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Friends, Relationships And Family In The Arab Society

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Abstract

Around the world, there have been studies of different cultures and values that are most important and apparent in a society. Within the Arab world, there lies a culture that provides a general guideline to what the Arab nation believes is the way to live. Within those guidelines, an emphasis is placed on the social development of each individual. With the current population of the Arab world holding such a high percentage among young people, the development of each child is critical to the future of the Arab society. The way any child develops socially lies outside of the family setting and relies on the bonds formed with others. These bonds represent the importance that is placed directly underneath family values. It is the value of friendship.

This paper will further explore the values and expectations of the Arab culture, providing an inside look on the importance of certain aspects regarding family life, as it is the center of an Arab individual. The specific address of this paper will be how a child is brought up in the Arab culture to give way to an easier and more specific focus. How friendships are formed and why there are certain rules on relationships between the sexes will also be examined. Why is the culture the way it is and how does it compare to other cultures around the world, in specific the Western culture? I compare it to the Western culture because this is the culture that I am most familiar with and is the culture that considered the most developed in public opinion. The results of this research paper are intended to provide a slight outlook into interpersonal relationships within the Arab society and the development of children regarding these relationships especially in this modern era.

Introduction

Each individual in this world requires the need of human connection. Society sometimes misses the fact that each one of us can overcome common problems in our lives by having a friend. This may seem like such a simple concept but in many societies especially in the West, the importance is placed on other things that are in fact not as necessary at all. Many people lose sight of what we require as human beings to grow and live happy lives. The philosopher, Aristotle once said, “In poverty and other misfortunes of life, true friends are a sure refuge. They keep the young out of mischief; they comfort and aid the old in their weakness, and they incite those in the prime of life to noble deeds.” (Collingwood 2012). Friendships are difficult at times and many find it hard to maintain when our world has become so fast paced in today’s society. With the use of Internet, some find ways to go so long without seeing a friend face to face and instead only communicate through social media and other forms of technology. Although technology has become a great asset to our lives, it completely strips the whole purpose of the reason for friendship that is social development and our human need for connections with others.

With that being said and with the focus of this paper being on values and friendships within the Arab society, there is a high importance placed on the value of friendship and the necessity of relationships between two people. The family does come first and foremost in the Arab culture but friendships are also a value that is respected and young people are taught to cherish all relationships with others. One can obtain a different level of intimacy from a friendship that cannot be obtained through relationships within the family.

Themes/Problems

In regards to the culture of the Arab society there are many stereotypes and profiling that have been placed on the way in which they live as well as the way women are perceived to be treated. Women are portrayed as the weaker gender and are subordinate to men stereotypically. The understanding of the way in which women are perceived is crucial to relationships among men and women because people from other cultures may not realize why the Arab society has placed such stipulations. This paper aims to educate those about the Arab culture and the important values that are held within an Arab family. Of course, there are some developments that can be made in the Arab world in terms of institutions and politics for example but in regards to the culture, it is very strong and should be maintained.

Goals/Justifications

In the Arab world today, the population is made up of a high percentage of youth. Therefore, there is an even bigger emphasis placed on the way a child is taught in terms of the Arab culture and what is expected of them. The purpose of this paper is to address the way in which a child is brought up in the Arab culture and what they are taught, dismissing the stereotypical views someone may hold. Even though, the Arab world is changing in many ways, the Arab culture holds respectful and important values that should be passed on as it demonstrates the good teachings of the Arab culture.

Design/Methodology/Approach

Scholarly secondary sources were reviewed to provide accurate information on the topic of friendship among Arab people. Information recorded from classes and PowerPoint slides of my classes of the Sociology 3326G summer evening 2012 course, at King's University College, Arab Society: family, culture, and social change is also used to provide concrete background knowledge on the issue.

Literature Review/Analysis

The culture that has been maintained for years is based on the Islamic religion. Many Arabs have devoted their lives to living in the way that the teachings from the Quran have outlined for the followers of the Muslim faith. The way those teachings and rules have been interpreted differ in each country and can vary in terms of what they believe will ensure a prosperous and well-balanced life. With that being said, not every Arab is a Muslim, there are also Arabs that are Christian and Jewish and although the religion does play such a key role in the culture this may not apply for everyone and is more of a general outlook in terms of the amount of information that can be covered in this paper.

Even though there are strong and admirable values that Arabs follow in pursuit of living a good life, there is disunity present between Arab countries that contradicts their beliefs but is a sad reality. Similar to other countries around the world that deal with this issue, the Arab countries are not all united under one culture even though they generally follow the same lifestyle. There is no need to

point fingers as to who is to blame as there are many factors that have contributed to this misfortune, such as other countries interfering with the disunity and using it to their advantage. One must also not forget the dispute regarding the oil enriched countries and the fight over that powerful resource that has resulted in certain countries benefiting from it while others suffer. (Tradock Handbook 2006).

The center of all Arab values and principles is the family. The family is the center and comes before anything else as it is regarded as the most important thing a person can have. This is such an admirable trait of the Arab culture as other cultures place less importance on the unity of the family and this can lead to poor psychological development for an individual who loses sight of what should be most important. The typical Arab family is highly patriarchal and large families are encouraged. Honour and shame is a product of the family unit. It is important to maintain the family honour and keep the family name in good standing among the public. Therefore, all matters of the family remain as private as possible because it is shameful for others to know about intimate details of a household.

