

The relationship between intercultural abilities and cultural identity styles: A longitudinal cross-lagged analysis

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Hybrid and alternating identity styles are dynamic strategies that members of immigrant and ethnic minority groups use to maintain multiple cultural identities. Although research shows that the two strategies predict different outcomes for cultural identity development and psychological well-being, less is known about their antecedents. The present study investigated the temporal relationship between intercultural abilities (i.e. intercultural effectiveness) and the activation of hybrid and alternating identity styles in a community sample of Filipino and Indian New Zealanders. Cross-lagged analysis indicated that intercultural abilities positively predicted the hybrid identity style and negatively predicted the alternating identity style. Cultural identity styles were not predictive of intercultural abilities over time. Multigroup analysis indicated equivalence of regression paths across ethnic groups. Findings suggest that intercultural abilities function as an antecedent of cultural identity styles.

Keywords: Alternating identity style; Bicultural; Hybrid identity style; Intercultural abilities; Intercultural effectiveness; Longitudinal.

Developing a coherent sense of identity is a central and challenging task in every individual's life (Erikson, 1968). However, it can be especially difficult for people with multiple cultural allegiances, who have to accommodate demands and expectations of more than one culture. Drawing on qualitative work with Muslim youth in New Zealand, Stuart and Ward (2011) identified two integrating strategies (or styles) young people used to create balance between their competing cultural orientations: blending and alternating. Ward, Ng Tseung-Wong, Szabo, Qumseya, and Bhowon (2018) extended this line of work more specifically to cultural identity styles. The hybrid (blended) identity style involves combining elements of both cultures in a unique and novel way. The alternating identity style, on the other hand, refers to bringing forward different cultural identities depending on the situation. It is important to emphasise that hybrid

and alternating cultural identity styles do not represent blended or compartmentalised/situated types of bicultural identities. They are conceptualised as cultural identity processes underlying cultural identity consolidation.

Ward et al. (2018) explored how these hybrid and alternating cultural identity styles influence cultural identity development and psychological adaptation in a series of studies with individuals from diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds in New Zealand, Mauritius and Israel, whose developmental stages ranged from adolescence to late adulthood. In accordance with developmental theory and research, they found that identity processing, particularly for individuals from immigrant backgrounds, extends beyond adolescence and young adulthood (Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen, & Kokko, 2005; Szabo & Ward, 2015). They also found that both identity styles were predicted by the motivation to integrate, indicating

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that cultural identity styles reflect both developmental and acculturative processes. Although both strategies were activated in an attempt to integrate cultural identities, only the hybrid identity style was associated with a consolidated bicultural identity and positive psychological outcomes. The alternating style was linked to a conflicted bicultural identity and poor adaptation. These effects were consistent across countries, ethnic groups and age ranges.

Overall, Ward et al.'s (2018) findings suggest that, even though both styles are potentially integrative mechanisms, they influence cultural identity outcomes and psychological wellbeing in different ways. Considering that these strategies create distinct pathways to adaptation, it is important to understand what prompts a bicultural individual to adopt one strategy over the other. The activation of cultural identity styles is influenced by the motivation to integrate; however, it is unclear what other factors are predictive of the differential use of these strategies. We present intercultural ability as a potential antecedent variable determining a person's tendency to activate a particular cultural identity style.

Intercultural abilities and identity development

Chen and Starosta (1996) describe the ability to engage in culturally functional and appropriate behaviours as cultural adroitness or intercultural effectiveness. A wide range of abilities that support intercultural effectiveness have been identified, including the abilities to negotiate and protect the cultural identities of self and others, maintain flexibility, communicate competently across cultures, manage intercultural interactions and cultivate intercultural relationships (Chen, 2007; Imahori & Cupach, 2005; Portalla & Chen, 2010; Spitzberg, 2000). Beyond intercultural effectiveness, these abilities have also been discussed in terms of related and overlapping constructs such as intercultural competence (e.g. Leung, Ang, & Tan, 2014), cultural intelligence (e.g. Ang et al., 2007) and sociocultural adaptation (e.g. Wilson, Ward, Fetvadjev, & Bethel, 2017). Despite the multiple approaches to defining and assessing intercultural abilities, research findings converge to show that those with greater abilities have better social relationships (e.g. quantity and quality of social contact; Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Zlobina, Basabe, Paez, & Furnham, 2006), report higher levels of psychological wellbeing (Ang et al., 2007; van Oudenhoven, Mol, & Van der Zee, 2003), are more successful in their jobs and find it easier to adjust to new work environments (Lee & Sukoco, 2010; van Oudenhoven et al., 2003).

