My Socialization

From the dawn of civilization, humans have been creatures of interaction between one another. Originating in small groups or clans, which, over time evolved into more complex organizations with their populations continually increasing in size. Within these separate civilizations, different social standards emerged which guided individuals on how they were to live out any and every aspect of their lives. In today’s world, each country has its own culture with smaller sub-cultures within itself. Because of this, the place in which one is born can have a significant impact on shaping an individual’s personality and character.

I come from a small town in southern Michigan called Armada. It is not a diverse place by any means, out of the two hundred kids in my graduating class, less than ten were not Caucasian. Having said this, Michigan Tech is much more diverse with students from different states and countries around the world. For me, it was interesting to step out of my comfort zone and interact with people from many different countries and cultures for the first time in my life. At first some of what I was seeing for the first time may have seemed weird or different such as the music that fellow hall members were playing, or just the different types of clothes people chose to wear. I now know that it is natural to fear what you do not know or understand, because I was not raised in the same culture I could not openly understand why some people would make certain decisions on different topics. Because of this, I began thinking about my own culture that I grew up with and how it molded me as a person.

After thinking about it for some time, I realized that there are several significant aspects to the culture that I was raised in that may have molded me into the person that I am today. For instance, community is important to my culture as I come from a small town where everyone knows everyone. This aspect helps build unity within the community and I feel that because of this unity, several values are instilled into the children at a young age. Values such as caring for one another are stressed in the class rooms at school, an important institution, and because you would always see members of the community helping one another as a kid, it always seemed natural to do what you could to help other people if they needed it. It is important to recognize the education institution because it has a major influence on American culture. In our society, children are sent to school at a young age making it one of the early forms of socialization. In my earliest years at school, I was taught how to act acceptably in public and the norm of respecting your elders as I was always told to listen to my teacher and if I refused, I knew I would face a form of punishment. In regards to caring for others the education institution instilled this value and many more into me, shaping who I have become.

Over the years this value of selfless service to those around you became natural such as holding a door open for an elderly person, or plowing your neighbors driveway when it snowed, to just stopping when there is a car on the side of the road to see if they need any help. Furthermore, I have noticed that even within the state of Michigan this value is not held as important in differing cultures in the area. When I drive to my aunt’s house in the bigger city of Detroit, it is rare for individuals to stop and help other citizens who are having car troubles. It seems as if everyone just drives past without even a second thought about the other persons well being. I also noticed that even the more simple things such as holding open the door for other people is not as common. In my small town people will walk past, thank you, and go about their business as it is a common courtesy. In the city I can remember a time where I held open the door for an elderly lady and she gave me a hug thanked me and told me how sad it is that she has had anyone hold open a door for her in years. This clearly displays a small but noticeable difference in two cultures that are only located thirty miles apart. This might be related to the differences in the education systems in the separate locations. This relates to society in general on a larger scale. If the education system differs slightly from one state to the next, as it does, different locations will hold different values more significant than others.

Furthermore, my culture is also highly patriotic. As a boy I remember my parents telling me to walk up to veterans and thank them for their service to our country. I was always told that they made great sacrifices for our country and that if it was not for them, I would not be able to live how I choose and do the things that I wish. In addition to this, every morning in school we would stand and say the pledge of allegiance all through high school. Tasks like these instilled within me the value of patriotism. Not to mention that the media also is giving the message constantly to be patriotic because it helps make them look better to the common public.

I believe another important aspect to my social life that has shaped my life is my gender. From the time humans are born they are placed into one of two gender classes, male or female. I am a male, which societal norms view as athletic and strong, while at the same time emotionally tough. These values were taught to me repetitively over my life and were reinforced constantly though sports, the media, and other members of society. If I had refused to obey this inherent status I would have be alienated from society facing discrimination from others. I know realize that joining the military, in my society, is seen as a respectable decision for males as it is the supreme male institution. It embodies all masculine traits and uses them to appeal to males throughout our society enticing them to join. These factors combined with our society’s patriotic values make joining the military an easy decision for some young males. It is important to note that those growing up in a small town culture may also be less familiar to different cultures. This is because they are immersed into a tight knit community with very slim cultural differences between those in the given culture. This may make it more difficult for those from small town cultures to accept different ones because there were socialized from a young age to act accept that their way of life is normal. However, once they encounter differing cultures it will be easy for them to say that the other culture is taboo because their culture has been engrained within them due to their isolated upbringing.

I chose to emphasize these aspects of my culture because while brainstorming for this project I realized that for the first time the significant impact my culture had on one of the most important decisions of my life at this point. I realized while writing my paper that my decision to join the Army has largely been influenced by my culture. The Army is also a form of total institution, which means that they have ultimate power over my own actions. Once a member of the military, one is placed under a strict set of social codes enforced by those within the institution. This means that one’s appearance such as hair length and clothing must follow regulations, as well as how the individual acts and presents oneself in public places. However, by becoming a member of the military, it also came with a certain status. This is an achieved status as it was not inherited at birth, it was achieved by contracting with the military. With this status you may be eligible for special promotions and countless benefits, and people may look at you or treat you differently, yet I am proud to hold this status. If I had grown up in a culture where selfless service was seen as disgraceful, I never would have considered joining the military, as I would feel that others would look down on me. If I had been raised in a counter culture sub setting where everyone that I lived around despised the government and the military in general, I never would have considered joining the military, because it would have been instilled in me that the military was morally wrong.

I found this epiphany interesting as it allows me to look into what aspects have shaped my life in ways that I have never thought about before. My culture has molded me over the years into the person that I am today, and I am comfortable with what I have become. I now know that if I had grown up in counter culture perhaps that my life would be significantly different. I most likely would not have joined the military. I would wear different clothes as I tend to wear more conservative clothes right now which fit into the accepted social norm. I may have a different style of hair even as I have a military regulated haircut. Not to say that these changes would be necessarily unacceptable, just that my outlook on the world would be altered changing every decision that I have ever made. A thought that will keep me pondering on my important life decisions and why I selected the path that I have in life. It is easy to see now that the decisions individuals make, or their agency, may only be a charade. Societal forces shape nearly every decision one makes either directly or indirectly. We as humans make our decisions based off of what others in our society view as appropriate or inappropriate or what is legal or illegal. An example of this is how differing different cultures around the world may be. Each culture may find another one to be taboo, but that is only because they were brought up in a certain culture effecting their decisions and what they view as normal. If the same person were to be raised in the other taboo culture, it is not hard to believe that they would in turn view it as normal and their origional culture as taboo.