is based on the assumption that identity is not as simply flat and singular but as layered and politicized. Tensions may exist between the different facets of our identity and instead of arguing that the tensions should be aligned, a dialectic view instead suggests that we manage these tensions. In a way, instead of thinking in terms of the “real” and

“fake” self we conceptualize a crystallized self that presents a different facet of identity according to the context.

Identity Regulation

Expanding on the notion of fluid identities, the literature also discusses how identity regulation occurs between organizations and their members. According to Alvesson and Wilmott (2002), organizations at times engage in identity regulation that is strategic in that they purposefully encourage certain member identities that may favor organizational interests. An example of this can be seen in research on service organizations where it was found that members are encouraged to put on a “show” or role-prescribed demeanor (Tracy and Tracy, 1998; Tracy, 2000). In another example of identity regulation, Zanoni and Janssens (2007) found that organizations opt to either suppress certain cultural identities within organizations or emphasize them. By emphasizing cultural identities it could mean organizational efforts in acknowledging their unique culture or celebrating them. Suppressing cultural identities on the other hand could mean the organization deliberately deemphasizing the “otherness” or unique circumstances of being from a certain culture. Identity regulation may also be non-strategic (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002). There are times when the organization’s leadership expresses views to members without deliberate intentions of identity regulation but nevertheless has the effect of advocating a certain identity for the members.

Discursive Formation of Identities

Thus far, I have examined the relevant literature conceptualizing identity as fluid and multifaceted and how identity regulation occurs. In this section of the review, I will move on to the discussion on how identity is discursively constructed. Before we examine how identity is discursively formed it is necessary to define the concept of discourse. According to Watson’s

(1994) and Barker's (1999) definition, discourse refers to a set of statements, terms, and concepts that constitutes way of articulating a particular issue that frames the way people deal with an issue. In a sense, discourse can shape the way we understand and view a particular issue. In addition to this definition of discourse, certain scholars also advocate that we further clarify the usage of the term discourse. According to Fairhurst and Putnam (2004), we have to distinguish between *Discourse* and *discourse*. *Discourse* (with a capital "D") refers to the enduring or general systems of thought while *discourse* refers to the study of both talk and text within social practices (also see Alvesson & Karreman, 2000). Furthermore, discourse and Discourse can differ in their role and importance within discursive approaches depending on the way we discursively frame organizations. First, we can view organizations as formed objects. Discourse merely reflects the features and outcomes of the organization. Second, organizations can also be viewed as being in a perpetual state of becoming as discourses shape the process of organizing. Finally, we can also consider organizations as being grounded in action in that they are anchored in discursive forms and social practice. The literature conceptualizing organizations and identities clearly reflects this perspective (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Zaidman, 2001; Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998; Deetz, 1998; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002; Zanoni & Janssens, 2007) where identity and organizations are formed discursively.

Viewing identity as a discursive formation is helpful as it helps us better understand how identities are specifically formed and locate the influences that shape identity. An example of this can be seen in a study by Kuhn and Nelson (2002) where the authors found that how we locate ourselves within the organization and how we view our role and identity depends on discursive resources we draw upon. Discursive resources here refer to socially constructed frames that are drawn from certain cultures or subcultures that help members assign meaning to

both their own activities and the activities of others. In their study, the authors found that when lay members and organizational leadership are presented with a contentious event they draw upon different sources of discourse to help frame and interpret the event and their role during the event. For example, when two groups within the organization argue over the appropriateness of a certain policy that might favor one over the other, members from both groups will draw from different sources of discourse (that favors their respective groups) in order to protect their interests or interpretations of the policy. Discursive resources are important as they influence how we frame identities and organizations. Moving forward, it would be necessary to study the concept of culture as it is what discursive resources draw from. Now that I have discussed how identity is formed through discourse, I will review what the literature has to say on culture as it is the major influence on discourse.

Intercultural/multicultural Communication

Multicultural/intercultural communication conceptualizations are typically organized into either the global-culture approach or the culture-in-context approach (Cai & Donohue, 1997; Zaidman, 2001). The perspectives on culture and the implications will differ greatly depending on which approach we choose to adhere to. While the culture-in-context approach is more relevant to this study with its focus on specific contexts, a review of both approaches is necessary as they each contribute to our understanding of cultural influences on discourses albeit in different ways. In this section, I will discuss both of these approaches and their key features, how they both contribute to our understanding of discourses, and the reasons the culture-in-context approach is more relevant for the context of the study. However, before I begin with a discussion on the approaches it is necessary to define culture. For the purpose of this study, culture is defined as the complex frame of reference that consists of patterns of traditions,

beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and meanings that are shared to different degrees by members of an identity group who interact (Ting-Toomey & Takai, 2006). This definition is useful as it includes the pertinent factors to consider in any discussion of the term culture.

The first approach, the global-culture approach, conceptualizes individuals' communication as being globally influenced by culture. Predictions of communicative tendencies of the individuals within that culture can be made based on the generalized characterizations of that culture. This approach tends to encourage us to make comparisons of different cultural groups and their tendencies because cultures are viewed as having a set of prescribed characteristics. The literature in the global-culture approach points to a number of major dimensions (Cai & Donohue, 1997; Hofstede, 1983; Ting-Toomey & Takai, 2006, Deresky 2006) as ways to describe and define culturally-influenced tendencies. First, we have the individualistic-collectivistic dimension which refers to the extent to which cultures tend to emphasize individuals' interests or groups' interest (Cai & Donohue, 1997; Hofstede, 1983; Ting-Toomey & Takai, 2006, Deresky 2006). Cultures that are more individualistic focus on how individuals should pursue their own interests and make decisions that further individual goals while collectivistic cultures focus on how people fit within the larger group and the harmony between members of the culture. Second, we have the high-context/low-context dimension which refers to the extent to which cultures either utilize more explicit communication or context-sensitive communication. Cultures are also described within the terms of a power distance spectrum. This dimension refers to the importance cultures place on vertical power relations. For example, individuals from a certain culture might relate differently to their superiors differently from individuals from another culture. Also worth mentioning is the

uncertainty tolerance dimension where cultures are defined in terms of how well individuals within the culture can tolerate uncertainty.

Within the context of the study, the global-culture approach helps us understand some of the macro-level discourses shaping our interaction. The use of cultural dimensions is somewhat useful to generally describe cultures for people unfamiliar with them. By saying that the Japanese are collectivistic and that the Europeans are individualistic we are distinguishing the cultures in a meaningful way. The global-culture approach gives one a logical place to start within the area of identifying general differences between cultures. Although this approach gives us the advantage of broadly clarifying certain differences between cultures, the approach has certain drawbacks. Utilizing broad comparisons can be useful but we are also doing a disservice to the individuals within the cultures themselves as such dimensional characterizations of cultures make them appear to be culturally static and homogeneous. For example, the global-culture approach is not effective in explaining how certain individuals within a certain culture behave or act differently from the culturally-prescribed norm. On top of that, the global-culture approach does not effectively address some of the inherent complexities and dynamics of intercultural/multicultural communication. An example of this is how individuals are capable of adapting their communication strategies depending on who they are communicating with whether it is with members of an “in-group” or an “out-group” (Ting-Toomey & Takai, 2006).

The second approach to intercultural/multicultural communications, what we refer to as the culture-in-context approach, focuses on individual communications and specific contexts (Cai & Donohue, 1997; Zaidman, 2001). As was mentioned earlier, some might argue that individuals are capable of adapting their communication strategies depending on the contexts they are presented with. One example of this was examined in the study by Zaidman (2001) on

the ways in which Israeli and Indian businesspeople differ in terms of the discourses they draw upon. It was found that while they spoke a “common” language (English) there was a clear disconnect between the discourses (influenced by their respective cultures) that informed these two groups on their notions of “politeness”. The Indians were seen by the Israelis as being too concerned with including “polite” greeting terms in their electronic and written communication as the Israelis preferred a more “to-the-point” approach to communication. However, the Israelis eventually grew accustomed to the Indians’ more verbose greetings and occasionally adapted the Indian approach. In a sense, the individuals do not necessarily conform to their cultural code and might tweak or adapt their communication strategies when they are engaged in intercultural communication. Related to this point, the literature also discusses how individuals sometimes attempt to match the bargaining strategies of their intercultural counterparts (Pruitt, 1981; Rubin & Brown, 1971).

