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Unspoken Rules in Scotland

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Edinburgh, Scotland

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Unspoken Rules

I think what continually surprises me is how friendly people from the UK are but they are still very reserved about topics of conversation and how long you talk about yourself during group conversations. The unspoken laws of conversation are very different here, and that is something I had to catch onto very quickly (because it is so strange to feel out of place in conversation when you speak the same language). I remember thinking how easy a transition would be to the UK when there is a startling amount of differences, but not in the obvious ways you'd think. There really aren't any glaring day-to-day differences in the sense of culture, but in the much more subconscious 'rules of engagement' for conversation and habitual tendencies, I've noticed far more.

When I asked Jill about her family, she spoke in very general terms and used even more vague speech when asked about herself. But when the topic changed to work, she spent much more time on that subject than anything else, which I am definitely not used to back home—I've noticed that people from the States are generally more interested in talking about themselves or family and not about work when they aren't at their jobs. I think it says much more about the privacy expectations than anything else, which I never imagined would come up when reflecting on my time here.

I honestly cannot identify many differences between Jill and I other than classical tastes that separate people of different generations. I am a lot more connected to social media and friends/family on my phone, and she and her husband are much more likely to go to large

group dinners/gatherings than I would due to my age. In a cultural sense, we aren't that different.

Something that I have noticed is a general difference in outlook—Jill has commented several times on how optimistic I am in diverse situations and thinks that has to do a lot with American pop-culture and being brought up in the US (and related cultural identities associated). Now I'm not saying that Jill is a pessimistic person, because she is quite optimistic, but it is interesting to hear that sentiment continually be brought up from not only her but other people in the UK as well.

My perceptions haven't changed all that drastically, but I am starting to identify smaller differences between our cultures much easier now. Having an intent conversation with someone and being able to speak candidly about language and culture allowed me a brief window into her life and see what small things are in fact different. Just like the unspoken rules of conversation I mentioned earlier, I had an "Aha!" moment when she finally laid out my behavior patterns in relation to hers. I spoke much more in-depth about myself and family, and apparently my speech patterns are a lot more lengthy than people are used to, and that kind of change in cultural speech format can be really uncomfortable for some people. It's really difficult to see something so innate to your nature/behavior as different from someone else's, and it's absolutely fascinating when it's identified.

I don't think my perceptions of the UK have changed, but I have learned to appreciate the culture even more from finding our differences.