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Experiences of Native Finnish Women who Converted to Islam

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Experiences of Native Finnish Women who Converted to Islam

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The purpose of this thesis was to uncover the experiences of native Finnish women who have converted to Islam, in a non-Muslim majority country. A sub-interest in this study, seeks to uncover what type of support individuals would have needed during their transition into the religion of Islam and what types of factors affected it.

The need for understanding this phenomenon became evident during the first two years at Laurea University as the cultural competence courses provided on campus caused intense reactions from students who had opposing opinions about the religion of Islam and the need to have a general and professional understanding of its function in the lives of millions of individuals across the globe. The local interest in this study and the usefulness of the findings contribute to the working partner Nuoret Muslimit ry and their development of outreach programs available to Muslim and non-Muslim youth in the capital area.

Literature in this thesis included social work related competences focusing on culture and religion and the importance of gaining a better understanding of these subjects.

The planning and implementation of this study used participatory and traditional methods. Community involvement alongside academic interests drove this study forward and actively included members of the society in developing the study design for the research. The use of semi-structured interviews in this participatory study provided the researchers to scratch the surface and begin to uncover a bit what types of experiences and disparities exist within the Muslim community of Finland and how to build on those and improve the conditions. Participants in the study were keen to share their experiences and NuoretMuslimit Ry equally eager to begin taking action.

The findings have discovered and identified a new Finnish minority group and their experiences during their transition into their new identity. Many new phenomena were discovered throughout this study and suggestions for future studies have also been made.

Keywords: Competences, Islam, Acculturation, Experiences, Finnish Muslim

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1 Introduction

There is a growing Muslim population in Finland many of whom are native Finns. According to Finland's national registry in 2014, there were an estimated 12 327 Muslims registered in Finland, however the current accurate number is unknown due to lack of statistical data (Tilastokeskus, 2017). Upon taking Islam as a new religion, the practice of the religion in a non-Muslim environment such as Finland, may directly affect the individual's life in several different key areas such as; spiritual, socio-cultural, physical, and intellectual, further impacting the individual's customs and habits thus potentially affecting their cultural identity.

By practicing the religion, new habits and opinions begin to develop and manifest themselves into shaping the individual's own Islamic cultural identity. The institutional religion of Islam will affect the identity development of the new Muslim in relation to their experiences.

This research will study the experiences of native Finnish Muslim women converts to further increase an understanding of the changes that may take place during an unallocated amount of time and to discover possible cultural changes in the individual's social status and interactions within society.

The relevance of this study is evident in all communities as there is a strong public interest and fear of Muslims in general (Taylor, 2016). The changes that take place after converting to Islam may directly impact the individual's role within the society and how the society chooses to accept them and this study will bring those into light.

In this thesis, seven native Finnish Muslim women who have converted to Islam will be interviewed and questioned about their experiences and potential cultural changes that may have occurred, after changing religious beliefs to Islam. There is currently no scholarly information available that discusses this phenomenon in Finland, so literary searches were thoroughly conducted to provide relevant theory. The literature searches which were conducted for this thesis allows the researchers to gain an in depth understanding of the processes of acculturation, the religion of Islam, and both religious and cultural competences which should be applied by professionals in their own professions.

The working life partner for this study is Nuoret Muslimit Ry, who wants to gain knowledge on this subject in order to improve their community outreach activities. With the findings produced they also hope to have an impact on a smaller scale on the Muslim community and other organizations, public and private, which too seek to promote inclusion within the communities and to eliminate or decrease the disparities that exist among minority communities.

2 Working Life Partner : Nuoret Muslimit Ry

The working life partner is Nuoret Muslimit Ry (Young Muslims NGO), also known as NUMU. It was registered as an organization in 2012 by group of active individuals who wanted to do something for the Muslim youth living in the capital region of Helsinki. NUMU's main goals are to activate, motivate and unite the youth and community members (Nuoret Muslimit, 2012). Although the organization is titled Young Muslims, in order to participate in the events and the activities, age is never not an issue. At the moment, the age range of NUMU members and active participants is averaged around 12-30 years old.

NUMU is an international youth organization, who encourages youth to participate in the society and in governmental activities whilst holding on to their religious values. The organization empowers youth by increasing their confidence and strengthening their cultural identity by supporting and valuing individuality and uniqueness of everyone. NUMU's youth work seeks to instill ethical and moral values, strengthening the individual identity, and within a larger group to work together towards better integration into society by strengthening and uniting the ties between the Muslim and non-Muslim community.

NUMU's main office is in Helsinki and they also have other sectors working in Tampere, Vaasa and Vantaa. NUMU organizes many activities and events to engage with their target groups for example, by organizing peer-support groups weekly which provide the youth a chance to interact with each other and discuss current events and other subjects that may be pressing. Other events which NUMU hosts are expositions and other conferences where guest speakers and lecturers are invited to speak and hold charity events. One of the biggest events arranged by the organization was called NUMU Expo. It was a two-day conference held in December 2015 at which 200 people attended at which special guest speakers came from all around the world. The topic of the conference was "Steadfastness" and the main reason for such a topic, was to encourage youth to strive in upholding their spirituality and religious practices. The conference was a success in many ways as it brought together many individuals from all over Finland and fostered a strong sense of belonging to the Muslim community. The authors of this thesis presented the research question to NUMU's chairman Muttaqi Khan, who was eager to take this matter forward to the board for discussion. It was a unanimous vote that NUMU agreed to become our working life partner and provide us with access to use their office space, ability to use their social media resources, helped recruit participants, and discuss ethical issues related to the study in order to succeed. In return, the research will help the organization to understand more about native Finnish converts and their experiences and in what areas they can try to provide individuals with support during transition. There are many native converts who are members of this organization and the results will also help them to build up current and potential member's cultural identity through self-awareness.

3 Research Question - Aim of the Thesis

The purpose of this research was to study experiences of native Finnish women who have converted to Islam. To find out what types of experiences individuals have had during their transition into becoming a Muslim and what types of factors may have had an impact on the individual's cultural identity in Finland.

The research findings will help local organizations and institutions improve and cater their services to help native Muslims and non-native Muslims become more visible and inclusive members of society. The research will also provide general insights into the individual experiences of native converts and what social status they possess within their own community. The findings will not only help the organization but can also serve as a voice for those who have converted to Islam and are in the initial stages of internalizing their new faith and still searching for ways to understand the changes happening around them.

4 Theoretical Basis for the Thesis

4.1 Previous Studies

There is a limited amount of information regarding native Finnish Muslim converts and their experiences. The information found were two Master's dissertation focusing on Finnish and Swedish Muslim women's perceptions of feminism and another research studies the individuality of Muslim women living in Finland. Both studies were published in the University of Helsinki and did not contribute to this thesis. A dissertation by Haataja (2010) was reviewed which loosely discussed Muslim women's place in a non-Muslim environment, however did not further investigate the current phenomenon in this study. Although the information was up to date it did not contribute to the theory or processes of this research. Convert Finnish Muslims have yet to be studied and included in academic and scholarly publications in Finland and finding studies which focus solely on native Finnish convert Muslims was unsuccessful.

In Germany one study which was conducted went more in depth behind the motives of the individual's decisions to convert to Islam and what impact their lifestyle has on the non-Muslim environment. However it did not provide insight into the individual experiences and thus also did not contribute to this thesis (Neumuller, 2013).

There are numerous articles and publications that discuss and revolve around integration and or assimilation and acculturation regarding individuals of foreign background, different nationalities and or cultures within a dominant westernized society, however they did not support this research nor contribute to the theory related to this study.

4.2 Professional Competence

4.2.1 Cultural Competence

According to the International Federation of Social Workers and the National Association of Social Work, social justice is one of the core values in social work, and cultural competences are a fundamental ethical standard within the field (Garran & Rozas, 2013).

Due to the institutional disparities that exist among racial and ethnic minorities, there also exist an imbalance in the quality and quantity of services offered. According to Horevitz et al. (2013) the majority of the individuals who work in the helping professions, are from white middle-class backgrounds, thus further increasing the cultural gap between client and worker. Garran and Rozas (2013) suggest that the interactions with clients from a different race or ethnicity can result in a different treatment and or recommendations than those who share the same race. This institutionalized prejudice and discrimination further increases the disparities among ethnic and racial minorities and marginalizes those who are already oppressed. As a result, an increase in the need to understand cultural competences and its application begin to emerge (Horevitz, E., Lawson, J., and Chow, J., 2013) (Garran, A. & Rozas, L., 2013).

Schools of social work and those teaching social services are beginning to emphasize the importance of cultural competences and are adding it to their curriculums. By adding these courses into the first-year studies, the new improved and mandatory curriculum provide students the opportunity to learn and recognize their own social competences and lack thereof. Laurea University of Applied Sciences Degree Programme in Social Services offers several courses such as; intercultural encounters and exerting influence in the social care sector, to promote the individuals increase in cultural competence, social inclusion and to help recognize their own prejudices. Although these courses are designed to introduce the constructs of multicultural awareness and diversity, still the contents of the course may neglect to further investigate and define cultural competence and how the culture itself is defined. Cultural competence is a vast subject to undergo in such a brief amount of time in any curriculum, therefore allotting the appropriate amount of time and tools need to be taken into consideration in order to achieve culturally competent social service workers.

The three major facets of cultural competence include the ability to recognize the differences that exist, the acceptance of diversity and ones adaptability in different cultural settings (Garran and Rozas, 2013). On an individual level, one must strive to; increase cultural intellect and acknowledge the relevance of it, work towards cultural tolerance by accepting the dynamics of different cultures, understand the importance of cultural assessment skills and communication in a multicultural environment and by fostering a healthy environment where cross-cultural encounters can occur and cultural competence increase. Cultural competence is an “on-going process with a goal of achieving [the] ability to work effectively with culturally diverse groups and communities with detailed awareness, specific knowledge, re-

finer skills, and personal and professional respect for cultural attributes, both differences and similarities” (Horevitz et al. 2013).

There exist many ambiguities pertaining to the meaning of cultural competences and how it is seen in the field of social work and social services. Culturally sensitive practices sometimes lead to discrimination as a result of intersectionality, but by knowing how to apply competence effectively in the working environment, it can enhance the interaction between the client and worker. By paying attention to macro- and micro-level barriers within an institution and its constituents, the selection of services which are better culturally suited to fit the needs of the clients are more likely to be culturally appropriate when applied such as multicultural social work, multicultural family services, and other projects related to further increasing inclusiveness and decreasing the existing disparities among services offered. “The mission and purpose of the social work profession demand respect for cultural diversity and practices that support this ethical commitment” (Horevitz et al. 2013). The effectiveness of cultural competence yet remains unconfirmed, however through practice and theory, ideally cultural competence would manifest itself into society and find its place in the lives of every individual.

4.2.2 Religious Competence

In congruence with cultural competence is religious competence. Religious competence entails the understanding of the diversity in religions and the behaviors and customs within specific religious denominations and non-denominations. Being aware of religious needs and practices and incorporating them with cultural competences, a professional and ethical working method will start to develop, as the social worker internalizes and comprehends the significance of the client’s religious preferences and behavior (Whitley, 2012).

