Ethnic Identity of Young Male Representatives of the Nenets Indigenous People of the Russian North

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Abstract. Background: The article deals with the problem of ethnic identity with adolescents of Nenets origin. The purpose of our research is to investigate ethnic identity of young Nenets boys—representatives of indigenous people of the Arctic region of Russia—in the course of the adolescence period. Methods: The research was carried out according to the methodology «Types of Ethnic Identity» worked out by G.U. Soldatova and S.V. Ryzhova and it describes development of ethnic identity through ethnonihilation, ethnic indifference, positive ethnic identity, ethnoegoism, ethnoisolation and ethnofanaticism with young boys of Nenets origin aged 12 to 15. Results: The research revealed peculiar features of ethnic identity with the boys of Nenets origin as compared to the boys of Russian origin residing in the Arkhangelsk region of the Russian Federation.

1. Introduction

In the modern world we can note the intensification of inter-ethnic contacts, ethnonational diversity of social groups is growing bigger. At the same time, there is a growth in the national identity of cultural groups representing both the ethnic minority and the majority [1, 2]. In the age of increasingly intensive intercultural cooperation, interaction and convergence of cultures the problems associated with the education and upbringing of an individual in a multi-ethnic environment are becoming more and more relevant. These problems are very prominent in Russia inhabited by both indigenous minorities and representatives of Russian nationality. One such example is the subarctic region of European Russia which is home for the indigenous peoples—the Nenets with their authentic culture and unique way of life. The process of personal development of an individual, a representative of indigenous minorities, is largely determined by their ethnic identity development [3, 4, 5].

The concept of ethnic identity is interpreted differently in modern Russian psychology. On the one hand, ethnic identity is regarded as a component of the social identity of an individual, a psychological category which refers to one’s awareness of their belonging to a certain ethnic community [6]. On the other hand, researchers include in this concept other characteristics as well. They define the concept as awareness, perception, emotional evaluation, experiencing one’s belonging to an ethnic community; evaluation of the significance of membership in an ethnic community, ethnic feelings shared in it [7]. Thus, ethnic identity can be interpreted as a multifaceted complex phenomenon that includes self-identification, awareness of one’s belonging to a particular ethnocultural group, loyalty to their ethnic community [8].

Since the most significant period of one’s identity development is generally adolescence it would be reasonable to refer to this particular period of one’s life when studying the process of ethnic identity development. In adolescence there occurs formation of a system of ideas and evaluation of the ethnocultural characteristics of one’s own community in comparison with a foreign ethnic environment [9]. At this time, a conscious attitude to one’s ethnos, a system of ideas and evaluation of the ethnocultural and ethnopsychological characteristics of one’s own community in comparison with the foreign ethnic environment is formed [10].
The researchers note that younger adolescents are characterized by ethnocentricity, they prefer their own ethnic group and show a negative attitude towards others, whereas older adolescents are characterized by the harmonization of the structural components of ethnic identity [8].

The researchers point out that there are certain peculiarities of the ethnic identity development among individuals belonging to an ethnic minority. Their ethnic identity is formed more quickly and the ideas about the peculiarities of their own ethnic group and the other ones are more accurate [11]. Russian psychologists have conducted some studies of the ethnic identity of small ethnic communities. But they are few. As a result, our knowledge of the process of the ethnic identity development among individuals belonging to an ethnic minority is very fragmentary. Therefore, we have conducted an empirical study of the ethnic identity of Nenets adolescents, the indigenous peoples of the Far North of Russia.

The aim of the paper was to study the ethnic identity of Nenets boys, representatives of the indigenous peoples of the Far North of Russia, during their adolescence. In the course of our study we have formed the following hypotheses:

1. We assumed that during the adolescence the ethnic identity of the Nenets boys is not static, the intensity degree of the characteristics of ethnic identity keeps changing.

2. We assumed that the ethnic identity of male adolescents of Nenets nationality is different from the ethnic identity of their peers of Russian nationality.

While testing these hypotheses in the empirical study, we found out that 1) there is dynamics in the ethnic identity development among the Nenets boys during adolescence, 2) the ethnic identity of 12–13 and 14–15-year-old Nenets males differs significantly from the ethnic identity of adolescents of the same age of Russian nationality.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Participants

12-15-year-old male Nenets adolescents from the Nenets Autonomous Okrug in the Arkhangelsk region and their peers of Russian nationality from the Arkhangelsk region took part in the study as respondents. Overall, 115 respondents took part in the study. 52 of them were boys of Nenets nationality and 63 were boys of Russian nationality. There were 19 Nenets boys at the age of 12–13, 33 Nenets boys at the age of 14–15, 31 boys of Russian nationality at the age of 12–13 and 32 boys of Russian nationality at the age of 14–15.

2.2 Procedure

The empirical study was conducted within the framework of the project of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research "The identity study of adolescents - representatives of the indigenous peoples of the Arctic territories of European Russia in the modern social and educational environment". The experimental stage of the study was being conducted from March to May 2018. The empirical data was collected under a scientific expedition to the localities of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug in the Arkhangelsk region (rural localities Krasnoye and Anderma, town Naryan-Mar). Most families of the Nenets adolescents live in the tundra and lead a nomadic lifestyle. When it is time for the adolescents to go to school the adolescents are taken to educational institutions in large localities by helicopter. Thus, diagnostic examination of the adolescents was carried out in educational institutions (schools).

