WHEN MIGHT THE TWO CULTURAL WORLDS OF SECOND GENERATION BICULTURALS COLLIDE?

ABSTRACT

Second generation youth often identify with two cultures (heritage and Canadian). Although these biculturals usually negotiate their lives between two cultural worlds with ease, there are situations where conflicts may arise because of an incompatibility between the norms associated with each culture. Our research has identified some key points where bicultural conflicts can occur for second generation Canadians.

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Second generation youth in Canada are the children of parents who immigrated to Canada from another country. Although there is a tremendous amount of diversity among individuals within this second generation, they often share the feature of being bicultural. Culture can be defined by the norms and standards of a group that will delineate the appropriateness of behaviour. Bicultural individuals, therefore, have psychological access to two sets of cultural norms that may be tied to geography, ethnicity and/or religion. In the case of second generation Canadians, our research focuses on their heritage culture and their Canadian culture. Heritage norms are typically acquired from parents, extended family and the ethnic community to which parents belong. The basis of "Canadian" norms is much broader because they are acquired through the infrastructure of Canadian society (e.g., schools, media, social services), the neighbourhoods in which they live and from many of their peers. Moreover, Canadian norms are acquired through either a majority English-language or a majority French-language context, while heritage norms may be acquired through a completely different language.

Cultural conflict is likely to occur when heritage and Canadian norms offer incompatible behavioural prescriptions. These conflicts can be experienced at different levels in the lives of second generation youth. At the group level, they may experience discrimination because they have been perceived as not "fitting in" on the basis of criteria such as skin colour, accent or type of dress (e.g., Giguère et al. 2007). This is an example of an intergroup conflict because it involves an interaction between individuals, where some individuals are responding to others on the basis of group categories.

Our recent studies have focused mainly on cultural norm conflicts that are experienced at the interpersonal level or the intrapersonal level. Interpersonal conflicts for second generation youth may occur with parents or peers. Intrapersonal conflicts are experienced within the individual and are well captured by the experience of "feeling torn between two cultures."

In terms of their daily interactions, second generation Canadians do not constantly experience cultural conflicts. This is not surprising given that there are more similarities between the norms of cultural groups than there are differences (see Schwartz and Bardi 2001). Moreover, the cultural identity of bicultural individuals is contextually driven and usually only one culture will be salient in a particular situation. For example, immigrant children's behaviour may be largely determined by their heritage culture when they are with their family and by "Canadian" culture when they are at school. Clément and Noels (1992) have referred to this phenomenon as "situated identities."

A conflict between the two sets of cultural norms of the bicultural individual is more likely to be evidenced when the two cultural identities of bicultural individuals are simultaneously salient to the individual, when these identities evoke two sets of norms that are incompatible and when the individual feels some commitment to each set of norms. Finally, a conflict is more likely to occur in a situation that begs the individual to follow only one of the two sets of norms.

It should be noted from the outset that most of our research has focused on the adult children of South Asian and Chinese immigrants. We have focused on children of Eastern immigrants to Canada primarily for three reasons. First, they compose by far the largest immigration population in Canada. Second, these groups come from Eastern cultural backgrounds, which have been described

as collectivistic and are often guided by clear (i.e., well-defined) and tight (i.e., with little room for digression) norms (see Triandis 1995). Canada, on the other hand, is a Western and individualist culture and its norms are often less prescriptive. Finally, we have focused on young adults because they are at a developmental stage where they are more likely to face the challenge of resolving incompatible norms (Phinney 1990).

Our research aim has been to understand some of the psychological mechanisms surrounding normative conflict. Most of our work is based on samples of young adults who are attending university, and their responses may be somewhat less varied than the responses that would be obtained from broader random sampling. Within our research program, we have argued that the realm of close relationships (dating, sex and marriage) is one area where there is the potential for cultural conflict for bicultural individuals of Eastern descent. It is generally recognized that the norms of interactions in relationships are primarily defined and transmitted by culture (Berscheid 1995), and reviews of the literature on immigrant families have indicated that the issue of dating and relationships can be associated with considerable tension, particularly for the daughters of immigrants (e.g., Hynie 1996). For second generation Eastern immigrants, in a Western culture in particular, close relationships are typically associated with two distinct, and often contradictory, sets of norms (see Tang and Dion 1999).

For the remainder of this paper we will focus on two related domains of interpersonal relationships where there is a potential for interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict for second generation youth.

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Cultural norms of partner selection and preferred mate attributes

An important decision facing the majority of young Canadians is what type of person they would like to have as a life partner. Research by Buss et al. (1990) has demonstrated tremendous cross-cultural consistency in the attributes that men and women desire in a mate across 33 different countries. Individuals across cultures prefer a partner who will be kind and considerate, and our findings with young adult Canadians concur with those of Buss (Hynie et al. 2006, Lalonde et al. 2004). Mate selection across the world is often done within homogeneous cultural contexts where a large pool of potential partners will share ethnic, religious and linguistic features. In the case of second generation Canadians in urban centres such as metropolitan Toronto, however, the pool of potential partners is culturally heterogeneous given the tremendous variability in the ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds of their multicultural Canadian peers.

