DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF IDENTITY AND ETHNIC SOCIALIZATION PRACTICES OF PARENTS IN SERBIA[*]

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Abstract

In order to promote multiculturalism and reduce tensions in the multi-ethnic society of the Republic of Serbia, it is important to examine how parents shape their children's ethnic identity. Ethnic identity is a personal, self-categorizing concept in which an individual identifies with an ethnic group and its beliefs, values, and origins. Ethnic socialization is a process of learning about and making meaning out of one's ethnic heritage. The aim of this research is to examine the practices of ethnic socialization and various aspects of identity of parents of different ethnic origins. The sample consisted of 501 parents of high school students (75% women) of different ethnicities living in the territory of the Republic of Serbia. Parents reported their ethnic socialization practices using the 15 items Ethnic Socialization Scale referring to four underlying dimensions of ethnic socialization: Cultural Socialization, Preparation for Bias, Promotion of Mistrust and Pluralism. Belonging to certain groups, as a determinant of identity, was assessed by parents using the Social Identification Scale (SOCID) - a 5-point Likert scale with 9 items, and the groups included: belonging to gender, ethnic belonging, belonging to a religious group, belonging to a family, a group of friends and geographical affiliation such as city/village, Serbia, Balkans and Europe. The parents of Hungarian ethnicity are significantly less supportive of cultural pluralism in practice than parents of Serbian ethnicity and parents from Bosniak-Serb families, and that they are significantly less supportive of cultural pluralism than parents from mixed Bosniak-Serb families. Parents from mixed Bosniak-Serb families prepare their children for potential discrimination on the basis of ethnicity to a greater extent than parents of Serbian ethnicity and parents from mixed Hungarian-Serb families. A fostering mistrust towards members of other ethnic groups, the greatest difference was found between parents of Hungarian and Serbian ethnicity, who do so to a significantly lesser extent. Parents from mixed Bosniak-Serb families are more concerned with the ethnic socialization of their children than parents of Serbian ethnicity and parents from mixed Hungarian-Serb families. In general, parents identify most with family and friend groups, and when it comes to differences between ethnic groups, parents from mixed Bosniak-Serb families identify to a greater extent with their ethnic group than Hungarian-Serb families, and significantly more with Europe in relation to the Serbs, as the dominant ethnic group. The highest positive correlation was obtained between the practice of preparing for discrimination and identification with one's own ethnic group.

Keywords: Ethnic socialization, identity, parents, secondary school students.

1. Introduction

Ethnic identity is defined as the totality of feelings and experiences related to the physical characteristics, attitudes, culture, and values of one's own group (Smith, 1991). It is a dynamic and multidimensional concept that develops over time, which includes the cognitive, emotional and behavioural components of identifying with an ethnic group (Ignjatović & Radosavljević, 2023).

Modern societies are based on the values of multiculturalism, and fostering interculturalism is the foundation for good interethnic relations. Multiculturalism denotes the cohabitation of several cultures in one area, and their harmonious coexistence is essential for a modern democratic society. In some

