

Afghan Youth in the U.S.

Problems, concerns and challenges

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Prelude

Upon the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, more than 80,000 Afghans entered the United States as refugees, political asylum and illegal entry from 1980 to 2000. The exact number of Afghans in the United States is not very clear. The most accurate statistic we have available is from the US Immigration and Naturalization Service, which indicates the number of Afghans is less than 100,000 in total. Afghans are those who are citizen of Afghanistan. They speak Farsi/Dari, Pashto and Uzbek languages. However, some Pakistani Pashtuns have also obtained refugee status under the name of Afghans. This was not detected by INS in Peshawar or Islamabad, Pakistan, where most refugees have obtained refugee status. This makes the true Afghan population in the United States more complicated. Some Afghans were in the United States before the Soviet invasion either as diplomats or students. The first Afghan-American after the invasion and diaspora of Afghans was born in the United States in 1980.

This is a short study comprised of face to face interviews with fifteen youth aged 16 to 38, and a survey that twenty people answered. The researcher has also interviewed 15 couples to find out their relations and concerns with their youth. This study is based upon participatory research. All interviews and survey results are confidential. For protection of privacy, they were all destroyed after the assessment for this short study. Two Afghan American youths sent me their input in the form of short essays-these are included at the end of this paper with their permission.

Afghan culture from cultural anthropological point of view:

Afghans are predominately Muslims with a tribal mentality. There is also a small number of Jews, Hindus and Sikhs which constitute less than 0.9 percent of the population. The Afghan Islamic culture is mixed with tribal attitude and behavior. However, in reality, they are more tribal than Muslim. Islam is a sugar coating of tribalism in Afghan culture.

Afghanistan is a cross road of civilization. It consists of many tribes and, two major religious school of thought: Sunni and Shia. The majority, 80 %, are Sunni Muslims and 20% are Shia. There are many languages and dialects. The national languages are Farsi and Pashto. However, the lingua franca in Afghanistan is Farsi. Lingua franca means that the common language in the region, not only in Afghanistan, is Farsi. In the 1964 constitution of Afghanistan, this language has changed to Dari. As a matter of fact, Farsi and Dari are both the same languages. Only idiomatically and lexically there are some differences, which is common in all languages. Culturally and linguistically, Afghanistan, Iran, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan share the same linguistic heritage, which is Farsi. There are no national statistics in Afghanistan and or a complete census to indicate the exact number of ethnic composition. Pashtuns claim to be the majority but that cannot be proven due to lack of accurate census. However, Pashtuns did hold political power in contemporary Afghanistan for the last 250 years except for two or three very short periods of time when a Tajik became the ruler. That did not last long.

Family structure:

Afghan family structure is based upon extended an family system. This means not only parents, but all family members such as grand father, grand mother, uncles and aunties and even in-laws in some families play a role in upbringing children. This family system, due to the trend of individualism in the

West, is weakened in the United States. When a family is knitted together, children would learn more cultural values, particularly the language, which is the core of any culture anthropologically. When families spend less time together, of course, children would not have their family heritage. This cause of lack of communication and unity within a family in diaspora. However, there are many youth who know their mother language verbally with varieties of fluency. Again, this is because of the strength of the family network. The majority of youth who speak the language, cannot read or write. This means their language proficiency is very limited. Since the core principle of a culture is language, the strength or weakness of language within the youth impacts the parents-youth relationship. The major parents-youth problem within the Afghan culture in America is lack of communication. Not because they don't truly understand each other but since language is part of culture, they cannot comprehend each other culturally.

