Socialization, Identity and Psychological Resilience among Palestinians and Jewish Adolescents in Israel

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Abstract

Theoretical background and research model

The development of individual's personal and social identity is a psychological task of utmost importance. The ability to resolve identity crises throughout individual's life will depend to a large extent on how successful one is in forming individual's personal identity and consolidating the individual's social identity during adolescence. For adolescents, the process of construction and formation of personal and social identity does not depend on the individual alone; social context and the environment in which they develop is a crucial factor (Erikson, 1968).

Social psychologists studying identity have focused on the individual's feeling of belonging to the group as well as the consequences of identification with a particular group in society. The present research is based on Tajfel's psycho-social approach, which relates to the interaction between the individual and society (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Many scholars (Brown & Krishnakumar, 2007; Brown, Linver, Evans, & DeGennaro, 2008; Gaylord-Harden, Ragsdale, Mandara, Richards, & Petersen, 2007; Para, 2008; Phinney, 2004) have claimed that support and opportunities provided by the immediate environment and by the significant people in the adolescent's life critically influence his or her development, sense of belonging, and identity formation. Therefore, studying the processes of socialization that the adolescent goes through in his or her immediate environment are very significant for understanding the process of the formation and consolidation of identity. Parents, friends, teachers, clergy, and others are all meaningful agents of socialization for adolescents (Berns, 2009). These agents can determine and enhance components of the adolescent's national, religious, and ethnic identity by facilitating early exposure to language and assimilation of the culture, history, and heritage of the group (national, religious ethnic,) to which he or she belongs (Brown & Krishnakumar, 2007; Brown et al., 2008; Gaylord-Harden et al., 2007; Hughes et al., 2006; Kim, 2014; Nguyen, Wong, Juang & Park, 2015; Swenson & Prelow, 2005).

Adolescent identity formation is even more significant for members of (primarily ethnic) minority groups. Many studies have attributed great importance to processes of socialization and the role of parents, in the formation and consolidation of identity among minorities. Over the past two decades we have observed an upsurge in studies dealing with ethnic socialization and its relationship with the development and formation of ethnic identity among minority groups, in particular in the United States (Else-Quest & Morse, 2015; Hughes et al., 2006).

In other studies, a positive relationship has been observed **between ethnic identity and mental health and psychological functioning**, contributing in particular to self-esteem (Abu-Rayya, 2006; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997; Roberts et al., 1999; Umana-Taylor, 2004).

Similar relationships have been observed between ethnic identity and other psychological resilience indices, including self-esteem, self-efficacy and well-being (Greig, 2003; Kiang, Yip, Gonzales-Backen, Witkow, & Fuligni, 2006; Lee & Yoo, 2004; Louis & Liem, 2005; Shrake & Rhee, 2004; Tamanas, 2010; Umana-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007; Weaver, 2010).

Ethnic identity also functions as a mediating mechanism between processes of ethnic socialization and various indices of psychological resilience, as has been presented in the models tested in several studies (Costigan, Koryzma, Hua, & Chance, 2010; Gartner, Kiang & Supple, 2014; Mohany, 2013; Phinney, 1992; Phinney et al., 1997).

In other studies, the ethnic identity indices that contribute to self-esteem and self-efficacy have been found to mediate between ethnic socialization and psychological indices (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2007; Swenson & Prelow, 2005).

Although less abundant than studies dealing with ethnic identity, studies exploring the relationship between religious socialization and psychological adjustment do reveal a strong relationship between religious identity and psychological resilience indices, and, in particular, mental well-being (Seol & Lee, 2012; Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010). They have also corroborated a model that states that religious identity mediates between religious socialization and well-being (Seol & Lee, 2012).

In contrast to the many studies dealing with ethnic identity, studies dealing with national identity are relatively limited. On the whole, they have contrasted minority groups as being characterized by ethnic identity indices, with majority group as being characterized by national identity indices (Johnson et al., 2012; Phinney et al., 1997).

Aim of the research

Despite the abundant scholarship on the subject of identity among the Arab-Palestinian minority and the Jewish majority in Israel, few studies have dealt with the adolescent population, and certainly not in order to propose a model that can characterize the role of identity in mediating between processes of socialization and psychological resilience indices.

The research before us is a comparative study of Arab-Palestinian and Jewish adolescents in Israel, examining groups of high school students in Jewish and Arab schools in the country.

Based on models that propose identity (ethnic and/or religious) as a mediating force between processes of socialization and psychological resilience, the objective of the present research is to test a similar model in relation to the relationships between identity indices (national, religious and ethnic), socialization processes (at home and at school), and psychological resilience (manifested in self-esteem self-efficacy, and well-being).