The culture-in-context approach is more useful to my study as it accounts for how individuals adapt their strategies depending on their context and who they are communicating with. I will be studying a context that includes multiple cultures in contact with each other and the approach will provide me a framework for describing individual differences and nuances within the complex cultural context of the MSA. The global-culture approach will not be able to get at the micro-level discourses that are specific to the membership of the MSA and this is where the culture-in-context approach clearly excels. To better understand how both the macro-level and micro-level cultural discourses might be influenced within the context of the study, the next section will cover some of the background information on Islam as a religion and how it relates to the context of the MSA.

Islam

The MSA was formed to meet the religious needs of Muslims on campus and in order to understand the context of the study it is necessary have a brief overview of Islam as well as a background on its adherents to begin to understand MSA's culture and goals. In this section, I will first examine what is Islam as a religion along with its key features and values. Next I will present a discussion about the adherents of Islam, or Muslims. To begin, what is Islam? Islam was founded in 610 A.D. in what is now Saudi Arabia by Mohammed and is currently the second biggest religion in the world by population behind Christianity. According to the MSA website, the English Translation for the Arabic word "Islam" is simply submission. Within the context of the religion, this means submission to the will of God (or Allah for Muslims). There are five religious pillars that Muslims adhere to and these are generally understood to be the key religious practices required by the religion (or to some the minimum requirements of religious practice). They are the pillars of faith, prayer, zakat (tithing), the fast, and the Hajj (or pilgrimage). The pillar of faith simply means that a Muslim is a believer of Allah and that Mohammed is His messenger. The second pillar, the pillar of prayer, refers to the prayer a Muslim has to conduct 5 times a day. The pillar of the zakat involves religious charity and a Muslim is encouraged to donate a certain sum (or zakat) that is calculated based on his or her own income to those in need. The fourth pillar of the fast refers to the fasting that a Muslim conducts after reaching the age of puberty during the month of Ramadhan every year. During the month, a Muslim does not eat and drink, or engage in any sexual relations from dawn until sundown. The last pillar, the pillar of the hajj, refers to the Hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca that a Muslim is obligated to undergo provided he or she is physically and financially able.

Now that I have briefly described the religion, I will explain who its followers are and some of their characteristics. A Muslim is simply a person who believes and worships Allah as

God and recognizes Mohammed as His messenger. According to the MSA website, it is estimated that there are over 1 billion Muslims around the world. About 18% of Muslims hail from Arab countries and the largest Muslim country in the world is Indonesia with about 215 million of its people (about 88% of its population) considered Muslim (Beech, 2007). The demographics suggest that the Muslim world population is very diverse and includes populations with many different histories, cultures, languages, values, and worldviews. Even so, the majority of Muslims are at least partially able to read and understand the Arabic that is used in their holy book, the Quran. Because religious activities and prayers are conducted in Arabic, to effectively practice the religion, a Muslim has to at least be able to recite some Arabic.

Islam and the MSA

While what I have covered before provides the basic overview of Islam and Muslims, to better understand the context of study it might also be useful to further discuss some of the unique characteristics of Islamic thought and culture that might be relevant to the study. In this section, I will first examine the ways in which Islam is regarded by Muslims and the “Islamic way of life”. Later, I will discuss the issue of diversity within Islam and what this means for Muslims. I will begin with a discussion on a key difference in how Islam is regarded. Islam is largely characterized as simply a religion to most non-Muslims. However, to better understand how Muslims think and conduct themselves one has to understand that to Muslims, Islam is not simply a religion but a way of life. According to Caldarola (1982), there is no separation of the secular and sacred and thus whatever endeavor or act a Muslim does has to be in line with Islamic teachings. Not only is Islam a reference for how Muslims should worship, it is also a reference point for how Muslims should conduct their day-to-day activities and approach life. In some of the Muslim majority countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, Islamic law (known as

Sharia law) is implemented and just like any other system of law it is comprehensive as it covers issues ranging from banking practices to education (Vriens, 2009). While not every Muslim is subject to Islamic law the basic assumption that Islam is a way of life applies to every Muslim regardless of the degree and manner they choose to engage Islam.

There are differences in the way Muslims practice and implement Islam teachings and this is partly due to the regional differences as well as differences in tradition between the Islamic communities. The diversity in the Muslim population is huge and this is also reflected in the way the religion is practiced throughout the world. One indicator of the degree in which Islam is practiced and regarded is through a region's implementation of Islamic Law. I pointed out earlier that some Muslim majority countries adopt Islamic law. However, the degree to which Islamic Law is applied or implemented also differs between countries. There are the conservative countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran that follow a strict interpretation of Islamic teachings within their legal system. They do not regard themselves as secular and enforcement of Islamic Law is the most stringent in these countries (Vriens, 2009; Steiner, 2002). After that, we have countries that implement Islamic Law to a limited degree. An example of a country that has limited implementation is Malaysia where there is a unique dual system that includes a form of the common law (a version based off what was left behind from British Colonial rule) and a lighter version of Islamic Law. Under this system the common law applies to all Malaysian citizens and Islamic Law applies only to Muslims (and Islamic Law supersedes common law where they disagree). On the other end we have countries such as Indonesia where there is no federal Islamic law. However, secular laws in these countries can sometime be shaped to reflect Islamic sensibilities such as the example of Indonesia where there is a law banning prostitution within the country.

Another indicator of the degree the religion is practiced relates to the historical and cultural heritage a certain Muslim population might have. Depending on the historical and cultural heritage of the region, certain influences might be present in the way Muslims practice their religion. In Saudi Arabia, Wahhabism is the predominant school of thought with regards to Muslim religious practice. This school of thought that has roots in the Arab heartland, the birthplace of Islam, advocates for a conservative and highly orthodox version of Islam. Muslims in this country are subjected to the full extent of Islamic law and are required to strictly follow the teachings of Islam (Vriens, 2009). On the other hand, we have places like Indonesia where due to a different cultural and historical heritage they might have a different interpretation on how to practice Islam (Beech, 2007). Indonesia has had a long history influenced by regional religions such as Hinddhuism, Buddhism, along with a variety of animist beliefs before the arrival of Islam in the area. As such, the majority of Muslims in Indonesia practice a less orthodox version of Islam that incorporates these prior influences to some degree. For example, while Muslim women in Indonesia are encouraged to wear headscarves (or hijjabs as they are known) to cover themselves, they are not required to by law and many do not wear them. In a sense, while Muslims roughly adhere to a set of commonly held values or beliefs they might differ in the way they practice, articulate, and incorporate Islam in their lives. With Islam as a guiding influence of the MSA, I will have the opportunity to observe these influences of the religion on the organization.

A Discursive Identity and Organization take on Multiculturally Diverse Memberships

In the previous section, I reviewed the relevant literature and outlined a theoretical framework that is focused on examining the discourses surrounding a multicultural diverse

membership and the organization they are situated in. The diverse organization that is the MSA presented an excellent opportunity to study how organizational culture might intersect with or inform members' discourses as well as how members' cultures are incorporated within the larger organizational culture. I observed how individuals within the diverse organization discursively construct their identity and how the organization might acknowledge these members. In addition to that, I also explored some of the ways in which members might articulate alternative discourses to those of the organization. Preparing for the study, I came up with two research questions to guide my efforts. My first research question involves examining some of the relevant discourses with regards to national cultural identities:

RQ1: What cultural discursive sources are present and utilized by the MSA members during the process of identity formation within the context of the organization?

The second question relates to the issue about MSA members having different cultures between them. The focus of the question is to identify what some of these cultural differences are and how do the members manage these differences. It is relevant to examine some of the ways the members manage these cultural differences as it would help clarify the nature of their participation within the organization and how they adapt to the organization's membership:

RQ2: How do the individuals within the MSA manage the differences between their own culture and the cultures of the other members?

CHAPTER TWO: METHODS

In the prior sections, a rationale for the study was presented, the related literature on discursive approaches to organization and identity was reviewed, and my research questions were discussed. In the next section, the methods for this proposed study will be outlined. I will discuss the participants of the study and explain the methods I utilized for data collection and data analysis.

