

Cultural Immersion Project

Muslim-American Culture

Research and Events

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COUC-504-B02: Multicultural Counseling

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Research

Islam originated in the 6th century with a prophet named Mohammed. Mohammed was a Saudi Arabian man who was born in 570 AD, in the city now called Mecca. Both of his parents died when he was very young, so he was raised by his uncle. When Mohammed was in his early 40's, he began to have what he believed were revelations from God, through the angel Gabriel, while meditating in the cave of Hira, in the side of a mountain near Mecca. He had several scribes that helped in recording these revelations, which later formed the Muslim people's holy book, which they call the Qur'an, after Mohammed died in 632 AD.

Key Elements

The people who practice Islam are referred to as Muslims. The four key elements of the Muslim peoples researched are history and patterns of immigration, common attitudes, beliefs and values, prominent customs, practices, and behaviors, and key historical events and figures impacting the cultural and societal perceptions.

History/patterns of immigration to the U.S.

The Muslim population in the United States consists mostly of immigrants from other countries. In fact, Guhin reports that, "76% of American Muslims...are either immigrants or children of immigrants," (2018, p. 88). Islam is not a new religion in America. According to Hocker, "the history of the Muslim presence in the United States extends for 400 years, with the first arrival of enslaved people from West Africa," (2022, p. 4). Hocker goes on to say that, "additionally, in the 17th century Moriscos, former Muslims who were persecuted for their faith in Spain and Portugal, and settled in Spanish colonies and throughout what became the United States," (2022, p. 4). Many black Muslim slaves also came from "Senegal, Mali, Guinea, Sierra

Leone, Ghana, Benin and Nigeria where Islam was known since the 8th century and spread in the early 1000s,” (Diouf, 2021, p. 3).

The Naturalization Act of 1790 set race restrictions on people who wanted to immigrate to America. “According to the law, citizenship was limited to free white persons, and in practice, only white, male property owners could naturalize and acquire the status of citizens, whereas women, nonwhite persons, and indentured servants could not,” (Bridge Initiative Team, 2021, p. 1). At that time, most Muslims in the world were black, and most Muslims in America were slaves. It wasn’t until The Naturalization Act of 1870, which “extended naturalization rights to all aliens of African nativity and to persons of African descents, thus providing a path to citizenship for formerly enslaved Africans and their descendants,” (Bridge Initiative Team, 2021, p. 1). However, this act still banned naturalization to all non-white people. It wasn’t until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, also referred to as the Hart-Celler Act, that immigration from Muslim-majority areas of the world was legally allowed. This groundbreaking act, “not only introduced an overhaul of the US immigration system, but also opened the doors to increased immigration from Muslim-majority countries,” (Bridge Initiative Team, 2021, p. 2). After 1965, the number of Muslim immigrants to the United States increased dramatically. This massive arrival of Muslim immigrants happened at the same time as racial segregation in the United States, and this racial segregation greatly influenced Muslim Americans.

The last three decades of the 20th century resulted in several laws that affected the immigration of Muslims to America. Among them were the Refugee Act of 1980 and the Immigration Act of 1990. After 9/11, however, the Bush administration enacted the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS), which limited Muslims entry into the

United States. NSEERS, “was a program for registering non-citizen visa holders, such as students, workers, and tourists,” (Bridge Initiative Team, 2021, p. 3). Part of NSEERS stated that, “all males 16 years of age or older from 25 countries were forced to register ... and although no religious groups were explicitly targeted, all but one was a Muslim-majority country,” (Bridge Initiative Team, 2021, p. 3). Additionally, the Trump administration implemented several executive actions, constituting the Muslim and African Ban, the results of Trump’s, “campaign trail promise to implement a total ban on Muslim entry into the United States,” (Bridge Initiative Team, 2021, p. 3). Soon after coming into office, though, “Joe Biden issued a presidential proclamation titled ‘Ending Discriminatory Bans on Entry to the United States,’ which effectively ended the Muslim and African Ban. In April 2021, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill titled the NO BAN Act which would limit the ability of any United States president to impose a travel ban on the basis of religion,” (Bridge Initiative Team, 2021, p. 3).

