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From Aliens to Allies: Empowering Muslim Mothers to Navigate and Nurture Their Children's Educational Journey in American Schools

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Abstract

Recent Muslim immigrant mothers struggle to keep their children faithful to Islam while attending American schools. This paper discusses the societal advantages of accommodating these children, and it examines portions of an earlier qualitative study validating and supporting their experiences and practices. That study identified themes of nurturing, accommodation, and acceptable adaptations to achieve their goals. This article also briefly compares the Muslim experience of religious alienation to the historical experience of American Catholic immigrants of the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Addressing the concerns of Muslim mothers is a key factor in keeping their children in traditional American schools.

Keywords: *Muslim immigrants, public schools, acculturation, parent role, cultural accommodation.*

1. Introduction

The alienating social climate in the United States negatively affects Muslim immigrants making this a group with special health and wellness risks (Samari et al., 2018). Samari (2016) contends that the negative attitudes toward Muslims in the U.S. are even more detrimental to their health than current data indicate. These risks are nearly always present in the lives of American Muslims, but they become especially problematic when immigrant children enroll in traditional American schools and interact with teachers and peers who are unlikely to understand their behavior. American Muslims often hold on to their religion and cultural norms, and this can be a barrier to assimilation. In one of his frequently cited articles, Richard Alba observes that “When assimilation more or less requires a breaking of many ties to the group of origin and the assumption of a high degree of risk of failure, it is unlikely to be undertaken by large numbers, even in the second generation” (Alba, 2005, p. 26). Insisting on conformity to the rules of most school systems increases alienation and may contribute to mental and physical health problems. Unfortunately, animosity toward any immigrant population causes blindness to research findings documenting the benefits of diversity (Kao & Tienda, 1995), and to the

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opportunity of inculcating American civic values (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Macedo, 2003; Parker, 2002).

American Muslims often view themselves as part of a marginalized group within the dominant culture (Tindongan, 2011). Due to cultural differences between home and school, Muslim children face difficulties negotiating their situations. Parents expect their children to present themselves as proud Muslims. However, many children face mockery and misunderstanding from peers, teachers, and administrators. The obstacles they encounter weaken opportunities to gain the benefits of connecting with existing support systems, systems designed to facilitate their transition, improve their quality of life, and ultimately help in the process of their becoming a national asset (Hodge et al., 2015).

The wellness of Muslim immigrant children within American culture begins with the mother but should extend to schools and society in general (Ismail, 2018). For Muslim mothers, ensuring the practices of prayer and fasting while their children are in school are significant sources of anxiety since these are foundational to the Islamic faith and are believed to be essential to their children’s spiritual as well as physical health and well-being. From the mothers’ perspective, there is a seemingly impossible choice: foster strict religious observance or embrace the possibility that participation in the American school system might significantly improve their children’s upward mobility (Kao & Tienda, 1995; Kurlaender, 2006). From an American sociological perspective, the latter choice would seem obvious; integrating immigrant students into its school system provides valuable opportunities for American civic education, development of pride in American citizenship, and smoother integration into America’s diverse workforce (Kao & Tienda, 1995; Kurlaender, 2006).

In their new environment, Muslim mothers relied on flexibility and adjustment regarding the values they struggled to accept or tolerate from the new culture. These findings accurately reflect findings in a study by Roald (2001) who found that Muslim mothers realize that they are a part of a different culture, and it is difficult to isolate their children from it. In general, immigrant Muslim mothers found they could accept some values from the new culture but drew a firm line against those prohibited by Islam. Finding an acceptable compromise between their religious and cultural priorities and the cultural norm of the dominant culture is an ongoing challenge.

2. Problem Statement

Muslim children often face conflicts and challenges. They might see themselves as part of a marginalized group within the dominant culture (Tindongan, 2011). Due to cultural differences between home and school, Muslim students certainly face difficulties and recognize a need to negotiate their situations to remain healthy (Hodge et al., 2015). Parents expect their children to present themselves as proud Muslims. However, many children face mockery and misunderstanding from peers, teachers, and administrators. Frequently, media misinformation and the public’s predetermined notions have generalized to the entire Muslim population and fueled these misunderstandings (Bonet, 2011; Zaal, 2012).

