

IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF TEENAGE GIRLS: A CROSS-ETHNIC PERSPECTIVE[#]

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A comparative research was conducted to study the identity development of young girls belonging to two different cultures i.e., Britain and Pakistan. It was intended to observe their identity development in relationship specific domains (i.e., Gender Roles, Friendship, and Dating), the domains of ideology (Religious Ideology and Politics), and the domain of Occupation. The purpose was also to observe the ethnic/cultural differences in the process of identity development. 40 British (white) and 40 Pakistani (immigrant) teenager girls were the sample. Ego Identity Interview (Grotevant & Cooper, 1981) was used to determine their level of identity development. The results suggested that more girls were identity achieved in the relationship domains as compared to the other domains. Also there were significant differences in the levels of identity development of both the groups specifically in the domains of Religious Ideology, Dating, and Gender Roles. Pakistani girls were either diffused or had foreclosed identities in these areas. Overall, more British girls were identity achieved as compared to the Pakistani girls. Results were interpreted in terms of the theory of Self-in-Relation and cultural variability dimension of Individualism-Collectivism.

The importance of identity and self-structure in determining the psychological health of individuals has long been recognised. Erikson (1982) saw the formation of a personal sense of identity as one of the cornerstones of human development. Adolescence has been considered the most important stage when substantial changes in the self occur (Blos, 1967, 1979; Erikson 1968). From the existing theories of identity formation, it is apparent that the concept of self does not specifically address women's development (Blos, 1962, 1979; Erikson, 1968; Kagan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1984; Loevinger & Wesler, 1970). Erikson (1968) showed some concern for sex differences but ended up giving an anatomically based description of female identity in line with traditional psychoanalytic theory.

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Feminine psychodynamic theorists (e.g., Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver & Surrey, 1991; Miller, 1984, 1991) criticized the male bias in theory and research, and proposed a theory of *self-in-relation* which drew attention towards women's unique capacities of nurturance and caring, which play a significant role in their development of self and identity. As is notable in conventional theories (e.g., Branddt, 1977; Erikson, 1968), development of the self was generally considered to be a painful process of separating oneself out from the matrix of others. To develop a sense of separateness and autonomy from others was emphasized as a prerequisite for the development of individuality. Contrary to that, feminine psychodynamic theorists (see, for example, Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1984) suggest that women are more relational and empathic than men, and the reason for their dependency on relationships and empathy is the universally assigned responsibility to 'mother' children (Chodorow, 1978). On the basis of this analysis, Gilligan (1982), Jordan et al., (1991) and Miller (1984, 1991) tried to re-conceptualise the dominant theories and proposed a more relational view of women's identity development. According to this, the sense of self begins in the mother-child relationship when the infant starts developing an internal representation of the self as being in relationship with the mother. This is the beginning of the self, which reflects what is happening between people. Miller calls this a sense of 'being in relationship' (1991, p. 13). The infant picks up feelings of the other person and has an early sense of what is going on in the other person as well as in him/her. The child will have feelings of comfort if the caretaker is also comfortable. They are engaged in an emotional relationship which is important for the well-being of both (the caretaker/mother and the infant). According to Miller, the core of this early mental representation of the self is emotional. Dynamic interactions are inseparable from the self in which the central theme is to attend to each other's mental states and emotions. In her view, this earlier interaction is present both for boys and girls but cultural beliefs and norms (which generate sex-specific and stereotypical behaviour among the caretakers and others), make them respond differently to boys and girls. Girls are generally encouraged to develop the capacities to know and 'feel' the emotions of others. Their sense of self is interconnected with the feelings and emotional states of others. Boys on the other hand, are encouraged to divert from these feelings states. According to this theory, interaction, which involves attending to the other person's emotions and responding to them, is of central importance for the girl child's development of identity. It is also the basis of continuing psychological growth. Jordan et al., (1991) also suggests that this experience of being in relation and feeling of connectedness does not

threaten the existence of self or identity; rather it gains vitality and enhancement in this process. Relationships and identity develop simultaneously. Keeping in perspective the theory of Self-in-Relation proposed by the theorists mentioned above, it is assumed that girls would invest more in the relationship domains of identity development as compared to the other domains.

It is apparent that cultural patterns and societal norms and values play a significant role in the way personalities develop. Just as words have no meaning without a context, action and behavior of individuals are better understood when their social context is kept in perspective. Cultural history and social systems seem to influence the development of people's attitudes concerning themselves and others. Impact of social and cultural context on the process of identity development has not been explored in depth so far. Cultural variability is measured through various means and from different point of views in cross-cultural researches. A commonly used dimension is that of individualism-collectivism which has been used by many theorists across disciplines (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton, 1985; Hofstede, 1980; Hsu, 1981, 1983; Hui & Triandis 1986; Lebra, 1976; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, & Lucca, 1988). They separate cultures on the basis of individual values and emphasize individual versus group goals. In the present research the dimension of individualism and collectivism is used as a theoretical base for the analysis of the results.

