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CHANCES AND CHALLENGES OF BICULTURAL SOCIALIZATION – INTERVIEWS WITH YOUNG WOMEN FROM GERMAN-INDONESIAN FAMILIES

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Worldwide, the number of interracial marriages is increasing. Therefore, for many of the young generation a mixed background is normal. In fact, in all societies there are many children living with people of two or more cultures. Among them there are children of migrants and refugees and the offspring of mixed marriages. Most of the studies available on this topic are concerned with the situation and adaptation of individuals who moved to another culture and who are now forced to go through a process of acculturation (Buchkremer, 1999; Apitzsch, 1998). Very often inside these families the members are oriented to the origin culture of the parents, but outside in society they are forced to deal with the host culture. Most research on bicultural families with two cultures within the family focuses on the marital relationship (Beck-Gernsheim, 2001; Kunze, 1993; Scheibler, 1992) or the language issue (Arnberg, 1987; Oksaar, 1984). Bilingualism is examined mainly on children who grow up with two European languages (Kielhöfer/Jonekeit, 1998). Other studies are done from the perspective of therapists and counsellors, who emphasize the risks and burdens of patterns of such as socialization, primarily including the disturbances and problems of children from bicultural families (Peltzer, 1994; Muhs, 1993).

The participants in this research project are families with two cultures present in every-day-life, father and mother each representing a different culture and speaking a different mother tongue. The first transmission of basic ideas about the world include norms and values, life style, the attribution of meaning (objects, food; places, situations) takes place in the family. The symbol systems people use are grounded in culture and language (Bruner, 1990). Growing up in a bicultural family probably means being exposed to two different cultural influences. In families with two cultures present this process of enculturation might be different from that in monocultural families. How does this work? The theoretical approach of

this study was guided by the ecological perspective of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as well as Valsiner's (1989) demand for a culture-inclusive developmental psychology.

Research Design and Methods

The project was based on the interpretative social sciences approach such as discursive psychology (Lucius-Hoene/Deppermann, 2002). This means that access to the data is qualitative. Two quite different cultures were chosen. One was more individualistic and the other more collectivistic. To explore the special influence of mothers and that of the environment I conducted interviews with two groups of young women:

- (a) those whose mother is Indonesian and who spent most of their childhood in Germany; and
- (b) those whose mother is German and who grew up mainly in Indonesia.

Mother Indonesian	The "German" group	Mother German	The "Indonesian" group
Family lives in Germany		Family lives in Indonesia	

In both groups the mothers had similar conditions. They moved into another culture and had to learn how to live within a very unfamiliar surrounding. Rather than comparing the two cultures, my aim was to study the transmission of cultural standards and behavioural settings (Berry & Cavalli-Sforza, 1986). The experiences of young women aged 16-26 years living in a bicultural family were my major interest, primarily because the mother-daughter relationship is special — even more so when the mother has to cope with a new situation.

General Research Questions

Several questions guided my research in both GROUPS:

- What is the nature of enculturation when there are two cultures involved?
- How is this process influenced by the surrounding culture?

- Which norms, values and behavioural settings are transmitted to the children by their mothers?
- What is the role of the fathers?
- What are typical challenges and chances within their socialisation?
- What kinds of strategies are available to them in handling their special situation?

The research project made extensive use of semi-structured interviews. The young women were invited to narrate their lives, their growing up, and how they dealt with two cultures. After the narrative part they were asked questions which arise from the themes they have narrated and also questions according to the guided questions on bicultural socialization prepared by the interviewer. Twenty-one interviews were conducted. My basic methodological concept was the "Grounded Theory" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which is a method-generating hypothesis. Instead of proving or falsifying hypotheses which are formulated by using existing theories, data are collected, analysed and compared in order to develop a theory out of the data – that is, a grounded theory. The way the interviewees react to the incentive to narrate and to the questions are parts of their process of identity construction. In this study that means the way of narrating is analysed and based on the statements of the interviewees; codes and concepts are developed in order to come from a descriptive level to a more abstract level. I searched for similarities and differences between the statements, the situation, the persons, the context reported and out of this continuous comparison of interview passages and interviews theoretical statements are formulated. The quotations in the following paragraphs chosen from the interviews represent typical statements which are found in the interviews. The work is still in progress, and only some preliminary findings are presented here.

