

Identity issues among young adult and middle-aged Anglo-Indians

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ABSTRACT

Anglo-Indian community came into existence as a result of the intermarriages between the British East India Company employees and native women, is said to have experienced both, a preferential treatment over the Indians and being the target of marginalization and discrimination for generations. With India attaining its Independence, Anglo-Indians not only lost their stand on their reasons for living in India, but also faced socio-economic threats. Also, a major threat was posed to their identity, leading to the emergence of severe issues in identity in them. The present study titled, 'Identity Issues among Anglo-Indians', is aimed at studying the identity issues faced by the Anglo-Indians, as well as their socio-cultural experiences, from a psycho-social dimension. The participants of the study include 22 young adults and 28 middle-aged Anglo-Indians, recruited using snow-ball sampling method. The Semi-Structured Interview Schedule on Identity Issues among Anglo-Indians, developed by the researcher (2018) was used as a tool for data collection. A thematic analysis of the obtained data was conducted, which resulted in the emergence of various themes such as the withdrawal from social situations which made them feel uncomfortable; avoidance of trusting social relationships; retaliation in response to the comments received and other such.

Keywords: *Anglo-Indians, Identity Issues, Socio-cultural experiences, Psycho-social dimension.*

The British East India Company during its colonial rule on India, encouraged the intermarriages between the employees of the East India Company and the native Indian women. In fact, it was done to an extent that the East India Company even offered a stipend to Indian mothers upon the baptism of any offspring from an East India Company employee (Griffiths and Kris 2013). This was seen as an effort towards creating the 'English-speaking native workforce' for the British and as a result, the Anglo-Indian community, socially enjoyed the status of being a bridge between the European and the Indian cultures. Economically, they were privileged with preferential treatment at work and this socio-

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economic status of theirs, more evidently led to the development of a psychologically superior sense of self and identity among the members of the community. But, with India waking up to its independence, the world of the Anglo-Indians came breaking down.

Almost every aspect of their life, including their identity was put at stake. The community was left with no apparent purpose to continue their stay in the Indian sub-continent. Unfortunately, most of their efforts to relocate to the land of Europe and identify themselves with their European roots were also futile. They were not just 'not welcomed' in the European land, but were also looked down upon for even making such an effort. In India, socially they felt dethroned as they had no two cultures to bridge between anymore. Economically, not just the preferential treatment at work was lost, but to most who worked for the Raj, their work and careers too saw an end. The next blow came to their identity when Hindi was declared as the national language in India. The Anglo-Indians who had considered their English-speaking abilities as their greatest and most unique strength, now were no more benefited from that in the social and professional spheres. This experiences of rejection from the Europeans, social dethronement and withdrawal of economic privileges, resulted in the loss of their superior sense of self, affected them psychologically.

The paradigm changes in their self-identity developed into a state of confusion and uncertainty about oneself, giving raise to multiple issues in identity, among the members of the Anglo-Indian community. These issues further aggravated when most Anglo-Indian families migrated to countries such as Australia, Canada and others over the period of time. The one's who stayed back in India, largely remained as they could either not afford the migration of their families or could not find enough facilities to make the move. They more or less felt trapped in a land that they did not desire, than living in a country of their origin. Moreover, they felt inferior and helpless to the families that had migrated. These feelings, could not be removed by any provisions that were made by the Indian Constitution, especially to accommodate and address the interests of the Anglo-Indians. They felt alien to such a great extent that no assurance could comfort them enough, and thus they continued to remain a segregated, marginal and detached community. Castells (2008) encapsulates the issue by stating that, in the times of aggressive community competitions and devolution of forces, the Anglo-Indians, rather than effectively partaking in the public sphere, experience the ill effects of passivity, lack of enthusiasm and estrangement, having barely any importance and space in the domains of political life. In fact, they would perceive themselves as being kept out of all the activities of the public life and from the process of decision-making.

These experiences of uncertainty, confusion, alienation, and loss of social prominence leading to the raise of identity issues continued to exist across generations. In the present day, these issues are entangled with not only the development of an identity and sense of self but also factors such as nationality and religion, due to conversions and inter-religious marriages. Also, to the current world, the facts about the emergence and the existence of Anglo-Indian communities are lesser known, which makes it difficult for the Anglo-Indian individuals to identify themselves and establish their identity. Thus, the identity issues among Anglo-Indians is not only long-standing, but also multi-fold, which has varied with generations and developed new facets.

The review of relevant literature reveals that, even though there have been studies on the marginality issues of the Anglo-Indians, the study of these issues from a psycho-social perspective is not extensive enough. Also, the study of identity issues in particular becomes

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relevant in the present-day context as these issues continues to persist and affect individuals and the community, both psychologically and socially. The study of identity issues not only gives the psychological dimension to the problem, but doing it in comparison between nearly two different generations will help us understand the pattern of change better and also come up with ideas to tackle these issues in ways specific and most effective to each generation specifically.