Now, the religion of Islam is now the world’s fastest growing religion, according to the Pew Research Center, (Lipka, 2020, p. 2). In fact, “while Islam is currently the world’s second-largest religion (after Christianity), it is the fastest-growing major religion,” (Lipka, 2020, p. 3). Some experts project that at the rate that Islam is growing, it will be the largest religious group in America by the end of the century.

Common Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values

The main teaching of the Qur’an is the importance of taqwa, or piety and moral obligation. According to McGoldrick et. al, “taqwa means, ‘to protect oneself’ against moral dangers. Taqwa enables a follower of the Qur’an to discern right from wrong and to be the judge of his or her own actions,” (2005, p. 381). Although the Qur’an sets some very stringent rules

regarding the Muslim believers' daily practices, there are still many differences in their beliefs and practices. An example of these differences is the Muslim tradition of veiling, or hijab. "It ranges from totally covering a woman's face, head, and body, to a partial covering, to the wearing of the Salwar Kameese (pajama pants with a tunic top) as many Indian and Pakistani women do, with a thin chiffon shawl thrown around the shoulders or head," (McGoldrick et al., 2005, p. 381).

Just as there are many denominations in the Christian religion, the religion of Islam also consists of several groups, or sects. These include, "Sunni, Sh'ite, Sufi, and Ahmadiyyas. The majority of modern Muslims identify themselves as being Sunnis or Sh'ites," (Illsley, 2019, p. 7).

Family plays a very important part in the Muslim's life. "Major decisions, such as the choice of a partner and/or a career, are impacted by family expectations," (McGoldrick et al., 2005, p. 430). Elders, especially the fathers, deserve honor and respect and should be taken care of by their family members. One topic that is very difficult for Muslim families is sexuality. According to McGoldrick, et al., "Sexual inappropriateness can bring shame to a family; thus, there is little tolerance for homosexuality. Struggling with issues related to sexual identity or making such a choice is usually kept secret from the family," (2005, p. 430).

Prominent Customs, Practices, and Behaviors

The Muslim peoples practice 5 main tenants, which they call The Five Pillars of Islam. According to Hocker, they consist of,

1. "The profession of faith or shahada, by declaring the existence of one God, known as Allah, and the existence of his prophet, Muhammed.
2. Prayer or salah, which occurs five times daily, while facing towards Mecca.

3. Alms or zakah, which is an extension of one's faith to provide for others as a form of mutual aid.
4. Fasting, or sawm (also called sijam), which occurs during the holy time of Ramadan, from sunrise to sunset (if one is able).
5. Pilgrimage or hajj, taking a pilgrimage to Mecca," (2022, p. 3).

Key Historical Events and Figures Impacting Cultural and Societal Perceptions

Some of the important Muslim figures in history include the prophet, Abraham (Ibrahim), and Jesus (Isa). These two play a significant role in Islamic faith. Other influential Islamic leaders include, "Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989), and Nobel Peace Prize winner Anwar Sadat (1918-1971)," (Illsley, 2019, para. 6).

There are many misconceptions, or myths, concerning the Muslim peoples. These, as well as several historical events, contribute to some extremely negative attitudes and perceptions. According to Alosman et. al, "One of the first American direct encounters with Arab countries was the Barbary Wars in the early 19th century. These wars played a significant role in shaping early American perceptions of Arabs and Muslims," (2019, p. 72). The North African countries that were involved in the Barbary Wars were Morocco, Algiers (now Algeria), Tunis (now Tunisia), and Tripoli (in northwestern Libya). "As these countries were called Barbary States, their populations were labeled as barbarians," (Alosman et al., 2019, p. 72).

One of the first events that presented the opinion of Middle Eastern Muslims as terrorists was the massacre at the Munich Olympic Games in 1972. On September 5, 1972, "terrorists belonging to the PLO's Black September group infiltrated the Olympic Village, broke into the accommodation of the Israeli delegation, and murdered two athletes. They then held another nine

athletes hostage for almost an entire day,” (Alosman et al., 2019, p. 80), before ultimately killing them. This event sparked world-wide outcry and did nothing good for the general reputation of Muslims. Then, in 1980, came the American hostage situation in Tehran, where fifty-two American diplomats were held hostage by radical Muslim terrorists for 444 days. According to Alosman et. al, “terrorism-related generalizations about Islam and Muslims intensified as they gained more evidence that proofed their validity at the time,” (2019, p. 82).

