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ACCULTURATION EXPERIENCE OF FIRST GENERATION MUSLIM IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN A CANADIAN PRAIRIE CITY

A Thesis Submitted to the College of
Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Master of Arts
in the Department of Psychology
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

By
Farzana Nizar Karim-Tessem

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Head of the Department of Psychology
University of Saskatchewan
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Canada

OR

Dean
College of Graduate Studies and Research
University of Saskatchewan
107 Administration Place
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 5A2
Canada

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores first generation Muslim immigrant women's acculturation experiences and strategies from a religious, cultural and gender perspective. It aims to increase our understanding of the diverse and confounding roles and expectations of their heritage culture and host Canadian culture. Qualitative interviews with eight married with children, English-speaking Muslim immigrant women who have lived in Canada for at least three years explored: (a) their overall experiences living in a Canadian Prairie city; (b) their experience transitioning from their role in the family in a traditional non-Western culture to their role in the family in an egalitarian Canadian culture; and (c) factors that hinder and facilitate their adaptation in Canada. Findings demonstrated that although women's acculturation experiences and strategies are unique and dynamic, all women expressed the interconnectivity and significance of God, community and family in their lives. Women's personal experiences and goals related to work, family, and community influence how and to what degree they negotiate and reconcile the diverse and confounding roles and expectations of their heritage and Canadian cultures. Their acculturation experiences are constantly evolving, and their adaptation in Canada is largely influenced by their daily experiences, including the supports they have and do not have both at home and in their local heritage and host communities. Women also face the central challenge of raising their children in a culture that promotes a set of values that compromises the transmission of their own core religious/cultural values. Thus, they employ strategies such as conscientiously modeling devotion to Islam through practice and teaching, restricting their children's personal freedom and independence, and monitoring and limiting their children's Canadian friendships, while increasing contact with their local heritage community. This research contributes to cross-cultural inquiry via a cultural comparison that established cultural aspects of women's traditional heritage cultures, which was subsequently compared to Canadian culture as a tool for gauging cultural discrepancies. Future research may explore the whole family unit through a longitudinal lens to facilitate both the adaptation and integration of immigrants from collectivistic cultures into Canadian culture, and improved policies and programs that mark Canada as a pluralistic and egalitarian culture.

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I would also like to acknowledge and express my support for the Global Centre for Pluralism, a new international initiative of His Highness the Aga Khan, 49th hereditary Imam (spiritual leader) of Ismaili Muslims. In October 2006 the Government of Canada became partners with the Ismaili Imamat and the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) in the Global Centre for Pluralism. Dedicated to the creation of successful societies, the Centre is founded on the premise that tolerance, openness and understanding towards the cultures, social structures, values and faiths of other peoples are now essential to the very survival of an interdependent world. Pluralism is no longer simply an asset or a prerequisite for progress and development. It is vital to our existence.

"…we cannot make the world safe for democracy unless we also make the world safe for diversity."

His Highness the Aga Khan, 15 May 2006

(Retrieved September 2, 2008 from the Global Centre for Pluralism website **www.pluralism.ca**)

DEDICATION

For Mummy.

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