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Being Human: An Introduction to Anthropology

L.I.A ESSAY

According to the anthropological perspective, culture is a way of life. It can be defined by the combination of the things we make, things we do, and things we think in different contexts. In other words, it's a mix of materials, technologies, social relationships, everyday practices, deeply held values, and shared ideas (chapter 3, p.70). Cultures are nothing but the ways we as humans interact with the world that surrounds us under various circumstances—it's the things we teach, and learn, and share. It would be almost restrictive to define the concept only by the individuals that make it up; the race to which they belong, the country they originate from, etc. With this in mind, culture can be found almost anywhere; be it in friend groups, online fan communities, families, sports teams, or religions. The idea of it is almost infinite.

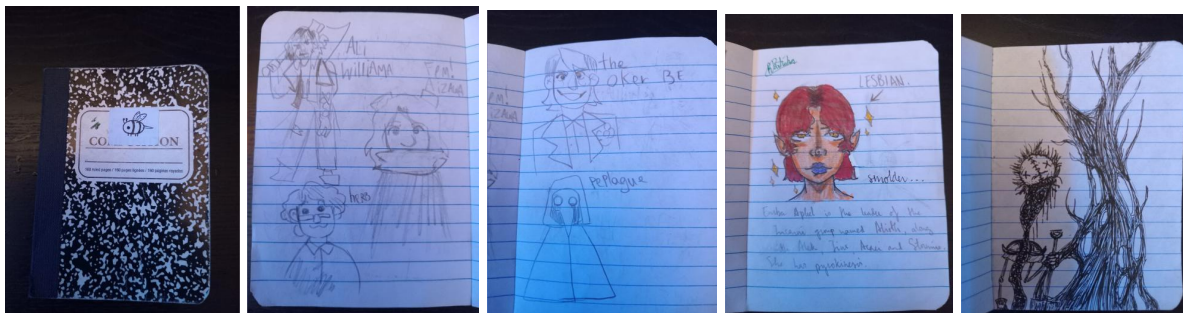
In this essay, I will be presenting a culture I belong to, analysing and explaining it from an anthropological perspective with the goal of further understanding how culture encompasses every aspect of humanity. The culture that I will be talking about is that of my friend group of approximately eight people, including myself. However, I will, for the most part, focus on a trio subunit of this group that also includes myself. This is due to the fact that the three of us have known one another longer compared to the rest of those in this culture. This text will analyse different concepts proper to cultures such as enculturation, values, rituals, language, and kinship.

In my friend group, we enculturate through various ways. A big part of our culture comes from our shared or similar mindsets. One of the ways we built this was by delving into some more specific things we have in common, like experiences in the same school or locality, senses of humor, and personality traits. As a result, we've developed inside jokes that we repeat often and will explain to other people as a way to integrate them into the group. For example, my two aforementioned friends in the group (whom I've known longer than the others) have an inside joke proper to the three of us: when referring to one of our former teachers whom we consider important to our academic journeys, we sometimes replace his name with any two words starting with the same letters as his initials—or, M and T. It's devolved into instances of talking about this teacher with incomprehensible combinations of words such as “Macaroni Territory” or “Machinability Trypophobia”. We have also created bonds by sharing personal information about our lives and our hardships. For example, a portion of my friends have difficult family situations, or struggle with social connections—this has led some of them to experience difficulties with their self-perception and their all-around mental health. As such, through talking about our problems we've come to understand one another better, and it has become part of our general culture to know and remember personal details in order to provide adequate support.

We have multiple pieces of material culture, or things made in a cultural group under a certain context. One example of this is the friendship bracelets that I made and gifted to almost every member of the group. Each bracelet is personalized with a provided colour combination and a set of 3-4 letters, usually a name or nickname. I began the process of making these bracelets in early 2023 for my friend group in highschool through a Google Forms I sent to every person. When I started at Vanier College and made more connections, I eventually personally offered to make them bracelets as well if they wished. Here are pictures of some of the bracelets:



Another example of material culture amongst my friends is a composition notebook we call the “Hive Book,” named after the B-Hive, or the student life room of Vanier College. We pass it around the group, each keeping it for an indefinite period of time during which we doodle or write whatever we want in the pages. Here are some pictures of the Hive Book and its contents:



We share a lot of values as a group, many of which are what brought us together. For one, we all believe in the importance of compassion, or being able to understand and support one another when in need. It also signifies a lack of judgement, or the dropping of any judgement when one of us divulges something personal. When we gather the courage to tell each other

things, we try our best to remain supportive. Another thing we greatly value as a group is creativity—all of us have hobbies related to creativity, whether it be literature, performance arts, or studio art. When needed, we'll help each other with our creative pursuits by providing ideas and inspiration or—if someone is capable in multiple areas of the arts—by tutoring and giving advice.

