

Acculturation Processes in White English Ethnic Majority Group Children

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This poster reports a qualitative study which was conducted to explore white English majority group children's identifications and acculturation styles. To date, acculturation has been primarily studied amongst adolescents and adults rather than children, and has focused mainly on members of immigrant minority groups rather than members of the host majority group.

Various models have been developed to describe acculturation. Theoretical conceptualization has shifted from a unidimensional assimilation model to the recognition that acculturation is a complex, multifaceted process. Berry (1997, 2001) has developed a four-fold model of acculturation strategies (integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation), while other theorists such as Bourhis et al. (1997) and Coleman (2001) have proposed five-fold and six-fold acculturation models, respectively. However, many minority individuals do not live within bicultural societies, as these various models assume. In many locations (such as London, where the data for the present study were collected), they live within multicultural societies in which many different ethnic groups reside alongside one another. In addition, it should not be assumed that acculturation is only experienced by minority individuals; particularly within multicultural contexts, the majority group can also undergo significant change and adaptation in response to intercultural contact (Rudmin, 2003).

The present study was novel in several respects: the participants were children rather than adolescents or adults, and were members of the white English ethnic majority group rather than of ethnic minority groups; the focus of the study was on the children's understanding and personal appropriation of the cultural practices of the many different ethnic minority groups which it is possible to encounter in London; and a grounded theory methodology was employed in order to explore in depth how these children subjectively construed their own identifications and acculturation patterns.

Twelve white English children aged 7-11 years old who attended multi-ethnic schools in London were interviewed, using a semi-structured interview schedule. The questions examined the children's spontaneous self-categorizations, identifications, the possible context-dependence of their self-categorizations and identifications (particularly when with family, at school, and with friends), and the balance between their cultural practices based on ethnic minority cultures, English culture and global culture (particularly in the domains of music, food, TV, movies, clothing, sport, role models and religion). The children's perceptions of multiculturalism, prejudice and racial discrimination were also examined.

The findings revealed the complex patterns of the children's identifications, which sometimes varied according to context and situation, and their active involvement with and relationship to minority cultures and global youth culture.

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Multiple Identities

In general, the children possessed a variety of cross-cutting identities which varied in importance and meaning but fitted together unproblematically and without conflict.

These identities included:

- Personal
- English
- British
- Christian
- London
- European

(Interviewer) Would you describe yourself as English or not?

(C4) English, because I am from England and I am English. It's important to me because I don't know what I'd do without being English (age 7)

(Interviewer) Would you describe yourself as British or not?

(F7) Yeah, basically because pretty much everyone in my family is British (age 9)

A common finding was the stability in the children's national identifications as English across both the private (e.g. in the home) and public (e.g. at school) spheres of their lives. However, some of the children did report differences in their identifications in different spheres:

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

(B3) Christian, because like whenever there's something on, sometimes I pray, and whenever there's stuff on about God I watch it at night

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

(B3) [Chooses English] Coz we watch a lot of English videos and stuff, we do a lot of English stuff. We don't watch any other videos (age 11)

Cultural Practices

This category describes children's behaviours and preference in terms of:

- Music
- Dress
- Food
- Sports
- Religion

MUSIC

(Interviewer) What sort of music do you like to listen to?

(J9) Eminem and things like that (age 8)

(Interviewer) What sort of music do you like to listen to?

(R1) The Black Eyed Peas

(Interviewer) Do you ever listen to any other types of music?

(R1) Sometimes like when I do a dance with my Indian friend, we were going to do a talent show so we had to do like an Indian dance (age 11)

(Interviewer) Which do you prefer English or other forms of music?

(A2) American, because most of the rappers are American. I like Eminem mostly because he talks about real things and so does Fifty Cent (age 10)

CLOTHES

(Interviewer) Do you like to dress in foreign clothes or have you ever dressed in foreign clothes?

(R1) I have two lengas at home. I wear those if it's a special occasion or something (age 11)

(Interviewer) Do you like to dress in foreign clothes or have you ever dressed in foreign clothes?

(F7) Um I once did this Indian dance and I bought some Indian clothes. It was this club I went to and I did a competition (age 9)

FOOD

(Interviewer) Do you prefer English food or other types of food?

(C4) Chinese and English, sometimes I have a bit Of both, coz I like it (age 7)

(Interviewer) Do you prefer English food or other types of food?

(B3) Mostly other types of food like Chinese and Indian (age 11)

Living in a Multicultural Environment

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

- Cultural knowledge
- Celebrating diversity
- School spirit
- Circle of friends
- Racism

CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

(Interviewer) What other groups of children are there in your class?

(J5) Icelandic, Japanese, Jamaican, and a boy left, erm, erm, Italian, Moroccan (age 10)

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

(Interviewer) How do you feel about people from different parts of the world all living together in Britain?

(G11) It's just quite different, it doesn't bother me, I think let's be friends, Black people should not be treated differently to white. That's my reason (age 7)

SCHOOL SPIRIT

(Interviewer) How would you describe the school?

(F7) Err well it's kind of quite multicultural and well I quite like the fact that it's multicultural (age 9)

CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

(Interviewer) Who are your friends?

(F7) My closest friends are CC, her dad's from Africa, she's half black half white, then there's Chloe, she's just English, I've got like a wider group of friends, Sachini, she's from Sri Lanka and there's Alexia she's from Spain (age 9)