The interiorized religion, which are the practices and beliefs done in private, directly affect and shape the behavior, personality and all other aspects that make up their individual identity. The institutionalized religion, which are the practices and beliefs conducted within the religious community, help shape the individual’s religious and cultural identity (Whitley, 2012). Institutionalized religion is experienced independently from other societies sharing the same religion for example, the Christian community in the United States. In the United States there are over 1,3 million Christian Baptists which are comprised of African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Caucasians and other ethnic and or racial minorities. Christians are the “most diverse Christian denomination” and that the experiences of each ethnicity are independent from one another as the institutionalized religion begins to manifest through the interiorized religion and vice versa (American Baptist Churches USA. 2016). The history of slavery and oppression has also directly influenced the behaviors and religious practices of the African Americans further creating differences within the institutionalized Baptist religion in

the United States thus shaping the cultural identity and ethnic identity of the African Americans. Therefore, it is important for the social workers to be aware and attentive to the religious need and practices in order to create an environment where the worker can use the religion as a tool to better serve each individual (Whitely, 2012). This environment should be open and safe for individuals to express their religious needs and the worker should apply the same set of skills developed through cultural competences. In some cases it is even encouraged to ask questions regarding spirituality and other sources that may be a source of strength, thus further supporting and respecting individuals' spiritual beliefs (Whitley, 2012). The position of the worker should be neutral and professional and as needed asking questions which further lead the discussion in a direction that will empower. Having information about the accessibility and occurrence of spiritual or religious events also promotes social inclusion and independence.

By learning to apply a broader perspective when analyzing cultural or community related phenomena, it is essential to consider all of the independent factors which make up one whole individual, who is a member of a group. It is important to acknowledge that cultural competence and religious competence do not equal understanding a mono-culture, and that one culture does not define how all members of that one cultural group behave. The previously mentioned statement will be one of the objectives explored throughout this thesis. By examining the possible cultural changes that might occur after changing religious beliefs and how the individual experiences their own culture, will help to develop Finland's understanding and cooperative working experiences with the Muslim community. By opening the doors for intercultural experiences and attempting to eliminate discriminatory practices towards the perceived mono-cultural religious group.

There is a common misconception that most Muslims in Finland are a homogeneous group and whose interiorized and institutional religion is one and the same. This can be seen in social media with a steady increase in islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims throughout the world, as a direct result of the refugee crisis and terrorist attacks linking the religion, refugees and terrorism together. There are at least five major Islamic sects represented in the capital area of Finland which are the; Sunni, Shia, Sufi, Tatar and Baha'i sects. The differences that exist within these sect are similar to the differences in comparison to Catholics, Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Lutherans. Nevertheless, the Muslim community remains to be classified into one mono-culture, is not serving the society on any level because one cannot be color blind and still seek social justice. The existing challenges in Finland for Muslims to build adequate places of worship because of protests against them are a direct infringement on their rights to worship and have a place to worship, constant difficulties contracting space suitable for prayers without landlord interferences is borderline harassment and discrimination, and the inability to attain building permits add to the disparities that exist within the Muslim community and in the non-Muslim community.

By furthering ones religious and cultural competences and applying radical social working methods, concrete solutions can be found and real changes made to improve on the discrepancies that separate Finland's citizen's immigrant and non-immigrant, Muslim and non-Muslim. These competences and theory should separate and remind social workers that practices worthwhile should always include elements of political and socio-economic action. By appreciating "the public causes of private pain and misery" the social worker can strive to change the conditions and work towards a more equal society (Ioakimidis, 2016). These competences are tools that work as a preventative measures if used as an early intervention in client, state or private work. The purpose of social policies are to support the wellbeing of individuals and to directly impact and influence those factors which affect ones wellbeing. Those factors which affect wellbeing include but are not limited to housing, work, movement, environment, education, culture and networks. However if one of those areas are in discord, then the wellbeing is directly impacted and must seek corrective measures. To prevent discord in one of those areas, all of those factors affecting the well-being, must be in harmony with one another and the working environment must also be supportive. This means that social policies that exist must work towards supporting those key elements such as housing, environment, movement etc. in such a way to increase the well-being and prevent exclusion.

If the methods and tools provided are well understood rather than so ambiguous, then the defined or perceived problem has different types of intervention methods and countless number of ways to solve the issue. Social work is guided by a series of policies and those policies should match the needs of all clients in their private and personal lives and once there is a disparity among the clients, changes to the policies should be made. Garran and Rozas (2013) point out that according to the International Federation of Social Workers, justice in social work also includes anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive social work. At the root of discrimination and oppression are a stockpile of issues impacting the well-being thus furthering the need for preventative work and early intervention in those problems that on a larger scale, can results in segregation by race, ethnicity and or even religion in a society that thrives on social justice, equality and is at the pedestal of acknowledging and promoting equal human rights. The social worker must strive "to understand the relationship between the individual and [their] environment so that the two could be helped to adjust". In order for this to happen, as mentioned earlier, the social worker must create an environment where the client feels that they can express their worries and concerns thus the need for a "therapeutic relationship" is established and the social worker is the clients gateway to social equality and social justice. This is along the same theme the radical social working method. The objective of the social worker is the idea of empowerment and giving the client a voice and recognizing their rights. Clients without power cannot determine their own experience nor can they control their environment to suit their needs or make plans and decisions that affect them. When working with a group or individual who "suffers disadvantage, inequality or injustice", the

need for validation and clear identification of the problem is at the foundation for succeeding and at the root of empowerment (Garran & Rozas, 2013) (Howe, 2009) (Kananoja, A., Lähteinen, M., and Marjamäki, P., 2010).

4.3 Culture

4.3.1 Cultural Identification

Culture is generally defined as a group's way of living and their shared behaviors. The generalizations are often misleading and the perceived culture is often relative and contextual. Culture is not always geographically determined by an individual's nationality, rather there are other key factors to take into consideration when attempting to measure and identify cultural behaviors and the motives behind an individuals and or groups actions.

Me ja Muut classifies motivating factors which affect the individuals decisions for a specific actions as universal, cultural and collective (Salo-Lee, L., Malmberg, R., and Halinoja, R., 1996).

- Universal motives are the same for most individuals. The ability to sense emotions, perceive surroundings and the need to connect are shared by all.
- Cultural motives determine what individuals do with those feelings and how they choose to express them.
- Collective motives are similar and shared within in certain groups. For example, the same language or similar learning styles.

Depending on the variation of motives and actions the individual culture begins to take shape. Culture is way of communication “[which is] learned through communication, maintained through communication and affected and influenced by communication,”and reflects on personal methods of communication and our own perceptions (Salo-Lee et al., 1996). Interaction between individuals is always a complex event involving a dynamic and in-depth understanding of cultural, contextual and individual factors.

Attempting to understand the difference between a collective culture and subcultures discourse, will further help to understand the components that make up individuals cultural identities. The motivating factors play a key role separating cultural behaviors from another because the relationship between a person and the context of their situation will determine what type of communication will formulate. Due to subcultures and discourse, cultural comparisons are not always so simple. There is no accurate measure to separate one culture from another because actions are either an individuals or culturally related. A persons intellectual motives can be categorized into universal, collective and individual to better understand if actions are in fact individual or culturally related.

There exists a maximalist culture, which presents an extreme monolithic culture and a rather static image that culture determines all actions between individuals. National and ethnic culture has precedence and subcultures and different methods of discourse are dismissed.

Extreme maximalist cultures approach easily leads to prejudice, negative stereotypes and gives the impression of emphasizing one culture being better than another (Salo-Lee et al., 1996).

A minimalist culture presents the exact opposite of an ethnocentric maximalist culture, where the option of grouping people together collectively sharing the same identity is not possible. A minimalist approach will highlight the differences and individuals uniqueness without ever being a collective whole. Generalizations and other methods of classifications are nevertheless inevitable and justified when used for scientific research.

Although most research investigates primarily cultural differences, it doesn't necessarily suggest that similarities aren't equally as essential. By comparison and observing differences it gives a new perspective to one's own culture to identify its rules which are not always so obvious, to make the comparison on one's own society. These cultural comparisons are usually done using two cultures, through which the contrastive investigation and differences are more easily discovered. With more cultures being investigated by comparison methods, more similarities and equal traits of often found.

4.3.2 Cultural Variations

Cultural environments are often predictable and thus cultural interactions often provide great insight into what the other culture practices. People prefer their surroundings to be predictable and the more uncertainty that their environment has, the more negative feelings they associate with what is causing the unpredictability. The subculture or "foreign" culture present will often be subjected to stereotypes which are contrary to general expectations and still unavoidable between the individuals. The stereotypes can help the individual to adjust to the new culture and activities when the individual is aware of the stereotype, the stereotype exists about a group and not a person and the stereotype changes with new information. Stereotypes are normal and each group consists of many variations of the represented culture. There exists no "typical" person from any culture because no culture consists of all the same personalities and identities. In a communication setting, certain characteristics representative of a popular culture, may be more evident in many other cultures when two foreign cultures interact. For example, the American notion of "small talk" to fill the perceived "awkward silences" may be engaged in by all members regardless of their cultural background, simply because it is a more commonly known method of communication that both may easily adopt (Salo-Lee et al., 1996).

The impressions other people give off, are often correlated with their methods of communication either direct or in-direct, verbal or non-verbal and meta-messaging. Factors which contribute to cultural comparisons are often most reflected in the methods of communication. Based on this, the culture is classified as both low- and high-context cultures and high- and low-contact cultures.

An example of a low-context culture is the Scandinavian cultures method of communication and interaction, in it that verbal and non-verbal communication match each other and words mean what they are intended to mean. There are no meta-messages and actions do not contradict with the verbal messages being sent. High-context cultures such as China, only a portion of the message is given verbally and the core of the message is through non-verbal communication and other meta-messages. Much of the message is contextual and more attention is paid to the non-verbal method of communication. During the communication process, high-context cultures touch more than low context-cultures and the need for personal space is less. Eye-contact is a strong form of communication in high-context cultures and although it is acknowledged as a form of communication in all cultures, however its use varies (Salo-Lee et al., 1996).

4.3.3 Acculturation

Cultural sensitivity can guide the analysis of people from a different culture in a new way. It can provide objectivity and a new foundation for thinking. Salo-Lee has expressed the need for individuals to understand their own culture and the multicultural environment and how they interact with each other. It requires the identification of the other cultures features and the flexibility of the individuals own culture, in order for a multicultural environment to flourish. Individuals tend to act ethnocentrically based on rules dictated by their dominant culture disregarding subcultures and discourse. Individuals who work in multicultural environments can easily adapt to and adopt universal communication methods, whereas individuals who aren't aware of social constructs and social behaviors even in their own dominant culture, can be faced with socially challenging situations during intercultural settings. As a rule of thumb for the latter, familiarization with encountering other cultures is useful in learning the values that they hold in that it will be a brief introduction to the social constructs that exist.

Intercultural communication at its core, aims to remove existing barriers that prevent social well-being in culturally new environments. When an individual faces a new cultural environment, their own values and norms feel threatened and the new environment may seem unbearable and even frightening because of new foods, religious practices and even the concept of time. The end results will suffer as will the interactions with members of the new community. By familiarizing oneself with the new culture beforehand, the encounter will be more pleasant and the end result more fruitful. If the new encounter involves more than one per-

son, the more prepared for the new cultural encounter all parties involved are, the more pleasant the interaction will be.

Factors that affect acculturation or integration depend on the individual's knowledge of their own dominant culture, intellectual state of mind and how effortlessly the new culture may be practiced.

Salo-Lee has classified individual levels or phases of acculturation into their own categories, depending on how they have entered into the new culture and how well they choose to take on these cultural norms. They have been labeled as the following:

Cultural rejection or *de-culturization*, happens when the individual rejects the dominant new culture and seeks their own cultural members. This new environment often leads to the sensation of having "no roots" and so the individual may feel disconnected and not at home in the new or old country

Substitution or *addition* is when the individual seeks to adopt the dominant culture and behave as much as possible within the new environment.

