Abstract

In this essay, *A Self Discovery: Mediums of Culture, Language, and Technology,* I will be discussing the relationship I had between language, culture, and technology. Being raised in a home of different cultural backgrounds created different contact zones for me, which I am still navigating through adulthood. Along with language and culture came technology. The different mediums I used through my childhood are mediums that evolved with me to the present day—starting with a mechanical toy to a computer that I built on my own. My relationship with language and technology has affected how I view the world around me. Nevertheless, I continue using these mediums to communicate and share my message.

A Self Discovery: Mediums of Culture, Language, and Technology

In one of my earliest memories, I was playing with a plastic toy with a red frame, using the two white knobs to create images. *Etch A Sketch* is a mechanical drawing toy that allows children to create linear drawings by twisting the knobs in which an aluminum powder is dispelled onto a gray screen. At first, as a preschooler, I did not draw anything in particular; it would mainly be scribbles and a bunch of nothing. Eventually, through my early elementary childhood, I began drawing objects like a flower or cat or writing the words I had learned in school. Starting with Etch A Sketch to the present day, I have used other forms of mediums and tools to expand my relationship with language, culture, and technology. Whether with the Etch A Sketch, pencils, crayons, or finger drawings on frosted windows, I always had the urge to make sense of the new knowledge I was gaining with these different mediums and tools.

With my coy, reserved demeanor in elementary school, I struggled socially to connect with others. Oral communication wasn't something that I had developed confidence in until middle school. My family moved a lot in my elementary school years, and I had trouble assimilating to new environments. Stability had an impact on my confidence to communicate orally. In middle school, I was always grateful to have lived down the block from a public library. It had a significant influence on my youth. Not only was I exposed to books, but I also gained more confidence orally expressing myself from the events held at the library – book clubs, activities, and various classes. By finding interest in books and other activities, I made friends who shared the same interests, and we could share conversations and ideas.

I was exposed to many contact zones throughout my life, being born into a multi-racial immigrant family. In *Arts of the Contact Zone,* Mary Louise Pratt defines contact zone as a term to refer to social spaces where "cultures meet, clash, and grapple each other." My Mother was born in Guyana, a country colonized by the British, who brought Indians over to work as indentured slaves. As a result, Guyana was engulfed with Indian culture that faded over time. They lost fluency in the Hindi language, and transculturation occurred between the British, Indian, and African heritage. The once-known Indians lost fluency in their language, Hindi. They became known as West Indians, taking bits and pieces from the cultures surrounding them – creating a new and different heritage. Hindi was replaced with Guyanese Creole, the food a combination of Caribbean and Indian cuisines.

On the other hand, Dada was from Pakistan. Pakistan was once a part of India before achieving its independence. I was raised between two cultures, often clashing —Indian and Hindu elements from my Mother's side and Indo-Iranian Islamic culture from my Father's side. Once I was at the age that I could read and write, my Father deemed it time to learn how to cite the Quran. Dada would send me to evening classes to learn how to read *Al-abjadiyah*, the Arabic alphabet. I remember reading the consonants:

ا ب ت

Over and over again, I repeated *"'alif, Bā,' Tā'"* until it was instilled into my mind. Once we learned all the consonants in the alphabet, I was taught to cite the Quran orally. Even though I had learned to read Arabic, I was citing the Quran blankly without knowing its meaning. I could vocalize the beautiful language but could not understand precisely what I was reading – literacy without comprehension. It had crossed my mind that, in school, I was learning English vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing composition to be well-versed in the English language. Thus, it raised the question in my young mind, *"Why do I have to read the Quran in Arabic if I don't know what I'm reading? Why can't I read it in English instead?"* I often brought this up to my parents, and my Father told me: It was *Sunnah,* a blessing, to be reciting the Quran in the original language it was composed of. However, I still never quite understood the purpose of learning a language without comprehension. As a result, I lost the ability to read the language as I didn't take my Islamic studies seriously. In my adulthood, I identified as being raised as a Muslim, but now I would consider myself agnostic.

