

Boundaries of Britishness in British Indians and Pakistanis

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Theoretical Background

The majority of social psychological papers on national identity have been concerned with social identity theory (SIT) and self-categorisation theory (SCT). The theories are presented here as tools which may help to guide the data analysis. Social identity is based on self-definition as a group member and the values and connotations attached to it. SIT 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 proposes that when social identity becomes more important than personal identity, individuals become 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-dependant. Individuals can be seen as different in one context (e.g. Asian and White Britons as members of different religions), but then can be re-categorised and seen as similar in another context (e.g. Asian and White Britons as British citizens).

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 a common descent of its members. Smith also suggests that there are five fundamental features of a national identity, with different subsets emphasised in the civic vs. ethnic models. These are (i) an historic territory, or homeland, (ii) common myths and historical memories, (iii) a common mass public culture, (iv) common legal rights and duties for all members, and (v) a common economy with territorial mobility for members. As well as these features, Barrett (in press) suggests additional features. Some of these are cognitive, such as categorising oneself as part of a national group, knowledge of national emblems, beliefs about common descent and kinship of group members, and beliefs about group characteristics/traits of the national group. Barrett also identifies affective components of national identity, such as the subjective importance of the identity to the individual, and the emotional attachment to the national group.

In relation to the affective features of national identity, Kelman (1997) suggests that people may display two types of attachments. The first is *sentimental*, where the attachment is emotional and people feel that the group reflects their personal identity. The second is *instrumental*, and is focussed more on the idea of the nation meeting needs, interests and obligations that accompany citizenship and membership of the national group.

Social Identity Threat

Looking at social identity threat also allows researchers to understand what types of strategies group members may use to attain a positive social identity. Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears and Doosje (1999) identify four types of threat related to social identity. *Categorisation threat* is being categorised against one's will; *distinctiveness threat* is where group distinctiveness is prevented or undermined; *value threat* is where the group's value is undermined on the dimensions of competence and morality; and *acceptance threat* is where one's position within the group is undermined.

British National Identity

Jacobson (1997) interviewed young British Pakistani adults to investigate their notions of Britishness. It was found that for this particular group of South Asians, national identity did not have a fixed content, but was in fact related to 'boundaries'. The three boundaries identified were the 'civic', 'racial' and 'culture' boundaries. The first

refers to Britain as a political entity, and is based on citizenship. In this way, it encompasses most members of minority groups, and is relatively clear-cut. The second, the 'racial' boundary, defined those with a British ancestry as being British. Britishness is inevitably seen as a matter of having ancestral roots, and consequently, being 'white', making it difficult for visible minorities to identify within this boundary. The final boundary, which is the cultural boundary, defined Britishness as 'those individuals whose behaviour, lifestyle and values are perceived as typically British' (p.193). This is a fairly problematic boundary, as British culture may be viewed in different ways, e.g. being attached to the cultural heritage, language or established religion of Britain. Alternatively, it may mean to have knowledge of famous British people, modes of dress and speech, or to be familiar with political and social institutions.

Jacobson's findings reveal that although British Pakistani respondents support integration and adopting various aspects of a British life, they often find themselves in conflict with their parents' ideals and their own religious/ethnic practices. Ballard (1994) also argues that, for the British-born generation, conforming to parents' expectations within the home may be fairly easy, but can get particularly difficult when outside the home. Most importantly of all, there was an overwhelming view that they still felt a minority, and there was a powerful notion held by many of the respondents that being British fundamentally meant being 'white'.

Modood et al. (1997) found that a broadening of ethnic labels had developed, and second generation Asians in particular, had taken to adopting hybrid identities, e.g. 'British-Bangladeshi', showing and expressing the impact of both cultures on their lives. Only a handful of the second generation respondents felt alienated or removed from British culture because it seemed not interested in values pertaining to the family, religion and community. What is apparent in the interviews, however, is the idea of acceptance from the white Britons; despite being culturally British, it was felt that the attitudes of white people may act as a barrier against the respondents calling themselves 'British'.