Not surprisingly, these choices can be very difficult for immigrant Muslim mothers. They are likely to perceive irony in the claim that the United States promotes freedom of religion. This study illustrated the mother’s struggle to keep their children centered in Islam while their children at public schools become friends with peers who may not always understand their behavior. Muslim mothers in this study had to develop coping strategies to overcome their sense of conflict at the same time they were struggling to promote their children’s overall wellness.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Social Diversity Among the American Population

Far from being a unified group, the Pew Research Center (2017) notes that American Muslim identity is remarkably diverse—28% Asian, 38% White, 28% Black, and 4% Latino. Unlike other immigrant populations, there is no dominant ethnic, cultural, or geographical demographic. However, contrary to the stereotype, there is much data to show that American Muslims do share a political unity as moderates. Fear or danger in their native country or lack of religious freedom are frequently the impetus for immigration (Amri & Bemak, 2012), and this may contribute to the fact that 71% of U.S. Muslims are “very” to “somewhat” concerned about extremism in the name of Islam, a percentage nearly identical to the concern voiced by 70% of the general public (Pew Research Center, 2017).

Three-quarters of American Muslims are immigrants or the children of immigrants (Pew Research Center, 2017). Yet, on most issues, Muslims mirror the attitudes of the public. Thirty-nine percent of Americans perceive American Muslims to be anti-American: "about half” (14%), “some” (24%), “most” (6%), or “almost all” (5%) (Pew Research Center, 2016, p.11). Just a few of their commonalities include regular attendance at religious services, family values, social justice, and national pride. Muslim pride in being American (92%) is higher than among the general public (47%) (Pew Research Center, 2017).

Animosity toward any immigrant population appears to cause blindness to research findings that document the benefits of diversity (Card, 2005; Kao & Tienda, 1995), and especially to the opportunity of inculcating shared civic values (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). This is especially true of those benefits arising within educational settings (Kurlaender, 2006; Amri & Bemak, 2013; Alarabi et al., 2022a). Kurlaender (2006) summarizes these benefits succinctly, “Overall, there are four broad categories of outcomes that have been associated with school racial/ethnic diversity: enhanced learning, long-term educational and occupational gains, increased social interaction, and improved attitudes and citizenship” (p. 80).

Native-born Americans often believe immigrants adopting the United States as their new home should immediately accept American ways. Contemporary news accounts frequently highlight public resistance to accommodating Muslim immigrants (Balmer et al., 2017; Agostinone-Wilson, 2020; Livingston et al., 2020). One of the concerns expressed is that the United States should not bear the responsibility of accommodating Muslim students because such accommodation would “swamp” already scarce resources. According to Britto and Amer (2007), taken together, Muslim immigrants, particularly Arab-Muslim immigrants, represent a unique demographic. Since 75% are already fluent in English, they contend that Muslim immigrant is more desirable from the point of view of already being able to communicate in the official language of their newly adopted country. Moreover, 40% of Arab immigrants have a bachelor’s degree and benefit from having a higher median income than other immigrant groups (Britto & Amer, 2007; Beitin et al., 2009).

3.2 The Religious Obligations of Islamic Mothers

For Muslim mothers, immigration causes serious challenges as they navigate from a homeland of nearly homogeneous religious and cultural identity into the somewhat more turbulent waters of the pluralistic United States (Hodge et al., 2015). We argue that the wellness of Muslim immigrant children within American culture begins with the mother. Jayyousi et al. (2014) extensively reviewed studies examining Muslim immigrant mothers. They describe how Muslim women want to follow Islamic law in raising their children but sometimes find themselves facing almost irreconcilable pressure to accede to biculturalism or assimilation. These choices can be very difficult for Muslim women as they try to keep their children faithful to Islam and yet allow them to interact with the non-Muslim children of the dominant culture.

