

Cultural Autobiography

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Introduction

As I sit here looking at my computer screen, I cannot help but see the question taped to the bottom of my key board which reads “Do you know who you are?” There was a time last year that I did not know how to answer that question, but God and his faithfulness reminded me that my identity was not lost just temporary forgotten. Like Mufasa came to Simba in *The Lion King*, God came to me in my place of confusion and told me that I had forgotten my identity in Him and as a result forgotten him, but it was time to remember (Hahn, 1994). Since that day, I have never again misplaced my identity and know exactly who I am. I am many things: a daughter, a “sister”, a friend, a student, and a believer in Christ. I am also: goofy, clumsy, sarcastic, a sinner, and sugar with spice. Those are just a few words that describe me. However, to really know me as an individual is as simple as knowing my family and my faith (McDaniel, Porter, Roy, & Samovar, 2013, p. 63). In this paper, we will observe how my cultural upbringing and identity affects my communication with people of the same and different cultures than me. [a1]

Background

My Family

Growing up as a middle class, English speaking, only child from California, my definition of family has changed a lot over the years, but no matter the changes my family has always had a strong impact on my life (McDaniel, Porter, Roy, & Samovar [a2], 2013, p. 61).

When I was growing up, I was always around family. Christmas Eve was always spent with my dad’s parents and continues to this day. At that time my definition of family consisted of my parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Holidays, birthdays, and celebrations all took place at my grandma’s house where the kids would play outside, and my aunts, uncles and

cousins would drink and laugh while watching us from the lawn chairs. My mom's side of the family was Catholic, so drinking and cussing was never a big deal to them. After my grandma passed away, the family broke up and we did not spend as much time with my mom's side of the family as I had when I was younger. My grandma had been the one that kept us all together. As I have matured, I see that I am so much like my grandmother in humor, spunk and physical appearance. Grandma Clark's death happened around the time that my parents and I move to Yuba City, a town about an hour away from most of my extended family. That was when my definition of family shrunk and I began to consider my family to be made up of just my parents, dogs, and rabbit.

In our house hold everything was centered on God, trust, and communication. It may be hard to believe, but I have no secrets from my parents. My home is the one place that I feel safe to be completely myself. I was sheltered compared to many of the teenagers that I knew, but as long as there was a strong trust in place I was able to experience a lot and have a fun life. As I have matured I have become aware of how much I relate to my nuclear and extended family. Spending time with my grandparents I now see that I am like grandma Roberts when it comes to humor, spunk, and physical appearance. Though I do have Clark blood deep in my veins which makes me a strong independent woman, I take most after my Grandma Roberts. Growing up with such a close and special bond to my parents also allowed me to take on a lot of the characteristics of my parents from the good to the not as good. My mom is a fiery red headed, truth speaking, strong, and loving, woman of God and my dad is a humorous, fun loving, outgoing, goofball, and who loves God with all his heart. Physically I have my mom's eyes and nose but my dad's hair color and smile. Personality wise me and my dad are the same especially in the way our humor tends to cross the line and we love to keep the peace in the household.

However, I am like my mom in the way that I speak the truth and need time before I can confront a conflict. Many times people that know me and my family are constantly reminding me how much I am like my parents because of the things I say or do to the way I look. I may have my own identity, but I share one with my family as well (McDaniel, Porter, Roy, & Samovar, [a3]2013, p. 63). Summed up my life can be described by a Jessica Andrews song that says, “I am my Rosemary’s (Julia’s) granddaughter, the spitting image of my father and when the day is done my mommas still my biggest fan... I have friends that love me, they know just where I stand, it’s all a part of who I am” (2001). Over all, God and my family have helped to make me the person I am today by showing me what is important and to always love others no matter how much plans and people change. [a4]

Religion

Since the day I was born, I was raised to see my cultural identity as who I am in Christ rather than my ethnicity, gender, or social class. Though my mom grew up Catholic, she did not have a relationship with God, and my father had no religious upbringing despite the fact that his grandmother was an ordained minister in the Presbyterian church. It was only when I was about to be born that God spoke to the hearts of my parents and drew them to relationship with him. As new Christians, my parents wanted to be the best parents they could be and raise me in the church. At home they taught me about the love of Jesus, the importance of prayer, and treating God like he is a friend in the room with me. To this day, I am a strong believer in the power of praying together because my parents prayed with me and for me every day over meals, at bed times, before trips, and just whenever we felt the need to pray. This is a tradition that I continue away from my family by praying with my roommates as often as I can especially before bed time.

