CROSS-CULTURAL IDENTITY OF SECOND-GENERATION IMMIGRANT YOUTH

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Abstract

Immigrating to a new homeland is not without its challenges. One of the challenges important in the process of assimilating and acculturating is a "fundamental tension between 'American' and 'Non-American' identities'" that individuals experience on a daily basis. Adapting to a new culture changes how individuals act and feel, and influences one's cultural identity. This study focuses on second-generation Bosnian youth living in St. Louis, Missouri, whose parents arrived in the United States some 20-25 years ago as refugees. The study explores the influence of ethnic identity on these youth's feelings of belongingness, especially in regard to partial or total affiliation with either their ethnic or host community. Moreover, this paper seeks to explore how bicultural individuals' ethnic identity is characterized and experienced by second-generation immigrant Bosnian-American youth.

Keywords: Ethnic identities, assimilation, first & second-generation youth

Introduction

This research paper explores how bicultural individuals' ethnic identity is characterized and experienced by second generation immigrant Bosnian-American youth. Second-generation refers to "native-born children of foreign parents or foreign-born children who were brought to the United States before adolescence" (Rumbaut, 2007, p. 985). When a child is born into a host culture that is ethnically and culturally different from the culture of their parents, a complex ethnic identity formation occurs. This is especially true of those who arrive in the host country as a refugee, defined as "a person who flees to another country out of a fear of persecution because of religion, political affiliation, race, nationality, or membership in a particular group" (UNHCR, 1951, para. 1). For these individuals, assimilation and adjustment tend to be particularly difficult, and in some cases, may never occur. Moreover, their first-generation children tend to share many of the parents' experiences and typically grow up as bicultural individuals stuck between the cultural world of their parents and the new homeland.

Given the diversity that exists in the U.S., most individuals in the United States identify with one or more ethnic backgrounds. The 2014 U.S. Census Bureau's projects "that by 2044, the majority of the population will be non-white, with that number rising to 56.4 percent by 2060" (para. 1). With an increase in the number of people who are biracial and/or those identifying with more than one ethnic or racial background, it is crucial to understand the experiences of this group.

As a country that endorses that all cultures should be melted into the one mainstream culture, this "melting pot" idea is frequently complicated by the overlapping identities. More individuals are growing up as biracial or will identify with the new majority of multiple cultures. A person who identifies as biracial can be defined by an individual's competencies and sensitivities within two cultures and how the identity reflects the

unique blending of the cultures (Ramirez, 1983). Therefore, for bicultural individuals, and youth in particular, identity formation is an ongoing process.

The term *identity* is used to describe a person's character and identification with other individuals. There is not a straightforward way to address the relationship between social and ethnic identities. A social identity is thought of as culturally defined personality characteristics, which are ascribed to social roles, such as the role of being a father, mother, friend, employer or employee (Bhugra and Becker, 2005). Ethnic identity, on the other hand, describes individuals who may or may not share the same race but do share common cultural characteristics, including history, beliefs, values, food, religion, and language. Ethnicity typically incorporates both race and culture (Shah, 2004), adding to the complexity of understanding identity among a single group, such as Bosnian-American youth.

This study aims to explore the identity formation of second-generation Bosnian-Americans, and youth in particular, who resettled in the St. Louis area with their first-generation parents. With an estimated population of anywhere between 50,000 and 70,000 today, St. Louis is home to the largest Bosnian community in the United States and the world (Mapping BiH Diaspora Report, 2018). In recent history, the Bosnian community has dealt the traumatic effects of genocide that forced individuals to flee their country. From March 1992 to December 1995, Bosnia's two neighboring countries invaded Bosnia seeking control over the territory. Nearly two million people were displaced by the Bosnian genocide (Hume, 2015), many of whom found a new home in the U.S. and St. Louis. Individuals were resettled to "St.

Louis because of the low cost of living compared to other cities in the nation" (Hume, 2015, p.10). In the light of the positive social and economic impact of Bosnian migrants on the region (Strauss, 2012), a number of studies have explored the Bosnian culture, history, and relationship to variables of interest. With the second-generation Bosnian-American youth gearing up to graduate from high school, go to college, enter the labor market and start families, this moment provides a unique opportunity to explore their experiences, goals, and aspirations as well as the influences that will shape their lives and community for years to come. Identity, or ethnic identity, on the other hand, is at the center of how second-generation immigrants characterize and think about their experiences, future goals and aspirations, and the various influences on their lives. Therefore, the goal of this study was to explore how ethnic identity is characterized and experienced by second generation Bosnian-American youth in the St. Louis area.

