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Examining the Role of Sibling Interaction in Multiethnic-racial Identity Development in the United States

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ABSTRACT

Ethnic-racial identity (ERI) is tied to wellbeing, especially for ethnic-racial minority individuals, and the process of ERI development is inherently social. However, much of the research on ERI development has focused on ethnic-racial socialization processes between parents and children, despite the fact that sibling relationships tend to be integral to individuals' development and adjustment. Further, ethnic-racial socialization research tends to focus on monoethnic-racial individuals, despite the increasing evidence of the unique benefits and challenges faced by multiethnic-racial (ME-R) individuals. Thus, the purpose of this study is to determine the role that sibling interaction plays in ME-R identity development. Twenty-one ME-R individuals were interviewed about their ME-R identity development process as well as what it was like growing up as a ME-R individual with siblings. Interviews were analyzed using a grounded theory approach and results show that there are three major ways that siblings affect ME-R identity development: through *shaping the process of engaging with difference*, through *sibling conversations*, and through *the benefits of sibling individuality in shaping ethnic-racial identity*. Implications and opportunities for future research are discussed.

Examining the role of sibling interaction in multiethnic-racial identity development in the U.S.

Ethnic-racial identity[1] (ERI) is "the degree to which individuals perceive themselves to be included and aligned with an ethnic [racial] group" and is associated with various aspects of well-being for ethnic-racial minorities (Smith & Silva, 2011, p. 42). Although the process of ERI development is important for understanding psycho-social well-being, the unique dynamics present in interracial families may not be captured in the current literature and models of ERI development (Nuru & Soliz, 2015; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003). As such, much of our understanding of ethnic-racial family socialization process likely does not speak to the experiences of multiethnic-racial (ME-R) individuals. Moreover, whereas a majority of research on ethnic-racial socialization has focused on dissemination of ethnic-racial norms from parent to child (i.e. Hughes et al., 2006), other family members may play an important role in ERI development of ME-R individuals (Soliz, Thorson, & Rittenour, 2009) – siblings are one such family relationship. Not only are siblings one of the more long-lasting and important relationships for individuals (Fowler, 2009), biological siblings are likely the only family member that shares a similar ethnic-racial background for ME-R persons potentially playing an important role in socialization and sense-making for M-ER individuals (Root, 1998). Because the parent–child relationship has dominated ethnic-racial socialization research, the purpose of the present study is to broaden our understanding of the family's role in ERI development by investigating siblings' relationships and interactions relevant to the socialization process.

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Ethnic-racial identity development for multiethnic-racial individuals

Ethnic-racial socialization can be defined as "specific verbal and non-verbal messages transmitted to younger generations for the development of values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs regarding the meaning and significance of race [ethnicity] and racial [ethnic] stratification, intergroup and intragroup interactions, and personal and group identity" (Lesane-Brown, 2006, p. 400). Given that ethnic-racial affiliations typically account for a large portion of individuals' identities, especially for minority ethnic-racial persons (Phinney, 2000), ERI is associated with a broad range of constructs including culture, language, family structure, and traditions. Moreover, secure ERI is strongly tied to an individual's well-being (Smith & Silva, 2011) and buffers against negative effects of discrimination and marginalization (Outten, Schmitt, Garcia, & Branscombe, 2009; Smith & Silva, 2011). However, arriving at a secure ERI is not a simple "black and white" process, specifically for individuals with mixed ethnic-racial backgrounds.

Since the case of *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967, numbers of ME-R individuals are steadily increasing due to the growing prevalence of interethnic-racial couples. As the number of ME-R individuals continues to grow scholars are focusing more attention to the unique benefits and challenges these individuals face in terms of identity development (Soliz, Cronan, Bergquist, Nuru, & Rittenour, 2017). In addition, a number of scholars have developed ME-R identity development models that speak to the experiences of ME-R individuals. For example, Root (1996) suggested that ME-R individuals engage in "border crossing" between the following four states of being: "(1) having both feet in both groups so that one has the ability to 'hold, merge, and respect multiple perspectives simultaneously,' (2) shifting the foreground and background as an individual crosses between social contexts defined by race, (3) consciously choosing to sit on the border and experiencing hybridity and a border identity as a central reference point, and (4) creating a home in one 'camp' while visiting other camps when necessary." (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009, pp. 19–20)

Similarly, Renn's (2003) multiracial identity theory suggests that ME-R college students' microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem environments all heavily influence their ethnic-racial identity. The complex ecology of sibling relationships (gender concordant siblings versus gender discordant siblings, sibling age, sibling birth order, sibling biological ties, etc.) (Riggio, 2006) as well as the complex ecology inside and outside of the family (i.e. peer relationships, region, generational cohorts, differential racialization, parent relationships, parent marital status, step-parent relationships, etc.) are all important factors to consider in exploring how siblings affect an individual's development. Focusing on sibling relationships will complement these existing frameworks by expanding our understanding of the role of personal networks in shaping ERI.

Apparent in these ME-R identity development models is that the process of ME-R identity development can be complex and at times challenging. Gibbs (1987) suggested that ME-R adolescents faced with forming a secure ERI may have a difficult time integrating multiple self-concepts. Marginalization and group-antagonism between parent groups can cause ME-R individuals to feel as though they have to choose between either affiliating with just one group, or adopting a ME-R existence (Hall, 1980), and this decision is highly influenced by the adolescent's personal network. These and other perspectives that problematize ME-R identity development (see Rockquemore et al., 2009) highlight the importance of studying the social factors that facilitate and constrain identity formation for ME-R individuals.

