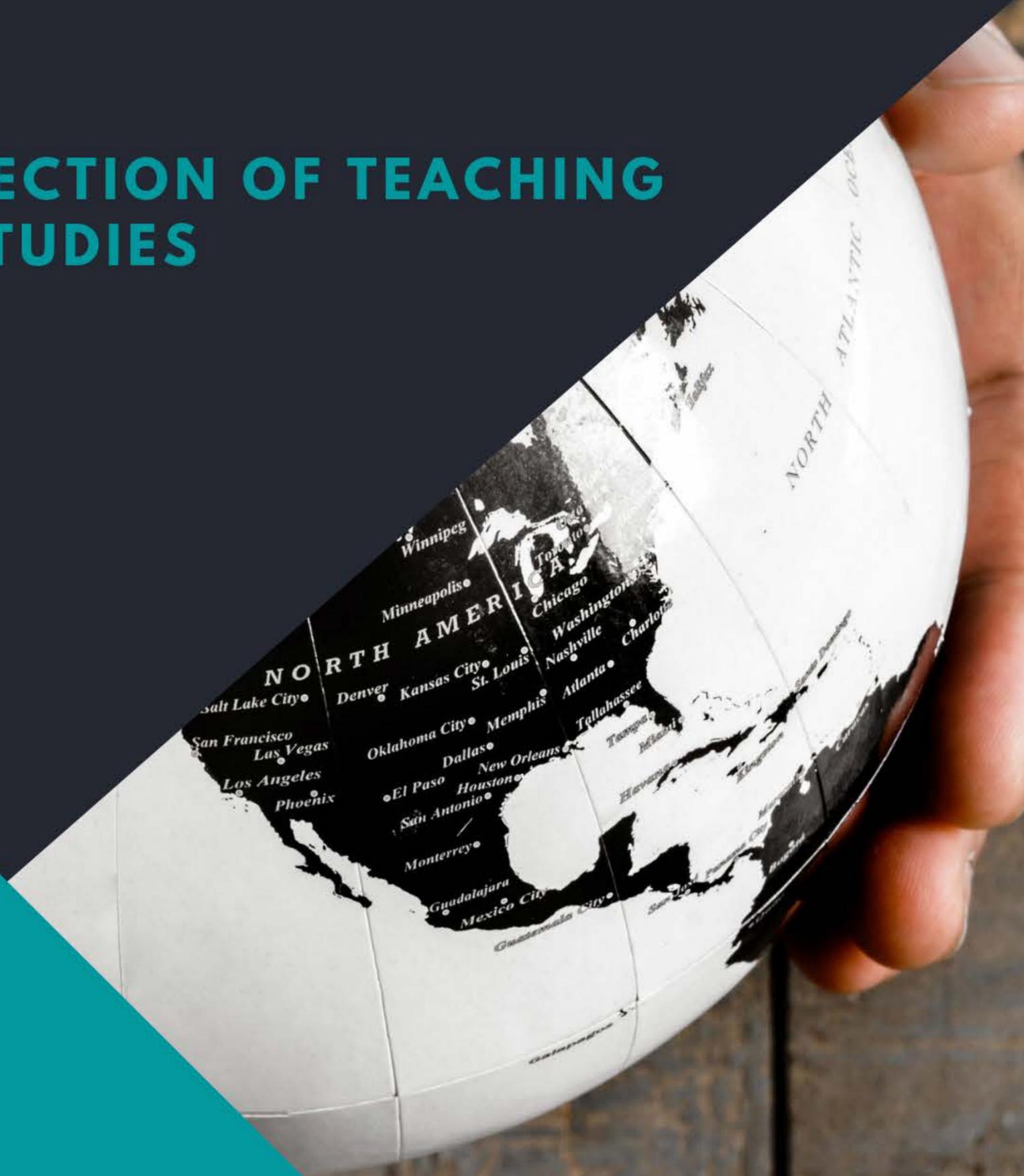


CASE STUDIES IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

A COLLECTION OF TEACHING
CASE STUDIES



Volume 1, Issue 1



Visibly Invisible: Implicit bias and microaggressions in the classroom

Keywords

implicit bias; microaggressions; higher education; diversity; brave space; racial battle fatigue

Setting

This scenario takes place mid-semester of an introductory graduate class on intercultural communication. The professor and the majority of the students in the class are White. Christine is the only Black student in the class.

Case

Christine is halfway through her first semester of graduate school. She entered the program full of excitement, but her enthusiasm is waning. Christine has experienced several uncomfortable moments in the classroom and when working in small groups. She notices her perspective and the ideas she contributes are often ignored. At first, Christine felt confused, worried she might be misunderstanding her classmates or overreacting. Given these doubts, Christine tried to convince herself she was being overly sensitive. However, two months into the semester, she sees a pattern of small slights. At times, she feels invisible.

Christine is the American-born daughter of Nigerian immigrants who grew up in Baltimore. She is proud of her cross-cultural upbringing and had the opportunity to spend a year attending high school in Nigeria, a life-changing experience that opened her eyes to many different perspectives. After high school, she went to a historically Black university and loved her time there.

Christine was drawn to her current graduate program in Washington, DC because it would enhance her intercultural competency, as she expected other students in the program to be just as curious, open to new ideas, and passionate about understanding other cultures. In practice, however, Christine believes her classmates are unaware of the assumptions and biases they bring to discussions and team projects. Yet, Christine realizes she has never needed to fight so hard to have her voice heard. It now dawns on her that this is her first educational experience in a predominantly White institution (PWI).

In today's class, the professor gives the students a challenge to solve in groups. Each group will need to make a decision at the end of a series of 5-minute rounds. In giving the activity instructions, the professor says, "Come back ready to explain your thinking as well as your group's decision-making process."

Christine lands in a breakout group with three White students, Brad, Amber, and Danielle, as well as Elaine, an international student from Lebanon. Brad, a military veteran, immediately takes the lead. He reads the scenario and tells the group his thoughts. Christine decides to wait to hear what everyone else has to say before contributing. Having been in a group with Brad and Amber before, she notices he tends to dominate conversations and Amber is also quite talkative. Christine wants to make sure she has a chance to collect her thoughts before



speaking. While she does not think of herself as a shy person, she feels self-conscious about being the only Black student in the group.

The conversation among Christine's four teammates converges on agreement. Christine finally speaks up. She disagrees with the logic behind the group's proposal and puts forward a counterargument. In fact, she believes her perspective as a Black woman allows her to see a flaw in the current solution. Brad passes over Christine's idea, saying, "Our five minutes are up, and we need to submit an answer. The rest of the group agrees, so we are going to stick with this."

The team begins deliberating in round two and a similar dynamic unfolds, with Brad driving the conversation, Amber adding in her thoughts frequently, and the other two women in the group making an affirming comment now and then. Christine decides to speak up sooner. "Have you considered..." – but before she can get her thought out, someone else speaks over her. She tries again, "I see things differently, I think we should..." – again Christine is interrupted. She persists, but when Christine is finally able to contribute her thought, Brad makes a sarcastic comment and moves on. Christine's face gets hot, her heart starts beating faster. Time is up for round two.

In round three, Christine is too worked up to actively participate. Worried she will sound angry and defensive, she holds back. But her eyes widen when she hears Danielle chime in with a comment, not backed by research or grounded in a particular logic, saying almost exactly what Christine tried to communicate to the group in round two! The other three nod in agreement. It seems the message got through this time, now that it came from someone else. The clock runs down and the four students submit an answer they agree on. No one checks to see if Christine agrees. All she can think about is how ready she is for this to end, these 15-minutes felt like an eternity.

Back in the main classroom, the professor invites a representative from each group to present their solution and elaborate on their process. For the first few minutes, Christine is too caught up in what happened to pay attention. Her mind plays back the interactions in the breakout group again. Did the other students not see how they were ignoring her input? Should she say something? While the activity centered on a made-up scenario, Christine can't help but feel that the students acted in a way that demonstrated bias. Shouldn't the students be learning to question their thinking and taught to appreciate differing perspectives given that this course is on intercultural communication?

Her group is called on last and Christine tunes back in. She listens with increasing frustration as Elaine speaks on behalf of their group. Christine's counterarguments are not mentioned. After Elaine presents the "group's solution," the professor signals it is time to move on to the final section of the class agenda.

Christine raises her hand, shaking with anxiety and annoyance. "I need to say something." An uncomfortable silence falls over the class. Brad leans back in his chair and crosses his arms. "I disagreed with my group's decision." Christine tries to keep a smile on her face, but her voice starts to quiver with emotion. She expresses her frustration at not being heard in her group or having her ideas taken seriously. While describing the details of the interactions in the breakout group, Christine does not explicitly say she thinks racial bias contributed to the group dynamic. Clearly taken aback by the intensity of emotion, Amber jumps in. "I didn't even realize you thought we were ignoring you. I'm sorry you felt that way. Why didn't you just speak up?" Having



let both sides express their version of events, the professor brings the discussion to an abrupt close because class time is up.

Christine is unsure what to do. Was it a mistake to speak up? Will it change the way her classmates interact with her in the future? Tonight's class was emotionally exhausting. Christine realizes she feels guarded in class, cautious about how she expresses herself, and anxious about how others perceive her. It is adding stress to her graduate school experience and making her question if she should consider transferring to another school.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- How does culture influence the intergroup dynamics of the breakout group?
- What beliefs, values, and thought patterns of the students might influence the decision-making process?
- What are some of the characteristics that might be attributed to a predominately White educational institution?
- How do the students' behaviors demonstrate implicit bias and microaggressions? What other examples of microaggressions have you witnessed in classroom settings?
- How do our personal identities, ascribed or imposed, influence interpersonal communication exchanges?
- How might Christine's sense of being invisible impact her learning? How might the term "racial battle fatigue" apply here?
- What are the potential consequences of Christine's decision to speak up? What could be the repercussions of staying silent?
- Although Christine felt that racial bias was at play, she didn't specifically mention it. Why might she have chosen to filter, or simplify, her thoughts during this follow up class discussion?
- What is your reaction to Amber's response to Christine?
- Who bears the burden of responsibility in this scenario? Is it Christine, the professor, or the other students in class?
- What can the professor do to facilitate a meaningful discussion following this classroom incident? What steps can the professor take to ensure the classroom is a "brave space," one in which the students recognize the opportunities to learn from conflict and feel able to rise to the challenge of engaging in genuine dialogue about issues of race and social justice?



Additional Resources

Additional recommended resources to explore the central themes in this case are available.

