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Beyond Cultural Identity¹

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Abstract

This theoretical essay takes a critical look at the views of cultural identity prevalent in contemporary American public discourse. The author finds it particularly problematic that cultural identity is commonly conceived as a fixed and exclusive entity with an inherently positive moral imperative. An alternative, dynamic view is thus presented emphasizing continuing development beyond the perimeters of one's ascribed or primary cultural identity. In this approach, the concept of "intercultural identity" is employed as an extension of, and a counterpoint to, cultural identity. Grounded in an open systems perspective, the identity development beyond one's primary culture is explained in terms of the internal stress-adaptation-growth dynamic, a psychological response to the challenges of interfacing with differing cultural identities. Such intercultural challenges are described as the very force that "pushes" an individual in the direction of greater intercultural learning, perceptual refinement, and a self-other orientation that is at once individuated and universalized.

The Polemics of Cultural Identity

About two years ago, the Cincinnati school district instituted a discipline code that provides stiff penalties for students who disrupt classes and who endanger others. This code was challenged by a claim that it would disparately affect African-American students. An impending court

settlement requires that schools keep records of the racial and gender identities of the teachers referring students for disciplinary action and the same identities of the students. These records are to help decide whether a teacher should get a pay increase or further training in classroom management—or be terminated. This court settlement, if approved, threatens to seriously compromise the way the code is enforced. Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers, raises the following concerns in *The New York Times* (January 16, 1994, Editorial/Letters Section).

What standards will be used in interpreting the records? Will it be OK for a black teacher to refer a black child for disciplinary action but not for a white teacher—even if it's the same offense? Will a white female teacher who mainly refers African-American boys be in trouble while a black male teacher doing the same will be all right? Will kids of different races who break the same rules be dealt with differently? Might a quota system be set up that establishes how many kids in different race groups can be disciplined for a given offense in a given year? (p. 7)

The problems with approaching school discipline based on racial and gender identities are obvious. The mere fact that there is a disparity between referrals of white and black students does not mean there is discrimination. The question must be whether a particular teacher is justified in referring a particular student for discipline, and we cannot answer this question by looking at the races. If the court accepts this settlement, teachers will most likely think twice before referring a student for discipline. As Shanker puts it, "This settlement is like telling teachers, 'The more students you turn in, the harder time we will give you. And, incidentally, your referrals had better be racially balanced'" (p. 7).

This story is but one of the many dominating contemporary American social discourse. It directly points to the prevalence of the misguided idea of group identity that channel public attention away from the real issues to be dealt with. The United States—a unique construction organized by free, democratic principles that transcend a monolithic tribal ancestral and territorial condition—has never before seen so many claims pushing identity and differences. The seemingly innocent banner of cultural identity (or

related labels such as racial and ethnic identity) is now a compelling "sore spot" for many Americans, frequently galvanizing them into "us-against-them" posturing. The traditional American "melting pot" ideal is threatened in the midst of the fractious landscape of the identity politics discussed in a spate of recent books such as *The Disuniting of America* (Schlesinger, 1992), *Race* (Terkel, 1992), *The Racial Crisis in American Higher Education* (Altbach & Lomotey, 1991), *Race Matters* (West, 1993), *Culture of Separation* (Bellah *et al.*, 1985), and *Culture of Complaint* (Hughes, 1993), to name only a few.

The exacerbated division between the "right" and "left" of the American political spectrum is embroiled in the bickerings about "political correctness" (PC)--an unfortunate offshoot of "multiculturalism." Indeed, much mud has been stirred up by the linkage of the two. Radicals in both ideological camps seem stuck in the defensive "victim" mode, orating about a wildly polemical "separatism" and denying the value, even the possibility, of a truthful dialogue. On the one hand, the radical left advocates a fortification of minority identities with angry outcries about "victimizations" and "entitlements." The radical right has its own form of PC--what Robert Hughes calls "Patriotic Correctness"--equally designed for protecting its vested interest in dividing the American polity by creating scapegoats and hate-objects. As such, we now hear from some radical conservatives promises for a "culture war" to "take our culture back." Although considerably toned down, the identity polemic of the extreme right has a startling resemblance to the bigotry vivid in the fatwa pronouncement of the Iranian mullahs against a live writer, Salman Rushdie, for "blasphemy" against Islam.

