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Ethnic identity during adolescence and adulthood: A review; The impact of becoming a parent on ethnic identity: Adult migrant mothers' experiences

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Ethnic Identity During Adolescence and Adulthood: A Review

The Impact of Becoming a Parent on Ethnic Identity: Adult Migrant Mothers’ Experiences

Abby Taylor

A report submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of Bachelor of Arts Honours, Faculty of Computing, Health and Science, Edith Cowan University.

October 2006

I declare that this written assignment is my own work and does not include:

(i) material from published sources used without proper acknowledgement

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Declaration

I certify that this literature review and research project does not incorporate, without acknowledgement, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature

Date ......../......../........
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And

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Ethnic Identity During Adolescence and Adulthood: A Review

Abby Taylor
Abstract

Developing a positive ethnic identity has often been linked to the psychological well-being of immigrants living in culturally diverse societies. Ethnic identity development theories have primarily concentrated on identity development during adolescence. As a result there are significant gaps in the literature and little is known about ethnic identity during adulthood. However, significant life transitions during adulthood, such as becoming a parent, may be influential in the development of ethnic identity. Intergenerational conflict and an increased desire to be ethnically oriented may relate to the experience of becoming a parent and influence ethnic identity. A means to achieving generativity has also often been discussed in relation to becoming a parent. Future research addressing ethnic identity during adulthood is needed to gain a greater knowledge and appreciation of the influence of significant life events on ethnic identity. Future research will inform ethnic identity development theory and have implications for support services for immigrants living in culturally diverse societies.
Ethnic Identity During Adolescence and Adulthood: A Review

Over recent decades, much psychological research has been devoted to the study of ethnic identity, the extent to which a person identifies with their ethnocultural group (Phinney, 1996). The study of ethnic identity has become of significant importance, largely in response to changing demographics and increases in immigrants and refugees throughout the world (Phinney, 1990). In particular, ethnic identity has been linked to the psychological wellbeing of ethnic minorities living in culturally diverse societies, for example immigrants who exist within the margins of a dominant culture, and who struggle to gain equality, recognition, acceptance and respect of their diversity (Phinney). Conversely, the dominant group refers to the host culture that is superior in population and cultural norms, and may be the standard against which the level of minorities’ diversity is measured (Phinney). Research has predominantly explored ethnic identity in relation to adolescent development (Erikson, 1968; Phinney, 1983 cited in Phinney, 1990). However, ethnic identity may continue to develop during adulthood, and indeed across the lifespan, reflecting the effects of significant life transitions, such as becoming a parent. As a result of this adolescent focus, there are significant gaps in the literature regarding ethnic identity in adults and the factors that influence it.

This literature review will endeavour to explore critically and comparatively some of the literature that exists in the area of ethnic identity. The opening section will discuss and illustrate the complexity of ethnic identity, however will arrive at a definition which will be used throughout this review. This section will further attest to the psychological importance of ethnic identity, whereby ethnic identity has commonly been linked to health related outcomes involving, for example, self-esteem, psychosocial adjustment and sense of belonging (Gaudet & Clément, 2005; LaFramboise, Coleman & Gerton, 1993; Phinney, 1990; Phinney, 1996). Following this, a brief historical overview of ethnic identity theory will be given and some interpretations and
Ethnic Identity

concepts of these theories explored. The strength and salience of ethnic identity will be discussed, predominantly in relation to the influence of bilingualism and the level of contact maintained with one's own and the dominant group.

A developmental perspective of ethnic identity will then be introduced. Here, some of the different perspectives, theories and models of identity and, more specifically, ethnic identity will be discussed. Erikson's (1968) model of development and Phinney's (1983 cited in Phinney, 1990) model of ethnic identity development will be explored. Phinney's proposed period, involving a process of exploration and decision making, will largely be discussed with respect to achieving a self-identified ethnicity. Any limitations and or potential flaws in the research, theories and models will also be identified.

Identity and ethnic identity will then be discussed in relation to adulthood. Whilst it will be acknowledged that there is little research in the area, speculations will be made about the influence of significant life transitions, such as becoming a parent on adults' and particularly parents' identities. This discussion will further extend to Erikson's proposed identity crisis involving the achievement of generativity, as this is said to relate to middle adulthood, which may therefore have some relevance to the transition to parenthood and the effects on identity. The review will be concluded with some possible recommendations for future research in the area of identity and ethnic identity in adulthood.

Defining Ethnic Identity

There are differing definitions of ethnic identity, also termed cultural identity by some researchers, which reflect the fact that it varies across individuals and groups and is complex and multidimensional (Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Phinney, 1996). Many definitions of ethnic identity stem from social identity theory, which recognises the potential problems of participating in two different cultures (Tajfel, 1981). Phinney (1990, 1996) in fact states that ethnic identity only
becomes important where two or more ethnic groups come into contact over a period of time. However, a problematic aspect of defining ethnic identity relates to the difficulty in determining exactly what ethnic identity consists of; because different components of ethnic identity have varying levels of salience across different groups (Phinney, 1996). For example, for one ethnic group language may be the most important factor, where for another, attitudes are more important. However, Phinney argued that there are three key components of ethnic identity that exist, in varying degrees, regardless of the group to which one belongs. These components include a sense of belonging, pride in one's group and self-identification. Ethnic identity will therefore be discussed as a progressive and fundamental aspect of the self, involving the exploration of and consequent decisions regarding sense of belonging and the feelings and attitudes toward a group (Phinney, 1990).

Many studies in the area of ethnic identity have linked the complexity of ethnic identity to the psychological functioning and wellbeing of minority ethnic group members (Gaudet & Clément, 2005; LaFromboise et al., 1993; Phinney, 1990; Phinney, 1996). Positive ethnic identity is crucial to the self-concept and psychological functioning of ethnic group members (Phinney, 1990), and leads to increased self-esteem and identification with the ethnic group (Ethier & Deaux, 1994). Phinney (1990) acknowledged the psychological importance of ethnic identity and stated that evidence for such rests in the research concerning ethnic group members and their struggle to understand their ethnicity and subsequent identity, particularly where it is complicated by the conflicting cultures of their own and the dominant group (Tajfel, 1981). She suggested that, from a psychological perspective, there are three critical aspects of ethnic identity. These factors include, (1) cultural norms, (2) ethnic group membership and (3) the experiences associated with minority status, for example powerlessness, prejudice and discrimination.
Each of these three factors can have significant bearing on psychosocial adjustment and the subsequent strength and salience of ethnic identity. Phinney (1990) and Cross (1995) found that low self-esteem and negative and weak ethnic identification is common in the early stages of ethnic identity development, which they suggested is largely the result feelings of anxiety and inferiority. However, Gaudet and Clément’s (2005) study, which explored the potential for cultural revitalization and ethnic maintenance to occur concurrently among a sample of French Canadians, illustrated that psychosocial adjustment and the development of positive ethnic identity can be moderated and optimized by contact with one’s own group, social support and language confidence.

**Historical Interpretations of Ethnic Identity**

Whilst psychological research in the area of ethnic identity is not exhaustive, reflecting the fact that it is a relatively recent interest, there has been quite a shift in the orientation of theories. Historical interpretations of ethnic identity tended to be based on theories of marginality and the experiences of ethnic minority individuals were pathologised (Yi, 1999). Members of minority groups were said to be marginal and it was believed that ‘marginality’ had certain social and psychological ramifications. Park (1928 cited in LaFromboise et al., 1993) stated that marginality leads to psychological conflict, a divided self and a disjointed person. Similarly, Stonequest (1935 cited in Yi) stated that minority members suffer from alienation, loss of identity, confusion and a yearning to be accepted by the dominant group. Marginal status, it was believed, could therefore be overcome by complete assimilation and an abandonment of one’s ethnic self (Stonequest).

More recent writings have often explored ethnic identity within a Social Identity theoretical framework. Social Identity theory recognises the potential problems of participating in two different cultures. Tajfel (1981) suggested that identity formation in ethnic group members,
living in culturally diverse societies, is likely to be problematic, particularly with respect to the conflicting attitudes, values and behaviours of their own and the dominant group. Tajfel and social theorists alike are interested in whether minority individuals must choose between two conflicting identities or whether they can establish a dual ethnic identity.

Further writings in the area of ethnic identity recognise that an ethnic label may reflect numerous feelings, experiences and attitudes in relation to ethnicity (LaFromboise et al., 1993). For example, Mego (1988 cited in LaFromboise et al.) stated that ethnic identity is developed in a reciprocally deterministic manner by the interaction between psychosocial experiences, a subsequent sense of self and the cultural context in which one exists. In this way the issue of ethnic identity is also linked to the social constructionist framework and can be discussed in relation to theories of symbolic interactionism (Phinney, 1990; Yi, 1999). Social constructionism relates to the way in which individuals’ values and socialisation influence the unique experience of events and the different meanings and understandings constructed of such (Gergen, 1999). Symbolic interactionism refers to the way in which we perceive and understand situations and objects in a given context in order to construct meaning (Gergen). Social constructionism and symbolic interactionism therefore play important roles in ethnic identity development as it is essentially from these processes that the meanings and feelings associated with ethnicity are derived.

