

Cultural Marginality:

Exploration of Self-Esteem and Cross Cultural Adaptation of the Marginalized Individual: An investigation of the second generation Hare Krishnas

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the cross-cultural adaptation of a sample of adults raised in the Hare Krishna culture. Fifteen second generation ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) adults were asked to describe their family, peer, and social interactions and the perceived impact on their cross-cultural adaptation. An analysis of participant responses generated the following fifteen themes: (1) age and context of first contact with mainstream culture, (2) process of cultural adaptation, (3) parents' marital status, (4) family relationships, (5) layers of marginality, (6) community norms and values, (7) identity crises, (8) self-esteem and self-esteem scores, (9) views of ISKCON culture, (10) views of mainstream culture, (11) cultural vernacular, (12) cultural emblems, (13) role models, (14) current cultural membership, and (15) future family vision. The outcome of the study was discussed with possible clinical issues which included the complexities of cultural belongingness, healthy and self-destructive aspects of adaptation, and feelings of terminal uniqueness.

Key Words: Cultural marginality, cross-cultural adaptation, Krishna Culture Kids

Introduction

Cultural diversity has been defined as "two or more distinct groupings recognizable by cultural, racial, or other socially distinctive features" (Berry 1974: 17). Among the world's "large and complex nation-states," there has been an increase in the population of multiple cultural groups (Berry 1974: 17). Therefore, much research has been conducted in response to this cultural expansion, as investigators strive to learn more about cultural identity and intercultural adaptation (Berry 1974).

Historically, it was believed that a healthy sense of self is achieved when one ascribes to a specific ethnicity and culture (Kim 1996). Yet, in a culturally diversified world, individuals may develop allegiances to multiple cultures simultaneously (Schaetti 2000). Furthermore, an individual may exist in cultural marginality, described by one writer as "feelings of 'passive betweenness' between two different cultures...and [they] do not perceive themselves as centrally belonging to either one" (Choi 2001: 193).

Cultural Marginality

The Marginal Man

The term "marginality" was first introduced by Robert Park in 1928. Park's "marginal man" is "on the margin of two cultures and two societies which never completely [interpenetrate and fuse]" (Park 1928: 892, Brackets in original quote). Park described the marginal man as one with "spiritual instability, intensified self-consciousness, restlessness, and malaise" (893).

Until Bennett's work in 1993, the experience of *cultural marginals* was most commonly thought to be one of pessimism, confusion, and isolation (McCaig 2002). Many writers used words such as "severe distress," "inferiority," "paralysis," "tension," and the "marginal syndrome" (McCaig 2002: 9-10).

Outcomes of marginality

Encapsulated Marginality

Janet Bennett conceptualized the term cultural marginality as encompassing two outcomes: *encapsulated marginality* and *constructive marginality* (Bennett 1993). *Encapsulated marginality*, according to Bennett's framework, is indicative of a loneliness, alienation, self-segregation, and internal distress. She identifies "the degree of similarity between internalized cultures as a factor in the intensity of disintegration for the encapsulated marginal" (Bennett 1993: 114). Thus, the more vastly different two cultures are from one another, the more prone an individual is to "internal culture shock" (112).

Another view of culture shock in its relation to an identity crisis is to see it in terms of "self-shock" or the omnipresent strain or pressure between the individual's own internal sense of self, and the environment around him (Kim 1996: 355). Although often thought of in extreme terms, this "culture shock" can be felt on many levels ranging from severe to mild (Bochner 2003).

Bennett continues to describe the internal struggles within the encapsulated marginal, maintaining that this could be escalated by the opposing views between the two cultural groups (Bennett 1993). At times, the original culture may accuse the individual of rejecting his or her roots or beliefs of origin, and conforming to the mainstream (McCaig 2002). At the same time, the second culture may be pressuring the individual to abide by their conception of norms and values, in order to be accepted into their group (McCaig 2002). This state of cultural conflict may leave the encapsulated marginal to feel culturally homeless, without a peer group to provide a sense of belonging, resulting in what Bennett termed "terminal uniqueness." The conflicting pressures of establishing one's identity, belief system, and goals remain a constrained effort to the encapsulated marginal and coincide with high levels of distress (McCaig 2002).

Constructive Marginality

The second type of marginality, according to Bennett, is a person who takes an active role in consciously constructing his or her identity (Bennett 1993). This type of individual, termed the *constructive marginal*, is said to move or shift effortlessly between cultural identities and create an "integrated multicultural existence" (McCaig 2000: 13).

Bennett emphasized the "self-differentiation" and assumption of "personal responsibility" in making life choices, aiding in the ability to shift frames of cultural reference with ease (Bennett 1993). Within her framework, she suggests that the ideal situation is one in which people look to their own self-reference and awareness for their identity, as opposed to the established definitions provided by singular cultures (Bennett 1993). Similarly, Yoshikawa (1987) believed in the integration of eastern and western perspectives in which an individual thrives in between two cultures, discovering the most about himself/herself because he or she is living without the constraints of established cultural confines (Yoshikawa 1987). It is the belief of both Bennett and Yoshikawa, that from this marginal place, one is able to exhibit the utmost in intercultural sensitivity (Bennett 1993; Yoshikawa 1987).

