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Commentary One: Reproduction and Human Development

Reproduction and development is something all living human beings can relate with more or less. This chapter in Barbara Millers book *Cultural Anthropology* begins with differing cultural views on reproduction and ends with the contemplation and realization that death is imminent. One thing we as humanity can cross-culturally be sure of is death at some time.

The different modes of reproduction that cultural anthropologists have constructed give insight into the few predominant modes that the average family or person raising children will choose. I found it interesting that when talking about the foraging mode of reproduction, too low of a woman's body fat level is shown to directly affect ovulation. A quick journal search on our library database showed that for us in the U.S., the opposite relationship is also just as detrimental; too much body fat can hinder fertility. The need for balance emerges. I found the descriptive analysis of the agricultural norm of reproduction to resonate greatest with me, as I am one of eight children in my family. I was born on a farm. As young boys my brothers and I learned to work alongside our father. I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for my parent's belief in pronatalism and his desire for a labor force to work the land he owned.

The Culturama page on 140 was a very interesting read of a sub-culture in our geographic locality here in Michiana. It is surprising accurate of how the amish in the Goshen, Nappanee, Lagrange, and Shipshewana areas go about and conduct their lives as a culture within a culture. Their whole way of life is so different from many of us and yet only a mere few miles separate our doors from theirs. Their heritage of strong family kinship, humility, and community solidarity give us interesting ideas and aspects of culture to contemplate.

ooh!
I actually
forgot about
this.

we all need to
learn this.

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Culture inundates most aspects of life, and how interesting that it largely shapes our sexual practices and expectations. I am thankful our culture encourages our children to wait a good few years beyond menarche or puberty to engage in intercourse. Miller says that "In many cultures, sexual activity should begin only with marriage" (142). I think a good argument could be made as to how that practice could benefit our society and culture.

I found it quite interesting how that at the family level, the four emerging factors deemed most important in one's desire for children doesn't include a desire for posterity that shares our likeness or the desire for reciprocity of love in the parent-child relationship. All of them in some way had financial attachments: how much labor a child can give back, their value as care-givers for elderly parents, mortality, and how much they will cost the parent to raise. I know that for me and my wife, while we thought about the financial aspect, when we thought of having children we didn't think of how our lives would be made worse, but rather strengthened and given more meaning. I disagree with author Miller when she says that "Higher costs reduce the desire for children" (144), for this isn't the case for me and for several people I know. I doubt we're the minority in the world with this view.

Fertility control is a hot topic as we consider the staggering rate at which humanity is growing globally. Even with abortion being a hot topic in the U.S., I wasn't aware that so many other cultures practices abortion as one means of fertility control. For me it is surprising how many different and possibly dangerous ways a woman will try in an effort to abort her unborn child. The author mentions that in Afghanistan a copper-sulfate treated stick of sorts is inserted into the vagina in hopes of killing the child and not the mother. I can't help but wonder how someone can be aware of a chemicals irritant and toxicological effects and yet not give thought to how it affects the mother. I also found it interesting that in this section it isn't mentioned once

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of any father taking responsibility for his own offspring; pregnancy is viewed as the mother's problem. I was also surprised with how infanticide is differentiated into two different forms of direct and indirect infanticide. Given my own dogmas and thought processes, I found it hard to be able to differentiate between infanticide by drowning and infanticide by failing to provide adequate clothing in winter. I don't agree with that being a more subtle process; in fact I would say it is worse as it involves torture for a greater length of time. *I agree!*

In this chapter gender and sex are distinguished from each other and gender is dubbed a cultural construction. Also adolescence is found to be a culturally defined period of maturation from puberty to adulthood, while two schools of thought remain. As repulsive as adolescence is to me now since I am past it, I still would much rather have our cultural adolescence we do than to have to go through what the young Sambian boys in which the young boy is paired with an older male partner and "regularly transfers his semen to the youth orally" (152). *I really agree!* I prefer adolescence. And I suppose the same could be said for female genital cutting. *Infibulation* should be deemed torture. I find it interesting that in these FGC areas, it's not mentioned that the men get their penis or anus sowed shut also. I highly doubt that any girl in those cultures would look forward to FGC as the author reports if the culture itself didn't put so much emphasis on it; the importance becomes recognition and not physical result of the act that counts.

This chapter concludes with thoughts, insights, and reflections concerning death and dying. Author Miller makes mention that those of us in America are "strongly embedded in contemporary culture and its fear and denial of death" (158). This is referring to the American mid-life crisis, but is insightful of our thinking on death. It is the greatest unknown we will likely ever face. Interesting it is the success of modernity (medicine, physics, research and practices that help the individual age more gracefully) that is accredited with giving us in the

Good job 5/5

U.S. our resistance to death. We are cultured to expect our life to be worthy of "unusual means" (159) when it comes to medicinal and surgical intervention. I liked how author Miller brought in the aspect of closure in concern to burial and funeral procession for loved ones, family, or friends. The stress that author Miller alludes to among the refugees of Mozambique I think is testament to the esteemed sacredness of life. Though dead and lifeless, the urgency to provide them with respect and remembrance beyond death is very strong. In our living we "carry on in greater peace" (159) when we honor the dead.

In short, this chapter on reproduction and human development has highlighted for me as to how culture is seen to influence many facets of our lives including reproduction, overall general fertility rates among cultures, and the shaping of our personality with which we interact with others. Anthropology provides better context for us to view our own culture and better understand cultures different from ours. We are all part of the greater humanity as we all experience a unique and individual life cycle.

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great job!