**Ethnic Identity Strength & Saliency**

**Language**

There are numerous factors that have been shown to have significant bearing on the development, strength and salience of ethnic identity. Phinney (1990) said that language is the most widely assessed cultural practice with reference to ethnicity and identity. Like ethnic identity, language often becomes a point of interest and of significant importance, where there is
the introduction of a second language. Lambert (1975 cited in Gaudet & Clément, 2005) acknowledged this and suggested that a process of identity changes occur where one learns a second language. Lambert further discussed bilingualism in terms of it being additive, involving the retention of ethnic identity, or subtractive, referring to the loss of identity. Whilst Gaudet and Clément (2005) acknowledged that there is a trend toward subtractive bilingualism where a second language is introduced to the minority, Landry, Allard and Theberge (1991) found that a strong ethnic identity could be maintained by a sample of Francophones, despite a strong presence of English as a second language. One reason for this, it was concluded involved the strength of other culturally specific components of ethnic identity. For example, subtractive bilingualism could be moderated and reduced where there was a strong French influence within the home and aspects of the family, and within the school structure (Landry et al., 1991).

Furthermore, a perceived proficiency in one’s second language has been connected to positive psychological adjustment and an increase in self-esteem (Gaudet & Clément, 2005). LaFromboise et al. (1993) too, stated that the more one is competent, on a number of different levels, the less they are likely to experience problems in functioning effectively within a culturally diverse society.

Landry et al.’s. (1991) findings may however relate to Clément and Noels’ (1992 cited in Gaudet & Clément, 2005) notion of a situational identity. Clément and Noels found that minority ethnic individuals, living in a culturally diverse society, demonstrated a stronger ethnic identity in the private sphere. The home provides a sheltered context in which the natal language can be maintained and culturally specific routines and activities practiced, thus reinforcing ethnic identity. Clément and Noels’ findings, concerning a pattern of dual identification between the public and private domains, demonstrate the potential for that which LaFromboise et al. (1993)
propose, being, ethnic maintenance as well as cultural revitalization, or rather, a dual ethnic identification.

Contact

The level of contact, which one has with his or her own ethnic group, has also frequently been discussed in relation to the strength of, or on the contrary, the loss of ethnic identity. Phinney (1990) said that the degree and quality of contact that is maintained with the ethnic group may impact on the psychological wellbeing of ethnic group members. However, Phinney (1996) also argued that ethnic identity may be strong even when there is little opportunity for direct cultural contact or involvement. Her arguments somewhat support the findings of Landry et al. (1991), for which subtractive bilingualism could be reduced, in that Phinney said that a strong ethnic identification can be maintained through symbolic ethnicity and ethnic loyalty, which may be achieved through the reinforcement of culturally specific routines and attitudes within the private sphere (Clément & Noels, 1992 cited in Gaudet & Clément, 2005; Landry, 1987).

Moreover, Gaudet and Clément (2005) suggested that, contact with the dominant culture too, may have significant bearing on adjustment and ethnic identity. For example they stated that particularly for extreme minority groups, who exist in only very small populations within the dominant context, ethnic identity may be influenced as a result of the greater likelihood of regular interactions with the dominant culture, compared to that with one's own. It may therefore be assumed that extreme minority members face an even greater challenge in maintaining a strong ethnic identity than do other minority group members, who are regularly involved in ethnically specific activities, such as friendships, religious and social organisations, in spite of this being within the context of the dominant group.
Some arguments have been made however, that suggest that there may be advantages to minority members having contact with the dominant group. These theories argue that interactions with both one's own and the dominant group may lead to the development of networks and therefore sources of social support (Clément, Michaud & Noels, 1998 cited in Gaudet & Clément, 2005; LaFromboise et al., 1993). LaFromboise et al. said that social support is a necessary tool in the process of adjustment and acculturation, as it may provide the knowledge and information required for developing positive attitudes toward one's own and the dominant group. For example, social support may be in the form of cultural and or linguistic translators, from the same or a different ethnic group, who have successfully adjusted to a status of dual identification. However, Gaudet and Clément's (2005) research demonstrated that psychosocial adjustment is reduced when social support is high from the dominant group, but low from one's own. Gaudet and Clément thereby concluded that the presence of ethnic-group social support, and therefore potential contact, may promote ethnic characteristics and increase the chances for the maintenance of ethnic identity and wellbeing.

The nature of contact between the minority and the dominant culture may also be linked to the centrality, impact and meaning of ethnicity. Most writings in the area of ethnic identity address the responses of the minority group, within the context of the dominant group, such as their adopting of dominant norms at the expense of their own. However, Collins (2000) suggested that a minority status and ethnicity itself and specifically, may influence the responses of the dominant group, depending on their social values and attitudes. Collins further acknowledged that social labeling is one of the greatest social threats to ethnic identity. This may also relate to that which Phinney (1996) acknowledged as one of the three psychologically important aspects of ethnic identity, being the experiences associated with minority status, such as discrimination and prejudice. The ethnic member may therefore be influenced such that they
develop their attitudes, values and patterns of behaviour, as well as the meaning of their ethnicity, in such a way that allows them to function effectively alongside the dominant group and receive, if not desirable, at least manageable responses (Collins). Kitzinger (cited in Collins, 2000, p. 119) stated:

Identities are not the freely created products of introspection, or the unproblematic reflections of the private sanctum of the “inner self,” but are conceived within certain ideological frameworks constructed by the dominant order to maintain its own interests.

Therefore, in order to understand the psychological impact of learning to live competently in a culturally diverse society, LaFromboise et al. (1993) stated that researchers must address not only one’s individual psychological development, but also the context in which the development occurs.

*The Development of Ethnic Identity*

More recent theories and models of ethnic identity tend to reject the pathological view of ethnic identity and rather view marginality as a product of racism, prejudice and oppression (Yi, 1999). Furthermore, many of these writings concerning identity and ethnic identity, which are predominantly based on the experiences of first and second generation children and adolescents growing up in culturally diverse societies, largely stem from a developmental perspective and are stage based (Cross, 1995; Erikson, 1968; Phinney, 1983 cited in Phinney, 1990). More recent writings however, now view these stages as ‘statuses’, as the term stage implies a linear progression of development (Yi). Nonetheless, these models largely propose and describe the achievement of ethnic identity in a progressive manner, from the point of a somewhat unexamined status through to an achieved ethnic identity (Cross; Phinney). They therefore recommend that the means to overcoming a status of marginality requires self-acceptance and a positive self-image, which is eventually achieved as one progresses through each stage (Yi).
These theories of ethnic identity development have often been based on Erikson's (1968) model of development which suggests that identity-related concerns are the primary focus of adolescence and an identity status is achieved by early adulthood. However, Erikson did view development as a progressive process and acknowledged that identity-related issues continue throughout the lifespan. His model of development also emphasised the influence of social and cultural factors. Erikson argued that in order for the adolescent to achieve a secure sense of identity, they must establish the orientation of their moral values and religion, a functional personality pattern, gender and sexual orientation, political stance, a plan for future relationships, such as marriage and family, an ethnic status, and a vocational position.

Marcia’s (1980) work, which is largely adapted from Eriksonian thought, is one of many theories which focused on adolescents, with respect to ego identity development. Marcia proposed four identity statuses in resolving the identity crisis; (1) identity achievement, (2) identity moratorium, (3) identity foreclosure, and (4) identity diffusion. Those who experienced and overcame the identity crisis were said to have reached an achieved identity status, demonstrating a vocational, religious and political commitment. Unlike a state of moratorium, foreclosure or diffusion, an achieved identity status was also associated with higher levels of self-esteem and an ability to contain affective fluctuations, organise motives and meet adaptive demands. Nonetheless, researchers using these models have paid little attention to the nature and development of ethnic identity beyond early adulthood.

A further well known stage model of identity development is that proposed by Phinney (1983 cited in Phinney, 1990). This model is of particular importance to this discussion as Phinney specifically addressed the development of ethnic identity. A further distinguishing feature of Phinney’s model is that whilst she described the achievement of ethnic identity through a progression of stages, and focused much of her research on ethnic identity development in
adolescents, Phinney acknowledged that ethnic identity is adaptable. The development of ethnic identity is not linear in nature and ethnicity may be examined and re-examined throughout the lifespan.

Phinney’s model of ethnic identity involves a three stage progression from a point of, (1) an unexamined ethnic status, through a period of, (2) exploration, eventually resulting in, (3) identity achievement. The first stage, involving an unexamined ethnic status, as mentioned, Phinney said is typically represented by adolescents and young adults who tend, although not exclusively, to show a preference for the dominant culture. Cross (1995), who also devised a stage based model of ethnic identity development, similarly said that the first stage is typified by an indifferent or negative attitude toward one’s ethnic group. Both Phinney and Cross found that low self-esteem and weak ethnic identity tend to correspond to specific, but predominantly the early stages of ethnic identity development. One reason for this, it was suggested, involved the fact that these stages may involve feelings of anxiety and inferiority. Self-esteem is therefore commonly used as a measure of adjustment in situations involving biculturalism, as it reflects a sense of belonging and worth, which are central to and critical components of ethnic identity.

