# Cultural Identity

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**ABSTRACT**

Cultural identity is the identity or feeling of belonging to a group. It is part of a person's self-conception and self-perception and is related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality or any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture. In this way, cultural identity is both characteristic of the individual but also of the culturally identical group of members sharing the same cultural identity or upbringing.

Cultural (and Ethnic) Identity is a subset of the communication theory of identity that establishes four "frames of identity" that allow us to view how we build identity. These frames include the personal frame, enactment of communication frame, relationship frame, and communal frame. The communal frame refers to the cultural constraints or the sense of "right" that people live by (which varies by cultural group). Therefore, Cultural (and Ethnic) Identity become central to a persons identity, how they see themselves and how they relate to the world.

Various modern cultural studies and social theories have investigated cultural identity and understanding . In recent decades, a new form of identification has emerged which breaks down the understanding of the individual as a coherent whole subject into a collection of various cultural identifiers. These cultural identifiers may be the result of various conditions including: location, gender, race, history, nationality, language, sexuality, religious beliefs, ethnicity, aesthetics, and even food. As one author writes, recognizing both coherence and fragmentation:

As a "historical reservoir," culture is an important factor in shaping identity. Since one of the main characteristics of a culture is its "historical reservoir," many if not all groups entertain revisions, either consciously or unconsciously, in their historical record in order to either bolster the strength of their cultural identity or to forge one which gives them precedent for actual reform or change. Some critics of cultural identity argue that the preservation of cultural identity, being based upon difference, is a divisive force in society, and that cosmopolitanism gives individuals a greater sense of shared citizenship. When considering practical association in

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international society, states may share an inherent part of their 'make up' that gives common ground and an alternative means of identifying with each other. Nations provide the framework for culture identities called external cultural reality, which influences the unique internal cultural realities of the individuals within the nation.

Also of interest is the interplay between cultural identity and new media.

Rather than necessarily representing an individual's interaction within a certain group, cultural identity may be defined by the social network of people imitating and following the social norms as presented by the media. Accordingly, instead of learning behaviour and knowledge from cultural/religious groups, individuals may be learning these social norms from the media to build on their cultural identity.

A range of cultural complexities structure the way individuals operate with the cultural realities in their lives. Nation is a large factor of the cultural complexity, as it constructs the foundation for individual's identity but it may contrast with ones cultural reality. Cultural identities are influenced by several different factors such as ones religion, ancestry, skin colour, language, class, education, profession, skill, family and political attitudes. These factors contribute to the development of one's identity.

Components of cultural complexity also interact with the emotional experience and behavior of individuals. Trnka et al. (2018) distinguish five main components of cultural complexity relating to emotions: "1) emotion language, 2) conceptual knowledge about emotions, 3) emotion-related values, 4) feelings rules, i.e. norms for subjective experience, and 5) display rules, i.e. norms for emotional expression."
Cultural identity is essentially how we as individuals cater to all positions of our lives. We may be teachers, students, friends, bosses, employees, etc. How we act and how our schemas contribute to our positions are the building blocks of your overall cultural identity.

**CULTURAL ARENA**
It is also noted that an individual's "cultural arena", or place where one lives, impacts the culture that person chooses to abide by. The surroundings, the environment, the people in these places play a factor in how one feels about the culture they wish to adopt. Many immigrants find the need to change their culture in order to fit into the culture of most citizens in the country. This can conflict with an immigrant's current belief in their culture and might pose a problem, as the immigrant feels compelled to choose between the two presenting cultures.

Some might be able to adjust to the various cultures in the world by committing to two or more cultures. It is not required to stick to one culture. Many people socialize and interact with people in one culture in addition to another group of people in another culture. Thus cultural identity is able to take many forms and can change depending on the cultural area. The nature of the impact of cultural arena has changed with the advent of the Internet, bringing together groups of people with shared cultural interests who before would have been more likely to integrate into their real world cultural arena. This plasticity is what allows people to feel like part of society wherever they go.

