FAMILY DYNAMICS BETWEEN ARAB MUSLIM PARENTS, WESTERN PARENTS AND THEIR BI-ETHNIC CHILDREN

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FAMILY DYNAMICS BETWEEN ARAB MUSLIM PARENTS, WESTERN PARENTS AND THEIR BI-ETHNIC CHILDREN

A Thesis

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Abstract

of

FAMILY DYNAMICS BETWEEN ARAB MUSLIM PARENTS, WESTERN PARENTS AND THEIR BI-ETHNIC CHILDREN

by

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Families made up of one an Arab Muslim parent, Western parent and their children were examined to find out what unique dynamics and issues they face. Bi-ethnic Arab and American participants completed a questionnaire about demographics and underwent an in-depth interview that explored their experiences as a bi-ethnic person and the dynamics within their families. Participants reported a variety of experiences, though certain themes were extrapolated from their responses. Participants either identified more strongly with their Western mother or their Middle Eastern father. Feelings of marginalization were identified as part of the bi-cultural Arab and American experience as well as some identity confusion. Participants also reported that they felt unable to disclose as much information about their life to their Middle Eastern fathers as they did their American mothers.

______________________, Committee Chair
Louis Downs, Ph.D.

______________________
Date
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Research

The statement of the problem, which considers the family structure and intergenerational conflicts of mixed Arab-Muslim and Western families is discussed in this chapter. The rationale for studying mixed Arab-Muslim/Western families and the definitions of terms used is also proposed in this chapter.

Rationale for the Research

As our world grows smaller with technological advances in traveling and communication, people that identify with a singular heritage in the United States are shrinking, giving way to a plethora of multiple cultural combinations. According to Kenney and Kenney (2009) “Multiple heritage couples and their families are one of the fastest growing segments of today’s U.S. population” (p.111). People of two or more races constitute 2.4% of the national population, 7.4% of marriages are composed of individuals from different ethnic/racial backgrounds and it is estimated that 5-10% of families are made up of individuals with different racial/ethnic backgrounds (Soliz, 2009) (Henriksen, 2009 p.45). This shifting of cultural identification affects multi-heritage family dynamics and the identity of the family members.

Intercultural families have additional stressors that are not present in mono-cultural families, “multiracial families have multiple voices, with differing or conflicting perspectives within the family unit when it comes to transmitting values, adhering to
traditions, and educating their children in school” (Brown, 2009). Soliz (2009) states “In multiracial/ethnic families, communication (e.g., language, content, style) may vary among family members depending on their perceived sense of racial/ethnic affiliation or distinctiveness. In fact, the uncertainty of what is expected in terms of interactions with family members may lead to feelings of anxiety and general discomfort” (pg. 821).

**Statement of the Problem**

Children explore their identities and compare theirs to their parents, all the while evaluating how they fit into family dynamics (McClurg 2004 p. 170). Until Census 2000, bi-racial people could only check one box to classify their ethnic background (Qian, 2004), forcing them to place more importance on one parent’s heritage. How then do family dynamics change when each parent hails from a different set of cultural norms and values? There are virtually no data on the issues of the multi-cultural Arab-Muslim/Western family.

While there is some religious variance in the Middle East, the majority of Arabs subscribe to the Islamic faith. Muslims are a heterogeneous group with varying levels of adherence to the written word of the Qur’an and the Hadith (the practices and saying of the prophet Muhammed). However, the majority of Arab-Muslim persons do share many similarities that oftentimes conflict with the status quo of the American lifestyle. One reason is that Islam does not simply instruct Muslims in religious requirements, but acts as a whole lifestyle guide (Abudabbeh, 2008 p.211).

Qian (2004) found that children of intermarried couples are more likely to be thought of as non-white when the minority spouse is male or native born as opposed to
the female spouse, which is important when attempting to understand bi-cultural identity.

Not only does Western society view the father as having a more important role in the ethnicity and cultural background of the child, but Muslim societies also exhibit this same principle. Further, the religious texts in Muslim society address this issue. For example, Surah 60:10 of the Qur’an maintains that Muslim women are only allowed to marry Muslim men, though Muslim men can marry a Christian or Jewish woman (5:6). This is mainly because it is believed that the religion is passed down through the father. Thus, Most mixed Arab-Muslim and Western families consist of a father that is Muslim in origin, instead of the mother.

Another dissonance between Western culture and Islam is the heavy collectivist nature of the religion. Basit (2007) states that “Family life is the basis and cornerstone of Islamic society and obedience and respect for the parents is constantly stressed in Islamic teachings”. It is expected in Arab Muslim families that children will reorganize their needs and wants to fit the family’s expectations (Henry, Stiles, Biran & Hinkle, 2008). Together, the strong collectivist nature of the religion and the foundation that seep into every aspect of a Muslim’s life sets up a structure for entrenched conflict on a variety of issues between Western non-Muslims and moderate to strict Muslims.

It has been argued that Christian Arabs assimilate much easier in American society (rather than Muslim Arabs), which may be due in part to the similarity of religion to the majority of American culture or to religious persecution in their homeland (Hovey, 2007). “In the Arab world, both Islam and Christianity are characterized by deep divisions, with each group fearful of being overtaken by the other” (Haboush, 2007
It can also be speculated that each religion has its own distinct culture that transcends many of the barriers set in place by nationalism. Because of this distinction we can only infer that the findings of this study would only be appropriately assigned to adult children of Arabs who identify as Muslims and not those who identify as Christian or any other religion.

Dominance by males is established in most Arab countries and fathers assume the role of the head of the household. Arab Muslim family structure is hierarchal and patriarchal and the eldest son will often take over the dominant role in absence of his father (Haboush, 2007). This family structure appears to be different than what is culturally normal for Anglo-American households. Typical Western families have an egalitarian structure between the husband and wife, both of whom often work outside of the house and contribute to the family income (McGill & Pearce 2005).

Children are shaped and socialized by their parents through subtle cues and role modeling (Bratter & Heard, 2009). How then is bi-cultural identity formed when each parent presents different norms, values and modeling? Furthermore, how does this shape family relationships and roles? The purpose of this study is to investigate the unique dynamics of the multi-cultural Arab-Muslim/Western family and any intergenerational conflicts between the parents and their bi-cultural children. There is virtually no information concerning individuals from this specific background and data need to be collected to investigate the unique needs of this population. Due to this disparity of awareness, this study will qualitatively explore intrafamily relationships in mixed Arab and Western families.
The next chapter will present literature related to Arab Muslim and Anglo American families. It will also highlight differences between the two cultures so that the study at hand can be fully understood.
Definitions

Multi-cultural, Multiple heritage, bi-cultural or intercultural families: Families in which the mother and father originate from two distinctly different cultural backgrounds. For the purposes of this study, these families are made up of one Arab-Muslim parent and one Western-non Muslim parent.

Arab and American: An individual with one Arab parent and one American parent as opposed to “Arab American” which may indicate someone only Arab descent living in the United States.

Biracial: Any first-generation offspring of parents of different races (McClurg, 2004)

Hadith: the “the collective body of sayings and traditions relating to the Prophet Mohammed.” (Odeh Yosef, 2008)

Qur’an: the Holy book of Islam, believed to be transmitted from God to Muhammad.

“Being the verbatim word of God, the text of the Qur’an is valid for religious purposes only in its original Arabic, cannot be modified, and is not translatable, although the necessity for non-Arabic interpretations is recognized.” (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2010, Odeh Yosef, 2008)

Sharia: The religious law of Islam as put forth by the Qur’an and Sunnah (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2010)
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the related literature. An overview of family life and expectations in the Arab Muslim society is explored as are cultural values and norms of Caucasian/European Americans. To understand the study and results at hand, one must first have some knowledge about the divergence in culture and religion between average Anglo American values and Middle Eastern, moderate Muslim values. Because of this, an overview of both cultures will be presented.

