

Critical Period for Forming Bicultural Identity

Introduction:

Searching for one's identity has always been baffling for some Japanese returnees, especially if one was exposed to a second culture during the critical period of acquiring cultural sense of values. After spending constant period of time as a Japanese expatriate, not a few Japanese returnees perceive the differences in cultures between Japan and the second country. When "kikokushijos", the returnees, go back to their home country, they get mentally ill because for one reason when acting upon the feelings of the second culture, kikokushijos find it complicated to get along with the classmates and eventually feel left out. They feel that Japan is greatly different from what they have expected. This phenomenon is called a "culture shock", and after they experience the culture shock, returnees naturally get confused of their own identities. Going through several emotional stages, the returnees end up by confirming that they belong to: Japan, the country they sojourned in (monocultural), or the both countries (bicultural). Being bicultural means assimilating two cultures. That is, one must be able to understand, accept, and accommodate the difference between the customs, manners, values, and people in two cultures, realizing that one is acting differently

based on the culture he/she is in. Considering myself as an example, I had spent six years living near San Francisco, from age eight to fourteen, and I affirm that I am bicultural. To prove more specifically, from the moment I step in the United States, I would be more frank, self-asserting, and express myself more explicitly than I am in Japan. On the other hand, in Japan I act more fitting and use expressions that is intimating. However, my core personality is the same in both cultures. I am friendly, optimistic, and active. It is apparent that my sojourn in the United States had caused my biculturalism, however, not all the Japanese returnees who have been abroad feel that they have bicultural identity. My underlying concern and the purpose of this study is to find out the significance of the age and the period spent in the other culture toward biculturalism. Is there a critical period for forming bicultural identity? I decided to answer this question by doing research and making a questionnaire.

Literature Review:

Over the past few decades, a considerable number of studies have been conducted in the field of bicultural identity. Yasuko Minoura states “On the level of cultural adjustment, while the child at age nine acknowledges behavioral differences between cultures, they

do not perceive differences in 'cultural grammar' at that age. By age eleven dissonances in cultural grammar is felt, and by age thirteen children will generally not discard previously-acquired cultural grammar even if they change behavioral patterns." (Minoura, 1979) in her PhD. dissertation entitled "Life in Between". To sum up Minoura's theory, Minoura presumes that children who spend in the second culture during the age between nine and thirteen will somehow cognate the difference between culture and culture, and this indirectly shows the importance of age and period for becoming bicultural. On the level of the formation of the bicultural identities, Richard Brislin and Tomoko Yoshida explains the stages returnees proceed by using Milton Bennett's model.(Brislin, Yoshida, 1994) Bennett (Bennet,1986) presents the six stages people go through: denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration. Becoming bicultural means that one is at the level of integration. After pointing out Bennet's theory, Brislin and Yoshida also provides the notion of Third Culture Kids (TCKs), originally presented by Ussem (1973). To quote Yoshida, TCKs are "children who are now or once were dependents of adults with extended overseas job assignments", which is a typical case for a Japanese returnee. TCKs are normally exposed to their parents' cultures at home and Hoshukos (Japanese schools), and the host-country culture outside of their homes, resulting the integration of the two cultures

and forming a bicultural identity. Naoko Tani purports in her article “Psychological Development of the Bicultural Self-Concept: A Theoretical Perspective” (1995) that the experience and personality dominates the two major role in the matter of second-culture acquisition. She too shares the psychological development model introduced by LaFromboise, Coleman and Gerton (1993) which includes five stages: assimilation, acculturation, alternation, multiculturalism, and fusion. Yasuko Kanno also introduces a simple model based on the stories of Japanese returnees with three stages: sojourn, reentry, and reconciliation. (Kanno, 2003) Referring to the data, Kanno professes that in order to go through all three stages, Japanese returnees must spend a constant amount of period at a certain age. Otherwise, the returnees cannot experience “defense” or “minimization” if they are too young to form the first culture’s identity and “reentry” or “fusion” if they are too old to be a high school student and have already concreted their identity. Therefore, it seems reasonable to say that age and period spent in the second culture have strong bond with biculturalism.

