Ethnic identity erosion in the indigenous Nenets population under globalization influence: gender differences between adolescent girls and boys

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Abstract.

Research background: Ethnic identity development, while universal, is also recognized as an especially important prerequisite for economic and social life among indigenous populations [1, 2]. Global transformations such as technology, industrialization, global warming and political and economic forces are impacting positive ethnic identity development in indigenous populations around the world.

Purpose of the article: The purpose of this study is to examine gender differences in ethnic identity erosion in the adolescent indigenous Nenets population of the Russian Siberian Arctic Region.

Methods: The study sample included 78 children in boarding schools from the northern area of Western Siberia. To define ethnic identity, the "Types of Ethnic Identity" questionnaire [3] was used.

Findings & Value added: The study results show that across 8th-9th grade as well as 10-11 grade Nenets adolescent boys perceive their ethnic identity positively. However, the same indicators show girls do not view their ethnic identity as positively. There are also several other interesting gender differences that emerge between the students in each grade. This may be the result of specific gender differences in perceptions about the economic and social realities of tundra life, the position of women in traditional societies as well as the impact of global transformations on indigenous populations overall.

Keywords: *at-risk adolescents; ethnic identity; identity erosion; tundra; Nenets; indigenous populations*

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1 Introduction

Globalization is a world-wide phenomenon which has, among other impacts, economic consequences that affect even the most remote regions on earth including the Arctic. Adolescents are especially susceptible to the effects of global economic trends as they develop their social identity.

The importance of identity development in adolescence cannot be underestimated. During adolescence children become more independent, and begin to look at the future in terms of relationships, vocation and family. The individual wants to belong to a society and fit in. According to social and human development theories, adolescence is the critical period in which humans attain their sense of personal as well as social being as they move into adulthood [1]. Ethnic identity development, while universal, is also recognized as an especially important prerequisite for social life and economic behavior among indigenous populations [2, 3]. It is intricately entwined with traditional methods of survival such as nomadic reindeer herding, access to food and water, medicine and housing. Global transformations such as technology, industrialization, global warming and political and economic forces are impacting positive ethnic identity development in indigenous populations around the world. In this context, the Russian Siberian Arctic Region inhabited by groups referred to as "indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North" (ISNPN) becomes of particular interest for both research and practical purposes when looking at ethnic identity development.

Several countries such as Norway, Denmark, Finland, Canada, and Sweden have developed national strategies for Arctic studies [4-7] largely for the purpose of protecting and preserving the social, political and economic rights of indigenous populations which are increasingly under stress. The goal is to balance traditional ways of life with the 3 demands of modern methods of education, health care and resource management economic behavior as well as maintain self-governance.

The importance of issues related to the development of ISNPN goes far beyond local humanitarian problems pertaining to the social life of indigenous ethnic groups, which represent a very small percentage (0.03%) of the total population of the Russian Federation [8]. They directly impact economic and political structures that define social life among indigenous populations. Studies performed in the late 1990s indicate a demographic decline among indigenous peoples due to high mortality rates of children and adults of working age, reduced birth rates, and low average life expectancy [9]. Hence, some researchers predicted depopulation or the complete disappearance of these indigenous groups [10].

While entire groups have not disappeared, they do face considerable stress from the globalization processes that are changing their way of life through inter-ethnic marriages, cultural and language assimilation. As such, the issue of ethnic identity development and its role in successful activation for the population in negotiating the modern world versus barrier or obstacle to regional development becomes of critical concern. In the Russian Federation, the ethnic identity of ISNPN individuals takes into consideration multiple factors. Privileges (so called "additional guarantees") granted by the State to the ISNPN often become a decisive factor in choosing one's ethnic affiliation for individuals of mixed origin [11]. In this context one of the key issues of state relations with ethnic indigenous communities is the relationship between existing territorial and political structures and the ethnic identities of the indigenous population. It appears that this relationship and the categorization of the ethnic identity of an indigenous population it produces is instrumental in vesting the residents of a territorial/administrative entity with a sort of political and economic legitimacy. This is crucial in structuring and conceptualizing the environment and its resources for management purposes [12]. However, heretofore

little attention has been paid to the potential of these policies in creating different opportunity structures between men and women. There is concern that policies and programs designed to promote and preserve indigenous populations are largely beneficial to men. Women are increasingly choosing to inter-marry and leave behind life on the tundra.

