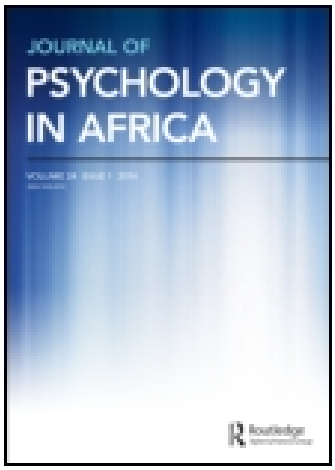

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Ethnic Identification as Contributor to the Development of Moral Identity in Child-Headed Households

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This study explored whether ethnic membership was a core construct in the moral identity development of adolescents in Zulu child-headed households. A convenience sample of 60 participants (31 male and 29 female) were recruited for the study from a mixed urban and rural neighbourhood of a South African municipality. Data on the lived experience of the participants in relation to their ethnic identity were collected using semi-structured questionnaires, face to face interviews and field notes. The qualitative data were thematically analyzed and incorporated with quantitative data. In the analysis of the quantitative data, the participants' responses were analyzed in relation to traditional and modern Zulu norms using frequency tables. Results suggest that participants carried a blended identity combining traditional and modern self-images and that neither presented as a core construct for moral identity development, but that spirituality and a attitude of giving are identified aspects to be utilized in moral identity development.

Keywords: Ethnic identity, moral identity, Zulu child-headed households, traditional, modern

Child-headed households present a unique context for moral development in that parenting roles combine with those of a developing child (Savio Beers & Hollo, 2009). By definition, child headed households are those in which one of the children, or the youth in the house has long-term or permanent principal responsibility for the household inhabitants from any cause or any reason. This setting could result in atypical moral development. Moral identity is viewed in this study as having achieved the cognitive ability to discern between right and wrong, harmful and beneficial; evolving into actions displayed in relationships that benefit the community without detriment to the sense of self. These actions are guided by internal conclusions that were formed through the dynamic interaction of the different contextual factors exposed to (Aquino, Freeman, Reed, Lim, & Felps, 2009; Hardy & Carlo, 2005).

Identity formation is a developmental life task that is largely associated with the adolescent phase, but the way identity is constructed is not always obvious. It includes everything in the field of people as contributing to creating meaning in their lives, which leads to the notion that identity is continually formed in relation to the other (Resnick, 2009; Reynolds, 2005; Toman, Bauer, McConville, & Robertson, 2005). What seems to be of importance, is that people must make choices about the relative importance to attach to different loyalties in particular contexts. People may therefore attach their identity to religion, family, or talents, rather than to their ethniticity (Stojnov, 2003; Turiel, 2007). This may very well be true for Zulu child-headed households as well, since their atypical family structures allow for identities within very challenging contexts (Germann, 2005; Tsegaya, 2008).

Moral Identity

Moral identity is an important dimension of being in the social world. It is shaped and mediated by the evolving adolescent's 'true' or 'essential' moral self or 'ideological becoming' which includes the acquisition of an identity (Tappan, 2005).

Moral identity is linked to contexts, social relationships, and growth opportunities. For instance, peoples' sense of identification with the group and its communal norms will generate a 'moral atmosphere' that either conduces to moral identity formation, or undermines it (Deeb-Sossa, 2007; Hart, 2005; Lapsley, 2008) .

Hendry, Mayer, and Kloep (2007) hypothesized that local and national community norms were important to identify development and psychosocial resources to extend their sense of belonging to a wider, international context. Cultural identifications are thus not constructed in isolation but are produced within and across dynamic contexts (Collier, 2005; Hendry et al., 2007) which in turn influence moral identity development. This could be the case with indigenous African culture children.

For instance, Zulu adolescents in a rural area are exposed to urban influences, or are culturally challenged, for example where traditional cultural kinship structures fail them (Tsegaya, 2008). Identity may then suitably, and necessarily, be adjusted to act in combination with a broader social context, while still possessing an identity in keeping with their self-image (Hendry et al., 2007; Robertson & Shepard, 2008)

Traditionalist and modern African perspectives share elements in regard to the view that relationship and conduct in the social sphere will affect people's sense of morality. They also differ in regard to the accent placed in viewing moral aspects about social beingness. Whereas the traditionalist perspective

places a greater accent on the collective harmony of community, requiring conformity and maintained through customs, the modern perspective focuses more on individualistic autonomy and responsibility, leading to a personal morality. The modern perspective is viewed as developed due to European influence (Kikongo, 2002).

The value placed on the "worth" of the culture may, therefore, influence cultural identification (Wickrama, Noh, & Bryant, 2005). As mentioned earlier, to understand someone's identity it is necessary to construe their core constructs. It is thus important to understand whether adolescents in Zulu child-headed households identify with the Zulu culture, in order to gain a sense of whether their ethnic membership is one of the core constructs in the development of their moral identity.

