

According to Merriam-Webster, home is defined as:

“the place (such as a **house** or apartment) where a person lives. : a family living together in one building, **house**, etc. : a place where something normally or naturally lives or is located.”

1. **What, if anything, is missing from this definition?** When answering this question, consider your learning from class and Zahra Ahmad’s *Journey Home*, a collection of personal essays about her identity and connection to “home.”

In class we defined home as a place where you feel comfortable, safe and/or included - it’s a place where you feel loved and where you feel like yourself. This is different from the dictionary definition because the class definition talks about emotions and feelings, however, the dictionary definition only focuses on home as a specific place. When home is connected to an emotional state it can change, however when home is tied to a geographic location, it is more static.

2. **How do you define home?** If you are struggling to create a definition, think about when you have most felt “at home”. Did it have to do with a physical place, an aspect of your identity (e.g., culture, language, faith, etc.), etc.?

Home is a place where you feel comfortable, safe and included - it’s a place where you feel loved and where you feel like yourself. Home can be shaped by our external environment and our sense of home can change based on the environment we are in as well as our particular values.

3. In her piece *The Journey Home: The Welcome Home Committee*, journalist Zahra Ahmad’s aunt observes: "There's something deep inside your [Zahra’s] eyes. You seem lost, like you're not fulfilled. That something is missing, like you're caging yourself in. It shows that you've been through a lot and it's trapped you. There is something weighing you down."

**What do you think her aunt meant when she said this? Based on your understanding of the texts we read, why did Zahra appear “lost” during her visit to Iraq? What was she struggling with?**

After 9/11, Zahra Ahmad was treated awfully - she was called a “terrorist” and she was judged for her religion and where she was from (Iraq and Iran). She was stereotyped and bullied which made her feel disconnected, like she didn’t belong and not at “home.” She went to Iraq to better connect with her culture and better understand who she is. She was struggling when

she first got to Iraq because of the pressure society put on her . She was struggling to fit in and she was overwhelmed by all of the stereotypes that were assigned to her and put on her. This shows how single stories can impact one’s sense of identity and one’s sense of home. It can lead to confusion and a lot of internal struggle. Exploring home, even when it is difficult, however, can lead to a greater sense of belonging and self-discovery.

4. Feeling “at home” is often tied to a sense of belonging and of feeling accepted and connected. This was certainly the case with journalist Zahra Ahmad.

**Think about a time when you felt like you did NOT belong, when you felt like an outsider and not “at home”. Why was that the case (e.g., perhaps you felt disconnected to an aspect of your culture, perhaps your community was misrepresented on the news, perhaps you did not feel accepted by others or you felt judged, etc.)? Explain.**

I think my experience and relationship with the hospital, given my autoimmune disease, has forced me to find a sense of home in a location you wouldn’t typically suspect - the hospital. Normally, people view hospitals as scary, cold and unfriendly places - they associate hospitals with bad news or even death. Unfortunately, I have had to spend a significant amount of time of my formative years in the hospital. Unlike classmates who would go play soccer after school or hang out at the video game club, I had to take the bus over to the hospital. I was there so often most people greeted me by my first name. This made me feel a bit disconnected from my peers because I did not have a ‘typical’ social experience and because I found a sense of home in a place that is typically feared.

5. Consider the example you provided above.

**How did you respond to not feeling “at home”? Did your understanding of “home” evolve or change? What have you learned from that experience?**

My understanding of home evolved because I understand that we have the power to decide how we define and find home. Just because the hospital is a place that is normally not associated with a ‘home’ I should not be ashamed that I have found a sense of belonging there. I realize that many people do not have a positive experience at the hospital so I am hoping that I can figure out a way to use my experience to help others find a greater sense of belonging at the hospital.

6. Now, apply your learning from the example you provided above.

Think back to Zahra Ahmad’s experience as a first-generation Iraqi- and Muslim- American, especially, the way she felt when single stories about her community and her “home” were circulating across the media after 9/11. Recall the way she was treated in school and how that made her feel.

**How might you use under-reported news stories to address single stories, and in the process, create a greater sense of inclusion? How might under-reported news stories expand our understanding of “home”?**

**What could someone have done to make you feel more at home—more included, more loved, more belonging?**

**\* An under-reported story is a news story that doesn’t get as much attention in the news.**

Zahra Ahmad’s personal essays about her return to Iraq, for example, are examples of under-reported news stories.

I’ve been at the hospital since I was little. I was always in and out, most times admitted, and the other time, at a doctor’s appointment, to the point where it started becoming my second home. The doctors and nurses always accommodate me and make me feel comfortable, as if I were at ‘home’. Even though being at the hospital isn’t fun or a good thing, I do feel like I belong, especially because I’ve known most of my doctors since I was an infant.

The reason why the hospital has become my second home was when I was admitted for months in the hospital, trying to get better. They would take care of me when my parents couldn’t because of money/work issues. They helped me a lot and kept reassuring me that I would get better and I wouldn’t have to be in pain anymore, just that I’d need to wait a little while longer. I found comfort in their constant encouragement and with that, a sense of empowerment and belonging.