Introduction to Arabs and Islam

The Qur’an, Hadith and scholarly literature is compiled to describe significant aspects of Arab/Muslim family structure. The three main Abrahamic religions instruct followers to follow some sort of guideline for living laid forth by the religious text. Islam not only relies on the Qur’an for guidance, but on Hadith as a means of living a righteous life. Holtzhausen (2011) states “Arabs and Muslims accept the Qur’an as the verbatim word of God, revealed to the Prophet Mohammed in Arabia over 1400 years ago” (p.193) thus the Qur’an is held in great importance to Muslims. Abudabbeh (2008) states that “Islam goes beyond guiding a Muslim in…religious requirements” (p.211) and in fact influences factors in everyday life from how to treat spouses, to parenting styles (Haboush, 2007). From this one can infer that this mindset is prevalent with Muslim, Middle Eastern parents in regards to raising children.
Kobeisy (2004) states that “Islam is the youngest of the major monotheistic world religions, and the second largest and fastest growing religion in the world” (p.1). It is a monotheistic religion that adheres to many Judeo-Christian values and practices. While Muslims hail from a variety of countries and cultures, there are some uniting factors including: a faith in one God, the Qur’an, the Prophet Muhammad and the five pillars of Islam (Kobiesy, 2004).

As a group, people from a Middle Eastern or Arab background have been gaining attention in the media, but are often ignored in studies and bodies of literature. Even the definition of who an Arab is has some confusion and controversy around it, as there are 22 members that make up the “Arab League of Nations”, yet these countries range from the Middle East to North Africa (Hovey, 2007). Even though many Arab countries share cultural traditions, food, music, art and literature they are not a homogenous group (Hovey, 2007).

According to the Arab American Institute at least 3.5 million Americans are of Arab descent. California, New York and Michigan are the states with the highest amount of Middle Easterners, though Arabs are spread out through all 50 states. In California, the population of persons who identified as having Arab ancestry grew by more than 28% from 2000 to 2008 (American Community Survey, 2009).

Introduction to Anglo-Americans

Anglo-Americans or European Americans are made up of families who had previously immigrated from various European countries, the largest groups being from Germany, England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. Four different groups are responsible
for shaping Anglo American culture today: Puritans (1629-1641), Royalist Southerners (1642-1675), Quakers (1675-1725) and Scots and Irish (1717-1775) (Giordano & McGoldrick, 2005). While no one group is homogenous in all areas Giordano and McGoldrick state that the founding fathers established a platform on which White American culture still stands and includes “Valuing the rights of the individual over those of the state” (2005, p. 509).

While America is made up of many ethnicities and belief systems, 78.4 percent of Americans identify as some form of Christian (with 51.3% identifying as Protestant), 4.7 percent identify with “other” religions (e.g. Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, etc.) and 16.1 percent were unaffiliated with a particular religion (Pew Forum, 2008). According to the 2008 U.S. Religions and Landscape Survey by the Pew research forum “Despite predictions that the United States would follow Europe’s path toward widespread secularization, the U.S. population remains highly religious in its beliefs and practices, and religion continues to play a prominent role in American public life” (pg.1).

**Family Life**

As stated in the introduction, not all Arabs are Muslims and thus one cannot mistake all Arabs or Muslims as a homogenous group. However, according to the Pew forum on religion and public life (2009), 91.2% of the Middle East- North Africa identifies as Muslim and “More than half of the 20 countries and territories in that region have populations that are approximately 95% Muslim or greater (Pewforum.org, 2009).” Family structure is guided by the Qu’ran, Hadith and Societal norms. “A major component of Islamic law pertains to the family, including its structure, values, and role
responsibilities” (Aroian, 2006 p.256). The family’s main purpose in the Muslim world is for the means of procreation and “social stability” (Crabtree, S. 2007). Both Islam and the Arab culture in general stress the importance of the collective as opposed to the individual (Mourad, 2010).

Shame, honor and dignity play a very large role in the traditional Arab family (Dumak, S. 2009). Aroian (2006) states:

Family honor includes segregation of the sexes, particularly modesty in women and not being alone with men who are not immediate family, as well as refraining from behaviors that are prohibited by Islam, such as pre- or extramarital sex or drinking alcohol. (p.256)

There is a cultural code regarding keeping emotions hidden and family life is guarded with fierce privacy and seeking help outside the family realm is seen as unacceptable and shameful (Al- Darkmaki& Sayed 2009, Kobiesy, 2004).

The strong collectivistic nature of the Middle East conflicts with the importance that European Americans give to the individual. While Individualism is at the core of Anglo American society, a common problem is that it is then exaggerated into hyperindividualism. Anglo American culture holds individual work and career as the most important sign of success (McGill Pearce, 2005). McGill and Pearce (2005) state: “Belief in freedom of the individual and in psychological individualism are core values of Anglo-Americans…” (p.520).
**Marriages**

Islamic law typically follows highly traditional gender roles, thus relationships between husband and wife are based on respect as opposed to equality (Aroian, 2006). The Qur’an states:

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah has guarded (Qur’an 4:34).

Thus, in an Islamic household it is expected that the husband and father take on the role of the provider and “protector” and that the wife and mother carry out her husband’s wishes as he sees fit. He also acts as the representative of the family to society at large, presenting the families beliefs, values and morals (Mourad, 2010).

The main duty of women as set forth by Islamic law is to marry, take care of her children, maintain her home and protect the honor of her family (Aroian, 2006). Robinson Wood (2009) states that sexuality discussions are regarded as taboo for many people of the Middle East and culturally, there is a high value placed on virginity and women are expected to bear children right after marriage. In the Arab-Muslim family structure, respect is obligatory towards elders (Barakat, 1993) and thus the mother in law has full authority over the wife when the husband is not present. Sometimes dual family relationships are formed as marriage between first cousins are acceptable, thus cousins become spouses and aunts and uncles become mothers and fathers in law (Barakat, 1993).
While the Qur’an cautions husbands against unnecessary or excessive force against their wives, it is culturally and religiously acceptable for husbands to physically and verbally punish their wives. The Qur’an lays out guidelines for appropriate discipline for husbands to administer to their wives:

As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next) refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly) ; but if they return to obedience seek not against them… (Qur’an 4:34)

It should be noted that the practice of killing women accused or even suspected of adultery (or any sexual behavior outside of marriage) to restore honor to the family is still somewhat common in some Arab countries (Kobiesy, 2004). While this practice does not define Arabs or Muslims it does illustrate that gender specific violence is still (to varying degrees) acceptable in much of the Arab world, thus influencing the dynamics of family life. Specific Surah’s (or verses) in the Qur’an (4:15, 4:16, 24:2) all speak to adultery and punishment advising (somewhat contradictorily) lashing or confining offenders to their houses or leaving alone those that have repented.

Men have specific duties towards their wives and women are given instructions regarding proper treatment of their husbands. Traditional Islamic law allows men four wives, though men are instructed not to marry more than one woman unless he is able to provide for and treat them all equally (Robinson-Wood 2009 p. 133).

In Anglo American households, marriage is seen as a contractual relationship, in place to satisfy individual needs. Divorce is fairly acceptable and common with Anglo-American couples. It’s common for the wife to both work and take care of the household
duties and child rearing responsibilities and for the husband to be the main financial provider. Many Anglo American couples do not view seek support in childrearing or child birthing from their families of origin (McGill & Pearce 2005).

Parenting

Arab Muslim Parents are expected to keep an Authoritarian household with the father at the head which is fairly typical for a collective society such as that of the Middle East (Dwairy, M. 2009, Mourad 2010). The most important aspect of raising children is making sure that they are and stay “good” Muslims. Children are taught from an early age that their actions are a reflection upon the family as a whole, and shame and honor are greatly stressed (Mourad, 2010, Haboush 2007). Parents most often use shaming and comparison with others as ways of discipline, and stress conformity to social norms as a reason to modify behavior (Nydell, 1987). Barakat (1993) states that because children are taught that family is the most important commitment they have, they often feel “guilt feelings” if they somehow disappoint their parents.

In stark contrast, Anglo Americans emphasize responsibility, independence, self-reliance and self determination when raising their children. “The more children begin to demonstrate that they can take care of themselves, the more successful Anglo American parents feel” (McGill & Pearce 2005 p. 525). Thus parents often praise children being “big girls or boys” when they start acquiring independent skills.

In Muslim families, the father is the head of the household to which the wife acquiesces, and she then is the disciplinarian of the children when the father is not present. One Hadith states “Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for
his own flock... a man is the shepherd of his family and is responsible for his flock; a woman is the shepherdess of her husband’s house and children and is responsible for them...” (Shaikh, 1996 p.102).