Then, on February 26, 1993, radical Muslim terrorists bombed the parking garage of the World Trade Center in New York City, resulting in six deaths and more than 1,000 people badly injured. This event marked the first time that radical Jihadists had hit on United States’ soil. After that, there were several terrorist attempts by radical Muslims, but the most horrendous and far-reaching is the attack on September 11, 2001, where 16 terrorists hijacked planes and flew into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington D.C. These acts resulted in the death of almost 3,000 lives and injuring over 6,000 people. Since 9/11, negative sentiments toward the Muslim peoples have increased, although these terrorists represent only a small minority of Muslim extremists.

Historical and Current Oppression

According to Lipka, “Muslims in the United States perceive of discrimination against their religious group,” (2022, p. 4). This discrimination, often referred to as Islamophobia, has been especially prevalent since the events of 9/11. “With the rise of Islamophobia, Islam has been cast as irrational, incompatible with modern civilization, and inherently violent,” (Suleiman, 2017, p. 1).

Throughout the 19th century, American knowledge of Islam was still quite limited. According to Alosman et. al, “they used to call Muslims, “‘Mahometans” (adherents of Muhammed and not of God) or ‘mussulmen’ or ‘mussulmen’ (which engenders the stereotype of

muscle-bound brutes),” (2019, p. 74). Media definitely enforced these negative images. “From the beginning of the American film industry in the 1920s, the Arabs, Turks and Kurds were strongly present within a frame of representation built on a Darwinist conviction of their inferiority to Americans and Europeans,” (Alosman et al., 2019, p. 76). Little was written or filmed in the 20th century that put the Muslim peoples in a positive light. This stereotypic portrayal of Muslims continues into the 21st century. “Today’s filmmakers’ Islam is linked to masculine authority, Jihad, and terrorism, while Arab Muslims are depicted as aggressive foreign ‘intruders,’ and as lustful, oil sheikhs willing to use nuclear weapons against Americans,” (Alosman et al., 2019, p. 77).

Events

First, I attended a local celebration of Eid al-Adha, or the “Feast of Sacrifice.” This celebration marks the second most important day for Muslims, second only to Ramadan. This year, it was celebrated on July 9th and 10th. “Eid-al-Adha celebrates the redemption that has taken place on the Day of Arafat, the faith of Abraham who was willing to sacrifice his son, Ishmael, and God’s provision of an animal as a substitute for Ishmael,” (Black, 2018, p. 150). A local mosque held their celebration at a park, and it was open to the public. I asked a Muslim co-worker beforehand what attire was appropriate, so I knew to come completely covered and to wear a scarf head-covering. I was a little nervous, because I had to go by myself, how I would be accepted, but I was greeted politely.

The men were all dressed nicely, some with turbans or skull caps. The women were also dressed well, with head coverings but I noticed that there were variations in the type of head coverings that were worn. Some were completely covered, some had their faces covered also, some had their heads and necks covered, and some had simple thin scarves covering only their

hair. Later, I asked my friend why this was, as she said that this was because they originated from different parts of the world.

They held a congregational prayer, followed by a short sermon. There were two large tents set up, one for the men and the other for the women. Most people brought rugs to kneel on and everyone faced east, towards Mecca, as is the Muslim custom. There were several women sitting on park benches in the back, so I sat next to them during the prayer and sermon. Everyone was very quiet and respectful this whole time. The prayers were spoken in Arabic by the imam, or their leader, which of course, I did not understand at all, so I just sat there, respectfully. The sermon was spoken in English, though.

After the sermon, they had a sort of festival, with bouncy houses and food trucks. Most everyone mingled amongst each other, though no one spoke to me. I stayed, sitting at one of the picnic tables by the celebration, and watched everyone as they played, visited, ate, and enjoyed the day. I can't say that it was easy, sitting alone and observing the events, but I understand. I've spoken to a couple of Muslim friends about it and although they said that it is regrettable, they remarked that Muslims, in general, tend to keep to themselves, and can be known to ignore people that they do not know. I guess this reaction is probably a habit born out of self-preservation, after decades of discrimination and persecution.