Synthesis is when an individual combines positive elements of their own culture and new culture.

Re-synthesis is when an individual combines the positive elements of their own culture and new culture while taking in yet a third cultures positive elements to form a new cultur (Salo-Lee et al., 1996).

These processes of acculturation depend greatly on the context of the situation and the new environment. Individuals, who have had a negative experience with adaptation, may waiver under pressure and move away or give-up. Other individuals may have a counter reaction and criticize their surrounding environment and culture. This type of a reaction is retaliatory in nature and *lex talionis*, meaning an eye for an eye, in practice. Negative integration can be due to poor communication in the environment which may be hindered by lack of knowledge of the new language or cultural norms which may be challenging to practice. Some issues that arise pertaining to acculturation and appropriation are ethical considerations for the dominant or minority culture to which the individual is attempting to adapt to.

Cultural identity issues are mainly prevalent when the minority group is not ethnically representative of the dominant group. This problem often occurs when the dominant group represents an ethnic majority rather than a cultural majority. The separation of race and culture is like splitting hairs. As contextual as cultural development is, ethnic identification correlates with the cultural identity one develops. During appropriation, the individual from a dominant culture knowingly seeks to adopt qualities from the often minority culture and use them out

of context. However, under the right circumstances, it can be used as a tool for integration and promote social inclusion. Acculturation can also be correlated with appropriation in that it can promote social and cultural integration. The Religion of Islam has its own set of behaviors which through constant practice manifests itself into a perceived culture (Salo-Lee et al., 1996).

4.4 Religion of Islam

4.4.1 Fundamentals of Islam

Islam is a monotheistic Abrahamic religion that has been practiced for thousands of years. The word Islam means submission to The Creator and to be a Muslim means to have submitted. Muslims also believe in all of the Prophets mentioned in the Torah and the Bible, and that the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) is the last Prophet sent to mankind. (Whilst gathering information about the religion of Islam, it became quite evident that Muslims hold a great amount of respect for all of their Prophets and use special terminology such as asking for peace and blessings upon them when mentioning their names and so a gesture of respect, the authors of this thesis will also use the appropriate terms when mentioning such names.) Muslims believe that the Quran is the Holy Book which was sent through the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) to guide Muslims in their affairs. The practices and teachings of Prophet are referred to as Sunnah [Sun-naah] and followed by 90% of the world's Muslim population (Al-Majid, 2007).

Islam has five pillars which by which every Muslim strives to fulfill and believe in, in order to be considered a Muslim, hence practicing Islam.

The five pillars of Islam are:

- 1) Belief in the Oneness of God - Allah. Not associating nor worshipping anything except Him.
- 2) Prayer - Muslims who have reached puberty are required to perform five daily prayers.
- 3) Charity/Almsgiving - Muslims annually pay charity from their accumulated wealth. Every individual who has been able to save an undefined amount of money or is in possession of gold for a period of one year, is required to pay 2.5 percent of the wealth in charity.
- 4) Fasting the month of Ramadan - Individuals who have reached puberty and are in good health, are required to fast the month of Ramadan from sunrise until sunset. Individuals who are ill, pregnant, or on a journey are not required to fast.
- 5) Pilgrimage- Muslims must strive to go to visit the Holy City of Mecca, Saudi Arabia at least once in a lifetime and is obligatory to those who can afford it. The event takes place annually and is referred to as performing Hajj [Hädz].

The religion of Islam is a personal lifestyle choice that cannot be forced upon anyone because of the fundamentals that need to be practiced and believed in, in order to be a Muslim. “There is no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion...” (Holy Quran) therefore anyone who practices Islam and or wants to be a Muslim, must do so only by their own free will. (Al-Majid, 2007).

4.4.2 Converting to Islam

Islam has certain conditions that must be met in order to be considered a Muslim. The conditions were discussed in the previous section of Fundamentals of Islam and Pillars of Islam. When an individual wants to become a Muslim, generally it is done amongst other Muslims where the testimony of the faith or Shahada [:Shä-hää-däh] is witnessed. The testimony is as follows:

Ash-hadu an-laailaha ill-Allah. Wa ash-hadu an Muham-madan Rasuul-Allah
 [:Äsh-hädu än-lää iläähä il-Allaah. Wa äsh-hädu ännä Muhäm-mädän Ra-suul-ul-llaah]

أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ
 وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ

I bear witness that there is no god worthy of worship except God (Allah) and I bear witness that Muhammed is the final Prophet and Messenger of God (Allah.)

(Testimony of faith - Shahada in Arabic transliteration, pronunciation of transliteration, Arabic language and followed by the English translation.)

Converting to Islam can be done almost anywhere. Most individuals tend to go to the mosque, however it can also be done outside of the mosque, so long as it is witnessed by two individuals.

After converting, the new Muslim is encouraged to bathe, pray and to slowly begin implementing the Islamic way of life (Kamil, 2011).

4.4.3 Daily Practices of Islam

Islam is practiced in many different ways throughout the day, some of which are more visible than others.

Intention plays a major role in the actions of an individual. Everything that the Muslim does, depending on their intention, either serves themselves or God. Motives behind actions can be considered a form of worship with the right intention being to please God.

Praying and women publicly covering themselves are not the only visible forms of worship, rather there are more internal and spiritual actions and practices which are also done.

The more visible practices may include attending Friday prayers, cultural interactions, norms and participation in public holidays which are known as the institutionalized religion. The less visible practices include fasting, the internal struggle to strive for God to become a better person (also known as Jihad [:dzi-hääd]) and the remembrance and mentioning of God before, after and during many activities such as eating, going out, and sleeping known as the interiorized religion (Whitley, 2012).

Implementing the Sunnah and interiorized religion eventually exposes the individual to the institutionalized religion. This means practicing the religion within and as a part of the community which contributes to the Islamic cultural identity beginning to manifest itself on a personal, societal and global scale thus forming a Muslim or Islamic identity. The institutional religion at its purest form was practiced during the lifetime of the Prophet (P.B.U.H.). In modern times, predominantly Muslim countries present a tainted version of the religion due to their own cultural influences and practices. For example, Islam is seen and practiced differently in Afghanistan and Morocco. The collective differences may be as subtle as the chosen method of reciting the Quran and or as extreme as the chosen covering by women. The differences exist simply because of cultural influences and do not represent a mono-cultural Islam. A monocultural Islam exists as an institutionalized religion and can be seen in many different ways even within the city of Helsinki.

5 Qualitative Research

5.1 Participatory Method

“The role of the researcher is to explore, uncover and challenge forms of dominant discourse.” (Bryman, 2008).

As Dane (2013) mentions that “qualitative research can be referred to as a family of methods in which some members are more compatible than others.” In this qualitative study, a small group of people were used to guide and support the construction of hypotheses. The reason

for selecting the participatory qualitative research method, is that it is an ideal method for studying a phenomenon of which there are no previous. This qualitative study allowed the researchers to safely explore experiences and emotions of the participants and use the results to formulate a basic hypothesis (Dane, 2013).

Qualitative research and theory are used as a foundation for the framework for this empirical study. Relevant literature has been included to as it is an essential part of empirical studies, furthermore an equally important part in providing proper knowledge in measuring the categories. By utilizing the relevant literature, researchers have gained better insight into the phenomenon and implemented a nominal measuring method in the analysis of the data and ordinal methods to scale the data. This will be further explained in the data analysis section.

The main objective in this thesis was to study experiences of native Finnish women after converting to Islam and the chosen method for the research was the participatory method combined with elements of more conventional or traditional research methods.

Participatory studies are used when conducting a study in partnership with a local community. In this study, NUMU was representing the Muslim community and its members. The study focused on bringing to light the needs NUMU has to develop their programs and events catering to Muslims in Finland. Participatory methods generally work closely with community members in identifying the phenomenon and conducting the study. However, in this study the researchers were able to work more independently in producing theories and analyzing the data.

In traditional research, institutions already have an idea of what it is they want from the findings and it is the job of the researcher to produce the data using scientific methods and less community or institutional involvement. Traditional research method aspects, which contributed to this study were mainly presented “in the speed through which relatively accurate, relevant, information [was] gathered rather than in involving local people in formulating the research agendas or in the representation of the outcomes.” (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995).

This participatory research involved members of the communities and the local non-government organization NuoretMuslimit as the partner. NUMU’s interest and involvement in this study was for their organization and for the researchers it was the pursuit of academic interests in addition to community involvement. Participatory research requires community members’ involvement and general interest in the research processes, analysis, and use of the findings. It also included semi-structured interviews with community members NUMU has an interest in working with and the results will be used to further that agenda. Participatory methods use a ‘bottom-up’ approach which means it involves the communities’ priorities and perspectives in the research and planning which this included on a smaller scale. Participatory studies seek to “enable local people to seek their own solutions” and through this study NUMU will be able to do so. One of the most important aspects of participatory research

which this study has paid keen attention to lies in exploring local knowledge and perceptions of the phenomenon. This participatory study includes characteristics of traditional research methods such as in the identification of the phenomenon and the analysis of the findings. However, a complete fusion of participatory and traditional research methods was sought for academic purposes and in measuring internal and external validity of the study (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995).

Below in the image, is seen the division of participatory research methods and traditional research methods and how this study has merged the two for the purposes of this thesis.

