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Interview with Heba Kotb

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Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Ahmed Ahmed

Interviewee: Heba Kotb

Date: September 25. 2011

Place: interviewee's Office
HUSS Building at AUC
New Campus, Cairo, Egypt

College: The American University in
Cairo, School of Global
Affairs and Public Policy,
Dept. Journalism and Mass
Communication

Date completed: September 27. 2011

September 25. 2011

Persons present: Ahmed Ahmed - F.

Heba Kotb - M

Ahmed: Hello Everyone! My name is Ahmed Ahmed an AUC student at the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at the School of Global Affairs and Public policy and this recording is for JRMC 202 Multimedia Writing class with Dr. Kim Fox. And we are here today to interview Dr. Heba Mohamed Kotb an Affiliate Instructor at the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology and Egyptology. Dr. Kotb is very famous for her campaigns in the awareness of disability in Egypt and inclusion of people with disabilities in the educational system in Egypt. So, please welcome Dr. Heba Mohamed Kotb.

Ahmed: Hello Dr Heba.

Kotb: Hello Ahmed, how are you?

Ahmed: Ok, could you please give us a brief introduction about yourself?

Kotb: Ok, I'm Dr. Heba Mohamed Kotb; I am a graduate of AUC; I graduated with a Psychology Major and then I worked as a teacher for children with disabilities for five years during those five years, I did my masters degree in Aien Shams University in Psychology and then I traveled to the UK where I finished my PhD in education Psychology; my thesis was about the inclusion of children with disabilities into mainstream schools and then I returned back to Egypt where I started working at AUC for 11 years ago I started teaching Psychology and also teaching at the

Graduate School of Education.

Ahmed: Ok, could you please tell us why did you choose to major in Psychology in specific?

Kotb: At that time, of course I was much younger and I wanted to understand more about my self and about other people's personalities I wanted to learn more about disorders I was very much interested in those types of things.

Ahmed: Ok, through your long trip with the Psychology, what was the most important thing that you have learned?

Kotb: I think I've learned that people can be different and that people have always their excuses or the reasons behind their differences and that we one of the things that I've learned is to always accept differences and accept that everybody is entitled for their the way they think and behave and that it is all has roots to their environment and their genetic make-up too.

Ahmed: Ok, since you have been at AUC like since quite good time to know about the differences between AUC in the past and now, could you please like give some of the differences that you witness yourself that has happened since you were at AUC as a student?

Kotb: when we were at AUC of course the major was much smaller one of the things the student body was all smaller; in my graduating class from Psychology, we were only five people graduating. Now when we attend the graduation the major has become a bit bigger, about 20, 25 so, we are talking about five times bigger; the students are much more open than we, I mean of course, we were open, but I mean what I mean is the more outspoken and more politically active nowadays than we used to be maybe the differences in the social classes are now a bit prominent; I can see people coming from different social classes, but our time, we seemed to be of a more homogenous kind of group.

Ahmed: So, did you do any extra curriculum activities during your study at AUC?

Kotb: For three years, I used to write for the *Caravan* Magazine which still functioning till today. I used to write in the English section and I enjoyed it very much.

Ahmed: That's great so, could you please tell us about your your journey with disability awareness in Egypt and the campaigns? If you are working on a current program, could you give a brief detail about it?

Kotb: It's all started when I graduated from AUC I had a wonderful Professor who made me understand the needs of people with disabilities and how we need to educate them so, I decided as soon as I graduated to work with people with disabilities and I did for five years and then when I traveled to England, I found a completely different situation there; people with disabilities are much more accepted; they have better life styles; they are supported by the community and by the government so, I, this is what I really wanted to find here in Egypt. So, when I returned back to Egypt, I started in my social club the club I go to which is *Nadi Elseed* (Fishing Club) I became a member of the committee for people with disabilities and I'm what I do, at that time, at least, I started carrying out lectures, and giving lectures and talks about people with disabilities just to raise awareness through education because I thought people have very negative attitudes just because of their ignorance; people do not understand what it means to have a disability so, I started creating more knowledge among people so they can understand more. Currently, in my undergraduate classes, I always have to have a portion on people with disability where we will take and discuss I make sure that everybody leaves the class understanding that people with disabilities have rights just like everyone else. Part of the graduate school, my work in the graduate school of education is I prepare teachers and I've also included a chapter in each of my courses about people with disabilities because I believe, all teachers should know how to deal with people with disabilities so, even mainstream school teachers should have an awareness of what it means to have a child with disability in the classroom.

Ahmed: What kind of disability that your work are like focusing on your awareness; which which kind of disability your are interested more in and why?

- Kotb: Most of the people with disabilities that I'm dealing with or I'm interested in are people with cognitive disabilities because I always feel that they are more difficult to deal with; people find it easier to include people with physical disabilities – for example, people on Wheelchairs or people who are using Crutches or even sensory disabilities they're much easier to deal with because they have normal intelligence and they would function well at the school and so on. I feel that the people with cognitive disabilities pose the biggest challenges so, I always feel that we have to not marginalize them, but actually include them and make sure that their needs are met in any setting.
- Ahmed: Ok, since we are in Egypt, what do you think what needs to be done in order to have people with cognitive disabilities included in the educational system, not excluded?
- Kotb: I think that we have to make sure that the legislation, the law, allows people with cognitive disabilities to inter school like everyone else. We also have to change the way we train teachers; teachers should be trained in ways of dealing with people from different with different types of disabilities. We need to make sure that the curriculum becomes more flexible as to meet the needs of everybody and to be tailor made so, that every person will find that the curriculum matches with his or her abilities. And to not to require the other way around, not to require people to fit with the curriculum, but rather to require the curriculum to fit with people.
- Ahmed: Okay, have you worked with the with the Egyptian government trying to, the law is already exists in the constitution, but it is not implemented as it should so, are you trying to work with with them to try to implement this law to be effective and include people with cognitive disabilities a normal school say mainstream schools along with the other disabilities also as I saw, as you saw in the England.
- Kotb: Yes, I actually attended a few meeting with the government officials who are responsible for the law and I think the final version is that they are going to allow people with an intelligence IQ, intelligence quotient of 70 plus in schools main stream schools which is I'm not saying that this

is the best we can hope for, but at least, it is a step in the right direction. Hopefully, in the long run, we'll be able to accept people with lower intelligence , but at least, nowadays, they were pushing them towards accepting people with IQ 72, hindered who used to be marginalized before who used to be sent to special schools before. So, I think we are in the right way, but it takes a long time with people from the Ministry of Education; it takes a long time.

Ahmed: Ok so, if you are to give your students in a classroom an advice a piece of advice, what would it be?

Kotb: I will actually first try to make them understand what is it like to have a disability and that everyone anyone is prone to have a disability so, we can't be looking down upon people with disabilities just to understand what it means to have a disability and then probably I will encourage them to to to push for equal opportunity for everybody to be the ones who ask for people with every type of disability to be included in society, included in universities, included in everything the planning for the curriculum and so on; so, I think the students who have this type of ability to push for that.

Ahmed: At the end we thank you very much and hope that your work be effective to include more people with disabilities in the educational system; thank you so much.

Kotb: Thank you Ahmed very much.