

International Journal of Latest Trends in Engineering and Technology Vol.(16)Issue(1), pp.001-008 DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.21172/1.162.01 e-ISSN:2278-621X

# EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE IDENTITY ORIENTATION AND SENSE OF COMMUNITY OF DUSUN BONGGI YOUTH

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Abstract- The objective of this study was to examine the identity orientation and sense of community among Dusun Bonggi youth living on Banggi Island, Sabah. Sixty youths from various villages took part in a study examining their identity orientation and sense of community. A questionnaire with three sections was used to measure the research variables. Section A established the participants' demographic profile (age, gender, ethnicity, location and education level), Section B had 45 items measuring four identity orientations (personal, relational, social and collective), and Section C measured sense of community (membership, influence, shared emotional connection and reinforcement of needs). The study revealed that personal identity orientation, at 32.37 (SD=4.18); and social orientation, at 32.37 (SD=4.18). The results showed a negative correlation between personal identity orientation and sense of community, while higher relational identity orientation was associated with lower sense of community. The other two identity orientations (collective and social) did not display any positive correlations with sense of community. The findings showed that Dusun Bonggi with high personal orientation (they identified less with their group) and high relational identity orientation (they had mutually satisfying, close bonds with other people) had lower scores for sense of community. In this paper, the significant findings are thoroughly discussed with references to Bonggi culture and past studies on sense of community theory and identity orientation that might help understand the phenomenon studied.

Keywords- Identity orientations, sense of community, Bonggi community

# I. INTRODUCTION

All persons have different identity orientations reflected in their attitudes and behaviours. Identity orientation refers to peoples' tendency to focus their attention and efforts on certain internal and external goals when defining their identity [1]. Identity orientation defined as the ways in which individuals approach or avoid constructing and revising their self-identity [2]. Knowing who one is and developing a clear sense of identity are crucial to healthy psychosocial development and can affect many areas of life [3]. Identity is an especially salient construct for adolescents [4] and identity is the construct that defines who or what a particular person is [5].

Identity is individuals' perceptions of who they are and what they value. Identity includes a person's abilities, skills, interest, beliefs and relationships and can fit with or defy social roles and cultural expectations [6]. In earlier historical eras, identity rarely was an issue as stable societies to a great extent assigned identity rather than allowing it to be selected or adopted [7]. Today, however, the concept of identity carries the full weight of the need for a sense of who one is amid the often overwhelming pace of change in one's social contexts [7]. Identity orientations refer to the relative importance that individuals place on various identity attributes or characteristics when constructing their self-definitions.

There are four types of identity orientation: personal, relational, social and collective [8]. Personal identity orientation is closely tied to more individualistic notions and beliefs [9,10,11] is motivated by self-interest and conceives of self primarily in terms of individual traits and characteristics [12]. For example, Bonggi youth with dominant personal orientation may perceive themselves as better persons than other Bonggi in their group. Those with relational orientation are primarily motivated to seek others' benefits. For example, youth with relational identity orientation may identify strongly with their role as Bonggi. Social identity orientation reflects an external emphasis on interactions with others and their reactions [13]. Collective identity orientation primes persons to

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ensure the welfare of their group, often based on comparison with other groups. Such persons also determine their self-worth by evaluating how their group compares to other groups [14].

This study focuses on Bonggi youth, an indigenous group living on Banggi Island, off the northern tip of Sabah, Malaysia. It is believed that in today's world, the identity orientation of youth still living in their communities might be influenced by social and technological changes and modern lifestyles. Technology offers new forms of empowerment for young people and creates generational gaps by supplanting the habits and preferences of older generations [15]. Technology is seen to have direct psychological effects and provide new ways of forming identity and, hence, new forms of personhood. In the era of globalisation, changes in values and culture can be seen among Malaysian youth, which may affect their daily lifestyle [16]. A study by Taylor Nelson Sofres and the Youth Foundation of Asia (2012) revealed significant changes among Malaysian youth's mindsets and ways of socialising, including their views on identity [16].

Identity orientation among youth involves constant reproduction of images of the self [17]. The identity formation process starts during adolescence when individuals have opportunities to explore their identities, beliefs and values without any romantic commitments [17]. Although identity becomes better defined during adolescence, that does not mean that it begins during adolescence. Youth in disadvantaged communities with fewer social and economic resources often feel alienated within their communities, which can make the identity formation process more challenging [18]. Bonggi youth living on the Bonggi island have fewer social and economic resources than urban youth, so they might find it challenging to develop and relate their identity orientation to their Bonggi sense of community.