Distinctiveness of the research groups

Adolescence is considered the most critical stage in the formation of individual identity. In Israel, both Arab-Palestinian and Jewish adolescents are confronted with complex challenges of adjustment during this period; growing up in the shadow of ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict creates a complex and unique psychological fabric. Each of the national collectives (Jewish/Israeli, Palestinian/Arab) has its own character, and they are distinct in almost every way: ethnic origin, history, religion, tradition, language, culture, political orientation, and identification with the state. Their differences are also a result

of their different status: one as the majority and the other as a minority. The groups' distinctiveness is also manifested in the identity components examined in the present study.

The identity of the Arab-Palestinian minority in Israel can be described in three circles. The first of these is national Palestinian identity. This identity gives the Arab-Palestinian minority in Israel its national distinctiveness. The second circle is that of ethnic identity. This is a cultural and linguistic identity characterizing the Arab world at large and including the Arab minority in Israel. The last is the circle of religious identity – Muslim, Christian, and Druze. The identity circles that characterize the Jewish majority in Israel are primarily national (Israeli) and religious (Jewish). The ethnic component is woven into national and religious identity and is thus not an independent component, for which reason it is not examined separately in the present research.

Research hypotheses

Socialization

Hypothesis 1: There will be differences between Arab-Palestinian students and Jewish students in the processes of national and religious socialization, both at home and at school.

a. The national socialization indices of Jewish students will be higher than those of Arab-Palestinians students, both at home and at school.
b. The religious socialization indices of Arab-Palestinian students will be higher than those of Jewish students, both at home and at school.

Hypothesis 2: We will find differences within the Arab-Palestinian research group in the intensity of national, ethnic, and religious socialization.

a. Religious socialization will be higher than national and ethnic socialization.
b. Ethnic socialization will be higher than national socialization.

Hypothesis 3: We will find differences in the salience of national and religious socialization within the Jewish research group.

    a. National socialization will be higher than religious socialization.

Identity

Hypothesis 4: We will find differences between Arab-Palestinian students and Jewish students in the salience of national identity and religious identity.

    a. The intensity of national identity among the Jewish students will be higher than that of the Arab-Palestinian students.

    b. The intensity of religious identity among the Arab-Palestinian students will be higher than that of the Jewish students.

Hypothesis 5: We will find differences in the salience of national, ethnic, and religious identity within the Arab-Palestinian research sample group.

    a. The salience of religious identity will be higher than that of national and ethnic identity.

    b. The salience of ethnic identity will be higher than that of national identity.

Hypothesis 6: We will find differences in the salience of national and religious identity within the Jewish research sample group.

    a. The salience of national identity will be higher than that of religious identity.

Psychological resilience

Hypothesis 7: We will find differences in the psychological resilience (self-esteem, self-efficacy, and well-being) between Arab-Palestinian students and Jewish students.

    a. Self-esteem among Jewish students will be higher than among Arab-Palestinian students.

b. Self-efficacy among Jewish students will be higher than among Arab-Palestinian students.

c. well-being among Jewish students will be higher than among Arab-Palestinian students.

Relationships between variables

Hypothesis 8: We will find a positive correlation between the socialization and identity indices among both Arab-Palestinian students and Jewish students.

a. The stronger the national socialization, the stronger the intensity of national identity.

b. The stronger the religious socialization, the stronger the intensity of religious identity.

c. The stronger the ethnic socialization, the stronger the intensity of ethnic identity (in the Arab-Palestinian group).

Hypothesis 9: We will find a positive correlation between the socialization and identity indices and the psychological resilience indices among both Arab-Palestinian students and Jewish students.

a. The stronger the national socialization and identity indices in both groups, the stronger the psychological resilience indices.

b. The stronger the religious socialization and identity indices in both groups, the stronger the psychological resilience indices.

c. The stronger the ethnic socialization and identity indices in the Arab-Palestinian group, the stronger the psychological resilience indices.

Research methods

317 10th- and 11th-grade students took part in the study: 163 Arab-Palestinian high school students, among them 93 girls and 70 boys; and 154 Jewish high-school students, among them 70 girls and 84 boys. All of the Arab-Palestinian students were Muslim.

The research was conducted in two Arab-Palestinian schools, one secular-Jewish public school, and one religious-Jewish public school.

The research employed a series of questionnaires. First, a background questionnaire was used to collect basic data about the adolescents, for example, national affiliation, age, and gender. Second, a socialization questionnaire assessed the national and religious socialization of the Jewish teenagers and the national, religious, and ethnic socialization of the Arab-Palestinian teenagers. Third, an identity questionnaire assessed the salience of national and religious identity among the Jewish participants, and the salience of national, religious, and ethnic identity among the Arab-Palestinian participants. The three questionnaires examine indices of psychological resilience: self-esteem, self-efficacy, and the sense of well-being.