- Sue, Derald Wing *Race Talk and the Conspiracy of Silence: Understanding and Facilitating Difficult Dialogues on Race*
- Oluo, Ijeoma. *So You Want to Talk About Race*
- Greenwald, Anthony and Banaji, Mahzarin R.. *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*
- Phillips, Katherine. “[How Diversity Makes Us Smarter](#)” in *Scientific American*
- Franklin, Jeremy. “[Racial Microaggressions, Racial Battle Fatigue, and Racism-Related Stress in Higher Education](#)” in the NYU Journal of Student Affairs
- Arao, Brian and Clemens, Kristi. “[From Safe Space to Brave Space](#)” in *The Art of Effective Facilitation*

Corresponding Authors

Zielinski, Alessandra, Executive Coach and Consultant, ACZ Consulting, LLC (Adjunct Instructor at American University), Austin, Texas, United States. Email: alessandra@aczconsultingllc.com

Lasan, Christine, Investigator and Administrator, Maryland Department of Health, Baltimore, Maryland, United States. Email: cl2849a@student.american.edu



Bow and Take Off Your Hat: The value of respect

Keywords

prejudice; religion; business; discrimination; stereotypes; intersectionality; ethnicity

Context

The context for this case is an international business meeting featuring a royal envoy from an Eastern European country to the United States.

Case

Elijah is a quiet and thoughtful person who tends to think very deeply and thoroughly about his decisions. He is meticulous and neat, often standing out for his tidy appearance and organizational skills. Elijah loves getting to know people on a deeper level, but can be shy when first meeting new people.

Elijah's somewhat introverted personality stems from a deep religious background, growing up as part of an isolated and private Orthodox Jewish community in the United States. His parents, Moroccan immigrants who were able to find a degree of security and belonging as part of the religious community, were reluctant to allow their only son to stray too far from home. However, Elijah eventually put himself out of his comfort zone to pursue a four-year degree in finance at an accredited American college.

After arriving on campus, Elijah began to feel alone and targeted as a dark-skinned religious Jew on a predominantly secular, white, Christian campus. He found solace in quietly displaying his identity every day by wearing two ancient and traditional Jewish religious garments that can be seen by anyone upon first glance- the *kippah*, a skullcap that represents eternal reverence to a higher power and the *tzitzit*, a fringed undergarment which serves as a reminder to spread love and goodwill through good deeds every day. As a result, Elijah receives stares and hurtful, racist remarks for his appearance. He also faced many stereotypical anti-Semitic jeers in his business and finance classes. Regardless, Elijah keeps his head up and wears these garments daily.

At Middle East and North African cultural clubs, he feels slightly more at home at first, but then is berated with questions about his religious identity. At religious services and events, he stands out and notices that people seem to be afraid of him.

Eventually, Elijah's excellent work ethic and organizational skills distinguish him in his upperclassman courses and he graduates near the top of his class. When accepted to a prestigious internship program during his senior year, Elijah trains in intercultural business practices and diversity along with fellow interns. There, he meets an extremely diverse group of individuals for the first time and appreciates the opportunity to hear the experiences of others who have gone through discriminatory and uncomfortable episodes similar to himself. Elijah learns how to better explain his complex identity to others and remains extremely proud of his parents for working hard to overcome obstacles while staying true to who they are. His



perception of the world expands greatly as he learns how to interact with cultures and individuals that he has not encountered before. Elijah also feels understood and accepted for the first time since leaving his community and family. At the end of the internship program, Elijah becomes the first in his family to obtain his undergraduate degree. Due to a connection he made during his time interning, a large company hires Elijah to work developing the international interests of the company.

Elijah is happy to be a part of a professional organization and feels he is finally being judged based on the quality of his character and work ethic, rather than stereotypes and confused assumptions. To better understand how to foster communications with foreign business partners, respect the national and organizational cultures of his future partners, and adapt to their customs as a display of goodwill, Elijah participates in intercultural training. Fortunately, his work pays off and he is able to send money back to his parents who are struggling to work into their old age. This job becomes even more important to Elijah and his family, and he devotes himself to the company through long hours and hard work.

On Fridays, Elijah takes off work three hours earlier than his coworkers to honor the religious period of “Sabbath” or *Shabbat* in the traditional ways. Although he is concerned this will look bad to his superiors and peers, Elijah makes sure to work late the rest of the week to make up for lost time. Even though they think it is strange, Elijah’s superiors approve of this schedule and the workplace continues to be an efficient and friendly environment.

After a few months at his job, Elijah assists a team of upper-level associates in signing a lucrative deal with an Eastern European Duke—the largest sale of the last five years. There is much celebration around the office, especially when the company announces the Duke would be coming to visit the team that had worked on the deal. Weeks go by quickly and soon Elijah finds himself walking into the office on the morning of the Duke’s visit. He is nervous for a moment of what the Duke will think of him and the traditional Jewish clothing he wears. His grandparents fled the Duke’s country in World War II to escape persecution and he had heard that anti-Semitism was rising again in the area over the past several years. With a deep breath, Elijah sat down for a debriefing on the big meeting.

The team leader shared the agenda and goals of the meeting with Elijah and his senior colleagues, ending with an important statement on the cultural traditions and norms of the Duke’s homeland. Elijah froze and suddenly became very uncomfortable, as the team leader mentioned everyone was expected to show respect to the Duke as he walks into the meeting room by taking off any hats they might be wearing and bowing. Elijah’s discomfort arose out of a conflict with his core religious principles, which teach that a member of his faith may never bow or kneel before any mortal man, rather reserving this act of reverence for only the worship of God himself, and that the *kippah* and other garments he was wearing should not be removed in public.

Before he is able to make a decision, the Duke enters the room. Many thoughts rush through Elijah’s head as he looks around the long table and sees his colleagues and superiors each remove their caps or dress hats and one-by-one bow deeply to the Duke. As the process makes it around the table to Elijah, he comes to an impasse. If he participates in the customary show of respect and honor, then he will be in good standings with his superiors, yet violate the traditions that he has considered such a monumental part of himself up to this point. He needs this job to



financially support his parents and he has ambitions within the company. Elijah finds himself being stared at as his turn to bow and remove his *kippah* approaches.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- How would you describe Elijah's dilemma in this situation?
- How might Elijah's religious practices influence his everyday decisions?
- How might the outcome of this situation affect Elijah's standing in his company?
- Could Elijah show respect while maintaining his authenticity? If so, how?
- Could better communication have helped the situation? If so, in what way?
- How might Elijah's decision impact the deal with the Duke?
- How could Elijah's prior experiences with racism and anti-Semitism impact this situation?

Additional Resources

Additional recommended resources to explore the central themes in this case are available.

- Fukayama, Frances, *Identity: Contemporary Identity Politics and the Struggle for Recognition*
- *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Corrected ed., Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1996.
- Gottreich, Emily Benichou, *Jewish Morocco: A History from Pre-Islamic to Postcolonial Times*
- Silverman, Eric, *A Cultural History of Jewish Dress*
- Brettschneider, Marla, *Jewish Feminism and Intersectionality*

Corresponding Author

Levine, Jacob, American University, Washington DC, District of Columbia, United States. Email: jl2361a@student.american.edu



“That’s Not a Real Chinese Name”: Tying names to personal identity and culture

Keywords

adoptee; name; personal identity; belonging; Mandarin-Chinese

Context

To understand the context in this case, some understanding of the Mandarin-Chinese language is necessary. Ju is an adoptee and she did not have a Chinese surname. Rather, the orphanage used the name of the city she was born in, Yang Chun (阳春) leading to her surname becoming Yáng (阳), as opposed to the very common Chinese surname Yáng (杨).

Case

Ju is a college freshman majoring in International Studies with a minor in Mandarin-Chinese. She grew up in a small rural town with little racial or cultural diversity but explored her own Chinese American identity independently. Ju studied Mandarin-Chinese for over four years through online classes and visited China multiple times on personal trips, but was not confident in her speaking or listening abilities. Additionally, being a Chinese adoptee, Ju was exposed to some Chinese culture as a young child through youth camps and meeting other Chinese Americans but she had no prolonged exposure to or interaction with Chinese culture.

Upon entering college, Ju was ecstatic to be immersed in diverse cultures, languages, thoughts, and opportunities. In addition to enrolling in the college’s Mandarin-Chinese program, she joined many organizations on campus, one being the Asian Student Union. Through these experiences, Ju felt more connected to her Asian American identity.

Throughout the first few months of college, Ju had great experiences with a diverse range of students with different backgrounds. She was able to connect with members of the Asian Student Union, meet with international students, and explore a plethora of restaurants serving various Asian cuisines throughout the city. These experiences made her feel very validated and included, despite not growing up in an Asian household or with Asian culture. Halfway through the semester, Ju was invited to a multicultural event by a friend. Giddy to attend, Ju put on her best formal wear and hopped into the Uber.

During the event, food from a variety of cultures was served, from seafood to shaved ice and colorful rice. There were also tables set up along the corners of the venue with different activities, including calligraphy and educational presentations. At the calligraphy station, a



Chinese woman was painting people's names in Chinese characters upon request, so Ju stepped up asking for her Chinese name to be painted. Ju explained the characters used to write her surname, Yáng (阳), the name given to Ju by her orphanage, then waited with excitement to see them appear in beautiful brush strokes. But, the calligrapher paused and exclaimed "That's not a Chinese name. Do you mean Yáng (杨)?" As Ju continued to insist on using her given name, the calligrapher went silent and wrote the incorrect Yáng (杨). Understandably, the calligrapher was confused and believed that Ju was referring to the wrong character, as meeting an adoptee with this name was not common.

This interaction was extremely distressing to Ju. She felt greatly invalidated, especially after yearning to feel accepted and validated by the Asian American community for so long. But, she also did not want to disrespect the calligrapher. And while Ju was well aware that Yáng (阳) was not a Chinese surname, it was the name her name which held deep meaning and a sense of personal connection to the little knowledge she had about her birth country. In previous instances, Ju was told that her name "sounded Japanese" or was "written with strange characters," so while this encounter was not isolated nor malicious, it was another reminder that she will always be viewed as an outsider by her birth culture and community.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- How is personal identity tied to one's name?
- How does language affect one's perception of personal identity?
- Is it possible for Ju to validate her own identity while also respecting the calligrapher? If so, how?
- What is an appropriate way to ask someone about the history or meaning of their name?
- How can one be more inclusive of different names and identities?

Additional Resources

Additional recommended resources to explore the central themes in this case are available.



