

Will My Children Grow up to Be Bicultural Bilinguals? Applying an Identity Negotiation Lens to Binational Family Dynamics

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Abstract: This study investigates the dynamics of bicultural German-U.S. families, specifically how parents promote their cultures with their children, maintain their children's interest in belonging to both cultures, and what they expect their bicultural children's academic achievements to be. Results showed that most values, norms, and traditions largely align across the German and American cultures. However, cultural differences also surface in the level of parental control, concerns over the environment, and the need to compromise in celebrating traditions. For parents, bilingualism represents the main access to the minority culture (i.e. German). While the level of children's proficiency in minority language varies across families, parents' commitment to raise bilingual children is consistently high. This study summarizes successful and unsuccessful techniques parents employ to promote biculturalism and bilingualism in their children.

1. Introduction

As national borders become more fluid, facilitated by political treaties, waves of immigrants move to developed markets such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, and several other European countries (Anderson, 1999). Over the last four decades, the United States registered an increasing proportion of immigrants, most recently in the neighborhood of 15% in 2013 (Zong, 2015). While some of these immigrants married within their nationality of origin, many married people from different cultures, which gave rise to a dramatic increase of intercultural couples. By 2013, 1 in 4 children below the age of 18 in the U.S. lived in a household with at least 1 immigrant parent. Most of these children were born in the U.S. with only 1 in 10 children being born outside of the U.S. The number of children born to at least 1 immigrant parent shows an upward trajectory with an increase by more than 50% between 1990 and 2000 and more than 30% from 2000 to the present (Zong, 2015).

To investigate the impact of such demographic changes, a recent body of literature focused on binational and bilingual families, as well as the children living in such family environments (Anderson, 1999; Bacallao & Smokowski, 2009; Garcia, 2002; Marley, 2013; Toomey, Dorjee & Ting-Toomey, 2013). Intercultural scholars focused on studying children who were surrounded by two distinct cultures: either divergent school and home cultures or different parental cultures of origin (Anderson, 1999; Schwartz, Moin, Leikin & Breilkopf, 2010). It is important to note that the identity creation process not only affects the parents who are transplanted in the new culture at an adult age, but also impacts the children born in binational households.

The current study strives to provide more insight into how parents with different cultural backgrounds promote their own cultures with their children, maintain children's interest into

belonging to both cultures, and expect their bicultural children's academic achievements. Little research had been conducted to compare two individualistic cultures such as Germany and the U.S. To this extent, one might conclude that cultural differences between two developed, powerful nations would be more diluted. Since little research exists in the area of intercultural and interpersonal communication between German and U.S. cultures, this study represents one of the first attempts to fill this gap.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study focuses on the family dynamics in binational German-U.S. families and parents' expectations of their bicultural bilingual preschool children through the lens of the identity negotiation theory (INT) proposed by Ting-Toomey (1999). While Anderson (1999) showed that bicultural children play an active role in forming their own identity, other research literature showed that the family environment plays a crucial role in setting the foundation for these children (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2009; Schwartz et al., 2010). Ting-Toomey's (1999) INT provides the framework for the present study which aims to understand how immigrant parents encourage and facilitate the adoption of their culture of origin in their children.

2.1. Identity Negotiation Theory (INT)

Communication scholars argued that identity creation is a fluid process whereby a person constantly defines and redefines himself/ herself (Toomey et al., 2013; Trenholm & Jensen, 2011). The constant evolution is due to the dynamic nature of identity creation, which is "viewed as the reflective self-images constructed, experienced and communicated by the individuals within a culture and in a particular interaction situation" (Ting-Toomey, 1999). INT also explains that negotiation results from people's desires to affirm themselves when they try to either promote their own or dispute others' ideas. Making the desired impression on others is ultimately the goal of such interactions. Ting-Toomey's (1999) theory focuses on ten principles that occur at the cognitive level when individuals start defining their identity in relation to the members of a group.

According to Hofstede (1984), Americans and Germans share many similar cultural values and traits. First and foremost, both cultures promote the individualistic idea that everyone is his/her own person. In addition, both cultures use a direct style of communication where avoidance is not common practice. Moreover, both countries are in the low context and small power distance end of the continuum, opposite to collectivistic cultures. Last, both cultures tend to be more short-term oriented than the collectivistic cultures, such as Asian, African, and Latin American cultures (Hofstede, Pedersen & Hofstede, 2002).

