A Model for Multicultural Identities Within an Individual

Erina Ogawa

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Abstract

As cultural borders are crossed and increasing numbers of individuals are identifying with more than one culture, the issue of how we define ourselves and our place in society is becoming a more complicated task. Multiculturalism not only relates to a society made up of individuals with a variety of cultural identities, but it can also refer to an individual with an identity comprised of more than one culture.

This article examines models of identity development, including multicultural identity models. It then introduces a model of multicultural identities within an individual which is an adaptation of the iceberg metaphor of culture illustrated by Cummins (1980), Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005), and others.

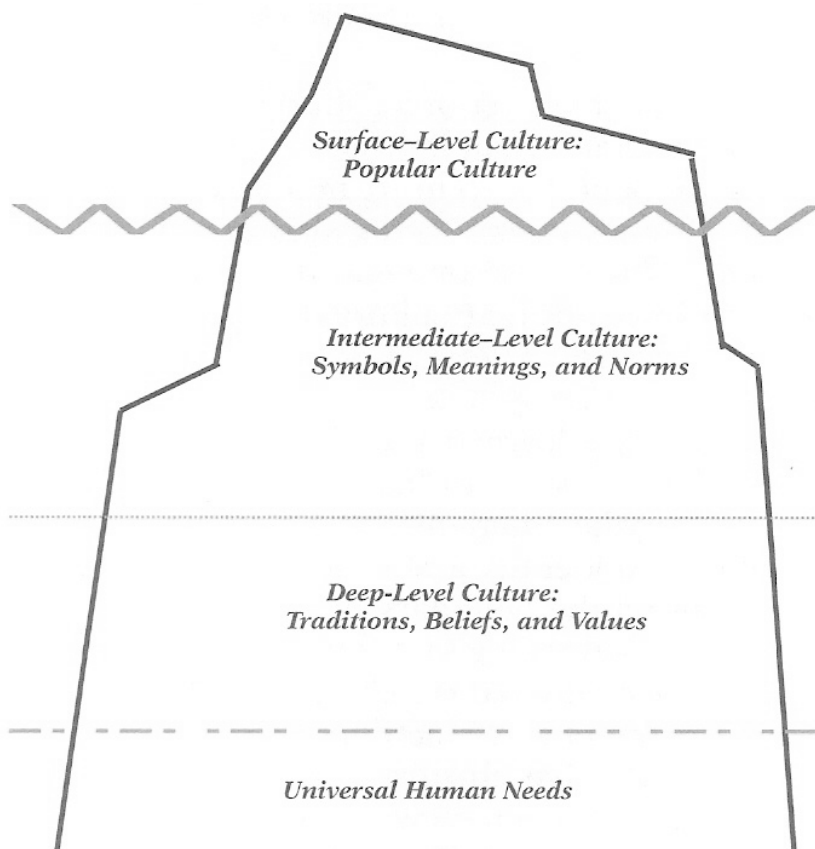マルティカルチャリズムというのは一つの社会が様々の文化の人々でできていることだけではなく、一人の人が様々の文化をもつことでも言えます。

世界が小さくなり、二つ以上の文化に浸し身をもつ人が増えると同時に自分が誰だとか自分の社会的の立場が何なのかなどの問題が複雑になって来ています。

この論文はマルティカルチャルアイデンティティを含まれ、アイデンティティのモデルを分析します。

そして、カミンズ「1980」やチン・トーミーとチャング「2005」でのアイスバーグの例を工夫して、一人の人物の中のマルティカルチャルアイデンティティのモデルを紹介します。

How we define ourselves and our place in society is a complicated task and consequently a number of theories have been developed.   Identity is defined by difference (Woodward, 1997) and we are often defined by what we are not, rather than what we are, particularly in the case of minorities (JanMohamed, 1995). Furthermore, identities are formed by our parents' unified perception of us (Piskacek & Golub, 1973) through family activities such as language, food and holiday celebrations (Cuellar, Hams, & Jasso, 1980).   Identities are also moulded through the process of communicating with others (Collier, 1998; Erikson, 1968; Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2004) and are dependent on others' acceptance of them (Erikson; Greer, 2005).   In addition, our identities change over time and according to different situations and roles (Stephan, 1992).