It is taught in the Qur’an that obeying your parents is only second to obeying god (The Qur’an 31:14, 46:15, 6:151, 17:23-24) and thus children are never supposed to question parental authority. There are also many Hadith that emphasize one’s respect to their mothers and fathers, especially one’s mother. One Hadith recorded states that Prophet Muhammad had told a young man to “stay with her [your mother], for paradise is at her foot” (Haneef, 1993 p.149). However, in a sort of dichotomy sons often exert control over their mothers and sisters (Haboush, 2007)

Unlike much of Western tradition, Arab Muslim children are not thought of as adults once they turn eighteen. Instead, marriage is used as an indicator of entering adulthood, “Marriage is the usual way in which young Muslims establish their freedom from parental authority” (Basit, 1997 Muslim Family Structure section, para. 2). Children live at home until they are married, and if they never marry are expected to live with their parents for the remainder of their lives (Haboush, 2007, Aboul-Enein 2010). In Arab societies it is not unusual for an unmarried woman to remain at home with her parents all of her life whereas in Western societal norms this would be considered to be inappropriate.

Even as an adult however, duty to one’s family is critical, and frequent close contact with the family is still expected even after marriage (Aboul-Enein, 2010). Elder and ailing parents are expected to live with one of their children (normally one of the
sons) (Aboul-Enein, 2010). Retirement and elderly care homes are almost unheard of in the Middle East, because of the strong sense of familial duty.

Almost in exact opposition, Anglo Americans attempt to keep up their independence even in old age, not wanting to “burden” the family with their declining body and increase of needs (Giordano & McGoldrick, 2005). Thus, it is common to see elderly adults living independently (often with non-family support such as a live-in nurse) or in a care home or facility.

Physical discipline is very common in Middle Eastern Muslim families (Nydell, 1987) and can range from “spankings” to beatings with hands, fists and objects. Because the extended family is expected to play a large role in rearing a child (Haj-yahia 2002) they often take on a disciplinarian role if it is felt necessary, and use of physical punishment is completely acceptable. It is not uncommon for unmarried children to receive physical punishment until they are married which could lead into the ages of 20 and 30 for some.

Sons and daughters are treated differently (Mourad 2010) and are allowed different degrees of freedom and responsibility. While most Arab families deny that sons are more celebrated over daughters, many Arab communities hold more lavish celebrations for sons (e.g. in the United Arab Emirates 2 goats are killed at the birth of a son instead of the 1 when a daughter is born) (Crabtree, 2007).

Boys are permitted much more freedom than are their female counterparts, and many girls are not allowed to leave the house without a male relative to accompany her. This can be explained by one Hadith that states “The woman may not travel unless
escorted by a mahram (an unmarriageable family member i.e. brother, uncle, father, son), and men are not allowed to visit a woman who is not accompanied by a mahram” (Mannan, retrieved April 1, 2011). The adult eldest son is responsible for his parents, the behavior of his immediate family as well as his extended family (i.e. brother and sisters along with their families) and often times is financially responsible for many of the family members as well (Haj-Yahia 2002).

Girls are thought to become women and expected to start covering their heads at menarche which may provide reasoning for the statement by Haj-Yahia that fathers tend to become increasingly strict and aggressive as their daughter’s age (2002). The virginity of unmarried girls is of utmost importance to family honor and preserving it is thought to be the responsibility of all the family members (Mourad, 2010).

Summary

Essentially, Arab Muslim life is still widely understudied and misunderstood by much of Western society. There is a paucity of empirical and long term studies involving Muslim Arabs and family dynamics. What has been established is that the Muslim Arab culture is a hierarchal and patriarchal society that relies heavily on the will of the husband, father and older brother. Family life is an integral part to the Arab individual as it a strongly collectivist society. Children are expected to carry out parental wishes and always maintain a respectful and obedient demeanor towards any adult.

What one can ascertain from Anglo American families is that individualism and personal freedom are held as the most important core values that make up the bedrock of
the culture. Different Western European group have contributed to the makeup of the current Anglo American culture, some of which are based on Christian school of thought. After understanding basic Arab Muslim and Anglo American family functioning and assumptions, Bi-Cultural Arab/Western families can be more fully explored. What happens when two seemingly different cultures collide such as Western and Middle Eastern?
Chapter 3

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter three will state the purpose of the study, list the research questions and examine the methods used to make inferences regarding the interviews from mixed Arab and American bi-ethnic participants. Methodology, sample population, design, data collection and analysis will be discussed in this chapter.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to study the inherent relationships that may reside between mixed Arab-Western children raised in a Western country and their Arab/Muslim parent and non-Arab parent.

Research Questions

Research question 1
What kind of relationships develop between bi-cultural Arab American persons and their parents?

Research question 2
What issues do Bi-cultural Arab and Americans face?

Research question 3
Are there intergenerational conflicts between Arab-Muslim parents, Western non-Muslim parents and their multi-ethnic children? If so, what are the effects on the bi-cultural person?
Research Methods and Procedures

A mixed methods procedure was used to establish first, what can be objectively measured and compared, then to qualitatively explore themes that are presented by the participants.

Neither Arabs nor Muslims are a homogenous group. Muslims typically fall into one of two categories: Sunni or Shi’a with varying levels of commitment and interpretation of the Qu’ran with Sunnis making up the largest group, around 85% of the entire Muslim population (Kobeisy, 2004). Arabs also have diverse backgrounds hailing from countries such as: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestinian territories, Syria, Egypt and Yemen. Thus, as much information about the participant, their Arab parent’s country of origin and religious commitment must be measured both by a questionnaire and then by an interview.

Sample Population

A group of volunteers were selected through convenience sampling and snowballing through a search of the Arab American Learning Center in Sacramento, California and online newspaper advertisements at CSUS online newspaper. All participants were required to have one Arab/Muslim parent and one American non Muslim parent. Because the Qur’an mandates that Muslim women marry only Muslim men, the Arab-Muslim parent is almost always the father. Criteria for the selection of participants included that they must have been raised predominately in the United States and were between the ages of 18-30 (assuming that adult dynamics have not substantially ameliorated family dynamics within the nuclear family of origin). Lastly, all the
participants still needed to consider the nuclear family of origin as the primary family, and thus were not married.

Research Design

The study was a mixed methods procedure, composed of a quantitative questionnaire followed by a semi-structured qualitative interview that was based partially on questions developed to discover internal family dynamics that existed between both parents and their children and potential conflicts that may have resulted. Further questions were then developed based on the data that was collected from participants’ answers to the questionnaire to form the semi-structured interview. It has been stated that “qualitative research may be best suited for research on biracial and multiethnic populations” as it allows the researcher to “enter the world” of the subject and explore how participants understand themselves (Jourdan, 2006 as cited in Robinson-Wood).

Research Procedure

All potential candidates were asked to read the letter of invitation and informed that participation in this study was voluntary and that no incentives were offered (See Appendix A). Individuals who wished to continue received an informed consent waiver which outlined possible risks associated with participating in a study of this nature as well as contact information for counseling services available to them (See Appendix B).

Participants were then asked to complete the questionnaire (See Appendix C) by e-mail and return it back to the researcher within a 5 day period. The questionnaire was used to identify descriptive information about the participant such as: age, gender, language(s) spoken, birth order, ethnicity of biological parents, marital status of parents,
etc. Content of the questionnaire (as well as the interview) were triangulated with an expert in research, who also has significant training in multiculturalism and experience in both Muslim and American cultures, to ensure internal validity of the methods of inquiry.

After the participants had returned the questionnaires to the researcher, the content was analyzed to determine if further pertinent detail should be added to the interview structure. A face to face interview with each individual participant was then set up. Each session lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was tape recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The interviews followed a semi-structured format which focused on relationship themes between both parents and the Arab-western child (See Appendix D). This provided the platform to delve into the nuances of the religion and cultures practiced within the home.

Participants were asked in detail about their childhood and the religious practices in which their parents instructed them. They were also asked whether or not they had any specific disagreements with one or both parents. Questions were also presented about their social support and peer relationships. Because there was the potential for variations in the semi-structured interview due of the diversity of Middle Eastern cultures, religious sects and influences of internationalization, second interviews were arranged as an option to protect the integrity of the study should a significant variable arise.