To examine the hypotheses of the research and the correlations between the variables, we applied multi-variable tests such as Manova analyses, regression analyses, and SEM analyses.

Primary findings

The findings of the research indicate differences between the processes of socialization experienced by the Arab-Palestinian students and those experienced by the Jewish students. The national socialization experienced by the Jewish adolescents was stronger than that experienced by the Arab-Palestinian adolescents, while the Arab-Palestinian adolescents experienced stronger religious socialization than that experienced by the Jewish adolescents. Accordingly, we also found that the religious identity index was higher among the Arab-Palestinian participants than among the Jewish participants. On the other hand, we did not find differences in the two subject groups regarding the salience of national identity.

Contrary to the research hypotheses, the findings did not point to differences between the two research groups with regard to two of the psychological resilience indices: self-esteem and well-being. Furthermore, the self-efficacy of the Arab-Palestinian students was found to be higher than that of the Jewish students.

The research findings show that the theoretical model proposed in the present study can be applied equally to Arab-Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli adolescents in Israel. In both groups, we found that identity indices indeed mediate between processes of socialization and indices of psychological resilience. However, the differences between the socially and culturally distinct research groups were also expressed in the present model, each group having a different emphasis. For the Arab-Palestinian participants, Muslim religious identity was given special emphasis both in its intensity and in its role as mediator between processes of socialization and indices of psychological resilience. On the other hand, for the Jewish participants, Israeli national identity proved to be the dominant identity factor and played a central role in mediating between the processes of national socialization and indices of psychological resilience.

Conclusions

This study has shown how the differences between the two subject groups – as members of the majority and minority group in Israeli society who are distinct in almost every parameter of their identity – are indeed manifested in the processes of socialization experienced by the adolescents in the very critical period for consolidation and nurturing of their social and personal identities.

Regarding identity indices, contrary to what was expected we saw a high salience of Palestinian national identity among the Arab-Palestinian participants. This finding can be attributed to the importance of the period of adolescence in the consolidation of social and personal identity. This is a time when individuals search for information about their identity, the more so in the context of ongoing tension between the minority group and the majority group.

Particularly salient throughout the comparative study were the characteristics of each of the respective groups. The findings showed that among the Arab-Palestinian participants, religious socialization and identity stood out, expressing the mood and orientation of the Arab-Palestinian population in Israel. One can conclude from this that the limitations and restrictions that hinder the Arab-Palestinian minority's socialization as Palestinians lead to a strengthening of religious socialization, but this in turn has

contributed to national identity and served the minority as a compensatory mechanism for the lack in national socialization.

The examination of the proposed model among Arab-Palestinian adolescents revealed the complexity and inter-relationships between the three identity indices. In a separate model (see p. 90), the relationships between ethnic identity and socialization indices were stronger than national and religious identity indices. These findings attest to the inter-relationship between the three identity indices, which have a certain degree of overlap, but also to the distinctive identity of each of the components. We can further conclude that the national component is more particular, while the ethnic and religious components are broader and were revealed in the present research to be inter-connected, contributing to one another but also to the national component of identity and socialization.

Among the Jewish participants, on the other hand, Israeli national identity was found to be the strongest of the identity components. Its relationship with the rest of the factors was found to be stronger than the relationships of religious identity with those factors. On the other hand, among the Jewish adolescents, Israeli national identity was also found to be more particular, and therefore national socialization contributed only to national identity. On the other hand, although it was found to be a weaker socialization index, religious-Jewish socialization was found to contribute to national and not only religious identity.

Regarding psychological resilience, in recent years we have seen a narrowing of the gap between the Jewish and Arab-Palestinian populations in Israel, although psychological resilience among Jewish adolescents is still stronger than among their Arab-Palestinian counterparts. In some cases, certain indices have been found to be higher among the Arab-Palestinian students. For example, the happiness index examined in Cohen and Romi (2015). Likewise, in the present research, the index of self-efficacy of Arab-Palestinian students was found to be higher than that of their Jewish counterparts.

Considering this, the findings seem to confirm both the general trend of interrelatedness between the factors and the research model employed. In other words, socialization processes leading to a strengthening of group belonging contribute to the strengthening of psychological resilience among adolescents. On the other hand, the distinctiveness

of each of the research groups was obvious, with the religious orientation among the Arab-Palestinian students and the national orientation among the Jewish students setting a particular tone within the general model.

Contribution of the research

This study can make a significant contribution not only to research about majority/minority interactions, but also in the field of education. It can yield new insights about the importance of educational and social interventions aimed at promoting mental health and well-being among adolescents.