The present study, is aimed at studying the identity issues faced by the young adults and middle-aged Anglo-Indians, owing to their cross-cultural identity from a psycho-social dimension. It is an effort to capture their socio-cultural experiences in their own words.

METHODOLOGY

Objective

To examine the presence of Identity Issues among young adult and middle-aged Anglo-Indians.

Operational Definition

Identity Issues: In the present study identity issues refers to an experience of uncertainty and confusion, in which a person's sense of identity becomes insecure, specifically owing to their Anglo-Indian origins.

Research design

Sample Survey Research Design was adopted for the study.

Sample

Snowball sampling method was adopted for the study. The sample consisted of 60 participants, both male and female, belonging to the Anglo-Indian community and was collected from the cities of Bangalore, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Chennai and Mumbai. The participants hailing from various localities of Bangalore were met in person, individually, where as participants from other cities were contacted through telephone and mail.

Table 01: Sample Composition

Category	Age Range (in years)	Gender Distribution	Total
Young Adult Anglo-Indians	20-35	Males 08 Females 14	22
Middle-Aged Anglo-Indians	45-60	Males 13 Females 15	28

Inclusion Criteria

Anglo-Indians whose earlier, a minimum of two generations have lived in the Indian sub-continent.

Tool

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule on Identity Issues among Anglo-Indians: A semi-structured interview schedule consisting of 8 questions, which is seen to have a direct connection with the psychological and social aspects of marginality and aids to study the

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identity issues across generations, was developed by the researcher in 2018. The tool consisted of four forced choice questions and four questions requiring quantifiable responses. Along with the questions pertaining to the above-mentioned area, the researcher was free to explore by further enquiry of the responses, as the tool used for the collection of data was a semi-structured interview schedule.

Validity

The validity of the Semi-Structured Interview Schedule on Identity Issues among Anglo-Indians, was established by the method of expert validation. The copy of the interview schedule was sent for review and validation to 4 experts in the field of Psychology and 3 experts in the field of History, who were asked to rate the relevance of each question to the particular area and the entire study in total. The ratings received were cumulated and a mean of ratings was calculated for each item. Since no item received a rating lesser than 50% of the aggregate, all the items were retained, but a few qualitative corrections suggested were incorporated before the questionnaires were used for data collection.

Procedure

Organizations and Associations in the chosen geographical area, specifically formulated for the Anglo-Indian population was approached and the purpose and the nature of the study was explained to them. After ascertaining the required permissions from the organizations, contact details of its members were procured and the members were approached in person and through the means of telephone and e-mails. Further contacts of other participants were collected from initial participants through the method of snowball sampling.

Having sought the contact details, every participant was contact individually and after an introductory conversation, clear descriptions regarding the purpose of the study and its implications were explained them. After receiving the informed consent for participation and recording of responses, the participants were interviewed using the Semi-Structured Interview Questionnaire, either in person or by using the online methods of data collection and supportive information was collected by means of further questioning and clarifications. The responses of the participants were recorded and compiled for further analysis.

Analysis

A thematic analysis of the obtained data was conducted and the themes and subthemes emerged were listed and discussed with instances.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the participants’ response to the Semi-Structured Interview Schedule on Identity Issues among Anglo-Indians is discussed in terms of each question and the sub-themes emerged out of the responses as follows:

Q1. Have you ever experienced any difficulty in introducing yourself and establishing your identity in terms of an Anglo-Indian?

