

George Dranichak III

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Dr. Ebony White

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## **I am a Cultural Being**

YouTube Link (Unlisted): <https://youtu.be/taT7M5qyPtl>

OneDrive Link: [IAM A CULTURAL BEING.mov](#)

Draw My Life Script:

**DRAW THE IMPORTANT CULTURAL STUFF IN RED MARKER.**

Hi, my name is George Dranichak and today I'll be drawing my life with a cultural lens. I'm doing a deep dive into my life, so if you're my professor for this class, Dr. White, I will be drawing the important cultural moments in my life in red so I can make sure that the points on the rubric are mentioned. There will also be a lot of "full-circle moments" where I'll say something that will come back later in the video. Those will be marked with a special color in the top right, with a number, color, and label for each moment.

### **Birth and Early Childhood**

I was born in Simi Valley, California in 2001, which makes me an early gen Z. For one year of my life, I lived in Lake Tahoe. **(1/5 – Dad)** My dad was a self-made man, working with technology during the start of the internet era at his own company. **Religion played a huge part in his life, growing up as a Catholic.** Both my mom and my dad came from Upstate NY, which is where most of our family still was. So, in order to be closer to them and my two older cousins, my dad took a job opportunity in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. In Kindergarten, I would start to play video games on a PS2 and a Gameboy Advance. I had a very active imagination, and I would spend a lot of time playing with toys and talking to my stuffed animals. I had a dog named Shell that was my favorite 😊

In first grade, my family moved to Mississauga, where I would attend a Catholic school called St. Francis of Assisi. It was there where I made my first real best friend, Everett. **I had my first communion, even though religion seemed kind of boring to me.**

## Video Games

**(1/4 – Video Games)** After visiting my cousins one trip and seeing a friend playing Pokémon, I became obsessed. It was around that time where I completely immersed myself in video game culture, and most of my childhood memories were playing Nintendo games like Pokémon. I was able to make a YouTube account in 2008 where, with parental supervision, I could watch all the video game content I'd like. I discovered a youtuber named Chuggaaconroy who would narrate gameplay so I could "play along" with him. I also really got into the video game Super Smash Bros., where I would play with Everett constantly.

In January 2008, my mom had my brother, Tyler. This is a true story, I did not fully grasp the importance of the birth of my brother until my family got me a Webkinz plush. I never cared about my mom's pregnancy, and only "wanted" a brother because I didn't want a little sister.

## Divorce

### [Family System]

**(2/5 – Dad)** It was around this time where I can recall that my mom and dad's relationship was falling apart. My dad was a busy man, and he wasn't happy. One night, he was out with a longtime business partner when he was approached by two women, who asked for money. My dad and his friend were drunk and started harassing them to the point where his friend was stabbed and killed.

In 2009, he divorced my mom. **Since we were American citizens (my brother has dual citizenship), we could not stay on a marriage/work visa. So, my mom, brother, and I had to move to rural Rochester to be with our family.**

## Moving

**(2/4– Video Games)** Video games and Chuggaaconroy were there for me when my dad wasn't. Gaming was my emotional support. I was heading into 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and I lived with my Grammy and Poppy on my mom's side. **I see this moment in my life as very formative, with**

me becoming a child of divorce and moving from Canadian culture to American. Thankfully, I had already had some friends through my cousins' friends' siblings, and when I'd go to church with the family during the holidays, there were some kids in Sunday School that I had already met.

### **[Early Cultural Messages]**

**(1/5 -Culture)** In Canada, there were a lot of people from different backgrounds, but where I moved, it was predominantly white. I remember there was a lot more diversity in Canadian classrooms, but it didn't register as 'difference' until I moved to rural NY, where almost everyone looked like me.

### **Elementary and Middle School**

**(3/4 – Video Games)** I made friends with 3 people, who would become my best friends up until high school, all through a shared interest in Pokémon and Smash Bros. I loved reading, Hatchet by Gary Paulsen and My Side of the Mountain were personal favorites of mine. **(1/3 - Japan)** But the most formative book of my whole life was Hachiko, a Japanese tale of a dog who would wait for his owner at the train station every day, even after the man passed away. I fell in love with Japan and Japanese culture.