Thus extremes meet. Radical liberals and conservatives find themselves in a destructive game of confrontation. In Robert Hughes' (1993) words, they are now "locked in a full-blown, mutually sustaining *folie a deux* , and the only person each dislikes more than the other is the one who tells both to lighten up" (p. 79). In these highly charged polemics of cultural identity, the traditional American genius for finding a consensus for resolving problems through constructive debates and compromises is in danger of extinction. Absent in the confrontational discourse, too, are the main ideals of multi-culturalism itself, that is, people with different roots can co-exist, that they can learn from each other, and that they can and should look across and beyond the frontiers of race and ethnicity (as well as gender and other social categories) without prejudice or illusion, and learn to think against the

background of an integrated society of true multiculturalism. Most importantly, the current polemics seem to deny the fact that some of the most interesting things in American history have happened, in fact, at the interface of various cultural roots.

Academic Approaches to Cultural Identity

Systematic investigations of cultural identity can be traced back to psychologist Erik Erickson's (1950, 1968) important early theoretical framework. Erickson's theory places identity at the "core" of the individual and yet also in the core of his or her "common culture." Erickson further views the process of identity development as one in which the two identities--of the individual and of the group--are merged and integrated into one. Other investigators have since echoed Erickson's conception and have articulated similar presumptions about cultural identity. F. Yinger (1986), for instance, describes ethnic attachment as the person's "basic identity" formed during the earliest periods of socialization, and that strengthens the individual's self-esteem. Further elaborations of identity have been made in social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974, 1978; Turner, 1975) and many experimental studies based on the theory (e.g., Giles & Bourhis, 1976; Giles & Saint-Jacques, 1979). A dominant feature of the social identity theory is the presumed value and emotional significance attached to group identity and its close relationship to self-identity, self-esteem, and outgroup behavior (Brewer Miller, 1984; Turner & Giles, 1981).

Taken as a whole, existing conceptions of cultural identity are clearly based on a presumption of inherent positivity. An implicit agreement exists in the literature concerning a moral value attached to the idea of cultural identity. No matter that the presumed linkage between cultural identity and self-esteem has been found inconclusive in empirical studies (Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992). The predominant belief among social scientists appears to be that identity boundaries are something everyone feels, and ought to feel, reluctant to change or compromise and that the cultural homogenization of a society would lead to a debasement of an individual with a minority ethnic background. Such appears to be the case, for example, with Jean Phinney's (1989) description of ethnic identity development. In presenting the model, Phinney strongly emphasizes the critical importance of achieving a commitment to one's ethnic identity and thus implies that not achieving such a commitment would result in a significant detriment to the individual's

psychological and social functioning. Interestingly, the importance placed on maintaining a cultural identity among ethnic minorities is seldom extended to white ethnics in the United States.

Undeniably, the exclusive assignment of positive values to cultural identity oversimplifies the reality. It overlooks the "dark side" of cultural identity abundantly witnessed in the contemporary American society--the tendencies of collective self-glorification and outgroup denigration. An insufficient amount of attention has been given to the apparent association between strict adherence to a single cultural identity and distrust of other groups or separatist sentiments. Yet, the notion of intrinsic "goodness" in cultural identity continues to prevail, widely shared by a broader mass of journalists, politicians, and some segments of the general population.

