

Eyes or Mouths

My eyes trying to read emotions only by the mouth, I had difficulty comprehending my best friend's emotions making my cheeks warm. As the world connects through the internet, economy and politics, it's not hard to notice and to be intrigued by the different and unique cultures around the world. I'd lived in California for three years and one cross-cultural difference I faced is where people read and analyze emotions from.

The ability to read emotions from facial expressions is an important skill when it comes to communicating with one another, and communication plays a crucial role when building a relationship. Human beings around the world have similar brain structures and facial expressions; however, we analyze emotions differently. One experiment showed that Japanese people mostly read the emotion signaled by the eyes, while Americans focused more on the mouth region. In fact, this cultural difference can be seen in emojis. In Asia, most emojis use different eye shapes to express different feelings. However, in western countries, most emojis use different mouth shapes to express emotions. I felt this cultural difference when my friends wore sunglasses.

Going to the beach every single day during summer break, all my friends wore sunglasses. I wasn't sure why; but I found it difficult to fully understand their emotions and feelings, leading me to make unnecessary comments and apologizes. Once my friend said, "You're good," meaning you're fine after I spilled Fanta all over her skirt. However, I thought she was being sarcastic and meant you're good at spilling Fanta. However, none of my friends seemed to have trouble analyzing each other's emotions. At first, they gave me concerned and worried looks but, when they got used to it they even laughed at my weird comments. When I finally

found out that it was because I couldn't see their eyes, I told them, and they kindly took off their sunglasses.

One friend named Mia, my best friend who lives in America, even taught me a few tips on how to analyze emotions by only one's mouth. For example, she suggested looking at how the corners of the lips move. When one corner of the lips falls it may indicate hate or contempt and when it moves upwards it may mean happiness. This tip actually works, and I still use it to this day.

When COVID-19 hit in 2019, everyone was encouraged to wear a mask. Even though wearing a mask was the norm in Japan, many people in the U.S resisted wearing it. Some say it impairs individual freedom causing political issues. Mia and I occasionally call each other on the phone, and once she told me that she had trouble reading emotions when someone had a face mask on. Because I struggled through the same problems, I was able to help her and give her a few tips. Like how you can guess someone's emotions through the number of blinks he or she does. We even played games where we each guessed each other's emotions while video calling. By learning about each other's differences and how to overcome them, this brought us together even though we lived eight thousand kilometers apart.

This world is becoming smaller and smaller through globalization. There are differences that are easier or even harder to get used to. However, I believe that the important thing is to know about the beautiful cultures around the world and to accept the differences. This cross-cultural experience taught me that our differences can tell us about each other and that it brings people together. Like it brought Mia and I together. When I meet someone from abroad, I try understanding their culture as well as telling them about my culture. I also believe that it is important to know that people may misjudge your emotions and that it is completely okay. [643 words]