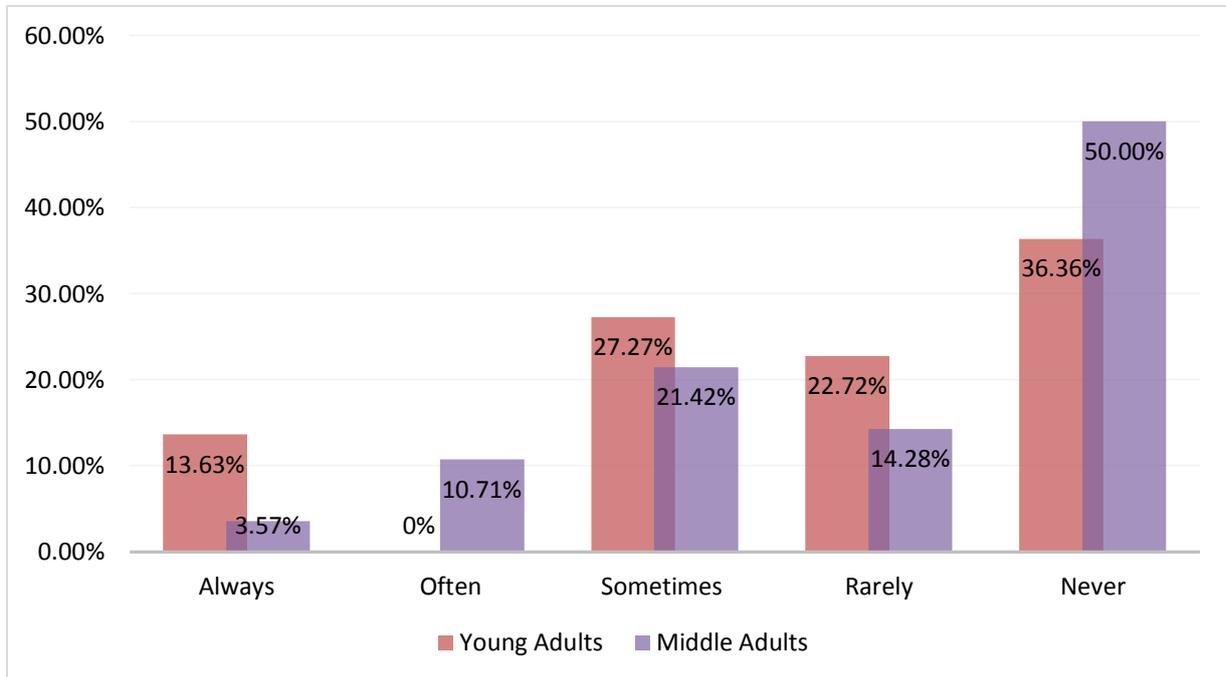


Figure 1: Difficulty in terms of establishing their identity among Anglo-Indians

The participants were posed with the question, “Have you ever experienced any difficulty in introducing yourself and establishing your identity in terms of an Anglo-Indian?”, to know if they experienced any sort of hindrance or difficulty in terms of establishing their identity in social circles or in the professional sphere. As the graph represents, nearly half of them responded that they have never come across such a situation and have always been comfortable with carrying and establishing their identity. But, there were also responses which were marked by an additional explanation to their agreement with the experience of difficulty, that, they often felt left-out or estranged when they tried introducing themselves as an Anglo-Indian and also were made to feel out of place. Thus, the results show that, almost equal number of Anglo-Indians can be spotted who are comfortable with establishing their identity as those who have faced a difficulty in doing so and it can be spotted that the young adults are seen to be facing a greater difficulty, in comparison to the middle adults, though the difference seems not entirely significant.

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Q.2 *Have you met instances in which you have become uncomfortable or insecure among your peers or in social situation because of your Anglo-Indian identity?*

