Gender and Ethnicity in Identity Formation

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Identity formation among ethnic minorities is becoming a highly important area of study in light of North America's rapidly changing demographic landscape. As ethnic minorities integrate into American society, balancing their minority culture with mainstream American culture becomes an important task in identity development. It becomes an even more complex process when gender is added to the scenario. This article suggests that it is the interaction of gender and ethnicity-not each factor in isolation-that profoundly affects identity formation. To support this assertion, this review of literature presents (a) an overview of research on gender and ethnic socialization, (b) a synthesis of research on gender and ethnicity in identity formation, and (c) practical implications for counselors.

Ego identity formation is a central developmental task during the period of adolescence (Erikson, 1968). The adolescent years are typically marked by the exploration of different roles and lifestyles in an attempt to find a right fit. As individuals experience life more fully, their decision-making process culminates into a crystallized sense of self. Identity provides the structure for personality, equipping the individual with a sense of purpose and direction for one's life. Ego identity exploration is common to all adolescents. However, it is particularly complex for members of ethnic minority groups (Markstrom-Adams & Spencer, 1994).

Although numerous researchers have studied the role of varying components of self (e.g., religious and political orientation) in identity formation (e.g., Marcia, 1966), surprisingly few researchers have explored the important role that ethnicity plays in identity. Phinney and Rosenthal (1992) have noted that more research needs to be conducted examining the impact of ethnicity on identity. They reasoned that racial and ethnic minorities have an added dimension to their identity development. These youth are faced with the challenge of not only developing their personal identity, but also integrating their identity as an eth-

nic group member with their identity as an American. In short, they must negotiate between multiple identities. Dubois (1903/1969) captured this sentiment when he described the African American identity: "One ever feels his two-ness,-an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (p. 5). This sense of "two—ness" seemingly contradicts Erikson's (1950) developmental goal of Ego Integrity (i.e., "oneness"), again suggesting how profoundly ethnicity has been neglected in identity research.

The impact of gender on identity development, in contrast, has received much attention in the psychological research (e.g., Skoe & Marcia, 1991). The impact of differential socialization by parents influences the way that boys and girls perceive themselves as well as their external realities. Such a view of socialization could easily apply to ethnicity's effect on identity development and would provide a logical bridge between the two factors, yet few researchers have examined the impact of both gender and ethnicity on identity development (Phinney, 1990).

As such, for this review the author examined the existing research on gender and ethnicity in identity formation. This review certainly is not intended to be a comprehensive work, but rather seeks to integrate

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existing research in these three areas to encourage a more holistic view of identity development. Implications for counseling are presented.

Socialization Processes

Gender Socialization

Numerous studies have suggested that parents view their children through the lens of gender schema (Karraker, Vogel, & Lake, 1995). These perceptions have significant effects upon the identity development of males and females. Researchers have suggested that identity development is constructed primarily through the relationships in which one has engaged (Marcia, 1993). Therefore, gender socialization establishes the identity structure, at least in part, for the individual. Although some scholars have suggested that biological factors influence one's gender formation, Marcia (1993) pointed out that "being a biological male or female [is] less important in understanding adult relationships than [are] one's beliefs and values about their maleness and femaleness" (p. 107). These beliefs about gender orientation may be directly related to the degree to which parents adhere to gender schema.

According to the literature, socialization processes related to gender orientation start at an early age (Maccoby, 1992). From birth, according to some studies, parents project expectations of gender-specific behavior toward their children (Condry & Condry, 1976; Hoffman & Kloska, 1995; Rubin, Provenzano, & Luria, 1974). Although all babies behave in a similar fashion, adults tend to define their behaviors, often unconsciously, in terms of distinctly different gender stereotypes (Hoffman & Kloska). In two studies that employed similar methodologies, Rubin et al. and Karraker et al. (1995) interviewed parents of newborn babies that were 24 hours old. When the parents from both studies were asked to describe their babies, the parents of girls reported that their babies were softer, more delicate, and finely featured. The parents of males described boys as stronger, larger, and more masculine. Although these studies were conducted almost 20 years apart from each other, they both revealed that gender stereotype perceptions continue to persist. Apparently, in ambiguous situations in which gender differences in behavior should not be detected, stereotypic assessment becomes salient.

