

We don't need sameness to connect

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February 19, 2015

I have never had the privilege of a faith community catered to my cultural background.

Although born to a Taiwanese family, I was exposed to a Western education (at age 10); far too young to relate to local Taiwanese children. And yet with my dark hair and yellow skin, love for barbecued squid on a stick, and fluency in two Chinese languages, I was certainly a foreigner to American ways.

This means **I have always had to reach across a large cultural divide to access any community of faith.** Chinese churches saw me as foreign. American faith communities considered me a convert from the outside. There doesn't exist a church tailor made for me, a Third-Cultured Kid.

It wasn't easy growing into faith in a God preached to me in a foreign tongue. I wasn't certain what language God would speak into my heart. Western Christian practices felt so strange to me, but Chinese church was even more awkward, as it is often an imitation of Western practices with a veneer of Chinese flair.

To sum up: I was Chinese, converted to Christianity, living in Taiwan, practicing Western-style worship in Mandarin, doing QTs in English, taking communion with bread and red wine, doing church potluck with fried rice.

One could say it was too much identity confusion for a child, but children are also resilient. Instead of breaking, I bended to the cultural norms of whichever context I found myself in, and built bridges to cross those divides whenever I needed to. Our brains are remarkable in that multilingual people like me intuitively access the area of the language center we need to function in our social context. It just happens. I open my mouth and the appropriate language comes out.

I thrived in my faith, navigating through the muddled waters of mixed cultures. I learned to pray in English and worship in Chinese. I developed Western creative thinking and practiced Chinese lavish hospitality. I watched, listened, and learned,

picking up social cues and cultural nuances.

At the same time, I was lonely. Every person is unique, but it seemed to me other people had huge swaths of their cultural experience overlap with peers and community, while I had to work extra hard to patch up some common ground.

At any given time, I had reason to feel uncomfortable, like I didn't belong.

At any given time, I am making choices. To hide half of my cultural identity in order to conform to the majority, or to present all of my complicated self, bringing confusion and living with tension.

This is the delicate line I walk as part of a growing maturity in this life journey. I feel an increasing conviction to show the world, the church, that **we do not need sameness in order to connect.**

We all do this to a certain extent, in order to relate to one another, we search for common ground, finding similar interests and topics to converse about, choosing hobbies and activities to participate in. But sameness and uniformity require us to pick and choose which parts of ourselves to offer up for one another, **and I can't help but think there is enough space for us to live out more of ourselves with each other, for each other.**

We are wired to connect. Relationships with one another are vital to our health. But let's not make the entry point of our relationships with each other dependent upon sameness. How do we rub shoulders with one another as the incredibly diverse individuals that we are? Must we speak like one another, eat like one another, watch the same shows, like the same sports, share the same activities, or **is our shared humanity enough?**

Instead of avoiding discomfort present in the company of differences, can we not fear tension, disunity, and disruption?

I don't know about other couples, but after a solid match between my husband and me of duking out our clash of opinions, our divergent ways of doing life, our stubborn assertions of our perspectives, we feel as though we've taken our relationship to the next level. There is a deep satisfaction in having learned about the other's real feelings and also having asserted our own. **When there is enough room to contain more than one worldview, two people emerge better off**

than before.

Make no mistake, sameness is easier. Neater, more contained. We tend to enjoy resolving differences, easing the tension. We like the comfort of the sameness bond.

Here we are in this new reality of jet planes and high speed Internet, where international boundaries blur and cultures mingle. We need to forge bonds in order to forge a path forward.

But we don't need to be alike to bond.

We don't need sameness to connect.

We don't need similarities to do faith together.

We can be strong and different.

We can be united and disagree.

We can fight and still grow.

We can insist on being part of the program with all of our quirks and edges and foreign-ness.

I know we can, because I do it every day.

Originally posted at [Brandt's blog](#)