

STORY SUBMISSION #1

Prompt: Tell us a story about your self-cultural heritage and how that has had an impact on your identity

"I am a Mexican/American woman. I am proud to be that. I identify with my Mexican culture from the Catholic Church I attend to the time every year I cook, lay out photos and celebrate La Dia De Los Muertos. I love who I am, where my family came from and the difference my upbringing has shown me not only to accept other but be proud of what my family ties have taught me.

There have been many instances where my cultural identity has made me feel like "the other". I do not allow many people to meet my family simply because once you meet them, you are family. If you and I never speak another word you are still part of my family. I grew up watching aunts and uncles divorce and start new families, but when it came to family gatherings all were there. My mother and stepfather remain close with my father's mother. My mom and dad still have an open communication and congratulate one another and support one another. This has made it hard to see my friends go through situations that have torn their families apart. This is not the case with my family due to our cultural upbringing. It does not matter who you are to me, how our relationship may end, once you meet the family, you are the family.

I have partners who have met my family and even though we are no longer on speaking terms, I know when it is family get togethers they will be there. We were taught to accept that. Family is family. It always will be family no matter what and we will always have one another's back and support one another. I do not always feel this way as relationships end and you no longer want to engage the other person, you set that aside and you respect them as part of the family once you are introduced. This has led me to be very selective as to who I allow into our circle. So, if you are brought in, give the same respect I am expected to give you. I have been in situations where my father, for instance, has had a few past ladies present in our family home and at the end of the day, we all get along, respect one another and celebrate whatever occasion has brought us all together." (story continued on next page).

STORY SUBMISSION #1 CONTINUED

Prompt: Tell us a story about your self-cultural heritage and how that has had an impact on your identity

"This family bond has supported me in so many ways I can not even put it into proper words. I have a beautiful family, but I have an even more beautiful extended family. I can reach out to anyone who has ever been a part of our circle for anything I need. This may be a simple phone call to vent to a further extreme of needing help in any way, shape or form you an imagine. There are no boundaries once you become a part of our family. I was taught you do not allow someone into your life that you know you will not be able to openly communicate with from the moment you allow them in until the day you take your last breath. There are people from my past that I do not care to communicate with regularly, but I know because I chose to bring them into my family for even a moment will always be able to reach out to my blood and talk, vent, or ask for help. I must say I am lucky to have the family I do because the people that compose my family are they type of people I would choose to surround myself with. They are loving, caring, compassionate and willing to stand by anyone regardless of blood or ties and fight for them. That is how I see family. That is how I learned to love everyone that comes into my life no matter how long or how brief. If you invite someone in, you keep them. You give the respect, understand, appreciation and love you would want in return. The proud Mexican family I was brought up in makes me a proud Mexican woman who is not ashamed of myself or anyone I bring home to meet my family. If I do allow you to meet my family, believe the fact that I will always consider you family and my family will always consider you part of them!

If it was not for my family traditions and the respect I was taught to hand down from those that handed it down to me, I would not be the woman I am today. I am proud of that and always will be."



STORY SUBMISSION #2

Prompt: Tell us a story about your self-cultural heritage and how that has had an impact on your identity

"When it comes to identifying myself, I take huge pride when it comes to saying that I am Filipino. My grandparents were the ones that instilled their Filipino culture and knowledge into me; they were my best friends, second parents, and most importantly ... everything to me. They taught me the idea that Filipinos are resilient. No matter what challenges approach them, they will always find a way to pick themselves up and keep a smile on their face. They also taught me the importance of religion and family. No matter how many friends or significant others you lose, your family and your religion will always have your back. They even taught me the importance of respect and love in the Filipino culture: to always treat others the way you want to be treated.

