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How Parents in Multiethnic-Racial Families Share Cultural Assets with Their Children

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Abstract
Relatively little psychology research has investigated racial-ethnic socialization processes in multiethnic-racial families despite the fact that more than 1 in 7 children born in the United States today have parents from different ethnic-racial backgrounds. The present study seeks to contribute to the extant research by exploring how parents in multiethnic-racial families seek to help their children access and benefit from two (or more) sets of cultural assets. Accordingly, this study considers key themes about cultural socialization that emerged in qualitative interviews with parents in multiethnic-racial families ($n = 37$). Key themes emerging from these interviews included the importance of both co-parents: (a) putting in the time and effort to learn about each other's cultures and cultural practices; (b) being reflective about the practices, values, and traditions that were and were not important to them to share with their children; and (c) protecting their children from racial micro-aggressions in a variety of settings by advocating for the recognition, inclusion, and appreciation of their children's multiple ethnic-racial heritages. There is such a paucity of research on cultural socialization approaches in multiethnic-racial families that these perspectives from parents offer both valuable building blocks for future research efforts as well as practical guidance to the growing number of multiethnic-racial families in the United States and elsewhere.

Keywords Ethnic-racial socialization · Cultural socialization · Parent socialization

The values, traditions, and practices that parents share with their children from their own ethnic-racial-cultural backgrounds represent important cultural assets that contribute to positive youth development (Huguley et al., 2019; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Yet relatively little psychology research has investigated ethnic-racial socialization processes in multiethnic-racial families (Atkin & Yoo, 2019; Roy et al., 2022), despite the fact that more than 1 in 7 children born in the United States today have parents from different ethnic-racial backgrounds (Alba et al., 2018), and that multiethnic-racial youth represent the fastest growing demographic in the United States (Csizmadia & Atkin, 2022). Moreover, much of the research on multiethnic-racial socialization has focused narrowly on Black-White families, and/or how parents in multiethnic-racial families prepare their children to contend with racial bias and discrimination (Atkin & Yoo, 2019). The present study seeks to contribute to the research literature by exploring ethnic-racial socialization practices in a more diverse sample of families, and by investigating socialization practices within these families that help children to access and benefit from two sets of cultural assets.

Defining Multiethnic-Racial Families

We start this exploration by defining the term, multiethnic-racial families. Race can be defined as a socially constructed category intended to group people together by physical characteristics such as skin color, hair type, eye color, etc. (Tatum, 2017). Ethnicity is also a socially constructed category intended to group people together who share common culture, religion, language, and country of origin (Rivas-Drake & Umaña-Taylor, 2019). Because there are substantive overlaps in the definitions of these terms, many scholars have begun to invoke the term "ethnic-racial identity" to describe how individuals describe the significance and

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meaning of their own race and/or ethnicity (Hughes et al., 2006). Likewise, scholars have begun to invoke the term "family ethnic-racial socialization" to describe how families introduce youth to the values, traditions, practices, and social strategies associated with their ethnic-racial group(s) (Hughes et al., 2006; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020). In the present study, we invoke the term "multiethnic-racial family" to refer to the union of two individuals from different racial and/or ethnic groups as well as any children they are raising together (Roy et al., 2022). We use the prefix, "multi", (rather than "bi") because it allows for more than two racial and/or ethnic backgrounds (Soliz et al., 2017).

Other scholars have offered definitions of this term that include families in which two adults share the same ethnic-racial identity but their children hold a different ethnic-racial identity (e.g. families with transracial adoptees) (Atkin & Yoo, 2019). However, because the present study is explicitly investigating the ways in which parents or caregivers share two (or more) sets of cultural assets with their children, our sample includes only individuals who characterize themselves as parents or caregivers belonging to a different ethnic-racial identity group (or groups) than their co-parent.

Familial Ethnic-Racial Socialization

Hughes et al. (2006) conceptualize family ethnic-racial socialization as comprised of four distinct sets of messages about their child's ethnic-racial group membership(s): cultural socialization, preparation for bias, egalitarianism, and promotion of mistrust. *Cultural socialization*— the primary focus of the present study— refers to messages conveyed to youth about the history, culture, values, traditions, and heritage of their ethnic or racial group(s). *Preparation for bias* refers to messages conveyed to youth that seek to prepare them to encounter prejudice and discrimination due to their ethnic or racial group membership(s). *Egalitarianism* refers to messages conveyed to youth to focus on people's personal qualities rather than their ethnic-racial group memberships, and *promotion of mistrust* refers to messages that urge youth to be cautious when interacting with people from other ethnic-racial groups (Hughes et al., 2006).

Cultural socialization messages tend to be the most widely utilized of the four, and are conveyed to youth through numerous mechanisms including attending cultural events; visiting parents' (or ancestors') home country and learning the language(s) of that home country; introducing music, art, and literature associated with their ethnic or racial heritage; eating and learning to cook traditional foods; watching television and films about the history and culture of their ethnic or racial group, etc. (Huguley et al., 2019). A substantive body of research has found cultural socialization to be predictive of a host of positive outcomes in youth including self-esteem (Gonzales-Backen et al., 2017), psychological wellbeing (e.g. Nguyen et al., 2015), academic achievement (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014), and resilience (e.g. McDermott et al., 2018).

Although the majority of research studies informing Hughes et al.'s (2006) familial ethnic-racial socialization framework focused on mono-racial families, their framework is a relevant and useful guide for research on familial cultural socialization in multiethnic-racial families (Jackson et al., 2017). However, there are also a number of issues related to familial ethnic-racial socialization that are unique to multiethnic-racial families such as learning how to respond to mono-racism (oppression targeting individuals who do not identify with a single racial-ethnic group) and authenticity policing (contesting the membership of a multiethnic-racial individual in one or more of their cultural heritages) (Atkin & Yoo, 2019; Harris, 2016).