The positive bias in academic approaches to cultural identity has been intensified by the tendency among social scientists to exaggerate the exclusivity of cultural identity. A person is viewed to "belong to" one and only one cultural identity: If someone sees himself or herself, or is seen by others, as a Mexican-American, then this person's identity is viewed to exclude all other identities. This tendency of an "all-or-none and "either-or" conception glosses over the fact that many people's identities are not locked into a single, uncompromising category but incorporate other identities as well. Particularly in the United States, 30-70% of Blacks, virtually all Latinos and Filipinos, the majority of American Indians and Native Hawaiians, as well as a significant proportion of White-identified persons are of multiracial-multiethnic origins (Root, 1993, p. 9).

Relatedly, the common conceptions of cultural identity often exaggerate uniformity among the individuals who are associated with a particular group. Researchers have tended to lump together all individuals identified as "belonging" to a particular group and portray them as though they were a homogeneous group with identical characteristics. In *Two Nations* (1992), for example, the author Andrew Hacker describes the contemporary Black as someone who is marginal, separate, and victimized in the White world, despite the many contrary statistics presented in this book. Uniformities of a cultural group such as this are, of course, far from being accurate and tend to perpetuate the impasse of preconceived categories and stereotypical generalizations, thereby preventing a more accurate understanding of the complex relationship between the individual and the group.

The fact frequently put aside in recent academic investigations is that, even with a common cultural background, individuals vary significantly in the intensity of identification with and commitment to collective experiences and goals as well as in the degree to which their daily activities and accomplishments are bound up with their membership to that group. It has been further forgotten that many people's experience of cultural identity is thus filled with a dynamic set of social-psychological processes that allow a trade-off among multiple group identities or a merger thereof into a single selfhood. Findings from a recent survey of Hispanic Americans (Garza *et al.*, 1992) remind us of such complexities in cultural identity. The study, for example, shows that the majority of Hispanic Americans feel at least as close to Anglos as they do to members of the other Hispanic groups. Despite the strong fear expressed by those who adhere to identity maintenance at any cost, the study further indicates that a large majority of Hispanics are moving toward mainstream American culture and that 60% or more say the purpose of bilingual education is to learn both languages, and less than 10% believe it is exclusively "to maintain the Spanish language/culture." The majority of those surveyed further indicates their loyalties toward the United States as a whole expressing very strong "love" and "pride" for the country.

An additional misnomer in the current academic conceptions of cultural identity is found in the exaggerated presumption of its permanence: Once an Italian-American, always an Italian-American. Even theories that describe the developmental process of cultural identity (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Phinney, 1989; Phinney, Lochner & Murphy, 1990; Phinney Rosenthal, 1992) have not addressed the phenomenon of identity development beyond the formation of the primary identity during the formative years. Phinney's (1989) description of the identity development of minority adolescents, for instance, identifies three stages: (1) the stage of "an unexamined ethnic identity" during which the adolescent remain largely passive in reacting to ethnic images and stereotypes; (2) the stage of "exploration" of what it means to be a member of a specific ethnic group in society, which is equivalent to the identity crisis or moratorium described by Erikson (1968); and (3) the stage of "resolution," in which the adolescent develops "an achieved ethnic identity," and "makes a commitment to a particular way of being a member of [his or her] group" (Phinney, 1989, p. 41). While this conceptualization helps us to understand minority adolescents' struggle to "finally obtain a secure sense of themselves as ethnic group members" (p. 42), it fails to

account for the fact that, for many of these adolescents, identity development reaches beyond the attainment of "a secure sense" of their ethnic selves. This limited perspective discounts the extensively documented fact that immigrants and their offsprings undergo assimilative changes over time and across generations. (See Kim, 1988, for a review of pertinent literature.)