Multiculturalism:

Afghan youth are not only bi-cultural because of their upbringing as Afghans and in the American environment as American, but they are also multicultural. Afghan family mentality, American attitude/behavior and Islamic values make them multicultural. This give them a broader perspective about life and also faces them with challenges as Afghans and Muslims. Because of their religion, namely Islam, the full majority of Afghan Americans carry Islamic names. This can be a liability sometimes when they are facing some people who are prejudiced and anti-immigrant in their place of work or school. However, for many, their ethnicity and religious background is an asset and they take pride of that. In one gathering, when we talked about Islamic identity, a young Afghan-American female who was born in this country said "We are not ashamed of Islam." Some male Afghan-Americans for the purpose of integration choose to shorten their Islamic names or adopt American names. For example a person's name is Edris and he calls himself Ed. The majority of Afghan-American youth believe in Islam as their religion but do not necessarily practice Islam. The notion of secularism is much stronger among Afghan youth. They prefer to see religion and politics as two separate entities. A very few Afghan American joined the Whahabi sect of religion from the Sunni part of the community. The Afghan Shia youth also, as much as they believe in their religious doctrine, the full majority do not believe in association of religion and politics. They are secular, but on the 10th of Muharram, when the anniversary of martyrdom of Imam Hussain arrives, then they are Shia. Likewise, Sunnis don't practice Islam, but they are Muslims when they wed and their wedlock is performed according to Islamic law. American democratic values give Afghan-American youth a choice between when it comes to practicing religion. Ninety five percent of female youth, our study shows, do not believe Hijab is necessary in this society but modest dress is preferred. 60% of females see religion a personal matter and they don't relate their belief to their dress at all.

Traditionally, dancing is forbidden in Islamic culture, especially when men are present. However, there are many Afghan-American youth female who wear hijab and dance with others in weddings. When asked if it is contradictory to wear hijab and dance at this same time? They say, No!. They equate with their religion but at the same time enjoy dancing as well. They see dancing as fine art not a source of corruption. These female youth do not want to sacrifice their individualism and freedom for the sake of religion. This is what liberal democracy offers. As Francis Fukuyama said in his book, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and The Politics of Resentment, 2018*, "The other problem with the expansive understanding of individual autonomy is that not everyone is a Nietzschean superman seeking to revalue all values. Human being are intensely social creatures whose emotional inclinations drive them to want to conform to the norms surrounding them." (pp. 56,)

Anthropologically, there are three things that unite people: language, music and food. Within the Afghan-American youth group, almost all of them, both male and female know how to dance the

traditional dancing but they do not know their religion or language properly. Afghan youth, when together, they speak English. With families coding and decoding is common. In families that get together quite often, Afghan-American youth love Afghan cuisine. On the contrary, those families who spend less time together or the mother does not cook regularly, Afghan-American youth adopt poor dietary habits of eating outside, usually fast food such as Chipotle, Pizza, In & Out Burger, or Panda Express. This means that family policies, working parents, and the role that Afghan parents play within the family have a direct impact on youth's diet. At the same time, those families who spend less time together, their children have not learned to eat together at the table. Youth take their meal and go to their rooms.

Education:

It is very inspiring that the majority of Afghan-Americans youth interviewed or submitted their survey questionnaire are highly educated. This means that Afghans from day one took advantage of education in the United States and most of them either hold a Bachelor, a Master, or a Doctorate degree. Afghans youth are engaged in all fields, business management and finance, law, law enforcement, social sciences, biological sciences, social work, research, communication and journalism, psychology and medicine and real estate management. However, females are more educated among Afghan youth. This is because culturally, Afghan families were more protective of their young girls than boys. If boys stay out late at night, this is acceptable, but not so for girls. If boys date, this is acceptable, but girls are not allowed to do so. This was, and is, a discrimination within the family, but at the same time, provides young girls the opportunity to pursue more education. Hence, this research finds that the first lawyer within the Afghan community after mass migration was a female named Wahida Noorzad, who resided in California. Wahida was eight years old when she came to the United States and finished her first phase of education in law in 1994. She practices law in the State of California. The first medical doctor was also a female named Maihan Amiryar and she is with Kaiser Permanente. Maihan was three years old when arrived to the United States. By the same token, in the Afghan community, four Afghan-Americans ran for political office. One was Aisha Wahab, a female for City Council of Hayward, California, and the other was Harris Mojadedi, a young man for City Council of Union City, California, and Safia Wazir, a 27 years old Afghan-American who ran for a seat in New Hampshire Congress, and Omar Qudrat for the 52nd district in San Diego, California for U.S Congress during the mid term election of 2018. Aisha Wahab and Safia Wazir both were elected and they are the first Afghan-American females in American politics. This is an enormous achievement within the community for almost four decades since their parents arrived on US soil. Most Afghan-American educated class and professional are listed on Link-it. However, all academic successes and social and political achievements do not mean that Afghan-American youth are not facing different challenges, or that they do not have their problems and concerns.