Marginality and the ISKCON Culture

One group that is considered a marginal culture in this society is the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), founded in 1966 in New York City by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami (Rochford 1985; McCaig 2002).

In the mid-60's, the first devotees of Krishna culture joined the movement as young adults (First generation Krishna Culture Adults) (McCaig 2002). They were typically Caucasian, and from middle-class to upper middle-class families (Rochford 1985). Research of the first Krishna devotees has looked at them as "meaning seekers" from a widely spread 1960's counterculture, seeking liberation from their

dominant cultures' values (Rochford 1985). They were ready to live an alternative lifestyle, much different than their lifestyles in childhood.

Often, the Hare Krishnas developed "culturally enclosed communities," leaving behind all cultures of origin (McCaig 2002: 15). According to McCaig (2002), similar to "the Amish and Shaker communities of the US and gypsies of Eastern Europe, their contact with the conventional world was intentionally limited in an effort to preserve the integrity of their chosen culture" (16). This limitation on contact often included contact with biological relatives and former friends who were not members of the Krishna movement.

Krishna consciousness movement

Currently, the international movement is comprised of an estimated 300,000 full-time members, with "more than 300 temples, 40 rural communities, and 80 restaurants in 71 countries" (McCaig 2002). The Krishna consciousness movement is a group with distinct cultural practices, including dress, music, art, and diet.

The members of the ISKCON movement follow strict religious practices in an effort to lead them to self-realization; first and foremost, the practice involves chanting the Sanskrit names of the Lord as a means for meditation and God realization: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. This chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra has become a "trademark of the Krishna movement" and led to their commonly referred name "Hare Krishnas" (Rochford 1985: 11).

In addition to the daily practice of mantra meditation, initiated ISKCON members take four vows: no meat, fish, or eggs; no illicit sex; no intoxicants (including cigarettes, alcohol, and illegal drugs); and no gambling (McCaig 2002; Rochford 1985). "ISKCON members believe indulgence in the aforementioned activities disrupts physical, mental and spiritual well-being, and increases anxiety and conflict in society" (ISKCON.com 2002).

Second Generation 'Krishna Culture Kids'

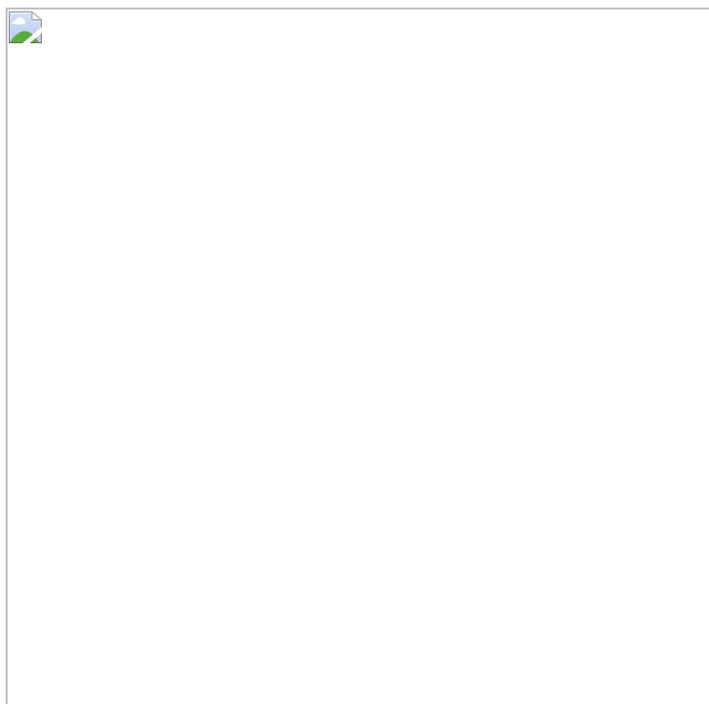
McCaig (2002) researched the development of ISKCON's second generation, born into the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), and coined the term Krishna Culture Kids (McCaig 2002). According to McCaig, although the first generation chose to become marginalized individuals within a dominant society, the second generation could be conceptualized as having been given this status at birth (McCaig 2002).

Many of ISKCON's second generation were born and raised within the "enclosed communities." Krishna Culture Kids share many commonalities and experiences, seemingly with a distinct culture all their own, and described as separate from their parents (McCaig 2002: 15). ISKCON culture and way of life was all that many of these second-generation kids knew; contact with the outside world was extremely limited. This experience is one reason why the second-generation will always be different than their parents; "Once a Krishna-Culture Kid, always a Krishna-Culture Kid" (McCaig 2001). Many of the second generation were educated in devotional schools called gurukulas, many which functioned similar to day schools. Others were boarding schools that provided dormitory-living, located both in the US and in many other countries internationally (McCaig 2002).

