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## **Migraine Journeys: An Exploration in Connecting Cultures**

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### **Abstract**

"Migraine Journeys: An Exploration in Connecting Cultures" is a research project that looks at headaches from different cultures. Through the blog "Beyond Migraine Pain," this project looks at how different cultures use language, how they think about headaches, and how they treat them. The goal is to shed light on how migraines affect people and communities around the world and get rid of the stigmas that come with this disease. Such as women only being the only ones to get migraines and not men, the fact that very simple everyday actions can manage migraines because they aren't "that serious", and that migraines are used as excuses to not carry out jobs or responsibilities. The blog will be a space for my personal stories, peer-reviewed research discussion, and posts from people who have migraines. This encourages understanding, support, and sharing of knowledge. Even though certain blog resources for subjects can be hard to find, this blog's aim is to help migraineurs and their loved ones understand each other by developing a network of support.

*Keywords:* migraine, multi-disciplinary, cross-cultural, blog

## Section 1: Introduction

Although there are many medical blogs about migraines, few are written by people with migraines themselves, and many are daily updates. My capstone project is a blog that aimed to be original, helpful, and interesting. As discussing medical problems online is sensitive and open to criticism and mockery. The blog's purpose is to understand the migraine community's breadth of experience and understanding so as to break down stigma's often tied to it.

As the blog's focus shifted from understanding migraine triggers to a broader perspective aimed at neutralizing regional preconceptions, I began to understand how migraines are seen in varying countries. Because this approach would help to break down stigmas surrounding migraines that are deeply rooted in culture. Such as the Western Culture mindset in America stigmatizing migraines as a female ordeal that shouldn't be taken seriously because in many cases it's a weak excuse to avoid doing a variety of activities or carrying out daily responsibilities.

Contemporary westerners are accustomed to taking their own views of sickness and healing for granted [ . . . ] Such and such diseases exist, and there may be specific techniques for their treatment. Although westerners recognize that their medicine, biomedicine, is imperfect in detail, still, its underlying principles of pathology and Therapeutics are presumed to be correct. (Hahn, 1995, 1)

The blog theme became mostly about looking into how migraines affect people from different cultures and how they use language to describe them or even categorize them.

I wanted to make it a cross-cultural look at migraines in a blog format. I want to approach it with the academic learning and training I have gained at Boise State University. It was hard to find specific sources that could help with the language part of headaches. But I did find an interesting book called *The Language of Emotions* by Susanne Neimeier. An excellent comment from that was about how we learn to

express ourselves through language from an early age. Something extremely similar to what I learned in my Boise State studies in that "Children begin to label their subjunctive experience as early as two years of age and three-year-old children make use of expanding 'internal state language' as cited by Inge Bretherton, 1986 with multiple forms and range of functions." (Niemeier & Dirven, 1997, 173) I intend to research how migraines are described by others and how individuals from varying nations began experiencing migraines as part of the linguistic understanding of migraines. I want to understand how people describe their emotions verbally during childhood. because this has a connection to how using language affects their adult life. The connection between migraines and emotions may be shaped by societal norms or societal stigmas. By increasing interactions with the blog and Facebook page, I hope to collect information that would be helpful in incorporating migraine topics into the blog. It would bridge the gap in what peer-reviewed articles I couldn't find and use for material for the blog. I remain determined to use more medical and peer-reviewed sources to improve the credibility of the blog.

### **Summary of Project**

The research began when I sought to pinpoint my migraine triggers. My professor suggested I develop a blog when I was brainstorming IPS 492 projects. To distinguish it from other blogs, its direction stemmed from the realization that few civilizations knew much about migraines apart from their culture's understanding. Why not make it cross-cultural?

A step-by-step process started with a weekly outline and goal setting over the course of seven weeks. The process would entail creating a website tailored to pleasing experiences for migraine sufferers, letting viewers choose the logo, using a sandbox approach to understanding how users might experience the website and their thoughts thereof, meetings with stakeholders, and reporting results.