Categorizing the ME-R identity development process as being plagued by marginalization from multiple groups is problematic, thus scholars are focusing more attention on what leads to positive identity development. Doing so requires looking beyond parent–child relationships given that the feeling of difference and isolation faced by ME-R individuals may be difficult for monoethnic-racial parents, or ME-R parents that are of different ethnic-racial compositions than their children, to understand and help dissolve – especially when one considers the changing racial dynamics in the U.S. between parents' and children's' generations. Thus, acknowledging the importance of socializing

agents in the family above and beyond parents, we focus on the potential role of siblings in ethnic-racial identity development.

Sibling relationships in multiethnic-racial identity development

Sibling relationships have the potential to be one of the longest-lasting bonds an individual forms (Fowler, 2009). In fact, most children spend more time interacting with their siblings than with their parents (McHale & Crouter, 1996), and most children in the United States (around 80%) grow up with at least one sibling. While parenting research has discussed the challenges of competition and sibling rivalry, siblings also have the opportunity to provide support and companionship to each other, impacting their self-concept and social relations (Dunn, 2002).

There are three characteristics of nearly all sibling relationships that make them unique, their emotional power, their intimacy, and their wide range of individual differences (Dunn, 2002). Despite the wide range of contextual differences affecting sibling relationships, as most sibling relationships develop during periods of adolescence they become more egalitarian, causing these relationships to have a lower power distance than other family relationships, making them more candid and informal (Buhrmester, 1992). While parents and other family elders tend to have more knowledge and experience to share with children in terms of discussing racialized topics, approaching a sibling to discuss issues of race and ethnicity may be less intimidating and siblings may offer a less formal and more candid space in which to discuss identity.

While research acknowledges the importance of sibling relationships, few scholars have devoted attention to the ways that siblings factor into ERI development although there is evidence that positive sibling relationships are associated with more secure ERI (McHale, Whiteman, Kim, & Crouter, 2007). Siblings may be even more important for individuals with mixed ethnic-racial backgrounds.

As noted by Root's research on ME-R individuals; "biracial experience is unique in that neither parent knows what it is like to be biracial, and neither is likely to have experience with the type of hazing to which a biracial individual may be subjected" (Root, 2003, p. 117). In many cases, a biological sibling is the closest person, or in some cases the *only* person, that exists within a ME-R individual's multiethnic-racial "ingroup" in their family. Thus, the support of ME-R siblings, especially in influential periods of ME-R identity development, is likely to be important. This further necessitates the expansion of current ecological ME-R identity development models (i.e. Renn, 2003; Root, 1996) to acknowledge the unique contribution of personal network factors, like siblings and sibling relationships, to ME-R identity development.

However, this is not to say that any two siblings will ever be 100% the same in either phenotype or ethnic-racial identification. Interracial families can take many different forms and the multiple complex factors that make up the unique family constellations within which ME-R individuals find themselves are integral to understanding the sibling relationships within each family. For example, many ME-R siblings with the same biological parents self-identify as racially different from each other (Root, 1998). Although these siblings may not be able to offer support during adolescent times of ERI formation identical to that of homogeneous monoethnic-racial siblings, they may still be able to provide their siblings with a ME-R ingroup with which to identify.

In addition to this, many ME-R individuals grow up with siblings of completely different races and ethnicities (i.e. half siblings, step-siblings, adopted siblings, and foster siblings). These siblings still likely play a role in ERI development, as both siblings are deciding what it means to grow up in the same family and with the same parents as someone that is phenotypically different from them, and thus what that means to their individual and shared family identity. Multiracial identity theory suggests that the complex interaction between and within micro and macro systems affects a ME-R individual's decision to hold and merge multiple identities, sit on the fence between multiple identities, shift between multiple monoethnic-racial identities, adopt a monoethnic-racial identity, or opt out of racial categorization altogether (Renn, 2003). The unique characteristics that define

a ME-R individual's family/family relationships and the interplay between these factors and the other ecological systems the family is embedded within are important in understanding patterns of ME-R identity.

In addition to the positive effects that siblings can have on each other's ERI development, sibling relationships can also present negative consequences. For example, Root found that many ME-R individuals are subject to hazing, "an injunction to prove that one is an insider through a demeaning process of racial and ethnic authenticity testing" (Root, 1998, pp. 242–243). This type of ridicule can cause trauma and derail the identity process, and interestingly hazing does not only occur in non-family relationships, but within the family and within sibling relationships as well. Due to the fact that many ME-R siblings identify as ethnic-racially different from each other, some siblings may judge each other's cultural alignments, styles of dress, and even physical appearance. For example, some ME-R siblings describe comparing their hair texture, eye color, and skin tone to that of their siblings as being a negative or confusing experience while growing up (Cardwell, Soliz, Crockett, & Bergquist, 2019). This illuminates how complex the process of ME-R identity development can be.

Because siblings can have profound effects on one another in myriad ways, and the conversations, interactions, and shared experiences surrounding identity that happen between siblings could shape the way they view themselves, their families, and the ethnic-racial groups they are a part of, it is important to understand the role that these siblings play in ME-R socialization and identity development. This inquiry will broaden our understanding of the complex ERI development process undergone by ME-R individuals and provide insight into how relationships and interactions with siblings can alleviate challenges or further complicate that process of identity development.

