'A Drumbeat Underneath the Child': Asian Indian Mothers' Perceptions of Their Multiethnic Children's Lived Experiences

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There has been an increase in the number of multiethnic families and children across the world. Within the research addressing the realities and needs of multiethnic children, there has been little inclusion of children of Asian Indian heritage and their mixed heritage families. This phenomenological study includes interviews with eight Asian Indian mothers raising multiethnic children with their non-Asian Indian spouses in the Northeastern United States. Four primary themes emerged through analysis: navigating multiple cultures, effects of pervasive racism, strengths of multiethnic children, and recommendations for professionals.

Keywords: Asian Indian families, multiethnic Asian Indian children, bicultural Asian Indian children, working with multiethnic children and families

INTRODUCTION

The Asian Indian population in the United States has grown exponentially in the United States at a rate of 70%, from almost 1,678,765 in 2000 (0.6% of U.S. population) to 2,843,391 in 2010 (0.9% of U.S. population) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Though Asian Indians are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States, relatively little is known about their adjustment and acculturation here (Farver, Narang, & Bhadha, 2002). Asian Indian immigrant families are influenced by traditional Indian culture which places great value on family, community, and tradition. First generation Asian Indian immigrants often reproduce Indian culture through a specific lens, which creates a dichotomy where the reproduction of their own culture is more traditional or idealized than the cultural context in India (Farver, et al., 2002). Further, these parents have a strong need to preserve cultural values and traditions through social, religious, and cultural knowledge (Iwanmoto, Negi, Partiali, & Creswell, 2013). This emphasis on cultural preservation greatly influences subsequent generations and may cause inter-family conflict as each generation continues to define their own identities (Iwanmoto et al., 2013; Mehrota & Calasanti, 2010).

Asian Indian immigrants are the least likely to engage in mixed race unions (Qian, Blair, & Ruf, 2001). They are one of the most enculturated ethnic groups and are "179 times" more likely to marry within their ethnicity (Qian, Blair, & Ruf, 2001). Multiethnic identity as a term may refer to either people who simultaneously belong to two cultures through their mixed-race heritage or people who are immersed in two different cultures as a result of immigration to another country (Cassels, Chan, Chung, & Birch, 2010). There has been abundant research on the experiences of parents raising mixed race or multiethnic children, and this will be explored in detail below. However, no peer-reviewed research to our knowledge explores the experience of raising Asian Indian multiethnic children, which is the focus of this research.

Multiethnic Families and Children

Across the United States, there has been a rise in the number of families composed of parents of different racial or ethnic identities and their children (McCubbin, McCubbin, Samuels, Zhang, & Sievers, 2013). The literature exploring the experiences of these families and their children uses a variety of terms including biracial, bicultural, multiracial, multicultural, multiethnic, and transcultural (Jeffreys & Zoucha, 2017; McCubbin et al., 2013). In this project, we are using the term multiethnic to refer to both the children and families as this term is inclusive of diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

There are many perceived benefits (pluralistic worldview, stronger sense of self) and challenges (identity tensions, community based racial abuses) when raising children with a multiethnic identity (Soliz, Cronan, Bergquist, Nuru, & Rittenour, 2017). Multiethnic children have been perceived to get less support from their families and struggle developing healthy relationships with their parents than monocultural children (Lorenzo-Blanco, Bares, & Delva, 2013). Children whose parents are supportive of and engage with the multiple identities that the children identified with, have a stronger ethnic identity and self-confidence (Jourdan, 2006). Many multiracial individuals are raised in mixed race households where racial diversity is accepted and supported, resulting in positive multiracial identity (Henderson, 2007). Murphy-Shigematsu (2012) and Spickard (1997) delved into the multiethnic experience of Asian Americans, and noted a huge push back against designating people with singular rather than multiple identities. Murphy-Shigematsu (2012) and Soliz et al. (2017) challenged people to thrust past fixed identities and start to understand identities as fluid in multiethnic families - push the narrative from a singular identity to a multiethnic one. Children of mixed racial and ethnic heritage are increasingly choosing to embrace both parents' heritage (Brunsma, 2005; Dhooper, 2003).