Muslim women are considered a source of reinforcement and encouragement as they serve their children emotionally, physically, and mentally, and as they work to develop their children's faith and character (Crosnoe & Cavanagh, 2010). Moreover, they try to help their children in any way possible: sharing knowledge, giving assistance, and even providing financial aid (Jayyousi et al., 2014). Faithful adherence to these responsibilities adds to the mother's religious stature in the Muslim community. Therefore, their relationship becomes both a religious and a cultural imperative. Taking all of this into account provides the necessary context for understanding why the Muslim mother's concern for the health and well-being of her immigrant children is so fraught.

3.3 History of Religious Alienation

It might draw at least a few parallels between the experiences of Muslim and Catholic immigrants in their attempts to adhere to a religion perceived as dangerous and fundamentally un-American. In the early nineteenth century, religious alienation characterized much of the experience of Catholic immigrants (Nolle, 1989).

The alternative of having Muslims create their schools as did Catholic immigrants is fraught (Shatara et al., 2019). According to the Council of Islamic Schools in North America (Azmat & Shatara, 2022), there are about 400 Islamic schools. The reasons Muslim parents send their children to these schools are very much the same as those Catholics presented at the initiation of the parochial school system. They are the same reasons for supporting Jewish schools, Christian schools, or even homeschooling; parents want their children educated with knowledge about and with the values of their religion or culture (Shatara et al., 2019). However, a good education is expensive (Hamad et al., 2022). The quality of underfunded religious schools often suffers from underpaid and underprepared teachers (Alarabi et al., 2022b). In most cases, only financially well-off parents can send children to high-quality private schools. Ultimately, this leads to the segregation a pluralistic society needs to be working against (Banks, 2017b; Moretti, 2015; Renzulli & Evans, 2005). Finally, there is evidence that Muslims who currently send their children to Islamic schools would be willing to switch to public schools if they felt their culture and religion would be respected (Ahmed, 2013).

Following guidance from their sacred texts, the mother takes on the role of completing the family physically, mentally, and emotionally (Crosnoe & Cavanagh, 2010). She bears primary responsibility for setting the religious and cultural tone (Beitin et al., 2009; Oh, 2010). Jayyousi et al. (2014) conducted an extensive review of studies examining Muslim immigrant mothers. They describe how Muslim women who want to follow Islamic law sometimes find themselves facing almost irreconcilable pressure to accede to biculturalism or assimilation.

However, good education is expensive and requires skilled teachers. The quality of underfunded religious schools often suffers from underpaid and underprepared teachers (Banks, 2017b; Moretti, 2015; Renzulli & Evans, 2005). Moreover, there is evidence that Muslims who currently send their children to Islamic schools would be willing to switch to public schools if they felt their culture and religion would be respected (Ahmed, 2013).

Within this complex social, demographic, cultural, and historical background, the study focused on how immigrant Muslim mothers mediate the many challenges that might impact wellness to support their children's well-being.

4. Materials and Methodology

The researchers followed the Tracy (2010) design to conduct this qualitative observational research using a narrative ethnographic approach (Tracy, 2010; Fraenkel, 2003). Qualitative data were collected from seven Islamic immigrant mothers (Table 1) regarding their approaches to maintaining the health and well-being of their children who were enrolled in American schools. The study used an open-ended, semi-structured interview methodology conducted at an Islamic community center in a northeastern United States city. The data was collected in several forms: interviews, naturalistic observation, field notes, and a reflective journal. The setting, familiar to the participants, allowed them to feel comfortable and act naturally. Additionally, the interviewer, also a Muslim mother, believed her familiar presence was an asset in fostering the participants' openness.

4.1 Participants

In December 2020, seven face-to-face, individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted, each lasting 45–60 minutes. The subjects, here identified by pseudonyms, were all Muslim mothers regularly attending the same Islamic center. The women came from different countries around the world, arriving in the United States at different times. With one exception, each had earned a bachelor, associate, or high school degree in her country of origin. These empirical data provided a foundation for the study.