After the questionnaires and interviews were completed and transcribed, the results were analyzed and applied to the question “How has a mixed marriage between an Arab Muslim and a Non-Muslim Westerner affected the child’s relationship with their parents?”
Analysis

All quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 11, using non-parametric statistical analysis to increase statistical power.

Research began with generative questions for the purpose of illustrating themes relevant to the question at hand, thus following the format of Grounded theory (Creswell, 2008). After the interviews were transcribed, information was then coded to represent core themes that surface regarding bi-cultural persons of mixed Arab-Muslim and Western heritage.

Cohen’s Kappa is “…the standard tool for the analysis of agreement on a binary outcome between two observers…” (Vach, 2005 p.655 and was used as an analysis of reliability of the emerging themes and participant responses by measuring the percentage of agreement between raters (Stemler, 2001). To offset any research bias, and increase validity and reliability there was: transparency in the research procedures, use of low inference descriptors, participant feedback and researcher reflexivity (Johnson, 1997). The study design, instruments, and themes were triangulated with 2 readers to further increase validity.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify common themes in relationships between parents and their bi-cultural Arab and American children. A questionnaire and semi-structured interview were administered by a student researcher and overseen by a professional trained in multicultural issues. The questionnaire was used to establish basic information and descriptors of each of the participants. The qualitative interview was
conducted to identify themes surrounding bi-cultural Arab Americans and the relationships with their parents. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, which were then analyzed using the Cohen Kappa method and triangulated between one researcher and two readers. The next chapter will discuss results of this study.
Chapter 4
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The primary purpose of this study was to examine dynamics between bi-ethnic children, their Arab Muslim parent, and their American parent. A mixed methods study was designed to identify any inherent issues of conflict between parents and their adult children. A quantitative questionnaire was designed to gather descriptive data on the participants, while a semi-structured qualitative interview was designed to ascertain what issues bi-ethnic Arab and American persons may or may not have with their parents. A Cohen Kappa was used to rate validity of themes that developed and the reliability of categorization of the participant responses. Quantitative data were then analyzed using SPSS version 11, using non-parametric statistical analysis to increase statistical power.

Three educators familiar with Middle Eastern and American culture were chosen from a pool of scholars who were used to triangulate. Each was given a Cohen Kappa with all themes and participant responses following, coded by the researcher. All three scholars rated appropriateness of emergent themes from the data and congruence of study participant quotations regarding those themes. Results of the distribution gave evidence of accuracy of organization and of themes ($r_3=1.0$). To discover relationships between demographics of the participants and trends that developed in themes discovered during interviews a Pearson’s Product Moment correlation test was administered.
**Demographics of Participants**

Participants were found using convenience sampling and snowballing. Advertisements were placed at an Arab American learning center and already selected participants of Arab and American descent were asked to pass on the study information to friends that matched the criteria listed for the study. \( n=6 \), with two participants identified as male and four as female. Participants ranged in age from 20-33 with a mean age of 25. The researcher has assigned fictitious names for all participants in order to protect their privacy. Two of the female participants still lived at home with their fathers, one male lived with his mother, and the other three participants, one male and two females, lived independently. Four participants reported being most comfortable speaking English and two reported speaking both English and Arabic equally as comfortably.

Four participants identified as Muslim, one identified as Christian and one identified as “spiritual” not affiliated with an organized religion.

One participant reported being in a serious long term relationship, two reported dating but not in a serious relationship and three reported no dating or romantic relationship of any kind. All subjects reported that they had never been married and none had any children. Five participants spent all of or the majority of their lives in the United States, and one described being raised in the Middle East and spending all of her adulthood (18-25) in the United States.

While all participants had one American mother and one Arab father, three identified themselves ethnically as “Arab” and three identified themselves as being “Arab-American”. None of the participants identified themselves as “American” only.
Family Characteristics

All participants reported that their mothers were Caucasian American and originally not Muslim, and all reported that their fathers were from the Middle East and Muslim. Countries that fathers originated from are: Jordan (n=2), Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Lebanon.

Three subjects reported that their parents were still married and living together, while three reported that their parent’s marriage is no longer intact. Of those whose parents had divorced, all three reported that their father had remarried and one reported that the mother had remarried as well. All remarried parents had remarried within their own societies, thus Middle Eastern Muslim fathers remarried a Middle Eastern Muslim female and American non-Muslim mothers re-married American non-Muslim male. There were no same sex marriages reported. Four participants reported that their mothers, the American parent, had converted to Islam. All mothers in the study that had converted to Islam still currently identify as Muslim, however they all adhere to religious standards in varying degrees.

A Kruskal-Wallace Test was performed to identify if certain demographics affected whether or not participants agreed with their mother or father on certain core Islamic and Middle Eastern cultural values such as: abstaining from alcohol consumption, dietary restrictions (such as pork), abstaining from premarital sex, dressing modestly, abstaining from dating and avoiding friendships with the opposite sex. No factors were identified as having any bearing on whether or not the participant agreed or disagreed with their mother or father on these issues.
Responses from subjects during the interview portion of the study were categorized into “themes”. The following were themes that were identified: 1) The importance of family honor- saving face, avoiding shame, and bringing honor to the family 2) Either parent’s disclosure to child. Whether one or both parents negatively talked about the other or shared details of their relationship in confidence with the child 3) Development and level of development with American peers 4) Development and level of development with Middle Eastern peers 5) Impact of mother or father’s opinions on participant’s decisions 6) Level of personal information disclosed to mother or father. 7) Participants’ religious or spiritual identification in relationship to both parent’s religious or spiritual identification. 8) Gender differences or perceived differences of treatment by mother or father based on participant’s gender. 9) Participants’ feelings of closeness with mother’s or father’s extended families. 10) Participants’ perception of being of mixed Arab and American descent. 11) Tensions with mother or father regarding their current or past significant romantic relationships.

**Relationships with American and Middle Eastern Peers**

There was a strong correlation between the American mother converting to Islam and friendships with US peers being stronger ($r_{66}=.866$, $p=.026$) as well as stronger ties with Arab peers ($r_{66}=.866$, $p=.026$).

Participants who identified strongest with their Arab heritage and the Islamic religion reported that their American friendships were not as close as their Middle Eastern peers. Hassan reported, “I have to explain some stuff to them that I don’t have to explain to friends that are Middle Eastern. You know, “why do you do this?” or “why
halfway into the middle of when we’re kicking it you have to walk out the room real quick? [In reference to praying five times a day]”

Amal reported a similar experience with not being understood as well by American peers, “I’m probably more close with my Middle Eastern friends, because they understand, I don’t have to explain things to them… I feel like they always consider me like we’re like the same, but then even if my mother is American I’m never the same as my friends (American) they always consider me Arab. I always feel like I’m one of the girls [with Arab peers], I don’t even think they consider me different I don’t feel different, you know? But I know I was more raised as an Arab”

Mahmoud reported that his friendships to Americans were closer. “I primarily have friends that are Americans; I don’t really have many Arab friends. I have a couple with the MSA [Muslim Student Union] but, we often play intramural soccer, but the majority I have friends that are American.”

Aliya reported mixed positive and negative feelings about both groups of friends, stating, “They’re much more honest [Americans]… here [in the U.S.] it’s kind of like… people are much more accepting of your individuality you know?… Americans… they don’t care what you do, they accept you for who you are, but when the shit hits the fan and you’re in trouble they’re not going to be there, because they think about themselves first. It’s a very selfish society I’d say from my experience.” She went on to state about Arab peers “It’s, uh, a little more superficial, um the relationships aren’t as close you know, I think it’s changed a lot especially since I’ve been here for so long… it’s Arab culture to really care about each other you know, if you’re, if you’re in need at
all you can completely rely on them you know and there’s like an amazing loyalty that I haven’t been able to really find in Americans you know?”

Both participants whose mothers had not converted reported having no or very weak ties to their Arab peers and no or very weak ties to their American peers. Both participants were female. Manal reported, “I honestly don’t really have any. I can’t think of like a friend that wasn’t Middle Eastern or wasn’t Muslim. I feel like, I tried at some point in my life when I was younger to kind of have those relationships and I’ve always been kind of pushed away… I would try somehow, and meet somebody that was American or something and I was too foreign to them” and when talking about Middle Eastern peers she stated “I was always considered the odd ball, just the black sheep of the gang. I had like 1 close friend and you know they always kind of looked at me funny… the Muslim crowd I was always “the half white kid who was a bit off” so I never really fit in there either.”

