

**Culture Immersion Project Part 1;
Research and Events**

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Author Note

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Cultural Immersion Project Part 1: Research and Events

Counselors should learn about the surrounding cultures to understand a cultural perspective. In this paper, I will discuss the culture of Uganda. A country that is considered the pearl of Africa next to Lake Victoria. We will discuss the characteristics of Ugandan culture and the historical/present oppression faced. We will also cover cultural events I have attended to become more aware of this culture and its impact on my perspective of it.

Research

Common Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values Relative to the Cultural Group

With Uganda having over 65 indigenous /tribal communities, there are many differences. However, some typical values are present. The Ugandan Traditional Values article lists a “sense of community, respect for authority and elders, hard work, sacredness of human life, good human relations, hospitality, honesty, integrity, sense of time, and justice and fairness and sacredness of life; language and proverbs.” (Onyango).

Uganda’s sense of community is of vital importance. Most of the time, the individual is not seen as just an individual but as a part of a community, a concept known as collectivist ideology. An individual does not have as much power as a group, and individuals are expected to conform to the community (Onyango), which also plays into their values of hard work. Because of the importance of community, everyone is expected to chip in. Young and old, male and female.

Uganda also stresses the importance of ensuring their children and youth respect their elders. “The children have great respect for the elders in the family, and at home and in school, children are taught songs that teach them to be grateful for their elders. In these societies, the father’s sister (Ssenga) is the most significant moral authority for girls. Right from childhood,

children were taught to be respectful to elders, and this was done through storytelling and the use of proverbs.” (Onyango).

Finally, concerning fairness and justice, the community aspect is essential. To enforce the values of the community, there are village meetings where disputes are often covered and resolved before more injustice is practiced. Therefore, to show their understanding of each other, the two conflicting parties are often expected to partake in a peaceful reconciliation party, which sometimes includes eating from the same bowl. (Onyango).

Prominent Customs, Practices, and Behaviors

Most of the customs of Uganda are influenced by the values upheld by their society. This plays into the festivals or celebrations of the community. Holidays Such as Martyrs Day on June 3rd, Heroes Day on June 9th, and Independence Day on October 9th highlight the sacrifice of others in the community for the freedom of Uganda.

Food was mainly made from what was produced on land. For example, a staple diet in southern Uganda was mainly made up of “Matoke”, a plantain cooked into stews. In contrast, the North was more grain and meat-based. (Uganda - Daily Life and Social Customs | Britannica,” 2020). Most of these tribes could access ingredients from the central market in Kampala, Uganda. (I have had a chance to try what is called “oluwombo” before, which I will share about later in this paper).

In the form of art, wood carving, ironworking, and batik were popular among the tribes. Also, music plays an intricate part in their culture. “Ugandan traditional music makes use of instruments such as the [lyre](#), [marimba](#) ([xylophone](#)), and [thumb piano](#) (see [lamellaphone](#))”

(Britannica, 2020). Although there are some writings, the more traditional way of storytelling is by oral presentations.

There are museums, sports and recreation, and some forms of media such as radio, television, and newspapers that are also parts of this culture. So, although this country is considered third world, there are still many of the comfortable amenities that we can expect in America that are present there.

Attitudes or Practices of the Cultural Group toward Spirituality and Religion

Ugandan beliefs in spirituality stem from the influences of society. According to Namatovu et al., “The gods ranged from naturally occurring physical structures such as lakes, mountains, and trees to spirits that were evoked through the intercession with witch doctors” (Namatovu et al., 2018).

That is not to say that other religions were not present. Many missionaries of Muslim, Christian, and Catholic beliefs successfully ministered to many tribes in Uganda, creating international trade as well. In Uganda, 84% of Ugandans are Christian, with an 11% increase in Pentecostal Christianity. (Namatovu et al. 2018). Because of the community's influence, this faith can heavily influence how business owners practice their business (i.e., hiring people of the same faith and crafting missions according to religion). Alternatively, how the Ugandans faced hardship, such as in the case of the “Break the Silence” Campaign. This was a nasty, ugly war between two tribes where one tribe committed atrocities against the other purely because of differences. The “Break the Silence” Campaign was centered on providing a solution to peace from the religious persecution of the first tribe. (Taylor 2006).

Key historical events and figures impacting the cultural group and societal perceptions of this group

As mentioned earlier, the Ugandans celebrate holidays that are important historical moments for their country. These historical moments impacted this cultural group, but they played a little into the historical oppression that Ugandans faced. According to ugandanmartyrsshine.org, the holiday Martyrs Day, celebrated on June 3rd, is a holiday about the death of Christians for their beliefs. “This is an annual celebration held on 3rd June, the feast of the Uganda Martyrs as decreed by the act of canonization in 1964 by the Universal Catholic Church in Uganda. The government declared this day a national public holiday in commemoration of the first Christian Martyrs in the country” (ugandanmartyrsshine.org). It honors the Christians who were Martyrs who died between 1885 and 1887.