Asian Indian Families

Asian Indian families are traditionally very close; multiple generations support each other and become intricately linked through caregiving and arranged marriage practices (Madathil & Benshoff, 2008). Large extended families and interlinked communities thrive through the practice of caring for elders and arranging the unions of children. This emphasis on family and community has been traditionally supported by the collectivist culture of India, but is often at odds with the individualistic western culture (Madathil & Benshoff, 2008). These conflicting cultural values have created numerous strengths and challenges for Asian Indian immigrant families. Resulting differences in levels of acculturation within Asian Indian immigrant families is a major source of personal conflict and stress (Farver, et al., 2002; Farver, Xu, Bhadha, Narang, & Lieber, 2007). Generational differences in acculturation have also led to a breakdown of the traditional caregiving roles in some families. Asian Indian immigrant families may contend with significant discontent and strife as their second-generation children break from the traditional caregiving and financial support roles upon reaching adulthood (Mehrota & Calasanti, 2010).

Raising Multiethnic Asian Indian Children

Asian Indian immigrant families constantly negotiate their identity as they acculturate and adapt to the United States (DuPree, Bhakta, Patel, & DuPree, 2013; Fishman, Raval, Daga, & Raj, 2014; Inman, Constantine, & Ladany, 1999; Kaduventtoor-Davidson & Inman, 2012; Mann, Roberts, & Montgomery, 2017; Roysircar, 2010). Research has considered the relationship between children and their parents in Southeast Asian and Asian Indian immigrant families in the context of adjustment issues due to

acculturation (Baptiste, 2005; Cassels et al., 2010; Farver et al., 2007; Farver et al., 2002; Jain & Belsky, 1997; Jensen & Dost, 2015; Khaleque, Malik & Rohner, 2015).

There is abundant research on the topic of multiracial families with focus on Black/White, or White/Hispanic families in general, and on Asian Indian immigrant families raising children. Very little research has been conducted on mixed heritage parents or children from other racial and ethnic groups. Of the existing research, multiethnic Asian families are specifically underrepresented. This may be due to many mixed-race Asian children having ambiguous physical features which caused them to be historically identified as white (Bratter, 2007). This may also be a result of the traditional rarity of Asian outmarriage (Qian, Blair, & Ruf, 2001).

To our knowledge there has been no research on Asian Indians raising multiethnic children in the United States or the cultural challenges faced by Asian Indians married to non-Asian Indians. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences and perceptions of Asian Indian mothers of their children's multiethnic lived experience. Here, we have gathered first-hand accounts from eight mothers currently living in New England while raising multicultural children. Through analysis we identified shared experiences facing these mothers and their children regarding complex issues of identity, parenting, and sociocultural interactions. Implications include recommendations to service providers working with multiethnic Asian Indian children and families.

METHODS

This phenomenological project was guided by the research question: "What are Asian Indian immigrant mothers' perceptions of their children's multiethnic experience?" Interviews were conducted with eight Asian Indian mothers of children with a non-Asian Indian father. Interviews were conducted over a one-year period by the first author, an Asian Indian mother of two children who is married to an Asian Indian. The second and third authors are of white European descent and did not participate in the interviews.

Phenomenology is well suited to study commonalities of a shared experience (Grbich, 2013), which in this study was the experience of parenting a multiethnic child of an Asian Indian immigrant mother with a non-Indian spouse in a predominantly white New England state. The mothers had varying experiences in where they grew up, when they moved to the predominantly white state where they raised their children, and the ethnicity and religion of their non-Indian spouse; however, their shared parenting experience was the focus of investigating the essence of parenting their multiethnic children.

This research employed hermeneutic phenomenology to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of participants from their perspectives and in their words, with the researchers as the interpreters. As the interpreters, the researchers include the context of the data/phenomenon and meaning expressed by participants in the analysis while acknowledging their assumptions and position in relation to the study topic and participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The interpretive lenses of researchers are essential in hermeneutic phenomenology; however, the process of bracketing and documenting reactions throughout the analysis is intended to distinguish the researchers' and the participants' experiences in analyzing and presenting the findings (Armour, Rivaux, & Bell, 2009).

Bracketing was an important piece of the process in this project, given the variety of experiences and relationships of the authors related to the experiences of multiethnic families. The first author knew many of the participants, as she is part of a small community of Indian families in the New England region. The second and third authors who had no previous knowledge of participants or the small knit community were equally involved in the data analysis. The second author is the aunt of a multiethnic teenager, and her research is focused on social-emotional development in many contexts. The third author is the parent of two grown Black/Jewish multiethnic children and previously conducted research in a related area when her children were young.

