

**A Summary of**  
**Between Cultures : Developing Self-Identity in a World of Diversity**  
*by Associate Professor Jacqueline Wasilewski (ICU)*  
*delivered on December 18, 1997*

In *Between Cultures: Developing Identity in a World of Diversity* (H.Ned Seelye and J.H. Wasilewski, NTC Publishing Group, 1996), my co-author, H. Ned Seelye, and I address the issue of multicultural identity. The fundamental question is the representation of self, of how to communicate one's reality to others, so that identity and experience are socially affirmed. Very often the multicultural person is the only one with their particular background in a group of people, the proverbial Ugly Duckling, the only "goose" in a flock of "ducks." Lack of social affirmation is a chief source of feelings of inauthenticity among multicultural people.

Metaphor, the power to make pictures in other people's minds, is related to the ability to convey effectively one's own story in social space. Up until now the major metaphors in English for referring to multicultural experience made the condition of being multicultural sound like a disease: fragmented ("a half"), marginal ("at home nowhere"), somehow chaotic and incoherent. The best existing vocabulary for multicultural experience is that of the theater with the idea that all the world is a stage and that an actor can play many parts and still be an authentic person.

In Part I of the book we examine, first, the conventional categories of identity: bloodlines, nationality, ethnicity, race, linguistic group and culture itself. Next, we elaborate on the "disease" and "theatrical" metaphors used to describe the multicultural state. In Part II, we explore alternative metaphors from many sources: spiritual and scientific metaphors, diamond-like metaphors that emphasize the faceted nature of life, those that emphasize life as a quest, metaphors of pure imagination, the metaphor of the kaleidoscope and the idea of polyphony. At the end of the book each

reader has a chance to do an exercise and create their own personal metaphor. There are also examples of metaphors that other multicultural people have created using the exercise. (Water is a favorite metaphor because of its two simultaneous characteristics of flexibility and coherence.)

This book is written for the person who is struggling with constructing an identity in a very diverse world. To use a medical metaphor, the book is written for the patient, not for the doctor. It is hoped that upon reading this book a Sri Lankan, Japanese or an Irish, French-Canadian, Welsh, English, Cherokee-Indian, Danish, Swiss person like myself will more effectively be able to represent themselves in our common social space.

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