

Essay on romani marriage: why the romani encourage their minors to marry

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The Romani people, sometimes called “ gypsies” or “ Travellers,” are a nomadic people that live in Europe. The Romani, also sometimes known as the Roma, are known for their nomadic ways and strange customs. They are often subject to persecution by the governments of the countries that they inhabit. Because of the way the Roma travel-- in large communities, driving caravans-- they often have disagreements with local governments about their ability to stay in a place for any extended period of time(Everyculture. com, 2013). The Roma are also known for their marriage ceremonies, which often diverge from local customs significantly; their children are encouraged to marry young and begin families, often before they are even of legal age (Femalefirst. co. uk, 2008).

According to Female First, a United-Kingdom-based women’s-issue magazine, there is a good reason for the Roma children marrying at a young age. “ In spite of myths of Roma immorality,” the periodical writes, “ most Roma follow strict rules of sexual behavior. He or she is expected to marry someone within their particular tribe and most Roma conform by marrying within their group permissible marriage choices may be restricted. This is a way of maintaining tribal and social purity” (Femalefirst. co. uk, 2008). The Roma still follow a tribal system of community groups, so it is unlikely that Roma children will ever be able to choose their future mate. Instead, Roma elders and families get together and form the pairs that make the most sense politically and socially within the group.

Like arranged marriages of old, Roma marriages are primarily concerned with family power, and families with children of marrying age are concerned with finding the match that will provide their family with the most political

clout. If the family has a daughter, that family is concerned with finding her a husband that is capable of providing for her, because many Romani women do not have the educational level of their non-Roma counterparts that are outside the Traveller community (Hancock, 2002).

In recent years, the Traveller community in Great Britain has amassed some notoriety because of a new television show that has brought the unusual wedding traditions of the Travelling community to light: “ My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding” (Everyculture. com, 2013). When the show premiered, many people were perplexed, because they could not understand why young Romani couples married as young as they did. Some of the couples on the show were as young as fourteen, which was certainly shocking for viewers unfamiliar with the culture.

Why do the Roma tend to get married so young? Although stereotypes in many countries say that the Roma are responsible for theft and sexual immorality wherever they go, in reality, the Romani people are often held to a very strict social code that dictates their actions (Hancock, 2002). For this reason, many young Romani men and women are willing to get married young to escape the confines of the sexual code of conduct they are required to live under. While this does not seem to be an ideal reason to get married, historically, Europeans have married young in an attempt to subvert the codes of conduct that they are required to follow until marriage.

In non-Traveller society, many young men and women are postponing marriage to attend secondary school and university. However, due to the Romani’s nomadic lifestyle, very few Romani complete secondary school, let alone university (Hancock, 2002). There is, therefore, no real reason for the

Roma to wait to get married: their foray into the business world begins immediately after their schooling ends at a young age.

Many people worry that the Roma lifestyle is harmful to young people, as it forces them into marriages that they may not have entered into of their own free will. While there are definite dangers to the Romani community, more dangerous than young marriage is the threat of prejudice from the non-Romani communities that the Romani people move through on a regular basis.

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