For many of the South Asian and Caribbean respondents, as with those in the Jacobson (1997) study, citizenship (i.e. holding a British passport) was important in identifying as British, but was not always meaningful because these individuals would never be white. Acceptance of being British, it seemed, lay primarily in the unreasonable demand of having to give up the parent culture as a response to colour exclusion. Another important observation was that South Asians would identify with aspects of British society, whilst rejecting the idea of 'being British'. Modood et al. (1994) argue that this is because they actively participate in important aspects of British society, yet reserve the term 'British' for the features that they cannot, or feel that they are not allowed to, identify with. Second generation South Asians argued for a more bi-cultural view of their identities, but were also aware that there was often a need to minimise their ethnic identities in order to be culturally more accepted as British (Modood et al., 1994).

These findings are also echoed in the extensive work carried out by Ghuman (2003), who used both quantitative and qualitative measures to study the identities of South Asian adolescents in Britain, Australia, the USA and Canada. Participants favoured behaviours and attitudes that promoted integration as well as maintaining aspects of their ethnic heritage. However, they disagreed with old-fashioned and 'backward' behaviours that were often expected by their parents. In general, the participants seemed to favour biculturalism and sought to create new and innovative identities that encompassed the best of both ethnic and national identities. Ballard (1994) argues that just as bilingual individuals use 'code-switching' and can fluently move from one language to another, the same can be said for culture. People will use different combinations of cultures, according to the specific contexts or situations they find themselves in. A dilemma or conflict they may face, however, is not necessarily derived from the fact that they participate in these different arenas, but because these arenas may view each other negatively.

This study aimed to explore what it means to be British from the perspective of young adult British Indians and Pakistanis.

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and a grounded theory approach was used to analyse the interviewees' responses. A total of fifteen participants were used for this study which included eight British Indians, four male and four female, and seven British Pakistanis, four male and three female. The interview schedule covered items on self-description and categorisation, patriotism, context, sport, multiculturalism, and racism and discrimination.

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.

In the first perspective, many of the respondents felt that they were automatically being categorised by white British people in terms of their Indian or Pakistani background, as opposed to their British identities. This became most apparent when interviewees were asked, "what do you say when someone asks 'where do you come from'?".

'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, we mean where do your parents come from?', and that just shows straight away, just cos I was born here, they won't accept me like that, but they still look at where my parents come from.'

The participants felt that that they were not accepted as British perhaps 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 being 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 British people may not necessarily understand their practices or family obligations that played a central role in their lives. As a result, many responded defensively, preferring to stress the importance of their ethnic ingroup and using the British white group to derogate.

In the second perspective a threat from members of the same ethnic group occurred as a result of mixing with mainly white British friends. Although mentioned only by two of the respondents, members of their own ethnic group would often class them as wanting to be 'white'. They would not necessarily be accepted 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 ('brown on the outside, white on the inside').

Finally, the participants' own categorisation as British revealed the heterogeneity of the group. A Pakistani respondent wore traditional clothes on a daily basis as an attempt to assert her distinctiveness as a Pakistani, and not as a Brit. Feelings of comfort were also mentioned by an Indian female respondent who felt that going to the pub was not natural in comparison to attending religious or cultural events. In this light, British Asians may be excluding themselves from those aspects of being British that they do not feel a part of. To be categorised as British does not necessarily mean having to adopt typically British behaviours for these respondents.

On the other hand, accepting the majority culture and attempting to understand the way of life and culture were encouraged by some of the other respondents. Although the strength of identification with the British group was not measured, high identifiers may attempt to gain acceptance by participating in behaviours seen as typically British (e.g. socialising in the pub), whereas low identifiers may be unlikely to take any course of action as they do not feel the need to be accepted.

Context

The fluid and contextual nature of identities was a major theme in the data. According to SCT, personal identity should be more evident when engaged in intragroup comparisons, whereas social identity should come more into play in intergroup comparative contexts. The most common finding was the divide between private and public spheres of the respondents' lives. Some went so far as to say they had a 'split personality' between their lives 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.

'...the way we talk, we talk Gujarati at home, or we try to... but when my parents are home we all try and speak Gujarati. Um, we eat Indian food... when we go out we eat Indian, um, our upbringing, our parents... You know, it's always, it's always Indian in our house.'