Regarding cultural socialization processes—the focus of the present study— parents or caregivers in mono-racial families can work together to introduce their children to the values, traditions, and practices of the ethnic-racial group of which they are both members. Potentially in contrast, the limited research on parents or caregivers in multiethnic-racial families suggests these individuals are typically the sole or primary knowledge-holders of their own group's (or groups') values, traditions, and practices in their immediate families (Csizmadia & Atkin, 2022). Moreover, it is likely that there will be differences or even contradictions in the values, traditions, and practices prized by the ethnic-racial groups within a multiethnic-racial family (Gonzales-Backen, 2013). Consequently, parents or caregivers in multiethnic-racial families may need to engage in a process where they first learn about each other's values, traditions, and practices, and then determine how to address differences between them (Atkin & Yoo, 2019). Finally, whereas youth in mono-racial families are typically being socialized into ethnical-racial groups in which they can unequivocally claim membership, youth in multiethnic-racial families are being introduced to the values, traditions, and practices of ethnic-racial groups for whom their own membership may feel more complex. To further complicate matters, most of the parents or caregivers in multiethnic-racial families have no firsthand understanding of their children's experience as a multiethnic-racial individual (Csizmadia & Atkin, 2022). In summary, these distinctive issues facing multiethnic-racial families point to the importance of theoretical and empirical scholarship focused specifically on cultural socialization in multiethnic-racial families. We describe this relatively limited body of scholarship below.

Familial Multiethnic-Racial Socialization

While recent reviews of research have turned up hundreds of articles on familial ethnic-racial socialization in monoracial families (Huguley et al., 2019), Atkin & Yoo's (2019) review of the literature on familial ethnic-racial socialization of multiracial youth in the United States identified only 21 relevant research studies (14 qualitative, 7 quantitative). This paucity of research is due, in part, to laws that made interracial marriage illegal in different parts of the United States beginning in the 1660s and carrying on through the late 1960s (Atkin & Yoo, 2019; Golash-Boza, 2015). It should also be noted that the research community has itself contributed to the pathologizing of multiethnic-racial families through scholarship that has characterized interracial unions themselves as unnatural (e.g. Carter, 2013), and that has depicted the children of such unions as psychologically damaged (e.g. Stonequist, 1937), prone to feelings of cultural homelessness (Vivero & Jenkins, 1999), and suffering from unhealthy identity confusion (Crippen & Brew, 2007). While Atkin and Yoo's (2019) review focused on youth raised in multiracial families, we were likewise able to identify very few studies that focused on family ethnic-racial socialization practices in multiethnic (but not multiracial) families (e.g. an Irish/Italian family or Chinese/Korean family).

The paucity of research on familial multiethnic-racial socialization is also due, in part, to a longstanding lack of empirical attention to individuals from multiethnic-racial families. The United States Census, for example, did not begin allowing individuals to identify as multiracial until 2000. An additional challenge stems from the substantial variation in the ethnic-racial socialization processes of multiethnic-racial families and outcomes for youth raised in multiethnic-racial families based on the differences in the identities of parents, the intersection of those ethnic-racial identities with gender, and the configuration of the family (Atkin & Yoo, 2019).

Nonetheless, there are a number of studies in the research literature that informed the present effort. In their study of mothers ($n = 73$) in multiethnic-racial families who primarily identified as White (33% of sample) or African American (43% of sample), Rollins and Hunter (2013) identified five types of socialization messages they conveyed to their children: cultural socialization, preparation for bias, egalitarian socialization, self-development socialization (which focused on the child's development of positive character strengths), and no racial-ethnic socialization. In this study, only 12% of the mothers reported engaging in cultural socialization, which was far lower than the percentage of mothers who reported conveying each of the other types of socialization messages. In contrast, Jackson et al.'s (2017) study of adults raised in multiracial Mexican–American families in Arizona ($n = 16$) found cultural socialization messages to be second only to preparation for bias in terms of the frequency of reported socialization messages within participating families.

A number of other studies exploring specific cultural socialization messages in multiethnic-racial families have reported that parents and caregivers in these families rely on many of the same mechanisms as do those with mono-racial compositions (Atkin & Yoo, 2019). These mechanisms include visiting parents' home countries (Stone & Dolbin-MacNab, 2017); exposing youth to music, art, literature, and food associated with their parents' ethnic or racial groups (Rollins & Hunter, 2013); participating in religious activities associated with their parents' heritage (Jackson et al., 2017); and learning to speak their parents' first or ancestral languages (Lester-Murad, 2005).

Yet in contrast, a number of these studies also reported on cultural socialization practices unique to multiethnic-racial families such as the importance of parents or caregivers learning about and participating in each other's cultural traditions and practices so that they are jointly nurturing their children's ethnic-racial identity development (Jackson et al., 2017; Lester-Murad, 2005). Other studies reported on families who sought to live in diverse communities and send their children to diverse schools that could expose their children to members of both parents' ethnic-racial groups (Jackson et al., 2017; Stone & Dolbin-MacNab, 2017). In contrast, there are some families that choose to emphasize values, traditions, and practices from only one of their children's ethnic-racial identities (Harris et al., 2013), and even convey negative socialization messages by encouraging (consciously or unconsciously) their children's development of prejudicial beliefs about their "other" ethnic-racial identities (Jackson et al., 2017).

Theoretical Framework

There is not currently a theoretical framework that we are aware of that focuses specifically on ethnic-racial socialization processes in multiethnic-racial families, though several scholars have offered multiethnic-racial identity development models that include family socialization (e.g. Gonzales-Backen, 2013; Rocquemore & Lasloffy, 2005; Root, 2003; Wijeyesinghe and Jackson, 2001). Consequently, the present study of cultural socialization practices in multiethnic-racial families is guided by Gonzales-Backen's (2013) Ecological Model of Biethnic Identity Formation. This model—which draws on principles from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and Garcia Coll et al.'s (1996) integrative developmental model for children of

color— posits that multiracial-ethnic youths' identity formation is influenced by bidirectional relationships with familial ethnic-racial socialization (comprised of both parents and extended family) and non-familial ethnic-racial socialization (comprised of peers, teachers, and media).

Gonzales–Backen further hypothesizes that there is a bidirectional relationship between these two sources of ethnic-racial socialization, and that young people's multiethnic-racial identity development is further influenced by their physical appearance and experiences with discrimination. Additionally, Gonzales-Backen explicitly notes in her model that the influence of familial ethnic-racial socialization on multiethnic-racial youth is moderated by the quality of the parent–child relationship, and that parents' contributions to their children's cultural socialization will be influenced by their own ethnic-racial identities.