## LANGUAGE

Language develops from the wants of the people who tend to disperse themselves in a common given location over a particular period of time. This tends to allow people to share a way of life that generally links individuals in a certain culture that is identified by the people of that group. The affluence of communication that comes along with sharing a language promotes connections and roots to ancestors and cultural histories. Language can function as a fluid and ever changing identifier, and can be developed in response or rebellion of another cultural code, such as creole languages in the US.

Language also includes the way people speak with peers, family members, authority figures, and strangers, including the tone and familiarity that is included in the language.

Language learning process can also be affected by cultural identity via the understanding of specific words, and the preference for specific words when learning and using a second language.

Since many aspects of a person's cultural identity can be changed, such as citizenship or influence from outside cultures can change cultural traditions, language is a main component of cultural identity.

## EDUCATION

Kevin McDonough pointed out, in his article, several factors concerning support or rejection of the government for different cultural identity education systems. Other authors have also shown concern for the state support regarding equity for children, school transitions and multicultural education. During March 1998, the two authors, Linda D. Labbo and Sherry L. Field collected several useful books and resources to promote multicultural education in South Africa.

## IMMIGRANT IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Identity development among immigrant groups has been studied across a multi-dimensional view of acculturation. Dina Birman and Edison Trickett (2001) conducted a qualitative study through informal interviews with first-generation Soviet Jewish Refugee adolescents looking at the process of acculturation through three different dimensions: language competence, behavioral acculturation, and cultural identity. The results indicated that, "…acculturation appears to occur in a linear pattern over time for most dimensions of acculturation, with acculturation to the American culture increasing and acculturation to the Russian culture decreasing. However, Russian language competence for the parents did not diminish with length of residence in the country" (Birman & Trickett, 2001).

In a similar study, Phinney, Horencyzk, Liebkind, and Vedder (2001) focused on a model, which concentrates on the interaction between immigrant characteristics and the responses of the majority society in order to understand the psychological effects of immigration. The researchers concluded that most studies find that being bicultural, having a combination of having a strong ethnic and national identity, yields the best adaptation in the new country of residence. An article by LaFromboise, L. K. Colemna, and Gerton, reviews the literature on the impact of being bicultural. It is shown that it is possible to have the ability to obtain competence within two cultures without losing one's sense of identity or having to identity with one culture over the

other. (LaFromboise Et Al. 1993) The importance of ethnic and national identity in the educational adaptation of immigrants indicates that a bicultural orientation is advantageous for school performance (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990). Educators can assume their positions of power in beneficially impactful ways for immigrant students, by providing them with access to their native cultural support groups, classes, after–school activities, and clubs in order to help them feel more connected to both native and national cultures. It is clear that the new country of residence can impact immigrants' identity development across multiple dimensions. Biculturalism can allow for a healthy adaptation to life and school. With many new immigrant youth, a school district in Alberta, Canada has gone as far as to partner with various agencies and professionals in an effort to aid the cultural adjustment of new Filipino immigrant youths. In the study cited, a combination of family workshops and teacher professional development aimed to improve the language learning and emotional development of these youths and families.

## SCHOOL TRANSITIONS

How great is "Achievement Loss Associated with the Transition to Middle School and High School"? John W. Alspaugh's research is in the September/October 1998 Journal of Educational Research (vol. 92, no. 1), 2026. Comparing three groups of 16 school districts, the loss was greater where the transition was from sixth grade than from a K-8 system. It was also greater when students from multiple elementary schools merged into a single middle school. Students from both K-8 and middle schools lost achievement in transition to high school, though this was greater for middle school students, and high school dropout rates were higher for districts with grades 6-8 middle schools than for those with K-8 elementary schools.

The Jean S. Phinney Three-Stage Model of Ethnic Identity Development is a widely accepted view of the formation of cultural identity. In this model cultural Identity is often developed through a three-stage process: unexamined cultural identity, cultural identity search, and cultural identity achievement.