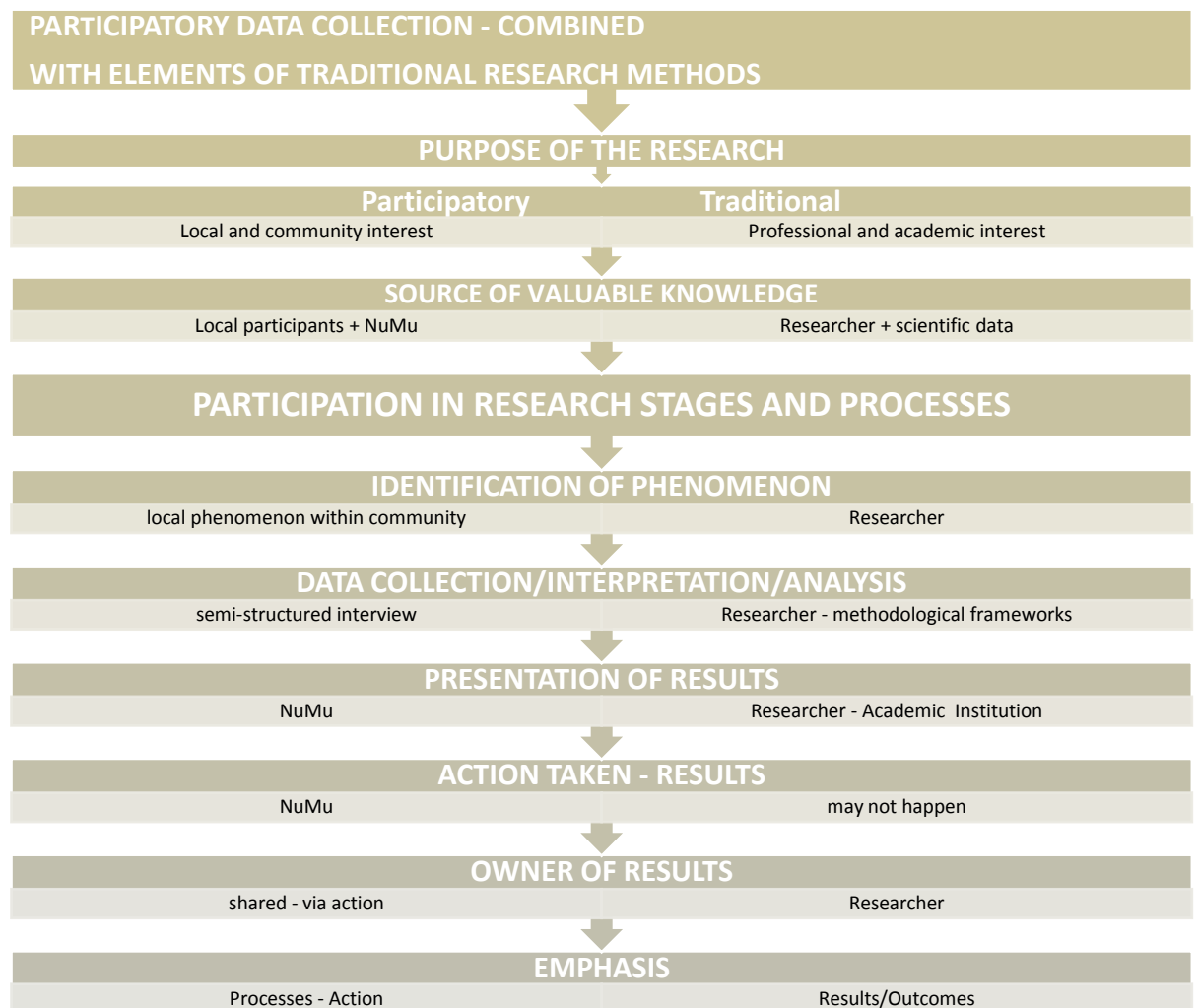


Figure 1 Participatory and Traditional Research Methods

This participatory study uses theory in addition to combining knowledge from within the phenomenon itself through the participants (Fig. 1). The essence of this study lies in actively including NUMU and the study participants in producing the data, addressing their issues and deciding what type of change should be made. The information collected was interpreted and analyzed by the researchers and together with NUMU used to create the action or type of intervention to follow.

Participatory studies don't seek to change behaviors or influence attitudes, rather to further understand what is happening within the community via words from within the community.

5.2 Study Design

This empirical study used semi-structured interviews to better observe the phenomenon. This style of interviewing was more relaxed and created an atmosphere of trust so that the participant would feel more comfortable sharing their experiences. It was chosen because it allowed more freedom in the sequencing of questions whilst still focusing on the main subject. It provided the researcher a chance to explore other important areas that were uncovered during the interview and still provided the opportunity to tie it all together in the end. Semi-structured interviews have base questions and fillers, which helped guide the interview process. In this study, the base questions were at the core of what was being studied and the fillers were used to guide the discussion in a more natural way (Semi-structured interview, 2008).

Participants in this study were selected by using NUMU as a medium for recruiting participants. Invitations were out via social media, requesting all individuals who were interested in the study and met the criteria to respond. Prerequisites for study participation required the individual to be a native Finnish female who had changed their beliefs to that of Islam and were at the time of the study between the ages of 15-35 years old living in the capital area of Finland. From these applicants', seven participants were selected.

Selective participant recruitment was due to the nature of this empirical study and the necessity to personally interview the participants. Interviews were then conducted at the chosen location of the interviewee, with the option of NUMUs' premises being used.

The combination of participatory and traditional research methods were done in cooperation with NUMU and recruited participants who represent an aspect of the phenomenon under study. The initial scheduling and timetable for this thesis was already set and introduced to NUMU for approval prior to conducting the interviews. The necessity in acquiring relevant information within an allotted amount of time was due to the nature of this thesis.

This participatory study, took place in the Helsinki capital region. Locals were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire and also a consultative mode of participation. A consultative mode meant that the interviewee's opinions were asked and the researcher consulted with them prior to any action taking place. This type of method integrates the local knowledge and their experiences into the research theory and contributed to the taken action following the analysis of the results. In this study, the action which NUMU was keen on making relied on the produced results and what types of new discoveries were made.

5.3 Data Analysis

This study used the inductive data analysis method to interpret the results and condense them into reduced expressions. The inductive method is a popular method for analyzing qualitative research.

After the interviews were finished, the audio recordings of the interviews were then transcribed. This thesis used verbatim transcription as the method for typing the audio recordings into text. Verbatim transcription includes filler words such as; um, oh and well..., which were included in the analysis. After transcribing the interviews and notes, the initial observations were done by first detecting patterns and regularities in the answers provided to the base questions.

Nominal measuring meant to code or categorize the expressions. In order to code the expressions, it required the researcher to name a quality by labeling it appropriately regarding what the question was and what type of response was given. When reading each expression, using face-validity as a measurement tool helped keep the coded expressions as close to their original meaning as possible. The importance of coding is to translate the expression into a concrete variable or code. Finding commonalities in the coded categories and then reducing the expressions to a point that each expression is at its most final form means that transparency has been reached.

The data was measured using a nominal and ordinal measuring approach. Ordinal measuring means to rank the answers provided by the participants in a specific order but without any *meaning* to the actual order in which they are in. The usefulness of ranking the expressions was for clarification purposes and only used during the induction process and not in the final presentation of the findings. The ordinal scaling was only used to group together similar codes to make it easier to find the reduced answer.

After the analysis and exploring the hypothesis, developing theories which are supported by the results and theory, to conclude the study. An example of this process is seen in the following figure.

Inductive Method

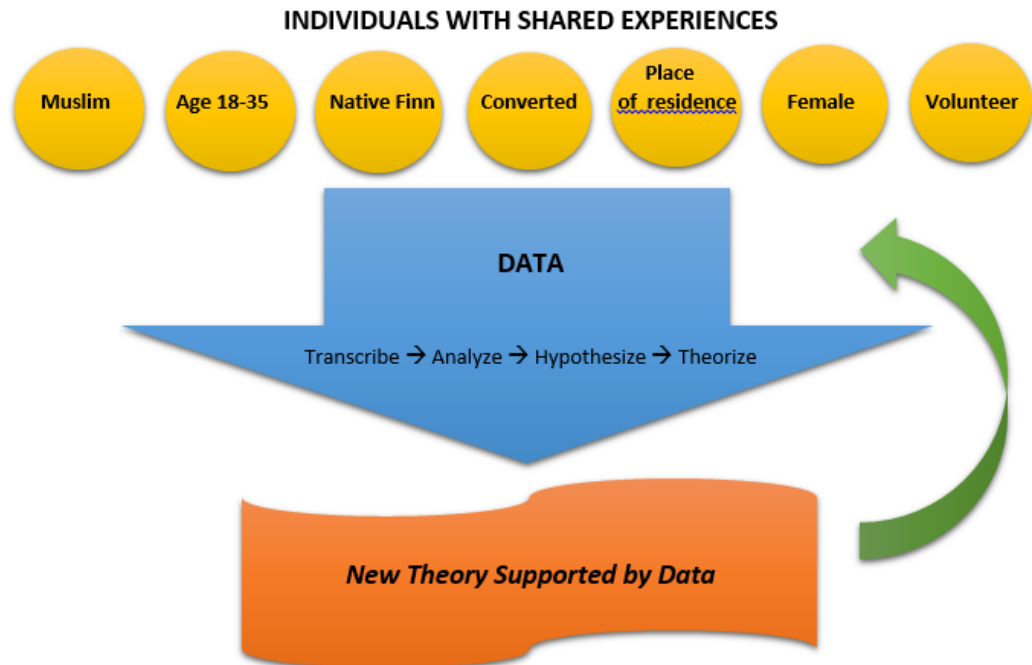


Figure 2 Study Design

The data which was collected was then translated, analyzed using the and based on the findings, a hypothesis developed which is supported by theory in this study and combined will form new theories to begin to understand the phenomenon (Fig. 2).

6 Findings

This study focused on gaining a better understanding on what types of experiences native Finnish convert Muslims have in Finland.

In this section, there are answers provided by the participants and to show the connectivity between changing religions and how it coincides with individuals changing cultures. Furthermore, the experiences that the participants have shared, give valuable insight into what types of emotional responses they may have shared and how the new religion may have affected their own cultural identity

Question 1. What kind of feelings and experiences did you have when converting to Islam?

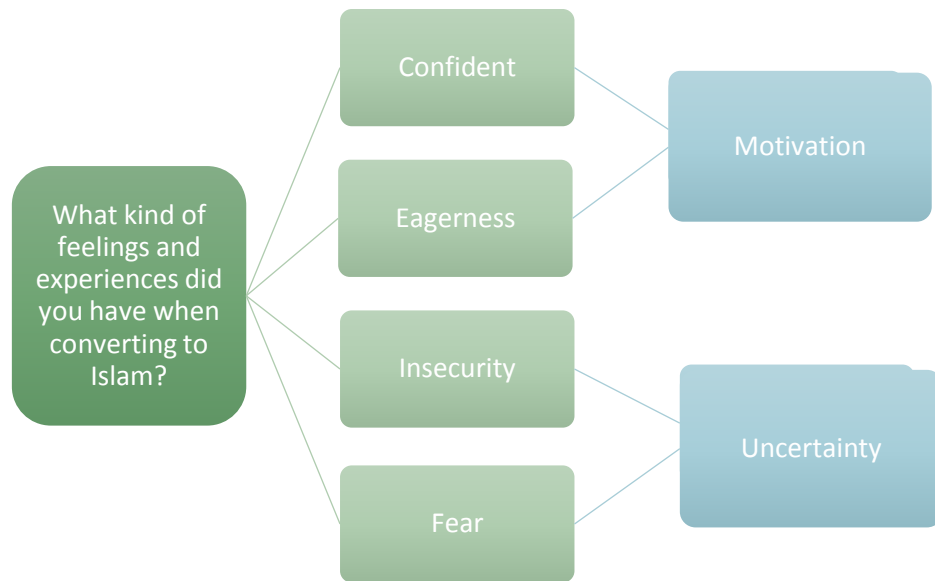


Figure 3 Question 1

The reduced expression to this question were positive and negative (Fig.3). A few excerpts from the responses given are below.

"Olikovamotivaatio ja haluharjoittaa ja innostus oppia lisää oli korkealla"

"I had a lot of motivation to practice and was highly eager to learn more"

" Oli kuin suurta helpotusta, se oli niin oikea, en usko epäillyt"

"It was a huge relief, it was the right thing, I didn't doubt my faith"

The negative answers interpreted by the researchers were labeled as insecurity and fear. The excerpts which support this interpretation are as follows;

" pelon tunnetta koska ei tiennyt mitä tulevaisuus tuo tullessaan"

" fearful feeling because I didn't know what the future would bring"

"mielessä oli tietysti, että mitä minun perhe sanoo [uudesta uskosta]"

" On my mind, there was what will my family say [about my new faith]"

Participants expressed combinations of both negative and positive feelings and experiences. Positive emotions and experiences were associated with internal feelings of embracing the new religion and lifestyle, whereas negative feelings and associations were only connected to external factors such as how family members and other people would treat them.

One participant mentioned having developed a solid religious foundation prior to coming out as a Muslim which lead her experience to be positive.

Question 2. Have you experienced discrimination within the Muslim community after taking the new religion?

