

The Impact of Bicultural Identity on Immigrant Socialization through Television Viewing in the United States

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Abstract

It was found, using a sample of 235 adolescent Asian immigrants in the northwest region of the United States, that the majority of the subjects developed their bicultural identity: keeping their original cultural values while picking up the host cultural values. The results showed that individuals with bicultural identity tend to recognize Western values in the television programs that they watched, evaluate their functionality while watching television programs, and accept Western values learned from television. The differences between the bicultural group and the remainder of the three groups (marginal, Western, and Asian) are statistically significant.

Immigrant socialization is a very complicated process. Immigrants need to reconcile two cultural environments: the original culture in which they were born and the host culture in which they find themselves. Upon relocation to a different culture immigrants culturally evolve through a process of adaptation to a bicultural environment. While attempting to resolve this situation immigrants are not only influenced by their dominant cultural values, attitudes, and ideals, but also by their original culture. Through this struggle immigrants obtain a level of bicultural identity in the host environment (Dong & Gundlach, 2004).

The concept of bicultural identity has not received an in-depth concentration of study. The studies that have been completed show that biculturalism is closely related to socialization (Bernal & Knight, 1993; Berry, 2004; Buriel, 1993; Lambert & Taylor, 1990; Berry, Kim & Boski, 1987; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005). Terms such as ethnic identity, cultural identity, and social identity are all related. They focus on different aspects of bicultural identity. The concept of bicultural identity assumes that immigrants can maintain their unique cultural identity while adopting the host country's values and ideals (Buriel, 1993). In other words, socialization or acculturation can take place among immigrants without a corresponding loss in their ancestral cultural patterns.

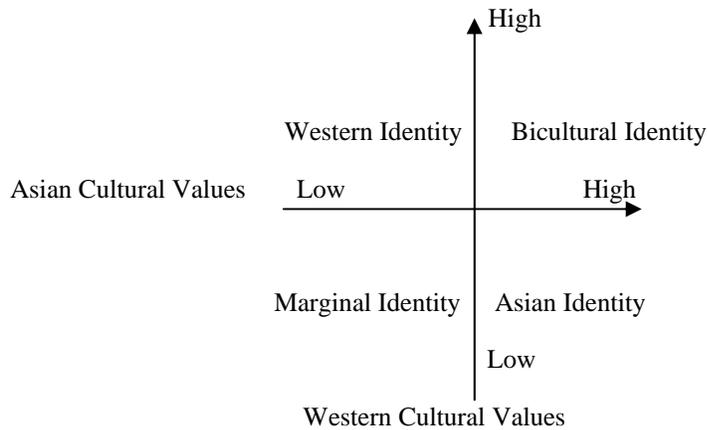
One important socialization agent in today's society is television. Television socializes individuals through its messages and images, which are highly loaded with the host culture's values, ideals, and perspectives. Individual viewers pick up those values, both passively and actively, through recognition of the values in television programs. After recognition, the viewers evaluate the function of the value and then internalize those values that they believe will be beneficial. The purpose of this study is to investigate how television viewing by adolescent Asian immigrants affects the development of their bicultural identity and its influence on their adopted cultural values.¹

The reason for choosing new Asian immigrants is that they have to cope with such a distinct contrast between their “original home” and adopted cultures. This includes dissimilar values and communication styles from the United States. The Asian communication style may be shaped by Confucius, who promoted the relational orientation style, while the American communication style may be shaped by Aristotle, who emphasized the rhetorical orientation (Goodnight, 1990). Another reason for making the choice of using Asians in the study is that more adolescent Asian immigrants are getting involved in politics of the country. These young people are becoming a potentially strong political force. A study of these adolescents may give educators, policy makers, and social scientists the basis for understanding the experience of these people and the complex bicultural journey that they experience.

Literature Review

According to Ramirez (1983), biculturalism involves a person’s developing competencies and sensitivities within two cultures. It manifests a blending of the two cultures. Hutnick (1986) proposed a bicultural identification model based on the degree of identification with the “out-group” or the majority group and the “in-group” or the ethnic minority group. This study conceptualizes bicultural identity (based on Hutnick’s conceptualization) as the ability to identify with two cultures. According to Hutnick, these individuals with bicultural identity are able to develop new values from a new group while maintaining old values from their original group (see Figure 1 for illustration).