The blog began to take shape as I sought out numerous forums, notably on Reddit to collect first-hand tales of migraines from people from other places. This could give a potential view of the cultural

aspects of migraines and the some of the linguistics behind describing migraines. I discuss the results of Reddit later on in the results section of the paper.

### **Personal Experiences**

On this journey, my own experiences with migraines have had a big impact on the direction of the blog. During the COVID pandemic, a cashier mistook my migraines for the contagious pandemic sickness. This brought attention to the problem of stigmatization. This experience raised questions I had about whether similar misunderstandings occur in different countries during significant events. This was a segway into how I considered the direction of the blog to differentiate it from other migraine blogs.

It's been hard working on this project. Regular migraines made it impossible to measure time during the project. It became evident that my 1 pm headaches slowed me down and made it harder to write, research, and blog more. My energy also drains at that time of day and my brain goes to mush. I also managed two additional classes that required a lot of reading, writing, and studying. It was challenging to juggle schooling with the project, and I sometimes felt pulled in too many directions. Particularly since I am also a single mother of three.

This project showed me that my discipline is different than I expected. Because I am going after a major, a minor, and several certificates, I feel I might have overstretched myself. As an accidental and unknowing perfectionist of sorts, I set too high of goals for myself, which made it hard to focus on the balance of things. Nonetheless, I have done quite well. Recognizing this part of myself was a key step in helping me understand the problems I faced on this journey.

I'll fix the issues by making a more sensible schedule after graduation. Giving me more time to build the blog. I hope to overcome these issues and maintain the blog successfully by better regulating my energy and focusing.

## **Elements coming together**

### **Innovative Approach**

My innovative approach to asking and answering my question, “How might I effectively eliminate stereotypes surrounding migraines and promote cross-cultural understanding of this condition through my innovative blog that explores linguistic and anthropological perspectives while understanding my triggers better?” was to write about migraines by examining anthropological and linguistic perspectives from different civilizations, and by examining how different cultures perceive, explain, and treat migraines. By examining social media posts and requesting submissions from other cultures, the project intended to eliminate stereotypes and promote cultural understanding. This approach challenged the notion of one interpretation, making dialogue more open and understanding.

My either/or statement was either focus solely on documenting personal triggers and experiences with migraines or provide medical information and advice about migraines. I went beyond this either/or by combining anthropological and linguistic approaches to explore migraines as cultural and societal issues. This innovative approach aims to expand migraine knowledge for a wide audience.

### **Emotional Intelligence**

As I started working on my blog, "Beyond Migraine Pain," I found myself not only looking into the linguistic and anthropological parts of migraines but also exploring my emotional intelligence and awareness of myself and others. I take a Buddhist approach to understanding the complexities of human emotions and interactions because my own experiences and the difficulties of living with chronic migraines had led me to who I am and am not in the topic of being a migraine sufferer.

In Buddhist thought, the idea of "non-self" (Anatta) says that people don't have a permanent self that doesn't change once it reaches self-actualization. This idea stresses that our ideas of ourselves and

others change over time and are tied to the fact that life is always changing. As I reconnected more with Buddhism in these last few years (I practiced it as a teen) and its principles, I learned more about empathy and compassion. By recognizing that my feelings and experiences change, I became more open to the different problems and points of view of others.

This realization of "not-self" made me realize how important it is to learn about other cultures and break down assumptions. As I began my journey in understanding migraines and how they are seen in different cultures, I realized that the idea of "non-self" helped me approach these conversations with genuine curiosity and openness. The more I was able to let go of my own ideas and opinions, especially of others pertaining to me being a migraineur, the more I could appreciate how different people's lives are.

By adding this Buddhist approach to my approach, I hope to make a place where people could share their stories without worrying about being judged. This would help migraine sufferers from different cultures feel like they were part of a group and get support from each other. Emotional intelligence was a key factor in making people feel safe and welcome.