Participants

To examine the concepts identity, discourse, and culture, I studied the membership of the MSA. Based at the University of Montana, the organization is culturally diverse with members from different nationalities and cultures. The focus of the study is on the discursive sources, or the frames drawn from cultures, which help members, assign meaning to activities (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002). There are differences in the cultures present and the study was an attempt to understand how some of these differences influence how members articulate their participation within the organization. By analyzing the different segments of the MSA (i.e. leadership, lay members, active members, female members, male members, etc) it might be easier to identify these cultural differences in terms that appropriately address their complexities and nuances. Most of the organization's members were only be available during the school semester and I faced certain challenges in obtaining these interviewees which include the limitations imposed by their schedules and the lack of availability of interviewees during the summer holiday period.

After initiating contact with the MSA, I proposed the two-method approach (participant observation and interviews). The MSA leadership formed a list of people to be interviewed factoring in the logistical issues (scheduling, assigning members) involved with the study. The initial list included fifteen members and later through personally meeting with members during

events I expanded that list to an additional five members. Upon gaining institutional approval for conducting this study, I then contacted the members on the list through their email accounts providing them with details of the study. Of the twenty people contacted only fifteen agreed to be interviewed. For the participant observation, I observed two events, a Friday service and an Eid gathering, where a substantial amount of members were present.

Methods

In order to analyze the discursive sources that are present within the organization and the ways the membership manages the differences of cultures, I utilize the methods of participant observation and semi-structured interviews to gather my data. By utilizing both these qualitative methods I rely on two data sets and by combining my data from both methods I triangulated and combined my data. Each of these methods have their advantages and in this section, I will discuss some of these advantages and why the methods are suited to the purposes of the study.

Participant Observation

The first method, participant observation involved me following and attending organizational events to observe the communication of individuals and organization. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), this method of observing as a participant within a phenomenon allows for thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) where the descriptions of the observations are not only very well-detailed but also exhibit a great amount of depth in the interpretation of the events under observation. Considering the context of my study this allows me to explore with great detail and depth some of the communication and expressed identities of the members. I relied on my organizational contact person to inform the participants of the events I observed while I also made myself available to answer any questions or concerns participants might have had.

The two events I observed were one of the Friday prayer sessions and the Eid gathering. The first event I attended was the Friday prayer session held on the first week of May, 2009. The session began around noon and I spent about an hour and a half observing and participating (I prayed with the members) during the whole period. About twenty five members were present during the duration of the observation all of whom were male. While the whole prayer itself did not begin until approximately 12.20 pm typical to such gatherings, informal conversations occurred between those present so not all of the observed period was filled with formal proceedings. The second observation was conducted during the gathering celebrating Eid, the end of the fasting month. Held on the 20th of September, the event attracted about forty members including both men and women. Proceedings began at 9.30 am but I was present from 8.30 am as there were members present preparing the venue, the MSA house, from earlier. I spent about two and a half hours observing and interacting with members during the event. A prayer session was held followed by a light meal immediately after. After each of the events I returned home and recorded my observations and my impressions within the day they were recorded.

Interviews

In addition to the participant observations, I also conducted fifteen semi-structured face-to-face interviews with different members of the organizations. The interviews were semi-structured in that there were a set of questions that I will start with but depending on the direction of the conversation I pursued issues or details I found relevant to my theoretical framework. These interviews are what Lindlof and Taylor (2002) refer to as respondent interviews, where the interviews are focused on the interviewees rather than their environment (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). Interviewees are able to speak for themselves and address the questions in ways that best expresses their opinions and concerns. These semi-structured interviews also help me examine

some of the discursive resources (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002) that might be present. I made a conscious effort to obtain an insider's perspective that speaks better to the specific nuances and dynamics of the membership. Beyond that, these interviews were good way for me to gain a deeper understanding of my participant observation data and perhaps clarification on certain issues I might find unclear or inadequately explained.

For the interviews, I used a combination of an intensity sampling strategy and a purposeful sampling strategy (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This means that I selected participants purposefully so that ideally they reflected the diversity of the organization. Of the fifteen, only two of them were female. I had eight participants from Tajikistan, four from Saudi Arabia, two from Morocco, and one from India. Alongside selecting interviewees that reflected the diversity of the organization, I also attempted to interview a sample that is proportionately spread along the hierarchy of the organization (i.e. interviewing members from different levels from leadership to lay members). To this end, I was successful that of the fifteen interviewees six of them held official positions within the leadership. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. To ensure confidentiality I assigned aliases to each interview and will only present any analysis with the use of these aliases. I also conducted the interviews in one of the rooms in the MSA house as it is the most convenient place available that is also a private area that members will feel comfortable in. The interviews were conducted after institutional approval from late April, 2009 through September, 2009. The long duration of the interview period was in part due to the unavailability of participants from May through August due to the summer holidays for members who are all students.

To initiate interviews, I introduced myself and the goals of my study. I would state my interest in the area of identity and membership within organizations and I would clarify that this

meant I wanted to discuss the nature of my participants' involvement with the MSA, how and why they were part of the organization. I also explain my interest in understanding culturally diverse settings such as the MSA as an organization. Then, I would review the informed consent form, ask my participants if they had questions or concerns about the interview as they understood it at that moment, and if they were clear on the audio-recording that was about to take place. All participants signed the informed consent form and agreed to be audio-taped. Interviews ranged in length from 24 minutes to 60 minutes. The average interview was approximately 40 minutes in length. Pseudonyms were assigned to the interviewees.

Coding and Data Analysis

Upon the completion of data collection, I compiled my field notes and transcriptions and applied open-coding for the purposes of data analysis. Strauss & Corbin (1990) defined open coding as the method of labeling and categorizing of phenomena as indicated by the collected data. Each line of the field notes and transcriptions were coded into descriptive categories after which axial coding was applied to the data to further refine the conceptual categories. Axial coding refers to the process of relating codes to each other through a combination of inductive and deductive thinking (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I then organized the descriptive categories into clusters of themes which could then be linked together depending on their thematic relevance with regards to my theoretical framework. These thematic linkages underwent analysis where I focused on establishing the relationships between the categories. Based on this analysis of the thematic linkages I then formed my conclusions and generated interpretations from the data I collected.

CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS

Introduction

In this chapter, I present findings from both my interviews and participant observation data. I have organized the results into two major categories. First, I will show how the members view and communicate with outsiders. These "outsiders" include non-members, non-Muslims, and members of the larger Missoula community. Second, I will discuss how members view and communicate with other members of the organization. These include members with official positions within the organization as well as lay members who might or might not participate in the organization's activities. In presenting these results, I intend to address the research questions posed earlier in the essay but not in any particular order. The results were organized into the two categories (insiders and outsiders) that both include parts of the answers to the research questions. By the end of the analysis we should have clearer picture of how the study addresses the following questions:

RQ1: What cultural discursive resources are present and utilized by the MSA members during the process of identity formation within the context of the organization?

RQ2: How do the individuals within the MSA manage the differences between their own culture and the cultures of the other members?

Communicating Externally

In this study, basically, outsiders include anybody who is not a part of the organization and to some extent, non-Muslims (when organizational members say "we" at times they may mean members or Muslims). In this section, I will look at how members view and communicate with outsiders. First, I will discuss how members deal with the perceived negativity towards

members and their religion. Second, I will present how members balance the tension between their religious/cultural expectations and the local (i.e. American) expectations within the context of the organization and location in Missoula. Finally, I will examine how members attempted to place my sentiments and opinion on their organization and Islam while simultaneously adjusting their messages to improve my opinion of them.

Perceived Negativity

Almost all of the members interviewed expressed discourse that indicated that they joined the MSA in part as a response to what they feel are outsiders tendencies to negatively portray Islam and Muslims. Regardless of national/cultural origin, these members expressed a concern for this issue and membership within the MSA is seen as a productive and positive response to what they feel is the negativity in the media they see "here". There is a perceived tension between Muslim society and Western (particular to America) society that members feel is either already affecting relations negatively or is potentially going to impact relations between these societies in a negative manner. When asked about the challenges that the organization and its members face Amir, a student from Tajikistan, expresses his concern during the interview:

"The other challenge of course is cultural differences between us and Americans here and uh (long pause).....Most of the time the challenges are, we face are that misunderstanding about the religion and this is the reason that we organize, that we hold a meeting table in the UC. So they come and see Islam from a different perspective which is more correct than they see from the media".