As identity begins to crystallize in adolescence, salient differences between the two genders emerge. First, studies indicate that the relational (interpersonal) social processes are more closely linked to the conceptual framework of female identity development compared to males who have been found to be more self-oriented (intrapersonal) (Adams & Jones, 1983; Fannin, 1979; Grotevant & Thorbeck, 1982; Kroger, 1988). Archer (1989) contended that females are more likely to develop sophisticated identity statuses in the area of family and sexuality priorities (domains related to intimacy). Female identity development revolves around who she can be in relation to others. Specifically, she faces the issue of what it means to be a woman in society and in relation to others. Moreover, a woman's sense of self is contingent upon her successfully resolving issues of connecting with others in ways that satisfy herself as well as those in her communal context (Archer, 1993).

In contrast, male identity development rests on the capacity to master and handle nonsocial realities, in which his talents and interests are directed toward achieving a sense of personal competence (Archer, 1993; Skoe & Marcia, 1991). Archer (1993) noted that male identity development is a matter of separating oneself for action to defend against domination by others. She suggested that males are socialized to develop skills and talents to be competitive in the workplace. This ideology conveys the impression that the world of work is not people oriented and that men don't need to be interpersonal. Other research has rendered similar findings. Investigating the relationship between moral reasoning and identity, Skoe and Marcia found that men were likely to uphold a justice-based moral reasoning that espouses a principle-oriented, nonpersonal view of right and wrong. Women, on the other hand, demonstrated a care-based moral reasoning. The idea of care-based moral thought is rooted in Gilligan's (1982) theory of moral development, which suggests that a woman's conception of self and morality are complexly associated.

A second prominent difference between male and female identity development is that because of sociocultural expectations of women (e.g., balancing occupation and caregiving), identity development may be a longer process for females compared to males (Marcia, 1980,1987). Archer (1985) attributed the intricacy of female identity development to the high number of content domains used to define "womanhood," coupled with the relative lack of societal support for the female position.

Research suggests that the general period for identity formation among males is between the ages of 18

and 22, but Kroger (1987) found that female subjects were predominantly in the moratorium stage from the ages of 17 to 47. Patterson, Sochting, and Marcia (1992) suggested that for the majority of women, the task of developing a sense of identity may be prolonged until the departure of their children. For it is at this time that they have the opportunity to freely pursue their identity commitments.

Ethnic Socialization

As the number of minorities in the United States increase, the socialization of ethnic minorities has become a topic of growing importance. Three themes emerge in the literature regarding ethnic socialization: (a) the need to be socialized to one's own culture, (b) the need to be socialized to mainstream society, and (c) the need to understand prejudice and discrimination (Phinney & Chavira, 1995; Rosenthal & Cichello, 1986).

First, learning one's own culture is a prominent aspect of ethnic socialization. It is not clear, however, exactly how this process is achieved across all ethnic lines. One might assume that the mere observation of parents' behavior at home would provide children with a natural learning environment about their culture. Research seems to indicate that these learning processes may vary in priority among different ethnic groups. Phinney and Chavira (1995) discovered that African American parents were found to provide the most extensive ethnic socialization among three ethnic groups (African Americans, Japanese Americans, and Mexican Americans). According to Bowman and Howard (1985), a significant number of African American participants reported that their parents taught them about African history, culture, ethnic pride, and commitment to the African American community. Likewise, Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, and Allen (1990) reported that approximately 30% of African American subjects were taught the historical traditions of African Americans as well as ethnic pride. Last, a study with young African American children and their parents revealed that children with a high sense of ethnic awareness and knowledge tended to have parents who taught them positive aspects of their ethnic background (Branch & Newcombe, 1986).

As noted, ethnic socialization differs among ethnic groups. According to Phinney and Chavira (1995), Asian American participants of Japanese descent were least likely in comparison to African American and Mexican American parents to ethnically socialize their children. Indeed, data on Asian American socialization processes have revealed that most Asian parents exhibit very little verbal teaching about Asian culture and traditions (Chae, 2000). Rather, nonverbal routines lay a foundation for modeling expected behavior (Hieshima & Schneider, 1994).

Second, different ethnic groups have been found to spend more time socializing children toward "getting along" in mainstream society. Phinney and Chavira (1995) found that Asian American parents were most likely compared to African American and Mexican American parents to encourage their children to be successful academically and to ascribe to American ideals. Likewise, in a study measuring the degree to which ethnic groups identify with the ideals of North American culture, Phinney, DuPont, Espinosa, Revil, and Sanders (1994) found that among four ethnic groups (i.e., African Americans, Asian Americans, Latino Americans, and White Americans), Asian Americans were most likely to identify with American cultural values such as individualism and self-sufficiency. Furthermore, large portions of Asian American participants were highly assimilated into mainstream American society. This assimilation may be one of the reasons why Asian Americans have been deemed the model minority. However, assimilation and its correlative rewards may be attained at the cost of losing one's ethnic identity. Researchers have noted that Asian American participants were most likely to indicate that they did not like their ethnic identity, and if given the opportunity, would be Caucasian (Phinney & Chavira, 1992).