Literature review

Immigrant identity
Studies that have explored immigrant identities have focused on bicultural individuals, and how different people assimilate to the new and host American culture. When immigrants arrive in the United States there is a "fundamental tension between 'American' and 'Non-American' identities" which individuals have to experience daily (Massey & Sanchez, 2009, p. 15). Immigrant integration is a problematic process that individuals have to face when resettling in a new homeland. The meaning and belonging to an ethnic group membership varies based on social, political, and economic forces and how an individual identifies with those

factors. That is, individuals' self-identification along ethnic lines is changeable and so is their participation in shared cultural activities (Dhingra, 2007). This relationship differs between migrant parents and children. Some children are influenced more by other sources such as school, social media, and language, whereas, some parents may or may not chose to incorporate both cultures into their identities.

Children who are second-generation immigrants grow up "exploring the relationship between acculturation and identity" (Schwartz & Montgomery, 2006, p.3). Most individuals find themselves living with two identities or perceiving that one culture is better than the other. American cultural assimilation is arguably unique because of the idea that the United States is "the land of the free," and the numerous opportunities available for individuals who live there regardless of their background. When immigrants come to the United States with this mindset, most of the time these individuals are let down by the newcomer acceptance. In recent academic debate, researchers found that some children follow the straight-line assimilation model (Waters 1990; Alba and Nee 1997), arguing that more immigrant children are losing their parent's culture and are becoming more influenced by the new culture. However, some of these theories have been challenged by the ethnocentric tendencies displayed by other individuals (Alba and Nee, 1997). Emerging research is starting to explore how individuals may construct and affirm their ethnic background.

Another topic that is addressed in the literature is the idea of cultural homelessness, which is a "unique experience and feeling reported by some multicultural individuals" (Phinney, 2001, p. 495). This

concept examines how individuals feel torn between identifying with one group of individuals and are not sure what place to call "home." Similarly, biculturalism "involves a person's developing competencies and sensitivities within two cultures" (Dong & Gundlach, 2006, p. 65). This area of research addresses the new phenomenon in which individuals are choosing to identify with one group versus the other. Identity development is quite complicated if an individual is a part of two cultures.

Berry's model
Berry's Acculturation Model (1997) suggests that all individuals can be categorized in several ways in terms of the level of acculturation. The model proposed by Berry includes four quadrants, namely assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. Berry (1997) proposes that individuals' paths to assimilation vary on the basis of their level of identification with either the heritage or the US culture (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. John Berry's Acculturation Model

According to Berry (1997), an individual who identifies strongly with both cultures is referred to as having a "bicultural identity" ("integration"), while others who identify far more strongly with the US culture than they do with their heritage culture would fall in the "assimilation" quadrant. Younger

generations usually identify as "bicultural" because of upholding the two cultures or tend to assimilate in whereby an individual "wants nothing to do with their old culture and just wants to blend in with the mainstream culture" (p. 25). Moreover, those who identify strongly with their heritage culture but less with the US culture would be categorized in the "separation" quadrant, while those who do not strongly identify with either the US or the heritage culture would fall in the "marginalization" quadrant. Older immigrant generations may identify as "separated" or "marginalized". Individuals who identify as separated, "stay with their people and just celebrate their own culture" (Berry, 1997, p. 15). This tends to be the parents or grandparents of second-generation youth. Lastly, individuals who identify as marginalized "believe rewards are based on 'luck,' and they usually have a negative outlook on life" (p.17). It is important to note, as Berry (2003) points out, that "the portrayal of acculturation strategies was based on the assumption that non-dominant groups and their members have the freedom to choose how they want to acculturate" (p.9), and so the acculturation model is not just an individual choice. Instead, it is shaped and limited by attitudes and expectations of the dominant culture.

Berry's Acculturation Model is important and serves as an appropriate theoretical framework for this paper in thinking about how bicultural individuals might be unique and different than those in the other quadrants. The model also serves as a guideline for identifying and categorizing Bosnian-American youth who might identify themselves within this framework.

Identity among Bosnian Americans
Though there is limited research evidence exploring the identity of Bosnian-American second-generation youth, discussion of identity is inevitably relevant to this community. Bosnian-Americans are often not included in the "European" identification compared to other popular countries as a part of the Council of Europe (Hume, 2015). Bosnian-Americans have similar ethnic recognitions that most individuals from Asian or Latin countries feel when coming to the United States.

Another factor to consider in cultural identification of Bosnian-Americans is religion, as most Bosnian-Americans identify themselves as Muslim (Hume, 2015). Recent immigration events and the media in the United States have led individuals to stigmatize this religion. Another challenge and an advantage at the same time, that Bosnian-Americans face is their appearance. Most Bosnian-Americans resemble a typical white American, which "makes it easier for this community to acculturate into the nation but makes it more difficult for this community to relate to mainstream traditions" (Hume, 2015, p.16).

