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A World of Apologies

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Abstract

A World of Apologies is a music video that was created in order to promote multiculturalism and foreign culture education. Within this video, twelve different languages are showcased to the tune of the world-wide pop music hit “Sorry” by Justin Bieber. The video includes multiple important aspects of culture such as music, language, art, and dance. The video was made in hopes to bring about culture appreciation and to bring people around the world together, especially since the current political and social climate in many countries nowadays are in turmoil. Not only does the video itself speak to this message, but so does the process behind the making of this video, which will be revealed within this paper. Also throughout this paper, I will discuss the music video that I have made that stresses the critical role of language and art in culture, the importance of understanding these different cultures, and examples of artists who have created pieces with a similar message to my own such as Dora de Larios, Akram Khan, and Rihanna.

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A World of Apologies

Lately, I have realized that the world we live in has a lot more problems than I had previously thought. It is infested with misunderstandings, and miscommunications are plucking at its very seams. This infestation has led to many wars, powered by strong, deep rooted hatred. Perhaps this hatred stems from the fear of the unknown. When humans are approached by the idea of the unknown, many will choose to either fight or avoid it. These instincts can take many forms: some may keep a baseball bat close by when in an empty house, while others may be more subtle like when visiting a friend's family for dinner for the first time and sitting as far away from the plate of chicken feet as possible. However, just because something is unknown to you, does not mean that it is dangerous. Sometimes the best moments can manifest from the unknown, like surprise parties, wedding proposals, or even making a new friend. Something that I believe is very unknown to people all around the globe is the wide variety of foreign cultures that our world possesses. I think it is important to bring these different cultures, each having different traditions, beliefs, and even languages, to light and show that they are all beautiful in their own way. Bringing more foreign cultures into the spotlight will help lessen the amount of misunderstandings and miscommunications in the world and will in turn lessen their usually negative repercussions. I plan to do this and make the issue of multicultural ignorance and miscommunication known through the best means I know how: through my art. Throughout this paper, I will discuss the music video that I have made that stresses the critical role of language and art in culture, the importance of understanding these different cultures, and examples of artists who have created pieces with a similar message to my own.

“A World of Apologies” is the title to my project. It is a multicultural music video that is sung in 12 different languages. The video is to the song “Sorry” by Justin Bieber, in order to symbolically apologize for people’s lack of understanding for each other. The video has 12 different actors who lip-sync the song while having different flags, representing different cultures, painted on their faces. However, the voice that is singing the entire song in the background is my own. The purpose of this is to have the effect of one voice for many people, showing that even though we all come from different backgrounds, we still can always find something in common. The concept behind expressing this concern in music-video form, with painted anonymous faces and 12 different languages, is to mix a wide variety of languages, art and music. People will be able to begin to accept the unknown easier when it is mixed with the known, making it an easier transition to understanding different cultures. Art and language have always been crucial parts of culture and they mix more often than people may believe. The beautiful blend between the two can be seen in things as ancient as hieroglyphics and as recent as graffiti in the styles of tags, throw-ups, blockbusters, and wildstyles.

Combinations of art and language, like hieroglyphics and graffiti, have heavily inspired my work overall as an artist. I believe that both art and language, when boiled down to the core, are mere symbols. Depending on where and how one grew up, some symbols will be recognizable and others will not. I love combining them as much as I can because I see it as a way to add a decoder into your piece. For instance, we figure out the meaning of an unknown word, when reading, by finding context clues within the same sentence. We can figure out the story behind a person or a culture by using context clues through art in the same way. Furthermore, if both language and art are combined in the same piece, then the result is a piece

that looks complex on the surface, but actually contains more decoders than either vessel would have had alone. Therefore, this combination piece can help the viewer learn even more than they could have from a piece that contains only one of the two. Art does not always have to be a medium for education, however in the case of my project, I would like it to be. This is why I chose to combine the two elements when making my video.

I hope that when watched by others, my video, “A World of Apologies”, will spark up conversations between people that will make them feel compelled to share their stories and their cultures. Throughout the process of making this video I found myself in many of these enlightening conversations. The spark that caused the start of this project was when I realized the drastic difference in approach between myself and a friend when visiting a foreign country. I was excited to embrace a country’s differences and try to understand them the best I could, whereas he just wanted to embrace the parts that were similar to the USA and make fun of the parts that differed too much. I was baffled by his approach and really wanted to understand why he avoided embracing their culture.

I came to the conclusion that if I were to put myself in a situation again where I was faced with foreign cultures, with my friend’s reactions in mind, I could be able to see this experience through a different perspective. I then came up with this idea of a music video because music videos usually encase many different cultural elements at once: music, style, language, art, and dance. I told a friend about this idea and soon enough word of my project had spread throughout the school. When I met up with each person who volunteered to be in the video, I learned so much more than I was expecting. They explained the sounds and patterns of their languages, helping me pronounce the lyrics of the song just right. As I painted their faces,

they told stories of home and their friends, sometimes even about their feelings of attending a foreign school. Through these conversations, I picked up on their personalities, their traditions, their families, and even their joys and worries. Slowly, by adding all of these parts of our encounters together I not only learned who they were, but what their culture was like as well. The whole experience of making this video was very eye opening. I realized that maybe people shy away from different cultures because they are afraid they will be too difficult to understand. Open-mindedness is the key that is needed in order to unlock all the beauties foreign culture education has to offer.