**Figure 1
Bicultural Identity Model**



According to the conceptual model, those who can identify highly with both Asian cultural values and Western cultural values are conceptualized as individuals with bicultural identity. Those who can only identify highly with Western cultural values but not with Asian cultural values are conceptualized as individuals with assimilated or Western identity. Those who can identify highly with Asian cultural values but not with Western cultural values are conceptualized as individuals with ethnic or Asian identity. Those who cannot identify highly with either Western cultural values or Asian cultural values are conceptualized as individuals with marginal identity. In this study “identity refers to who or what one is, to the various meanings attached to oneself by self and others” (Gecas & Burke, 1995, p.42). According to

Gecas and Burke, there are two processes for identity development. One process is “identification of” and the other is “identification with.” The current study focuses on the process of “identification with,” which refers to immigrants who are associated with cultural value systems in the new environment. A preponderance of the evidence in the literature shows that being bicultural tends to give immigrants advantages (Dong 1995; Hinkley et al., 2002). Culture is a shared meaning system through which individuals pick up values, attitudes and behaviors to develop cultural competency (Zanden, 1970). This competency helps individuals develop self-efficacy in social interaction. Dong (1995) said that individuals who are bicultural tend to become comfortable with the host culture while keeping connected with their original home. These individuals tend to be successful in the host environment.

The advantages of one culture can be abundantly beneficial as a tool to becoming proficiently bicultural. Swan and Weissbrot (2000) asserted that “the most significant traditional Korean values which families imparted to the youth included respect for elders, sacrifice for the sake of the family and the importance of education” (p. 5). Also, “parental sacrifice was key to success of the family” and “respect was one of the most important Korean values passed on by the parents to their children” (Swan & Weissbrot, 2000, p. 5). These are some of the same attributes that individuals can find in many high context societies such as Japan, Korea, and China and would be advantageous for anyone who is struggling with developing a level of proficiency in a new culture. According to Lee (2003), biculturalism is essential for the Korean child to build a strong psychological foundation for high self-esteem and clear identity.

Having positive bicultural identity can be reinforcing and enabling for immigrants, as well as for people of color, such as African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans. Recent research may suggest a correlation between individual behavior and identity development (Zaff, Blount, Phillips, & Cohen, 2002). Oyserman and Harrison arrived at the conclusion that bicultural identity has a positive correlation with an individual’s self-esteem (1999). Oyserman and Harrison added that bicultural identity could be a tool for African American youths and could help them to improve their results in school and reduce their risk of depression (1999). The concept of biculturalism has received a level of empirical support from studies of Hispanic immigrants (Buriel, 1993). Within a multicultural environment like the United States, bicultural identity tends to be more common among those immigrants who want to adapt themselves into the mainstream culture while maintaining their original cultural values. These bicultural individuals are cultivated in two cultures, function and succeed in two cultures.

In short, the literature shows that immigrants tend to go through an identity adaptation process in the host country. Evidence suggests that bicultural identity is associated with both adaptation and success. Those individuals with bicultural identity tend to do well at school, organizations, and other environments.

Research Questions

Biculturalism can be defined as individuals’ competencies and sensitivities within two cultures and how it reflects the unique blending of the cultures (Ramirez, 1983). According to Hutnick (1986), individuals can be bicultural through an identification process in which they identify with both the majority group as well as the minority group. There is growing evidence to indicate that individuals with bicultural identity tend to feel better about themselves and do well in the host environment. It is critical to understand how adolescent

Asian immigrants develop their identity and what types of cultural values they retain through the socialization process in the host cultural environment. Therefore, the following question is proposed:

R1: To what extent do adolescent Asian immigrants develop their bicultural identity?

Adolescent Asian immigrants are defined in this study as high school students who immigrated to the United States from Asian countries. These countries and regions include: China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Laos. Bicultural identity is conceptualized as individuals' internalization of both the original cultural values and the new values in the host country. In terms of measurements, the study focuses on the identification process. Bicultural individuals tend to identify with both Western cultural values and Eastern cultural values (detailed measurements are discussed in the method section).