Table 1. Demographic Data of Participants

Pseudonym	Origin Country	Arrival	Education	Married	Age of Sons	Age of Daughters
Anaya	India	2001	Bachelor's	Yes	16 & 12	14
Myra	India	2008	Bachelor's	Yes	7	--
Amira	Sudan	1999	Associate's	Yes	18 & 6	15
Ayesha	Pakistan	2000	Bachelor's	Yes	22	--
Amina	Somalia	2010	Some College	Single	--	11 & 8
Zainab	Pakistan	2000	Bachelor's	Yes	13 & 11	16 & 8
Amal	Jordan	1992	High School	Yes	17	19, 18, & 14

4.2 Data Collection

4.2.1 Interviews

A standardized open-ended interview technique, modeled after recommendations by Patton (2014), allowed participants to respond with free-flowing answers and to answer clarifying questions. Again, following Patton's (2014) model, questions were designed to collect six representative types of data: a) experience and behavior, b) opinion, values, and emotions (which Patton (2014) refers to as feeling questions), c) knowledge, d) sensory (i.e., experiences based on what participants had heard, felt, tasted, etc.), and e) demographics. After receiving verbal consent, the interviews were audio recorded. The ensuing discussions explored the participants' perceptions of factors affecting their children's well-being.

4.2.2 Naturalistic Observation

Since all the mothers and children were regular attendees of the same Islamic institution, it was possible to observe the children as they unselfconsciously did what children do: interact, pray, talk, play, and eat with their families and peer groups. This naturalistic observation provided clues to help formulate interview questions and to validate conclusions. These observations were recorded in the collection of field notes.

4.2.3 Field Notes and Reflective Journal

Following the advice of Ishtiaq (2019) who cautioned, “If you wait too long, you might forget important details” (p. 239), the interviewer recorded notes within one-half hour following each session. Along with the exemplars noted above, these notes included information about the projected confidence of the women and their level of understanding of the questions. A later check of the field notes against the interview audio recordings helped ensure accuracy. The interviewer wrote reflective journal entries after reviewing field notes and audio transcripts. Journal entries ranged in length from a few sentences to a paragraph. The journal became a useful reflection tool, providing a record that incorporated the subjects’ thoughts as well as descriptions of their experiences. As mentioned above, the journal helped identify themes emerging from the data.

4.3 Data Analysis

Wellness, the focus of this study, is too multifaceted to address on only one level; therefore, the ecological model and the wellness model provided a wider scope to analyze participant issues (Robinson, 2008). The ecological model provided a framework to examine external influences on the participants’ experience: intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, and public policy categories (McLeroy et al., 1988). In turn, the wellness model provided a framework to examine more internal experiences: social, emotional, spiritual, and cultural. Using thematic analysis we identified, reported, and analyzed patterns within the data. This approach allowed the researchers to organize and describe the data in rich detail.

Themes. The goal was to synthesize the data from interviews, field notes, naturalistic observation, and the reflective journal into themes. Well-defined themes emerged from the data sources. Themes were highlighted and verified through a rigorous process of data familiarization, data coding, pattern development, and revision. As the primary researcher interviewed the women, she scoped interviews as well as her field notes and observations, looking for meaning establishment, pattern growth, and thematic presence. The careful synthesis of the data allowed for the development of credible themes.

Several data reviews accomplished a thorough analysis triangulation. Member checking strengthened validity; the researchers sent the audio transcriptions back to the seven participants for verification of the accuracy of comments, emphases, and thoughts.

5. Results

In the analysis of the research question: How do Muslim mothers mediate the many challenges that might have an impact on wellness to support their children’s well-being? Three themes emerged: nurturing, cultural accommodation, and acceptable adaptations.

5.1 Identifying and Defining Themes

5.1.1 Nurturing (N)

Mothers described how they helped their children understand Islamic traditions and practices. Within this theme, many mothers described sharing their own stories with their children to help them develop models for how to cope with the challenges of being Muslim in a predominantly non-Muslim society.