Participants

Purposive snowball sampling was used in this study. To be included in the study, participants had to be an Asian Indian immigrant mother of a multiethnic child with a non-Indian spouse living in the New

England region. To find participants, the first author first reached out to individuals she knew in the community, and asked them to recruit others. The sample (N=8) participants were all female and their ages ranged from 43-60 with a mean of 53. All the partners of the Asian Indian participants were male, married to their partners, and identified as Caucasians. In regards to religion, Asian Indian participants identified as: Christian (2), Hindu (4), and Sikh (2), and their partners identified as Christian (6), and Jewish (2).

Data Collection

A semi-structured interview guide was used to gather the mothers' experiences of parenting a multiethnic child with their non-Indian spouse. The first author designed the interview guide based on the literature as well as her experience as an Indian mother raising her children in a mostly white state. Interviews lasted approximately 60-90 minutes. Sample concepts included in the questions are identity, strengths and challenges raising multiethnic children, their experiences of racism, and acculturation in the United States. A full list of interview questions is available from the first author.

Procedures

This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Southern Maine. The first author reached out through recruitment emails to community members known to her and asked potential participants to forward her email to any Asian Indian parents in multiethnic relationships with children in the region. Eight individuals reached out and all were scheduled for interviews. Consent forms were reviewed in person before each interview, and all participants consented to have their interviews recorded on a digital voice recorder.

Data Analysis

All audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Phenomenological analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Moustakas, 1994) was used to examine the data using the following steps: (1) recording a list of assumptions about the positive and negative experiences of raising multiethnic children; (2) bracketing the researchers' experiences with the community; (3) conducting a naïve reading to absorb the entirety of the data; (4) eliminating data that did not pertain to the lived experience of the participant group; (5) creating meaning units from participants' significant statements; (6) eliminating repetitive and overlapping meaning units; (7) categorizing meaning units into themes; and (8) validating the themes according to the interview transcripts. The data analysis was triangulated by the three researchers as they went through each step of the analysis process together. Given the positionality of the first author, triangulation and bracketing were rigorously adhered to.

RESULTS

Four primary themes emerged through analysis: (a) navigating multiple cultures (b) effects of pervasive racism in their daily lives, (c) unique strengths of multiethnic children, and (d) recommendations for professionals working with multiethnic children.

Theme One: Navigating Multiple Cultures

The participants highlighted that learning to navigate multiple cultures every single day was helping their children to become resilient. Learning the majority cultural rules and having a place in majority culture with a White parent was described by the participants as an advantage. One described, *"One side of the family is White. So, they have understood the norms, the words, phrases, the language, the music, everything that's part of their culture, because that's half of their family. And then the other half of the family is...Indian. So they really learn about and understand both worlds"*. Another participant detailed that she wants her child *"to really try to understand our identities. And then, to identify as both of those. And I think he does"*. Each participant discussed a number of ways they observe their children working to navigate multiple cultures, much of which they interpreted as the result of differing cultural expectations of each parent. There are three sub-themes here: life at home, identity development, and academic achievement.

Life at Home

There are a number of ways in which children must adapt to different styles and expectations of their parents. For one, communication patterns are subtler in Indian families, and the participants shared ways they assist their partners and children to understand this. One participant stated, *"Children have to navigate two different communication styles between my spouse who is direct and myself who is more indirect due to our culture"*. Another participant acknowledged, *"So, trying to balance...the girls know that because of how I grew up I don't really say what I really feel. Or you expect the other person to guess what you are feeling...that's very hard versus their dad who is very direct"*. Daughters do not necessarily adhere to the mothers' notion of gender roles and expectations. One participant shared, *"I grew up with a mother who really dotes on my spouse, because he is the man, and when he's hungry she gets up to get him food. And I've absorbed that. So now my [daughter] has a boyfriend and if the boyfriend ever says I'm hungry, I'll say get up girl go get him food! And, [she is] like, "Why should I get up and do that?...it's part of my culture"*.