My mom started working as a secretary for a doctor's office, where she continues to work to this day. **(3/5 – Dad)** My dad's business fell apart after not being able to keep up with mobile technology like the iPhone. He still clung on to scam.com, a website with a domain name that's worth a lot of money. It was a web forum where people would discuss notable scams, it would not really see much traffic once web forums started to die off. I saw him on the weekends. When I was in middle school, when it was just me, I had seen my dad being noticeably drunk for the first time. I would later come to learn that he was an alcoholic for most of my life, but that moment had always stood out to me. My dad had a cat named Lloyd who kept me company at that time.

In Middle school, I started to find my identity through musicals and chorus. I had also played soccer. I became a celebrity for my acting and did an after-school club called Odyssey of the Mind with a really good friend. That club let me flex my creativity and imagination muscles where we would write our own skits and design our own sets to perform as a competition. Grades had always been super important to our family, and I was a really smart kid. One marking period, my GPA was over 100 because of extra credit, and I had really loved English class. **(1/4 – Mental Health)** I also started having anger issues, where I would briefly attend counseling.

## High School

**(2/4 – Mental Health)** So now I'm going to fast-forward to my life in high school. I had always said divorce did not really affect me as much as it would have other kids, but I started to become noticeably depressed and unhinged. **[Cultural Expectations]** I had grown up believing emotions made boys weak — a message from my dad that stuck until I saw myself crumbling over time. I started seeing a therapist for anxiety and depression, and, in the summer before I became a sophomore, at age 16, I had my first real relationship with someone who lived 40 minutes away. I failed my drivers test twice due to anxiety (I failed 7 times total) and it really got to me that I couldn't drive to see my girlfriend. I broke up with her and I immediately regretted it. When I tried asking her back in less than a week, she said she never really loved me in the first place. This was another formative moment where I completely went off the deep end. I became suicidal. I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and was put on different medications like antidepressants, but that only elevated the manic side of me. I remember there was one day I thought I absolutely could not go to school because I felt if someone pushed me, I would get into a fight. I was never violent. I had outbursts in soccer and mental breakdowns due to stress from extra-curriculars and grades. I started self-harming and pretending they were cat scratches. I bought everyone in my school's choir Christmas presents my junior year, and that same day I had attempted suicide for the first time. I had a choir friend talk me out of it.

I became fixated on sex, to the point of unhealthy desperation. I started watching anime but never fully committed to letting it consume my life. **I was bi-curious and came out as bi.** I also had a manic episode fueled by incel narrative that was deeply misogynistic. I posted my thoughts onto my finsta and it was very bad. I had been canceled at the school. I was stuck in **[INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION]** — telling myself my value depended on how I performed masculinity. **I attempted to double down on my claim but deep down I knew it wasn't who I was. I was having an identity crisis. This was a clear [cultural collision] between internal identity, social norms, and performative masculinity.**

At the time, around 2016, social justice warriors were everywhere. I hated mansplaining and manspreading and the concept of misandry. I had come to learn that just generalizations in general bothered me. I hated “men are trash” narratives, but I also hated “women should...” narratives. I hated Hillary Clinton and what she represented at the time, how people used her womanhood as a main point for her candidacy for presidency. Identity politics over policy drove me crazy. I thought checking my privilege was dumb and pointless, because I felt I had been marginalized in my school for being mentally unstable.

As a white male, I had a safety net of being presumed competent and 'normal.' But being mentally ill and later coming out as bi disrupted that. **[INTERSECTIONALITY]**

**(2/5-Culture)** One of my friends from elementary school became noticeably racist and misogynistic, which I just accepted. I did not try to change or correct, I just dealt with it. He casually said sexist and racist things. I didn't correct them. Looking back, I wish I had.

**(4/4 - Video Games)** Video games became dull to me, so I started taking up listening to music and fashion as a hobby. I started collecting vinyl records and becoming obsessed with clothing brands. I would write essays just for fun about topics I thought were interesting. I graduated ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in my class, the highest ranked male.

## College

I got accepted to the University at Buffalo as a psychology major, but immediately switched majors to Linguistics to study Japanese. **(2/3 - Japan)** Remember that Hachiko book I talked about earlier? It had always been my dream to go to Japan after reading that, and I really wanted to teach English.

