

Affiliative ethnic identity: a more elastic link between ethnic ancestry and culture

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Abstract

This paper explains the development of affiliative ethnic identity: an individual identity rooted in knowledge, regular consumption and deployment of an ethnic culture that is unconnected to an individual's ethnic ancestry until that individual regards herself, and may be regarded by others, as an affiliate of a particular ethnic group. While ethnic culture remains identifiably linked to a particular ethnic ancestry, ideological, institutional and demographic changes have elasticized the link between ancestry and culture, making the formation of affiliative ethnic identity possible. Multiculturalism and its accompanying value of diversity have become institutionalized such that individuals regard ethnic difference as something to be recognized and celebrated. The prevalence of ethnic culture in schools, ethnically infused products of popular culture, demographic changes and growing interethnic contact allow individuals, regardless of ethnic ancestry, ready access to multiple ethnic cultures, providing the basis for the formation of affiliative ethnic identity.

Keywords: Ethnicity; race; identity; multiculturalism; diversity; culture.

Introduction

Students of ethnicity take for granted that ethnicity is malleable, situational and contingent. It becomes symbolic when there is much generational distance from the immigrant point of origin (Gans 1979), in response to external group threats (Portes and Rumbaut 2001), resurgent when social movements activate it (Nagel 1997) and pan-ethnic when the interests of multiple ethnic groups coalesce around their treatment as a single race (Espiritu 1992). What these ranging forms of ethnicity share in common is that they are rooted in a shared sense of ancestry, or common descent.

However, another form of ethnic identity has emerged; one that does not depend on claims of ancestry. Instead, it exclusively depends on knowledge, consumption and deployment of ethnically linked symbols and practices, or ethnic culture. Individuals are no longer confined to their own ethnic ancestry in forming an ethnic identity. They are now accessing culture connected to other ethnic ancestries in developing *affiliative ethnic identities*: individual identities rooted in knowledge, regular consumption and deployment of an ethnic culture that is unconnected to an individual's ethnic ancestry until that individual regards herself, and may be regarded by others, as an affiliate of a particular ethnic group.

Scholars have documented specific manifestations of affiliative ethnic identity: 'wiggers' (whites who display a strong appreciation for black identity) (Roediger 1995); teens who 'act black' or 'act Spanish' (Carter 2005); Puerto Rican 'wannabes' (Wilkins 2008); and whites who 'play Indian' (Deloria 1998). These are not discrete instances of ethnic 'crossover', but examples of a larger phenomenon that is affiliative ethnic identity. While ethnic culture remains identifiably tethered to a particular ancestry, ideological, institutional and demographic changes have elasticized the link between ancestry and culture, making the latter available to individuals who wish to broaden their range of 'ethnic options' (Waters 1990).

Ethnic change, crossing over and ethnic transgression

An ethnic group is 'a collective within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood' (Schermerhorn quoted in Cornell and Hartmann 1998, p. 19).¹ Ethnicity includes three related components. The first is *ancestry*, which entails belief in common descent, or kinship; ancestry amounts to a claim to a family writ large. The second component is *culture*, which includes the symbols and practices around which ethnicity coalesces and that epitomize group belonging. While group members regard ancestry as the 'inherited' element of ethnicity, the cultural aspect of ethnicity is 'achieved' since individuals learn it (Brubaker et al. 2007). Ethnicity's third component, *history*, is a collective of events that form a narrative that group insiders (and outsiders) tell about a shared or inherited past. The line between history and culture is thin. Since ethnicity relies on interpretations of history more than on a verifiable historical record, interpretation of history is a cultural act.

Affiliative ethnic identity grows out of a more elastic connection between culture and ancestry, which have been so closely tied in the popular imagination and academic study that when individuals untie

the two in their own lives, usually through the enactment of culture, it is seen as an instance of ethnic transgression. This transgression historically has been shaped by a larger set of power relations in which whites dominate non-whites. Dressing in black face (Gubar 1997), playing Indian (Deloria 1998) and passing (Davis 1991; Hobbs 2009) are all examples of identity transgression that grow out of these unequal power relations.

Ethnoracial stratification remains prominent, and the social sanction against overt expressions of ethnoracial prejudice has produced subterranean forms of prejudice that are more difficult to identify and combat (Bobo and Smith 1998; McDermott 2006). Nonetheless, institutions and individuals more positively recognize ethnic difference compared to the past, helping to create the conditions that allow for wider access to ethnic culture, and thus the formation of affiliative ethnic identity.