My Filipino background stems all the way back to my father; he was 100% Filipino and was born and raised in the Philippines. Sadly, he passed away in a tragic car accident when I was only three years old. As a result, I spent majority of my life with my grandparents while my mom worked hard to finish college and work. My grandpa even retired early from his job to take care of me, and my grandma worked extra shifts as a nurse to have food and clothes for me. I was always constantly reminded of my father because of my last name, and all of my friends addressed me by my last name my entire life: even some of my teachers and professors did. I was even given the opportunity to change my last name to feel more welcomed in my family; however, I wanted to keep it out of respect and love for my dad."
(story continued on next page)

STORY SUBMISSION #2 CONTINUED

Prompt: Tell us a story about your self-cultural heritage and how that has had an impact on your identity

"Once I reached college, I knew I wanted to graduate and finish what my dad always wanted: a college degree. He passed away when he was only 20 years old, so he never got the opportunity to graduate. I had this strong feeling of pride inside of me that I needed to obtain this education for my family and that I wanted to make them proud. My grandma was my biggest supporter, and I even promised to take care of her after she retired. She told me about her dream of retiring and traveling the world with me; she sent me daily texts to check up on me and say I love you. However, at the beginning of my junior year in college, I got a phone call that my grandma suffered a stroke and that she was not going to make it... I was devastated by the news, and it was one of the roughest years of my life. I always wanted her to be there when I walked across the stage for graduation, so I went to her grave with my cap and gown on. To this day, I always think about her and appreciate every single day of life that is given to me; I continued my education towards my master's degree because I wanted to make a promise to myself.

To give one degree in honor of my father and to give one degree in honor of my grandma."



STORY SUBMISSION #3

Prompt: Tell us a story about the cultural community you've cultivated and how that helps to support you.

"Cosmetology was my first career, for over 30 years I practiced the art of cosmetology. In 1990, I learned hair replacement, which brought me closer to my clientele. I learned the behaviors of my clients were all different. I established a diverse clientele, which I was able to interact with them on several levels. Several clients discussed details of relationships with their husbands, children and even colleagues. I helped so many of my clients resolve their issues that it was time to follow my dreams and become a psychotherapist.

I had dreamed of becoming a therapist before doing hair, but having three sons cosmetology made more sense financially. I begin to research what courses were needed to become a counselor. That would be the first step to entering the field of a Psychotherapist. Realizing I needed to finish basic college courses would lead me to learn how to open a non-profit; Community Development was a way of me discovering my destiny in the field of Psychology. I knew I wanted to work in communities. I could help families learn what they needed to overcome; their fear of being mentally or emotionally overwhelmed with children suffering from ADHA and Bipolar 1.

In the communities where I had lived in Los Angeles, I saw a lot of mentally, emotionally and behavioral challenged young people. I completed my GE requirements it in two years and I began to go to meetings at the Center for Non-Profits downtown Los Angeles.

I met several individuals with the same idea of wanting to see change in our communities. I begin mentoring youth in my community. I had learned coaching techniques from classes I had taken. The skills I learned helped their parents with budgeting fixed incomes. The idea of how to manage their children with suggestions discipline techniques changed so many people in the at-risk neighborhoods I visited."



STORY SUBMISSION #4

Prompt: Tell us a story about how your cultural identity has ever made you feel “other” and what you did to work through that.

"Feeling like “the other” has become normalized throughout my life, especially as someone who identifies as a Jew. One encounter during my freshman year in undergraduate studies truly shaped my cultural heritage and significantly impacted my identity.

While I grew up in a predominantly Jewish area, I differed from some of my Jewish peers. Specifically, I had never attended temple for Shabbat services on Friday nights, went to Sunday school to learn Hebrew and information about the Jewish culture, or became a bat mitzvah. Even though I did not grow up in a religious household, my family did celebrate the major holidays with family and friends such as Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Hanukkah, and Passover.

When it was time to choose a University to apply to my freshman year, I chose a small, private liberal arts college in one of the largest cities in the United States. Despite my mother reminding me that this University on average obtains 5 Jewish students per year, which is 1% of the overall student population, I doubted that it would matter, especially because I did not have a religious upbringing. During my freshman year at this University, I was placed in a Sociology 100 course with 35 students. My typical spot was in the last row, and I routinely took a seat in the right, back corner, which is where I felt the most comfortable.

The syllabus for the semester noted that week five included topics such as social interaction, groups, and social structure. I vividly remember paying attention to this lecture, especially when my professor began to discuss social groups and gave examples of people being “outsiders.”

“Class, what if I was a Jewish person...
What do they have on their door? Is it called a mijugah?
A mibuzah?” (story continued on next page)



STORY SUBMISSION #4 CONTINUED

Prompt: Tell us a story about how your cultural identity has ever made you feel “other” and what you did to work through that.

