

Research Trends and Issues in the Study of Identity of Multi-ethnic Persons

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Introduction

People seek their identity as an individual in early adolescence, comparing themselves to others in order to determine what makes them distinct, as well as similar. Erikson (1959/1994) refers to identity as the sense of *the real me* or *ego identity*. The ego is defined “the individual center of organized experience and reasonable planning” (Erikson, 1959/1994). Ego identity is based on two coincidental observations: the immediate perception of one’s self-sameness and continuity in time, and the simultaneous perception of the fact that others recognize one’s sameness and continuity. Identity, thus, is dependent on a sense that the self is consistent, continuous and developing.

Erikson’s (1959/1994) definition of ego identity was associated to Hartman’s concept of self-representation (self recognized by ego). Erikson assigns ego for the subject and self for the object because ego perceives and regulates self, as in, “The ego as a central organizing agency is during the course of life faced with a changing self which, in turn, demands to be synthesized with abandoned and anticipated selves” (Erikson, 1959/1994). Likewise, Baumeister and Muraven (1996) note, identity is a set of meaningful definitions that are ascribed or attached to the self, including social roles, reputation, a structure of values and priorities, and a conception of one’s potentiality.

From the above, it is apparent that identity has two facets: ego identity and self-identity (Nishihira & Nakajima, 2011). However, for the purpose of this review, we shall refer to them interchangeably, as Suzuki (2006)

has mentioned that in essence, identity often means ego identity.

Group identity

Aside from the self-sameness discussed above, Erikson (1959/1994) also mentions that identity includes a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others. This he refers to as group (collective) identity, which is mutually complementary with self-identity (Erikson, 1959/1994). Group identity is a group basic ways of organizing experience like culture, history and ideal which the society holds (Erikson, 1959/1994; Uematsu, 2008), and reflects both maximum (e.g., nation, culture, ethnic group) and minimum (e.g., companions, family group) social contexts within the environment in which one resides (Appiah, 2005; Uematsu, 2010).

Groups differ on how strongly an individual may identify with. Groups high in *entitativity* are those that are perceived to be highly cohesive and unified, rather than just a mere collection of individuals (Lickel, Hamilton, & Sherman, 2001). One can identify more strongly toward groups in which their membership is more salient, such as race or ethnicity, in which physical similarity clearly draws a boundary on group definition.

Social identity theory

Tajfel and Turner (1979) referred to one’s identification with a particular social group or category as *social identity*. Social identity arises from a sense of belongingness to a group with some emotional and value significance, such as pride and self-esteem, which they refer to as *collective self-esteem* (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Self-esteem is connected to the group if his/her group membership leads to attainment of a sense of pride. Simply belonging to a strong, respected group will elevate his/her self-esteem.

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Social identity theory demonstrates how a social entity, such as a group, can be incorporated into self-identity. When an individual identifies with a group, s/he is likely to endorse the rules, values, norms, and traditions of that particular group, hence acquiring a discrete guideline for attitude formation and behavior, which is an essential part of the self-concept.

Social identity theory distinguishes between *personal identity* and *social identity*. Personal identity entails the self as an individual, and consists of personal traits and abilities which comprise his/her self-concept. Social identity, on the other hand, is identity based on group membership, i.e. awareness that one is a member of a particular social category, such as race (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Members of a social category hold a common social identification, perceiving themselves to be similar to fellow group members (ingroup similarity effect), but distinct from those of other groups, whom members are inclusively regarded as being wholly different from one's self (outgroup homogeneity effect).

Self-categorization theory

An off-shoot of social identity theory, self-categorization theory, places greater emphasis on the individual than the group. Self-categorization is the cognitive self-classification of a person into a particular social group or category (Turner, Oakes, Haslam and McGarty, 1994; Kakimoto, 2001). When an individual is amongst members of his/her group, i.e. the ingroup, personal identity is activated, and the individual assumes a personal identity. However, while in the presence of members of other groups, or outgroups, his/her identity as being a member of a different group, i.e. social identity becomes salient. As a result, the individual becomes sensitive to intergroup differences, and accentuates the *us* versus *them*. Once a person is categorized, the person is perceived through the lens of the relevant group prototypes, and is regarded as embodiments of the attributes of his/her group, not a unique individual, which Hogg and Reid (2006) refer to as depersonalization. Depersonalization brings ingroup normative behavior, cognition, and judgement. At any one time, a person may identify strongly to a particular ingroup, and this membership salience brings about cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral patterns that are in consistency to the ingroup prototype. In the case of a multilingual, multinational person, s/he will

undergo *cultural frame shifting*, and assume whichever identity is consistent with the language being used, and the cultural standards that accompany it.