Defining and distinguishing affiliative ethnic identity

An affiliative ethnic identity is rooted in knowledge, regular consumption and deployment of an ethnic culture that is unconnected to an individual's ethnic ancestry until that individual regards herself, and may be regarded by others, as an affiliate of a particular ethnic group. Several aspects of this definition warrant elaboration.

The first relates to the use of ethnically linked symbols and practices, or ethnic culture. Individuals do not just claim ethnic identities, they enact them through culture – cuisine, language, art, holidays, festivals – that defines what it means to be an ethnic-group member (Nagel 1994). Individuals with affiliative ethnic identities display a deep knowledge of an ethnic culture unconnected to their own ethnic ancestry, regularly consuming and deploying the elements of that culture. Knowledge, consumption and enactment of culture form *the* foundation of affiliative ethnic identity.

The ancestral component of ethnic identity calls attention to the 'affiliative' nature of this identity. Individuals with an affiliative ethnic identity do not make claims to the ancestry or history of the group from which they draw their affiliative identity. The absence of such claims is precisely what makes this ethnic identity 'affiliative'. Nonetheless, affiliative ethnics have a deep affinity for an ethnic group and culture that are unconnected to their own ancestry, and they make claims to 'honorary' group membership. These claims are implied though the regular deployment of ethnic culture. Though affiliative ethnic identity does not depend on claims to a common ancestry, it is no less *ethnic* in nature. Individuals experience and express an affiliative identity through symbols and practices that are associated with a particular *ethnic* ancestry.²

A third aspect of the definition relates to the affiliate status that individuals may have in an ethnic group. Ethnicity is not marked by ethnic culture only. It is also defined by the boundaries that distinguish groups from one another in everyday life (Barth 1969; Wimmer 2008). Claims to an ethnic identity are regarded as legitimate to the extent that both members of the ethnic 'us' and 'them' deem them to be so. Individuals with an affiliative ethnic identity do not cross ethnic boundaries such that others assign them to the ethnic category from which they draw their affiliative identity. However, their social networks, familiarity with history, knowledge, consumption and enactment of customs and practice, and, in some cases, their allegiance to social and political causes may gain them acceptance among ancestral ethnics, who may bestow category labels on affiliative ethnics that recognize cultural membership in the absence of ancestral belonging. These category labels include words 'honorary' and 'semi' that precede the ethnic-specific label (e.g., 'honorary-Mexican,' 'semi-Italian') (see Waters 1990, pp. 110–14). These labels may also come from non-ancestral ethnic insiders who recognize affiliative ethnics' embrace of a particularly ethnic culture. Affiliative ethnic identity is an additive aspect of identity that does not supplant but rather exists alongside an ancestral ethnic identity. Affiliative ethnics thus do not deny their own ethnic ancestry.

Fourth, affiliative ethnic identity is an integral part of individual identity. Affiliative ethnics do not merely borrow aspects of ethnic culture in order to piece together culturally omnivorous highbrow or cosmopolitan identities. Instead, they routinely consume and deploy an ethnic culture. Though affiliative ethnics do not identify with the ancestral aspect of ethnicity, their deep knowledge, consumption and regular deployment of an ethnic culture is central to how they identify themselves and often how others identify them. The salience of an affiliative ethnic identity, like ancestral ethnic identities, can be located on a continuum that runs from 'thick' to 'thin' (Cornell and Hartmann 1998). What makes affiliative ethnic identity thick or thin is not merely how much of an ethnic culture that an individual knows, consumes and enacts, but rather the importance that an individual attaches to these activities as a part of a sense of self.

Affiliative ethnic identity and ethnic change

Affiliative ethnic identity might be easily confused with several other ethnic processes or forms:

- *Assimilation* – 'the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary social and cultural differences' (Alba and Nee 2003, p. 11) – might be said to be multidirectional affiliative ethnicity on

a large scale. However, assimilation takes place when two or more groups become more alike until ethnic distinctions are all but imperceptible, while affiliative ethnic identity *depends* on recognizable ethnic distinctions. Affiliative ethnic identity is possible only because there are symbols and practices widely recognized to be associated with a particular ethnic group. In contrast, assimilation takes place when aspects of culture that were once ‘marked’ as distinctively ethnic become ‘unmarked’ features of the mainstream. With assimilation, individuals become more similar to a mainstream (and change the mainstream in the process) (Alba and Nee 2003). With affiliative ethnic identity, individuals distinguish themselves from a mainstream by drawing on a culture linked to marked ethnic categories. In short, assimilation involves becoming more similar, while affiliative ethnic identity entails becoming more different.

