Theoretical Background

The majority of social psychological papers on national identity have been concerned with social identity theory (SCT) and self-categorisation theory (SCT). The theories are presented here as tools which enable researchers to explore the role that identity is based on self-definition as a group member and the values and connotations attached to it. SCT proposes that individuals strive to maintain a positive social identity, by favourably evaluating their ingroups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Further elaboration came from the development of self-categorisation theory (SCT). SCT suggests that when social identity becomes more important than personal identity, the second is instrumental, and is depersonalised – they view themselves as more similar to prototypical members of their category (Oakes, Haslam & Turner, 1994). It is particularly important to bear in mind that identity within SCT is fluid and dynamic, and very much context dependent. Individuals can be seen as different in one context (e.g. Asian and White Britons as members of different religions) but when they categorise themselves in another context (e.g. Asian and White Britons as citizens) they choose to identify with both groups.

National Identity

It has been suggested that there are two models of the nation – civic and ethnic (Smith, 1991). The civic model is based on a political community in which its members are brought together with all the legal and civic rights of citizenship, irrespective of ethnic background. The ethnic model, on the other hand, is based primarily on ancestry and an idea of common descent and kinship of group members. However, in the majority of social psychological papers on national identity, the focus is on both cultural and political aspects of the nation's identity, and is relatively clear.

New findings of research into national identity show that this is not the case. National identity is based on a complex set of characteristics, and is a dynamic construct. It is influenced by a variety of factors, such as the individual's self-categorisation, their perception of their own identity, and their perception of their own group.

Social Identity Threat

Looking at social identity threat also allows researchers to understand how and why people feel that they belong to different groups. Social identity threat is when group distinctiveness is threatened, and can lead to a decrease in group members' sense of belonging. Social identity threat is when a group is perceived to be less distinct, or to be losing its distinctiveness. This can happen when a group is perceived to be losing its political, cultural, or religious identity. In such situations, people may feel that they are being excluded, or that they are no longer a part of the group.

National Identity Threat

Jacobson (1997) interviewed young British Pakistanis in order to understand the nature of their national identity. It was found that for this particular group of South Asians, national identity did not have the same importance as political identity. The boundaries of this identity were identified as the ‘live’, ‘race’, and ‘cultural’ boundaries. The first refers to British as a political entity, and is based on citizenship. The second refers to ‘race’ in the way that it is perceived by most members of minority groups, and is relatively clear. The third refers to ‘cultural’ boundaries, and is based on shared values, such as language and religion. These boundaries are important because they define who is considered to be part of the group, and who is not.

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and a research diary was developed to analyse the interviewees' responses. A total of fifteen participants were used for this study and included eight British Indians, four male and four female, and seven British Pakistanis, four male and three female. Each interview focused on the participants' self-categorisation, and included open-ended questions on the dimensions of identity, personality, and the cultural heritage, language or established religion of Britain. Alternatively, it may have been perceived as a way to defend their identity and their position within the group.

Discussion and Results

Threat

The respondents were found to draw upon three different perspectives of threat: of white British people, of people from their own ethnic group, and of their own self-categorisation as British.

One respondent replied: "you know, that's the thing. When people do sit in my car and they say 'where do you come from?', I say I was born here and they say 'no, no, no, you must be Asian', and I'm like 'no, I know my parents are from Pakistan, but they still felt a minority, and there was a powerful need to differentiate from the rest of the world. It was felt that being British fundamentally meant being white.'

The respondents felt that that they were not accepted as British because they did not fit into the racial category of being British, or more specifically, that they did not represent the prototypical British person. In one respect, the respondents felt a threat that they were not categorised or accepted into the British category, yet in another, they felt a threat to the value of their ethnic identity. This was because they felt that white Britons may not necessarily understand their practices or family obligations that played a central role in their lives. As a result, a many respondents preferred to think of themselves as the importance of their ethnic ingroup and the British white group to derogate.

Within the home, there was interplay with British and ethnic identities in order to be culturally more oriented', and as another male respondent said: 'I mean I know my parents are from Pakistan, but it doesn't matter if you're from Pakistan or India, um, being Muslim, I'm Muslim first.'