Goals of the Study

This study explored ethnic identification as a core construct in the moral development of Zulu children who were heads of households. The specific research question was:

Which aspects of ethnic identity can be utilized to enhance moral identity in Zulu child-headed households?

Method

Participants and Setting

Participants were a convenience sample of 60 child heads of households who are of Zulu ethnic background (mean age =17.48). Of the sixty participants who contributed to the study, 51 per cent were males and 49 per cent females. Age distribution varied from 13 years old (n=1) to 22 years old (n=2), with the greater number of participants being between 17 and 19 (n=32).

The criteria for inclusion were that participation was voluntary for the heads of the household, who had to be 13 years or older and younger than 18 years, unless they were still attending school. They had to be able to fill out a questionnaire, with or without assistance, and had to give permission for the use of an interpreter.

Data Collection

Data was collected by means of a semi-structured survey-type questionnaire, followed up with face to face interviews, to elaborate on the survey data, and to generate qualitative data on the teenagers' developing identities

Semi-structured questionnaire.

Identification with the Zulu culture was studied by asking how they referred ethnically to their household, their opinion on what a traditional Zulu was and which traditions they still practice.

Identification with the traditionalist perspective of *ubuntu* was explored by asking them about their perceptions of *ubuntu*. They were then presented with traditionalist and modern statements and asked to choose options according to their personal preferences.

The participants were asked to mark only one of four options to describe their household. They were given the options of Zulu, African, South African and other. If they chose 'other', they were asked to specify their choice.

The participants were also given the names of seven well-known traditional Zulu practices and asked to mark the ones that they still practiced (inclusive of initiation school, ancestor reverence, etcetera).

Eight traditionally *ubuntu* statements regarded as Afrocentric were juxtaposed with modern statements that were, according to the *ubuntu* perspective, regarded as immoral. The participants had to choose between the perspectives according to their personal values. An Afrocentric score was then calculated to establish to what extent participants identified with the traditional perspective.

Interviews.

Richness of context was provided through responses in face to face interviews conducted and recorded by a Zulu-speaking field worker. Detailed rich descriptions of the data obtained, showing the range of different realities that were represented, were documented. By accurately describing and representing participants' views the credibility of the study was enhanced (Ebersohn et al., 2007; Nieuwenhuis, 2007; Schurink et al., 2011).

Fieldnotes.

Field notes assisted to understand the overall context of the research by adding to multiple perspectives in collecting and contemplating the data, thus increasing the validity and transferability of the study (Ebersohn, Eloff & Ferreira, 2007; Nieuwenhuis, 2007; Schurink *et al.,* 2011). Field notes were based on what was experienced and observed during the empirical data collection, and from debriefing conversations with field workers. The notes also assisted in detecting possible bias in the researcher (Seabi, 2012; Strydom, 2011).

Procedure

Ethical clearance was obtained through the ethics committee of the Hugenote College, UNISA and North-West University (NWU-00060-08-A1). Informed consent was explained to the individual participants by field workers from the community where they resided. School-based counsellors were alerted to the fact that their personal details would be given to the participants to enable them to have access to counselling, should it be indicated. Although no payments were made to encourage participation in the study, they were provided with a meal after they had filled out the questionnaires, and they were permitted to keep the stationery they used. The interviewees received money for the taxi-fares to get to the meeting point and return home.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analysed through univariate analysis and displayed through frequency tables. Qualitative data were thematically analyzed using the method proposed by Babbie (2007). The procedure involves reading through the data (answers to the open-ended questions, transcriptions of the interviews and the field notes) several times, to get an overall sense of underlying meanings and patterns of relationships (Babbie, 2007; Schurink, Fouche & De Vos, 2011). These patterns were incorporated with the quantitative data to provide a gestalt of the results.

Results and Discussion

Despite the high percentage of participants indicating that their households were to be described as Zulu, only two of the traditions were still practised by more than half of the participants (53.7%), namely the payment of *lobola* and ancestor reverence. We consider the specific themes from the study next.

Preference for Ethnic Identity of Households

When asked about ethnic identification, 69.2 % identified themselves as being a Zulu as opposed to being an African (13.5%) or a South African (17.3%). No-one identified with the option of 'other'. A field note indicated that the category "African" was interpreted by some as being black, as opposed to being from Africa. Nevertheless, identification was primarily based on ethnic membership and not on race.

According to Forster (2007), identity is no longer an easily verifiable matter. A Zulu identity would, for example, not exclude other identities, so that an identity description may state: "I am Zulu, but I am also…". The subjective description of being a member of the Zulu culture does not, however, guarantee being a Zulu. According to Fleming and Englar-Carlson (2008), it is not enough for adolescents to conceive of themselves as part of a group in order to attain cultural identity. The group of which adolescents consider themselves to be a member also needs to regard the adolescents as members. Other self-described Zulus must, therefore, also consider the adolescents to be Zulu. Consequently, the definition of what a Zulu is becomes important but, within the subjective definition of the participants, they predominantly perceived themselves as being part of Zulu households.