Marriage:

Divorce is the number one dilemma within the Afghan-American youth. One reason for a high rate of divorce is lack of equality between sexes, which most Afghan-American youth are still fighting to achieve. Cases reviewed by Afghan Domestic Violence Prevention, the divorce rate is 35% which is very high for Afghan culture. As the founder of Afghan Domestic Violence Prevention, I witnessed that most Afghan young men promise one thing before marriage and act upon something else after marriage. Most Afghan young men are very controlling. Girls who are educated cannot tolerate all this. Some of them keep quiet and accept patriarchy because of their children, family reputation and stigma. But highly educated Afghan women do not accept this status, although they try very hard to change their husbands and make them more ideal and even civilized. But most ask for divorce. Family

interference is another reason for divorce. Most Afghan young men cannot bridge love and respect between their parents and their wives. It is very common, unfortunately, that Afghan parents interfere in their young sons' and daughters' family life. This happens from the girl side as well. The girls pay more attention to their blood-family side rather than focus on their new family. Many girls take advantage of the liberal society, and, gender equality and under the name of democracy ignore their husbands' needs, and are not grateful, but sarcastic and nag all the time for no reason. Another reason is cultural differences among Afghan youth. American liberal democracy provides an atmosphere in which everyone is entitled to be who they want to be. Accordingly, one is liberal Muslim and another is not. One adheres more to Afghan culture and the other does not. One is more secular and one is more religious. When we talk of Afghans, it does not mean they are all the same. This is common to all cultures. Afghan parents push their son and daughters to marry despite the fact that he or she is not ready. Most of the time they agree with their parents out of respect and marry. Since dating is still a taboo within Afghan culture, arranged marriages take place. There is nothing wrong with arranged marriages but the proper application of arranged marriages in Afghan culture is totally misunderstood. Arranged marriage is when some one within the family or outside the family introduces a young man and woman to each other. However, either the opportunity is not provided for the youth to fully discuss their expectations, demands and wishes and differences or they don't do their homework well. Mostly, parents put their input that he is a nice man, has a good job and has a house or is of noble heritage,. This means that Afghan youth marry based upon other people's recommendations and wishes, namely that of parents and family members or even friends. This causes a lot of miss-communication, mistrust and arguments after marriage . Muslim girls are not supposed to marry non-Muslims. So they have to find a man within the Afghan community or a convert. Most parents, study shows, prefer an Afghan man rather than a non-Afghan Muslim. Most Afghan youth believe in Islam but they are not practicing Muslims, both men and women. They marry as Muslims without understanding their responsibility as Muslims. This causes more problems. Another reason for divorce is marrying from Afghanistan. Either a young man imports a wife from Afghanistan or a young woman imports a husband. The result due to huge cultural differences, is that expectations differ. One is raised in a closed traditional tribal system and one is raised in an open liberal capitalist democratic society. To fill the gap requires a lot of sacrifices and hard work for both sides. Files from the Afghan Domestic Violence Prevention shows that 95% of marriages of Afghan-American youth between the U.S and Afghanistan is a total failure, including those who were close relatives such as first cousins. Afghans come from an extended family system. However, a man or woman is inclined to more western individualism. This has caused major family problems. Since marrying a cousin and close relatives is permissible; if the marriage is within relatives, divorce causes families to fall apart. Very few parents accept that their daughter marries a non-Muslim. Some did not have any other choice but to go with what their daughter desired. There are some who became so secular that it is not important to them who their daughter marries. At the same time, they argue that Muslims are killing each other, that women in Muslim societies do not have any rights, Muslim countries are backward, etc.. They do not want to understand the fact that all this is not the problem of Islam as a way of life but of those who practice it and of those who are in charge of Muslim countries. However, the number is very few at this time. There are a few Afghan youth who have accepted the Wahabi brand of Islam in America. There are a few young Afghans who have studied traditional Islam in some African Muslim countries and came back with a strong Wahabi understating of Islam and they serve within the community as Muslim Sheikhs. The majority of Afghan youth, both girls and boys, do not enjoy all these restrictions, especially young girls don't approve patriarchy and injustice under the name of Islam where women do not have any rights unless their husbands approve, and they have no freedom of expression and some are even not allowed to go to school after marriage. Another major problem within Afghan-American youth-,demographically, is the relatively high level of education among females. They are not able to find an Afghan husband who matches their level of education because, as we said earlier, females are more educated than males.