- [Getting it right; why pronouncing names correctly matters - Ted Talk](#)
- [Chinese orphanages and children's names - Pinyin News](#)
- [How Do Chinese Names Work?](#)
- [Can You Say My Name? On Names, Culture & Identity](#)
- [Cultural and Ethnic Influences on Baby Names](#)

Corresponding Author

Tomko, Mei, American University, Washington, DC, USA, Email: mt3393a@student.american.edu



Quick or Quality Work: Building trust

Keywords

military culture; high-context; low-context; language, trust, norms

Context

The context for this case unfolds at the individual and organizational levels between individuals from the United States Navy and individuals from a country in the Middle East. The USS Lastship is deployed to the Persian Gulf and is in port for routine repairs and to load supplies. A foreign contracting company will be conducting the repairs, but all foreign workers must be escorted by a US sailor while on board. John is a sailor on board who comes from a small town in the Midwest. He has been in the Navy for three years and will be escorting a group of foreign workers on board the ship.

Case

John is a sailor aboard the USS Lastship and is known for being a hard worker. He has been on board for a year and gained the trust of his peers and superiors alike. He has earned a reputation for being honest and trustworthy with everyone on board the ship.

John is on his second deployment to the Middle East, but things are different this time. John has been promoted and now has much more responsibility and experience. It has been a long time since John was a “new guy” and he knows the Navy’s rules and regulations well. After a month and a half at sea, the USS Lastship is pulling into port for some routine maintenance.

John's superiors told him that he would be supervising some foreign workers while they were on board. Because the foreign contractors were accessing a secure space, regulations required that a crew member escort them. John's superiors told him to ensure that the contractors completed the work correctly and quickly, adding that the repairs must be completed within five hours. John had not supervised foreign workers before and asked what he should expect. His superior informed him that the contractors probably wouldn't speak English, and if given the opportunity, will be lazy. The supervisor then told John not to be friendly and reiterated that he needed to make sure the foreign contractors completed their work and disembark within five hours.

John was bothered because his supervisor seemed to be demeaning the locals and insinuated that John could not trust the contractors to do their work well because they were not Americans. Although he was uncomfortable with his supervisor's comments, he was in no position to question what was said.

As John waited for the foreign contractors to arrive, he thought about how he would address them and how he might interact with them. John had been to several countries and knew that cultures can be significantly different, and that it is alright to acknowledge that. He knew that the United States had a fast-paced and direct way of completing work and that many other countries, like the one he was in now, typically worked in a slower, more relaxed manner. Although John disagreed with what his supervisor said, he was still worried about making sure the work got done.



As the contractors arrived, John smiled and happily greeted four Middle Eastern men and their manager. The foreign manager spoke broken English and the contractors did not speak English at all. After the initial greeting, the foreign manager motioned for contractors to go with John, where he led the men to the area to conduct repairs. They immediately started working. As John sat silently watching the contractors, he thought about how wrong his superior had been. At this point, John thought the repairs would get done without a problem.

After about 20 minutes, the contractors had prepared the workspace and unpacked their tools, but then asked John for permission to take a break. John was conflicted because the contractors had only just started working and John did not truly have the authority to authorize them to work or take a break. Technically, John was only there as an escort and to verify that the repairs were completed correctly. John replied that a break would be great and led them to the cafeteria where the contractors could sit.

As soon as the contractors got to the cafeteria, they poured cups of coffee, took out food, and started talking to the other workers who were on a break as well. John began to worry that his superiors were right and feared he would be taken advantage of now because he had so easily led them to the break room. John understood that being straightforward and to the point about getting work done was an American trait and that in this country, things moved at a slower pace. Regardless, John's superiors told him to ensure that the contractors complete the repairs within five hours. John was unsure how to approach the situation because the contractors had only done a small amount of work since starting. To make things more complicated, John noticed that the manager also seemed to be enjoying the conversation with the contractors.

John seemed to be at a point where he needed to either interrupt the contractors and ask them to continue making repairs or trust that they understood the job well enough to complete it on time without being told to do so. John's gut told him just to let the contractors complete the job at their own pace because they knew what they were doing. However, he was also worried about being reprimanded by his superiors for allowing the foreign contractors to take such a long break.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- Do you feel trust was established between John and the contractors?
- If John attempted to communicate with the contractors despite the language barrier, do you think that would have changed the interpersonal dynamics?
- What could the potential consequences be if John decided to interrupt the contractors' break?
- Should John confront his superiors about labeling people as lazy?
- How do the ideas of power and authority influence your perception of this case?
- How culture influence the cadence of work?



Additional Resources

Additional recommended resources to explore the central themes, in this case, are available.

- Hickey, K. (2017, November 21). [The Smart Way to Disagree at Work](#). Wavelength.
- Maclachlan, M. (2010, February 12). [Cross-Cultural Communication Styles: High and Low Context](#). Communicaid.
- McGuire, N. (2018, July 24). [9 Steps to Overcoming Language Barriers in the Workplace](#). Argo Translation.
- [Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence US Army Training and Doctrine Command](#). (2006).
- Partners for Recovery, & Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2010). [Understanding the Military: The Institution, the Culture and the People](#).

Corresponding Author

Schreiner, Benjamin, American University, School of International Studies, Washington, DC, United States. Email: bs4809a@student.american.edu



Not My Language: Language restriction in the classroom

Keywords

language; education; national identity; racial/ethnic identity; power dynamics

Context

This case takes place at a high school in California. The high school has a population of just over a thousand students. The school's racial composition is 60% Asian, 27% White, 10% Hispanic, 1% African American, with 1% identifying as two or more races and 1% not identifying. The school has a sizable foreign student population and many classes have one more student from China, who came to the United States recently for educational purposes and sometimes struggle to communicate in English. The school is located in the suburbs in an upper middle-class neighborhood.

Case

Cai is a Chinese student who came from China to attend high school in America. Cai quickly became friends with another Chinese student, who he often spoke with in Mandarin about their shared experiences of being new to America and unfamiliar to the English language. Cai and his friend often spoke to each other in class in Mandarin and most teachers did not have a problem with it. Coming to America from China was a difficult transition for Cai and many other Chinese students like him. Throughout middle and into high school, Cai and his fellow Chinese friends formed a tight-knit social group. Speaking Mandarin during class and breaks was one way they could keep in touch with their Chinese identity. For the most part, their teachers did not have a problem with it, even though there was technically a rule against speaking anything but English in the classroom.

However, one year they had a class where the teacher was not okay with students using a language other than English in the classroom. In the beginning, Cai and his friend disregarded the rule, expecting it to not be enforced or for the teacher to not care. Yet, this teacher did find their use of Mandarin in the classroom problematic. After repeated warnings about not speaking Mandarin in the classroom, they were told there would be serious consequences if they did not stop. Cai and his friends stopped speaking in Mandarin during class and from that point on spoke only English in class.

It was difficult for Cai and his friend to adapt to the classroom rules against foreign languages. Being forced to use English did not make him assimilate more easily into the class and created a feeling of hostility towards the teacher for not accommodating him. The rule impacted his learning in the classroom as well, as Cai and his friends could no longer help each other understand the material by explaining it to one another in Mandarin. Instead they would be forced to use a language they are unfamiliar with or figure it out on their own. However, the teacher was satisfied with the decision because they could understand what was being said in the classroom, restoring a feeling of control.



Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What cross-cultural instructional strategies could the teacher use to accommodate foreign students in the classroom?
- Does being forced to use a language you are not proficient in erase part of one's identity?
- Is the teacher justified in asking students to use English at all times in the classroom?
- What impacts does forcing students to use an unfamiliar language have on their education or learning, if any?
- How do the power dynamics between students and teachers influence situations in which there are language conflicts in the classroom?

Additional Resources

Additional recommended resources to explore the central themes in this case are available.

- Cunningham, Clare. "[Why Teachers Shouldn't Be Afraid of Other Languages Being Spoken in the Classroom.](#)" *The Conversation*, 8 July 2020.
- Farnsworth, B. (2018, June/July). "[Enhancing the Quality of the International Student Experience.](#)"
- Textor, C. (2019, November). "[Number of college and university students from China in the United States from academic year 2008/09 to 2018/19.](#)"
- Wang, T. (2020, July 17). "[Chinese students who once set their sights on US schools now weigh other options.](#)"

Corresponding Author

Dingman, Spencer, American University, Washington DC, USA. Email: sd7174a@student.american.edu



A Choice to Make?: Tokenism and the complex navigation of multicultural identities

Keywords

multicultural identity; intersectionality; passing; personal identity; cultural brokers; tokenism; diasporic history

Context

Children experience different psychological stages of identity development depending on where their identity falls in the social hegemony. For those who identify with majority or minority cultures, their development follows specific steps; embracing the dominant culture, conforming to a divisive, hierarchical status quo, and finally resisting and redefining oneself in spite of those norms. It's a process of realization that leads to a strong sense of identity, both as an individual and as part of a larger group.

For multicultural people, whose identities encompass two or more cultures, the process is cyclical and varies depending on the social situation. There is an awareness of differences between themselves and both groups, re-emphasized by varying perspectives, traditions, and experiences. As their peers grow into their identities, multicultural children commonly feel pressured to pick one identity over the other, an especially difficult process if they feel disconnected from both groups. Multicultural individuals are more likely to become cultural brokers, whether voluntarily or not, because they theoretically fill disconnects between the cultures which can reduce conflict.

Case

Eva is a first year college student enrolled in a living-learning community at her university. The program is rooted in community service and encourages students to examine the intersectionality of their identities. Multiple classes are spent assessing privileges and underlying biases that may affect their ability to work with local communities.

Eva is a multicultural person, with both white and Mexican-American identities. Growing up with both identities was not complex until her elementary classmates started forming their own identities. There was unspoken pressure to pick one, which most multicultural kids feel and internalize. Eva felt out of place in just her Chicana identity. Though the culture was part of her, passed through her mother and grandmother, she could not speak Spanish. Her friends tried to teach her, but the insecurity was compounded by outside perspectives saying this invalidated her as a "real Mexican." She saw her family's experiences with racism firsthand and felt it in



instances where her differences were recognized as well. Living in the southern United States, people who only saw Eva's whiteness were too comfortable engaging in microaggressions and revealing prejudices against her friends and her family. She would do her best to confront them, but it could be emotionally draining when no one else seemed willing. Other times, when they did know, they would remind her she wasn't "white enough" either.