Before we started collecting the data we had had meetings with the Department of Education, Culture and Sport of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug and with the principals of each secondary school to coordinate the procedure of the study. The parents and legal representatives of the students gave us a written consent to the students’ participation in the study. The psychodiagnostic study was carried out in classrooms during the lessons.
2.3 Methods

The study used the psycodiagnostic methodology “The types of ethnic identity” by G. Soldatova and S. Ryzhova [12]. In the survey, the respondents were given 30 statements reflecting attitudes towards their own ethnic groups and other ones in various situations of interethnic interaction. The respondents were asked to rate the degree to which they endorsed the given statements according to the following scale: “totally agree” - 4 points, “rather agree” - 3 points, “somewhat agree, somewhat disagree” - 2 points, “rather disagree” - 1 point, “totally disagree” - 0 points. Then all the points were calculated on each of the 6 scales, reflecting different types of ethnic identity: ethnonihilism (denial of one’s own ethnic identity), ethnic indifference (uncertain attitude towards one’s own ethnic identity and indifference to the ethnicity of others), positive ethnic identity (respect for any ethnicity), ethnoegoism (emphasizing superiority of one’s own ethnic group), ethnoisolation (total belief in superiority of one’s own ethnic group), ethnofanaticism (willingness to take aggressive actions in the interests of one’s own ethnic group). Depending on the number of points scored by each respondent on one or another scale, we have determined their intensity degree of each type of ethnic identity.

2.4 Statistical Analysis

The research data processing was carried out with the help of SPSS Statistics 22. To reveal the dynamics of ethnic identity development with young male representative of the Nenets people during the period of adolescence Student's double-choice t-criterion for independent selections was used. With the help of this method meaningful differences in the degree of manifestation for this or that type of respondents' ethnic identity at different age stages were revealed. To reveal peculiarities of ethnic identity with Nenets adolescents as compared to the ethnic identity of teenagers of the Russian nationality in the same age Student's double-choice t-criterion for independent selections was used. This method helped to establish meaningful differences in the degree of manifestation for this or that type of respondents' ethnic identity with respondents of Nenets and Russian nationality.

3. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the results made it possible for us to answer the questions formulated in the hypotheses. We assumed that during the adolescence the ethnic identity of the Nenets boys is not static, the intensity degree of the characteristics of ethnic identity keeps on changing. Testing this hypothesis in the course of the empirical study, we have found the dynamics of the ethnic identity development among the Nenets male adolescents (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. The Dynamics of the Ethnic Identity Development Among Nenets Male Adolescents at the Age of 12-15.](image-url)
The Nenets boys at the age of 12-15 show a slight increase in such types of ethnic identity as ethnonihilism and ethnic indifference. The intensity degree of ethnoegoism (p<0,05) and ethnoisololation (p<0,01) drops drastically, while the decrease in ethnofanaticism and positive ethnic identity is not significant. The data show that the belief in superiority of one’s own ethnic group is gradually becoming weaker among the Nenets boys. At the same time, we see that the significance of one’s own ethnic identity also tends to decrease. Such results prove that there is dynamics in the ethnic identity development from the age of 12-13 to the age of 14-15 among the Nenets male adolescents, which confirms our first hypothesis.

The second hypothesis was that the ethnic identity of male adolescents of Nenets nationality is different from the ethnic identity of their peers of Russian nationality. The results of the study did show that the ethnic identity of 12-13 and 14-15-year-old Nenets males differs considerably from the ethnic identity of Russian male adolescents of the same age (Figures 2, 3).

The prevailing types of the ethnic identity among the 12-13-year-old males are positive ethnic identity and ethnic indifference. The difference between the results of the Nenets and Russian adolescents is not significant. The only type of ethnic identity where a considerable difference can be traced is ethnonihilism (p<0,05). The Nenets males at the age of 12-13 attach greater importance to their ethnicity compared with their peers of Russian nationality. At this age the Nenets males rarely move away from their own ethnic group and start searching for stable social and psychological niches being guided by some other criteria apart from ethnicity.

The prevailing types of ethnic identity among the 14-15 year-old males (exactly as among the 12-13-year-old males) are positive ethnic identity and ethnic indifference. We have found it interesting that the difference between the Nenets and Russian males according to these criteria becomes statistically significant. The Nenets male adolescents have a lower result compared with their peers of Russian nationality (p<0,001).

This means that the 14-15-year-old Nenets males have a less tolerant attitude towards their own ethnic group and others’ ones. And they are more likely to experience insignificance and vagueness of their own ethnicity. What is more, when it comes to ethnofanaticism the Nenets adolescents show a much higher result compared with the Russian male adolescents (p<0,05). This means that the Nenets boys are more willing to act aggressively in the interests of their ethnic group. Such results prove that there are significant differences between ethnic identity of the Nenets male adolescents compared with their peers of Russian nationality, which confirms our second hypothesis.

![Figure 2. Ethnic Identity Among the 12-13-Year-Old Males.](image-url)
4. Conclusions

To sum up, having studied the ethnic identity of the Nenets adolescents, representatives of the indigenous peoples from the Far North of Russia, we have found out that there is dynamics in the ethnic identity development in adolescence among the Nenets boys, that the ethnic identity of 12-13 and 14-15-year-old Nenets males differs considerably from the ethnic identity of the Russian males of the same age.

Between the age of 12 and 15 the Nenets boys’ belief in superiority of their ethnic group is gradually becoming weaker. At the same time, we see that the significance of their own ethnic identity also tends to decrease. The ethnic identity of the Nenets male adolescents differs from the ethnic identity of their Russian peers: 12-13-year-old Nenets males attach greater importance to their ethnicity, while 14-15-year-old Nenets males tend to have a less tolerant attitude towards their own ethnic group and the others’ ones; they are also more willing to act aggressively in the interests of their own ethnic group.

The results of the study will make it possible to design educational environment in multi-ethnic schools of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug taking into account peculiarities of the ethnic identity development among adolescents, representatives of the indigenous peoples of the Far North, and to predict possible disturbance in the ethnic identity development among the adolescents.

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References