societies with conflicts and wars in their history, this can be a particular challenge. Special responsibility belongs to the most important agents of socialization who, through their specific relationships and influences, should convey values that that align with those of a multi-ethnic society. Taking into account the unique approach that parents have in the lives of children when they acquire concepts about themselves and their ethnic group, along with the specific emotional relationship that exists in the family, it is certain that parental influence must be considered a significant determinant in the formation of the ethnic identity of their children. Parents can deliberately and directly influence the formation of children's ethnic identity by openly and consciously conveying values that are characteristic of a particular ethnic group. On the other hand, through the process of identification and imitation, children adopt values conveyed by parents in connection with an ethnic group, even when parents do not intentionally and consciously do so. This is confirmed by research whose findings indicate a high level of similarity between parents' and children's attitudes towards their own ethnic group and members of another ethnic group, ethnic distance and similarity in attitudes towards discrimination (Mihić & Mihić, 2003). Ethnic socialization specifically refers to beliefs, messages and practices that instruct children and adolescents about their racial or ethnic heritage and promote pride and commitment in their ethnic identity development (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Hughes et al., 2006; Thornton et al, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990; Rivas-Drake et al.., 2009). Researchers list a number of parental practices through which children convey the messages, values and attitudes of their own ethnic group and define the relationship in relation to other ethnic groups. Hughes and colleagues (2006) organized the substantive content of parental ethnic-racial socialization along four general practices, which in the context of more current literature can be understood as (a) pride and heritage socialization, (b) bias socialization, (c) promotion of mistrust, and (d) egalitarianism. *Pride and heritage* socialization refers to parents' proactive approach to children in learning and emphasizing the values of their own culture, history, heritage, significant personalities, customs, food and all other characteristics of their own ethnic group. *Bias socialization* encompasses the practices of parents who are oriented towards preparing children for the potential experience of discrimination and the ways in which they should deal with such events. Promotion of mistrust refers to the socialization of parents, which indicates caution and distance towards members of other ethnic groups. In this context, children can be educated to be careful about establishing affective relationships with members of another ethnic group (friendships, love relationships) or fostering distrust when it comes to business or institutional relationships (choosing business associates or doctors based on ethnicity. As the fourth practice of parental ethnic-racial socialization according to the model of Hughes and colleagues, *Egalitarianism* is cited, and it refers to parental practices in socialization that advocate and promote equality, equal treatment, emphasizing universal values and what connects people, regardless of ethnicity.

A large number of studies show the connection between the development of children's ethnic identity and ethnic socialization (Tran & Lee, 2010; Hughes et al., 2006; Hughes & Johnson, 2001). However, the results are not unambiguous, since a link has been found between the practices of ethnic socialization and positive development outcomes (e.g. academic achievement), but the magnitude of these effects in practice is not known. In general, there are more studies dealing with ethnic socialization that emphasize the value and pride of one's own ethnic group. There are significantly fewer papers dealing with other practices of ethnic socialization (Huguley et.al, 2019) Moreover, the studies that related parents' ethnic identities with ethnic socialization practices have been rare. This study aims at filling this gap by investigating parents' ethnic identities (statuses of minority, ethnically mixed or culturally dominant groups) and their relation to ethnic socialization practices towards their children. This is particularly relevant for the Republic of Serbia where interethnic tensions have been an important socio-political issue in the last four decades, as well as for other countries with similar socio-political landscape.

2. Objectives

Ethnic identity is an important determinant of social behaviour and a creator of interpersonal relationships. In order to promote multiculturalism and reduce tensions in the multi-ethnic society of the Republic of Serbia, it is important to examine how parents shape their children's ethnic identity. The aim of this research is to examine the practices of ethnic socialization and various aspects of identity (including ethnicity) of parents of different ethnic origins who live in the Republic of Serbia. In addition, we explored if the socioeconomic status of the family plays a role in shaping ethnic socialization practices parents apply with their children.

3. Methods

3.1. Sample

The sample consisted of 501 parents of secondary school students, (75% women) of different ethnicities living in the territory of the Republic of Serbia. The participants included 9.7% Hungarians, 4.2% Bosniaks, 5.7% Roma, 63% Serbs, 10% members of mixed Bosniak-Serb families, and 7.2% of mixed Hungarian-Serb families. The average age of parents was M=45; SD=6.69. The parents who participated in the sample come from families with varying numbers of children (M=2.42; min = 1; max=6), and belong to different categories of education, reflecting the educational structure of the population of the Republic of Serbia. Regarding the socio-economic status of the parents, the majority (52.2%) stated that they "have enough money for everyday normal life", 24.9% indicated that they "have money for basic needs", 12.5% said that they have enough for a luxurious life, and the smallest number of parents (10.4%) reported barely covering the costs of elementary living needs.