Generally speaking, individualism refers to the tendency to be more concerned with one's own needs, goals, and interests. Hui and Triandis (1986) have classified the main differences between members of individualistic and collectivistic cultures. According to them, individualists emphasize independence and self-sufficiency. They belong to many in-groups and are less likely to be dependent on any one of them. Individualists will give top priority to their personal gains or losses. They do not interfere in their children's lives after a certain age and give them relatively greater independence concerning major issues. After a certain age, of maturity, children make almost all major and minor decisions for themselves. Matters related to education, choosing a career, friends, or marital partners etc. are children's own business. Shame or 'loss of face' is not a matter of major concern if they fail to satisfy the expectations of the in-group/s. They feel guilt rather than shame if they fail to achieve something. They don't like expressing dependency on others, and will emphasize independence and self-sufficiency. Adolescents are generally expected to develop a unique sense of self-identity.

Collectivists, on the other hand, consider the implications of their actions from the perspective of the group. They are more likely to be influenced by the majority and so, are more likely to be conformist. They believe in the sharing of material resources which maintains a network of reciprocation. They are more concerned about gaining the approval of group members and feel embarrassed if they fail to get it. They value interdependence and share its outcomes. One person's misbehaviour or failure is a disgrace to the whole family or even the entire clan. Parents are involved in their children's choice of friends, studies, jobs, place to live, marriage, etc. They believe that the human race is intricately interwoven and one person's misbehaviour may harm many (Hui & Triandis 1986). Youngsters are not encouraged to develop a unique identity rather they are expected to follow the guideline given by their elders. Despite criticisms (Schwartz, 1990), this has been found to be a major dimension of cultural variability which has differentiated clusters of cultures (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Chau, 1988; Hofstede, 1983; Triandis et al., 1988).

According to the research (see, for example, Hofstede, 1980, 1983) Pakistan, India, and China were found to be highly collectivistic cultures. On the other hand, Britain, Australia, and USA were high on individualism. In the present research it was intended to observe the identity development of adolescents girls belonging to two distinct cultures i.e., Britain (individualistic) and Pakistan (collectivistic). Having in view the theory of self-in-relation, a comparison was made between the identity development of adolescent girls in 'relationship specific' domains and 'ideology specific' domains.

Hypotheses

- i. There will be more identity achieved girls in the relationship specific domains compared to the other domains.
- ii. More girls in the British group (i.e., individualistic cultural background) will be identity achieved in all the domains compared to the Pakistani group (i.e., collectivist cultural background).

METHOD

Sample

The research was conducted in London (England) in which 40 Pakistani (Muslim immigrants) and 40 British (Anglo-Saxon) teenagers participated. All the girls in the Pakistani sample belonged to the second generation. Five of them were between the ages of two to five when their

parents immigrated, the rest were born in Britain. Most of the girls were sixth formers and were attending different courses of science and humanities in two leading colleges of the borough of Waltham Forest, London. Only nine of them (four British and five Pakistani) were doing part-time diploma courses in fashion design and secretarial work.

The mean age of British girls was 18.01 years, and of the Pakistani girls was 17.5 years. Care was taken to obtain the sample from similar socioeconomic backgrounds which was checked through their parents' income and locality of their residence. Average yearly income of the British families was £18125, and of the Pakistani families was £17885. These families resided in middle class localities of the borough.

Only those girls were included in the sample that belonged to intact families, were currently living with their natural parents, and whose parents were either Anglo-Saxon (British sample) or from Pakistan (Pakistani sample). This was done to avoid the possible effects of broken families and different socio-cultural backgrounds of the parents.

Instrument

Ego Identity Interview (Grotevant, & Cooper, 1981)

This Interview was used to test both the hypotheses. This semi-structured interview was developed by Marcia (1966) and was congruent with Erikson's idea of identity crisis as a psycho-social task during adolescence. Interview questions addressed the person's exploration and engagement in choosing from meaningful alternatives and also their degree of commitment to, and personal investment in the choices made. It had four clearly differentiated identity statuses in addition to four concentrating points along a continuum of identity achievement. These were: a) Identity achievement; b) Foreclosure; c) Moratorium; and d) Diffusion.

