

# The Effect of Parents' Ethnic Socialization Practices on Ethnic Identity, Self-Esteem and Psychological Adjustment of Multi Ethnic Children in Malaysia

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**Abstract**—The present study aims to explore the role of parents' ethnic socialization practices contributes to the ethnic identity development, self-esteem and psychological adjustment of multi ethnic children in Sabah, Malaysia. A total of 342 multi ethnic children (age range = 10 years old to 14 years old; mean age = 12.65 years, SD = 0.88) and their parents participated in the present study. The modified version of Multi group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM), The Familial Ethnic Socialization Measure (FESM), The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) and Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale Edition 2 (BERS-2) were used in this study. The results showed that: i) parents' ethnic socialization practice was a strong predictor of ethnic identity development of multi ethnic children; ii) parents' ethnic socialization practice also was a significant predictor of self-esteem of multi ethnic children; iii) parents' ethnic socialization practice was not a significant predictor of psychological adjustment of multi ethnic children. The results of this study showed the implications parents' ethnic socialization practices and ethnic identity development in successful multi ethnic families.

**Keywords**—Ethnic Identity development, multi ethnic children Parents' Ethnic Socialization Practices, psychological adjustment, self-esteem.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE term parental ethnic socialization refers to the way in which parents transmit information, values, and perspectives regarding race and ethnicity to their children (Hughes et al., 2006)[1]. This information may encompass a range of issues such as ethnic group history, custom and traditions, ethnic pride, awareness of discrimination, intergroup trust and mistrust, and appreciation of diversity and equality across groups [1],[2].

Although, racial information may come from other sources such as teachers, others family member, and friends. But, parental information are more frequent and have more impact in shaping their children ethnic identity, as they are the primary ethnic socializing agents to their children. [1], [3] agree that family provides the primary foundation for ethnic identity development through the process of ethnic-racial socialization. The ethnic information that the children receive

from parents about how they should perceive their ethnic group and the meaning of their ethnicity to themselves play an important role in shaping children's ethnic identity. Thus, a positive practice of ethnic-racial socialization by the parents would develop a strong and positive ethnic identity in their children.

Numerous findings from research on the development of ethnic identity documented that ethnic socialization and ethnic identity have a positive relationship with a range of children outcomes, including self-esteem, academic motivation and achievement, and behavioral outcomes [4], and those at higher stages of development enjoy a higher level of self-esteem [5]. [6] has been proposed that individuals with a strong sense of their ethnic identity are more psychologically healthy than those with a weaker sense of ethnic identity. A strong sense of ethnic identity is linked to positive psychological adjustment in terms of self-esteem, life satisfaction, happiness, and less loneliness and depression [7], [8].

The studies on multi ethnic children also emphasized that family provides the basis to this group of children in developing their ethnic identity. Nevertheless, if both parents are from cultural backgrounds that different from each other, the parental ethnic-racial socialization practice may negatively affect their children's formation of ethnic, racial and cultural identity. As claimed by [9] that biracial children are particularly vulnerable to differential treatments by their parents and relatives, social rejection by their peers, and ambivalent attention in their schools and communities.

Many psychologists believe that multi ethnic children are often faced with difficulties and conflict in identifying and choosing their ethnicity in a community [10], [11]. They are often stressed out in choosing their ethnic identity, as choosing an ethnic over the other may result in guilt [12]. On the other hand, some psychologists believe that inter-racial/ethnic children who have identified and understood their heritage and both cultures for their parents from the early stages experience less identity problems [13], [14], [15], and ethnic identity may be associated with high levels of psychological well-being, high level of self-esteem, coping and optimists, and better academic performance [16].

Much research has been conducted along the lines of ethnic socialization, ethnic identity and psychological well-being, but

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the findings often are inconsistent, and the conclusions are limited. Besides, because of ethnic socialization, ethnic identity relates to a variety of psychological adjustment, it is important to investigate the relationship between these variables. Thus, this study aims to explore the role of parents' ethnic socialization practices contributes to the ethnic identity development, self-esteem and psychological adjustment of multi ethnic children in Sabah, Malaysia.

## II. METHOD

### A. Participants

A total of 342 multi ethnic children (age range = 10 years old to 14 years old; mean age = 12.65 years, SD = 0.88) from Sabah, Malaysia participated in the present study.

### B. Measures

The participants were asked to give responses to a set of questionnaire which consists of five parts. Parts A consist demographic information regarding gender, ethnics, ages, and religions. Part B, The Familial Ethnic Socialization Measure (FESM), Part C, Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM), Part D, The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE), and The Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS).

#### *The Familial Ethnic Socialization Measure (FESM)*

The parents' ethnic socialization practice was measured by using a modified version of The Familial Ethnic Socialization (Umana-Taylor & Fine, 2001) [17]. The FESM was used to measure the degree to which participants perceive that their parents socialize them with respect to their ethnicity. The FESM consists of 12 items and are rated on a 5- point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (very much).

#### *The Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)*

The modified version of Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) (Phinney & Ong, 2007) was used to measure an individual's degree of identification with their ethnic group in two aspects, exploration and commitment towards an ethnic group. The modified version of MEIM used in this study consists of 12 items. The items are scored on a 4-point Likert scale, with points of 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

#### *The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)*

This scale was developed by Rosenberg (1965) to measure global self-esteem. The scale consists of 10 items, with items answered on a 4-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Participants were asked to answer questions on this scale to indicate their sense of self-worth. RSE consists four negative items. The scoring for these items were reversed so that in each case the scores go from less to more self-esteem.

