Globalization and Transformation Processes: Evolving Hybrid Families
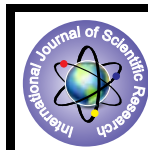
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ABSTRACT
Globalization has given rise to hybridization processes within families as emerging families of today are being challenged by the complexity of blending different transnational cultural beliefs and practices. The concept of hybridization within the biological sciences describes the process and blending of two unique entities. Hybridization also pertains to the unique combination of rearing children by blending of different socio-cultural practices and traditions. We propose that (1) Children in families with parents of dissimilar cultural families of origins represent the first generation (F1) of hybridization, (2) Children reared in these families will manifest cognitive flexibility in psycho-social and cultural dimensions. This is a study of 5 transnational couples whose affiliation to a nation/state differed from the other partner. Separately asked, open ended interview questions about family relationships revealed five primary and eight secondary themes. Depending on their cultural backgrounds, decision making and conflict resolutions required negotiation, compromise, and discourse in raising children. There is evidence that children reared in transnational families are exposed to multiple cultures and will most likely reflect their hybrid identification. This study provided a picture of the hybridization process in families.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization is a multidimensional process, which is transforming families as it unfolds in multiple realms of existence. According to Pieterse (1994) globalization can best be understood in terms of an open-ended synthesis of several disciplinary approaches, thus suggesting an ecological approach in understanding changing families.

Given the fluidity of change, there are many structural types of families and many distinct symbolic meanings associated with the behavioral cultural norms of actions of families in societies (Skolnick & Skolnick, 1994). However, there are three universal assumptions of families. First, there are patterned variations with respect to relations among men, women, and children. Second, there are fundamental reciprocal relationships between child and adult caregiver. Third, family is the bridge between the larger social context (macro-system) that mediates or translates the culture's dominant messages to its members thus evolving its own micro-system variation.

Throughout history, we have witnessed the constant interplay between the macro level of social organization and the difference it makes at the micro level of family life. The macro levels of more traditional societies often change slowly, whereas, in postmodern societies the fluidity of change occurs at various degrees of rapidity. In the United States there is recognition of various family forms as they adapt and evolve, however, lacking in the literature are the effects of the rapidly evolving global complexity of deconstruction and transformation of families and individuals.

Existing family theories have revealed the uniqueness and variability of family systems; however, with a perspective derived from a dominant mono-cultural milieu. What has been less understood are transnational families, which are specific types of global cross cultural families, where each partner's place of origin is different from the other. We propose a theoretical explanation that frames transnational families within the processes of stability to change, homogeneity to diversity, gendered to transgender roles and outcomes of parenting resulting in hybrid children. These processes of change are brought about by the deconstruction and transformation of families. This metamorphosis is most profound in the development of *hybrid* children.

What influences the dynamic processes that occur within these

ever increasing, transnational families are not well understood, especially regarding the socio-psychological development of hybrid children. Cultural traditions are like genetic clues that inform and are transmitted from one generation to another that can enable or hinder a successful adaptation for each new generation. Depending upon one's family of origin, expectations of family and gender roles and appropriate communication styles can prove to be a challenge, as they relate to decision making, negotiations, and conflict resolutions. Therefore, children reared in these families experience many more competing cultural norms or cultural messages than children whose parents were socialized within a similar culture or host society. Children socialized within a transnational family can be identified as first generation (F1) hybrid children.

Hybridization has been a useful delineation of a biological process in which two unique entities are blended. According to Webster's Dictionary, the definition also extends to persons produced by the blending of two diverse cultures or traditions. Children reared in transnational families are influenced by a blending of different cultural inheritance. This refinement in explanation and introduction will enable family researchers to more fully explain the complexity of merging different cultures of family systems and subsequent effects on future generations. The term hybridization immediately places family systems dimensions away from a monocultural perspective into a more complex global family framework.

When we speak of individuals bonding to form a new family, each of the persons comes with a socio-cultural family background unique to their heritage and upbringing that is nested in a cultural milieu. Each partner's fundamental ideological system has been constructed and organized into attitudes, values, beliefs, interests, and norms within a socio-cultural context. The dimensions of axiology, logic and epistemology are deep socio-cognitive interfaces that require consensual interdependent negotiations and many times, compromises or changes for the survival of the family.

The beliefs about the way the world works have influenced the individual from early childhood, mostly at the hands of parents and significant others. Each individual has been constantly reinforced on a daily basis by the dominant patterns of socio-economic, political activity as well as the educational, cultural,

religious and political leaders that surrounded the growing individual. The transnational couple must adapt to each other's unique cultural heritage, as well as to normative and non-normative stressors found in their host country, in this study to the United States.

This union of transnational individuals is happening with remarkable speed, and what is becoming apparent is the changing nature of families and the limited availability of information concerning family processes within these ever increasing numbers with unique family life styles. More perplexing are the nurturing and socialization of children with each parent coming from very different countries of origins. The influences of parents from diverse cultural backgrounds are bound to bring about socialization processes that impact their children to help them be *good enough* to fit into their resident host society.