Cultural identity and Ethnic identity

Social identity theory forwards the idea of social category as the basis for identifying the self. When this category is culture, the identity that arises from it is *cultural identity*, which Collier (1998) refers to as the enactment and negotiation of social identifications by group members in particular settings, along with contextual structures and public discourses that produce representations and subjectivities.

Cultural identity is often used interchangeably with national identity, racial identity and ethnic identity. For the purpose of this review, the distinction between cultural identity and ethnic identity is particularly warranted. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 8th edition (2010), ethnicity is "a social category associated with some combinations of common national origin, race, religion, culture, and language." Kim (2009) notes that ethnicity differentiates one group from another based on extrinsic markers such as physical features and speech patterns, and intrinsic ethnic markers, including cultural norms, beliefs, values, and thought patterns.

From the above definition, race, as an extrinsic marker, is subsumed under ethnicity (Phinney, 1996). Ethnic identity entails a sense of membership within a particular ethnic group, and the attitudes and feelings associated with that membership (Bernal & Knight, 1993; Berndt & Keefe, 1992; Phinney, 1990). Sadowsky, Kwan, and Pannu (1995) define ethnic identity as, "one's attachment to, sense of belonging to, and identification with one's ethnic group members" (p. 133).

The salience and significance of ethnic identity is accentuated within a social environment consisting of multiple cultures and ethnic groups (Phinney, 1990). Children develop ethnic identity as ego identity and group identity. Erikson (1959/1994) asserts that a child must attain his/her self identity through selective accentuation of significant identifications, and gradually integrate self-images as part of his/her identity. In the case of children born to parents of different ethnicities, s/he must manage two distinct ethnic identities, integrating them into one consolidated personal identity.

Research in ethnic identity

Interest in ethnic identity arose from issues pertaining to ethnic minorities, who are groups of people from diverse cultures residing in a society in which the dominant group is a different culture or race. Studies in the United States typically focus on African-Americans, for example, Clark and Clark (1939, 1940) revealed that African-American children had a more negative ethnic identity than Caucasian children. Furthermore, Oyserman and Harrison (1999) discovered that African-American youth had both American and African ethnic identities, suggesting that minority youth identify with both their ethnic roots as well as the dominant culture.

The ethnic identities of multiracial children have been examined by Gibbs (1987), who revealed that bi-racial American children of White and Black ethnicity experience identity conflict. If their physical appearance is more White, they identify with the dominant majority, rejecting their Black identity. Moreover, many bi-racial adolescents have ambivalent feelings to the racial backgrounds of their parents, and may fail to integrate the two racial identities in whole or in part.

In the Japanese context, Cho (2013) studied Korean-Japanese students attending a regular public school versus those attending a Korean school. Those enrolled in public schools had little relationships with Koreans, so they identified as Japanese, creating conflict regarding their ethnic identity. On the other hand, those in Korean schools had a distinct Korean identity, and Cho (2013) concluded that the school experience has significant influence on the formation of ethnic identity for children of Korean descent in Japan. The scope of this review is on the identity of multi-ethnic people in Japan. Multi-ethnicity entails an individual who identifies with two or more ethnicities. The typical case in the Japanese context would be the *zainichi* (在日韓国・朝鮮人 = Korean-Japanese). In contrast, the *kaigai-shijo* (海外子女 = overseas residing children) are fundamentally Japanese, but depending on how acculturated they are, i.e. how much they have adopted the ethnicity of the host culture, they too can be considered multi-ethnic. One other common multi-ethnic group would be the offspring of international marriages, whom in many cases, may be multi-racial as well.

Ethnic identity of Japanese multi-ethnic people

Research dealing with Japanese multi-ethnicity have spanned various contexts. For example, Suzuki (2014) investigated the cultural identity of Japanese-German women living in Germany, revealing three types of cultural identities: bicultural identity, predominant Japanese identity and predominant German identity. Morikawa (2009) observed the ethnic identity of Japanese-Filipino high school students, discovering that each complex self-concept was characterized by external categories, such as nationality or hometown, rather than defining their identities as individuals through personal attributes.

Suzuki (2014) elaborated on the factors forming cultural identity of Japanese multiethnic children (one parent is Japanese) as: (1) country of residence; (2) combination of nationality or culture of parents; (3) sex of Japanese parent; (4) external features (figure, visage, skin, hair color); (5) family and home environment (parents' educational level, personality, economic background and language ability, along with their orientation toward their children's education); (6) school environment; (7) birthplace, age and sex. These factors are dynamically intertwined to form the multiethnic children's identities.