Being exposed to this contact zone was confusing for me throughout my childhood. Often, I didn't know where I fit into the world. I was an American that understood my Mother's broken English and was able to read Arabic but did not comprehend any of what I could read. I was also never considered a true "Indian" or a true "Pakistani" from both perspectives of the cultures. At home, my family would speak English because that was the only language my parent could communicate with each other. Sometimes I wish my dad had spent more time teaching me his mother tongue, Urdu*.* But I only picked up a few words here and there from him and had never met his side of the family, which were all back in Pakistan.

Despite the differences between the two cultural backgrounds, the two cultures met halfway in Bollywood films. My family would watch Bollywood films together; only my dad could understand the language, but we always enjoyed the movie with subtitles. A huge part of Bollywood films was the musical scenes accompanied by cultural dancing. I always admired the choreography and music produced in Bollywood films because it was a completely different world I didn't quite experience being raised in America. These films served as a medium where I was able to identify and connect with my culture.

Even now, I enjoy watching these films with my husband, from a different cultural background altogether. Christian is an Ecuadorian American. When we first started dating, it was hard to connect with his parents, who were strictly oral people. They know a little bit of English, but since they lived in close-knit Latino communities like Corona, for most of their lives, they never felt the need to learn English. Over the years, I have learned a lot of Spanish from his parents and traveled to different Spanish-speaking countries. I found myself in a whole new contact zone. When I traveled to Ecuador, Panama, Colombia, and Spain, I experienced different Spanish-speaking cultures but in different dialects. As mentioned before, I could cite Arabic but did not comprehend what I was vocalizing. In this case, I could understand Spanish conversations pretty well but often had difficulty orally responding to others. My husband and I have a contact zone of our own, being able to share our cultures through transculturation and sharing the experience of being an American from an immigrant family. For example, there are Spanish words that we use in our lingo. Sometimes we might joke around and tell our dog that he's getting the *chancla* (slipper)whenever he's in his stubborn ways. Or, sometimes, whenever there is something we can't quite explain, we might say: "*What is this brujería?"* (witchcraft). It may sound odd to others, but it was a new contact zone in a world between us that only we could understand.

In high school, I considered myself creative; self-expression came through different mediums and tools. McLuhan's theory states that *The Medium is the Message,* where the medium is the focus and carries more value than the message itself. In other words, the medium plays a significant role in how the content is perceived. Using different mediums allowed me to express myself in many ways. In my teenage years, when I got my first laptop, I met new friends in the realm of gaming that I still stay in touch with today. We would communicate with each other on platforms such as MSN and Skype. I also started micro-blogging around the time Tumblr and Twitter became popular. In school, I took an interest in art and spent a lot of time drawing and painting, and at home, I would write in my journal. Since childhood, I have had the urge to use tools to give me a better understanding of myself and the world around me. At the same time, I used my laptop to communicate with my friends through social media, microblogging, and video games. While the medium of journals, canvases, writing, and art tools held a more intrapersonal connection to me.

Now, as an adult, I still use the same mediums as a form of self-expression. However, over the years, the mediums have changed. Instead of my rinky dinky Dell Inspiron laptop, I started taking an interest in building computers. The gaming world has completely evolved since then; I needed a computer with the specifications to run the new and upcoming games. So I created my current computer for gaming and other leisure. In terms of writing tools, I started collecting different types of pens and notebooks with quality designs I didn't have access to when I was younger.

Something that I didn't evolve with was eBooks. Barnes and Noble and local bookstores became a distant memory with the rise of eBooks and audiobooks. While Amazon was the best source to order your books, I always preferred to go to my local bookstore and pick out a physical copy with my own hands. A book was a medium through which I could immerse myself in a new world– allowing me to unwind, understand human relationships, and expand my knowledge. As well as hone my writing skills. I like to annotate my books whenever I encounter a piece of writing that left an emotional mark on me or where I admire how the author conveyed the message. These author's inspired me to become a better writer. But I always thought, how can I manipulate words to convey the same emotion and excitement as these authors did for me when I read their novels?

Through mediums, I gained self-identity from the struggles of finding a place between two different cultural backgrounds. Language and technology created contact zones and mediums that were an outlet for my message, ideas, and culture to be displayed. While Bollywood films opened the door to my cultural background; technology and social media introduced me to communication and the gaming world. Journals and art were a medium where I could bring my ideas together, and Books were my escape. I continue navigating through different mediums and contact zones as time passes. From a child fiddling with the Etch A Sketch to an adult trying to write her understanding of language and technology.