This study examined the potential relationship between Bonggi youth's identity orientation and the Bonggi sense of community. For instance, youth with high relational and collective identity orientations might display high affinity with the Bonggi Dusun sense of community. A sense of community defined as a feeling that all members of a community belong, matter to one another and the group and share a faith that all their needs will be fulfilled through their devotion to being together [19]. A sense of community is defined as individuals' connections to their community [20]. It, therefore, is interesting to explore Bonggi youth's identity orientations (personal, relational, collective and social) and their relationships with the Dusun Bonggi sense of community. The findings may enrich our understanding of today's Bonggi youth's identity orientation and sense of community.

# II.THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Past studies identified various factors contributing to the sense of community among indigenous group [21,22]. Young people's global sense of community decreases as they move through high school. As teenagers, they congregate in areas away from their neighbourhoods and thus feel less connected to and have fewer opportunities to influence their neighbourhoods [22]. Sense of community grows as adolescents have positive experiences with peers and significant adults in different settings (e.g., neighbourhoods and schools), which contribute to the development of their personal and social identities and positive developmental outcomes [23].

For instance, past study [21] revealed a positive correlation between social participation and sense of community among three groups of university students (Italian, Iranian and American). In this study, social participation referred to the frequency of students' participation in social recreational, sports, political, religious and volunteering activities in their communities in the past three months. The study showed that the more frequently students were involved in social activities in their communities, the higher sense of community they had.

Another past study [24] examined the effects of community identity on perceptions of local product quality in two communities in Vietnam (Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh). The participants more positively perceived the quality of products made in their communities and expressed purchase preference for these products. Participants preferred products from their own communities over those from outside their communities. This study demonstrated that community identity has meaningful, measurable impacts on how people see themselves. Sense of community is a changeable feature of people's relationships and thus can be a barometer of change in communities. It can foster a sense of identity and resilience amid social change [25].

Based on these past studies, it can be concluded that identity orientation is correlated with sense of community. It, therefore, is interesting to further explore this relationship by focusing on the identity orientation and sense of community of indigenous Bonggi youth living on the northern island of Sabah.

# III. THE DUSUN BONGGI COMMUNITY

Many Dusun Bonggi, who live on the island of Banggi in the Kudat District in northern Sabah, follow traditional ways of life and are considered by some to be a primitive people [26]. Banggi Island is at the northernmost point of Malaysia, about 12 kilometres off the northern tip of Borneo. From the north-eastern coast to the south-western coast, Banggi Island extends about 32 kilometres, with a width from west to east of about 22 kilometres. The island is mostly covered by forest, and its highest elevation is Bonggi Peak at 529 metres [27]. The majority of Bonggi live in the western, northern and eastern parts of the island. In addition, a few hundred Bonggi speakers live in two or three villages on Balambangan Island, west of Banggi Island, and many Bonggi speakers live on the mainland in the Kudat District [27].

Bonggi are indigenous to the island and claim that they have always lived there [28]. Unlike other Bornean people groups, they have no history of longhouses, headhunting or *tapai* (rice wine) drinking. In 2006, Banggi Island had 56 villages [29], including 15 [28] identified as Bonggi villages. Six are on the more remote northern area of the island, while the remaining villages are on the southern end of the island. The Bonggi villages are Batu Layar Darat, Mamang, Kalangkaman, Palak Darat, Kapitan, Pasig Modom, Kapitangan, Pengkalan Darat, Kuda-Kuda, Sabur, Limbuak Darat, Selangan, Lok Agong, Tambising, and Lumanis Darat. Among the various people groups living on the island, Bonggi are the bottom of the economic hierarchy [30]. Most Bonggi work as farmers, fishermen and labourers on oil palm plantations. Some, mostly younger people, have migrated to search for jobs. Most of those with low education levels work and live in the Kudat area [29].

Regarding religion, Bonggi historically were animists, but many have converted to other religions, including Christianity and Islam. Bonggi tend to call themselves Dusun. Although Bonggi is not a Dusunic language (Porodong, 2008), the Kadazan-Dusun Culture Association includes Bonggi within the larger Dusun group. Outsiders may refer to Bonggi as Banggi or Banggi Dusun. The word *Banggi* is defined as 'corpse' and is used in the curse, '*banggi nu*!', equivalent to the English phrase 'drop dead! [28]. Bonggi suffer from an inferiority complex (Porodong, cited in Kluge 2015b). Many Bonggi, especially younger people, are not proud of their traditions and even claim, 'We don't have traditions!' In fact, most of their traditions are related to taboos [30].