The prevailing academic conceptions examined above clearly reflect an ideological tilt toward pluralism with a slight tinge of the separatist notion, as noted by Thomas Pettigrew (1988) and Eugene Roosens (1989). The literature tends to espouse an idea that cultural identity must not be negotiated or changed and that any change in an individual's original identity is undesirable and opposite to a healthy existence. Pettigrew (1988) goes even further in concluding that:

To many, talk of mosaics and guilts to emphasize the autonomous nature of identity and its relationships among cultural identities is both an attempt to describe the way America is headed and an effort to hurry it along. (p. 19)

A Systems Approach to Identity

Reiterating Alfred Korzybski's (1958/1933) General Semantics principle, "the map is not the territory," Harry Weinberg (1987) points out that when our conceptual tools do not fit the empirical reality, when we act as though our inferences are factual knowledge, "the inevitable result is frustration and an ever-increasing tendency to warp the territory to fit our maps" (p.29). We now need to acknowledge the common misconception that a person's cultural reach is categorically fixed forever by whatever slot into which one is born and raised. In so doing, we need to suspend the prevailing notion that such occurrences would necessarily involve "throwing away" or "being disloyal to" one's original identity. We need, instead, to address what has been conspicuously shunned in current academic approaches to cultural identity, and recognize the contentiousness of the claims of identity in the contemporary political landscape. We must further pay greater attention to a form of identity that allows a greater flexibility and openness toward differing cultural identities. To do so, we need to pay as much attention to where two or more identities touch and join one another as to where they separate and diverge, and to investigate what such an interface does to the

human personality, or more specifically, the construction, negotiation, expansion, and transformation of identities--a kind of traditional American common sense.

To move in this new direction requires us to examine the experiences of numerous everyday folks who recognize that the boundaries of a cultural identity are seldom impermeable, engage in cultural cross-borrowing, and understand that cross-borrowing of identities is often an act of appreciation that leaves neither the lender nor the borrower deprived, symbolically or otherwise. Among such individuals is Mary Catherine Bateson, author of *Composing a Life* (1989), whose insight touches on the complexity and richness of her own identity:

I had spent my senior year of high school in Israel and had come back to the United States to start college with a deep sense of dividedness, of having first found a new sense of myself in Israel and then having left that clarity behind. The new task was to combine and translate, to put an American gentile identity with my Israeli experience and to use my college education to shape them into some new whole....Each of us has repeatedly had to pose the question of who we are. (p. 212-213)

Sandra Kitt is another one of the many Americans whose personal experiences and views challenge the prevailing academic notions about cultural identity. She felt strongly enough to write to the editor of *The New York Times Magazine* (April 29, 1992) in response to an earlier article on "cultural baggage":

I've been fighting ethnic labels since I was 12 or 13, and decided that only I had a right to define myself. It was a lonely position to take. I am not almost WASP. I am African-American. I'm also part Cherokee from both sides of my family. But so what?....I've taken risks with my life that only I am responsible for, and I have reaped substantial rewards for daring to be myself and not just different. (p. 10)

Yet another person named A. J. Nagel reacted similarly to a different story about cultural identity in *The Tulsa World* (April 17, 1992, Section. A) and wrote the following letter to the editor:

I am an American with a German name. My forbears have lived as loyal U.S. citizens for 150 years. Am I a German-American? I have some Cherokee blood also. Am I a Native-American? It makes little sense to refer to a group or an individual by the use of such titles. We are all Americans and as such should have equal opportunities. Along with those opportunities goes the acceptance of responsibility. The United States has enough problems without injecting background and race. This country was built and became great by the efforts of all. Why inhibit its growth and existence by separating its citizens into fractions? (p. 16)

Identity Interface and Transformation

A metatheoretical foundation for the present conception of identity is found in the General Systems perspective, which views a person as an "open system" that evolves throughout life (Bertalanffy, 1968; Ford & Lerner, 1992; Ruben & J. Kim, 1975; Slavin & Kriegman, 1992). Plasticity--the ability to learn and change through new experiences--is considered one of the most profound characteristics of the human system and, indeed, the very basis upon which individuals acquire a cultural identity. Born into this world knowing literally nothing of what is needed to function acceptably in a given society, and through continuous interaction with various aspects of the cultural "data field," adaptive human minds undergo a progression of changes, in each of which some of the new concepts, attitudes, and behaviors are "programmed" into them forming a sense of identity.