Finally, drawing on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work, Gonzales-Backen (2013) adds that these direct influences on young people's multiethnic-racial identity formation also interact with the community environment and broader societal climate in which multiethnic-racial youth are growing up. For example, a family in our study that included both Iranian and Irish heritages explained that their relocation from Los Angeles, California to Nashville, Tennessee greatly reduced their access to a vibrant Iranian community that supported their cultural socialization efforts. Another family that included Latinx heritage described ways in which rising xenophobia during the Trump administration weakened their commitment to cultural socialization practices associated with their family's Latinx heritage in favor of a more assimilationist approach. These notions—that multiethnic-racial familial socialization is taking place both within a broader ecological context and also in relationship to several other influencing factors –serve as important guideposts for the present study. The research questions driving the present study are as follows:

1. How do parents in multiethnic-racial families negotiate with their co-parent the transmission of traditions, practices, and values from their respective ethnic-racial groups?
2. What practices do parents in multiethnic-racial families describe and understand as facilitating (or hindering) their family's cultural socialization processes?

Method

The present study sought to investigate these research questions through a qualitative research design involving semi-structured interviews conducted between January 2021 and June 2022 with a diverse set of parents in multiethnic-racial families. Below, we describe this study's participants, data collection procedure, analytic strategy, and researcher positionality, and then turn to the study's key findings.

Participants

This study's participants included parents ($n = 37$) in multiracial-ethnic families. Twenty-eight of these parents identified as women and mothers, and nine identified as men and fathers. They ranged in age from their mid-twenties to their early sixties, and their children ranged in age from less than 1-year-old to 30 years old. Specifically, two of the parents who participated in interviews were in their twenties; 13 were in their thirties; 13 were in their forties; eight were in their fifties; and one was in her sixties. Additionally, 17 of the interviewed parents reported that their oldest child was between zero and 9 years old; 14 parents reported that their oldest child was between 10 and 20 years old; five parents reported that their oldest child was between 21 and 30 years old; and one parent reported that her oldest child was in his early thirties. In terms of the total number of children in their families, 11 of the interviewed parents reported having one child; 18 parents reported having two children; and eight parents reported having three children.

Interview participants resided in 13 different states in the United States including New York, Minnesota, California, Pennsylvania, Nevada, Hawaii, and North Carolina, and four participants were living outside the United States in European and Asian countries. Participants came from a diverse set of ethnic-racial groups. Specifically, participants described their own ethnic-racial identities as African American (3), Ashkenazi Jewish (6), Chinese (2), Dominican (1), European (2), Filipino (1), Ghanean (1), Greek (1), Kenyan (1), Korean (2), Indian (2), Iranian (2), Irish (2), Italian (2), Mexican (3), Norwegian (1), Polish (1), Puerto Rican (1), Russian (1), Togolese (1), and Trinidadian (1).

While much of the prior research on family cultural socialization in multiethnic-racial families has focused on Black-White families, participants in the current study offered a vast array of heritage representations in their respective families, including: African American/Polish, African American/Ashkenazi Jewish (3), Chinese/Ashkenazi Jewish (3), Dominican/African American, Indian/European (3), European/Japanese, European/Salvadoran, Filipina/Irish, Ghanean/Ashkenazi Jewish, Iranian/European (2), Irish/African American, Italian/Caribbean, Kenyan/French-Togolese, Korean/Irish, Korean/Filipino, Mexican/Ashkenazi Jewish, Mexican/European, Mexican/Scandinavian, Polish/Japanese, Puerto Rican/European, Russian/Palestinian, Spanish/Ashkenazi Jewish, and Trinidadian/Norwegian. The diversity in family composition among study participants simultaneously represents a distinctive strength

and interpretive limitation, both of which are considered in the discussion below.

Data Collection

Participants for this study were primarily recruited through postings on Facebook pages associated with multiethnic-racial parenting such as "Multiracial Americans of Southern California" and "Parenting Across Racial Differences." All 37 parents participated in a single semi-structured interview that lasted approximately 45 min to an hour. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all of these interviews were conducted over Zoom or the telephone. During each interview, participants responded to prompts about the following topics:

- Practices, traditions, and values associated with their or their co-parent's ethnic group that they were invested in sharing with their children;
- Practices, traditions, and values associated with their or their co-parent's ethnic groups that they were *not* interested in sharing with their children
- Whether and how they and their co-parent planned their children's cultural socialization
- Times when their and their co-parent's practices, traditions, and values felt like they were in conflict with one another
- How they and their co-parent resolved those conflicts
- The role of extended family members and community members in their children's cultural socialization
- Perceived benefits and challenges to their children from growing up in a multiethnic-racial family

These prompts sought to inspire the participants' discussions of topics relevant to the present study, while not leading participants toward particular responses. As described in further detail below, analyses of these interviews focused on practices that participants regarded as advancing their and their co-parent's cultural socialization goals within a multiethnic-racial family context.

Data Analysis

All interviews with participants ($n = 37$) were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and participants were assigned pseudonyms. Our analysis of these interviews was a multistep process that aimed to balance inductive and deductive perspectives (Erickson & Murphy, 2008). Beginning with a deductive approach, our investigative team drew from the research literature on familial racial-ethnic socialization (e.g. Hughes et al., 2006), cultural socialization in multiethnic-racial families (e.g. Atkin & Yoo, 2019), and our guiding theoretical framework on multiethnic identity formation (e.g. Gonzales-Backen, 2013) to construct descriptors of multiethnic-racial family socialization processes that we expected to find in our subsequent analyses of interviews (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Examples of descriptors drawn from the literature on familial ethnic-racial socialization included "visiting parents' home countries," "using parents' first languages," "choice of community," and "eating cultural dishes" (Hughes et al., 2006). Examples of descriptors drawn from the literature on multiethnic-racial familial socialization included "Supporting co-parent's cultural practices" and "negative socialization messages" (Jackson et al., 2017). Finally, descriptors drawn from this study's guiding theoretical framework included "influence of extended family" and "children's physical appearance" (Gonzales-Backen, 2013). This study's co-authors read through each participant's interview and assigned these descriptors to relevant portions of each interview transcript.

Following this initial reading and coding of each participant's interview, the co-authors re-read all of the interviews and utilized those initial codes to identify 16 superordinate themes that interview participants cited as supporting positive multiethnic-racial socialization within their family. Examples of these superordinate themes included "Co-Parents who are invested in celebrating each other's cultures", "Parents who listen to their co-parents about their cultural experience", and "Parents who are self-aware about what matters to them culturally." The co-authors then re-read each of the interviews independently and assigned these superordinate themes to each interview as applicable.