In this quote, Amir indicates that this concern is actually a reason for one of the activities that the organization conducts. He begins by describing the problem as "cultural differences" between Americans and the organization's members and moves on further by mentioning the example of

how the media portrays them incorrectly. In this example, we see how there is an assumption of tension between the Muslims of the MSA and the society they reside in. Some of the other interviewees even suggested that this is the primary reason for organizing in the first place. There is this understanding that the messages coming from outside the organization are almost always negative or at least unhelpful regarding the image of Islam and Muslims in general. Certain interviewees like Amir even mentioned specific activities and actions for dealing with these negative perceptions.

In another example, we have Harun from Saudi Arabia who responds to the same question on what he sees as the main organizational challenge faced by the MSA:

"Yeah, the big challenge for us, how to bring the all (unite), Muslims in one group and the other thing, how to clarify the misunderstanding about Islam".

Harun, an officer of the MSA at the time of the interview, says here that the challenges faced by the organization include uniting the Muslims on campus into a group and clarifying any misunderstanding that the community might have about Islam. Harun as an officer highlights the possible misunderstanding as a big challenge and for an officer to emphasize this indicates how important this concern on negative perceptions to the MSA membership.

Alia from Tajikistan echoes the sentiment of the previous examples when she explains her expectations of the MSA in its role in increasing awareness in the community:

"Well I guess, um, I would expect, that I had hoped to more , increase the awareness about Islam and the Muslim students on campus and uh MSA can play a really big role in it...I think it's helped a lot increasing awareness on campus but I know that it can do more because I mean we can't deny that some people still have this negative impression about like Islam and Muslims, you know thinking about them you know I don't know much but

it can play a really big role in this changing people's perceptions about Islam. That would be like my biggest expectation from this organization".

The same assumption of there being a negative perception is seen here again. Members like Alia see the MSA as a force for engaging this negativity. She hopes that the organization and its members play their roles in changing this negative perception. This motivation for engaging this negative perception manifests into certain strategies. In the next section, I will examine the main strategy adopted by members which is the public relations strategy.

Public Relations Strategy

The public relations strategy is used by members to deal with the perceived negativity originating from outside the organization. Members would attempt to present the organization and religion in a positive light and frame the negativity that comes from outsiders as a misunderstanding perpetrated by the media. In a way, the members are consistently checking and adjusting the messages surrounding the description of the organization. Mahfuz from Tajikistan provides this response when asked about the benefits of his role within the MSA:

"Benefits I guess uh, show people more faces of Islam because most of them have stereotypes from the media and this I guess is the main benefit. I enjoy people getting good information".

The examples from the previous section show how members' discourse framed the issue as a problem and a challenge but this example emphasizes the positive nature of a potential avenue of member involvement. The dissemination of "good information" was something that could be done with a degree of enjoyment by this member. In a sense, he expressed that the perceived negativity which includes the pervasiveness of negative stereotypes and potential "misunderstanding" on account of there being cultural differences, is a problem that members

collectively face. However, via membership with the MSA members are able to collectively and individually engage this problem in a way that is seen as being sanctioned organizationally as well as cross-culturally. Members feel that the organization is primarily there to conduct public relations and at the same time members themselves are expected to adopt this strategy when speaking about the organization and to some extent, the religion. There is a constant tension expressed from the members' discourses on the danger of misrepresentation and public misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the MSA's and Islam's characterizations.

I think that the description of the organization's communication strategy as a public relations strategy is fitting. The leadership and the members of the organization understand that the messages (from the media and elsewhere) negatively influence opinion about Muslims and the organization. Parallel to that, they also understand that the actions and messages from members themselves may color that same opinion about them. There are various groups (or publics) that surround the organization such as the university, the city, and student body. Regulating the discourses characterizing the organization and Islam would assist the MSA with presenting a more acceptable image at least towards these groups. While serving the religious needs of the membership is an important organizational objective, the maintenance of the organization's image is seen as more important and this is largely achieved via the public relations strategy.

Balancing Expectations

From the data, I found that members expressed a cognizance of how they are perceived within American society and within the campus community. Some of them go a step further and express an understanding of the different sets of expectations originating from their religious and cultural background as well as the local American context. Not all of these expectations are

compatible and there are various points of potential conflict and friction. Rahim from India describes his unease at the way Americans are expected to keep their thoughts to themselves regarding religious matters:

"We used to discuss things and say " You are doing this wrong". But somehow I am not finding student groups talking to people here and say, "Oh you are doing this wrong". So that is one challenge that I want to do but I am not really able to do that.Over here no one is suppose to tell you, "Why are you doing this?" But maybe people have this mentality at the back. In the U.S. no one will tell you don't do this or don't do that.....but being in our country we are a very social country, we are very honest. We used to tell people, "you are not suppose to do this". But people, I am not saying definitely that, but being in the U.S. people don't uh... the don't tell you do's and don'ts. At least in the religious activity".

Rahim comes from a culture and setting where people are expected to directly advise against differences in religious practice. This is also the same in the cultures of many other members of the MSA. Earlier he described his culture as being a "social" culture where disagreements even in the religious realm are voiced out. In a sense, this is not a negative way of viewing "intervening" with another member. Instead of being seen as heavy-handed or imposing as it might seem in American culture intervening in matters where religious deviances occur is seen as proper and desirable compared to allowing the deviance to continue. Considering the context of the quote, we can see how the American expectation of noninterference in religious matters causes unease for Rahim.

In this next example, we see the same sort of dilemma faced by certain members when balancing expectations but from a different perspective. Azrina from Tajikistan describes herself

as more secular in her religious upbringing and in most ways her approach to cross-gender interactions falls more closely to what Americans are used to. She is more accustomed to more open communication between men and women and is not accustomed to the more limited interaction between genders seen in more conservative Muslim groups. She relates an incident she was a part of earlier in the semester:

"I remember once in the UC room and I was just talking to other Tajik men and I was fine. I was just standing there and another person from Saudi Arabia came in, he saw me, he closed the door and turned and left (laugh). And I was laughing so hard. So I was like "Ok I gotta go" I did not want to interfere in their bubble you know... because I know the kinds of relations that they have. They are sensitive about it. So I don't you know just go in and start talking to them or shaking hands for example like in their culture. So I try to be sensitive about it".

Azrina avoided an awkward situation by leaving the scene. Here we see a person who is more secular or more American in their sensibilities face a situation where she had to deal with someone from a culture and religious background with more conservative expectations in gender communication. She immediately identified and understood the differences in gender communication between the different cultures involved.

Members within the organization face this disconnect between expectations to varying degrees. Like Rahim and Azrina, other members have to balance these expectations in order to live and be a part of the campus community. Even if they favor the expectations of their own culture or religion, they would still be cognizant of what the alternative (be it American or other) expectation of the situation might be. Members show a concern for how they might be perceived and part of this is understanding what the expectations are and how they might be different.

Interviewer Bias

Certain interviewees were also trying to place my sentiments regarding my religious identity and how I regarded Islam and the MSA by observing the way I framed questions and asking me to rephrase certain questions in less formal ways. While the interviewees knew I was Muslim, in some ways I appeared more Western with my mannerisms and language. With the perceived negativity being a main theme throughout all the interviews, certain members were in a "public relations" mode when answering questions I posed. Interviewees needed to identify my preferences, tendencies, and perhaps sense of belonging before expressing their opinions. They felt a need to tailor their responses to fit what they perceived as what I would find positive while satisfying the questions I presented to them. By observing the words I used and asking me to explain them they could in some way gauge my position on them and their organization. Rephrasing questions also became a way to observe how I might view the interviewees. In a way, I the interviewer became the interviewee in these mini-episodes within the interviews.