Bonggi differ from other Borneo groups as they do not have traditional clothes other than loincloths and sarongs. Consequently, they feel concern about their costumes when invited to cultural events [28]. Outsiders perceive Bonggi as tending to accept their situation as is or, alternatively, immigrating to the mainland when they face problems they cannot solve. Their perceived lack of ambition to better themselves may well be related to another Bonggi characteristic: their traditionally, non-hierarchical, flat social structure [27].

In the modern era, this academic perception is changing among educated Bonggi youth. Some wish to gain a better education for their future careers, like other Borneon youth groups. For instance, during an interview, one Bonggi youth expressed concern about academic achievement among Bonggi youth. The participant from Kalangkaman Village claimed that in 2018, he was the only male student who took the national examination, the Malaysian Certificate of Education (*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*) for fifth-form secondary school students. According to the interviewee, some youth did not have a good education and were content to live in the village, but he wished to pursue higher education and have a better future life (Roszan Mahajung, Bonggi youth, personal communication, 11 January 2019).

In Karakit and the surrounding villages in Bonggi island, children and Bonggi in general tend to speak Sabah Malay, and not all parents transmit the Bonggi language to their children [31]. This issue has also arisen in other Borneon groups. Most youth cannot speak indigenous languages, creating a major concern among various Borneon ethnic groups in Sabah. Borneon ethnic cultural associations have addressed this problem by conducting awareness programmes on indigenous languages at relevant cultural events and holding native language classes for youth to preserve their culture.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

A three-part questionnaire was administered to capture the research variables.

# Part A: Demographic Profile

Part A established the participants' demographic profile with 18 items on age, gender, educational level, location, possession of Bonggi traditional costumes and ability to play traditional Bonggi musical instruments.

## Part B: Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ-IV0 [9]

This self-concept scale consisted of 45 items measuring the four types of identity orientation (personal, relational, social and collective). The following are sample items for each identity orientation: personal identity orientation: 'my personal goals and hopes for the future'; relational identity orientation: 'having close bonds with other people'; collective identity orientation: 'my language, such as my regional accent, dialect or a second language that I know';

and social identity orientation: 'the ways in which other people react to what I say and do'. The participants gave responses on a 5-point scale (1 = 'not important to my sense of who I am'; 5 = 'extremely important to my sense of who I am'). Higher scores indicated the participants' self-concepts.

#### Part C: Sense of Community Index 2 (SCI-2)

This scale consisted of 24 items on the four elements of sense of community: reinforcement of needs (items 1–6), membership (items 7–12), influence (items 13–18) and shared emotional connection (items 19–24). The Sense of Community Index 2 (SCI-2) was based on theory holding that sense of community consists of perceptions of these four elements: membership, influence, shared emotional connection and reinforcement of needs [19].

## Procedure

The researcher went to the secondary school in Banggi island to collect data and asked for approval from the headmaster and teachers to administer the survey to the students. With assistance from two teachers, the researcher gathered 60 Bonggi students in a seminar room in the school. There are only 60 of Bonggi students in this school and they are all staying in the hostel because the school is far away from their home. The participants involved in this study were form three, four and five students of SMK Banggi.

The researcher then briefed all the potential participants and informed them that participation in the study was voluntary, anonymous and confidential. These measures were intended to ensure that the participants would give honest answers to the questionnaire and not feel any doubts while completing it. The researcher was present with the group of students responding to the questionnaire to monitor them and answer any queries. The participants answered 63 questions over approximately 10-12 minutes. The participant was given a token of appreciation once they completed the entire questionnaire. Once the results were collected and inputted into SPSS 24, descriptive and inferential statistics were calculated.

#### V. RESULTS

Before further data analysis, the reliability for each identity orientation and sense of community was checked. The reliability values for the identity orientations were acceptable, ranging from .62 to .77. The reliability value for sense of community was .80 and also acceptable.

Variable	Number of Items	Reliability Value
Identity Orientation		
Personal	10	.62
Relational	10	.77
Social	7	.71
Collective	8	.64
Sense of Community	12	.80

Table -1 Internal Consistency of the Variables

Most Bonggi youth came from various villages on Banggi Island, including Batu Lawas, Batu Layar, Kalangkaman, Kapitangan, Lok Agung, Palak, Pangkalan Darat, Sabur, Limbuak and Pasak. The participants' mean age was 14.95 years old (SD=1.42). They were all secondary students at a secondary school on Banggi Island. The numbers of male and female participants were nearly equal (Table 2).