Identity achievement and diffusion are polar alternatives of identity status. An identity achieved person has experienced a crisis period and is committed to an occupation or an ideology. They have considered many options seriously and made a decision on their own terms. It is possible that their choice is similar to the parents' wishes but as long as they had gone through the crisis period and made up their minds on their own terms, it is their decision. An identity achieved person has considered the available options and chosen a suitable and comfortable one. These people score moderate to strong on both exploration and commitment.

Foreclosure refers to strong commitment to a goal without going through the period of crisis, exploration, and decision-making. The

decision is a reflection of parents' or role-model's wishes which they have internalised. The adolescent doesn't exactly know why he/she has chosen a goal, and might come up with an explanation like 'I always wanted that'. Their commitment and self-assuredness is very similar to identity achievers, though they will appear to be more rigid. The foreclosed person scores low on exploration and high on commitment.

The persons who are at Moratorium, are presently in a crisis period and have not made up their minds about either an ideology or an occupation. Their commitments are vague or general, if at all present. People at this stage will appear to be confused, struggling to reach an ultimate decision. They will score low on commitment and high on exploration.

Diffusion is lowest on the identity scale. The person has either vague and low exploration, or vague and low commitment. Such people have either experienced no crises or have passed through them and there is a little or no commitment. Sometimes there seems to be a 'commitment to no commitment', which can also be defined as a 'post crisis diffusion'. They actively avoid getting involved in a domain because they feel that they can't resolve or understand it properly.

In the present research, the modified version of the interview (Grotevant & Cooper, 1981) was used. It included two ideology specific domains i.e., Religion and Politics, and three interpersonal or relationship specific domains i.e., Friendship, Dating, and Gender Roles. It also included the domain of Occupation. The interview was based on a semi-structured series of pre-determined open ended questions. Exploration and commitment scales were designed to capture two types of information only, first, how much exploration has the adolescent made into each domain, and second, what is the strength of his/her commitment to any decision made regarding that domain. Four basic areas underlie the rating scale: First, has the adolescent actively considered any options in the domain being discussed, and if so, how many? This applies to exploration, and indicates breadth or lack of breadth, of exploration. Second, to what degree has she considered each of the options discussed? This also applies to exploration and will give indications of depth. Third, has she decided what option is best? This applies to commitment, and will indicate the strength of the commitment. Finally, how open she is to alternatives for the future? This also applies to the commitment and suggests that rigidity or dogmatism is not necessary for the commitment. Adolescent has to be prepared to take other options into consideration which are available, and are directly or indirectly related to the area of interest, if the first option becomes impossible to

achieve. Every adolescent was rated accordingly on the Identity Interview Note Sheet which came with the manual. Instead of calculating an overall identity status of each adolescent, a domain specific approach was used in order to assess the difference between their identity status in each domain.

Procedure

Two colleges of the borough were selected randomly with the help of the Race-Relations Unit of Waltham Forest, London. Both the colleges provided a quiet and independent room for research purposes. The interview was based on a semi-structured series of pre-determined questions. Questions in every domain were asked in three time perspectives: Present thinking, contrasted with past behaviour, and future expectations. They were also questioned about the development of their thinking and attitudes in these domains from past to present. Approximately 25 to 30 questions were asked in each domain. It took about 90 minutes to complete each interview. Total number of girls at each level of identity development was counted separately i.e., one girl could be identity achieved or otherwise in more than one domain so the total number of identity achievers would be more than the total number of girls participated. All the interviews were tape-recorded. Apart from the researcher, the interviews were also scored by an independent rater who was unaware of the hypotheses, but was familiar with the identity interview procedure. Cohen's Kappa was used to test inter-rater reliability, which was .86.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results strongly supported the first hypothesis (see Table 1) as there were more identity achievers (i.e., 170) in the relationship domains compared to the ideological domains (i.e., 21).

Table 1

Total Scores of Identity Achieved Adolescents From Both The Groups in all Domains

| Respondents | Relationship Domains (Friendship, Dating, Gender-roles) | Ideological Domains (Religion, Politics) | Domain of Occupation | Total number of identity achievers |
|--------------------------|---|---|-------------------------|--|
| British Adolescents | 107 | 11 | 22 | 140 |
| Pakistani adolescents | 63 | 10 | 18 | 91 |
| Total | 170 | 21 | 40 | 231 |

This suggests that the process of women's identity development may be different than men's. The domains which have significant meaning for women have a lot to do with connectedness and togetherness rather than separation and individuality. This does not imply that women are less capable of having a separate identity; rather it would mean that being connected has significant meaning in the way a girl's identity develops. As Jordon (1991) stated, the early experience of mutual empathy of the child with the caretaker is internalised and a continuous empathic responsiveness on part of the caretaker/mother contributes to the capacity for later relational mutuality. For girls, the experience of self is bound to relationship and development proceeds through relational differentiation and elaboration rather than through disengagement and separation.