Krishna Culture Kids generally had little contact with outside cultures until early or even late adolescence, when they attended public school or moved outside of the community for the first time (McCaig 2002). This was in part due to the individual family's discovery that it was necessary to interact with the outside world to financially support themselves. So, although currently most ISKCON members live and work in the mainstream, a vast migration didn't begin to occur in greater numbers until the late 80's. For many second generation Krishna Culture Kids, the differences were described as a "culture shock," as they were plucked from the confines of the inclusive ISKCON community, unprepared to interface with mainstream culture. These Krishna Culture Kids faced compounding issues of adjustment as young adults, marginalized between the culture of origin (ISKCON) and the outside mainstream culture (See Figure 1, McCaig 2001).

Figure Caption

Figure 1. The second-generation Krishna-culture kid cultural identity continuum



Commonalities of marginals

Although diverse experiences exist within marginality, those who have experienced the phenomena of living between cultures share many universal common features. For one, many marginals experience a divided self, in some situations having two separate identities because the two cultures are so vastly different. As one Krishna Culture Kid described it, "[it is] like acting a role in a play but all the while knowing that this is not the real you" (McCaig 2002: 23). A similar experience can be found in other cultural groups that have been marginalized in mainstream society, namely black women (Jones & Shorter-Gooden 2003). According to Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003), *shifting* is a term used to describe what black women do in order to outwardly adapt to a new environment. This change in demeanor is reflected in behavioral differences, interactions, attitudes, and tone of voice (Jones & Shorter-Gooden 2003: 63).

"Shifting can be adaptive...when it allows a woman to explore

different parts of herself...Shifting can [also] be profoundly self- destructive, never allowing for the black woman to have an authentic experience" (Jones & Shorter-Gooden 2003: 64).

It still remains unclear in the existing, yet limited empirical research, how an individual living in cultural marginality develops his or her identity. Therefore, existing adolescent identity development literature was reviewed, as adolescence has often been considered the time of identity exploration (Marcia 1966).

Parental/familial support

Researchers have established that because individuals are multifaceted, so too are the factors influencing healthy identity development. First, there appears to be a general consensus in the literature regarding the importance of parental relationships in adolescent self-concept, emotional regulation, and adaptive skills. Barber (1977) proposed a theoretical framework that illustrates the role of parenting on the adolescent's development. This critical role of the parent includes a parent's own development of social skills, self-regulation, and encouragement of the adolescent's psychological autonomy (Barber 1977). Furthermore, a review of the literature found much research that identified positive familial/parental support as correlating with high self-esteem (Meeus & Dekovic 1995; Cooper 1994; Rathunde 2001; Sartor & Youniss 2002; Wei, Bogt, & Raaijmakers 2002; Nelson, Hughes, & Honore 1993). Similarly, researchers have suggested that social support in itself (i.e. friend, teacher, extended family, community) is associated

with personal adjustment and functional adaptability (Hunsberger, Pratt, & Prancer 2001; Farrell & Barnes 1993).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the cross-cultural adaptation of a sample of adults raised in the Hare Krishna culture. How does the individual born into a marginalized culture describe his/her familial, peer, and community interactions? What are the similarities and differences between the emergent themes expressed by those with high and low scores on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale?

Method

Design

A phenomenological approach was used in this qualitative study to identify themes and/or concepts related to cross-cultural adaptation and to further describe the individuals' experience living within cultural marginality.

Participants

A convenient sample generated geographically of fifteen second generation ISKCON adults between the ages of 22-38 was recruited to participate in the study. Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Each participant must have been between the ages of 22-38. Each participant must have been born to at least one parent who currently identified as a Hare Krishna member.

Exclusion criteria

1. Participants who have at least one biological parent from a non- white racial background were excluded from the study, due to the assumption that these individuals may encounter a unique experience of marginality as a factor of their racial/ethnic background, in addition to their ISKCON status.

Procedure.

First, all participants completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, which took approximately five minutes to complete. Then, the examiner conducted a face-to-face interview that lasted approximately sixty to ninety minutes. Upon completion of the individual interviews, the examiner debriefed the client and inquired as to any further questions about the study.

After the investigator had gathered the data from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the individual audio-taped interviews, the information was transferred to a comprehensible form for data analysis. This was done by first transcribing all audio-taped interviews into typed documents. Then, each page of data was coded to indicate the person who was interviewed, along with the page of the transcript. For example, if the participant's name was Radha Moreland, the initials R.M., pg. 1 was typed in the upper right hand corner of each page. If more than one participant had the same initials, a middle name initial was added.

Next, all pages were photocopied to allow the researcher to analyze the data by breaking down the statements by each participant into phrases, experiences, ideas, and common themes. The researcher then grouped the meaningful data and placed it onto 3 x 5 cards. On the back of each card, the researcher recorded information about the participant such as sex, age, occupation and Rosenberg Self-Esteem score.

Finally, the researcher grouped the 3x5 cards according to larger categories of meaning according to similar themes that were expressed. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem scores were then noted to see if themes were found among higher or lower scores.