5.1.2 Cultural Accommodation (CA)

Mothers sought ways for their children to observe Islamic practice in a system that was often not conducive or interested in that goal. Frequently, they found that accommodation could provide alternatives that preserved the spirit of Islamic tradition. For example, to meet Islamic standards for cleanliness, they made sure their children had wipes for use in the restroom, and to meet dietary requirements, they ensured their children brought halal food from home and did not need to be suspicious of food provided by the school.

5.1.3 Acceptable Adaptations within Family Practices (AA)

Mothers especially struggled with justifying their children's inevitable choices when interacting with the children of the dominant culture—choices that were difficult to make while trying to adhere to strict Muslim expectations. The mothers found that their children simply could not uphold all Islamic traditions as they might have in their culture of origin. As a result, mothers found they had to modify their expectations and make adaptations to their usual strict observance. They developed acceptable adaptations that they believed, while perhaps not letter-perfect, still allowed them to remain faithful to their responsibilities as Muslim mothers. Table 2 Illustrative Quotations & Themes gives examples of how the researchers described the themes about discrete units of text from the mothers' interviews. It will help the reader to see how each description fits naturally into one of the three themes.

Table 2. Illustrative Quotations & Themes

Themes	Description	Illustrative Quotations from the Mothers
Nurturing (N)	Mothers helped their children understand Islamic traditions and practices; Mothers shared personal stories with their children to help them have models for how to cope with the challenges of being Muslim in a predominantly non-Muslim society	What I did to help my kids was just be around them all the time. Make them feel that they are not alone and you are close to them. My strategy is just to be there for them by talking, discussing, and communicating. I used to share my personal experiences with my kids. I like them to hear from me more than their friends.
Cultural Accommodation (CA)	Mothers found ways to meet their children's Islamic needs in a system that could not. For these mothers, an accommodation preserved the spirit of Islamic tradition.	I told my son that he could take wipes with him to clean himself, and he should be fine. I always send lunch with them.
Acceptable Adaptation (AA)	Mothers modified their expectations, taking a step toward integration. For these mothers, an acceptable adaptation was a concession to the dominant culture and yet would still be in keeping with Islamic tradition.	We don't celebrate Halloween at all. So, that's the time that's kind of hard for me. We brought them out for dinner and then after that, they had their favorite ice cream. For sleepovers, I allow their friends to come to my house instead. I have family in Massachusetts, Okay, that's your cousin, and you're going to go sleep over there. I offered my daughters to wear leggings and a long-sleeved shirt to cover exposed skin and offered a bandana as an alternative to a hijab during gym class. I told my children to make up the missed prayers when they returned home from school. I told my daughter to fast on weekends so that she wouldn't fall behind on school activities during the week.

Table 3 Correlation of Themes to Participants identifies the themes that were ultimately associated with each participant and consistently based on the data and interpretation methods discussed above.

Table 3. Correlation of Themes to Participants

Pseudonym	Origin	U.S. Arrival	Sons' Ages	Daughters' Ages	Themes		
Anaya	India	2001	16 & 12	14	N	CA	AA
Myra	India	2008	7	--	N	CA	
Amira	Sudan	1999	18 & 6	15	N		AA
Ayesha	Pakistan	2000	22	--	N		
Amina	Somalia	2010	--	11 & 8	N	CA	AA
Zainab	Pakistan	2000	13 & 11	16 & 8	N	CA	AA
Amal	Jordan	1992	17	19, 18, & 14	N	CA	

Note. N, nurturing; CA, cultural accommodation; AA, acceptable adaptations

The nurturing theme correlated to seven of the mothers. The cultural accommodation theme correlated to five mothers. The acceptable accommodation theme correlated to five.

