Ethnic and Language Identities among Finland-Swedish Young People

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Abstract

In youth many significant physiological and psychological changes take place. These identity changes are especially important for an individual's identity development. However, questions of identity for young people, especially as they shift from childhood to adulthood, have become a central concern in numerous researches. Ethnic and language identities are bonds that hold a common social identification for individuals who view themselves as members of the same group. This study investigates the role and importance of ethnic and language identities for Swedish-speaking young people in Finland presented through an analysis of existing literature and documents on the matter. The data consists of essays written by 1012 (704 boys and 308 girls) ninth-graders from 12 Finland-Swedish high schools on the topic, "Me, a Finland-Swedish youth." These were analyzed by using a thematic analysis. The results show that ninth-graders feel that the Finland-Swedish culture gives them a stable foundation in life that affects their identity, health and

well-being in a positive way. The language and Finland-Swedish culture appear to be important for the youths' sense of belonging and happiness as well as for a sense of stability in a changing world. Thus, the results illustrate that their language is an important aspect of self-identity and a central part of their lives.

Introduction

In our contemporary times, questions of ethnic identity, integration, migration, and refugee displacement are debated worldwide. Identity is used to differentiate and identify the majority from minority ethnic groups in various contexts. Thus, identity has become important to an individual's sense of belonging and self- understanding (Verkuyten, 2006, pp. 224-225). In addition, questions of identity for young people, especially as they shift from childhood to adulthood, have become central to many people's lives. Ethnic and language identities refer to a set of individuals who hold a common social identification and view themselves as members of the same category (Stets & Burke, 2000). In the past decade, the number of studies on ethnic identity that investigate why people place themselves in their social environment, and why such positions play a major role in terms of personal meaning and value, has increased (Delgado, 2009; Haarmann, 1986). From a psychoanalytical viewpoint, Freud argues that one's sense of self-identity is derived from parental introjection during the genesis of the superego, and at the end of the oedipal conflict (Freud, 1930/1965).

In the latter half of the twentieth century, Erik H. Erikson investigated the implication of identity development in the ethnic group (Verkuyten, 2006, p. 41; Schwartz, 2005). Erikson's findings showed that the self-image (ego) is impacted by ethnic and ecological factors. He stated that identity development occurred as a result of the interplay between biology, psychology, and environment (Sameroff & Chandler, 1975; Ferrer-Wreder, Trost, Lorente, & Mansoory, 2012). Erikson extended Freud's theory, which suggested that identity occurs within the first 15 years of life; Erikson went beyond childhood to suggest that identity development occurs throughout the lifespan (O'Brien, 2010). Erikson spoke of personal identity as the set of goals, values, and beliefs that one shows to the world. Personal identity includes career goals, knowledge, belief, art, language, law, morals, customs, and other aspects of self-identification that are acquired by individuals as members of the group that may help to distinguish them from other people (Schwartz, 2001; Martin & Nakayama 2008, 87).

Ethnic identity is a kind of social or collective identity, and ethnicity is typically analyzed in these terms (Verkuyten, 2006, p.42-43). However, a basic lack of theoretical precision seems to pervade Erikson's writings (Côté & Levine, 1987). His

writings are rich in clinical and metaphorical accounts, but they lack consistency in detail. Erikson showed identity as a collective project between young people and their context, and he described three distinct levels of identity: ego, personal, and social (Schwartz, 2005). Erikson's student James Marcia (1966) developed Erikson's theory and derived four independent ethnic identity statuses which are: identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, and identity achievement. Marcia further suggested that each identity status is associated with a distinctive set of personality characteristics.

Identity moratorium (high exploration, low commitment), is associated with indices of critical thinking, when one individual in the ethnic group is faced with an important life choice or a serious commitment (Kidwell, Dunham, Bacho, Pastorino, & Postes, 1995). Identity foreclosure (low exploration, high commitment) is the state of having made commitments to a set of goals, values, and beliefs in the relative absence of prior exploration. The foreclosed individual often goes into crisis without knowing what to do, and not being able to rely on the norms, rules, and situations to which the individual has become accustomed (Marcia, 1994, 1995). (E.g. a young boy who steps into his family business just as soon as his father is ready to retire).

