

# Ethnic Identity of Adolescent Nenets Girls in Contemporary Learning Environment

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**Abstract.** *The article is concerned with the study of ethnic identity of adolescent Nenets girls as representatives of the indigenous peoples inhabiting the Russian High North. The authors report the findings of empirical research conducted in reliance upon the Ethnic Identity Types approach developed by G.U. Soldatova and S.V. Ryzhova. The paper describes dynamics in the development of ethnonihilism, ethnic indifference, positive ethnic identity, ethnic egoism, ethno-isolationism, and ethno-fanaticism in the Nenets girls during their adolescent years (aged 12 to 15). The article identifies the peculiarities of ethnic identity of the Nenets girls as compared to that of the similar age Russian girls residing in the Arkhangelsk Region of the Russian Federation. The authors define the specifics of the learning environment typical for the adolescent representatives of the High North indigenous peoples.*

**Keywords** – *ethnic identity, Nenets girls, learning environment\*.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The modern world is described in terms of two opposing trends: on the one hand, globalization is on the rise, but on the other hand, there is an upsurge of national self-awareness among the representatives of different ethnic groups [9]. This results in aggravation of the problems originating from intensive intercultural interaction. Consequently, a person locked in a multicultural environment is required to develop new competences related to the task of accepting another culture while trying to preserve the native one. Such issues are not irrelevant to Russia, which is home to both indigenous small-numbered peoples and Russian nationals [4].

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Subarctic territories of the Russian European North are inhabited by both Russians and representatives of the

indigenous small-numbered peoples, including the Nenets. While having their own unique culture and authentic lifestyle, the Nenets are still involved in the multiethnic social and learning environment. It shall be noted that the process of personality development in the representatives of indigenous small-numbered peoples is largely determined by the specifics of their ethnic identity formation [7]. The very concept of ethnic identity can be interpreted as a multidimensional and multifaceted phenomenon comprising self-identification, awareness of affiliation with a certain ethnocultural group, and allegiance to one's ethnic community [8].

With regard to the process of ethnic identity formation, it is necessary to place particular emphasis on the age of adolescence, which is the most important period for the person's identity development [8, 9]. The narrative of ethnocultural peculiarities inherent to one's community as compared to other ethnic groups is shaped at this particular age, along with the judgments about different ethnoses [5]. At about the same time, adolescents become aware of their affiliation with the ethnic group, and develop their emotional attitude towards it [1].

The ethnic identity undergoes changes throughout the age of adolescence. Young adolescents tend to be ethnocentric: they often favour their own ethnic group and view others negatively. In senior adolescents, the structural components of ethnic identity are more harmonized [3, 8].

The ethnic identity of indigenous small-numbered peoples may be different from the one developed by the representatives of the dominant ethnic group. Typically, ethnic minorities are more accurate and quicker in forming ideas about the peculiarities of their own ethnic group as well as of the surrounding ones [2]. Research devoted to the ethnic identity of adolescent representatives of the indigenous small-numbered peoples living in the Russian Federation is scarce, which is why the knowledge concerning identity formation processes in the members of ethnic minorities is fragmentary. Pursuant thereto, the authors conducted empirical research into the ethnic identity

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of the adolescent Nenets as representatives of the indigenous peoples inhabiting the Russian High North.

The research objective was to study the ethnic identity of adolescent Nenets girls as representatives of the indigenous peoples inhabiting the Russian High North. While accomplishing the objectives, the authors came up with the following hypotheses.

- The authors assumed that the ethnic identity of Nenets girls is inconstant throughout the age of adolescence, with its features demonstrating varying degrees of manifestation.

- The authors also assumed that ethnic identity of adolescent girls of the Nenets nationality is different from that typical for their Russian peers.

While testing these hypotheses in the course of empirical research, the authors discovered that there is certain dynamics in the development of ethnic identity of the Nenets girls during the age of adolescence, and that ethnic identity of the Nenets girls aged 12 to 13 and 14 to 15 is substantially different from that of Russian girls of the same age.

### III. METHOD

Respondents were selected among the adolescent Nenets at the age of 12 to 15 living in the Nenets Autonomous Area, as well as among their Russian peers living in the Arkhangelsk Region. A total of 103 respondents participated in the research. Of these, 45 were Nenets girls and 58 were Russian girls. There were 22 Nenets girls aged from 12 to 13 and 23 Nenets girls aged from 14 to 15. There were also 28 Russian girls aged from 12 to 13 and 30 Russian girls aged from 14 to 15.