It is, however, far less understood what role culture-specific abilities play in integrating multicultural identities. For example, Lee's (2010) study with

expatriates examined the relationship between intercultural abilities and identification with the heritage and host cultures. Those reporting strong identification with both cultures had higher levels of intercultural effectiveness (measured as cultural appropriateness and communication effectiveness) than their peers who identified with only one or neither culture. Similarly, Thomas, Brannen, and Garcia (2010) found that bicultural university students scored significantly higher on cultural metacognition (i.e. awareness of and reflective thinking about cultural knowledge and interactions) than monoculturals. Benet-Martínez and Haritatos's (2005) study with Chinese Americans also concluded that "individuals who report having overlapping or hyphenated cultural identities are more likely to participate in both cultures effectively" (p. 1033).

While there is some empirical evidence linking intercultural abilities to bicultural engagement and identity integration, the direction of the relationship is unclear. Bicultural individuals might develop better intercultural abilities and display greater cultural adroitness because of their familiarity with and knowledge of multiple cultures (Lee, 2010; Thomas et al., 2010). This would suggest that both the hybrid and alternating identity styles are predictive of greater intercultural effectiveness over time, as they represent efforts to integrate two or more cultural identities by either combining cultural elements in a unique way or by emphasising them depending on situational demands. Although research to date has linked the alternating style to negative psychological outcomes, alternation and situated identities have been theorised to have potential benefits by enabling individuals to behave in accordance with cultural norms (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Noels & Clément, 2015), and, therefore, could be predictive of greater intercultural effectiveness.

However, it is equally possible that those who are more competent at navigating culturally diverse environments, are also more likely to develop a strong and consolidated bicultural identity, since they find it easier to reconcile competing elements of multiple cultures (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). In particular, when people have the appropriate abilities to navigate cross-cultural settings, adopting the hybrid identity style (i.e. integrating elements of both cultures in a novel and unique way) might be a more natural choice. In contrast, when someone struggles to manoeuvre their life around cultural differences, alternating (i.e. emphasising particular cultural aspects depending on the situation) could be a more accessible and less demanding identity strategy. The relationship could also be bi-directional. To clarify the direction of the effects, we investigated the relationship between intercultural abilities and cultural identity styles in a longitudinal framework, using cross-lagged analysis, with a community sample of Filipino and Indian New Zealanders.

TABLE 1
Descriptive statistics for the total sample and by ethnic groups

	Total Sample			Indian			Filipino			Test of difference between Indians and Filipinos
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	%	
Female	—	—	60.4	—	—	55.8	—	—	64.1	$\chi^2(1) = 1.76$, ns
Overseas-born	—	—	82.6	—	—	60.0	—	—	98.8	$\chi^2(1) = 73.49$, $p < .001$, $V = .51$
Citizen/Permanent resident	—	—	89.9	—	—	99.2	—	—	83.3	$\chi^2(1) = 18.65$, $p < .001$, $V = .26$
Length of stay (years)	30.21	14.53	—	23.74	18.3	—	32.83	11.81	—	$t(169) = 11.73$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.59$
Heritage language proficiency	3.46	0.78	—	3.13	0.89	—	3.70	0.60	—	$t(286) = -6.43$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.75$
Age (years)	44.08	13.94	—	47.13	16.03	—	41.92	11.81	—	$t(280) = 3.14$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.37$

ns = non-significant.