Needless to say, a U.S.-German binational family living in the U.S. is inundated by the U.S. culture. Daily exposure to U.S. stimuli defines the high status of the majority culture. In this environment, the German parent's job is to create and maintain an equal position for German culture. Language and cultural status inspire children's desires to practice a minority language on a regular basis (Varro, 1998). Many linguistic and intercultural scholars agree that language is the main vehicle of culture (Anderson, 1999; Garcia, 2002; Riches & Curdt-Christiansen,

2010). Consequently, language status reflects the group status.

Ting-Toomey (1999) also accentuated the significance of the group status in maintaining appeal and ultimately the desire of group membership. If children in bicultural families realize that the minority culture or language is not positively regarded, the likelihood of them not wanting to learn or practice that culture or language is quite high. Andersen (1999) stressed that the main area of parental disagreement is the language spoken to children. Minority culture parents often see language as the main vehicle for their children to learn the minority culture (Anderson, 1999; Varro, 1998). As a result, minority culture parents invest extensive efforts to ensure their children learn and practice the minority language, even to the expense of temporary family harmony. Varro (1998) concluded that bilingualism in children from bicultural families is a success measure of intercultural relationships.

Quinn (2005) examined cultural differences in child-rearing and parenting practices in six communities around the world and proposed a common framework across all cultures. Quinn proposed that, no matter what the parents' origin culture is, the goals that guide their children's upbringing are very similar. Four principles lay at the foundation of Quinn's framework: providing consistency in children's learning experiences, using such instances to stimulate powerful feelings in children, acclaiming or reprimanding children's behavior, and creating an affective inclination of what the children are anticipated to become as grown-ups. While Quinn found this framework to be consistent across cultures, it also highlights the fact that each group achieves these four principles in different ways, mostly informed by cultural norms, traditions, and customs. Quinn highlighted that bringing up independent children is in fact a trait that both German and U.S. cultures share. In Quinn's view, stimulating powerful feelings in children to acclaim or disprove behavior is the barometer children need to learn what is expected of them. In Quinn's (2005) research, U.S. parents focus more on encouraging feelings of self-esteem and happiness. These feelings are supported by verbally communicating "good boy/girl" and nonverbally clapping in order to encourage positive behaviors among American children. Quinn (2005) found that the Germans seem to value independence and rules while Americans seem to attach importance to happiness and professional success.

The feeling of being understood is deeply rooted in one's cultural identity. While individuals sharing the same cultural background are more likely to be in agreement, people coming from different origins may encounter dissimilarities. As a result, people find ways to adapt. Through this adaptation process, one's identity evolves. In an intercultural setting it is not uncommon to assume two or more identities, depending on the group. This concept of identity fluidity has been examined by a number of intercultural scholars, who explained how bicultural individuals form a "double-swing" (Toomey et al., 2013, p. 127) identity and are often able to switch behaviors depending on the context. Similar to culture switching, code-switching also facilitates communication in each culture. However, moving from one culture to another (e.g., norms, customs, and traditions) at the other ends of the individualistic-collectivistic continuum is quite challenging (Toomey et al., 2013). It will be interesting to observe whether these difficulties are more subdued in the individualistic German and U.S. cultures.

2.2. Bicultural Families

A self-observation research conducted by Caldas and Caron-Caldas (1992) outlined the challenges of raising a bicultural family. Caldas and Caron-Caldas (1992) and Schwartz et al. (2010) agreed that older children represent the biggest threat to the maintenance of the minority culture, a phenomenon labeled as the “sibling effect” (Schwartz et al., 2010, p. 120). This usually occurs when older children start kindergarten, an environment which facilitates immersion in the majority culture. Furthermore, a negative correlation was found between the number of children in the household and the strength of the minority culture. This is an example which shows the ratio of adults to children matters. A household with two minority culture parents and one child is more likely to be successful at maintaining the minority culture than the household where the number of children is equal or greater than two. As such, the first research question is proposed for the current study:

RQ1: How do binational and bicultural German-U.S. parents build their family culture in their children?

Marley’s (2013) research provided insight into how parents encourage bicultural identity formation in their children. However, little existing literature focuses on parents’ efforts to maintain children’s interest in practicing biculturalism in German-U.S. families. As a result, a second research question is offered:

RQ2: How do bicultural German-U.S. families encourage their children’s interest in belonging to the two cultures?