Afghan youth as a minority

The United States of America is truly a land of opportunity. There are Afghan-Americans who have become very rich without a formal education. There are Afghan youth who do not come from an educated family but understood the importance of a good education and got educated. Of course, family guidance and support always plays a key factor. But the personal initiative of a young man or a woman was a factor as well. However, there is always problems within society that an immigrant cannot ignore. For one, being a Muslim is not always an advantage. Although some Afghans played a low-key profile and didn't show their religiosity, their names were good enough to face discrimination and challenges, even in schools or universities, where discrimination in an institution of knowledge should not have any place. But there are professors as well as students who are prejudiced, unfortunately. Ethnicity is the second issue that caused challenges. Those who are prejudiced, if they cannot find something constructive, will bring the issue of communication, and looks, such as black hair or eyes, as a deficiency. They see them as non- American, although Afghan-Americans do not have any accent in language because they were raised in this country. Another issue is expressing their ideas freely. This seems to be acceptable in a free society but, as a matter of fact, the opposite is true. People react differently and some have been forced to leave their jobs. Some “did as the Romans do,” and they turned out to be better off. However, they have a hard time psychologically that they depict themselves as something they are not. Inside they are a different person but outside they have to act differently. . Our study shows that most educated Afghans who are raised in this society are less interested in Afghan community affairs, less cooperative with Afghans and they don't attend community meetings. To some extent they cannot be blamed. Afghan youth see that older generations do not get along very well. They are not cooperating with each other. They have huge differences about the issue of Afghanistan. They are ethnically divided. The youth claim that after almost 40 years in diaspora, Afghans do not have a strong lobby for the sake of Afghanistan. Those who are religious do not accept those who have a different opinion about religious issues. On the political front, Afghans are divided about the Taliban and the presence of Americans in Afghanistan. There are Afghans who support the Taliban and there are many who are against them. All this turns off Afghan-American youth who then choose not to cooperate with Afghan entities and organizations. Afghan-Americans enjoy their freedom and all of them love their country of birth, the United States of America. Despite all odds and evens as sons and daughters of immigrants, all believe that this is a land of opportunity and one has to work hard to achieve his/her goal. In one gatherings, they said that when they go abroad and come back home, it feels so good when they read the sign of immigration directing citizens and non-citizens, and they enter the queue reserved for U.S. Citizens!.