Cultural norms will influence not only what we look for in a life partner but also how we look for a potential mate. In Western cultures, marriage is seen as the union of two individuals. Although family approval is desirable, young adults are expected to find their partners without their parents' assistance. Marriage in Western cultures is assumed to be a consequence of a couple's feelings or romantic love. In contrast, in many Eastern cultures, marriage is seen as the alliance between two families (Dion and Dion 1993), and in some cases they may be arranged. Although children's selection of a marriage partner is desirable, obligations and duties may be more important than personal preferences. Young adults from some Eastern cultures may be expected to respect their parents' desires regarding the choice of a spouse, and love may be better conceptualized as a state that may follow marriage rather than one that precedes it (Goodwin and Cramer 2000).

So what happens to the children of immigrants who develop two sets of norms that offer some incompatible behavioural prescriptions regarding preferable traits in a mate and the nature and meaning of the union with a life partner? These young adults know what their family would like and expect in their intimate relationships but also know of the choices and expectations of their Western peers. Given that family is the primary carrier of heritage culture for the children of immigrants, the expectations of the family should play a role in their mate preferences. A first step in our research program was to determine if heritage culture and family expectations played a greater role in the preferred mate attributes of second generation youth of Eastern cultural backgrounds compared with the expectations and preferences of their European Canadian peers.

Our first set of studies in this area (Lalonde et al. 2004) focused on second generation South Asian Canadians. We expected that these young adults would be aware of two different sets of cultural norms regarding mate selection and that they would still be influenced by their heritage culture although they lived in a Western culture. Our results indicated that they had in fact internalized some of the norms of their heritage culture. They were found to have a stronger preference for "traditional" attributes in a mate (e.g., family reputation, parents' approval) compared with the preferences of their European Canadian peers. A second study with a different sample of South Asian Canadians further demonstrated that those with a greater preference for traditional

attributes in a mate identified more strongly with their South Asian heritage and were more culturally connected to their families. This idea of cultural connectedness refers to the psychological concept of family allocentrism, which is essentially the expression of cultural collectivism at a family level (see Lay et al. 1998).

Our second study on this topic (Hynie et al. 2006) focused on second generation Chinese Canadians, as well as the views of their first generation parents. Parents still play a strong role in the selection of their children's mate in modern China (Xiaohe and Whyte 1990), and parental approval is reported to be an important factor in determining modern Chinese marital satisfaction (Pimentel 2000). As with previous research, our results indicated that when it came to rating the importance of different attributes in a mate, both children and parents emphasized the importance of an understanding partner above and beyond all other characteristics. Chinese immigrant parents, however, rated traits associated with traditional family structure, function and roles as being of moderate importance relative to other potential characteristics, even though they themselves had resided in North America for an average of 30 years. In contrast, their North American-raised children perceived traditional characteristics as being the least important of the possible traits in an ideal mate.

Similar to our South Asian samples, second generation Chinese Canadian's preference for traditional mate characteristics reflected their degree of family connectedness as well as their identification with their Chinese heritage. Finally, we found that parental preferences for traditional attributes in a mate for their children positively correlated with the children's actual preferences for the same attributes, corroborating our belief that parental cultural expectations will help shape the views of their children about relationship partners.

The studies reported above indicate that second generation South Asian and Chinese Canadians tend to prefer more traditional attributes in a mate if they are more culturally connected to their families and if they identify more strongly with their heritage culture. These findings demonstrate that identification with a cultural group influences the choice within incompatible sets of norms. Our most recent data (Lalonde and Giguère 2007) comparing young adult Canadians from different cultural backgrounds within the same study (Chinese, South Asian and European Canadian) indicates that preferences for traditional attributes in a mate (e.g., similar religious and cultural background, parental approval) were again related to cultural connectedness to family for our Eastern samples. This study further revealed that a preference for traditional attributes in a mate were stronger for the South Asian sample than the Chinese sample.

Different cultural expectations about what is important in a life partner can lead to potential cultural conflicts in bicultural individuals in a number of situations. In situations where the two sets of opposing cultural norms are simultaneously salient, second generation youth may have to confront difficult and painful dilemmas. For example, what happens when bicultural individuals are attracted to someone who is from a different cultural or religious group? At the interpersonal level, such individuals may experience conflict with their parents if the parents expect their children to marry within their group (see Uskul et al. 2007). At the intrapersonal level, some second generation biculturals may experience an internal conflict if they find themselves attracted to someone from another culture. Part of them may want to give in to the desire and explore the potential of a relationship, while another part of them may be telling them to bury these feelings and wait for a more appropriate target for their affection. Given that recent Canadian Census data indicates that inter-ethnic and inter-faith relationships are on the rise in Canada, it is quite likely that such cultural conflicts are being experienced by many second generation Canadians.