Figure 1: Ting-Toomey and Chung's Iceberg Metaphor

Surface–Level Culture:
Popular Culture

Intermediate–Level Culture:
Symbols, Meanings, and Norms

Deep-Level Culture:
Traditions, Beliefs, and Values

Universal Human Needs

(sourced from Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005, p. 28)

Identity development is further affected by the complex nature of culture.   Depths of culture and the aspects of culture at each depth can be illustrated using an iceberg metaphor, as Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005) illustrate the different levels of culture in Figure 1 (below).   The surface-level culture, or popular culture, is the part of a culture which is easily identifiable and distinguishes it from other cultures.   Below this is intermediate-level culture which consists of symbols, meanings, and norms.   The next level is deep-level culture which is made up of traditions, beliefs, and values.   The deepest layer of the iceberg contains universal human needs which are shared by all human beings.

Ting-Toomey and Chung's (2005) definition of culture determines that the intermediate-level and deep-level aspects[1] of a particular culture are shared by individuals to "varying degrees" (p. 28).   This means that an individual's cultural identity is not only multi-layered and changeable with a variety of influences, but also unique to that individual.   We play a major part in the development of our own unique identities (Kovel, 1991).   Holliday et al. (2004) liken this combination of individual choice and outside influences to a card game.   Players are dealt a hand of ethnicity, gender, and other cards and choose how to play them. This card metaphor is also used by Luke and Luke (1998) who point out that cards can also be played by other people against us through discriminating by class, gender, or otherwise.

Other writers have created models or identified stages to clarify the complexities of cultural identity development.   The first model of biracial identity, the Marginal Person Model, was introduced by Stonequist as early as 1937.   In this model, bicultural people associate with both cultures but belong to neither.   In 1977, Lacan explained phases which a child (not necessarily multicultural) passes through in their identity development.   He describes an Imaginary phase when the child is not aware of itself being separate from the mother.   The child's identity formation begins in the Mirror stage (as does the need for language), when the child develops a sense of self reflected by the other.   This desire to unify with the other (the mother) continues throughout life.   The Oedipal stage suppresses this desire into the unconscious as the child enters the law of the father.   It is here that difference is introduced (e.g. male and female).   Cultural differences between parents would also be introduced at this point.

In addition to psychological models of identity development, social models also exist.   Society's

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 (1)   These aspects are: symbols, meanings, norms, traditions, beliefs, and values.

influence is emphasized in the five stages of biracial identity[2] development introduced by Poston (1990). The Personal Identity stage is when a child is so young that their sense of self is unrelated to ethnic grouping. However, they are pushed to choose an ethnic group during the Choice of Group Categorisation stage. Factors that influence this choice are the status of the group, parental influences, language and cultural knowledge, and physical appearance.   They then feel confused and guilty about choosing an identity which is not fully expressive of all their cultural influences in the Enmeshment/Denial stage.   This is followed by an Appreciation stage when they learn to appreciate their multiple identities, and finally the Integration stage when they experience wholeness.

A further multicultural identity model, which uses common life stages, was designed by Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995).   They relate stages in their model to stages in the life cycle.   Preschool is when racial awareness emerges.   Entry to school introduces the use of labels.   Preadolescence brings an awareness of group membership based on physical appearance, language, culture and other factors.   Adolescence is the most challenging stage when there is peer pressure to choose one racial group over another.   An immersion in one culture (and sometimes rejecting other's expectations and accepting bicultural heritage) occurs in the College-Young Adulthood stage.   In Adulthood this develops into an understanding of, and effective functioning in different situations and communities.   So far, several models of multicultural identity development have been outlined.   In contrast, another model uses a circular framework, within a particular culture.

How an individual functions in a community is illustrated by Du Gay, Hall, Janes, MacKay, and Negus (1997) in their Circuit of Culture model.   Their model describes how identities are produced, consumed, regulated, and represented within a culture but it does not allow for individuals to belong in two or more cultural groups.   However, it has taken until the new millennium for a model to illustrate the wholeness of a multicultural person.   Ironically, this alternative model uses an ancient Taoist symbol, which is illustrated in Figure 2 below.   Greer (2005) uses the yin yang symbol to demonstrate the fluidity the combination of

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(2)   Biracial identity is not the same as multicultural identity as it only allows for two cultures and it
        defines them by race, rather than the variety of factors which can determine a multicultural identity.
        A racially European child raised in Japan, for example, is likely to be multicultural but not biracial.
        However, Poston's biracial model is included here as it provides useful insight into the stages involved
        in combining more than one culture into an individual's identity.