Family Relations:

As mentioned before, there is a cultural gap between Afghan youth and their parents. Hence family relations can be very tense due to cultural differences, or very amicable because of a good cultural setting. Both exist within Afghan American families. Inevitably, there are clashes between parents and youth in all cultures. In the case of Afghan-American youth this clash is mostly due to cultural differences where parents come from a traditional, tribal, religious conservative society while their children were born in a capitalist, liberal democratic society. Parents like to advise their youth what to do, even if they are over 18 years old, and this is not acceptable to most of the youth whom have a notion of individualism that their parents cannot comprehend. Youth from early young age, get a job while studying. This gives them economic independence and they want to spend their money as they

feel fit, while parents interfere with what to purchase, what not to purchase. Some parents emphasize Islam while their daughter or son see Islam not as way of life but a personal choice that bears no relation to daily life. The best example, as mentioned above is when the daughter wants to marry a non-Muslim. It is a taboo within the Afghan, indeed Muslim culture, but the daughter sees it differently.

Concerns of Afghan Youth (young girls):

Parents are overprotective. They don't allow their daughters to travel or go out with their friends although they are over 18 years old.. While at the same time they allow their brothers to do what they want to do, which is not fair. Some girls complain that they are pushed to marry while they don't want to marry someone whom they don't approve. Parents should stop pushing them and let them decide for themselves. Sometimes parents propose someone among their relatives and they push hard for their daughters to approve of it. This is playing with their destiny, they argue. Girls want their parents to be more friendly and cooperative and to support them, trust them fully, and listen to them. Some parents, instead of being understanding and friendly, are very sarcastic towards their sons and daughters. This attitude truly hurts the youth. Some participants said that they don't enjoy Islam because of so many restrictions. They claimed that in the United States, we have our freedom and it is up to us how to lead our lives. They complain about their parents that, instead of learning new things, they either argue at home or gossip about other people and relatives regarding what they do or don't. This is frustrating. Some argued that they preferred to stay in the library and study rather than go home and listen to all this “crap.” One young girl complained that her mother is controlling her so much that she plans to leave home as soon as she reaches the age of 18. Despite all this young girls love their parents without hesitation. Some young girls were deprived of an education because they were accepted by a university in a State different from the one where they live, but their parents did not allow them to leave home whereas they did allow their sons to leave. All girls said that this is absurd.

Concerns of Afghan youth (young men):

Afghan parents think that the only way to succeed in this life is to have an education which might be true but there are other ways to succeed in this life, some youth argued. Some parents push them to learn Islam while they don't practice it themselves. Some complained that in their family they are very much divided about Islamic life as to what kind of Muslims they should be. Some argued that they do not go to the mosque because they do not learn anything new there. The discourse, they said, is always about “old stuff”, which is boring. Even if the mosque invites some scholars, they do not bring speakers who contend with the youth and discuss new fresh ideas about Islam such as science, family relations, gender equality and so on. . Some young men complained that their fathers are very ritualistic when it comes to the issue of Afghanistan. Our parents don't see and understand that we are living in a different society. Almost all of them who were interviewed said that their parents don't trust them. However, the full majority, like young girls, love their parents and recognized their problems too.

Parents Concerns Regarding their Youth:

Parents concerns are important because it constitutes their relations with their offspring. Parents who were interviewed love their young ones but most of them argue that their children don't appreciate them as much as they expect of them. One major concern that all shared is lack of interest of their children in Islam and Afghanistan. One couple said that, “We do know that they are born here and that they are Americans but they should also know why their parents came here. “My son is educated and

finds time to play games, go with friends, picnic, and so on but does not have time to read about Afghan history or culture. This really bothers me," a father complained. Another couple complained that their son goes out, which is fine, but "we expect him to call us and tell us as what time he is coming home, and he never answers our calls.". They said that their children are indifferent toward their feelings. Another couple said, "We did our best, but failed especially in the matter of respect. Our daughter argues, never listens, and if we say quietly lets talk, she leaves home." Some couples expressed frustration because they felt that their children were not theirs. "We just don't know - our children are kind of without any feeling for us. They are not good listeners. They don't have a goal and objectives," a couple complained. They don't have anything in common anymore. There were also couples who were very grateful of their children. Their youngsters are well versed in Afghan culture, they respect their parents and are happy. The only reason that we find in this research for youngsters being bi-cultural and getting along well with their parents is close relations with the entire family both from the mother's side and the father's side. Weekend gatherings are important. Celebrating birthdays, New Year, Islamic Eids and so on makes a huge difference.

