THE ARAB AND ISRAELI SOCIAL IDENTITIES OF ARAB ADOLESCENT BOYS AND GIRLS IN ISRAEL

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Abstract: Two of the main social identities of Arabs in Israel are Arab and Israeli – they belong as part of the Arab world but also want to assimilate to the Israeli society. These two identities are often conflicting. Arab boys, but not girls, are socialized to assimilate to the Israeli society. In the current study, 271 Arab adolescents living in northern Israel rated the regard and salience they have for their Arab and Israeli identities. It was found that in both genders, the Arab identity was perceived as significantly more important than their Israeli one. In addition, boys exhibited a higher regard of both of their identities and a higher salience of their Israeli identity – compared to girls. Both genders exhibited similar high salience of their Arab identity. In both genders, their regard for the Arab identity was negatively correlated to the salience of their Israeli society. However, only for boys a negative correlation was also found between their perceived salience of both these two identities.

Key words: **Arab, Arab Israeli, Israel, Social Identity, Gender**

The current study focused on a unique minority group - Arabs living in Israel. In 2016, 20.8% of the Israeli population were Arabs (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017). In general, most Israeli Arabs have four significant social identities: Arab, Palestinian, Israeli and religious (Muslim, Christian, Druze). The study focused on two of these identities – Arab and Israeli and the relationships between them. Their Arab identity signifies their sense of belonging to the general Arab world. In parallel, most Israeli Arabs identify emotionally with the Palestinian people, specifically those living in the West Bank and Gaza and hold strong in aspirations for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state (Rodnizki, 2014). At the same time, they continuously try to assimilate in the dominant Jewish majority and become equal Israeli citizens to enjoy the same resources and opportunities as the rest of the population (Bligh, 2003). However, because of the ethnic similarity between Israeli Arabs and Israel's Arab enemies they experience continuous and systematic

deprivation and discrimination in the Israeli society. This makes it harder for them to identify with the state of Israel and feel they belong to its society (Rekhess, 2007). Previous studies found that Arab adolescents hold a stronger Palestinian or Arab identity than Israeli and there is negative correlation between the two (i.e. Abu-Rayya & Abu-Rayya, 2009; Diab & Mi'ari, 2007).

Boys and girls are socialized differently in the Arab society, though this difference has diminished somewhat over the years. Girls are socialized, as typical in such cultures, to focus on their family roles and adhere to culture norms and not to assimilate in the Israeli society. As a result, they don't have much experience interacting with Israeli Jews during their childhood. In contrast, boys are socialized to assimilate into the Israeli society in order to get a good job and be able to support their family as adults. As such, they are more exposed to Israeli Jews and are taught how to deal with discrimination and prejudice against them (Adler, Argaman, Tsucker, & Vatali, 1995; Horowitz, 2001). As a result, when Arab boys reach adolescence they are more aware of the political and social situation of Arabs in Israel – its limitations and opportunities, compared to girls (Al-Haj, 1995a).

The current research examined how these differences between the genders will be manifested in how adolescent boys and girls will perceive each of their social identities – the Arab and Israeli and how these two identities will be related to one another.

The research hypotheses were:

1. Boys will exhibit higher regard (satisfaction) and salience of their Israeli identity than girls.

2. Girls will exhibit higher regard and salience of their Arab identity – compared to boys.

Methods

The study was conducted with 271 adolescents 16 to 17 years old - 116 (43%) male and 166 (57%) – female living in northern Israel. The adolescents filled a self report questionnaire that included four questions: how satisfied are you to have been born an Arab?; how important is it to you to belong to the Arab people?; how satisfied are you to have been born an Israeli citizen?; how important is it to you to be an Israeli citizen? For each of these four questions, participants were asked to rate their response on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "not at all" (1) to "very much" (5). Internal consistency couldn't be assessed as each question was analyzed separately,

but Hertz-Lazarowitz et al. (1978) found it to be highly reliable and valid. The current article only presents some of the research findings.

Results

In order to test the first hypothesis, the mean regard and salience boys and girls gave their Arab and Israeli identities were compared using t-tests. Table 1 presents this analysis. As can be seen, we found that in both genders, the Arab identity was perceived as significantly more important than their Israeli one – with no significant difference between the genders. In addition, boys were significantly more satisfied than girls in both of their social identities and they saw their Israeli identity as more important.