Television plays an important role in immigrant socialization. Most immigrants construct their social reality of their host country by processing and internalizing what they watch on television. One learning mechanism in television viewing is observational learning (Bandura, 1994). By observation, people obtain values, ideals, and attitudes about the host culture. Direct experience and interpersonal communication with significant others may influence immigrants more than mass media do (Austin, Roberts, & Nass, 1990), but mass media, such as television, can play a critical role in socialization as well. New immigrants tend to lack an interpersonal network in the host country, particularly during their initial years of relocation. Through television viewing, immigrants become socialized by adopting those values, beliefs, and attitudes reflected in the content of the television programs.

Immigrants who arrive in the United States with an abundance of wealth are few in number. Therefore, the majority has minimal funds to be able to invest in classes and coursework to improve their speaking skills and cultural understanding. Television provides an alternative educational source that is financially within the reach of the majority of the new arrivals. Adolescent immigrants may very well depend more on television to learn about the dominant culture so as to survive and succeed in their new cultural environment. This is due to the fact that television has the characteristics of simplicity, availability, and accessibility, making it a crucial information source for immigrants to get to know about the host culture.

Studies have shown that people learn new cultural values through a three step-process: recognition, evaluation, and acceptance (Tan, Nelson, Dong, & Tan, 1997). Tan and his colleagues suggested that people first recognize cultural values in programs that they watch on television. For example, while watching a television program viewers may recognize that wealth is highly emphasized in the American culture. Then, the individuals will evaluate this value's functionality in the social environment. For example, material wealth is an important factor for individuals to be successful in the United States and accumulating wealth is an indicator of an individual's level of success. Finally, these television viewers will accept the cultural value as their own according to their positive evaluation of the value. Based on the literature, three more research questions are proposed in this study.

R2: To what extent does bicultural identity affect Asian immigrants in recognizing Western cultural values portrayed in television programs they watched?

R3: To what extent does bicultural identity affect Asian immigrants in evaluating Western cultural values portrayed in television programs they watched?

R4: To what extent does bicultural identity affect Asian immigrants in accepting Western cultural values portrayed in television programs they watched?

In the last three research questions bicultural identity is conceptualized as the same in the first research question. In research question 2, the conceptual definition of "recognition of Western values portrayed in television programs" is the notice of those cultural values in the television programs. The operational definition is to ask subjects: "How often have you seen the values or themes portrayed in television programs?"

In research question 3, the conceptual definition of "evaluation of Western values portrayed in television programs" refers to how subjects perceive the way in which those cultural values are functional in the host country. The operational definition is to ask subjects "How important are these values if you want to be successful in the United States?"

In research question 4, the conceptual definition of "acceptance of Western values portrayed in television programs" refers to how subjects internalize those cultural values which they saw and perceive to be functional in the host country. The operational definition is to ask subjects "How important are these values to you personally?"

Method

Sample

The survey was conducted in a Seattle School District during a three-month period. Seattle is one of several large cities in the United States where many new immigrants from Asia have resettled. The study surveyed three high schools which were chosen on the basis of high Asian student enrollment, according to the Minority Enrollment Summary Report of the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. According to the Minority Enrollment Report, the first selected school had 375 Asian students, or 28 percent of the total student enrollment. The second school had 353 Asian students (51%) and the third school had 391 Asian students (33%).

The respondents in the survey were mainly 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students. The reason for surveying these students is that these adolescents are undergoing an experiment regarding themselves. This experimentation can be viewed as a process of identity formation, exploring one's role, and making commitments, which leads to increasing cohesiveness of the adolescents' thoughts, attitudes and behaviors (Erikson, 1968). The ongoing identity formation makes these high school students ideal subjects for the current study of socialization effects.

The Survey

The questionnaire was administered by research assistants, with help from individual teachers in each school. The survey administration took about 50 minutes, or one class period. The students were briefly informed about the survey. However, they were only told to take part in a group-administered survey. The explanation contains the technical procedures in answering the questions. On several occasions during the survey, class teachers offered assistance to those students who had difficulty in fully understanding a term or question because of English language competency or cultural issues. In order to avoid any stereotype or bias, which might arise through the administration of the questionnaire, a debriefing and an explanation of the purpose of the survey followed the completion of the process. The participants were also given time to ask questions about the project.