To establish reliability, the co-authors then engaged in a process of consensus building in which we compared our assigned superordinate themes with one another for each of the interview transcripts ($n = 37$). We discussed any coding discrepancies surfaced by this process, clarified our understandings of the meaning of each of these superordinate themes, recoded the interviews that we had originally coded differently, and then compared again until coding discrepancies were resolved.

The final step of the analytic process was an inductive one in which the co-authors sought to identify common patterns and themes within each of the clusters of participants associated with each of the superordinate themes. For example, for the superordinate theme of "Parents who listen to their co-parents about their cultural experience", two patterns that emerged within this broader theme was that being a good listener was a particularly important practice for White parents with co-parents of color, and that parents who did not feel listened to can feel ally-less. After identifying these patterns associated with each of the superordinate themes, the co-authors re-read each interview independently, assigned these sub-codes, compared codes, and then engaged in a consensus-building process similar to that described above

to address any coding discrepancies. We share the results of this analytic process below.

Results

Interviews with parents in multiethnic-racial families about how they negotiate the transmission of traditions, practices, and value from their respective heritages offered valuable insights into specific multiethnic-racial socialization practices that they perceived as advancing their children's cultural socialization. We share four of those practices below.

Co-Parents Invest in Each Other's Cultural Practices

A number of interviewed parents cited the importance of putting in the time and effort to learn about their co-parent's culture and cultural experiences (and vice-versa). For example, Mia is a Filipina woman in her fifties who raised two children with her Irish-American husband. Mia described numerous ways in which her husband signaled to both her and their children that he was invested in learning about and participating in her Filipina culture. According to Mia, "It came from him that almost all our vacation time and months went to the Philippines." She added: "Before we got married, my husband surprised me and he sent away, in those days, for an audio cassette and books and learned Tagalog." They also joined a predominantly Filipino Catholic church, and, when their children began singing in the choir, her husband suggested the two parents join the choir as well. According to Mia:

> So there is my White husband in the Philippines shirt singing all the Tagalog songs phonetically. He kind of generally knows what he's saying, but not understanding, and so the four of us are singing this thing for 9 days before Christmas, and it's hectic, but it's wonderful, and most of it came around because of my husband.

For her part, Mia learned to bake traditional Irish foods such as soda bread and corned beef, and encouraged her daughter to participate in an Irish dance troupe.

According to Mia, she and her husband's mutual interest and enthusiasm for each other's cultures supported their goal for their children "to be comfortable in both" their Irish and Filipino identities. Mia took it as evidence of their successful cultural socialization practices that both of her children "joined the Filipino club" at their respective colleges, despite physical appearances ("brown hair and very, very fair skin") that made their Filipino heritage less evident to others.

Mia explained that her husband's investment in participating in Filipino culture was, in large part, because "he just wanted to make me happy. That's a definite aspect of his personality." However, another parent, Cami— an African American woman in her early sixties raising one daughter with her Polish American husband— argued that enthusiasm for a co-parent's culture needs to be driven by an intrinsic curiosity and interest in that new culture. She explained:

> If you're in a relationship that's multicultural, you've got to find those things that are unique [about your co-parent's culture] and embrace them. And really not just do them because you want to show the other person you're caring, but because you like them.

She added that, from her perspective, the source of many of the conflicts between parents in multiethnic-racial families is that "they're not looking to embrace and understand and respect and appreciate those things that are the base and core of who you are." As an example, Cami explained: "Growing up in a Black Baptist church, there were certain things that were just non-negotiable, and that is dressing up for church…So that's a cultural thing, but it is also something that I feel like, you dress the part, you dress for the occasion. And that's something that was really important for my daughter [to learn]." She explained that her Polish-American husband—who did not care about fashion and did not own a single suit when they met— had to be open to really learning about the ways in which that emphasis in Black culture on dressing for the occasion was a deep-seated response to slavery and inequality. Cami explained:

> Back during sharecropping and slavery, slaves had to stand outside the church. So if you look at any movies like *The Color Purple*, those people were dressed up in their Sunday best, because that was the only time you had nice clothes. And so culturally that's how I grew up. When we were putting on our best clothes, they were set aside for those moments when we had to show up. As we say, 'show up and show out.'

As Cami noted, understanding why she perceived dressing up for the occasion to be such an important cultural practice to share with her daughter required her husband to work to understand the historical circumstances underlying the practice.

There were also parents who described the opportunity to learn about and participate in their co-parent's culture as meaningful or simply fun. For example, Douglas— a European American man in his thirties raising a daughter with an Iranian woman—described the way in which he really "took to" the Iranian celebration of the Persian New Year. He appreciated the practice of "jumping over fire to cleanse your soul prior to the new year" and expressed enthusiasm for incorporating these traditions into their own growing

family. Likewise, Lourdes—a Mexican American woman in her fifties raising two children with an Icelandic-American— explained: "When my son was about seven, I started learning about Iceland. And so I wanted to bring that to our children so that they knew about that side of them too. So we started celebrating." She described several Icelandic traditions that her family enthusiastically participated in including the Christmas traditions associated with the legend of the "Yule Cat" and the "Yule Lads" rather than Santa Claus.

Finally, it should be noted that there were parents who participated in interviews who expressed discomfort with embracing aspects of their co-parent's culture. For example, Marisa—an Italian American woman in her early thirties raising a son with a Indian-American husband— expressed reservations about her husband's investment in giving an Indian name to their soon-to-be-born second child. Marisa explained:

> You know everything's been about an Indian name right now, and I'm like, well I'm White. You know, you want to make your family proud and have this Indian name, but my family's like, what the hell is that name, you know?

Marisa also expressed reservations about the cultural practice within many Indian families of young children sleeping in the same room as their parents. As Marisa explained:

> [My husband] didn't want my son to be in his own room at an early age. I wanted him to, but we worked hard, and my husband was on board with it, and we worked very hard to get him in his own room at a month [old]. You know, after a month, he was done in our room…But when his mom came down to visit for the first time, his mom actually put him back in our room. She wanted things done the Indian way.

For Marisa, several of the "Indian ways" of parenting incited feelings of concern and frustration rather than curiosity or enthusiasm.