"I remember thinking to myself that I could not believe my professor was targeting my social group during this lecture on social structure. Not only that, but he mispronounced the small container that is commonly found on doorposts of Jewish households, which encloses parchment that functions as an expression of Jewish identity, and it is a reminder of God's presence. I rarely raised my hand during class, but I knew this was the time to do so. As such, I slowly began to raise my hand in the back of the class.

"Dr. X, it is actually called a mezuzah."

The class became silent. My professor's eyes and mouth began to widen, and the whole class turned to the back corner and stared at me for five seconds in shock, which felt like a whole minute.

"Oh, Miss, are you Jewish?"

"Yes."

A woman sitting next to me turned her head and quietly said, "I have never met a Jewish person before."

Shortly after, my professor disregarded using that example and began to discuss a different topic. Nonetheless, my entire Jewish identity changed in that moment. I realized that I was looked at as an "outsider" by some for the first time in my life. I am thankful for this experience, as it has shaped the person I am today. The next semester, I transferred to a different University with a larger Jewish population. I took it upon myself to dive into the Jewish culture and explore what my heritage is about. As a result, I joined a Jewish sorority, attended Shabbat dinners every Friday night, volunteered as a camp counselor in Israel one summer, served as a leadership board member for a Jewish organization, and participated in a course that entailed discussing Israel. Being considered an "outsider" empowered me to educate myself on Jewish history and culture and led me to develop a deep connection to my Jewish heritage."



STORY SUBMISSION #5

Prompt: Tell us a story about your self-cultural heritage and how that has had an impact on your identity

"My cultural heritage has always been an integral aspect of my life. My cultural identity became even more influential when I moved to the U.S. from India five years ago. I feel immense gratitude to be the first person in my family to be able to pursue a doctoral degree in the U.S. However, being away from home, especially in the midst of the pandemic and ongoing experiences of othering, have not been devoid of challenges. Often times, I have experienced othering in my classroom, in the form of lack of understanding of the South Asian culture, as well as cultural differences in the academic writing and communication style. I have had to educate my practicum supervisors and colleagues about international student guidelines that impact my ability to participate in various practicum opportunities. As an international student in a primarily American classroom, I have always created a space for dialogue about multicultural sensitivity. I have actively participated in on-campus and externship activities, providing my peers, faculty, and supervisors with positive glimpses of my cultural roots and values. It is my cultural heritage that has inspired my dissertation, which attempts to explore the intersectional experiences of motherhood and immigration of Indian American mothers. My research work was inspired by reasons such as lack of research about the experiences of Indian women in the U.S., stigma around mental health, and my own experiences of finding my place as a brown woman in a largely white field. In addition to research work, my cultural roots have inspired my passion of working with immigrant youth and families by making the therapeutic space culturally sensitive and supportive. Further, my lived experiences as an international student motivated me to pursue a graduate assistant position supporting other international students at TCSPP. With the help of my work study position, I have been able to support my international student community in their transition from their home countries to TCSPP, advocate for their professional and personal needs, and organize cultural events inculcating a sense of community. In these ways, I hope to decrease the stigma around mental health among South Asian communities and help to increase access to culturally sensitive mental health resources and services. Despite the challenges, the warmth and support of my cultural community at TCSPP and engaging with South Asian peers in cultural activities, such as watching ethnic movies and shows, cooking and eating ethnic food, and interacting in my language continue to be crucial aspects of self-care for me."

STORY SUBMISSION #6

Prompt: Tell us a story about how your cultural identity has ever made you feel “other” and what you did to work through that

"Coming from Sri Lanka, a small island in south Asia at a young age I didn't expect to feel like an outsider until I began to have awareness of how much my skin tone and features would keep me as an outsider in a culture that is based on racial hierarchy. I have always felt proud of my Sri Lankan heritage I felt that I came from a place that only a few people exist in and spoke a language that is only native to the island of Sri Lanka and within that island I was only a small percentage of individuals that could identify as Sinhalese. I felt great pride in the sweetness, spice of our food, the bright colors of our flag, our beautiful language, our blue clear oceans, and scenery that is comparable to paradise. I felt pride in how we celebrate our heritage the festivals that are colorful and joyous filled with pride in being who we were.