Measurement and Statistical Analysis

A questionnaire was constructed to answer the research questions proposed earlier. The study focused on three major sets of variables: (1) communication and demographic variables; (2) media use variables; and (3) socialization outcome variables. The socialization variables include the three steps of learning from television programs. The three steps include: recognition of host values in television programs, evaluation of the functionality of those values in the host country, and acceptance of those values. The host cultural values include 12 value items with six "Eastern" values: "respect for tradition," "humbleness," "moderation," "ordering relationships by status and observing the order," "having few desires," and "having a sense of shame." The six "Western" values are "wealth," "individualism," "ambition," "competition," "freedom," and "equality." The two cultural value scales were developed based on previous literature (Chu & Ju, 1993; Jandt, 2001).

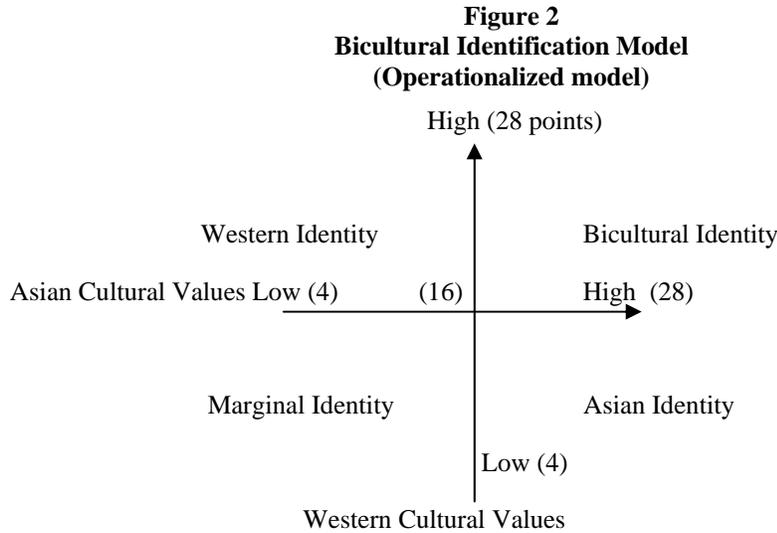
The methods of data analysis are focused in three parts. Descriptive analysis is used to provide a basic understanding of the characteristics of the sample population. Factor analysis identifies values, which are biculturally oriented, or "Eastern" or "Western." Bicultural identity is based on factor analysis. ANOVA analysis is used to examine how bicultural identity affects learning during the socialization process.

Results

A descriptive analysis of the study shows that the sample contains 235 Asian immigrant adolescents with an average age of 16.7 years. On average, they have been in the United States for a little over six years and attended the American schools for about five and a half years. The average grade level of these adolescents is 10.7, roughly late sophomore year.

In order to answer the first research question (To what extent, do adolescent Asian immigrants develop a bicultural identity?), the study conducted a factor analysis of the twelve values with six Western (individualism, freedom, wealth, equality, competition, ambition) and six Eastern values (humbleness, having a sense of shame, having few desires, respect for tradition, ordering relationships by status and observing this order, moderation). These values are referred to as "important personal values" in the study. The result of the factor analysis shows that four Eastern values are grouped together in the first factor. They are moderation, "having few desires," "ordering relationships by status and observing the order," and "having a sense of shame." This factor reflects an Eastern cultural orientation. The second factor has four outstanding items: competition, individualism, ambition, and wealth. This factor constitutes a Western cultural dimension.

The factor analysis indicated that Eastern and Western cultural value dimensions emerged. After the factor analysis, the variables in the first factor (moderation, "having few desires," "ordering relationships by status and observing the order," and "having a sense of shame") are added together to form an index of the Eastern cultural values dimension. The factor 2 variables (competition, individualism, ambition, and wealth) are added together to form an index of the Western cultural value dimension. Each dimension has a range of 4 to 28 points because each item has seven points. The operationalized typology with these dimensions and numbers is shown in Figure 2.