- *Symbolic ethnicity* – ‘a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior’ (Gans 1979, p. 9) – allows individuals to feel part of a mainstream undefined in ethnic terms, while also permitting an occasional and inconsequential foray into ethnic ‘otherness’ (Waters 1990). Both symbolic and affiliative forms of ethnic identity are forged primarily with ethnic culture, and both allow individuals to distinguish themselves from a mainstream. But symbolic ethnic identity entails individuals looking *toward* their own ethnic ancestry for an ethnic experience; affiliative ethnic identity develops when individuals look *away* from their own ethnic ancestry. Ironically, symbolic ethnic identity involves the sporadic deployment of ethnic symbols and practices, while affiliative ethnics often display an intense interest in ethnic culture.
- *Passing* historically involved black individuals living their life as a white person. Passing is associated mostly with blacks since, historically, the ‘one-drop rule’ made blackness as much of a biological identity as it was a socially constructed racial category (Davis 1991; Hobbs 2009). Individuals whose phenotype was close to that of whites were able to hide their ‘one-drop’ of black ancestry, living as if they had no black ancestry at all, and thus reaping social, economic and legal benefits attached to whiteness.

Passing differs from affiliative ethnic identity in three important ways. First, affiliative ethnic identity is asserted, not ascribed. While passing involves the assertion of membership in a white ethn racial category, equally important to passing is ascription by others to a white category. It is unlikely that individuals with an affiliative ethnic

identity would be assigned to the ethnic category from which they draw their affiliative identity. Secondly, passing is a function of a deep-seeded racial inequality. Historically, passing was a virtual requirement for blacks to succeed in mainstream institutions, giving it a coercive quality that affiliative ethnic identity lacks. Finally, whereas as those who pass claim white ancestry, affiliative ethnics make no claim to the ancestry in which their affiliative ethnic identity is rooted. They exclusively rely on their knowledge and deployment of ethnic culture to form their affiliative identity.

- *Ethnic hybridity* involves the mixing of different ethnic cultures. Recent research on immigrant assimilation in urban centres has identified the hybridization of ethnic culture among second-generation youth, who combine elements of culture from their own ethnic ancestry with the multiple ethnic cultures that are vibrant in the milieus that they navigate (Kasinitz et al. 2008). The resulting hybrid, or ‘cosmopolitan’ (Warikoo 2004) culture allows the second generation to remain ethnically authentic, while projecting the qualities that garner them respect from peers (Warikoo 2007). Whereas hybridity involves combining cultures to create something new, affiliative ethnic identity relies on the enactment of culture associated with another ethnic ancestry. Any alteration would make such an identity no longer affiliative, but something altogether different.

The origins of affiliative ethnic identity

Affiliative ethnic identity emerges from factors that have created both a ‘demand’ for ethnic difference and a ‘supply’ of the ethnic culture on which individuals draw to experience this difference.

Multiculturalism and the demand for ethnic difference

One of the most significant ideological changes in the last forty years relates to everyday understandings of ethnoracial difference. While ethnoracial prejudice and pernicious stereotypes endure, norms about ethnoracial equality have become remarkably more prevalent (Bobo and Charles 2009). This shift originated in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The two crowning legal achievements of the movement – the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 – have raised the legal cost of discrimination, and ultimately the social sanction against the overt discrimination that has been in place for most of US history (Alba and Nee 2003). As a result, there has been a change in attitudes about race and ethnicity such that in three generations US society has seen a ‘shift from the nineteenth- and early

twentieth-century emphasis on the value of racial homogeneity, as in the white supremacist vision of America, to an institutionalized consensus on the value of diversity' (Alba and Nee 2003, p. 57). This value of diversity is embodied in multiculturalism, which celebrates – even if often superficially – ethnoracial difference (Suárez-Orozco 2000). Whereas multiculturalism was once an insurgent way of thinking about ethnoracial difference, it now forms the foundation for a new understanding of American national identity. Schildkraut (2005), for example, shows that multiculturalism undergirds 'incorporationism', a new tradition of American civic identity characterized by an embrace of America's immigrant origins and the celebration of its different ethnic strands. In the incorporationist tradition, all Americans are hyphenated Americans. Similarly, Wolfe's (1998) interviews with middle-class American suburbanites shows them to have accommodating views of multiculturalism, though they favour a 'soft' brand of multiculturalism over the 'hard' sort.

Supplying ethnic culture: institutional mechanisms

A supply of ethnic culture, made possible by the institutionalization of multiculturalism and diversity, meets a growing demand for an ethnic experience. Firms and organizations have embraced multiculturalism for normative as well as rational economic reasons, and in the process have disseminated ethnic culture more broadly so that virtually everyone has access to it. One of the most prominent sites for the dissemination of ethnic culture is schools. Schooling – at least through high school – is a near-universal experience in the United States, and school curricula increasingly reflect the changing demographic makeup of students as well as the desire to create a more 'globally minded' citizenry (Frank and Gabler 2006). Academic courses, school-sponsored trips, clubs and organizations and special school events that recognize and celebrate diversity are now common. These ethnically inflected school activities can pique individuals' interest in an ethnicity that is untied to their own ancestry.