In addition to the normative and non-normative stressors that transnational families experience they might also experience similar challenges related to immigrant families which have been identified as common barriers and stressors such as language barriers, diminished social support networks, conflict in intergenerational relationships, conflict and change in marital relationships and expectations, lack of familiarity with U.S. norms and discrimination (Bush, Bohon, & Kim, 2010). These social interactions lead each member of a couple from total acceptance to the other extreme of non-acceptance or varying degrees of hybridization of each other's points of view. According to Chan and Peverelli (2010, p. 221), hybridization occurs when people with different cultural backgrounds during interaction are willing to "culturally let go" and open up to other "possibilities" Hence in these cases, hybridization is the process of the creation of new cultural forms as a result of mixing and adapting to different cultures.

According to Rowe and Schelling (1991, p.231), hybridization is defined as "the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms into new practices". Therefore, the identity patterns of children from these families are becoming more complex. As children begin to share in more global values and lifestyles, the processes of hybridization further push the families toward postmodernism, which is characterized by flexibility and adaptability.

The phenomenon of hybridization in plants is very clear. Genetically it is easier to trace the results of the process often by their phenotypic expressions in the next generation of the plant. In humans, this phenomenon is a bit similar when we can identify physical traits that are different in each parent and the consequence of its appearance in their children. Meanwhile, culture is an abstraction, except for when expressed in behavioral actions and concrete ways such as language spoken, traditions practiced, values stated, foods eaten, music appreciated, and artifacts valued and used. Culture is like the genetic component of a group or society that is passed down from one generation to another. From the earliest years, a child learns rapidly about the world and parents. Parents' attitudes and expectations play an important part in the genesis of beliefs and attitudes a child holds of himself or herself (Levine, 1963).

Therefore, this study attempts to understand the process of hybridization, what is happening in transnational families and how children's identities are being influenced as F1 hybrid generation. In the biological world, FI is often referred to as hybrid vigor. Are the F1 children also unique in their fluidity to adapt to the globalization that is occurring? Are F1 children also unique with regard to marked agility to construct unique and fluid identities and social interaction patterns and thus exhibit hybrid vigor?

The following propositions will be relevant to the analysis presented here.

Proposition One: Children represent the first generation F1 of hybridization.

Proposition Two: Children born and reared will manifest cognitive flexibility in socio-cultural and psycho-social dimensions.

METHOD

In this research on transnational families, the method of choice was a qualitative approach. Data collection through open ended questions encouraged participants to answer with their own words and expand on topics of interest. The aim was to anchor observations in particular intergroup relations inside a family. This allowed the researcher to unravel the family system as reported by parents and place the emphasis of understanding on perceptions and feelings in ways that created a system of meanings within behavior patterns that could be understood. This is a fundamental criterion to validate meanings when carrying out cross cultural studies. We assume that the family is a socially constructed system of meanings, and how children are socialized in it is largely determined by the parents who were influenced by their families of origins as well as the social norms of rules, regulations, and normative standards of the society in which they reside. The dynamic process of acculturation will influence what happens in these families and therefore, will be considered as an important factor in the development of hybrid children.

A convenience sampling approach was applied to recruit participants by word of mouth or snowball communication. Ten individuals, forming five transnational couples, were the participants in this study. All participants provided written consent and approval for this research was granted by the Michigan State University IRB.

Participants and Procedure

To be eligible for this study, participants were parents whose families of origin and affiliations to nation/states differed. Important differences in attitudes, values, and behaviors distinguish people from different countries and cultures; therefore attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs before and after marriage were included as part of the open ended interview questionnaire.

Given that social structures for both parents are unique representations of their particular cultural heritage, we used the structural diversity approach (Baca Zinn, Eitzen & Wells, 2011), and the human ecological systems approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). These approaches view families as being shaped by their interactions with social structures in which they find themselves. Moreover, these approaches emphasize a close connection between the inner dynamics of family life and the structural forces that shape them in their country of origin as well as in the host country, where they presently reside.

Given the limited number of transnational couples for this study, it was important to control for socioeconomic status and for educational attainment of post associate or bachelor's degrees. They all could speak the English language. Each partner was interviewed separately, at different times and places, to maintain internal validity of the information gathered.

RESULTS

The results of this study are divided into primary and secondary areas of interest.

Primary Interest. The primary interest identifies aspects of the process of hybridization in families, and how children are socialized. What are the precursors of processes and patterns that

lead to socialization? What is the nature of the hybridization process and how does it influence their children?

Five themes emerged which required negotiation, compromise, and discourse in raising their children. Discourse implies complex structures, strategies, mechanisms, and processes of observed text and talk.