Research on African Americans has revealed more of a bicultural orientation. Demo and Hughes (1990) have suggested that African American parents were most likely to balance a sense of ethnic pride with a desire (perhaps a need or duty) to get along with White Americans. Cross (1987) suggested that African American parents teach their children to become bicultural as a means of achieving acceptance by both minority in-group culture and dominant (and presumably hostile) majority culture.

A third component of ethnic socialization entails the preparation for discrimination and prejudice. Adolescents from ethnic minority groups will be forced to confront issues of prejudice, discrimination, and structural (i.e., institutional) barriers against opportunity (Carter, 1995; Phinney, 1992). Again, the research indicates differences among ethnic groups. Phinney and Tarver (1988), in a qualitative analysis of

structured interviews revealed that African American adolescents, compared to White Americans, had a better understanding of prejudice and discrimination toward their own ethnic group. Further, Demo and Hughes (1990) described African American socialization as teaching children to become aware of institutional and cultural barriers that exist in society. Research on Asian Americans has shown that parents socialize their children to excel academically as a means to upward mobility (Sue & Sue, 1999). In general, Asian American parents provide little teaching about racism and discrimination.

Gender, Ethnicity and Identity: A Synthesis

Gender and ethnic socialization processes lay the groundwork for identity development. Ecological factors play an important role in shaping the identity development for ethnic minorities. The way that a group is perceived by majority society and the socio-cultural expectations of the group itself influences the way the individual group member processes his or her identity (Tajfel, 1982). The majority of existing research focuses on African Americans. Therefore, sweeping generalizations that include other ethnic minority groups would be difficult to make.

Research suggests significant differences between male and female identity development among ethnic minorities (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Phinney, 1990; Wade, 1994). Evidence suggests that males develop an awareness of ethnic obstacles and seek equality to majority society group members, whereas women are more likely to develop strong ties to ethnic heritage and tradition. Bowman and Howard found that African American males were more oriented toward equality and institutional barriers, whereas their female counterparts were more likely to be oriented toward ethnic pride and adherence to their cultural background. Likewise, Wade suggested that ethnic minority men are socialized to develop a deep awareness of ethnic barriers and may develop a compensatory sense of exaggerated masculinity characterized by sexist attitudes, antifemininity, and aggressive solutions to disputes. Spencer, Cunningham, and Swanson (1995) added to this dialogue an interesting perspective, linking African American child-rearing strategies with what they refer to as "hypermasculinity." The authors wrote, "The parental use of contempt and humiliation to socialize the emotions of fear and distress in boys is hypothesized to be of major importance in fostering an exaggerated masculine style" (p. 37). These gender differences are further supported by lower scores in identity statuses of African American men as compared to their female counterparts. Parham and Helms (1985) found that African American males were more likely to have preencounter attitudes compared to their female counterparts, who were found to score significantly on inner-directedness, a manifestation of higher identity functioning. Similarly, Carter, DeSole, Sicalides, Glass, and Tyler (1997) found that African American men scored high on the preencounter status, suggesting that they had internalized American cultural values. Conversely, African American women demonstrated more advanced racial identity statuses, expressing a strong commitment and appreciation of their racial heritage. Phinney and Tarver (1988) found that African American women were more likely to explore their ethnic background and tradition compared to their male counterparts. However, the sample consisted of only 48 participants (i.e., 24 African Americans and 24 White Americans). Finally, Phinney (1989) observed a similar trend in her African American participants: 5 females had an achieved identity whereas none of males had.

In evaluating these findings, the lower identity scores of male participants may be attributed to a reaction formation (Freud, 1933/1965) against the discrimination and racism experienced by this group. Males, in general, have been found to be competitive and task oriented (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975). When African American males become aware of out-group prejudice, prominent racial barriers, and inequality, they may feel compelled to seek relief against these threats to their male sense of efficacy in egalitarianism. Their male socialization, which emphasizes a sense of dominance, may be undermined by sociopolitical barriers, causing them to fall short of the "traditional male gender role." Moreover, one of the primary tenets of moral thought for men is justice and equality (Skoe & Marcia, 1991). Perhaps the masculine — as opposed to the strictly ethnic — socialization process predisposes African American men to be oriented toward equality. Conversely, because females in general may be less competitive (Spence et al.), they may be less concerned with equality and more concerned with interpersonal harmony. Hence, in response to racism and discrimination, African American females may be more likely to maintain a strong adherence to their ethnic background and develop a sense of ethnic pride.