Eva's first time actively serving as a cultural broker was in high school, trying to bridge a gap between her white peers and a cultural experience not often considered in their studies. She acknowledged the privileges of her whiteness up front while also freely speaking up for herself and her family in discussions surrounding identity and power. Some students were willing to listen, but conflict persisted. One time during a discussion, a white classmate compared their skin tones and said he was "more Mexican" than Eva because he was tanner. She recognized he was trying to undermine her voice by simplifying being Mexican to a skin tone, while having total disregard for the culture and cultural implications of said skin tone in the US. Eva endured many similar conversations throughout her education. Though she saw through arguments like this, she further internalized that she didn't fit anywhere entirely. While completing high school, Eva began trying to rationalize her identity as an intersectional mix rather than two halves. Initially, the process was smooth, but her social context shifted leading into college.

While Eva's university prides itself on the diversity of student identities, the demographics of the program are reflective of the school status as a primarily white institution. Out of 50 students in the community service living and learning program, there are six students of color, a number which varies depending on who is asked. Eva does not count herself as a student of color on account of the many privileges she has being both white and "white passing." With the exception of Eva, the program has no students of Latin American descent.

A few of the community partners that students in Eva's program work with are in a majority-minority community: While the neighborhood is known for its amalgamation of cultures, it has one of the most predominant Latin American populations in the area. Before they were allowed to do research in the field, the program director assigned a month's worth of projects on the city's history. Through the readings, Eva learned that the Mexican-American and other growing Latinx populations in her new city had historical difficulties receiving recognition from the local government. She tried to discuss this with her peers, but most students glossed over it and expected someone else to present on it. When presentation day arrived, Eva used her time slot to cover the most influential points of a Latinx experience in the city and emphasize the need to listen to every voice within the community.

As the semester went on, class discussions on social disparities and the city continued. It became increasingly more obvious that Eva's peers turned to her alone for a Latinx perspective. She was actively learning from the community and felt an obligation to educate her classmates as the only Latinx student in the cohort. Yet this led to an unfair emotional strain for her and the other students of color in the program who are constantly advocating to have their perspectives heard. She doesn't mind sometimes, but her multicultural identity makes her uncomfortable speaking on topics or for cultures where she has less experience. Not to mention, she is a



stranger to the historical dynamics within her college town and the full scope of Latin American cultures represented there. Yet, Eva knows if she does not speak up, her classmates are unlikely to look for the perspective elsewhere and it may not be a positive or well-rounded one.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- How can multicultural identities vary in saliency and across social situations?
- Why should multicultural identities be viewed as intersectional of the individual and not counteractive of each other?
- How does Eva's situation reflect the dangers of tokenism?
- Should it be a student's responsibility to teach their classmates or their faculty about their identity/background?
- How could the other students avoid relying on tokenism in the future?
- How can the program director create assignments or initiatives to bring additional voices into the educational experiences of students?
- How could the program ethically avoid the underrepresentation of people of color in the program in the future? Can they?

Additional Resources

Additional recommended resources to explore the central themes in this case are available.

- Jones, Curtis. "[Cultural Brokering Stresses Students, Families.](#)" WCER. University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Morrison, Gina Zanolini. "[Two Separate Worlds: Students of Color at a Predominantly White University.](#)" *Journal of Black Studies* 40, no. 5 (2010): 987-1015.
- Ogawa, Erina. "[Multicultural Children: Their Cultural Identities as Communicated by Their Parents](#) ." Thesis, Massey University, 2007.
- Sherrer, Kara. "[What Is Tokenism, and Why Does It Matter in the Workplace?](#)" *Vanderbilt Business School*, Vanderbilt University, 22 June 2020.
- Yampolsky, Maya A, et al. "[Multicultural Identity Integration and Well-Being: a Qualitative Exploration of Variations in Narrative Coherence and Multicultural Identification.](#)" *Frontiers in Psychology*, Frontiers Media S.A., 14 Mar. 2013.



Corresponding Author

Cougot, Sierra, American University, Washington, DC, USA. Email: cougotsierra@gmail.com



Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Facing sociocultural norms of beauty

Keywords

self-identity; authenticity; sociocultural norms; beauty standards; culture shock; discrimination

Context

The context for this case plays out at the individual, organizational, and international levels between someone from the United States and another from South Korea. The case specifically explores the socio-cultural norms surrounding beauty standards.

Setting

Lia is the only employee who was hired as a non-native Korean in her new marketing company in Seoul, South Korea. The company is small, consisting of only 30 employees. All other employees are native Koreans, born and raised throughout South Korea.

Case

Lia is someone who always brings smiles to others. She is known to be bright and joyful, as she seems like a person who hasn't had a single worry in her life. Lia is always surrounded by people she loves and the people who love her. She is a ball of positivity.

But Lia's worry started when she decided to leave the country for the first time. As a teenager, she always dreamed of starting her life someplace new. Out of all the places, however, South Korea interested her the most. She wanted to learn more about her heritage and the lives her parents had shared in South Korea. After her college graduation, her teenage dream seemed to come true. Lia got a job offer in South Korea.

After a long flight, Lia finally landed in the land of her dreams. She was astonished by the beautiful scenery that unfolded in front of her eyes. She spent the next weeks exploring the area around her new home. She even developed new friendships with her group of co-workers. Everything seemed to be just the way she pictured it to be.

One night after her work, Lia and her friends decided to have dinner together. As Lia was excitedly looking at the menu, she noticed that one of her friends was just sitting there. When Lia asked why, her friend brushed her question off with a simple response: "I gained weight." With her friend's response, the conversation suddenly shifted to the topic of beauty.. Her other friend started to discuss how her boyfriend would tell her she needed to get plastic surgery. Another chimed in and complained about how her fiancé told her to get certain procedures done before their wedding. Then, everyone looked at Lia. They slowly began to suggest areas on her face and body where she could improve to look more "feminine." Lia was trapped inside a conversation she had never dealt with before.

Lia came home from the dinner and hurriedly looked at herself in the mirror. She quickly began to notice all the imperfections from her face and body. She never experienced these suffocating beauty standards back at home. No one was complaining to her about the way they looked or telling her what to fix. Lia brushed off the thought of "fixing" herself because she believed she could fit into society, even without having the perfect appearance.

There were several more instances when someone would openly suggest to her ways to become "beautiful." Yet, she thought these conversations were taking place because they were



casual and friendly conversations between friends and people she trusted. However, one point during her time in South Korea, she faced the biggest crisis of her professional career.

It was during her lunch break when her supervisor called her to his office. After months of working, she thought this was her chance to be recognized for her hard work. When she entered his room, she found herself in front of a middle-aged man with a stern look on his face. He quietly opened his mouth to ask her a simple question: “Do you look at yourself in the mirror?” Lia’s face immediately turned red and her eyes filled with tears of shame. Lia didn’t know how to respond to the question and she began to remind herself of all the times she compared herself to others. It repeatedly crushed her when her coworkers and friends consistently suggested to her all the surgeries and procedures she could get done. She believed that as long as she was acknowledged for her professional skills and efforts, she would be able to mix into the society. When Lia finally got the courage to answer him, his response stunned her. Her superior smiled faintly and told her that he was just looking out for her as her supervisor.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- How does Lia experience the “culture shock?”
- What aspects of Lia’s sojourn created confusion or complexities with the interactions between her coworkers?
- How do our cultural upbringing influence how we see ourselves in the world? How do we make sense of conformity?
- How does Lia maintain authenticity while still being successful in adapting to the new societal norms and expectations in South Korea?
- How would Lia seek out support after the encounter with her supervisor to better understand the cultural norms? When do we have to adapt or tackle foreign behaviors?

Additional Resources

Additional recommended resources to explore the central themes in this case are available.

- Cho, K. (2020, May 22). [*The Destructive Effects of South Korea's Beauty Standards*](#).
- [*How Not To Lose Your Cultural Identity While Living In A New Country*](#). Stump & Associates. (2018, May 3).
- Kuhn, A. (2019, May 6). [*South Korean Women 'Escape The Corset' And Reject Their Country's Beauty Ideals*](#). NPR.
- Roucek, J. (1944). [*Ideology as a Means of Social Control*](#). *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 3 (3), 357-369.
- Stevenson, A. (2018, November 23). [*South Korea Loves Plastic Surgery and Makeup. Some Women Want to Change That*](#). The New York Times.

Corresponding Author

Park, Hae Lim, American University, Washington, D.C., United States of America. Email: hp3056a@student.american.edu



A Difficult Day: Disagreements regarding the validity of love

Keywords

homosexuality; respect; LGBTQ+; acceptance; identity; empathy

Context

The context for this case occurs within the family dynamic between an openly gay man and his family in the United States. The man and his family are white, upper-class individuals from the Northeast. His family spans several generations, including members who are over the age of 75. The man is in his 50s.

Case

Devon was the manifestation of success. He was happy, wealthy, and well-liked by his friends and colleagues. He was kind, unconditionally selfless, and brilliant, a thoroughly excellent man.

Devon's impressive character was infallible since his youth. He was one of the brightest students in his high school class and attended top tier schools for both his undergraduate and legal studies. His warm personality allowed him to make many incredible relationships throughout his life, including one with another brilliant and kind man named Charles. Devon and Charles were perfect opposites – Devon was intellectually gifted and driven by practicality, while Charles was boundlessly creative, completing several artistic fellowships before establishing his own design firm. The two fell in love and saw their lives blossom together.

Despite their mutual success and love for each other, Devon and Charles' relationship wasn't immediately accepted by either of their families. The two began dating in the early 90's, a time when homosexuality still had yet to be widely embraced by American society. Gay marriage hadn't been legalized and there were little legal protections against sexuality-based discrimination or hate crimes. Both Devon and Charles' families isolated the men. There was a period in which neither man was invited to their families' gatherings – they were kept from the weddings of their siblings, baptisms of their nieces and nephews, and family reunions.

There was much pain on both sides. Devon and Charles loved each other and couldn't sacrifice their partnership, but they cared deeply about their families and wanted those they loved to respect their relationship. Their families still loved Devon and Charles separately, but couldn't permit a homosexual relationship within their familial circle.

Devon and Charles continued to see their lives flourish with each other. Devon made partner at his law firm and Charles' design firm was attracting increasingly impressive clientele. The two enjoyed their lives together and as homosexual acceptance began gaining traction in the 2000s and 2010s – becoming legalized in 2015 – their families began to open their arms to their sons and their relationship. The acceptance of their relationship was a gradual process, but the pair eventually became integral members in each other's families, becoming loving uncles to several nieces and nephews and devoted sons-in-law and brothers-in-law. They received love, but their relationship remained a sensitive subject for certain family members, including Devon's mother, Georgia.



