Microcosms of Culture: A Graduate’s Analysis of the College Experience

How can one wholly define the term ‘culture’? It is the theological, linguistic, educational, habitual, and ancestral facets of life that are acquired by members of a society. These ‘cultural facets’ that each individual internalizes can be based upon a society’s beliefs, customs, behaviorisms, mannerisms, laws, etc. (Robbins). For my Honors Portfolio entitled “Microcosms of Culture: A Graduate’s Analysis of the College Experience,” I aim to explore the concept of culture with respect to my four years at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Indeed, I have benefited and learned from the diverse cultural experiences with which I have been involved during my college career. In my portfolio, I intend to research and explain these differing, yet equally foundational factors that have contributed to my broader understanding “culture” throughout my college experience, while also informing me about how I personally embody, and maneuver through, these disparate cultural lessons.

In order to understand the cultures that I have become a part of, I had to thoroughly examine what factors made me feel as though I identified with these particular cultures. I feel that I identify with each of these cultures as I use artifacts to symbolize my involvedness within the culture, I relate to the symbols within the cultures, I abide by the rules and maintain the cultural attitude that shows my conformity with others in the culture, and I maintain the ethical codes, laws, and norms that allow others to recognize my cultural belonging and understand me as an individual. These facets affect my moral beliefs as well as my social life in that they depict my cultural relativity and opinions on “right” and “wrong” in today’s society. For example, my
perspective on birth control shows my feministic moral stance on the right for women to have choice over their body, which displays the beliefs and views of the Feminist culture I self-identify with. Ideals, such as the one I just described, not only allows others to recognize me as a member of a particular culture, but also allows me to recognize myself as a member of the culture.

Regarding the University student theme, my slides from World Through Film and Arts and Society embodies my entrance into the University student culture through Liberal studies classes that all students take for general education requirements. In these classes, I proved to myself that I could in fact develop my right brain and become interested in artistic aspects such as art and foreign film, which is partially what these courses are offered for. Another significant piece of being a part of the university student culture is finding and declaring my major, something every student must face. My Introduction to Accounting class, represented in my portfolio by a simple balance sheet (Wilson), convinced me that I should major in Business. Being actively involved in my University and showing a sense of pride and passion for my majors shows my commitment to the University and my identity within it.

The animal rights culture is definitely the one I am most proud to be a part of and most thankful that I found. The Honors Community Service class gave me the opportunity to find The Humane Society of Concord, where I spent much of my time, so it is only fitting that I include my portfolio slide with pictures from my experience at the shelter that semester to represent my entrance into the animal rescue culture. Also relevant to this culture is the essay I wrote in Julie Hicks’ Freshman Seminar class entitled “This I Believe,” where I depicted my ever-growing love for rescue animals through my belief in bathing puppies (Wilson). At this time I was becoming more and more engulfed in the practices of this culture and determined to learn more about its
beliefs such as spay and neutering, micro-chipping and disease prevention. Finally, my tattoo of paw prints on my shoulder perfectly represents my identification with and belonging to the animal rescue and commitment to animal rights culture. My tattoo is a visual reminder that no matter where I end up, I will always belong to the animal rights and rescue culture. These artifacts are symbolic of my devotion to animals and how my passionate stance on animal rights will forever drive my desire to help the cause and, in turn, solidify myself as a member of the animal rights culture (Wilson).