Finally, the participants' own categorisation as British revealed the heterogeneity of the group. A Pakistani respondent who had lived in England for many years explained that he was felt that they were not British because they did not fit into the racial category of being British. Although mentioned only by two of the respondents, members of the Pakistani group were seen as wanting to be 'white'. They would not necessarily be categorised into their own ethnic groups (at school in particular), as the idea of biculturalism was uncommon. The term 'coconut' was used to highlight the idea of someone who wanted to be white, but was seen as Asian because of their skin colour only (‘browned on the outside, white on the inside’).

The fluid and contextual nature of identities was a major theme in the data. According to SCT, individuals may respond differently when engaged in intragroup comparisons, whereas when they are engaged in intergroup comparisons, individuals may be more likely to enact stereotypes. The most common finding was the divide between private, intimate, and family contexts, and private, public, and social contexts. Some went so far as to say that they had a ‘split person’ identity, being both within the home and their lives outside the home.

Private spheres

Within the home, there was interplay with national, ethnic and religious identities. Many of the Indian respondents said that the home was a constant reminder of their ethnic identity. The immediate environment served as a frame of reference within which the participants were able to categorise themselves in terms of their religious or ethnic background.

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Boundaries of Britishness in British Indians and Pakistanis

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Individuals would feel discriminated (pp 35-58).

Social Identity

Banal Nationalism


Cardiff:

Respondents would talk of their whole family 'we' or the 'home country'. There was also a sports yielded responses such as supporting 'our

nation together. But supporting England was also terms of the support or attachment that may be

The context of sport played an important role in

an Indian-born Indian seemed based on lifestyle

boundaries such as Jacobson's 'cultural' boundary.

Boundaries of being British

Race and culture

A model of the boundaries of being British can be
derived from the data. The boundaries described
here will consist live to Jacobson's (1997) civic,
racial and cultural boundaries of Britishness.
However, additional boundaries are also posited, as
well as some which may help to unravel the
complex and problematic nature of some
boundaries such as Jacobson's 'cultural' boundary.

The Racial Boundary

This exclusive boundary refers to a racial model of
the nation. It encompasses the view that Britishness
is a white ancestry. In other words, for this category,
To be British is to be 'white'. This boundary appeared in
exclusively terms of race and indeed the view that
British, based on their skin colour and racial
background, which usually prompts questions
such as 'where do you come from?'.

The Historical Boundary

Although this boundary was mentioned by only
respondents, it is nevertheless a very important
boundary. People may need a national, historical
or other kind of boundary to enable them to
be able to develop a national identity, or perhaps to
hold a more emotional attachment to the nation.
However, it is possible that these British Asian
respondents felt excluded from Britain's history.
As stated previously, an individual's attachment to
Britain and their parents' countries of origin, and a
sense of identification with the older generation.

I don't have any respect for British culture in the
sense that they tend not to acknowledge other
countries, and historically they've
invasion, conquest, or even mythological story about the
nation to be

The Civic/State Boundary

This boundary is based on citizenship, being
born in Britain and place of domicile only. The idea
of being British stems only as far as acknowledging
one's role in helping to develop and

importantly, it has significant implications for the
multicultural conception of Britishness, and
amongst ethnic super-diversity: the respondents may be using
creativity strategies, the respondents may be using

The Racial Boundary

Racism was not seen as a major issue anymore,
due to the current culturally diverse state of most urban
conquests. Respondents recognised that racialised people were seen as
'resmall minority of people who were ignored and narrow-minded.

Boundaries of Britishness

The contextual importance of the support or attachment that may be

to the nation. The same respondent also said:

'society's become so multicultural that the

that Englishness has been redefined in terms of the
urban, while Britishness (at least within London) has
been redefined in terms of ethnic super-diversity:

Everything is so culturally diverse that you get
lost in it, and you really don't know what it is,
and you can't understand them. It's
the country-bumpkin kind, where there is a lot of
English English culture, whereas, you know that Britishness

Interviewer- So what do you think Britishness is about?

'society's become so multicultural that the

'What does it mean to be British?'

'mean I was young, naive, and I was like 11, 12

'MULTICULTURALISM: The idea of multiculturalism means
that Englishness has been redefined in terms of the
urban, while Britishness (at least within London) has
been redefined in terms of ethnic super-diversity:

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