Georgia was a respectable woman. She was independent, intelligent, and successful in her own right. She had four children, Devon being her oldest. She was well-known in her community and widely respected. During her young-adult years, she was the beautiful, educated wife of a wealthy lawyer, and something of a socialite in her town. Shortly after the birth of her fourth child, her husband was diagnosed with cancer and passed shortly thereafter. Georgia handled her husband's death as best as anyone could – she worked hard to make sure her children felt supported and were well cared for. All four of her children would go on to be successful, respected, and well-educated themselves, and for that Georgia was incredibly proud.

Georgia loved her children, but she was also notably self-interested. Her reputation was important to her – she was proud of the life she had led and the challenges she had overcome. She wanted others to appreciate her legacy, especially her family.

Devon and Georgia enjoyed a close bond that dated back to Devon's childhood. Devon was the only child old enough to accurately remember his father, and thus shared a unique connection with his mother that none of his other siblings had. Devon was the spitting image of his late father, right down to his successful legal career. Though their connection was interrupted when Devon and Charles first came out with their relationship, the mother and son eventually rediscovered their ties after years of hesitant diplomacy from both sides, and their closeness was revived. Georgia considered Devon a continuation of her husband's legacy, and Devon was proud to keep alive the memory of his father for his mother.

One summer, Devon and Charles announced that they had decided to officially marry and they wanted only their families to be present. Almost everyone's face was drawn up in a teary smile as they exchanged their vows after nearly 30 years of being together. Despite the general cheeriness, there were some stony expressions in the crowd, one of them belonging to Georgia.

After the ceremony, the grooms and their families gathered for a sunny reception full of love and laughter. While the families mingled and swapped sweet stories about the grooms' relationship, Georgia sat, motionless, barely concealing her frown and offering nothing to the conversation except for half-hearted laughter. She was noticeably uncomfortable.

Devon approached his mother. Though he was mildly discomfited by her display of discontent, he sat with her, made small talk, and tried to brighten her dampened mood. She seemed reluctant to engage and remained removed from the conversation before finally admitting that the ceremony had been difficult for her to watch.

Devon, though he never expected Georgia to bless his relationship entirely, was taken aback by his mother's comment. After all that he'd proved himself to be, as a professional, a son, and a devoted family man and husband, his mother still couldn't bring herself to approve of a relationship that had endured and thrived for nearly three decades.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What aspects of Georgia's life or values make it difficult for her to accept Devon's relationship with Charles?
- Why is it challenging for Devon and Georgia to be culturally empathetic towards each other?



- How can Devon maintain saliency within his identity as a gay man even as he crosses cultural borders, specifically when dealing with Georgia?
- How could Georgia's comment impact Devon's cultural identity as a gay man?
- What are the distinct cultural misunderstandings that may have led to Georgia's remarks on Devon's wedding day? Which is the most impactful?

Additional Resources

- Franke-Ruta, Garance. "[How America Got Past the Anti-Gay Politics of the '90s.](#)" *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 8 Apr. 2013.
- Signorile, Michelangelo. "A Journey through Our Gay Century." *Advocate*, no. 802/803, Jan. 2000, p. 26.
- Wetzel, Janice Wood. "Human Rights in the 20th Century: Weren't Gays and Lesbians Human?" *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, vol. 23, no. 1 / 2, Apr. 2001, pp. 15-32. EBSCOhost, doi: 10.1300/J041v13n01_03.
- "[Growing Support for Gay Marriage: Changed Minds and Changing Demographics.](#)" *Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy*, Pew Research Center, 30 May 2020.
- Spero, Josh. "[Old and Young See LGBT Rights in Contrast.](#)" *Financial Times*, Financial Times, 24 Oct. 2016.

Corresponding Author:

O'Neill, Meghan, American University, Washington, DC, USA. Email: oneillme460@gmail.com



You Just Called a Priest Fat:

Exploring cultural barriers within language

Keywords

Language; immigrant; taboo; Latinx; Cuba

Context

The context for this case plays out between two individuals situated within the United States, a US-born man and a Cuban-immigrant woman. Both individuals speak the same language but have very different cultural understandings of what conversational topics are appropriate.

Case

Carmela immigrated to the United States in 1973, fleeing the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution with her husband and two children. Carrying nothing more than a suitcase each of belongings, Carmela was tasked with reestablishing her family in Boston, Massachusetts, a country whose climate, language, and culture was dramatically different from her own.

Carmela's immigrant story is a testament to her strength and resiliency as an individual, and the wisdom gained from her experiences is immense. Sit down with Carmela for a *Cafecito con Leche* and one will leave with an entirely new perspective on something, and probably an *empanada* or two. To many in her *barrio*, or neighborhood, Carmela was a role model and a friend.

In fact, Carmela prides herself on her strong character, even in adverse situations. Whether it was working as an environmental chemist in a white male dominated field, or whether it was facing housing discrimination on the basis of her Latina ethnicity, Carmela always held her chin up high, finding the good in life's most difficult moments. To her, that's what it means to be an immigrant. Life never gave her any options to act otherwise.

Being an immigrant, particularly from non-English speaking countries, also mean navigating a myriad of language and cultural barriers. Pronunciation, annunciation, and regionalism can all make it very difficult for immigrants to fully communicate thoughts and ideas, especially when involving idioms or slang. Carmela knew this firsthand, and she would be the first to share her struggles with communicating in a new language.

One such example of language barriers within the Spanish language is the common usage of diminutives, which is when people add the suffix *-ito* to the end of a noun as a term of endearment. Grandmother in Spanish is *Abuela*, but most people say *Abuelita* in informal settings, the same way Carmela calls her kitten *gatico* instead of *gato* or cat. And although *gatico* could roughly translate to kitty, when you get to terms like *gordito*, they start to get lost in translation.

Carmela learned through experience that in the United States, some topics of conversation are considered more taboo than within the cultural context of the Caribbean island of Cuba. One



such scenario played out on a sunny Sunday afternoon at the back of a Catholic Church, between Carmela and a local priest, Father Francis.

Father Francis, a tall man with Nordic features, was introduced to Carmela on a couple of occasions and they were acquaintances at best. Both friendly people and kind-hearted in nature, they embarked in small talk after the mass had ended, in a reintroduction-type manner. Carmela proudly introduced the priest to her youngest daughter and then to her four grandchildren.

Carmela thought that Father Francis looked well-rested and healthy, and asked him with a warm grin, “Father, have you lost any weight?” She rolled the *R* in his title. The priest smiled rosily in reply, “I have actually, thank you for noticing!” Carmela nodded, responding sheepishly, “Good, because you looked fat the last time I saw you.”

There was a brief moment of pause before Carmela’s daughter’s face sunk into an appalled frown, while her grandchildren struggled to contain their laughter. To Carmela’s grandkids, they knew that weight was not a taboo topic of discussion in Cuba, treated much more like a fact than an opinion. “This is a hilarious misunderstanding!” they thought to themselves. But to Father Francis, it was so much more.

Unknown to anyone else, Father Francis struggled with his body image for his entire life. His scowl practically reached his own chin. Reddened in the face, Father Francis excused himself from the conversation circle, his expression visibly struck with humiliation and shame. Carmela, overwhelmingly confused by his reaction, was greeted by a rapid, infuriated explanation from her daughter. Flooded with embarrassment and guilt, Carmela found herself in an extremely uncomfortable position, unsure of what to do or say next.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What complexities or cultural frames draw Carmela and Father Francis to interpret the exchange differently?
- How might the power dynamics between Carmela, a lay woman, and Father Francis, an ordained man, affect their communication exchanges?
- What could Carmela and Father Francis learn from this particular encounter?
- What are some practical ways Carmela and Father Francis could learn more about the cultural identities of each other and share their interpretations of the situation?
- How does one increase their cultural empathy and expand their culturally relativist perspectives to include multifaceted experiences of individuals?
- How do you overcome the fear to “say the wrong thing” and still engage your authentic self in the process of cross-cultural communication?

Additional Resources

Additional recommended resources to explore the central themes in this case are available below.



- [Cultural Barriers to Communication](#). *Businessstopia*, 6 Jan. 2018.
- [Cultural Misunderstandings](#). *Psychology Today*, 22 Sept. 2020.
- [Cultural Obstacles to U.S.-Cuba Relations](#). *Brookings*, 30 Nov. 2010.
- [More Than Miles: The Taboo Traditions That Separate Us – Reaching Beyond Western Taboos](#). *Penn State*, 27 Sept. 2020.
- [Spanish Language Word GORDO: Insult, Compliment or None of the Above?](#) *Speaking Latino*, 16 Jan. 2017.

Corresponding Author

Boyle, John, American University, Washington, DC, United States of America. Email: jmboyle8@gmail.com



Can you please not ask that?: Dealing with racially insensitive questions amongst school children

Keywords

Identity; international education; stereotypes; othering

Context

The emphasis on teaching children about different cultures as part of their academic education at school has become more important in recent years, as a way to broaden children's minds, engage in our globalized world, and display the school's resources. Inviting people of different backgrounds, ethnicities, and cultures is seen as a way to aid children's interest in the world around them. There are programs established both nationally and internationally that work to provide elementary aged school children with the opportunity to meet other people from a variety of places. An important aspect of this experience is the chance for children to ask questions about whatever it is that might provoke their interest.

Case

A school assembly is taking place at a small, private elementary school in northern California for the entire student body, ages five to fourteen. The majority of the students are white and come from upper middle class homes, making them fairly privileged. The vice principal, Lucille, and the school events team planned a special assembly involving a group of student teachers from South Africa who came to the school to talk about their experiences growing up in South Africa and as young teachers. The organization, South African Teachers Abroad (SATA) sends their young teachers to various schools in Northern California every year where they work with students and learn more about the American education system. The assembly is meant to be interactive. After finishing their presentation, the South African teachers will lead an interactive discussion session with the students. Lucille has worked as vice principal for the past three years, but this is the first time she is organizing an assembly around the South African teachers visit. She and the rest of the school staff expect the assembly will be a wonderful experience for everyone involved. Lucille hopes that the students will leave the assembly gaining a better appreciation for teaching and learning more about South Africa. None of the students were informed of the assembly or prepared in any way as to what questions they should ask. There was no discussion in classes about this assembly and the students most likely know little to no information about South Africa.

The first part of the assembly goes according to plan. The visiting South African teachers give their presentation. They discuss their lives back home, why they wanted to become teachers, and their experience participating in this program. The students seem engaged and everyone is paying attention. At the end, to conclude their presentation, the visiting teachers sing a South African song and dance. Everyone begins to clap and dance, including the students. Toward the end of the assembly the visiting teachers ask if anyone has any questions.



