



Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services

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## **Biculturalism and Ethnic Identity: An Integrated Model**

by

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# FOCUS

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## *Identity Development*

## Biculturalism and Ethnic Identity: An Integrated Model

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The model of acculturation presented here provides a framework for understanding biculturalism as complex and varied. Existing models, developed in the context of different acculturating populations, contain different images of biculturalism. This diversity suggests that a variety of bicultural styles are possible in different cultural and socio-political contexts.

Two influential frameworks have been developed in the field to describe acculturation. The biculturalism (Szapocznik, Kurtines & Fernandez, 1980) and the biculturalism/multiculturalism (Ramirez, 1984) models were developed in the context of immigration, and emphasize cultural competence. The other framework, developed in the context of racial and ethnic minority experience, has been called the cultural identification model (Helms, 1985), the ethnic identity model (Phinney, 1989), and the racial identity model (Cross, 1971; Helms, 1984). The identity models argue that for racial and ethnic minorities the best resolution of acculturative conflicts involves the primacy of establishing a positive sense of identity as a member of one's own (cultural, ethnic, racial) group, while retaining competence in the larger society.

Both types of models are implicitly bicultural in that they describe how individuals deal with their membership in two distinct cultures. Yet, because they were developed to address the experiences of quite different populations, they contain important differences.

Biculturalism models have focused on the necessity to acquire the cultural skills and knowledge to function in a new cultural environment. Figure 1 presents this model as described by Berry (1980), Szapocznik et al. (1980), and others. The question of identity is not as pressing for most immigrants and refugees as it is for U.S. born minorities, because their separation from their culture of origin is recent, and a firm sense of belonging to the culture of origin is more easily maintained. Rather, the most pressing problem for immigrants is survival in their new environment. Thus, for immigrants the extent to which they are able to behave in ways

which maximizes their participation in their surrounding community has become the focus of investigation and intervention.

On the other hand, the identity models have emphasized the consequences of oppression. For members of racial/ethnic minority groups who are born in the U.S., language and knowledge of the majority culture generally do not pose a problem in adaptation. Rather, oppression has led to marginalization, making it difficult to have a positive sense of one's cultural identity. In this context, attention has focused on identity development.

The distinction between identity or attitudinal, and behavioral acculturation has been addressed in the literature and incorporated within the same model (Birman & Tyler, 1994; Clark, Kaufman and Pierce, 1976, Szapocznik, Scopetta, Kurtines, and Aranalde, 1978) suggesting that an individual may identify with or prefer one culture, but exhibit behavioral characteristics typical of another. However, the implications for such a distinction for biculturalism have not yet been articulated.

Another important distinction among biculturalism theories involves the difference between "alternation" and "fusion" bicultural styles, as suggested by LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton (1993). The alternation style is implied in Szapocznik et al.'s (1980) model of biculturalism, which suggests that biculturalism is advantageous for Cuban-Americans in Miami because they have to alternately negotiate Cuban and American contexts.

In contrast, the biculturalism model outlined by Ramirez (1984) in the context of Mexican Americans in the Southwest, suggest that biculturalism implies a fused cultural identity, incorporating aspects of both cultures.

Such a diversity of styles of acculturation and biculturalism are captured in the acculturation model outlined here (see Table 1 on next page). This model expands the traditional four-square model of

biculturalism (Figure 1), by adding the dimension of whether behavioral or identity acculturation is considered.

In this way, each acculturating individual can be described as assimilated, traditionalist, marginalized, or bicultural, with respect to two distinct dimensions: identity and behavior. The

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**Figure 1**  
**Biculturalism: Traditional Model**

		<i>Acculturation to the culture of origin</i>	
		High	Low
<i>Acculturation to the dominant/host culture</i>	High	Bicultural	Assimilated
	Low	Traditional	Marginal

### *Biculturalism and Ethnic Identity (continued)*

resulting combinations result in as many as 16 acculturative styles, with as many as 13 types of biculturalism possible in this three-dimensional model (see Table 1). The bicultural styles most frequently adopted by acculturating persons are described below.

**Table 1**  
**Acculturation: a differentiated model**

Acculturative Styles	Identity Acculturation	Behavioral Acculturation
TRADITIONAL	Traditional	Traditional
ASSIMILATED	Assimilated	Assimilated
MARGINAL	Marginal	Marginal
BLENDED BICULTURAL	Bicultural	Bicultural
INSTRUMENTAL BICULTURAL	Marginal	Bicultural
INTEGRATED BICULTURAL	Traditional	Bicultural
IDENTITY EXPLORATION	Traditional	Assimilated

#### **Blended bicultural:**

The individual who is highly identified with both cultures, and participates behaviorally in both, is likely to have synthesized, or "fused" the two, and can be described as a "blended" bicultural. Such persons may live in a community of others who share in this new synthesized culture.

Such an image of biculturalism is captured by Ramirez's (1984) bicultural/multicultural model. He described multicultural individuals who, rather than having distinct cultural repertoires which can be brought out in different cultural circumstances, have transcended both cultures, and belong to neither.