Variable	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	31	50.80
Female	29	47.50
Religion		
Islam	1	1.60
Christianity	43	70.50
No religion	16	26.20
Possession of Dusun Bonggi Cultural Attire		
Yes	26	42.60
No	34	55.70
Missing	2	3.20
Ability to Play Dusun Bonggi Traditional Musical Instrument		
Yes		
No	9	14.80
Missing	50	82
Number of Siblings	2	3.20
1–5		
6–10	27	44.30
11–15	27	44.30
	5	8.20

Table -2 Demographic Profile of Dusun Bonggi Participants

Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations of each identity orientation. The Bonggi youth had the highest scores for personal identity orientation, followed by collective, relational and social identity orientations.

Table -3 Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Identity Orientations

Identity Orientation	Mean	SD
Personal	35.98	4.99
Relational	33.18	6.65
Social	21.67	5.10
Collective	32.37	4.18

The correlational analysis found that sense of community had negative correlations with personal and relational orientations and none with the two other orientations (Table 4).

Identity Orientation	Sense of Community	
	R value	Sig
Personal	36	.007
Relational	34	.02
Social	27	.052
Collective	15	.32

 Table -4 Correlation Analyses of Identity Orientations and Sense of Community

#### VI. DISCUSSIONS

#### Negative Correlation of Personal Identity Orientation and Sense of Community

This study found that youth with high scores for personal identity orientation had low scores for sense of community. In this study, personal identity refers to the level of importance the participants' attributed to their goals, hopes, values, moral standards and private opinions. Lantz et al. (n.d.) defined personal identity orientation as how people see themselves as individuals and give precedence to their private views of the self over the views of others. Personal identity orientation predicts private self-consciousness and the need for uniqueness and autonomy [9]. Personal identity orientation and sense of community might have had a negative correlation because the participants were more focused on themselves and less attached to the Bonggi community.

Another factor deserving of consideration is lower involvement among youths in Bonggi community social activities, such as cultural ceremonies and community social gatherings, which might be due to changes in society, technology and modern lifestyles. The drastic increase in technology usage is especially noticeable in younger generations [34] and has direct psychological effects on identity orientation [35]. The preceding phenomenon has been observed among Malaysian youth [16] and could have also affected the Bonggi youth.

In this study, sense of community consists of four elements: membership, influence, shared emotion and reinforcement. Membership refers to a sense of belonging and identification including the feeling, belief and expectation that one fits in the group, has a place in the group, is accepted by the group and is willing to sacrifice for the group. Influence refers to individuals' acknowledgement of others' needs, values and opinions [19]. Reinforcement refers to integration and fulfilment of needs as a strong community fits people together to meet others' needs and their own [19]. Sense of community refers to shared emotions as strong communities offer members positive ways to interact, important events to share, ways to resolve problems positively and opportunities to honour members, invest in the community and experience a spiritual bond among members [19].

Identities can vary and change in importance across contexts [6]. We, therefore, speculate that Bonggi youth with high personal identity orientation and low sense of community might have been influenced by external factors, such as the school environment and relationships with their neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods are defined by the people who live around and near each other and mingle for years [36]. Past studies revealed that sense of community is influenced by adolescents' connections and experiences with their neighbourhoods and schools [22,21]. Accordingly, the lack of connection and opportunities to be in the community might have contributed to the negative relationship between personal identity orientation and sense of community among Bonggi youth.

In addition to these factors, culture is assumed to play a prominent role in connecting community members. Many Bonggi, especially younger people, are not proud of their traditions. Some even claiming that they do not have traditions [30]. Compared to other Borneo groups, Dusun Bonggi do not have standard traditional clothes but, instead, wear loincloths and sarongs. Consequently, when invited to cultural events, they have concerns about what they should wear [28]. A past study revealed [32] that Kadazandusun participants who owned traditional costumes had stronger relational, social and collective self-identity than those who did not. People who wear traditional costumes and accessories tend to feel connected with their ethnic groups. Bonggi community is one of the Kadazandusun tribes. However, some of the Bonggi older generation prefers to wear the loincloth during festivals and feel proud of the loincloth because it is what they traditionally used to wear [31]. Other cultural factors, such as language and traditional values and rituals, might also influence sense of community. Ethnic identity defined as a sense of belonging based on one's ancestry, cultural heritage, values, traditions, rituals, language and religion [33].

The social environment might also explain the negative relationship between personal identity orientation and sense of community. In particular, school environments that promote academic competition and success might influence this relationship. Indigenous students frequently find that state education promotes individualism and a competitive atmosphere rather than communal ways of living and cooperation [34]. Academic achievement and competition might have influenced the participants' low sense of community and high personal identity orientation.

