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Reflection Paper

As someone who has grown up being exposed to several different cultures, it would be natural to think that I know a thing or two about experiencing intercultural communication. However, it would also be ignorant for me to assume that the cultures I have been exposed to are the only ones there are and that I know everything about intercultural communication. When we think about culture, a lot of the time we think about it as something very surface level, but if given the chance you can see that culture is something with multiple layers and a vast depth that requires an extensive amount of understanding from both parties. I hope to have a better grasp of cultural humility, which is defined as “A process of self-reflection that helps people understand and respect cultural differences.” (*What Is Cultural Humility? The Basics | Division of Equity and Inclusion*, n.d.).

In the Martin and Nakayama essay, water is used as a metaphor for culture, and I believe that it does so accordingly. If we take a look at how culture can be studied, fluidity is something that comes to mind because culture is so fluid, especially when different cultures clash with one another. For example when a person from a heavy culture centric country moves to another heavy culture centric country then the fluidity comes into play. I would also like to argue that sometimes, just like how water cannot move past boundaries and lines, sometimes cultures are the same. Sometimes cultures are the reason that country borders exist and why some countries and religions do not get along. This is something that unfortunately, is still happening today but it only helps us understand the way cultures interact with one another, especially when certain values are exceedingly different.

When discussing intercultural communication, it is important to think about self-reflexivity. Self-reflexivity is the process of essentially just studying people as people and not observing them as if they are zoo animals. It involves making sure we are listening intently to people's lived experiences and taking a step back to further examine our own selves. In regards to some experiences that have shaped me and my world view of culture, I was born in Sydney, Australia and grew up there until I was almost 16 years old. My parents have an interesting story. My mum was born in India and at 10 moved to Harare, Zimbabwe. This is where my dad was born and raised, however he is Indian by background as well. So both my parents come from different countries and cultures already and since we are Indian, culturally, we are Hindu’s but our mother tongue is Gujarati. That is already enough to make most people see that I would have a pretty different upbringing than most people, but then when you bring into the fact that I was born and grew up in Australia, then that adds another dimension to the conversation. Growing up in Australia, I was never exposed to the idea of school shootings, gun violence or anything like that. I grew up watching the news hearing of people being stabbed or robbed at knife point and even killed by Kangaroos, but never guns. I grew up a 10 minute walk from the beach, in an area where shoes and shirts were not required to enter establishments, because we were right by the beach. I grew up learning to surf and having beach days for Christmas because our Christmas was in the summer and we would barbecue our Christmas day food. In elementary school I was required to wear a uniform and was taught the importance of a firm handshake and being on time and looking neat and tidy and using the metric system. These are just such a small handful of different things I experienced culturally growing up in Australia. When I moved to the United States, Houston, Texas out of all places, it was one of the biggest culture shocks of my life. Everything was different. It was so full of city which is the only way I can describe it and everything was just so big and fast paced. School was different and words for things were different and there were countless times where I embarrassed myself at school when asking for things because I used vocabulary that my peers and teachers had never heard before.

Something that this caused was a way for me to learn a few things about myself and learn about how to navigate the world around me. The first thing I learned was how deeply important family was. When we moved we had no one, only each other and this was a really scary fact to face. I learned that if I had no one, I would always have my family, and my sister and I grew way closer together after this. The other thing I learned was that no matter what, people are going to judge you based on multiple different factors and the people who really care to get to know you and learn about your life experiences and story are the people that really matter. People are going to come and go and that is okay. I think the people I went to school with probably perceived me as “the new kid with an accent” and I wanted so badly to be more than that. I wanted people to know me for me and not know me as the kid who had an accent. I was also someone (And still am) someone who was visibly gay and I think that also added another layer of judgement onto some people who did not bother to get to know me. Luckily, I was fortunate enough to meet an amazing group of people who welcomed me into their friend group with open arms and so I was able to assimilate into American culture with help rather than doing it alone and I am still friends with these people to this day and they have never once made me feel like I was “different” or “foreign”, and I think this also has to do with the fact that the group of friends I am apart of is full of people from different backgrounds as well.

As stated in my opening paragraph, I am pretty well versed in intercultural communication, but I think there is always room for improvement and better understanding. One thing I hope I can do is listen to people from even more cultures on their stories and lived experiences. I believe my worldview has been molded by all of my experiences as someone who was born in Australia who is now living in the U. S. and being born into an Indian family. To my understanding, worldview is just the way a person views the world around them, and this is usually done by what they were taught growing up and the things they experienced, sometimes it is not always good, but I hope that what I have experienced has made me a good person and someone who is open to other cultures and other peoples stories.

References

*What is Cultural Humility? The Basics | Division of Equity and Inclusion*. (n.d.). <https://inclusion.uoregon.edu/what-cultural-humility-basics>