In the present study, and building upon existing literature, the focus is on Bosnian-American youth involved in ethnic identity formation. Arnett (2003) explains that "adolescents' identity formation centers primarily on how adolescents develop a firm sense of self in relation to other within their own cultural context" (p.190). This paper seeks to explore how bicultural individuals' ethnic identity is characterized and experienced by second-generation immigrant Bosnian-American youth.

Methods
This study was an extension of an existing and ongoing research project titled, "The St. Louis Bosnian Family and Youth Study," being conducted collaboratively between

Saint Louis University and the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

The primary method of study data collection was qualitative, in-depth interviews with Bosnian-American youth living in the St. Louis area, whose parents migrated to the United States after 1993 and as refugees. The goal of the interviews was to explore the identity of second-generation Bosnian-American youth.

All respondents first signed a consent form, and an assent form was obtained from their parents. The interviews were conducted by one of the researchers of this project. All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview guide was semi-structured, and it consisted of questions exploring the cross-cultural experience of the respective youth. Questions focusing on answering the main research question of this study, however, focused on the identity of second-generation Bosnian-American youth, and included:

- To what extent do you see yourself as American?
- To what extent would you like your children to feel American?
- To what extent do you think Americans see you as American?
- Do you have to be born in the United States to identify with it?
- What does it mean to "be American" or "act American"?

Interviews lasted anywhere from thirty minutes to an hour. All interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis and in the location preferred by the interviewee, such as coffee shops and/or local high schools. All interviews were conducted in English, the preferred language of communication for this particular group.

Sampling method
Bosnian-American students were selected from St. Louis school districts such as Mehlville, Lemay, Affton, and Wilbur Park through convenience and snowball sampling. These districts were chosen because of a known high number of Bosnian students. Snowball sampling helped to expand the sample by asking informants with knowledge of the setting to identify other group members of the population (Hessey-Biber and Leavy, 2006; Babbie, 2007). We recruited respondents through several primary informants such as going to speak to specific classes in schools. We also attended different meetings and cultural programs with the hope of meeting prospective interviewees. Inclusion criteria was that the students were either in high school or first or second year of college, and that their Bosnian parents resettled in the US as refugees.

Sample
We interviewed second-generation Bosnian-Americans whose parents resettled in the St. Louis area as refugees during the late 1990s and early 2000s. This paper reports on findings from only two respondents who were interviewed, though we plan to interview more in the upcoming months. The ages of the two respondents included in this study were 13 and 18, and they were female and male, respectively. Participants were contacted via email, by phone, and/or in person.

Data analysis
Though the sample for this study was limited and responses from only two interviewees have been obtained so far, each interview was transcribed and coded. Transcription is the complicated process of translating oral discourse to written language (Miller and Crabtree 2004, 200). We transcribed the two recordings

immediately after each interview. The method of transcription included a note of any gestures, silences, pauses, stalling words, and exact pronunciation of the spelled words, as suggested by Rubin and Rubin (2005). We evaluated the interview guide to ensure that the research questions were relatable for each participant. After each transcription, we wrote a memo that summarized the critical themes of the interview. Once we finished the interview transcriptions, we coded them into different categories.

Because this study is ongoing, it is worthwhile to mention that future data analysis will include entering all the interview transcripts, interview notes, and memos into ATLAS 8.2.3, an analysis software program that allows for the coding and sorting of the qualitative data. We will develop a set of codes to evaluate the different patterns found in the interviews. From there on we will work to connect different theories with the findings from the participants. We will also identify the patterns and themes from the transcripts by grouping concepts that were labeled and then reflect on the collective mean (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Finally, we will define each dimension of the process by using the literature review and secondary sources to begin to develop new theories.

Results

Intergenerational cultural dissonance (ICD)
Preliminary data gathered via two qualitative face-to-face interviews with second-generation Bosnian-American youth point to some initial themes important in understanding their identity. Though the data is preliminary and restricted to only two interviewees, the first prevalent and consistent theme discussed in the interviews was intergenerational cultural dissonance

(ICD), or clash between parents and children over cultural values.

For example, BFYS_128 (male, 18) explained how the work ethic between him and his parents is different. He continued to discuss how his parents wanted him to start making money for himself:

"My mom was talking to actually the other day saying that she sat down with me and said that me and you have to scrounge up some money. You got to start working a little bit harder to make your dad retired for one of the jobs, like quit one of the jobs. He's eventually going to retire soon. So yeah, my parents are both planning on retiring but I know we're gonna get that money from them too. But I do work but just, I just don't that make that good money."