After that, I attended a birthday party for a Muslim girl, held by her parents. The girl's mother is a co-worker of mine and had invited me to the party. The birthday party was held outside at a neighborhood pool. This was interesting because I assumed because Muslim women had to be completely covered. This proved to be true, though the children came dressed in their swimsuits and had a blast playing and swimming. Many of the men did come dressed in shorts, but the Muslim women were all covered, mostly in thin, white outfits that resembled pajamas. A

couple of the women did get in the pool, fully dressed, though most of them sat at the tables and visited. Most everyone was very friendly with me, and though I was obviously not Muslim, they accepted me as a friend. Although this party was not a specifically “Muslim” event, most of the participants were Muslim and it was nice to spend time talking with them, without feeling left out or ostracized in any way.

I learned several things about the Muslim culture during these two events that I did not know before and had not encountered in my research. First, I learned that celebrations in the Muslim culture are much like those in the Christian culture in many ways. I guess I was expecting my experiences to be quite different from regular church celebrations and parties that I am used to. But with the exception of prayers being offered in Arabic and with kneeling and chanting, most of the religious service felt familiar and comfortable. The people were very friendly, especially at the birthday party, and tried to make me feel comfortable.

Additionally, from what I had been told and what I had seen on T.V. and in the movies, I had always assumed that Muslims would be unfriendly or angry. But I was pleasantly surprised at how friendly and open my encounters were. At the birthday party, I was welcomed with open arms, and at the religious celebration, even though no one spoke to me, I was never shunned. In fact, many people smiled and nodded at me.

Finally, in these experiences, I found that most Muslim people in my community are very open and eager to share their faith and beliefs with “non-believers.” No one ever tried to convert me to Islam, though. On the contrary, I think that they were genuinely interested in helping me to understand that they are not unlike me at all. I had an interesting discussion with one woman, about how Islam and Christianity are alike and how we share many of the same beliefs and values. These people are not radical terrorists, as so many of us are taught to believe. They are

peaceful, loving people. I firmly believe that if more of us would open our minds and hearts to get to know and understand our Muslim neighbors our world would be a much more peaceful place.

Suggested Counseling Theories

Because religion plays such a major part in the lives of most Muslims, I would recommend that counselors always keep this in mind when working with their Muslim clients. It is also important that we continually educate ourselves on Muslim history and characteristics to improve our understanding of our clients. “Mental health providers’ knowledge of cultural aspects of Muslims is crucial for effective service provision. The recognition and incorporation of these cultural aspects into the provision of mental health services are crucial for mental health providers,” (Tanhan & Francisco, 2018, p. 967). We should also consistently guard ourselves against negative opinions or prejudices to avoid any internalized racism or biases.

In working with Muslim clients, Podikunju-Hussain suggests, “a multidimensional approach that includes using models of counseling that support both individualism and relational contexts can also be used to counsel Muslims. Cognitive, cognitive-behavioral, existential-humanistic, family therapy, and feminist models should be considered,” (Podikunju-Hussain, n.d. p. 105). Of these, I would suggest using the family therapy and cognitive behavioral strategies first.

Because of the importance that Muslims place on family, I would recommend utilizing family therapy when treating Muslim clients. McGoldrick. et. al offers several suggestions for “inclusive thinking necessary for judging family problems and normal adaptation in a cultural context,” (2005, p. 36). These suggestions include, “assume that the family’s cultural, class, religious, and political background influences how its members view their problems...(and)

assume a positive connection to one's family of origin contributes to one's sense of mental health and well-being," (2005, p. 36). Most Muslim individuals cannot be properly treated without considering the significant role that their family plays in their lives. "Family therapy is a type of psychotherapy that focuses on family members' communication and conflict resolution," (Soliman et al., 2022, p. 2). Soliman, et al. concluded that, "Individuals, communities, and nations can all benefit from a stronger understanding of the antecedents and outcomes of family health," (2022, p. 9).