#### *The Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS)*

The Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS) [18] was used to measure the strengths of the children with significant emotional and behavioral concerns. The BERS

consists 52 items that measure five domains (i.e., Interpersonal Strength, Family Involvement, Intrapersonal Strength, School Functioning, and Affective Strength). The BERS was designed to be completed by any adult (e.g., parent, teacher, school psychologist) with knowledge about a student. In this study this part had been completed by the participants' parents. The items are rated using a 3-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (not at all like) to 3 (very much like).

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Effect of Parents' Ethnic Socialization Practices on Multi Ethnic Children's Ethnic Identity Development, Self-Esteem, and Psychological Adjustment

The regression analysis was performed to analyze the relationships between parents' ethnic socialization practices and ethnic identity. The variable of parents' ethnic socialization practices (independent variable) was entered into a linear model of regression equation with ethnic identity, self-esteem and psychological adjustment (the four sub scale: Interpersonal Strength, family involvement, intrapersonal strength, school functioning and affective strength) as the dependent variables. Table I, II and III presents the results of regression.

TABLE I  
MULTIPLE REGRESSIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARENTS' ETHNIC  
SOCIALIZATION PRACTICES AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

Independent Variables	Ethnic Identity					
	R <sup>2</sup>	F	sig. F	Beta	t	sig. t
Parents' Ethnic Socialization Practices	.40	220.98	.001	.63	14.86	.001

#### *The Effect of Parents' Ethnic Socialization Practices on Multi Ethnic Children's Ethnic Identity Development*

The regression analyses showed that 40.0% of the variance in ethnic identity development of the participants can be explained by their parents' ethnic socialization practice ( $F_{(1,332)} = 220.980, p < .05$ ). The result showed that parents' ethnic socialization practice (beta = .632,  $t = 14.865, p < .05$ ) was found to contribute significantly and positively to their children ethnic identity development (refer Table I). The finding indicated that the greater the participants perceive that their parents' socialize them with respect to their ethnicity, the greater their identification, preferences and positive feelings towards their ethnic group. This finding was consistent with the study of ethnic from Asian, Indian, Chinese, Philipinos, Vietnamese and Salvadors decendents (mean age 15.5 years) residing in the United States by [3]. They found out that family context explains 50% of the variance associated with the development of ethnic identity for the ethnic groups in their study. The findings suggested that family play a critical role in shaping children ethnic identity and they concluded that the context of the family, which includes ethnic

socialization practices of parents, are factors that are critical to the formation of ethnic identity of all youth.

#### *The Effect of Parents' Ethnic Socialization Practices on Multi Ethnic Children's Self-Esteem*

The analyses in Table II indicated that parental ethnic socialization only can explain 3.7% of the variance in multi ethnic children's self-esteem. However, the model was significant ( $F(1, 326) = 12.356, p > .05$ ). The result showed that parents' ethnic socialization practice ( $\beta = .191, p < .05$ ) contributed significantly and positively to their children self-esteem. This finding suggested that high scores on ethnic socialization were linked to high scores in multi ethnic children's self-esteem. Those received more influence from their parents on their ethnic group tend to have a higher self-esteem. This result is consistent with the finding that had been reported by [4]. They found out that ethnic socialization and ethnic identity have a positive relationship with a range of children outcomes, including self-esteem, academic motivation and achievement, and behavioral outcomes. Theoretical writings on ethnic-racial socialization have also proposed that parents' emphasis on cultural pride and knowledge of one's cultural heritage enhances self-esteem [19]. Spencer also suggested that ethnic-racial socialization play an important function to bolster youths' self-esteem.

TABLE II

MULTIPLE REGRESSIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARENTS' ETHNIC SOCIALIZATION PRACTICES AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

Independent Variables	Self-Esteem					
	R <sup>2</sup>	F	Sig. F	Beta	t	Sig. t
Parents' Ethnic Socialization Practices	.037	12.36	.001	.19	3.52	.001

#### *The Effect of Parents' Ethnic Socialization Practices Ethnic Identity on Psychological Adjustment*

TABLE III

MULTIPLE REGRESSIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARENTS' ETHNIC SOCIALIZATION PRACTICES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT

Dependent variables	R <sup>2</sup>	F	Sig. F	Beta	t	Sig. t
Interpersonal Strenght	.001	.01	.99	-.001	-.02	.99
Family Involvement	.004	1.71	.28	.060	1.08	.28
Intrapersonal Strenght	.001	.01	.98	.001	.01	.98
School Functioning	.003	.91	.34	.053	.95	.34
Afffective Strenght	.009	3.08	.08	.097	1.75	.08

The analyses in Table III indicated that parental ethnic socialization parents' was not a significant predictor of all five sub scale of psychological adjustment of multi ethnic children. The model showed almost no contribution to the sub scale of

interpersonal strength (.01%), family involvement (.04%), intrapersonal strength (.01%), school functioning (.03%) and affective strength (.09%). The result indicated that parents' ethnic socialization practice had no influence on psychological adjustment of multi ethnic children in Sabah, Malaysia.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In summary, the present study highlights the importance of parents' ethnic socialization practice, as indicators of the children's ethnic identity development and psychological adjustment of multi ethnic children. The results of this study indicate that the greater parents' ethnic socialization was related to greater ethnic identity development and better psychological adjustment (interpersonal strength and school functioning). Parents' ethnic socialization also play an important function to bolster multi ethnic children's self-esteem.

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