

Anonymous

Prof. Chris

ENGL 1121

06 February 2025

Balancing cultural values: marriage and school.

At my marriage ceremony, I remember going to the park with family and friends to have memorable pictures with my loved ones, feeling love and excitement in the air. I was twenty years old, at an early age, when I embarked on one or two significant journeys: marrying the person I loved and starting college. These would both be first-time experiences for me. Despite the doubts of others, I pursued my passion and achieved what appeared unattainable. Many people doubted whether I could manage both at such a young age, questioning if I was ready for the responsibility of marriage or if juggling school would be too much. While. Their concerns were understandable; marrying young can have both positive and negative aspects. It demands emotional maturity, effective communication, time and growth together, fertility consideration, and social pressure and expectation. Building a life with someone I cared about while pursuing my education goals was a fulfilling dream for me. Despite skepticism from others, I pursued my passion and achieved what appeared unattainable.

I was born in Conakry, Guinea, a small country on the western coast of Africa. I moved to the United States on February 11, 2019. Growing up in Guinea, I noticed many cultural differences between my home country and America. For instance, in Guinea, family is everything. It's common for extended family members—like grandparents, aunts, and uncles—to live together or nearby, and everyone helps raise the children. Such an arrangement is part of a tradition where the whole community looks out for one another. Guinea encourages young

marriages. Families sometimes arrange marriages, and it's normal for young people to marry early. However, in the United States, people usually marry later, often after finishing their education and starting their careers. If you told an American that you wanted to marry young, they might be shocked or ask why. In the United States, education is highly valued, which contrasts with my culture, where it is not prioritized, leading many young people to focus on completing their schooling before making significant life decisions such as marriage. In contrast, while marriage is important in Guinea, education doesn't always hold the same priority. I've experienced both cultures. I'm pretty sure that my Guinean background has shaped who I am today. I've learned the importance of family and community, and I've also embraced the American value of education. That's why I decided to get married young while continuing my studies. I believe I can balance both and achieve my goals, no matter the challenges I face along the way.

I met my now-husband through my family, which is common in Guinean culture. In Guinea, marriage is often considered a union between families rather than just individuals. It's custom for families to introduce young people to each other to see if a relationship could lead them to marriage. Our traditions deeply entrench this practice, emphasizing the importance of family approval. Our relationship began with communication through phone calls and FaceTime, allowing us to get to know each other over time. Eventually, we met in person and went on several dates, building a relationship with respect and understanding. As we spent more time together, we realized we were well-suited for each other and decided to marry. On our wedding day, the joy was overwhelming. My parents were very proud because, in today's world, it's rare to see children from Guinea living in the United States and still validate our cultural values. In Guinea, marriage is a significant event that involves ceremonies, including the payment of bridewealth, which signifies respect and commitment. For me, adhering to our cultural values is

a way to preserve and pass down our traditions. While some may view arranged marriages with doubt, I believe that love can grow in such unions. Our relationship is a testament to how understanding, patience, and shared values can lead to a strong and loving partnership, regardless of how others may perceive it.

During my first semester of college, I faced significant challenges in balancing household responsibilities with academic work. At first, trying to manage both effectively felt overwhelming, and I had a hard time figuring out a good routine. Thankfully, my husband's constant support was a lifesaver during this period. He took on most of the household chores and handled all the bills, which really eased the pressure I was feeling. This support allowed me to focus more time on my studies, ultimately enhancing my academic performance. This experience helped reduce my stress levels and showed me how important mutual support is in a marriage. It made me realize that when partners work together and understand each other, they can create an environment that helps both people achieve their personal goals. Through this arrangement, I gained a deeper appreciation for how partnerships work and the positive impact they can have on living a balanced and fulfilling life.

Navigating married life at a young age has been a rewarding and challenging experience. One of the primary obstacles I've faced is the sense of isolation. At one time, I observed some of my close friends and peers leading stress-free, relationship-free lives, and it sometimes made me question my decision to get married young. Although I know these feelings are temporary, they linger more the more I see posts on Snapchat and Instagram. However, I've noticed a significant improvement in my mental health since I decided to limit the use of social media. Research supports this; studies have shown that reducing social media usage can lead to decreased anxiety, depression, and feelings of loneliness. By cutting down on screen time, I've been able to focus more on my regular life, the relationship with my husband, and my faith. I believe that I've

chosen the right one for me. Cultural perspectives encourage and support young marriages. It's a tradition that I hold, as it allows me to honor my heritage while building a life with someone I love.

Looking at the present day, I have had many realizations since September 2023, which is when I got married. I questioned my capability of juggling so many responsibilities, but I soon was able to be fully confident in myself. My husband helps me keep my life organized. Structure and routine are essential, and they give me a sense of maturity. Because it may make people feel connected, supported, and respected, a feeling of community is crucial. Additionally, it can make people feel less isolated, which lowers stress and enhances mental well-being. My husband and I live in Minnesota; however, all my family members live in Ohio and Guinea. I get homesick regularly, but they make the time to come and visit me and make me feel loved and fully supported. I feel like I would be lost without my support system and probably not be in a great place mentally. But my family visit was more than just a reunion; it was a reminder of the strength and resilience that family provides. We spent a lot of time together, sharing meals, fun stories, and much laughter. These moments not only reduced my homesickness but also reinforced my sense of identity and belonging. The presence of my family served me as a force but reminded me of my roots and the values that have shaped me. You can tell when someone is loved, cared for, and listened to because it is reciprocated 100%. I have noticed that I've matured a lot during this transitional time of my life. I am still young and have a lot to still learn, especially as a married woman who is also a full-time student. This will also be an interesting journey to witness, and I am excited for it.

I anticipate graduating within the next four years and starting my career in nursing, while my husband and I plan to enjoy married life without children for now, as we will discuss having kids in the future. We have already planned an entire month of traveling through Europe. Every

country we visit holds its own unique charm. We plan to spend three to four days exploring what each country has to offer. Essentially, first-time experiences can be a powerful catalyst for personal development and leave a significant mark on our lives. They are important because they frequently create lasting memories, shape our understanding of ourselves and the world around us, and serve as a foundation for future experiences, allowing us to learn and grow from the novelty of new situations. This was a very fun essay to write, as it only triggers wonderful memories for me. This is also my first essay that I've written, and it was quite literally a challenge since I've never written one before. I'd like to say this is a fantastic first essay. I can confidently say that I will be more prepared for the next essay to come.