Additionally, from my research, it seems that Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) could prove useful in working with Muslim clients. "Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) is considered an effective therapeutic method for depression and anxiety disorders. Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) is a new therapeutic form of CBT that, according to a growing number of studies, offers remarkable possibilities and perspectives in understanding and treating depression and anxiety," (Bahattab & AlHadi, 2021, p. 87). ACT shares several components with the fundamental ideas of Islam, which some experts claim could be an appropriate method for working with Muslim clients. In a study done with Muslim women and the effects of using ACT to treat depression, Bahattab & AlHadi found that, "experiential exercises, as well as the group discussions, were helpful and shared that the assignments had enriched and deepened their understanding. They specifically appreciated the reading and mindfulness exercises," (2021, p. 90). They offered that, "perceived benefits indicated that ACT was associated with a positive change in anxiety and depression symptoms, in addition to the positive changes in diet, sleep, psychological flexibility, emotion regulation skills, value-based living, and mindfulness. ACT supports Islamic values and that it actually helped them become the Muslims they wanted to be," (2021, p. 89-90). I intend to not only keep educating myself on the Muslim peoples so that I can

be more comfortable and competent in working with them. I would like to also educate myself on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. I feel that this unique method of counseling can prove to be a successful mode of working with clients from other cultural backgrounds, as well.

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Cultural Immersion Project Interviews

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Organization Interview

As part of my cultural immersion project, I interviewed Nuran Sykes, the wife of Iman Abdurrahman Sykes. Iman Sykes is the founder of the Islamic Society Leading American Muslims (I.S.L.A.M.). As Mr. and Mrs. Sykes live in Orlando, we were not able to meet in person, so we had several conversations on the phone and through text messages.

Purpose/Mission Statement of I.S.L.A.M.

When I asked Nuran about the purpose, or mission statement of the Islamic Society Leading American Muslims, also referred to as I.S.L.A.M., she referred me to the organization's website. According to their website, their mission statement is to provide, "education, social

support, and empowerment to Muslims born, reared, or converted in the United States, to ascertain and advocate for their needs and provide outreach to our neighbors (Muslims and nonMuslims), media and government with the true and peaceful message of Islam,” (Islamic society leading American Muslims para. 1). It also states that, “This is where you need to be if you are a new revert to Islam or just interested to learn about the religion of Islam,” (Islamic society leading American Muslims para. 2).

Services Offered to Muslim Community

I.S.L.A.M. holds Sunday meetings at the Muslim Academy of Greater Orlando. Each week, Nuran’s husband, Abdurrahman, gives a presentation on specific topics on Islamic

teachings. These classes are open to the public and consist primarily of converted Muslims and non-Muslims wanting to learn about the Islamic faith. In addition to the services offered at the center, Iman Sykes regularly gives speeches about misunderstandings of the Islamic faith at universities, schools, churches, synagogues, and corporations. The goal is to educate and empower converts to Islam to attain a sustainable level of faith in order to prevent separation from Islam, as well as to educate non-Muslims on the basic principles and beliefs of the Islam faith. There are so many misconceptions about Muslims and their beliefs in the United States and Iman Sykes feels led to do away with these some of these misconceptions through education and personal support.

Advertisement

People are made aware of the services offered at I.S.L.A.M. primarily through word of mouth. They also print advertisements in newspapers and local magazines, as well as posting information at local mosques. They have a website that talks about their founder, Iman Sykes, as well as offering their mission statement and testimonials from people who have attended in the past. The website also contains contact information, as well. They also have a blog, in which they regularly post recorded talks by Iman Sykes, covering various topics on the Islamic faith.

Areas of Greatest Need

Nuran commented that there is a massive need in our country to support Muslim converts as they face the daily challenges of misconception and oppression. She stated that it can be very confusing for people thinking about converting to Islam to understand what it truly means to be a Muslim. Because of the recent growth in the radicalization of Muslim converts and their exploitation by extremist groups, it is crucial to understand what is, and what is not, Islam. More than ever, people need to know that the Islam faith is a peaceful one and that these radical

Muslims are misleading so many converts down the wrong path, resulting in war and terrorism.

Nuran said that there is much misinformation and confusion about what Muslims truly believe and what the Qur'an actually teaches. She and her husband feel that both Muslims and non-Muslims need to be educated on what the Qur'an says, so that they can make educated life choices.