METHOD

Procedure and sample

Participants were recruited through ethnic organisations with the help of field assistants. Link to an online survey was distributed among members of two ethnic communities at cultural events and through mailing lists. Participation in the study was voluntary and without compensation but ethnic organisations received a donation. Informed consent was obtained from each participant online. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the School of Psychology's Human Ethics Committee at Victoria University of Wellington. The total sample included $N = 288$ participants from New Zealand Filipino ($n = 168$, 64.1% female) and New Zealand Indian ($n = 120$, 55.8% female) communities with a mean age of $M = 44.08$ years ($SD = 13.94$ years). Indian participants ($M = 47.13$ years, $SD = 16.03$ years) were significantly older than Filipinos ($M = 41.92$ years, $SD = 11.81$ years). Filipinos were more likely to be born overseas (98.8 vs. 60%). Overseas-born Indians ($M = 25.07$ years, $SD = 13.51$ years) had been in New Zealand for significantly longer than their Filipino peers ($M = 8.19$ years, $SD = 5.35$ years). Indians were more likely to hold permanent residency or citizenship (99.2 vs. 83.8%). Filipinos ($M = 3.70$, $SD = .60$) reported significantly better heritage language proficiency than Indians ($M = 3.13$, $SD = .89$). Statistical analyses and effect sizes are reported in Table 1.

The attrition from wave 1 to wave 2 was 28.82% resulting in a sample of $N = 205$ (Filipino: $n = 128$; Indian: $n = 77$) participants. Average time between the first and second participation was $M = 35.77$ days ($SD = 26.17$ days). Attrition analysis indicated no significant differences based on gender, nativity, residence status, length of stay, and heritage language proficiency. Filipinos were more likely to participate in both waves than Indians (76.2 vs. 64.2%): $\chi^2(1) = 4.93$, $p = .23$, Cramer's $V = .13$. Participants completing both waves were significantly older ($M = 44.13$ years, $SD = 13.93$ years) than those who dropped out ($M = 40.47$ years, $SD = 13.68$ years): $t(280) = -2.01$,

$p = .046$, Cohen's $d = .26$. There was no significant difference in any of the study variables between those who did and did not complete the second survey.

Measures

Scales were measured on a 5-point Likert scale anchored by 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Descriptive statistics and psychometric properties are reported in Table 2.

Intercultural abilities

Intercultural abilities were measured by the Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (IES; Portalla & Chen, 2010). IES assesses the ability of an individual to negotiate interactions with culturally different counterparts. The measure incorporates skills in six domains: (a) message skills (three items), (b) interaction management (two items), (c) behavioural flexibility (four items), (d) identity maintenance (three items), (e) interaction relaxation (five items), and (f) interactant respect (three items). In line with Portalla and Chen's (2010) protocol, the items are combined to form a composite measure with higher scores indicating higher levels of intercultural effectiveness.

Cultural identity styles

The Multicultural Identity Styles Scale (Ward et al., 2018) measures hybrid and alternating identity styles. Participants gave responses to items such as "I am Indian in a New Zealand way" (hybrid identity style) or "I have a Filipino private self and a New Zealand public self" (alternating identity style) with higher scores indicating greater use of hybrid and alternating styles. The measure has been validated with diverse samples in New Zealand, Mauritius and Israel.

Data analysis

Cross-lagged analysis was performed in MPlus with maximum likelihood estimation to examine

TABLE 2
Means, standard deviations and reliability for the total sample and by ethnic groups

	Total Sample			Indian			Filipino		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α
Intercultural effectiveness	3.73	.49	.88	3.82	.46	.87	3.68	.50	.88
Hybrid identity style	3.69	.73	.86	3.82	.66	.83	3.60	.77	.87
Alternating identity style	3.13	.65	.74	3.12	.72	.82	3.14	.59	.66
Intercultural effectiveness T2	3.77	.47	.88	3.83	.45	.87	3.73	.48	.89
Hybrid identity style T2	3.74	.67	.90	3.88	.56	.84	3.65	.71	.92
Alternating identity style T2	3.09	.67	.89	3.07	.70	.82	3.10	.65	.77

the temporal relationship between intercultural effectiveness and the cultural identity styles. Models with a chi-square/degree of freedom ratio (χ^2/df) lower than 2, a comparative fit index (CFI) higher than .95, a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) lower than .06, and a standardised root mean square residual lower than .08 indicated good fit to the data (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Next, the equivalence of regression weights across ethnic groups was investigated. CFI and RMSEA difference tests were used to compare the unconstrained model to the model with regression weights constrained to be equal between Filipinos and Indians. A difference of .01 or less in the CFI and the RMSEA was considered to indicate invariance of regression weights across groups (West, Taylor, & Wu, 2012). Missing data were treated with the full information maximum likelihood function.