Instruments

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1989). This scale is comprised of 10 items measured on a 4- point Likert-type scale, with 30 points as the highest score. Responses can range from 1= strongly agree to 4=strongly disagree; higher total score is indicative of higher self-esteem. Longitudinal research has shown acceptable reliability and validity; test-retest correlations have a range of .82 to .88, with Cronbach's alpha in the range of .77 to .88 (Blascovich & Tomaka 1991).

An individual semi-structured interview was conducted. Using Patton's (1990) method of developing a qualitative interview, the researcher developed open-ended questions that gave each participant the freedom to respond as a question pertained to his or her personal experience. Although the majority of the interview was designed with standard questions, the researcher followed with additional questions in response to the participants' specific responses. An example of a standard question was, "Please tell me about the community where you were raised." Follow-up questions were asked to acquire additional information such as "Was it in an all Krishna community or did you live in a neighborhood with people of various cultures?" as well as questions addressing the participants' interactions with their parents, family members, peers, and community (both within the Krishna community and the mainstream cultural community). All interviews were approximately 60-90 minutes.

Data Analyses

The following data analysis was performed utilizing a non-emergent, qualitative design. The qualitative data was analyzed utilizing Maykut and Morehouse's (2001) constant comparative method, which combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained (126).

Results

An analysis of participant responses to semi-structured interview questions generated fifteen themes. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity and maintain confidentiality of all participants.

1) Age and context of first contact with mainstream culture

The age of first contact of the 15 participants varied within the sample population. Eight reported that first interactions with mainstream culture occurred early in their development, ranging from two to seven years old. Seven reported that first interactions occurred later in their development, ranging from 13 to 19 years old.

Of those who reported earlier interactions with mainstream, most of the participants described negative first experiences with the "outside." Some even described a fear of being harmed. However, there were two participants who discussed their early experiences interacting with mainstream culture differently than that of the majority, having described their interactions as "accepting."

Of those who were isolated from mainstream culture until adolescence, most described their first interactions in terms of a "culture shock." Similar to the experiences of the earlier group, they too remember feeling "out of place," "not normal," and as one woman remarked, "terrified and fearful of them."

2) Process of adaptation

In general, regardless of age of first interactions with mainstream, most participants described a period of adjustment. Many commonly expressed that "no one prepared me" to regularly interact within the non-Hare Krishna sphere; therefore, they had to learn the norms, behavior, and dress on their own. All of the participants described themselves in a similar fashion, using terms such as "observer," "shape-shifter," and "chameleon." However, the process and extent to which they adapted to the new environment differed among participants. For instance, at the age of 16, one participant explained that he educated himself on "pop culture," "sneaking out of my house and going to the movies...I was a sponge for American culture" (Yadu, 34 years old). Others told of joining sports teams, drama clubs, and other school related activities.

A small minority of participants described their adjustment in terms of changing their values and beliefs to fit in. Two participants stated that they found interacting in a non-Hare Krishna environment extremely difficult, explaining that they never adapted to the mainstream environment in childhood.

3) *Marital Status of Parents*

Nine of the 15 participants reported that their parents were still married. Of those participants who stated their parents were married, six reported at least monthly contact with both parents, while three stated infrequent contact with their father and frequent contact with their mother.

Six participants stated that their parents were divorced. Out of those parents who were divorced, two sets of parents divorced during the participants' adolescent years; the other four sets divorced in their early childhood. Of those who were a product of a divorced family, one participant reported frequent contact with both mother and father, one reported frequent contact with her mother and infrequent contact with her father (every few months), and four reported frequent contact with their mother and no contact with their father. Fourteen out of fifteen participants reported that both parents were still a part of the Krishna Culture.

4) *Family Relationships*

Eleven of the 15 participants expressed a history of poor relationships with both their mothers and their fathers, with strong feelings of emotional disconnect.

Four of the participants stated that they had at least an average relationship with their parents, although only two expressed that they can talk with their parents honestly and openly.

Seven of the participants reported living apart from their parents for the majority of their childhood, most attending either *gurukula* (boarding school) or living with friends' parents; seven reported living at home with their parents throughout most of their childhood and had a combination of schooling which included attending a boarding school type *gurukula* in early childhood and either a day school type *gurukula* or a public school for the remainder of their childhood. Only one participant went to public school until adolescence, when she chose to attend a boarding school type of *gurukula* for the remainder of her schooling. Out of the seven participants who lived apart from their parents in a boarding school type *gurukula* throughout most of their childhood, four visited home on either a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Although living apart from one's parents appeared to be the norm for this sample, the boarding school type of *gurukula* was more of a norm for the older second generation (those born before 1975). For those born after 1975, other options became available for schooling such as the day school type of *gurukula* and/or public school.

5) *Layers of marginality*

The majority of participants described experiences of not belonging to either ISKCON culture or mainstream culture. Many reported feeling judgment from both mainstream culture and ISKCON culture, although the reported judgment has been felt more strongly from members of the ISKCON culture. The participants conveyed their cautiousness in "revealing too much" of themselves, for fear of criticism.