The second stage which Phinney (1990) proposed in the development of ethnic identity is one of exploration, whereby one explores the meaning of their ethnicity. This stage may be prompted by a significant experience that forces an awareness of one’s own ethnicity and subsequently an understanding and appreciation of their ethnic heritage. Phinney suggested that this phase is often typified by a deep immersion in one’s own culture which may be demonstrated by culturally specific reading, language and activity. Erikson (1968), Marcia (1980) and Phinney (1990) proposed that a process of exploration and decision making and or commitment is necessary for the achievement and resolution of identity crises and ethnic identity. Phinney
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(1996) said that the impact of ethnicity may vary depending on the extent to which the ethnic individual has explored and resolved issues related to their ethnic status.

This process of exploration and decision making is illustrated whereby, for example, individual people, within and beyond a specific group choose to label and define their ethnicity in different ways, as various components of ethnic identity differ in meaning and in worth (Phinney, 1990). Thus, individual ethnic group members must embark on a process of self-identification (also termed self-definition or self-labeling), which allows them to select an ethnic label that is most suited to them. Collins (2000) further argued that the decisions made about ethnicity, which lead to the identification with a particular group, are also influenced by subgroups, such as groups based on socio-economic status, gender, age, family structure and geographic locale, and personal factors. Given this heterogeneity within cultural groups as well as between, Phinney and Yi (1999) therefore argued against a single ethnic label, stating that this alone cannot predict behaviour or attitudes in any psychologically meaningful way.

However, some ethnic individuals may make a conscious decision to opt for a single label and ignore part of their cultural heritage. Collins' (2000) qualitative study, involving the development of dual ethnic identification in fifteen Japanese Americans demonstrated this, whereby some participants chose an ethnic label and identity that did not completely capture their cultural heritage. Collins suggested that one reason for this involved the participants' feelings of guilt and confusion, which LaFromboise et al. (1993) proposed is common in the process of achieving a dual identification. However, Collins further claimed that as the participants progressed, many of them began to acknowledge their differentness and explored their unresolved and conflicting identities, therefore achieving some form of resolution. Therefore, whilst ethnic self-identification is an important aspect of ethnic identity, the use of a single ethnic
label is potentially limiting and detrimental to adjustment (Phinney, 1990) and must be interpreted with consideration and care (LaFromboise et al.).

The authenticity of one’s ethnic identity may be critiqued in terms of any disparity between the way in which one describes their ethnic identity and the way in which they feel and subsequently behave, with respect to this label (Phinney, 1990). Moreover, Chung (1991, cited in Phinney, 1996) proposed that where an individual has distinct racial features their freedom to self-identify may be limited. Again, Collins’ (2000) study demonstrated this in that all participants reported experiences of discrimination and prejudice, which was largely based on their noticeably, Asian physical appearance, despite their American heritage.

The final stage which Phinney proposed in her model of ethnic identity is the achievement phase which involves the internalisation and acceptance of ethnicity. Cross (1995) extended this stating that here the concern for ethnicity and culture may be illustrated through community, social and or political activity. Phinney extended this further and proposed that the achievement of ethnic identity may also involve a process of accepting any cultural differences between one’s own and the dominant group. However, this may be particularly challenging for some ethnic groups as it may require that the ethnic person learns to manage the lower or devalued social status of their group within the culturally diverse context.

It is crucial that it be recognised and understood here that an achieved ethnic identity does not denote an unchanging, uninfluenced ethnic status, nor an end point in development (Phinney, 1990, 1996). This is a limitation of ethnic categories in that they are not consistent indicators of ethnic group membership. One of the most common criticisms of stage models of ethnic identity development involves the linear fashion in which it is depicted. Although Phinney’s (1983 cited in Phinney, 1990) model is stage based, she, like Yi (1999) and others, acknowledged that ethnic identity development is not necessarily a linear progression. Rather, Phinney (1996) said that
Ethnic identity is more complex than models allow. The psychological implications and meaning of ethnicity may continue to adapt throughout the lifespan as they largely depend on one's experiences within the given context, at a given time (Phinney, 1996).

Identity and Ethnic Identity in Adulthood

All of the discussed models and theories of identity and ethnic identity development have addressed the issue of identity in relation to adolescence. As a result, there is very little known about ethnic identity during adulthood. However, significant life transitions that force an awareness of one's own ethnicity may have an effect on identity and ethnic identity. Gim Chung (2001) acknowledged the influence that immigration can have on identity. The transition of moving and learning to exist in a new and foreign country may see traditional family roles and patterns challenged and traditional gender roles and power relations undermined. For example, women may be forced by economic necessity to work outside of the home (Gim Chung).

Another significant life transition that is likely to influence identity is the experience of becoming a parent. Of particular importance to the discussion involving adults' and more specifically parents' identity and ethnic identity is the potential influence of intergenerational conflict. Intergenerational conflict may occur particularly where, in a family situation, there are differential rates of acculturation between foreign-born parents and children, who are born and raised within the context of the dominant culture (Farver, Narang & Bhadha, 2002; Gim Chung, 2001). Gim Chung found that the status of almost all first generation participants fell in a range from a low level of acculturation to bicultural, where second and subsequent generations predominantly had a bicultural to acculturated status. Farver et al. (2002) stated that the greater the acculturation gap between parents and their children, the greater the level of anxiety, stress and family conflict. For example, parents with a marginalised style of acculturation, whose children were socialised predominantly within the dominant culture, reported a higher degree of
family conflict than did parents who had an integrated or assimilated acculturation style (Farver et al.). Therefore in order for parents to bridge the ethnic and cultural divide between themselves and their children, it is very likely that they need to adapt their ethnic identity in some way that will allow them to understand and integrate the perspectives and orientations of their children.

Positive ethnic identity has often been linked to a supportive family environment (Farver et al., 2002). The transition of becoming a parent may influence ethnic identity in that, despite potential differences in ethnic orientation between parents and children, the children of a first generation migrant may, through demonstrating respect for and an appreciation of their parents' ethnic identity, reinforce a positive ethnic concept and therefore strengthen identity. Collins (2000) also acknowledged the role of supportive families, however stated that supportive families can rather help their members to positively and functionally integrate the identities of two cultures. For example, Gim Chung (2001) acknowledged that children of first generation immigrants, who are fluent in the language of the dominant culture, may often serve a role as an educator and cultural translator for their parents. In this way, becoming a parent may influence ethnic identity in that it may require the integration of a second language, again largely as a means of identifying and communicating with one's children.

The importance and strength of ethnic identity may also be influenced by the experience of becoming a parent. A Jewish woman in Friedman, Friedlander and Blustein (2005) commented that becoming a parent had shaped her ethnic identity in that it had encouraged her to want to be more focused on her Jewish beliefs, values and behaviours. Having become a parent she expressed a desire to join a synagogue and to meet more Jewish people, as a means of achieving a greater sense of belonging within the Jewish community. She further said that she would like her daughter to learn about Jewish culture and education. Similarly, Phinney (1990) acknowledged that a common desire of minority parents, raising children in culturally diverse
societies, involves their children learning their language. In this way, whilst it is somewhat speculative, it would seem that having children may strengthen ethnic identity, as children broaden the ethnic network in which one lives and may provide the motivation for the maintenance and passing of ethnic identity.

**Middle Adulthood and Generativity**

Indeed, becoming a parent is one of the means of achieving generativity, a life task of middle adulthood, proposed by Erikson (1968) in his model of development. Generativity refers to the production of or concern for future generations and involves some belief in the species and hope for the future. As one enters middle adulthood, it is said that the need for generativity becomes apparent (Erikson). However, Azarow (2003) argued that generativity is not associated exclusively or even primarily with a particular stage of adult development. Similarly, Mc Adams and de St. Aubins (1992 cited in Phelan, 2004) emphasised that generativity is not simply a task of midlife, but rather, generativity is itself an important part of identity formation. Azarow further acknowledged that psychological research concerning generativity has ignored ethnic differences, and therefore ethnic identity, in its discussions.

Nonetheless, many studies suggest that the achievement of generativity and the overcoming of this conflict in identity, leads to an increase in psychological adjustment and wellbeing (Erikson, 1968; Phelan, 2004). Helson and Srivastava (2001) acknowledged this stating that successful psychosocial development involves the achievement of identity, intimacy and generativity. This active psychological development is said to prompt the modification and expansion of identity toward an identity which encompasses a sense of self as a carer of others (Cantor, 2003). Whilst Cantor did find that generativity in women is most commonly achieved through parenthood (although it is noteworthy that this finding was presented in a dissertation that was not published), there are other means by which generativity may be achieved. For
example, it is reported that generativity may also be achieved through relationships of care and paid and, or voluntary work. The primary generative value of this work largely rests in its benefit to others (Cantor).

However, these arguments and theories surrounding generativity, particularly those that link it to parenthood, may best be considered with skepticism, as they may also reflect social and ideological concepts about heterosexuality and an expectation of parenthood, particularly for women. For example, the binary nature of Erikson’s (1968) stages of development, somewhat convey these ideological expectations, in that, for each identity crisis there is a positive outcome, which suggests the achievement of that particular stage, and a negative outcome for which the individual may be considered maladjusted. For example, the identity crisis in middle adulthood involving generativity, suggests that its achievement enhances psychological wellbeing. The flip side to the achievement of generativity however, Erikson proposed is a state of stagnation, for which one is said to become self absorbed. Therefore, despite evidence that there are other means to achieving generativity, theories that emphasise that having children is the superior means to achieving generativity, to an extent reinforce social expectations of parenthood. It may be implied that people who do not have children may have difficulty overcoming the identity crisis involving generativity, resulting in selfish individuals in a state of stagnation. These theories leave little room for homosexual couples and people who voluntarily opt not to have children. Whilst these comments are speculative, important points may be raised, particularly in that Erikson himself recognised the influential role of social forces in development.