Co-Parents Both Take Active Role in Cultural Socialization

Another promising practice that emerged from our interviews was the importance (in heterosexual families) of fathers playing an active role in their children's cultural socialization rather than treating children's cultural socialization as primarily the mother's domain. This shared role practice is likely useful in all types of families, but takes on additional importance in a multiethnic-racial family in which the co-parents come from different ethnic heritages and possess knowledge of different cultural practices, traditions, and values. For example, Jimmy—a Polish American man raising two children with a Japanese American wife— explained that "very early after my wife and I started dating…we started talking about okay, when we have a family, we said we want our children to have these strong identities." He added that, symbolically, they gave their daughters Japanese first names "because we wanted them to have a strong identity and [one's] name is an important part of that. We also gave my daughters' Polish middle names so they would have that part of my culture." Importantly, both Jimmy and his wife both then sought in numerous ways to introduce their children to practices, traditions, and values from their respective cultures. Specifically, their children attended Japanese language school on Saturdays, and Jimmy's wife engaged the whole family in cultural activities through the Japanese Americans Citizens League. For his part, Jimmy noted that, where they live, "Polish culture is harder to find than it used to be", but that he cooks a lot of Polish dishes for his family. He added: "At the Catholic Church I grew up in, they have a Polish festival every year that involves polka bands. My mother and father usually work at it, and a lot more recent Polish immigrants will go there, so there's a lot of Polish language being spoken, and so we go to that every year as a kind of space for them." These examples reveals ways in which both Jimmy and his co-parent take an active role in their children's cultural socialization.

The same was true of other fathers in our sample such as Thomas, a Trinidadian man raising two children with a Norwegian-American woman. For Thomas's Norwegian-American co-parent, the most important mechanism for connecting her children to their Norwegian heritage was their participation in a Lutheran church whose congregants primarily came from Norwegian heritage. For Thomas, helping his children connect to their Trinidadian heritage revolved around food, celebrations, and 'chosen' extended family. As Thomas explained:

> I come from a culture where a substantial amount of men know how to cook, so I prepare the Caribbean food. I don't expect this Norwegian woman to cook Trinidad food. I handle that myself so that they have access to the cuisine. I think it helps reinforce the culture.

Similar to Jimmy, Thomas also saw cultural festivals as an important tool for connecting his children with their heritage. He explained: "Carri-fest" is "a lively event and so that's kind of a different type of experience and vibe then they would get in [their hometown]." Thomas added:

> I think having had that experience has reinforced certain cultural aspects and a lot of my friends from the Caribbean still view them (his children) as like their nephews, you know. So it's nice to know that sense of

> culture because in the Caribbean, you know, you have all these extended family members that we don't really differentiate.

Thomas explained that participating in all of these different cultural practices helped his children feel a genuine connection to their Trinidadian heritage. He explained: "I think with them going away to college, I think they actually realize how much of a Caribbean influence they have." He added: "I didn't ask them to do this, but they had a big Trinidad and Tobago flag in the [dorm] room, and as a parent it makes you feel proud."

Jimmy and Thomas's active participation in their children's cultural socialization processes are notable because several parents in our study described family dynamics in which fathers were significantly less engaged in their children's cultural socialization. For example, Lili an Afro-French mother raising three children in the United States, has worked in numerous ways to introduce her children to her French culture including speaking exclusively French to her children and enrolling them in a French-immersion school program. Lili's co-parent Joseph is a Kenyan man, and Lili explained Joseph's more limited role in their children's cultural socialization in this way:

> I feel like I push mine a lot, like on my kids. And I wish they were more Kenyan. So I've been telling for 8 years, like, hey, speak Swahili to her. Like I speak French so you need to speak Swahili. And whenever we go to like Kenya, if like she doesn't speak Swahili, it's like somehow my fault. I'm like, 'What?' Why is it my fault that your child is not speaking Swahili? So it's now recently where I kind of asked around and I have a friend who is from Tanzania. And I was like, hey, how do you do with your kids? Like can she pass me the contact of a woman in Texas who teaches Swahili on Zoom. And now they are taking classes like on Zoom with a Kenyan woman from Tanzania, when my husband is here. Like I feel like I pushed, okay, we need to resolve this issue. You need to pass down your culture to your kids. And I'm gonna take over this thing even though I don't know Swahili.

Lili was one of several interviewed mothers who described themselves as feeling responsible for sharing not only their own culture practices with their children but their male co-parent's cultural practices as well. For example, Grace is a Chinese women raising two children with her Ashkenazi Jewish husband. Grace described numerous ways in which she works to introduce her children to Chinese cultural practices, but she also added: "I'm [also] doing a lot of the legwork too with the Jewish part. I'm the mom, you know, and that's kind of like the gender norm that we're adhering to." As an example, Grace described herself as the parent more likely to suggest that they take the children to religious services at their local synagogue. Similarly, Hannah—a European American raising two children with her Chinese husband—explained:

> A lot of the Chinese things in our house are there because I've decided that's important, because I like holidays, and I like observing culture. Whereas he's just like not interested in that at all. So I do think he's happy for me to do it. He's not the one pushing that though.

These perspectives offered by parents from different families make clear that cultural socialization in multiethnic-racial families really requires both parents to play an active role in cultural socialization processes.

Co-Parents are Self-Reflective About their Own Cultural Practices and Traditions

Several interviewed parents asserted that the most important advice they could give to new parents leading multiethnic-racial families is to think about which practices, traditions, and values feel critical to them to carry forward, and which do not. One parent, Celia—a Mexican woman raising two children with an Italian American man—explained that it's crucial to have "a really clear view of what you want for your children and work toward getting there." She added: "Choose to focus on the most important parts." Farah—an Iranian woman raising a child with a European-American man—added: "Define what's important for you and make sure your partner is on board."

For Celia, Farah, and a number of other parents, sharing their first language with their children was their top priority in terms of cultural socialization. Celia explained: "I've chosen to value Spanish a lot in raising my children. I always speak to them in Spanish. My husband doesn't speak Spanish, and it makes it really difficult to have family conversations at home because I'll speak to the children and then I'll have to repeat what I say to him." As for why it mattered so much to her, Celia explained: "A lot of it is practical. I want them to be able to communicate easily with their [extended] family." Later in the interview she added:

> Because we don't both speak Spanish, it's less likely they're going to continue to speak Spanish as they're older. That's what worries me the most. Look, I have 21 nieces and nephews, and my children are by far the youngest… The ones that had two Mexican parents, their children feel Mexican, right? And the ones that grew up hybrid don't at all associate themselves as being Mexican. And I'm really hopeful…that I can make things different.