As Ramirez has noted elsewhere (1983), while in many regions of the U.S. segregation of races and cultures has occurred, Latin American history is characterized by a mixing of various races and cultures, resulting in "genetic mestizos" who "could play the roles

of cultural 'ambassadors' and 'brokers' because they spoke two or more languages, and they were familiar with the two sociocultural systems which were being amalgamated" (p. 25-26). In such a historical context, a blended bicultural model may seem more desirable and adaptive for Mexican-Americans.

#### **Instrumental Bicultural:**

Individuals adopting the instrumental bicultural style are like the blended biculturals, in that they are involved in both cultures, but this involvement is limited to behavioral participation, and not a psychological sense of identity. With respect to behavior they adopt an "alternation" acculturative style.

However, with respect to identity, instrumental biculturals are likely to feel marginal, feeling torn between the two cultures. They may be able to pass as members of either culture in a chameleon-like fashion, without the accompanying sense of identity as belonging to

either or both cultures. Instrumental biculturals are likely to live outside a bicultural immigrant or minority community, feeling like outsiders to both worlds, though behaviorally competent in both.

#### **Integrated bicultural:**

Integrated biculturals are highly behaviorally involved in both cultures, but have a traditional identity orientation. This style is described by the last stages of racial and ethnic identity theories, and is generally seen as most adaptive for members of oppressed groups. There is strong identification with (commitment to) one's own ethnicity, culture and race, and this sense of identity may be accompanied with pride, and a positive sense of belonging to one's own people.

At the same time, integrated biculturals are comfortable in the majority culture because they have the skills in order to survive in it. Among immigrants, integrated biculturals may speak English with an accent but without embarrassment. Such persons are frequently called upon to represent interests of their own communities, because they have the competence to converse with the dominant majority, yet maintain the integrity of their own cultural affiliation.

#### **Identity exploration:**

The individuals who are highly involved behaviorally in the majority culture and not their culture of origin, but have a high identification with their culture of origin and not the majority culture, can be described as exploring their cultural identity, and wishing for a reconnection with their cultural roots. Such persons may have grown up in the majority or new culture, and may feel fairly comfortable in it.

However, either because of a negative "encounter" experience, or out of interest, they may engage in a process of discovering their

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### *Ethnic Identity (continued)*

cultural roots. As such, they may become strongly identified with the culture of their ancestors, though unable to behaviorally participate perhaps because no cultural community is around to provide such opportunities. To some extent, the efforts of members of the African American community to reconnect to their African heritage, and the third stage in Phinney's (1989) theory which describes exploration of ethnic identity are examples of this type of biculturalism.

### Summary

The different types of biculturalism described above are not exhaustive, and many more combinations of identity and behavioral acculturation are possible. They may be conceptualized as stages as in the ethnic identity models, or as distinct styles of acculturation which differ with the demands of the particular context of resettlement or acculturation.

Though the identity dimension of acculturation may be more critical for the native-born members of ethnic and racial minority groups, while behavioral acculturation may be more important for immigrants, attending to both identity and

behavior creates a richer picture of a bicultural acculturation process. Thus, each of the bicultural styles described above may be adaptive, depending on the individual, the circumstances of the ethnic, racial and cultural group(s) to which the individual belongs, and the attitudes and constructions of ethnicity, race, and culture in a given society.

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The model of acculturation outlined in this article is described in more detail in: "Acculturation and Human Diversity in a Multicultural Society", in E. J. Trickett, R. Watts, & D. Birman, (Eds) (in press), Human Diversity: Perspectives on People in Context. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

### Meet the President-Elect

*Gordon C. Nagayama Hall, Kent State University*

I received my Ph.D. in clinical psychology in 1982 from the Graduate School of Psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary, where I was actively involved in the recruitment of students and faculty of color. Although my dissertation was on the effects of therapist/client racial match on psychotherapy, I became interested in forensic psychology during my internship and postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Washington School of Medicine. I pursued my forensic interests and developed a research program on sexual aggression in my first job as a clinical psychologist at Western State Hospital in Fort Steilacoom, Washington.

In 1988, I moved to Kent State University and have been able to expand my interests in sexual aggression, as well as my interests in ethnic minority issues. The first dissertation that I supervised at Kent State was on

racial identity and feminism and was published in Journal of Counseling Psychology. Since I have been at Kent State University, we have hired an African American woman faculty member, and 26% (11 students) of the past three graduate classes in clinical psychology have been persons of color, versus less than 2% in the classes before I came to Kent State.

I am on the editorial boards of Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology and Psychological Assessment and I have edited the book, Sexual aggression: Issues in etiology, assessment, and treatment (Taylor & Francis, 1993). I am currently working on the book Theory-based assessment, treatment, and prevention of sexual aggression (Oxford). I hope to integrate my interests by examining sexually aggressive men's cognitive distortions concerning victims who are of color.