Selected Results

Seesaw-Identity

Identity construction is everyday work for everyone. For adolescents, working on identity is a special developmental task. During this time the ability to narrate one's life story or tell about biographical events increases. The way they narrate and answer the questions provides an important way

to analyse regarding how they construct their identity (Gergen, 1991). Young bicultural women face a special situation. They must, like other individuals in modern societies, integrate different self elements, but characteristics of their identity such as name, physical appearance and the identity card where nationality is marked, are signs pointing to which group they belong. Such things are often delicate for them to discuss.

Sinta, who lives in Germany: *"the students ask me sometimes 'where does your name come from? It looks Indian or South American (laughing).' This I am asked very often and then I always explain."*

Beate, who has a Chinese-Indonesian mother: *"and then my sister and I have a tattoo made with our Chinese name, the Chinese signs."*

Although by their surroundings they are very often recognized as different and they have the feeling of existing in different parts, they often work hard to puzzle together the different parts of their identity in order to regard them as a coherent person. In the interviews, identity is constructed by narrating one's life story. How do the young women describe themselves? Do they have a sense of coherence (Habermas & Paha, 2001)? Do they regard their lives as something continuous (McAdams, 2001)?

Triandis (1991) and many others distinguish between collectivistic and individualistic cultures. In individualistic cultures educational aims are self-confidence, independence and self-realization, while in collectivistic societies conformity, obedience and good behaviour are more highly valued. In western culture individuals are supposed to consider themselves unique in contrast with others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). People construct themselves as an independent SELF. However, in non-western cultures, individuals feel connected with others and a part of the social context; they are supposed to construct themselves as an interdependent self.

Depending on the context, most of the young women demonstrate both ways of self-construction. When the girls with a German mother talk about their mother they seem to be very unique and independent, but within their Indonesian context they describe themselves much more as a part of the group and construct themselves as interdependent.

The process of identity construction is an active work done by the individual integrating personal needs, meanings, thoughts and emotions on one side and attributions, opinions, and feedback from others. Because

of their appearance and stereotypes associated with it, the young women are often perceived in a special way and faced with certain clichés such as "All Eurasian people are pretty." Concerning cultural identity they seem to have a kind of seesaw identity.



Sandra: "When there is something here I do not agree with, then I feel more pulled to Asia. When there are things I do not accept in Indonesia, then I feel more European."

Sometimes when the Indonesian culture is the background, they feel very German. However, when they are in Germany the Indonesian identity seems to be the figure. This also might happen in certain situations which they are assessed as either German or Indonesian. When the young women move from one culture to another they feel insecure and they are forced to digest situational experiences and to integrate these into their self image defining themselves as a whole, which is not falling apart.

Tabita: "I am as German as Indonesian. I am all half and half."

Strong Family Orientation

Paola: "My home is there where my family lives, where I can always return, whether this is Indonesia, Germany, France or America."

In all interviews it was obvious that the family is of great importance to the young women. They report being unable to imagine living without being in close contact with their families; although that does not mean that the family life is free of conflicts. This is true for both groups. This can be explained in the following points:

1. For the mothers who had to cope with a strange and unfamiliar surrounding, often the family was the only place of safety. Therefore they worked hard for close relationships within the family and solidarity among each other.
2. The bicultural young women feel they are neither fully accepted as part of the surrounding culture nor as a member of their mother's culture. Therefore, the family is the most important group to which they belong.
3. In the Indonesian culture the family ranks very high. Even in the language family terms are used to express personal relationships in every day life. In most of the interviews it is shown that the mother-daughter-relationship is very close and is generally reported to be of good quality. The mothers are very often mentioned and their influence seems to be high. They are advisors; often they decide for their daughters, because they pretend to know what is best for them. But there are also conflicts between mothers and daughters, especially concerning the orientation toward the values of the surrounding culture.

Sometimes there is a clash and the mother expects her daughter to behave as she would do.

Rita (living in Indonesia): "Sometimes she [her mother] says to me [imitating a reproachful tone] 'you already behave like an Indonesian' then I answer 'yes perhaps **I am** an Indonesian' [laughing]."