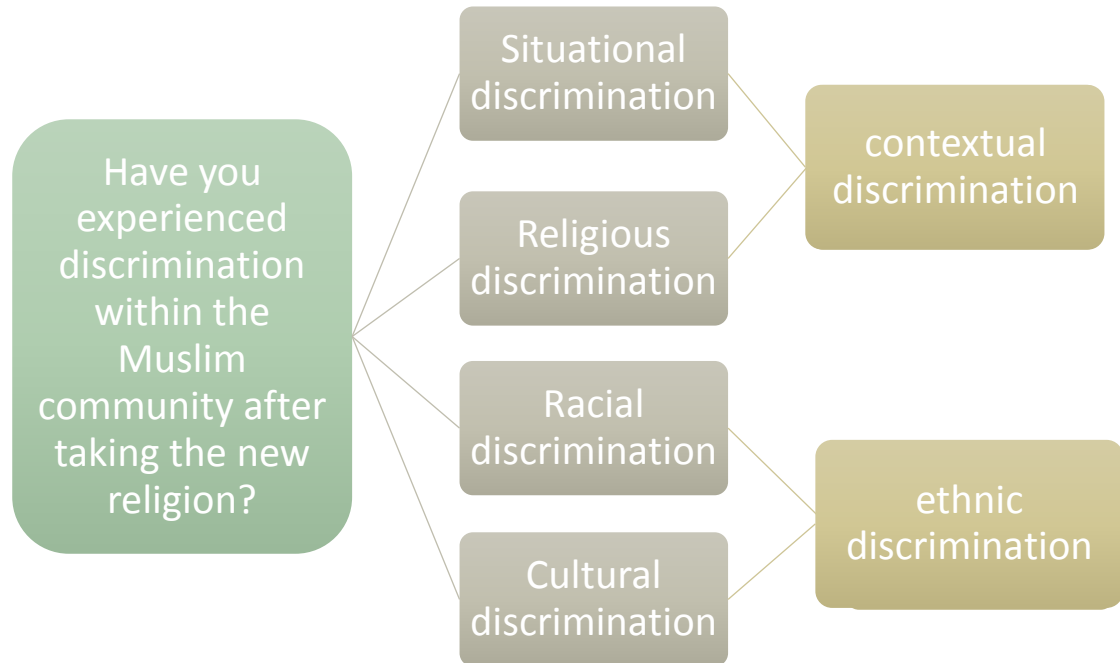


Figure 4 Question 2

There were many forms of discrimination experienced by the seven participants (Fig. 4). They were reduced to two main expressions labeled as contextual discrimination and ethnic discrimination.

” Yksittäisiä tapauksia on, erityisesti somaliyhteisöltä... on ollut suorannaista sekä piilossa olevaa syrjintä. Musta tuntuu, että syrjintä johtuu koska olen vaaleaihoinen. Ihmiset myös luulee, että esitän, ja minulla on muslimiystäviä jotka ovat lopettaneet yhteydenpidon. En ole saanut tervehdyksiä takaisin muslimeilta, koska en kuulu samaan lahkoon”

[Isolated events, especially from the Somali community... there has been direct and hidden discrimination. I feel that the discrimination is because I'm Caucasian. People think that I'm pretending, and I have Muslim friends that have cut off all contacts. Muslims didn't return greetings, because I don't belong to the same sect]

“ muut lapset ovat lapsilleni sanoneet, että ootko muslimi oikeasti... koska ovat vaaleaihoisia”

[Other children have said to my children that are you really a muslim... because they are Caucasian]

“mä en tykännyt, että heti alussa multa kysyttiin että ootko shia vai sunni, että siskot minuun nähden siinä alussa, koska mä vielä opettelin uskontoa, oli niin tiukkoja. koin sen tosi hyökkäväksi. Aattelin että mä lausuin shahadan kaks viikkoo sitten - et en oikeesti tiedä mitä mä oon. yritän löytää itseäni tämän uuden uskonnon kautta”

[I didn't like that right in the beginning I was asked whether I am sunni or shia. Because I was still learning my religion, other sisters seemed very strict and it felt like an attack. I was thinking to myself that I just had announced my testimony of faith two weeks ago- I don't really know what I am. I am finding myself through this new religion]

Majority of the participants expressed that they have experienced different forms discrimination within the Muslim community. Many of them had said that they felt their ethnicity was a factor which further contributed to the increased discriminatory experiences. In Finland, there is fairly small Muslim community and the institutionalized religion is strongly present. Some participants expressed that they had felt discrimination because they had not yet fully integrated in to the Muslim community that they were not yet part of it. The participants had expressed that as they were still developing their interiorized religion, this prevented them from become members of the institutional religion.

Question 3. Have you experienced discrimination within the non-Muslim Finnish community after taking the new religion?

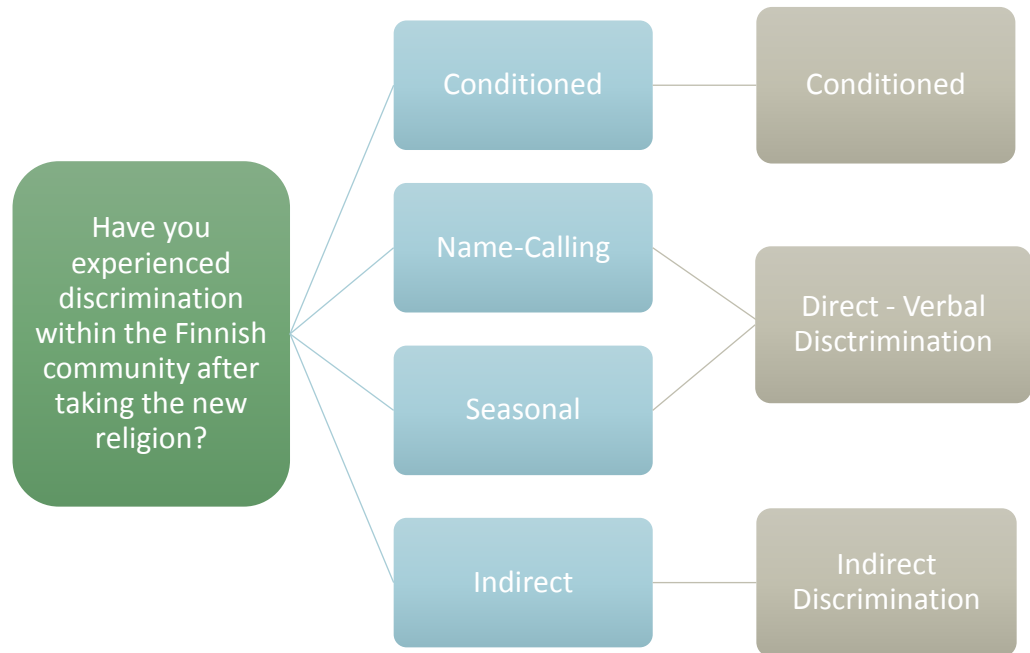


Figure 5 Question 3

In the answers given there was conditioned, name calling, seasonal name calling and indirect discrimination (Fig. 5). For clarification purposes they were reduced into direct verbal discrimination, conditioned response and indirect discrimination. The excerpts which support this interpretation are as follows;

"ulkona tapahtuu mitä tapahtuu, mutta siihen tottuu, mutta ei pidä välittää"
"Outside what happens happens, but you get used to it, but one shouldn't mind"

"en oo suurta syrjintää kokenut... en koe huutelua syrjinnäksi"
"I haven't experienced extreme discrimination... I don't consider shouting as discrimination"

"Kommentteja tulee kaikesta mahdollisesta. On kausia, milloin ei kuule mitään ja on kausia, milloin on sanomista suomalaisilla. Sanoisin, noin kerran pari kuussa kuulen huuteluja. Olen oppinut suodattamaan kyllä suurimman osan. Kesällä kuulen enemmän huuteluja, koska koen että talvella vaatetus ei ole niin näkyvä. "

"I get comments about everything possible. There are seasons when I don't hear anything and seasons when the Finnish people have something to say. I would say a few times a month I hear shouting. I have learned to filter out most of them. In the summer time, I hear more shouting because I feel like in the winter my attire blends in. "

All of the participants said that they had experienced some form of discrimination from the non-Muslim community. The amount of discrimination that the participants had experienced, was so significant, that they no longer recognized it as a form of discrimination rather they had learned to filter it and accept it as a part of their daily lives so much that it was normalized. This was referred to as conditioned (Fig. 5). Some of the participants even went on to say that “shouting is shouting and one shouldn’t mind so much...”.

The discrimination that was experienced from the Finnish non-Muslim community, only began after these participants were externally identifiable as Muslims, meaning that they had now transitioned into the institutionalized religious phase.

Question 4. Do you feel that you belong one or more cultures than the Finnish culture?

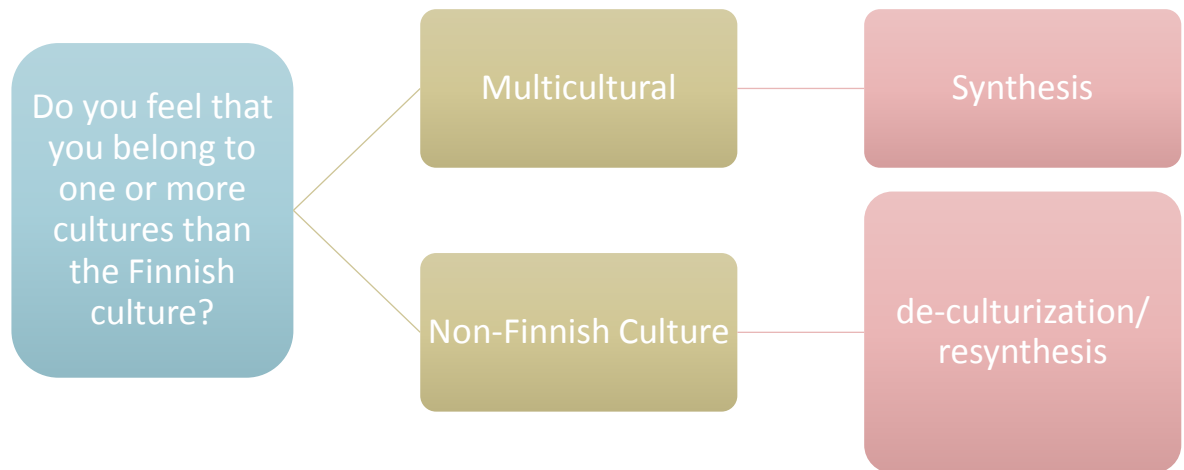


Figure 6 Question 4

All participants expressed certain levels of multiculturalism after becoming a Muslim. Majority of the participants expressed synthesis (Fig.6) after becoming a Muslim. In the answers given the individuals identified themselves as multicultural or non-Finnish.

“Koen kuuluvani useampaan kulttuurin... Mutta ... olen aina ollut suomalainen ja olen edelleenkin.”

[I feel that I belong to many cultures...but...I have always been Finnish and still am.]

“Koen kuuluvani islamilaiseen kulttuuriin pelkästään, suomessa on muutenkin paljon erilaisia kulttuureja, niin koen että on helppo omaksua uusia kulttuureja”

“I feel that I belong only to the Islamic culture. There are already many different cultures in Finland and so I feel that it is easier to assimilate new cultures. “

“Koen että kuulun islamilaiseen kulttuuriin, en mieheni kulttuuriin koska en koe sitä omaksi. Minulla suomalainen ja islamilainen kulttuuri kulkevat käsi kädessä- Suomalainen kulttuuri on todella läsnä, koska olen kasvanut siihen. Koen että voin olla suomalainen muslimi, ilman että minun tulisi unohtaa se vaikka siinä olisi pahaa tai väärin. Kaikki ei ole suomalaisessa kulttuurissa pahaa tai väärin. Ei minun tarvitse muuttaa mitään. Islamilla taas ei ole sellaista nationalistista kulttuuria jota pitäisi kaikki ottaa, kun palaa”

”I feel that I belong to the Islamic culture, not my husband’s culture because I don’t feel it is my own. To me, the Finnish and Islamic culture go hand-in-hand together because the Finnish culture is very present in my life, as I have being raised as a part of it. I feel that I can be a Finnish Muslim without having to forget it, even if there is something bad or wrong. Not everything in the Finnish culture is bad or wrong. I don’t need to change anything. In Islam, there is no nationalistic culture that everyone should adapt to when reverting.”

