Culture: Two Different Worlds Essay, Research Paper

Two Different Worlds

What is culture? Culture is the idea of what is wrong or right, the concept of what is acceptable within our society. Culture serves us as a guide, taking us to the “right way” and helping us to make sense of things that surrounds us. There are many different cultures around the world. A lot of them are similar in specific ways and others are just completely different, this difference explains why we think that people from different backgrounds are “weird”.

The person that I interviewed is from the United States; he is 20 years old and a student at Tri-State University. Ezell Moore is an African American from East Chicago, IN. Ezell comes from a community where Hispanic people represents 60% of the population and African Americans represents 40%. There is no existence of White European Americans in his community. He has two siblings and his parents are still married. He came to TSU to play basketball and get his degree in communications.

Comparing Ezell’s culture to mine was very interesting. I’m from Brazil, a third world country in South America and I’m also a communications major at Tri-State University. In general, I can say that our cultures are somewhat similar. Our countries are both a democracy. Elections, a president, and the senate are common characteristics of our democratic countries. Our laws are similar as well. The only difference is that in Brazil they are not enforced effectively. Therefore, people do not really care about our laws and they can get away with a lot of things just by bribing the police. Politicians are seen, in general, as corrupted people that only care about their own benefit, maybe this is why our economy is so bad. Our countries are both very large and have a lot of agricultural activities as well as industrial. Of course, the U.S. is far more technologically advanced than Brazil.

The U.S. has a huge influence in the Brazilian culture. This is due to the fact that economical strings tie us, so we are attached whether we like it or not. We buy CDs from America, we listen to the same music, we have MTV, and we wear the same clothes. We also incorporated to our vocabulary a lot of English words such as “Shopping Center” or “Sale”. This is a sign that the Brazilian culture has become “Americanized” to a certain extend.

Part of the cultural aspects that is similar is the way we view women in our cultures. In Brazil as well as in the U.S., women are viewed as workers. The idea that women should stay at home taking care of the kids does not exist anymore; our capitalistic society needs every person to work in order to have a decent life.

Ezell also described the way the elderly is treated in his culture. They are treated with a lot of respect and love. The younger people have no need to change their language or nonverbal behavior when interacting with an old person. They are seen as active and still useful in some ways. In Brazil, the elderly is viewed as a fragile piece of glass. They are treated with a lot of respect and love as well, but at the same time we do not give them any credit. It is very rare to see an old person being active in Brazil, maybe because our life expectation is shorter. When a person reaches a certain age, it seems like they lose all their value to our society. They are there just to tell stories and make us laugh. We usually watch our language and nonverbal behavior in order to interact with them. For instance, when talking to my grandmother, I usually try to keep a certain distance and do not make so much eye contact to show respect.

Another similar aspect of our cultures is the way we value our families. For both of us our families are the most important thing in our lives. We both agreed with the idea that a person is the product of his/her environment. We can usually tell who has a well-structured family and who does not. The parents have the same level of respect from their children; the patriarchal construction is it not in use anymore. The only difference in our views when talking about family is the idea that Ezell’s culture is a little more individualistic than mine and this concept intervenes even in his family. They tend to think first about themselves than the rest. In my family, collectivism is more suitable. Even though we also have our own individual goals it usually comes right after our family’s goal.

Big differences between our cultures are the nonverbal behaviors. As a Brazilian girl, when greeting a person or meeting a person for the first time you usually give two kisses, one on each side of his/her face. Guys usually give a handshake or give a hug to the other guy and give kisses to a girl. Whereas in his culture the handshake is usually appropriate in business related interaction. He said that when meeting a person for the first time or greeting someone he usually says “ Hi. How are you doing?” and does not touch the person. Also it is known that people from Brazil talk very close to each other, we usually touch the person we are talking to and eye contact is pretty long and direct. Ezell said that in his culture you only touch very close friends and the distance usually decreases according to the level of intimacy. If he is talking to a very close friend, he usually will touch that person, but if that person isn’t close he won’t touch him/her. The same rule is used for eye contact. A very interesting aspect of his culture is that usually couples do not show much affection in public, it is very rare to see a couple kissing in public or just holding hands. Sometimes you can’t even tell who are couples or not. In Brazil, showing affection in public is very common. People just kiss, hug each other, and hold hands all the time to show that they are together. These demonstrations of affection in public are so common that nobody gets offended.

Our high school systems are very different as well. In Brazil we do not have a chance to pick what classes we want to take. We have to take twelve subjects all year long. Sports are not included in your education and if you want to play a sport, you have to go on your own and pay for it. Public schools in Brazil are very bad. They usually have a lot of problems, such as teachers going on strike because their salary is around R$600 or U$ 400 per month, because of bad benefits, and even because the government has not paid them in three or four months. Teachers are very respected by their students and much more demanding, but they certainly do not get paid what they deserve. So, nobody wants to go to school to become a teacher because of all of the problems. Also, we do not go away for college. Most of people just live with their parents until they graduate from college and most of times they are not asked to work or pay rent, which is a common practice in Ezell’s culture.

A huge difference between our cultures is the awareness of other cultures. Brazilians, in general, have knowledge about different countries. We usually watch the news to find out what is going on around the world. Of course, we always know what is happening in the U.S. because of our economical dependency, but we are usually very interested in all the other nations and their cultures as well. When I asked Ezell if he watched the news, his answer was no. He usually watches the sports channels, and this is a common practice in his culture. He views the United States as the best country in the world, having the economical and technological power over any other nation, so why worry about others? For the three years of experience I’ve had here, I have asked a lot of my friends what they would do if they won a million dollars right now, all of them answered they would buy something very expensive. If the same question were asked to people from Brazil, a lot of the answers would be something along the line, “ I would travel around the world!” This response shows how self-centered and materialistic Americans can be most of the times. This individualistic view of the world just allows them to think about their own benefits and nothing else. That is why their awareness of other cultures is so poor and their geographical knowledge is less accurate when comparing to Brazilians.

To conclude, I would say that these two cultures are somewhat alike, but each has its own uniqueness and this it what makes the world interesting for us. Being able to learn about different cultures in this class is a good opportunity to open our eyes for what we have been missing out during this entire time.

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