

PART 2

INTERSECTIONAL
identity.

THE
MULTIDIMENSIONAL
SELF

A
POV BY



AHZUL
BE INSPIRED.™

FEBRUARY 2026



Welcome back to the second installment of Ahzul's Cultural Fluidity series.

In **Part 1**, we established the principle of **Cultural Fluidity**: the reality that culture is an active, living force rather than a static bucket. We learned that individuals move fluidly between cultural mindsets based on their environment. But to stop there is to see only half the picture.

As we revealed in our introduction to this series, a consumer's cultural identity doesn't exist in a vacuum. It is in constant dialogue with the other roles they play.

- ✦ THIS BRINGS US TO THE SECOND PIECE OF THE PUZZLE:



INTERSECTIONAL
identity.





Beyond the Cultural Label: Understanding the Dialogue Within

If **Cultural Fluidity** describes how culture moves,

INTERSECTIONAL

identity

describes *what* moves with it.

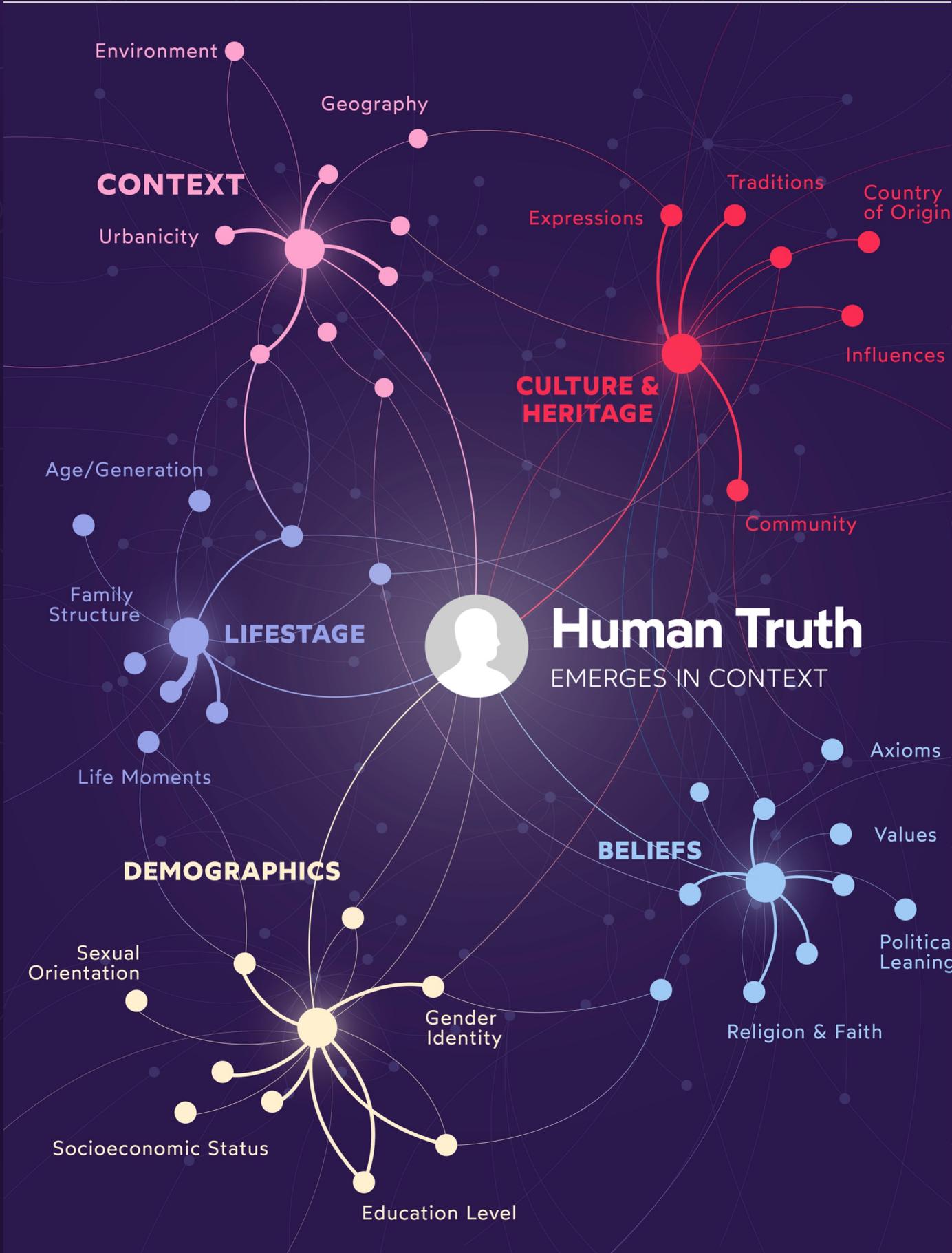
Understandably, marketing has traditionally relied on singular labels to classify multicultural groups, such as "Hispanic," "Asian," or "Black / African American." But, in reality, consumers today rarely fall cleanly under just one of those labels.

In today's current Multicultural spectrum, consumers' cultural thread is woven into a more nuanced & somewhat complex tapestry of other defining factors.

As highlighted in Part 1, identity is a living ecosystem comprised of **multiple layers, including:**

- PARENTAL STATUS & FAMILY COMPOSITION
- PRODUCTIVE ENDEAVORS, CAREER & PROFESSIONAL AMBITION
- GENDER IDENTIFICATION
- LOCATION (GEOGRAPHY)
- RELIGION, VALUES & BELIEFS
- PASSIONS, HOBBIES & INTERESTS







INTERSECTIONAL identity.

suggests that these layers are not separate silos; they are in constant “conversation.” A consumer isn’t just balancing “American / Mainstream” culture vs. their Heritage culture.