Contrary to the predictions of SCT, the participants had a stronger sense of their ethnic identity within the home, despite being within an intergroup context where there were no outgroup members present as a comparison.

For the Indian participants, religious and ethnic identities were closely related to each other, with little differentiation between the two. However, for the Pakistani respondents, religious aspects of their lives were much more important. The context of home for a Pakistani respondent was seen as more 'religion-oriented', and as another male respondent said:

'...being a Pakistani is one thing, or part of one thing, but basically we're Muslim. So we're Muslim first, it doesn't really matter, 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.'

Public spheres

This idea of a salient Muslim identity was also evident for the Pakistani participants in their public spheres of life. To a certain extent, having a strong Muslim identity was sometimes a barrier for the respondents.

For some, a religious identity often gave guidelines to follow, but did not necessarily act as a conflict in their lives. In an intergroup context, a Muslim identity may be more stable and enduring than a national or ethnic identity.

Previous research has suggested that in comparison to Muslims, Hindu and Sikh adolescents are more likely to integrate into the wider society (Ghuman, 2003). This idea of having a distinct personal and public life did not seem a conflict for most of the Indian participants:

'...the minute you walk through the door into your house, you start associating yourself with Indian culture ... all these little things, you know, it triggers off something in the back of your mind to remind you that you are brought up in an Indian community, culture, so that is like, 'ok, I feel comfortable'. It's the way you were brought up. The minute you walk out of the door, and say, 'I'm going to the pub', it's like 'click', you forget about the other one, your Indian one and you switch into the British one.'

As mentioned by Ballard (1994), conflicts arise when the two cultures view each other negatively or when parents have certain expectations of their British-born offspring. When questioned about whether having two different lifestyles was a problem, an Indian female replied:

'I feel I can switch in and out, but it's usually very seamless, but you know when you try and mix the two, like when you tell your mum or dad that you've gotta go out with friends

from work, and they want you to stay at home and do stuff at home, and it's really difficult because they don't understand that you have to do this stuff... They don't see that we need to have a life outside of the home and socialise with other people cos that's the only way you're gonna go above and beyond what you're doing, in terms of like work and career.'

What seems to be evident in the idea of differences between the private and public spheres of life is that most of the respondents felt a need to be able to change according to the situation and context they found themselves in. Thus, self-categorisation resulted not only from the similarities and differences between one group and another, but also from the individual's own goals, motives and expectations.

Friends

The idea of social circles was also found to be context-dependent. When around white English friends, many felt British or British Indian/Pakistani because it would often bring out behaviours seen as typically British, such as drinking in the pub. Being with friends sharing the same ethnic background allowed the respondents to joke in the same language and feel a connection with each other. They shared more similarities because of their mutual understanding of each others' family life, obligations, and because many went through the same issues.

Holiday

Many participants gave examples of going on holiday as bringing out their British identity. When questioned on holiday about where they came from, many would reply as British and would be perceived as British because of their accents. When meeting people from other countries, the salience of their British identity was rendered prominent, highlighting that they were 'British' Indians and Pakistanis. When visiting their parents' countries of origin, even those who primarily identified within their ethnic or religious background still felt 'different' when in India or Pakistan, highlighting their British identity.

One of the male Indian respondents described his lack of acceptance and belonging in India as well as in Britain:

'If you're in this country, you're seen as a foreigner, whether you're British or not, because of the colour of your skin, that's a fact. If you go to India, you're a foreigner, because of the fact you're from Britain and the way you can tell because you have English ways. So you can't win you know?'

The differences between a British-born Indian and an Indian-born Indian seemed based on lifestyle differences. The predominantly western lifestyle of the British-born respondents seemed to draw attention to their British identities.

Sports

The context of sport played an important role in terms of the support or attachment that may be shown to a nation. Respondents were asked questions relating to cricket, football and the Olympics.

Supporting England in football was regarded as a social event – something which brought the nation together. But supporting England was also linked to the idea of supporting a nation which provided various opportunities that respondents may not have received elsewhere. Some respondents suggested that they supported the players and not the team, and so dissociated themselves from any link to the nation itself. A few respondents mentioned supporting Britain because it represented the diversity of the country today.