Although the majority of the participants described feeling as if they don't belong, most explained that they do have a sense of connectedness with other second generation 'Krishna Culture Kids.' Still, there were a few participants who told of difficulties feeling accepted even among Krishna Culture Kids. Some reasons given were different levels of spiritual practice, more or less identification with either ISKCON culture or mainstream culture, and being married to a "convert." In her opinion, Krishna Culture Kids generally have a suspiciousness and/or distrust for those who converted to the religion, believing they [converts] will also be judgmental of them, as would the first generation.

6) *Community Norms and Values*

The childhood communities of the participants varied geographically, yet most described their community of origin in similar ways: enclosed, isolated, all Hare Krishna communities. For all but four of the participants, their parents also resided within the same community most of their childhood,

although they may have not lived together with their children. Only one of the four participants who lived in a separate community throughout most of her childhood continued to live in a separate community during adolescence as well. Many of the participants within this sample lived within a boarding school environment for at least part of their early childhood, primarily cared for by teachers. When the participants discussed the concept of community, they were generally referring to both their experiences within the gurukula, as well as the greater grouping of Krishna devotees living around them. The participants generally discussed the community members' judgment of one another, formal relationships with little intimacy, and minimal interaction with the mainstream culture. Many did, however, describe a united "focused energy" on preaching, physically building the community, and temple worship; still, the majority reported little adult supervision for the children and perceived nominal concern for the individual's needs.

There was one participant who lived in a community separate from her parents for her entire childhood and adolescence. When she described her community, she was referring solely to her experience in a gurukula boarding school, viewing it differently than the majority of those interviewed. She described it as "fun, did traditional dramas and plays, rode horses, lots of activities, let us read mainstream books... had supportive teachers" (Amara, 27 years old).

7) Identity crises

Most of the participants reported a period of identity confusion when they began regularly interacting with non-Hare Krishnas. For most, this period of confusion occurred in adolescence, although some describe a period of crisis in early adulthood.

8) Self-esteem

Most of the participants reported having poor self-concepts and poor self-esteem in childhood. Some described this poor self-esteem in relation to "not fitting in" or feeling accepted by the mainstream culture; others related their poor self-image to a lack of support from families and/or teachers.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scores

All 15 participants took the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Out of 30 points possible, the scores ranged from 12-29, with a mean of 23.7. There were no considerable differences based on age, gender, educational level or age of exposure to mainstream. (See Table 1).

Table 1. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scores (Total points possible: 30)

Name	Age	Gender	Age of Exposure to Mainstream	Educational Level	Mean of group	Range	Rosenberg Self-Esteem Score
Amara	27	F	4	College	23.7	12-29	29
Amrita	27	F	13	High School	23.7	12-29	28
Venu	26	M	7	College	23.7	12-29	28
Madhavacarya	30	M	18	College	23.7	12-29	26
Sita	26	F	13	College	23.7	12-29	26
Nitai	26	F	4	High School	23.7	12-29	25
Yadu	34	M	16	College	23.7	12-29	25
Kana	24	M	15	College	23.7	12-29	24

Caitanya Lila	25	F	13	High School	23.7	12-29	23
Karuna	22	F	2	College	23.7	12-29	23
Purnima	26	F	7	High School	23.7	12-29	23
Kirtan	26	M	6	College	23.7	12-29	20
Srimad	25	M	5	College	23.7	12-29	20
Rama	26	M	16	College	23.7	12-29	19
Rasa	33	F	3	High School	23.7	12-29	12

Yet, some differences can be noted among the participant with the highest score (29) and the participant with the lowest score (12). Amara, twenty-seven years old, was the only participant to speak about her community interactions in overwhelmingly positive terms, directly relating to the care she was given by her teachers. These same teachers were to eventually become part of her surrogate family, as she chose to move in with them instead of her parents in her adolescence. Thirty-three year-old Rasa, on the other hand, reported feeling disconnected from her family, guarded in her community interactions in both ISKCON and mainstream settings, angry at the leaders in ISKCON, and seemed to lack a peer support group.

9) Views of ISKCON culture

All of the participants referenced ISKCON culture in terms of its uniqueness to both Hindu and Western cultures. Most referred to it as a "culture of change," citing their belief of the culture's inevitable shift in expectations and norms because many Krishna devotees have to work and live amongst mainstream culture. Many discussed the culture's rejection of mainstream values and ideals and thereby, members' judgmental attitude of those who either are not a part of them or who fail to live up to their standards. Most of the participants heavily emphasized their experiences of ISKCON's demands of conformity, idealism for its members' behavior, and the consequential duality of their "real selves" versus their "ideal selves."

10) Views of Mainstream Culture

All but one participant described mainstream culture as encompassing lesser values and a poor moral standard. Some of the statements used to describe mainstream culture are as follows: "wasteful," "rat race," "backwards," "capitalistic," "materialistic," "greed," "exploitative," "very selfish," and "full of lust."

11) Cultural Vernacular

All participants referred to the language unique to the ISKCON movement, either by their use of it during the interview and/or by speaking to its direct influence on their ability to adapt to the outside world. For example, the word "karmis", a term with negative connotations referring to non-Hare Krishnas, created a cultural divide and a hesitation to interact with members outside of the ISKCON culture. "They were all karmis [non-Hare Krishnas]...and I would see them when we were out on harinama [chanting in the street]...I can remember being 7 years old and thinking, 'Are they a different species?'...I was scared of people in the outside world...such a feeling of separateness, us and them" (Purnima, 26 years old).