The main problem and the aim of the study is the contradiction between the acquisition of the ethnic identity of indigenous minorities in the context of gender (for men and women) and the processes of globalization, dictating universal characteristics of the individual, standards of behavior, implemented largely through the sphere of economic behavior. The aim of this study is to identify the features of ethnic identity in indigenous minorities adolescents of different gender.

1.1 Literature Review

Ethnic identity erosion among indigenous peoples is a global phenomenon and has been widely studied across multiple disciplines. This is confirmed by a study of 400 years of aboriginal identity destruction in Canada [13]. Since the early 1700s, the land and the wealth of natural resources have been subject to the colonial interests of the French and British empires. With considerable technical and tactical superiority, pressure and cunning, the colonialists were able to impose their will on the indigenous people of Canada. Despite significant changes over the years, there are still differences in educational levels, housing conditions and health outcomes between Canadians and aboriginal people. These inequalities affect the culture, language and ethnic identity of indigenous people.

Some of the more recent analysis of ethnic identity shifts looks at the issue contextually between sub-national, national and supra-national scales [14]. In the large-scale resettlement projects of indigenous people to large cities in Norway where there is critically little space for the preservation of national identity it was also apparent that younger adults grew to prefer the amenities of modern life. The rhythm of life of cities makes indigenous individuals adapt to other than traditional living conditions and interact with the environment in very different ways.

The erosion of ethnic identity of indigenous populations in Europe, Asia and America further confirms the global nature of this phenomenon [15]. The complex socio – political agenda, together with human-induced climate change, undermines the ecosystem on which the cultural survival of indigenous peoples depends. Their ability to live in the Arctic North depends upon a harmonious relationship with a fragile, vulnerable and sensitive yet brutal environment. The erosion of ethnic identity can permanently sever the ties to specific knowledge required to survive in these conditions.

Indigenous peoples around the world have tried to revive and strengthen those aspects of their identity that have been lost as a result of colonization. Some are embracing entrepreneurship as a means of livelihood and of maintaining viability in indigenous communities. This can be problematic as tourism, especially eco-tourism, can lead to a picturesque' retention of certain aspects of indigenous life but lack true sustainability [16;17]. Political avenues have also been embraced by indigenous peoples to strengthen their voice on issues that affect or threaten their way of life. Permanent inclusion in the Arctic Council, the ratification of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as within-country recognition has helped to redress some of the historical errors that have negatively impacted indigenous people of the Arctic North.

It is also important to recognize the relationship between ethnic identity and economic behavior pro-social behavior and to identify measures to promote the harmonization of inter-ethnic relations. One may be as simple as increasing the presence of common national

symbols such as a national flag, anthem, or coat of arms. Others are more difficult to implement, for example, the involvement of representatives of indigenous communities to the solution of general social problems such as poverty, crime, labor [18]. The peoples of the Arctic are now at the forefront of rapid environmental change caused by the forces of globalization and climate change. The melting of polar ice and warming weather are not the only things changing rapidly. The social climate is inextricably linked to the physical climate, and changes within each of them have profound effects on the daily lives, health and well-being of the circumpolar indigenous peoples. Studies that have looked specifically at the difficulties and challenges facing the youth of Arctic indigenous peoples find a significant relationship between their ability to maintain a strong ethnic identity and positive life outcomes. The integral aspects of social and economic life, such as kinship, resources of households based on kinship networks of peers, a nature-based economy (reindeer herding, hunting, fishing), and culturally valued practices (speaking in their native language, beading, traditional dance, throat singing, sewing traditional clothes) are all based on ethnic identity affiliation.

Thus, young people continue to draw from the community strengths and culturally integrated protection mechanisms, allowing for creative rethinking of reality and easy access to available resources. In this regard, festivals and fairs demonstrating traditional patterns of behavior, rituals and ceremonial designs, drawing attention to the wealth of folklore and national cuisine are widespread. Attracting public attention allows, even in a limited space, to reproduce cultural features and contributes to increasing interest and pride among younger generations [19].