They are navigating the intersection of being, for example...

- A *Hispanic mother* living in the *suburbs* who is not only part of the PTA, but is also a passionate cook, an amateur runner, and a professionally driven community leader.
- An *Asian male* who lives in NYC and spends most of his time growing his business, practicing his faith, connects with his family back home and roots for the Yankees.
- An *African American* student in her early 20s who attends university in Indiana and spends part of her time with her sorority sisters, while volunteering at a local animal shelter with aspirations of becoming a veterinarian, and is a passionate photographer of wildlife.
- An *LGBTQ* male living in LA, who is passionate about body building, is a consummate uncle to his nephew who lives in South America, loves travel, and works as a consultant professionally.





The Multiplier Effect in Action

Why does this distinction matter? Because these intersections create unique perspectives that a single cultural label cannot capture. When we look closer at the "dialogue" between these roles, we find that culture isn't always the loudest voice in the room.

➔ CASE 1:

The Gender Driver (Youth Mental Health)

Question we were meant to answer:

How can we effectively tailor mental health PSA materials for multicultural youth to increase engagement and encourage them to seek support?

What we Found:

In our work exploring youth mental health, we found that **gender** often shaped the consumer experience more than culture or ethnicity. We observed that teen boys - whether they were white, Black/African American, Hispanic or Asian - shared a profound reluctance to be vulnerable that they did not share with female counterparts of their own cultural background. In this intersection, the role of "young male" interacts with cultural expectations to create a specific barrier that a broad "multicultural youth" strategy might miss.

Implication for our Client + Our Recommendation Based on the Insights:

In this space, a broad "multicultural" lens only is insufficient because gender norms regarding vulnerability and norms of communication pose a stronger barrier than ethnic differences. Addressing a teen boy's cultural background without addressing the specific "young male" stigma toward mental health would likely result in the message being tuned out. As a result, we helped the client uncover gender-based norms for each audience that could be used as insights for creative development - bringing BOTH facets into play.





➔ CASE 2:

The Individual-First Intersection

Question we were meant to answer:

How can we engage with younger consumers in a way that feels authentic to their lived experience, rather than just their heritage?

What we Found:

Across the board, we have been seeing an **"individual-first" intersection**, particularly among Gen Z and younger consumers. These consumers **possess a strong sense of self where individual passions, values and interests take the lead in their identity and decision making**, over other factors - like their cultural background. That is not to say that their culture is absent or unimportant; rather, it is one piece of who they are, but not necessarily the biggest piece. For this group, their "headline" is defined by their chosen identifiers - be it career, parenthood, passions or other communities they belong to - while their heritage provides the texture/background/context. To avoid feeling out of touch with this segment of consumers, brands would be wise to speak to their individual "headline" first, while culture can support the narrative, without driving it.

Implication for our Client + Our Recommendation Based on the Insights:

While heritage culture is foundational, not all multicultural consumers lead with it; for some, culture serves as 'background texture' rather than a primary identity driver. Because their decision-making is more heavily influenced by individual passions and values, hyper-targeted cultural creative efforts can often feel disconnected from their lived experience. We recommended reaching this specific audience through passion-driven communications with a broad cultural reach - to talk them where they feel truly seen & understood - through their passions & other community ties.





APPLYING INTERSECTIONAL identity to Research & Strategy

In our view, understanding this dialogue changes how we approach research and strategy. It requires moving beyond standard demographics to ensure we aren't flattening multidimensional humans into two-dimensional stats.

We make this actionable by:

FINDING THE RIGHT CONSUMERS TO BRING EACH INTERSECTION TO LIFE:

We recruit based on what makes sense for the specific category and business question. While there are times when finding consumers strictly by cultural cohort is necessary and makes sense, other objectives demand an intersectional approach that gets to the nuances we (and our clients) are looking for - to achieve a more sophisticated and current understanding of consumers today.



QUESTIONING ASSUMPTIONS & DESIGNING ENGAGEMENTS STRATEGICALLY TO GET AT INTERSECTIONALITY:

When we design multicultural engagements for our clients, we do not assume culture is the primary driver of a decision. Instead, we create space for consumers to tell us which part of their identity is taking the wheel at that moment - all looking to get closer to how they truly see themselves. This reveals what makes them tick when it comes to products and services - and how they want to be communicated to (and addressed) by the brands & companies who offer them.





The Strategic Imperative

Recognizing Intersectional Identity allows brands to move from broad multicultural targeting to a more resonant, human-centric connection.

It moves the strategic goalpost from "How do brands reach multicultural audiences?" to "**How do brands connect with the different aspects of these multilayered consumers' identity?**"

By understanding that **culture is one piece of a larger puzzle**, brands can see a fuller, more nuanced & colorful side of their consumers - and can recognize that their choices are influenced not only by where they come from, but by who they are today—as people.

➔ WHAT'S NEXT: The Power of Situation

- We now understand that identity is **Fluid** (active and changing) and Intersectional (layered and multidimensional). But what triggers the shift between these different layers?
-
-

IN THE THIRD INSTALLMENT OF THIS SERIES, WE WILL EXPLORE "THE POWER OF SITUATION," ANALYZING HOW CONTEXT DETERMINES WHICH ELEMENTS OF A PERSON'S IDENTITY COME TO THE FOREFRONT AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT.



INTERSECTIONAL
identity.



Johana M. Gomez

johana@ahzul.com
PRINCIPAL



Holly Mourgues

holly@ahzul.com
SVP STRATEGY STUDIO



AHZUL
BE INSPIRED.™