Multi-ethnic identity model

From the above, the interaction between ethnic identity and environment is clear, and to this fact, Wardle (1992) concocted a developmental stage model of ethnic identity of biracial children in the United States. His ecological and developmental model of ethnic identity consists of two stages. According to this model, biracial children must successfully complete two stages to obtain a healthy and integrated biracial identity. At Stage 1 (3-7 age), children explore individual and racial differences, learn labels and emotional responses associated with various ethnic groups, and begin to pick up social norms and values. At Stage 2 (during adolescence), they begin to define who they are, how they feel about themselves, and how society views them. To complete both stages successfully depends on the impact and interaction of the five ecological components, consisting of: family, community, minority and majority context, and group antagonism (See Fig.1). The quality of each ecological component affects the child's identity concept indirectly.

Another model has been offered by Accapadi (2012),

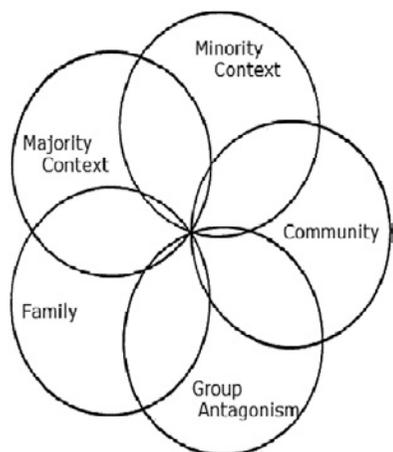


Figure 1. The ecological components of the biracial identity model (Wardle, 1992)

* The author reconstructed the original figure

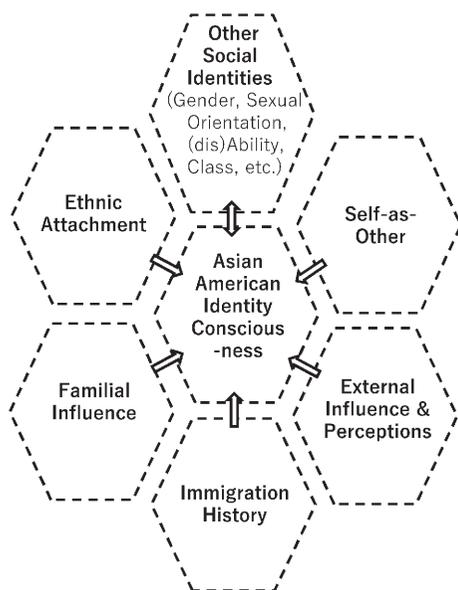


Figure 2. Point of Entry Model for Asian American Identity Consciousness (Accapadi, 2012)

who concentrated on the context of the Asian child in the United States, developing a model called the Point of Entry model of Asian American Identity Consciousness (POE, See Figure 2). According to this model, four environmental factors affect identity formation; ethnic attachment; familial influence; immigration history; external influence and perceptions; and two individual selves of self-as-other (i.e., physical appearance) and other social identities (gender, sexual orientation, ability,

class, etc.). These factors become a catalyst for Asian Americans to develop their ethnic identity.

Wardle's model is based on a developmental stage, yet it has been criticized for being rather crude, and for not considering the individual's internally controlled variables. On the other hand, Accapadi's model includes both external and internal factors, but it too contains variables which seem out of place in a developmental model (such as immigration history and sexual orientation). These models could hardly be called universal.

Another developmental model of ethnic identity had been proposed by Phinney (1992), who borrowed from Marcia's (1966) identity status model. The two dimensions of "crisis," which Phinney called "exploration," and "commitment" were incorporated into his model of multiethnic identity. Phinney devised the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) to assess ethnic identity on these two dimensions. MEIM was later revised as MEIM-R (Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised) by Phinney and Ong (2007). Exploration was defined as seeking information and experiences relevant to one's ethnicity, including a range of activities, such as reading and talking to people, learning cultural practices, and attending cultural events. Commitment originally implied the strength of one's ties with a particular ethnic group, but later was reconceived as affirmation/belonging (Phinney & Ong, 2007).

