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SOCW 207

October 24, 2006

### Cross Cultural Interview Paper

Dianna and Dalia Abdelaziz are American Muslims who have lived in the Chattanooga area for much of their life. Neither Dianna (age 24) nor Dalia (age 22) is married and they live with their parents and three other siblings consisting of two other sisters (ages 13 and 19) and one brother (age 16). Although their family is first generation immigrants from Palestine, their main cultural affiliation is with their family's Islamic religion.

When I asked them about their values Dianna explained that their religion was considered the highest value and is the backbone for all other values that they have. Whatever Islam places high value on, they are going to personally place high values on as well. Two of the things that they mentioned that are very important to their family are education and relationships. They used the phrase "knowledge is power" when describing their thoughts on the subject of education. Relationships within the family are seen as very crucial. They said that Muslim families do not keep secrets. They are always open about their lives and support one another when there is a need.

Although they live in America, the lives of both Dianna and Dalia are mostly influenced by their religion. It is what defines them as a person. The main thing that sets Muslims apart from society is their clothing. The ladies said the way they dress "is one

way they implement their religion.” They agreed that living as an American Muslim has helped them to gain perspective about other cultures. In the mosque that they attend a person can find representatives from all around the world praying together. Dianna and Dalia described their experience here as a “melting pot.” they said America has always been labeled as the melting pot and it cannot be any truer than it is when it comes to the Muslim communities within the United States.

Dalia defined social justice as “giving the same opportunity and the same social assistance to all people.” Although she could tell me the definition, she said she has not always experienced that in her life. Both of the ladies said that they had faced social injustice at different times in their lives. One thing they mentioned was that they felt if people were better educated about the Muslim way of life there would be less social injustice in this country. People are often afraid of what they do not understand and the Islamic religion is very widely misunderstood in the United States.

When I asked if they felt like they fit into the mainstream culture in America when they were in school Dalia was very quick to give me a negative answer. She said that when she was in junior high and high school she was always asking herself, “what can I do to make myself fit in?” She bounced around to different groups of friends over the years never quite feeling like she was accepted for who she was. When Dalia was sixteen she decided to stop trying to make people accept her and put on her head covering. She said that it was freeing to wear the headscarf because she was able to live as the truest version of herself instead of always trying to conform to the societal norms. Dianna, on the other hand said that although it was difficult in school, she thinks that she has assimilated as well as possible. There are still things that society sees as acceptable

that she does not do such as drink alcohol, but she has found ways to relate to the people around her so they do not view her in a negative light.

I think the underlying message throughout the interview was that people in the mainstream culture needed to be better educated about the Muslim world so they are not so afraid. Another problem that they mentioned was that mainstream ideas about Islam stem from what the media tells them. The media only shows the negative side of this religion, so naturally people only know about the bad side of things. Other than that, there were no real social problems mentioned within the family that needed to be addressed.

I was a little bit nervous about the interview with Dianna and Dalia because I did not know how different it would be to interview more than one person at the same time; however, they were both so nice and willing to answer my questions that they made it very easy on me. Going into the interview we had already met once before and we talked for a while before the interview began so I was pretty comfortable most of the time. At one point during the interview I became uncomfortable because I said something about American holidays and mentioned Christmas right afterwards. Dalia quickly corrected me saying it was not an American holiday, but a Christian one. This little exchange put me on edge for a few minutes and made me more aware of the way I phrased my questions and comments. Other than that I do not believe I used any language that was offensive to them. They seemed perfectly willing to answer any questions and did not seem annoyed or upset by anything I said. One thing I learned about my preparation for the interview was that my questions do not always get answered the way I expect and I need to be better prepared to turn the conversation back to where I think it needs to go

when it drifts off topic. I also learned that working with other cultures does not have to be a scary thing as long as you are willing to learn through the process. I hope that as I grow as a social worker I can hold onto the good things I learned about working with other cultures through this process like not approaching an interview with any preconceived ideas and to take the time to educate myself about the culture before entering into the interview.