National Heroes Day in Uganda is the celebration that honors the people who fought on both sides of the Ugandan Bush War from 1980-1986. The date June 9th is the day of the assassination of the tyrant government leader at the time. The War started with a coup against the government at the time. According to Wikipedia, “The Ugandan Bush War was a civil war fought in Uganda by the official Ugandan government and its armed wing, the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA), against several rebel groups, most importantly the National Resistance Army (NRA), from 1980 to 1986” (Wikipedia et al., 2020). Uganda also gained independence from the United Kingdom on October 9, 1962.

Historical and Current Oppression:

Besides the history behind the holidays mentioned above, Uganda suffered oppression in several ways as a whole country. However, there were also minorities in Uganda who had to fight for their voices to be heard in a society that promotes community. Minorities such as Women, disabled, and LGBTQ have a history of fighting for opportunity in this country.

The woman began their journey of freedom fighting in the 1990s, not long after Uganda was freed from UK rule. “ In Uganda, the idea of feminist advocacy for gender equality is rooted in and motivated by the oppressive gender regime in the pre-colonial and colonial State” (Mwiine, 2022). The only problem is that it was not long after Uganda was freed from the UK that dictatorial regimes settled in the place of power, leaving the Women to have their fight put on the back burner. That did not, however, stop them from trying to make significant improvements for Women throughout the following years. From the early attempts in the 1920s to the second wave in the 1980s-1990’s. (Mwiine,2022).

Now, the oppression of the LGBTQ community among Ugandans did not start to take place until after the missionaries started to arrive and teach homosexuality as being wrong. In fact, according to Kamya and White. “Prior to colonial contact, several African societies recognized the existence of different sexualities” (Kamya & White, 2022). The British even passed a bill in 2009 that made same-sex relationships illegal.

Today, the oppression of these groups is still prevalent. Women still suffer from having little control over their sexual relations, facing gender-based violence, and struggling with gender inequities. (Kamya & White, 2022). LGBTQ oppression, although slightly changed with the nullification of the anti-LGBTQ bill in 2015, did not abate. “Despite the reported drop in state-sanctioned and mob violence, families continue to disown LGBT members, and landlords continue to evict LGBT tenants. Institutional discrimination and exclusion of LGBT people also continue” (Thapa, 2015). Not only that, but there were attempts to reinforce the anti-LGBTQ bill or add a bill that enforces the same things.

Journal Articles of Treatment Approaches

One of the problems that Women might suffer in Uganda is the risk of illness, especially during pregnancy. The main risk is the woman suffering from Malaria, “Infection was significantly associated with stillbirth, early neonatal death, anemia, low birth weight, and pre-term delivery” (Braun et al., 2015). Intermittent preventive treatment of IPTp was some way Uganda tried to work through this malaria. “Intermittent preventive treatment in pregnancy (IPTp) with sulfadoxine–pyrimethamine (SP) is widely implemented in sub-Saharan Africa for the prevention of malaria in pregnancy and adverse birth outcomes” (Braun et al., 2015). Although this has been used, according to Braun’s study, this treatment option has not been effective. More research should be done on this topic and what treatments are effective in pregnant women.

Another treatment approach that has been in effect in Uganda is the effort for better mental health resources. The primary treatment approach for Uganda is the task-sharing, community-based model. “Results showed that community members, politicians, health workers, and leaders acknowledged the benefits of a task-sharing model to increase access to services but also identified several challenges that would need to be addressed in implementing such a model”(Shah et al., 2017). Even though this method effectively provides an opportunity for support, there are still underlying issues of the stigma of mental illness. With the help of the Bwindi Community Hospital Mental Health Programme, there is hope in providing insight into how to correct the issues with this model. Because of trauma's intrinsic(belief in inherent failure or weakness) and extrinsic(drugs, SES, spiritual forces, and physical illness) causes, mental health guidance in Uganda is crucial. Shah and colleagues say this problem can be fixed by discarding Western ideology in mental health programs and incorporating cultural strengths,

more training for mental health employees, and including the involvement of religious leaders. (Shah et al. 2017).

Events

Attended Events Description

Disclosure: For the events I will be covering in this section, I have to note that these are events that I have attended in the past related to my culture outside of my college years. Regarding newer events, I will be getting a chance to travel to Uganda soon, but no recent events regarding Ugandan culture have taken place where I am currently. Because of this limitation, the events I will share are dated several years back. This is not to say that I did not learn something from these events, but I still have a lot to learn about Uganda, which is why I am excited to get a chance to visit Uganda in January.