The erosion of ethnic identity in indigenous youth is precipitated by the conflicting demands of the social climate [20, 21]. These are the competing needs of acquiring knowledge, education and technology with maintaining traditional ways of living. The children of the Tundra Nenets spend their early (preschool) years surrounded by members of their own ethnic group and are raised in accordance with their ethnic traditions.

Then, to meet the demands of education necessary to survive in the 'modern world', children go to boarding school, where they start to interact regularly with people belonging to different ethnic groups (most of the teaching staff are not Nenets). Our study was based on asking 2 types of questions:

1) what happens to these children while staying and being educated in the boarding school? Do they become distanced from their ethnic group? Do they try behavior models picked up from the non-Nenets people around them? Is the unintended consequence of modern education detrimental to sustaining ethnic identity that is imperative within indigenous cultures and societies in order for them to survive?

2) is there a gender difference associated with this effect? What are the implications for survival of indigenous populations if there is a gender difference in ethnic identity? In other words – what do the women think and how will it impact their behavior?

2 Sample and Methodology

The sample included 78 children from Tundra Nenets families who were attending Gyda Boarding School and Tazovsky Boarding School (both schools are located in the Tazovsly district, Yamalo-Nenets autonomous region, and offer complete secondary education program). Participants in the study included 50 students (34 girls and 16 boys) in grades 8 and 9, and 28 students (16 girls and 12 boys) – in grades 10 and 11. Participation was voluntary and the population studied represented 90% of the students in those grade categories in this school.

2.1 The Nenets and the Tundra Nenets Ethnic Group

Nenets (the name they call themselves, "nenezi", means "man", "nena nenezi" – "a true man"; until the early twentieth century the name *"Samoyed"* was used) inhabit vast northern areas of European Russia and Western Siberia, from the river Mezen in the West to the river Yenisei in the East. The Nenets language belongs to the Samoyedic group of the Uralic-Yukaghir family. The 2010 census reported 44,640 Nenets in the Russian Federation, more than half of which lived in the Yamalo-Nenets autonomous region. Russian Federation law (April 30, 1999 Federal Law 82) identifies the Nenets as ISNPN. The Nenets are divided into three groups, each group having specific economic and cultural practices. Tundra Nenets are reindeer herders; Forest Nenets live in the taiga between Ob and Yenisey and are hunters and fisherman; the Kolva Nenets group, based in the area of the Kolva River, are descendants of 19th century intermarriages between the Nenets and Komi peoples. This study focused on the Gyda group of Tundra Nenets who live in the Gyda rural township of the Tazovsky district, located in the Yamalo-Nenets autonomous region. They are mostly traditional nomad reindeer herders, and entire families follow the herd year round (not just in the summer). The group numbers over three thousand, the total population of the Gyda township around 3.5 thousand (the 2010 census reported over 8.6 thousand Nenets in the Tazovsky district, about 54% of total population).

Political actions during the Soviet period, such as collectivization, dispossession of "kulaks" (peasants wealthy enough to hire laborers) and forced re-settlement of nomadic groups in the 1930s, and the introduction of compulsory education of children in boarding schools, brought drastic changes in the economy and everyday life of the Arctic nomadic populations. In especially remote areas that were largely left out of the industrialization process, such as the Tazovsky district of the Yamalo-Nenets autonomous region, the Nenets maintained their traditional nomadic way of life far longer than most indigenous populations. However, active development of large-scale oil and gas projects beginning in the second half of the 20th century have become a major factor affecting these traditional ways of life. The collateral effect of these projects was the arrival of large numbers of non-*Nenetz* people along with their ways of life.

To define ethnic identity, the following tool was used: The "Types of Ethnic Identity" questionnaire [22]. This tool, similar to measures identified by Phinney [23] was developed with cultural relevance in mind to research questions around ethnic identity in the Russian Federation and former Soviet states. The "Types of Ethnic Identity" questionnaire serves to examine and assess ethnic consciousness and its transformations in the context of inter-ethnic tension based on an ethnocentrism scale. The components of the questionnaire are grouped to measure self-identification, sense of belonging, attitudes towards one's own ethnic group and others and lastly, participation in cultural activities.