12) Cultural Emblems

Many of the participants discussed the importance of clothing and outer appearance for acceptance and belongingness in both mainstream and ISKCON culture. Yet, what they made clear was that although the saris, sikas [shaved heads], dhotis [men's attire], and tilak [clay marking on the forehead] were the norm and expected within ISKCON culture, many strongly felt that wearing these items on the "outside" "gets

in the way of people seeing who we really are." Others stated that if they chose to come to an ISKCON community gathering and did not dress in the traditional clothing, they would be made to feel like an outsider, "someone who doesn't belong."

13) Role Models

When asked about role models in their childhood, all but three responded that they had none. Most believed that their situations as second generation were unique, different from their parents or any of the elders in the community. As one participant stated, "I had to pave my own way" (Rama, 26 years old).

Two participants reported that their teachers from childhood were their role models, "strong, caring, smart."

14) Current Cultural Membership

When asked about their current cultural membership, twelve participants reported being in between mainstream and ISKCON culture. Two preferred to identify with Krishna Culture, as opposed to ISKCON specifically, and one stated she was in between ISKCON and South Indian culture. Most evidenced their cultural allegiances based on cultural involvement. For instance, if they did not follow the standards regularly within ISKCON culture, then they believed they could not pledge their allegiance to that specific culture. Similarly, if they did not watch television or get involved with politics, they did not think they could align themselves with mainstream culture.

15) Future Family Vision

When asked how they envisioned raising their children, all fifteen commented that they often thought about this issue. This did not vary based on their current marital status. Only four out of fifteen participants currently has children. All but two participants would want to raise their children with experiences from both ISKCON and mainstream culture.

Discussion

An analysis of participant responses to semi-structured interview questions generated fifteen themes, which will be grouped for the purposes of discussion.

Age/context of first contact with mainstream culture and process of adaptation

Most of the participants described negative first experiences with the "outside," many of whom lived in an inclusive community with only brief exchanges with members of the mainstream culture, mostly through preaching activities. Those who attended public school described hesitations and initial resistance to socializing with non-Hare Krishna children. It was unclear as to whether this resistance to socialize was a conscious decision on their part or a result of exclusion by mainstream children.

Only two participants discussed their early experiences interacting with mainstream culture in positive terms. Their experiences differ from the others described above for the following reasons: one participant moved with her family to a mainstream community as a toddler and thus, lived in this community until late childhood; the second participant resided in a Hare Krishna boarding school a few hours from her parents, who were residing in a largely non-Hare Krishna, mainstream neighborhood. Thus, one may make the assumption that these two participants not only had more frequent contact with those in mainstream, but were accepted because their families were living within mainstream society and assumed some similar norms and values.

In terms of the participants' adjustment, all but two participants discovered some ways of adjusting to the mainstream environment. However, for the two aforementioned participants, they appeared to endure a prolonged intensity of disintegration, similar to Bennett's description of the encapsulated marginal (1993). As the literature suggests, the conflicting pressures of establishing one's identity, belief system, and goals remain a constrained effort to the encapsulated marginal and coincide with high levels of distress (McCaig 2002). Unlike the others, these two participants did not involve themselves with mainstream extracurricular activities or actively try to understand the behavioral norms of those around

them. There did not appear to be any clear differences between these participants and their family constellation, friends, or community when compared to the other participants.

Parents' marital status and family relationships

One might assume that because most of the participants' parents were still married, there would be a majority of them who would express stability within their families of origin. Yet, most expressed a history of poor relationships with both their mothers and their fathers, with strong feelings of emotional disconnect.

There appears to be a general consensus in the literature on the importance of parental relationships on adolescent self-concept, emotional regulation, and adaptive skills. Furthermore, researchers have indicated that there is a strong relationship between emotional support by parents and high identity achievement (Sartor & Youniss 2002). Yet, one explanation of these remarkable results may best be illustrated by Barber (1977), who suggested that the critical role of the parent included not only encouragement of the adolescent's psychological autonomy, but must involve a parent's own development of social skills, and self-regulation (1977). In the mid-60's, the first devotees of Krishna culture joined the movement as young adults (McCaig 2002). In fact, according to one study, 51% of members were under 21 years of age and 80% were under 25 when they joined (Rochford 1985). They developed "culturally enclosed communities" and "their contact with the conventional world was intentionally limited in an effort to preserve the integrity of their chosen culture" (McCaig 2002: 15 & 16).

Thus, there are a few assumptions for the emotional disconnect and perceived poor relationships that appeared to exist among many of the participants and their parents. First, many of the first generation rejected their own parents along with their culture of origin and because of this, it may be assumed that they themselves may not have had stable relationships with their own families of origin. Second, because many of the first generation of members had a level of detachment from their own familial relationships, presumably they would be more likely to demonstrate these relational patterns with their own children. Third, because most of the congregation was young adults, an assumption is that they did not have many older role models to demonstrate appropriate parenting skills. Finally, it is unclear how the philosophical teachings provided may have influenced members' attitude towards caring for their children, except possibly the value of detachment from material life.