Summary

This literature review has demonstrated the complex and multidimensional nature of ethnic identity, the extent to which a person identifies with their heritage culture (Phinney, 1996). In particular ethnic identity has been linked to the psychological wellbeing of minority ethnic
group members living in culturally diverse societies. There are numerous components or influences that are central to ethnic identity, such as language, sense of belonging and level of contact, which have been discussed largely in relation to the strength and salience of ethnic identity.

A number of different theories and models exist in the area of ethnic identity, from historical interpretations, for which marginality was largely pathologised, to social identity theories, to stage based, developmental models, such as those proposed by Cross (1995), Marcia (1980), and Phinney (1983 cited in Phinney, 1990). However, identity and ethnic identity development are not linear in nature. Rather the meaning and implications of ethnicity may be examined and reexamined throughout the lifespan.

Theories in the area of ethnic identity have often primarily focused on identity in adolescence and have largely been adapted from Erikson's model of development. As a result there is little known about identity and ethnic identity in adulthood. However significant life transitions, such as becoming a parent may influence identity and more specifically, ethnic identity. Becoming a parent may influence ethnic identity, with respect to intergenerational conflict and a motivation to maintain and pass on one's ethnic heritage to their children. Thus the achievement of generativity has also often been linked to the transition to parenthood.

Conclusion

There are many gaps in the research on ethnic identity, and very little literature addresses ethnic identity in adults. With the exception of a few dissertations there is virtually no literature that explores the influence of parenthood on ethnic identity. However, there is much need for research in this area. Research that explored the effects of significant life transitions in adulthood would provide a greater awareness and understanding of the influences on adult development and subsequent identity. More specifically, research is needed that addresses the ethnic identities of
migrant adults, and the influences on it, such as becoming a parent in a foreign country, particularly in that we live in an ever increasing rich and culturally diverse society. The results of future studies would inform ethnic identity development theory and have implications for support services for immigrants in Australia.
References


The Impact of Becoming a Parent on Ethnic Identity: Adult Migrant Mothers' Experiences

Abby Taylor
Abstract

Developing a positive ethnic identity has often been linked to the psychological well-being of immigrants living in culturally diverse societies. However, ethnic identity development theories have primarily concentrated on identity development during adolescence and have neglected the role of significant life-events that may influence identity during adulthood, such as becoming a parent. The present study involved an exploration of the impact of becoming a parent on the ethnic identities of adult, first generation immigrants living in Perth, Western Australia. The project took a phenomenological approach for which the subjective experiences of migrant women were of primary importance. Qualitative data, from a sample of seven women, was obtained, using in-depth, individual interviews. Thematic content analysis revealed common themes in the women’s experiences. The results of the study illustrated that the transition to motherhood may have significant bearing on ethnic identity. However, an interpretation of the results may also suggest a reciprocal relationship between ethnic identity and the transition to parenthood. Whilst the results of the present study may not be generalised beyond the sample, they may still inform ethnic identity theory and be speculated upon with respect to future research and support services for immigrant mothers living in culturally diverse settings.

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The Impact of Becoming a Parent on Ethnic Identity: Adult Migrant Mothers’ Experiences

Over recent decades, much psychological research has been devoted to the study of ethnic identity, the extent to which a person identifies with their ethnocultural group (Phinney, 1996). The study of ethnic identity has become of increasing importance, largely in response to changing demographics and increases in immigrants and refugees throughout the world (Phinney, 1990). In particular, ethnic identity has commonly been linked to the psychological wellbeing of ethnic minorities living in culturally diverse societies (Phinney, 1996). Positive ethnic identity has been found to be crucial to the self-concept and psychological functioning of minority group members (Phinney, 1990), leading to increased self-esteem and identification with the ethnic group (Ethier & Deaux, 1994). However, research has predominantly explored ethnic identity in relation to adolescent development (Erikson, 1968; Phinney, 1983 cited in Phinney, 1990). As a result there are significant gaps in the literature regarding ethnic identity in adults, and the factors that influence it. Ethnic identity may continue to develop during adulthood, and indeed across the lifespan, reflecting the effects of significant life transitions.

There are differing definitions of ethnic identity, which reflect the fact that it varies across individuals and groups and is complex and multidimensional (Phinney, 1996; Ethier & Deaux, 1994). However, Phinney argued that from a psychological perspective, there are three key components of ethnic identity that exist in varying degrees, regardless of the group to which one belongs. These components include a sense of belonging, pride in one’s group, and self-identification. Using this conceptualization ethnic identity is a progressive and fundamental aspect of the self, involving the exploration of and consequent decisions regarding sense of belonging and the feelings and attitudes toward a group (Phinney, 1990).

Current theories of ethnic identity largely conceptualise ethnic identity within a social identity framework. The key component of social identity theory is that group membership
contributes to the self-concept and psychological wellbeing (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). We are motivated to belong to groups that contribute to a positive sense of self and we strive to maintain a positive identification with the group. Ethnic identity has primarily been studied among first and second generation migrants, living in culturally diverse societies. Research has shown that there are numerous factors that may influence the development and salience of ethnic identity. Phinney (1990) acknowledged that language has often been considered the single most important component of ethnic identity, however further stated that different components of ethnic identity vary in their salience and thus, language, for some groups, is not an appropriate measure of ethnic identity (Phinney; Phinney, 1996).

Lambert (1975 cited in Gaudet and Clément, 2005) suggested that a process of identity changes occur when one learns a second language. He further discussed bilingualism in terms of it being additive, involving the retention of ethnic identity, or subtractive, referring to the loss of identity. Whilst Gaudet and Clément (2005) acknowledged that there is a trend toward subtractive bilingualism where a second language is introduced to the minority, Landry, Allard, and Theberge (1991) found that additive bilingualism occurred and a strong ethnic identity was maintained, by a sample of Francophones, despite a strong presence of English as a second language. One reason for this, it was argued, related to a commitment to culturally specific routines within the home. These findings support much research, suggesting that the home and familial interactions provide a sheltered context in which culturally specific routines may be practiced, including language, and ethnic identity need not be compromised by the demands of the dominant culture (Landry, 1987; Gaudet & Clément).

There are also arguments to suggest that the degree and quality of contact that is maintained with one’s own ethnic group, as well as with the dominant culture, may have significant bearing on the strength of ethnic identity (Gaudet & Clément, 2005; LaFromboise,
LaFramboise et al. (1993) suggested that interactions with one’s own and the dominant group may lead to the development of networks and therefore sources of social support, which may aid in the process of adjustment. However, Gaudet and Clément found that when social support was high from the dominant group, but low from one’s own, psychosocial adjustment was reduced. Thus, research has tended to illustrate the importance of connections with members of one’s ethnic group for adjustment and the maintenance of ethnic identity (Gaudet & Clément).

As mentioned, ethnic identity is usually embedded within a social identity framework. However, current models of ethnic identity largely stem from a developmental perspective and are stage based (Erikson, 1968; Phinney, 1983 cited in Phinney, 1990). Critics have reviewed these models, suggesting that the proposed stages be viewed as ‘statuses’, as the term stage implies linear development, which is not supported by empirical research (Yi, 1999). Nonetheless, current models continue to describe the development of ethnic identity in a progressive manner, from the point of a somewhat unexamined status through to an achieved ethnic identity (Phinney).

Developmental models of ethnic identity have often been based on Erikson’s (1968) model of development, which suggested that identity-related concerns are the primary focus of adolescence and an identity status is achieved by early adulthood. Marcia’s (1980) work addressing ego identity development is largely adapted from Eriksonian thought and is among much research that focused on identity development in adolescents.

A further well known stage model of identity development is that proposed by Phinney (1983 cited in Phinney, 1990). Phinney’s model is of particular importance however, in that she specifically addressed the development of ethnic identity. A further distinguishing feature of Phinney’s model is that whilst she described the achievement of ethnic identity through a
progression of stages and has focused much of her research on ethnic identity development in adolescents, Phinney acknowledged that ethnic identity is adaptable.

Phinney’s model of ethnic identity involved three stages, from a point of, (1) an unexamined ethnic status, through a period of, (2) exploration, resulting in, (3) identity achievement. There is much support for this concept of exploration, whereby Erikson (1968), Marcia (1980) and Phinney (1990) all propose that a process of exploration and decision making and commitment is necessary for the achievement and resolution of identity crises. For example, Collins (2000), who is one of the few researchers to acknowledge identity concerns in adults, found that as people grow older they explore what they believe to be unresolved and contradictory identities and progress toward a self-identified ethnicity.