During that time however, I saw a doctor struggling to communicate with a man who could only speak Spanish. From what I could understand, he was having trouble seeing out of his eye and he had a bad headache, but the doctor could not understand him. The doctor was trying to explain to him that they had to wait for a translator to arrive, which you could tell made the man feel a bit uneasy - the man who was struggling to see could not understand what the doctor was saying to him. I saw the man wait for about an hour and then he left. By the time the interpreter arrived (about two hours after the doctor told the man to wait) the man was gone. I don’t know if the man ever received the treatment he needed.

That experience made me realize that there’s not enough news coverage about the ways that hospitals can improve to be more inclusive and ensure that people from different backgrounds are comfortable and find a sense of ‘home’ or inclusion in their experience at the hospital. It’s difficult and scary enough to go to the hospital and many people wait until their pain or problem is unbearable before they even go to the hospital. That being said, if a person finally musters up the courage to go and then when they arrive, they feel ostracized or misunderstood because no one can effectively communicate with them, you can imagine why they would not want to return. This often happens with really vulnerable populations and as a result, some of the most high-need populations do not receive the medical care they are entitled to.

If there was more coverage of the changes that need to happen to make hospitals across the country more inclusive I think we would see a net positive impact on our ability as a country to provide quality health care, especially to populations that have previously lacked access to

such care.

Home is a place where you feel comfortable, safe and included—it’s a place where you feel loved and where you feel like you can be your authentic self. When you’re at home you should feel secure. Although people can find their home in different places, communication is an essential part of feeling at home.

When I was younger, my parents would brag to anyone that would listen that as a baby, I never cried or caused a big tantrum when getting shots or vaccines. They told me that once I knew how to talk, I would always say “doctor” and how I wanted to be like my nurse practitioner and become a doctor when I got older. When I think back to it now, I think I’ve just always known that the hospital was not necessarily a place for pain, but one for healing. We’d always think that hospitals hurt us and cause pain, but it’s ironic because the doctors try to do everything in their power so we can feel better. Though I didn’t realize it at the time, as I grew older, I would be spending most of my time at hospitals.

My experience managing my autoimmune disease has forced me to find a sense of home in a location you wouldn’t typically suspect - the hospital. Normally, people view hospitals as scary, cold and unfriendly places - they associate hospitals with bad news or even death. In this sense, for most, hospitals are the antithesis of what a home should be. Unfortunately, I have had to spend a significant amount of time of my formative years in the hospital. Unlike my classmates who would go play soccer after school or hang out at the video game club, I had to take the bus over to the hospital. I was there so often most people greeted me by my first name. This made me feel a bit disconnected from my peers because I did not have a ‘typical’ social experience and because I found a sense of home in a place that is typically feared.

Because of a particular medical condition I have, I have spent an outsized amount of time at the hospital, way more than a typical teenager my age. As long as I can remember, I have always been in and out, most times admitted, and other times, at a doctor’s appointment - to the point where the hospital has become my second home. The doctors and nurses always accommodate me and made me feel comfortable, as if I was at ‘home’. Even though being at the hospital isn’t fun or a good thing, I do feel like I belong, especially because I’ve known most of my doctors since I was an infant.

The reason why the hospital has become my second home is because of the quality care I have received when I am there. They always take care of me when my parents couldn’t because of money/work issues. They helped me a lot and kept reassuring me that I would get better and I wouldn’t have to be in pain anymore, just that I’d need to wait a little while longer. I find comfort in their constant encouragement and with that, a sense of empowerment and belonging.

During a time when I spent a few weeks in the hospital, however, I remember that I saw a doctor struggling to communicate with a man who could only speak Spanish. From what I could understand, he was having trouble seeing out of his eye and he had a bad headache, but the doctor could not understand him. The doctor was trying to explain to him that he had to wait for a translator to arrive, which you could tell made the man in pain feel a bit uneasy - the man who was struggling to see could not understand what the doctor was saying to him. I saw the man wait for about an hour and then he left. By the time the interpreter arrived (about two hours after the doctor told the man to wait) the man was gone. I don't know if the man ever received the treatment he needed. I don't know if his sight has been restored.

That experience made me realize that there's not enough news coverage about the ways that hospitals can improve to be more inclusive and ensure that people from different backgrounds are comfortable and find a sense of 'home' or inclusion in their experience at the hospital. It's difficult and scary enough to go to the hospital and many people wait until their pain or problem is unbearable before they even go to the hospital. That being said, if a person finally musters up the courage to go and then when they arrive, they feel ostracized or misunderstood because no one can effectively communicate with them, you can imagine why they would not want to return. This often happens with really vulnerable populations and as a result, some of the most high-need populations do not receive the medical care they are entitled to. I believe we have a moral responsibility to do better.

If there was more coverage of the changes that need to happen to make hospitals across the country more inclusive I think we would see a net positive impact on our ability as a country to provide quality health care, especially to populations that have previously lacked access to such care.

My relationship with the hospital has evolved my understanding of home because I understand that we have the power to decide how we define and find home. Just because the hospital is a place that is normally not associated with a 'home' I should not be ashamed that I have found a sense of belonging there. At the same time, I realize that many people do not have a positive experience at the hospital and that my experience and relationship with the hospital is very unique. I hope that I can figure out a way to use my experience to help others find a greater sense of belonging at the hospital. While we may not wish to spend a lot of time at the hospital, it does not mean we cannot feel a greater sense of belonging and 'home' when we are there. I making more hospitals inclusive I believe that we can improve people's overall quality of life, especially during the times when we need the greatest care and attention.