

Ethnic Identity:

Examining impact of the school and home environments on second-generation Sikhs in Canada

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the school and home environments on second-generation Punjabi-Sikh adolescents living in eastern Canada.

Canada represents a diverse and multicultural mosaic. There is a large Punjabi population dispersed throughout our nation. At the time of this research (1998), there were no documented studies pertaining to the ethnic identity formation of second-generation Punjabi-Sikh adolescents living in either Ontario or eastern Canada. Subsequently, it is important to acknowledge all Punjabi-saturated communities in Canada. The Maritime provinces for example, represents a strong and progressive Punjabi community (Dogra, 1987).

Ethnic identity refers to, "one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking, perception, feelings, and becoming that is due to ethnic group membership" (Phinney and Rotheram, 1987, p.13). Second-generation refers to individuals who were born, or have been brought up, in Canada before the age of five (Thomson, 1974).

Even in a pluralistic society such as ours, second-generation Punjabi-Sikh adolescents are continuously being questioned 'Who are you?' or 'Where are you from?' (Ghuman, 1995). Essentially, these adolescents associate their identity with either their cultural roots or parents' place of birth (Phinney and Rotheram, 1987). Some adolescents 'tailor' their identity to meet the demands of the dominant society (Chapman and Nicholls, 1976; Tzuriel and Klein, 1977). Others may develop hybrid identities whereby they accommodate the norms, attitudes, and behavior patterns of their own culture and other cultural groups into one mindset (Phinney and Rotheram, 1987).

Environment:

Additionally, the impact of the school and home environment may cause second-generation Punjabi-Sikh adolescents to be caught between two well-intentioned opposing forces. Eventually, adolescents may either become alienated from both the home and school milieus, or acquire bicultural identities to cope with this 'cultural confusion' (Ghuman, 1997).

Rosenthal (1987) summarizes her sentiments about bicultural identities. She comments:

It seems that second-generation adolescents adopt a variety of strategies in dealing with their dual cultural environment. For some, the primary ethnic group serves as the most potent identification. Others adopt a more assimilatory position or view themselves as members of two cultural worlds, switching identification according to the situation (p.178).

Confusion:

Situational ethnicity, as mentioned above, allows adolescents to accommodate the expectations of both cultures. Whether it is the influences of either the family or school environments, adolescents may feel compelled to meet the expectations of both cultures. Unfortunately, this may result in confusion or resentment towards either culture.

Research concerning ethnic identity formation continues to be studied with a diverse array of multicultural populations (Ullah, 1985; Thompson, 1974; Phinney and Tarver, 1988). As well, Drury (1991), Ghuman (1991a, 1991b, 1994a, 1994b, 1995, and 1997), Ghuman and Kamoth (1993), Thompson (1974), and Gibson (1987) explored issues concerning Punjabi adolescents. However, the majority of this research was pursued either in United Kingdom or in United States of America. Very little research has been conducted on Punjabi adolescents in Canada. These studies were conducted in larger cities such as Vancouver, British Columbia.

From the review of literature, various themes emerged that contribute to adolescent ethnic identity formation. Results from the study, coupled with information extracted from the review of literature, will provide the basis for a Punjabi Ethnic Identity Formation Model. It is anticipated that this model will be useful to cross-cultural counsellors and educators nationwide, and further enable them to comprehend the obstacles experienced by second-generation Punjabi-Sikh adolescents.

Review of Literature:

Ethnic Identity Formation at Home and School

The concept of ethnic identity formation has been well documented (Ullah, 1985; Verkuyten and Kwa, 1996; Thompson, 1974; Phinney and Tarver, 1988; Rosenthal and Hrynevich, 1985). The schools in Canada predominately reflect the Anglo-Saxon culture. Schools in North America advocate personal autonomy, critical thinking, individual choice and general questioning attitudes of things (Ghuman, 1994b). This contradicts what is taught to Punjabi-Sikh individuals in their home environment. Second-generation Punjabi-Sikh individuals are encouraged to base their lifestyles on the traditions, values, beliefs, and expectations of the Punjabi-Sikh culture (Segal, 1991).

Role of Family:

The family also plays an integral role in the ethnic identity formation of the individual. The family establishes the child's first experience associated with ethnicity (Phinney and Rosenthal, 1992). The immediate family and other significant relatives influence the individual with

knowledge and perspectives that are prevalent in their ethnic background (Phinney and Rotheram, 1987). It is believed that the family provides the individual with the positive attributes of their culture and traditions.

It has been noted that both school and family have an impact on an adolescent's ethnic identity formation. In addition, the identity of second-generation adolescents' may be *reactive* to the situational factors that surround them in their daily lives. Drury (1991) remarks on situational ethnicity:

The extent to which ethnicity becomes significant depends on an individual's perception of a particular situation; the opportunities/resources and constraints which exist within and outside his/her ethnic community and the variability and flexibility of social boundaries between ethnic groups (p.388).