6. Discussion

6.1 Nurturing

Parenting research supports the importance of a strong parent-child relationship and careful attention to her child's peer group. Current thinking presents four important findings that support the Muslim mother's parenting style when it is both responsive to her child's needs but also authoritative regarding her child's behavior. These findings are: a) children tend to behave like their friends at an early age even regarding academic achievement; b) peer influence is strong for daily activities, but a child's value system and religiosity are most strongly determined by parental influence; c) the parent does and should have significant influence in her child's choice of peers; and d) the susceptibility of children to pro-social peer influence is strongly connected to the parent-child relationship (Collins et al., 2000).

6.2 Cultural Accommodation

Accommodation played an important role in how the mothers eased potentially stressful situations that might otherwise have a negative effect on the wellness of their children. Accommodation has long been a feature promoting the well-being of immigrant groups.

A research study by Bagasra and Mackinem (2019) concluded, "The notion that immigrants adopt the values and practices of the host culture and discard the values and practices of their culture of origin is no longer viewed as the dominant model of acculturation." Additional complications are accommodating the Muslim population due to stereotypes and misperceptions of Islam, especially after the September 11 attacks. Islam is significantly different from Catholicism, and the comparison is certainly not parallel. Nolle (1989) points out that Catholics were at least generally recognized as fellow Christians, and there were enough similarities of belief to build common ground. This is not the case with Muslim immigrants, even though religions often do look for commonalities upon which to build trust (Singh, 2011). Our research shows that school accommodation of Muslim religious observances existed but was far from pervasive.

The First Amendment makes public school teachers sensitive to accusations of teaching religion. Nevertheless, Singh's (2011) research indicates the value of pursuing such trust-building, "In this world of diversity, social praxis can perhaps provide a way of interconnecting people and their theologies expressly for the sake of a more critical goal: peace" (p. 231). A benefit of accommodation, therefore, is that allowing Muslim practice would help teach inter-faith acceptance, even in the absence of commonalities, without making this a part of the curriculum.

6.3 Acceptable Adaptation

Adaptation is part of the acculturation process. Much of the literature cited in this essay supports our research regarding adaptation as a key component of well-being for the immigrant population (Maiter & George, 2003). But, as Voas and Fleischmann (2012) point out in their thorough study of the subject, it is not the whole story. Much depends on the social circumstances of where and with whom the immigrant decides to settle.

Modeling and guiding proper behavior are "a process of action and interaction between parent and child; it is a process in which both parties change each other as children grow to adulthood" (Taraban & Shaw, 2018). As discussed above, Muslim immigrant women struggle to raise their children in a cultural context often not aligned with their own, especially since standards regarding parenting are prescribed by their religion (Maiter & George, 2003). Jayyousi et al. (2014) conducted an extensive review of studies examining Muslim immigrant mothers and described how Muslim mothers want to follow Islamic rules in raising their children but may be compelled toward compromise by the incorporation of biculturalism or assimilation.

Going to school and having to counterbalance cultural conflict is challenging for Muslim children in American public schools. Yet, for a significant part of their day, Muslim students attempt to behave according to an expectation of following the cultural norms and rules of their school and at the same time maintain their religious identity (Hodge et al., 2015). The resulting internal conflict causes stress for both the children and their mothers.

6.4 Balancing Wellness, Accommodation, Adaptation, and Fidelity

In this study, the seven participants spoke of the ideas and the strategies they employ to mediate their children's challenges. They spoke directly or indirectly about interpersonal and societal changes that could provide a supportive environment for their growing children. This study observed mothers developing coping strategies that included learning to nurture in a foreign society (often through education and sharing experiences with other Muslim mothers), acquiescing to some cultural accommodation, and making acceptable adaptations within family practices—all of this while still fostering and maintaining the spirit of Islam.

These findings accurately reflect a study by Roald (2001) who found that Muslim mothers realize that they are a part of a different culture, and it is difficult to isolate their children from it. In their new environment, Muslim mothers displayed variety, flexibility, and adjustment regarding the values with which they struggled to accept or tolerate the new culture. In general, immigrant Muslim mothers found they could accept some values from the new culture but drew a firm line against those prohibited by Islam. Finding an acceptable compromise between their religious and cultural priorities and the cultural norm of the dominant culture is an ongoing challenge.