There were a few question points where some of the interviewees seem to try to gauge my leanings and perspectives. The main one is the question on organizational challenges. In this example, Faris from Tajikistan waits for me to ask the question in a different way before he proceeds:

Interviewer: Well, you've talked about some of the benefits. But what are some of the challenges that you face as a member? Any challenges that you can see or any improvements that you might comment on?

Faris: (Pause)Hmm..

Interviewer: Well, if you look at MSA do you see anything that you might suggest they can improve upon? Do you see anything in that sense?

Faris: (pause) Everything like could be improved little by little. But it should take something, somebody who is motivated to improve something to make it better.

Faris becomes more cautious at the mention of the term "challenges" as it may seem like I am trying to elicit negative feedback about the organization. Even after rephrasing the question Faris remains vague as to elicit more comments and explanation from me before continuing the interview. In another example, Idris from Morocco appears cautious at first when posed the same question:

I: Okay, you mentioned about you know, there being a lack of a code and it seems that the objectives are not clear-cut and expressed. What are some of the other issues that you face with regard to your participation with the organization?

R: (Pause) Some what?

I: Some challenges. What are some of the challenges? Like you mentioned the code being vague. What are some of the other challenges do you think there are, that you faced within the organization.

R: (Pause) Vis-à-vis the association or.....

I: Your participation within the organization. I mean, is it...

R: Give me a second.

I: Yeah.

R: (Pause).

After the pregnant pause Idris went on to list in detail some of his grievances and disagreements with the MSA's direction and members. During the pauses Idris seemed to contemplate the way I asked the question and the tone of voice I had when I tried to clarify. As I did not seem to frame the potential of challenges as being negative and I did not appear confrontational prior to this

exchange, Idris decided that I was going to be impartial to what he was about to disclose. A few interviewees mentioned instances where information regarding the religion or people were taken out of context. One even mentioned being part of a research project where the researcher already had a negative point to make about his culture and religion based on the researcher's framing of questions and issues.

Not only through members' discourse is this tension regarding perceived negativity expressed but also through the way interviewees try to regulate discourse as to appear favorably. There is a potential for this public relations mode to influence the exchanges I had with the interviewees. Responses to questions might have been framed more positively and appeared more guarded than it would be if the interview questions were asked by other members or by friends of the interviewees. This was an unexpected finding and it contributed to my overall impression of the members and how they dealt with the perceived negativity. Now that I have presented the findings related to members' communication with outsiders, I will now look at the internal side of the MSA membership.

Communicating Internally

In this section, I will look at how members view and communicate with other members within the organization. First, I will discuss how members emphasize the primacy of their religious identity over their national/cultural identity. Second, I will present how members discursively downplay the diversity within their organization and only acknowledge it when mentioned outside of religious practice. Finally, I will examine how members coped or managed the religious and cultural differences they found when interacting with each other primarily through temporary involvement and peer support.

Primacy of Religious Identity

Almost all of the interviewees framed religion as the primary unifier within the organization and argued the religious identity should take precedent over disparate "national" identities. They favored being identified by their religion over their national/cultural group of origin. Members are Muslims first, nationality/culture second (or not seriously considered). Harun from Saudi Arabia responds to a question regarding how he would like to be identified in this exchange:

"I told you in the beginning when I came here I met a lot of Muslims from different countries, different cultures. So the only thing that brings us together, it is Islam. So that's what I like to refer to myself as, as Muslim. I didn't well, ok, I am proud to be an Arab Saudi but the most important thing I am Muslim.....If they ask me I am a Muslim. If they ask "from where?" I say from Saudi Arabia".

While Harun shared that he is proud of his national origins he underlined the importance of his religious identity. Within the organizational setting it is understandable that members look to the reason they are organizing in the first place which is their shared religion. In a sense, members who were interviewed all expressed that through affiliation with the MSA they are favoring their religious identity to some extent.

In some cases, this emphasis on religious identity manifests itself in the members' decision-making process. Later in the interview, Harun explains his view on why religious identity is central even with the existence of various national identities represented within the organization:

"Actually there is another thing a lot of people think that our culture is different than our religion but sometimes our religion is part of our culture. It is the opposite. Our culture, is

part of our religion and yeah our culture is based on our religion. Yeah, that is basically part of the big argument that we have. We have the meeting with the MSA officers we have like from every country has officers. They are from Tajikistan, Saudi, Afghanistan too. So they said “ Okay, we have to do this because it is part of our culture.” I said “ Okay, I am not talking about my culture and we’re not talking about your culture. We are talking about Islam. You’ve to make a decision for all of us, not just for yourself.” So that is a big challenge".

In this example, Harun characterizes culture as being subject to religion. More importantly, the discourse here frames the different members as having to unite under religious considerations even though there is an awareness of having different national cultures represented within the MSA. Where discussions on group interest is concerned members can identify each other separately by national culture. However, it would be more helpful to discuss them within the context of fitting the separate concerns within the framework of their religious identity as individuals and as a single organization.

Members further express that perhaps the emphasized "commonality" between members was already reinforced by the way in which American media and society viewed them even before considering the importance of religious identity of the organization. Zaki from Saudi Arabia notes that it would be more useful for members to think of themselves as belonging to a single group when he discussed the reasoning behind framing his identity through his religion while downplaying the nationalities of members:

"Well, because I don't like to call people who are from different countries, like he is from there and he is from Malaysia. No. Muslims from like uh, the Prophet and his example called all Muslims his brothers....Because if someone does a bad thing. People say that is

a Muslim. They would say, "look at that Muslim" and not "look at that Saudi" or "look at that Arab, Indian or whatever". The main thing is Muslim. I'm here as a Muslim".

This sense of "brotherhood" was emphasized over separate nationalities because Zaki felt that when problems arise inevitably they will be attributed to the perceived Muslim group as opposed to the nationality of the parties involved. Also, we see here the perceived negativity of society "here" crop up in the discussion of religion within members. Between the members, they feel that because of how they might be perceived from the outside they might as well emphasize their religious identity in order to engage Americans within the framework that they perceive the Americans are working in already.

Diversity

There are various examples of interviewees expressing happiness and even pride at the thought of there being such a diverse membership. However, members only expressed opinions on diversity in positive terms when discussing the diversity in geographic origins of members. Geographical origins would not indicate any potential for religious divergence but when speaking of different cultures, different frameworks of shared meaning, there is a possibility of divergent religious practices and views. Members idealize Islam as a single religion that should not have divergences (even with the various sub-sects) and even discussing the potential for religious divergences is a source of unease for members. While members express a sense of cognizance of the potential divergent viewpoints and influences with regards to religion some either downplay this possibility or view it as less useful when discussing the actual practices of the membership. When asked about possible differences between members in terms of religious, Haled from Morocco expressed divergence as being a negative feature to be avoided:

Haleed: Yes, yeah. There are some differences (long pause). As a difference, you mean a culture or a culture that, changes the religion?

Interviewer: Not necessarily change the religion, just the way they come in, conduct themselves and the way they do things. Like say Muslims from Europe or Muslims from Russia, they would come in and maybe the format of the proceedings might be different. I mean the prayers are the same and all that but maybe the way they do things might be different. Maybe they introduce themselves differently.

Haleed: If they do, they do it not knowingly. Or not learned. Otherwise, if they know they would change because the way our religion, the way our Prophet peace be upon him, shows, that is the only way. If they do mistakes or they change something mostly I think by not knowing. I know, if someone, if someone changes for example, someone will show you. "Put your hands there while praying". So we do mistakes but mostly from not knowing. The way you should do it in the religion.

Haleed in particular was more of an active member and is known to lead prayers. I would consider him to be representative of the more conservative set of members within the organization. Instead of expanding on discussions regarding diversity, certain members downplay this theme especially when it comes to religious issues. They are apprehensive and uncomfortable about the thought of differences within religious practices and as in the case with Haleed, put it down to ignorance or lack of knowing.

Coping With Differences

While members seem uncomfortable with discussing differences between members, they acknowledge that at least the potential for them exists. For the members who do perceive actual differences I found that the two main ways they coped with undesirable differences (such as

differences in religious practice, appropriateness of casual inter-gender relations, and importance of cultural traditions that do not completely conform with Islam) is by limiting their involvement with organizational events and by utilizing national/cultural peer groups as social coping forums to "sound out" disagreements or discomfort.

