Julia Gardner

Cultural Self-Portrait

Growing up in a small, majority-white town in Westchester, New York, I was raised as a part of the dominant culture. My hometown was in many ways a cultural bubble, and exposed me to a very limited range of cultural viewpoints; although people there pride themselves on being socially liberal and caring about social issues, our town is also populated by people who have benefited from social inequalities. While growing up Jewish aligned me with a non-dominant culture as well, I didn't feel that it affected my sense of belonging as much as other non-dominant cultural experiences may. My hometown also had a sizable Jewish minority, and so my religion was never treated as something novel or "different" in my school, just less common- I had school off during Jewish holidays and a fair amount of Jewish friends, an experience many other American Jews aren't lucky enough to have. In this way, geographic position has heavily influenced my Jewish experience. Apart from feeling alienated around the holiday season, the ease and belonging I feel with the dominant culture is most heavily influenced by being white and having two parents who were born in the US. However, I do think that being part of a minority religion influences my cultural identity, as I grew up with cultural experiences that non-Jews did not- I have access to this cultural bubble while still having access to the dominant culture. Because my culture as a white person with American parents is normalized as the dominant and "default", I may have to dig deeper to identify elements of my own culture, while also paying more attention to my own positionality and framing as I may not have as much awareness of dominant American culture as others who navigate between dominant and nondominant cultures do.

When I realized I was queer in middle school, it opened up a different cultural experience to me as well. I think that belonging to the LGBT community is not discussed as an aspect of one's culture as much as one's ethnicity or nationality is, but I do still feel that this identity affects my cultural experience. The media I consume, the connections I have with others in my community, my relationships with some family and friends, and the way I view fundamental social constructs such as gender, relationships, and the family are all affected by this identity. Lack of representation in media and heteronormative

assumptions do alienate me from aspects of the dominant culture. I don't always feel aligned with the cultural experience of what a woman is expected to be, especially as defined by heterosexuality. However, another aspect of queer culture is that the queer experience is heavily influenced by other identities, and while I feel connected to the queer community as a whole, I know my queer experience is heavily influenced by my whiteness and that other members of the queer community have a different experience than I do in many ways. I also know that my queer experience is affected by my geographic position, and I already feel it changing now that I'm at Wesleyan, where there is a larger and more normalized queer community than at my high school. I think that as I learn more about intercultural communication through this class, I'll come to think of how queerness factors into my cultural experience in a more nuanced way, both in class discussions and in individual perception.

I think going forward in this class, it will be important to keep my position as part of the dominant white American culture in mind to avoid ethnocentrism and to understand what causes someone's viewpoint or experience to be different from mine. At the same time, drawing on the non-dominant identities of being Jewish and queer that do, at times, affect my cultural experience, will inform my interactions with the concepts we discuss in class and bring viewpoints to discussions that others may or may not share.