Overall, in most domains there were more identity achievers among the British group of adolescents (individualistic cultural background) as compared to the Pakistani group (collectivistic cultural background) which supports the second hypothesis (see Table 2 and 3).

Table 2

Percentage of the Identity Status of Both the Groups

| Domains | Pakistani (<i>n</i> = 40) | | British (<i>n</i> = 40) | |
|------------|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|------------|
| Occupation | Percentage | Raw Score | Percentage | Raw Scores |
| I | 45.0 | (18) | 55.0 | (22) |
| F | 7.5 | (03) | 5.0 | (02) |
| M | 42.5 | (17) | 35.0 | (14) |
| D | 5.0 | (02) | 5.0 | (02) |
| Religion | | | | |
| I | 10.0 | (04) | 17.5 | (07) |
| F | 77.5 | (31) | 42.5 | (17) |
| M | 10.0 | (04) | 7.5 | (03) |
| D | 2.5 | (01) | 32.5 | (13) |
| Politics | | | | |
| I | 15.0 | (06) | 10.0 | (04) |
| F | 10.0 | (04) | 17.5 | (07) |
| M | 12.5 | (05) | 22.5 | (09) |
| D | 62.5 | (25) | 50.0 | (20) |
| Friendship | | | | |
| I | 87.5 | (35) | 92.5 | (37) |
| F | 7.5 | (03) | 5.0 | (02) |
| M | 5.0 | (02) | 2.5 | (01) |
| D | 0.0 | (00) | 0.0 | (00) |

Continued....

| Domains | Pakistani (<i>n</i> = 40) | | British (<i>n</i> = 40) | |
|--------------|-------------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|
| Dating | 7.5 | (03) | 82.5 | (33) |
| I | 0.0 | (00) | 5.0 | (02) |
| F | 5.0 | (02) | 10.0 | (04) |
| M | 87.5 | (35) | 2.5 | (01) |
| D | | | | |
| Gender Roles | | | | |
| I | 62.5 | (25) | 92.5 | (37) |
| F | 30.0 | (12) | 7.5 | (03) |
| M | 5.0 | (02) | 0.0 | (00) |
| D | 2.5 | (01) | 0.0 | (00) |

Note. I=Identity Achieved; F=Foreclosed; M=Moratorium; D=Diffuse

Table 3

Summary Statistics of Girls of Both the Groups on the Ego Identity Interview

| Domains | Chi-Square | <i>d.f</i> |
|------------|------------|------------|
| Occupation | 0.89 | 3 |
| Religion | 15.33* | 3 |
| Politics | 2.92 | 3 |
| Friendship | 0.59 | 2 |
| Dating | 59.78** | 3 |
| Sex Roles | 7.62* | 1 |

* $p < .01$; ** $p < .0001$

Tables 2 and 3 suggest that there were prominent differences in religion, dating, and gender roles. Most of the Pakistani girls were foreclosed in religion, i.e., 77.5%, as compared to 42.5% of the British girls (Table 2). Almost all the Pakistani girls expressed strong commitments to their religion (Islam) but most of them had not explored their own religion or others' properly. They had some information about Christianity and very little information about any other religion. They were simply following the religion of their parents and ancestors. Few of these girls, who were identity achieved in this domain had knowledge about Islam and could argue about it logically and with justifications. In Pakistani society, religion has been more of a socio-cultural phenomenon and less of a personal-theological one. People are generally very possessive about Islam. It is considered to be the primary responsibility of the parents to teach their

children to read the holy book the 'Quraan' (in Arabic) and learn to say their daily prayers. It is assumed that immigrant Pakistani communities have similar attitudes concerning religion. This became apparent when the researcher talked to some of the families after the interviews, they stated that they feel very possessive about their religion and were quite concerned about their children's knowledge of Islam and Islamic principles. Interestingly, their code of conduct was not as flexible as their relatives in Pakistan. Many girls told the researcher that they enjoyed going to Pakistan, because there, they had more freedom to go out and move about as compared to when they were in England. The reasons for the controlling attitude of their parents may be that they feel threatened by the external forces which they perceive as dangerous for their belief system. Thus control may be a defence against the fear that their children will lose touch with their religious and cultural values, and might get attracted to an alien culture and become different. This is a matter of shame and loss of face for them. The Pakistani girls were most likely fulfilling the expectations of their people and were doing what their immediate family and community would want them to do. In a sense, they had achieved their religious and ethnic identity. The question is, do we still want to call them foreclosed in religion? The answer to this cannot be straightforward. The socio-cultural background of these communities may have been the major contributor to their attitude towards religion. As Hui and Triandis (1986) argue, collectivists are more likely to be influenced by the majority of their people, so they are more likely to be conformists. One would thus expect a conformist attitude from these youngsters particularly in the domains of religion and gender roles. This may be an expression of a need to show their 'individuality' in a larger (and different) socio-cultural environment and their relatedness to their own community.