2.3. Bicultural Bilingual Children

Scholars have long valued the importance of biculturalism and they even make the presence of bilingualism a measure for successful binational marriages (Varro, 1998). While clear benefits exist at the family level, many studies showed benefits for children at the cognitive levels.

While previous studies suggested that bilingual children are delayed in acquiring speech proficiency (Carrow, 1972), recent studies showed bilingualism has actually several benefits among young children. Bilingual children possess a higher comprehension level (Siegal et al., 2009; Siegal et al., 2010), originality and inspiration (Leikin, 2013), executive function (Bialystok & Viswanathan, 2009; Poulin-Dubois, Blaye, Coutya, & Bialystok, 2011), creativity in solving problems (Leikin, 2013), and specifically their working memory (Morales et al., 2013).

Given the benefits of bilingualism outlined above, this study aims to understand how immigrant parents envision their children’s bilingualism will impact their future. Hence, the last research question is offered:

RQ3: How do immigrant parents think biculturalism will impact their children’s professional development?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The respondents were recruited through a snowballing sampling method starting with the one to three year old children's classes at a German Saturday school in the Northeast region of the United States. Twelve parents were interviewed in total.

The median age for both groups of parents (German and American) was 37 years old. All participants had completed higher education. Out of the six American parents, four were males and two females. All American parents worked full time except one who was currently at home. Only two out of the six American parents had lived abroad for one year or more. Only one American parent spoke conversational German other than English. Collectively these families had three boys and eight girls between six months old and seven years old.

Concurrently, four out of the six German parents were females and two males. Three of them worked full time while the others worked part time. Their median time living in the US was 12.5 years. A few participants highlighted their mixed heritage (i.e. Chinese German, East German, Italian American, Irish American, Jewish American, or Californian American). Most German spouses had lived away from their homeland for more than 10 years (current residence in the U.S. as well as other countries such as France, United Kingdom or China as exchange students). Concurrently, fewer Americans lived abroad. Just as their German spouses, the Americans went abroad as exchange students or later in life accompanying their German partners in another non-European country. While all of the German parents spoke fluent English, four out of the six also spoke at least one other language (i.e. Chinese, French, Russian, or Dutch).

The six families participating in this study had cumulatively three boys and eight girls between six months and seven years old as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Bilingual Children across the Six Families

Family	Children's Gender	Age Child 1	Age Child 2	Age Child 3
1	1 boy	2		
2	1 boy	5	3	
3		18m		
4	1 boy	4	6m	
5		2 girls	4	
6		3 girls	4	7

3.2. Data Collection and Procedure

Semi structured interviews were used because they provide a much richer content from real life examples to understand "the informant's point of view on some phenomenon or experience in as richly detailed a manner as possible" (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). Each session started with introducing participants to the structure of the interviews and lasted approximately 60 minutes.

All interviews were conducted at the family residence. With the consent of all participants, each session was voice recorded. The participants were assured confidentiality. The Institutional Review Board approval was obtained before data collection. The husband and wife were interviewed individually before they were interviewed as a couple to gain “the added insight that comes from observing the interaction that takes place between the informants themselves” (Baxter & Babbie, 2003).

RQ1 focuses on identifying each parent’s cultural background. Several questions were asked to gain a deeper understanding of the values, norms, and traditions that each parent brought to the family unit, their perceived differences in their values, norms, and traditions, and the languages spoken at home. The questions were asked individually to avoid bias between respondents. Sample questions included: What values, norms, and traditions do you find important to share/ teach your children? Do you feel any of these values different from your spouse’s? What language is primarily spoken in the household? How do you encourage the minority language?

RQ2 seeks to identify how parents encouraged their children to belong to each culture. Interview questions covered parents’ expectations of their children’s level of interactions with each side of the family, their degree of independence, and their participation in cultural activities. Sample questions included: How connected do you expect your children to be to your side of the family? What do you do to encourage that? How do you encourage your children to participate in your cultural activities? How important is it for your children to participate in peer group activities with other children of similar or different cultural status?

RQ3 aims to gauge parents’ expectations of their bicultural children vis-à-vis school performances and professional achievements. The following questions were asked to both parents as a group: How do you think bilingualism and biculturalism is going to help your child school? How do you think biculturalism will help your child to get ahead in their professional life?

