Welcome Home

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, safety, love and belonging are fundamental requirements for all human beings as they are essential to achieving one's fullest potential (McLeod, 2020). These key elements to attaining happiness are what I believe are the fundamental building blocks for a sense of home. As relational beings, our sense of home stems from the relationships we have with other members of our society, our family and friends, as well as ourselves. While the term 'home' will have a different meaning for each individual, for me, 'home' refers to a sense of love, support and acceptance that describes the feeling of comfort constructed from the various relationships I have within my life. Although it may be easy to regard the need of having a 'home' as simply a fulfilment of our psychological needs, a sense of belonging has the power to enable us to achieve greatness, to be resilient, and to overcome difficult challenges. Thus, while a 'home' may simply be a place of belonging and safety, it possesses great importance in our well being and ability to achieve happiness.

To begin, although we may not consider our society as our 'home' on a personal basis, the structures and systems in place at the communal level create the foundation for a sense of home. Representation in media, accessibility to services and stereotypes all have an immense impact on how people perceive and treat others, as well as how much an individual feels accepted in their society. When society is accepting of certain identities, those individuals feel supported, have access to more opportunities and ultimately develop a sense of belonging in their community. This feeling of home allows them to build deeper relationships within their school or workplace, feel safe from emotional or physical harm and feel supported when faced with failure.

For instance, fostering an inclusive environment in the educational system is critical to ensure that all students have an equitable opportunity to participate and learn. This becomes especially important for children living with disabilities who have specific needs and are often labeled with misconceptions, such as having a lower IQ. However, by supporting them throughout their academic careers as peers or mentors, these small everyday actions will accumulate to build an environment in which they feel supported and accepted for who they are. When they develop this feeling of 'home', they look forward to coming to school, have a more positive attitude when tackling challenges and feel valued despite their differences. In turn, this will have life-long impacts on how this student deals with failure, their self-confidence and resilience.

Conversely, stigma and stereotypes can destruct this sense of belonging, as they evoke discrimination and lead to a sense of marginalization or exclusion from society. The impact of these social injustices can be exemplified by the surge of anti-Asian hate crimes over the course of the pandemic. According to Avvy Go, the director of the Chinese & Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, "collectively and individually, these racist incidents have resulted in deep and long-lasting impacts on the Asian Canadian community as a whole" (Rodriguez, 2021). Reports conducted

on anti-Asian racism in Canada during the past year reveal devastating consequences, which include significant mental or emotional distress, physical harm and violence, loss of housing, denial of financial resources and job loss (Rodriguez, 2021). By hearing phrases such as "go back to China" or "you don't belong in this country", Asian Canadians are marginalized and treated as outsiders. Not only do these attacks create physical barriers and harm that deprives victims of a sense of safety, they also evoke a culture of fear, hate and distrust. This lack of safety, belonging and 'home' in their communities ultimately contributes to serious mental and emotional suffering, thus severely hinder one's well being. Therefore, our society plays a fundamental role in building a sense of 'home' as it develops our sense of belonging and safety as members of a community.

Additionally, an individual's sense of "home" is developed through their familial connections and friendships. While general support from peers can be motivating, deep connections built on mutual trust, loyalty and empathy have significant impacts on an individual's sense of belonging. It is incredibly uplifting to open up to someone about your flaws, insecurities or embarrassing aspects and receive a response of even greater acceptance and love. This is the true meaning of home. From personal experience, I can affirm that there is nothing more empowering than this.

A clear example of the devastating impacts of a lack of these close relationships is the effect of intergenerational trauma faced by many Indigenous families. Intergenerational trauma refers to the trauma that is passed down through generations which stems from the historical oppression of the residential school system (Menzies, 2020). Although all residential schools have been closed, their traumatic effects are still present in today's society. As residential school survivors, these individuals were subjected to cruel treatment and were deprived of a sense of family, thus finding it difficult to raise a family as adults. This challenge is heightened by societal stereotypes, stigma and a lack of support for Indigenous communities. Not only are Indigenous communities marginalized and treated as outsiders to mainstream society, many families also deal with intergenerational trauma and lack a sense of 'home'. This has resulted in suicidal rates which are over 10% greater than the general population and rates for experiencing depression to be twice the national average (Khan, 2008). Although the importance of feeling accepted and supported may be easily disregarded, these statistics reflect a reality in which many continue to suffer from a lack of self-value or belonging.

Lastly, although this may often be overlooked, building a home within oneself is equally important. While family and friends can provide great support in difficult times, some challenges must be overcome by oneself. Thus, it is important to practice self-love, to trust in and deeply understand oneself. For instance, an individual may be trapped in a toxic relationship, and while family and friends can encourage them to end the relationship, it is ultimately up to the individual to understand their needs and the treatment they deserve in

order to leave the relationship. In addition, building a home within themselves helps them to develop a sense of self worth rather than needing validation from others to know their worth.

In conclusion, a sense of 'home' is constructed through the various relationships we have with community members, family and friends, as well as ourselves. When these relationships are grounded in love, acceptance and safety, we develop a sense of belonging and feel emotionally supported for who we are. This sense of security is what empowers us to reach our fullest potential as human beings by motivating us to be resilient in the face of challenge and to lift one another up as members of a community.

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