Reflection on Culture

Culture is a very interesting topic to interpret. With countless differences and ways of life, many find it cumbersome to compare and contrast two or more different cultures with little to no bias. Our group has a few similar cultures, yet the most culturally abstract in my personal opinion was Duminda’s. Duminda originates from Sri Lanka, which is primarily a Buddhist country. He had the strongest accent, most unique view on everyday things, and an aptitude to learn as much as possible about everyone else’s culture and way of life. There were certain aspects of his culture that I felt not only culture shock and ethnocentrism toward, but also a surprisingly high amount of cultural relativism toward as well.

When I first interviewed Duminda, there were many questions I had for him. One of the questions I asked concerned his family. He told me a little about his family’s origins and about how he came to be in America. One of the aspects of his story that I thought interesting was that in his country, newborns were sometimes named by either their grandparents or perhaps even a famous local person, instead of their parents. I must admit, this kind of threw me off a bit and I suppose this would be where I experienced the most culture shock in the conversation. Since this practice was so different than my own western ideals, it kind of confused me. I also felt a bit of ethnocentrism toward the subject, since I wouldn’t want my father naming my son, much less a random person in my village or town!

Duminda also told me about the educational system back in Sri Lanka. He informed me that all of the education in his homeland is completely free, even college, however only the
best-of-the best gain access to a university. This not only shocked me, but also filled me with envy. Who wouldn’t want their future children to continue their education and better themselves for free? We also discussed his country’s main religion, Buddhism. This is where I experienced the most cultural relativity, since I share many of the same religious ideals and practices with him. At least I was able to connect with him on some level and have something in common, opposed to experiencing total culture shock, which I’m sure is the most common reaction when shown a culture other than our own.

To say the least, I’d say that my first interview with Duminda was quite interesting. I did feel a bit ethnocentric toward certain aspects of the conversation yet I’m glad I kept my composure and tried to relate to him and his way of life in Sri Lanka. We did connect quite a bit on a few levels, although I’m sure we have much to learn from each other in future interviews.