Unexamined cultural identity: "a stage where one's cultural characteristics are taken for granted, and consequently there is little interest in exploring cultural issues." This for example is the stage one is in throughout their childhood when one doesn't distinguish between cultural characteristics of their household and others. Usually a person in this stage accepts the ideas they find on culture from their parents, the media, community, and others.

An example of thought in this stage: "I don't have a culture I'm just an American." "My parents tell me about where they lived, but what do I care? I've never lived there."

Cultural identity search: "is the process of exploration and questioning about one's culture in order to learn more about it and to understand the implications of membership in that culture." During this stage a person will begin to question why they hold their beliefs and compare it to the beliefs of other cultures. For some this stage may arise from a turning point in their life or from a growing awareness of other cultures. This stage is characterized by growing awareness in social and political forums and a desire to learn more about culture. This can be expressed by asking family members questions about heritage, visiting museums, reading of relevant cultural sources, enrolling in school courses, or attendance at cultural events. This stage might have an emotional component as well.

An example of thought in this stage: "I want to know what we do and how our culture is different from others." "There are a lot of non-Japanese people around me, and it gets pretty confusing to try and decide who I am."

Cultural identity achievement: "is characterized by a clear, confident acceptance of oneself and an internalization of one's cultural identity." In this stage people often allow the acceptance of their cultural identity play a role in their future choices such as how to raise children, how to deal with stereotypes and any discrimination, and approach negative perceptions. This usually leads to an increase in self-confidence and positive psychological adjustment.

**THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET**

There is a set of phenomena that occur in conjunction between virtual culture – understood as the modes and norms of behavior associated with the internet and the online world – and youth culture. While we can speak of a duality between the virtual (online) and real sphere (face-to-face relations), for youth, this frontier is implicit and permeable. On occasions – to the annoyance of parents and teachers – these spheres are even superposed, meaning that young people may be in the real world without ceasing to be connected.

In the present techno-cultural context, the relationship between the real world and the virtual world cannot be understood as a link between two independent and separate worlds, possibly coinciding at a point, but as a Moebius strip where there exists no inside and outside and where it is impossible to identify limits between both. For new generations, to an ever-greater extent, digital life merges with their home life as yet another element of nature. In this naturalizing of digital life, the learning processes from that environment are frequently mentioned not just since they are explicitly asked but because the subject of the internet comes up spontaneously among those polled. The ideas of active learning, of googling 'when you don't know', of recourse to tutorials for 'learning' a program or a game, or the expression 'I learnt English better and in a more entertaining way by playing' are examples often cited as to why the internet is the place most frequented by the young people polled.

The internet is becoming an extension of the expressive dimension of the youth condition. There, youth talk about their lives and concerns, design the content that they make available to others and assess others reactions to it in the form of optimized and electronically mediated social approval. Many of today's youth go through processes of affirmation procedures and is often the case for how youth today grow dependency for peer approval. When connected, youth speak of their daily routines and lives. With each post, image or video they upload, they have the possibility of asking themselves who they are and to try out profiles differing from those they assume in the 'real' world. The connections they feel in more recent times have become much less interactive through personal means compared to past generations. The influx of new technology and access has created new fields of research on effects on teens and young adults. They thus negotiate their identity and create senses of belonging, putting the acceptance and censure of others to the test, an essential mark of the process of identity construction.

Youth ask themselves about what they think of themselves, how they see themselves personally and, especially, how others see them. On the basis of these questions, youth make decisions which, through a long process of trial and error, shape their identity. This experimentation is also

a form through which they can think about their insertion, membership and sociability in the 'real' world.

From other perspectives, the question arises on what impact the internet has had on youth through accessing this sort of 'identity laboratory' and what role it plays in the shaping of youth identity. On the one hand, the internet enables young people to explore and perform various roles and personifications while on the other, the virtual forums – some of them highly attractive, vivid and absorbing (e.g. video games or virtual games of personification) – could present a risk to the construction of a stable and viable personal identity.

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