# Negative Correlation of Relational Identity Orientation and Sense of Community

The findings contradict the expected positive relationship between relational identity orientation and sense of community. In this study, relational identity orientation refers to relationships, commitments and mutually satisfying, close bonds among community members. Relational identity refers to the contents of identity present in face-to-face interactions framed in a variety of social roles and positions (e.g. child, student and friend), including how adolescents define and interpret these roles [37].

Bonggi youth with high relational identity orientation and low sense of community might have lacked involvement in Bonggi community activities as they all attended boarding schools far from their communities. This claim is supported by past study [37] finding that active participation in one's community can meet community members' needs and strengthen their sense of belonging. Engagement in social activities can reinforce one's sense of community—according with the definition of community as a group that 'communicate[s], participate[s], share[s] with, converse[s], confer[s], communicate[s], exercise[s] a right in common [and] eat[s] at a common table' [39].

Bonggi youth living at the boarding school might have been involved in forming their own identities with their peers and thus experienced their own psychological sense of community [40]. They were developing their own visions and hopes of an improved world [40]. Youth in socially disadvantaged communities often feel alienated from their neighbourhoods and broader society, so to meet the need to belong, they seek a sense of community and form subcultures and hopes with their peers [40]. Participating in a community means allows connecting with others and experiencing a sense of community rather than feeling isolated, alienated and alone [40].

Active participation in one's community may provide opportunities to establish social relationship with other community members [22]. Adolescents and young people who participate more in local community life have higher sense of community than less involved youth, and a lack of participants in local community activities may cause isolation, diminishing sense of community [41]. For instance, in Australia, youth often express feeling alienated from their local communities, revealing a lack of sense of community [18]. In addition, factors such as the length of community residency, satisfaction with the community and the number of neighbours one can identify by

first name might also explain the inverse correlation of relational identity orientation and sense of community among Bonggi youth [42].

Another reason for the inverse relationship between relational identity orientation and sense of community might be that Bonggi youth who stayed at boarding schools spent more time with their schoolmates and lived far away from their families, homes and community. During data collection, we approached all the participants at their schools, which were all boarding schools. Students living on campus showed less sense of community with their environment than students living off campus. It is assumed that Bonggi youth might have based their identity orientations on their school environment, including relationships with their peers and teachers from various backgrounds [20]. In addition, they focused more on personal academic achievement and had to compete with other students. In this study, sense of community refers to youth's level of agreement that they share their community's values, can recognise most people in their community and can influence their community. Most of the Bonggi youth participants spent more time at school and were in their communities only during school holidays, which might be one reason for the negative correlation of relational identity orientation and sense of community.

The other two identity orientations (collective and social) had no relationship with sense of community. Collective identity orientation focused on the importance youth saw in being part of many generations and having a shared language and feeling of belonging. While the social identity orientation emphasised on the importance of people's reactions towards youth's actions. These two identity orientations are not discussed further due to the non-significant results.

# VII. CONCLUSIONS

This exploratory study examined the identity orientation and sense of community of youth in the Dusun Bonggi community. Although the results cannot be generalised to the Dusun Bonggi community due to the small sample size, this study can ignite interest in future research exploring other interesting variables in the Bonggi community based on psychological approaches. It is believed that the unique cultural elements of the Bonggi community, such as their traditional costumes, music, customs and ways of life, might influence their identity and sense of community. Bonggi living on the Banggi island have slightly different cultural beliefs and customs, including traditional costume and music, from other Kadazandusun tribes in Sabah.

We suggest that future studies be conducted in Bonggi villages rather than settings outside their communities, such as schools and workplaces. Much can be learned about how young people navigate everyday experiences in their residential communities and how such experiences affect their social needs for community identity and belonging [42]. It is the researcher's hope that this study may enrich the literature on Kadazandusun tribes, particularly the Dusun Bonggi community, and assist future researchers and the Bonggi community in better understanding Bonggi youth's identity orientation and conducting research focused on the Bonggi community.

#### Acknowledgements

It was my great honour to receive a research grant from the University Malaysia Sabah, in addition to kind assistance from teachers and students. A special thanks goes to Dr. Paul Porodong, a sociologist who has conducted many interesting studies on Bonggi communities and shared his views and comments on this article. My first experience meeting and mingling with Bonggi youth was a treasured moment, and I will remember it throughout my life as a Social Psychology researcher.

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