Implications for Counseling

Recently, the counseling profession has recognized the significance of multicultural competency in counseling and psychotherapy (Ivey, Ivey, & Simek-Morgan, 1997; Pope-Davis & Coleman, 1997; Sue & Sue, 1999). Culturally sensitive approaches to helping constitute not only a more humanitarian approach to counseling, but more importantly, a means to improve the overall delivery of mental health services.

As counselors work with multicultural populations, it is important to develop an awareness of one's own culturally learned values, assumptions, and expectations that influence one's behavior and provide meaning to experience (Cheng, Chae, & Gunn, 1998). Sue, Ivey, and Pedersen (1996) recommended that counselors engage in an in-depth exploration of themselves through studying their ethnic heritage, personal history, and genogram. Counselors may learn that much of what they considered as individual characteristics are actually based on traditions and beliefs handed down through culture and family. As individuals begin to see themselves from a self-in-context perspective, they may realize that their own point of view is only one of many possible alternatives.

Culturally sensitive counselors have a knowledge and understanding of the client's minority culture. This knowledge involves developing an understanding of the client and her or his experiences, worldview, and philosophy of life. As research has shown, many racial and ethnic minorities may "hold collectivist or group-oriented values." Therefore, understanding how the client perceives her or his place in American culture is important in facilitating the therapeutic process.

Assessing the client's level of ethnic consciousness provides the counselor with a guide to how the client deals with issues related to her or his ethnic background. In discussing issues related to gender and ethnicity in identity, counselors should recognize that ethnic minority clients may vary in degree of ethnic identity development. Ethnic identity deals with whether and to what degree an individual has explored the meaning of her or his ethnicity (e.g., cultural values) and developed a sense of commitment to her or his ethnic heritage (Phinney, 1996).

Assessing the client's ethnic identity through a framework such as Phinney's (1992) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure may be useful. In her framework, she identifies three content domains of ethnic identity: affirmation of belonging, ethnic behaviors and practices, and ethnic identity commitment and achievement. The model assumes that individuals operate on a continuum of ethnic identity formation, with one end representing a weak or uncommitted ethnic identity and at the other end, a strong or committed ethnic identity (Phinney, 1993). Although assessing where the client is in relation to this continuum may be helpful, examining the specific domains in which the client shows evidence of resistance or openness to exploration and commitment is also important. For example, a client may be immersed in ethnic behaviors and practices without having considered what it means to belong to that certain group. This client may have blindly accepted group expectations without questioning the ideological assumptions and beliefs that are associated with group membership. Counselors who can explore and identify these issues may help their clients develop a deeper awareness and understanding of their own ethnic group membership and therefore facilitate the process of ethnic identity formation.

An exploration of social oppression in the form of racism and sexism may also be an important task in counseling ethnic minority clients. Ethnic minority men and women may react differently to sociopolitical barriers. Research has shown that in general, women may develop strong ties and bonds to their ethnic heritage, whereas men may adapt to societal norms by developing an exaggerated masculine style and employing aggressive solutions to disputes. Although providing an open environment to discuss these identity issues is important, the counselor and client's search for resolutions may also be important.

In sum, counselors need to be sensitive to the different cultural values and traditions held by racial and ethnic minorities. Further, understanding the experiences of minority groups in light of North America's cultural context may be valuable knowledge that can help the counselor more accurately conceptualize the client's issues. Although research has shown general tendencies in identity formation among persons of color, counselors should use this information only as a hypothesis that may or may not be confirmed by a specific client's experiences.

Conclusion

Identity formation among ethnic minorities is becoming a highly important area of study as the United States becomes increasingly multicultural. As ethnic minorities become exposed to the traditions of American society, balancing their minority culture with mainstream American culture becomes an impor-

tant task in identity development. It becomes an even more complex process of identity development when gender is an additional variable. The degree to which these sociocultural constructs influence each other is unclear, but this exploration suggests that the interaction—not each factor in isolation—profoundly shapes identity formation. The powerful effects of gender socialization were already evident. The gender role expectations also seem to pervade ethnic lines. Further, ethnic groups seem to socialize children somewhat differently. In part, this differential socialization may be a result of the higher levels of discrimination and devaluation experienced by ethnic groups. Because few studies have been focused on socialization and identity, the author could not review a range of ethnic groups and their socialization practices. In sum, the interaction of gender and ethnic socialization powerfully affects identity development and promotes differential reactions to majority prejudice.

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