However, an achieved ethnic identity is not an end point in development (Phinney, 1990, 1996). The psychological implications and meanings of ethnicity may continue to change throughout the lifespan, as they largely depend on one’s experiences within a given context, and at a given time (Phinney, 1996). Despite this, little attention has been paid to ethnic identity in adulthood. However, identity, and specifically ethnic identity, may continue to develop during adulthood and across the lifespan, reflecting the effects of significant life transitions. For example, research, although it does primarily relate to adolescents, has shown that significant life events, such as migration and intergenerational conflict, may have profound effects on ethnic identity (Farver, Narang, & Bhadha, 2002; Gim Chung, 2001).

Whilst there is virtually no research that has explored the influence of becoming a parent on ethnic identity, based on previous research addressing significant life events, becoming a parent may be another significant life transition that may influence ethnic identity. Research has shown that the transition to parenthood has implications for identity generally, involving for example, shifts in one’s roles, sexuality and general self-concept (Peterson, 1996). One piece of
research in particular, which addressed ethnic identity in relation to parenthood, showed that becoming a parent may influence ethnic identity in terms of an increased motivation to maintain and pass on one's ethnic heritage to one's children (Friedman, Friedlander & Blustein, 2005). Nonetheless, there is a great lack of knowledge about the potential influence which parenting may have on ethnic identity.

Therefore, the aim of the present study was to explore the influence of becoming a parent on ethnic identity. A qualitative research design was adopted, involving a phenomenological approach, for which the subjective experiences of migrant women were of primary importance. The project was gender specific due to the researcher's specific interest in women's experiences, particularly of motherhood. The rationale behind conducting a qualitative, phenomenological study reflected a desire to give minority women, living in Australia, an opportunity to voice their stories about their experiences of motherhood. The present project was a retrospective study in that, for some informants, the birth of their first child was some years ago. Nevertheless, the present study involved an exploration of the research question: Does becoming a parent influence the ethnic identities of migrant women?

Methodology

Research Design

The present study involved a qualitative research design. A phenomenological approach was adopted, for which the subjective experiences of migrant women were of primary importance. The project was a retrospective study in that, for some informants, the research question may have addressed issues and experiences that occurred some time ago.

Paradigm and Assumptions

A qualitative, phenomenological approach was adopted to capture the depth of the women's subjective experiences of motherhood and its effects on ethnic identity. Consistent with
feminist approaches, the design of the project was intended to allow the participating women the
opportunity to voice their stories, from their perspectives (Riger, 2001).

Sample

A total of seven first-generation immigrant women, living in Australia, voluntarily
participated in the study. The sample did not involve women with a refugee status because
previous research has identified that refugees differ from other migrant groups for a number of
characteristics (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002). All participants were biological
mothers, five of them of two children and two of them of three children. A biological relationship
between the mother and her children was a requirement as step or adopted children, for example,
may have been of a different ethnicity, and thereby raised other issues.

The women were from culturally diverse backgrounds, all of a different self-identified
ethnicity. Specifically, the women were from Argentina, Bangladesh, Columbia, Croatia, Iraq,
Peru and Spain. Whilst Spanish was the most commonly spoken mother tongue among the
sample, all the women were also fluent in English. All women were living in a married
relationship, and all but two were married to a man of a different cultural background to
themselves. In four cases the woman’s husband was Anglo-Australian and in one case the
husband was Irish. The women were aged between 28 and 40 years, and the average age of their
children was 3 \(\frac{1}{2}\) years. They were all predominantly ‘stay-at-home’ mothers, with the exception
of one woman whose children were of a school age. Two of the other mothers engaged in some
casual work, including voluntary work and work from home, during which times the children
attended child care.

Recruitment of Sample

The recruitment of participants began in mid April, 2006. Initially the ISHAR
Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health was approached to be involved in the study and the
recruitment of informants. Through ISHAR, three women were informed of the study and expressed their interest and wish to participate, to the researcher directly. Potential informants were given a verbal summary of the project aims and procedure, and were provided with an opportunity to ask questions about the study. Those interested in participating were then invited to participate in an interview, at a mutually convenient time. A snow-ball effect then occurred whereby subsequent participants were largely obtained through one woman’s connection to a specific group, *Bilingual Families*. Some of these contacts were also linked to a Spanish playgroup, which again led to participants being recruited via a snow-ball procedure. Some of these women were contacted by telephone by the researcher, whilst others initiated contact themselves.

*Data Collection Procedures*

The data were collected using semi-structured, in-depth, individual interviews, which were audio recorded. Interviews varied in length from approximately one hour to 90 minutes. The interviews were conducted in English, in the informants’ homes, with the exception of one interview, which took place in a private room at ISHAR. At the beginning of each interview, the aims and procedure of the project were verbally summarised and participants were given the opportunity to ask questions about the study. They were also given the information sheet and asked to complete the consent form (see Appendices A & B). A set of semi-structured, open-ended questions were used to open and direct discussion (see Appendix C), and additional prompts were used when a particular point needed elaborating or clarifying.

*Ethics*

Informants were required to complete a consent form once they had read the project information letter, but prior to participating in the interview. The information letter clearly outlined what the study involved, including any potential risks and a contact list of help services.
The consent form stated the confidentiality of information and specified that information disclosed during the interview will remain confidential in the writings of the data.

In the transcriptions of the interviews pseudonyms were used instead of informants' names. The data were accessible only to the student conducting the project and the project supervisors. Audio recordings of the interviews were kept in a locked cabinet during transcription and analysis, and will be erased following the preservation period.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data began with the audio recordings of the interviews being transcribed verbatim, using a simple form of Jeffersonian transcription (Jefferson, 1984). The transcripts were read multiple times and personal biases of the researcher were identified, such as sympathy toward the informants' experiences or comments which may have led their responses according to the researcher's own values or preconceived ideas. The responses to these questions and comments were carefully considered and every effort was made to interpret them in a culturally relative manner, from the perspectives of the informants.

The data were then analysed using thematic content analysis. Significant and, or common themes, such as reoccurring concepts, statements and words were identified, labeled and coded on the transcript. A colour-coding method was further used to identify the themes in the transcript, recognising both individual and group themes. The data were then reduced into a table, identifying the significant themes, issues and exemplars from the transcripts. A method of reflexivity was employed as a means of protecting the rigour of interpretations. Finally, the reduced data were written up in a concise but detailed thesis, reflecting the participants' experiences of motherhood, with respect to its influence on ethnic identity.
Findings and Interpretations

The results of the study suggested that ethnic identity was of great importance to the sampled informants and illustrated that the experience of becoming a parent strengthened ethnic identity and increased their motivation to maintain it. However, the informants’ commitment to passing on ethnic identity did not necessarily mean that they accepted all of the values of their heritage culture. Rather, in some cases it would appear that motherhood prompted a re-evaluation of ethnic identity and the subsequent adoption of aspects of the Australian culture, in the best interests of one’s children.

Thematic content analysis of the data revealed five major themes and a number of sub-themes, in relation to the transition to parenthood and ethnic identity. Common themes were identified for the sample, as individuals and as a group, and labeled and coded on the transcripts. The major themes to emerge included issues around language, family, community, culturally specific routines and practices, and values, in terms of religious and self-identified, personal values. Whilst the informants were all from different ethnic backgrounds this will not be a point of discussion and where the informants’ ethnicities are identified specifically, no inferences or meanings may be drawn from such.

Language

The most salient theme to emerge from the data was that of language. All of the women in the sample commented on the increased importance of the maintenance of their mother tongue to their ethnic identities, following the birth of their children. For example the Bangladeshi informant said,

…maybe I wouldn’t emphasise Bangla as much as I do now because I got children and I want to hold on to it.
Phinney (1990) acknowledged that it is a common desire for parents to want their children to learn their first language. Furthermore, this concept of ‘holding on to it’ seemed to resonate with many of the women, whereby they felt that by exposing their children to their cultural heritage through language, ethnic identity is being passed on to the next generation and therefore maintained. The Spanish informant stated that for her, language is the,

...most important thing because it is going to be their vehicle...to communicate, to be able to live in Spain...

All informants emphasised the importance of bilingualism because fluency in the mother tongue was largely perceived as the means by which one’s children could connect and identify with their extended families and ethnic roots. The Argentinian informant also said:

...I want them to speak Spanish...because I want them to be able to connect with my mum. I want them to be able to, when we are on the MSN on the computer, say, be able to say, ‘hey look I’m playing with play dough’, and all those things so my mum can talk back to them and be grandmother.

Furthermore, teaching one’s children to be fluent in the mother tongue was identified as being of great importance, in order for these mothers themselves to communicate with their children in a culturally similar way. For example, the Colombian informant emphasised the need for her children to speak Spanish,

...because English it still doesn’t come as natural to me. Spanish it comes natural

Similarly, the Croatian informant stated that sharing and speaking her language with her children allows her to,

...express the sweetness which I feel for them. So, I think it creates a great intimacy.

These results may demonstrate that as opposed to the transition to parenthood influencing ethnic identity, it may be ethnic identity and culturally specific practices, such as language, that
influence the expression of motherhood. In this way, perhaps what the results suggest is a reciprocal relationship between ethnic identity and the transition to parenthood.