In the end, my journey with "Beyond Migraine Pain" not only helped me learn more about migraines from a linguistic and anthropological point of view, but it also made me more open to others. By accepting the Buddhist idea of "non-self," I gained a deep understanding of how all human experiences are linked and how important it is to promote cultural understanding and compassion when things go wrong, like when I get migraines.

Emotional intelligence is essential for engaging with an audience who may find migraines personal and sensitive. I wrote a blog with the intent to gain understanding, compassion, and cultural awareness, connecting with the audience through empathy, cultural sensitivity, and self-awareness. By fostering a safe and supportive space for sharing experiences, I attempted to avoid assumptions and



stereotypes while maintaining an open mind and promoting helpful chats. By displaying empathy, cultural sensitivity, and self-awareness, the author aimed to create a community where people from diverse cultures could find understanding, support, and compassion for migraines.

The blog aimed to showcase the diverse cultural perspectives on migraines, aiming to help people understand and eliminate stigmas. I want to connect with the audience by listening carefully and respectfully, creating a safe and supportive space for sharing experiences. Cultural awareness and self-awareness were also essential in avoiding assumptions and stereotypes.

### **Creative Thinking**

The creative framework of "Beyond Migraine Pain" combines anthropology, linguistics, and cross-cultural study to explore the unique ways people deal with migraines worldwide. By examining the language of migraines, I gained a deeper understanding of the condition. The blog's website showcased some of my creative framework, while using academic tools and firsthand stories and insights people from different cultures were also explored.

### **My Innovative Solution**

A key element in creating the blog was to ensure that it was also migraine friendly to the people using the site. We have now seen an uptick in dark themes for many websites and applications. and I think that this is an important element to keep in mind when creating a blog about migraines. In Leah Buley's book *The User Experience Team of One*, she discusses design principles that should be kept in mind. Granted this book was mostly about creating products within the user experience design field, I found it helpful when creating a blog since that is technically a product that can be individually created using *another* product. She said that "Design principles are a tool to help you clarify what personality is right for your product, and then to ensure as you progress that you were designing an experience with this personality." (Buley, 2013, 157)

I decided that an ethical approach would be best when it came to using Reddit for observation in linguistic and cultural understanding of migraines. I stated in the blog that this research was done without giving information about the people's screen names to avoid any misuse by readers to know of their identity aside from their country of location. Erika Hall, co-founder of Mule Design Studio, stated that it's crucial to consider the ethicality of a research project and whether it may cause harm to others. In research you need to be intentional about your position and avoid participating in studies that may lead to misuse of user data. (Hall, 2019, 32-33) In keeping the screen names of the people I read posts from, I was attempting to safeguard their identities. Particularly since they share commonalities with one another within the migraine community.

I am currently attempting to use a particular article for research to write a blog about the many different practices to recover from migraines in tribes. While getting access to this article is presenting a challenge, I think it would be beneficial in understanding the cultural use of shamans in healing. Shamans practice their craft publicly, offering healing services to people. The people recognize their skills and the shamans symbolically give a portion of their remedy to patients, demonstrating their commitment to obtaining help. (Womack, 2010, 217) This would further be in an attempt to break the barriers of stigma and understanding of how migraines are culturally viewed.

### **Feedback**

The blog got positive feedback from friends and other writers who liked the unique perspective it offered. Though two said so in the comments section, the rest told me verbally. The blog could have a beneficial effect because readers can talk to each other and share their stories and ideas, making a supportive community.

I consider the project successful. It showed me how languages depict migraines. The method in which I learned this is addressed in the summary portion of this work. I also learned how different

cultures may approach a medical issue without bias, again mentioned in the summary. I've learned a lot about migraines and the importance of cultural perspective as I conclude this assignment.