The participants acknowledged that the children encounter internal pressures as they navigate family dynamics across cultures. One participant explained, *"There's always pressure as they are always trying to please the adult versus the other kids who goof off and are not doing anything major"*. This can result in a lack of sense of belonging as a multiethnic child and become a burden, and one participant shared, *"It's a challenge, you feel like the floater, or the person who goes from one group to the next, but you don't really belong anywhere, you're not really anchored"*. Additionally, it is difficult to reinforce to the children that being multiethnic is a strength when the mainstream/dominant culture is telling them that it is not. In the words of one participant, *"I'm saying, it's an advantage. The rest of the world is saying it's not an advantage. So that's...I would say the most difficult"*.

Identity Development

The participants witnessed unique paths of identity development in their children. One participant described the variation in her children this way, *"Each child is different...my oldest had the most time with both parents and embraces both cultures. The middle one decided at a very young age you can send me to a Herbew school, but I don't relate, I'm going to pick one side and I'm pick Indian...and my [youngest] told me he doesn't fit in at all"*. Additionally, multiethnic children find it difficult to find a place where they fully belong, and it complicates their experiences of identity development. One participant said, "[My daughter's] *social pressure was finding a place where she fits because there was a phase where at the end of Freshman year, where she would say: I don't belong anywhere...where do I belong? There aren't any people like me"*.

All the participants reflected on the external pressures their children grappled with as they struggled with acculturating to the dominant White American culture. One participant shared, *"I think there are social pressures as they are always trying to figure out where they fit in...My daughter felt she was Indian before she went to high school...once she went to high school she dropped that, she no longer considered herself Indian, she wanted to fit in"*. Another participant corroborated, *"When you're a minority in a majority white Christian background your child wonders who am I? And then they might try to become a white Christian, because they want to live for the will of others...issues like lack of self-confidence, taking up habits, rebelling, or what have you"*.

Academic Achievement

All the participants recognized adopting mainstream cultural assumptions around education with a focus on helping children find their passion, but it was layered within the value of academic success. These expectations impose pressures on the children despite the mothers' attempts to focus on the effort over the outcome. One participant expressed, *"My kids are very anxious about their schoolwork, their grades, even though we've had sort of the more American (White) culture which says just try your best"*. Another participant described, *"The curse of the next generation of Indian kids is that they've got way too much pressure on them from parents, and the discussion Indian families have when they get together is 'oh where is your child going to school?', so there's a lot of pressure on the parents too"*.

All the participants acknowledged their biases around the value of academic success that they grappled with in their everyday life. One participant shared, *"There's still that part of me that's very Indian....that's very (authoritative and I constantly question the children)...how come you're not getting the grades".* Another participant described, *"That sense of motivation is like **a drumbeat underneath the child**. Whether you pull back on it or not, it's there...the sense that you must achieve".*

Theme 2: Effects of Pervasive Racism in Their Daily Lives

In all of the interviews, the participants described varying effects of racism on the lives of their children. There are three sub themes here: (a) coping, (b) skin color, and (c) strategies for managing the impact of racism.

Coping

All the participants struggled with pervasive racism in their daily lives. As one parent described, *"[My kids live in a] surrounding environment which is saying to them that if you're not pure white, you're inferior".* The participants agreed that racism in the New England region was more severe than in more ethnically diverse geographic regions. One expressed, *"We have [experienced social pressures], because it's predominantly white. My kids do stand out, either the color of their skin, the way they look..., they do stand out".* In comparing experiences of racism [here] with those of their friends and families in more diverse states or cities, one participant said *"I do think the big cities as well as these small states, I think they have an element of [racism] regardless".* Another participant explained, *"I do think it's the case that this region has a little bit more [racism], as much as we'd like to think we're so accepting up here, the lack of exposure, people don't know the differences between certain races. Which is pathetic. But that's the way it is".*

Coping with racism in schools was another shared experience of participants in this study, including experiences with multiple stereotypes. Some teachers assumed the children, who present as Indian, would excel in science and math. As one participant described, *"...most kids will say, the teachers expect that if you're Indian, you're brilliant and study really hard, right? Right?"* Another participant acknowledged their children being 'sized up' in unspoken ways, saying *"When the kids first started in the system, the teachers would think twice about whether the kids were Indian, or non-Indian, or American. Then as the kids proved that they were...not linguistically or socially challenged, the teachers moved on and ignored the fact of race".*

