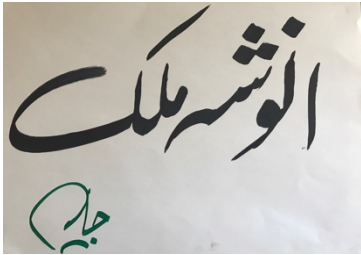


Culture

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Merriam-Webster defines the term *culture* as ‘the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group’. At first glance, these complex definitions make the term seem challenging, or perplexing, but when I zoom in on words like "racial" or "customary", I connect them to the habits and norms that I embrace as a Pakistani woman. My collage encompasses the unique aspects of my Pakistani heritage that have shaped my identity and given me something to define as "my culture".



Language. Being the diverse country it is, Pakistan has a few specific languages that are spoken depending on the region you come from, but Urdu is the common language, understood in most parts of Pakistan. I was privileged enough to learn how to read and write in my adolescent years, and it continues to run through my vocal chords to this day. Being bilingual is an important aspect of my identity, entailing a sense of uniqueness in a sea of typical norms and ideas.

Food. The Pakistani palate has evolved to incorporate all the different cuisines from the numerous provinces within the nation. My personal favorite is *naan*, (pictured on the right) the warm crisp bread baked in a clay oven sprinkled with garlic and butter, something I have been eating all my life. Not only do I appreciate it for its mouthwatering aroma, but it is a reminder of the city I was brought up in. Every time I take a bite of the soft bread, it is a reminder of the traditions that I am deprived of in the western culture. It's a taste of home.





Clothing. The traditional attire worn in Pakistani culture usually changes as trends come and go. The national, most well-known dress of Pakistan, worn by both men and women of all ages is known as the *salwar kameez*. The picture on the left displays my younger cousin in a full *salwar kameez* outfit. A *salwar* usually refers to loose pants and *kameez* refers to a shirt of any design. Clothing serves as a platform to express the rich cultural history that exists within our country and some of the creative styles are based on the living conditions in each respective region. A feeling of liberation comes over me every time I wear my *salwar kameez*. From clothing with chiffon based material to silk, there lies several fabrics that go into the tedious makings of our traditional clothing. Culture usually serves as a hidden entity behind the barrier of your personality, but clothing allows you to express your culture at the public eye's first glance.

I feel very privileged to be a part of a culture as rich as Pakistan's. From vibrant clothing, to alluring aromas of food, Pakistan has given me a reason to appreciate its wondrous culture. Being a Social Work student, I tend to push myself to be more aware of not only the strengths that exist within my own culture, but as well as all other cultures. I want to expand my knowledge base in order to connect on a more personal level with my future clients that may come from socially diverse backgrounds. I encourage everyone to go back and explore their cultural roots because you never know what's in store.