Accordingly, the systems perspective on human life is dynamic and evolutionary. It offers the insight that human beings are equipped with the capacity to maintain an overall integrity despite the continual instability, and that such systemic integrity is possible because of an open system's capacity to evolve, that is, to develop new forms of relating to a given milieu. The concept of autopoiesis (Maturana & Varula, 1975, cited in Jantsch, 1980, p. 7) points to this tendency of humans to continuously renew themselves and to regulate this process in such a way that the overall integrity of the structure

is maintained. This autopoietic property, in turn, reflects the self-reflexiveness of the human mind that reviews, anticipates, generalizes, analyzes, plans, and thereby transform itself. Erich Jantsch (1980) reflects all of these human capacities when he describes humans as "self-organizing": "We live, so to speak, in co-evolution with ourselves, with our own mental products" (p. 177).

Based on the above premises, this writer attempts to explain the identity development beyond culture by using a new concept, "intercultural identity." As a counterpoint and an extension of the term "cultural identity," this new concept helps us shift our primary attention temporarily from the question of "who we are" to the question of "whom we may yet become." Just as a cultural identity serves as a psychological linkage between a person and a specific biological and/or social community, an intercultural identity can be also viewed as a linkage between a person and more than one such communities³. The meaning of intercultural identity further includes a vital component of an emotional identification of oneself that is not limited to one's own social group but to other cultures as well, thereby projecting an outlook that is not locked into a parochial group interest but, instead, one in which one sees and identifies with others' perspectives. As Peter Adler (1982) describes it, the intercultural identity can be viewed to be based,

not on belongingness which implies either owning or being owned by culture, but on a style of self consciousness that is capable of negotiating ever new formations of reality. He is neither totally a part of nor totally apart from his culture; he lives, instead, on the boundary." (p. 391)

The phenomenon of identity development beyond the ascribed or primary cultural perimeters is closely linked with intercultural communication activities. Through face-to-face or mediated forms of communication, intercultural interfaces often present a multitude of challenges, including those that force people to confront and re-assess their own identity as well as the taken-for-granted practices of thinking, feeling, and acting associated with the identity. The severity of challenges to one's cultural identity would be a function of the severity of cultural difference and incompatibility presented by the other person's cultural identity (Sarbaugh, 1979). Severe or not, however, few people living in a society of

multitudes of cultural identities such as the United States can escape what Dean Barnlund (1989) has described as "the paradox of closeness": Faced with the new reality of both the physical and informational closeness of the cultural other, the involved communicators must redefine the universe around them and, more importantly, redefine themselves, their own identity, in relationship with the cultural others. As Jantsch (1980) points out,

Communication between autopoietic systems includes the possibility of the self-organization of knowledge by mutual stimulation of the exploration and extension of the cognitive domain. A true dialogue is never the exchange of readily available knowledge, but also active organization of knowledge which was not in the world before. (p. 206)

Indeed, the popular concept "culture shock" (Oberg, 1960) essentially points to reactions to such intercultural stress or, as Janet Bennett (1977) describes it, "a natural consequence of the state of a human organism's inability to interact with the new and changed environment in an effective manner" (p. 46). (See Furnham & Bochner, 1986, for a detailed discussion of culture shock.) A more pointed linkage of culture shock to identity crisis is made in the term, "self-shock" (Zaharna, 1989), or the ubiquitous tension between the individual's own internal strengths and imbalances, and the supportive or stress-producing nature of the environment.