RQ1: What role, if any, does the sibling relationship play in the ethnic-racial identity development process of multiethnic-racial individuals?

Method

Participants

Participants were 21 ME-R individuals from a variety of ethnic-racial backgrounds and compositions (see Table 1). Participants were prompted to self-identify both their parents' ethnic-racial backgrounds as well as their current ethnic-racial identification, as this allows for a more complete picture of the individual's ERI (Charmaraman, Woo, Quach, & Erkut, 2014). Participants were recruited from a large Midwestern University as well as through social media and relevant online listservs (i.e. discussion boards and organizations serving ME-R populations). Those participants from the University (n = 8) were awarded research credit upon completion of the interview. In order to participate in the study, individuals had to be over the age of 19 with at least one sibling and at least one parent from the following ethnic-racial groups: American Indian/Alaska Native, African/ African American, Asian/Asian American, Hispanic/Latino, Middle-Eastern, or Pacifica Islander/ Native Hawaiian. This qualification stemmed from our interest in representing ME-R individuals with at least one parent from a non-European background. Individuals did not necessarily have to identify as ME-R to participate in the study. Although participants were restricted based on parents' ethnic-racial makeup, sibling phenotype was not restricted in this study. For example, individuals with half-siblings that are not phenotypically the same as they are were still invited to participate in the study. In addition to this restriction, participants must have lived in the same household with their sibling(s) for at least 5 years during the participant's periods of middle childhood (ages 9–11) and/or adolescence (ages 12–18). These qualifications stemmed from our interest in examining siblings that have had frequent contact during formative periods of identity development.

Table 1. Participant demographics and ethnic-racial identity.

Pseudonym, Age, Gender	Parent Backgrounds	Ethnic-Racial Identity
Ralisha, 21, F	Black/White	Biracial
Jonathan, 20, M	Chinese/White	yes
Laura. 38, F	Black/White/Native	Biracial
Gabriella, 19, F	Cuban/White	Hispanic
Sandy, 19, F	Mexican/Swedish	it depends
Caleb, 30, M	Mexican/White	Biracial Latinx
Marley, 27, F	Mexican/White	Mixed
Samantha, 20, F	Puerto Rican/White	Mixed Latina
Xavier, 22, M	White/Korean/Japanese	Hapa
Jessica, 19, F	Black/White	Black
Aaron, 23, M	Mexican/Native	Half Latino half Native
Collin, 19, M	Black/Indian/Cuban	African American mixed with Indian and Cuban
Andrew, 20, M	Mexican/White	Half Mexican
Regan, 21, Non-binary	White/Filipino/Chamorro	Filipino and Guamanian but my dad's White
Nicole, 21, F	Indian/Black	Black, Indian, or Mixed
Elise, 20, F	African America/Nicaraguan/White	Biracial
Connor, 24, M	Black/White	Black
Dustin, 19, M	Cuban/Irish	Hispanic
Matthew, 21, M	Hawaiian/White	Mixed/multi
Kelsey, 35, F	Irish/German/Scottish/African American/White	Just me
Darrin, 19, M	African American/White	Biracial but more toward African American

Age, gender, parent backgrounds, and ERI at time of interview are self-identified, ERI at time of interview displays exact verbiage used by participants.

Interview procedure

Upon confirming willingness to participate in the study, the participants were contacted by the primary author to confirm that they qualified for the study and to set up an interview via the participant's preferred channel (i.e. in-person (n = 7), Skype (n = 2), FaceTime (n = 1), phone (n = 11)). Interviews ranged from 15 minutes to just over 2 hours.

Interviews were conducted by the primary author using a semi-structured interview guide which allowed for participants to freely discuss topics that are important to them while being guided to discuss topics of sibling socialization, race, and ethnicity. For example, participants were prompted to talk about their families and siblings in general and chose to emphasize parts of family life that were important to them. Subsequent interview questions were centered around how the participant identifies, how their sibling(s) identifies, and what role their ERI's have played their sibling relationship or their relationships with other family members. Participants were also asked to discuss specific conversations or topics of conversations they have had with their sibling(s) regarding their own ERI or their sibling's ERI. At the end of the interview, participants were asked if there are any other topics they would like to discuss relating to growing up in an interethnic-racial household with siblings. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim resulting in 204 pages of single-spaced data.

Analysis

Analysis was guided by Charmaz's (2006) method of grounded theory which allowed themes and concepts to both objectively and systematically emerge from these data while also giving us the flexibility as the researchers, and simultaneously as members of the ME-R community, to organize and present the data in what we believe is a meaningful way.

Following procedures outlined by Charmaz (2006), the primary author began initial coding by labeling any sections of the data that represented any meaningful thought about ME-R identity development and/or siblings. During the process of initial coding, she also engaged in memo-writing which involved taking notes on the emerging themes or thoughts on the data after each interview. Next, she engaged in focused coding by reading back through the transcripts and identifying the

most prominent themes among the initial codes. During this step, several codes were organized and consolidated into 12 themes. Finally, she engaged in axial coding, where she organized these themes into four major categories and subthemes, identifying how these categories fit together and how they connect to existing literature on the ecology of ME-R identity development. Throughout the process, themes and codes were shared and refined with the second author. After completion of the analysis we conducted a data conference and member-checking as verification steps (see Braithwaite, Allen, & Moore, 2017). Data conferencing involves discussing findings with individuals with expertise in the method and/or content area and, if necessary, using this feedback to refine for conceptual clarity. As a result of this process, the existing four themes were re-organized into three themes and given their final labels. Following this, member-checking involved contacting participants to confirm that their experiences were appropriately reflected in the findings. During this process, we emailed a short description of the findings to all participants who expressed willingness to member check (16). Participants were invited to respond letting us know whether or not they believe their experience was represented in the findings of the study. Six participants responded to this opportunity and all of them indicated that they felt represented by these results.