Empirical research was conducted within the framework of the project supported by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research and devoted to the *Study of identity in adolescent representatives of indigenous peoples inhabiting the Arctic territories of the Russian European North in contemporary social and educational space*. Empirical data were gathered from March through May 2018. Empirical research was pursued during the scientific expedition to the settlements located in the Nenets Autonomous Area (the villages of Krasnoye and Amderma and the town of Naryan-Mar). Diagnostic testing was organized at the school premises due to the fact that most of the Nenets adolescents live in the tundra together with their parents, lead a nomadic life and are transported by helicopters to the education institutions of large urban localities only for the period of studies.

The Nenets Autonomous Area Department of Education, Culture and Sports gave its consent to conduct the research. The authors negotiated the research procedure with the administration of each secondary school. Pupils' parents and legal representatives gave their written consent allowing the adolescents to take part in the research.

The authors relied upon the psychodiagnostic approach of *Ethnic Identity Types* developed by G.U. Soldatova and S.V. Ryzhova [6]. As part of the research, the respondents were given 30 statements, reflecting attitudes towards their own or other ethnic groups in different situations of intercultural interaction. The respondents were asked to assess to which extent they agreed with the statements according to the following scale: "I agree" - 4 points, "I rather agree" - 3 points, "I partly agree and partly disagree" - 2 points, "I rather disagree" - 1 point, "I disagree" - 0 points. Afterwards, the number of points was counted for each of six scales, reflecting different identity types: ethnonihilism (denial of one's own ethnic identity), ethnic indifference (uncertainty about one's own ethnic identity and indifference to ethnic identity of others), positive ethnic identity (respect towards any ethnic identity), ethnic egoism (emphasis on the advantages of one's ethnic group), ethno-isolationism (confidence in supremacy of one's ethnic group), and ethno-fanaticism (willingness to aggressive actions for the sake of one's ethnic group). In dependence to the score demonstrated by each of the respondents regarding each of the scales, the authors concluded about the degree of manifestation of a particular ethnic identity type.

Empirical data processing was conducted by means of the SPSS Statistics 22 software. In order to determine the dynamics in the development of ethnic identity of the Nenets girls during the age of adolescence, the authors resorted to the unpaired two sample Student's *t*-test. This method allowed to identify significant discrepancies in the degree of manifestation of certain ethnic identity types among the respondents of different age groups. The unpaired two sample Student's *t*-test was also used to define the specific features of ethnic identity in the Nenets adolescents as opposed to that of the Russian nationals of the same age. This method allowed to identify significant discrepancies in the degree of manifestation of certain ethnic identity types among the Nenets and Russian respondents.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Having analyzed the findings, the authors were able to reply to the questions articulated in the hypotheses. The authors assumed that the ethnic identity of Nenets girls is inconstant throughout the age of adolescence, with its features demonstrating varying degrees of manifestation. While testing this hypothesis in the course of the empirical research, the authors identified the dynamics in the development of ethnic identity of Nenets females (Fig. 1).

The Nenets girls aged from 12 to 15 display increased ethnic indifference ( $p < 0.05$ ) and positive ethnic identity. The rates of ethnonihilism ( $p < 0.05$ ), ethnic egoism ( $p < 0.01$ ), ethno-isolationism ( $p < 0.01$ ) and ethno-fanaticism ( $p < 0.01$ ) are lower. The results reveal that national affiliation of the surrounding people is gradually becoming less significant for the Nenets girls, while at the same time confidence in supremacy and advantages of their own ethnic group is growing weak. The girls demonstrate increased acceptance of their own ethnic identity.

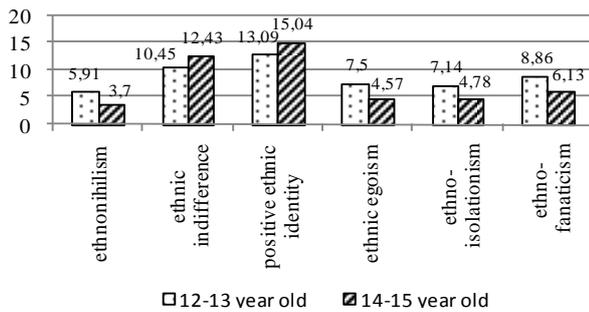


Fig. 1. Dynamics in development of ethnic identity of Nenets girls aged from 12 to 15.