Based on the respondents' scores, the tool specifies six types of ethnic identity:

1. **Ethnic nihilism**. A form of hypo-identity, when one becomes distanced from his/her own ethnic group and looks for stable social and psychological niches selected by non-ethnic criteria.
2. **Ethnic indifference**. Erosion of ethnic identity, with ethnic affiliation becoming unclear and losing relevance.
3. **Norm (positive ethnic identity**). Positive attitude toward both one's own ethnic group and other ethnic groups. In a stable and prospering multiethnic society, positive ethnic identity is a norm shared by the vast majority. As it shapes an optimal balance of tolerance toward one's own and other ethnic groups, the positive ethnic identity can be regarded as a condition required for the ethnic group to enjoy autonomy and stability, and for the multi-ethnic environment to develop

peaceful cross-culture interactions.

Increasing destructive tendencies in inter-ethnic relations are associated with the hyper-identity transformations of ethnic consciousness. In the questionnaire, hyper-identity refers to three types:

4. **Ethnic egoism.** In a benign form, it may be expressed verbally, when one perceives everything in the optic of the "my people" concept. It may provoke tension and irritation in situations of contact with people of other ethnic groups, or induce to deem one's own people entitled to solve its problems at the expense of others.

5. **Ethnic isolationism.** Assurance of the superiority of one's own people; assumed need to "purify" the ethnic culture; negativity toward inter-ethnic marriages; xenophobia.

6. **Ethnic fanaticism** - willingness to take any action in the name of the ethnic interests (which can we interpreted in many different ways), up to ethnic purges or denial of rights to use resources and social privileges to other ethnic groups; primacy of the ethnic rights of the group over the human rights; condonation of any sacrifices to be made for the welfare of one's own people.

Ethnic egoism, ethnic isolationism, and ethnic fanaticism are degrees of hyperbolic ethnic identity characterized by discrimination in inter-ethnic relations. In the context of cross-ethnic interactions, the hyper-identity is manifested by various forms of ethnic intolerance, ranging from mere irritation against members of other ethnic groups to the promotion of restricting their rights and opportunities, to aggression and violence toward another ethnic group, and even to genocide [22].

This measurement tool, whose reliability has been tested across several studies [22] allows for the assessment of ethnic self-consciousness and how it changes in the context of multi-ethnic environments such as those experienced by the students of indigenous populations who attend boarding schools in cities with different ethnicities.

One of the indicators of ethnic identity transformation is the growth of ethnic zero tolerance (intolerance). Tolerance/intolerance, identified as the one of the main problems of inter-ethnic relations in the conditions of growing tension between peoples, was a key psychological variable in the design of this questionnaire. The ethnic tolerance level of the respondent is estimated on the basis of the following criteria: the level of "negativity" in relation to their own and other ethnic groups, the threshold of emotional response to other ethnic environments, the severity of aggressive and hostile reactions in relation to other groups.

As a result of a series of pilot studies, indicators were selected that interpret the end of the phrase: "I love my.., I consider…., I find…". Indicators reflect the attitude to their own and others' ethnic groups in different situations of inter-ethnic interaction (see Appendix 1). Respondents' answers are translated into points according to a Likert scale: agree – 4 points, rather agree- 3 points, 50/50 – 2 points, rather disagree- 1 point, disagree – 0 points. The number of points for each question indicates a particular identity type. Depending on the amount of points scored by the subject for a particular scale (possible range – from 0 to 20 points), it is possible to estimate the corresponding type of ethnic identity, and the comparison of the results on all scales allows to distinguish one or more dominant types. The values range from: 0 – no trend; 1-4 – low rate; 5-8 – reduced rate; 9-12 – average; 13-16 – the higher; 17-20 high rate (see Appendix 2). The higher the cumulative value, the greater the identification with that particular ethnic identity.

3 Results and Discussion

The results obtained with the "Types of Ethnic Identity" questionnaire are presented in

Table 1.

Table 1. Ethnic Identity types appearing in Tundra Nenets male and female students attending classes 8-11.