Figure 2:   Greer's fluid notion of multi-ethnic identity
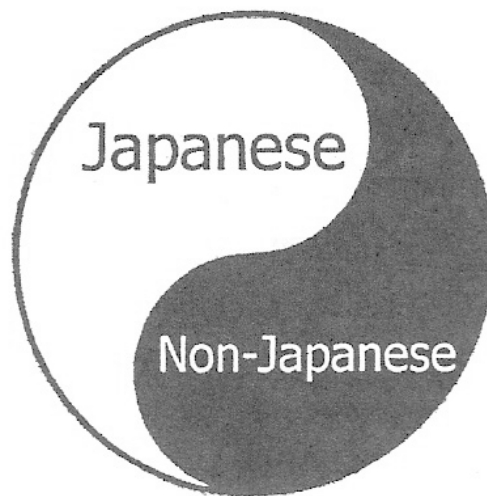
(Sourced from Greer, 2005, p. 7)

more than one culture within an individual.   These cultures are "separate and flexible, yet interlock to create a unified whole" (p. 7) and the curves suggest a fluidity which allows the influence of one culture to flow into another.

The development of this unified whole is "a complicated and important process in the life of any individual whose parents are from different ethnic groups" (Poston, 1990, p. 155).   Portes (1996) suggests that this is not an easy task and Bammer (1994), Crohn (1995), New (1999), Sebring (1985), Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005), and Wardle (1987) all urge parents to support children with their identity development.   Crohn and Sebring recommend emphasising the positive aspects of each parent's ethnic group(s).   Ting-Toomey and Chung state the importance of a secure environment in the home.   Additionally, Jacobs (1992) and Sebring suggest parents of multicultural children assist their children in forming a healthy self-concept by providing a biracial label.   These suggestions indicate the important role parents play in the formation of their children's cultural identities[3].
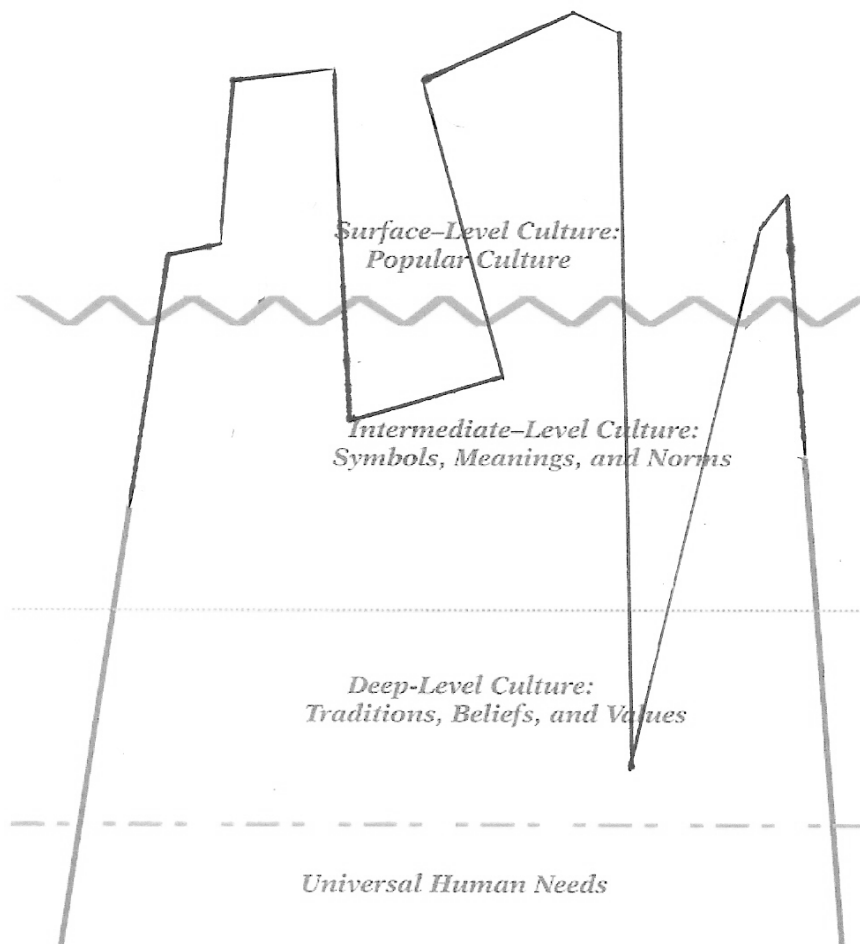
(3)   For the results of research into what identities parents choose to encourage their multicultural children to develop and what strategies parents use to do so, see my articles in Tokyo International University journals published in 2008 and 2009.