Ethnic Identity Formation of Second-Generation Punjabi Adolescents

There is a plethora of research concerning the ethnic identity formation of second-generation Punjabi adolescents. Research by Ghuman (1991a) examined the cultural issues of second-generation Punjabi adolescents in the United Kingdom. He investigated the perceptions of second-generation Indian individuals regarding their personal, social, and school life. Ghuman interviewed family dyads about intergenerational views on extended family, religious institution attendance, language retention, and career aspirations (p.330).

From the semi-structured interviews, his research suggested the notion of extended family appears to be more out of obligation, reciprocation, and respect. Others did not abide by the extended family concept but rather lived on the same street as their extended family (p.331). Regarding language, Punjabi is spoken with the parents but not among siblings (p.333).

Religion:

Concerning religious retention, one participant said she is unable to comprehend the religious services and in fact referred to her mother for interpretation of the religious procedures (p.334). She feels the older Punjabi dialects are harder to understand and believes the services should be officiated in English. Also, when asked about their nationality, several of the participants responded with English-Sikh or English-Hindu as opposed to just English, Indian and so forth (p.343).

This study established that adolescents believed in the value of education as an instrument towards upward social mobility and an advantage towards eliminating some discrimination in the workplace job market. The adolescents in this study considered themselves to have acquired bicultural identities: a combination of values from their parents and the British culture.

In a study by Ghuman and Kamoth (1993), twenty second-generation individuals (ten females, ten males) from England were informally interviewed about their perspectives on school, home life, religion, language, and personal identity (p.3).

Awareness:

This study believes that there was a lack of cultural awareness and preservation in the school environment during the nineteen sixties, seventies, and early eighties. Students in this earlier environment were unable to retain their mother tongue as they were expected to integrate immediately into the dominant culture (p.7). Fortunately, second- and third-generation children are aware of the importance of preserving their culture, which is now recognized in their school classrooms.

The authors of this article summarized their findings by stating: "According to research this generation is developing bicultural identities. This however, has not changed the fact that they continue to suffer racial abuse both in and out of school and have mixed feelings about whether they belong here" (Ghuman and Kamoth, 1993, p.7).

In 1991, Drury examined the ethnic identity formation of Punjabi-Sikh female adolescents in the United Kingdom. She was interested in the following topics: **to what extent have the participants been socialized into the beliefs, practices, and prescriptions of the Sikh culture in order to maintain, modify or abandon the traditions; to learn more about gender inequality between females and their male siblings; and the role of women in the Sikh culture as being 'bearers of tradition' (p.388).**

The female participants mentioned that they did not receive as much freedom as their male siblings in terms of dating. It was acceptable that their brothers date outside of the culture as long as they revert back to their prescribed cultural values by marriageable age. Participants discussed some of their gender specific duties and chores (p.397). Females are expected to stay at home to help their mother and engage in minimal socialization outside of the home environment.

Drury found that her participants were neither fully engaged in the British nor home culture. She also does not believe in the notion of 'caught between two cultures' as it implies that individuals are confused about their identity or 'caught up in a vacuum' (p.388). Instead, her study reflected that her participants were comfortable with both their parents' culture and the dominant culture and were occasionally able to display 'contextual culture based on selective and situational decisions' (p.388).

Sikh Culture:

Some of Drury's final remarks included participants would appreciate receiving language and religious instruction from the government. They would rather be taught the language at school than at home. They believe that if non-Sikhs are taught Punjabi and the Sikh culture then there will be less racism present in their school environment (pp.397-398).

Moreover, participants' parents are no longer transmitting some traditions. As Drury indicated earlier, "It allowed for the possibility that ethnic cultures do not remain static since first-generation individuals can and do sometimes modify - or abandon - tradition so as to accommodate changes in their lives in Britain" (p.387). Yet some of the participants are

maintaining the traditions and others feel that they will ease their frustration regarding cultural expectations when they have their own children (re: equality between the sexes!) (p.397).

The following themes emerged from the aforementioned studies: the value of education is an instrument towards upward social mobility and an advantage against discrimination in the job market are important in a second-generation Punjabi adolescent's ethnic identity formation (Ghuman, 1991a); transmission of culture, via family interaction, language retention are significant in adolescent ethnic identity formation as well as the home promotes traditional beliefs whereas school manifests the norms and values of the dominant society (Ghuman and Kamoth, 1993); wearing traditional dress and attending religious institutions strengthen adolescent ethnic identity formation (Drury, 1991).

From this review of literature, it is apparent that there is a lack of research concerning Canadian Punjabi-Sikh adolescents within the context of ethnic identity formation, situational ethnicity, and biculturalism. In response to this gap, a study was conducted to explore the viewpoints of second-generation Punjabi-Sikh adolescents living in eastern Canada and expand upon what has been documented in the present literature.



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