The participants explored the impact of the lack of diversity and the representation of Indian culture in schools as leaving their children feeling lonely, isolated, and frustrated. One result is that their children must constantly explain themselves and their culture. One participant highlighted, *"People don't understand the kind of skin variations, the diversity that exists, because Asia is so unknown... it's like those people with slanted eyes".* The participants noted positive changes in local schools over the last decade, with rising numbers of multiethnic children and the integration of multiple cultures in school curricula. One participant shared *"in the last five years [the school] made changes, and in an English class, [my child's] teacher brought in readings by Indian authors, and brought in a guest speaker who had written an article about skin color living in Canada and how she was fair, so she had a different experience than her darker cousins".*

Skin Color

The participants discussed the development of their children's awareness of the significance of skin color and social understanding of skin color and whiteness in both the conversations with their children at home as well as stories their children shared with them. Most participants had stories of the White parent of their children being assumed to not be a biological parent, or perhaps not a parent at all. One participant explained, *"We've had some awkward experiences where people assumed that [my husband] is not [our children's] father".* The participants acknowledged that their children question where they fit in terms of race, and where society sees them fitting in. One participant shared, *"My kids asked me, am I white? And if not, where do I fit in? My youngest....asked, if this were during the civil rights resistance in the 1960s*

would I be considered colored? My kids...they struggle". Another participant described the conversations she has with her child about being assumed or perceived to be an immigrant, despite being third generation in this country. She shared, *"They were born in the same hospital as their father and grandfather...but when people look at them, they say where are you really from".*

The participants speculated about how these experiences might feel for their children. As one said, *"I know they feel different...at school functions or whatever at school. They feel it, that I'm Indian and my husband is white. And everybody else has two white parents, two white parents, two white parents".* They also described their children reaching a place of acceptance of themselves as one participant shared, *"My daughter wrote an essay for college and one of her essays was, I am a coconut. I am brown on the outside and white on the inside, and that works really well for me".*

Strategies

The participants described strategies they use to manage the impacts of racism in their daily lives while raising multiethnic children. Parents prioritized diversity for their children, selected schools carefully, and raised their children to be aware of and prepared for the types of challenges they may face. As one participant described, *"I think for the kids to see other kids who have that [multiethnic identity] is helpful...for my kids to be friends with other Indian children was a gift for them too. Because they see they can identify with them."* Prioritizing diversity for their children was an individual process for families, with some shared approaches.

Nearly every participant described the importance of leaving this region for their children and their families, finding this to be both supportive and enriching. As one participant stated, *"You do that year after year after year, go [to India] and come back, go [be immersed in Indian culture in another place] and come back, and that's what leads to this journey of introspection- to have a world I fit in, what would I want? What's important to me. And I think that's really important to prepare them for college and for their lives".*

The participants also sought out diverse environments and experiences for their children within the region. In the words of one participant, *"[Here] you have to make an extra effort, to find that cultural diversity".* Most families described having open communication about the realities of race and racism with their children. As one participant shared, *"we brought them up to be strong and talk to people...to have the kids, if they were challenged, to say, let me tell you, or ask me a question, or let me tell you more about that".* Other families described such as taking the train to Boston to walk around Chinatown or eat in an Indian restaurant.

The participants shared that their families gravitated toward people with shared experiences, which lessened some of the feelings of isolation. Creating friendships with other multiethnic families, and/or immersing themselves in community with Indian families in the area was important to them. One participant described, *"Our tendency is to kind of hang out with our own culture, as the parents, and maybe that's our comfort level... to feel kind of normal".* These same trends were evident in their children's lives and friendships. Another participant stated that her child felt isolated and estranged from both the White children and the Indian children from India at school, and explained *"her group has ended up being multiracial kids, which is so interesting. So she's founded, and is the president now... of a new club for multicultural kids".*

Theme 3: Unique Assets of Multiethnic Children

While many challenges to multiethnic families and children were discussed, all interviewees discussed strengths and assets that they see in their multiethnic children. There are two interrelated subthemes to these strengths: (a) change agents, and (b) fluidity.