Noora, whose mother also had not converted and had a strong Christian background stated, “I haven’t really had any [American friends]; I’ve always had just one close friend. I’ve felt rejected by my classmates. They always told me I was different and I was very shy so that probably didn’t help.” She also stated that she has not had any Middle Eastern friends.

Parental Disclosure

One factor that appeared to have an effect of the mixed Arab and American person was whether or not one or both parents disclosed negative information to the child about the other parent. Participants were asked whether or not a parent had taken them
into his or her confidence about their feelings or the nature of their relationship. Four reported no and, one reported that both parents talked negatively to the participant about each other, and one reported only the mother had disclosed negative information.

There was a negative correlation between tension with the father in regards to the romantic relationship and at least one parent taking the child into confidence in regards to the other parent ($r_3=-1.00, p<.000$) which signifies that there was more likely to be tension with the father over a relationship if one or both parents had taken the child into confidence. There was significance between the mother remarrying and taking the child into her confidence (regarding the other parent) ($r_3=-1.00, p<.000$).

Both Aliya and Manal reported that at least one of their parents had disclosed negative information about the other parent in confidence. Manal reported, “They both just talked shit about each other so that’s all it was, you know my mom bashed my dad and my dad would bash my mother. So it was always kind of, neither one had any positive comments to say about the other. So it was like I would visit my mom and I would come back and have this angst towards my father and then I would be with my father and he would tell me all of these terrible things about my mother.”

Aliya reported that her mother had confided in her stating, “Put me in the middle? Yeah absolutely, my mom did, a lot. I think at the time I really appreciated it. I thought ‘great we’re friends she can tell me anything’, but then like now as an adult I think that it was not the best decision for her to confide so much in my young mind you know?... My aggression and resentment toward my dad grew…”
Mahmoud reported that both of his parents had never disclosed anything to him in confidence when they were married and continued not to do so even after divorcing. “No… My parents are still close, they see each other and they help each other financially, and they hang out. Like my mom is making ribs for my dad and his wife and my little sisters, so I mean we’re still a family unit but we just don’t live together.”

_Tension between Participant and Parent over Dating_

Three participants (two female, one male) had stated that they had been in recent or current significant romantic relationships. There was a significant negative correlation between being close to father’s extended family and tension with father over current or past significant romantic relationships ($r_3 = -1.00, p<.000$). Thus, the closer the participant was with their father’s family, tension with father over a romantic relationship lessened. This may be due to differences in gender as the male participant reported less tension with the father and a high level of closeness to the father’s family. There was also a negative correlation between the mother being remarried and the participants relationship status ($r_3 = -1.00, p<.000$).

All participants reported at least some tension with their father over the relationship, and both females reported that the relationship was kept from the father, thus making the tension perceived as very high if the relationship was made known to the father. Because dating and relationships with the opposite sex is considered to be taboo and dishonorable for the family of the female, both female participants stated that their American mother’s knew but that their Arab-Muslim fathers had not. The male, Hassan, reported the father’s knowledge of the relationship stating, “uh, he loves her too [as does
his mother], he doesn’t really know her because he’s old fashioned, he’s like look “I know that you have a girl, but I’d rather not know until you get engaged” which I mean he’s talking to her father right now, but he doesn’t want to go to the house and he already knows the guys daughter, which is just kind of awkward so he’s like ‘look you got a girl, I don’t need to know everything about it.’”

Manal stated, “all of my life it’s always been [from mother] ‘hey, you know if you don’t want to listen to your dad’ and ‘your dad doesn’t own you and if you want to date go ahead date whoever you want’. She went on to state about her father, “yeah my kind of secret dating life, if he knew about that I’d be dead by now.”

Aliya reported a similar experience as Manal about a relationship that had taken place for years. “Well, he [father] didn’t know about the relationship up until, not until it got serious, like marriage serious. Because it’s just unacceptable, you don’t have relationships. You’re not even really supposed to have guy friends. You know so it’s one of those things that was kept from him until um, things were… well he didn’t know that I was in a relationship, he thought that it was done like arranged marriage type thing. Like his sister knew me type thing.” She also reported that her mother had known about the relationship in its entirety and had supported her.

As stated earlier, gender may be the biggest factor in the level of tension with the father over the relationship. There was significant negative correlation between being male and tension with father over the relationship ($r_3=1.00$, $p<0.000$) and tension with father over the relationship. There was also a negative correlation between perceiving
there to be different parental treatment based on gender and tension with father ($r_3=\text{-}1.00$, $p<.000$).

**Relationship with Mother’s and Father’s Extended Family**

Five participants reported that they were not at all close to their mother’s family, one reported being very close. Three participants reported that they had very close relationships to their father’s family and three reported not being close at all to their father’s family. There was a negative correlation between closeness to father’s family ($r_3=\text{-}1.00$, $p<.000$) and the mother being remarried.

Hassan stated that he is much closer to his father’s family and not his mother’s.

“They’re just different [maternal family]. It’s hard to relate to them, I mean I can relate to them to a certain extent, but I mean we go to my mom’s side’s Christmas parties, it’s just like when is it gonna end. It’s very um, I don’t want to say fake, but it’s very ‘how are you? How’s life? What’s new?’ on my dad’s side of the family, [it’s] not only how’s life what’s new? They’re going into politics, they’re always talking about everything you can imagine. I mean, maybe it’s more cause I relate to that, but my mom’s side is kind of boring.”

Amal reported that she felt closer to her father’s family partly because her mother’s family had rejected the Middle Eastern culture stating, “My mom’s family we’re not really that close like my mom, her family used to send us clippings in the mail about terrorism on my birthday in my card… I mean my grandparents were really nice to me last time I saw them… So I think they forgot that they don’t like Arabs… I felt like
they always accepted me but I felt guilty for, to really be nice to them because they weren’t really nice to my dad.”

Manal reported that she was not close to her maternal or paternal extended family stating about her father’s family, “I never really clicked with them I was always considered the bad American girl, the crazy American girl. I had like one cousin that I was able to hit it off with but every time I’d go there it was like “why are you wearing this? Why are you doing this? Why aren’t you praying? Why did you do this? Why did you say this? Why did you breathe like this? Why did you eat like this?” just like I go there and just get like I feel like, it’s like tormenting.” She reported that she only saw her mother’s family “once a year at thanksgiving and that’s about it.”

Aliya reported that she was not close to either side of her extended families stating “My mom’s pretty close to her family but, whenever she comes to visit she goes to visit them and stuff I never want to be a part of it, too many traumatizing childhood memories I’d say (laughs).” She also stated that she was not close to her father’s family and had not seen them in a long time.

Noora reported being close to her mother’s family but not her father’s and said, “[I’m] a lot closer than with my dad’s just because of sheer geographical distance and everything, just because I grew up seeing my mom’s side of the family a lot more because they were closer.”

**Impact of Parental Opinion**

Five of the six participants reported that their father’s opinion had a great impact on their decisions. One reported very little or no impact from the father’s opinion. Two
participants reported that their mother’s opinion had a great impact on their decisions, two reported some impact, and one reported no impact and one did not answer.

Manal stated about how much of an impact her father’s opinion makes on her decisions, “Um, pretty big… it’s mainly out of fear that you know I’d get reprimanded but it’s not because um, I respect it I think, it’s just more out of I don’t want to get in trouble I don’t want to have a headache. I have to just do what I gotta do.”

Mahmoud reported “His opinion [father’s] is the world to me. The stuff he has experienced and the life he’s lived, when he says it, even if I don’t agree with it I know it’s for the best and I just go with it… my mom’s opinion I value and I respect it, but I don’t know, it’s just the father son experience, like you just know…”

Aliya stated about her parents, “I want to make him [father] proud so bad. And it’s, and he’s the reason that I chose my major, he’s the reason why, I mean obviously I busted my ass and tried to get good grades for myself first but then, making him proud just was the cherry on top you know? There’s a lot and getting his approval is something that I need…my mom is so loving that it doesn’t matter what I do, but she’s you know, she’s like she’d be the mother if I was on death row standing right there, it didn’t like her children can do no wrong you know?”

