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Social Work Interview

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Cross-Cultural Interview

As part of the cultural interview assignment, I had the honor to interview “Nadia,” a bashful but extremely personable and helpful female who is 24 years-old. She was born in America (and subsequently christened as “Jennifer,” which she later changed), and has lived her life in the Hixson and Red Bank areas, near Chattanooga. While she was raised in a Baptist household (her parents are both very active in their church community), she now considers herself a Muslim, and lives with her husband of six years who also follows the Islamic faith.

Islam places a strong emphasis on several values which include charity and sincerity in faith and, “Nadia” subscribes fully to these beliefs. As a Muslim, “Nadia” believes, “in one God and that no one is equal to God, honesty, abstinence before marriage, and pretty much the “Golden Rule.”” “Nadia” also feels that the Islamic faith places a special emphasis on acts of giving and charity, and holds elder citizens in high regard, which are values that she also feels to be important.

“Nadia” feels that, unfortunately, there are some struggles that are faced by most Muslims living in America. “Nadia” believes that the Muslim people often are perceived in a bad light, or judged wrongly, and stated that her study of and conversion to Islam really magnified her view of the negativity and hostility towards the Muslim culture. During the interview, she asserted that negative reactions towards Muslim and their

beliefs sometimes stem from people and their tendency to be closed-minded. "Nadia" also believes that because there is not one living central figure to Islam (she likened this idea to that of the relationship of the Pope and Catholicism), there is difficulty in spreading the word of her faith. She feels that this lack of voice, and the subsequent ability to spread the word, really works against Islam in that non-Muslim people are ignorant of Islamic practices and beliefs, which only perpetuates the misunderstandings surrounding the Islamic culture. Another force working against positive relations between Muslims and non-Muslim people is the American media, she noted, and how it portrays Muslims and Islamic countries. She aptly compares the struggles of the Islamic people to that of other cultures that have been discriminated against in American history (citing the Japanese and African-Americans specifically) and hopes that, with time, these negative attitudes toward her faith and her people will subside.

Because "Nadia" is an American-Muslim, she explained that her assimilation into the American culture is a little different from that of non-American Muslims. For example, she hesitantly admitted that she watches television shows like Grey's Anatomy and Desperate Housewives, which some other Muslim people may find offensive. As an American who converted and thus assimilated into Muslim culture, she changed her name (both first and middle) and now wears the traditional Muslim headscarf (hijab) in public. While one may wonder if wearing the hijab poses problems for her (in regards to being discriminated against), she told me that she has only once felt that she was a victim of discrimination, and in that situation she was determined to stand her ground.

Social justice certainly isn't a foreign concept to "Nadia" (although, I'm not sure she had ever heard of it described with that term until our interview). The idea of social justice is promoted throughout the Koran and she stressed, throughout our interview, that Islam is a religion that focuses on equality despite one's gender or race. As giving to charitable organizations is another basic teaching of the Islam religion, this only furthers her concept of social justice in trying to ensure that necessary resources are available to everyone by giving freely.

I have now completed three interviews with "Nadia," and I must admit that I am amazed at how she is able to keep an up-beat spirit and positive outlook on life in the face of her experiences. I began this project knowing very little about the Islamic faith and Muslim people, and now I feel a great sense of respect for the Muslim culture because of their values and beliefs, and how well the Muslim people handle the pressures and struggles they face in today's society. Throughout my interviews, "Nadia" has always been willing to answer any question I presented (although, I'm sure she found some comical), and has always spoken candidly about her faith and her life as a Muslim woman. During the interview, I was very comfortable, although I could tell she was certainly apprehensive about some of the questions I presented to her. She nervously told me during the interview that she wasn't very "articulate," but I truly feel that she handled herself well and answered questions with as much grace as one can possess when they are "put on the spot." As a future Social Worker, I feel that this experience has been unparalleled to conventional classroom exercises because the interview assignment forced me to reach out to a member of the community and to ask direct questions to a member of a population that I would not have been in contact with

on a normal basis. I found this experience invaluable because I will be able to take the information “Nadia” has given me and use it to help future Muslim clients. Moreover, I made a friend!