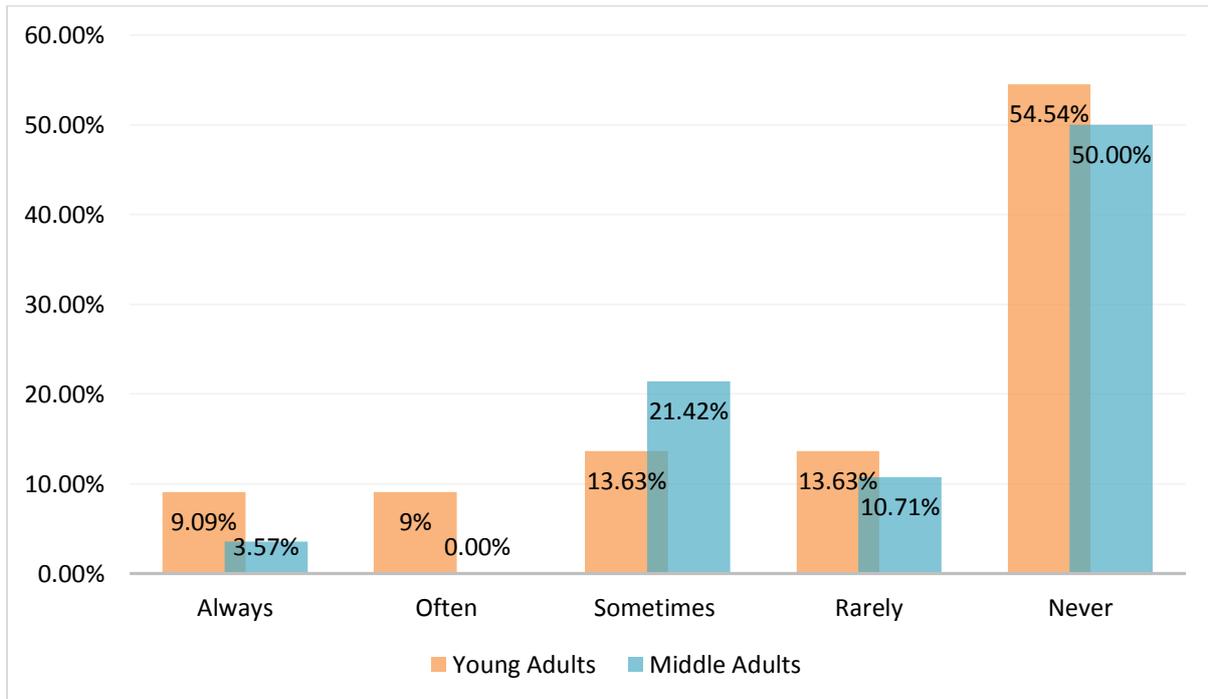


Figure 2: *Experience of discomfort or insecurity in social situations among Anglo-Indians*

The question, “Have you met instances in which you have become uncomfortable or insecure among your peers or in social situation because of your Anglo-Indian identity?” intended to understand if the participants experienced any sort of discomfort or insecurity in social-situations or among their peers, owing to their cross-cultural identity and if it had a lasting effect on the minds of the participants. The responses as represented by the graph is indicative that, it was least likely for the participants to face any such circumstance among their peers or in social circles. But, among the ones who have been in the position where in they had a hard time convincing their peers that they belonged to the same land and shared the same attitude towards the culture, the impact of the negative experience has been very strong that they reported that, if given an opportunity, they would want to go back to the offenders and speak for themselves one day. Also, there exists no significant difference among young adults and middle adults in their response to the above question.

Q 3: *When you face an uncomfortable situation because of your identity, what would be your feelings or response?*

The above question was posed to the participants, with the objective of learning about the circumstances during which they would feel uncomfortable of their cross-cultural identity, which would make them feel out of place, if it does, and the impact it would have on them, resulting in varied responses. Even though, majority of the participants reported that, they have not come across a situation such as that so far, most of them could come up with what would they feel and react like, under such a circumstance. The responses varied from a simple ignorance to visible fury, involving other shades such as a superficial response like, “Does that even happen to someone? Well, it hasn’t to me so far”, and even the avoidance of the question itself. These responses of the participants, in total could be classified under the below six categories, which are common among young adults and middle adults:

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- **Irrelevant:** Some of the participants opined that the question was of no relevance to them since they had never experienced any such situation, as they were usually looked up to and are not up for such humiliation.
 - “I have never faced any such situation so far.” (*Y16, Y20, M4, M17 etc*)
 - “In nature we are people who create our own weather wherever we go, so we do not get uncomfortable, in fact we have this huge factor of attraction where in other communities’ love to integrate with us more often than not.” (*M 11*)
- **Withdrawal/ Avoidance:** Responses indicating avoidant or withdrawal behaviours were also given by the participants, who said that they would rather prefer walking away from that place and the person and avoid facing them again, if a situation like that was faced. Some participants also noted that they have had faced such discomfort and have been avoidant of such places and situations ever since.
 - “It really makes me feel lost and sad”, “I would act as a reserve person.” (*Y21, Y11*)
 - “It did happen to me at the birthday parties of my orthodox Indian friends when we were in school. Their parents called me a ‘pardesi’ once and I had not known the meaning of the term back then. But, after that instance, I have always stayed away from visiting others’ houses” (*M13*)
- **Ignorance:** Some of the participants also responded that they would like to ignore such negativity around them and move on and one should not be bothered by others’ comments.
- **Retaliation:** While most participants chose to remain avoidant and ignorant of such discomforts faced, a few also said they would definitely retaliate and stand up for themselves and speak in their defence.
 - “Pay them back with the same coin.” (*M5*)
 - “Tell them how better we are.” (*Y14*)
- **Assertiveness:** A few Anglo-Indian young adults and middle adults specifically mentioned that it was necessary to remain calm and assertive under a circumstance of discomfort and they would like to explain themselves and the reasons for them being different from others and also one of the participants mentioned, how it was the humanity that mattered and not the race and the way it would be conveyed to the ones who cause discomfort to them.
 - “Would explain myself and what makes us different” (*Y9*)
 - “Nothing to be uncomfortable about, there can be no other person who is more comfortable than you with your identity.” (*M28*)
- **Frustration:** Evident frustration and annoyance could be spotted in the response of a few participants who explained how out of place it felt whenever they had to establish their identity specifically as an Anglo-Indian and realized that they were being looked down upon for the same.
 - “August 15, every Independence Day of India, it becomes very annoying.” (*Y5*)

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- “I have always felt like asking where did their ancestors come from. I don't understand what gives them the right to look down upon us? Like we don't belong here, amidst their pure Indian homes.” (M9)

Q4. Are there instances where you have faced an ambiguous situation, not knowing where to place yourself under various communal categories?