Table 1: Salience and regard of Arab and Israeli identity in boys and girls

		Boys (N=116)		Girls (N=155)		
		Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**t**
Arab	**Regard**	4.48	1.009	4.21	1.044	*2.147
identity	**Salience**	4.29	1.063	4.1	1.121	1.469
Israeli	**Regard**	2.83	1.239	2.52	2.208	*2.07
identity	**Salience**	2.66	1.265	2.35	1.221	*2.02

In order to test the second research hypothesis, we computed the correlations between the regard and salience the participants perceived each social identity. This analysis was conducted separately for boys and girls. As can be seen in table 2, in both gender a similar negative relationship was found between their regard for their Arab identity and the salience they perceived their Israeli identity. In girls only a negative relationship was found between their regard for their Arab and Israeli identities and a negative correlation was found between the salience of their Arab identity and the regard of their Israeli identity. In boys only, a negative correlation was found between the salience of their Arab identity and that of their Israeli identity.

Table 2: Correlations between regard and salience of Arab and Israeli identities in boys and girls

	Boys			Girls		
	Salience Arab	Regard Israeli	Salience Israeli	Salience Arab	Regard Israeli	Salience Israeli
Regard Arab identity	**.718	-.114	*-.213	**.714	*-.185	**-.218
Salience Arab identity		-.159	*-.23		**-.239	-.139
Regard Israeli identity			**.767			**.588

*p<.05, **p<.01

Discussion

Similar to findings in other minority groups, boys were found as more satisfied with their Israeli identity than girls. The reason for this finding is the different role and expectations which are placed on men versus women in the Arab society. Even though the Arab society in Israel is undergoing a modernization and urbanization processes in the last couple of decades, its basic culture is patriarchal. Accordingly, men are expected to support their family financially and socially. The best way for Israeli Arabs to do that is by assimilating in the Israeli society in order to get the resources and opportunities available to them as citizens in Israel. In order to prepare them for this role, Arab boys are taught the knowledge and skills they will need to compete in the Israeli market and are encouraged to adopt the behaviors of other Israelis and interact with Jewish Israelis (Adler et al., 1995; Horowitz, 2001; see review Sirin et al., 2008). In contrast, the traditional role of women in the Arab community was to take care of her home and family and follow the collectivistic cultural and family norms and expectations. Today girls are no longer raised with the sole purpose of taking care of their families (Adler et al., 1995) but they are still socialized to separate themselves from the rest of the Israeli society and not adopt

their behaviors and way of life or interact with Jewish Israelis, in order to preserve the family's "honor". As a result, Arab girls have less opportunities to interact with Israeli Jews and get acquainted with the larger Israeli society (Adler et al., 1995; Al-Haj, 1995b; Horowitz, 2001; see review Sirin et al., 2008). As a result, the girls do not feel as connected to the Israeli society and feel less than boys that they belong to it. It's also possible that Arab adolescent girls will report on a low identification with Israel, in order not to go against their family and culture norms and be perceived negatively in the eyes of her family and community. A possible support of this explanation is that in girls the correlation between the regard and salience attributed to their Israeli identity – was weaker than in boys. This might show that the girls are more conflicted about their Israeli identity and thus will exhibit a less consistent pattern of how they perceive their Israeli identity. As their regard for their Israeli identity was higher to its salience – it's possible that they perceived this identity as positive and maybe as an opportunity to improve their status and advance professionally in the future. However, at the same time they tried to minimize its importance in order to preserve their self concept. This trend might have also resulted from the less exposure girls have to the Israeli society, and how being an Arab in it might be challenging and not straight forward. As a result, they might focus on the positive aspects of it and the opportunities it might provide them and less on its negative sides.

Both genders saw their Arab Identity as similarly highly important and meaningful. In other words, all the Arab adolescents who participated in the study, felt that their basic core identification is being Arab. These findings show that even though Arab girls might be encouraged more strongly to adhere to culture norms than boys, boys also feel a similar need to be a part of their own culture and ethnicity. One of the reasons for this finding is the rejection and discrimination they experience in the Israeli society, which emphasizes how much they don't truly belong there. As such, in order to feel a sense of belonging and receive support and acceptance, they need their Arab identity and connection to their family and to other community members.

