

Questions:

1. What is your history? What is your home of origin? Why did you/your family settle in _____?
2. What are some of your family customs and roles of members within your family? What is your role in your family?
3. How closely do you identify with and affiliate with your culture?
4. What religious or spiritual beliefs are influential in your culture and for your family?
5. What would be the characteristics and practices of people who are Muslim?
6. What are the similarities/differences between Christians and Muslims?
7. Who are the power structures in your family? Is age a factor in who has power? How are decisions made at the family and community level?
8. How can you communicate effectively in your culture? Consider the meaning of tone of voice, gestures, eye-contact, overall body language, terminology used to describe health, face-saving behaviors.
9. Identify and verify customs, beliefs, and practices that might be misinterpreted by established institutions within your community e.g. schools, law enforcement, social services, health care providers (this includes such beliefs around certain body parts such as the head, male and female circumcision, cutting or puncturing the skin, transfusions, autopsies)

Viewing the World Outside of My Own Culture

I interviewed Rasheed, a Muslim graduate student at Marquette University, early in April at the library. Rasheed is a South Pakistan Muslim who came to the United States and to Marquette University in August 2007 to earn a graduate degree. His parents came from India, and presently live in Pakistan, as does his younger, brother. He visited his two older sisters, who live in the United States, before he made the decision to come to school in the U.S.

I decided to interview Rasheed because I want to be a culturally competent counselor and understand the worldviews of my all of my clients, and because Rasheed and I work at the same restaurant I figured he would be the perfect person to interview because I don't know many people from other cultures. I have wanted to know more about the Muslim faith since September 11, because of the uninformed way many in the United States reacted to persons of this faith. More recently, I learned how Islam, Judaism, and Christianity all came from the same roots and share some similar yet different beliefs. I saw this interview as an opportunity to learn about the Muslim faith and my own ability to counsel a person different from me.

What I believed about this culture before the interview and what changed is that the Muslim faith required a personal commitment to prayer, that the Holy Book was the Quran, that Jesus was not considered divine, that Muhammad was the messenger/prophet of the faith, and that the Muslim faith was centered in the Middle East. What I knew about Islam was mostly from what I read as I prepared for the interview. I expected that Rasheed would look physically different than me. Other than that, I knew very little. Though those things did not change, I learned many new things about the Muslim faith and culture, as well as my own ability

to relate one-on-one with a person of a very different faith and culture than my own. What I noticed about my own comfort level was that I was somewhat nervous before Rasheed arrived. We met at Golda Meir Library in one of the conference rooms. I went a bit early in order to not make him wait there for me. I wished, particularly, that I could have found information about whether I should offer my hand to shake or not, but I had found nothing. I decided to offer it and he shook my hand. As we sat down, I felt as if all the questions I had prepared somehow were not enough. They seemed trivial, cursory, or too broad. I felt nervous about beginning, because there was so much to ask. However, I jumped in and he seemed ready to begin. I told him what kinds of questions I would be asking, explained the project a little, and began with my first question about this family. We both seemed to become more comfortable nearly right away.

Though my intent was to find out about the Muslim faith, I began by asking Rasheed about his upbringing, his family, and his decision to come to the U.S. in order to also find out about his culture. I also asked a few questions that would help me determine his level of acculturation. His suggestion that he was surprised how much people in the U.S. drink on a daily basis led me to believe that he was more aware of the college scene than general society. I found that we had both similarities and differences in our faiths and cultures. As for differences, Rasheed shared the dedicated prayer life of Muslims who pray five specific times throughout each day. Christian prayer is not mandated. Muslims also fast from food, bad language, and sexual activity during Ramadan, a spiritual practice that helps Muslims practice control over basic needs. Many Christians fast, but few do so for an entire month. The way Rasheed explained the Muslim's devotion to their religion reminded me quite a bit of the elderly people in *Number Our Days* and their commitment to Jewish culture. These people were all about keeping the old ways and traditions of their religion active and were always committed to maintaining

just that, which is also very apparent in the Muslim religion. Another major difference was that Rasheed is very much a minority in the U. S. as well as on campus. The Muslim students at Marquette have been given a room in the cultural center in which they may worship, though they sometimes pray together in their own apartments. Christians have an abundance of churches in nearly every town in the U.S. In addition, Rasheed described the Muslim holy book, the Quran, as “straight, concise, and brief” and the Christian Bible as confusing, hard to understand, and mysterious. Muslims are required to read the Bible and know about the life of Jesus. Few Christians, I would venture, know much about the Quran. Similarities between the faiths were obvious, as well. Both faiths believe in a supreme Being (God and Allah) who is the only God; both have holy writings (the Bible and the Quran) that are the inspired Word of God; both believe in the Day of Judgment for which humans will be held accountable for our deeds; and both look toward an eternal life (Heaven or Paradise). Even more, the similarities were most apparent in the significance of each faith.

This was one of my favorite cultural assignments, if not one of my favorite counseling assignments. It was personally, culturally, and professionally meaningful to me. Any time I meet someone and get to know them, I grow personally. Any time I get to know someone from another culture and break down my biases, I grow culturally. Any time I learn from someone of a different faith about their faith, I grow spiritually. And any time I do any of those things, I grow professionally. Many of Rasheed’s words will stay with me for a long time. He has helped me to understand the Muslim faith much better than I ever could from reading a book. I considered myself very open minded going into the interview, and I found that the similarities within our faiths made connections that we could build on in our conversation, and the differences did not stop us from connecting with one another. I was comfortable asking him about himself and his

faith. He was comfortable describing his faith and asking me questions about the United States, Christianity, and counseling. In turn, I gained confidence in working with clients who might be very different than clients I have worked with in the past. Having said this, I realize that one of the most important ways this assignment should affect me is in knowing that this is just one Muslim's view, and one Muslim's way of relating. As we have heard so many times in class, there are differences amongst persons of any specific culture. What I have learned is a step toward learning more. I will continue to grow, and must seek to learn more should I counsel a client from this faith.

I was amazed by the open and honest exchange we were able to have so readily. Rasheed spoke straightforwardly about his faith without knowing much about where I stood except that I was curious about his faith. I tried to ask questions in a way I might ask a future client: invitingly, respectfully, and openly. In turn, he felt comfortable asking me about my faith, as well. This amazing connection confirmed my desire to counsel persons of nationalities and cultural backgrounds. After this experience, I feel even more confident in my ability to respectfully, openly, and non-threateningly establish working relationships in counseling persons of cultures and faiths that are radically different than mine.