Learning Guyanese Culture

Name

[Course Number and Section]

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1. Introduction

Culture is an essential part of an individual's life considering that it interferes with their views, values, hopes, loyalties, worries, and fears. Therefore, knowing your culture is important since it makes it easier to learn and understand another culture (Thiederman, 2019). My name is Claudia Antoinette Lorrimer and I am Guyanese born in Georgetown, the capital of Guyana. Guyana is a Caribbean country in South America. At the age of ten on June 24th, 2010, my family migrated to Queens, New York. Moving permanently to New York means I had to learn a new culture. However, my Guyanese culture remained unmoved and up to date it is still inside of me and I will treasure it as long as I live. In this paper culture diversity paper, I discuss my Guyanese culture focusing on both socialization and values.

2. Socialization

2.1 Family Roles in Socialization

According to my Guyanese culture, families are mainly monogamous. Although some families maintain deep relationships within extended families, some families similarly live as nuclear families with the father being the head of the family. Due to our culture, women are submissive to their husbands as men are regarded as the heads and their decisions are supreme. However, due to the increased liberation of women, through education and job opportunities, most families, including my family, have disregarded some of the believes and recognized wives as heads of the families too. However, most husbands still retain the rights to say and responsibilities in the protection and provision of the family. On the other hand, most wives are caretakers of the family with most of their roles being taking care of the house and feeding the

family. According to the Guyanese culture, children are always answerable to their parents and obliged to assist in house chores and running errands (Simpson, 2016). For extended families, grandparents' roles are uniting the family and solving disputes among family members. Uncles help in sharing ideas of developing homesteads and advising younger families.

2.2 Skills taught at home

In Guyanese culture, children are regarded as delicate members of the society. They are taught the culture from the age of five years old. Boys are taught by their fathers and grandfathers while girls are taught by their mothers and grandmothers. Boys are mainly taught leadership skills and how to react bravery to challenging situations. On the other hand, girls are taught how to do house chores perfectly and satisfactory to all members of the families.

2.3 Games played by children

However, besides culture, children are allowed to play cultural games which are passed on from elder children to younger children. Boys mainly play Bun House and Dog and the Bone among themselves while girls play Bun House and Ketcha (similar to Catch) among themselves.

2.3 Influence of Religion on Families

Due to the multi-religious identity of Guyana, religion plays a significant role in guiding families. Every religion dictates the way of lives that do not offend others. Religion including Hindu and Islam supports male supremacy in the family. Being a Christian, religion does not strictly dictate the organization of families. However, it states values and traditions that make a family peaceful. Additionally, religion in the region supports intersexual marriages. Homosexuality is regarded as an immoral behavior that society punishes by extinction from the community. Further, religion in Guyana plays a significant role in championing for tolerance, respect, trust, and love as the main pillars in happy families. Through these teachings, most families are united among Guyanese people. The religion does not only play a role in uniting

families but also help parents in molding the character of their children. Attendance in religious places (mosques, temples, and churches) is regarded as the measure of values and character. Those who do not attend to worship centers are feared in society and sometimes avoided by children. Additionally, all religions in Guyana dictate the appropriate dressing code to be used by their followers. Although Christian men mainly wear trousers, Hindu men and Islamic men wear kanzus. However, all religions agree on women wearing dresses and skirts that cover their knees and shoulders (Taylor, 2001). Further, most festivals are based on religions. Christian, Hindu, and Islamic beliefs have festivals to commemorate some religious leaders and also to mark special occasions that they believe deserve special acknowledgment. Very few secular festivals are held among the Guyanese.

3. Values

3.1 Relationship with other members of the family/ethnic group

Families are regarded as the most respected social organizations among the Guyanese people. Personal and social values are nurtured at the family level. To enable smooth relationships between members of the family, children are taught core values which they grow to adulthood. Values are tailored according to the acceptable norms in the society, culture and religious teachings. Among the indigenous Guyanese, respect of a woman is measured on the basis of how submissive the woman is to her husband. Industrious measures of women were based on how early they wake up to tend to the family. On the other hand, the respect of a man was measured on how they could organize their families and command submission from wife and children. However, with the influence of religion and education, families have changed the values they teach their members. Families have accepted gender equality which they teach their members. Family members are taught values that are acceptable to other parts of the world.