Colleges have played a particularly important role in the dissemination of ethnic culture. College is not a universal experience, but the proportion of Americans who have a college degree has grown to roughly 30 per cent (Fischer and Hout 2006, p. 15). In the last forty years, colleges have offered more courses related to ethnic and racial diversity, and curricula have expanded to include the study of the contributions of specific ethnic groups (Frank, Schofer and Torres 1994). In many colleges, completing one or more of these courses is a graduation requirement. By offering, and in some cases requiring these courses, colleges communicate to students that ethnic difference is something of value that ought to be studied and even celebrated. But

these courses provide more than a superficial understanding of an ethnic origin. What may start as a purely academic interest in an ethnic group or culture can turn into an affiliative ethnic identity when individuals use these courses as a basis to grow their knowledge of a particular ethnic culture.

Extra curricular organizations on college campuses also help affiliative ethnics gain familiarity with various ethnic cultures. Ethnically themed clubs, organizations and celebrations have blossomed on college campuses in the form of dance troupes, musical groups, fraternities, sororities and political organizations. College students may become acquainted with an array of ethnic cultures through participation in these clubs, organizations and activities. Most students join clubs and organizations that reflect their own ethnic ancestry. But membership is not exclusive to ancestral ethnics. Indeed, it is through participation in these clubs and organizations that affiliative ethnics may have frequent contact with ancestral ethnics and become acquainted with ethnic culture and certain political causes.

As with education, the mass media has embraced multiculturalism, though the motives may be more economically rooted. The purveyors of popular culture appeal to ethnicity in order to capture specific consumer markets (Dávila 2001). This recognition has helped create a more diverse popular culture that takes the form of ethnically themed television shows, publications, radio programmes, music, film, sports networks, festivals and fashion. This 'market-driven multiculturalism' (Zolberg and Long 1999, p. 26) informs popular culture, making the ethnically inflected products of culture widely accessible.

The mass media more than any other institution has helped elasticize the link between ethnic ancestry and culture. Experiencing an ethnic culture once required being in close proximity to a particular people, in a particular place, but the media channels through which ethnic culture flows are so wide and long that affiliative ethnic identity can develop without direct contact with ancestral ethnics. Ethnically themed productions of popular culture give individuals mediated access to ethnic culture that can form a basis for an affiliative ethnic identity in the absence of direct social relations with ancestral ethnics (see Bennett 1999; Macias 2006).

Communications technology and the internationalization of consumer markets make the cultural elements of ethnicity available to individuals without having to get on a plane. The internet provides easy access to news and culture from abroad by placing the global market of ethnic culture at one's fingertips. News, information and cultural wares from abroad are also available for purchase in local markets and bazaars in the global cities in which many individuals live (Sassen 1991). Though the trading of goods is as old as civilization,

never have the cultural products and by-products of trade been so easily and instantaneously accessible.

The activities of Native-American hobbyists illustrate how the consumption of ethnic culture facilitates the formation of affiliative ethnic identity. Hobbyists, who in most instances are not of Native American ancestry, meet regularly at powwows where they don the clothing, sing the songs, play the instruments and consume the food associated with Native American ethnicity. Hobbyists may have some contact with Native Americans, but they primarily invoke their Native American affiliative ethnic identity by consuming and invoking elements of Native-American culture. In recent years, hobbyists have used the internet to disseminate information about Native American culture, scheduled powwows and the availability of products that symbolize Native American ethnicity.

Likewise, the way in which the mass media disseminates a supply of ethnic culture is clear in the case of 'wiggers', an often (though not always) derogatory term given to white people who 'act black'. Wiggers display a strong appreciation and knowledge of black-American hip-hop culture. They don baggy clothing, speak African-American Vernacular English and are avid consumers of all things hip-hop. For many whites, taking on a black affiliative ethnic identity develops without direct contact with ancestral ethnics (Bennett 1999; Warikoo 2007). Scholarship, films and television are replete with tales of non-blacks who display a black hip-hop affect through their consumption of television, music and clothing (Roediger 1995; Whitesell 2003; Kitwana 2005). Hip-hop culture is, of course, part of a larger global youth culture, and it is not, therefore, within the sole jurisdiction of black ethnic culture. Nonetheless, in the US context, hip-hop remains connected to blackness, and the wide dissemination of black culture supplies it as a convenient source of affiliative ethnic identity.

