A Model of Assimilation and Accommodation
in the Cognitive & Cultural Realms

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A general hierarchical, lifespan developmental model is presented involving the processes of assimilation (growth) and accommodation (change) in the cognitive and cultural spheres. Cognitive assimilation is defined as construct growth for internal system's fit, cognitive accommodation is defined as construct change for external/environmental fit, cultural assimilation is defined as prevailing culture growth as diverse cultural identities/groups adapt and adjust for contextual fit and cultural accommodation is defined as prevailing culture change to fit plural cultural group's/identities' traditional practices and beliefs. To ground the model the "Me" - "I" cognitive and "Us" – "We" cultural dynamics are employed. In particular, neo-Piagetian developmental sequences are expounded separately for the "Me" (assimilatory cognitive), "I" (accommodatory cognitive), "Us" (assimilatory cultural) and "We" (accommodatory cultural) realms. It is now for future research to test the validity and veracity of the theoretical modelling.

This paper presents a stage-based, neo-Piagetian model of Assimilation and Accommodation in the Cognitive (structural) and Cultural (behavioural) realms.

To ground the model the writer has applied the systems-theoretic dimensions of "ego, system" and "cult, system", for example, in partnership with the contextual constructs of "environment, ego" and "environment, cult" (see Figure 1 for parallel system-context relations).

Relative to these dimensions, the model argues that:

- a "Me-pathway", and
- "I-pathway" (per G. H. Mead's symbolic interactionism)

are social-psychological products of the *cognitive* processes of assimilation and accommodation, respectively.
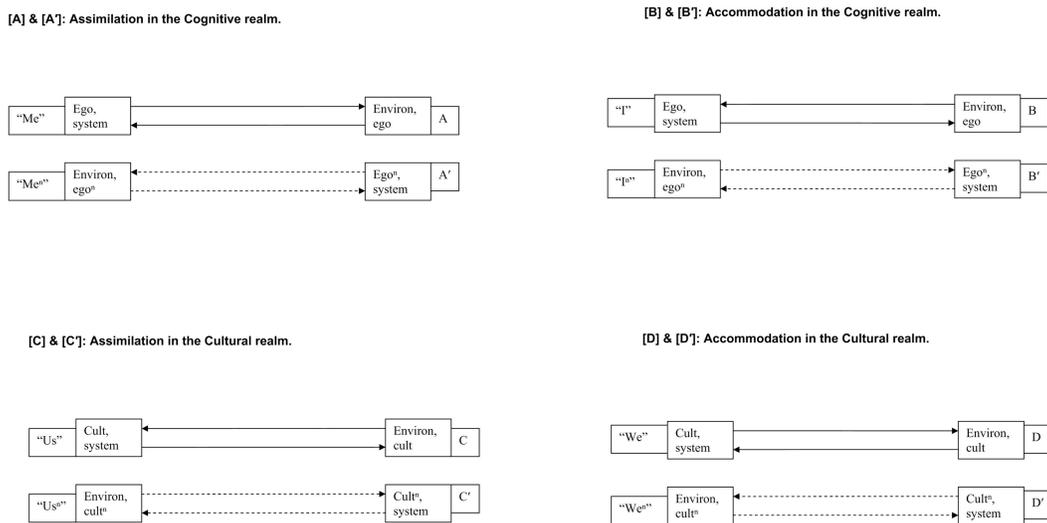
Correspondingly and also relative to these dimensions, the model purports that:

- an "Us-pathway", and
- "We-pathway"

are social-psychological products of the *cultural* processes of assimilation and accommodation, respectively.

Figure 1 depicts these systems-based relationships.

Figure 1:   A Model of Assimilation & Accommodation in the Cognitive and Cultural spheres

[A] & [A′]: Assimilation in the Cognitive realm.

[B] & [B′]: Accommodation in the Cognitive realm.

| "Me" | Ego, system | | Environ, ego | A |
| "Me^n" | Environ, ego^n | | Ego^n, system | A′ |

| "I" | Ego, system | | Environ, ego | B |
| "I^n" | Environ, ego^n | | Ego^n, system | B′ |

[C] & [C′]: Assimilation in the Cultural realm.