At the end of 2020, I was a second-year doctoral student in the clinical psychology program, and I was waiting for a taxi under the shade of a gas station when an older white male in a car pulled up to get gas and started screaming obscenities to me. This took place in Beverly Hills in a fairly nice neighborhood the man was yelling at me and was asking if I spoke English and was screaming racial obscenities at me. 2020 was one of the hardest years for all of humanity we faced uncertainty, lack of employment, grief, death all around us, and issues of racism were highlighted. Although all of these things happened in California a state that is fairly liberal, here I was being attacked and being called names, and assumptions were made about me from a man that took no time to speak to me to understand who I was. He did not take the time to understand where I came from, the struggles I overcame, what I am doing with my life, or even speak to me for a second to know that I spoke English. This is only one experience out of many that minority men and women go through every single day. This was not the first time I was verbally attacked because of the way I look.

My cultural identity has made me felt like an “other” since I gained awareness of my skin tone and how I looked different than others. I could feel all the pride in myself and my culture but there is a fundamental disconnect that takes place when others do not understand or take the time to view us with the care or sensitivity to our experience. The attacks I have gone through are minuscule compared to so many that other women of color and men of color face each day. In a country that was brought together by multitudes of cultures, in a state where we have a melting pot of diversity there is still hate in some people's hearts." (story continued on next page)

STORY SUBMISSION #6 CONTINUED

Prompt: Tell us a story about how your cultural identity has ever made you feel “other” and what you did to work through that

"One of the reasons I am in this field is because I want to make a difference in changing those hearts, if not the ones that belong to the older generation, to the ones that are being raised by them. I want to help people understand that where we come from does not matter in the understanding of the basic human connection and human need. Our cultural identity is what makes us who we are and it is unique to each individual. Even those who were raised in American culture within your family have the traditions that you follow and that is an important thing to keep in mind and understand when considering those from other cultures that come here to the U.S. We also have been brought up with our culture role practices and traditions that we honor and that we cherish. America is viewed as a land of freedom and where dreams can come true from countries that may not have many opportunities. Before I arrived here I remember all the expectations I had of coming here at such a young age, I was so excited to experience the opportunities here. Since I've arrived it has been truly a struggle to get to the point that I am today. I have been doubted, I have been held back, I have been oppressed because of my nationality, because of my culture, and because of my race. I have overcome those things to be a minority woman that is an immigrant that has overcome the struggle of being an immigrant in a country where immigrants are hated. I am proud to be who I am and if and when I am given the opportunity to be an American on paper, I will be proud of that as well.

I think that if we all put ourselves in the shoes of others and experience what life is like from outside of our immediate circle that we are in, we would be able to understand each other's pain sadness grief, and also happiness. We would be able to see that we all feel the same emotions and the languages we speak or the color of our skin or the food we eat does not negate the understanding of each other's the human experience."

STORY SUBMISSION #7

Prompt: Tell us a story about how your cultural identity has ever made you feel “other” and what you did to work through that

"While my birth certificate appears normal at first, one will notice that my information includes the text “US Citizen born abroad”. I was born in Pune, India, the country that constitutes my heritage, however, this was after my parents had already immigrated to the United States. I spent a majority of my upbringing reflecting this citizenship status. This was especially relevant for me during my high school experience. I am of South Asian cultural identity, yet I found myself fully immersed in a very American town. My parents did the best they could to help me fit in, including supporting my involvement in extracurriculars, helping me pick out school dance dresses and pulling out all the stops for birthdays, but nothing seemed to get me quite the same level of validation as my peers. Something about us was different, and at the time, I did not realize that what I was feeling was “othered”. How come all of my friend’s body types were similar, but mine was not? Why could they share make-up and the colors turned out similar on their skin? Why did they get their religious holidays as built-in days off from school? Although my family was supportive, they still preserved many of our cultural traditions such as holidays, music, food and language. In my desperation to feel comfortable around my peers at school, I found myself celebrating their holidays, eating their food, listening to their music, and even asking my parents not to speak Hindi in front of my school friends because I felt embarrassed. I still cringe when I think about the latter. Some of the most important growth I have had thus far is working through feelings of being “the other” after I got to college. On days when I feel particularly down, I think back to my grandfather’s beautiful garden in India. I would sit out there in the front yard during summer vacations and drink chai with him, however, it was temporarily wiped out from the dust and pollution that sweeps through South Asia. This was how I felt in high school. I felt the pollution of other’s insinuating that my culture, or garden, was weird- and that I should change it to be more like theirs. In college, I found a group of friends that thought my culture was incredible. They wanted to learn more about it, to try my food and meet my family. In 2015, my grandfather got a new gardener, and I brought new, more supportive, friends into my life. Both of us watched our garden’s bloom. I worked through the feeling of being “othered” by surrounding myself with individuals who allow me to be my South Asian self unapologetically. I cook Indian food, listen to Bollywood soundtracks and speak Hindi to my parents, while still being able to participate in American culture. Sometimes you do not need to buy all different and new plants. You just need a new, nurturing and supportive gardener."