This issue of expression was also emphasised in relation to the influence that necessarily adopting a second language has on ethnic identity generally. It was stated:

> It has a really big impact on you because...you cannot express yourself in the way that you're used to...it doesn’t come naturally for you in another language...so...it’s like you’re cut from a big part of your personality. (Spanish informant)

Lambert (1975 cited in Gaudet & Clément, 2005) suggested that a process of identity changes occur where one learns a second language. He proposed that bilingualism may be additive, involving the retention of ethnic identity, or subtractive, referring to the loss of identity. Despite the challenges of learning a second language, the informants in the present study would appear to have achieved an additive state of bilingualism, involving a balance between their mother tongue and English. Moreover, this additive state would appear to be maintained through the informants' commitments to always only speaking their mother tongue in the home and when speaking to their children.

**Family**

Family as an overarching theme was commonly identified as an important component of ethnic identity. In particular, the Latin-American informants all emphasized the great importance of family to their cultures and their subsequent ethnic identities. For example, a number of the informants commented that they speak with their extended families, who reside in their countries of origin, on an almost daily basis.

> We call our family on a regular basis, like almost everyday talk to my mum, and the kids too. Like for me it’s very important to be close to, like my family in Columbia
The results would further suggest that the transition to motherhood influenced the priority of family and familial connections. For example, the Croatian informant said,

Family is extremely important in Croatia...only realise that once you have your own children.

Similarly one participant said,

...it’s very...important for me to be with my kids and my husband all the time. (Columbian informant)

And,

...the most important for me is my family...this is the most important in my life... (Peruvian informant)

However, it is difficult to determine here whether there was any significant impact on ethnic identity as a result of parenthood, and in relation to family, or whether these results better reflect a more general shift in values and priorities following the transition to motherhood.

On a different level, the significance of family to ethnic identity and the experience of becoming a parent may involve, to an extent a rejection of aspects of one’s heritage culture. An Iraqi woman discussed at length the importance of family to her ethnic identity, however in the sense that she chose to reject particular aspects of her ethnic heritage, which her family continue to value. As a result, the informant stated that despite the challenges of being isolated from one’s family in a foreign country, it was a somewhat deliberate decision to remove herself and her children born since, from her family in Iraq. Iraqi families predominantly live together in the one home and all members may play a role in the upbringing of children (Wikipedia, 2006). The Iraqi informant acknowledged this and stated the,

...need to be very far away...so she [mother] won’t criticize me...and no one influence my kids, only me you know.
Nonetheless, this informant’s extended family is still of great importance to her and remains central to her, perhaps negotiated, ethnic identity, particularly since she has become a mother. The informant acknowledged a commitment to teaching her children her mother tongue,

...because my family still in Iraq I want them [children] to learn Arabic...so they can communicate with my family...

The results of the present study therefore illustrated that family is an important component of ethnic identity, in terms of sense of belonging and ethnic group membership (Phinney, 1990), and suggested that family may have some bearing on ethnic identity in the transition to motherhood. However, as discussed, the importance of family to ethnic identity may differ in meaning and involve various levels of connectedness (Gim Chung, 2001). Whilst the concept of bringing up one’s children independently was commonly acknowledged as an advantage of migration, the overarching feeling among the majority of informants was one of a longing to be closer to one’s family, and particularly one’s mother, since becoming a mother themselves.

**Community**

Community was a significant theme in the data. However, similar to the issue of family, the informants varied in their opinions of the importance of actual connections with one’s own ethnic group. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that all informants, following migration, initially sought an ethnically and culturally similar social network.

For half of the sampled informants there was a strong value of and need for connections with ethnic group members, which it would appear was influenced by the experience of becoming a parent. For example the Croatian informant, as she now self-identifies, stated that she initially did not socialise with any people from her cultural background, which reflected the suppression of her ethnic identity due to the war in the former Yugoslavia. This informant is half
Croatian and half Serbian, and therefore described her ethnic identity as a "...very traumatic one..." She found it too hard to identify because she did not know who to identify with and stated,

...whenever I met any Croatian people I felt that I didn’t belong there because they were so anti-Serb...and when I would meet Serbian people they were very anti-Croatian...So I felt um trapped.

However, the informant went on to say that:

The birth of my children reignited the need to be culturally, ah, to go back to my roots.

This informant stated that a commitment to raising her children bilingually prompted the need for a positive ethnic identity and indeed, at least for her, interactions with people who share the same ethnic background and language.

These findings support previous research, demonstrating the need for culturally relevant interactions following the transition to parenthood (Friedman, Friedlander, & Blustein, 2005). Furthermore, these results may relate to social identity theory, which states that it is human nature to belong to social groups that contribute to a positive self concept. However, if the group is evaluated negatively, as was the case for the informant during the war, then the part of oneself that identifies with the group may be rejected (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Nonetheless, the informant’s motivation, following the birth of her children to re-identify with her ethnic heritage, demonstrated that positive ethnic identity is crucial to the self-concept and psychological functioning of ethnic group members (Phinney, 1990), and leads to increased self-esteem and identification with the ethnic group (Ethier & Deaux, 1994).

Whilst the Spanish speaking informants did not overly emphasise the importance of interactions with members of their ethnic communities, they all acknowledged that they had greater connections with people from culturally diverse backgrounds, who were also ethnic
minorities within the Australian context, than they did with Anglo-Australians. Although, it is noteworthy that these interactions tended to occur with other Spanish speaking people, which may connect peoples, despite their country of origin. Nevertheless, it was stated that:

…the fact that you speak the same language doesn’t mean that you’re going to connect… I think that the common denominator with people that speak Spanish in Australia is that we all come from another place and know what it is like to be far from our families (Argentinian informant)

Thus interactions with people who understood the impact of migration and isolation, particularly in relation to becoming a parent by oneself, without the support of friends and family, were important to the reinforcement of these informants’ ethnic identities. In particular, following the birth of children, these interactions functioned as sources of support and encouragement in committing to the efforts required in maintaining and passing on ethnic identity, within the context of a dominant culture.

LaFramboise (et al. 1993) acknowledged the role of social support in the process of adjustment, within a culturally diverse setting, stating that social support from members of the same or a different ethnic group may provide the knowledge and information required for developing positive attitudes toward one’s own and the dominant group. However, Gaudet and Clément (2005) found that when social support was perceived as being high from the dominant group, but low from one’s own, the strength of ethnic identity may be weakened.

Rather, the results of the present study somewhat support Phinney’s (1996) argument, that a strong ethnic identity can be maintained even when there is little ethnic group involvement, through symbolic ethnicity and ethnic loyalty. For example, although ethnic identity was of great importance to all informants, approximately half stated that ethnically similar interactions were not of significant value to their ethnic identities, even following the birth of their children.

I didn’t like them. I didn’t feel there’s a nice connect between us…” (Iraqi informant)
The lack of value which some of the informants described for connections with ethnic group members was closely related to previous experiences of negative and critical interactions. The informants largely explained this criticism as being the result of the apparent disapproval, which other ethnic group members expressed, over their chosen methods of parenting and their openness to some aspects of the dominant culture. For example, the Peruvian informant reported that her Peruvian friends had commented “Oh no you are a bad mum...” for giving her children a sandwich for lunch instead of a traditional Peruvian soup. Similarly, the Iraqi woman commented:

...they don’t like the way I treat my kids yeah...and sometimes they criticise you, you know? Like, you know, they come to my place and they saw the kids are playing here, “oh how dare you let the kids a play, I will never let the kids a play in the loungeroom”, you know? Something like that. I just feel oh they’re kids you know, they want to enjoy themselves.

It could be speculated in both cases that members of the informants’ ethnic communities perceived these behaviours, and quite possibly correctly, as reflecting a shift or openness in ethnic identity to dominant practice. However, it is an interesting point to consider that the concerned informants largely attributed a process of cultural revitalisation (Berry et al., 2002), to the negative nature of interactions with members of their ethnic communities. The Iraqi, Bangladeshi and Peruvian informants all suggested that members of their communities have changed; that they have become more conservative in their ethnicity and cultural ways for fear of it getting lost in the Australian culture.

Nevertheless, the results of the present study would suggest that the experience of motherhood may influence the importance of interactions with members of one’s ethnic community, depending upon the nature of these interactions and the perceived value of such to one’s own and one’s children’s adjustment.
Culturally Specific Routines and Practices

It would appear, for this sample of migrant women, that there was a shift in ethnic identity, with respect to the level of commitment to its components, following the birth of one’s children. The need for practical, culturally specific routines and festivities to be practiced within the home, and involving one’s children in these, was commonly expressed. For example, many of the informants identified culturally specific food and cooking practices as important components of ethnic identity, and stated that this is something which became more important since becoming a parent.

It’s important for me that they [children] eat the food that we have there [Argentina], and... he [son] cooks with me (Argentinian informant)

Similarly, many responses emphasised the importance of culturally specific music, activities and festivities.