Within the context of sport, there was also the idea of an alternative. That is, when questioned as to why participants supported England in football, many replied with 'because India/Pakistan don't have a team'. Supporting India or Pakistan in sports yielded responses such as supporting 'our people' or the 'home country'. There was also a strong influence of the family in cricket. Respondents would talk of their whole family getting involved in matches and the feeling of pride that emanated from their parents, which was also experienced by the respondents themselves. The family context seemed a strong influence in affirming their loyalty or support to India or Pakistan.

Racism

This category of racism can also be seen in terms of threat, but is also a major category within itself. Experiences of racism were drawn upon by many of the respondents. Many responses to racism highlighted the fact that these experiences brought out feelings of a need to be accepted as British:

'We had a shop and we used to have people come in there and say 'yeah you Paki' and I'll be like 'well I just live in this country like you do, I'm just as British as you!' and I'd say that, I mean I was young, naive, and I was like 11, 12 years old and I would say 'yeah I'm just as British as you' and 'I've lived here' and 'my mum and dad lived here' you know?'

This particular example from an Indian respondent highlights how she began to feel differently about being British. When questioned further, she suggested that the volumes of people coming to Britain justified white people's racist reactions. Individuals would feel discriminated against, and want to be acknowledged as British, yet at the same time racists were seen to 'remind you of who you are', and that they could never escape the fact that skin colour would always be there to allow others reject them from the British category.

Racism was not seen as a major issue anymore, due to the current culturally diverse state of most urban areas, but also because the respondents recognised that racists represented a small minority of people who were ignorant and narrow-minded.

Boundaries of being British

A model of the boundaries of being British can be derived from the data. The boundaries described here are comparable 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 only those with a white ancestry. In other words, for this category, to be British is to be 'white'. This boundary appeared in respondents' feelings of exclusion of being British, based on their skin colour and racial background, which usually prompted questions such as *'where do you come from?'*.

The Historical Boundary

Although this boundary was mentioned by only two respondents, it is nevertheless a very important boundary. People may need a national, historical or even mythological story about the nation 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 participants felt excluded from Britain's history. As stated by a male Indian respondent:

'I don't have any respect for British culture in the sense that they tend not to acknowledge other countries, and historically they've invaded lots of other countries by force, including India, and forced their own traditions on other people and shown disrespect to other countries.'

If identification with being British is based on historical bonds, or if such aspects are needed to create a sense of national identity, this, like the racial boundary is an exclusive category. To develop a national identity with the idea of a common history excludes those groups for whom such an association is not possible. Commenting on the first Indians that came to England, an Indian female participant argued that people fail to acknowledge their role in helping to develop and build Britain's economy and public services. It seems that some British Asians feel excluded from the nation because they have been excluded from the culturally dominant representations of its history.

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 these objective circumstances, as exemplified by one female Pakistani respondent:

'I'm just living here... I don't feel I have to change to become an English person.'

If this boundary is employed, then the individual concerned does not feel any need to adopt any aspect of the majority culture. Such a boundary is inclusive as it is extended to all British passport holders, but it may also be regarded as allowing the segregation of groups to exist.

The Instrumental Boundary

This boundary differs from the state boundary, as it regards the notion of Britishness as more than just the right to reside in Britain. Being British was evaluated along the dimensions of meeting legal, political, career and educational needs and interests.

'To me personally, being British gives more benefits than being known as a Pakistani. You know you get free NHS, you get free medicine,

eyesights, and they're the advantages, free education, and you don't get that in Pakistan. You know those are the things that's bringing people here, and they come here and want to be known as British.'

Within this category, there is more engagement with, and participation in, the national group. For some, it involved a comparative dimension between Britain and their parents' countries of origin, and a sense of pride derived from the fact that such opportunities allow them to benefit and achieve more in their careers, education and financially.