Methodology:

To inquire the critical period for forming bicultural identity, I decided to collect data by

creating a questionnaire. The questionnaire included the following: interpretation of biculturalism, question no.1- do you feel that you have a bicultural identity (Graph1), question no.2a- how long were you exposed to the second culture, question no.2b- between what ages did you spend your time in the second culture? The participants in this survey were the members in the Japanese returnee community on the internet. In the social network system web site called mixi, (<http://www.mixi.jp>) there are over 1,000,000 members registered and 400,000 communities. There are 3,755 members (to date 01/09/06) who belong to the Kikokushijo Community. I sent ninety messages to the Japanese returnees who were registered in by using real names in order to receive more trustable, accurate responses. I made a data using spreadsheets, separated the replies who answered yes and no for question no.1 (Graph2, Graph3). Then, I added the period of time in the second culture for each sample I received; i.g.8-14 on the side. Next to the period, I put the length of time the Japanese returnees sojourned in the second culture; i.g.6 years. After sorting all the data, I compared the informants who answered yes for question no.1 (bicultural or not) and the period and years to the Minoura model, and checked if Minoura's theory apply for typical Japanese returnees. In the end, I analyzed the data and embossed the critical period for forming bicultural identity.

Results:

The following results were obtained. Out of the ninety messages I sent to the Japanese returnee members of the Kikokushijo Community, I gained fifty five replies. All of the questions were answered correctly. As for question no.1 (do you feel bicultural?), thirty nine informants answered yes, while sixteen answered no. The average of the length of time living in the second culture for members who answered yes was 7.45 years, and 4.19 years for returnees who answered no. To verify the authenticity of Minoura's model, I compared the period of time the informants who percept themselves as having a bicultural identity to Minoura's theory, and discovered that out of thirty nine informants, thirty four of them were exposed to the second culture for at least two years between age nine and thirteen. Concerning the returnees who did not conceive themselves as being bicultural, eleven out of sixteen informants did not spend any time in the second culture at the age between nine and thirteen. I combined two data and figured that Minoura's theory has eighty one percent of accuracy according to my results. As for tendency, I separated the period of time sojourned in the second culture in five age stages: Ages 0-6,6-9,9-12,12-15, and 15-18. Then I classified the data out

and counted one for returnees who spent at least two years in an age stage. For example, a person who spent from 10-14 would be counted as one for both 9-12 and 12-15 stages. I found out that Japanese kikokushijos who did not recognize themselves as people having bicultural identity tend to have spent their time abroad at the stages between 0-6 and 15-18. The utmost gap I saw in the period of time spent between returnees with bicultural identities and monocultural identities is at the stage between 9-12. On the grounds of the data, it is suggestible that the critical period for forming bicultural identity is from age nine to twelve.

Conclusion

Wading through this research, I found out that there were several points which implied how to become bicultural. As far as on the period of time level, I feel that unlike acquiring a language, acquiring a culture start from latter age. One must be able to speak and communicate with people in order to experience the culture he/she is immersed in. And integrating the second culture needs the first culture to bond together, so I assume that the starting line for forming bicultural identity is at least few years later than the first language acquisition. This logic reflects the great number of

people spending time in the second culture between 0-6 who answered they did not think they were bicultural. For the 15-18 stage also, the result shows that a greater number of people exposed to the second culture at that age answered they were not bicultural than they were. The reason is because from the middle of adolescence, the returnees had already crystallized their first culture, and won't grant the second culture so easily. Scientifically, the adolescents are in their rebellious stages, too. Taking a look at the remained three stages, the numbers tell us that the biggest gap is found at the age 9-12 stage. Therefore, numerically and logically, the critical period for forming the bicultural identity is at the stage of 9-12.

Discussion & Further research

A few questions remained in this research, concerning the trustfulness of informants and number of samples. I tried my best to gain confiding samples, since generally the people who register in social network system are said to be truthful. The acquaintances of mine which is over one hundred register as their real names with real identity. I also made the questionnaire simple with only three questions to ask and one paragraph for explaining the term "bicultural" so more receivers will respond with

accurate answers. As for number of samples, I feel I did the best I could, even though it is obvious that more number of samples is better for getting precise results.

There are more further research can be done on critical period for forming bicultural identity. One is to do same research in wider range. For example, the questionnaires were sent to Japanese returnees only, so it is possible to obtain various results with various returnees in other countries. Also, applying this research to the older people remains as a matter to be researched. Factors such as personality of a returnee or the environment the returnee was exposed to the second culture affects the formation of the bicultural identity. It is suggestible to do a research relating that topic. In the future, I suppose returnees have chance to understand the notion of the biculturalism in the early age, so they do not need to suffer when on their return to their home country.