Change Agents

In discussing the strengths they see in their multiethnic children, many participants shared that their multiethnic children are more self-reflective than children in mono-culture families. Given that children are learning about and living in multiple cultures, culture and cultural differences are often discussed explicitly and openly. One participant explained the positive impact of learning two languages and cultures on her

children, saying *"the journey that they take leads to a lot of introspection and self-reflection, which I don't think the average teenager can do"*.

The participants portrayed their children's ability to stand up for themselves and their cultural backgrounds as a result of their multiethnic upbringing. One participant stated, *"...there's a lot more that happens in the house in terms of culture and religion. And also being sensitive to other cultures, understanding other cultures, really looking at other people and not judging them"*. Their children are further able to challenge misinformation about their cultures in school, such as in this example; *" they are able to observe the bias in the curriculum...to say 'wait a minute, that's not accurate, that's biased information that the rest of the class is getting'"*. Further, their children take their multiethnic status as a point of pride and responsibility for themselves. One participant explained, *"They are proud, but they also realize that they have to teach others, to teach the next generation about...being multicultural and understanding different cultures, and they take that responsibility very seriously"*.

Fluidity

The participants commented on the benefits to their children's overall resilience and elasticity through growing up immersed in two cultures, suggesting this impacts the ways children process information, seeing things from one side at home and another at school. One participant described these dynamics, *"They certainly bring those diverse experiences to the classroom, and I think that way they are already more flexible and adaptable, as they don't live in just one lifestyle"*. Another participant suggested that growing up multiethnic has made her children attuned to *"completely different unwritten social cues like an unspoken language, that they have to get to know and understand, that you can get to know that person through a different perspective"*. This understanding of and comfort navigating difference lends multiethnic children a fluidity that is different from their single-culture peers.

Theme 4: Recommendations for Non and For-Profit Businesses Working with Multiethnic Children

Each participant was asked specifically for recommendations for professionals working with multiethnic families. Parents' responses through this theme focused on the impacts of racism, anxieties, identity, and individuality. Practitioners should be aware that both overt and covert racism and discrimination are realities in the daily lives of their multiethnic children. As one participant pointed, children may be *"feeling different because the school is not so diverse...and it may not be overt"*. Another participant advised to keep in mind that children may be *"thinking about the difference in the color of their skin"*, and hearing comments about this, *"even if they are not talking about it"*.

In order to partner effectively with multiethnic children, providers should take steps to learn about cultural traditions and norms, and ask children and families about the traditions and norms in their multiethnic family. In the words of one participant, *"...really try and connect with the person and talk to them about their family...about how they grew up, and ask them: How do you identify? What do you identify with? What do you like about each culture, or not like? Try to get to know the person"*. Further, providers working with multiethnic children need to be aware of that some questions and comments may feel different to multiethnic children than to monocultural children. As one parent described *"[My child] is very sensitive in particular to questions and assumptions that people have so if they probe like where are you from, that question is really loaded for here. Never ask* [multiethnic children] *that. Because how do you answer that? What they're really asking is 'what's your ethnicity'"*. Participants also spoke of the covert and overt instances of racism their children experience in school, whether or not they bring it up, with one saying, *"In suburban schools I've heard of kids being bullied. Or, children feeling different just because the school isn't very diverse. So, it's important for counselors to realize that something like that may be happening"*.

The participants cautioned providers to keep in mind that multiethnic children will be grappling with anxieties and that *"even if the kid has not spoken about it, they might be thinking about it"*. In the lives of multiethnic children, some of these anxieties will be specific to issues that may include aspects of identity development. In the words of one participant, *"The one thing I have really observed is the outsider status, it's hard on kids, and it does produce anxiety. The identity issues, the expectations; 'Where do I anchor myself? I don't really fit in here, I don't really fit in there"*.

DISCUSSION

Navigating Multiple Cultures

Though every family is unique, the mothers in this study felt their children have one foot in each culture, which results in more work for the whole family as they are individually and collectively navigating two (or more) cultures. Most mothers described their children as able to see the similarities and strengths in each of their cultures of origin, and this ability to learn and understand subtleties and differences was identified as a huge strength. Furthermore, expectations are more prescribed in Asian Indian families than in White families, and that is a challenge for the children to constantly navigate. This constant dichotomy was also reflected by Farver et al. (2002), in their study about Asian Indian immigrants' lived experiences; however, Farver et al. (2002) only studied Asian Indians, and we purport that this chasm is further exacerbated in multiethnic families where only one parent identifies as an Asian Indian.