What both concepts do not readily reveal, however, is the fact that the "shock" experiences are generally followed by a profound learning experience leading to a high degree of self-awareness and personal growth (Adler, 1975, 1987/1972). As explained by this writer elsewhere (Kim, 1988; Kim & Ruben, 1988), individuals as open systems experience a state of disequilibrium or stress in the face of challenges, followed by a struggle to regain an equilibrium. Stress, as such, is viewed as a manifestation of a generic process, a temporary personality disintegration or a sequence of "symmetry breaks" (Jantsch, 1980, p. 79). Stress occurs whenever the capabilities of an open system are not totally adequate to the demands of the environment, as is likely to be the case when a person is confronted by a person or an event whose cultural identity threatens his/her own.

Yet, no autopoietic human structure can stabilize itself forever by defense activities only. In time, most people manage to regain an

equilibrium through an adaptative process of making adjustments in the existing internal structure so as to maximize the "functional fitness" (Kim, 1988) between them and the challenges at hand. Here, it is the very stress that "pushes" an individual to restructure his/her existing conditions and thereby realize an increased adaptation to the external challenge. As Jantch puts it (1980),

The higher the resistance against structural change, the more powerful the fluctuations that ultimately break through, and the richer and more varied are the unfolding of mind. (p. 255)

This seemingly paradoxical principle suggests the unity in which stress and adaptation are inseparable. Stress is part-and-parcel of the intercultural transformation cycle, as individuals strive to regain their inner balance and make themselves better equipped to face the demands and opportunities of the intercultural reality. This process continues as long as they are in communication with, and are challenged by, the milieu in which they must function. As such, the interrelatedness of stress and adaptation describes the process of organizing and reorganizing oneself--the process that, in the context of intercultural interface, involves the continual reinventing of oneself beyond the parameters of the original cultural identity. In the moment of calm and relaxation, the process of what may be called the "inner alchemy," or the restoration of inner cohesiveness, takes place. As the "old" person breaks up, new cultural knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral elements are incorporated, ever so subtly and gradually, into an enactment of growth--an emergent "new" person at a higher level of integration. Here, the symmetry between the inner and the outer world is broken, but is still present in the ecological relations of the organism with its environment.

The stress-adaptation-growth dynamic underlies a cyclic and continual process of identity transformation as illustrated in Figure 1 on the next page. It lies at the heart of identity development in the forward-upward movement of a cycle of "draw-back-to-leap" in the direction of more intercultural adaptation and growth. Each stressful experience is responded to with a draw back," which then activates one's adaptive energy to "leap forward." The shifting between the breakup of the old internalized cultural system and the creation of a new system enables the individual to be better adapted to

subsequent intercultural encounters. Here, intercultural stress is the internal resistance of the human organism against its own cultural evolution.

The above conception of identity development as a dynamic, dialectic process enables us to understand seemingly paradoxical statements so common in many cultural injunctions such as, "The greatest gain is in the giving" and "One finds oneself by losing oneself." As Chuang Tzu, in Great and Small, wrote:

Consequently, he who wants to have right without wrong,
Order without disorder,
Does not understand the principles
Of heaven and earth.
He does not know how
Things hang together.

Adaptation

Growth
over time

Stress

Figure 1

Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamics of Adaptive Transformation

(Source: Kim 1988, p. 56)

The dialectics of push and pull in the evolution of human psyche has been also explained by anthropologist Edward Hall's (1976) idea of "identity-separation-growth dynamism." In addition, psychologist Sydney Jourard (1974) describes the same phenomenon in terms of "integration-disintegration-reintegration":

Growth is the dis-integration of one way of experiencing the world, followed by a reorganization of this experience, a reorganization that includes the new disclosure of the world. The disorganization, or even shattering, of one way to experience the world, is brought on by new disclosures from the changing being of the world, disclosures that were always being transmitted, but were usually ignored." (p. 456)

The spiral of the shaping and reshaping of identity gradually brings about more skillfulness in the very activities of learning to become a part of a new, larger human community. In this spiral, the consequence of intercultural interaction is the creation of new mental constructs. This is not to suggest that the old constructs will disappear, nor that a gradual and partial acquisition of each other's initial cultural constructs will not take place. It only means that the new constructs constitute a decisive transformational element.

