“AM I FRACTURED OR WHOLE?”: EXPLORING CENTRAL ASIAN FEMALE STUDENTS’ SELF-IDENTITY IN AMERICAN GRADUATE SCHOOLS (254 pp.)

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The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand whether and how Central Asian female students’ identities change because of their studies in American higher education and cross-cultural encounters. Using a basic interpretive approach, I interviewed six female students from five countries of Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. My dissertation puts Central Asian women’s identity formation in a historical perspective. This offers some insight into who the female students were before coming to the United States and some of the challenges women face while defining their identities and coming to grips with their identity changes.

Based on the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007), the Affective, Behavioral, and Cognitive Model of Culture Shock (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001), and the transnational feminist perspective (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994), the findings are divided into three chapters. The first findings chapter demonstrates the ambivalent nature of participants’ views on their certain identity dimensions. The second findings chapter elaborates on the transformative effects of higher education in the United States on women’s self-identity. The third findings
chapter explores the in-betweenness of women’s sense of self-identity after living and studying in the United States. The dissertation concludes by suggesting that universities should not view students’ identity change as a pathology, but to understand the sense of in-betweenness and accept this complexity that is still in process.

*Keywords*: identity construction, Central Asian female students, education abroad