Promoting multiculturalism is the main goal I have in mind for my project.

Multiculturalism, also known as pluralism, “permits or even encourages racial-ethnic variation” (Henslin 228). A society that accepts and promotes this policy creates a safe and accepting environment for people who have different cultural backgrounds from that of the country and/or society they are residing in, for example immigrants. It creates the opportunity for minority groups to be able to continue to cherish and uphold their separate identities while still being able to participate socially in the country in which they are currently residing without limitations. When multiculturalism is functioning successfully within a society, the country has a greater opportunity to learn about these different cultures and creates a more comfortable environment for its people to ask questions and delve deeper into these cultures. Having an environment where it is easier to ask questions and be open about one’s own culture may not completely eliminate cultural discrimination, but it can lessen it. This is because the discrimination against a person derives from an attitude called prejudice (Henslin 220).

A prejudiced attitude forms when a person makes a quick judgement based only on one or two aspects, for example appearance, and does not educate themselves in that subject thoroughly, therefore making an inaccurate overgeneralization their conclusion. If a society is open about these cultures, then people of that society will become more educated on these matters subconsciously, as well as consciously. Therefore, they will be less likely to make these inaccurate overgeneralizations. An example of a country that embraces multiculturalism immensely is Switzerland. This country holds large populations of the French, Italian, German, and Romansh ethnic groups. James M. Henslin, author of the book titled *Essentials of Sociology*, states that these four ethnic groups “have kept their own languages, and they live peacefully in political and economic unity. Multiculturalism has been so successful that none of these groups can properly be called a minority.” Other countries who are experiencing turmoil between the ethnic groups that make up their population, for example the United States of America, can look at the success that multiculturalism has had in countries like Switzerland and use it as a model in order to work towards the celebration of multiculturalism within their own country.

Although multiculturalism has proven to be beneficial and harmonious in some locations, such as Switzerland, the idea of anti-multiculturalism has a following as well. Some of those who believe in the anti-multiculturalism movement are worried that this celebration of different cultures would separate a country to a point where the original united image of the country becomes nonexistent. Jack David Eller, author of the journal article “Anti-Anti-Multiculturalism”, explained the worry that anti-multiculturalists have quite eloquently. “They worry that the emphasis on differences over commonalities accentuates or even creates differences and undermines shared knowledge and values. Some consider this

unhealthy, while others go so far as to see this as the end of American civilization” (Eller 250). It is true that as multiculturalism begins to develop in a country that the initial image of the country may change, however change is inevitable. An image of a country does not solely change because of the cultures of the individuals that reside there. The image can change for a plethora of other reasons, for instance its amount of wealth, political power, and technology. Also, not all change is bad. Sometimes changes can help lift a country out of a rut and help it bloom into something incredible that no one would have expected. For these two reasons, I believe that the change that multiculturalism may bring is a risk worth taking.

I have come across multiple artists from different genres who share this same desire to promote multiculturalism and foreign culture education throughout their work. One of these artists is Dora de Larios. She is a sculptor based in Los Angeles, who has work displayed all over the globe, and is most known for her clay pieces. The reason behind her global success can be attributed to the multicultural influences in her work. Her biography on her official art website explains how these influences are derived from a mix of her Mexican heritage, ethnically diverse hometown, and her worldly travels: “though her art shows definite influences of her Mexican heritage, those who have been collecting her work for decades are just as likely to describe the figurative works as Asian, African or Greek. Her studies of world religions and ancient art at the University of Southern California, her travels around the world and her upbringing in ethnically diverse Los Angeles account for the unique cross-cultural influences on her artwork” (De larios). Some of her pieces that one may be familiar with are her dinnerware set for the White House, her abstract cement mural in Nagoya, Japan, and her exhibit at the Main Museum in Los Angeles called *Dora De Larios: Other Worlds* (Miranda.). Many of her pieces have a spiritual theme,

using symbolic animals from different cultures and meshing these symbols together very harmoniously. A specific example of when she combined aspects of two different cultures in her pieces was from her exhibit called *Sueños/Yume: Fifty Years of the Art of Dora De Larios*. *Sueños* and *yume* both mean dreams, the first in Spanish and the second in Japanese, indicating that this show was based off of both the cultures of Mexico and Japan (Levin 1). Many of Larios pieces and exhibits, like the ones mentioned above, have taken the chance to show off different aspects of various cultures, and therefore have promoted foreign culture education and the beauty of multiculturalism.