Supplying ethnic culture: interethnic contact

A supply of ethnic culture also comes from demographic changes. Since 1965, the United States has seen a dramatic increase in the number of immigrants arriving from Latin America, Asia and the Caribbean, adding tremendous ethnoracial diversity to the US population (Bean and Stevens 2003). From 1960 to 2006, the foreign-born population grew from just 5 per cent to 12.5 per cent of the total US population (Migration Policy Institute 2008), and immigrants who arrived after 1960 and their offspring together comprise nearly a quarter of the US population (Portes and Rumbaut 2006, p. 246). The expression of ethnicity is not merely a private affair that comes to life behind closed doors. Public celebrations of ethnic ancestry – street fairs, visual and performing arts, festivals and

religious celebrations – are important parts of civic life in places where immigrants settle. These celebrations also make ethnic culture available to everyone, regardless of ethnic origin, and become part of the supply of resources that make affiliative ethnic identity possible.

Changing demographics in the United States have also altered patterns of romantic partnering in ways that contribute to the formation of affiliative ethnic identity. Several factors have combined to increase intermarriage rates in the last four decades: anti-miscegenation laws have been removed from legal codes;³ attitudes about intermarriage have relaxed (Bobo and Charles 2009); and young adults now experience their twenties as an ‘age of independence’ (Rosenfeld 2007), living away from their parents and thus free from parental-imposed constraints on the selection of romantic partners. These changes have resulted in a dramatic increase in intermarriage for virtually all groups.

Theories of assimilation suggest that intermarriage contributes to the fading of ethnic boundaries, and thus the declining importance of ethnicity in the lives of each partner as well as their children (Gordon 1964; Lee and Bean 2007). But intermarriage can also lead to an exchange of ethnic culture such that an individual sees the world through a lens tinted by the ethnic origin of his or her partner. There is generally some degree of exchange of ethnic traditions between members of a pair, but it is often the case that the ethnic culture of one partner dominates, particularly that of the partner who is generationally closer to the immigrant point of origin and lives in a context replete with ‘ethnic resources’ (Stephan and Stephan 1989; Jiménez 2004). In such cases, one member of the couple may come to adopt the culture of their partner’s ethnic origin, incorporating it into familial and even extra-familial life to such a degree that it becomes part of an affiliative ethnic identity (see Waters 1990, pp. 110–14). A pre-existing affiliative ethnic identity can inform a preference for partners from a particular ethnic origin, deepening the access to ethnic culture that allows for the development and sustenance of an affiliative ethnic identity. Relationships need not be romantic to facilitate the development of affiliative ethnic identity. Friendships with members of another ethnic origin can also provide regular and ready access to ethnic culture.

The availability of inexpensive international travel also allows individuals to import an affiliative ethnic identity from abroad. Individuals may form associations with others through whom they develop an affiliative ethnic identity, while also engaging in the consumption and deployment of culture that forms that basis for that identity. For some, international travel provides an introduction to a culture that ultimately becomes the source of an affiliative ethnic identity. For others, affinity for a particular country and culture, as well as the associations they form during initial visits, inspires repeated

trips to the territorial origin of their affiliative ethnic identity, refreshing its salience in their lives. In either case, cultural immersion during international travel 'becomes ethnic' when, upon returning home, individuals draw on it to develop an affiliative ethnic identity.

Research on wiggers illustrates how interethnic contact contributes to the formation of affiliative ethnic identity. In explaining the meaning of the term wigger, Sartwell (2005) describes how the demographics of where he grew up contributed to the development of his own black affiliative ethnic identity:

I emerge from the wigger tradition. I grew up in a mostly black city and attended mostly black schools. I associated coolness with blackness and clumsy stiltedness of manner with whiteness. I listened to black music, talked in black slang. Eventually, I immersed myself in the history of black music and learned to play the blues and harmonica. Later I was a white rock critic writing about early Hip Hop music . . . Reading the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* in a junior high school black history class had been a formative experience. Eventually, I also immersed myself in African American literature, particularly autobiography. And you'll still hear black slang circa 1971 coming out of my mouth, as well as Hip Hop coming out of my speakers. (Sartwell 2005, p. 36)

Why affiliate?

Given that affiliative ethnic identity is chosen and not ascribed, why would anyone choose such an identity?