Considering all the interviewees and their responses, I got a sense that some conformity is encouraged. However, members are able to cope by framing the duration of conformity as temporary in that they are only required to conform for the duration of their presence at organizational events such as meetings or prayer gatherings. When asked about the degree of their participation or how frequently they attend organizational events almost all interviewees only mentioned the Friday prayer meetings as the only consistent activity they are involved in. Other events such as table presentations or community dialogue are mentioned but they only occur sporadically. Individual events are not seen as being long and involved and in some cases only brief regardless of their purpose or frequency in which they are held. This is welcome to some members as they are able to limit the potential for expressed disagreements on religious and cultural differences between themselves. As mentioned before, conformity in religious practice is encouraged among members. While this is a source of tension for some, this is mitigated by the fact that the conformity is only temporary. Some members would rather just "put in their hour of religious service" and not have to get too involved in religious debate or asking uncomfortable religious questions between each other. For these members, the existing arrangement of brief events allows them to do so while meeting the minimum requirement of "being a member" of the MSA.

Alongside the temporary nature of involvement in organizational events, members are also helped in their coping efforts by their own national/cultural peers (friends or acquaintances

who share the same culture or nation of origin). When a disagreement or uncomfortable event occurs, members are able to consult and "vent" with their national/cultural peers with the threat of conflict being minimal due to the shared frame of reference. These peers are seen as typically more empathetic and agreeable to their concerns compared to other members with different backgrounds. In her explanation of coping with the differences she faced, Azrina from Tajikistan explains how she respectfully deals with disagreements with non-Tajiks as well as frames her peer group as an acceptable venting avenue where she can express her opinions:

"If those Muslims were my friends and we have this kind of issue like you know with the Nahruz (Persian new year) celebration, there was an issue where we are Muslims and we should stop celebrating. And at that point I was really arguing with them because you know, culture and you are not practicing, you are not a pagan. This is culture, but you should see how terribly modified this holiday was just to meet the religious criteria. So if it was my friends, I would argue and I would explain my point of view and I would listen to them. I would try to find a common ground just to explain why things are. So I would express my ideas but if it was someone from a country I don't know you know...I don't feel comfortable with because this person doesn't know me. He or she doesn't know me, will be arguing with me (members who are not familiar with Azrina's background/culture will end up arguing instead of understanding)".

Azrina also frames non-Tajiks as less understanding and potentially hostile to her position especially towards the end of that exchange. She indicates that listening but not expressing disagreement is the preferred way to deal with non-Tajiks. With her own cultural peers she is able to express disagreement more openly as she seems to frame them as being more receptive to her position. This is informally the preferred approach to expressing divergence or disagreement

within the organization compared to being confrontational with members from other nationalities or cultures.

Summary of Results

To summarize, in Chapter Three I presented how members viewed and communicated externally with groups outside of the organization and later looked at how members viewed and communicated with each other. When looking at how members viewed and communicated with others I found that they conduct themselves under the assumption of a perceived negativity towards the members, balanced the different expectations between their own religion/cultures and American society, and were actively trying to place the sentiments of those communicating with them (i.e. me the interviewer). Later, I examined the findings on how the members viewed and communicated with each other. I found that they emphasized the primacy of religious identity, downplayed diversity within the organization when it came to religious practices, and coped with undesirable differences by framing involvement as temporary and by utilizing national/cultural peer groups.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Having presented my results, I will discuss practical implications of this study and theoretical contributions this study makes to the organizational communication discipline in this section.

Practical Implications

While my initial interest in the MSA was more theoretical in nature, there are some practical implications that we can glean with regard to membership within a diverse organization such as the MSA. In this section, I will first discuss the practical implications related to the public relations strategy of the MSA. Utilizing a "PR" strategy may seem useful in terms of managing the organization's and Islam's image or profile within the campus community but the organization may want to consider some of the strategy's drawbacks since it is an integral part of the organization's purpose. Second, I will present how members coped with the pressures of conforming to organizational expectations. We will see how members adopted two main strategies, coping through limited participation and coping through peer groups, in order to deal with the pressure of conformity within the organization. Finally, I will discuss some of the potential implications of building cultural bridges both within the MSA and between the MSA and the larger American/campus society.

I will begin by discussing the implications related to members adopting a public relations strategy to dealing with the perceived negativity. The members of the MSA seem to present themselves as representatives of Islam. Although this is useful for the public relations side of the organization's interests, there are certain drawbacks. One of them is that members can potentially downplay the need for constructive feedback or criticism needed to address organizational issues. Note here that the "PR" strategy is not only used when talking about the organization's

members dealings with non-members, but also when members deal with each other internally. The members seem to discourage certain discourses such as the diversity of the way the religion is practiced as to present a unified front for the sake of public relations.

Instances where differences and diversity are labeled as "mistakes" or unnecessary discourage conversations on the topics of contention between cultural groups or religious subgroups. I am not saying that all instances of diversity are stamped out completely within the organization and that would be impossible considering the makeup of the membership. However, adopting a "PR" strategy can discourage expressions of diversity between membership due to the pressure to appear a certain way. Interviewees from Tajikistan for example, expressed that at times they feel the need to repress discussions on their specific cultural celebrations when dealing with non-Persians due to the pre-Islamic influences in their own culture. The Persian New Year is a tricky subject to broach to non-Persians that may consider it to be un-Islamic and therefore not desirable to portray. A meaningful part of their heritage has to be downplayed in discussions within the MSA due to the "PR" framework that members adopt.

The tension surrounding negative perceptions also affects members who balance the perceived cultural religious imperative of influencing others with the accepted American norm of respecting people of different faiths or practices. Members were not only balancing the national culture aspect of identity and the religious aspect of identity but also perceptions of accepted American sensibilities regarding intervening with the religious practice of others. The example of Rahim from India earlier where he discusses wanting to be more frank about correcting mistakes he sees in others, also presents a problem for him as he restrains comments on his part due to perceived American dislike for interfering or offending people of different faiths. In this example, we see that while he frames his approach as being Muslim and "correct", at least where

he is from, he expresses an awareness that what he wants to do might not be viewed favorably within the society he is located in.

While it is somewhat positive that members seem aware of the multiple influences around them and are able to some extent navigate the tensions between them, this "awareness" remains largely under the surface and only informally expressed at best. Considering the setting of the organization and their position within the larger campus and town community it is unusual that religion or religious identity is seldom addressed within this context other than within the public relations strategy. Building this "awareness" and viewing it as a competency that the organization could cultivate among its members could address a seldom appreciated aspect of managing multiple aspects of members' identity more directly. It might also provide more insight into "being Muslim" or being a MSA member within the community and America for new members if organizational elders or veterans discussed this more formally. For instance, when the MSA welcomes new members at the start of a new academic year the MSA leadership can provide some sort of orientation that discusses ways in which new members can better adapt and adjust to the new set of norms and expectations of their current setting. The leadership can prepare new members by discussing some of the challenges other members faced when trying to balance the multiple influences that will play a part in their lives within the new setting.

One other practical implication I considered after conducting this study relates to the finding where members coped with the pressure of conformity in part by framing participation as only occurring for a short period of time and as temporary in nature. In a sense, members allow themselves to downplay or avoid expressing religious divergence for the duration of the organizational activity as it is only temporary and brief. Members could return to their own desired "being" after proceedings are over. This is comparable to restaurant waiters who "put on

a smile" for the duration that they are serving customers. The problem here is when organizational members express a desire for more participation from everyone (which they did) they do not realize how prolonged participation would become problematic. The tension between wanting more participation and retaining an outlet or coping strategy has to be managed.

To be fair, there are other real reasons for the lack of participation such as class and work schedules. According to some of the interviewees, these reasons play a large part in preventing a participative membership. However, the brief nature that some members participate in events in a way gives them an outlet and they can return to being individuals who do not necessarily fit the "PR" frame of the organization. Organizational leaders should examine further reasons as to why members only choose to participate briefly in order to meet their organizational goal of increased participation. Understanding the balancing act that members engage in when participating and framing identity to fit into accepted norms of the organization would be a good place to start.

