Realizing that we are all shaped by our experiences, my multi-cultural background instills in me the belief that education directly affects the quality of societal life. This understanding drives me as I pursue a doctoral degree in Educational Psychology. Born to an American father and a Brazilian mother, my nuclear family is a unique hybrid of two cultures. Through a combination of growing up in the Brazilian school system and attending American postsecondary and graduate schools, I realize what an asset it is to be able to not only be fluent in two languages, but to develop fluency in both cultures. This allows me to critique culture from an outside perspective but also relate with it in deeply personal ways.

I took pride in my ability to blend in with different cultures but this was challenged through an undergraduate trip to India for one month and a professional research trip to mainland China and Hong Kong for six weeks. For the first time in my life I was exposed to the vulnerability that comes from unfamiliarity. I anticipate a new learning experience this summer as I solidify plans to go with my advisor, Dr. Mucherah, to Kenya on a research and service trip. These experiences remind me of the depth of culture and express my desire to continue expanding my horizons. Through a college course and library resources I am conversational in Spanish and help translating at a local food pantry a few times each month. This experience grounds me and reminds me of the humane side of life – a vital reminder for any researcher in the social sciences.

I chose Ball State University to pursue both my Masters and Doctoral degrees due to the tremendous opportunity to work under Winnie Mucherah. Her commitment to partner with communities in the United States and abroad inspires me to do the same. She contributes to the field of educational psychology while benefitting local low-income schools as well as the schools in Kenya. Her connections with her hometown have spawned meaningful research and inspire me to pursue that partnership in my home state of Paraná, Brazil. I have worked with her in
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Merrell Thomas Marshall Memorial Scholarship
Essay

researching the development of pre-service teacher efficacy in a community immersive program in a low-income school. This experience has broadened my awareness and understanding of race relations in the United States and intensified my beliefs towards advocacy. Through this research we have one article in press and one in review.

Currently we are working on writing a grant to provide cloth hygiene pads for girls in Kenya. Many girls skip multiple days of school per month because of their monthly cycle and their lack of resources and knowledge. These absences decrease their chances of passing the entrance exam to high school and contribute to their cycle of poverty and inequality. We hope our work will construct a student immersion program that will allow Ball State undergraduate students to help create innovate solutions and implement them in a culturally sensitive manner.

Growing up in a Latin American city, inequality is blatant and I am acutely aware of my place of privilege in society. Although my parents have never been upper-middle class financially, my dual citizenship and my educational resources have brought me even farther than some of my wealthier friends. I am privileged because of the variety of choices that were presented to me. I work hard in every position I hold but I also know the playing field is not equal. Because of this I am intrigued by people’s perceptions of justice and I strongly believe it influences their interactions in society. Perceptions of justice and fairness underlie how we interpret the world and are motivated to make sense of it. I am currently developing my dissertation proposal to gather data in Brazilian high schools both private and public to understand their beliefs about justice and how that influences both their school interactions and their attributions of authorities. My bicultural background and compassionate disposition leads me to continue integrating my scholarship across racial and international lines in this project and future work wherever it leads me.