As evident by this quote, there seems to be a disconnect between the expectations of parents and the adolescent in question. The parents' goal is collective-oriented in that they see that the son as responsible for providing an opportunity for the father to quit one of his jobs, while the interviewee seems more individually-focused to where he does not feel like he earns enough to be able to help as much as needed.

Pressure to maintain own cultural identity and values
When looking at second-generation Bosnian-Americans, individuals spoke about the values they enjoyed growing up with and the ones they would like to pass on to their future children.

BFYS_127 (female, 13) explained how there are some values and traditions that she wants to keep in her life, as well as, to pass it on to her future family:

"Um, like when my parents were doing with me, um, I think being like close because we are very close and like we do go out a lot. Like me and my dad, we'd go shopping a lot. Me and my mom, like my mom doesn't work, she has multiple sclerosis so like everyday I have off because I work full time so everyday I have off like me and her go out, we go shopping and we'd go out to and that's something like I want to do with my kids and have a relationship with them. So, I want to maintain that."

BFYS_128 (male, 18) discussed how he wants to be a mixture of both of his parents because the different influences that have impacted his Bosnian identity:

"Probably a mix of both because my dad, even though he does care about my school and a lot, he is really strict and I don't really. I'm more lenient person. I don't know. I've always had been, I've always been like a, like a playful. I've always been like, you know, uh, I make jokes and stuff, you know, so I've always been a little more childish than my dad and my dad is too serious for me. My mom and my mom's funny but she's, she's a little too hard sometimes to be a mix of both."

Ethnic enclave exists to support own cultural identity
The last emerging theme from the interviews was the existence of ethnic enclave which serves for many youths as a way of supporting their cultural identity. Bosnian-American youth "compartmentalize their lives in ways that meet the demands of both their ethnic world and the broader American society" (Liebkind, 1992, p. 50). These youths maintain ties to their Bosnian culture, but are also influenced by their friends and family who are Bosnian to adhere to ethnic values and norms in America. The youth choose their friends, involvement with their

faith, and customs (language, beliefs) to construct their identity in the United States.

BFYS_127 (female, 13) communicates with her friends and family in Bosnian, which creates a sense of community for her. She continued to discuss how her Bosnian friends play a huge role in her life because they understand the same issues she might be experiencing at home and school:

"I really didn't like talking to adults, like adults, you know, they're just. Especially now I do, but like when you were a kid, like they never understood. They were like, oh you're just a kid, you're this and this. So, my friends and me, we like always ranted and I still do like to my friends mostly I complained because they will like, you know, they won't judge me. I think they, they might, but I don't really care. Like they'll at least offer me some support and some love."

Discussion
The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of ethnic identity on Bosnian-American youth's feelings of belongingness to partial or total affiliation with the heritage and host culture and community. Cultural identity is particularly important for understanding children of immigrant families' development and well-being (Schwartz et al., 2006). Youth, in particular, are at a vulnerable period where cultural identity is a significant part of their overall identity and self-concept. Acculturation not only affects a person on an individual level, but it also affects the family as a unit. Each family member may acculturate at a different pace, which results in a growing discrepancy in cultural values or practices. This discrepancy is often observed between youth and adults (Berry, 2003), specifically when children tend to acculturate faster than their parents. In the traditional Bosnian culture, parents, especially fathers, are

stricter towards their children than are traditional American family fathers. This results in Bosnian-American youth perceiving their parents as cold and distant, and overly concerned about academic and financial success, as was evident by at least one of the themes that emerged in the interviews conducted for this study.

Though the sample in this study was minimal and included only two respondents, and although acculturation conflict is often a natural part of the acculturation process, it appears that Bosnian-American youth experience low levels of acculturation conflict. In other words, Bosnian-American youth do not seem to struggle with negotiating issues related to existence of both Bosnian and American cultural identity. Instead, most of these Bosnian-American families were successfully navigating the potential challenges of acculturation and finding a balance with both the Bosnian and American culture.

Moreover, individuals who grow up with other members of the same cultural background may become more aware of

ethnic and racial issues. "Ethnic enclaves provide support for an individual's ethnic identity as a predictor of well-being among ethnic adolescents" (Yip, 2014, p. 210). The Bosnian community has clearly developed into an ethnic enclave in St. Louis, MO, that reinforces a space for parents and youth to support their cultural language, values, and traditions.

Study limitations
While this sample is too small to draw definitive conclusions from, the consistency of the three themes discussed above in both of the interviews conducted seem to be encouraging. We plan on conducting additional interviews with both genders as well as wider age range to accurately capture the identity formation of Bosnian-American youth. Other limitations of this study include the snowball sampling technique used to recruit interviewees. There is a danger of forming a homogenous sample when using a snowball technique and while this is not necessarily an issue in this study where only two individuals were included, it could be a potential limitation as we recruit more participants.

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