A “bicultural” person would subscribe to both Western and Eastern values. Individuals belong to the bicultural identification group when they have more than 16 points of Western cultural values and more than 16 points of Asian cultural values as shown in Figure 2. The marginal identity group is formed with fewer than 16 points of Western cultural values and fewer than 16 points for Asian cultural values. The Western cultural identity group is formed with more than 16 points of Western cultural values and fewer than 16 points of Asian cultural values. The Asian cultural identity group is formed with fewer than 16 points of Western cultural values and more than 16 points of Asian cultural values.

The results of the current study show that the bicultural identity group constitutes 117 (57%) of the subjects; the marginal identity group has 32 (16%) subjects; the Western cultural identity group has 39 (19%) subjects, and the Asian cultural identity group has 16 (8%) subjects. A summary of the four groups is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Value Identification Groups

Group Names	Characteristics	N	Percentage
Bicultural group	High Western values High Eastern values	117	57%
Marginal group	Low Western values Low Eastern values	32	16%
Western group	High Western values Low Eastern values	39	19%
Asian group	Low Western values High Eastern values	16	8%

The results seem to provide a clear answer to the first research question. They suggest that most adolescent Asian immigrants tend to develop a bicultural identity during the high school years. They can identify highly with Western cultural values, like competition, and they accept the values. At the same time, they also keep their original values, like a sense of shame.

The second research question was “To what extent does bicultural identity affect Asian immigrants in recognizing Western cultural values portrayed in television programs they watched?” In order to investigate this research question, the study conducted a mean comparison of the four groups to see how the bicultural identity group affects individuals recognizing Western values in television programs. The ANOVA test, which is reported in Table 2, shows that the four groups are different significantly in recognition of the Western values in television programs that they watched.

Table 2
Group Means Comparison in Recognition of Western Values on TV

Variable	Bicultural	Marginal	Western	Asian	F value
Recognition of Western Values	5.1 (0.9) <u>a</u>	4.7 (0.8) <u>ab</u>	5.0 (0.9) <u>ab</u>	4.6 (0.8) <u>b</u>	3.26*

1. The underlined letters indicate means comparison across groups by Duncan’s multiple range tests. Means with the same letter are not significantly different between each other.
2. The numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.
3. * = $p < .05$

Table 2 shows that the bicultural group is more likely to recognize the host cultural values in television programs than the remaining three groups. The Western identification groups ranks second, though it does not have a significant difference from the marginal group. The Asian group ranks last of the groups studied. The findings suggest that value and knowledge picked up from television viewing may very well be a factor in the bicultural group’s learning the Western cultural values.

The third research question was “To what extent does bicultural identity affect Asian immigrants in evaluating Western cultural values portrayed in television programs they watched?” The ANOVA results, which are reported in Table 3, show that the bicultural identity group is also leading in evaluation of the functionality of the Western values presented in the television programs they watched, along with the Western group.

Table 3 shows that the bicultural group and the Western group both lead in evaluation of Western values functionality among the four groups. It suggests that the two groups are more likely to assess favorably the functionality of Western values portrayed in television programs in the host cultural environment. The two groups have significantly higher numbers when compared with Asian and marginal groups. The marginal group ranks last in perceiving the functionality of those Western values portrayed in television programs.

Table 3
Group Means Comparison in Evaluation of Western Values

Variable	Bicultural	Marginal	Western	Asian	F value
Evaluation of Western values' functionality	5.8 (0.8) <u>a</u>	5.2 (0.9) <u>b</u>	5.8 (0.9) <u>a</u>	5.4 (0.9) <u>ab</u>	6.45**

1. The underlined letters indicate means comparison across groups by Duncan's multiple range tests. Means with the same letter are not significantly different between each other.
2. The numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.
3. ** = $p < 01$.

The fourth research question was "To what extent does bicultural identity affect Asian immigrants in accepting Western cultural values portrayed in television programs they watched?" The ANOVA results, which are reported in Table 4, show that the four groups are statistically different in accepting Western cultural values.