[D] & [D′]: Accommodation in the Cultural realm.

| "Us" | Cult, system | | Environ, cult | C |
| "Us^n" | Environ, cult^n | | Cult^n, system | C′ |

| "We" | Cult, system | | Environ, cult | D |
| "We^n" | Environ, cult^n | | Cult^n, system | D′ |

From the diagram and Table 1 below it may be stated that:

- **Cognitive Assimilation** – entails the process whereby an individual's constructs grow from interaction with the environment, for *internal fit*
- **Cognitive Accommodation** – entails the process whereby an individual's constructs change through interaction with an environment, for *external fit*
- **Cultural Assimilation** – entails the process whereby a prevailing context/culture grows as diverse cultural identities/groups adapt (intelligently) and adjust (personally) to "fit in", for *external fit* (& unity)
- **Cultural Accommodation** – entails the process whereby a prevailing culture/context changes through plural cultural identities/groups living out their traditional beliefs and practices, for *internal fit* (& diversity)

The present approach is somewhat distinct to or at variance with significant contributions in the cross-cultural literature (e.g., John Berry and colleagues, 2006 – four strategies of acculturation) and in the social-developmental literature

(e.g., Diane Ruble and colleagues, 2004 – social identity approach to the development of "we" as collective identity) because it is characterised by a hierarchical, lifespan developmental systems model underpinned by a cognitive-cultural complex of mutual assimilation and mutual accommodation.

To explicate the dynamics in Figure 1, [A] represents "Me" from a person's own (self/ego) side of the self-other interrelationship and [A′] represents the "Me" ("Me^n") from the an other's (ego) side. For instance, "Me" as a scientist and an other "Me^n" as an artisan.

[B] depicts the "I" from one's own (self/ego) side of the self-other interrelationship and [B′] depicts the "I" ("I^n") from an other's (ego) side. For instance, "I" as an introvert and an other "I^n" as an extrovert.

[C] portrays the "Us" from one's own cultural group/identity's side of the socio-cultural unit (*cult, system*) - culture (*environment, cult*) cross-cultural interrelationship and [C′] portrays the "Us" ("Us^n") from an other group's/cultural identity's side (*cult^n, system – environ, cult^n*). For example, from the context of Australian national culture "Us" may be the Anglo-Celtic Australian community and another "Us^n" the Chinese Australian (or Australian Chinese) community.

[D] illustrates the "We" from one's own cultural group/identity's side of the socio-cultural unit (*cult, system*) - culture (*environment, cult*) cross-cultural interrelationship and [D′] illustrates the "We" ("We^n") from an other group's/cultural identity's side (*cult^n, system – environ, cult^n*). For example, from the context of world cities "We" may be Sydneysiders and an other "We^n" Berliners.

Moreover, the diagram above is intended to denote that for assimilation in the cognitive and cultural realms interaction between a system and its environment favours <u>growth</u> and that for accommodation such interaction favours <u>change</u>. While the "Me" and "Us" are premised to be fundamentally assimilatory, their respective dialectical relations with the "I" and "We", impart an element of accommodation. The same can be argued for the "I" and "We" as fundamentally accommodatory, with the "Me" and "Us" imparting an element of assimilation to them.

Table 1: A Stage-based Model of Assimilation & Accommodation in the Cognitive & Cultural Realms