Identity achievement (high exploration, high commitment) is the mature status because it is associated with balanced thinking, effective decision making, and maintaining interpersonal relationships (Craig-Bray, Adams, & Dobson, 1988). Identity diffusion (low exploration, low commitment) is the apathetic or disinterested state. It is a lack of both exploration and commitment that may hold individuals together and afford a solid basis for making choices to follow a consistent life path (Marcia, 1993 a). One example is a talented secondary school student who continues to fail classes because of spending much time on WhatsApp and Facebook and not do assignments. Turner suggests three characteristics to identify ethnic identity: personal identity, social identity, and human identity. He argues that personal identity is the characteristics that make an individual special and unique in the group; social identity is characterized by the various classifications the person belongs to, such as ethnicity, race, hometown, occupation, and age; while human identity is the perception of self-image that links a person to the rest of humanity and sets such a person apart from other life forms (Turner, 1987, p.45).

Furthermore, ethnic identity refers to the subjective experience of embracing the feelings, experiences, and behaviors through which people put their membership in a single or multiple ethnic group (Trofimovich & Turuševa, 2015). People's identities could be categorized into two different groups: a personal individual identity and a group identity." The individual identity is created in the process of self-reflection or the understanding of the self (Korostelina, 2007, p. 36). Psychological mechanisms exist that causes people to be selective about the groups they join and about the individuals they allow to join (Buss, 1990; Michael et al., 2009, p. 514). These findings are unrelated to Finland-Swedish young people because they did not choose their

identity by themselves. People who feel socially rejected are subject to a host of behavioral, emotional, and physical problems, suggesting that human beings may possess a fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

According to Samovar, Porter, McDaniel & Roy, social structures help the members of the ethnic group to organize their lives, establish communication networks (WhatsApp group, Facebook, twitter), and regulate norms of personal, familial, and social conduct (Samovar et. al., 2012, p. 32). Studies (Schwartz, 2005; Smith & Silva, 2011) show that because individuals who belong to the same group share invisible characteristics and values, ethnic identity may promote healthy development, less depression, and trauma coping.

The language identity of young Finland- Swedish

Language is an ethnic, cultural product of human interaction through which individuals define themselves to the world. Language allows the members of the ethnic group to communicate with each other freely, and to share ideas, feelings, and information; it is also one of the cornerstone mechanisms for the transmission of culture (European Parliament, 2017). It is an instrument of communication, and presentation of the members of the ethnic group to the world using their own minds, learning and words that such language provides (Ager, 2001, p. 3). Philosophers have claimed that language is a basic human need to express ideas, feelings, and desires, and to socialize with other people who are outside their group. They indicate that absence of language communication may result in frustration, anger and social exclusion from ethnic groups (Patak, Gawlinski, Fung, Doering, Berg, & Henneman, 2006).

According to Ting-Toomey (2005), language and ethnic identity is reflective of self-conception that members of the group have received from their family, gender, culture, and ethnicity (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 212). Until 1809, Finland had been part of the Swedish kingdom for over half a millennium (Allardt & Starck, 1981, pp. 166-171; Huldén 2004, pp. 45-55). When Sweden was defeated by Russia in 1809 and made Finland part of its own territory, the power of the Swedish-speakers was dramatically changed from the majority to a minority position. However, when Finland gained independence, the group of Swedish speakers came together in defense of their language (Engman, 1995, pp. 185-190). In the mid-19th century, Finnish and Swedish were declared to be the two official languages of Finland (Allardt & Starck, 1981, pp- 200-211; Statistics Finland, 1990-2018). Regarding age group 10-19, young Swedish-speaking people are 33.149 (17.100 males and 16.049 females). According to the United Nation's (2017) Universal declaration of human rights, article 2, "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, or social origin, property, birth or other status"; however, the Swedish language tends to be under strong social and political pressure in Finland.

At the most contextually oriented level, social identity is identified as a sense of inner solidarity with a group's ideas, the consolidation of elements that have been integrated into one's sense of self from groups to which one belongs. Social identity has sometimes been described as group identity in the social psychological literature (e.g., Côté, 1996b; Weigert, & Teitge, 1986). Language is an important aspect of self-identity and a central part of an individual's culture (European Parliament, 2017; Haarmann, 1986, 37). According to Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, and Roy, how people think and how they speak are determined to a large extent by their cultural identity. They argue that the knowledge and information that is communicated in language is an artifact of language itself since language is constituted to identify and give meaning to human experience (Samovar et. al, 2012, pp. 143–151). Martin and Nakayama (2008, p. 87) considered linguistic identity as individuals' self-concept, how they think they are as people. Language as a tool of communication helps the group's institutions to function because it infiltrates the core of cultural and ethnic identities without people's awareness (Joseph, 2004, p. 15).