3.3. Data Analysis

An Excel workbook was set up to transcribe the data. A separate sheet was created for each interview question. All interview questions were distributed under the four research questions to ensure these would be analyzed both individually and holistically. Once the structure of data coding file was set up, the author listened to the sound recording and transcribed these into notes. Each concept brought up during the interview by the participants in this research became a “unit of textual data” (Baxter & Babbie, 2003).

The coding phase, which “addresses the meanings and the meaning making evident to the researcher” (Baxter & Babbie, 2003, p. 367), was started once all field notes were fully transcribed. This process involved several steps: thoroughly going through each sheet capturing the detailed field notes by interview question from start to finish; identifying each unit of data

by selecting the text that answered an interview question; repeating the identification of the units of data until all field notes were exhausted; constantly analyzing the similarities and differences between the units of data to ensure they were worth a separate category; continuing this comparison process until all field notes were exhausted; naming the emerging categories and writing notes to ensure ideas were not lost; and, going over each of these steps again from start to finish to validate the coding decisions previously made.

Once the coding process was completed, categories were subjected to multiple cross-checks across informants and previous topics that emerged from the literature review. Baxter and Babbie (2003) described the data checking process across various sources as triangulation. In other words, if multiple sources reflect similar answers to the same questions, the likelihood of the answers being correct increases.

4. Results

RQ1 inquired how binational and bicultural German-U.S. parents build their family culture in their children. Both majority and minority parents described what was important to them from a cultural perspective.

4.1. Cultural Values

Germans treasured the most a sense of responsibility of their own actions, reliability, human equality (i.e. gender, heritage, religion, etc.), honesty, loyalty, the family unit, hard work, work ethic and self-respect. Americans and Germans shared the focus on responsibility, human equality, political and religious tolerance, and hard work. In addition, Americans highly valued free thinking, adding value to the community (a group at school or at work), and open-mindedness (acquired through traveling or ensuring the children were exposed to a variety of races, ethnicities, religions). Americans were also focused on making sure their children learned social skills, became self-confident, and calm. American parents expressed an appreciation of constitutional freedoms in the U.S. (speech and choice) which were not to be taken for granted: “be whatever, you have an opportunity to become whatever you want, expose kids to many things and let them know they can choose to become whatever.”

German parents deemed important to teach their children where they came from. In particular, the subject of the Second World War came up where parents wanted to be the first ones to explain to their children why Germany and the U.S. were once at war. Parents wanted to ensure their children understood the impact of this historical era on the world. Because some of the German parents came from East Germany or Berlin, it was necessary for these parents to explain to their children the political division between East and West Germany.

4.2. Family

While Americans and Germans alike pointed out religious holidays were important in their household, the German parents highlighted some differences from the American holidays. For example, St. Nikolaus on December 6th which involves placing everyone’s boots by the door

and discovering little gifts in the morning from St. Nikolaus, and opening Christmas presents on December 24th because Christkind brought the presents in Germany and not Santa Claus. American parents had to compromise on opening some Christmas presents in the evening of December 24th to accommodate with their German spouse traditions. Every February was important in Germany for the Carnival celebration which brought a lot of festivities on the streets in Germany. ‘First day of school Cone’ was a tradition which Germans did not share with Americans. When children started first grade at five or six years old, they were given a school cone (German: Schultüte) filled with chocolate, toys, and candy. German parents had to compromise on the timing of this tradition: “in the U.S., kindergarten is part of school. They are in the same building, so technically kindergarten is the first day of school and not first grade like in Germany”.

Due to proximity, it seems common to expect that the extended American family seen as “loud and celebratory” (Scott, an American dad) would influence more the binational family unit than the extended German family; however, parents reported that several children were able to build a strong relationship with Oma (German for grandmother). In addition to religious celebrations, Americans mentioned watching sports on Sundays was another family tradition. Some talked about baseball or American football on Sundays while others talked about encouraging their children to stay active by playing sports.