At first the questioning is going well. Students are asking polite, respectful questions that show they are genuinely engaged, even the young students are trying their best to remain focused. Students ask about the teacher's backgrounds, what they like best about America, and what they learned so far about teaching. Then an 8th grader asks an inappropriate and culturally insensitive question: "Do the South African teachers appreciate being in America and having access to electricity and internet access in comparison to their mud huts back home?" It is clear that the student has a very limited knowledge as to what life in South Africa is like. The other students laugh out of nervousness and confusion. Lucille becomes furious and ashamed, looking at the other teachers who are all glaring at the students. The entire assembly appears uncomfortably silent. The visiting South African teachers look at each other nervously, trying to find a way around the question, as they explain that they have many resources in South Africa and do not live in mud huts. Everyone attempts to move forward, but at this point the students are distracted and the school teachers are embarrassed. Lucille tries to think of ways to rectify the situation, but finds no clear answer. Eventually the assembly ends and the South African teachers quickly leave.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- How could the school better prepare the students for this assembly? Could the teachers have done something to prevent this?
- Should Lucille, the vice principal and organizer of this assembly, take responsibility and address the incident that happened?
- How should the school address the incident? If the school chooses to apologize to South African Teachers Abroad then who should be involved in the apology?
- How could the South African teachers have better prepared to deal with uncomfortable or inappropriate questions?
- Should the school continue to foster a relationship with the South African Teachers Program?

Additional Resources

- [How to Start Talking About Race in the Early Elementary Classroom](#) - Sarah Gosner, Edutopia, the George Lucas Educational Foundation
- [How Should I Talk about Race in My Mostly White Classroom?](#)- Anti-Defamation League
- [Tips on Teaching about Africa » African Studies Center](#) - Boston University Pardee School of Global Studies



- [What Do We Want Children to Learn About Africa? - Teaching for Change](#) - Margy Knight, Teaching for Change

Corresponding Author

Hubbard, Caroline, American University, School of International Studies, Washington DC, United States. Email: ch5224a@student.american.edu



“Look at her ring!”: Discrimination within diversity

Keywords

intersectionality; religion; community; discrimination; identity politics; prejudice; power

Context

Islam, the religion with the second largest number of followers in the world, is split into two main sects; Sunni and Shia. In recent years other sects have been growing as well. Currently, the fastest-growing sect of Islam is the Ahmadiyya sect. Although Ahmadiyya followers believe in the same Qur’an and the same five pillars of Islam, many Muslims disregard Ahmadis and do not view them as fellow Muslims. The disaccord is a result of differing beliefs on a specific line of the Qur’an. While most Muslims believe that the line “خاتم النبيين (Khatam an-Nabiyyin)” declares Prophet Mohammed to be the **last** of all prophets, Ahmadi Muslims believe that this line refers to Prophet Mohammed as the **seal** of all prophets. They believe the founder of the Ahmadiyya sect, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, is also a prophet.

One of the five pillars of Islam is prayer. Muslims pray five times a day at specific times for specific prayers. Prayer can be done at home or at mosques, but it is considered more religiously beneficial to pray at mosques. There are specific times for each prayer, however, each prayer does not have to be done at the exact time that prayer is called. They can be done anytime before the next prayer is called. Men and women have separate sections at mosques in order to maintain privacy. Mosques are meant to be open for everyone to pray. However, in reality most mosques are exclusive to certain sects and ethnicities.

Case Study

Husna is a 19-year-old Bengali-American college student. Her upbringing in Jewish communities led her to strongly identify with her Muslim and Bengali identities. She considers herself to be very spiritual and in touch with her faith, even if she doesn’t maintain practices that other Muslims partake in. She strongly believes in questioning and looking at scripture holistically with historical context. Husna avoids practices that she believes are not relevant to current historical contexts. Her identities as Bengali and an Ahmadiyya Muslim often clash because the majority of Bengali Muslims are Sunni Muslims and hold biases against the Ahmadiyya community. While living in a predominantly Bengali Muslim community Husna experienced a shocking and disappointing encounter.

She had a busy day planned and decided to pray at a well-known mosque nearby instead of making the commute to her regular mosque in order to get to the city quicker to start her day. She purposely went after prayer was first called, hoping the mosque would be emptier, in order to pray quietly and peacefully on her own and avoid praying behind Muslims of another sect, which is taboo. She entered the mosque dressed appropriately and sat in a corner to herself before beginning to pray. A woman approached and greeted Husna politely until she noticed the ring on Husna’s hand.



Many Ahmaddiya Muslims wear a ring that says, “is God not sufficient for his servant” (The Qur’an 39:36). For Ahmadiyya Muslims, the ring serves as a reminder of their faith. However, Sunni Muslims recognize the ring as a symbol of the Ahmadiyya sect and reject it.

With a sense of urgency, the woman suddenly started telling Husna that she should leave immediately, and she shouldn’t be at this mosque. Husna, confused and upset, continuously asked the woman “Why shouldn’t I be here? Why can’t I pray here?” Yet the woman frantically urged Husna to leave, telling her in both English and Bengali that she doesn’t belong there. Other women began approaching the two. The first woman began pointing at Husna’s ring and explaining to the other women that Husna should leave. As Husna tried to ignore the women and pray, the older women began using anti-Ahmadiyya slurs and continuously ushered Husna towards the exit. Husna tried to stay calm and explain to these women that they were not allowed to dictate who gets to pray in the mosque and who doesn’t. She even cited that Prophet Mohammed would allow non-Muslims to say their prayers in mosques. While holding back tears, Husna reprimanded the silent young women who were neither yelling at her to leave nor supporting her right to pray in that mosque. Many of them did not even understand the significance of the ring or the Ahmadiyya sect, yet they refused to support Husna in her efforts to communicate with the older women. Ultimately Husna forcefully walked out of the mosque while calmly wishing the women *salaam*. She took a bus to her usual mosque and upon entering, she broke down into tears, feeling heartbroken yet even more strongly committed to her faith as an Ahmadiyya Muslim.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- How is the intersectionality of religion, culture, and politics an important part of this case?
- How do our perceived identity differences influence the ways in which we represent ourselves and interact with others? How does this play out in Husna’s story?
- Why do you think the young women in the mosque remained silent?
- How do power dynamics come into play in this scenario to challenge or foster discrimination?
- Given the history and context of anti-Islamic sentiment in the United States, how might that impact an understanding of the cultural exchange between the women?

Additional Resources

Additional recommended resources to explore the central themes in this case are available.

- Chaudhary, Ayilah. [“Surviving as an Ahmadi in Pakistan.”](#) *Pulitzer Center*, 7 April 2020.
- Evans, Nicholas H. A. [“Beyond Cultural Intimacy: The Tensions that Make Truth for India’s Ahmadi Muslims.”](#) *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 44 No. 3, 14 August 2017.
- [“Pakistan: Ensure Ahmadi Voting Rights.”](#) *Human Rights Watch*, 28 June 2018.



- Petersen, Kristian. "[Intersectional Islamophobia: The Case of a Black Ahmadi Muslim Celebrity.](#)" *Journal of Africana Religions*, vol. 7 no. 1, 2019, p. 139-151. *Project MUSE*.
- "[The Globe and Mail interviews the leader of the world's Ahmadiyya Muslim community.](#)" *Youtube*, uploaded by The Globe and Mail, 3 November 2016.

Corresponding Author

Akhter, Shajneen, American University, Washington, DC. sa7980a@student.american.edu



How Can You be a Feminist and Muslim?: Confronting multiple identities

Keywords

unconscious bias; prejudice; ethnocentrism; intersectionality; stereotypes; perception; assumptions

Context

The context of this case addresses multiple identities, which can sometimes seem contradictory from an outside perspective. The case specifically deals with how the assumptions people make about other's identities influence their perceptions of them. In this regard, the case confronts the ways in which people are socialized to see the hijab, and subsequently the identity of a woman who chooses to wear one.

Case

Sadaf is complex. Like many people, she is a member of various groups and assumes multiple identities that construct who she is. Sadaf also wears a hijab. A physical marker of her identity as a Muslim that seemingly prevents others from noticing all of the layers of Sadaf's identity.

Growing up a Muslim-American in a post 9/11 world proved burdensome. She was often targeted and called out for being a supporter of the Islamic faith, as the evidence of such was pinned around her face. As she grew up her parents made clear that she did not have to wear a hijab to support her religion, but Sadaf took pride in wearing it. Although others viewed her hijab as a concession of her singular identity, Sadaf knew that she was so much more. By participating in karate and feminist societies that contradicted a static view of an Islamic women, she aimed to show others that the scarf upon her head was not a mechanism of oppression or representative of her whole persona.

Regardless of what activities Sadaf choose to participate in or the ways she tried to layer her identity, her hijab signaled to many her perceived single affiliation to Allah and Islam. In this view she was not even an American, although she was born and raised in the United States. Nor was she seen as a women without the caveat of being a Muslim women. Beyond that her status as a black belt in karate or a feminist were somehow branded as diametrically opposed to her identity as a Muslim, and thus ignored.

Throughout her time in high school the stares and assumptions tied to her hijab, that supposedly defined Sadaf, followed her into every room and space she entered. There were so many layers to her, yet she could not seem to express that to others who continued to see her identity as static and fixed. These actions left Sadaf feeling uncomfortable, excluded and



dejected, but never weakening her resolve to prove to people that she was so much more than the scarf wrapped around her head.

When she entered college, she thought it would be a new frontier in discovering her identity. Surely here others could look past the neatly placed hijab on her head, and see all the shades of her being. She would not have to be simplified, but would simultaneously be seen as an academic, a feminist, a black belt, a woman, and all of the other affiliations that made Sadaf's who she is.

That hope though for a detached space from the glares and hushed conversations of high school seemed to deflate after her first week. One day during a class discussion in her Women's Studies course she noticed one of her white, female classmates staring her up and down with a particularly curious look. Sadaf sat and twisted the end of her Hijab around her finger, something she had developed as a nervous habit. The way the women glared at her was reminiscent of those stares she received walking down the street in her hometown or down the hallway in high school, instantly making her feel aware of the hijab framing her face.

The conversation was about feminism and what feminists in the 20th century were trying to accomplish. Despite the continuous stares and whispers from her classmate, Sadaf actively participated in the conversation and contemplated what it meant to be a feminist with the class. After Sadaf finished her statement regarding how feminists in the early 20th century focused on equality for white women rather than fighting for equality for all women, the woman raised her hand. Without wasting time she questioned why Sadaf wore a hijab. More specifically she asked how Sadaf could be a feminist yet wear a hijab. How could she possibly hold these two apparently contradictory identities? Such a question brought back the negative experiences of her past and the importance society placed on her claiming a singular identity. The question reiterated to Sadaf the blatant need for her to be defined in a static manner that signaled oppression. Why couldn't she be more than a Muslim in the eyes of her classmates?

