

Lyft and Uber Are Bringing Cultures Together

By now, if you haven't ridden in a Lyft or Uber vehicle, you at least have heard one amazing story from a friend who has. Philosophical conversations, sports talks, business opportunities, and friendships have all been born of these rides taken with strangers.

One of the things I love about these rides with strangers are the moments of randomness they insert into my life. I have encounters with experiences and with people I wouldn't normally expect. Sometimes these are thrills like riding in a Tesla roadster for the first time. But more interesting have been my rides with people whose cultural backgrounds differ widely from mine.

Like most people, I tend to flock together with people who share my culture, my assumptions, my experiences, my worldviews, and yes, my ethnicity (frequently because many of those things tend to come in packages). It's easy to subconsciously and automatically separate ourselves from cultures and people foreign to us, even when they make up our own cities. Through the activities we choose, the areas we visit, and the crowds in which we run, we broaden the gap between ourselves and our neighbors. Some of this in-group flocking is benign, but often this causes us to lack empathy and respect for people who are different than us, to fail to build trust with other communities, and to miss out on a full understanding of the world.

But as others before me have noted, technology does not have the capacity to discriminate - even subconsciously. Through the delightful randomness of their driver-rider algorithms, ride-sharing services Lyft and Uber have put together this farm-bred white boy with a Nigerian immigrant, a Colombian salsa music fan, a veteran from the Pacific coast, and a member of one the native tribes of Alaska, not to mention many more interesting people.

A Lyft or Uber ride forces us to spend a stretch of time in the company of someone who may be very different than us. In those awkward moments of introduction to strangers, our instinct is to search for common ground. In those moments, brought to us (and our cities) by Lyft and Uber, we share our own vulnerabilities about salsa dancing, our shared entrepreneurial dreams, and our love of the city we all call home.

I'm sure it's been mentioned before, but someone ought to notice the public service Lyft and Uber are doing for the world. Through commercial interactions, they are helping to break down walls between cultures and and replace them with bonds of neighborliness.