Cultural Differences Between Brazil and the United States

When observing another culture, it is hard to avoid being ethnocentric. People, especially coming from a country as dominant as the United States, tend to look at other countries’ culture and beliefs from the perspective of what they already know. They naturally compare different cultures viewing their own culture as the correct way of life. Brazil, being a south american country, was different than any other culture I have studied or experienced. While I looked on most of the Brazilian culture with awe, wishing the U.S. would adopt the same values, there were times when it was difficult to keep an open mind when something so greatly contradicted my own beliefs.

Some of the most beautiful women in the world can be seen walking the streets of Brazil. These women are not necessarily famous, wealthy, or in shape. They are beautiful because they are confident in themselves. They obtained this confidence because they were born into a culture where it is beautiful to be yourself and the “ideal body type” does not exist. Within an hour of being in Rio de Janeiro, I could sense that there was something different about the women in Brazil. A majority of the women had more round, full figures; what would be considered “fat” in the U.S. Not only were the women more voluptuous, but they wore clothes that accentuated their curves rather than trying to hide them. The men wore Speedo-type bathing suits to the beach and even to run in. The billboards in Brazil rarely portrayed full body shots of models, and magazine covers often had “bigger” women on the cover. It was very apparent that in Brazil inner beauty is valued much more than physical beauty. There is no pressure to be a certain weight, look a certain way, or dress in certain clothes. Because of this people are free to be themselves.

The Brazilian women were so striking because in the United States we, as women, are constantly pressured to be the “ideal body type”. If a person is not rail skinny, 5’10, and tan they are not considered stunning. We are pressured by the media, who is continually altering photos of models and celebrities to make them look skinnier or prettier. We are pressured by the entertainment industry, where women and men can only “make it” if they look a certain way. Most of the time American women won’t wear certain clothes because they are too afraid of what other people will think of them. If a woman were to wear clothes that didn’t fit her perfectly or flaunted her figure too much, she would be looked down upon by other women because in the U.S. that is considered inappropriate. While in Brazil it is the social norm to wear whatever makes you happy! The body image problem in the U.S. goes much deeper than that. Everyday young women look at their bodies and compare them to other people, famous or not. They could be exactly the right weight yet still believe they are 50 pounds heavier. These young women are so blinded by the pressure put on them to look a certain way, they cannot see how beautiful they are. Some will go to great lengths to change their image and severely hurt their bodies and their health, which is why so many women have had eating disorders for many years. Observing the women in Brazil raised even more awareness of the body image problem in the United States. Body image and self esteem
issues are major cultural differences between the two countries and an area where it
would be beneficial for the U.S. to adopt the Brazilian way of life.

The Brazilian people bring a whole new meaning to the phrase “carpe diem”
because they actually do seize the day. Brazilians live a laid back lifestyle, where it is
important to take time out of your day to watch the sunset, and restaurants and bars stay
open extra hours because having fun is important too. One of the most breathtaking
sights to see in Rio de Janeiro is the sun setting from the rocks at the end of Ipanema
beach. Everyday local Brazilians take advantage of this natural beauty, even if it means
taking an hour out of their day to sit and watch it. And everyday, right before the sun
disappears in the horizon, every person on the beach starts clapping and cheering because
the sight was so breathtaking. Even if the suns sets the same way everyday, they still
cheer because it brings such joy to their life. Everyone and everything moves slower in
Brazil. Not one person is in a rush and running on a schedule is not part of their day.
Most of the restaurants and bars in Brazil stay open until four or five in the morning
because they are in no rush to end their night. Brazilians save time for socializing and
having a good time because it is fun and brings them happiness. So why should all fun
end at midnight?

But Brazilians are laid back in all aspects of life, which was hard for me to fully
accept at times. Waiters and waitresses take extra time when bringing out food or serving
their customers to the best of their ability. Multiple times we would be at a restaurant for
at least two hours because the service slower than what we were used to. On multiple
occasions the wrong order was brought out and the waiter or waitress would be annoyed
if we made them take it back and bring us the right order. Brazilians are not used to the
accuracy that Americans need in their everyday life. Most Brazilians eating at the
restaurant would just accept what was brought to them rather than complaining because it
just is not a big deal. While Americans know that in the long run it is not a big deal
whether or not they received the right dinner, they don’t appreciate being disregarded by
the waiters and waitresses.

In the U.S., it is rare for a person to stop and watch the sunset or even take 10
minutes out of their day to relax because they simply don’t have time. Every person is in
a rush everywhere they go, especially during the week. Americans especially do not
appreciate when you hold them up because that is time you are taking out of their day. In
that 5 minutes you took of their time they could have crossed off one item on their “to do
list” and started on another. Everything in the U.S. runs on schedule and if a restaurant closes at midnight, and you’re still eating, you better finish fast. When flights run off schedule, airline employees not only have to deal with getting things on track, but also with all the angry customers who are fuming because their flight is delayed. This does not mean Americans are rude or uptight, we have just been brought up in a society where we expect the best service and for things to run on time.