Perhaps the most important motivation comes from a desire to avoid ethnic blandness. For many individuals, the ethnic culture connected to their own ancestry is in short supply. Among white ethnics, ethnic identity makes up a thin, symbolic part of their identity (Waters 1990). Such an ethnic identity may have its advantages, especially in view of the many ways in which ethnoracial difference structures inequality. But ethnic difference can give individuals a degree of cachet in an age of multiculturalism. Having a thin attachment to an ethnic identity can leave some people feeling ethnically bland when the various pieces of the American ethnic mosaic are becoming more vibrant. Affiliative ethnic identity can be an antidote to the not-uncommon lament that people express about being ethnically plain (Schildkraut 2005, ch. 5). Integrating the culture of another ethnic ancestry allows individuals to invoke ethnicity as a leisure pastime, as they might with a symbolic ethnic identity. But an affiliative ethnic identity allows individuals to link themselves to a culture that is much more salient in the US context.

Wilkins's research on Puerto Rican 'wannabes' – 'white young women from various class backgrounds who identify with the local black and Puerto Rican hip-hop communities' (Wilkins 2008, p. 5) – illustrates how affiliative ethnic identity can be an answer to ethnic blandness. The white women in Wilkins's study borrow elements of Puerto Rican and black ethnic cultures in order to break free from what they see as a constraining white, middle-class, female identity. Wilkins points out that identity politics has reduced the perceived benefits of whiteness among the people she interviews, and they thus look for an identity that they see as salient, celebrated and attached to a morally worthy group (Wilkins 2008, p. 11).

Individuals whose ethnic ancestry is salient in the US ethnic landscape and who have abundant access to an ethnic culture linked to their own ancestry may still choose an affiliative ethnic identity. The development of this identity, even when other ethnic options are readily available, may come from an effort to elevate one's ethnic status; to 'trade up' to an ethnic identity that is seen to have more status in a particular milieu. The immigrant second generation, for example, often has easy access to the symbols and practices from their own ethnic ancestry through family members and a large co-ethnic community. They may nonetheless choose to take on an affiliative ethnic identity. Among youth, certain ethnic cultures may have high status partly because of the cultural prominence of these ancestries, but also because the groups associated with these cultures are perceived to have the qualities that many teens value (Perry 2002; Carter 2005).

Affiliative ethnic identity may also provide status to individuals in upper-class circles, where multicultural literacy carries cachet. Affiliative ethnics signal a high status not by being culturally omnivorous, but by communicating expertise in a specific ethnic origin unattached to their own ancestry. Indeed, possessing a particular ethnic ancestry while presenting an alternative ethnic self can project a worldliness that the upper-class values. Speaking a non-English language, being familiar with the literature, art, music and cuisine connected to a particular ethnic culture can make individuals stand out in cliques that value multiculturalism.

Enacting affiliative ethnic identity

Ethnic identity – affiliative or otherwise – is both an internally held sense of self and an expressed aspect of identity. Because affiliative ethnic identity is not rooted in a shared ancestry, individuals do not make claims of ancestral group belonging. Instead, they make implied claims to an honorary group membership through their knowledge, consumptions and enactment of ethnic culture. Individuals may enact

their affiliative ethnic identity along multiple dimensions of an ethnic culture, expressing an affiliative ethnic identity in ways that are not altogether different from the ways that ancestral ethnic invoke their ethnic identity.

The use of language is a primary way that individuals deploy an affiliative ethnic identity. Fluency in a language, much like other elements of ethnic culture, is a learned – or ‘achieved’ (Brubaker et al. 2007) – aspect of ethnic identity that does not depend on ancestry. Foreign-language requirements in schools and the proliferation of dual-language immersion schools across the United States provide opportunities for individuals to learn a language that is not associated with their own ethnic ancestry (Linton 2007). Speaking the language associated with a particular ethnicity allows affiliative ethnics to deepen their access to other aspects of ethnic culture – festivals, art, music, political causes and visits abroad – that may give them a greater degree of legitimacy in the eyes of ancestral ethnics. There are also accented and slang versions of English, like African-American Vernacular English, that are regularly identified with a particular ethnicity. Much as they can learn a non-English language, affiliative ethnics pick up on and deploy these English dialects as a way to put their affiliative ethnic identity into practice (Cutler 1999; Sweetland 2002). Knowing slang words, turns of phrase, certain intonations and even how to properly mix languages are central ways that language becomes an expression of affiliative ethnic identity.

Individuals also express affiliative ethnic identity through art, athletic-oriented activities and food. Musical groups, dance troupes, popular music and visual art are widely accessible not just as objects of consumption but also as participatory activities. Salsa dancing, belly dancing, Balinese drumming, hula, Japanese Taeko drumming, Native American powwows, yoga, Brazilian *capoeira*, Mariachi bands, Klezmer bands and folkloric dancing are just a few of the popular and widely available participatory activities in which affiliative ethnics engage. Affiliative ethnics may also decorate their home and, through fashion, their bodies with accoutrements that symbolize a particular ethnic group. They may also display a deep knowledge of and regularly consume the cuisine of the ethnic group from which they draw their affiliative identity.