The mothers' observations of their children's experiences related to identity development reflect a conflict between the traditional insular nature of Asian Indian culture as described by Hogge and Kim (2015) and the individualistic western culture as discussed by Madathil and Benshoff (2008). Mothers discussed having seen each of their children choose how they want to identify and have come to understand that it is important to not take their children's choices personally. Being multiethnic is not the only factor for the children, and unique experiences of each child may also be attributed to gender, color of skin, or personality traits. Mothers also discussed the challenges for themselves and their children in balancing cultural differences related to communication and academic achievement. The mothers themselves expressed acceptance that their own immigrant experience had been infused with the cultural pressures to succeed academically, and that invariably transfers over to their multiethnic children.

Effects of Pervasive Racism

Prior studies have identified challenges in confronting societal racism while raising multiethnic children where one parent is of African descent (Alethea & Hunter, 2013). Mothers in this sample were all Asian Indian, and acknowledged racism to be a blatant reality that they encountered in their daily lives. They described preparing their children to recognize and address issues related to racism in their lives. They worried about the direct impact of this on their children's identity, as most saw signs that their children seemed to be absorbing and understanding that people will make assumptions about who they are based on their skin color. As a result, the mothers stressed the importance of supporting and providing diversity in the lives of their children. They highlighted the importance for their children to have a shared experience, where their Asian Indian heritage and appearance were considered the norm and/or were understood. They made efforts to seek out diversity in other places. Parents sought to give their children experiences where they were surrounded by other people of color. The majority of parents saw this as a strength of multiethnic families in general, resulting in children who are able to stand up for themselves. Further studies could explore these dynamics from the perspective of both parents in families where one parent is Asian Indian.

There are no prior studies on multiethnic children with one Asian Indian parent. Similar experiences of racism related to skin color or doubting parentage have been found in families where one parent is of African descent (Bratter, 2007; Roth, 2005). In prior studies, multiethnic children were easily identified by their skin tone or mixed physical traits. Where children exhibited physical traits that are more ambiguous, the identified race was more often to be determined by the race of the child's head of household (Roth, 2005; Qian, 2004).

Unique Strengths of Multiethnic Children

A new finding in this study is related to the resilience that parents see in their multiethnic children. Here, mothers note a higher level of self-reflection and fluidity in their children than they observe in children from monocultural families. Prior studies have found that despite being underserved by their school's curriculum and social services, multiracial students outperformed single race minorities in grades and retention, and had no significant variation in delinquency or psychological service utilization. These findings reflect the strengths of these multiethnic children and their parents, as schools have been found

consistently lacking in services, materials, and extracurriculars support for multiethnic and multiracial students (Cooney & Radina, 2000; Cruz-Jansen, 2000; Harris, 2002).

Recommendations for Professionals

Nearly every parent advised providers to keep in mind that multiethnic children will be grappling with anxieties. Some of these anxieties will be developmental and shared by all children, such as wanting to be accepted and fit in. However, in the lives of multiethnic children, some of these anxieties will be specific to issues that may include aspects of identity development, for example, or balancing different expectations and pressures from each parent.

As services are developed to support this population, the overwhelming message from mothers was to approach each child and family as their own beings. It is important to see each individual as just that, one individual, and not make assumptions built on stereotypes. Practitioners should take steps to be aware of their own biases, as well as the fact that they can cause more harm through micro-aggressions such as asking the question "where are you from?", when what they mean is, 'what is your cultural background?'.

LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The current study highlights the unique parenting struggles facing Asian Indian mothers raising multiethnic children, including shouldering a majority of the responsibility of balancing and integrating both cultures. Additionally, the study elucidates the stress and worry of mitigating racism for their children, though parents were also able to see being multiethnic as a strength. Further research is needed to address a gap in the literature and develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of multiethnic children and their families. This research could include focus groups, interviews with children, both parents, and extended family. This will assist in the development of strategies, programs and support systems. Recommendations to increase support for multiethnic families include awareness and more information on identity development for service providers and teachers, training on bias awareness, and the development of formal and informal support systems for multiethnic families. Further research is needed to address a gap in the literature and develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of multiethnic children and their families.

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