3.2. Instruments

The Ethnic Socialization Scale for Parents (Hughes D, Johanson D, 2001) - Parents reported their ethnic socialization practices using 15 items regarding the frequency of a range of parental behaviors and communications to children that concerned ethnic and intergroup relationships. Items focused on behaviors, rather than on attitudes and values, because of the likelihood that parents' reports on their behaviors better reflect their actual practices. For each item, parents estimated the number of times they had engaged in the specified behaviour during the past 12 months (e.g., 1 =*none*; 6=*more than eight times*). The 15 items were intended to assess four underlying dimensions of racial socialization, including: (a) teaching about one's own group's culture, history, and heritage (termed *Cultural* Socialization); (b) teaching about prejudice and discrimination (termed *Preparation for Bias*); (c) communication of cautions or warnings about other groups (termed *Promotion of* Mistrust); and (d) emphasis on diversity and awareness of other groups (termed *Pluralism*). The scale shows high reliability (Kronbach alpha= 0.85).

Social Identification Scale (SOCID) (Branković et al., 2015) - Belonging to certain groups, as a determinant of identity, was assessed by parents using a 5-point Likert scale with 9 items, and the groups included: belonging to gender, ethnic belonging, belonging to a religious group, belonging to a family, a group of friends and geographical affiliation such as city/village, Serbia, Balkans and Europe. The scale shows high reliability (Kronbach alpha= 0.93).

Respondents provided data on gender and their ethnicity. The socio-economic status of the respondents was recorded on a scale, where they were asked to mark one of the six described socio-economic categories that most closely reflected their socio-economic status. Descriptors ranged from 'we barely cover the cost of food' to 'we have money for a more luxurious life, including travel to distant destinations, investing, etc."

4. Results

The results of examining various practices of ethnic socialization among parents of different ethnicities reveal certain differences in different aspects of ethnic socialization (ethnic socialization F=3,606, p≤0.01; preparation for discrimination F=4,362, p≤0.01; practice of supporting distrust of others F= 3,182, p≤0.01; practice of nurturing egalitarianism F= 5,209, p≤0.01). The parents of Hungarian ethnicity are significantly less supportive of cultural pluralism in practice than parents of Serbian ethnicity and parents from Bosniak-Serb families (MD= -0.63; p≤0.05) and that they are significantly less supportive of cultural pluralism than parents from mixed Bosniak-Serb families (MD= -1.21; p≤0.01). Parents from mixed Bosniak-Serb families prepare their children for potential discrimination on the basis of ethnicity to a greater extent than parents of Serbian ethnicity (MD= -0.71; p≤0.01) and parents from mixed Hungarian-Serb families (MD= 0.96; p≤0.01). As for fostering mistrust towards members of other ethnic groups, the greatest difference was found between parents of Hungarian and Serbian ethnicity, who do so to a significantly lesser extent (MD= 0.75; p≤0.05). Parents from mixed Bosniak-Serb families are more concerned with the ethnic socialization of their children than parents of Serbian ethnicity (MD= 0.63; p≤0.01) and parents from mixed Hungarian-Serb families (MD= 0.82; p≤0.01).

When we talk about the differences between parents in ethnic socialization practices, taking into account their socio-economic status, we obtained differences in cultural socialization practices (F=3.537,p≤0.05), preparation for discrimination (F=3,.212, p≤0.05) and the practices of advocating distrust towards members of other ethnic groups (F= 7,301,p≤0.01).We found that parents of below-average socio-economic status are more likely to prepare their children for discrimination (MD=0.53, p≤0.05; MD=0.59, p≤0.05), more likely to distrust others (MD= 0.72, p≤0.01; MD=0.87,

p≤0.01; MD=1.05, p≤0.01), and more likely to turn to ethnic socialization practices in general (MD= 0.44, p≤0.05; MD= 0.46, p≤0.05; MD= 0.51; p≤0.05) than parents of average and above-average socio-economic status.

In accordance with the aim of the research, we also examined what parents most easily identify with, i.e., what is especially important to them as a determinant of their own identity. In general, parents identify most with family and friend groups, followed by identification with Serbia, the Balkans and Europe. In terms of identification, it has been shown that there are no differences in terms of socio-economic status and education. When it comes to differences in social identification in relation to ethnicity, parents from mixed Bosniak-Serb families identify to a greater extent with their ethnic group than Hungarian-Serb families, and significantly more with Europe in relation to the Serbs, as the dominant ethnic group. The following table shows the correlation values between individual practices of ethnic socialization and social identification.