Ethnic Identity types	Classes 8 and 9		Classes 10 and 11	
	M	**F**	**M**	**F**
Positive Ethnic Identity	14.99	3.37	15.23	4.01
Ethnic Fanaticism	12.2	4.64	10.35	3.16
Ethnic Indifference	10.86	3.87	11.01	3.43
Ethnic Egoism	9.99	4.36	8.45	4.64
Ethnic Isolationism	9.22	3.76	7.29	3.19
Ethnic Nihilism	6.72	3.56	5.51	3.49

The type of ethnic identity prevalent for adolescent boys in both classes 8-9 and classes 10-11 is 'positive ethnic identity'. The values represent a strong positive attitude toward one's own ethnic identity and with a positive attitude toward other peoples. This can be seen as a welcome trend as it indicates an acceptance of oneself and of others who may not be of the same ethnic group. In multi-cultural societies this is an optimal personal and social outlook as it can be the foundation for ensuring cooperation with others, the ability to work in multi-ethnic groups and tolerance for difference. The adolescent boys maintained this strong 'positive ethnic' identity across both grades; in fact by the 10 and 11 grades it had increased in strength. In comparison the values for adolescent girls reflect a low rate of 'positive ethnic identity' across both grades, although by 10 and 11 grade it represents the next highest value. The difference in the values between genders is quite significant across all categories. The second most frequent ethnic identity type in Nenets boys and girls attending classes 8 and 9 is 'ethnic fanaticism'. However, in the classes 10 and 11 the average frequency of this type decreases for both boys and girls, giving way to 'ethnic indifference' for boys and 'ethnic egoism' for girls. The of type of identity of 'ethnic egoism' implies a more benign but still relatively negative attitude towards others.

Thus, the results of ethnic identity diagnostics in Tundra Nenets high school students show a strong background of positive ethnic identity (acceptance of themselves and others as belonging to different ethnic groups), along with a number of students featuring clear signs of ethnic fanaticism, ethnic egoism ethnic indifference with equally clear gender differences.

Gender Differences (Table 1)

4 Discussion

The most striking result of this research study is the overall low scores given by the adolescent girls to all of the questions asking them about ethnic identity. While the adolescent boys rated their responses very definitively, the girls clearly did not. Of course the logical question is 'why'? Why would there be such a different response based on genders between adolescent boys and girls in this population of Tundra Nenets students?

Without a qualitative research component to this study it is impossible to answer this question. As researchers we can only speculate on the reasons why based on existing knowledge of the position, roles and expectations of women in indigenous or traditional societies. Previous studies of indigenous populations of the Russian Siberian Arctic Region [2; 24; 11 and others] have described the strong role that women play in maintaining traditions and the cultural life of their societies; women are also primarily responsible for maintaining kinship and family networks on which entire traditional social and economic structures are based.

Is it possible that the unintended consequence of global modernizing trends are eroding the strong ethnic identity of women? Do the results of this study imply conflicting feelings about ethnic identity in the face of modern life? Many of the social and economic incentives provided to the indigenous populations have also largely benefited male members of those societies; are the adolescent girls in this study expressing their discontent with having the carry tradition without the benefits of greater access to resources and opportunities? It is unclear and more research is needed.

Preliminary conclusions that can be drawn from this study reflect similar findings by Wexler [25] in a study of the Inupiat (Alaska Native) youth where young women were more likely to reconfigure notions of culture and gender identity in order to meet the challenges in their lives.

The blurring of ethnic identity among girls, to a greater extent more than among boys, may indicate their greater readiness to master the economic roles offered by the global society. For example, the identity of the "working woman" or "entrepreneurial small business owner" familiar across all societies around the world thanks to globalization and social media as avenues of female economic success. In contrast, the traditional socio-economic female roles may seem less attractive. On the contrary, the male traditional socio-economic roles available to the Nenets (the very masculine and well-defined role of a reindeer breeder, fisherman, hunter) may be more attractive to adolescent boys.

At the beginning of the 2000s, some researchers suggested that reindeer herders, such as the Nenets, were more successfully preserving their ethnic identity, compared to the entire SNPN pool [24]. The results of this study, however, cast some doubts on these conclusions. The effect of factors such as the transition to a market economy, emergence of new technologies and media that reduce the remoteness and inaccessibility of the region are clearly having an impact. Hitherto isolated territories are increasingly being drawn into the global context [26], producing drastic changes in the lives of the Nenets and shaping the long-term processes of ethnic identity restructuring. Critical to consider is how the processes of globalization impact individuals on a personal level and in turn, impact their ability to survive in an environment that they have mastered for thousands of years. The implication of gender differences is even more critical to understand; will girls adjust better to life outside of their native culture? Do they view their native culture as limiting in what it has to offer women in terms of status, career, opportunities? What do the women want?