Individuals felt that they belonged to more than one culture, however still identifying themselves as a Finnish woman. Many expressed that it was easy for them to adopt new elements into their culture if not completely adapt. Cultural synthesis was present in the majority of the participants and only one expressed cultural substitution saying that she had completely abandoned her Finnish cultural identity. Many of those who had synthesized their cultures, had taken elements from both their new religion and partners culture whether Islamic or not. There were many participants who said that their partners culture had no influence on their cultural behavior and felt that only the Islamic behaviors were the ones that would be adapted.

Factors that affect adaptation and integration often depend on how familiar the individual is with the new culture that they are merging with(Salo-Lee et al., 1996). These participants had discussed the levels of knowledge they had acquired prior to becoming a Muslim and in which ways their cultural behaviors changed and how it had affected their cultural identity which further supported their adopting Islamic behaviors.

Question 5. Have you adopted Islamic customs in to your culture?

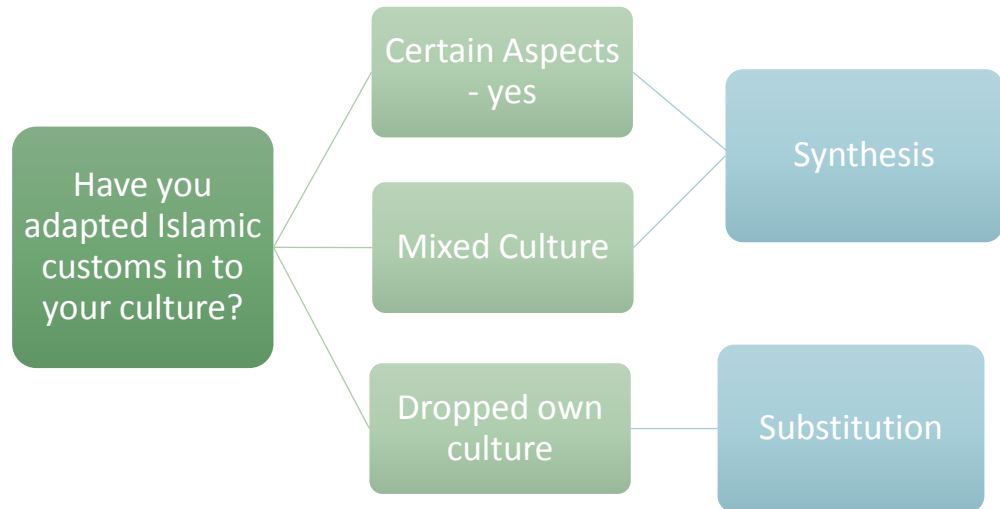


Figure 7 Question 5

All participants expressed that they had adopted Islamic customs into their own culture (Fig.7). The levels of adaptation and which customs, were independent from each other.

“Kyllä, koen että olen jättänyt oman kulttuurini pois. Se oli helppoa minulle.... Esimerkiksi olemme jättäneet joulunvieton kokonaan pois”

“Yes, I feel that I have completely left my original culture behind. It was easy for me...for example we have stopped celebrating Christmas.”

“joo varmasti on tullut. Vanhempia kunnioittaminen, se on lisääntynyt... Sit on sellaista kulttuuri sekoitusta kyllä enemmän tai vähemmän sitä miehen kulttuuria...”

“Yes certainly has. Respecting elders has increased...and then there is the combination of different cultures more or less from my husband...”

“Kyllä uskoisin joo, että olen omaksunut. Esimerkiksi, en koe, että se on suomalaista kulttuuria perinteiset perhearvot ja selkeät roolijaot kotona... se tulee enemmänkin islamilaisesta kulttuurista.. Mielestäni ei tartte ottaa arabikulttuuria, vaatetusta sisustusta, tai ruokaa jos ei tykkää. ...Suomalaisessa kulttuurissa gender mixing on runsasta ja ...minulla on häveliäisyys lisääntynyt, suomalaisessa kulttuurissa taas voi olla ilman vaatteita missä vain.”

“Yes I believe I have adopted Islamic customs. For example, I don’t feel that family roles are so clearly set in the Finnish culture and values, I think it comes more from the Islamic culture. I feel that you don’t have to take the Arab culture, clothing, décor or food if you don’t

like. In the Finnish culture there is a lot of gender-mixing and ...my modesty has increased. In the Finnish culture you can be anywhere without any clothes on.]

All participants said that they have adopted Islamic customs into their lives. The religion of Islam is a religion that can be practiced daily in various ways. By implementing different practices on an interiorized and institutional level the Islamic customs begin to manifest themselves and the Islamic culture identity begins to develop. The participants also said that adopting these customs were easy however, they took time to grow. Some examples of these customs which were evident in most interviews, was the gradual introduction of the headscarf and Islamic attire.

Question 6. As a Finnish Muslim woman, do you believe that you have the same opportunities as a non-Muslim Finnish woman do?

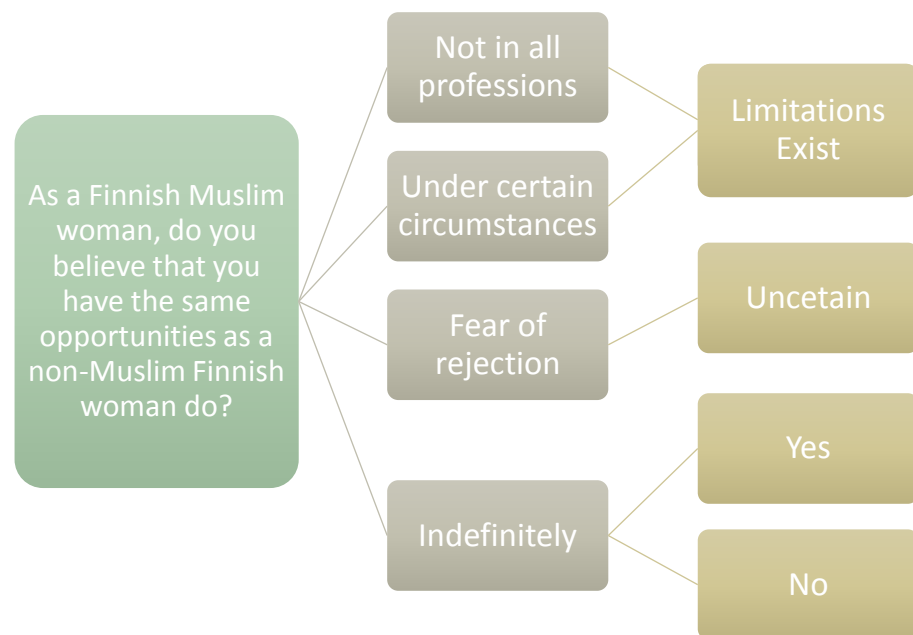


Figure 8 Question 6

In the answers given there was fear of rejection, under certain circumstances, not all professionals, indefinitely yes/no and “we will see...”. For clarification purposes they were reduced into limitation exist and indefinitely yes/no (Fig. 8). The excerpts which support this interpretation are as follows:

"... tiedän että tietyissä ammateissa ei välttämättä ole samoja mahdollisuuksia vaatetuksen takia. Jos ne työpaikat on kuitenkin uskonnon sallimissa paikoissa, niin silloin uskon että on samat mahdollisuudet. "

"... I know that in certain fields the same opportunities don't exist because of our clothing. But if the work is allowed in Islam, then I do feel that I have the same opportunities as everyone else."

"on samat mahdollisuudet. ehkä sitä hyväksynnän että joutuu tekemään enemmän töitä hyväksynnän tasa-arvoisena. Mutkylkoelettä on ihansamat."

"Yes, the same opportunities exist. Perhaps accepting that more work will need to be done and being accepted as an equal..but I feel that I have the same chances"

" Sinisilmäisenä sanoisin että, joo kyllä minulla on samat mahdollisuudet kuin suomalaisella naisella tässä yhteiskunnassa, uskonnon sallimissa rajoissa siis."

"As blue-eyed person I would say that yes, I have the same opportunities as Finnish women in this society, within the limitations of Islam."

"en usko, varsinkaan työpaikan saamisessa. Ei olla samassa asemassa"

"No I don't believe so. Especially pertaining to employment opportunities. We are not in the same position."

This question received three main answers which were reduced to indefinitely yes, indefinitely no, and limitations do exist. Those who answered yes, meant that they would have to work harder than their non-Muslim counterparts but could achieve any position desired. Those who answered no, said that positions they are qualified to work in will not hire them unless they compromised their own religious values. Others who felt that limitations existed, expressed that positions which the religion considers to be acceptable work environments is attainable by them.

Question 7 Question: What type of support would have needed when you first converted to Islam?

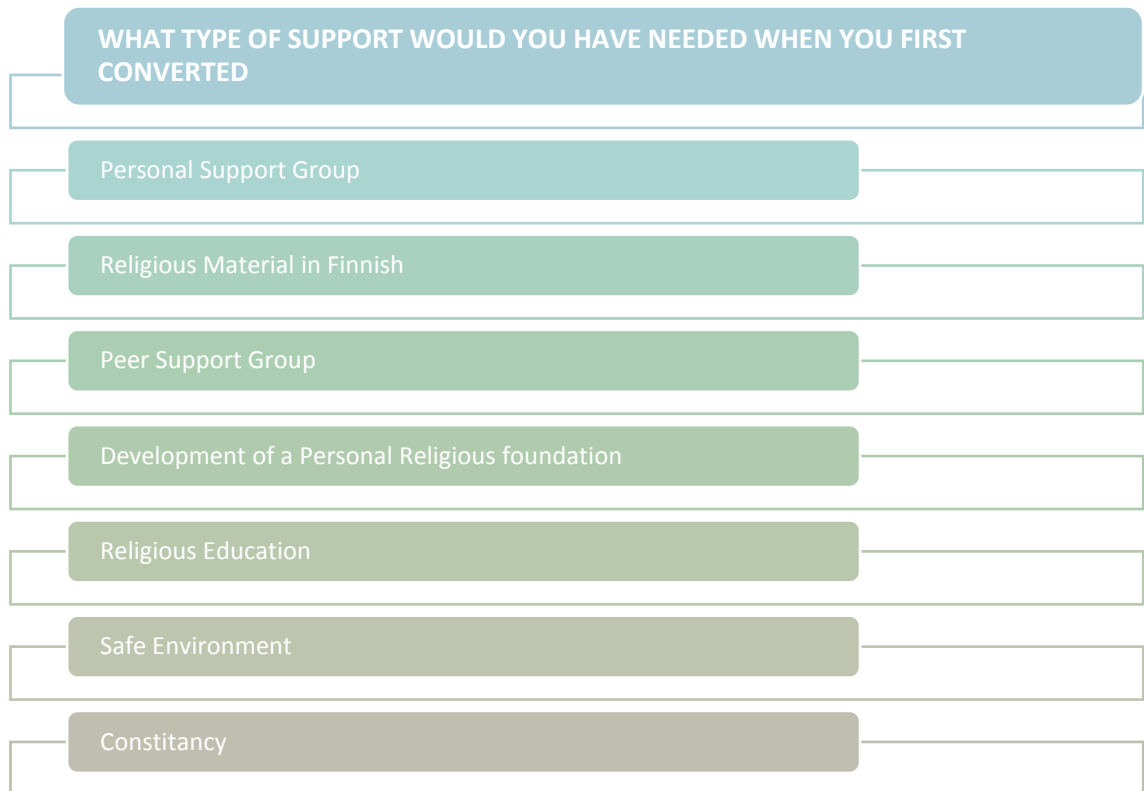


Figure 9 Question 7

The answers provided to this answer are listed rather than reduced (Fig. 9) which make it easier to understand the needs of the participants.

