

My Culture Book:

A Workbook to Support Cultural Identity Formation and Exploration

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Introduction and Inspiration

The "My Culture Book" is a workbook created for children ages 10 and up to support them through the exploration of their cultural identity. This book is geared towards third-culture kids, people with multicultural and multiracial identities, and anyone who wants to explore their cultural identity. For anyone, but particularly multicultural individuals, having the ability to freely develop one's identity predicts mental health and wellness (Cheung, *Class 7: Acculturation 2024*). I believe that providing young learners with the tools to freely develop their own identity could make an impact on their mental health in the future, as cultural identity can be a challenging struggle for many.

My own journey of understanding my cultural identity also played a large role in shaping this workbook and what I wanted to include in it. Although I lived a very multicultural childhood living in both the US, where I was in a predominantly Japanese community, and Japan, where I attended an English international school, speaking less Japanese than I did living in the US. I never directly thought about my cultural identity until I was in University. Moving to Japan at 16 thinking I was truly Japanese, but then realizing that many Japanese people wouldn't view me as 'real' Japanese because I am mixed and didn't grow up fully immersed in the culture, caused me a great deal of stress and anxiety in high school, though I didn't realize that was the reason at the time. Coming to University and building relationships with people with similar experiences, trying to mend my relationship with my Japanese identity, and taking ACAM320B were the main things that allowed me to understand my own cultural identity, and appreciate it.

I also saw a book in the bookstore a while ago called "That's Not My Name!" by Anousha Syed, which followed a girl named Mirha who kept getting called the wrong name. It

talked about loving one's name and standing up for yourself, and in it was my name, Aiko, as an example of a girl's name in a classroom. Reading this book made me think of how differently I would have viewed myself and my name when I was younger had I read this book. I had always changed my name when getting coffee or quickly introducing myself, as I hated the explanation of how to pronounce it, and the questioning of my identity as it is a Japanese name. Seeing this, and reflecting on how great it would be for young multicultural readers to feel confident in their name and identity also influenced me to create a workbook geared towards younger learners.

This workbook also took a lot of inspiration from the Big Life Journal (Eidens, *Growth Mindset for Kids & teens* 2022) which allows readers to gain a growth mindset, explore their interests and identity, and encourage resilience and confidence. Using this book for some of my clients in my work as a Behavior Interventionist gave me the idea of creating something similar but that was focused on cultural identity.

Working on this book and sharing it with my coworkers, family, and friends also made me think that I would like to continue to work on this further and hopefully work with child development specialists and people who study and have an interest in cultural identity to produce a book that can truly make a difference in the mental and emotional health of people with multicultural identities. I could publish this far in the future if I can, as something like this could provide people with a way to learn about cultural identity as well as learn tools to approach challenging situations that they may encounter in the future regarding their identity. Ideally, with more time to work on this, I would create a guidebook to go along with this that explains to adults using this book with their children and students the more complex ideas behind the concepts being taught, as well as guiding questions to prompt further discussions.

Analysis of Workbook

The first pages of this workbook explain what cultural identity is in very simple terms. By providing a written explanation along with a more visual way of seeing different things that influence cultural identity, readers would be able to utilize multiple means of engagement and can provide some visual cues to prompt discussions about the reader's cultural identity.

For the second set of pages, I incorporated an example of Sakura, who has multiple cultural identities, as having an example of what cultural identity might look like to someone could help make readers feel less alone, and apply those thoughts to their own situation. By providing examples of how her multicultural life looks like practicing multiple religions, celebrating different holidays, and having different beliefs from traditional medicine, I aimed to incorporate multiple aspects of her cultural identity. By including an example of the challenges that Sakura has faced and the inspirational support she got from her teacher, I started the book with a positive outlook.