Stage 0	A or B or C or D (no coordination)	*No "Me", "I", "Us" or "We"*
Stage 1	A + A′ or C + C′ or B + B′ or D + D′ (one-dimensional coordination)	*"Me" or "I" or "Us" or We"*
Stage 2	A + A′ and B + B′ or A + A′ and C + C′ or A + A′ and D + D′ & B + B′ and A + A′ or B + B′ and C + C′ or B + B′ and D + D′ and C + C′ and A + A or C + C′ and 'B + B or C + C′ and 'D + D′ & D + D′ and A + A′ or D + D and B + B′ or D + D′ and C + C′ (dual coordination)	 *"Me" and ("I" or "Us" or "We")* *"I" and ("Me" or "Us" or "Me")* *"Us" and ("Me" or "I" or "We")* *"We" and ("Me" or "I" or "Us")*
Stage 3	[A + A′ & B + B′] and C + C′ or D + D′ or [B + B′ & A + A′] and C + C′ or D + D′ and [C + C′ & D + D′] and A + A′ or B + B′ or [D + D′ & C + C′] and A + A′ or B + B′ (partial mutual coordination)	 *"Me":"I"/ "I":"Me" & ("Us" or "We")* and *Us":" We"/ "We":"Us" & ("Me" or "I")*
Stage 4	[A + A′ [C + C′ & B + B′] + & D + D′] and [B + B′ [D + D′ & A + A′] + & C + C′] and [C + C′ [A + A′ & D + D′] + & B + B′] and [D + D′ [B + B′ & C + C′] + & A + A′] (mutual coordination)	 *"Me:"I"/"I":"Me" & "Us":"We"/"We":"Us"* *and* *"We:"Us"/"Us":"We" & "I":"Me"/"Me":"I"*

It should be noted that the model presented in Table 1 assumes that A, B, C and D are primary dispositions, while A′, B′, C′ and D′ are secondary. <u>Mutual</u> coordination means that assimilatory and accommodatory operations occur together, either cognitively and/or culturally.

It is conjectured that at Stage 4, cognitive-cultural maturity, the 'I'-'Me' cognitive-cultural dynamic is fully combined and mutually coordinated within and without and, similarly, that the 'Us'-'We' cultural-cognitive dynamic is also fully combined and mutually coordinated within and without.

For discussion purposes I hereunder separate out "I" from "Me", and Us' from "We", though in principle and in actuality they are wholly and systemically interrelated.

First, the development of "Me", as a cognate, assimilatory phenomenon follows Robert Selman's (1980) model of social perspective taking and coordination. The following table outlines that model (with cross-cultural revision).

It is claimed that the development of "Me' is assimilatory because it entails a cognitive ability for progressively greater levels of <u>generalisation</u>, to the level of societal/cultural perspective taking and coordination.

Table 2: Social Perspective Taking & Coordination: Development of "Me"
(after Selman , 1980)

Stage	Properties
0: Undifferentiated	Own (or other), 1st person, perspective taken only. No social perspective taking.
1: 1st and 2nd person perspectives taken	Own, (or other) 1st person, perspective and other's (or one's own), 2nd person, perspective taken but not competently coordinated
2: 1ST and 2nd perspectives generalised	1ST and 2nd (own & other) perspectives taken and reciprocally but not mutually coordinated
3: 3RD party perspective	3RD party perspective taking, facilitating mutual coordination of 1ST & 2nd party, own and other, perspectives
4: Societal/Cultural perspective	Mutual coordination of societal/cultural (3rd party) perspectives

It should also be noted that perspective coordination for "Me" construct development in Table 2 should not be confused with ego and

'cult' coordination in Table 1. Social perspective taking is a social-cognitive, **individual level** process and phenomenon, while assimilation and accommodation in the cognitive and cultural levels are both (respectively) **individual and group level** processes and phenomena.

Following Piaget (1985) it is proposed that "Me" development involves *decentration* from ego or alter-centricity to societal/cross-cultural perspective taking and coordination, through the operation of G. H. Mead's (1934) generalised other (3rd party perspective).

Second, it is argued that the "I", as a cognate (personality/structural) accommodatory phenomenon, develops through role-play/role enactment and internalised role expectations & cognate socio-cultural values (c.f., Keats, 1986).

The following provides an operationalisation of the proposed developmental, stage-related process.

It is claimed in this paper that the development of "I' is accommodatory because it entails a cognitive (structural) process of progressive <u>personalisation</u> ("I am" personal identity statements).

Furthermore, following Kurt Lewin (1935), it is proposed that "I" development involves the personality (affilio-affective) process of *detachment*, as the person develops social-psychological security through a dynamic, multifaceted self-system.