I accepted Christ and was baptized at a young age and God has been the center of my life ever since. Mom and dad never let me get away with following what the world considered expectable and held me to a Christian standard. Many times mom told me that if I was going to call myself a Christian I have to act like it too. So, that is what I did and it came with heavy prices, the price of being an outcast. The song “Outcast” by Kerrie Roberts describes my life as a Christian almost to the letter because of the struggles I have faced living the Christian walk (Roberts, 2010). Because I spoke out about my faith, I lost many friends to parents who did not want their children involved with the Christian faith. I tried to talk about my faith as a relationship rather than religion but that never seemed to make a difference to the people that viewed me as religious. Sometimes I was even called names like “Jesus freak” and “Heaven” by kids at who were devoted atheists (Something I am now very proud of). Even in the church I was treated like an outsider. For three years I was part of the worship team and youth group bringing as many of my friends from school that would attend, but when leadership changed in the youth ministry department my friends stopped talking to me and I was excluded by faculty and students alike. The youth and their parents both talked about me to my parents calling me fake and a con-artist who my parents did not really know. My family knew the truth though and stood up for me in the face of all the criticism and judgment. I left the youth group as a junior in high school and attended adult services. Many of the youth at my church avoid authority and adults, but because I grew up around so many adults as a child I am very comfortable letting wiser people than me speak into my life. In main service the older generations could see my heart and was adopted by many families as non blood related granddaughters, daughters, and sisters. It was hard sometimes, but God was always looking out for me and helping me to grow through all the trials and tribulations and turned bad into good for His glory (James 1:2-3, NIV).

God has also been very active in my education decisions. He called me to go to public school over private school when I was going into middle school. There He tested my faith and obedience by making sure that I did not follow the road of conformity. He put a passion in my heart to create change even if it seemed small. In middle school, all but one of my friends was a non-Christian, but because they knew about my relationship with God they respected me by not cussing in my presence. In seventh grade, I started a two year long radio show at my church radio station to encourage young Christians in their walks with Christ using uplifting music and relatable scripture verses. Finally, in high school I became president of the Christian club on campus and tried to encourage young Christians to live as Christ and seek a personal relationship with God. God even provided me with a group of girl friends who accepted me for who I was and am still very blessed to have as my friends today. Had my parents not raised me to trust in Christ as my strength I do not know where I would be or what choices I would have made. All I know is that God and my family were always with me for support even when my heart was broken or I felt like an outcast.^[a5]

Ethnicity

I have been very blessed to experience many different cultures because my family loves to travel and experience as much of the world as it can. My family came to America from Germany and Canada. On my great grandpas side of the family we were originally called Roberge, but it was changed to Roberts when the English men could not pronounce our name correctly. On my dad's side of the family I am French Canadian, German, and Irish while my mom's side adds in English and Paiute Indian. We do not hold onto very many traditions from these different cultures, but mom still makes corn beef and cabbage every Saint Patrick's Day. Many of our traditions are ones that we have started as a family. For example, every Valentine's

Day my family had a fancy home cooked meal together, and every Christmas we go out and cut a tree to decorate together. In my town being any mixture of white is a minority compared to the Mexican and Indian culture that makes up most of the city. Having Indian friends I have learned a lot about their culture and religion. In fact many school activities added to our knowledge by taking field trips to local temples and having solidarity weeks. Traveling to Mexico, Jamaica, Haiti, and various places in the United States has also opened my eyes to the many beautiful differences each culture has to offer in the way they each value time and family and problems. I have also experienced the difficulties in communication due to cultural differences. For example, though my grandparents grew up at a time where white culture was supreme, they sometimes still say politically incorrect statements about members of other cultures. Though they are very loving people they could easily be judged as racist rather than members of an older generation. Growing up in a place as a minority I have also experienced the receiving end of racism, and know how inability to understand people can lead to terrible assumptions and accusations. It is a hatred that I never want to have anyone ever experience just because of their color or culture. My family is not perfect and sometimes we too can miss judge people based on our preconceived notions. However, my parents always raised me to love others as Jesus would despite any differences because we were all made in the image of God. [a6]

Cultural Identity

Being a middle class American, I have been very blessed. Some people think that because I am an only child I am spoiled, but that is not true. My parents taught me at an early age that I must respect the things that I have and always treat my positions like I will never get another if it breaks. Mom also taught me to be frugal and shop to sales rather than always buying the brand names. My parents taught me that things do not last forever so we have to value what we have

and fight to protect it. God and my family are things that I will always fight for. I do not consider myself a mean person, but if someone comes against my family they will have to deal with me and my fury. Voting and having a voice is really important and something that my family and I discuss frequently and many times have the same opinions.