...yeah music and my kids, ah they listening salsa...and tropical music...it’s traditional in Peru...yeah it’s very important for me...here in my home (Peruvian informant)

Furthermore, although religious activities were not regularly practiced by any of the South American informants, the importance of nativities for example, at Christmas, was commonly expressed. For example, the Spanish informant commented that it is important to her ethnic identity that she maintains certain festivities, specific to Spanish culture, such as celebrating Christmas and giving gifts on the 6th of January. However, she continued to say that these visible, culturally specific routines have become especially important to her since becoming a parent, because they provide a way in which her children too can identify with her ethnic heritage. For example, she stated,

...for me I would have many things inside that maybe don’t show...so it’s important for me to have all these external that I can share...with others...[that]...the kids can really grab.
By one’s children being exposed to and embracing important aspects of the mother’s ethnicity, ethnic identity may be reinforced, in that it is being accepted and valued, and because the mother is not isolated in her ethnicity. Furthermore, by sharing and passing on one’s ethnicity to one’s children and partner, when they are from a different ethnic background, as was the case for five of the informants, the family members may all understand and appreciate the mother’s ethnic heritage and therefore connect in a culturally similar way.

Research has often shown that positive ethnic identity is linked to supportive family environments (Farver, Narang, & Bhadha, 2002). Collins (2000) also acknowledged the role of supportive families, stating that supportive families often play a significant role in assisting members to positively and functionally integrate the identities of two cultures, as was the case in the present study. Therefore, where ethnic identity initially may not have been so salient because it is largely internalised, the experience of becoming a parent prompted the need, and subsequent motivation for this sample of migrant women to be explicit about their ethnic identification and its core components, so that their offspring too may do, as Collins says, and functionally integrate the identities of two cultures.

Importantly, of the seven informants only two were married to men from their own ethnic backgrounds. Four were married to Australian men and one to an Irish man. Thus, considering this, and not forgetting that the sample were migrants, the issue of integrating two cultures (Collins, 2000) was of great relevance to these women. In particular, for the women whose husbands were Australian, the passing on of one’s ethnicity involved great commitment, for the fact that their children were also Australian and were growing up in Australia. The Argentinian informant commented that it takes a great deal of energy to pass on one’s cultural heritage and that the experience of becoming a mother had influenced her ethnic identity,
A lot. Yeah. Because I see how my children are being raised here and all the influences they get from the outside and I think I have to really work very, very hard to match that up.

Thus, the transition to motherhood may have a profound influence on ethnic identity with respect to a need for an even greater commitment to, and expression of cultural heritage.

**Values**

Finally, the issue of values was a significant theme to emerge from the data, which may underlie and be intertwined with all other themes identified. Whilst the values, largely defined by the informants themselves, are not necessarily consistent with each other, the common theme emerged in that all informants, at some point in the interviews, identified personal ‘values’ specific to their cultures, which were, in some way, influenced by the transition to motherhood.

For example, it was stated that:

...having children really brings up a lot of issues in your life. What values are you going to give them, where do these values come from? And, they inevitably come from where you come from. (Croatian informant)

In this way the transition to parenthood may prompt a reevaluation of culturally specific values. For example, the Bangladeshi and Iraqi informants were motivated by Hindu and Muslim beliefs and shared in the sentiment,

[I]...do not value...living together, or having partner before marriage, or drinking or smoking.

However, the Bangladeshi informant acknowledged that these values had only become important to her, since becoming a parent, as she stated that:

...when I was a child it was ok to me [to have a partner before marriage], I thought it was fantastic.

The transition to motherhood has seen her religious values become much more pronounced, and central to her ethnic identity, as evidenced by the quote above. From a different perspective, the Iraqi informant stated that whilst she wants her children to know that they are Muslim, and to
respect these values, she doesn’t want her kids to view their ways as better than others. She acknowledged that for different religions, different behaviours and practices are acceptable.

There were additional values to emerge from the data which largely demonstrated the informants’ ethnic identities, and the influence of the transition to parenthood. One informant discussed her concerns about the school structure in Australia, suggesting that it is very casual, and values sport too much. She continued to say that:

Basically doctor, engineer, lecturer in the university or school teacher, that’s what we value... If my child wants to be a chef... I wouldn’t be happy... I wouldn’t be a proud mother. (Bangladeshi informant)

On the contrary, the Columbian informant stated, which all of the informants made a point of acknowledging, that she values the opportunities which Australia offers her children. She said:

I actually prefer the Australian values than Columbian values...

She defined some of these ‘Australian values’ as, telling the truth, the fact that people don’t steal from each other, more egalitarian gender roles, fidelity in marriages and safety. It is due to these values, as she perceives them, that she would “prefer [her] kids grow up here”. Nonetheless she still self-identifies as Columbian and demonstrated a strong and positive ethnic identity.

Summary

Overall, the results of the study indicated that the experience of becoming a mother, for this sample of migrant women living in Australia, did influence their ethnic identities, particularly in relation to language, family, community, culturally specific routines and practices and values. Primarily, becoming a mother would appear to influence ethnic identity in terms of strengthening it and creating an increased need to be ethnically aware and specific, so that the children may share in the mother’s culture and connect with their ethnic heritage. The results further showed that the transition to parenthood may influence ethnic identity in terms of prompting a reexamination of it. In the context of migration ethnic identity may be negotiated
and expanded to incorporate aspects of the dominant culture, which are perceived to contribute to and optimise the adjustment, wellbeing and opportunities of one’s children, within the dominant context.

However, adaptability and fluidity have been said to be important characteristics of an achieved ethnic identity status (Phinney, 1983 cited in Phinney, 1990; Yi, 1999). In this way, it could be argued that the informants in the present study demonstrated particularly salient ethnic identities, in that they have all maintained a strong ethnic identification with their heritage culture, within the context of a culturally diverse setting, even though aspects of the Australian culture may have been adopted, in the best interests of their children.

Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to explore whether becoming a parent influences ethnic identity. The results of the study illustrated that the transition to motherhood, for this sample of migrant women, had significant bearing on their ethnic identities. Whilst the informants’ ethnicities were at times identified specifically, no inferences or meanings were or can be drawn from these comments. It is also important that the role of context be acknowledged in the results because whilst the results did reflect the comments of migrant women, the interviews with the informants were conducted within the dominant context, by a member of the dominant culture.

Contrary to the direction of the research question, some of the informants’ responses suggested that as opposed to the transition to parenthood influencing ethnic identity, it may be ethnic identity and culturally specific practices, such as language, that influence the expression of motherhood. Nonetheless, given that motherhood would appear to influence ethnic identity, in that the birth of one’s children reinforced the need to express and maintain culturally specific components, central to ethnic identity, perhaps what the results rather suggest, is a reciprocal relationship between ethnic identity and the transition to parenthood.
A potential limitation of the study may relate to the small sample size, which was the result of a lack of further interest being expressed by potential participants, who had been informed of the study. However, the conducted interviews went into great depth and saturation was achieved. A further limitation of the study, also in relation to the sample, is that the migrant women who participated may be somewhat unique in that five of them were married to men from different cultural backgrounds to themselves, four of these men being Australian. In this way the informants' ethnic identities and experiences of motherhood may differ from other migrant women's, living and raising children in Australia, with a partner of the same ethnicity. As a result, the implications of the present study are minimal and the results cannot be generalised beyond this sample. Nonetheless, the results may still inform ethnic identity theory, with respect to the influence of motherhood on ethnic identity, and speculations may be made about other migrant women's experiences of parenting within a culturally diverse setting.

There is still a great need for future research in the area of ethnic identity, particularly in relation to ethnic identity during adulthood. Research with migrants of a specific self-identified ethnicity or status would be beneficial, in that the results may be more easily generalised to other members of that community, and also contribute to the development of policies and support services for migrants living in Australia.
References


Appendix A

THE IMPACT OF BECOMING A PARENT ON CULTURAL IDENTITY: ADULT MIGRANT MOTHERS’ EXPERIENCES

You are invited to be a part of this study which is being conducted by Abby Taylor as part of the honours program in psychology, at Edith Cowan University. This project has gained ethics clearance from the Ethics Sub Committee of the Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences.

The aim of the study is to develop a greater awareness and understanding of migrant women’s experiences of living and becoming a parent in Australia. In particular, the purpose of the project is to explore how becoming a parent affects the cultural identities of migrant women.

Women who express an interest in the project will be invited to participate in a one hour (please allow for 90 minutes) individual (one-on-one) interview. Interviews will take place either in your home or in a private room at ISHAR Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health.

Should you agree to be involved, the interview will be tape recorded. The purpose of this is to ensure the accuracy of your information. The recordings will be transcribed (written down) word-for-word. No names will be used in transcripts or reports. All tape recordings will be kept confidential (private) and only the student researcher and her supervisors will have access to the recordings. The recordings will be erased once the project is complete.

The interviews are not meant to raise issues that will cause discomfort or seem inconsiderate. However, if you are upset by any issue that you discuss in the interview, there is a list of help services and their contact details on page 3 of this letter.

The information which you provide will only be used for the purpose of the project and will only be accessible to the student and project supervisors involved. Any information that you give for this project will be kept confidential (private). You will not be identified in any written work or results of this project.