Interview results

Essays were written by 1012 (704 boys and 308 girls) ninth-graders from 12 Finland-Swedish high schools on the topics, "Me, a Finland-Swedish youth," "To live in a bilingual country, and "My contacts with Finland-Swedish youth." At the time of the data collection, these students were studying in different locations in Finland: Karleby, Jakobstad (Oxhamns skola), Nykarleby, Vasa (Övnings skola and Borgaregatans skola), Kristinstad, Åbo (St. Olofsskola), Pargas (Sarlinska högstadiet), Tammerfors (Svenska Samskola), Ekenäs (Svenska högstadium), Helsingfors (Grundskolan Norsen and Åshöjdens grundskolan). The participants were selected according to the following criteria: the respondents should be ninth-graders from Finland-Swedish high schools; they should speak the local language, Swedish; and have a Finnish citizenship. The data were analyzed by using a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The results are thematically presented below.

Ethnic identity as a sense of belonging among Finland- Swedish youth

Human beings have the capacity to develop and maintain their relationships. Ethnic identity is reflected by several indicators: inner beliefs, feelings, emotions, a sense of belonging and commitments to the group, identification as a member of the group, a sense of shared attitudes and values; and specific dimensions of ethnicity such as language, behavior and customs (Della Pergola, 2011). Thus, Finland-Swedish young people in Finland are strongly attached to Sweden and are proud to present themselves as Swedish speakers. Regardless place of residence, these young people, particularly those residing in Ostrobothnia, manage to find ways to preserve their Swedish identity. They have their own media channels, schools, and university where they can learn their cultural identity and hear their language. The assimilation into the Finnish culture by young Finland-Swedish is a possible form of identity and identification. This assimilation may be moderated among youths who build bridges

with the Finnish majority and their transnational connection with Sweden, a process that can be beneficial to both sides. However, according to bilingualism issues, the respondents in Ostrobothnia report that their knowledge of the Finnish language is not as good as that of those who reside in southern Finland.

Studies have broadly discussed the complexity of ethnic identity and identification, but they differ in their explanations of the origin of ethnicity. For instance, Castles and Miller (2009) argue that ethnicity is a primordial attachment that results from being born into a community and its cultural dimensions (Castles & Miller, 2009, pp. 35-36). According to this theory, ethnicity is not a matter of choice, but is rather pre-social because no individuals have ever chosen to be born as they are. Ethnicity is a growing phenomenon that continues to develop as the position of groups and individuals change within a dynamic social structure (Nagel, 1994). Identity and culture go hand in hand because human beings are attached among themselves based on cultural perspectives (Nagel 1994).

Culture and ethnic identity are like luggage which people carry wherever they go. However, the longer migrants stay in the new destination, the more they socially and economically resemble the natives, even if their ethnic origin continues to have a residual influence on their structural mobility. Therefore, both migrants and natives may change their inter-group encounter (Alba & Nee, 2003; Portes & Zhou, 1993). Based on appearance, people cannot differentiate Finnish from Finland- Swedish youth. However, conflicts sometimes occur between Finnish-speaking Finns and Finland-Swedish youths. Those who speak Swedish and Finnish fluently have many chances and advantages of securing work compared to those who speak only one language. Those who speak only Swedish in the big cities feel like they live outside their communities. They are uncomfortable when they do not receive service in their mother tongue and prefer to speak English instead of Finnish.

In the adolescent stage, people enter intimacy and the young person can experiment with different roles; consolidate the past self with a new changing and multifaceted sense of self. As these young people's organs reach maturity, boys and girls begin to engage in new forms of social behavior because the heterosexuality is attractive (Bornstein, & Lamb 1999, p. 107). In some cultures, during this period young women were considered fully grown, but the young men had to prove that they could support themselves and their families. According to Erikson, children at this stage become independent and experiment with various roles in the communities and families; however, during this stage, their sense of identity can be confused (Berzoff, Flanagan, and Hertz, 2008). Thus, during this stage, society, including parents, may help young people explore and give them freedom and responsibility.