The development of affiliative ethnic identity can take place in an academic setting, but academic study is also a way to express an affiliative ethnic identity. Engaging in the academic study of another ethnic group demonstrates a keen interest in a particular ethnic culture. Courses on particular groups often have a large number of ancestral ethnics enrolled from the group under study. By enrolling in these courses, affiliative ethnics signal to ancestral ethnics a high degree of commitment to their affiliative identity.

Individuals can also signal a dedication to a particular affiliative ethnic identity in how they choose romantic partners. Selecting romantic partners from ethnic groups to which an affiliative ethnic identity is linked may be spurred by an interest in a particular ethnic culture, but it may also serve as a marker of legitimacy in the eyes of ancestral ethnics (Wilkins 2008).

Ethnic groups can also be interest groups (García Bedolla 2005), and individuals express an affiliative identity through their participation in political causes connected to an ethnic group. Since the groups whose identity they adopt are often marginalized, there are abundant opportunities to participate in political causes as part of an affiliative ethnic identity. Fair housing, immigrants' rights, language rights, treaty rights and anti-discrimination campaigns are just a few of the high-profile political causes in which affiliative ethnics may engage. Participation in a political or social cause is often motivated by a more general commitment to justice and equality. Nonetheless, participation in these causes may be part of a repertoire of expressive forms of ethnicity that affiliative ethnics assert.

The enactment of affiliative ethnic identity generally involves knowledge, consumption and deployment of multiple dimensions of an ethnic culture. Summarizing how Puerto Rican wannabes display their affiliative ethnic identity through deployment of multiple aspects of ethnic culture, Wilkins writes, 'they are saturated in the accoutrements of hip-hop culture, aligning not only their physical self presentation and musical tastes, but also their political, spatial, and, most importantly, heterosexual commitments with poor and working-class black and Puerto Rican communities . . . Wannabes challenge the delineation of racial boundaries by assumed heritage, using comportment, consumption practices, and sexuality for authentic membership marked not only by race but also by class' (Wilkins 2008, pp. 5–6).

Dealing with ethnic authenticity

The enactment of ethnic culture as part of affiliative or any other type of ethnic identity has currency only to the degree that others deem it authentic. Language, knowledge of ethnic customs, taste in music and popular culture, peer groups and the selection of romantic partners are all subject to tests of authenticity that highlight both inter-group boundaries as well as boundaries that knife through an ethnic group (Jiménez 2008). Individuals who assert an affiliative ethnic identity would thus seem to have difficulty in having their assertions regarded as authentic given their lack of ancestral connection to the ethnic group from which they draw their affiliative identity.

How affiliative ethnics resolve the problem of authenticity likely varies by context. For some the issue of authenticity may resolve itself. The

expectation that affiliative ethnics exhibit authentic behaviour is likely quite low. Few would expect, for example, a man with Irish ancestry to enact an 'authentic' form of a Japanese ethnic culture. While the Irish-origin individual's deployment of Japanese language, knowledge of history, cuisine and popular culture may not be regarded as authentic, it is nonetheless seen as acceptable since, after all, the Irish-origin individual is an ancestral outsider. With no ancestral ties to the ethnicity from which they adopt their identity, the expectations for authentic displays are low, potentially allowing affiliative ethnics a 'free pass'.

Affiliative ethnics may not be able to rely on a free pass, however. They may instead resolve the problem of authenticity by asserting their affiliative ethnic identity only in situations in which they are unlikely to face challenges about the authenticity of their display. Perry (2002), for instance, shows that white students who attend a predominantly white high school are more likely to consume hip-hop culture than white students in a multiethnic high school, partly because the former group of students are less subject to authenticity tests from black students. Similarly, Wilkins (2008) reports that one of her 'Puerto Rican wannabe' subjects is effusive to an audience of white females about what it takes to fit in at a predominantly black and Puerto Rican nightclub. Her subject knows that she is unlikely to be challenged about her authenticity in an all-white context, and she is thus willing to impart her (affiliative) ethnic knowhow (Wilkins 2008, p. 217).