Recommendations:

Cultural difference remains a fact of life for this generation and will not fade away as long as the Afghan generation of the 1980's live. But both parents and youngsters can take the initiative to, if not fill the gap totally, at least compromise somehow for the sake of the youth who are the legacy of our culture.

Parents should realize the fact that their youth are born in this country . This means that,by law, they are not Afghans but Americans.

The second thing parents should realize that this country is one of laws, not just traditions. In a country of law, people are raised with some notion of legality, i.e., there is legal age for marriage, or legal age for driving, This notion of legality has cultural attachments that extends to all walk of life, which our youngsters cannot avoid. Examples include going out of the home State for education, not marrying a cousin, and marrying someone of their own choice not the parents' choice. .

Parents should trust their youngsters. If they had managed to teach them and educate them in the right way, then they should not fear and should stop controlling them.

The legal age of "adulthood" is 18. That is not a big deal. However, may youngsters see that as a sign of independence, maturity and decision - making. Therefore, parents should foster a line of open communication rather than say: You do not know, you do not have experience, and so on. For example there are many parents who don't want their sons and daughters go away from home after high school. So parents should say that it is very nice that you got accepted to this university out of town, but don't you think going to a two year college in the beginning is more cost effective, and you will not need to pay for accommodation and so on. Asked your children what they think.

In a capitalist economy, for many, career is as important as marriage. However, marriage should not be forced or recommended until a young girl or young man decides for themselves.

Once married, interfere in their life should stop. This has caused a lot of damage between families.

Every human being is created with a talent. We all have talents. But one has to find out about his/her talent regarding that what he or she is good at. Parents push their youngsters to go to law school or college of medicine while they don't have the talent for law or medicine. Parents are doing this for the sake of more money and for prestige, forgetting the fact that their sons and daughters may finish law school or medical school without a deep interest in the field. That will create a boring, and likely unsuccessful lifestyle for them.

Indigenous culture has useful and useless items in it. Parents should try to sieve our culture and see what is really good to use and what is not good. For example, according to Islam no one can marry a young girl or a widow without her permission. Hence it is unacceptable that parents force their

daughters to marry someone they don't like.

Recommendation for youth:

Afghan youth should know that their parents are forced - immigrants. They arrived here due to political turmoil in Afghanistan, not by personal wishes or for making a good living in this country. Most parents left the country not only to save their lives, but also to save their children from the danger of communism and atheism. They should be grateful for that. Afghan youth should realize the fact that their parents did as much as they could do in a country they did not know anything about and with limited resources and knowledge of the English language, not knowing the system and not aware how a liberal capitalist democracy works. Youth should take the initiative and learn more about the positive culture of their parents, and be productive citizens. Parents say that, to their children, they are old style folks. That is well understood. But the new generation are missing time management and money management skills. They care less about their families. Therefore, it is better to spend quality time with parents, take them to museums, parks, and so on. Afghan youth should learn the true form of Islam. Afghan youth should learn anger management, and try to overcome any social and family problems. Those who are married should respect their wives. Afghan youth should enjoy learning their mother-language in order to fill the cultural gap. Afghan youth should know that they are the legacy of their parents and culture.

Following are two short essays that our youth shared. Both were born in the United States.

Report for Afghan Youth Study

Salam,

I am the daughter of Wadad Amilee who contacted you over my interest in your study. This is something I am very passionate about considering I am a child of two Afghani refugees, which has not only shaped my whole life, but made me the way I am today.