Layers of marginality

The majority of participants described experiences of not belonging to either ISKCON culture or mainstream culture. Many of these experiences felt by the participants were similar to Bennett's description of the internal struggles within encapsulated marginals (1993). She maintained that their feelings were escalated by the opposing views between the two cultural groups (Bennett 1993). At times, the original culture may accuse the individual of rejecting his or her roots or beliefs of origin, and conforming to the mainstream (McCaig 2002). At the same time, the second culture may be pressuring the individual to abide by its conception of norms and values, in order to be accepted into the group (McCaig 2002). This state of cultural conflict may lead the encapsulated marginal to feel culturally homeless, resulting in what Bennett termed "terminal uniqueness" (1993).

Thus, one response to this "terminal uniqueness" may have been the participants' ability to act as a "chameleon," "observer," and lead "a double life." It can be assumed that creating a facade is one means of adaptation by the marginal to feel accepted by a cultural group. However, it is important to recognize that having to culturally transition across environments can be exhausting to the individual.

Although the majority of the participants described feeling as if they do not belong, most explained that they do have a sense of connectedness with other second generation 'Krishna Culture Kids.' Therefore, even though many of the participants reported feelings of rejection from both cultures, research has suggested that they could still have positive personal adjustment and functional adaptability if they have some type of social support system (Hunsberger, Pratt, & Prancer 2001; Farrell & Barnes 1993). Fortunately, for the majority of the participants, it is other second generation Krishna Culture Kids that have provided them with this support.

Still, there were a few participants who told of difficulties feeling accepted even among Krishna Culture Kids. When looking at these last few participants who struggle with not only cultural acceptance, but a peer group as well, the research does not appear optimistic. Instead, it points to a lack of peer support as being linked to feelings of emptiness and internal struggle, because it is a peer group that can provide a sense of belonging for the marginalized individual (Bennett 1993; McCaig 2002).

Community Norms and Values

Similar to many of the participants' previously reported statements of feeling as though they had to individually put on a facade, they too felt that the community members demonstrated this same lack of genuine interactions.

One assumption related to the participants' experiences of their communities is that their communities seemed to reinforce their need to interact with a facade, modeling the need to consider the groups' needs over the needs of individual member's. Furthermore, the feelings of emotional disconnect seemed to parallel many of the participants' own relationships with their parents.

There was one participant who lived in a community separate from her parents her entire childhood and adolescence and when describing her community, referred to it in mostly positive terms. This participant's experience of her community seemed to be different from the other participants because her sense of community support was reinforced by the support and affection of her teachers. This experience demonstrates the powerful impact that a social support system can play in an individual's well-being.

Identity crises

Most of the participants reported a period of identity confusion when they began regularly interacting with non-Hare Krishnas. For most, this period of confusion occurred in adolescence, although some described a period of crisis in early adulthood. The participants' experiences seemed characteristic of the manner in which developmentalists have characterized adolescence in the literature: as a period of confusion, doubt, and rebellion, as teenagers strive to find the answer to understand themselves and their world. Yet, for many of the participants, they were also trying to discover their identity after having been isolated and unprepared to understand the complexities of the mainstream culture.

Self-esteem, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scores

In the interviews, most of the participants reported having poor self-concepts and poor self-esteem in childhood. In looking at the fifteen emergent themes, many similar experiences were relayed when discussing family, peer, and community interactions. For instance, the deeper feelings of often seeing themselves as "outsiders," "not belonging," and fearing rejection were expressed by the majority of participants, with no differences based on current self-esteem score. Therefore, it appeared that for this study, self-esteem did not seem relevant in determining an individual's experiences and feelings related to issues of marginality.

Yet, as described earlier, some differences were noted among the participant with the highest score (29) and the participant with the lowest score (12), in regards to the type and amount of support each felt from their community, family, and peer group. The differences between these two participants are not surprising, given the extensive literature on the links between positive family and social supports and self-esteem (Meeus & Dekovic 1995; Cooper 1994; Rathunde 2001; Sartor & Youniss 2002; Wei, Bogt, & Raaijmakers 2002; Nelson, Hughes, & Honore 1993). Yet, it is also not unexpected that many of the participants fell within the middle range when compared to one another on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale; research has established that individuals are multifaceted, and so too are the factors influencing healthy identity development and self-esteem (Meeus & Dekovic 1995; Cooper 1994; Rathunde 2001; Sartor & Youniss 2002; Wei, Bogt, & Raaijmakers 2002; Nelson, Hughes, & Honore 1993). Thus, for example, although two participants may have reported similar high feelings of self-esteem, one may acknowledge stronger peer support and the other may perceive stronger familial connections.

Views of ISKCON and Mainstream culture

In the participants' explanations of their perception of both ISKCON and Mainstream culture, their statements clearly supported their similar experiences of being the "observer," and the "outsider." Noticeable was speaking about the cultures in non-possessive terms, as opposed to referencing either as their culture.