4.3. Lifestyle

German parents reported to be more focused on traveling because of their own experiences highlighting the direct link between traveling and open-mindedness. German parents reported to be less controlling and less focused on enrolling their children in multiple activities than American parents. Being punctual (Ulrike, a German mom “on time or early”), very neat, and organized were important for Germans while Americans took a more laid back approach to life in general. Because these participants were parents of at least one preschool child, screen time was an important topic of conversation. All parents agreed that screen time was not beneficial for their preschool children and limiting the time in front of the TV was important.

A difference in the level of friendliness between the two cultures also stood out. Both American and German parents agreed that Americans came across more friendly and social (i.e. Americans greeted strangers while Germans did not). Another difference that stood out was the Germans’ environmentally conscious nature. American parents thought that “Germans care about recycling, more environmentally conscious, everything is used, Americans have a lot of excess.” American parents saw Germans very preoccupied with ensuring food is not wasted: Silke, a German mom “teaches the kids to clean their plates and not leave scraps behind to go to waste.”

Lastly, German parents focused on teaching their children about social status. Germans wanted to make their children aware that some people were less fortunate and could not afford as many material things as their family. Teaching children that family was more important than material possessions was common across these families (Silke and Ulrike, German moms).

4.4. To Speak or Not to Speak German

When comparing the amount of English and German spoken in the six families involved in this project, the proportions varied dramatically. Some families spoke more than 9 out of 10 times in German with the children while for others the reverse was true. Most German spouses declared it was impolite for them to speak German in front of their spouses and made them feel uncomfortable. German parents' tendency to translate the conversations with the children seemed a common theme across most families. While only one American parent, Nancy, was adamant about encouraging her German spouse to speak German at all times, other American parents also showed support of the minority language. An American dad, Jake, who spoke intermediary German chose to speak German to his daughter as a way of encouraging her to use German more. Scott, an American dad, indulged his children with reading German bedtime stories even though he reported he did not understand what each word meant.

Parents in this study reported all children had a basic vocabulary of German, from understanding everything and being able to translate into English to consistent uses of scattered German words. Jake, an American dad, reported his daughter never used the word "car" but always referred to a car as "auto" (German for cars). Similarly, Silke reported her older son tended to insert German words for concepts he might not have the English equivalent for such as "asymmetrisch" (German for asymmetric). Parents of two or more children alluded to the effects of older children on younger siblings. Only one of the older siblings among the four multi-children families spoke German on a regular basis.

Generally American parents reported they were involved in supporting German as the minority language. Some examples they provided included using basic German words with their children, supporting attendance to German school either by accompanying the children to school or speaking highly of the program, suggesting and hiring a German au-pair to augment children's exposure to the minority language, being proud of their children's usage of German, trying to participate in German events (school international days or parades, events at German school), and screen time if at all only in German. American parents hoped that all of these would help increase their children's exposure to the minority language.

At the opposite end, German parents carried the weight of being responsible for their children's skills of speaking German. While some parents were thrilled because their children preferred German to English (Caterina, a German mom, and Rudi, a German dad), others, Ulrike and Vicki, felt somewhat discouraged that valuable time passed and their children were not fluent German speakers yet. Even though most parents used similar techniques of encouraging their children to speak German (e.g., communication in German at all times, songs and books, displaying pleasure when children replied in German, and attending German Saturday school), the levels of proficiency among children were vastly different. All parents reported language preference was triggered by the interlocutor (i.e. when Rudi addressed his daughters, they would reply back to him in German), certain words (e.g., "wassermelone" German for "watermelon", "passt auf", German for "pay attention", and "hier sitzen" German for "sit here"), or bedtime stories.

4.5. Inspiring Children

In order for these cultural values, norms, and traditions to become an integral part of children's lives, parents attested that the groundwork for a binational foundation starts as early as infancy and continues with every developmental stage. Some of the tools parents used included German nursery rhymes, summer vacations with grandparents in Germany, sharing stories about Germany and parents' traditions as children, explaining lifestyle differences between Germany and the U.S. (i.e. "big cars are more common in the U.S. than Germany", Silke, German mom), and raising awareness about the environment (i.e. being judicious about gasoline consumption, Silke, German mom). German parents showed their children early that working hard was essential for every privilege. As an example, Rudi, a German dad, asked "kids to contribute in the house or help in the garden. If they want something they should earn it".