STORY SUBMISSION #8

Prompt: Tell us a story about your self-cultural heritage and how that has had an impact on your identity

"The Philippines is an island between Asia and Pacific Islands, where Filipinx are debatably Asians, Pacific Islanders, or Hispanic. Filipinx endured years of colonization including nearly 400 years by Spain and 50 years by America. Along with influences, some have fair skin and some (like me) have brown skin. Impacted by colonialism, Filipinx welcome all people. As a Filipina American, I value my heritage, which consists of pride, hospitality, and community.

Raised by an immigrant family, my parents are from Atimonan, Quezon Province, Philippines. Quezon Province comprise of towns, and towns comprise of barangays. Geographically, it is located on the north island of Luzon alongside Pacific Islands. Atimonan is known for its sea port and mermaid statue; according to legend, a mermaid was spotted in its waters. The name derives from folktale between a boy and a girl, named Ate Monan ("Ate" translating to "older sister"). When the boy was lost, he yelled, "Ate Monan! Ate Monan!" Overheard by Portuguese settlers, they determined the land's name, "Ahh, Atimonan."

Due to Spanish influence, each town's prominent landmark is its Catholic Church. Each town celebrates an annual fiesta to honor its saint's feast day. In Atimonan, the fiesta is in August. After mass, townspeople welcome one another into their homes with food. Gathered at the Church or balcony, townspeople applaud a parade of marching bands, dancers, and sponsors with the "reina," embodying the Virgin Mary and carrying the saint. Throughout the day, festivities from fashion shows to basketball games are held in scattered parts. Every year, the theme is "tagultol" ("fish") to honor the fishermen since Atimonan is located along the sea. Students at competing schools wear colorful costumes and perform indigenous dances. The fiesta is a joyous time with the community." (story continued on next page)

STORY SUBMISSION #8 CONTINUED

Prompt: Tell us a story about your self-cultural heritage and how that has had an impact on your identity

"In 2019, I traveled to the Philippines to visit extended family and join a tour. Immersing myself in the culture for a month, I enjoyed both catholic and muslim dances using bamboo and candles. I also enjoyed "boodle fights" or "kamayan feasts" ("eating with hands") sharing rice, fish, meat, and fruits laid out on banana leaf using no utensils. Despite its modern urbanization, the majority live in poverty, which imply lack of medical equipment, stable housing, and job opportunity. This is evident by shacks and huts as impoverished housing and local business prevalently in the province and dispersedly in the city. Filipinos value education as a means out of poverty as shown by portraits of graduates displayed on home windows. Filipinos pursue medical related careers to work abroad and sustain income for the family. Otherwise, the focus is on survival by maintaining basic necessities, so there is a lack of focus, understanding, and progression toward mental health. In addition, mental illness is stigmatized as it brings shame to the family in a collectivistic society. As a result, mental illness manifest through psychosomatic symptoms and superstitious beliefs (indication of trauma). Due to a lack of mental health providers, patients refer to medical doctors for treatment. Not only are medical doctors overworked, but also obtain little to no referrals to mental health providers, yet mental health treatments prevent symptoms and hospitalizations. Internationally, I aspire to co-deliver psychoeducational workshops such as "how poverty can affect mental health" in town gatherings and city hospitals.

As a Filipina American from Chicago, Illinois- I dream that one day Filipino Americans will not be an overlooked or a misunderstood group, both within and between groups. I dream that one day Filipino Americans see the value of mental health, so students will not struggle to find a sense of belonging and support in higher education. I dream that one day Filipino Americans will not be underrepresented, so people could access mental health education and service."

