

THE IDENTITY AND IDENTIFICATION OF TURKISH CYPRIOT CHILDREN

A research was carried out by KADEM in collaboration with the Centre for the Study of Childhood and Adolescence which looked at the identity and identification of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot children. The research was supported by the Bi-communal Development Programme, which is funded by USAID and UNDP and is executed by UNOPS, and results of the study in the Turkish Cypriot community clearly show that Turkish Cypriot children (ages ranging from 10-13) have an awareness of identity. All the children in this age-range identify with Turkish Cypriotness and feel a need to highlight differences between themselves and others. However, the results of the study clearly show that this awareness is not only based on the perceptual process of observation, but also on the cognitive processes of generalisations and categorisations. These will be discussed with some statistical details in the rest of the article.

The identification of Turkish Cypriot children and a sense of “otherness”

The children in the sample were asked to consider different groups of people and state to what extent they like or dislike them. The results clearly showed that most of them had a definite perception of the “other” but all of the children, except one case, had formed a strong belief of “us” as Turkish Cypriots. They also believed that some of the other nationalities around them shared the same characteristics. Seventy eight percent (78%) of children in our survey, state that they like Turkish Cypriots “a lot”. This shows that children perceive themselves as members of a certain group and have a social conception of the self. As we know from existing literature, one indication of awareness of identity is the perception of individuals in their group identity and the feeling of attachment to this identity. Throughout many studies it is observed that even when children are not asked to make comparisons, they tend to compare themselves with “others”. They use the results of these comparisons to shape their identity. They believe that they are possessing some common attributes like to be “clean” and “civilized”.

Fifty two percent (52%) of the children stated that they liked the English “a lot”, with the Greeks being the second most liked foreign group. This percentage is higher than the feelings towards Americans (28%) and Turks (25%). Pakistanis, Thai, Russians and Bulgarians are at the bottom of the list (Table1).

Groups	I dislike them a lot	I dislike them a little	I like neither nor dislike them	I like them a little	I like them a lot	Don't know/no answer
Pakistani	48.5	7.2	13.4	11.3	5.2	14.4
Russian	30.9	17.5	19.6	10.3	9.3	12.4
American	13.4	17.5	12.4	18.6	27.8	10.3
Thai	35.1	27.2	13.4	10.3	10.3	16.5
Bulgarian	36.1	10.3	16.5	10.3	10.3	16.5
Romanian	25.8	16.5	16.5	6.2	13.4	21.6
Turkish (from Turkey)	32.0	12.4	10.3	16.5	24.7	4.1
Greek	20.6	9.3	18.6	11.3	30.9	9.3
English	8.2	13.4	6.2	14.4	51.5	6.2
Turkish Cypriot	5.2	6.2	1.0	6.2	78.4	3.1

The questionnaire used in the survey included pairs of attributes like “clean-dirty” or “civilized-uncivilized” for the different groups of people. Those who were liked “a lot” by the children were also perceived as “civilized”. There is a positive correlation between the perception of a group’s civility and their cleanliness. The groups accepted as “civilized”, like the Americans, Greeks, English and Turkish Cypriots, were also perceived as “clean”. Nearly half of the children did not want to categorise Pakistanis, Russians, Thai, Bulgarians and Kurds as a whole or did not know/give an answer about these groups. Kurds, and Pakistanis were ranked as least civilized and most dirty.

Groups	Civilized	Uncivilized	Do not want to categorize the group as a whole	Don't know/no answer
Pakistani	17.5	33.0	24.7	24.7
Russian	32.0	20.6	28.9	18.6
American	62.9	7.2	13.4	16.5
Thai	17.5	25.8	39.2	17.5
Bulgarian	32.0	21.6	21.6	24.7
Romanian	37.1	17.5	23.7	21.6
Turkish (from Turkey)	38.1	24.7	18.6	18.6
Greek	52.6	9.3	15.5	22.7
English	57.7	6.2	13.4	22.7
Turkish Cypriot	69.1	--	8.2	22.7
Kurdish	8.2	33.0	29.9	28.9

Table 3: "Clean" and "dirty"				
Groups	Clean	Dirty	Do not want to categorize the group as a whole	Don't know/no answer
Pakistani	17.5	33.0	27.8	20.6
Russian	32.0	20.6	30.9	23.7
American	62.9	7.2	14.4	24.7
Thai	17.5	25.8	39.2	29.9
Bulgarian	32.0	21.6	24.7	19.6
Romanian	37.1	17.5	26.8	25.8
Turkish (from Turkey)	38.1	24.7	23.7	21.6
Greek	52.6	9.3	20.6	30.9
English	57.7	6.2	11.3	30.9
Turkish Cypriot	69.1	--	11.3	29.9
Kurdish	8.2	33.0	34.0	26.8

Turkish Cypriot children strongly identify with their own group and perceive themselves as a member of the "civilized" category. They also believe that they are different from members of "other" groups as there is a tendency to like one's own group and dislike the "outside groups". However, what is striking here are the criteria children have used to differentiate groups. The level of civilization is significant in categorising groups of people and the children tended to categorise the groups into two different categories when making many of the comparisons. They frequently used "level of economic and social development" as the determinant of these categories. The first category included Americans, English, Turks, and Greek Cypriots and the second category included Pakistani, Thai, and Kurds. When the children were asked in what ways these groups were similar or different from us, they frequently used terms such as civilised/uncivilised, rich/poor, easy/difficult, white/black (dark skin), modern dress/fully covered or wearing a turban, and clean/dirty (bad smell) to define the group.

The tendency to categorise not only affects the perception of groups, but also their future aspirations. When asked if they would want to be friends with different groups, or consider sitting next to one in their class, or inviting them to their birthday party, most of the children discriminated against groups without any hesitation. Most of them preferred to be with English and American children rather than second category nationalities. All of the participants but one, stated that they would want to be friends with English and American children, and would consider sitting next to one in their class, or invite them to their birthday party. They also felt sure that their parents would want them to be friends with children of these nationalities.

It is well known that there was a "conflict" between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. And many people have an opinion that this conflict directly leads to prejudices. Research results show that intergroup conflict does not directly lead to prejudice nor is a necessary prerequisite for stereotyping. "Way of living" and "level of civilization" are much more important factors in categorising groups of people and in constructing stereotypes and prejudices.