The answers provided to this question were used to help NUMU design their peer-support group and to establish the aims of the group. The findings (Fig. 9) were only coded to have a certain level meaning to the expressions. Each participant gave similar responses and below are a few excerpts to show what was said.

”[uskon] sisko tukea.. joku joka olisi voinut tukea ja auttaa minua alussa”
”[faith] support from sisterst..someone who would have supported and helped me in the beginning”

” islamia [uskonnosta] suomenkielellä”
” Islam [about the religion] in finnish”

” koin hyödylliseksi viikottaiset uusien siskojen tapaamiset, jotka järjestettiin moskeijalla, sellaisia olisi hyvä olla enemmän”

” I found it beneficial the weekly meetings with the new sister that was arranged in the mosque, there should be more like that”

“on järkätty toimintaa mutten ite oo menny mukaan. alkutaipaleel, se tärkein, et luo sen pohjan itelles. hankkii ystäviä ja laittaa ittse sisälle sinne yhteiskuntaan ja mä en tehnyt sitä siinä alussa”

” there were activities but I didn’t participate in them. In the beginnig what’s most important is that you establish a good foundation for yourself and then you put yourself into the community. I didn’t do that in the beginning.”

Most participants said that having a contact was very important during the beginning. Many participants said during their interviews that there was no-one to guide them or teach them and they said it didn’t feel so good.

These findings were discussed with NUMU and appropriate action will be taken.

7 Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

Qualitative studies involve a series of processes that must be followed in order to produce quality and reliable results. Such empirical studies and the interpretation of the findings may be easily prone to inaccuracies and or biases and for this reason, in qualitative research there are several key areas which must be accounted for to assure the validity of the study. While conducting this study and gathering theory, the authors took into account measures to attain internal and external validity of the study.

Internal structures and measures that must be fulfilled to validate the study results are an important aspect which is also thoroughly covered. In qualitative research, these aspects are referred to in terms as transferability, credibility, dependability, and conformability. It is the way that the researcher ensures that their findings or results are a product of an implemented study. In this research the primary objective was to produce a hypothesis for further investigation, rather than to test and prove the hypothesis theories. The material was collected in this thesis through a series of interviews and the hypothesis followed. In qualitative research, the validity of the study means “gaining knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Krefting, 1991).

The accurate representations of information provided by the participants, as well as the interpretations of the data, is known as conformability and were met using face-validity of Scale Items to construct validation in this study (Dane, 2013, 142 & 154). It means that information provided by the participants which were related to the questions were used, and information produced via semi-structured interview methods were omitted. Seeking to interpret the results in a way so that expressions “represents concepts it should represent and [expressions do not] represent concepts it should not represent” to make comparisons between the coded data and existing theory to support the hypothesis made.

To further zero in on the relevant information, using semantic differential scales to “measure the psychological meaning of concepts along three different dimensions: evaluation, potency and activity” (Fig. 10) (Dane2011,142 & 154).



| Figure 10 Measuring Expression

The information which was produced was also categorized using nominal and ordinal measuring methods, which supported accuracy in the data analysis. All findings are reflective of the voice of the participant and do not represent the researchers own opinions.

This study had seven participants and so the findings produced were limited and cannot be used to generalize any phenomenon, therefore fulfilling certain ethical aspects of this study, such as the replication of such a study to confirm or negate any findings, can be challenged.

The intimate relationship that was established between the researcher and participant is also worthy of mention, as qualitative research often involves certain types of issues including the establishment of privacy “honest and open interactions, and avoiding misrepresentations”. A semi-structured interviewing method was used which allowed the interview process to feel more relaxed and casual. It was important to take caution in avoiding the emergence of certain issues while maintaining study participant’s anonymity and confidentiality, which was covered in the consent form (Elo, S. et al. , 2014) (Banks,S., 2014).

Informed consent was given and provided to advocate the participant's anonymity, security and confidentiality throughout the study. This was one of the essential parts of fulfilling ethical requirements when conducting research in any field of study. The consent form was sent by an email to the potential participants, and they had the opportunity to overlook it before signing it and ask questions if needed. After agreeing to the form it was printed and given to the participants to sign the paper before the interview. This procedure was done to provide adequate information concerning the research data collection process and research purpose in a clear and comprehensive manner. Clarifications of complicated terminology and or procedures were also covered in the consent form in addition to the purpose of the study, the role of the participants, the working life partner, the identity of the researcher, objectives of the study, how the results are to be published and for what purpose. The consent form was an imperative and an essential part of the study itself to further increase the trustworthiness and conformability of this study in sections 6.1-6.3 of this thesis and is located in the appendices.

The dependability of a qualitative study is shown in research through its implementation and analysis. This thesis has provided a clear process of how the study was conducted and implemented, data analyzed and findings produced which meet the requirements for internal validity of the study. By using nominal measuring and face validity, the expressions have maintained their original meaning throughout the inductive processes. The importance of quality results and reporting the analysis process thoroughly were essential steps that needed to be taken prior to publishing the findings.

The events in this study were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Afterwards translated into English verbatim and then the translations were reviewed. Excerpts from those answers can be read in the results and discussion section below. The translation was coded into appropriate categories and further reduced into the expressions. The interpretations made during the coding processes required both researchers to decide which answers are relevant and provide the necessary information for each question.

8 Discussion

8.1 Study Review

The purpose of this research was to study experiences of native Finnish women who have converted to Islam and to discover what types of experiences the individuals had during their transition into becoming a Muslim. This study has uncovered factors which potentially influenced the individual's cultural identity in Finland. There were seven participants in this study who shared intimate experiences about their journeys to becoming a Muslim. Many individuals shared personal stories about what led them to Islam and how it has changed their lives. It is

worthy of mentioning that participants were extremely honest and open about their struggles and challenges in addition to sharing their experiences of enlightenment and peace throughout their transition. Because of the nature of the study, it is unfortunate that the excerpts which were used only began to scratch the surface of the hidden challenges, mysteries and new-found phenomena which exist in the Finnish Muslim community.

Prior to conducting the study, researchers had the prejudice that many converts would have experienced cultural substitution, however it wasn't as prevalent as previously thought. All participants experienced different levels of acculturation independent from one another and they should be seen as such; independent Finnish women who have converted to Islam.

During the data analysis, it was revealed in many ways that there exist several new phenomena within the Muslim community that should be studied. For example, intersectionality and the work-related discrimination shows that there is a great amount of work that still needs to be done within the Finnish society on many institutional and academic levels in order to eliminate these hidden discriminatory practices, no matter how culturally sensitive professional may deem themselves to be. Discrimination within the Muslim community and the social striations which became evident during the interviews was equally intriguing and shocking. Initially Conducting a broader study would have served the Muslim and non-Muslim community well, however due to the nature of this thesis, it was limited to studying only the experiences of the seven participants.

This study was very successful in producing quality findings and the working life partner NuoretMuslimit have been equally satisfied with the research. During the study, there were a few hiccups and obstacles that were faced, however none which drastically impacted the implementation or findings of this study. Some of the obstacles that were faced, came up during the implementation phase. Participatory research often involves group interviews and for this study, it would have provided more insight. However, while booking interviews, many of those who had originally volunteered to participate in the group interviews had changed their minds and eventually due to scheduling and the time reserved for conducting the interviews, it was no longer possible to proceed with them.

A surprise finding was the amount of similar experiences that many of the participants shared. It was surprising to learn that although the participants had converted to Islam at different times in their lives, were at the time living in different cities, were members of different communities, at the time did not know each other... still the experiences mirrored each other in many different ways. One can only assume that these seven participants are not the only ones.

8.2 Final Thoughts

The general idea was to uncover the untold stories of native Finnish women who have changed their beliefs to Islam. By giving a voice to this minority community this publication intends to impact on society and its members in unprecedented ways by opening doors for dialogue and raising awareness of the issues which are constantly swept under the rug. “Social workers now have an obligation to deliver culturally competent services” and this study has only proven the need to work harder towards attaining that. (Garran & Rozas, 2013)

It has become more and more evident that understanding the experiences that these participants have shared are not isolated events, rather they scratch the surface of the phenomenon pertaining to and within the diverse Muslim community in Finland. The data collected provided valuable insight into the hidden dynamics within the Muslim community and this thesis aims to reach each reader and help them gain insight into the personal experiences of what it means to be a native convert.

The relevance of this study and its usefulness outside of being a Bachelor’s thesis is considerably the juice of this research. The motivation for this study was of academic pursuit but also the necessity of bringing to light sensitive subjects which are currently shaping societies locally and across the globe, such as inequalities between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. One example of such inequality is the lack of a centrally located, easily accessible mosque which would not only represent a growing Finnish minority group and their place in the Finnish society, but also provide all Muslims a place to practice their belief. The building of this mosque has been under heated debate for over a year and is being protested against on social media and publicly in the streets due to fear-mongering and misrepresentations of the Muslims and their impact on the societies in which they live in. These misrepresentations not only exist within the non-Muslim community but as this study shows, in the Muslim communities as well.

In order to combat against institutional discrimination and institutionalized religious discrimination, individuals and members of all organizations and communities need to acquire cultural and religious competences to work towards a more inclusive society. In Finland, there are currently changes being made to curriculums in institutions, departments and organizations public and private to include diversity training, cultural sensitivity, and an overall need for cultural competences in all professions. The issues with such workshops or training programs, is that often they focus on one aspect of multiculturalism, which is the stereotype that “along with diversity comes cultural richness and as it makes the world a better place”, people will also become more tolerant. However, it fails to address the individuals themselves and get to the root of what makes these individuals which makes Finland a multicultural Finland, different. By not engaging in dialogue with the individuals themselves, this has the potential to lead to discriminatory practices and opinions to formulate within the majority

community. This study has shown that some participants faced discrimination in the work place and while searching work, because of the lack cultural and religious competences, many participants felt that potential employees held stereotypes and based on their prejudices, used discriminatory behaviours when selecting the employee. Garran and Rozas have mentioned from a mental health perspective, that “culturally responsive interventions require...awareness, knowledge, and behavioral flexibility” and so it is imperative that the professional working with individuals from minority groups understands “the impact of culture and social context on a world view, expressions and manifestations of distress, outcome [because there] exists a dynamic interplay between individuals and their environments (Garran and Rozas 2013). For professionals to be able to work effectively, they must be competent and aware of the “power dynamics and stigmatizing experiences of those from ...marginalized groups. ...[They] must be aware of their own worldview and cultural background and the impact of these sociocultural factors” which directly affect their quality of work and relationship with those they are trying to help. This type of relationship works when professional recognize their own levels of cultural and religious competences and what their position in the society is and how it affects their clients and the effort made to empower those individuals prone to become marginalized and excluded (Garran and Rozas 2013).

The experiences which the participants have shared, are not isolated events and the more they continue to exist, the more damaging the impact they have on the individual and their own community. This damage may lead to withdrawing from the majority community and minimize their attempts to integrate into the society, thus further increasing the disparities which already exist.