Next, we perform many rituals on a regular basis. One example is a practice where every Monday, we put our hair into half-up ponytails for the entire day. This ritual originated from a very specific sequence of events. One of my friends has a very, very intense interest in the game *The Last of Us Part II*, where the main character wears her short hair in a half-up. I maintain my own hair around the same length and sometimes also tie it up in the same way; as such, when we all began to warm up to one another, that friend would often draw comparisons between me and the character. This, somehow, led to all of us selecting a day of the week where we wear our hair in half-up ponytails to create a sense of community. We call this day “Half-Up Monday.” A second ritual we carry out is when we take a picture of a cat or other animal from an existing meme or video and draw our features onto it, such as our hair, our glasses, a signature piece of clothing or a beard. This is an idea we got from posts on the Internet that land on our feeds. We see this a form of initiation into the group, considering someone a member of the Hive group once they've been drawn. Thus, this ritual—which we call “[*name*]-ification”—is also a sort of rite of passage. Here are some examples of this ritual:



As for symbols, we use and refer to a lot of imagery and objects that hold meaning. To start, at the beginning of this semester, we put together what we call the “Friendship Freedom Fighter Chart.” It’s a spread chart on a blank template of a school schedule with a colour-coded legend for every member. It’s made up of dots representing every half-hour that one of us is out of class and therefore available to hang out. We use the chart very often, almost everyday, and it’s become an essential symbol in this group. A second symbol present in our friend group is a logo created by one of us with includes drawings and pictures of all of us and some; it was originally made in the context of a Computer Science Technology class project where the goal was to create a website:



When it comes to language, my friend group and I use a lot of expressions in abundance, many of which we created. To start, a portion of us combined the words “fun” and “unhinged” to create the new term “funhinged”. We will sometimes refer to people who are outgoing, enjoyable to be around, a little bit strange—and who fit well into our group—as funhinged. We will also oftentimes use it to label ourselves, such as when creating group chats. Another instance of language we created as a group is when we use the expression “I wish Toby was here.” We use this as a code when we find someone in our vicinity attractive, and want to let the other people in the group know without making it too obvious. This expression came from multiple instances of us sharing looks with one another for the same reason, and the name Toby is used because a lot of the time, the look is shared with someone in the group who has the same name.

Next, many of us have complex relationships with gender and the concept of it. A large majority do not identify (or only partly identify) with our gender assigned at birth—some of us are agender, genderfluid, or binary transgender, and others are cisgender, meaning they are very comfortable with the gender they were assigned at birth according to their biological sex. Additionally, a lot of us identify with sexualities under the LGBTQIA+ agenda, and therefore, queer theory and culture seeps its way into a lot of our own culture. We dress in ways that do not conform to gender norms and use many sets of pronouns which are both gendered and gender-neutral. We all have a pretty healthy relationship with our queerness, whether we're in a medical transition process or just trying names and new pronouns out, as we've created a pretty comfortable space in this friend group where almost anything goes.

To expand on almost anything being accepted, over time we've come to cultivate a strong fictive kinship in this group. Although none of us are related by blood, we have a close enough relationship to allow frequent contact, such as hugging, holding hands, playing with hair, looping arms, laying on top of each other or sharing straws, drinks and food. We also make jokes about being cousins, or siblings, and many have observed our friendship from an outside point of view and agreed that we are interestingly comfortable. Moreover, upon asking the other people in this culture, we all unanimously agreed that we've built a strong sense of intimacy over the years and months.

Anthropology is incredibly relevant and useful in its outlook on life as well as its usage of time and space. Being able to study life through the anthropological lens of both biology and culture makes for a better understanding of our place in the world. With the knowledge that all groups have a sense of culture no matter their size, their origin, their level of interconnection,

their history, and their context, we come to realize that humanity is incredibly diverse, unique, and special. The various fields of anthropology study exactly that—what it means to be human across time; how we adapt, how we evolve (chapter 20, p. 614). Through writing about my friend group from an anthropological lens, I was able to further understand just how essential anthropology really is. I was also able to appreciate the cultures that exist in my life, and the varied ways in which they influence how I live my life. Everything from my manner of speech, to my habits, to my gait, to my ways of thinking, come from how I was raised and who surrounds me.