A COMPARISON OF CULTURES: THE UNITED STATES AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Bridging the Gap
Order of Presentation

1. Defining Adolescence
2. Religion
3. Gender
4. Stigmas and Stereotypes
5. Violence and War Impacts
6. How We Can Close the Gap between the Two Cultures
7. Brief Documentary film
The ages of Adolescence roughly ranges from 11 to 21 in most cultures. Although this period of development is commonly known as the “teen years” in the United States, in many other cultures it is known as the “right of passage,” from childhood to adulthood.
The word teen can be loosely translated from a Latin term meaning “to grow to adulthood.” Yet in Middle Eastern Countries the term has a more ambiguous meaning because the Islamic culture only separates the life cycle into childhood and Adulthood; puberty is the dividing line for the two stages.
# Adolescent Labels

## United States Teens

In the English Language, the idea of being a teen is associated with terms like “restlessness” and “rebelliousness” (Teens in the Middle East, 2003).

## Middle East Teens

The term often implies “immaturity and imperfection,” which gives them the mindset that they must seek guidance from their older family members (Teens in the Middle East, 2003).
"The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. Islam is peace." President Bush, 2001
Religious Preferences

**United States**
- Protestant 51.3%
- Roman Catholic 23.9%
- Mormon 1.7%
- other Christian 1.6%
- Jewish 1.7%
- Buddhist 0.7%
- Muslim 0.6%
- other or unspecified 2.5%, unaffiliated 12.1%, none 4% (2007 est.)

**Middle East**
- Saudi Arabia: 100% Muslim
- Egypt: Muslim (mostly Sunni) 90%
- Christian 1%
- Iran: Muslim 98% (Shia 89%, Sunni 9%), other (includes Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Baha'i) 2%
Countries and Religions in the Middle East

- Algeria
- Bahrain
- Egypt
- Iran
- Iraq
- Israel
- Jordan
- Kuwait
- Lebanon
- Libya
- Yemen
- Morocco
- Oman
- Palestine
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- Sudan
- Syria
- Tunisia
- Turkey
- United Arab Emirates
Middle East Adolescents and Religion

- “does provide a set of behavioral guidelines—or long-accepted behavioral guidelines are explained as deriving from the religion. But this does not mean that Arab Adolescents always conform to those guidelines or see them as essential to their own faith. And other social pressures can cause religiously sanctioned guidelines to change.” Islam is a “symbolic and social force that precludes total or unquestioning acceptance of Western lifestyles and values” (Marilyn Booth, 210 worlds youth). Islam is considered a “religion, legal system, social blueprint, oppositional ideology.”

This identity formation begins at a young age. As Maryam describes—When we were little, our parents started telling us—“Oh, that’s God’s name” and like you’re supposed to pray. Even when we didn’t know how to pray, we’d just stand there with my uncles or my parents [and pretend to pray] and it was just around us a lot (Religious identity formation).
Differences

- Muslim societies through history have tended to be more tolerant of religious minorities -- especially Jews and Christians -- than the West has.

- The Middle East has a long history of trade, communication, and cultural exchange with Europe and the United States, as well as other cultures around the world.

- Some groups in the Middle East today disagree with U.S. foreign policies, but this is a political rather than a purely religious issue. While it's true that there are those in the Middle East who mistrust extremes of Western cultural influence and want to protect local cultural norms and practices, many Muslims want to adopt (or adapt) other aspects of Western culture and technology. (GLOBAL CONNECTIONS, 2002)
Degeneration of values is often cited as the source of the trend toward earlier sexual behavior (Meier, 2003). Political and moralistic arguments implicate detachment from religion as fundamental to a downward shift in age at first time of intercourse. Meier's (2003) study finds that lower levels of religiosity influence teens' decision to have sex for the first time. Teens with strong religious views are less likely to have sex than are less religious teens, largely because their religious views lead them to view the consequences of having sex negatively. Religion reduces the likelihood of adolescents engaging in early sex by shaping their attitudes and beliefs about sexual activity (how religion affects lives of adoles.)
“More than half of the most religious American Muslim teens don’t pray or even know how to pray” (Useem, 2007).

Many Teens are less religious than their parents in the US.

“When parents are more religious than their adolescent kids, family relations tend to suffer...It is clearly a source that gives rise to tension.” (Science of Religion UTX).
“By recognizing the stereotypes we hold about others -- and others hold about us -- we can begin to understand each other better and communicate our positions more clearly.”
People in other countries, Muslim and non-Muslim, often have misperceptions about life in America. They get their perceptions of the United States from American movies, popular music, and television shows. The fact that the media is directly controlled by a foreign government, and for the most part one that doesn't agree with U.S. foreign policies, it may choose to reinforce negative stereotypes of the U.S.
American Stigmas

- All Americans are rich.
- Women are oppressed in the U.S.
- America is hypocritical.
- Americans have no Family values.

Pakistan Muslim students chant anti-U.S. slogans at a protest in Karachi, September 24, 2001.
When a power elite wants to destroy an enemy nation, it turns to propaganda experts to fashion a program of hate. What does it take for the citizens on one society to hate the citizens of another society to the degree that they want to segregate them, torment them, even kill them? It requires a “hostile imagination,” a psychological construction embedded deeply in their minds by propaganda that transforms those others into “The Enemy” (Zimbardo, 2007)
Muslim Stigmas

- Islam is violent.
- Islam is oppressive toward women.
- The Middle East is; one big sandy desert with lots of camels, populated by men in turbans and long white robes, women in black with their faces covered, men waving long curved swords, husbands with four wives, rich oil sheikhs, and terrorists.
Muslim Stereotypes

"They thought that because I'm a Muslim, I must agree with what the terrorists did... Of course I Don't!"

