

The Challenge of Connection

Every human life is different from the other ranging from race, sex, religion, and cultural backgrounds. Yet, despite all of these differences every human life is connected to the other through some form of conversation. Kwame Anthony Appiah's essays "Making Conversation" and "Primacy of Practice," and Julia Alvarez's "Selections from *Once Upon a Quinceañera*" both explore the reasons, values, and importance behind cultural practices. Cultural rituals and values help define the person one becomes in that cultural society. Being exposed constantly to new ideas through media and conversation we learn to deal with change. Conversation is the key in social growth. One must be able to tolerate each person's own definition of living a normal life. One does not have to agree with other's cultural practices, but through conversation one can grow to accept other's reasons and values for those practices. People's practices such as cultural rituals and traditions make up the basis of conversation, and these conversations provide the ability for us to recognize differences within each other.

To begin with, most every culture has rituals and traditions that they follow in their culture's society. In Julia Alvarez's essay "Selections from *Once Upon a Quinceañera*" she explores the Latina tradition of the Quinceañera. Alvarez begins her journey full of skepticism. Alvarez is under the impression that the Quinceañera is a pointless ritual that drills holes into the pockets of those throwing the celebration. After conversing with Isabella Martinez Wall about the cultural ritual of a Quinceañera, Julia Alvarez states in her essay:

But although some psychological elements of the American Quinceañera and my first Abbot year were the same—a community grooming a young lady for her entry into womanhood—the content of that grooming was significantly different. We Abbot girls were encouraged to develop our minds, not leave our brains parked at the door of our gender. (Alvarez 38)

Despite the fact that Alvarez doesn't agree with the Quinceañera ritual, she does agree that the effects her school had on her life are comparable to the effects a Quinceañera has on a young Latina's life as far as values and self-growth. Though the Quinceañera and the school are two different practices, they both have similarities and give Alvarez a different look on the Quinceañera ritual. The Quinceañera offers a new idea to people on how to celebrate one's coming of age. Appiah states something similar in his essay when talking of female circumcisions, "You will offer reason for doing it—that unmodified sexual organs are unaesthetic; that the ritual gives young people the opportunity to display courage in their transition to adulthood" (Appiah 65). To some people the idea of a female circumcision sounds barbaric, because they are not used to it and don't practice it in their own cultures. This cultural tradition of female circumcision opens up discussions on what is right or wrong. When one listens to the young girls who have been through the ritual, one finds that these young girls have a sense of pride. Both the situations in Alvarez's essay and Appiah's essay show that these cultural rituals somewhat deviate from the norm of society, but through conversation derived from

the existence of these cultural practices we are able to acknowledge their unique differences and reasoning.

The existence of different cultural rituals and traditions are being presented to us more often through media. With today's consumerism and availability of media we are able to see how others live in the world around us. It gives us new ideas on how to live our own lives and offers more opportunities to converse about each other's differences. In Appiah's essay he states, "There are Muslims, many of them young men, who feel that forces from outside their society-forces that they might think of as Westernor, in a different moment, American- are pressuring them to reshape relations between men and women. Part of that pressure, they feel, comes from our media" (Appiah 71). The media of American culture is showing Muslim women that not all women in the world are submissive to men; they can be their own person. These new ideas are brought by cultural differences presented through the media. It causes conversation that challenges the position of Muslim men. Alvarez speaks of something quite similar in her essay when she quotes Isabella Martinez Wall saying, "I don't care what class you come from. Every girl should have one" (Alvarez 37). Isabella Martinez Wall has a website that promotes the Quinceañera ritual and helps young Latina girls plan their own Quinceañera. She is very passionate on trying to make the Quinceañera more common in all cultures. She feels that conversing with these young girls ideas on how to celebrate their Quinceañeras and the importance of having one, will give a young girl a better understanding and respect for themselves when they have their own Quinceañera. The American culture being presented to Muslim women through media and the

Hispanic cultural ritual being presented to young girls all over opens up conversation to help us possibly alter our own personal practices, but also be able to recognize each other's differences.

With how media surrounds us in everyday life, it forces us to get used to and be able to tolerate the people around us whether we agree with their values and practices or not, and we do this through conversation. Appiah states in his essay, "The increasing presence of "openly gay" people in social life and in the media has changed our habits" (Appiah 68). When one is more verbal about their practices and the reasons behind it, people listen. Practices that seem unusual to others will initiate conversation. People are interested in what they're not familiar with. The more something is discussed or presented to someone the more common it is to that person and the more they will acknowledge the other person's differences. Appiah also states in his essay, "I am urging that we should learn about people in other places, take an interest in their civilizations, their arguments, their errors, their achievements, not because that will bring us to agreement, but because it will help us get used to one another" (Appiah 68). By listening to conversations derived from cultural practices and actively joining in on those conversations we can learn about another way of living. These conversations may offer good ideas and may change how some people may live or it may not, but they will be able to tolerate each other's cultural practices by acknowledging their differences.

To elaborate more on the subject of being able to tolerate one another through conversation, Appiah states in his essay:

They are pro-life or pro-choice. But this is a dispute that makes sense only because each side recognizes the very values the other insists upon. The disagreement is about their significance. Both sides respect something like the sanctity of human life. (Appiah 69)

The practice of abortion creates a conversation of debate between most people. The conversation will not come to a conclusion on what's right or wrong. Both sides are similar in the sense that they value the human life. The conversation will present the possibility of recognizing each other's different choices of action.

To bring to a close, in order to live in the diverse world that we live in, we must learn to assimilate. Without assimilation we cannot progress and work together to help the world and ourselves. We all share similar values behind our cultural practices, maybe we can learn new and improved ways on how to utilize those practices from others around us, if not we sure can recognize each other's unique differences. Media is forcing new ideas in other cultures; we should come together to converse to see how different we all are, to help us grow globally. We have no choice but to live in the presence of others, and whether we agree with their lifestyle choices or not we must deal with them. Conversation is the key in being able to tolerate others. One does not have to agree with another's practices, but conversation derived from these practices help us to acknowledge our differences in the world.

Kedgeree:

This paper has a number of strengths but there are still some issues for you to work on as you move forward. In terms of strengths you have a smooth writing style and

you have a lot of skills in working with the text. Your first para is a great example of that. You also have a good sense of organization. What you need to focus on first, I think, is stating your argument more strongly. I think if you do that it will help you with the rest of the paper, in terms of transitions and also in terms of moving between the texts in each para. Look at what you do in the paras and use that to state your argument. For ex: Rituals, central to every culture [first para], are increasingly spread through the media [second para], a process which forces us to get used to people [third para] and tolerate differences [fourth para]. Make sense?