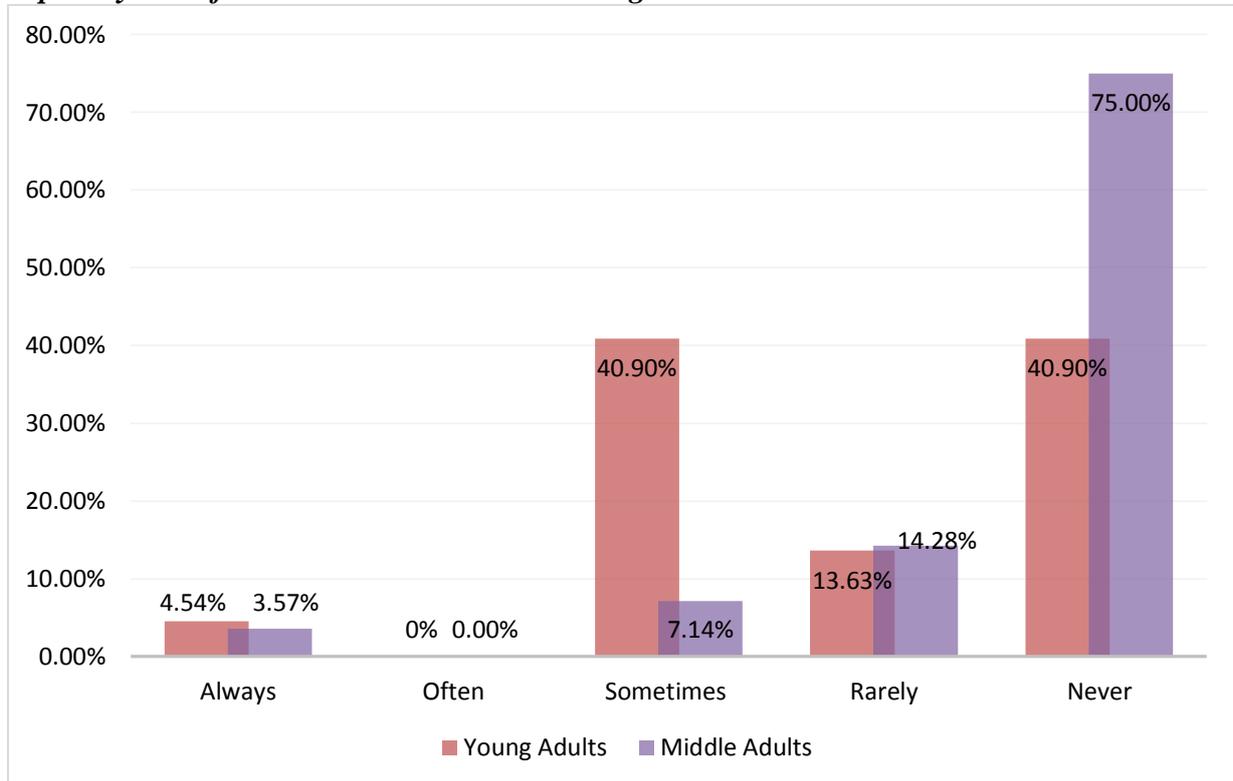


Figure 3: Ambiguity with reference to communal categories among Anglo-Indians

While the participants were posed with the question “Are there instances where you have faced an ambiguous situation, not knowing where to place yourself under various communal categories?”, on their identification with the communal categories, as the graph indicates, most middle-aged Anglo-Indians stated that they haven’t faced such an issue as they all generally belong to the Catholic Christian community unless converted through marriage or by choice. But among Anglo-Indian young adults, it was seen that the likelihood of facing an ambiguous situation was more when compared with that of the middle adults. The young adults faced an additional challenge in case one of their parents was a Catholic Christian (Anglo-Indian) and another belonged to a different communal category (Non-Anglo-Indian). Under such circumstances, participants reported that they had faced difficulties not in terms of paper work or official records but in terms of mixed practices, where in they could not entirely fit into either of the communities and this created a deep sense of ambiguity and confusion in them during their growing up years and at times, those ambiguities surface even now.

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Q5. Have you ever felt uncomfortable in terms of nationality, because of your Anglo-Indian origin?