## **Results**

The "Beyond Migraine Pain" project has gained engagement and has gained over 100 views since its launch. Stakeholders appreciate the creative approach, which uses anthropology, linguistics, and cross-cultural studies to explain migraines worldwide. The project has boosted awareness and understanding, bringing people from diverse backgrounds together and breaking down cultural barriers, though at a small level at this point in time. To further expand the project and change how people view migraines, more audience feedback and community participation are needed.

In using Reddit as a means to conduct minimal research, I had hoped it would provide more information but I may have to return to the site periodically to obtain any new information.

## **Conclusion**

The "Beyond Migraine Pain" project's results were promising. The number of how many people visited my blog in the first month astonished me. It outnumbered my first blog's readers. Indicating strong interest and connection to the topic. This proved that the project's approach—combining anthropology, linguistics, and cross-cultural inquiry to examine a unique and often overlooked topic—was correct. In determining which strategy to employ in testing the data that I will continue to acquire through the WordPress Jetpack tool, I intend to use a Chi-Square method to obtain more information through the analysis of multiple-way contingency tables. This method is both simple and sophisticated in the sense that the methods of analysis are only one of several. As noted in *Quantifying the User Experience*, more information can be obtained through card sorting and analysis, as well as analysis of eye-tracking data. If I take the time to observe in person how a reader interacts with my blog using cards that they order themselves, I will construct a model of the mental organization of information by users. And I'd be able to

see how their eyes move around the page by analyzing eye-tracking data. (Sauro & Lewis, 2016, 322)

While more than 100 views are a nice and little amount of data to examine results. What this doesn't tell me is whether the user is mentally tracking what they're trying to do on the site.

### **Future Work**

After taking a well-earned break after graduating, I plan to learn more about anthropology and might even talk to doctors to add more real information to the blog. My goal is to keep writing posts and build a sense of community among people with migraines all over the world by giving people a place to talk about their experiences in private or in public. Through this blog, I hope to help people from different countries learn more about migraines and build a supportive community that goes beyond borders. I want to interview medical professionals and people from different cultures to contribute real-life experiences to the site and promote cross-cultural empathy to eliminate migraine stigma. To do this I plan on using not only a preset list of questions that I would write ahead of time, but also questions that probe what has been unsaid such as asking for clarification, asking about particular words that have a meaning to which I may not understand, asking about any emotional cues that I might pick up on while the medical professional is talking, I would probe delicately about the medical topic at hand, and without presuming what is being said on behalf of people that are not present, as well as asking the medical professional about how they might explain this to a patient had they asked the same question. (Portugal, 2013, 91) I'm committed to the project's growth and success beyond my degree because it has the potential to connect people globally.

### **Final Thoughts**

As I think about the future, I see the blog as a place where people from different cultures can share their ideas and learn from each other. It's important for people with migraines all over the world to feel like they have something in common, and I hope to encourage good interactions that break the

stereotypes about migraines. I'm not giving up on the fundraiser. It just needs time to catch and also, I am new to the realm of fundraisers.

After reflecting on the project, I should have arranged my lessons better to focus on blog growth. But I did have a change in academics in the third to last semester that was unexpected in my degree. I struggled to balance academics, employment, and personal duties, limiting my anticipated involvement. I might have started the project in the first half of the summer semester to get more posts in. I did do more than I planned, however.

I also think I should have employed more use of blog aggregators. which is a tool that retrieves RSS and the like type feeds from “news sources, blogs, and other publishing platforms, and pulls them together into one place.” (Rich et al., 2014, 83-84) This would help me reach more viewers.

The "Beyond Migraine Pain" project has left me enthusiastic to continue growing this platform, promoting empathy and healthy interactions. I want to challenge misconceptions, break down stigma, and create a more welcome and supportive community for migraineurs by using genuine stories, open communication, and cultural understanding. The journey has just begun, and I'm excited to develop the blog's audience, learn about various cultures, and make it more valuable for migraine patients and others.

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## Appendix

Link: [Beyond Migrain Pain](#)