Most of the participants heavily emphasized their experiences of ISKCON's demands of conformity, idealism for its members' behavior, and the consequential duality of their "real selves" versus their "ideal selves." In addition, some participants stated that second generation Krishna Culture Kids have a unique relationship to the ISKCON culture because of their parents' involvement in the society. Essentially, their belief is that, unlike those who converted, they will always be a part of ISKCON culture in some way regardless of whether or not they live up to the standards and norms of the group.

When discussing mainstream culture, all but one participant described it as encompassing lesser values and a poor moral standard. Again, the language used demonstrated a separation and distinction between participants and the members of mainstream culture.

One participant acknowledged the stereotypes of mainstream culture and spoke of his relationship within the society as belonging with those that "embrace multiculturalism...[and the] space to create your identities." Bennett would suggest that this perspective would be a healthy, constructive approach to marginality (1993).

Cultural Vernacular and Cultural Emblems

As could be expected, language, clothing, and outer appearance were discussed by all of the participants as being important or in some cases, an impediment for acceptance and belongingness in both mainstream and ISKCON culture. Similar to the misconceptions or stereotypes that can occur as a result of language, appearance could also foster false impressions, further marginalizing Krishna Culture Kids' cultural experiences.

Role Models

What was unexpected was that when asked about role models in their childhood, all but three responded that they had none. Most believed that their situations as second generation were unique, different from their parents or any of the elders in the community. This again returns to Bennett's concept of "terminal uniqueness," an experience of marginality that could lead to feelings of isolation and high distress (1993).

Current Cultural Membership

Although the second generation Krishna Culture Kids were recognized as having been born into marginality, their current cultural membership was unknown at the beginning of the study. With so much transition in the ISKCON members' frequency of interaction with mainstream culture, it could not be predicted how the participants would view their cultural belonging. Therefore, the results were startling when twelve participants reported still feeling as though they are a cultural marginal, clearly being between mainstream and ISKCON culture. Again, surprisingly, regardless of whether the participants spoke of rebelling or rejecting aspects of ISKCON culture, none of the participants stated they exclusively felt as if they were part of the mainstream culture. One assumption explaining this might be that the negative impressions of mainstream culture felt by the first generation Hare Krishnas were internalized by the second generation Krishna Culture Kids.

Future Family Vision

After the previous themes emerged from the participant interviews, it was predictable that when asked how they envisioned raising their children, all fifteen participants commented that they often thought about this issue. Many expressed concern for their children facing similar cultural confusion as they themselves experienced and suggested that they would ideally like to offer their children a healthy balance of positive aspects found within both cultures.

Contributions of the Study

Much of the previous literature has focused on issues of cultural marginality grounded in theory, with few studies that explored actual experiences of a marginalized group. Therefore, this study has added to the literature on intercultural identity by researching the personal experiences as described by those who were born into a marginalized culture. It has provided valuable and rich data related to issues of self-esteem, perceived support in the family, peer, and community context, and the complex nature of the layers of marginality. This information can help to inform the Krishna Culture community and specifically, Krishna Culture Kids, of the potential issues related to living in cultural marginality.

Similarly, it would be useful for those who serve this and similar groups or individuals considered marginal to the dominant mainstream culture to be made aware of the potential that may arise as a result of living in a marginalized culture, including potential practitioners, teachers, and elders in the community. Some of these clinical issues include the complexities of cultural belongingness, healthy and self-destructive aspects of adaptation, and feelings of terminal uniqueness.

Finally, the information gathered will be also useful for the cross-cultural adaptation research with applications for education, therapy, psychoeducational seminars, and future research.

Limitations of the Study

There were limitations to the study. For one, in order to lessen extraneous variables, only an all white population was utilized for the study. Second, a convenient sample was generated geographically. Finally, although multiple sources were used to generate a sample population via internet, mailings, and word of mouth, there may be a population of second generation Krishna Culture Kids who have limited contact with others who were never contacted. Therefore, those who chose to participate in the study may be different from those who chose not to or who were not accessible via the above means.

Future Research

There are a multitude of areas generated from this study to consider for future research. For one, because this study focused solely on the marginal experiences of an all-white sample population, those from a mixed racial background were excluded. Therefore, utilizing a population of subjects from a variety of racial backgrounds would yield invaluable data that could add to what is currently known about the different layers of marginality. Second, although this study showed some differences between the support systems of the participant with the highest self-esteem score and the participant with the lowest self-esteem score, marginal experiences did not appear to be relevant in understanding the level of self-esteem within the sample population. Future studies should seek to clarify the factors such as a positive support system that might facilitate the development of a positive identity in spite of one's marginal status. In addition, it would be beneficial to compare the self-esteem scores of a larger sample of Krishna Culture Kids with a norm sample from the mainstream population. Third, a longitudinal study of the third generation Krishna Culture Kid and how their experiences differ from that of the second generation would provide information related to cultural belongingness and adaptability as well. Finally, there is a need for future research in establishing data that supports appropriate and valid therapeutic approaches in working with cultural marginals.

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