Especially in Indonesia, the fathers do not play a very important role in the family life. Sometimes the daughter allies with her father against the mother. Difficulties the mothers face may be transmitted to the daughters: When a mother cannot adapt to the situation in the foreign culture, when she faces problems in her partnership or in her husband's family, it is more difficult for the daughter to cope with the bicultural situation. When the mother is able to integrate her original culture and the foreign culture, it is much easier for the daughter to balance the two realms of influence. Usually there are intensive relationships with relatives, especially on the mother's side although they are far away. In Indonesia the paternal family is also very important, and there is much contact except when the mother does not feel accepted in her husband's family. In the German group there seems to be more distance from the father's family.

Coping Strategies

Picking out the best und puzzling it together!!

Karin: *"and I combine different things - I especially pick out the positive ones and the negative ones I leave behind. I have the choice."*

They compose different elements of the two cultures together to form a patchwork. They are aware of having a great treasure which can enrich their lives. Many of the interview partners emphasize that they like many things in both cultures and that their ideal is to combine them in their lives, to put pieces together to create something new, to integrate it into their personality and to achieve some kind of bicultural identity.

Adjusting to the environment wherever they are!!

Katbarina: *"Usually I always adjust myself to the others and what they talk about, what they tell; I do the same and tell the same, I am not so much different then."*

Lydia: *"I was convinced that it is a big advantage that we can always adapt ourselves wherever we are."*

Most of the young women strive for adjustment. They do not want to attract attention, but want to live in harmony with the other members of the group. They are very sensitive to the signals of their environment. This enables them to react immediately and adjust their behaviour to the challenges of the moment. They are very flexible and have no problems in adjusting themselves to different environments. This capability is a main aim in Indonesian education. This may be the consequence of the Indonesian influence, either by their mothers or by the surrounding Indonesian culture because it is found in both groups.

Being bicultural is normal and notbing extraordinary!!

Rita: *"He regards me as totally normal. He doesn't regard me as something extraordinary as a half breed or a foreigner."*

They reject having to explain their situation and personality on the basis of culture. They insist that in their families everything is as normal as in other families. They do not want to be regarded as somebody who is

extraordinary or different from the others. Some of them emphasize often that it is no problem for them to live in a bicultural family. They do not want to be victimized; for them it is normal to have influences from two cultures.

Rita: *"perhaps also because I do not know anything else."*

Going a third way: Being neither Indonesian nor German, but Cosmopolitan.

Katharina: *"When I am grown up, I will live neither in Germany nor in Indonesia."*

Katharina: *"I would like it best to marry somebody who is a half breed as I am. Yes, then he knows how you feel. Instead of marrying a German who wants me to be pure German or an Indonesian, who wants me to be pure Indonesian."*

Many of my interview partners have already lived either in both countries or in other nations. The U.S.A. in particular is a dreamland for them, because there it is normal to be mixed. The hyphenated-identity is a fact because many Americans have parents who come from different cultures. But usually the cultures are not constructed in an additive way. Instead, they are mixed up and something new is created. Some of the young women expose themselves as young citizens of a modern world and their ideal is that the differences of race and origin are no longer important.

Typical Conflicts and Risks

Orientation on Western or Indonesian norms and values?

Karin: *"Then it was after my first year in Germany by then I knew the German culture better and then, sure, I allowed more not only holding hands. But sleeping together- 'On this point I am still Indonesian', I have said to him."*

Because the young women have been confronted with two value systems during their socialisation, they have to decide which one is valid for them in special situations. In Indonesia, Eurasian young women are suspected to follow western norms concerning sexuality, which are not accepted in Indonesia. This means having a partnership before marriage is

supposed to be normal for European girls. These young women are afraid of being perceived as cheap girls by Indonesian boys. Another example: An unmarried girl who has a child does not dare to go to Indonesia with her child and without a husband. Or the Indonesian grandmother who is in Germany for a visit should not know that the granddaughter stays overnight with her boyfriend. Usually the young women decide to follow the norms of the surrounding culture, but in fact they are exposed to a double pressure to adapt. They should observe the rules of both cultures although, even when they are contradictory.

To which group do I belong?

Katbarina: *"Ever since I was a child I have been among the German and then I am in Indonesia and then I am in Germany, then in Indonesia again. And then you are confused and then I think sometimes that I really don't know where I belong to."*

Affiliation to a cultural or ethnic group is precarious for the young women. They cannot define the group to which they belong, nor do others unambiguously categorize them as German or Indonesian. Their appearance makes it clear that they are neither "pure" German nor "pure" Indonesian. In Indonesia most of the interviewees report situations in which they were called *bule*, meaning white-skinned (usually associated with the Dutch colonialists) by other children. Their European look attracts attention, sometimes also admiration; in any case it is something that gives them a special status in their group. In a collectively-oriented culture this is not appreciated, for a person should not be different from the others of the group. Being called *bule* can be translated: "You aren't part of our group, you don't belong to us." In Germany the young women are not classified as Indonesian, but generally as foreigners. Therefore many of them already had been confronted with xenophobia or at least with rejection from some people who have prejudices against people with a different appearance.