Description of a Traditional Zulu and Traditions Still Practiced

An open-ended question explored the perception of what the participants thought a traditional Zulu was. Participants described their perceptions of a traditional Zulu in vague terms as "someone with a belief in the traditions of the Zulu culture" or in concrete, physical and literal terms, such as "someone who practices traditional dancing, wear [sic] traditional clothes and does virginity testing". The most prominent beliefs they linked to being a traditional Zulu were characterized by the respect they showed others and themselves and the practice of ancestor reverence. Most participants described their perceptions of a traditional Zulu in concrete, physical and literal terms, which might be a cultural preference or on the other hand indicate an identity that has not been explored well.

Ancestor reverence was indicated by 64 per cent of the participants. This was one of only two traditions that were reported as still practiced by more than half of the participants. This reflects identifying with the integral part of the traditional spiritual characteristic of the Zulu which reflects an interconnectedness across space and time, as also described in the field theory (Fairfield, 2004; Parlett & Lee, 2005) and being one with the community (Forster, 2007). Death, for example, is viewed as that a person has passed on to another stage of life, and not, as it is often viewed in the modern perspective, as the final end to a person's life (Forster, 2007).

From a traditional Zulu perspective, there is also no distinction between body, mind and spirit; they form a holistic entity. According to the view of a traditional healer: 'When a Zulu is sick it is the whole man that is sick, his physical as well as his spiritual being that is affected' (Berglund, 1976:82).

The other tradition that was still mentioned as practiced by more than half of the participants (77 per cent,) was paying lobola. It is a marriage transaction that secures identity and belonging to the father's kin unit. Lobola entails paying the future father in law with cattle, for a wife.

Perception of ubuntu. Eleven of the respondents either said that they did not know what it was, or did not answer the question. From the remaining answers relating to participants' views of what *ubuntu* was, a contextual definition could be formulated. A synthesis of the perception of *ubuntu* obtained from the questionnaires, interviews and field notes provides a contextual definition of the concept as the selfless, respectful giving or attempts to give to the wider community, from what you have and who you are as a person, even if it is inadequate, as well as respecting the inadequate efforts of another.

The participants indicated that their perception of *ubuntu* was that it focused more on giving or contributing than on receiving. The participants' perceptions of what *ubuntu* entailed were thus in line with the general philosophy of being more com-

Table 1

Preference for Modern or Traditional Statements

	Modern statements	***%***		***Traditional statements***	***%***
1	Killing a person is wrong because people have the right to live.	71.7	OR	Killing a person is wrong because he is part of the community.	28.3
2	It is wrong to take something from someone even if they won't miss it.	73.3	OR	It can be all right to take from someone, if they have much more than they need.	26.7
3	Traditions should be discarded whenever they fail to improve people's quality of life.	46.7	OR	There is often good reason to act according to tradition, even when it is inconvenient.	53.3
4	Make a decision when you are under pressure, even if not everybody agrees with your decision.	46.7	OR	See that everybody agrees before you make a decision when you are under pressure.	53.3
5	People deserve to be punished for their wrongs.	40.0	OR	People deserve to make peace when they have done something wrong.	60.0
6	Compete with others to create wealth.	20.0	OR	People should work together to create wealth.	80.0
7	My money is my own because I worked for it.	33.3	OR	I must share my money with those in need.	66.7
8	It's up to me to get married and have children.	61.7	OR	I have a duty to get married and have children.	38.3

munity-orientated and thus traditionalist, rather than focusing on the rights of individuals, as found in the modern perspective (Mbiti, 1989; Metz, 2007; Shutte, 2001).

Personal Preference Combining Traditionalist and Modern Views

About 45% of the participants preferred traditionalist to modern statements, indicating that less than half the participants had a stronger identification with traditionalist values.

Responses to statements one, two and eight showed a decided preference for the modern perspective, which focuses more on individualism and autonomy, as opposed to maintaining relationships, a key component of the traditional perspective (Kikongo, 2002; Verhoef & Michel, 1997). The individual's right of choice of procreation was also preferred to the traditional perspective of having a duty to procreate (Metz, 2007).

The core constructs of the collective identity of the participants could not be identified as neither being predominantly traditionally Zulu or modern. The blending of the traditionalist and modern perspectives therefore needs to be accommodated in the development of moral identity in Zulu child-headed households. Despite the shift to identifying with the modern perspective of individualism and autonomy, the value of spirituality and the insight displayed regarding the value of having a giving attitude emerged from the exploration of the ethnic identity of Zulu child-headed households as useful aspects in their moral development.

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