Since interpersonal contact is a means through which individuals develop an affiliative ethnic identity, affiliative ethnics often find themselves in the presence of an audience that may challenge their deployment of ethnic culture. Terms used to describe affiliative ethnics of a particular sort – 'wannabe', 'wigger', etc. – are meant, in most instances, to be charges of inauthenticity; to communicate that one lacks the proper ancestry required to be an ethnic insider. Rather than selectively enacting their affiliative ethnic identity or relying on low expectations, affiliative ethnics may deploy avidly their affiliative ethnic identity, finding that persistence and a high degree of cultural competence brings acceptance. Hancock's (2005) ethnographic research in Chicago's black steppin' scene shows how his competence with steppin', a popular black dance form, earned him an 'honorary' status among black steppin' dancers who were initially sceptical of his regular presence at black clubs. Hancock's ability with steppin' led black club-goers to 're-racialize' him from white to black. Hancock provides the following quote from a black club-goer who calls Hancock his 'nigga' to illustrate his re-racialization:

When I call you my nigga, that means that we're tight, that we're friends. It doesn't mean the same things when White people say it. So I

can say it because you're straight, man. You are definitely not White. You're my nigga now. You're one of us now. (Hancock 2005, p. 446)

Through their fervent participation in the practices that define ethnicity, including clubs, organizations and political causes, ancestral ethnics may come to see affiliative ethnics as people who have proven themselves worthy of ethnic affiliation. To be sure, how affiliative ethnics deal with authenticity varies and may depend not only on the situation, but also on the ability of affiliates to be astute, and even sensitive about when and how the deployment of ethnic culture is likely to be received by ancestral ethnics as acceptable, presumptuous or even offensive aspects of a 'fake' identity.

Conclusion

Ethnic culture and its associated ancestry remain closely tied, but knowledge, consumption and enactment of culture are not just for those who claim the ancestry to which culture is connected. Ethnic culture is now part of the consumptive and participatory domains of life to which virtually everyone has access. This more elastic relationship between ancestry and culture allows for the development of affiliative ethnic identity.

This paper provides a theoretical basis for understanding affiliative ethnic identity. In pursuing a greater empirical understanding of this form of identity, scholars must keep in mind a few key points. First, the empirical examples that I draw upon predominantly come from studies of whites and their adoption of black or Native American affiliative ethnic identities. Affiliative ethnic identity is not for whites only, nor is it exclusively rooted in black and Native American ethnic culture. My inclusion of these examples is a function of the extant empirical research. The fact that the bulk of empirical examples I site come from the literature on whiteness should serve as a call for studies of ethnicity to consider how individuals from multiple ethnoracial origins – not just whites – are looking to other ethnic cultures, both black and non-black, to form affiliative ethnic identities.

Second, I have discussed affiliative ethnic identity as being connected to established ethnic categories. However, specific forms of affiliative ethnic identity may become identity categories in and of themselves. 'Wiggers' and 'wannabes,' two of the most established such categories, are associated with a group of people with a particular type of affiliative ethnic identity. As the number of affiliative ethnics grows, we may witness the creation of new categories based on specific forms of affiliative ethnic identity.

Third, though affiliative ethnic identity is possible because of a more elastic connection between ancestry and culture, it does not represent a

move toward a US society in which ethnicity is entirely fluid or exclusively defined by cultural. Affiliative ethnic identity is possible *only* because there is a widely held belief in the association between particular ethnic ancestries and culture. There are aspects of ethnic culture with which virtually all individuals are familiar and that they can freely consume and enact. Through assimilation, these aspects of culture become part of a larger ‘composite culture’ that defines a mainstream to which various ethnic groups have contributed (Alba and Nee 2003). Without any connection to an ethnic ancestry, culture ceases to be ethnic.

Still, the rise of affiliative ethnic identity may approach something of a ‘post-ethnic America’ (Hollinger 1995) in that it allows individuals greater freedom to hold multiple ethnic affiliations connected to different descent groups. If ethnic ancestry and its associated culture continue to become more elastically tied, we may very well see the coming of a US society in which there are far more ‘ethnic options’ (Waters 1990) for everyone.

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Notes

1. A *race* is ‘a human group defined by itself or others as distinct by virtue of perceived common physical characteristics that are held to be inherent; it is a group of human beings socially defined on the basis of physical characteristics’ (Cornell and Hartmann 1998, p. 25). Some groups, like African-Americans, are both a race and ethnic group. I rely on the term ‘ethnic’ even when referring to groups that have been historically regarded as a ‘race’ since affiliative ethnic identity depends on culture, which is more closely associated with asserted ethnic rather than ascribed racial categories.
2. Many groups have a set of symbols and practices that capture the essence of belonging, but these symbols and practices are not necessarily *ethnic*. What distinguished an *ethnic* culture is that group insiders and outsiders associate culture with a particular ethnic ancestry and history.
3. The US Supreme Court declared anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional in the case of *Loving v. Virginia* (1967).

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