My discovery and participation in the Feminist culture was certainly the most distinct and controversial culture of which I have become involved. This culture also brings up one topic I will explore within my portfolio, which is how the cultures within which an individual may become invested may, at times, clash and cause internal debate. To be sure, this personal controversy of culture is a microcosm for the broader understanding of cultural divergence that is evident in society at large. The field of Women’s and Gender Studies and its emphasis on feminism is a wide-ranging culture with numerous mini-cultures of which it is comprised. A couple examples are radical and liberal feminisms, which are quite different despite their both falling under the umbrella of Feminism. I studied in-depth the different feminist theories, and although I found a few that I could identify with some of their beliefs, I could never fully declare my identity with one. For example, I identify with certain aspects of lesbian feminism, namely the idea of heteronormativity; however, the notions seem to alienate all other feminists who are attracted to men, and I surely see how this angle can hurt the feminist movement. Interestingly, I undoubtedly identify with the broad belief of this culture as the social, economic, political and legal equality of all genders, races, classes, sexual orientations and so much more.
This culture was surely one I was excited to learn about and dignified in being a part of. Professor Kelly Finley is the person to thank for my initial interest in becoming a part of the feminist movement, as her Introduction to Women’s Studies course sparked a fire in me that fascinated me with the culture and its beliefs and activism. Because of this, I will include a photo of my professor for this artifact. I will also include a photo of Jessica Valenti, my favorite author, and I. This artifact depicts me slowly becoming more involved in the feminist culture off (researching and reading for leisure) and on campus (going to social and educational activities and taking Women’s and Gender Studies classes). Lastly, I will include a flyer for one of the activities that VOX: Voices for Planned Parenthood (Ritchie), the club I co-founded and served as Treasurer for, put on for the campus. This artifact ties together my entrance into the Feminist culture and becoming an active member of its society, as it represents my continued involvement in feminism and efforts to share my knowledge and valuable experiences with people on and off campus.

The last culture that I found in my college experience is the Corporate America culture, which I have more recently become involved in. It was a complete shock coming into the business world from simply being a college student, as the language, communication style and other practices are fascinating and confusing to anyone looking in from the outside or just coming into the world. As anyone involved in Corporate America should know, each corporation prides itself on its individual culture, defining its purpose and promise to customers and stakeholders within and out of the company. Fortunately I think I have adapted well to this culture shock for someone coming into this foreign culture with no experience. The artifact I will use for this culture and theme is the presentation I constructed that explains what my team, Global Functions Finance, within Ally Financial Inc. does, including where we get our
information, what we do with it, and where it goes once it leaves us. My presentation presents many cultural norms within the company that I had to adapt to in order to thrive in my role, including terminology such as COH (Corporate Overhead) Allocation and Managerial versus legal entity views of financial reporting (Wilson). Within this presentation is also my networking map from the end of my internship over a year ago and an updated version of my map now that I’ve been working part-time at AFI since my internship ended. This map represents my involvement in the Corporate America culture and the vital connections I’ve made throughout my time at Ally.

The methodology I will use for my portfolio will go along the lines of the Kolb style, as his method seems very concrete and easily depicts the transformation of discovering and becoming a part of cultures through “touching all the bases.” Through Kolb’s first phase, the concrete experience, one encounters a new experience such as a lecture on Women’s and Gender Studies. In phase two, the reflective observation, one contemplates the inconsistencies between their experience and their understanding of the culture itself and outside of the culture (McLeod). Exemplary of this is reflecting on whether the beliefs of Feminism align with what I conceptually know and am comfortable becoming a part of. Third, the abstract conceptualization phase (McLeod), brings about a new idea or modification of an existing concept, such as the independent research and leisurely activism I took part in that slowly molded me into a feminist mindset. The last phase, active experimentation, where one applies the concepts to the world, is easily represented by my decision to co-found and become Treasurer of an on-campus women’s rights club.

After looking into possible advisors and readers, I decided to stray from my original plan. Jennifer Byrd was my professor for the writing-intensive class “Feminist Thought” and always
had valuable feedback for both theory and writing technique. I would like to use her as my advisor. I took two UHP classes with Professor Jonathan Perry and believe he would be the perfect as my reader.

Lastly, I have come up with a schedule outlining the process to complete my proposal starting from November 2014:

**November 11, 2014:** Turn in Application for Admission to Candidacy form

**December 3, 2014:** Turn in Honors Portfolio Proposal

**January 26, 2014:** First meeting with Advisor

**February 16, 2014:** Second meeting with Advisor

**March 1, 2014:** Initial design due

**March 9, 2014:** Third meeting with Advisor

**March 10, 2014:** Submit first draft of portfolio to Reader

**March 30, 2014:** Fourth meeting with Advisor

**April 15, 2014:** Second draft of design due

**April 20, 2014:** Fifth meeting with Advisor

**April 21, 2014:** Submit second draft of portfolio to Reader

**May 8, 2014:** Final due
Bibliography

Finley, Kelly. Personal photograph by author. 2011.


