An Analysis of Some American Values

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The reading of this assignment served as an eye opener for me, as I looked at the values more in-depth. Where was this document when I needed it? When I first moved to the mainland U.S., (was previously living on a U.S. territory) I did not know any "American" customs and values. I felt out of place. Personally, this assignment helped explain why some Americans act the way they do and why some of their values reinforced my theories. I am shockingly intrigued of how accurate this list is. Three values from the list really stood out to me. They are the following: time and its control (value # 3), self-help concept (value #6), and informality (value #10).

As I reflected, I chose those three values because I encountered them while living on the mainland. I sometimes saw Americans worried and even consumed with time. For example, some of my peers care very deeply about arriving to class on time, meeting deadlines, and keeping appointments. Some felt as if they can control time, and often said, "I will do my homework later after…" Or they believe that the have the power to "create time" as they would be allowed to makeup an assignment later. Regarding the self-help concept, sometimes Americans appear to be very independent at times, and sometimes they accept help as if they are in a dire situation. Sometimes, I would offer someone some help, and they would respond that "They got it" which is perfectly fine and showcase the self-help concept. In addition, when I was a freshman, I did not know where some of my classes were located. So, I asked some people for directions. Some gave me verbal directions, while others provided written instructions. The takeaway is that those people believed that I would be able to find the class on my own, thus I would be capable of "helping myself".

Finally, when I first moved to the mainland, I did not understand Americans because I could not fathom the concept of "informality". I thought some people were just impolite. For

example, some people would tell each other "Hey hoe, or hi bitch." Where, I was raised, this words were considered "fighting words", people fought for being called out of their name, more importantly it was disrespectful. I also did not understand the concept of dressing casual to formal places, like knowingly wearing pajamas to school. I experienced culture shock for about a month before I realized these values were the cultural norm.

Besides encountering some of these values, I am guilty of practicing some of them. First, on some occasions, I value time. For example, I like to be on time if not early for meetings and appointments. I also try to my best to submit my assignments before their deadlines. In addition, I like to plan in advance around activities and events which includes my deadlines. In some instances, I do waste valuable time and procrastinate at times, inevitably trying to make up for lost time.

Secondly, I am an extremely independent person. At first, I only asked for help when I absolutely needed it. For example, I did everything myself. Whether it was making a sandwich or completing a task, I feared that someone else would not get the job done good enough, so I would do everything myself. I felt that they could mess up the task which would be terrible, because I really do not like "redoing" someone else's work. This is one of the reasons why I did many things on my own. As I matured, I learned to accept help, as well as guidance from others. Overtime, I have gotten better in asking for help.

Currently, I do like the media's concept of self-help. In my own opinion, some illustrate that people who were less fortunate who became accomplished by themselves. They are often times on a different tier than someone who received help. Do not get me wrong, I think making it on your own is an awesome experience, and is something to be very proud of! But why does it

have to be a competition? This leads to people comparing their struggles with one another, to see who has made the most successes in life.

Finally, the last value I will discuss is informality. In some situations, it makes me feel uncomfortable to be informal. Therefore, *only* on limited occasions I am informal. My personal norm is to be formal. For example, one of my professors said that the class can call him by his first name. I opted to call him by his last name. On another occasion for my music class, I attended a jazz band and an orchestra band concerts. I was tasked with reporting on the concerts for class. As is customary for me, I dressed in semi-formal clothing because I did not know the dress code. Compared to many of the other attendees, I might have appeared to be over-dressed. There are times however, where I am informal. This usually occurs with people that I am comfortable with like family and friends. This is when I would "let my hair down", laugh, make jokes, and tell stories without being formal.

Although some of these values are mostly common with Americans, some cultures would have different opinions about some of these values. Besides being American, I am Caribbean, and I saw these values differently when I first moved to the U.S. First, some Caribbean value time differently. Some of their events do not start on time. For example, a concert would be scheduled to start at 7 pm, and may it start at 7:30 pm. Many people would be perfectly fine with that, citing "island time". Most are accustomed to events not starting on time, and understood that unplanned events like frequent power outages would make one late. Most understand that they do no control time, and they must be flexible.

Secondly, some Caribbean people view self-help as positive thing. However, if a visitor were to ask for directions, a local would give verbal instructions, and still sometimes accompany them to the location because of courtesy. Helping others is a value with many Caribbean people.

Finally, informality is viewed differently and varies between generations on some Caribbean islands. Specifically, on my island, it is okay for adults to be informal to other adults, children cannot be informal with adults. We value manners and respect! One would hear "good afternoon ma'am, excuse me sir" etc., which is very different than in America. If the event says the dress code is formal, one should dress formal, otherwise they would be looked at differently. In this case, it would be best if someone came over dressed than under dressed.

I enjoyed the reading. I found it shocking, as well as intriguing! I would recommend it to others, as I recommended it to my mother. American values are often times different from other cultures but they should not be discounted. This is what makes America different. Although I grew up in St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands, when I was a child I frequently traveled during the summers to spend time with family in various states. Looking back now, I would say that I was sheltered because I was not exposed to the culture of Americans since the family I visited kept our island traditions. As a young adult attending college, I am no longer sheltered and have received a full dose of American values. After initially experiencing culture shock, I came to the conclusion that my core values are what's important to me. My value of time, self-help, and the state of being informal, do not define me. I define me.

Reference

Kohls, L. R. (1984). *The values Americans live by.* Washington, DC: Meridian House
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