Coming from western culture it is normal to not know a neighbor or look at people as they walk by or even hold a door for another person, so people tend to mind their own business and not worry about if a girl is going to marry while she is still able to give birth. I never use to call someone “ma’am” or “sir” and eat with my elbows off the tables. I also never took care of people as much as I told them to just help themselves if they are hungry or thirsty. In today’s age I have many freedoms that women of the past did not. For example, just being in college shows that education is valued for all people and women can do more than be just a stay at home wife. However, I do have one gender role that my mom has always placed in me and that is family comes first. She was a stay at home mom and knew how important it was for her to be there for me whenever I needed her. This gender role I am okay with because I believe that a woman should make sure that her house is on a firm foundation before attempting to provide for anyone else (1 Timothy 3:5, NIV). A woman’s ministry starts in the household. As a whole, my identities comes from how I see myself as a child of God as well as how I relate to my parents and carry some of the culture that I grew up in. [a7]

Communication across Cultures

When God created mankind, He created us all in His image (Genesis 1:27). He created us to have differences in color, gender, and culture so that we could together show the wide spectrum of Gods beauty and creativity. When communicating with people from other cultures I try and communicate with them in a way that does not come off as superior or better than their

culture. Instead when I talk to other people about their cultures I come wanting to learn and understand not be judgmental (McDaniel, Porter, Roy, & Samovar, 2013^[a8], p.13). A problem that I could have communicating cross culturally is that I am terrible at learning new languages, in fact I am not even that great at speaking English, and that could cause many problems if someone were to think I was being disrespectful and not trying (McDaniel, Porter, Roy, & Samovar^[a9], 2013, p.13). Though there are challenges and benefits to learning about other cultures and communication cross culturally, it is important that we just respect and love on those different than us.^[a10]

Conclusion

Family is the way that values of the past and pieces of our families continue to live from generation to generation. By looking in the mirror I will not only see myself, but my mother's brown eyes and my dad's smile. When I decorate the room to match the season or celebrate a holiday or make a stupid joke or pray with my roommates I will remember the important practices and values my parents raised me in. Being raised in a Christ centered home has not only helped me discover my own relationship with God, but find my identity as both a member of the Roberts family and Gods family. So, who am I? I am Kara Rae Marie Roberts: a daughter, a student, a friend, a Jesus freak, an outcast, and one piece of a beautiful body of Christ.^[a11]

References

Bose, J., McArthur J., Morgan, C., & Roberts, K. (2010). Outcast [Recorded by Kerrie Roberts].

On *Kerrie roberts* [CD]. Brentwood, Tennessee: Reunion Records.

Hahn, D. (Producer), & Allers, R., & Minkoff, R. (Director). (1994). *The lion king* [Motion picture]. United States : Buena Vista Pictures

McDaniel, E., Porter, R., Roy, C., & Samovar, L_[a12]. (2013). *Communication between culture* (8th ed.). Boston , MA: Wadsworth

Verges, J. (2001). Who i am [Recorded by Jessica Andrews]. On *Who i am* [CD]. Nashville, Tennessee: DreamWorks Records.

Week 5 & 6: Cultural Autobiography	Possible Pts.	Actual Pts.
Content		
Description of your cultural background and upbringing	25	25
Discussion of your cultural identity in terms of your class, age, race, ethnicity, gender, language(s) you speak, and religion	25	25
Description and analysis of how your cultural background and identity affects your communication with people from the same culture and those from other cultures	20	20
Integration of information from the textbooks and other sources	10	10
Presentation		
APA Formatting (running head, paper title, author's name, proper pagination, headings, text citations, reference page)	5	2
Organization/Structure/Spelling/Grammar	5	5
Oral presentation in class	10	10
TOTAL:	100	97
Comments:		
Kara—A fascinating, well-written cultural autobiography. May God who has begun a good work in you continue to work out His good plans for your life, so that you'll be an instrument in His hands, to draw others into His kingdom.		
Dr. Ayee		