1. *Physical and psychological identity issues.* One dimension of this theme was explanation of skin color, if the parents had pigmentations different from each other and/or different from the child. A child might ask the following questions. "Why do I look different?" Why is my hair different?" Another dimension of this theme was psychological. For example, a child might ask "Why is my name so different from others in school?"

2. *Value clarification in terms of behaviors and expectations.* Especially important was what respect meant cross culturally with regard to hierarchy and dominance relationships, with regard to the status of children and parents, and with regard to older adults and others such as teachers. Another dimension of concern included gender roles and expectations. Examples of children's comments were:

"Why must I eat all my food when other children do not need to?"

"Why do I have to dress this way? Other girls wear shorts."

In most cases, parents explained and translated different behavioral definitions of what are respectful or appropriate behaviors in Moms' and/or Dads' families of origin, as well as what is expected from their host country.

3. *Which parent(s) discipline(s) the children and how?* This often required negotiation and conflict resolution in many of the families. How these issues were resolved often depended upon issues of distributive power within the family including how one's family of origin handled this situation, gender-based discipline, SES, or acculturated to host societal expectations. Belief in physical punishment, while others prefer time out and/or talking it out became an issue in families. Which parent is responsible for disciplinary actions was a point of contention in many families.

4. *What traditions and rituals from one's culture of origin do you observe or carry on?* This required many interactions between the couples to come to a compromise that worked for the family. Some of the traditional expectations caused disagreements and compromises were not easily reached. Some examples include gift giving on special occasions or holidays; celebrating different holidays (those of the host country or countries of origins), and foods eaten and served.

5. *Education of children.* This was an important topic for all families. For example, parents disagreed on whether a child should be monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual. They disagreed on educational outcomes pertinent to a child's gender role expectations and behaviors. They had different viewpoints on the child's religious education, conceptions of intergenerational relationships, and whether it was more important for a child to have an orientation toward the future or the past.

Secondary Interest. A secondary interest of this study was to capture a glimpse of family systems, with particular emphasis on structural-functional aspects, interpersonal relationships, and personal changes before and after marriage. This section is related to themes or issues that arose due to cultural differences in axiology, logic, and epistemology between adult partners. The major themes that emerged were mainly associated with decision making and conflict resolution in the following areas.

1. Issues of dependence, independence, and autonomy
2. Extended families/ relationships
3. Changing and expanding habits, including food habits
4. Gender roles (traditional vs. modern). For example, who disciplines the children? Who does household tasks? Who provides economically for the family?
5. Cultural habits especially those annoying to a partner, such as cleanliness, bathing, dress codes, and sleep patterns
6. Communication patterns, verbal and non verbal
7. Concern for the education and future of their children
8. Decision making, especially related to financial matters

CONCLUSIONS

There is evidence that children raised in transnational families are exposed to multiple cultural influences. It is evident that they are socialized to form an identity that is simultaneously a personal, relational, and collective phenomenon that is stable in some ways and fluid in others. The influence of parents whose cultures and histories are quite different, and where the processes of personal and social construction of socializing children are relatively deliberate, have only recently begun to be understood, in terms of identity development and formation. Transnational parenting roles are guided by difficult and often challenging negotiation, compromise, and deliberate attention towards socializing children to develop a subjective understanding of who they are as sociocultural beings. Consequently, exposure to multiple cultures will most likely become a basis for social identification (Spears, 2010). Social identity theorists would predict that cultural identification involves internalization of a prototype that characterizes one's culture collectively, rather than a simple matching of one's personal values with those around oneself (Smith, 2010).

We hypothesize that children raised in transnational families are the prototype of hybridization. They will manifest a stable as well as fluid integration and formation of a socially constructed identity that is an outcome of the process of hybridization within their unique families. The family is a unique socio-cultural learning environment in which the beliefs and practices shape a child's perspective taking, for example through rose-colored glasses.

According to Jensen, Arnett, and McKenzie (2010), there are challenges and opportunities that globalization presents for people forming their identities especially during adolescence and emerging adulthood. Research data suggest that identity develops through processes of individuation and connectedness within the family (Hamilton, 1996). There is evidence to suggest that formation of identity begins during early childhood for children raised in transnational families. The F1 generation may manifest hybrid cognitive flexibility, which will need to be investigated.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are limitations to this study as it was carried out with a small sample of parents. The study could be strengthened by including data from older children. Future studies of transnational families should include data from interviews with adolescents or young adults. This can be the evidence needed to verify whether these children are hybrid F1. The question of whether these children's identity development is normative and related to self-valuing and positive autonomy will necessitate further study of the F1 generation. This requires further research to elaborate on the social psychology of identity formation in hybrid children.

Increasingly, the future will be constructed by children who are global in their outlook. They will be transnational hybrid children having qualities of many cultures. To the extent that principles of biological hybridization apply within a cultural realm, these children may be considered hybrid vigor with the possibility to construct a more desirable future.

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