
Significant Life Event

Introduction

Life is at its best unpredictable; characterized by many highs and lows. Nevertheless, each of the events whether a low or high leave us with more experience and better informed. While every event in life is of the significant learning experience, some touching incidents completely change our beliefs, faith and sometimes our personalities. Like many of us, few moments in my life have completely wiped the stereotypes that I have held about others and shaped a new direction in the choices that I make. One of those events took place when I visited the other part of my family in the remote parts of Jamaica. This incident provided the most vivid experience of how culture can influence the way we see each other and the behaviors that we exhibit despite having the same genes.

Last year, I had the opportunity to reunite with some of my family members in the rural parts of Jamaica. My parents come from Kingston, Jamaica, but I have never had the opportunity to travel and connect to any of my family members in the country. In the beginning, I was very excited, but I did not know what to expect or how to relate to them considering the cultural differences. I had begun preparation a month before the visit, but the essential part of my research was frequent Google searches about the culture of the locals. When I finally visited, there was a fundamental difference between what I had learned from websites and how people lived and related to each other. Kingston being the capital city of Jamaica, I expected the area to be technologically advanced, with a few shopping centers, but this was somewhat not the case, there were hardly any shopping center and the little that existed contained only necessary items. I later realized that my perception was a mere generalization.

Among the many things that I learned from that interaction, the most amazing part was my firsthand experience with a freshly prepared chicken. I had gone to my grandmother's house, and she was so thrilled to see us. She ordered one of her caretakers to prepare a chicken for us, and I was so excited to see the preparation of a chicken before it is cooked. Watching the head gets cut, the feathers removed, and then the legs were a little shocking to me, but after reading about the treatment that these animals go through in our industries back in the United States, it was amazed by the respect that these people accord to animals.

My experience with my extended family in Jamaica can be understood from the social-cultural perspective and reaction formation. The social-cultural perspective recognizes the role of social context, social pressures, environmental cues, and cultural influences on behavior change.

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Attitudes and values underline the social culture perspective. According to Shiraev and Levy (52), attitudes are the psychological representations that rely on an evaluation of various features of the social world. These values are based on personal experiences and form the psychological link between cognitive images that act as the basis of their evaluations. Our memories retained a particular image together with their appraisal. Values, on the other hand, are the attitudes that reflect a standard, principal or quality that are considered by individuals the most desirable or appropriate. Values are more stable than attitudes and represent the most significant influence on how we interact and behave on various occasions. For example, during my visit to Jamaica, it was amazing to realize how religion plays a central role in shaping how people interacted and viewed each other. While my parents are somehow religious, I am not that religious from our homes and religion forms the least consideration when interacting with others. A sort of sacred chant characterized every conversation back in Jamaica. For example, my grandmother was delighted that God had been keeping us safe, immediately after we met; she spends a few seconds reciting some prays which I came to learn that she was thanking God for being able to see us before departing from this world. I'm amazed by the value that she placed on the belief in God and his protective capacity. When explaining the difference in cultural values, Vognar (n.p.) observes that the differences that exist between individuals from different cultures are connected to the way various groups cope with the fundamental societal problems.

After a careful examination, I realized my experience in Jamaica took place in four different stages. First, there is the initial period where I approached my new family from the perspective of my own culture, personality and stereotyped information from the internet. This was a period characterized by stereotypes and polarities, but after a little interaction with the locals, the stereotypes that I approached them with began to faint. I realized that was a critical point of awakening where I learned new ideas about the community, and more importantly, my perspective started changing. There is also a period of adjustment, which acts as a critical point of completely wiping the stereotypes. However, I did not stay for an extended period of complete adjustment but the impressions that I gained from the few months that I stayed with the locals. The last stage of the perspective change is described by Shiraev and Levy (62), as the period of testing and consolidation. In this stage, the visitor has acquired a revised version of the values and beliefs

Finally, my experiences in Jamaica provided a wealth of information about how culture affects our perception and attitudes towards life in general thus shaping both my implicit and explicit memories. Due to the mere fact that I had come from a highly industrialized country, my expectation was very high and, in some cases, I was shocked to realize the some of the things that we regard as essential in urban life are not even necessary for survival. Also, I learned the importance of being open-minded when interacting with people from other cultures. I went to Jamaica with limited knowledge about the culture and language. In fact, most of the information

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that I had about the country was from google. Nonetheless, the experience expanded my understanding of the people, and in some cases, I realized that what I learned from the internet about the people in the locality was very skewed causing a misinformation effect. Having an open mind helped me adjust and change my attitude towards life in general.

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