RESULTS

Bivariate correlations

Bivariate correlations are reported in Table 3. Intercultural effectiveness was positively and moderately strongly related to the hybrid identity style, and was negatively and weakly associated with the alternating identity style at both time points in both cultural groups, although the magnitude of the effect between intercultural effectiveness and the alternating identity style did not reach significance for the Filipino group at Time 1. The hybrid and alternating styles were unrelated at both time points in both groups.

Cross-lagged analysis

A cross-lagged model was estimated with intercultural effectiveness, the hybrid identity style, and the alternating identity style (Table 4 and Figure 1). The autoregression for intercultural effectiveness was high ($\beta = .83, p < .001$). Autoregressions for the alternating ($\beta = .67, p < .001$) and hybrid identity ($\beta = .57, p < .001$) styles were moderately high. Intercultural effectiveness at time 1 significantly predicted both the hybrid ($\beta = .19, p = .001$) and the alternating identity styles ($\beta = -.16, p = .002$). However, neither cultural identity style had a significant effect on intercultural effectiveness over time. Next, multigroup analysis was performed to investigate the equivalence of the cross-lagged model across ethnic groups. The CFI- and RMSEA difference tests indicated that the fit of the model did not decrease after constraining the regression weights to be equal across groups. The difference in the chi-square of the unconstrained and the constrained model also confirmed that there was no significant reduction in the model fit. Consequently, findings suggested that regression weights were invariant across groups (Table 4).

DISCUSSION

The main objective of the paper was to investigate the temporal relationship between intercultural abilities, assessed in terms of intercultural effectiveness, and hybrid and alternating cultural identity styles in bicultural individuals over time. Results indicated strong temporal

TABLE 3
Correlations among the study variables by ethnic groups

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Hybrid identity style T1		-.06	.25**	.60**	-.00	.20**
2. Alternating identity style T1	-.09		-.19**	-.10	.69**	-.23**
3. Intercultural effectiveness T1	.29**	-.15		.31**	-.29**	.82**
4. Hybrid identity style T2	.58**	-.16	.37**		-.07	.30**
5. Alternating identity style T2	-.01	.65**	-.23*	-.12		-.30**
6. Intercultural effectiveness T2	.25**	-.13	.83**	.39**	-.19*	

Note: Correlations for the Indian subsample are presented above diagonal, while correlations for the Filipino subsample are presented below diagonal. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

TABLE 4
Fit indices for the cross-lagged model with the total sample and for the multigroup analysis

	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA (90% CI)	SRMR	ΔCFI	$\Delta RMSEA$	$\Delta \chi^2$
Total sample	4.84	4	1.21	.998	.027 (<.001; .096)	.021			
Multi-group analysis									
Unconstrained model	8.296	8	1.04	.999	.016 (<.001; .100)	.035			
Regression weights constrained	13.366	13	1.03	.999	.014 (<.001; .084)	.092	<.001	-.002	ns

CFI = Comparative Fit Index; CI = confidence interval; ns = non-significant; RMSEA = root means square error of approximation; SRMR = standardised root mean residual.

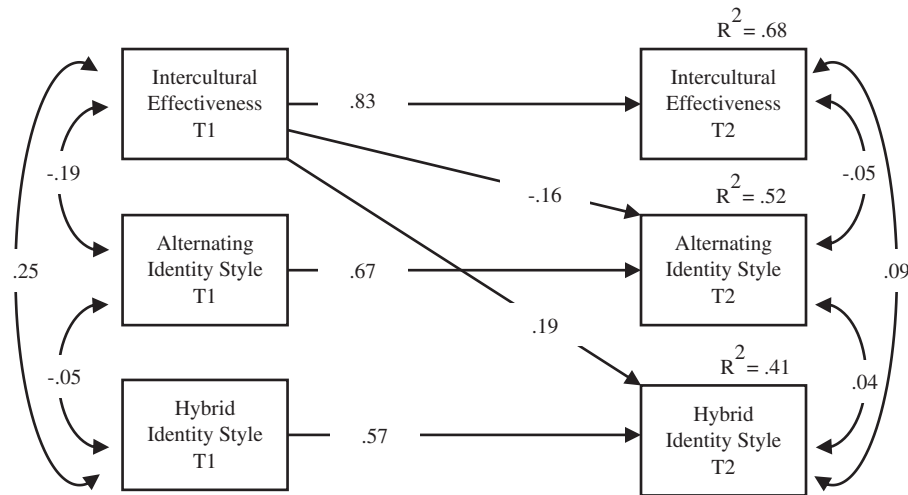


Figure 1. Autoregressive cross-lagged model: intercultural effectiveness, alternating identity style, and hybrid identity style.