Challenges

Nuran described several challenges in working with I.S.L.A.M. With all of the misconceptions about the religion of Islam, many non-Muslims come to her husband's lessons with pre-conceived, often very negative ideas. The people in the community that most of them live in have many misinformed ideas of Islam and convincing these people that much of what

they see and hear from the media is incorrect is sometimes difficult. It is essential that these people be approached with kindness and grace. Arguing does no good in these situations. She also explained how often newly converted Muslims often have little knowledge of exactly what it means to be a Muslim. Outside of local Mosques, there are few places where they can come to have their questions answered. At I.S.L.A.M., they strive to be a safe place where all people can come for fellowship and education, free from judgment and discrimination.

Importance of Social Justice

According to Hussain Mir and Ahad, social justice is, “the most important and influential fact in the life of a human being that can solve the problems of society in a peaceful

manner and in Islam it is the fundamental principle of thought and practice,” (2019, p. 219).

Nuran agreed with this statement. We discussed how every day we see the news of shootings, assassinations, and acts of terrorism. Many times, it seems, these events are attributed to Muslim extremists. At I.S.L.A.M., they strive to educate the community on the fact that the vast majority of Muslims do not support this violence and these violations of basic human rights.

Individual Interview

During my cultural immersion project, I interviewed my co-worker, Loubaba Karim. We work together as co-teachers, teaching Middle School Math. We were able to have several conversations, which I found extremely educating and illuminating.

Background/Key Events

Loubaba was born in Syria in 1976 to a Muslim family. She said that about 40% of the population in Syria is Muslim. The other main religions are Christianity and Judaism. In Syria, she attended university and became a secondary math teacher. In 1998, Loubaba moved to

Cleveland, Ohio with her husband, who is also a Syrian-born Muslim. She was 22 at the time. She came to the United States with a green card and had no issues with immigration, as her husband had already lived here and was already a citizen. When she moved to Cleveland, Loubaba and her husband lived and worked in a non-Muslim community. Life was very tough for her at first, as she didn't speak English at all. Her husband owned a restaurant, called "Flavors on the Vine" and she ran that restaurant for 22 years. They had three children, two girls and a boy, while living in Ohio. In 2021, they lost their restaurant business, due to CoVid, so they decided to move to Florida to have a new start. Loubaba's husband started a construction company and she decided to go back to school and obtain her teaching license so

that she could teach again, as teaching has always been her passion. She now teaches middle school math in the classroom right next to mine and is finishing up her coursework online with the University of Phoenix.

In time, she learned English, but she still struggled with fitting in with her neighbors and community, mostly because of her Muslim culture. There were many practices and customs here that were very foreign to her, and she told me that most of her neighbors did not understand her at all. For example, here in America, people greet each other with hugs or handshakes. In her culture, they only hug close friends or family members, and men should never touch a woman unless she is his wife or daughter. Also, she didn't feel comfortable when

people would drink alcohol, so she often declined invitations to get together with her non-Muslim neighbors, because there would be drinking. So, in time, her neighbors began to dislike her, thinking that she must think that she was better than them. When, in actuality, she was just shy and felt uncomfortable with their mannerisms that she did not understand.

Loubaba's religion is very important to her. She stated that, living in America, she tries not to be too strict in her behavior, but she doesn't want to lose her culture. In fact, while we were talking, she said, "oh, it's almost 5:00...I need to go pray!" She left the room and came back in just a couple of minutes, carrying her prayer rug. I asked her if she had already prayed and she said, "no, I went to wash. We always wash before we pray so that we are clean." She

then proceeded to lay her prayer rug on the floor, there in my classroom, and went through her prayer ritual. I sat at my desk and quietly worked while she prayed. It only took two or three minutes, and then she rolled up her rug and came to sit next to me again. I knew that they pray facing toward Mecca, which I had always been told was towards the east. I asked her about that, and she said that, in the United States, they face northeast. Likewise, Syria is north of Mecca, so when she is in Syria, they face south. They pray five times a day, based on the position of the sun. According to Muslimiversity, their five daily prayers occur at pre-dawn (fajr), noon or early afternoon (dhuhr), late afternoon (asr), sunset (maghrib), and early night ('isha), (2021). I guess this was her late afternoon prayer.