In comparison, the Western culture places a less serious emphasis on family and friends in some cases hold higher importance. In the Western society, it is common for adolescent to only care about his or her friends and disregard the family as important. The typical adolescent spends most of his or her time with their friends and as minimal time as they can with their family, it is considered more of a chore to be with the family. This type of behaviour is regarded as normal and most parents let their children pick their friends over family, which would not happen in an Arab household.

The amount of stereotypical remarks about Arab women has been blown out of proportion. There is a level of domestic violence in any country but the idea that has been placed in the minds of non-Arabs is that women are being treated poorly and are not considered equals in their own society. The countries in the Arab world are still developing and trying to improve standards for everyone with many scholars placing emphasis on the improvement of the lives of women. There are some restrictions placed on women but it is due to the fact that Arabs believe in privacy in their lives and want to protect their women. There is a high level of respect for women that seems to be disregarded when stereotypes about Arabic women arise. Men and women are kept separate to maintain that respect. In accordance to what has been addressed regarding what is expected among men and women in Arab society, this leads into the main topic of discussion, friendships.

As mentioned earlier, friendships are vital to the proper development of an individual and gives way to a healthy way of living that deters one from feelings of despair that comes naturally when stress arises in one's life. In the article, Boyfriend, girlfriend in a traditional society: Parenting styles and development of intimate friendships among Arabs in school, this form of development is discussed as well as how the absence of friendships affect an individual according to adequate research. "Adolescents who had no close friends were at greater risk than others of becoming socially maladjusted (Hussong, 2000; Parker & Asher, 1993), and of experiencing victimization (Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999), anxiety and depression (Ladd & Troop- Gordon, 2003)" (Sharabany et al.) By having someone other than your family members that you can trust and confide in helps you in every relationship that you may have in your life such as interactions with coworkers, employers, everyday acquaintances and generally people you meet.

In the Arab society, same-sex friendships are highly encouraged and help with the development of children and adolescents whereas friendships formed between a boy and a girl are discouraged. Having an intimate relationship with the opposite sex gives the wrong impression in the Arab society and can bring dishonour upon one's family. In most Arab countries and among Arab families, marriages have been pre-arranged so that the family can ensure that their son or daughter is paired up with someone who they have previously accepted. This eliminates the need for relationships between a boy and a girl before their wedding day. But in regards to that, their son or daughter still has the right to give their parents consent to having them married off to that particular person. Dating and boyfriend/girlfriend relationships that are common in the Western world are likely to be unheard of in the Arab world. "Same-sex friendships in both Arab boys and girls are encouraged by the collectivistic norms, whereas this societal norm prohibits close relations between boys and girls outside the family circle. Despite this prohibition, there is reason to believe that other-sex intimate friendships in Arabs do develop over time due to the co-educational school context, as is the case in other societies (Bukowski et al., 1993; Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000; Feiring, 1999)" (Sharabany et al. 2008).

In the article, it outlines that girls express a higher intimacy level, which can probably be said for other cultures as well. Boys are typically brought up to be tough and are not taught to express their feelings in a healthy way for the most part whereas girls are known to cry and be emotional towards their family and friends.

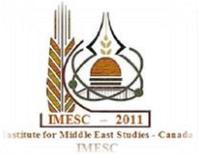
The parenting styles of the Arabs plays a huge role in how their child will learn to form friendships and what is acceptable depending on how the discipline. As said earlier, pre-arranged marriages are

still occurring but this is something that is also changing as well. Parents are leaning towards a more authoritative parenting style rather than authoritarian because they want to adapt to the way society is developing. They may support their children in finding their own partner instead of having their children try rebel against them. As more adolescents in the Arab world become educated through social institutions such as universities this may open their minds to other opinions about friendships with the opposite sex, dating and consequently, marriage. Children are family jewels and they will carry on the family name as well as being the future of their culture. The typical Arab parent is known to be strict and hard headed when disciplining their children but they only want what is best for their child and want their child to grow up to be a respected individual in the civil society.

Arabs take friendships seriously and take the time to invite their friends over to their house. Arabs show the best form of hospitality to any guest that they have in their home and they are known to entertain and provide the best drink and food that they can provide. Hospitality is a huge factor of the Arab culture as it is another way in which their family can be properly represented and consequently, respected by others.

Conclusion

In summary, the culture of the Arab society holds high values that are implemented at a young age and demonstrate good morals for an individual to possess, making them a valuable member of society. The Arab culture places a high emphasis on the importance of family which ensures that a person who is raised in the Arab culture understands where their loyalty lies and their goal is to grow into a member of the family that makes them proud. As stated, friendships within an Arab



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culture are presented to young individuals as an important factor in their lives that they hold with them as they grow. This teaching is very valuable as mentioned in the introduction, friendships are so important to the social development and health of an individual. The stereotypes of the Arab culture is something that will continue to exist regardless of what can be said to counteract those false accusations but that remains in all cultures in some form. Through the education of an individual can stereotypes be reversed but that takes time.

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