Table 1. Correlations between individual practices of ethnic socialization and aspects of social identification.

	Gender	Ethnicity	Town	Religion	Family	Friends	Serbia	Balkans	Europe
Cultural Socialization	.105**	.136**	.143**	.095*	-.039	.033	.040	.099*	.104*
Preparation for Bias	.179**	.208**	.205**	.178**	.025	.072	.083	.149**	.157**
Promotion of Mistrust	-.029	.031	.028	-.027	-.251**	-.162**	-.142**	-.119**	-.079
Pluralism	.128**	.119**	.130**	.097*	.119**	.151**	.167**	.195**	.161**

Note. * refers to sig≤0,05 and ** sig≤0,01

The largest positive correlation was observed between the practice of preparing for discrimination and identification with one's own ethnic group, while the most significant negative correlation was found between the practice of supporting distrust towards others and identification with family. It is noteworthy that, in social identification with the Balkans, a slightly higher positive correlation was recorded in terms of fostering pluralism and preparing for potential discrimination, and a negative correlation when it comes to advocating distrust.

5. Discussion

Recent research indicates that adolescent ethnic identity exploration and commitment can be significantly predicted by parental cultural and ethnic socialization (Else-Quest & Morse, 2015). Ethnic socialization practices, which are oriented towards getting acquainted with one's own ethnic group, heritage and values correlate with various aspects of social identification. This confirms that ethnic identity is a component of social identity and is strongly linked to other aspects of identity (Rivas-Drake et al., 2009). Promoting pluralism, i.e., highlighting other ethnic groups and their values, correlates with all aspects of identity that the respondents declared. It is interesting to note that the greatest correlation was observed in terms of identification with the Balkans. Considering the geographical area and ethnicity of the peoples living in the region, this information can be further clarified, especially when taking into account the fact that our respondents support and live in multi-ethnic environments constituting the Balkan peoples. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the correlation was obtained even in practices of ethnic socialization aimed at preparing children for potential discrimination and differential treatment. Specifically, the Balkans is an area burdened by a history of conflict, making it unsurprising that there is a possibility of discrimination or the perception thereof.

The finding that parents from mixed families more frequently practice the transfer of values and attitudes of their own group to their children is considered to be quite interesting. This information can be viewed from the perspective of the specific dynamics in these families where parents are of different ethnicities. Namely, based on the research of French et al. (2006), it is considered that individuals belonging to majority groups in a society do not necessarily have to change or improve their identity. However, it remains important for individuals belonging to minority groups to negotiate the meaning and importance of their identity.

The socioeconomic status of parents is a crucial factor in determining the representation of ethnic socialization practices, including education about one's own ethnicity and preparation for discrimination. The analysis of the results reveals a special risk group of parents and children who are members of ethnic minorities and have a lower socioeconomic status. This statement is in agreement with the findings that suggest that individuals who belong to multiple stigmatized social categories, such as

those based on ethnicity and socioeconomic status, face the greatest challenges in terms of discrimination and identity formation (Remedios & Snyder, 2018).

6. Conclusion

The period of adolescence is crucial for exploring and resolving identity. The practices of transmitting knowledge and positive attitudes towards one's own and other ethnicities are the most influential during this period. Considerations about parental practices of socialization should certainly be interpreted in accordance with the context of the environment in which the family lives, especially considering the ethnicity of the parents. Understanding parental practices of ethnic socialization in children can provide a deeper insight into relationships with one's own ethnic group and relationships with other ethnic groups, i.e. that it forms the basis for information, knowledge, and feelings. In multi-ethnic societies, this understanding can be of great significance. In societies that are multi-ethnic and burdened by conflicts in the past, this can be crucial for establishing good relations and coexistence. The limitations of this research primarily include the small number of Roma and Bosniaks included in the sample, as well as the issue of ethnicity itself, which remains a sensitive topic with a strong political connotation, especially concerning certain ethnic groups. Future research should also focus on the affective dimension of ethnicity and socialization practices in this regard, since relations between ethnic groups are often coloured by strong feelings.

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