Leading by example stood out for American parents. This translated into talking to children about hard work and teaching them everyone needs to make a living. American parents expected their children to make decisions by themselves on a regular basis. Michael, an American dad, was looking forward to understanding his son's interests to help him pursue his dreams. As mentioned previously, acceptance for diversity (race, ethnicity, religion and genders) was also important for some families. To aid their children's awareness of diversity, Scott, an American dad, said it was important to have his children attend Catholic, Hebrew, and German school on a regular basis. Scott supported his children's exposure to diversity in everything they did, "ideas, attitudes, behaviors of various people."

Nancy, an American mom, pointed out that building a trusting rapport with her child was fundamental. Nancy talked about showing her child "affection through physical contact — hugs" to ensure comforting was achieved emotionally and reinforced by maternal physical warmth. Along the same lines, Jake, an American dad, showed physical affection (i.e. hugs and kisses) to ensure his daughter understood and learned from a negative experience. Another way Jake reinforced lessons of good manners was to talk to his daughter like a grown up.

The reward system was considered to be very effective by Scott, an American dad. In his opinion, children needed to learn how to handle money and understand the meaning of money early on. He allowed his kids to pay for items at the register to understand how money works. Scott's reward rule also had a flip side version: "if you do something bad, something will be taken away from you." In Scott's opinion, the reward system helped children understand how much work was necessary to gain something.

RQ2 inquired how bicultural German-U.S. families encourage their children's interest in belonging to the two cultures. All families unanimously agreed children did not realize the blend of the two cultures. For them, having a German parent and an American parent was normal. The two parents formed their family culture and that became the foundation for their children. However, maintaining a strong connection with the German side of the family was a challenge for all parents, American and Germans alike. A yearly trip to stay connected with the German side of the family was the main vehicle to maintain a strong connection to the German culture. All families reported using online technology (i.e. Skype) to connect with the German family.

All parents, German and American alike, hoped their children would become independent

and gain a sense of confidence to experiment things on their own. The one point of difference was that Germans hoped their children would leave the parental house earlier, while Americans were more permissive.

American parents not only looked to encourage their children to experience life through their own mistakes but also let children know they were there for them at all times. An interesting aspect that stood out was that some parents were preparing themselves to see their children live far from them since these children grew up knowing one of their parents lived far from their own family (Silke, a German mom and Tim, an American dad).

While German and American cultures blended together to form a new family culture, participants in this study reported specific things they did with their family. Caterina, a German mom, reported she created a “German overdose” around her son. In this environment, her son heard German 98% of his time. This was achieved through bringing a German au-pair to continue speaking the minority language to her son while parents worked outside of the house. In addition, Michael, an American dad, reported participating by learning German recipes from German cookbooks as well as other international recipes. Some popular German dishes for Michael, Ulrike, and Vicki would be stews, sausages, snitzles, vanilla pudding, obstkuchen (cake with fruits), pasta with cinnamon and sugar. Ulrike, a German mom, made it a point to let her daughter know that the good Gummibärchen (Gummy bears). This way parents tried to build positive associations with Germany in their children’s minds, hoping to make the cultural connection even stronger.

None of the majority parents felt the need to encourage the mainstream culture since the family was immersed in the American culture. Children were inspired by the majority parents to participate in activities that are believed as more American.

RQ3 inquired how immigrant parents think biculturalism will impact their children’s professional development. The common belief among parents in this study was that bilingualism would help their children in the long run. Caterina mentioned it was possible bilingualism might hold children back; however, in the long run bilingualism might translate into a richer vocabulary. Parents were also convinced that being bilingual since a young age would help their children pick up a new language (not only a foreign language but also a programming language such as coding or statistics) as well as being better communicators. Parents knew that exercising children’s brains by switching from one language to another was going to be useful later on in professional life.

Concurrently, being brought up with two cultures was an advantage that parents translated into becoming more tolerant and accepting of diversity. Parents thought that showing a dual heritage with bilingualism and biculturalism from birth would help their children with their grownup careers. When talking more in depth about the positive impact on adult careers, parents strongly believed their children would be more equipped to navigate an international environment at work, and make their children more aware of and sensitive to the diversity of others. Parents thought that speaking English as a first language was a big advantage since English was the language of international business. Showcasing German as a native language on a resume was going to help their children gain respect with colleagues and hiring managers.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the dynamics of bicultural German-U.S. families, specifically how parents promote their cultures with their children, maintain their children's interest in belonging to both cultures, and what they expect their bicultural children's academic achievements to be. Results showed that most values, norms, and traditions largely align across the German and American cultures. However, cultural differences also surface in the level of parental control, concerns over the environment, and the need to compromise in celebrating traditions. For parents, bilingualism represents the main access to the minority culture (i.e. German). While the level of children's proficiency in minority language varies across families, parents' commitment to raise bilingual children is consistently high. Parents wanted children to grow up being aware of their dual heritage and most importantly, to maintain close ties to the extended family in the minority culture.