Findings

The goal of this inquiry was to examine the role of siblings in multiethnic-racial (ME-R) identity development. The analysis suggests that siblings are not a panacea for understanding ME-R identity as, although siblings make a difference in ethnic-racial identity development, there are many other socializing agents that factor into this process. Simply being ME-R does not make siblings inherently closer or cause them to automatically play a larger role in ethnic-racial socialization than other family members. Additionally, it is not simply the specific moments or conversations between siblings or day-to-day occurrences that comprise sibling socialization, it is also the characteristics of the social ecology and environment that are related to the process and outcomes of sibling socialization. In other words, the role sibling relationships play in ethnic-racial identity development is influenced by community and societal factors. For instance, ME-R siblings that attended predominantly white schools likely had different experiences than they would have if they grew up in more multicultural settings. Although sibling relationships are unique in the ways that they shape multiethnic-racial identity, three themes emerged as major ways that siblings affect ME-R identity development: through *shaping the process of engaging with difference*, through *sibling conversations*, and through the *benefits of sibling individuality in shaping ethnic-racial identity (ERI)*.

Shaping the process of engaging with difference

This theme reflects the idea that *when ME-R individuals face situations in which they are othered, they often allow their sibling to play a role in making sense of these situations*. When siblings are interacting with each other, their identities/roles as siblings tend to be more salient than their ERI's. However, when a sibling is othered or engages with the difference due to their unique ethnic-racial makeup, either within the family or outside of the family, that is when the *ME-R sibling* identity tends to be activated. When one sibling experiences a situation in which they are ethnic-racially different, an identity is not being ascribed to just that individual, it is being ascribed to the individual *and* their sibling(s). This tends to remind the individual that their sibling may be the only one who has a similar ethnic-racial experience in the world in terms of simultaneously being part of multiple ethnic-racial groups. Often, siblings discussed how encountering difference has given them and their sibling(s) a special bond, somewhat of a shared experience of exclusion, which highlights the cyclical nature of engaging with difference shaping the sibling relationship and vise-versa.

There are many contextual factors that affect how individuals engage with difference and thus how these experiences shape the role their sibling plays in their ERI process. Some of these factors include how the sibling chooses to deal with the experience, whether the experience was positive or

negative, and whether or not the individual's sibling has had a similar experience. For example, Samantha (20, "Puerto Rican and White") has a close relationship with her sister. When describing their relationship she stated,

> "Growing up, my sister was only mixed person that I knew. If I didn't have that I don't really know if I would, you know, come to the same conclusions, like about myself and my self-confidence." (p#10: 7)

The relational closeness that the sisters share is the first contextual factor at play in the way they relate to each other when engaging with difference. Because they are close to each other and are a main source of support to one another they tend to seek support in one-another when they feel othered. Samantha went on to talk about how even though the world perceives her and her sister differently, when Samantha engages with difference which has made her feel like she is not Latina enough, she finds comfort and confidence in her own identity knowing that she has her sister and she is not alone.

> "I think that her, the way that the world perceives her, I think that I'm a little bit more white passing than she is, just in experience. And so, I think that she struggles with feeling Latina enough less than I do. So I think that when we're around each other that we can both have that label makes me feel like if she can feel confident in like her identity as a Latino woman then so can I. because we have the same parents, like we do have the same background. So, if she can then I can. So, it gives me comfort sometimes I think." (p#10: 4)

Here, Samantha showed that when she engages with the difference that results in her feeling invalidated as a person of color, her and her sister's relational closeness and solidarity allows them to help each other overcome these negative experiences even despite the fact that they have slightly different ethnic-racial experiences due to their physical appearance. Thus, Samantha's view of her experiences engaging with a difference as negative combined with her desire to seek support in her sister resulted in reciprocal shaping between them in terms of race and ethnicity.

The next participant, Ralisha (21, "Black and White"), has had a similar experience to Samantha in terms of her closeness with her sisters. Ralisha had a difficult time feeling secure in her ERI growing up because many people did not see her as Black, due to her "White" features. She discussed many negative experiences in which she would come home from school and work feeling invalidated by others. In the following quote, Ralisha described how her sisters helped her through these difficult experiences of engaging with difference.

> "Um, I feel like both of my sisters that I'm like really close with are just some of the most intelligent women I've ever met. And so, having them like close with me and like supporting me with literally everything that I do, like including how identify, it definitely had a positive impact, especially growing up when I would come home crying being like, why doesn't my hair like yours? They would both like support me a lot and even when we were little. So I think it's definitely like a positive." (p#1: 8)

Similar to Samantha's experience, the sisters' relational closeness and Ralisha's negative perception of her experiences when engaging with difference caused her to seek positive support from her sisters, thus shaping Ralisha's security in her ERI. Perhaps Ralisha's sisters would not have had such a strong positive impact on her ERI if the sisters were not close and if Ralisha felt positively or neutral about her encounters with difference and thus did not feel the need to seek support in her sisters. In these cases, differences in physical appearance may lead to comparison and negativity between ME-R siblings.