Farah took a similar approach to Celia in only speaking Farsi with her young daughter. Farah explained: "I do think the language is a cultural identity you lose if you lose the language. I mean this is how worlds get conquered, right? You make the country stop using their language. And so I think if she doesn't have that, there is this loss of identity. And it's very very important to me that she has that Iranian identity as well." Farah added that because so few people in their social circles speak Farsi, "I struggled initially a little bit of the way of not making them feel bad. And I think it took some time for me to just say, you know, the conversation between my daughter and I, this is what I want, and I just need to focus on it."

Other parents described other cultural practices that felt critical to them to pass forward to their children. Achira—a South Asian American parent raising a child with an Italian American man—was adamant that her daughter have a South Asian name. She explained that "there has to be something that marks for people that she has South Asian heritage." Reflecting on her daughter's physical appearance, she added: "I wish that it was more easy to identify her as a South Asian. I think her name helps, so I'm so glad that I insisted on that." Achira also described her investment in shaving her daughter's head and piercing her ears shortly after she was born in accordance with her South Asian cultural tradition. Because her husband had reservations about both of these practices, Achira explained: "That was like a tense, tense, tense practice, but it was done, and she's fine." She added that there have also been traditions her husband values such as over-the-top Christmas celebrations that, "I'm not super comfortable with, but I know it's important to him, so it's something I kind of just deal with." Reflecting on her and her husband's negotiations around cultural socialization, Achira observed: "I just didn't realize [before parenthood] how much we want our experiences in our lives to be replicated."

Another parent, Stephanie—an Ashkenazi Jewish woman raising two children in Spain with a Spanish co-parent—explained that, in accordance with Jewish tradition, "Immediately upon birth, I wanted to circumcise my son, and Spanish culture and traditions don't do that. They don't even allow it under their national health system in the hospital." Stephanie described herself as surprised by the extent to which carrying out this tradition mattered to her:

> I had to really question myself. I was like, is this worth it? I don't know why it's so important to me…[But] it is like a big part of my tradition and my learning and who I am. I'm not religious, I just consider it a big part of my culture, and so it was a very weird feeling to me to be in Spain and then also say my kids aren't going to be connected to this in the way that you're supposed to be.

As Stephanie explained, "My husband's parents were incredibly freaked out by like in-home penis surgery." She praised her husband for recognizing her own investment in this cultural practice that felt so foreign to him, and she added that her adamancy about carrying out the circumcision "created for me this massive, incredible tale of who I am."

Being self-reflective about one's cultural heritage also entails identifying the cultural practices and traditions that *don't* feel critical to parents in multiethnic-racial families. Carmen—a Mexican American woman raising two children with a European American man—explained that parenting in a multiethnic-racial family "forces you to think about your own childhood and your own family and your own things that you probably don't otherwise think about. And which of those things are important to you?" She noted, for example, that Catholic practices are central to the traditions of many Mexican families including her own, but that "praying to the Virgin Mary wasn't ultimately a critical part of my Mexican identity, even though it was something I grew up with. And so I realized that that could be something I could give up, and it really didn't matter to me."

Finally, being self-reflective about cultural socialization also entails recognizing practices and traditions from one's own culture that do not fit well into a parent's newly-formed multiethnic-racial family. For example, Jae— a Korean American man raising two children with an Irish American woman— was highly invested in sharing aspects of Korean culture with his children, but he also identified several aspects of traditional Korean culture he wanted to temper within his own multiethnic-racial family. First, Jae explained that some of the patriarchal dimensions of Korean culture meant that there were a variety of ways in his own childhood family in which sons were treated as more important than daughters, and that he and his co-parent were committed to discontinuing those practices with their own children. Likewise, Jae explained:

> One of the values that is very important [in Korean culture] is education. I worry that in traditional Korean culture, it can go way overboard where it's like if you're not a doctor or a lawyer, then you've failed.

Jae added that he appreciated his co-parent pushing him to be mindful of encouraging their children to explore their passions in whatever form they take. In reflecting on their approach to cultural socialization, Jae noted: "It's always like a constant struggle of like, what are the values that we want to keep and what are the values that we want to create?" Along similar lines, Marcus—an African American man raising three children with a European-American co-parent—explained that he and his wife have sought to find a middle ground between some of the authoritarian disciplinary practices he associates with many African

American families and the permissive practices he associates with many White families. Reflecting on his experience in a multiethnic-racial family, Marcus observed: "I think I've learned a little humility as far as like, you know, does my culture offer the best solution to every issue? I say no." Reflecting on his own disciplinary experiences as a child, Marcus explained:

> I certainly reflect on how to integrate some of those things and pass them down without stomping them all over everybody and having the worst of those things kind of get in there too. I want the best of those things, not the worst.

Both Jae and Marcus perceived their ability to engage in such self-reflection about which cultural values and practices *not* to carry forward into their multiethnic-racial families as contributing to their children's positive cultural socialization.

Co-Parents Embrace Their Children's Multiethnic-Racial Identities

Another important practice that emerged among a relatively small number of participants were parents in multiethnic-racial families who actively embraced and nurtured their children's identity as multiethnic-racial individuals. For example, Thomas—the Trinidadian man raising two sons with a Norwegian American woman— explained of his sons: "I feel good knowing they have access to two different worlds, and I'm proud to be able to help get them that." Along similar lines, Arash— an Iranian woman raising two daughters with a European American man— shared:

> There are a lot of things I love about the United States, and I think that my daughters are perhaps one of the best things that encapsulates that for me where they have a lineage that goes back to the Mayflower as well as being first generation. And I think that there are very few countries where things like that are even possible. That is definitely not possible in Iran, so I think that's something that should not be taken for granted.

While nearly all of the parents who participated in interviews could identify ways in which their children benefitted from growing up in a multiethnic-racial family, Thomas and Arash were two of just a handful of parents who explicitly expressed pride in their children's multiethnic-racial identities. In so doing, they differed from other parents in our study who tended to treat their children's multiethnic-racial status more matter-of-factly or as a challenge for their family to navigate.