stability of intercultural effectiveness. In contrast, both the hybrid and alternating identity styles had moderately strong autoregressions over time, indicating that these strategies are more susceptible to change and are likely to be influenced by contextual and individual difference variables (also see Schwartz et al., 2019). The substantially lower longitudinal stability of these constructs supports Ward et al.'s (2018) theorising that hybridising and alternating are dynamic strategies that are simultaneously available to individuals with multiple cultural backgrounds.

Intercultural effectiveness significantly predicted both cultural identity styles over time. Although cultural identity styles were significantly related to intercultural effectiveness cross-sectionally, they did not have any longitudinal impact. This finding provides support for intercultural abilities acting as an antecedent of cultural identity styles. Specifically, intercultural effectiveness promoted the use of the hybrid style. Those who have a wide range of abilities to effectively interact with people in diverse cultural settings are more likely to adopt a strategy that allows them to bring elements of their different cultural backgrounds together in a novel way. In contrast, intercultural effectiveness negatively predicted the alternating identity style. This suggests that when people lack the abilities to effectively manage

culturally mixed settings, they have a tendency to alternate their different cultural identities in response to the circumstances. It is, however, unclear to what extent alternating is an adaptive strategy under these circumstances. When someone does not have the ability to navigate interactions with individuals from different cultures, it is possible that they lack the skill set to alternate their cultural identities in an effective way. This would explain why the alternating style has been previously linked to negative outcomes (Ward et al., 2018). If it is done with appropriate cultural sensitivity, alternating could be an adaptive strategy by allowing people to meet conflicting cultural expectations (Noels & Clément, 2015; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). However, when it is done without cultural awareness, it might be detrimental in terms of cultural identity development and psychological adaptation (Benet-Martínez, 2012; Ward et al., 2018; Yampolsky, Amiot, & de la Sablonnière, 2016).

It is important to note that we assessed self-reported intercultural abilities with a measure designed to assess effectiveness in intercultural settings with a focus on interaction management. We did not know people's actual competency level, as demonstrated by performance, and it is possible that some participants over- or under-represented their intercultural abilities. However, it is fair to assume that such bias would have affected

the scores uniformly at both time points. Furthermore, in the autoregressive cross-lagged models, the longitudinal relationships among constructs (cross-lagged paths) are estimated after controlling for the stability of constructs across time waves (autoregressive paths) as well as the concurrent correlations among constructs (correlating error terms).

In this study, we investigated the impact of intercultural abilities on cultural identity styles with members of two Asian ethnic groups in New Zealand. New Zealand is a highly diverse society with 24% of its total population born overseas and with 30% of its residents belonging to an ethnic minority group (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). Although multigroup analysis indicated invariant regression weights, this study, and research on cultural identity styles in general, should be extended to other cultural contexts and groups. Furthermore, Asian samples in New Zealand represent high cultural distance groups. Cultural distance could influence the relationship between intercultural effectiveness and cultural identity styles (Furnham & Bochner, 1982); therefore, investigating it as a potential moderator in future research might be worthwhile. Finally, the sample consisted of adults from the community with an average age of 44 years and an average length of residence of 30 years in their settlement country. Although the acquisition and development of culture-specific abilities is a dynamic process, especially at the early stages of acculturation, intercultural effectiveness becomes a more stable individual difference variable over time (Leung et al., 2014). Consequently, for new immigrants, the relationship between intercultural effectiveness and the cultural identity styles could be reciprocal, as they simultaneously acquire intercultural skills and engage in cultural identity development.

In conclusion, the study provides further insights into the relationship between intercultural abilities and cultural identity processes. Findings indicate that intercultural effectiveness plays an important role in how adults of culturally diverse backgrounds engage with their identities to achieve cultural identity consolidation and integration. This has implications for interventions designed to promote bicultural identity development by highlighting the benefits of enhancing intercultural abilities and of building cultural competence.

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