**(3/5 -Culture)** My roommates were from Long Island, my suitemate was from Dubai, and my best friend I made in Buffalo was a Muslim dude from NYC. **[Perspective Shift]** This was a turning point in expanding my world perception. My roommates were extreme stoners, and our dorm room was the spot where everyone would come to smoke. I started doing drugs and engaging in unhealthy hookup culture. This led to more unhealthy behaviors such as not taking my medication. **(3/4 - Mental Health)** Combined with the number of drugs I was doing, I was not in a good place mentally and had to be hospitalized twice due to mental instability.

I switched dorm rooms into a single with accommodations which ended up being the best move for me mentally. I still saw my friends on my dorm floor, but I was able to have the privacy I needed. Too bad in a month in a half, COVID happened. I had to move back to Rochester and start virtual learning. I became a delivery driver at a pizza place I had worked at since I was 16.

I completely fell out of love with learning Japanese. I came to UB to learn Japanese and hopefully study abroad, and COVID screwed me over. **(4/5 - Dad)** It was around this time I started to completely distance myself from my dad. He became incredibly right-wing politically, and it really bothered me. My political views did not align with his and it divided us.

When I came back to in-person learning, I had one year left. I started dating my now fiancé, Ngan, towards the very end of my final semester. [\(4/5 - Culture\)](#) She is Vietnamese, and I've come to learn so much about her culture over time.

[\(5/5 - Dad\)](#) Two weeks before I graduated, my dad passed away. I had come to learn that he had already sold scam.com to a business partner, and he left my family with nothing.

I graduated with a degree in Linguistics a full year early thanks to credits from high school and taking summer and winter classes during quarantine.

## Post-Graduation

After graduating, I became a full-time building substitute teacher. I realized I wanted to become an English teacher, but with my degree in Linguistics, I could only really study ESOL. I tried it out, with 4 classes being virtual, and one being in-person. So, once a week, I would drive up to Buffalo from Rochester (an hour and a half drive) to attend class and to see Ngan. [I won raffle tickets to a concert in Japan, so Ngan and I took a week-long vacation during her spring break. \(3/3 - Japan\)](#) I got to see the Hachiko statue in person, and to practice my language skills. It was a dream come true.

[\(5/5 - Culture\)](#) Almost a year later, I traveled to Vietnam with Ngan to meet her family. I did not know the language at all, but it didn't matter. This was **[cultural humility]** in action -- I was completely open to learning. I immersed myself in the culture and had a lovely time.

Taking 5 classes and working two jobs while in a relationship was incredibly stressful. Coupled with the fact that my grandfather, my Poppy, passed away, I dropped out, not even completing one semester. Discouraged, I had no real direction in life. [\(4/4 - Mental Health\)](#) My supervisor, who was the dean of students at my school, AND my old middle school counselor suggested that I become a school counselor. That really opened my eyes. Saint Bonaventure's online program really worked with my schedule, and the workload was way less than what I had during my semester learning ESOL education at UB.

So, that's my story — or at least the version of it that I see through a cultural lens. [Telling it this way has made me realize how much culture isn't just race or religion — it's everything: family dynamics, mental health, gender roles, where you grow up, how you see the world, and who you become. \[Cultural Competence is a journey, not a checklist\]](#)

[At times, I've been privileged — white, male, U.S. citizen — and at other times, I've felt deeply marginalized, whether through mental illness, identity confusion, or just feeling like](#)

I didn't belong. I've said things I regret, stayed silent when I should've spoken up, and had to re-learn what empathy, accountability, and growth look like.

But through every misstep, every hard lesson, and every meaningful relationship — whether in Canada, New York, Japan, Vietnam, or the classroom — I've learned how important it is to meet people where they are. And more importantly, to listen. **[LIFELONG LEARNER]**

In CE 638, I want to keep challenging myself to see the blind spots in my own story — and to become the kind of counselor who creates space for others to do the same. Because in the end, counseling isn't just about helping people fix themselves — it's about helping them feel seen, valued, and safe in their whole identity.

Thanks for watching.