Several other parents described efforts to help their children explore their multiethnic-racial identities. For example, Hannah—the European American woman described above raising two children with a Chinese man— explained:

> I'm trying desperately, always, to find books, movies, anything where they can see themselves. Thus, they can read about other kids who are either of mixed background or a Chinese background going to America. Just so they can see, like, you're not the only person who's going through this. And you're part of a group of people.

Along similar lines, May—a Chinese American woman raising a child with an Ashkenazi Jewish co-parent— described introducing her daughter as a teenager to the work of a photographer, Tseng Kwong Chi, "whose work is very much about cultural hybridity and pluralism." May explained that her daughter ultimately wrote her senior thesis in college about Chi's art and explained—by reading aloud the acknowledgements of her daughter's thesis— that Chi's work "captured an emotion in a 14-year-old confused, biracial me that I was and I'm still unable to verbalize." May added that her daughter wrote in her thesis: "I saw myself in Kwong Chi. I felt seen, heard, and understood in a way that I never thought was possible." Both Hannah and May took active steps to support their children in negotiating the world as multiethnic-racial individuals.

A handful of parents not only supported their children in negotiating their multiethnic-racial identity status, but also found ways to develop practices that mixed and synthesized their family's multiple cultures. For example, May explained that every year their family "do[es] a Buddhist Seder for Passover" that added her Chinese heritage into a Jewish tradition. Likewise, when it came time for her daughter's Bat Mitzvah—a Jewish rite of passage ceremony—their family "replaced the Torah with the I Ching" and incorporated into the ceremony the Four Noble Truths, one of the most important teachings in Buddhism. Along similar lines, Akwasi and Brianna— Ghanean and Ashkenazi Jewish co-parents— described holding a baby-naming ceremony for their daughter that mixed Ghanean and Jewish traditions:

> Our parents both spoke. They did Ghanean prayers and songs, and then the Jewish song, and then we did some like water rituals, like bathing her feet and tying beads on her wrists and ankles. We just wanted it to be really special and honor all of her heritage.

Both of these families found opportunities in reinvent existing cultural rituals to acknowledge and honor their family's multiple heritages.

Finally, Bernie and Marnie—African American and Ashkenazi Jewish co-parents respectively— explained that their treatment of their son's hair offered an opportunity to blend their family's cultures as well. As Marnie explained:

> We try to celebrate his hair. I guess maybe that's something culturally that was cool. He's not getting his hair cut till he's three. So it's really big and like a nice giant afro. So it's kind of hard to deal with sometimes, and we spend a lot of time combing it out, a lot of time doing it. And that's kind of celebrating both cultures that we're like treating his curls, but we're also not cutting until he's three.

Marnie added that they do take their son to a barbershop to get his hair braided and that "a stylist there is also mixed, so he knows how to do it, and we feel comfortable with him." In these explanations, Marnie invoked both a Jewish cultural tradition of not cutting children's hair until they turn 3 years old as well as their family's recognition that spending time styling their son's hair represents an everyday opportunity to celebrate their son's Blackness and strengthen his connection to Black culture. In all of these different ways, parents in our study sought to engage in practices that embraced their children's multiethnic-racial identities and the multiple heritages present within their family.

Discussion

This qualitative study explored how parents in multiethnic-racial families negotiate with their co-parents the transmission of traditions, practices, and values from their respective cultural heritages, as well as these parents' descriptions and understandings of co-parenting practices that helped their children to benefit from their connection to both heritages. In so doing, we sought to contribute to a very sparse body of research literature about cultural socialization practices in multiethnic-racial families.

As described in the Results, parents in this study identified several different co-parenting practices that they believed had supported their children's cultural socialization within a multiethnic-racial family context. These practices included investing in learning about each other's cultures, both parents taking active roles in their children's cultural socialization, being self-reflective about which aspects of their own cultural traditions felt important to carry forward (and which did not), and recognizing and embracing their children's multiethnic-racial identities. These practices identified by parents in multiethnic-racial families can inform the relatively sparse body of research and scholarship on cultural socialization processes in multiethnic-racial families.

As we noted in the Introduction, we are not aware of an existing theoretical model of parental socialization that focuses specifically on multiethnic-racial families (Atkin & Yoo, 2019). Accordingly, the present study relies upon Gonzales-Backen's (2013) Ecological Model of Biethnic Identity Formation that includes familial ethnic-racial socialization as a core component of the model. Several of the insights offered by participants in the present study offer additional nuance and raise useful questions about the portions of Gonzales-Backen's theoretical model focused on familial ethnic-racial socialization processes.

For example, Gonzales-Backen (2013) posits that familial ethnic-racial socialization directly influences multiethnic youths' identity development, and she adds that this relationship between familial ethnic-racial socialization and a young person's ethnic-racial identity development is moderated by the quality of the parent–child relationship. Insights from the present study suggest that, not only is this relationship between familial ethnic socialization and ethnic-racial identity moderated by parent–child relationship quality, but also by each parent or caregiver's conception of their *role* in their children's cultural socialization. As described in the Results, there were a number of fathers in the present study who conceptualized cultural socialization as the primary responsibility of their children's mother and, consequently, took a passive and limited role in their children's cultural socialization. This finding resonates with previous research in this area (e.g. Thornton et al., 1990). While such a stance may weaken children's ethnic-racial identity development in all types of families, this stance by a parent in a multiethnic-racial family may have the effect of cutting children off from a sense of belonging, connection, and understanding of one or more of their cultural heritages.

Related to this point were the high number of participants in the present study who echoed previous research reporting that children need to be proficient in the language associated with a particular heritage in order to feel an authentic connection to that heritage (Wang et al., 2020). Several participants noted that helping children to develop such proficiency can be particularly challenging in multiethnic-racial families in which co-parents may not be proficient in each other's heritage languages and, thus, it requires a significant investment on the part of one or both parents to speak consistently to their children in their respective heritage languages. In keeping with the imbalanced role finding described above, the present study suggests that mothers in (heterosexual) multiethnic-racial families were often more committed than fathers to teaching their heritage language to their children and, thus, described their children as feeling a deeper, more authentic connection to their mother's heritage than their father's heritage.