Much research has been generated from the development of MEIM and MEIM-R. Studies implementing MEIM have revealed that higher levels of ethnic identity are related to higher well-being (Phinney, 1989; Oliveira, Pankalla, & Cabecinhas, 2012), higher self-esteem (Phinney, 1992; Yasui, Dorham, & Dishion, 2004), higher academic achievement (Yasui, Dorham, & Dishion, 2004) and less mental health issues such as somatic complaints, anxiety or depression or psychological distress (Pyant & Yanico, 1991; Yasui, Dorham, & Dishion, 2004; Yip, Seaton & Sellers, 2006; Walker, Wingate, Obasi, & Joiner, 2008; Williams, Chapman, Wong, & Turkheimer, 2012). Furthermore, studies using MEIM-R have been used to measure gender and religious identity of adolescents (Ashdown, Homa, & Brown, 2014), and have revealed that higher ethnic identity relates to better psychological well-being, academic achievement, mental health (Roberts, Phinney, Masse, Chen, & Roberts, 1999).

Identity management theory

Ethnic identity has often been construed as a fixed, trait of an individual, but Greer (2005) acclaimed that the ethnic identity of Japanese-Canadian, Japanese-American, and Japanese-British students in international schools in Japan had defined their ethnic identity according to the context and interlocutor. Ethnic identity, thus, can be situational, or can be salient at a particular time and occasion. To this, Cupach and Imahori (Cupach & Imahori, 1993; Imahori & Cupach, 2005) developed their identity management theory (IMT), which claims cultural (ethnic) identities are negotiated within particular interpersonal relationships. IMT defines identity as self-conception which serves as a framework for understanding the self and the surrounding world. They refer to social identity theory, and self-categorization theory, in that particular situations allow for ready cognitive access to certain identities. For example, if a Japanese-American child is interacting with a group of Japanese children, his/her Japanese identity is becomes more salient if s/he is proficient in the Japanese language and well informed about Japanese culture, but if not, his/her American identity is inevitably accentuated. Ethnic identity, thus, is dependent on the particular social environment that one finds his/herself in (McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stryker, 1980).

Identities can be divided into two components: cultural identity and relational identity. Cultural identity is a group-level identity, defined as “identification with and perceived acceptance into a group that has a shared systems of symbols and meanings, and norms/rules for conduct” (Collier & Thomas, 1988). Relational identity is a personal-level identity, described as a privately transacted system of understandings which helps people coordinate meanings and behaviors (Wood, 1982). According to IMT, *intercultural* communication occurs when cultural identities are experienced as salient and distinct, while *intracultural* communication is when cultural identities are saliently mutual. Furthermore, *interpersonal* communication is when relational identity is more salient than cultural. Identity salience can fluctuate momentarily, and shared communication between two people will vary both within and between interaction contexts. At first, two people from different cultural groups may form an intercultural relationship and their

communication will be intercultural communication. After that, their communication may shift toward intracultural or interpersonal. Once a relationship has been established between two people, an out-group person will be regarded as a member of the in-group, and shared cultural identity is actualized. In summary, IMT raised the importance of ethnic identity to be conceived of as being situational versus just an individual's trait. Multi-ethnic persons can fluctuate from one identity to the other to adjust to the environment on hand. In a social environment, such as the Japanese, the relative homogeneity of race and ethnic composition lends itself to pose difficulty in identity management of multi-ethnic persons, especially if this entails a difference in race and other physically characteristic differences between the average Japanese person.

Conclusion

In this review, we attempted to raise the various issues and topics surrounding multi-ethnicity. The management of ethnic identity is a developmental task faced by children of multiple ethnic backgrounds. This task is especially difficult for children of mixed ethnicities, as they are caught in between the majority and minority. At times, they will identify with the majority, but other times, the same majority will not include them within their membership. Research on multi-ethnicity should focus on this very situation, since identity conflict would seem to be greatest in the case of usch children. The formation of cultural/ethnic identity of multiethnic people is a lifelong process which starts at birth and continues on until death, posing many a difficulty throughout one's life (Kich, 1992; Minoura, 1995; Suzuki, 2008). Therefore, researchers should probe into the conflicts incurred by multi-ethnic individuals in order to determine how they can effectively develop and manage their ethnic identities.

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ABSTRACT

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In this article, concepts of identity are considered and surveyed researches of ego identity and group identity in social identity theory, self-categorization theory. It indicates ethnic identity is related to self-concept, well-being, academic achievement, mental health, and so on. Furthermore, identity management theory reveals that cross-cultural communication occurs depending on management of cultural identity as group identity and relational identity as personal identity. However, there are issues in the theory that it does not refer to the majority and minority groups which have different aspects of ethnic identity and how multiethnic people distinguish in-group and out-group and manage identity. It needs investigating development of identity of multiethnic people toward multiculturalism.

Key words: ethnic identity, multiethnic, identity management theory