Reference Citation

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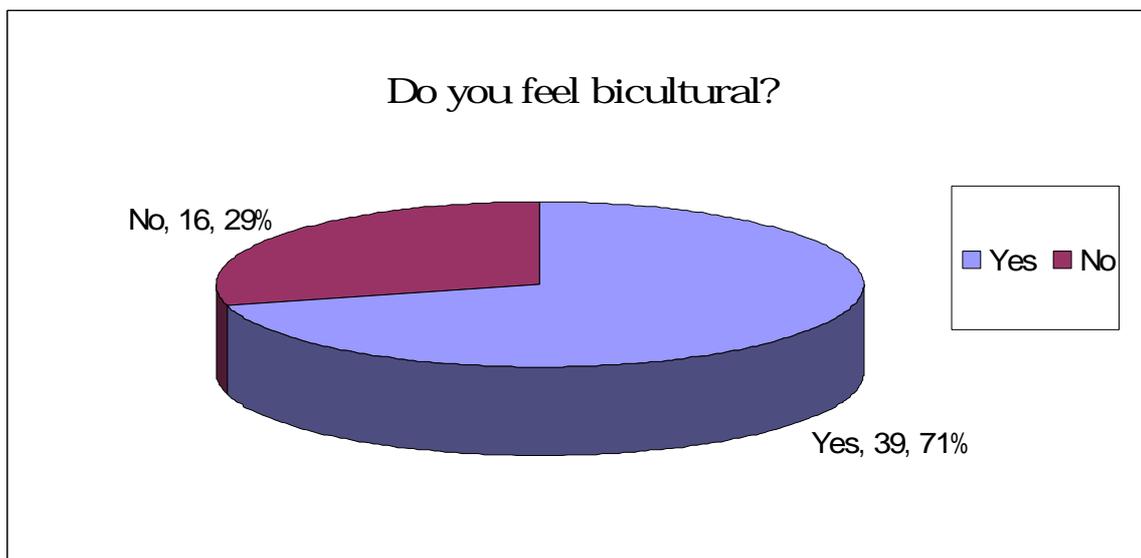
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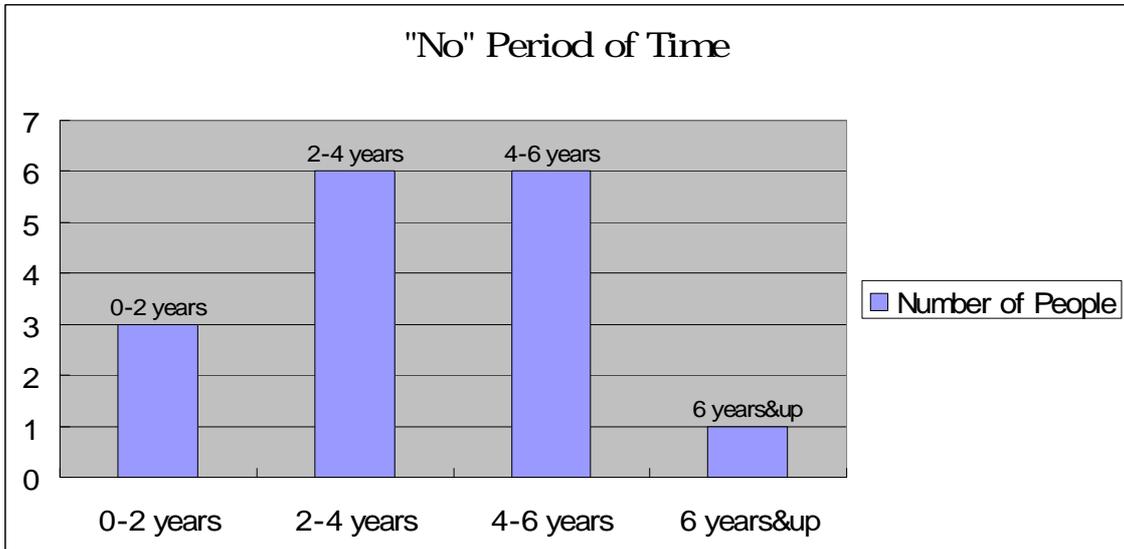
Available from World Wide Web: (<http://pweb.sophia.ac.jp/~yoshida-k/bicultural.htm>)

Appendix

Graph1. Do you feel bicultural?



Graph2. Period of time for participants who answered “No” in Question 1.



Graph3. Period of time for participants who answered “Yes” in Question 1.