When I asked Loubaba about her experiences with school and work here in the United States, she said that she rarely had any issues, but that she did struggle at times with older people, who are usually more prejudiced towards Muslims. I asked her to elaborate on any experiences with subtle racism. She told me that daily she experiences dirty looks and rude people. Many times, people will stare at her when she is the only woman wearing a head scarf. At her last school, there were a lot of Jews that would often act scared of her. The negative misinformation about Muslims that people receive from the media is very much reflected in her treatment in public. She also told me about one time, while working at the restaurant in Ohio, she was cleaning her desk with Windex. A man was sitting nearby and commented, “in your

country, they clean glass with camel hair, don't they?" This statement was ludicrous to her, because there is no desert in Syria, so there are no camels there! Syria is a beautiful country, with the sea, mountains, trees, and farms. She guesses that he just assumed that everyone from the Middle East lives in the desert!

When asked about her experiences with overt racism and discrimination, she said that many times she has endured people yelling at her, "go back to your country!" Once, a customer said to her, "your husband bought you, didn't he?" She is amazed sometimes at how ignorant people are about other religions and cultures. She said to me, "you know, in every religion or culture, you will have bad people. We are all human, but we are not all terrorists." She did

comment that the younger generations are much more open to different cultures and religions. Right after 9/11, it was very difficult to be a Muslim in the United States, but each year things get a little easier. She now lives and works in a community with several mosques nearby. She has several Muslim co-workers and students at the school that we work at, and that makes life much easier.

Personal Reaction

As I talked with Loubaba, I was touched by her openness and willingness to share her story. Even after all the negative experiences with discrimination that she has endured, she has remained warm, kind, and cheerful. I never felt any judgment from her, even though she knows

that I am a Christian. I was wearing shorts and a sleeveless shirt; and though Loubaba was completely covered from head to toe, she never treated me any different than she would anyone else. When Loubaba was praying, I was struck by her reverence and peacefulness. Even though her prayers are more ritualistic than I would prefer, I am so glad that my God doesn't require that

I pray at specific times and that I can come to Him whenever and wherever I am.

New Knowledge

Before meeting with Loubaba, I was unaware that believers must always wash before they can pray. In a paper on the religion of Islam, Beaunissant states, "before starting the

prayers, a Muslim must enter a state of purity. Such a state is reached through wudu, which involves cleansing one's hands, head, face, and feet," (2020, p. 3). They also have very strict rules on how their prayers are conducted. They have very formalized prayers that require them to recite certain verses from the Qur'an and that they perform specific actions during their prayer, (Beaunissant, 2020, p. 3). Although I respect these practices, I would miss the freedom that I have to talk to my Father in Heaven freely, without rules and etiquette.

Gracism

Throughout my time spent with people in the Muslim culture, I was struck by several aspects of gracism that I feel would be useful in working with Muslim clients. I feel that this

situation specially addresses Davidson's principle of no division. Just because someone does not act or believe as I do, doesn't mean that I am any better than them. Davidson stated that, "the diversities of giftedness, gender, race, class, perspectives, and preferences may collide and even compete at times," (2010, p. 107). Yes, we may have different perspectives on things, but that's ok. I need to give my clients the freedom to voice their concerns and beliefs. I don't have to agree with them, but I can still support them and affirm their feelings.

Summary

When I first began my research on the Muslim Culture in America, I had very little knowledge, besides what I had seen in the media. I learned so much about the religion of Islam

and the history of Muslims in America, but until I tried to get to know some of my Muslim coworkers and their families, I never really had a feel for who they really are. I have learned that Islam has many rules and rituals that believers are required to submit to. The people that I interacted with seem to adhere to these rules willingly, even joyfully. I never heard any of them complaining that they had to wear a head covering or that they had to pray five times a day. I admire their dedication and commitment to their faith.

What I experienced in interviewing and spending time getting to know these people never contradicted what I learned through my research. I did see many differences, though, in what I experienced and some of the things that I had been led to believe about Muslims from

movies and television. It makes me wonder what fallacies we are taught about other cultures and religions. This experience has sparked a desire in me to learn as much as I can about other cultures and religions around me. The grace and kindness that I have felt throughout this project have made a definite impact on me. I love my life as a Christian, but I believe that getting to know and understand people who may live or believe differently from me will make me a better person and a more competent, multicultural counselor.

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