Relying on good advice and counsel, this stage would be meaningful and offer a sense of safety and security, but avoidance of intimacy can lead to isolation, loneliness, and depression (Berzoff et al., 2008, pp. 100-101). At this stage, it is important to have friends to connect with. However, in the case of hobbies and sports many of the

activities for young people are in Finnish which Finland-Swedish youth found was not worth it. Other studies show that relationships to other human beings are the most powerful psychological and behavioral transformers known (Dayringer, 1998, p. 7; Hofmann & Otto 2008, p. 82). A recent longitudinal research that studied 1700 New Zealand adolescents on connectedness to their family, school, peer group, and community, show that the physiology and psyche of adolescents who had a higher connectedness functioned well; they felt secure and had positive relationships (Crespo, Kielpikowski, Jose, & Pryor, 2010). Moreover, studies on the effects of personal ethnic discrimination have shown that discrimination is related to psychological ill-being which can lead to distress while the positive impact of ethnic identity for ethnic minorities leads to good self-esteem, less depression and to trauma coping (Adams et. al., 2016; Banyanga, Kaj & Karin, 2017; Lee, 2003).

Social identity as a stable foundation

People are designed for relationships, and their deepest cry is for intimacy and meaningful involvement with others. Social identity refers to the liaison between people and their surroundings. It localizes a person in social space through the quality of relationships and is indicated by membership (Gecas & Burke, 1995). Social identity indicates what a person is from a social perspective in terms of location or place in society (Simon, 2004). According to Verkuyten (2006, pp. 64-65), identification can correspond to an existing social distinction to which one belongs and can also be resisted or denied. For instance, sometimes Finland- Swedish people feel unwanted in Finland, and, as a result, some young Finland-Swedish have chosen to emigrate to Sweden or other western countries for work. People who violate property rights are aggressive toward group members, fail to share the cost and risks of group membership and are likely to be excluded from the group (Buss, 1990). According to the above lines, there is a positive example of Finnish-speaking and Finland-Swedish youths in Pargas working together on their show called "Show 21600" which led them to get to know each other, spend time together, and have discussions.

Some studies have shown that young people who are accepted in their social group and who have good social skills do better in school; by contrast, socially rejected young people are at risk for numerous negative outcomes (Asher & Coie, 1990; Hinshaw, 1992, Wentzel, 1993). However, other studies on children of effectively sick parents have found that being born into and raised by a depressed parent may lead to antisocial issues (Downey & Coyne, 1990). In many cases, this is because of violence at home, and especially in developing countries children are inclined to live on the streets, use drugs, beg and commit crimes. Although divorce may be considered a positive solution to destructive family life, it can also have negative consequences for the entire family, especially, the children. According to Statistics Finland (1987−2018), the percentage of divorce in Finland is 27.1% (13.5% male and 13.6% female). However, according to the International Comparative Study of Ethno-

cultural Youth (ICSEY) that studied ethnic majority and minority youth in 5 nations (The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Portugal), Finland and Sweden were the only states where minority youth reported better academic performance and less antisocial behavior compared to majority youth (Sam, Vedder, Liebkind, Neto, & Virta, 2008). Therefore, relationships play a central and formative role in children's and youths' development and identity; social relationships should be increasingly organized within institutional frameworks, such as at home, in school and in the community (Bornstein, & Lamb 1999, p. 418–422; Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Discussion

The cultural literature suggests that minority youth are likely to live simultaneously in and between two or more "worlds," and issues of otherness and segregation from the majority culture may play an important part in their identity formation (Sam & Berry, 2010). However, the results in this study show that ninth-graders in Finland feel that the Finland-Swedish culture gives them a stable foundation in life that affects their identity, health and well-being in a positive way. Minority research by Ahmadi and Carpelan, (2003) shows that minority youth are at risk of perceiving themselves as strangers, individuals in a culture and nation without a sense of belonging to their own ethnic or national heritages. As the results show above, some Finland-Swedish young people feel unwanted in Finland, and, as a result, some young Finland-Swedes have chosen to emigrate to Sweden and other western countries for work.

According to Judy's study (2006), an individual's identity exists in connection to the world, to understand "what or who they are not". Identity can be seen as a collection of different features from an individual's culture of origin (Judy, 2006, p. 101). For instance, the respondents from Vaasa, Nykarleby and Jakobstad, say that their Swedish language is like a rock which cannot be moved away by any circumstances. They continue to express that individuals should receive service in their mother tongue. In addition, many respondents think that being bilingual is a gift and blessing and contributes to being happy in private life, in the academic arena, and in future working life. Finally, bilingualism opens up for more opportunities for different education programs, and for more important jobs in the future labor market.

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