Table 4
Group Means Comparison in Acceptance of Western Values on TV

Variable	Bicultural	Marginal	Western	Asian	F value
Acceptance of Western values	5.8 (0.7) <u>a</u>	4.3 (0.8) <u>c</u>	5.4 (0.8) <u>b</u>	4.5 (0.5) <u>c</u>	42.00***

1. The underlined letters indicate means comparison across groups by Duncan's multiple range tests. Means with the same letter are not significantly different between each other.
2. The numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.
3. *** = $p < .001$.

Table 4 shows that the bicultural group leads significantly in accepting Western values portrayed in television programs they watched. The Western group came second, followed by the Asian group, and the marginal group. The ANOVA test for this variable is highly significant, showing that there are substantial differences across these groups in acceptance of Western values (portrayed in television programs that immigrants watched). Clearly, the bicultural group is the group which adopts Western values learned from television while keeping their original cultural values.

Discussion

The subject of cultural adaptation of immigrant groups may be traced to the very earliest days of sociology in the United States. The groups were seen as progressing from adherence to the "old" culture, to cultural marginality, to adherence to American culture. In this old view, immigrants and their cultures, were seen as a problem, not a resource. The idea

of the bicultural individual was not a part of this early view of cultural adaptation of immigrant groups (Park & Burgess, 1921; Sellin, 1938).

The findings of this study show that adolescent Asian immigrants vary in their identity formation in the host culture. The results show that the majority of immigrants fall into the bicultural identity group. Individuals in this group are actively adopting the host cultural values, while retaining their original cultural values. The results also show that bicultural individuals tend to recognize the Western values in television programs more than the other groups.

The study finds that the bicultural individuals are like the Western group in evaluating functionality of the Western values represented in television. The marginal and Asian groups are significantly behind the two groups in the evaluation step. The findings also show that the bicultural individuals are more likely to accept the Western values portrayed in television programs they watched. The difference between the bicultural group and the other three groups is substantial, suggesting that the bicultural individuals are constantly learning the Western values through mass media, such as television.

According to current literature, immigrants tend to become bicultural much as they become bilingual because they have to adapt to the new cultural environment. They tend to learn cultural values from whatever sources are available to them. Although interpersonal influences can be more effective, they may use mass media, such as television, to fill in the gaps if they lack "Western" friends.

The results of the current study indicate that bicultural identity seems to be a more psychologically comfortable state, in which the immigrants can develop less dissonance by linking themselves with their past and their present. In this way, they do not lose their complete self-identity while constantly adapting to new cultural values, ideals, and attitudes. The bicultural individuals can adapt to the new cultural environment by working and socializing with the host people. At the same time, these bicultural individuals can retain their original cultural identity, their cultural wisdom, ideas, and knowledge, in the new environment.

As described earlier, these bicultural individuals tend to become actively involved in learning the host culture, values, and attitudes. This study suggests that bicultural individuals lead in all three stages of television learning when compared with other groups, including the Western group, the Asian group, and the marginal group. The results suggest that these bicultural individuals are more likely to recognize Western cultural values in television programs that they watch, evaluate the cultural values' functionality in the host environment, and accept these cultural values as their own.

The United States is a multi-cultural and multi-racial society. It is critical that people in the United States understand and accept cultural differences (Chen & Starosta, 2003). It is exceedingly important for people to recognize that bicultural identity can be a comfortable state in which immigrants can excel in their adopted cultural environment while retaining the traditions of their original cultures. This study has shown the significant impact that television viewing has on immigrants' understanding of the American culture. A crucial factor that helps immigrants to develop their bicultural identity is their appreciation of other cultures and the benefits derived from this inclusive thinking. Only in a comprehensive environment of respect and understanding can immigrants become comfortable and effective actors in the host culture.

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Notes

¹ The authors realize that "culture" is a sociological concept, and the term describes groups, not individuals. "Vietnamese culture" characterizes the Vietnamese people not necessarily any individual Vietnamese person. On the other hand, one of the most useful conceptualizations of culture considered culture as consisting in norms, values, beliefs and symbols (Zanden, 1970). The first three of these are commonly measured in survey studies. The present study, of course, measures values.