The MSA might also want to consider how it approaches its cultural bridge-building efforts both within the organization and towards the public. The MSA was initially envisioned as an organization where all Muslim students on campus can pursue their religious interests as a group. It became an enclave for Muslim students in a place where they are a minority group. The group is unique within the campus community and its group diversity presents certain challenges that makes it a little bit more complicated. Consider the notion of being a Christian within the United States. A practicing Christian is able to select a local church that best fits his/her way of practicing and denomination. Muslims like Christians, may also have different ways of practicing depending on their region of origin, history, and religious subgroup. However, in places like Missoula, Montana there is usually only one place for worship and regardless of the diversity of the Muslims in town they only have one option when selecting a venue or prayer

group. It becomes necessary to facilitate cultural bridge-building efforts in such settings. In the MSA, the organizational leaders, through prayer sermons and informal discussions, emphasize the common Islamic identity as a way to build a connection within the diverse membership. This approach is effective to a certain extent as it presents the members with a common vision to focus their organizational identities but it lacks the depth of an approach that incorporates more specific and targeted efforts. An example of an approach that is more specific to its members might be how the leadership can hold formal meetings on how specific nationalities practice or view Islam. Instead of having everyone conform to a ideal single vision of Islam perhaps it may be useful to address the concerns of specific national/cultural groups.

The organization can't just focus on own members as it also has to reexamine its bridge building efforts with the general public. Currently, the organization occasionally holds meetings with church groups, runs informational tables during campus events, and makes presentations on campus. The assumption of the members is that bridge building is mostly about generating an understanding of the Islamic perspective within the American/campus public. This can be helpful as it equips the public with some insight into the reasons and motivations behind certain Islamic practices and values. What is not emphasized here is how bridge building can go both ways where the MSA's members are also informed about the American perspective. Like the previous discussion on building cultural bridges between members, I think that the MSA should add more depth into how they approach their bridging efforts. Perhaps members could analyze some of the American media messages surrounding Islam and try to see where these messages are coming from instead of dismissing them as uniformly critical just for the sake of. They could then reflect on their findings together with non-members within the community in order to gain an informed perspective that better acknowledges the complexities and nuances of the communication that

occurs between both sides. Making the public understand Islam and the MSA helps but perhaps encouraging members to understand the American perspective as well may cover the gaps in understanding between the MSA and the American/campus public.

Theoretical Implications

The main motivation for the study was to generate discussion on organizational communication literature regarding identity (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Meisenbach, 2008; Tracy and Tracy, 1998; Tracy, 2000; Tracy & Trethewey, 2005; Zaroni & Janssens 2007) and the role of discourse and culture in influencing identity formation (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Zaidman, 2001; Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998; Deetz, 1998; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002; Zaroni & Janssens, 2007; . Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Watson, 1994; Barker, 1999). Examining the literature within the context of the results, I found certain areas that required further investigation and more nuanced perspectives. First, we have to reconcile Tracy & Trethewey's conceptualization of crystallized identities and critique of the real/fake self dichotomy in order to accurately describe diverse organizations like the MSA. In the analysis, some of interviewees expressed identities which correspond with the authors' view on crystallized identities. However, I found that the real/fake self dichotomy to be a more accurate way to characterize singular identities and I argue that it is necessary to incorporate both perspectives in order to add nuance to current discussions on organizational identities. Second, through my analysis of discursive resources within the MSA I will contribute to the discussion on how organizational identity is largely defined by how members balance the tensions that exist between the various influences they draw from. The outcomes of the management between tensions shape the organizational identities of members. In this section, I will discuss how this occurs within the membership. Finally, I will discuss the problems associated with the current

culture-in-context approach to explaining cultural communication through examining examples of members being non-negotiable with their practices. Ultimately, by discussing these theoretical implications I will extend and complicate the discussions on identity, discourse, and culture.

To start, this study has highlighted a potential area where we can expand on current postmodern interpretations of identity (Meisenbach, 2008; & Tracy & Trethewey 2005). The literature regarding identity has to this point provided us with intelligent approaches to viewing identity. More specifically, the concept of a crystallized identity (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005) provides a complicated view on identities where identities are layered and politicized.

We emphasize the importance of individuals constructing different angles of repose and inching closer to the edges in their lives. To see different facets of the self, people—including scholars, entrepreneurs, or service providers—must place themselves in various situations with myriad textures.... A complicating circumstance, context, and set of values force different angles of repose, opportunities for contemplation, and reflections of alternate values (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005, p.188).

As I wanted to see how the literature would hold up in diverse settings where multiple cultural groups and nationalities were represented, I felt that this approach to identity would align well with what I was going to study. To some extent, the crystallized identity is expressed by the membership and contributes to a deeper understanding of how the members view themselves and how they enact their identities. In the results section, I discussed how Azrina, a Tajik woman, excused herself from a conversation with male Tajik members in order avoid an awkward situation with a certain Arab male member. We see how within the context of cross-gender relations she shifts from enacting a social, perhaps more secular and "Tajik", facet of her identity to acknowledging the religious facet of her identity which prescribes a more restrictive code of

conduct. In a sense, the crystallized or multifaceted perspective on identity is useful in the analysis of members who appear to be less conservative on how they view the role of religion in defining one's self.

However, Tracy and Trethewey's conceptualization of the crystallized identity may not accurately characterize some members. Perhaps it may even be necessary to extend the discussion on the real/fake self dichotomy in light of the results of the study. Certain members' discourses on identity appear very singular and one-sided where regardless of the contextual factors they favor the religious aspect of their identity. This complicates Tracy and Trethewey's idea of how the different facets of identity are brought forth by placing people in different situations. For some members it is the religious identity that holds sway over the other aspects of their identity. These members would not change the way they practice religion or the conduct themselves regardless of setting. In the example of Rahim from India, we find an individual who clearly favors a religious perspective on the conduct of intervening with the religious practices of other members. Interestingly, Rahim enacts what might be characterized as a real/fake self where he remains quiet in front of other members who might be practicing religion differently. Rahim's real self that views intervention is justified is put aside when he participates in MSA activities. Conservative, or more fundamentalist, members like Rahim seem to display what appears to be the real/fake self dichotomy.

Clearly, we have to adopt a more nuanced perspective that involves both the crystallized view of identity and the real/fake self dichotomy in order to accurately capture the nature of diverse memberships such as the MSA. Identities may be fractured to some but to others a singular layer or aspect of their identity dominates. For these members the real/fake self dichotomy appears to be a more accurate way to characterize their identities. While Tracy and

Trethewey criticizes this dichotomy it appears that within the context of this study, it best describes certain members' identities in terms that are more applicable to them compared to the crystallized identity dialectic. The crystallized identity does explain the identities of the members who are less conservative and I am not dismissing this notion at all. However, it may be more useful to think of these two perspectives as possibly existing simultaneously in such settings. We may favor either the dialectical/multifaceted or dichotomist real/fake self perspectives within individual identities. However, dismissing either one perspective could in a theoretical sense deprive us of the means to accurately describe diverse organizations like the MSA in their entirety.

In the literature, the notion of balancing tensions within organizations is brought up with regard to organizational identity(Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Meisenbach, 2008; Tracy and Tracy, 1998; Tracy, 2000; Tracy & Trethewey, 2005; Zaroni & Janssens 2007). The organization and to some extent the individual identities become sites of tensions between competing discourses and influences. In the MSA, some members are cognizant of the different expectations that exist religiously, culturally, and socially. Specifically, from their own national culture, from the organizational/Islamic perspective, as well as Western culture. There are different sets of discursive resources being drawn from when it came to religious issues and this is evident considering the existence of different interpretations when it came to religious concerns. For example, a Tajik interviewee expressed how the Persian New Year is perceived as celebratory by themselves yet forbidden by Arabs. Tensions do exist between the different influences but just as the literature suggests, certain tensions are best left managed rather than resolved when attempting to define one's own organizational identity. Tajiks clearly outline the differences the two resources (national/cultural and religious) represented.