Relatedly, another participant Jonathan (20, "White and Chinese") discussed that his relationship with his brother is characterized by a special bond that they share over their heritage. He stated

> "I guess in a nutshell our like shared experience as mixed-race siblings kind of, you know, is a common denominator that is unique in that we're the only ones who share it. But I would say that's certainly not the primary foundation of our relationship." (p#2: 12)

Here, Jonathan exemplified that his and his younger brother's shared ethnic-racial backgrounds do not necessarily define their relationship altogether but that he does feel a connection to him in terms

of their race and ethnicity that he does not feel with their parents. He went on to suggest that this bond is not a result of simply sharing heritage, but a result of "not belonging."

> "I think it's safe to say it's brought us closer together … it was one of those things where we just kind of, you know, are drawn together in a way that maybe other siblings aren't just because we know we're different. Maybe not an explicit term, but that, you know, fake ambient sense of not belonging just kinda hangs in the background." (p#2: 5)

The contextual factor of these brothers feeling a mutual shared experience has given Jonathan a positive sense of belonging when he feels othered. This quote suggests that the bond of the ME-R sibling relationship is activated by experiencing the difference.

In contrast, Kelsey (35, "Irish, German, Scottish, African American, and French Creole") described how contextual factors surrounding her sister's experiences of difference led to their relationship and ERI connection being weak, which led their sibling relationship to play a much lesser role in their ERI development. When describing her life with her younger sister, Kelsey told stories about how difficult it was growing up as one of the only people of color in the area. While Kelsey described being proud to be different, she recalled that her sister did not want to be different, so instead, she rejected certain parts of her identity in order to fit in at school and in the community. Kelsey stated

> "So I think a lot of how we separated, it floated around how she didn't want to be considered separate from everybody else. Like she became part of the popular crew. She kind of forced herself into that box as far as I'm concerned and we just drifted apart." (p#5: 3)

Kelsey went on to discuss in several points in the interview that she and her sister did not have a profound effect on each other's ERI while growing up because there were many contextual factors such as her sister trying to fit in at their predominantly White schools and choosing to minimize or ignore ethnic-racial difference that led her and her sister to not relate in terms of race and ethnicity. Thus, engaging with difference can also distance ME-R sibling relationships, depending on the unique factors of their situations and the role they allow each other to play in processing their experiences. In any case, an individual's experiences of engaging with difference often acts as a catalyst for the following theme.

Sibling conversations

The second theme reflects the idea that *sibling conversations, or lack of conversations, surrounding race and ethnicity are impactful and memorable.* Explicit talk is an area of opportunity through which the sibling relationship can play a role in ME-R identity development. As previously mentioned, many siblings do not tend to talk about race often because it is not the most salient identity/role that they play when they are in a private setting or just interacting with each other, so often siblings either talk about race on a societal level or they talk about racialized incidents that happened to them. Some major contextual factors that affect how siblings discuss race are family communication patterns, relational closeness, siblings' individual communication habits, and siblings' individual personalities and interests.

Xavier (22, "White, Korean, and Japanese") is an active member of the online Hapa community and does some peer counseling for young ME-R adults. However, his older sister is not very interested in discussing race and ethnicity. He stated

> "I always try to be careful just because for me, uh, I guess it was a little bit harder to talk about because I don't want to like, uh, step on anyone's toes or talk about something that someone's not interested in and I just never get the vibe that my sister really cares." (p#11: 7)

Contextual factors at play in Xavier's experience include Xavier's communication habits of avoiding topics he feels others are not interested in as well as his sister's lack of interest surrounding issues of race and ethnicity, which have led to little to no conversation surrounding their ME-R identity.

Similarly, Sandy (19, "Mexican and Swedish") discussed that although she may talk about racialized events occasionally with her brother, they don't often have deep conversations about ERI, as that is not how they tend to communicate in general. She stated

> "We don't really talk about it. He'll like mention something but it doesn't normally turn into a conversation of 'hey [brother] how do you identify?' Just because that's not the kind of, that's not really how I talk to my brother, it might be how I would talk to somebody else but not, not to him." (p#7: 8)

Here, Sandy and her brother's individual communication habits are a major factor that has affected the way they discuss race and ethnicity. As previously mentioned, incidents usually act as a catalyst of conversation for ME-R siblings, but they do not tend to discuss their heritage or identities explicitly.

Although many siblings do not explicitly discuss race and ethnicity, sibling communication habits can change throughout the life course. For example, Caleb (30, "Mexican and White") did not discuss race with his siblings when he was younger however their communication habits have developed which has caused them to talk more frequently about race in adulthood. He stated

> "Um, I think now that we're at a point where we can have more open conversations, it's helping at least to just describe experiences to each other and reflect, um, it gives us an opportunity to see our ignorance growing up … I think just building up vulnerabilities, through shared experience and time spent together can help with having those conversations just because we've done it before and we're going to continue trying to do it." (p#8: 9-13)

Age, stage in development, and frequency and quality of past conversations are major factors in how Caleb and his siblings' discussions of race and ethnicity have evolved.