The findings that Arab boys exhibited strong regard and salience to both their Arab and their Israeli identities – manifested the strong conflict they have in between them. This conflict is also apparent in the negative correlation found only in boys between the salience they attribute to each of these identities. These findings show that boys need to find a way to balance between these sub identities, which present

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contradictory expectations and behavioral norms. Similar findings of a larger conflict between ethnic and national (civic) identity for boys than for girls, was also found in studies with Muslim adolescents living in the U.S. (Sirin & Fine, 2007; Sirin et al., 2008).

However, when looking at how satisfied (regard) boys and girls are in their Arab identity - boys exhibited higher regard than girls. Boys who are encouraged to assimilate in the Israeli society, feel they have the freedom to connect to their Arab community when they need to and are not pressured in any way to accentuate their Arab identity. As such, especially when comparing their experiences in their own community and in Israel in general, they will be more aware of its positive contributions to their lives and wellbeing. In contrast, Arab girls might feel that to some extent the Arab part of themselves hinders their personal or professional development or limits the opportunities they have in life – compared to Jewish Israeli girls their age. As they have less exposure to the Israeli society, they might perceive it as particularly positive in comparison to their lives as Arabic girls where they pressured to adhere to the traditional norms and thus will be less satisfied with this part of themselves. This explanation is manifested in the negative correlation found only in girls between the regard they have for their Arab and Israeli sub-identities. The more positive was their perception of their Israeli identity, the more negative they perceived their Arab sub-identity.

The current study had a number of methodological limitations that should be taken into account when drawing conclusion from it. First, the sample used was not randomized but a convenience sample. As such, it doesn't necessarily represent the Arab and Israeli identity of this population in general. In particular, the study participants came from families with a high socio-economic status and with a father working full time. This is in contrast to a large proportion of Arabs in Israel who live in poverty and impoverished conditions compared to Israeli Jews. As such, it is possible that the findings do not reflect the actual issues this population deal with. It is thus important in the future to draw a more representative sample of this population, in order to learn more reliably the strength of the different sub identities of this population. Another significant limitation of this study is that the data was collected in 2007 – a time between two major Israeli-Arab wars and a period of changes in the Palestinian world. It was after they got back the control on the Gaza strip and chose Hamas to lead them there, thus creating a split between Gaza and Yehuda and

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Samaria, both defined as Palestinian governed, with no connecting land between them. As such, the findings might not represent how Arab adolescents feel about their different sub identities today. Further testing should be done to see the changes that occurred in their social identities over the last few years and what factors or events triggered them.

Future studies should take into account the degree these adolescents or close family and friends suffered discrimination or rejection by the Israeli society. According to the literature, when the minority group is more negatively perceived and not accepted as part of the majority group, they will feel a weaker civic (or national) identity and a stronger ethnic identity. Another question to examine in future studies is the effects of personal losses as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict (either during War or other circumstances) on these two sub identities. These can intensify the conflict between the two identities and make it harder to choose sides between the two fighting parties.

In sum, the Arab ethnic identity of Arab adolescents in Israel is stronger than their civic Israeli identity in both genders. The regard Arab boys perceive their Arab identity and the regard and salience of their Israeli identity are higher than in girls. There was no difference between them in their salience of Arab identity. In addition, boys exhibited a stronger negative correlation between their Arab and Israeli identities. As such, it seems that particularly Arab boys who are more exposed to the Israeli society and are expected to assimilate in it – will struggle more in defining their self concept and combine their Arab and Israeli identities. From these findings it seems important to give Arab boys in Israel support and tools as to how to balance between these two identities and find a way to combine them in a way they can benefit from both worlds. As the Arab identity of these adolescents is stronger than the Israeli one, the encouragement to assimilate in the Israeli society should be accompanied by effective ways to remain connected to their culture and family without hurting their chances in the Israeli society. For girls, as their relatively low regard to their Arab culture was negatively related to their regard for the Israeli society – it seems important to discuss with them what the Israeli society can and can not provide them in the future and expose them to more interactions with Jewish Israelis. These experiences might on the hand, reduce their sense of deprivation and isolation and on the other hand allow them to see the Israeli society for what it is – on

its positive and negative aspects. This might help them create a more balanced social identity.

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