Culture Shock Assignment

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Approx: 1250 words

Culture Shock Assignment

The concept of a "culture shock" is a very real thing, as well as an extremely important component to social growth within certain individuals removed from their original birthplace, or culture they are used to. It is not a surprising reaction--both modern psychology and history both indicate that human beings do not adapt well to unfamiliar social situations. This rings true for everyone, but children most prolifically, as they are the most impressionable of all. This especially proved to be true with my interviewee--though her strong will has allowed her to persevere over the horrors involved in her individual culture shock.

 Schmidt clearly outlines the model for a general case of culture shock in a four, and occasionally five-step process. Keeping in mind the principles of the honeymoon, horror, humor, and home stages while preparing interview materials--which seems at face value as an extremely logical and pragmatic progression--I figured I would use communication and social norms to judge my ethical responsibility when approaching the interview as a whole (Schmidt, 2007). As it turns out, these models are not necessarily universal.

 This naturally involved evaluating the interviewee; first deciding what stage I could most attribute her so as not to cover any subjects she was not comfortable speaking about--especially due to her particular situation. To my surprise, she was very open about the culture shock she had experienced individually, and seemed to be inside the "home stage"--where the individual is comfortable with both their past as well as their present, and has come to terms with--or "recovered" from their culture shock (Schmidt, 2007). What I found while conducting the interview itself was something different altogether from my expectations--which again draws the conclusion that her individual situation created an individual result.

 A background on my interviewee is absolutely essential to understanding the profound culture shock she encountered throughout her young life. The only way to describe what this strong woman has endured is a multi-pronged culture shock--being forcibly removed from her home due to bloody Civil War's as a refugee--not just once, but twice--and in her most impressionable years as a child. My interviewee was living in Liberia during the Civil War taking place in the late 1990's primarily. When rebel forces threatened her homeland near Monrovia, she fled with her family--along with many other Liberian refugees--across the border into the country of Sierra Leone.

 The Civil War followed her across the border--in the early 2000's Sierra Leone exploded with violence worse than what was even seen in Liberia. The warring factions, neither better than the other, tore the country apart--enlisting child soldiers and funding campaigns with slavery and the illegal diamond trade. Her family was again forced to relocate after just three years in Sierra Leone--this time far away from West Africa, closer to Liverpool. This was very temporary before my interviewee, and her family found their final destination in London.

 Operating under the auspices that she was indeed in the "home stage" of culture shock, I asked a question I believed would elicit an answer that would monopolize much of our interview. When posed with the seemingly simple question of what was the hardest thing about moving, or the most difficult relocation from her situation, I received an answer I certainly did not expect. "Definitely moving from Liverpool to London was the most difficult for me...", she responded. This was naturally shocking considering the forced relocations she had to deal with in her young life. Upon a little more conversation, she went on to state that her chaotic childhood left her without any knowledge of what it was like without it. In Liverpool she knew her situation was temporary as well--it was not until coming to the realization that she was indeed settled in a safe environment that a true shock of any kind set in.

 "Balloons," she went on to say, "they just sounded differently. It was not for a while after I moved to London that I stopped ducking when the popped. Cars too--when they make that loud echoing popping sound..." before briefly trailing off. I decided not to press that issue too much more--I knew I was dealing with sensitive material, and ethically I could not continue to prod further. This was when I realized that I had perhaps misjudged my interviewee a bit, and quickly changed direction.

 I chose a simple question and asked what the word "culture shock" meant to her. She responded quite eagerly about the differences between West Africa and the UK--specifically referring to her "smartphone", which she stated may have been impossible to have because she is female, overlooking the cost issue. There was clearly an underlying issue of feminism when she was speaking in this regard, so I allowed her to continue. She explained to me the demographics of where she came from--between the influence of tribal beliefs, the male-dominated rebels, and how she would never have reached the goals she has indeed reached in her life as a female in either Liberia or Sierra Leone. Knowing she was a college student now, I inquired about the education where she came from. She responded somewhat dejectedly that though a vague possibility for a man, it would have been unheard of for a female.

 I asked how education in London had impacted her life, and she became ecstatic. "Where do I start?" was her first response. The movement from West Africa to London, she explained, opened up doors she had never imagined possible. Specifically citing her multicultural studies, she has become fascinated with other cultures--as if her own was not diverse enough. Enjoying history, she explained that she was not privy to any of the materials in her books at home. "At first, I felt out of place of course. I felt behind--dumb even. I just decided to take advantage of my situation and learn as much as I could...".

 Economically, she outlined her situation very clearly--although her Father works very hard, there was no way she would have the quality of life she has in London had she not defected from West Africa. She offered the information that whether it was Liberia or Sierra Leone was beside the point, which I found interesting as a concept. She said that moving to Sierra Leone was nothing--she was moving with family, friends, and many others like her. Her life was no different in Sierra Leone. London, however, initially struck her with the fear of the unfamiliar--attempting to harness the three parts of the triangle model was overwhelming; she claimed trouble balancing new cultural norms with her own feelings and experiences. This, she claimed, came with nothing but time--though claiming she now thought most of these issues were nowhere beside her own head citing her new brilliant life.

Culture Shock Interview

Question: So, where are you originally from?

Answer: Originally I was born near Monrovia in Liberia, and I lived there with my family for a few of my earlier years. Unfortunately, this was not the safest environment--well, it became very unsafe very quickly. Even as a child I remember my Father leaving a machete by the front door just in case.

Question: In case...can you elaborate at all?

Answer: Yes, just in case. Neither the government or the rebels had a plan--or any sort of conscious either. People disappeared--they were just killed senselessly or else forced to fight. My parents decided to move to Sierra Leone across the border along with many others at the time. Liberia brought its problems to Sierra Leone, and the war followed us. At that time, there was only survival--we settled in Freetown temporarily. Moving through Guinea, my family ended up in the UK--living closer to Liverpool.

Question: That must have been an incredible difference in lifestyle. Was it a difficult adjustment?

Answer: You know, to Liverpool, not so much. We stayed inside a lot--we also knew it was temporary. Definitely moving from Liverpool to London was the most difficult for me though.

Question: Why?

Answer: Hmmm...Balloons... they just sounded differently. It was not for a while after I moved to London that I stopped ducking when they popped. Cars too--when they make that loud echoing popping sound...

Question: What has education in London done for you?

Answer: Where can I start? The doors that opened up for me were unthinkable for someone like me. I was naturally thrilled, but it also illustrated how different I really was and this was scary.

Question: How did this affect you?

Answer: It pushed me harder! I love learning about other cultures, so I decided to learn as much about Britain's as I could. I observed social situations--and there you go. I mean at first, I felt out of place of course. I felt behind--dumb even. I just decided to take advantage of my situation and learn as much as I could to compensate at the bit I suppose.

Question: Lastly, what does culture shock mean to you?

Answer: See my phone? First of all, for a female to even own a phone where I come from is unheard of. Second of all, we could never have afforded even one phone! I go to school now--coming here; I felt like I was so behind because girls do not go to the school where I come from. Men dominate everything--and of course, this isn't every case--but from tribal leaders to the government, and especially the rebels can be cruel to women. This is what I am saying--Liberia, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe--anywhere in West Africa--it makes no difference. I was alarmed by my freedoms when I moved to London more than anything, and it took awhile to get used to it.

Works Cited

"Cultural Shock." Personal interview. 15 Oct. 2013.

Schmidt, Patrick L. . *In Search of Intercultural Understanding*. Montreal: Meridian World, n.d. Print.