In contrast, some siblings discuss race and ethnicity more frequently and explicitly. For example, Darrin (19, "African American and White") stated "I feel like it's always just been a very common topic in my house. It's never been any different than discussing anything else." (p#6: 6) This quotation suggests that if families have more open communication habits in general that may affect the role that conversation plays in sibling socialization. Thus, family communication climates, especially as they relate to discussions of identity and difference (Soliz et al., 2009) can also be a contextual factor that determines sibling conversations. Similarly, some siblings cited that talking to their sibling played a major role in their ERI development. Regan (21, "White, Filipino, and Chamorro") recalls conversations with their sibling being pivotal to their identity development. However, in Regan and their sibling's case, their family communication patterns are very protective and closed-off, and the siblings have a very contentious relationship with their parents. Regan stated

> "My sibling and I shared a room like our entire childhood, and I know like late at night we used to have really long in-depth conversations about this and everything else … they would talk a lot about things my mom would say to them just like little comments, like honestly, like, microaggressions basically … I think my relationship with my sibling is so fundamental to my identity and vice versa. We needed each other growing up. Um, I don't know where exactly I would be, but I, I can say with certainty that it would be different. Um, because like it was important to have someone to bounce ideas off of. Even if we've only started having like very in-depth informed racial conversations like recently, like the past year or two." (p#17: 4-13)

Here we can see that contextual factors like the quality of the relationship between siblings versus parents, relational closeness, sibling communication habits, and even whether or not siblings share a room (level/intimacy of contact) can play a role in sibling socialization. In addition, the last two cases exemplify how unique sibling relationships and socialization effects can be and scholars must consider contextual factors other than overall family communication patterns when examining how siblings discuss race and ethnicity.

Benefits of sibling individuality in shaping ethnic-racial identity

The final theme reflects the idea that *siblings often identify differently in terms of race and ethnicity, which affects how they jointly make sense of their identities, how they shape and re-shape each-others'*

understandings of race and ethnicity, and how they relate to one another. Many siblings identify differently based on contextual factors outside of the home (i.e. peer groups, generational cohorts, schools attended, exposure to diversity, current place of residence, etc.). These outside factors also include discourses on how society sees and labels ME-R individuals, which changes the terminology that individuals use to describe their identities (i.e. hapa, biracial, mixed, Eurasian, half). In addition, siblings often identify differently because they look different, which causes others to perceive their ERI differently. However, individuals who identify differently still tend to see their sibling as someone with shared experience, which again could have to do with the fact that the sibling role/identity is more salient than ERI when siblings are interacting. Common contextual factors that shape sibling identity differently are physical appearance, age, sociohistorical factors, peer groups, stage in development, and the use of different terminologies.

Laura (38, "Black, White, and Native American") had a difficult time growing up as a ME-R individual. She is the oldest of her 7 siblings by a range of 6 to 30 years. Laura described in her interview that her siblings are developing their ERI's differently because of the current sociohistorical context. She stated "I have to say in their generation people are more accepting, than during my time. So it's actually easier for them in their era versus mine." (p#3: 4). Laura has noticed that because society is becoming more accepting of ethnic-racial mixing her siblings are having an easier time expressing their identities, where she did not feel as though she could fully express her identity until much later in her life, suggesting that sociohistorical contexts effect the way that siblings' identities develop differently. Participants also cited contextual factors of age and stage in development as reasons why they identify differently than their siblings. For example, Matthew (21, "Hawaiian and White") described that all of his 5 brothers identify slightly differently in terms of race and ethnicity and when describing one of his younger brothers' reason for identifying as White he stated

> "[Brother 3] He's 13. He's kinda like in the weird stage, so I wouldn't bet on him putting both. I'd definitely put it as he'd mark White or Caucasian … I think he would do it more to fit in with his friend group then try to be different at that age." (p#21: 3)

Here, age, stage in development, and peer groups are all factors as to why Matthew feels his younger brother identifies as White and not Hawaiian or ME-R.

Relatedly, generational cohorts and peer groups can also contribute to siblings identifying differently. For example, Nicole (21, "Indian and Black") commented on how her younger sister has a more diverse friend group which has led her to be more comfortable identifying with both sides of her heritage. She stated

> "She [Sister] has a lot more of a diverse friend group that I did when I was in high school. Uh, so I don't think she, even though we both still exist in a predominantly white space, I think she has had more success with uh bonding with either of the groups that we're in." (p#16: 3)

Nicole went on to describe how having a predominantly white group of friends was a contextual factor that changed how she viewed her identity and that her sibling being able to express her ERI more openly in school and with her friends changed the security and expression of her identity. Nicole and others commented on how influential peer groups at school are in terms of influencing identity development which reminds us that it is important to consider these socializing agents in the ethnic-racial socialization process.

Another major contextual factor that shapes individual identity is physical appearance. Many participants noted that their sibling(s) look more or less like one of their parent cultures, which causes others, both inside and outside the family, to see that sibling as a more authentic member of that group. These ascribed identities based on physical appearance caused individuals to think about themselves and their self-concept differently than their siblings do. For example, participants often said things like "When I was younger I always was like, 'well, I'm just white because I look white. So why not say that I'm white?'" (p#1: 5) or "White-Hispanic is normally what I say. Cause I don't really

like look Hispanic." (p#4: 2) These kinds of responses make it clear that although an individual may feel aligned with a certain ethnic-racial group or feel connected to their sibling in terms of race and ethnicity, the contextual factor of how they are viewed by others changes the way they view themselves. When describing why her brother identifies as Black and she identifies as biracial Elise (20, "African American, Nicaraguan, and White") noted that having loosely curled light hair and lighter skin is a reason why she does not feel comfortable identifying as a monoracial Black individual as compared to her brother that has more typical African American features. She stated

> "My brother growing up grew up more in where people assumed that he was Black. And then I grew up where people assumed I was more like mystery white. Um, so, for me it's like weird to say like, "Oh, I'm black" versus him It's like, okay for him to say I guess." (p#18: 5)

Here, Elise describes that physical appearance is a factor in why she would not feel comfortable claiming a monoracial Black identity.