In the British sample, 42.5% of the girls were foreclosed in religion and expressed their commitment to their parents' beliefs, without exploring the domain themselves. Similarly 32.5% of the British girls showed a diffused status in religion compared to 2.5% of the Pakistani girls. A probable explanation of that could be the relaxed and laid back attitude of the British society towards religion. Generally people's attitude towards religion is quite flexible. There are people who are non-believers, and there are couples who have different beliefs but live together. Religion is considered a personal affair and children usually have considerable amount of freedom to choose their own way of living. It seems that British society, like other individualistic societies, gives greater freedom to adolescents for choosing an ideology for themselves. Non-believers and atheists are

also accepted by the society and enjoy equal rights and privileges. Most of the British girls expressed that religion was never an issue for them. They had very limited knowledge about other religions and expressed that they do not usually pay attention to matters related to religion.

In the domain of Dating, only 7.5 % Pakistani girls were identity achieved as compared to 82.5% of the British girls. 87.5% of the Pakistani girls had diffused identity compared to only 2.5% in the British group (Table 2). British girls had sufficient experience and exploration in dating and were quite clear about their preferences whereas a majority of the Pakistani girls had no experience in this domain. Pakistani girls showed a lack of interest in or willingness to date, in the past, present, and future. These results shed light on the differences in the norms of the British and Pakistani societies, as well as in the immigrant communities. In British culture, one of the developmental tasks that adolescents have to face is to have the ability to form healthy relationships with the opposite gender. Dating is accepted as a normal part of the adolescent's life. On the other hand, dating is not a norm in Pakistani society. Girls and boys are not expected to master their ability to date and to form relationships with the opposite sex before marriage. It is not unlikely to see that boys and girls start having feelings for each other and decide to get married, or the relationship may not work and they decide to get out of it, but this usually is a very private affair and the feelings are not expressed in public. Children's marriage is generally their parents' responsibility and is considered a 'social bond' and an 'extension' of the families which is meant to be a source of strength for its members. Relationships with the opposite gender carry different meanings for Pakistani girls and boys; it has consequences for the whole family. A few of them cited the examples of some Pakistani girls who were going out with boys and were also involved with them sexually. They felt that they were a disgrace, not only to their families but to the whole Pakistani community. These expressions supported the views of Hui and Triandis (1986), who stated that for the collectivists, one person's 'misbehaviour' may harm many and is considered a disgrace not only for the family but for the entire clan.

More girls in the British group had explored the issue of men's and women's roles in the society and seemed to have formed their views about them. A majority had quite liberal attitudes concerning gender roles and were in favour of equal rights and sharing of domestic and financial responsibilities. Many girls in the Pakistani group (62.5%) had similar ideas about men and women roles although 30% of them were foreclosed in this domain compared to 7.5% of the

British girls. These were in favour of traditional roles of men being providers and women being responsible for childcare and domestic duties.

Generally, Pakistani girls expressed that women are better carers of children because they are emotionally closer to them. They seemed to be expressing their personal experiences and felt that they were closer to their mothers than to their fathers. Many of them expressed that they would like their children to feel the same way towards them as they felt towards their mothers.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the research supported the theory of feminist psychodynamics that girls' identity and self structure is validated through relations. It was apparent that occupational concerns that were related to their future goals were important for both the groups regardless of their cultural backgrounds. On the whole, there were more British girls who achieved the highest level of identity development compared to their counterparts. It was also evident that cultural background and social environment of the family have a significant impact on the process of identity development. Pakistani girls were brought up with a strong emphasis on their religious and cultural traditions. They exhibited a positive ethnic identity in term of their identification with the group and differentiation from the other ethnic group without showing conflicts on this issue. They generally exhibited collective goals and gave priority to their family and community. On the other hand, British girls exhibited individualistic goals and emphasised personal concerns regardless of the concerns of their family or community. The findings suggest that adolescents' performance on different tasks must be evaluated by keeping their cultural and ethnic background in perspective. It was also realised that although the interview provides a means to assess the self structure which is the outcome of the developmental process, the socio-cultural and familial background in which the concept of self or identity develops, has not been taken into account in the development of this measure.

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