However, to ensure that the cultural routes are not completely forgotten, parents and grandparents pass family and society values to their children through stories, games, songs, and proverbs. These methods of teaching values are not only taught in family levels but also in religious places and schools.

However, there still exist conflicts among family members or members of the larger community in Guyana. Traditionally, conflicts were solved as per cultural beliefs. Wrongdoers would be punished harshly, either by expulsion or corporal punishment. However, society has adopted better means of conflict solutions. These methods include diplomacy in the family level, use of religious leaders, and use of legal action. However, at the family level, family elders are mostly consulted in case of interpersonal disagreements between members of the family.

3.2 Dependency on others
Living an independent life away from family and the community is highly discouraged among Guyanese people. Among the Guyanese people, individuals are taught love and unity among themselves. Unity is championed in the family level and at the community level. According to the indigenous cultural beliefs, most activities were carried in groups. Children played together as grown-ups worked together. However, with the spread of education among the community members, professionalism emerged. People started working on their own and only reunited with the family in the evenings or during holidays. However, the culture of the Guyanese people still regards individualism as a betrayal of society. Family members are urged to unite in solving some social problems and in cultural activities such as marriages. However, those who live away from Guyana only unite at the nuclear family level and unite with other Guyanese people during festivals (Glasgow, 2012).

3.3 The responsibility of the grown adults towards parents

The form of elder care varies significantly among cultures. Even within the same country, regional differences might exist with respect to how adults take care of their aging parents. In Guyana, grown-up adults should be in the front line of taking care of their parents. According to a 2011 article by Guyana Times, it is totally unforgivable for a grown adult to sit down at a loaded table without thinking about that the mother who sustained him in her belly, breastfed him or her, and who was always there at the time of need is going hungry (Guyana Times, 2017). On realizing that the parent is no longer in a position to take self care, a grown adult should step in and assist in all means. The assistance should be paying bills, providing food, and providing access to quality health care. Before the community and the government steps in, it is the responsibility of a grown adult to take care of the parents.

3.4 Inter-racial and Inter-cultural friendships and marriages

In Guyana, people of multiracial heritage are categorized as 'mixed.' The demographic statistics of Guyanese shows that people of 'mixed' ethnicity makes up 7-12% of the entire population of Guyana (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2004). This is a clear indication that there have been cases of interracial marriages among the Guyanese people. However, 'mixed' people have faced hostility especially due to the fact that they cannot identify themselves as either Afro- or Indo- Guyanese people. Shibaba (1998) wrote a book on Cross-Cultural Marriage and in one of the chapters "Crossing Racialized Boundaries: Intermarriage between 'Africans' and 'Indians' in Contemporary Guyana" Shibaba asserts that in Guyana, attitudes about marriage are based on long-standing ideas that people should marry from their own race, ethnic group, and religion and that interracial marriage and intercultural marriage especially between Afro and Indo-Guyanese is seen as controversial. Typically, an Afro-Guyanese woman married to an Indo-Guyanese man is likely to experience difficulties

integrating into her Indo-Guyanese in-laws. However, an Indo-Guyanese woman married to an Afro-Guyanese man is likely to be welcomed by her Afro-Guyanese in-laws. To conclude, Indians in Guyana are more likely to reject interracial marriage arguing that it can result in disruption of their religious and cultural traditions. On the other hand, Afro-Guyanese people are open to interracial marriage (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2004).

3.5 Head of the family

In Guyana, fathers are crucial to strong family units and they hold the highest power in the family. In a family where the father is present, the father is mandated to shape the expectations of the children. It is the role of the father to protect the mother and the children and also provide for their needs. The father is expected to improve the quality of life of the entire family. If the father figure is missing, the mother steps up to replace the father. In Guyana, parental responsibility has always been promoted through strengthening the role of the father and at the same time encouraging shared parenting between both parents (Guyana Times, 2012) Parents must provide both spiritual and material welfare of their kids. They should love their kids in a dependable way and provide their healthy development. Parents must inspire their children by their own praiseworthy life and should never disregard to address their deficiencies (Guyana Chronicle, 2015).

Guyanese children are expected to obey their parents and to always seek permission from either the mother of the father before engaging in serious matters. For instance, before going out to play with other kids, a Guyanese child must seek permission from the father of the mother. Children must love their parents and should never do whatever will offend them. They should regard them, pay them due respect, talk and act with legitimate reverence, acknowledge their redresses promptly, consult them and look for their recommendation in regards to critical

choices. They must be appreciative to their parents, please and support them, and bolster them in need. They should be caring, faithful and honest to them (Guyana Chronicle, 2015).