The two events I would say I learned the most about Ugandan Culture are during fundraising events for my elder sister's organization run in Uganda. However, I would also say that there were times when my sister would return from Uganda and share a part of the Ugandan culture with us. I would say that the fundraising events would run from 1 to 3 hours, depending on the event. I will focus on the fundraising event at a vendor location, which lasted about 2 hours. Also, with my sister, I will focus on the time she made us a Ugandan dinner where she could share about Uganda's different foods and music, which usually lasted about 2 hours.

The Vendor fundraising event was centered on selling products young women in Uganda had made and returning the profit to them. Everything was handcrafted by struggling young mothers trying to make an income so they did not have to leave their children in an orphanage or marry someone to ensure their children received adequate care. Often, these were single mothers whose husbands got them pregnant in their teens and then left or abused them until they ran

away. T In addition, if a woman remarried and had kids from a previous man, the stepfather would either become abusive of the children or demand them to be sent away. This stepfather issue often leads to women giving up their kids to orphanages, so these women are also trying to keep this situation from happening to their kids.

When my sister returned home from Uganda, she made us a meal known as Oluwando, which is known as a popular dish there. It has either chicken, beef, or fish steamed with vegetables such as carrots, potatoes, mushrooms, and peanut (g-nut) sauce, usually wrapped in banana leaves. However, for this occasion (and because there were no banana leaves to buy), my sister served it to us as a soup. She also shared with us a new and upcoming artist in Uganda who is getting much attention for his music and his call for a new president to be put in place. During this visit, I became more aware of the political side of Uganda and the frustrations the Ugandans were facing regarding the unjust state of their voting privileges.

Emotional Impact:

In regards to the fundraising event. I had a strong emotion of gratitude for my current situation. Learning about how these women were severely oppressed and were always facing the dangers of the patriarchy compared to America, I felt extremely ashamed of how much I complained about my suffering as a woman. I also enormously respected these women since they continued to fight against their oppression, seek education, and try to make an income without the help of the men who mistreated them at such a young age, for many of these mamas were still young teenagers.

My interaction with my sister's cultural experience was more heartwarming, I would say. Although I was saddened to hear about the political turmoil, I was also happy to get that personal experience to taste and see the culture of Uganda outside of their oppression. Their music taste is

so unique that it was fascinating to hear the differences. For the first time, I felt like I got to tangibly experience what my sister was experiencing in Uganda and what she was dealing with there.

The biggest emotional impact these two events have had on me and some of the other events I experienced taught me that I, as an American, have so much privilege. Even if I have suffered my fair share of injustice, others are worse off than me. Also, there are people out there who have cultures that they want to share with the world, and these cultures are just as beautiful and intriguing as my own.

Key Things Learned

Three things I learned in this overall experience are that injustice is international, culture is ever-growing, and everyone's experience is different. Also, I would like to say that the emotional impact of these events helped me relearn these things.

Injustice is international. Even though America has a history of treating others unjustly, I would say that in some cases, other countries fight even worse injustices. Uganda stresses the importance of community yet still treats people of a minority like a disease to be cured, especially for women. This is relevant in the history of Uganda and is the cause for international organizations to get involved. As I mentioned above, I feel humiliated when I think about how I complain about women suffering when I see the conditions of women in Uganda. Not only is injustice seen in minorities, but in the overall system. Currently, Uganda is under a president who is causing oppression for his people.

Culture is ever-growing; even though Uganda is suffering, their culture continues to grow and evolve. The women are stepping up to the plate in seeking education and better-paying jobs,

the people are protesting the oppression of their government, and the arts continue to blossom in the middle of it all. Culture does not stop with oppression; it thrives.

Everyone's experiences are different. Even in a country that promotes community, Uganda still has individual or group experiences that differ. While some might face the oppression of the leading group more severely, others experience a level of privilege that only elites receive. There is still a matter of dynamics in Uganda, just like worldwide. Seeing Uganda as a group of culturally different people who recognize their suffering and beauty is essential.

Conclusion:

The experience has left me craving to learn more about Uganda and excited to see the culture firsthand. Although reading all this research and attending these events have been eye-opening, nothing can beat the reality of coming face-to-face with another culture. I would say that there is a need for more research and treatment approaches for this country and a better understanding of how the historical past of Uganda affects the present Ugandan lifestyle. However, overall, I learned much about privilege and cultural differences, and I am grateful to have had a chance to explore it.

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