As such, intercultural identity transformation is manifested in the progressive attainment of a self-other orientation that is individuated. This means that, as an individual's cultural identity evolves toward increasing interculturalness, that person's definition of self and others become increasingly less restricted by rigid cultural and social categories. Instead, the person's perceptual orientations become broadened and enriched by an increased ability to "particularize" his/her perception of each communicative event in the context of a specific situation.

Simultaneously, this perceptual refinement toward individuation reflects a development of a universalized self/other orientation, which enables the individual to broaden his/her orientation beyond any particular cultural identity and ultimately reach the level of humanity itself. This seemingly paradoxical development in one's identity is generally consistent

with Paul Ricoeur's (1992) notion of a "transcendental ego," which is associated by Ricoeur with a non-personal, non-cultural, but a universal identity. A similar observation is made by Adler (1987/1972), who describes intercultural learning as "a movement from a state of low self- and cultural awareness to a state of high self- and cultural awareness" (p. 15) --an achievement of what has been otherwise referred to as "cultural reflexivity" (Roosens, 1989), "cultural relativistic insight" (Roosens, 1989), "moral inclusiveness" (Opatow, 1990), "double-swing" (Yoshikawa, 1988), and "double perspective" or "stereoscopic vision" (Rushdie, 1991).

The evolution of identity from cultural to intercultural further resembles the attainment of the characteristics of what Abraham Maslow (1954) called the "self-actualizing" individuals: (a) more efficient perception of reality and more comfortable relations with it; (b) acceptance of self and others; (c) spontaneity and naturalness (i.e., they have "codes of ethics that are relatively autonomous and individual rather than unconventional"); (d) problem-centered rather than ego-centered; and (e) continuous freshness and appreciation (pp. 232-234). In addition, the present conception of intercultural identity suggests a close linkage to what Linda Harris (1979) referred to as an "optimal level of communication competence"--the maximum capacity to communicate with individuals who are significantly different or incompatible, and to make deliberate choices of actions rather than having them simply being dictated by the normative courses of action in a given culture.

Identity development beyond culture, as has been described above, is not to be viewed as the product of aberration but the expression of the normal people in the act of "liberating" themselves from the hidden grips of their own psychocultural "status quo." The specific attributes of increased individuation and universalization, along with a heightened moral inclusiveness and communicative competence, are most incisively articulated by Glenn Louri (1993), a Black American scholar of English Literature.

I have often experienced this dissonance between my self-concept and the socially imputed definition of who I am supposed to be. I have had to confront the problem of balancing my desire not to disappoint the expectations of others--both whites and blacks, but more especially blacks--with my conviction that one should strive to

live life with integrity....I no longer believe that the camaraderie engendered among blacks by our collective experience of racism constitutes an adequate basis for any person's self-definition....The most important challenges and opportunities that confront me derive not from my racial condition, but rather from my human condition. I am a husband, a father, a son, a teacher, an intellectual, a Christian, a citizen. In none of these roles is my race irrelevant, but neither can racial identity alone provide much guidance for my quest to adequately discharge these responsibilities. The particular features of my social condition, the external givens, merely set the stage of my life, they do not provide a script. That script must be internally generated, it must be a product of a reflective deliberation about the meaning of this existence for which no political or ethnic program could ever substitute....The expression of my individual personality is to be found in the blueprint that I employ to guide this project of construction. The problem of devising such a plan for one's life is a universal problem, which confronts all people, whatever their race, class, or ethnicity. By facing and solving this problem we grow as human beings, and give meaning and substance to our lives. (pp. 7-10)

Stricture and Freedom in Identity Development

At this time, let us note that the theoretical description and explanation presented in this essay are of a general nature, and that the degree to which intercultural identity development actually occurs in specific people would depend on combinations of many forces, some external and some internal (Kim, 1989, 1994). Among more salient external factors are the conditions of the societal environment such as the historical and institutionalized subjugation of one group by another. Under such conditions of systemic inequity, the prejudice and discrimination directed against members of a particular ethnic background may constrain their full participation in intercultural communication activities and thus interfere with an intercultural identity development. The self-definitions of the members of a historically discriminated group may be dramatically inconsistent with the identity reflexively imputed to them by others. This lack of social

confirmation for their subjective self-definitions may leave them uncertain about who they really are, compelling them to find emotional refuge in a rigidified ethnic identity. People in this situation are likely to avoid opportunities for positive intercultural experiences.