4.1 Limits of the Study

There are some limits to this study. The sample size of the population is small; although 90% of the students in both the 8-9 and 10-11 grades agreed to participate in the study the total number of respondents is 78. The study also focuses on one population of Tundra Nenets people, those of the Gyda rural township. As with many indigenous populations, there are within group differences that cannot be accounted for by this study. A study based on one population cannot be generalizable to all Nenets or for that matter to indigenous populations overall. It also must be noted that ethnic identity scales have not

been widely used on assessing indigenous populations' views of their ethnic identity and therefore the validity of using these instruments is also questionable. Follow-up studies should include qualitative data such as interviews with individuals, focus groups or the use of other research tools that might capture respondents' views in other than survey format. Such studies might corroborate or provide greater depth to the quantitative data. The administration of this questionnaire was conducted over a limited period of time, so it is also difficult to ascertain whether or not study participants were providing answers they believed the researchers were looking for.

The study results of the "Types of ethnic identity" questionnaire show that across grades 8-9 and 10-11adolescent Nenets boys maintain a positive ethnic identity. This means that they are and remain strongly identified with their ethnic group and derive satisfaction and well-being from this positive identity. These results indicate that for adolescent Nenets boys the life of the tundra provides them with a strong personal and social identification which in turn suggests that Nenets culture can survive into the modern world. The situation of adolescent Nenets girls, however, is different. On the questionnaires of ethnic identity the girls consistently rate their responses well below their male counterparts. What does this mean? More research on indigenous adolescents, especially girls is necessary in order to understand how these societies are coping with the global transformations impacting their ways of life. It is inconceivable that an indigenous population can survive if only one half of the population derives strong positive associations with traditional ways of living. No amount of economic, political or social interventions can sustain such gender imbalances. The question of how women see themselves, their roles and their expectations in the context of tundra life need to be examined.

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Appendix 1 Types of ethnic identity (G. U. Soldatova, S. V. Ryzhova). Determine your agreement or disagreement with these statements: agree; rather agree; 50/50; rather disagree; disagree.

1. I prefer the way of life of my people, but open to others
2. I believe that interethnic marriages destroy the nationality
3. I often feel superior to people of other nationalities
4. I believe that the rights of the nation are always above human rights
5. I believe that in everyday communication nationality does not matter
6. I prefers the way of life of my people only
7. I do not usually hide my nationality
8. I believe that true friendship can develop between people of the same nationality only
9. I often feel shame for people of my nationality
10. I believe that any means is good to protect the interests of my people
11. I do not give any preference to national culture, including my own
12. I often feels the superior of my people over others
13. I love my people, but respect the language and culture of other nations
14. I consider it strictly necessary to preserve the purity of the nation
15. I find it difficult to get along with people of my nationality
16. I believe that interaction with people of other nationalities is often a source of trouble
17. I am indifferent to my nationality
18. I feel tension when I hear other languages
19. I am ready to deal with a representative of any nation, despite national differences
20. I believe that my people have the right to solve their problems at the expense of other peoples
21. I often feel inferior because of my nationality
22. I consider my people more gifted and developed than other nations
23. I believe that people of other nationalities should be limited in the right of residence in my national territory
24. I get annoyed at close communicating with people of other nationalities
25. I always find an opportunity to negotiate peacefully in an international dispute
26. I consider it necessary to "cleanse" the culture of my people from the influence of other cultures
27. I do not respect my people

28. I believe that on my land all the rights to use natural and social resources should belong to my people only
29. I have never taken interethnic problems seriously
30. I believe that my people are not better and not worse than other nationalities

Appendix 2

1. Annihilism (3, 9, 15, 21, 27).
2. Ethnic indifference (5, 11, 17, 29, 30).
3. Norm (positive ethnic identity) (1, 7, 13, 19, 25).
4. Ethno-egoism (6, 12, 16, 18, 24).
5. Ethnic isolationism (2, 8, 20, 22, 26).
6. Ethnofanatism (4, 10, 14, 23, 28).