As previously noted, Gonzales-Backen (2013) posits that familial ethnic-racial socialization directly influences the ethnic-racial identity development of youth in multiethnic-racial families, and she conceptualizes familial ethnic-racial socialization as the combined influence of a young person's mother, father, and extended family. Gonzales-Backen adds that these different family members can favor cultural practices, traditions, and values that not only differ

but actually conflict with one another. Gonzales-Backen's model stops short of delving deeply into how such conflicting perspectives may interact with one another and, in so doing, influence children's ethnic-racial identity development. The present study builds on this model in suggesting that an important co-parenting practice within multiethnic-racial families is the willingness and ability of each parent or caregiver to not only respect and support the cultural socialization goals of their co-parent, but also to stand up to their own extended family members who are challenging these goals. Recall, for example, Stephanie—an Ashkenazi Jewish parent—describing how her Spanish co-parent stood up to his own extended family in order to support her investment in circumcising their son (in keeping with Jewish tradition). In short, the present study suggests that familial ethnic-racial socialization processes are influenced not only by the socialization goals of children's parents, but also by the willingness of those co-parents to support each other's socialization goals in the face of opposition from extended family members.

The present study also suggests that the interaction between co-parents' socialization goals within a multiethnic-racial family are further influenced by the ability of each co-parent to be self-reflective about the practices, traditions, and values associated with their own cultural heritage. Such self-reflection includes clarity about the practices, traditions, and values that *are* important to each co-parent to share with their children as well as clarity about practices, traditions, and values that do not resonate with the goals of their newly-formed family. Recall, for example, that Jae—a Korean American parent raising two children with an Irish American co-parent— described patriarchal elements of his own Korean culture that he did not want to carry forward into his newly-formed family. This ability to be self-reflective about socialization experiences from his own childhood contributed to Jae's ability to work productively with his wife to integrate their respective socialization goals for their children.

Finally, in her theoretical model, Gonzales-Backen (2013) includes a young person's physical appearance as another factor influencing their multiethnic-racial identity development. She further cited research focused on Latino adolescents that found a stronger association between familial socialization and ethnic identity development for adolescents who had darker skin and were rated as looking more Latinx and less European (Gonzales-Backen & Umana-Taylor, 2011). There remains much to be learned about the role of a young person's physical appearance in influencing the cultural socialization processes within their multiethnic-racial family. However, the current study extends Gonzales-Backen's (2013) attention to this issue by capturing how several parents deliberately gave their children names and other signifiers of their cultural membership out of a recognition that their child's physical appearance might not automatically indicate such membership to the broader world. This finding raises an important question about the ways in which the physical appearance of a young person in a multiethnic-racial family might influence the motivation of their parents or caregivers to engage (or not engage) in cultural socialization processes. While research in Latinx families found familial socialization to be positively associated with children "looking more Latino" (Gonzles-Backen & Umana-Taylor, 2011), this association between familial socialization and physical appearance may be more complex in multiethnic-racial families. Cumulatively, the ways in which the findings in the present study both identify nuances and raise additional questions about the role of familial cultural socialization in multiethnic identity models points to the need further for empirical and theoretical work focused more narrowly on familial socialization processes in multiethnic-racial families.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations to the present study. First, while the present study features a more diverse sample of multiethnic-racial families than much of the existing scholarship, it is not representative of the wide range of multiethnic-racial families in the United States. For example, the present study does not include a multiethnic-racial family in which one parent identified as Native American, despite the fact that the largest percentage of multiracial adults in the United States identify as White and Native American (Parker et al., 2015). On the other hand, six of the 37 parents (16%) who participated in interviews identified their ethnicity as Ashkenazi Jewish, despite the fact that Ashkenazi Jews make up less than 3% of the population in the United States. These differences between our sample and the broader population of parents in multiethnic-racial families are likely due to the particular online groups that the authors relied upon for recruiting participants. In addition to differences in demographics, one might also reasonably infer that individuals who volunteered to participate in a research study about co-parenting practices in multiethnic-racial families are individuals who may be particularly predisposed to value the diverse set of cultural assets within their multiethnic-racial families. Put another way, participants in our sample may have been less likely than the broader population of multiethnic-racial families in the United States to focus exclusively on cultural socialization practices from just one of the cultural groups represented in their family. While a qualitative study like this one never aspired to recruit a sample that was representative of multiethnic-racial families in the United States, future work in this area would do well to

be mindful of including multiethnic-racial families with ethnic-racial compositions and ideologies about culture and diversity that have not been adequately included in the research literature.

Another limitation to the present study is its narrow focus upon the perspectives of parents in multiethnic-racial families about the practices that support their children's cultural socialization. While these parental perspectives are valuable— particularly in a study focused on how co-parents in multiethnic-racial families negotiate with each other the transmission of traditions, practices, and values from their respective heritages— future research would do well to include the perspectives of young people raised in such multiethnic-racial families about the influence of these socialization practices on their own development.

Conclusion

A steadily increasing percentage of the children born in the United States have parents from different ethnic-racial backgrounds (Alba et al., 2018; Csizmadia & Atkin, 2022). While indeed there have been multiethnic-racial families in the United States throughout the country's history, it is also the case that laws prohibiting interracial marriages and relationships have been present in the United States from the country's founding through the late 1960s, and discouraging and persecutorial social forces continue to persist (Cashin, 2017). These prohibitions have contributed to a sparse body of research or even practical guidance on how co-parents in multiethnic-racial families negotiate with each other the transmission of practices, traditions, and values from their respective heritages. This dearth of scholarship is particularly concerning given the robust body of research that has found parental ethnic-racial socialization to be associated with a wide range of positive youth outcomes (Gonzales-Backen et al., 2017; McDermott et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2015; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014) as well as research suggesting that such socialization is often more complicated in multiethnic-racial families than in mono-ethnic-racial families (Atkin & Yoo, 2019). Accordingly, the present study seeks to contribute to the research literature in this area by sharing several of the practices that parents in multiethnic-racial families have identified as contributing to their children's socialization into their and their co-parents' ethnic-racial groups. In so doing, we seek to inform nascent theoretical work on familial socialization in multiethnic-racial families, as well as to offer practical guidance to the rapidly increasing number of parents in multiethnic-racial families seeking to nurture their children's feelings of connection and belonging to two or more heritages.

Declarations

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