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case discuss:

- Why does Sadaf's classmate only register her as a member of the Islamic community, rather than recognizing that she has multiple affiliations and identities? Is there a problem with her classmate(s) doing so?
- What societal institutions, norms, or values could have contributed to the development of the unconscious bias of Sadaf's classmate? How do these biases operate in the larger context of society?
- In what ways could Sadaf respond to the question posed by her classmate?
- How do you think the professor should respond or intervene, if at all, in this situation?



- What could be done on the institutional level to prevent unconscious bias and stereotyping of different groups?

Additional Resources

Additional recommended resources to explore the central themes in this case are available.

- Yassmin Abdel-Magied, [What does my headscarf mean to you?](#), TED Talk
- Homa Hoodfar, *The Veil in their Minds and on our Heads: The Persistence of Colonial Images of Muslim Women*
- Maheera Zubair, [Opinion: If the Hijab Is Such an 'Oppressive Tool', Why Do I Feel so Empowered?](#)
- Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: the Illusion of Destiny*
- Calvin Lai and Clara Wilkins, [Understanding Your Biases](#)

Corresponding Author

Sette, Marisa, American University School of International Service, Washington, DC, United States of America. Email: ms5332a@student.american.edu



Seeing in Color: The discovery of a father's coming to America story and his assimilation into American society

Key Words

Americanization; cultural assimilation, immigration; heritage; refugee

Context

This case is about a Hungarian man named Karoly and his coming to America story. He was born into a life of conflict and had to endure the constant violence of World War II and then the strict rule of the Soviet Union. When the Soviet's launched a purge throughout Hungary after a failed revolt, he fled to America. Once in America he had to make a choice: to keep his Hungarian culture or to assimilate into the American one.

Case

Anne-Marie never knew much about her father's past. She knew she was Hungarian and that her father fled during the 1956 conflict between the Hungarian people and the Soviet Union. Other than that, her father's Old World past was a mystery. It wasn't until they visited Hungary in 2008 that she discovered her father. She would say, "My whole life I saw my dad in black and white. But when we went to Hungary, I began to see him in color."

Her father, Karoly, was born into a life of conflict in 1934 in a small peasant town near the Hungarian-Ukraine border. During World War II his father was taken by the Russians as a forced laborer, leaving Karoly and his 4 sisters to fend for themselves. Together they scrounged for food while also avoiding the constant conflict over the strategically important hill that overlooked their small village. According to Karoly there were no good guys in this war. Both the Germans and the Russians destroyed, stole, killed, and raped in equal measure. He and his sisters had to hide in the thatching of their roof in order to evade the soldiers. Once when he was 7, Karoly was taken by the Russians because his long hair made him look like a girl. Luckily when it was discovered that he was a boy he was released.

When the war was over, at the age of 13, Karoly was drafted into the Hungarian Army. By the time he was in his twenties he was a border guard on the Austria-Hungary border. During this time, this border was not just between two countries but between two worlds. Karoly was stationed on the Iron Curtain. His job: to keep people inside.

In 1956, students in Budapest rose up against the Soviet puppet government and after three weeks of "freedom," the Russian military invaded. The intention of the invasion was to purge the country of any resemblance of a free Hungary and that included many Hungarians in political and military positions. During the chaos of the invasion someone told Karoly "the Russians will be here soon...if they find you they will kill you". Karoly then crossed the border into Austria, leaving everything that he had ever known.



Karoly became one of the tens of thousands of Hungarian refugees that fled during the Russian crackdown after the 1956 Revolt. He lived in a refugee camp until he was able to go to America through a lottery.

Once he came to the United States, he was determined to become an American and make a life here. One of the first steps he took was to Americanize his name to Charles. Then, with the help of a wealthy Hungarian-American, he was brought to Maryland and was helped to find a job. Charles worked odd jobs and learned English through listening to people talk and watching television, eventually teaching himself how to read. He worked as a truck driver, a laborer, a welder, and eventually bought a welding shop. He married an American woman and together they had three children.

It was the American Charles who Anne-Marie knew as her father. The man who didn't talk about his life in Hungary, refused to speak Hungarian in the presence of non-speakers, and refused to teach his children Hungarian. He became interested in American politics and became a life-long Republican. He was determined to make his family a traditional American family, and he succeeded.

When Charles returned to Hungary in 2008, he was reunited with the life and culture that he once knew. He saw his sisters again, got to speak in his native language again, and got to see his childhood home again. It was during this emotional trip that Anne-Marie said that she saw her dad for the first time "in color". She saw her father in his entirety.

Charles' story is a timeless example of the "American Dream" that has inspired so many people, but at what cost? Is the price of the "American Dream" one's own culture? Anne-Marie, for most of her life, only knew part of her father. Is that what is expected of immigrants in order to be successful in America?

Charles' story sheds light on not only the tragedy and trauma of an immigrant and his ability to rise above and create a good life for him and his family, but also the sacrifices that he had to make. He gave up his name, his language, his homeland, and his culture in order to become an American and provide a good life for his family. Many would wonder if it was worth it? For Charles the answer was always yes.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What purpose might it serve for some immigrants to create a clear delineation between the past and the present? Not openly sharing what life was like before immigration is common among many immigrants. Why?
- Is there an expectation to assimilate and adopt the culture of the country you live in?
- Is there a way to balance one's home culture while living in another one?
- What do you think might've happened if Karoly didn't assimilate into American society?
- Beyond language, why would an immigrant want to connect with a community of people of the same culture?



Additional Resources

Additional recommended resources to explore the central themes in this case are available.

- Grover G. Huebner, *The Americanization of the Immigrant*
- Jaswinder Singh and Kalyani Gopal, *Americanization of the Immigrant: People Who Came to America and What They Need to Know*
- Alex Nowraseth, *The Failure of the Americanization Movement*
- Laila Lalami, *What Does It Take To 'Assimilate' in America*
- Luma Simms, *Identity and Assimilation*

Corresponding Author

Ridenour, Thomas, American University, Washington, DC, United States. Email: tr6298a@american.edu



Sobre la Palabra “Chinita”: Sociohistorical and linguistic differences surrounding offense

Keywords

linguistics; race; multicultural; identity politics; stereotypes; diaspora

Context

On the word *Chinito/a*: “*China*” refers specifically to Chinese ethnicity while “*-ito*” and “*-ita*” are diminutives applied to nouns in Spanish to indicate smallness in size or to express fondness. *Chinita* literally translates as “little Chinese girl.” In Latin America, it is oftentimes used interchangeably with *Asiático/a*, or “Asian.” The word *china* is also sometimes used in replacement to “*tienda*” (general store), *chino* also means “curly” in Spanish, and “*china*” is another word for “porcelain” in the English language.

On the Asian female identity: Stereotypes for East and Southeast Asian women include petite physicality and subservient personalities. There exists a history of fetishization perpetuated by media and war-time sentiments; a popular demonstration of this phenomenon is the colloquial term “Yellow Fever” to describe a sexual preference towards Asian women.

Case

Jade and Grace have been friends for almost two years and have maintained their friendship largely online due to Jade living in Panama and Grace living in the United States. Grace is Asian-American of Sino-Malaysian descent and Jade is Afro-Indigenous with some Asian ancestry. Jade’s heritage mix is not uncommon for a country as multicultural as Panama. After all, it is called the *Puente de Vida*, or “Bridge of Life,” which points to its geographic positioning as well as its population diversity.

A few months after Grace traveled to Panama to collaborate with Jade on project, Jade and her father traveled to California to reunite with Grace. Grace wanted to take the duo to the beach and end the day with a traditional dinner cooked by Grace’s mom, to which Jade expressed excitement since she never tried Malaysian food before. When in the car, Jade and her father took particular interest in the music Grace played: it was a mixture of Korean pop music, Cantonese ballads, and Khmer Psychedelic Rock. At one point, Jade and her father referred to Grace as *Chinita* when talking about her Asian heritage.

Grace understood that the term meant no harm, especially coming from close friends, but she still couldn’t help but think about the word’s direct translation of “little Chinese girl.” She was a high school senior, an age she didn’t think was literally “little.” In addition, she is not from China. Grace thought she would be viewed as being overly sensitive if she brought it up, so she didn’t think much of it until later in the car ride when she noticed that this term was conversationally used to describe things that were generally Asian, not Chinese. Curious as to why this was, she asked Jade and her father about whether the terms *Chinita* and *Asiática* (Asian) were used interchangeably. The two were quick to reassure her that it was merely a general term used by



Panamanians when they referred to anyone that fits a general East Asian phenotype. This didn't quite assuage Grace's wariness surrounding the word, but she didn't bring it up for the rest of the trip out of fear of creating unnecessary tension.

Years later, the two are still close friends who communicate mainly via social media. The incident never really left Grace's mind, so she decided to bring it up again over text:

Grace: "recuerdas la conversacion que tu padre, tu, y yo, tuvimos... sobre la palabra "chinita" y la connotacion en lugares diferentes... me gusta mucha esta conversacion [porque] he abrido un perspectiva diferente que no considero despues de la conversacion contigo... pero sobre la palabra "chinita" pienso que yo, una asiatica americana quien puede hablar un poquito de español a veces tiene un sentido diferente"

Translation: "do you remember the conversation that your dad, me, and you had... about the word "chinita" and the connotation in different places... I liked this conversation a lot because it had opened up a different perspective that I didn't consider before the conversation with you... but about the word "chinita" I think that I, an Asian-American who can speak a bit of Spanish, sometimes have a different feeling [about the word]."