In this study, acceptable adaptations ameliorated the conflicts as they arose, and at the same time upheld family beliefs and kept their children happy. Implementing these concessions helped the children not to feel excluded or different. By doing so, the mothers felt they were contributing to the overall wellness of their children.

6.5 The Importance of an Educated Citizenry

As stated by Carpenter (2004) “It is virtually impossible to find a U.S. civics or government textbook that does not site Thomas Jefferson’s faith in a well-educated citizenry as the great defense against tyranny” (Carpenter, 2004, p. 140). Jefferson argues that all citizens should have equal educational opportunity and that without education, people would not understand their value and their power within the democracy (Banks, 2017a; Banks, 2017b; Mirra et al., 2013; Moretti, 2015). To follow Jefferson’s reasoning, it might be unwise for American democracy to miss the opportunity to educate immigrants in its political systems. Given the changing American demographic and the increase in immigration, many researchers point to the public school system as the unifying resource for instilling civic values in a pluralistic society (Banks, 2017a; Banks, 2017b; Mirra et al., 2013; Moretti, 2015).

6.6 Legal Protections

The “Establishment Clause” of the First Amendment forbids public institutions from doing anything that might promote any religion; the same amendment includes the “Free Exercise Clause” which forbids any action that might restrict religious practice (U. S. Constitution). Teachers cannot teach religion, but as mentioned above, allowing religious practice promotes understanding (Singh, 2011).

6.7 Social Benefit

The presence of Muslim students is a benefit to society at large. First, there are good reasons and much public support for teaching the value of a diverse society in public schools (Singh, 2011). Godwin et al. (2001) made the observation that merely having interethnic students in a traditional classroom did not necessarily improve student attitudes about what they called political tolerance. However, they did find that such interethnic student populations did have a positive effect when examined in the context of participation in extracurricular activities. They suggest more research is needed, but they assert, “…it may be that the greater ethnic diversity of public high schools will facilitate interethnic friendships in extracurricular activities and that these friendships will increase students’ political tolerance” (p. 546). Thus, the promotion of accommodation in the classroom promotes the well-being of Muslim students and has the potential to promote interethnic friendships that may help ease societal tensions.

6.8 Productive Members of a Diverse Society

A most significant reason to encourage welcoming immigrants into the American school system, regardless of their country of origin, comes from statistical facts documented by the United States Census Bureau, “…immigration will become the primary driver of U.S. population growth by 2030, not because of an increase in immigration, but primarily due to the rising number of deaths and lower birth rates in the U.S.-born population” (Allen et al., 2017). An important role of education is to prepare individuals for employment. Estimates of the future workforce point to a dramatic increase in diversity. The importance of preparing students for that future should be self-evident. The future workplace will contain more children of immigrants who will exhibit behaviors or customs not currently recognized as American cultural norms. As we have argued here, it is in America’s national interest to build a foundation of trust and acceptance for immigrant children. In the case of Muslim immigrants, our research indicates supporting Muslim immigrant mothers to fulfill their religious obligation to promote the well-being of their children is a key component of that foundation.

7. Conclusion

The results of this study offer ways to help Muslim mothers cope with the stresses of immigration that might negatively affect the well-being of their children in one place at one time. The analysis presented here supports reasons to encourage the accommodation of Muslims into the public school system. To fight the most common negative American attitudes toward Muslims mentioned above, it is useful to address the attitudes on four levels: political, legal, social, and economic.

The conclusion is that American schools should recognize the value of a diverse classroom. In the case of Muslim immigrants, schools need to increase cultural sensitivity to the needs of their Muslim students. Moreover, one key to reaping the advantages of a diverse classroom is for schools to reach out to and involve Muslim mothers. An exchange of ideas about how to help Muslim children experience the respect and comfort necessary for their social and educational achievement is mutually beneficial.

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