Participating in this project is your free choice and you may choose not to continue at any time. You do not have to explain why you do not wish to continue and there will be no negative consequences for withdrawal. Any information which you have provided, you may ask to have removed.
Should you have any more questions or need any more information about the project, please contact:

Student: Abby Taylor  
Contact Details: 0439703191  
E-mail: abbyt@student.ecu.edu.au

Project Supervisor: Deirdre Drake  
Contact Details: (08) 6304 5020  
E-mail: d.drake@ecu.edu.au

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the study and want the advice of someone independent of the project, you may contact:

Honours/Fourth year coordinator: Julie Ann Pooley  
Contact Details: (08) 6304 5834  
E-mail: j.pooley@ecu.edu.au
HELP SERVICES

1  Northern Suburbs Migrant Resource Centre, Mirabooka
   Free counseling service
   Phone: (08) 9345 5755.

2  Beyond Blue
   Post Natal Depression Support
   Phone: 13 11 14 (local call cost)

3  ISHAR Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health
   Subsidised Counseling Service for Migrant Women
   One hour sessions: $10 members / $15 unemployed
   Phone: (08) 9345 5335
The Impact of Becoming a Parent on Cultural Identity: Adult Migrant Mothers' Experiences

I have been given a copy of the Information letter that explains the research project on the affect of having children on cultural identity. I have been given the chance to ask questions and any questions I have asked have been answered.

I understand that I will participate in an individual interview for the project.
I know that the interview will be tape recorded and I understand that this recording and any other information I give will be kept confidential (private) and will only be used for the purpose of the project.
I understand that the tape recording will be erased when the project is finished. I also understand that I will not be identified in any written work or presentation of the results of this project.

I understand that I am free to discontinue at anytime without explanation or negative consequence.

I understand my position in this research project and agree to participate.

..........................................................  ..........................................................
Name                                                Signature

..........................................................
Date

..........................................................
Researcher Signature

..........................................................
Date
Appendix C

Interview Schedule

1. How would you describe your cultural/ethnic identity?
2. How important is this identity to you?
3. Has the experience of becoming a parent affected your cultural/ethnic identity?
   1. 3a. [If yes] How?
   2. 3b. [If no] Why do you think this is?
   3. 3c. Do other members of your community treat you differently since you became a parent?
4. What aspects of your heritage culture (culture of origin) do you want your children to learn?
Appendix D

Audit Trail

March 31: Submit project proposal, including application for ethics clearance.

April 13: Scientific Review Meeting
1 Discussion about proposed project – Few amendments to be made on ethics form to increase clarity about the aims and purposes of the project.
2 Amendments to project proposal made, and proposal resubmitted for ethics clearance.

April 27: Email confirming application for ethics clearance, of the proposed project, was granted.

May 9: Meeting with project supervisors
3 Confirm the project has received ethics clearance
4 General chat about where to go from here
5 Justine (project supervisor) to make contact with ISHAR Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health to approach them to be involved in the recruitment of participants
6 Justine will attempt to organise a time for herself and I to visit ISHAR
7 Recommendations from meeting about interviewing:
   - To become really familiar with literature and theories of ethnic identity
   - To demonstrate confidence in the current project
   - Be clear in asking questions – i.e. what is it I want to know, what is it I need to ask.

May 25: Meeting at ISHAR
1 Justine and I met with woman (confidential) at ISHAR about the possibility of recruiting participants through the centre.
2 Justine did most of talking, although meeting was informal. I gave a letter, outlining a brief summary of the project – aims, purpose, methodology etc.
3 Positive response and willing to assist with recruitment of participants where possible.
   - Invitation to attend parenting group, Parenting from the Heart, being run at ISHAR
   - Gave name and contact details of Co-coordinator of group Bilingual Families

June 2: Attended Parenting from the Heart at ISHAR
1 Amazing, very rewarding experience – only one woman spoke English, so the workshop was translated to the group members, and their comments back to the parenting educator.
2 First participant found. Iraqi woman, fluent in English

June 13 – September 13: Interviewing Period
3 Seven interviews conducted
4 Have thoroughly enjoyed all of them as each woman has been from a different cultural background, which has been very interesting, as a number of common, significant
themes would appear to be emerging.

1 Challenges: keeping conversation on track and in answer to the research question
   - Being aware of my own subjective opinions and preconceived ideas and not allowing these to direct my questions or the responses of participants

2 Informants willing and enthusiastic to talk about their experiences of parenthood in terms of its influence on their ethnic identities.

June 22: Research Group Meeting
   1 Transcription – introduced to Jefferson’s transcription.

June 30 - September 30: Transcribing of Interviews
   Reflected upon transcriptions of initial interviews to improve subsequent Interviews:
   - Ask more direct questions and one at a time
   - Direct conversation more toward answering research question.

October 1 – October 20: Analysis of Data
   Data analysis is going well and appears to support some existing literature in the area of ethnic identity.
   Significant themes emerging for discussion
   Be mindful of need for reflexivity: be aware of and monitor personal biases that may direct questions and informants’ responses.

Guidelines for Contributions by Authors

This research project is submitted in full to the requirements of the

*British Journal of Social Psychology*
Notes for Contributors

The British Journal of Social Psychology publishes original papers in all areas of social psychology. Topics covered include social cognition, attitudes, group processes, social influence, intergroup relations, self and identity, nonverbal communication, and social psychological aspects of personality, affect and emotion, and language and discourse. Submissions addressing these topics from a variety of approaches and methods, both quantitative and qualitative are welcomed.

We publish papers of the following kinds:

- Empirical papers that address theoretical issues;
- Theoretical papers, including analyses of existing social psychological theories and presentations of theoretical innovations, extensions, or integrations;
- Review papers that provide an evaluation of work within a given area of social psychology and that present proposals for further research in that area;
- Methodological papers concerning issues that are particularly relevant to a wide range of social psychologists.

1. Circulation

The circulation of the Journal is worldwide. Papers are invited and encouraged from authors throughout the world.

2. Length

Papers should normally be no more than 7,000 words, although shorter submissions are strongly encouraged where possible. The Editor retains discretion to publish papers beyond this length in cases where the clear and concise expression of the scientific content requires greater length.

3. Reviewing

The journal operates a policy of anonymous peer review. Papers will normally be scrutinised and commented on by at least two independent expert referees (in addition to the Editor) although the Editor may process a paper at his or her discretion. The referees will not be aware of the identity of the author. All information about authorship including personal acknowledgements and institutional affiliations should be confined to the title page (and the text should be free of such clues as identifiable self-citations e.g. 'In our earlier work...').

4. Online submission process

1) All manuscripts must be submitted online at http://bjsp.edmgr.com.
First-time users: click the REGISTER button from the menu and enter in your details as instructed. On successful registration, an email will be sent informing you of your user name and password. Please keep this email for future reference and proceed to LOGIN. (You do not need to re-register if your status changes e.g. author, reviewer or editor).

Registered users: click the LOGIN button from the menu and enter your user name and password for immediate access. Click 'Author Login'.

2) Follow the step-by-step instructions to submit your manuscript.

3) The submission must include the following as separate files:
   - Title page consisting of manuscript title, authors’ full names and affiliations, name and address for corresponding author - Editorial Manager Title Page for Manuscript Submission
   - Abstract
   - Full manuscript omitting authors' names and affiliations. Figures and tables can be attached separately if necessary.

4) If you require further help in submitting your manuscript, please consult the Tutorial for Authors - Editorial Manager - Tutorial for Authors

Authors can log on at any time to check the status of the manuscript.

5. Manuscript requirements

- Contributions must be typed in double spacing with wide margins. All sheets must be numbered.
- Tables should be typed in double spacing, each on a separate page with a self-explanatory title. Tables should be comprehensible without reference to the text. They should be placed at the end of the manuscript with their approximate locations indicated in the text.
- Figures can be included at the end of the document or attached as separate files, carefully labelled in initial capital/lower case lettering with symbols in a form consistent with text use. Unnecessary background patterns, lines and shading should be avoided. Captions should be listed on a separate page. The resolution of digital images must be at least 300 dpi.
- All articles should be preceded by an Abstract of between 100 and 200 words, giving a concise statement of the intention and results or conclusions of the article.
- For reference citations, please use APA style. Particular care should be taken to ensure that references are accurate and complete. Give all journal titles in full.
- SI units must be used for all measurements, rounded off to practical values if appropriate, with the Imperial equivalent in parentheses.
- In normal circumstances, effect size should be incorporated.
- Authors are requested to avoid the use of sexist language.
- Authors are responsible for acquiring written permission to publish lengthy quotations, illustrations etc for which they do not own copyright.

For Guidelines on editorial style, please consult the APA Publication Manual published by the American Psychological Association, Washington DC, USA (http://www.apastyle.org)

6. Publication ethics

Code of Conduct - Code of Conduct, Ethical Principles and Guidelines
Principles of Publishing - Principles of Publishing

7. Supplementary data
Supplementary data too extensive for publication may be deposited with the
British Library Document Supply Centre. Such material includes numerical
data, computer programs, fuller details of case studies and experimental
techniques. The material should be submitted to the Editor together with the
article, for simultaneous refereeing.

8. Post acceptance

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for rewriting or the introduction of new material. Authors will be provided
with a PDF file of their article prior to publication.

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assignment of copyright form.

10. Checklist of requirements

- Abstract (100-200 words)
- Title page (include title, authors' names, affiliations, full contact details)
- Full article text (double-spaced with numbered pages and anonymised)
- References (APA style). Authors are responsible for bibliographic accuracy
  and must check every reference in the manuscript and proofread again in the
  page proofs.
- Tables, figures, captions placed at the end of the article or attached as a
  separate file.