The one participant who did not feel that her father’s opinion had a large effect on her decisions was Noora. In response to the question “How much impact do concerns about your father’s opinion make on your decisions?” she stated, “Not very much. But I see my dad as a very intelligent and knowledgeable, so I do listen and consider his advice greatly… I think just because my mom, we have more shared values in our spiritual
beliefs, it means, especially in the spiritual area it means a whole lot more. Just because we have that connection.”

**Family Honor**

All six of the participants reported that honor was important in a relationship with the father’s extended family. This was the only variable that all participants had agreed on. Four participants reported that family honor was of little or no importance to their maternal (American) extended family, and two reported that it was at least of some importance.

When asked the question “Is preserving family honor important in a relationship with your father’s family?” Aliya, whose family was living in the Middle East stated “Extremely. It’s like one of the most important things. My uncle told me time and time again…he would always say that women in Saudi Arabia are like crystal glasses that every scratch shows. And it’s kind of like I had to come here and break things off, like my ties to the culture in order for me to, in order for them to accept that. It’s almost like I couldn’t be like my full self living there you know? ”

A Hassan stated, “Very much so… I don’t drink, but if I came home drunk my dad’s side of the family would go nuts. They’d call every family member and let them know…”

**Participants’ Disclosure to Parents**

Five participants stated that they disclosed most to everything about their lives to their mother and one reported disclosing some. Two participants, one male and one female, stated that they disclosed most to everything about their lives to their father, three
participants, one male and two females, reported disclosing some, and 1 female reported disclosing very little.

Aliya reported not disclosing very much to her father and most everything to her mother. In response to the question, “How much information do you disclose about your life to your father?” She stated, “No. not at all. My dad there’s like an unspoken set of rules that everyone must adhere to and don’t break them or else it’s gonna piss him off and then, if he feels that you did break a rule, he’ll tell me “oh well I trust you” you know he’ll put that kind of pressure on me you know? And I’m like now I feel guilty. But, um, yeah I can’t. There’s a lot of things that I don’t tell my dad.” About her mother she stated “Everything for the most part… I can tell her anything. And she’d be accepting of it.”

Manal reported about disclosing to her father, “I disclose um, against my will. Only because he will sit there and harp on me and bug me and bug me and just pry it out. So it’s against my will, he’ll just keep bugging and asking me until I give in and I tell him.” She responded that she discloses “a lot” to her mother.

Amal reported, “I don’t know I talk about everything with them probably… with my mom and my dad both.” This was similar to Mahmoud who stated, “I tell them about 80% each. If it’s not gonna bother them, I don’t want them to know every 20%, but for the most part if they ask me a question I’m not gonna lie, I’ll tell them.”

**Gender Differences**

Four participants, two females and two males, reported that they noticed differences in treatment by their parents based on their gender. One female reported no difference and one female did not answer the question.
Both Aliya and Manal reported observing strong gender differences within their families. Manal reported, “…every decision that you’re making is based on whatever anyone else is thinking especially the double standards, it’s like my brother got away with having a girl staying at the house you know and quote un quote that was his friend. And then I talk to a guy at 10 o’clock at night and I get busted for that…I wish I was a man, I wouldn’t have to deal with all this and just like it’s so inconvenient to be a girl and I feel like a sense of guilt” she also reported that her brother had taken on a paternalistic role as well “[both have the] Same backwards views on women[brother and father], same you know attitude and just, I feel like I have two fathers instead of one. I’ve never had a decent relationship with my brother it’s always been you know “I’m older than you and you need to respect me’ that’s how it’s been you know? He even said ‘I’m your superior.’”

Aliya reported, “…Back home[Saudi] it gets out that you have a boyfriend no one will want to marry you therefore you’re damaged goods almost, you know what I mean? You’re not fresh, you’re just like awful…”

Mahmoud reported seeing a gender difference in the way that he was treated in comparison to his sisters. “Definitely growing up, I was comfortably able to have friends that were like girls in my family; however my parents weren’t comfortable with my sisters having friends that were guys. That’s one thing I do remember.”

Experiences of Being Mixed

Four participants, one male and three females, reported generally negative feelings about being a bi-cultural Arab and American, one male reported positive feelings
and one female did not answer the question. No questions were asked specifically about feeling marginalized as a bi-cultural person. However, the questions regarding closeness to American and Arab peers, as well as the question “is there something important that you would like to share about being mixed Arab and American?” elicited some responses that may indicate feelings of marginalization. One male participant stated that he has never felt fully American or fully Arab. Aliya reported “I think in general people shouldn’t marry that drastically outside their own culture because they’re gonna [sic] have some pretty messed up kids”.

Like Aliya, Manal reported negative feelings about being mixed, especially about not fitting in with either social group (see relationships with American and Arab peers). Neither of the female participants felt very close to their father, father’s family or mother’s family, or had a strong connection to Islam. Both reported that at least one of their parents had spoken negatively to the child in confidence about the other parent.

Hassan reported that being mixed has been a positive experience for him, he stated, “I think it’s a blessing being mixed. It keeps you open; you realize your culture, religion, even as a child sometimes I’d go to church with my aunt. Even as a Muslim, my mom wanted me to experience it so I don’t grow up one sided. I’m well rounded. The idea of having 2 different cultures, it doesn’t matter what it is, it’s just a blessing all around.”

Amal also reported an all-around positive experience stating, “Yeah, I mean I’m a dual citizen but I’m still an Arab, like I never felt any different. Even growing up I spent all my time with my cousins [Arab] I never felt any different you know?” Both of the
participants reported that they ethnically identified as “Arab” instead of “Arab and American”, strongly identified with Islam (which the mother had converted to as well), had much stronger ties to their father’s family (which in all cases was Middle Eastern), and reported being closer to their father over their mother. They also reported being much closer to their Middle Eastern peers instead of their American peers.

Noora reported a mostly negative perspective though felt that there were positive aspects saying, “I don’t want it to sound judgmental, but it would not be my choice to marry somebody of a different religion. The Bible says don’t be yoked with a non-believer and just because it was very confusing as a child, distressing to be so torn. I mean I want to say it’s a disservice to the child. I’m not angry with my parents and I’m grateful for what I know culturally and spiritually, I view it as a plus in a way, the other side is not having that sense of security.”

Mother Converting to Islam

Four participants reported that their mothers had converted to Islam, none reported that their fathers had converted from Islam to another religion. There was a significant negative correlation between the mother being remarried and whether or not she converted (r$_x$=-1.00, p<.000). Three participants reported that whether or not their mother converted did not appear to be of great importance to their fathers.

Hassan talked about his mother’s conversion from Christianity to Islam stating, “She actually converted to Islam, you don’t get married to guy and see him bowing like five times a day [to pray], she was kind of like curious what’s going on and he taught her, she learned, and she you know fell in love with the religion and she converted.”
Aliya stated, “My mom converted actually my dad did not pressure my mom at all, he didn’t even try and convince her, he didn’t really even talk about it much to her, um they got married and it wasn’t until I was a baby or she was pregnant with me that she actually converted, but it was before she moved to Saudi Arabia and it had nothing to do with my dad. My mom met this uh, woman who she found so inspiring she was um American and she converted.”

When talking about her mother’s religious beliefs, Amal stated, “She converted, but I think she converted before [she met Amal’s father] because she had a lot of Muslim friends before that. She was already curious; I know she didn’t just convert because of my dad because my dad didn’t care.”

Summary

The findings from this study reveal that family dynamics between Arab Muslim parents, American parents and their bi-ethnic children often have unique factors. Demographic factors such as age, gender and family circumstances did not affect participants chosen values. However, there was consistent strain between participants and their parents as well as parents’ families.

One major issue for participants is that honor was identified as extremely important to the Arab father and father’s family and not important or much less important to the American mother and mother’s family. Another issue was the level of closeness of relationships with American and Arab peers, which depended on factors such as whether the mother converted to Islam and the participant’s ethnic identification.
Another factor was whether one or both parents had disclosed negative information about the other parent to the participant. This was associated with tension with the Arab father over dating. Tension with the Arab father over dating was reported by all participants who were or are currently in a romantic relationship. However, tension lessened based on the participant being a male. The level of closeness to maternal and paternal families appeared as a theme and more participants felt closer to their father’s family over their mother’s.