Another major way that siblings identify differently is in the terminology they use. Whether this is using terminology like "Hapa," a more contemporary word used to describe a person who is partially of Asian or Pacific Islander descent, typically online, or using terminology like "half, " siblings see these differences in terminology as a distinction that tends to indicate where they are in their stage of development compared to their sibling. For example, many participants stated that they do not like the term "half" and that their sibling's use of the half terminology signifies to them that they have not yet reached a high level of identity reflection. Regan (21, "White, Filipino, and Chamorro") is very nuanced in their understanding of their identity and uses very specific terms to describe themself, where their sibling has had a negative experience being ME-R and tends to use different terms. Regan stated

> "It was disturbing to me I guess especially from like the terms they use, the derogatory terms they use like mixed breed and happie, like I hate that so much and I remember talking to them about that and they said something about like, kind of liking it and I don't … So like, oh, like I'm half this or I'm a quarter this or that sort of thing. I really hate that because I think it's, it's demeaning and it makes no sense, like you can't cut me in half. And like one side is white and the other side is whatever. It's just ridiculous and it's demeaning, it's dehumanizing." (p#17: 8)

Regan sees this terminology use as a distinction between they and their sibling's identity expression. Where Regan distinguishes between these terms based on their positive and negative connotations, other individuals use terminology as a way to express themselves as a unique being separate from racial identification, for example Jonathan (20, "Chinese and White") stated "There's a tendency to compartmentalize people into like box, right? It's like you have to be one or the other. I'm like, can like, can I just say yes." (p#2: 2) Here, Jonathan harnesses the power of labeling to go against traditional uses of the terms to describe ME-R individuals, instead he alludes to the fact that he is a whole person, not defined by ERI. These differences in terminology and what they mean to participants remind us of the power that denotative and connotative labeling has on identity.

Acknowledging the different contextual factors that affect how siblings identify differently reminds us that ethnic-racial socialization does not exist within a family vacuum, as two ME-R siblings with the same heritage raised in the same home may not identify the same way.

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to enhance our understanding of ethnic-racial identity for individuals with mixed ethnic-racial backgrounds by focusing on relationships and interactions with siblings. Findings suggest that the role that the sibling plays in multiethnic-racial (ME-R) identity development is highly dependent on contextual and social factors. These findings reinforce many preexisting elements of literature on ethnic-racial identity (ERI), ethnic-racial socialization, and sibling relationships. For example, as stated above sibling relationships tend to be unique (Dunn, 2002) which is exemplified in the variety of different experiences participants have had with their siblings, the wide

range of quality among these sibling relationships, and the differing levels of closeness and communication patterns of each relationship. In addition, these findings highlight the social nature of ethnic-racial identity development just as previous ME-R identity development models have (Renn, 2003; Root, 1996, 2003). However, the findings do offer important considerations for ME-R identity specifically as it relates to (a) ethnic-racial socialization and personal relationships including siblings, and (b) ecological perspective on ethnic-racial identity development. We discuss these considerations and conclude with opportunities for future research.

Ethnic-racial socialization and personal relationships

Although the focus of this study was on siblings, the findings offer three implications important for broadening our understanding of ME-R identity development. First, the finding that ME-R siblings often identify differently is in line with Root's "Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People" (1996). However, this finding also offers a new understanding of ethnic-racial socialization within the family. These findings confirm that two individuals with the same parents and heritage that are raised in the same house can develop very differently in terms of ERI due to factors like physical appearance, age, sociohistorical factors, peer groups, stage in development, and the use of different terminology. Thus, ethnic-racial socialization does not happen within a family vacuum, and although scholars should consider understudied family relationships like siblings when they study ethnic-racial socialization, they should also consider the other contextual factors at play outside the family. For example, the findings of this study suggest that ME-R siblings help each other make sense of interactions in which they are engaging with difference. Many such interactions take place outside of the home and family contexts, suggesting that attention should be paid to the role of non-family relationships and interactions in shaping identity.

Second, the results of this analysis reinforce existing literature that focuses on the social and ongoing nature of ERI development. For instance, when discussing how he and his siblings talk about race and ethnicity, Caleb stated that he and his siblings have just recently begun to discuss these issues but that these conversations continue to shape them as individuals. Similarly, when discussing what has led them to identify differently in terms of race and ethnicity as compared to their siblings, many discussed moving to more diverse areas later in life or starting a family as reasons why their identities continue to be shaped differently than their siblings'. These participants exemplify that ERI development does not stop in childhood, rather many participants recalled conversations and interactions with siblings, family members, peers, and community members that took place well into their adulthood, and many suggest that they are still evolving in their views of race and ethnicity. Thus, researchers should consider, the process of developing a secure ERI in adulthood, not just childhood and adolescence.