So far, we have seen how models introduced over the years have contributed to our understanding of our cultural identities.　However, the complexities of a multicultural identity have yet to have been adequately portrayed in a model that is complex, yet easily understood.　Next, I point out some inadequacies in the above models when applied to multicultural individuals and introduce my own adaptation of an existing model in an attempt to provide a model of a multicultural identity that is complex enough to be true to the nature of a multicultural identity, yet simple enough to be easily understood.　It is also intended to be adaptable in order to portray the multicultural identity of any multicultural individual.

Woodward (1997) points out that often difference is what identifies us.　If someone is a man, they are not a woman. If they are Black, they are not White. We are straight or gay; healthy or unhealthy.　But, where does this leave people who identify themselves with both sexes or who undergo sex changes?　Likewise, if somebody has a medical condition, such as diabetes or arthritis, are they necessarily unhealthy?　In the same way, if somebody belongs to one cultural group, does this mean that they cannot belong to another one? When someone does not belong to a dominant class, culture, or gender order, identity is often defined by what they are not, rather than what they are (JanMohamed, 1995).　This may be a common view of an individual's cultural identity, but is it an appropriate one?

A child's need to mirror themselves in their parents in order to know who they are is evident in Lacan's (1977) model but Stonequist's (1937) model portrays bicultural people as belonging to neither culture.　If this is so,　children with parents from different cultures cannot discover who they are by identifying with their parents.　Additionally, Du Gay et al. (1997) view membership in one cultural group as a rejection of another.　This suggests that membership in two or more cultures is contradictory.　However, Bowles (1993), Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995), New (1999), and Ogawa (2008, 2009) claim it is complementary.　Greer's (2005) yin yang model, which illustrates this complementary nature, is a welcome addition to literature. However, although Greer's model is a useful representation of the wholeness of multicultural identities, it does not represent the complexities involved.　Conversely, although Ting-Toomey and Chung's (2005) iceberg metaphor illustrates the complexities of culture, it does not relate to multicultural individuals.　This is where I found the need to make an adaptation of the iceberg metaphor to suit a multicultural individual, as illustrated in Figure 3: A Multicultural Individual's Cultural Identity Represented by the Iceberg Metaphor.

Figure 3: A Multicultural Individual's Cultural Identity Represented by the Iceberg Metaphor

Surface–Level Culture:
Popular Culture

Intermediate–Level Culture:
Symbols, Meanings, and Norms

Deep-Level Culture:
Traditions, Beliefs, and Values

Universal Human Needs

(adapted by Erina Ogawa from Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005, p. 28)

In my model, the iceberg represents a multicultural individual and the peaks represent the cultures comprising the individual's cultural identity. The shapes of these peaks change over time as a person's cultural identity changes. New peaks may also be developed as one begins to identify with new cultures. The fictional individual depicted in Figure 3 identifies with three separate cultures.

The two peaks on the left appear similar on the surface and could represent an individual's identification with two similar cultures, such as two Western cultures. The surface-level cultural manifestations are

similar, such as sharing a common language; yet they are identifiably different, such as having a different accent.　　These cultures may share common symbols, meanings, and norms in their intermediate-levels, but there may also be areas where they are different, resulting in gaps between these two cultures.　　For example, there may be similar norms for eye contact but different ones for punctuality.　　The gully dividing these two peaks represents the amount of change an individual must undertake to identify with, or operate in, these two cultures.　　As an individual becomes skilled at switching from one culture to another, cultural fluidity occurs.　　In other words, an individual can operate in one culture at surface-level, submerge to the point of shared intermediate-level culture, and re-emerge to operate at the surface-level culture of a second culture. An example of this occurring very quickly is when a professional interpreter communicates in a culturally-appropriate manner with a person from one culture and then immediately communicates in a different way with a person from a different culture in a manner that is culturally-appropriate to them.

The third peak in this iceberg appears quite different from the other two peaks and could represent the individual's identification with a culture which is very different to the first two, for example an Eastern culture.　　The smaller surface-level culture could represent less of an identification with that culture's popular or surface-level culture.　　The depth of the gully between this third culture and the first two cultures represents the lack of shared intermediate-level culture, such as social rules on public touching.　　It is only in deep-level culture that common ground can be found, for example a shared value of honesty.　　There are also gaps at this level representing differences, such as beliefs about reincarnation.

The base of the iceberg, namely universal human needs, is shared by all cultures and illustrates the syn-cultural nature of all human beings.　　I believe that if we do not forget this common base, it is possible for very different cultures to co-exist harmoniously, both within individuals and within our international society.

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