Polarisation within the family

Lydia: *"My sister and I have always taken side for my father, we have defended him and I think that German - all this cultural stuff this stands in our family always extremely in between."*

Normal conflicts inside families during socialisation can always go along with the acceptance or rejection of one or both of the two cultures, which are represented as father or mother. This sometimes leads to a polarisation within the family; the young woman takes side with her mother against the father or the other way round. When this happens she does not only reject the father or the mother but also the culture they represent. This often means that the young women identify strongly with one side and suppress the other completely.

Opportunities and Potentials

Despite some challenges and risks, there are many opportunities provided by bicultural socialisation. The evaluation of bicultural socialization changes over the age. Some respondents report that when they were children it was hard for them to be bicultural but now as young adults they can appreciate the special conditions in which they grew up.

Having two languages. Many of the young women learned their mother's language, but the language of the surrounding culture is usually stronger. Those who have grown up in Germany know less of the Indonesian language than those in Indonesia know German. The first reason for this difference is a very pragmatic one. The opportunity to learn German in Indonesia outside the family is much better than learning Indonesian in Germany. But another reason is probably because there is a ranking of the importance of the languages; a third reason might be that the German women in Indonesia never want to give up at least the option for themselves and their children to go to Germany. On the other hand, the Indonesian mothers in Germany do not see an opportunity or a need to go back home. They have to follow the Indonesian *ikut-suami* principle. This means that an Indonesian woman who marries a German has to live in Germany, because her husband is not granted a permanent residence permit in Indonesia.

Knowledge about mother's culture

Nina: "Yes it is an enrichment, and not only that I know two cultures but that I have two cultures."

The mothers talk about their culture and even more important the mothers behave in a special way. Therefore the young women know

much about their mother's culture, both implicitly and explicitly. They are familiar with two cultures. For example, the Indonesian mothers are more timid and do not openly assert their interests, while the German women in Indonesia do not accept their situation and try to overcome it by being active, for instance when they founded an association in order to improve their legal situation. Thus the mothers set an example of how to behave in certain situations.

The capability to switch from one code to the other

Paola: *"I don't have any problems, well, Indonesian, it doesn't matter with whom - I know I am allowed to do this and that and this and that not. That depends. They are very sensitive. What I can say and what not what I am allowed to do and what not, these things."*

Because the young women know a lot about the behavior code in both cultures, they are able to switch from one code to the other as the situation demands. They are very flexible and able to behave correctly in different contexts. Many of them had to move several times during their childhood; therefore, they are used to adapting to different surroundings very quickly. They can also tolerate ambiguous situations.

Internationality. Although it also depends on the economic situation of the families, nearly all of the young women try to go abroad for studies, as an au pair or for on-the-job training. For them it is normal to live together with people from different cultures. It is not unusual for them to speak or to listen to different languages and they know that there are always different ways of behaviour and more than one perspective to perceive a situation. But none of the young women who have grown up in Germany have left Germany to stay in Indonesia for a longer time. However, some of them had projects during their studies for which they intended to bring their knowledge to Indonesia in order to develop the country. They have also found partners with different nationalities, neither German nor Indonesian, or at least they prefer partners who have had experience abroad.

Summary

When the young women try to judge the two cultures, they often attribute the German culture as rational, serious, and liberal and the Indonesian culture as emotional, flexible, and humorous. They appreciate the German culture for the working life, the Indonesian for the social life. The mind likes Germany, the heart beats for Indonesia. I did not find disturbed and maladjusted individuals as some studies claim. The young women are confronted with special challenges and difficulties and these they have to cope with. Sometimes they are torn by inner conflicts, but the results of this research project do not agree with the assumption that being confronted with very different influences during the socialisation process leads to conflicts and disturbed or maladjusted individuals. Most of them view the two cultures as two offers, or opportunities, and that means they regard bicultural socialisation as an enrichment to their lives.

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