Third and relatedly, while some sibling conversations have to do with race and ethnicity specifically, findings also speak to understanding the general family communication culture that allows for engaging discussions about identity and difference. For example, some participants, like Darrin, discussed that their whole family is open about discussing race and ethnicity, which has led them to feel comfortable discussing these topics with their siblings, while others agree that their family has an open orientation toward discussing race and ethnicity but they feel as though they can be more "candid" when talking to a sibling. Further, other participants cited that their family does not discuss race but they tend to have these conversations frequently with a sibling. Thus, in continuation of previous work on the communication patterns in ME-R families (Soliz et al., 2009) this study exemplifies that scholars should consider the conditions under which certain co-relationships within families transcend or mirror common family communication habits and how these patterns affect ethnic-racial socialization and family relational outcomes.

Ecological perspectives on ME-R identity development

The above implications should lead scholars to consider how they can encapsulate the uniqueness of the ME-R identity development experience. As the findings of this study demonstrate, it is not simply family communication that shapes ME-R identity. For instance, as indicated when participants discussed experiences of engaging with difference, there are social factors inside and outside of the family that make siblings' shared heritage and ethnic-racial experience salient. This shapes how siblings discuss race and ethnicity with each other and can determine the role that the siblings allow each other to play in dealing with those experiences. Further, this analysis shows us that it is typically contextual factors outside of family communication and family socialization that cause siblings to identify differently in terms of race and ethnicity. For example, above Kelsey states that her younger sister wanted to "fit into a box" based on what her friends at school though was appropriate and Laura discussed how her much younger siblings' ERI's are developing differently based on their generational cohorts' perceptions of race. All of this speaks to the importance of an approach to studying ERI and ethnic-racial socialization that accounts for the social ecology of ERI development. By social ecology, we mean both the characteristics that specifically comprise the sibling relationship like relational closeness, sibling personalities, and conversation patterns as well as the characteristics of our environments that are not seen as directly related to our family relationships like physical appearance, sociohistorical contexts, and non-family peer groups.

In continuation of Root's Ecological framework for understanding ME-R identity (1996, 2003) and Renn's Multiracial identity theory (2003) researchers must not only look into the patterns of identity development that are common among ME-R individuals, including steps, stages, and outcomes, but scholars must examine the unique ecological factors and systems individuals are embedded within that lead to differences among ME-R individuals. As evidenced by the current study, it is not only that ME-R individuals exist within many social systems and are affected by many unique contextual factors that shape identity. It is also how these individuals *engage* with their environments that shapes their identity development. These findings suggest that when participants engaged with difference the positive or negative attribution they assigned to the event, the way they dealt with the event, and whether or not they engaged in discussion about the event was just as significant in determining how the incident shaped their identity as the environmental factors that caused the incident to occur.

Examining the contextual factors like closeness and valence of family and peer relationships, physical appearance, communication habits about race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, community diversity, and others will help scholars understand how various systems and environments interact to develop ME-R individuals' identities differently. Beyond acknowledging that these various systems and factors make a difference in ME-R identity development, research could benefit from moving to consider how the intersections of these various contexts lead to different ME-R identity development processes and outcomes. This leads scholars to consider that ME-R identity should not be studied as a single static outcome, but as a unique process that is shaped differently for each individual. Thus, the process of ME-R identity development is not simply shaped by contextual factors, but also how individuals *engage* with these factors.

Opportunities for future research

Although this study provides insight on new questions one might consider surrounding ME-R identity development and siblings, there are still limitations that should be considered and offer additional opportunities for future research. First, although this analysis has given us a rich look into a wide variety of contextual factors that affect ERI development, research may benefit from exploring specific contexts (i.e. specific ethnic-racial compositions, genders, religions, socioeconomic statuses, etc.) and how their intersections shape ME-R identity differently. For example, a ME-R Muslim woman who chooses to wear a Hijab may engage with her environment differently and arrive at different identity outcomes than a ME-R Muslim woman who chooses

not to wear a Hijab and two ME-R individuals from the same socioeconomic background may face different benefits and challenges if one is Asian–White and the other is Black–White. Second and relatedly, the U.S. is a specific cultural context with its own sociohistorical definitions on what it means to be of mixed ethnic-racial heritage. Thus, examining how these identity processes differ in different regions and countries would compliment the findings from the current study adding other cultural-contextual factors to consider in ERI development. Third, research should consider other characteristics like sibling gender, age, birth order and adjacency, and family size in shaping sibling socialization, as these characteristics have all been shown to affect sibling relationships and closeness into adulthood (Riggio, 2006).

Fourth, although this study deeply explained the experience of these participants using qualitative methods, this body of research could benefit from building off of these experiences to study these phenomena quantitatively. One way scholars could do this is by using the contextual factors and circumstances brought up by participants to quantitatively measure their specific prevalence and importance in the ME-R identity development process and link them to specific identity outcomes. For example, to gain a better understanding of how contextual factors shape individual identity differently scholars can quantitatively assess how physical appearance, age, sociohistorical factors, peer groups, stage in development, and the use of different terminology shape ME-R siblings differently in terms of both the significance and valence of their effects.

Note

1. Although nuanced constructs, race, and ethnicity overlap at the level of lived experience and are often inextricably linked. Because of their inherent connection and often their inability to be separated in an individual's everyday life, it is useful to collapse these constructs when discussing ERI (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, Cardwell, M. E. (megan.cardwell@huskers.unl.edu). The data are not publicly available due to their containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

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