This study also allowed me to examine how culture specifically plays a part in influencing discourse. I first looked at the global-culture approach (Cai & Donohue, 1997; Hofstede, 1983; Ting-Toomey & Takai, 2006, Deresky 2006) but I found that it was insufficient in accurately describing every aspect of the intercultural communication within the organization. The approach did provide some way to explain certain broad tendencies seen in the more conservative/fundamentalist members. The clearest example being the collectivistic nature of these members seeing how they define themselves as a long-term group (Muslims). While the approach did allow for some macro-level ways of looking at the data, it still lacked the depth needed to account for individual differences between the members who are not as conservative/fundamentalist. In this respect, the culture-in-context approach (Cai & Donohue, 1997; Zaidman, 2001) proved to be more useful to the analysis as it allowed me to examine multiple cultural discursive sources in context. I was able to look beyond perceived so-called enduring cultural norms like collectivism or individualism and see how the context and discourse affected members' expressions of identity.

During the course of my analysis, I found that while the culture-in-context approach can be applied to intercultural communication to an extent it may not be as useful in describing cultures that that interpret contextual factors primarily through a shared rigid religious lens. In the MSA, members seem motivated to converge on a shared religious interpretation. Every situation members face regardless of their culture is engaged in a way that is preferably proper according to the religion. A setting such as the MSA encourages this by encouraging a religious identity. Whatever the reason for this movement towards a singular way of conduct within the membership, we must further expand our notion on the culture-in-context approach to include populations of people who frame their decisions through a single perspective like the one

represented in the MSA. Hopefully, my study has pointed out a possible area for furthering the theories on context-centered approaches to culture. There may be ways in which the contextual factors of communication play out differently with populations such as the members of the MSA and it will be useful for us to try and understand this.

I began this study in part to encourage not only further examination into more diverse settings but also provide a basis with which organizational scholars and actual practitioners can critically analyze such settings while providing meaningful insight and direction. A discursive approach to identity and organization can inform us of the constitutive effects of discourse and how we can better examine the tensions that exist between discourses. In a way, we not only get a sense of how a certain context and identity is influenced by discursive resources but also how we can see the balancing of tensions as a platform for forming organizational identity. It is encouraging to me as a researcher (and hopefully, to those who are in the organization) to read that, as Taylor (2005) points out, the micro-practices of mundane interactions can lead us to a larger view of the organization and how it is run. I plan to share my report with the MSA and show the leadership of the organization how some of the themes that were discussed here can be drawn from the interactions that members have within the organization. While I do not foresee big organizational changes, nor do I intend for them to happen, I hope to provide a window into how the members themselves are in fact participating in the balancing act between the different influences and how that translates into the organizational identity they are currently cultivating.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this study is to examine how organizational identity is shaped, formed, and regulated by discourse within the Muslim Students Association as well as the role culture and religion played in informing discourse. Using a poststructuralist approach to

understand how members form multifaceted identities that shifted based on context, I wanted to accurately understand the diverse participants of the study, how they organize within the MSA, and the nature in which religious and cultural backgrounds inform their organizing actions. Importantly, I wanted to provide additional depth to my understanding of culturally diverse settings and what makes them work (or not work).

I found that members formed organizational identities that influenced the ways in which they communicated with outsiders and between themselves. Members shape their discourses around the assumption of a perceived negativity while balancing their conduct in light of the different expectations between their religion/culture and American society. These discourses were drawn from religious and national/cultural backgrounds in part to fit the "PR" strategy encouraged among the membership and to balance the tension members face between adhering to religious identity and satisfying American norms of religious tolerance. Members' discourse also reflected the primacy of religious identity with the MSA. Differences that exist within the membership are uncomfortably dealt with via temporary involvement and peer groups. The nature of membership is problematized as we observe how members walk a tightrope between multiple influences that are not only diverse but potentially contradictory to one another and how this is potentially enacted through their religious aspect of the identity.

This study contributes to the literature in a few ways. First, I presented how the postmodern notion of identity being multifaceted may be expanded to better understand certain populations or settings where a singular identities exist alongside crystallized identities. I also presented my study as an example of how tension-centered approaches can be useful in analyzing organizational settings. Not enough organizations like the MSA have been viewed through this lens and this is unfortunate considering the depth and variety of information to be

gained from such a rich context. Through this study, I also analyzed a potential area where the culture-in-context approach can be furthered seeing how it currently lacks conceptualizations of contexts where prescribed religious cultural practices remain consistent and stagnant. Apart from the implications I discussed, this study also lead me to consider a potential for future research in the area of media and its role in influencing discourse and perception of cultural groups. There was an agreement within the MSA membership that the media plays an important part in the shaping of Islam's, and by extension the MSA's, image and this may be an interesting area of study. My stated goals were to provide a relevant context for examination considering both the convergence of the literature on discursive identities and culture as well as the current imperative of understanding increasingly globalized and diverse organizations. Hopefully, I have achieved these goals and contributed meaningful insights into how we view diverse organizations.

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Appendix A

INFORMED CONSENT

The Influence of Culture on Identity in Diverse Organizations (Master's Thesis Project)

The purpose of this research study is to explore the issues of cultural identity within the membership of cultural organizations. The primary researcher is interested in how culture influences the formation and management of members' identities within the context of the Muslim Students Association. Specifically, the interview will explore the topics of participation within the Muslim Students Association, members' impressions of the organization, and the role of culture within the organizational context. I understand that this research involves my participation in an audio-recorded interview approximately 60 minutes in length. I understand that this research is being conducted as a master's thesis project. I understand that the results of this study will be confidential. My identifiable responses to the interview questions will not be made available to anyone other than the student researcher and the faculty supervisor, Dr. Gregory S. Larson. The audio-recording of my interview will be transcribed and then erased.

I understand that the participation in this study is purely voluntary. There are no personal benefits I receive from my participating in this study. The only risks I may experience are any discomfort I may feel in answering the questions. I may decline to answer any questions without penalty. Also, I can withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. **Although we do not foresee any risk in taking part in this study, the following liability statement is required in all University of Montana consent forms.** *In the event that you are injured as a result of this research you should individually seek appropriate medical treatment. If the injury is caused by the negligence of the University or any of its employees, you may be entitled to the reimbursement or compensation pursuant to the Comprehensive State Insurance Plan established by the Department of Administration under the authority of M.C.A., Title 2, Chapter 9. In the event of a claim of such injury, further information may be obtained from the University's Claims representative or University Legal Counsel. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Chair of the IRB through the University of Montana Research Office at 243-6670.*

I have been told that the researcher conducting this study is Burhanuddin Bin Omar. I may ask him any questions I have right now. If I have any questions later, I may contact Burhanuddin Bin Omar by phone at (406) 396 5336 or via email at burhanuddin.omar@umontana.edu. I may also contact the faculty supervisor for this project, Dr. Gregory S. Larson in 357 Liberal Arts, at (406)243-4161, or greg.larson@mso.umt.edu.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Chair of the IRB through The University of Montana Research Office at 243-6670.

I have read the above description of this study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered by a member of the research team. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I understand I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Statement of Consent to be Audio Recorded:

I understand that audio recordings will be taken during the study. I also understand that audio recordings will be destroyed following transcription, and no identifying information will be included in the transcription.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Appendix B

Interview Instrument

1. To start things off, I would like to know a little bit about your involvement with the MSA.
 - a. Why did you join the MSA?
 - b. What is your role within this organization?
 - c. What are the benefits of your role within this organization?
 - d. What are the challenges you face with regards to your role within the organization?
2. Now that we have discussed some of the overall impressions of the MSA and your role within it I would like to talk about your expectations within the organization/
 - a. What were your expectations of the organization coming into it?
 - b. Has your perception about the organization changed since you first joined?
3. Tell me a little bit about where you come from and your culture.
 - a. Where are you from?
 - b. What cultural/ethnic group would you consider yourself to be in?
4. Tell me about the role culture has in your position as a member of the MSA.
 - a. Considering your role within the MSA, do you feel that your culture plays an important role in informing your decision-making?
5. Is what you do here as a Muslim in the MSA similar to what you do where you come from?
 - a. How do you cope with the differences between what you do here and what you do where you come from?
 - b. How do you manage some of these differences?
 - c. Do other people notice these differences?
 - d. If other people notice these differences, what do they say or do about it?
6. We are now at the end of this interview.
 - a. Are there any concluding thoughts or comments you would like to add?