3.6 An authoritarian relationship between children and parent

In Guyana, authoritarian parenting remains to be the choice for many parents. Typically, parents who adopt authoritarian practices believe that children should obey the rules of the house without exception. Any time a child questions an authoritarian parent the all-time saying 'Because I said so' will mostly come out of their mouth. In an authoritarian relationship between the child and the parent, the parent cares less about negotiating and the focus is on the child's obedience. This kind of relationship does not consider a child's opinion and whenever there is a challenge or an obstacle, the parent will decide and make a rule if need be and enforce the consequences. An authoritarian parent believes in punishment any time the child does wrong. Although they might become more aggressive or have low self-esteem, children brought up by authoritarian parents tend to follow rules. According to Hopkinson and Johnson (2017), authoritarian parents use beatings, shouting, and restrictions as a way of disciplining their children.

3.7 Roles of family members

In the indigenous Guyanese cultures, men and women had distinct roles in society. It would be disrespectful if a man was found doing activities that were feminized. Similarly, women would not do activities that were masculinized. Men were entitled to all economic activities including tending to farms and in trade. Therefore, men were the sole providers for their families. On the other hand, the women were obliged to do all domestic activities and take care of the homestead. Men were also expected to provide security to not only their families but also to the larger community. Whenever the wife was unable to tend to the family may be due to illness or pregnancy, other women in the homestead would offer help. However, due to the

adoption of education among Guyanese people, the division of activities on gender was significantly minimized. Women can be heads of families. They can also do economic activities, which was a masculine activity. However, the role of tending to other family members still remained eked among the Guyanese people although men can now help in household chores. Children were obliged to take commands from their parents. Boys could receive directions from their fathers and girls from their mothers. However, there is no such distinction currently as boys and girls can all do similar activities (Taylor, 2001).

3.8 Responsibilities of the family members

In most Guyanese homes, the mother is the foundation. She provides a home for her husband and for her children. A mother provides a safe and secure environment in which to raise her children. Typically, a mother fulfills the primary roles of raising kids. The typical mother duties include feeding, bathing, nurturing, and loving. For children, mothers are everything and their relationship is built on unconditional love and care (Pope, 2011).

On the other hand, fathers are supposed to provide for the needs of the family. For instance, it is the role of the father to pay for the bills and to provide food, shelter, clothing, health, and education to the family. A father is responsible for nurturing his child's intellectual, physical, emotional, spiritual, and social development. Fathers teach through play, models, and coaches.

In Guyana, being the eldest child in a family comes with responsibilities. Being the eldest daughter or eldest son requires one to be patient with younger siblings. When parents are away, it is the responsibility of the eldest child to take care of their siblings. Eldest children should be role models for their siblings (Mikeylamorous, 2016).

4. Value Conflict
4.1 The conflict between traditional cultural values and the need to deal with life problems

Typically, the different cultural value dimensions can explain the reasons for differences in individual preferences for conflict handling styles when it comes to dealing with modern life problems. For instance, in Guyana, racism has for long been a life problem. The two main cultures are Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese. However, there is a conflict between traditional cultural values and the way forward to dealing with racism as a life problem. According to Shibaba (1998), attitudes about marriage are based on long-standing ideas that people should marry from their own race, ethnic group, and religion, and that interracial marriage and intercultural marriages especially between Afro and Indo-Guyanese are considered controversial.

5. Conclusion

Awareness of own culture is important and plays a crucial part in knowing and understanding a second culture. Being born in Guyana and living in America is the perfect example of learning cultural diversity whereby I have to learn my own culture before learning a foreign culture. Putting emphasis on socialization and values, this paper takes us deep into the Guyanese culture and way of life. Notably, just like in any other culture, religion plays a significant role in guiding families. The father is the head of the family but fatherly roles are taken up by mothers where the fathers are missing. However, shared parenting between mother and father is recommended where possible. Another important aspect of this paper is on inter-racial and inter-cultural marriages. Although people are inter-marrying on a high rate, the long-standing ideas of people marrying from their own culture and group are still in most people's

minds. This creates a conflict between the traditional cultural values and the need to deal with

racism as a life problem in Guyana.

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