Impact of parental opinion played a large role in family dynamics and almost all participants reported that their father’s opinion made the biggest impact. Fewer participants reported that their mother’s opinion had a large impact. Another issue was how much information participants disclosed about their lives to their mothers or fathers. Almost all participants had reported that they disclosed more to their mothers than their fathers, highlighting a discrepancy between parental knowledge. Gender differences were another factor that contributed to family dynamics. Some participants also had trouble with the perceived double standard of a different set of rules for male and females.

Participants varied in their views of perceived benefits or challenges of being of mixed Arab and American descent which appeared to affect the level family conflict. Lastly, some conflicts appeared to be mitigated when the American mother had converted to Islam.

The next, and last chapter will discuss the implication of these findings, the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This final chapter presents a summary of the research and interpretation of the findings about family dynamics between bi-ethnic children, their Arab Muslim parent, and their American parent. A review of the limitations will also be presented as well as considerations for future research amongst people of mixed Arab and American heritage. Finally, recommendations for further research will be addressed.

Summary of Study

The purpose of this research was to study family dynamics and any conflict between bi-ethnic Arab-American persons and their Arab Muslim and American parents. This study provides baseline information for future research about mixed Arab and American persons and their family dynamics. It illustrated some themes that appear to influence family dynamics which include: 1) The importance of family honor—saving face, avoiding shame, and bringing honor to the family 2) Either parent’s disclosure to child. Whether one or both parents negatively talked about the other or shared details of their relationship in confidence with the child 3) Development and level of development with American peers 4) Development and level of development with Middle Eastern peers 5) Impact of mother or father’s opinions on participant’s decisions 6) Level of personal information disclosed to mother or father. 7) Participants’ religious or spiritual identification in relationship to both parent’s religious or spiritual identification. 8) Gender differences or perceived differences of treatment by mother or father based on
participant’s gender. 9) Participants’ feelings of closeness with mother’s or father’s extended families. 10) Participants’ perception of being of mixed Arab and American descent. 11) Tensions with mother or father regarding their current or past significant romantic relationships.

All participants had one Arab-Muslim parent and one American (originally non-Muslim) parent. A quantitative questionnaire was given to the participants. After that, an in-depth semi-structured interview with each participant was completed.

As stated previously in the literature review, there is virtually no data regarding persons of a mixed Arab and American background. Thus much of the comparative research in this section is from studies regarding second and third generation Arab Americans (not bi-ethnic Arab and Americans) that report similar findings.

Discussion

In this study, participants reported a variety of experiences as mixed Arab and Americans. Some participants reported more positive perceptions of being a person from such different cultures, while others reported feeling torn between two worlds. Holtzhausen (2011) states, “Westerners and Arabs have very different views about what is right and wrong, good and evil, logical and illogical, acceptable and unacceptable. They live in two different worlds, each organized in its own manner” (p.204). Thus navigating these two worlds simultaneously provides additional obstacles that individuals hailing from only one background would not encounter. These differences between Arab and Western culture also contribute to vast variances between each of the parent’s values, leading to some confusion of the bi-ethnic child in regards to values and identity.
One theme that consistently came up and the only one that every participant was in agreement on, was that family honor was very important in a relationship with the father and father’s family. This has been shown to be true of Arab American immigrants as evidenced by Hakim-Larson et al. who state, “Maintaining family honor and avoiding shame that will reflect on the entire extended family is a crucial goal for many immigrants from the Middle East” (Hakim-Larson, Kamoo, Nassar-McMillan, & Porcerelli, 2007, p. 311).

Almost in complete opposition, honor in the mother’s family was also listed by almost every participant as not important or not as important as in the father’s family. This is consistent with previous research stating Middle Eastern culture places a high importance on honor and collectivism which conflicts with American cultural values that disregard the idea of honor in place of the rights of the individual (Hakim-Larson et al., 2007, Holtzhausen, 2011).

Honor can then be associated with differences in treatment based on gender, as much of Middle Eastern culture relies on chaste and pure women to uphold family honor. Many of the participants noticed that gender played a large role in what their family, particularly their Arab father, expected of them. This is consistent with many findings from studies regarding second and third generation Arab Americans. In their study regarding Arab and Chaldean American families Hakim-Larson et al (2007) state “As adolescents and young adults attempt to assimilate, intergenerational conflicts may arise in families around issues such as dating, education, and appropriate dress. A double standard exists for matters involving sexuality and intergenerational family tensions are
likely to be especially problematic for daughters as compared to sons” (p.306). This appears to be troublesome, especially because the participants are living in a Western country where there is an effort towards gender equality. This challenge for Arab and American women is similar to second and third generation Arab American girls and women. In his study regarding identity among young Arab Americans, Arjrouch (2004) states that the girls in the focus group often felt torn between family expectations and how they longed to behave.

Females reported that they hid more information about their lives from their Arab fathers, especially any aspect that was related to male and female relationships. However they reported this information to their mothers, who then kept it confidential from the fathers. This appears to set up a family dynamic of secrecy between the child and one Western parent as it became apparent to the child that there was a clash of cultural values between parents, for example: levels of acceptance surrounding dating, male and female friendships and obedience. This may also lead to whether or not one or both parents disclosed negative information to the child about the other parent with the American or Arab parent attempting to find an ally to confirm their cultural or religious beliefs.

For Arab and Americans living in the United States, friendships with Caucasian Americans may not attain a satisfactory level of closeness because of the cultural differences and expectations of the Arab parent. Alcohol, dating, consumption of pork products and immodest clothing (by Islamic standards) are all widely accepted by young American adults and their families in Western society. Explaining Middle Eastern cultural values that affect Arab and Americans to Caucasian American friends may
become frustrating and eventually a source of division between the bi-ethnic individual and their Caucasian Western peers. Hassan reported, “When it’s 10:00 [curfew] you either come home at 9:59 or 10:00. With my American friends it’s like ‘dude, why are your parents like that? I don’t understand, that’s a little weird.’”

On the other hand, some bi-ethnic Arab and Americans may feel judged by their Middle Eastern Muslim peers if they display too many Western values and characteristics which may then contribute to distancing or rejection by Arab peers. This is illustrated by Aliya when she states “something that I’ve adopted recently [towards Arab friends], I’m not going to lie about anything anymore this is who I am and I don’t care what you think and if you’re gonna judge me then you shouldn’t be my friend…I’d say based on the relationships that I had when I lived there [Saudi Arabia] most of my friends, I didn’t tell them anything you know?” Again, a dynamic of secrecy is set up with Arab peers as it was with the Arab parent.

Negotiating between social groups can be challenging for bi-ethnic Arab and Americans, especially at a time when both Arab and American cultures regard each other with a certain amount of distrust. For Arab and Americans with an Islamic background living in the United States, questions of patriotism and loyalty may add to the feelings of marginalization that they may already feel. With the polarization of ideologies, Arab and Americans may feel pressure to choose one nationality over the other, rather than risk becoming a “traitor” to both sides. This may also contribute to the child choosing to align with one parent more than the other. For example Hassan stated, “…Being middle eastern that probably plays as big role in it [father’s opinion influencing
participant’s decisions], to where he’s experienced stuff in this, living in the American society that my mom doesn’t have to experience. My mom can walk down the street you’re not gonna know that she’s Muslim or that she has that cultural knowledge and my dad, I can relate to my dad more than my mom when it comes to stuff like that.”

The societal marginalization that many of the Arab and American participants reported in the study may put another strain on the parent child relationship. This may be because the parents made the decision to produce offspring, all the while knowing that their children will be mixed from two completely different and sometimes opposing cultures. Negotiating between two cultures may not be an experience that parents, especially nonminority parents, can fully understand (Taylor & Nanney, 2011) which may put a strain on parent and child relationships.

Another factor that appears to play a part in cultural identity was how close the participant felt to the mother’s or father’s extended family. More participants reported a negative view of being mixed if they were not close to their father’s family. Because Middle Eastern culture is extremely collectivistic, participants who formed strong bonds with their father’s family may have drawn a larger source of support than from a close relationship to their mother’s family. An assumption may then be made that closeness to the father’s culture and religion may play a larger part than closeness to mother’s religion and family in whether or not bi-cultural Arab and American persons identify their mixed ethnicity as predominately positive or negative.
Limitations

It is important to acknowledge the limitations presented by this study when interpreting the results. The number of participants for this study is very small and gender make up was not even. The males interviewed both identified as Muslim, which may have affected whether or not they disclosed some information to the interviewer who was female. As mentioned above, honor plays a very large role for Arab and Americans and their families, which may play a role in why many participants spoke more freely as soon as the tape recorder was switched off. Future studies will need to take into further consideration the private nature of many Arab and Americans and explore other ways to get information while ensuring that the participant feel more at ease.

