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SP 108: Introduction to Human Communication
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Essay 1 Option 2

Cause and Effect in Self-Concept

The self-concept is as multi-faceted as its influences, all of which find their foundation in our experiences and communications with others, the roles we choose and our values, as well as how we believe others see us. The self-concept is composed of the substructures of self-image and self-esteem. Frequently, I find that I define my self-concept with descriptors, rather than roles, though the traits are chosen or realized in regards to a role. I use signifiers such as artistic, creative, passionate, and patient before I'd name the positions I associate them with: artist, writer, youth, and big sister, respectively. My self-image is fluid, which in turn, allows me to be accepting of others, or at least encourages me to try.

Crucial to the formation of self-concept are values, attitudes, and beliefs. My religious upbringing has impacted my values in that spirituality and morality are important to me and I judge others by any seeming adherence to a set of ethics. Though unintentional, I respect qualities in others that are described in Christian Beatitudes. I'm affected by the notions of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and sheltering the homeless. I'm continuously appreciative and impressed to find these qualities in others because I'd like to find them in myself. This specific value system affects my attitude: to treat others well, or as you would like to be treated. I believe that if one enacts some kindness in the world, they will pass it on so that good may spread. I have no evidence of this, but anyone would be hard-pressed in an attempt to convince me otherwise.

I attended a small all-girl Catholic high school that emphasized women's potential, particularly when acting in solidarity and encouraged religiously "gathering together". My first two years of higher education were spent at a fine arts institute that emphasized the benefits of the artists' community, an open dialogue of expression and inspiration. My schooling, more than anything else, has affected my understanding of the personal-social identity continuum with an emphasis on community and the importance of a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Each facilitated open and honest two-way communication. I'm comfortable, if not confident in vocalizing opinions or initiating conversation in small group settings, classrooms, or conferences. However, in places such as the cafeteria, in which there is little order and a significant amount of interference, I feel anxious about the ability to communicate clearly, for myself as well as others. I find it frustrating to simply watch people at a table attempt to shout over each other in attempts to be heard. The artists' community has probably given me the most perspective on expression and communication. In attempting to create a physical, nonverbal piece that "speaks" to others, artists realize that if something feels deeply personal, it is probably universal. This notion has made me comfortable feeling unique and simultaneously connected to others. It is evident in my nonverbal communication: in small groups and, more commonly, classroom size settings, when speaking, I address one person in particular, paying attention to maintaining eye contact and nodding in affirmation, but I raise my voice louder than is necessary for a one-on-one conversation, with intentions of being heard by the whole class. Because I expect to be heard, I assume others want to be as well, so I'd more likely than not ask someone to speak up if I cannot hear their message clearly.

Simultaneously, as a Mexican American, I feel most apt to position myself somewhere between individualistic and collective orientation. The simple repeated use of “I” in this essay denotes my cultural individualism. However, my Hispanic heritage is probably a prime factor in my expressed interest in community and collectivism. I find it influential during celebrations and meals. My family, immediate and extended, has always gathered around a table to share a meal: we don’t answer our phones, we show interest in each other’s lives, and we rarely watch T.V. These are habits I cannot unlearn—I don’t answer my phone at the table, even when I’m not in my parents’ house.

I’m hard-pressed to separate my gender from cultural constructs (in regards to both Mexican and American aspects). My feminist high school introduced me to the notion of gender as a social construct before I had really even acknowledged gender stereotypes, which has diluted my adherence to gender-specific roles. America is still sometimes seen as the land of opportunity, and coming from a foreign background, my family believes in and hopes for equality whole-heartedly. My parents have often told me of the strength of the Mexican spirit, particularly in women simply because we’ve needed to possess the quality historically. My father calls my grandma “mountain sturdy”, and that has left an impression. I rarely feel confined or restricted by my gender because these hopeful sentiments are encouraging. Also, I recognize that culture plays an important role in body-image, which as an American, plays a critical role in self-image. However, while American women are more likely to feel pressure to be thin, my extended family called me “puny” until last year and still attempts to force-feed me because I “eat like a bird” due to different ideals of beauty. I feel comfortable as a female, but sometimes forget its

impact on my self-concept because much of my environment has reiterated that it is not a restraint. Once again, I find the most appeal in embracing the spectrum's fluidly.

In summation, I've recognized that my flexible perspectives reiterate that self and self-image, like communication, are a process, always present and forever forming.