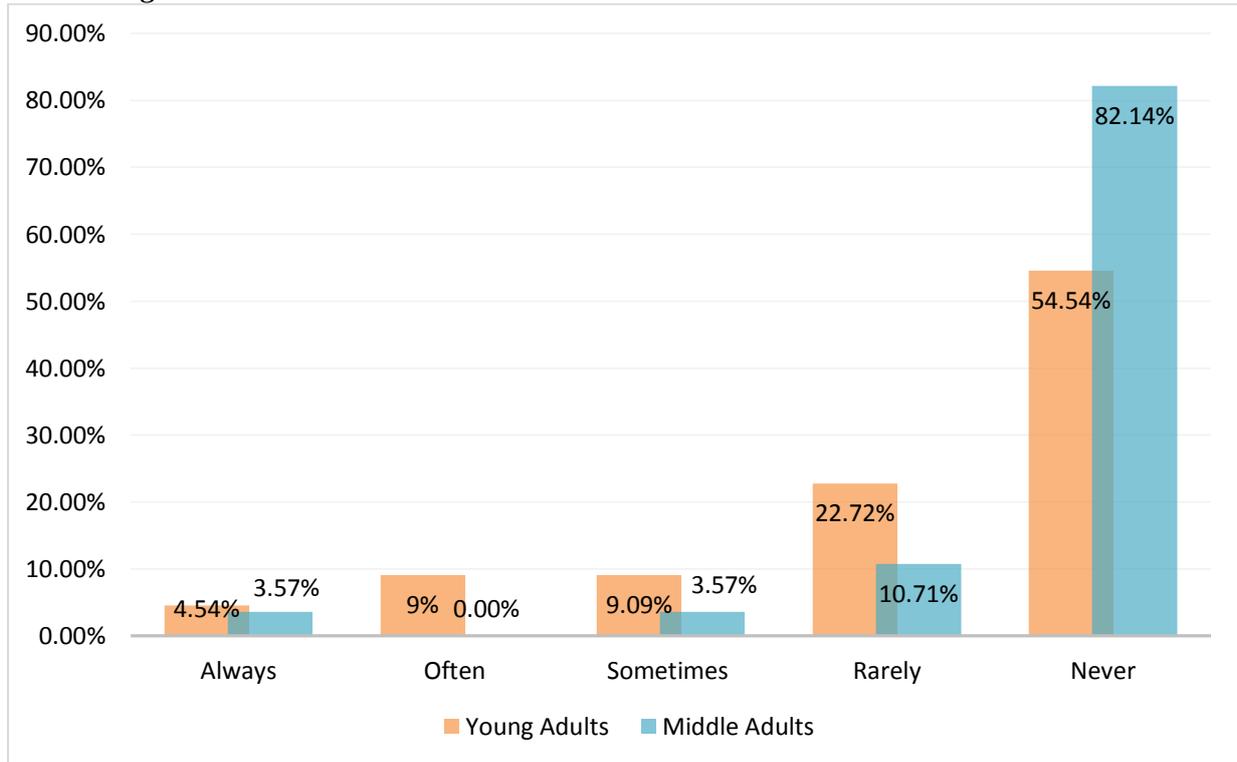


Figure 4: Discomfort faced in terms of Nationality among Anglo-Indians

The above question on nationality and discomfort in expressing or showing their affiliation to the Indian sub-continent was posed to the participants keeping their European origins in the background, to study if their strong affiliations with the land of Europe affects their experience and expression of Indian nationality. The results, as the graph represents were that most Anglo-Indians were happy with their Indian citizenship and were proud to be associated with it, while very few expressed some sort of discomfort or unfavourable attitude towards their nationality and “felt bound by the nations boundaries” as mentioned by them. A few also stated that they, ‘technically belonged to two countries, one by birth and the other by decent and having to follow one nationality sounds unreasonable and unfair to them.’ The difference is visibly seen between the two groups, where in the middle-adults are more comfortable in accepting their Indian nationality, but the young-adults are more sceptical towards unconditional acceptance.

Q6. Are you proud of your Anglo-Indian identity? If yes, give an instance to substantiate the same.

When the Anglo-Indian participants of the study were posed with the above question, with the objective of exploring the dynamics of acceptance of one’s identity, the responses received showed that, except for the 8% of the sample who choose to take a neutral stance and said that they were neither proud nor ashamed, the remaining 92% stated that very extremely proud of their identity and substantiated their response with the following reasons:

- **Communication Skills:** Majority of the participants reported that, having English as their mother tongue gives them a sense of superiority and unmatched confidence in

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their years of education and in the professional life and they profess extraordinary communication skills because of the same.

