

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

Hybridising identities by Korean mothers and daughters in New Zealand

A doctoral thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the Doctor of Clinical Psychology

at Massey University, Albany Campus
New Zealand

Hyunok Jeon

2011

Abstract

The population in the Pacific region is becoming increasingly diverse. In New Zealand, Asian migrants now make up almost 10% of the total population. Among them, women and second generation migrants are often described as most vulnerable to acculturation stress and identity confusions due to cultural conflicts, intergenerational issues and discrimination. However, their resilience to overcome these difficulties and their processes to construct alternative identities are not well understood. My study particularly concerns identity issues of Korean women migrants in New Zealand. The aim of this study is to understand how they deal with the challenges and re-construct their identities. For this purpose, this study draws on theories of hybridizing selves, the dialogical self and the interactive nature of culture. Six Korean mothers and six Korean young adult daughters were interviewed. Photographs and personal items were used to facilitate the interview conversations. To undertake the analyses, this study draws on frameworks suggested by discourse analysis and narrative analysis, and is underpinned by a social constructionist approach. Informed by a discursive approach, the researcher was aware of the potentials and constraints in the social and cultural context of the participants' everyday lives. Informed by a narrative approach, the researcher could explore participants' active roles in constructing their own stories. The findings demonstrate that these women are in the process of constructing hybrid identities. By constructing hybrid identities, they can avoid the strictures of being either 'authentic' Koreans or 'assimilated' Westernised women. Instead, they create flexible, positive selves, negotiating gender, ethnicity, and the power structures experienced in Western dominant society. The findings also show that mothers and daughters negotiate identities in various ways. Mothers construct the sense of being in a minority in ways that allow them to claim their strength and overcome powerlessness attached to their minority status. They also strategically construct others as the same as themselves to restore a sense of equality and to claim their rights in a Western country. Daughters construct themselves as being different from both 'typical' Koreans and their western peers, and then this dislocation is used to create a space to allow their own ways of adjustment. Daughters also describe their difficulties in carrying out adult roles in the family, but this construction turns into a sense of worthiness as a valuable contributor to the family. Regarding their future plans, daughters strategically use their hybrid identities to form positive self images as competent young women in an international context. Hybridised identities are also constructed with regard to intergenerational interactions within the family: mothers formulate ways of hybridizing children based on both Korean and Western notions of parenting, which becomes their way to be good mothers in the western society; daughters draw on both the notions of being a good, caring daughter in Korean terms and being

an independent woman in New Zealand in order to negotiate their relationships with parents. To conclude, this study documents how culture is not a set of inherent traits of an ethnic group but is interactive, shifting and performative. Also migrant women are to be seen as active negotiators in identity construction rather than victims of acculturation stress. These findings have implications for health professionals in New Zealand who are interested in assisting migrants in developing flexibility and resilience. The implications for appropriate cultural competence in professional psychological practice are discussed in terms of the broader understanding of culture and the importance of reflectivity for practice.

Acknowledgement

I thank my supervisor, Kerry Chamberlain. The conversations with Kerry have given me the chance to push my thinking forward in ways that I want to continue expanding. I deeply appreciate how much I benefit from his creativeness, professionalism and warmth during my psychology study. I am also grateful to Kerry Gibson, my co-supervisor. Her expertise and genuine interest in my research helped me enormously during the research process. I also thank all the participants. They were willing to share their stories and were happy to contribute to the research for Korean migrants. I am aware of the support from my good colleagues in Korean Community Wellness Society in New Zealand. They have been my mentors and companions along this challenging journey. I am grateful to my classmates. They have been very supportive and willing to listen when I needed to talk. I was lucky to have them in my years of the training. I also thank my good friends, Barbara, Tony and Christina. They have encouraged me to keep on challenging since the very first time I was thinking of this programme and gave me the support I really needed. My husband, Junewon has been with me throughout the journey and has also recently started his own postgraduate study in New Zealand. We shared many things that adult migrant learners could encounter and this has been such a valuable experience. There was my unborn baby for the last few months. I have never been alone with the baby and could appreciate everything I could have and share with him during that time. Most of all, I deeply appreciate the presence of all of you. I had meaningful conversations with you, which helped me constantly reflect on my research, career, and identities. This process has been the very part of this research.

Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgement	iii
Contents	iv
List of Photos	vii
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
Changes in immigration trends	1
Culture, migration and mental health	4
Acculturation stress for migrant women and second generation	5
Gender and mental health issues	6
Intergenerational issues in the migrant family	7
Are migrant women and teenagers necessarily vulnerable to mental health problems?	8
Culture and mental health practice	10
Culture and self	12
Questioning on cultural dichotomy	13
Acculturation model and an essentialised notion of culture	15
Hybridising in the multiple cultural dialogues	17
Dilemma of analysing gender in relation to culture	18
Critical studies to deconstruct essential views on self, culture and gender	20
Modern Korean women facing multiple self images	22
Aims of the study	24
Chapter 2. Methodology	26
Participants	27
Procedure	28
Ethics in procedure	29
Analysis procedure	30

Chapter 3. Analysis	33	
Reflexivity and analysis strategy:		
Negotiating in between an insider and an outsider	33	
Mothers: Creating agentic motherhood	40	
Being minority vs Claiming strength	40	
Being a powerless woman vs Being equal to others	44	
Folk model of hybridising children	49	
Daughters: Forming strategic hybridity	54	
Being different vs Claiming agency	54	
Doing daughter's role vs Taking on adult roles	57	
Hybridising as a strategy	61	
Summary	66	
Chapter 4. Conclusions	67	
Folk anthropologists, resisting and asserting	67	
Hybrid identities as a process and a strategy	69	
Multiple subjectivities in identity negotiations	71	
Qualitative approach as an effective tool for the migrant research	72	
Limitation of the study	73	
Considerations for further studies	73	
Chapter 5. Implications for cultural competence in New Zealand	75	
Critical perspectives on culture and cultural competency	75	
Critical use of cultural advisor/ supervision	77	
Therapy as a cultural enterprise	79	
Reflexivity for culturally competent practice	81	
References	83	
Appendix 1	Participant Information Sheet (English & Korean)	93
Appendix 2	Participant consent form (English & Korean)	99
Appendix 3	Consent forms for use of photographs and objects (English & Korean)	101

Appendix 4	Consent forms for non-participants in the photos (English & Korean)	103
Appendix 5	Consent forms for parents/ care givers (English & Korean)	105
Appendix 6	Interview topics	107
Appendix 7	Health Service organizations with Korean practitioners	108

List of Photos

Photo 1	41
Photo 2	43
Photo 3	46
Photo 4	50
Photo 5	54
Photo 6	60
Photo 7	62
Photo 8	63