

The Shopping Mall: A Cultural View

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Introduction

One quick search online and the definition of culture can be obtained: “The totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought (“Culture Definition,” n.d.)” Given this basic and simple definition of culture, it is easy to surmise that culture is indeed a very broad term that may encompass an expansive set of spectrum. Just about anything can cover culture but it is such a distinct phenomenon that one can hardly mistake it, may refer to it, vaguely knowing what it is and yet, being right with his depiction. Culture is something that will be always be used to explain a variety of things in human society and a careful study of it is a stepping stone to explain human behavior within this current civilization. With today’s rapidly expanding world, with frequently clashing societies on a daily basis, the importance of the study of culture has been more profound as one needs to break-in the different societies in order to gain an insight to the human mind. The importance of culture does not even stop there. With the all the ancient treasures our ancestors have gathered for us to enjoy, the study of culture helps preserve such important artifacts for our future generation to enjoy (Hunt, 2006). This paper shall discuss the culture inherent in a shopping mall, as observed by the author.

Location

For this project, the writer of this paper had chosen Towne Mall, located in 1704 N Dixie Highway, Elizabethtown, KY (“Location,” n.d.). The building itself is not spectacular. It is a red-brownish, rectangular piece of property, much similar to the normal shopping districts,

not very tall, but rather wide. Parking is easy enough to find, even on a windy (65 degrees) Saturday at 11:00am. The mall usually has events lined up for some special occasions but not on this day. There are several shops that posts “SALE” on their respective windows but that is common enough for every shopping mall. The author had decided to sit by the food court, in front of Mandarin China and Arby’s restaurant. The smell of sizzling food is rampant where the author sat, in fact the smell can seep through one’s clothes and hair but it offered a good a view of the children’s play area and their watching parents. The play area is for kids aged 3-10 and there were about 27 kids in there, running around and enjoying themselves.

Elizabethtown, Kentucky is a district where there are about 24,533 residents in 2009 (“General Information,” 2010). The area is predominantly white, with about 83.5% of residents Caucasians, 11.5% black, 0.4% natives, 2.3% Asian, 4.0% Hispanic (“General Information,” 2010). The median household income is \$49,500 in 2008 (“General Information,” 2010). These general facts about the town are prevalent with the author’s observations within Towne Mall. Mostly, the families therein are whites. There is exactly one Asian child and a couple of Black families (2 black boys) but the rest are Caucasians, enjoying their Saturday morning together. Elizabethtown is not by any means a prosperous town nor is it a town stricken by poverty. People live comfortably within their means and a leisurely stroll within a shopping area can hardly be called a luxurious activity amongst these people. Since a mall has a certain way of inducing people to buy things not considered a necessity, it is obvious that even at 11am, some families had already done their shopping for the day and are enjoying a brunch of some sort in the food court while the kids are off playing.

Acculturation

Acculturation is a concept in Anthropology that means, “the adoption of the behavior patterns of the surrounding culture” (“Acculturation Definition,” n.d.). It is a way for one culture to adapt to another. This process is especially easier for children. The author believes that racism is discreet within the United States and it does, in fact exist. Given the laws however, against it, people are encouraged to be tolerable about other cultures. On this day of observation, the author took particular interest in the one Asian child within the play area. She is about 7, with slanted eyes, olive skin and straight black hair. Her parents are watching her from their table and are waving to her from time to time. The child is happily mingling with the other children. She is happily playing with the Caucasians, and from the looks of it, she can speak perfect English and she can understand the language well. The other children are animatedly talking with her and she definitely belongs to one group of playmates. This little scenario is a perfect example of acculturation. The little Asian girl has found a niche within this community, despite the fact that a very few percentage of the population is like her in looks, she has adapted well to the language and the people who do not look like her at all accept her whole-heartedly.

Civilization

Civilization is “a society in an advanced state of social development” (“Civilization Definition,” n.d.). Over the centuries, as man has cultivated his way of life, he has learned to live in peace with his fellow inhabitants within this planet. No longer do people fear those who do not look like them in stature and in mannerisms, instead, they try their best to understand them and seek a common ground. There have been phases in history when the Caucasians felt like they were superior to others, hence they have tried to enslave the others, the Negros, most

especially, but thankfully, the world has grown civilized enough to end that malpractice. Slavery is no longer immoral, it is also illegal and will not be tolerated within this current society. The author of this paper is proud to report that children amongst all races are having fun without regard for skin color. The black kids are not even in the same group of children playing together. They do not feel that they have to flock together because of their skin color; instead, they are happily mingling within their separate groups. This is particularly noteworthy especially since both children are about 8-9 years of age and both are boys. They are both mingling within their separate group of Caucasians.

Pariah

As usual with every situation involving children, not long after the author of this paper sat down, one distinct sound of a crying child was heard. A little girl, in striped dress and orange headband was crying as loudly as she could within the play area and the other kids, amazingly not giving her mind. Her Dad rushed to her side and she did not say anything to him except continue to cry. Her Dad took her away to their table where she sat and continued on her tantrum, still not telling anyone the cause of her hysterics as her Mom continued to ask her for the cause. Finally, she spoke up and told her mother that no one wants to play with her. For whatever reason, it appears that there will always be pariah within any group. It is unfortunate that this pretty little girl is the victim within this little society of children and the reason for such is not something that the author can investigate from afar. Children must have their reason for outcasting this little girl and the author can only hope that they can resolve it within their little ways.

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Chief

Chief or leader is an important concept within any society. Just about any group of people doing any kind of activity has a leader that tells the rest what to do. The author of this paper had noticed a chief or a leader within the little groups of children in the play area. There is always that one little boy or little girl that leads a group and they all do things and laugh together. Overall, there were about five groups and there is that one leader within the group the other children listen to. Leadership is always inevitable within the group and even as early as this stage in the life of kids, leaders shine and do what they do best.

Conclusion

The author of this paper had dearly wanted to write about ethnocentrism, a concept that is very important in the study of Anthropology. However, as amazing as it sounds, the author observed none of it within that little community that is predominantly white. It is noteworthy to say that children and even their parents are in accord. They appear to be living happily and enjoying their family outing within the mall on a Saturday morning. They appear to be happy in their lives, except that one little girl who is considered the outcast by that group of children. As sunshiny as everything seems, it cannot be perfect and that pretty little girl seem to be the brunt of the joke. The bigger issue here, however, is the noticeable harmony within the community. Racism does not seem to be existent and world peace is embraced by the children.

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