- “At the time of interviews, I am proud of my name and the accent of English that I can talk with confidence, which I have learnt from my family” (Y21)
- “When it comes to the education field most people look for Anglo Indian teacher for good language, vocabulary and knowledge.” (M26)
- **Workplace Efficiency:** Another major aspect in making Anglo-Indians proud of their identity is their workplace proficiency, coupled with higher qualifications as stated by the participants.
 - “We represent the highest quality of secretaries in India. Have worked with several top companies like Voltas, IBM and Hewlett Packard and received the highest awards.” (M1)
 - “I am proud as an educated and efficient teacher to be wanted in school and looked up to for assistance” (Y20)
- **Contribution to the nation:** The Anglo-Indian participants also took pride in having served the nation to the best of their abilities and in various sectors across generations.
 - “Considering what such a small community has done for the country in terms of education (setting up Anglo Indian schools) and in the defence and the special forces in addition to the railways and other similar government establishments, I am certainly proud of my identity.” (Y4)
 - “We as a community are extremely proud of our identity and know that we are the only community defined in the Indian Constitution, with maximum contribution to the nation be it in terms of Inter State Board for Anglo Indian Education, Music, Sports, Railways, Armed Forces, Nursing, Geological Survey of India, Bollywood, Fashion etc to name a few given the size of our community.”(M11)
- **Unique culture and heritage:** A large group of participants stated that, it is their unique culture, heritage and way of life that makes them proud and distinct from their Indian counterparts and that is celebrated by them greatly.
 - “My identity gives me an opportunity to stand out as unique and distinct and also contribute to the diversity of India's culture.” (M6)
 - “The Anglo-Indian community comes along with a rich heritage that one can carry forward with pride in terms of language, ethnicity, food preferences, which is a blend of both Indian and European culture.” (Y18)

Q7: Have you ever wished you had not belonged to the Anglo- Indian Community? If yes, give an instance.

When the participants were posed with the above question, in order to know if there were instances where in they despised their Anglo-Indian identity and preferred not to be a part of it, owing to the issues in identity and the discomfort that they had faced, the responses of all the participants was a clear ‘no’. While all the participants assertively stated that they have never wished they were not a part of the Anglo-Indian community, some of them also went ahead and justified their stance, except for one response, which indicated that, at times, there

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were fleeting thoughts regarding the above question. The responses can be substantiated with the following statements:

- “I have never regretted my identity. It in fact is a gift, a precious one.” (Y8)
- “Sometimes yes. When I used to be pointed out among my friends, I used to have fleeting thoughts about this.” (M14)

Q8. Describe yourself in terms of an Anglo-Indian individual.

The above question was included under the area of ‘Identity issues’ and posed to the participants with the objective of seeking original responses with respect to a description of the individuals in terms of an Anglo-Indian. While in most circumstances, when questioned directly, there are possibilities that the respondents have reduced the intensity of the response or have come up with what sounds like a more plausible response to the question of identity issue than that of the real one, this question was posed to see if there are any discrepancies in the previous responses. The question also serves another purpose of shedding light on the information that is not covered under the questions posed by the researcher, with reference to the unique features of their identity.

The responses of the participants though varied in expression, could be seen to be of a positive reporting of the unique features, depicting that there are no major identity issues faced by the present generation of Anglo-Indians. The responses can be grouped under various themes as follows:

- **Confident and Smart:** Most respondents mentioned that they have always felt more confident and smarter in terms of planning and decision making and have been praised for the same in the work environment. They opine that the upbringing and quality that is given to almost all Anglo-Indians makes them confident by default and smart enough to handle any given situation
 - “Very confident, speak fluent English having studied in European schools and colleges. Always had good reviews.” (M2)
 - “Smart, Bold and Beautiful. I most certainly leave behind a mark no matter what I walk up to.” (Y17)
- **Excellent Language Ability:** While most respondents were specifically proud of their impeccable ability to speak English better than most other Indians, given the fact that it is their mother tongue, some also took pride in having mastered the vernaculars and mentioned that the command over language is something that makes them very distinct in the first place.
 - “Superior to most others & definitely speak impeccable English” (M21)
 - “Fun loving person with a bash of beautiful English and a good personality” (Y3)
- **Jovial and Sociable:** Being sociable, trustworthy and having a jovial and fun-loving attitude is almost considered to be a hallmark of an Anglo-Indian individual and most of the respondents endorse the same. The responses clearly indicate that these individuals believe in living the moment and enjoying life than cribbing over the past or brooding over the future.
 - “Bright, Friendly, Approachable, Enterprising, Disciplined, Joyous and Jovial” (Y9)
 - “Simple, Humorous, Educated, Smart, Respected, Talented, Family Oriented, Direct, Trustworthy and Sociable” (M11)