The biggest strength I have growing up in the west unlike my parents is my diversity due to living in the society of twenty-first century United States where your differences are celebrated and beautiful and can be united into one, hence UNITED states. This is one of the greatest parts of my generation as a youth. But my greatest weakness is also my diversity. Sadly I was born in what we call the awkward-middle-zone, where you have the younger generations of American children with immigrant parents who are liberals that find beauty in differences and then you have some of the older generation that find differences and change disgusting and a threat to them somehow. Thus, being a generation of endless controversy and argument.

This brings me to the next topic of why divorce rates are a lot higher. There are many points that contribute to this statistic in my mind. One, In the nineties a very common mistake among the youth was getting

married after high school. If you ask most of the kids today when their parents got married they will probably reply with "right after high school" or "after college". After high school you are 18. A common misconception is that eighteen marks the age of adulthood which is completely wrong. 18 is only the beginning of your pre-adult life, your young adult life. Another reason that only resonates with kids with middle eastern parents, like me, is that most of our parents had arranged marriages. By most, I mean almost all. Due to this, our parents were married from the ages 16-20. 16 is a VERY young age so of course in a few more years where you mature overtime, the couples will have differences and will not get along as much as they used to and because divorce is not as taboo as it used to be, more divorces are done.

In regards to our struggles with culture differences: Regardless of both being raised very Afghan, Afghans raised in the U.S. verses Afghans raised in Afghanistan are completely different. COMPLETELY. In Afghanistan, there is a theistic based government, already setting the tone for a non-open mindset throughout the country. In the U.S. there is a democracy with so many options and choices, you don't even know where to start. The Afghan culture of Afghanistan raised Afghans is very toxic, filled with judgment, and no room for change. These very reasons are probably why the government and country itself are failing. A HUGE example of this difference-something a lot of young American raised Afghans can agree on with me is- the expectations on who we marry and how. My whole life I was told "your khashgar has to be Afghan and Muslim" and when I was younger I agreed because I thought that's what I wanted to since everyone in my family was married to an Afghan Muslim. As I got older and became more aware of my surroundings and experienced different people and new things, my mindset adjusted to change, but my parents stayed the same. Something that I said that changed my mom's conservative request was when I told her, "Mom, You were born and raised in Afghanistan. Everywhere you looked there were pure Afghan Muslims and only Afghan Muslims. I was born and raised here where all around me, there is every race and religion you could possibly think of. So of course this means who I'm attracted to or spend my time with will not always be purely afghan and Muslim." At first, she didn't understand what I meant and assumed it was some kind of act of rebellion. After a while, she finally understood the simple thing I said and told me that it really changed her view on MANY things. I wish more Afghan parents were like this and made an effort to understand the new generation and accept how much has changed in 20 years from when they first came here. I wish they were brought up in a more open environment like ours as well. It must have not been easy being in an environment where the culture among the people were very close-minded and judgmental.

Thank you Dr.Sahib for this amazing opportunity to voice my opinion. Thank you for making the effort to look into this matter and difference in cultures. It has been something that has been long overlooked, so I'm

glad someone made an effort to understand it and hopefully change it.

I understand this is supposed to be anonymous but I am okay with and would like my name to be mentioned and connected with my words.

Thank you.

-Alina Amilee

Problems of the Afghan Youth
By Bellal Naderi

Academics:

Afghan youth along with most minorities with immigrant parents have a great disadvantage in achieving academic excellence. This is mainly due to parents being uninformed of the academic process and how to successfully progress to university and beyond. I personally witnessed how the schools let down many students by not educating them about how to apply to universities and in the exploration of professional and academic careers. Since the schools are not preparing the students with this knowledge, it depends purely on luck whether the student has any educated people or professionals in their network of family and friends. And, immigrants rarely make it to achieving university degrees and high-paying jobs due to financial, academic, and social constraints, leaving the youth without examples to follow. I have heard of organizations that target minorities (mostly Mexican-Americans and African-Americans) and provide them with information and support to make it to universities, but this leaves out all of the smaller minorities. And even then, a student's future should not be dependent on whether or not they have been approached by an organization or not or if their school educates their students about it or not. Educating students about the process of applying and succeeding in universities and exploration in professional careers should be a mandatory curriculum for every high school student.

