

# Ethnic minority children's cultural practices and patterns of national and ethnic identification

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To date, acculturation has only been studied extensively amongst adolescents and adults. The present research brings together two distinct research traditions, namely research into acculturation (Berry, 1997; Hutnik, 1991) and research into the development of ethnic attitudes in children (Aboud, 1988; Nesdale, 1999). A qualitative study was conducted with the aim of exploring the relationship between children's ethnic identifications and acculturation styles. Thirty two children aged 7-11 years old from a variety of Asian ethnic minority backgrounds in London were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule regarding their ethnic identifications, family, school, friends, role models, religion, travel and experiences of prejudice, and their cultural tastes in music, food, TV, movies, clothing and sport. The interview transcripts were analysed using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The findings reveal the dynamic nature of children's ethnic minority identity, its relationship to the dominant culture, and the multiple acculturation strategies which ethnic minority group children are able to use in different contexts.

## Multiple Identities

In general, children appear to possess a variety of cross-cutting identities which vary in importance and meaning but **do** appear to fit together unproblematically.

Children held a range of identities such as:

- Personal
- Ethnic
- Superordinate Ethnic
- Religious
- London
- English
- British
- European

*(Interviewer) Would you describe yourself as Pakistani or not?*

*(A1) Yeah definitely. Pakistani the most, then English, then British (age 11)*

## Emerging Core Categories of Ethnic Identification and Acculturation

### Contextual Influences on Identity

This category describes the fluid and contextual nature of identities as they are experienced:

- In the home (the private sphere)
- In school (a public sphere)
- When with friends

The most common finding was the divide between the public and private spheres of the children lives.

#### HOME (PRIVATE SPHERE)

*(Interviewer) When you are at home, which card best describes how you feel?*

*(A23) Iranian because most of the time we speak Iranian, we watch Iranian channels sometimes and our house feels Iranian, the style (age 9)*

#### SCHOOL (PUBLIC SPHERE)

*(Interviewer) When you are at school, which card best describes how you feel?*

*(R4) Um, I think it's English because most of the time you speak English at school and we have English lessons and all those things, I think it's English the best (age 7)*

### Cultural Practices

This category describes children's behaviours and preferences in relationship to:

- Music
- Films
- TV
- Dress
- Food
- Sports
- Religion
- Travel

#### DRESS

*(Interviewer) What sort of clothes do you like to wear?*

*(A17) I prefer English clothes but my mum likes to get me into Asian clothes. My dad isn't fussed (age 11)*

#### FOOD

*(Interviewer) What sort of foods do you like to eat?*

*(J5) I prefer English food, I'm not really used to spicy food actually. It's quite weird for me, but I do have a lot of Asian food (age 8)*

## Living in a Multicultural Environment

Living in a multicultural environment refers to how the children related to the multicultural nature and setting of the city of London and of the school the children attended. The two sub-categories were:

- Knowledge
- Racism

#### KNOWLEDGE

*(Interviewer) Are there a lot of English children in your class?*

*(T8) Not very many. Most of them are Muslim, many are Egyptian, many are Ukraine. Oh there's only one Ukrainian. Some from Japan and China...it's a mixed culture this school (age 7)*

#### RACISM

*(Interviewer) Have you ever experienced racism?*

*(A11) No. It happened to them. My mum and dad, this man started screaming at my mum and started swearing at them.....I forgot the word.....but you don't belong here ... go back to where you came from because my mum wears a scarf...(age 10)*

Ethnic Background of Children