In Finland the term “multicultural” is often associated with immigrants and in some cases different religions of those immigrants. Some organizations and institutions focus on home-grown multiculturalism which is referring to Swedish-Finns, Romani-Finns, Inkeri Finns, Sami-Finns and in some rare cases the Tatar-Finns. These minority groups represent the Finnish population from a historically and academically. However, in mainstream Finland, there exists only one true Finn. This research has studied a *new group* of Finns who will help shape the new Finland and its identity as a multicultural Finland. The native Finnish women, who have converted to Islam, belong to a new minority group which has yet to sink its teeth into the ground. These women have changed their religious beliefs that have exposed them to new lifestyles, communities, cultures whilst confronting themselves and going face-to-face with how society has chosen to label and identify them.

There were many new phenomena discovered throughout this research which deserve to be further investigated. The emergence of this new minority group and what that means for Finland and the Finnish identity, is a question that may not ever be answered, but is worthy of

exploring. The national identity of Finland is changing and without a doubt, the growing population of Muslims will play a large role as Finland transitions into a new era of multiculturalism.

The benefits of this study and its findings will not only be useful to the Muslim community, NuoretMuslimity and LaureaAmmattikorkeakoulu, rather it will serve as a tool to all professionals who seek to increase their cultural and religious competence. This study will serve as a foundation and reference for future studies pertaining to similar phenomena.

This study was conducted in accordance with Laurea's research guidelines and meets the needs qualitative participatory research methods.

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Appendix 1 : Glossary

Cultural rejection or *de-culturization*: Disconnection and rejection of new culture

Hajj [:Hädz]: Pilgrimage performed by Muslims to the Holy City of Mecca.

Islam [:Is-lääm]: The Religion of Islam. Submitting to The Creator.

Muslim: An individual who practices the religion of Islam. One who has submitted to God.

P.B.U.H.: Peace be Upon Him - said when the name of the Prophet of Islam is mentioned.

Ramadan: The month of Fasting.

Re-synthesis: Combinind elements of previous culture and new culture(s) to form a third new culture.

Shahada [:Shä-hää-däh]: The Islamic testimony of the faith announced as one becomes a Muslim.

*Ash-hadu an-laailaha ill-Allah. Wa ash-hadu an Muham-madan Rasuul-Allah
[:Äsh-hädu än-lää iläähä il-Allaah. Wa äsh-hädu ännä Muhäm-mädän Ra-suul-
ul-llaah]*

أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ
وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ

*I bear witness that there is no god worthy of worship except God (Allah) and I
bear witness that Muhammed is the final Prophet and Messenger of God (Al-
lah.)*

(Testimony of faith - Shahada in Arabic transliteration, pronunciation of transliteration, Arabic language and followed by the English translation.)

Sunnah [:Sun-naah]: The practices and teachings of Prophet Muhammed (P.B.U.H)

Substitution or *addition*: Seeking to adopt the new culture as much as possible.

Synthesis : Combining positive elements of previous and new culture. is when an individual combines positive elements of their own culture and new culture.

Appendix 2 : Consent Form in English

We are two Social Services students at Laurea University of Applied Sciences and are inviting you to participate in our qualitative research study on native Finnish Muslim revert women and their cultural experiences in the Finnish society.

This thesis work is conducted in English and all theory will be provided in English so please feel free to discuss and inquire about any terminology and or statements which may be unfamiliar and we will discuss any words or concepts with you. Interviews will be in Finnish Please take time introducing yourself to this study and ask any questions at any time. Participation in this study is voluntary and can be terminated at any time at the request of the participant and all information at that time will be properly discarded.

Participant Selection

Participants will be selected for this qualitative study. Individuals must be between the ages of 18 and 35 living in the capitol area of Finland. Participants must be native Finnish Muslim converts. The time and location of becoming a Muslim are irrelevant to participant selection.

Voluntary Participation

This research will only accept voluntary participation. Individuals who are selected to participate can at any time before, during and after the interview process decline to be interviewed or ask for their information and or answers given to be omitted anytime.

If the participant no longer wants to participate in the study, no explanation is needed. If the participant changes their mind before the interview has been conducted, the participant must email both researches to inform their cancellation in the study in the following email siskot@numu.fi

Procedures

The interview will be conducted Jennifer Eboreime or Sadio Geddi. During the interview, one of the interviewers will meet you at your chosen location where you feel most comfortable on in Nuoret Muslimit main office. All information and answers will be recorded and is confidential. No one else except Jennifer Eboreime and Sadio Geddi will have access to the information documented during the interview. The interview will be audio recorded for transcription to fulfill trustworthiness in a qualitative research. Participant anonymity will be ensured by proper storing of all documents by the researchers. Audio recording will be uploaded to a computer of Sadio Geddi and

stored on a USB drive of Jennifer Eboreime. All audio recordings will be destroyed on March 17, 2017.

Benefits

The societal benefits are yet uncertain because this qualitative study is the first of its kind. Local NGO's can utilize this data and results to shape their work design to improve their relations with local Muslims. To gain more knowledge about the experiences Muslims in Finland have and work towards a more inclusive society.

Reimbursements

Participants will receive no compensation nor reimbursements for participation in this study. All expenses made by the participant will be by their own free will and neither researchers nor Nuoret Muslimit will provide any incentives, financial or non-financial to any participant.

Each participant is voluntarily participating in this study.

Confidentiality

Participant confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study. All information provided by those signing up for participant selection and information given during interviews will be stored on two separate devices for protection of research data for the researchers and labeled anonymously for protecting identity of participants.

The researchers will not be sharing any information about the participants and all information collected will be kept in private.

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

Appendix 3 : Consent Form in English

Olemme kaksi opiskelijaa Laurea Ammattikorkeakoulusta ja kutsumme sinut osallistumaan laadulliseen tutkimukseen, joka koskee kantasuomalaisia käännäismuslimi naisten kokemuksia ja heidän mahdollisia kulttuuri-identiteetti muutoksia ja uuden uskonnon ottamisen jälkeen. Tarkoitus on, luoda katsahdus siihen minkälainen kokemus uuden uskonnon ottaminen on ja oliko sillä vaikutusta kulttuuri-identiteettiin.

Tämä opinnäytetyö tulee olemaan kokonaisuudessa englannin kielellä ja teoria kirjoitetaan myös englannin kielellä. Ryhmä- sekä yksilöhaastattelut tehdään suomeksi.

Tämä tutkimus on osa opinnäytetyötä ja sen tekevät opiskelijat Jennifer Eboreime ja Sadio Geddi Laurea Ammattikorkeakoulusta. Yhteistyökumppanimme on Nuoret Muslimit.

Osallistujien valitseminen

Tutkimuksen osallistujien henkilöiden tulee olla 18-35 vuotiaita pääkaupunkiseutulaisia. Osallistujien tulee olla kantasuomalaisia muslimikäännäisiä. Valintaa tehdessä ei ole väliä, milloin tai missä on vaihtanut uskontoa Islamin uskonnoksi.

Yksilöhaastatteluihin tullaan valitsemaan seitsemän henkilöä ja ryhmähaastatteluun neljä henkilöä.

Vapaaehtoinen osallistuminen

Osallistuminen on vapaaehtoista. Henkilöt jotka valitaan tutkimukseen voivat milloin tahansa ennen tutkimusta, tutkimuksen aikana tai tutkimuksen jälkeen kieltäytyä mukanaolosta. Osallistujat voivat myös pyytää, että haastattelussa ilmennyt tietoa ei käytetä tutkimusmateriaalina. Jos osallistuja päättää ennen haastattelua olla osallistumatta tulee tehdä ilmoitus sähköpostiin siskot@numu.fi välittömästi

Toimenpiteet

Opiskelijat Jennifer ja Sadio tulevat tekemään haastattelut. Yksilöhaastattelut tulevat tapahtumaan haastateltavan valitsemassa paikassa tai Nuoret Muslimit ry:n tiloissa. Ryhmähaastattelu tapahtuu Nuoret Muslimit tiloissa.

Kaikki vastaukset tullaan äänittämään ja ne tulevat olemaan luottamuksellisia. Kenellekään muulla paitsi tutkimuksen tekijöillä ei tule olemaan pääsyä vastauksiin. Äänitämme haastattelut, jotta se täyttäisi laadullisen tutkimuksen kriteerit. Osallistujien anonyymisyys tullaan varmistamaan tallentamalla äänitykset ja vastaukset tutkimuksen tekijän Sadio Geddin

tietokoneeseen ja Jennifer Eboreimen muistitikulle. Kaikki tiedostot tullaan hävittämään 17.3.2017 insha Allah

Tutkimuksen hyödyt

Sosiaalisista hyödyistä ei ole vielä mitään tietoa, koska tutkimusta ei ole vielä tehty Suomessa. Tutkimuksen tiedolla voi yhteistyökumppani arvioida ja luoda palveluita joita mahdollisesti tarvitaan, myös pyrkiä luomaan vuorovaikutussuhteita muslimiyhteisössä ja yhteistyötä tekevien järjestöjen kanssa

Korvauksista

Osallistujille ei tulla maksamaan mitään korvausta liittyen tähän tutkimukseen. Kaikki kulut jotka ilmenevät tutkimuksen aikana tai sen jälkeen joutuu osallistuja itse korvaamaan. Tutkimus on vapaaehtoista.

Luottamuksellisuus

Tutkimukseen osallistujan tiedot ovat luottamuksellisia koko tutkimuksen ajan. Kaikki tiedot jotka on annettu haastattelujen alussa ja aikana tullaan tallentamaan kahteen eri laitteeseen tutkijoiden turvaksi ja ne merkataan anonyymisesti suojatakseen osallistujien identiteettiä. Tutkimuksen tekijät eivät jaa mitään tietoa liittyen haastateltaviin ja kaikki tieto joka kerätään ja säilytetään yksityisessä paikassa.

Olen lukenut ja ymmärtänyt yllämainitut ohjeet.
Suostun olemaan tutkimuksessa vapaaehtoisesti.

Vapaaehtoisen nimi _____

Vapaaehtoisen allekirjoitus _____

Päivämäärä _____
päivä/kk/vuosi

Appendix 4 : Interview Questions

Ikä/Age:

Milloin lausuit shahadan?/ When did you take the Islamic testimony of faith?

Kerro lyhyesti kääntymisprosessisi? Minkä kautta sait tietää Islamista? /Briefly explain your transition to becoming a Muslim: Where did you find out about Islam?

Minkälaisia tunteita se kääntymisprosessi herätti sinussa alkuvaiheessa ja mitä tunteita se kokemus herättää sinussa nyt? /What kind of feelings and experiences did you have when converting to Islam?

Oletko kokenut syrjintää muslimi yhteisöltä otettuasi uuden? /Have you experienced discrimination from within the Muslim community after taking the new religion?

Oletko kokenut syrjintää ei-muslimiyhteisöltä otettuasi uuden uskonnon? /Have you experienced discrimination within the non-Muslim community after taking the new religion?

Oletko omaksunut Islamilaisia tapoja kulttuurisi? /Have you adopted Islamic customs in to your culture?

Koetko kuuluvasi vain suomalaiseen kulttuuriin vai useampaan kulttuuriin? /Do you feel that you belong one or more than the Finnish culture only?

Koetko että suomalaisena Musliminaisena sinulla on samat mahdollisuudet saavuttaa kuin kantasuomalaisella ei musliminaisella? /As a Finnish Muslim woman, do you believe that you have the same opportunities as a non-Muslim Finnish woman do?

Minkälaista tukea olisit toivonut kääntymisesi alkutaipaleella? /What kind of support you wished to have in the beginning of your transition?