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- **Non-Conventional and Liberal:** Most participants were of the opinion that Anglo-Indians have a very open-mind and by far because of the European influence, they are less conservative and non-competitive in comparison to their Indian counterparts.
 - “As an Anglo Indian, I would say that I am very open minded towards things and not a very conservative person” (Y14)
 - “Social, non-conventional, free thinking and open-minded” (M23)
- **Nothing Very Different:** While most participants straight away could list out the distinct features of themselves as an Anglo-Indians, a few also mentioned that they see no particular change, especially after centuries of the first generation came into existence.
 - “I try my very best to be a true citizen of India; I'm proud of this and I always patriotic to India. I don't see how I am anyway different from other Indians after all these years” (M3)
 - “I probably only look like one. Don't really follow the traditional practices personally. I anyway find no difference. Maybe I occasionally just listen to a couple of Anglo songs, and dance the famous jive.” (Y15)

Major findings of the study

1. Young adults experience more difficulty in introducing themselves and establishing their identity in terms of an Anglo-Indian in comparison to middle-aged Anglo-Indians.
2. Middle-aged Anglo-Indians face more discomfort and insecurity among peers and in social situation because of their Anglo-Indian identity in comparison to Anglo-Indians young adults.
3. The response to an uncomfortable social situation by Anglo-Indians is in the form of withdrawal, ignorance, retaliation, assertiveness and frustration.
4. Young adults face greater ambiguity in placing themselves under communal categories in comparison to middle-aged Anglo-Indians.
5. Young adults are more sceptical in the acceptance of their nationality, in comparison to middle-aged Anglo-Indians.
6. Anglo-Indians are proud of their identity in terms of communication skills, workplace efficiency, contribution to the nation, unique culture and heritage.
7. Anglo-Indians have hardly felt a need to move out or disown their community.
8. Anglo-Indians describe their identity in terms of confident, smart, jovial, sociable, non-conventional, fluent and liberal.

CONCLUSION

The Anglo-Indian community has been a part of the Indian sub-continent for well over a century and has been through the process of colonialism and Indian Independence just like its Indian counterparts. The community also has enjoyed privileges and has faced a lot of challenges like most other minority communities. But, unfortunately, considering India to be a melting pot, that it is often referred to as, the Anglo-Indian community has been not entirely successful in integrating itself into the culture of this land. It has remained a marginal community, despite its claim to have shared the Indian origin as much as it has of the European one and despite having its origin in the land of India itself. The Anglo-Indians, despite facing the socio-economic and psychological disintegration of their self, have been partially successful in standing up for themselves and earning a decent living for their families and respectable position in the society. But, there exists some degree of disturbance in terms of their identity, owing to their shared origins, which are endorsed by their socio-

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cultural experiences and thus it could be seen that Anglo-Indian individuals face identity issues to a certain extent which has affected them both socially and psychologically, resulting in behaviours such as the withdrawal from social situations which made them feel uncomfortable; avoidance of trusting social relationships; retaliation as a response to the comments received; ignorance of social criticisms; display of assertiveness and frustration towards the social treatment received and other such. The young adults are seen to be facing more complex problems of identity such as cultural and religious ambiguity, due to reasons such as conversions or inter-marriages. In terms of acceptance of their nationality, young adults are more sceptical and questioning than the middle-adults, which also has resulted in a two-fold issue for young adults, of both uncertainty of their identity in terms of both religion and nationality.

As the results of the study shows, the Anglo-Indian community as a whole also comprises of multiple positive attributes such as a strong sense of self, nearly no ambiguity in terms of nationality, confidence, enterprising, liberal, open minded, sociable and trustworthy features, can overcome this social disparity and be an integral part of the Indian society even after having retained its Anglo-Indian ethnicity, by initiating and involving in inter-community and inter-cultural programmes, interactions and by making a conscious effort to lead a harmonious life. Respecting one's own culture, customs, community and origins, as well as being tolerant and open towards other cultures and communities by merely being able to accept and respect the differences and distinctions would help Anglo-Indians to resolve their identity issues better.

Limitations of the present research study

Participants for the study were majorly chosen from one geographical area.

Implications of the present research findings

1. The results of the study can be used to organize inter-cultural interactions between Anglo-Indian and native communities to promote a better understanding.
2. Anglo-Indian associations and organizations can make use of the data to address the dilemmas of the members of the community by means of counselling, guidance and awareness programmes.
3. The data can also be used to formulate or alter the government policies to suit the needs of the Anglo-Indian community and make provisions for better and healthier interactions with other communities.

Scope for Future Research

1. A comparative study of Identity Issues among Anglo-Indian young adults and young adults hailing from other minority communities such as Jews, Tibetans etc who are domiciled in India can be taken up.
2. A study of other psycho-social issues among Anglo-Indians can be done as it can provide a more holistic approach towards understanding the community.

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Conflict of Interest

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