Young adults from some Eastern cultures may be expected to respect their parents' desires regarding the choice of a spouse, and love may be better conceptualized as a state that may follow marriage rather than one that precedes it.

Cultural norms of sexuality

In the cross-national study of mate preference attributes conducted by Buss et al. (1990), the attribute that elicited the largest cultural difference was the desire for chastity in a mate. Moreover among the nations that judged chastity as more important relative to other nations, we find India and China. English and French Canadian samples in the Buss study, on the other hand, ranked chastity as one of the least important attributes in a mate. Lalonde and Giguère (2007) compared second generation Canadians from different cultural backgrounds (Chinese, South Asian and European Canadian) and found that a preference for chastity was stronger for both of the Eastern background samples compared with the European Canadian sample. This later difference highlights another important potential source of conflict for second generation Canadians – norms regarding sexuality.

Our most recent study (Lalonde and Giguère 2007) includes a comparison of norms regarding premarital sex. We asked second generation South Asian and Chinese Canadians, as well as European Canadians, to rate the importance of chastity as a desired attribute in a mate and provide their views concerning the appropriateness of engaging in premarital sex in a loving relationship. We also asked the same participants to rate the perceived views of their parents and peers regarding premarital sex.

Both South Asian Canadians and Chinese Canadians showed a greater preference for chastity in a mate compared to their European Canadian peers. Of greater

interest, however, were ratings about the perceived appropriateness of engaging in premarital sex if involved in a loving relationship. As expected, South Asian and Chinese Canadians perceived premarital sexual intercourse as less appropriate than did their Canadian peers, although this difference was more marked for South Asian Canadians. More importantly, the ratings of South Asian Canadians fell in between what they perceived their South Asian parent perceived as appropriate (i.e., not appropriate) and what they perceived their Canadian peers perceived as appropriate (i.e., quite appropriate). These data provide evidence that second generation South Asians see their views regarding sexuality as falling between two sets of cultural norms.

To investigate more directly the key aspect of bicultural intrapersonal conflict (i.e., feeling caught between two cultures), we asked our respondents the extent to which they felt torn or caught between the norms of majority Canadians and their heritage norms when it came to intimate relationships. South Asian Canadian reported feeling more torn between the two cultures than did Chinese Canadians or a sub-sample of Italian Canadians. Moreover, South Asian Canadians who reported more of this intrapersonal conflict were more likely to report lower self-esteem. Greater intrapersonal bicultural conflict, therefore, can be associated with negative psychological outcomes. We believe that there are many situations where different cultural expectations about sexual behaviour can lead to potential interpersonal (e.g., with boyfriends or girlfriends) and intrapersonal cultural conflicts in bicultural individuals.

Second generation youth are usually no different from their Canadian peers whose families have been in Canada for multiple generations. There are some situations in their lives, however, where they find themselves facing cultural conflicts because they have to negotiate and compromise between the expectations of their heritage norms and their Canadian norms.

Other potential areas for bicultural identity conflicts

The potential for bicultural identity conflicts extends beyond the area of intimate relationships. Given that Western cultures have strong norms of autonomy and independence and that Eastern cultures have strong norms of family connectedness and interdependence, we believe that situations where the children of immigrants attempt to assert their autonomy will give rise to both interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts. We have been examining the potential for such conflicts in a few contexts. One example lies in the transition from living in the familial home to other types of living arrangements. In general, the norm of Canadian young adults prescribes moving out of the familial home much earlier than Eastern norms. More importantly, Eastern norms set criteria for moving out, such as marriage.

Another example where the above norms may be simultaneously salient is in the domain of education and career choices. The Western norms of individualism and autonomy may guide the individual to follow a passion that is not automatically linked to financial security (e.g., an Arts degree in literature, theatre school), while the Eastern norms of family connectedness and interdependence may call the individual to pursue domains of work that are valued and recognized by the heritage community (e.g., medicine, law, business) or where they will be able to financially provide for the family. Our recent work suggest that greater familial and cultural pressure is placed on children of Chinese immigrant compared with the pressure experienced by their European Canadian peers with regards to academic performance and that these pressures may be more stressful for second generation Chinese Canadians.

Conclusion

Second generation youth are usually no different from their Canadian peers whose families have been in Canada for multiple generations. There are some situations in their lives, however, where they find themselves facing cultural conflicts because they have to negotiate and compromise between the expectations of their heritage norms and their Canadian norms. We believe that it is important to focus attention on second generation Canadian youth because they are at a point in their lives where they are establishing their identity, their autonomy and their intimate relationships, and each of these is tied to different cultural expectations from their heritage and Canadian cultures.

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