Table 3: Role play/enactment and the development of detached "I"

Stage	Example
0: Attachment, without role-play	Infant attachment to mother mediates "good feelings of cleanliness", at washing times
1: Beginnings of ego security and role play	Role of "clean self" develops as child starts to 'play' (wash) separate from parent/s at bath times
2: Role play continues and social conventions & expectations begin to be implicitly internalised and specifically but not generally applied across social occasions	Importance of "good hygiene/dress presentation" is acquired through role-enactment at specific "socially important times", such as "going to church" or "going to school"
3: Role play develops such that own culture social norms are internalised and are, therefore, generally applied across own culture social situations	The norm of being "clean/hygienic, well groomed & fashionably dressed" is internalised & understood, through role enactment & experience of own culture social situations
4: Secure/Detached "I" with capacity for socio-cultural (including cross-cultural) understanding of role expectations & experiences	For example, "I" as a 'dandy' (well-presented person, socially) in own and other cultures is understood, including through hypothetico-deduction regarding unfamiliar contexts and "absorption" regarding familiar contexts

Third, it is contended that the "Us" develops explicitly as a cultural identity construct primarily through behavioural experience of culture level expectations, including through social learning (Bandura, 1977), group dynamics (Muzafer Sherif etal, 1961) and social identification processes (Tajfel & Turner, 1979 on social identity theory). In particular, "Us" develops with reference to the socio-cultural expectations of significant others such as parents and peers. As a result, the person acquires 'the particulars' of what it means to be one of 'Us' (e.g., as an 'Australian').

Fourth, it is conjectured that the sense of "We" develops implicitly, osmotically as a cultural group phenomenon. In general, feelings and experiences of 'We' are acquired from culture level experience of group dynamics, especially with reference to primary socio-cultural and lifespan developmental contexts (or 'cults') as "home" and "school"/"work". Developed to maturity, 'We'-ness conveys and involves a socio-cultural understanding of why it is important to belong to one's cultural group/s (e.g. 'We' as Australians look after one another/one's 'mates' and this is important for coping and resilience in times of adversity).

Table 4: Development of the cultural construct of "Us"

Stage	Example
0: Undifferentiated	Experience of group behaviour without cultural construal
1: Own group conceptualised	Significant others impart the characteristics identifying primary cultural groups (e.g., sharing is a key characteristic of what it means to be a member of *our family*)
2:In-group & out-group dynamics construed singularly	The person develops the notions of "Us" and "Them", but applies them simply & singularly to basic cultural units/contexts (eg., the "Greens" versus "Golds", Blues" & "Reds" at school athletic carnivals)
3: In-group & out-group multiply construed	The person develops the notions that they can belong to multiple and overlapping cultural groups, e.g., as a "Christian", "Conservative", "Online ebay user", "Marketeer", "Generation Y", "Anglo-Celtic Australian" …
4: Cross-cultural construal of "Us"	The person no longer relies primarily on significant others to delineate cultural group characteristics but develops expectations of cultural groups based on experience and inference, including the ability to construe "Us" cross-culturally (e.g., "foreigners" from Thai and Australian perspectives). Also at stage 4, persons are able to apply superordinate goal concepts and cooperative relations to overcome lower level "Us" v "Them" conflicts (c.f., Muzafer Sherif, the Robbers Cave Experiment)

Table 5: Development of the cultural sense of "We"

Stage	Example
0: Undifferentiated	Global feelings of parent-child togetherness but no social understanding of social belonging – esp., of 'home'
1: Family belonging	Understanding that one belongs to a family unit, distinct from other families
2: Social belonging, specifically	Understanding of belonging in specific/local "social units", especially one's school, sport teams, church, clubs
3: Social belonging, broadly	Understanding of belonging to broader socio-cultural units such as one's homeland (national culture)
4: Socio-cultural belonging, with cross-cultural integration	Understanding that different cultures have different as well as overlapping senses of belonging ranging across local to broad socio-cultural units

Conclusions

It now remains for all or part of the theoretical modelling to be tested empirically. Of course, for those researchers not inclined to investigate the stage-based developmental issues, they may consider Stage 3 & 4 behaviours as described herein - as those most relevant to the adult population.

As well, the model expounded upon in this paper entertains individual and group level behaviour of relevance to cross-cultural empirical and theoretical research.

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