Internally, the limits of an individual's identity development can be found where the balance between the stress engendered by intercultural challenges and the adaptive capacity that a given person is capable of mustering up. This means that, in the process of intercultural identity development, the aim must be to strike a balance between stress and adaptation, or between novelty and confirmation (Jantch, 1980, p. 139). The optimal point of such balance varies from person to person. Not everyone is sufficiently open-minded or motivated to be influenced by the challenges of intercultural interface. Some, by innate temperament, may be extremely susceptible to ill effects from such situations. Others may try to alleviate the fear of cultural strangers by retreating into their own cultural identity or aggressively asserting it.

As such, identity development beyond one's primary culture must be considered ultimately "the gift of the individuals" (Steele, 1990, p. 171). The power and responsibility for change rests in each person, who can either obstruct or facilitate his or her own transformation. To most people, adaptation to intercultural challenges is something that is desirable (Cornell, 1988; Kim, 1988). Contrary to the embittered polemics of ethnic politics among political extremists, the common wisdom of most Americans is one of pragmatic accommodation and the reconciliation of divergent identities for the common good. Such is clearly the case in the experiences of the persons whose testimonials presented earlier in this essay helped illuminate the reality of intercultural identity development: Mary Catherine Bateson, Sandra Kitt, A. J. Nagel, and Glenn Lourie. All of them proclaim the value of an intercultural personhood in their respective writings and provide witness to the spirit of affirmation of differing identities. These and numerous others who have achieved varying levels of intercultural identity serve as the sustaining core or "cross-links" (Molina, 1978) of multicultural communities. They provide the hub and glue of the moral infrastructure that helps to hold together groups in conflict, to facilitate individual freedom, and to discourage excessive claims for social categories.

The evolutionary conception of identity presented in this essay, then, projects a personhood that is profoundly humanistic. It points to a sensible

existence in the face of a multitude of divergent cultural identities. Both individuated and universalized, intercultural identity allows for ever-widening circles of self-other definition without diminishing one's cultural root. The concept of intercultural identity further discourages the obsessive adherence to the rigid categorization of people, exclusive loyalty based on past group affiliations, and fragmentation of the American society into many islands of cultural "interest groups."

In the end, the systems principles underlying the present conception of identity remind us of "the ultimate resource of human intelligence" (Boulding, 1985, p. 206)--our creative, adaptive capacity. It instructs us that, indeed, each of us can discover the shape of our own identity along the way, rather than insisting on the one already defined by birth and the scripts prepared by others. In Jantsch's (1980) words: "To live in an evolutionary spirit means to engage with full ambition and without any reserve in the structure of the present, and yet to let go and flow into a new structure when the right time has come" (underline added, pp. 255-6). The "right time" is now.

Notes

1. This article expands on a keynote address delivered at the 4th International Conference on Cross-Cultural Communication, San Antonio, Texas, March 24-28, 1993 .
2. Throughout this essay, the term "cultural identity" is used broadly as a generic term and can be used interchangeably with other terms commonly used in both international and domestic contexts such as "national," "ethnic," "ethnolinguistic," and "racial" identity, or more generic concepts such as "social" and "group" identity.
3. The term "intercultural identity" is employed exchangeably with related terms such as "interethnic identity," "interracial identity," "intergroup identity," "multicultural identity," "meta-identity," "transcultural identity," "species identity," and "universal identity."

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