Jade: "Bueno, los panameños nos referimos a las personas que tienen los ojos rasgados, o achina[d]os co[m]o los tuyos, como 'CHINITOS' sin importar, el color de piel, sexo, o cultura, nos referimos a chinito o chinita a las personas, que tienen los ojos asiáticos o rasgados, como los tuyos o los míos"

Translation: "So, Panamanians refer to the people who have elongated, or slanted eyes like yours, as 'chinitos' without importance on skin color, sex, or culture. We refer to people who have Asian or slanted eyes, like yours or mine, as 'chinito' or 'chinita'"

After the exchange, the girls felt that they better understood one another despite not reaching a decision over whether the word should be used or not. Grace was motivated to learn more about the history of Chinese-Panamanians and Jade admitted that ever since their conversation, she has been thinking about a career in International Relations. Occasionally, catcallers will use *Chinita* when trying to talk to Grace, and her Latinx friends will also refer to her as *Chinita*. Despite knowing more context on the word's usage, the feeling of discomfort due to the word's perceived association to Asian stereotypes still lingers in Grace's mind.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- In what ways can the same term be seen simultaneously as a tool of othering and solidarity?
- Was Jade and Grace's relationship a vital component to consider when analyzing this situation? Why or why not?
- There is no immediate equivalency to the diminutive of "-ita" in English; how can language characteristics such as this potentially lead to a disparity in understanding?
- How do different cultures view, discuss, or contextualize multicultural identities?



- How should Grace and Jade go about resolving this misunderstanding on perception of terminology?

Additional Resources

Additional recommended resources to explore the central themes in this case are available.

- [*Invention, Inversion and Intervention: The Oriental Woman in The World of Suzie Wong, M. Butterfly, and The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* by Peter Kwan](#)
- [*Race is Gendered: How Covarying Phenotypes and Stereotypes Bias Sex Categorization* by Kerri L. Johnson, Kristin Pauker, Jonathan B. Freeman](#)
- [*Memories of a Future Home: Diasporic Citizenship of Chinese in Panama* by Lok Siu](#)
- [U.S. Department of State 2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Panama](#)

Corresponding Author

Chai, Samantha, Undergraduate Student, American University School of International Service, Washington, DC, United States of America. Email: sc4937a@student.american.edu



To Dream Amidst Difficulty: Facing cultural and institutional challenges in higher education while undocumented

Keywords

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA); undocumented migrant; university/higher education; immigration; student services; ethics, social justice

Context

This case revolves around a university student who arrived in the US under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and the challenges she experienced in relation to said status, such as discrimination in the classroom and lack of institutional support.

Case

Lana is an undocumented third-year college student who is majoring in Sociology with research interests in social justice. Although she isn't sure what her career goals will be, she aspires to support undocumented immigrant low-income students like herself through her work. Lana also enjoys art, singing, drawing, and writing.

Lana's life was one fraught by challenges. For most of her freshman year in college, she was homeless as well as undocumented – the very first semester, she had to move from motel to motel with her family every three weeks as they didn't have an official home. She balanced her studies and taking care of younger siblings, leaving her no time to socialize. In her second semester, her family acquired an apartment. However, her father was arrested for driving under the influence, leaving Lana and the rest of her family risking homelessness again left before the lease was up. She eventually rented a room she found on Craigslist with a school counselor's help, while her mother and younger siblings went to live in a relative's trailer home.

Lana continued to have difficulties making ends meet, as the California Dream Act for dreamers only covered tuition (but not other fees), and her part-time job didn't leave her much room to pay for fees, books, rent, transportation, and food. Her parents had separated by that point. Her parents were unable to support her financially – her father, although released, just started working again and could barely afford his rent and her mother's existence was reliant on a minimum wage job. She had Lana's younger siblings to take care of as well.

In addition to these difficulties, Lana faced people who could not understand her struggles as well as those who were clueless about undocumented status. Although her relationships with other undocumented students comforted her with the knowledge she wasn't alone, it also grieved her with the reminder they were all still in a precarious situation. During her freshman year, she chose to write a speech about undocumented students for a class. Her teacher asked, "What do you mean undocumented students...you mean they're here illegally? How are they allowed to be here?" While Lana believed the questions themselves on their own weren't racist, the teacher's tone carried the undertones of prejudice.



Though she briefly hesitated about going through with the speech, Lana delivered it nonetheless and was surprised to get a very positive reception from her classmates. Lana owed her ability to stay in college to the support she got from past teachers, current counselors, and her boyfriend as well as his family. She maintained a high GPA until the second semester of her third year, something she took great pride in.

Lana, however, did not feel either she or her fellow DACA students (or *dreamers*) on campus received the institutional support they needed. She remembered how the social justice centers on campus after September 5th on 2017 - a time when much of the undocumented student community was feeling great anxiety and hopelessness in relation to their ability to stay in the US – avoided holding an event or discussing the situation out of fear of looking political or biased towards any one side. To Lana, this made no sense. She believed social justice centers should do everything they could do to support undocumented students. She also believed dreamer students needed better financial support opportunities than those limited to only the most exceptional.

After getting the news, Lana decided she needed to graduate more quickly due to DACA being rescinded and her being unable being able to renew her DACA status at the time. She feared she could not receive funding for a 5th year at university as well as pay her tuition.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What aspects of Lana’s identities would you say were salient for her in this story?
- How would you describe the internal conflicts Lana had to navigate to decide on a course of action?
- How can we prepare or educate teachers or administrators on college campuses to deal with or overcome their biases?
- What could the social justice groups at this college have done differently?
- What opportunities or resources could university campuses provide their undocumented students to assist them financially, professionally, or otherwise?

Additional Resources

Additional recommended resources to explore the central themes in this case are available.

- Suarez-Orozco, MM, et al. “[In the Shadows of the Ivory Tower: Undocumented Undergraduates and the Liminal State of Immigration Reform.](#)” EScholarship, University of California, 12 Mar. 2015.
- Munoz, Susana & Vigil, Darsella. (2018). “[Interrogating Racist Nativist Microaggressions and Campus Climate: How Undocumented and DACA College Students Experience Institutional Legal Violence in Colorado.](#)” Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, May 2018.
- TEDx Talks. [The Dreamer's Dream | Uriel Casas | TEDxJMU.](#) YouTube, 15 May 2018.



- [American Immigration Council](#), DACA.

Corresponding Author

Huq, Samin, American University, Washington, DC USA. Email: sh0278a@student.american.edu



Can you please use the other door?: Maintaining authenticity

Keywords

Intersectionality; discrimination; prejudice; representation; authenticity; ethnicity; identity politics

Context

The context for this case plays out at the individual, organizational, and national levels between individuals from the United States and a country in the Middle East.

Case

Nora is someone you don't forget. She is always the one trying to pull people in from the fringe of a conversation. She is the first to ask your name and will be sure to remember it. She is always smiling.

However, Nora wasn't always smiling. She had a difficult childhood as a black girl in the southern part of the United States, a time when race relations were tense. She was targeted and often scared, but she had a very strong family. As she came to understand racial tensions, she fought hard for equality in a town where the remnants of segregation are still felt today. Her parents taught her to never be ashamed of who she was, to always be proud of where she came from, and to know that while she may not be able to change the hearts of some, she could certainly decide how she responded to the discrimination she was confronted with throughout her youth.

Nora graduated from high school and moved to Washington, DC. She began her professional career doing administrative work for a government agency. A woman in her office took a liking to Nora. She appreciated her gregarious and hardworking nature, and mentored Nora throughout her first few years in the city. In telling her own story, Nora will often mention her mentor as the single most important reason she is where she is today. Nora and her mentor often talked about what it was like to be a woman in a male dominated field. They shared stories about conversations they overheard and discussed ideas for how to best react when they heard or experienced something that troubled them. It was a different form of discrimination from her youth, but discrimination none the same.

Nora's identity as a person of color and as a woman were important to her. The intersection of these two identities was the place from where she made sense of the world. It was the lens through which she looked at current events, global crisis, and her own life. Her racial and gendered identities and the negative and positive ways she experienced both of these framed her view of the world, shaped her values, and molded her beliefs about equality and equity.

As Nora's career progressed and other opportunities became available, she took a position at the State Department, working as part of an outreach team to contribute to civil society initiatives abroad. Her responsibilities often took her overseas to collaborate with partners on development projects. She traveled throughout South and Central American, Europe, and Asia.



Then Nora had the opportunity to travel to the Middle East. She was not sure what to expect, but spent the weeks leading up to the trip learning as much as she could about the culture, language, people, and societal norms. She wanted her trip to be successful. And if things went well, she had the opportunity to be considered for a promotion.

As she aged, her professional identity became more and more important to Nora. In Washington, DC, a city known for its networking, Nora couldn't recall how many times she was asked, "What do you do?" It was an odd question the first time she heard it, wondering why the person didn't want to know more about her. But over time, she too started to view herself and her worth through the lens of others. She spent plenty of time trying to come up with the perfect answer, a blend of who she was as a person and what she did professionally, but inevitably would respond by providing a summary of her job description. It was, after all, her job and her career that she was most focused on.

When the wheels of the plane touched down in the Middle East and Nora looked around, she knew she was in for an adventure. This place was quite unlike any other she had experienced or seen before, yet as she spent time on the ground, she also came to understand many things were quite similar to the previous places she traveled. In fact, throughout the week, she was often simultaneously surprised at how similar and how different things were from the other projects she collaborated on with partners in different parts of the world. These comparisons dominated many of the conversations she had with her colleagues.

Yet, if you ask Nora about this very trip, this important project, and this pivotal moment in her life, she will recount a story filled with tension that lies at the intersection of her gendered, ethnic, and professional identities.

On the last day of the trip, a large ceremonious gathering was planned. As a myriad of cars arrived outside the venue and people from both governments were ushered in, one of the organizers walked up to Nora and politely, in a hushed voice, asked her to please use the other door, motioning with his hand to a small doorway on the side of the building. Nora froze.

She was taken aback and her feet wouldn't move. She was not able to contain the look of shock on her face. She harkened back to her upbringing and the segregation she experienced. She thought about how she and other women were often treated unfairly in the workplace.

But, she also thought about her role as representative of the United States and recalled the intercultural training she underwent when she started at State. Yet at this moment in time, she wasn't sure how to react or what to do. It seemed to Nora that whatever path she choose, she was denying a very salient aspect of her identity and betraying her core values.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What aspects of Nora's identities are salient for her in this situation?
- How would you describe the internal conflicts Nora must navigate to decide on a course of action?
- How does Nora maintain her authenticity while managing her obligations to her co-workers and hosts?



- How may Nora's decision and actions impact the project?
- Should Nora take any action upon returning to the United States?

Additional Resources

Additional recommended resources to explore the central themes in this case are available.

- Kimberly Crenshaw, [The Urgency of Intersectionality](#), TED Talk
- Frances Fukayama, *Identity: Contemporary Identity Politics and the Struggle for Recognition*
- Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwalk, *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*
- Claude Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do*
- Andy Molinsky, *Global Dexterity: How to Adapt Your Behavior Across Cultures without Losing Yourself in the Process*

Corresponding Author

Gargano, Terra, American University, School of International Service, Washington, DC, USA, Email: gargano@american.edu