Due to the constraints on time, location and resources, the participants were selected through convenience sampling in the Northern California area rather than random selection. Had the study taken place in a location with a high volume of persons from a Middle Eastern descent, such as Dearborn Michigan, participants may not have reported as much marginalization. This disallows generalization to the population as a whole. However, traits were consistent enough across the study participants (n=6) to consider that further study might give further evidence to corroborate the findings of this study in order to describe the issues for mixed ethnicity Arab-Americans as a population.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further research is suggested to explore the variances in bi-cultural Arab and Americans and what factors affect which culture the person ascribes to more as well as identifying factors that determine whether or not the Arab and American individual had a
generally positive or negative experience of being of mixed ethnicity. Research into counseling mixed Arab and American persons individually and with their families is also recommended.

As the time that this was written, the United States is currently at war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Relationships with the Middle East are tense at best and many American citizens have a minimal understanding of Islam and the Middle East. While the topic of prejudice and hate speech was addressed in this study, it is recommended that further research be done on the impact that this may have on the Arab and American family dynamics as well as the effect on the Arab American individual.
APPENDIX A

Informed Consent

Dear Study participant:

You are being asked to participate in a questionnaire and an interview for a thesis study by Yasmine Binghalib, a graduate student in the counselor education department at Sacramento State University. The information obtained will be used as data applied to a thesis studying the relationships between Arab-American children and their parents. The purpose of this study is to better understand issues that may arise for many Arab-Americans who have parents from two different backgrounds.

Please read the following information about this study. If you feel as though you clearly understand what is involved in this process and agree to its terms, you may be asked to participate in the questionnaire and interview. Risks included as part of this study may be emotional discomfort brought on by sharing personal information.

**Research Project: Intergenerational conflict between Arab-Muslim, western parents, and their multi-ethnic children**

Investigator: Yasmine Binghalib, Marriage and Family Therapist trainee at California State University Sacramento. Dr. Louis Downs is the faculty advisor to Ms. Binghalib.

Purpose of the study: To find out if mixed marriage between an Arab Muslim and a Non-Muslim, Westerner has affected the child’s relationship with their parents?”

Procedures: The following is a documentation of your rights as a participant and the procedures that will follow your agreement to being a part of this study. Examples of the questions that will be asked in the questionnaire and interview include: whether or not
you parents are divorced, your identified spiritual background and whether or not you experience conflicts with your parents on a variety of different issues (such as dating, style of appropriate dress, food restrictions etc.). Some of these questions will ask about your relationship with your parents. You may decline to answer any question.

a. Your participation is voluntary and there is no incentive being offered for participating in this study.

b. All questionnaires and interviews will be kept confidential and no names or identifying factors will be disclosed or appear in the results of the study.

c. You will be asked to disclose personal information including (but not limited to) your family, childhood and personal values.

d. The approximate time to complete the questionnaire will be 10 minutes.

e. Due to the variable nature of an interview process, the interview may vary from 30 minutes to 1 hour (though is not limited to this timeline). You may also be asked to participate in a follow up interview.

f. If you agree to allow a recording of the interview, it will be stored in a locked container and destroyed after they have been transcribed.

g. Professional transcription services may be used in documenting the interview. Such services will be professional and adhere to all confidentiality requirements.

h. You have the right to withdraw from the questionnaire and interview at anytime.

i. If you experience discomfort or emotional issues that you feel need to be addressed with a counselor, professional services can be provided at: CSUS Health Center (916) 278-6416 The Well, Primary Care 2nd Floor (this resource is
only available to CSUS students) or for non-CSUS students services are available at Sacramento County Mental Health at (916) 875-1055 2150 Stockton Boulevard, Sacramento

If you are in agreement with the terms of this study, please read and sign below:

I understand what my participation in this study entails. I acknowledge that there are inherent risks to participating and may seek professional help if I experience emotional distress. I may follow up on study conclusions with the chief investigator, Yasmine Binghalib at ybinghalib@csumb.edu.

____________________________________________
Participant name (please print)  

____________________________________________  ________________________
Participant Signature  Date

I give my permission for the interview to be recorded:

____________________________________________  ________________________
Participant Signature  Date
APPENDIX B

Questionnaire

Age:

Gender: Male   Female (please circle one)

1. Who makes up your immediate family?

2. Who do you currently live with and what are their ages? (please list any siblings, grandparents, aunts/uncles if applicable)

3. Is your family intact? Yes   No

   (If your family is still intact please skip to question #5)

   a. if not, are your parents (please circle all that apply):

      Separated

      Divorced

      Deceased

      Father remarried

      1. In his own society: yes   no

      Mother remarried

      2. In her own society: yes   no

   b. How old were you when your parents separated? ________________

   c. Who had custody of you directly following the breakup?
father _____mother____:

d. Do you have any half siblings or step-siblings? (please explain and list)
____________________________________________________________

___

4. What percentage of time did you spend living in the household of each parent
(please circle the percentage)

Mother 1 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55 60 65 70 75 80 85 90 95 100
Father 1 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55 60 65 70 75 80 85 90 95 100
Other 1 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55 60 65 70 75 80 85 90 95 100
If other, please describe whom? _________________________

5. Are you close to any of your relatives on your mother’s side (i.e. grandmothers,
aunt, uncle, cousins etc.)? Whom?
   a. On your father’s side?

6. What religion (if any) were you raised with? What religion/spiritual beliefs if any
do you identify with now?

7. Do you identify with your parent’s religion?

8. How do you identify your ethnic background?

9. What language are you most comfortable speaking? Do you speak another
language?
10. Are you in a committed relationship? Yes_____ No_____ Other( please explain)

  a. Does your mother know about this relationship? Yes No
  b. Does your father know about this relationship? Yes No
  c. What is the ethnic and religious (if any) background of your partner?

11. Do you have any children? Yes______ No_______

  a. If so, do they spend time with your parents (their grandparents)?
     Yes_____ No______

  b. Where do they most often visit with their grandparents? (please circle one)
     your home your Parents home (if family is intact) your mother’s home
     your father’s home public place

     Other:_______________________________________________

**Personal Values**

Please circle which how much you agree or disagree with each parent on the following topics with 1 being strongly agree and, 2 agree, 3 agree and disagree on various aspects, 4 disagree, 5 strongly disagree

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<th>Alcohol Consumption</th>
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<td>Mother 1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Father 1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate style of dress</td>
<td>Pre-marital sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Mother 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Father 1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Having Friends of the opposite sex</th>
<th>Dietary Restrictions for religious purposes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Mother 1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Father 1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your childhood, where did you live and with whom did you spend the most time?

2. Do you identify with either of your parent’s spiritual beliefs?

3. Do you have any difficulties with your mother?
   a. father?

4. When you spent time with your mother growing up, where was it?
   a. your father?

5. Do you feel that either of your parents took you into her or his confidence about his or her feelings or the nature of the relationship between them?

6. (if participant has siblings) Do you feel as though your relationship to your parents is different than that of your siblings?
   a. How is your relationship with your siblings?

7. Tell me about what your friendships with your American peers/friends are like?
   a. Your Middle Eastern peers/ friends?

8. Do either or both of your parents live nearby now? How often do you see them?
   Are you in contact with them?

9. How much impact do concerns about your father’s opinion make on your decisions?
   a. Your mother’s?
10. Is preserving family honor and avoiding shame important in a relationship with your mother’s family?
   a. Your father’s family?

11. How much information do you disclose about your life to your mother?
   a. Father?

12. How close are you with your mother’s extended family?
   a. Your father’s?

13. (if participant is in a current romantic relationship) Have you had any arguments or tensions with your mother over your relationship?
   a. Your father?

14. (If participant has children) Have you fostered a relationship between your child and their grandparents.
REFERENCES


Haneef, S. *What everyone should know about Islam and Muslims.* (1993). Chicago, IL: Kazi