For the third set of pages, I provided a space for reflection, which could be completed by writing or by just discussion with the adult supporting the reader of this book. My aim with the guiding questions was to support some ways to think about one's cultural identity. Growing up, although I was living a very multicultural life, I didn't ever think that I was multicultural. I think that if I had someone sit me down and discuss my cultural identity with me, I would be able to discuss it quite easily, as it was my life. Creating a space for readers to reflect on their own cultural identity through simple terms like the foods they eat and the shows they watch could help readers verbalize and reflect on their own cultural identity, allowing them to better understand themselves and what cultural identity is. I also included the more abstract and

complex question, "Who influences your life the most, and what culture(s) do they represent? How do you think that affects your own cultural identity?", as this workbook could be used by older readers who can think more deeply of how their cultural identity is influenced. As discussed in the introduction, I would also recommend readers to have deeper discussions on these questions off the paper, to further understand and explore their cultural identity.

One of my largest takeaways from this course was the idea of how permeable cultural identity is. Based on who you interact with daily, the people around you and their beliefs and cultures significantly impact one's own cultural identity. The micro-level and macro-level influences on your life influence one's exploration of your cultural identity, often leading them to commit to one identity or continue to explore (Cheung, *Class 4: Identity Formation* 2024). With research showing how identity crisis can lead to higher levels of anxiety and depression (Cheung, *Class 5: Multiracial Identity* 2024), I felt that it was very important to incorporate this concept in simpler terms in this book. To include the idea of cultural identity not as stagnant but as ever-changing, I created the third set of pages to discuss the idea that cultural identity is a journey. Based on who a person interacts with and the different experiences they go through in their life, knowing that their identity can change could greatly benefit someone struggling to understand their cultural identity.

Furthermore, I made an effort to include support and ways to think when individuals face doubt and challenges in their cultural identity. Especially for those with mixed cultural identities, they may face many questions and confusing moments in their life where they may question themselves. Multicultural individuals are at risk of facing discrimination as well as identity crisis and denial, which threaten their psychological health and performance, and increase the risk of anxiety and depression symptoms (Hong et al., 2016), (Cheung, *Class 5: Multiracial Identity*

2024). I believe that preparing children about the challenges they may face and providing them with tools to explore their identity could help decrease the likelihood of them allowing those challenges to impact them negatively.

While brainstorming this workbook, I wondered if I should incorporate some of the challenges they face, as it could be controversial to tell children about what people might say about them before they do. It could be argued that it could create a learned helplessness or make the reader internalize those negative ideas and beliefs. However, I thought of the culture camps that many adoptive parents placed their children in, where they were taught some surface levels of their home country's cultures such as food and dancing, but that lacked in-depth discussions about discrimination that they would most likely face later in life, if they hadn't already. This left many young adoptees unprepared for when they face racism and discrimination later in life (Cheung, *Class 5: Multiracial Identity* 2024). That method was not ideal, as although people may have been able to eat some of the food of their home country, they weren't able to apply what being from that country meant for the way they were treated in their host country. With this in mind, I decided to include some aspects of discrimination and hate that people with mixed cultural identities may face which can be seen in the example of Sakura on page 3 of being made fun of at school, and on 9 and 11, when addressing how others may say things to make you doubt yourself and how some people think that some people are better than others. In a more advanced and in-depth version of this workbook, I may have included examples of microaggressions they may hear, with examples of how readers could respond to them.

Furthermore, by emphasizing that people are in charge of their own cultural identity, I believe that it could benefit readers not only while they are completing the workbook, but also in the far future when they encounter other challenges. Building a positive mindset and teaching

individuals about the complexities of cultural identity allows them to think about and explore their identity in that moment and also gives them the tools and positive mindset to use throughout their lives, as their identity may change. Having some inspirational quotes to refer to when readers may be struggling might seem trivial at first, but I think that hearing small statements about how I should be proud of being a little different, and how although having a complex cultural identity might be challenging, it also comes with the privilege of connecting people and cultures, would have helped me feel more confident and proud of my own identity.

In conclusion, I created this workbook with the aim that children with complex cultural identities can learn about cultural identity and gain the tools to explore their identities further. By preparing them with tools to discuss and explore their cultural identity and preparing them for challenges they may face, I believe that it can help support readers for their whole life. I enjoyed creating this workbook, and I plan to continue working on it, hopefully gaining new insights about how to support individuals with multicultural identities through my work and life.

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