Biculturalism, Identity, and Marriage:

Developing your own identity is a complicated task for any individual. But, being born from immigrant parents feels like an identity tug-of-war game with you in the middle. Society constantly pushes you to be "like everybody else." It comes mainly from indirect social pressure to fit in, so you don't stick out and be picked on for being different. It doesn't feel nice when everyone at the party is eating pepperoni pizza and you decide to go hungry because you don't eat pork because you are Muslim and everybody takes notice. On the other side of the battlefield, your parents are constantly raving about how great it was in Afghanistan before the war and about how they can't wait to go back after the war ends.

When you are a war refugee, you did not choose to leave your country. Violence, fear, and chaos chased you out. Physically, you may be in another country, but mentally you are still "home." This causes Afghan parents to try and assimilate their children to their "old" way of life. They want their children to have Afghani morals and traditions. They want their children to get married to other Afghans (like they did), so all the traditions, cultural norms, language, and religion can stay the same. Forever. So, it can feel like they never left Afghanistan. But, it's not Afghanistan. Traditions develop to serve a purpose in societies, and traditions are not always transferable to different societies. This is not only where Afghan parents and children clash, but also where the children's identity crisis begins. It is very normal for Afghan youth to act one way at home with family and relatives and totally different in school and friends. We learn to create multiple personalities at around adolescents. This is because some normal American behavior might not be considered normal for Afghan culture. So, we hide that part of ourselves. It might be how dress, how we talk, activities we are doing, and especially dating. The worst part is how women in Afghan society is critiqued so harshly. The reason again being that it is normal for an American woman to date, have sex (out of wedlock), drink alcohol and party. But, if an Afghan woman were to do ANY of these, she would be judged to be amongst the lowest in society. And, many Afghan parents refuse to assimilate to the American way of life, so they will try their hardest to prevent their children, especially the women, from becoming "American." These contrasts in culture causes great confusion in the youth as to who they are. Are they Afghan? American? Afghan-American? At some point in their life, they have to choose. Then, we disappoint our parents or our friends. But, it is better than pretending our whole life that we are everything.

Another issue arising from the possibility of having one of three identities is that the parents only see one identity, Afghan. They refuse to acknowledge the other two identities even if it means to consciously self-delude yourself. Then, when young Afghan men and women are looking to get married, their parents help them look for a spouse that fits the Afghani criteria. If the woman is too "American," she is not marriage material. An Afghani woman is not supposed to date, so it becomes nearly impossible to meet men. And, if she does, she is not marriage material. And, even after trying to set her up through family/relatives, the family may determine she is too American or lacks some good Afghani qualities. Many Afghani men follow this path and determine that, Afghan-American women are not good enough for them. So, they network with relatives in Afghanistan and get married in an almost arranged marriage style to "quality" women living in Afghanistan. This leaves a society of Afghan women that nobody wants to marry. And, if the Afghan women are living up to their parent's expectations, the Afghan woman will not dare marry a non-Afghan. So, as they age, they become more and more desperate, eventually marrying a man living in Afghanistan who is willing to marry an Afghan-American woman because that means he gets to live in America. In the other case, some Afghan-American men and women do find each other and decide to marry. But, when they meet each other and each other's families, they put on their Afghan persona. This means they are not acting like themselves when they are getting to know the other person and may be hiding a lot about themselves. It seems wrong for the youth to act like that, but they must

to fulfill Afghan society's expectations. And, since the women are critiqued harsher, they must act and lie better than the men. This creates a generation of deceptive and almost forced marriages.

Back cover

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