Another artist that shares my message of foreign culture education and multiculturalism is Akram Khan. He is a dancer and choreographer who was born in London, is of Bangladeshi heritage, and known for his “rich melting pot” style (Norridge 415-430). He has created many pieces that tell Hindu and classical Indian cultural stories but in a very modern, western dance style. For example, one of his dance performances known as *Kaash*, translating to “if only” in Hindi, tells the story of the Hindu god Shiva in a western contemporary dance style. This dance is seen as a continuation of “Akram Khan’s quest to build bridges between the worlds of contemporary dance and the Indian classical dance form Kathak” (Akram Khan Company). This dance is accompanied by intense, mainly percussion, instrumental music and many of the moves are sharp and full of power. This intensity helps to grab an audience’s attention and keep them highly engaged throughout the whole performance. If more people are highly engaged then that means more people are absorbing the story of the Hindu god that is being told in this performance. The fact that the dance is in the style of western contemporary makes it easier for people from western countries to follow the story because they recognize the system of

symbolism in this dance style already and can then use their previous knowledge of this dance style to decode the performance. For these two reasons, this dance performance was a great method to spread the knowledge of Indian/Hindu culture to the western world in a creative and contemporary way. Akram Khan not only supported multiculturalism and foreign education culture through this dance, but also through the fact that he uploaded this performance to his company's website and their YouTube channel so that his message has the ability to spread to all parts of the globe.

Finally the last artist that I will mention that also is a strong advocate for educating others about different cultures and embracing them is Rihanna. Her music has personally been an inspiration to me because of her frequent integration of words and phrases from her native Barbados dialect into her American English songs. An example of this language integration and cultural representation can be seen in her album called *Anti*. This album is said to be “her reclamation of her Barbadian heritage, and the return of her native accent” (Gibson). In this album she decides to stop trying to cover up her accent and native slang, which she used to do in order to gain popularity in the United States. An example of this is her song called “Work”. In this song she uses many common Caribbean phrases and idioms, one of them being “he said me haffi work” (Abley). The addition of these cultural phrases helps educate her wide array of listeners on aspects of the Caribbean culture. Rihanna has “sold more than 54 million albums and 210 million tracks worldwide” (“Bio”). This means her representation of a Caribbean and American mixed culture has reached an immense audience from all over the world, creating a powerful platform for foreign culture education and multiculturalism to shine.

Overall these three very different artists, Dora de Larios, Akram Khan, and Rihanna, have successfully achieved what I wish to accomplish with my piece “A World of Apologies”. I hope that my combination of twelve different languages in this music video will have the inspiring power that these artists have and respectfully represent aspects of these diverse cultures. I am aware that my video may not reach as large an audience as theirs, but I will be content with whatever the outcome may be as long as my video helps educate at least a few more people on the importance of having respect and appreciation for foreign cultures.

Since I feel that bringing the topics of multiculturalism and foreign culture education to light is extremely important, especially in today’s political and social climate, I want to spread my message in the most effective way I know for the current population: through technology. Technology has been advancing rapidly throughout the past few decades. Nowadays, a huge percentage of the world population has access to internet. For example, there are about 2.53 billion people this year who own a smartphone, giving them access to the internet (eMarketer). If I post my video on the internet and make it compatible to mobile devices as well, the scale of my potential audience would grow by the billions. This is why I chose to make a music video. In addition, music is something that is embraced internationally.

Music videos have proven their dominance over many other ways to reach today’s youth. Gangnam Style, by PSY, alone has 279 billion views online. The fact that the most viewed music video was a bilingual song, containing Korean and English words, shows that this medium is perfect for learning about different cultures. Michael Jackson’s video Black or White is another example of how video is an effective way to reach people. Even though his focus was on different races, instead of different languages, both my video and his have the same goal of

trying to promote acceptance of others' differences and reduce the fear of the unknown, as well as a similar style when it comes to the morphing faces section. I chose the song "Sorry" by Justin Bieber because it was the third most viewed music video and number one most listened to song internationally in 2016. If this song had such a huge impact when it was only sung in English, imagine the impact it could have when expressed in 12 different languages. I hope that this choice will help blur the line between familiarity and unfamiliarity so that this fear of the unknown can come to an end and the willingness to make amends can begin to grow.

My main goal for this project is to inspire people to become more curious about different people and their cultures instead of fearful. Multicultural education is an aspect of education that our world has been lacking for many years and now is the time to fix this. We now have the technology to be able to connect with others from around the globe so we should use these methods to help grow as a species to bond together. We need to stop tearing ourselves apart, and instead build ourselves up together. We are our own worst enemies. Once humans as a species learn to respect one another, no matter the quantity of differences we may have, there will be nothing to fear. All it takes is for this message to hit a few people who are determined to make a difference and spread the word. Hopefully these few people will see my video, "A World of Apologies", and will pass the message on. Hopefully they will realize the pressing issues of miscommunications and misunderstandings in the world and will show this video to their friends, family, or even share it on social media. Even if the video is not shared, as long as the message from it is shared that is all that matters. If out of this project there are at least a few more people in this world who have decided to open their minds just a little bit more, then I am content, because this is how it all starts. Problems of such grand measures as these do not become fixed

overnight. It is a slow process, but it is possible to achieve as long as at least one more person each day is touched by the issue and is determined to do something about it. We do not all have to be the Nelson Mandelas, Gandhis, or Oprahs of the world, but we can all still do our parts in fighting against these issues in the best ways we know how. My way is through this video, but the possibilities to choose from are endless.

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