-14 year old Feda Eid
American Muslim Adolescents

Ausma Khan, PhD, writer, human Rights lawyer and activist says that "Most representations of Muslims in the media are negative," she says. "Muslim Girl Magazine challenges those perceptions by telling the stories of Muslim teens who are proud to be American and who contribute to American society in so many positive ways. This is a chance for their voices to be heard" (Teens Not Terrorists 2007).
Gender Differences

The Middle Eastern Culture dictates how people of a certain gender must act and even what their job selections. In the United States we are fortunate enough to be able to act with no cultural repercussions and chose which job suits us best.
Education for Middle Eastern Young Women

This will not only provide benefits for themselves, but their family, society, and even the entire world. If they can expand their knowledge, they can educate the rest of the world about their religion and life styles which will provide a better understanding and hopefully more peaceful relations between cultures.
Employment and Education

United States
- Almost equal opportunity and equal wages both for men and women
- Almost equal opportunity both for men and women

Middle Eastern
- Increased proportion of females going into labor force
- Gap between male and female
- Gender Role
- Effect higher education for female in employment
e.g., Saudi Arabia
- Increased proportion of females getting into school
- Gap between male and female
- Yemen-No law regarding the minimum ages for marriage
Similarity and Difference (Education and employment)

**Similarity**
- Movement for equal opportunity for women
- Difference in rural area and urban area
- Traditional gender roles for occupations, e.g., teacher, engineer
- Goal

**Difference**
- Traditional Purpose of education
- Achievement
Impacts of Gender Roles on Females in the United States

- USED TO FOLLOW THE “BASICS WAY IN LIFE. THIS MEANS DOING THINGS FOR HUSBANDS AND THEM ONLY WITH NOTHING IN FOR THEMSELVES.

- NOW WE HAVE FOUND A WAY TO RISE ABOVE THE “BASICS”. WOMEN NOW CAN GET A COLLEGE DEGREE, WORK OUT OF HOME FOR THEMSELVES, VOTE/RUN FOR OFFICE, AND OWN PROPERTY.

- STILL SUBTLE GENDER INEQUALITIES. (BLAKIE)
Impacts of Gender Roles on Female Adolescents in the Middle East

- Women are now starting to break norms: going to school, which improves the society as a whole as well as improving family dynamics (Empowering Women, 2009).

- Social Roles are strained: Seem to be forced to wear abaya, must be submissive, and extremely modest (Empowering women, 2009).

- The women is at fault if a child disobeys or is not fully covered causing lustfulness in a man (Inside Saudi).
Middle Eastern Female Pressures

- Submissive and modest which strains the Arab teen girls both in the Middle East and in the United States.
- Not allowed to be heard by a man, give time to religious practices and be a diligent wife (keeping up with cooking, controlling children, and other household chores).
- Adolescent girls have developed a guilt if they let it be known they like a boy. (Marilyn Booth 218-219).
Similarities

- Women get more jobs that deal with children, while men get jobs where they can fix things.
- Policies of Countries.... Increasing schooling and working so that society can keep with the times.
- Education allows for knowledge so that things can change.
In the past two decades, four major conflicts in Middle East have persisted; Israel and Palestine, Israel Lebanese, Afghanistan and Soviets, Iran and Iraq. It is now become a “teenage war” (Teens in the Middle East, 2003).
# Effects of War on Adolescents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Middle East</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ No major direct impacts on kids. They get an education so the country continues to develop.</td>
<td>□ Schools are destroyed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Middle Easterners living in U.S. who have family in areas of war are negatively impacted.</td>
<td>□ Less opportunity for education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Psychological Stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Increased drug use and abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Promotion of “war games”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Injuries, death, and permanent disabilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
United States Drug Use in relation to the Middle East

- Over 90% of the world’s opium comes from Afghanistan (ME Opium Addiction).

- Illegal drug money funds terrorist organizations and activities.

- Terrorist groups use illegal funds from drug trafficking to fund their organizations.
The main reason for the rise in the number of children and young people using illicit drugs has been the psychological effects of violence. It is violence, specialists say, which has led to children finding easy ways to forget about the loss of their loved ones (Massawi, 2007).

As one of many young Afghani addicts stated, “This is a big problem…much worse than terrorism or the Taliban. In war, if the enemy kills you, you die once. But addiction kills the future.” (Time Magazine)
Specialists agree that continued violence and easy access to various narcotics is responsible for the rising number of users.

“Investigations by local NGOs showed an increase of at least 20% in drug abuse among children and youth over the past year.” —Ali Mussawi, president of local NGO Keeping Children Alive (KCA)
General Conclusions: How Can We Close the Gap?

Violence in the Middle East has had enormous effects on teen life that are not seen here in America. If we can better understand the Middle Eastern Culture and Religious Values, we could possibly find ways to help and be more supportive of their lifestyles.
Adolescents in the Middle East are losing opportunities for furthering their education due to the current political and religious conflicts. As Adolescents in the United States, it is difficult to relate our lifestyles to many of the Middle Eastern culture.

“Without mutual knowledge there can be no mutual understanding; without understanding, there can be no trust and respect; without trust, there can be no peace, only the danger of conflict. This means we have to be willing and able to familiarize ourselves with the way people of other cultures think and perceive the world around them, but without losing our own standpoint in the process.”

-Roman Herzog, President of Germany