The next hypothesis assumed that the ethnic identity of adolescent girls of the Nenets nationality is different from that typical for their Russian peers. Indeed, the research findings proved that ethnic identity of the Nenets girls aged from 12 to 13 and from 14 to 15 is substantially different from that typical for the Russian girls of the same age (Fig. 2, 3).

Positive ethnic identity and ethnic indifference prevail in the Nenets girls aged from 12 to 13, although there is a stark contrast regarding positive ethnic identity factor when compared to their Russian peers ( $p < 0.05$ ). This means that the Nenets girls aged from 12 to 13 are less tolerant towards their own and other people's ethnic identity than their Russian mates.

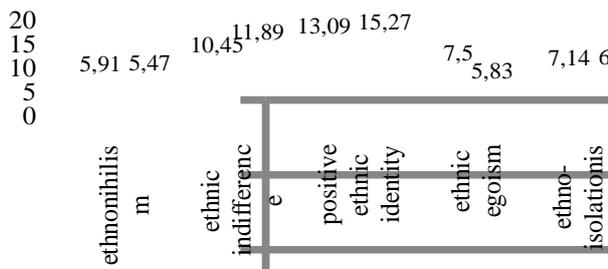


Fig. 2. Ethnic identity of girls aged from 12 to 13

Similarly, positive ethnic identity and ethnic indifference prevail in the Nenets girls aged from 14 to 15, but there is quite a difference regarding positive ethnic identity factor when compared to the Russian girls of the same age ( $p < 0.01$ ). This means that the Nenets girls aged from 14 to 15 are less tolerant towards their own and other people's ethnic groups than their Russian peers.

Thus, it is possible to deduce a general trend in the development of ethnic identity of the Nenets girls during the age of adolescence, and this trend distinguishes the Nenets adolescents from the Russian ones. For instance, the Nenets girls are less respectful towards representatives of other ethnicities. It might be attributed to their insufficient awareness of cultural features and traditions of other ethnic groups, as well as their limited experience of interaction with the members of other ethnoses. Such discrepancies could also emerge due to the confinement of the Nenets people within the subarctic territories resulting in the distinctiveness of social and learning environment.

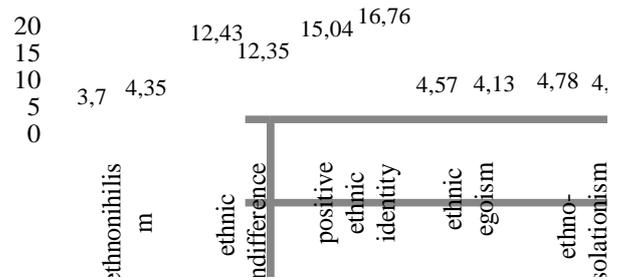


Fig. 3. Ethnic identity of girls aged from 14 to 15

For example, some of the adolescent members of the indigenous peoples live and study in the boarding schools because their parents come from nomadic reindeer herding communities. At the age of six, when there is time to prepare for school, the Nenets children are taken away from their nomad camps to the boarding schools in the large urban localities. Starting from the age of seven, children are sent to the boarding schools annually. In late August and early September, helicopters gather schoolchildren across the tundra. Pupils stay in the boarding schools from September through May, and return to their tundra families for the summer. Such unique social and learning conditions exercise their influence upon the formation of ethnic identity in the Nenets adolescents.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Thus, having researched into the ethnic identity of the adolescent Nenets as representatives of the indigenous peoples inhabiting the Russian High North, the authors discovered that there is certain dynamics in the development of the ethnic identity of the Nenets girls during the age of adolescence. National affiliation of the surrounding people is gradually becoming less significant for the Nenets girls aged from 12 to 15, while at the same time their confidence in supremacy and advantages of their own ethnic group is growing weak and they are demonstrating increased acceptance of their own ethnic identity.

The difference between ethnic identities of the Nenets girls and their Russian peers is that the Nenets girls aged from 12 to 13 and from 14 to 15 show less tolerance towards their own and other people's ethnic groups. In the authors' opinion, such differences could emerge due to the unique social and learning conditions caused by the confinement of the Nenets people within the subarctic territories.

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