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The Importance of "Besar La Mano"

As a member of many communities, including my Hispanic family, work, college, and friend groups, I've had to navigate different forms of talking and writing to fit in. Within my Hispanic community, fluency in Spanish is essential for effective communication and interaction with family members. The ability to speak fluently in both English and Spanish is a skill I value greatly, as it creates meaningful connections with relatives on both sides of my family.

Transitioning to my college environment, I found it necessary to master formal English to engage effectively in academic discourse. The language I use with friends and family differs significantly from the formal English required in my college life. When conversing with family, I adopt a more respectful tone reflecting our close relationships. However, in the professional setting of college, particularly when communicating with professors, a more formal and professional demeanor is imperative.

Being able to understand phrases in different discourse communities is what will build a deeper connection to you within the community. Certain phrases, such as "What's your major?" stand out as important in the college environment to obtain connections within the college community. This phrase serves as a common icebreaker, initiating conversations with fellow students that may lead to valuable relationships and networking opportunities beneficial for one's career advancement. As I navigate the diverse types of English and social landscapes of my

various communities, I recognize the importance of adapting my language and communication style to effectively engage and connect with others in each community.

The main phrase that is important to me and the Hispanic community is "besar la mano", which translates to "kiss the hand" in English and originates from a formal and respectful tradition of greeting elder family members in Hispanic households. It serves as the initial greeting when meeting or addressing older relatives. In response to hearing this phrase, it is customary to reply with "sion" followed by the appropriate familial title. For instance, "sion tía" is used when addressing an aunt, while "sion mami" or "sion papi" is used for one's mother or father, respectively.

The first time I came across the phrase "besar la mano" was in the Dominican Republic. I remember being left in the dark about how I was supposed to respond to this phrase. My first impression of this phrase felt like more of an annoyance and meaningless thing to say again and again to the same relative. As I got older and more mature, I started to truly understand the importance and meaning behind this phrase. The saying "besar la mano" is more than just a greeting between relatives, it is a way of showing respect, love, and passion for Hispanic heritage and family. This phrase is important to me and my community because it is a form of communication that connects all Hispanic relatives.

Having been born in the Dominican Republic and raised in the United States from a young age, I did not frequently use this phrase to greet family members in the U.S. However, when my relatives from overseas call me and I fail to respond with the correct greeting, I am met with disapproval from my Hispanic family members. This became evident when I received a call from an aunt whom I had never met. Simply saying "hello," which is customary in the United

States, was seen as disrespectful because I did not use the Hispanic greeting, a cultural nuance of which I was unaware.

Another instance highlighting the importance of this greeting occurred when I was addressed with "besar la mano" by a family member I had never met. Uncertain of their familial title, I was unsure how to respond, leading to further misinterpretation and repercussions. Consequently, "besar la mano" stands as a crucial phrase to understand when engaging in familial greetings within the Hispanic community, emphasizing the significance of cultural awareness and adherence to customary practices.

Understanding the significance of "besar la mano" as a gesture of respect and affection, has been instrumental in forming strong bonds and meaningful connections within my extended family, particularly with relatives from overseas, and embracing Hispanic cultural traditions. Before grasping the depth of this gesture's cultural importance, I found myself disconnected from certain family members and unaware of the customs that held profound significance in their lives.

Upon realizing this, I made a conscious effort to embrace "besar la mano" in my interactions with family members, particularly those from Hispanic backgrounds. As I began to greet the elders in my family with this gesture of respect, I noticed a shift in the strength of our relationships. The gesture of "besar la mano" became a bridge that connected the language barriers and distances, creating a sense of closeness and mutual understanding in my Hispanic family.

The phrase "besar la mano" finds its cultural home within the Hispanic community, serving as a cherished tradition deeply rooted in family with not only bonds but also with respect. Its significance stems from its origin within Hispanic discourse, rendering it less

appropriate for usage outside this cultural context. When employed in settings beyond the Hispanic community, the phrase may lose its authentic meaning and fail to convey the same level of respect and reverence it holds within Hispanic culture compared to someone with no knowledge of the history behind a Hispanic family.

Individuals of Hispanic background are encouraged to embrace and understand the profound significance of "besar la mano" as a symbol of family honor and respect. Understanding the significance of this cultural greeting fosters a deeper connection to heritage and reinforces familial ties through gestures of care and respect. Therefore, within the Hispanic community, the appreciation and use of "besar la mano" serve as components of cultural identity and familial tradition. It has taught me the power of cultural traditions to transcend boundaries and unite individuals in a shared sense of identity and belonging. The phrase "besar la mano" is more than just a greeting, it is an invitation into the caring and loving arms of our Hispanic relatives.