The Lifestyle Boundary

This boundary concerns not only an integrative aspect of a British identity, but also a banal aspect of their identity (Billig, 1995). These features termed 'lifestyle' are related to the modes of dress and speech, the media influences and socialisation patterns that are everyday facets of the respondents' lives. Whilst many feel that their ethnic identity is more prominent at home, they still feel British in the way they dress, the way that many continue to speak English within the home, the music, television and media choices they make, as well as the way they socialise, such as going to the pub.

It could be argued that these aspects mentioned are 'Western' as opposed to 'British', but nevertheless they allow people to categorise themselves as British. Perhaps in line with social creativity strategies, the respondents may be using these criteria of lifestyle as a comparative dimension which enables them to feel included within the British category.

The Multicultural Boundary

This boundary remains the broadest and most inclusive of all the boundaries. It relates to the idea that the cultural homogeneity of a national group is no longer necessary. This boundary allows all to be included within the category, whilst allowing the maintenance of one's own values and beliefs especially in the home. This boundary differs from the lifestyle boundary because it focuses on a multicultural conception of Britishness, and importantly, it has significant implications for the currently changing content of British identity. When commenting on how he felt about multiculturalism in Britain, an Indian respondent replied:

'I think it's good. You know, you got um, a lot of diversity, it brings a lot of skills and culture. It is bringing culture to Britain. You know? It's like how I was saying what is British culture? There is no British culture. British culture is about getting pissed off your brain on the weekend and acting like an idiot, whereas the sort of migrant... other people – Europeans, Indians, blacks, whatever, they bring a lot of culture to Britain.'

The suggestion here, echoed by many other respondents, was that being British implied a lack of culture, and it was multiculturalism and the diversity associated with it that had brought culture to Britain. The same respondent also said:

'...society's become so multicultural that the English terminology has just become ancient, yeah? It'll become one of those terms where people used to be called 'English', but now it's just 'British'.'

The idea of a changing British identity means that Englishness has been redefined in terms of the rural, 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 don't really know what it is, and it's only when you get thrown into it, like the country-bumpkin land, where there is a lot of English people there, that you can really understand what Britishness is about or, Britishness now is completely changed, but what it was to be, or is to be British – the humour, and the sarcasm, and all those things, and the way things are done.'

Interviewer- So what do you think Britishness is about now?

(Laughs!!) Politically correct!! Trying to be politically correct all the time!! Everything... you know, trying not to hurt anyone or offend anyone cos you might get sued, and it's all just gone completely a bit mad and crazy, but that's because there's so many different cultures here, that you have to be so... what's the word?...you've got to be very careful ... considerate to other people.'

Multiculturalism was seen by all the respondents as something positive and good not only because it allowed those with various ethnic backgrounds to be included, but also because it may help to break down barriers of racism, by acknowledging the make-up of British cities and the acceptance of the cultural differences between people. So this boundary is the most inclusive of all, as anyone can be a part of the British category. However, the idea of multiculturalism does not

necessarily mean a shared set of values or beliefs among people. It simply means, in the literal sense of the word, many cultures.

Another interesting issue revealed in the data is the idea of *new minorities*. Asylum seekers, illegal immigrants and other ethnic groups were talked about as being the new targets of discrimination, as if to suggest that Asians were no longer low-status excluded groups, and their inclusion in the wider British society meant that it was now the turn of these migrant groups to gain acceptance in the national group:

'The influence and acceptance of Indian people in Britain is growing and will out grow people's expectations and probably in 50 years tie, they'll be much more widely accepted and racism will turn to other groups like people from Kosovo and Somalians... it'll be the same thing that happened to Indians 20 years ago... and with all this stuff on immigration... it'll be the same situation but reversed... and by then the Asians will be a lot more accepted...'

In comparison to Jacobson's (1997) boundaries of Britishness, these boundaries show a progression of newer conceptions of Britishness, and suggest that her original three boundaries were an over-simplification of what it means to be British from the perspective of ethnic minorities. Although these findings cannot necessarily be generalised to all British Indian and Pakistanis, it does reflect their awareness of political, racial and cultural aspects of being British. Unlike Jacobson's cultural boundary, which lacks clear definition of what this boundary might include, there are clear distinctions which emerge from the present study between instrumental, lifestyle and multicultural definitions of being British.

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