Overall, German parents reported a more collectivistic culture while Americans thought of themselves as more individualistic. This was in line with The Hofstede Centre (2015) 6-D Model where the U.S. scored at the far end of the individualistic continuum (high 90s) while Germany's rank was closer to the 60th percentile. The values that American and German parents supported were very similar and common across all families: freedom of choice, hard work, and open mindedness. Cultural diversity was top of the mind for all parents. As a result, children grew up thinking the bicultural heritage of their family was the norm.

While initial literature suggests children may feel culturally different when entering the mainstream culture, this study showed that American culture, particularly the Northeast, was thought to be very diverse. To this extent, both German and American parents saw their children grow up immersed in cultural diversity from an early age. However, parents thought their children's low level of knowledge of the American pop culture may stand out as a point of difference with the other mainstream children. McDonnell (1994) described pop culture as "a kind of common currency among children, an adhesive that binds them together in a subculture of their own" (p. 9).

Proximity facilitated stronger extended family connections. The opportunity for children to be surrounded by cousins in similar age groups was an additional factor which strengthened the majority culture. Marley (2013) advocated that establishing a close relationship with children of similar ages helped maintain a desirable status of the minority language. In addition to peer friendships, parents also reported that several children built a strong relationship with Oma (German for grandmother). These family ties, even though across the ocean, helped binational families maintain strong relationships with the minority culture.

An unexpected finding from this research was the culture shock parents thought their children may encounter when visiting Germany. Germany was perceived as a more homogenous country from a cultural perspective than the U.S. Parents felt the need to prepare their children for summer vacations in Germany where they would be the only children not speaking fluent German.

Generally parents brought their "cultural shelf" (Quinn, 2005, p. 506) into their child-rearing practices. Punctuality, being environmentally conscious, equality and less controlling parenting styles were only a few of the traits that German parents found important. Regardless

of the cultural differences among parents, the participants in this study displayed a high degree of understanding. Parents relied on each other to promote a safe and nurturing environment for their children, promoting awareness for both German and American cultures.

From a linguistic perspective, bicultural children's level of proficiency varied between only understanding the minority language to speaking it regularly. This study revealed five areas which were successfully linked with raising a bilingual child. First, minority parents' perseverance to speak the minority language with their children at all times to the point of refusing to answer when addressed in the majority language by the children. Second, creating ties with children's peer groups to reinforce the minority language outside of the home. This was considered key to maintain a desirable status of the minority language on a daily basis. Third, the role of the minority language grandmother was reported to have immense influence on elevating the minority language. This was in line with Varro (1998) who highlighted the importance of involving the minority language grandmother in young children's upbringing. Fourth, ensuring the minority language was part of the family unit routine before the birth of the second child was also found to correlate with bilingualism in children. Last, showing full and continuous support from the majority language parent was crucial for boosting children's self-confidence. Seeing the majority parent involved with the minority language helped raise the status of the minority language as a desirable practice for the family.

Concurrently, the main area that seemed to consistently disrupt the support of the minority language was the minority parent's tendency to translate back into the majority language for the sake of his or her spouse. Children in bicultural families seemed to detect very easily speakers of majority versus minority language. Once children formed language proficiency perceptions around the majority and minority languages, they were able to participate in conversations. In other words, when a child realized his or her minority culture parent spoke the majority language fluently, there were less motivated to practice and use the minority language as part of their routine.

Scholars have argued that language is a big part of a culture (Varro, 1998). It stands to reason that having a good command of language will facilitate access to a culture. Based on the findings so far, the proportion of time the minority language was spoken at home was influenced by four factors: the amount of time German parent was present at home with the children on a daily basis, the German parent's refusal to participate in any English conversations, the German parent's level of comfort to speak German in front of the American spouse, and lastly the majority culture parent's support of the minority language. Online citizen journalism research revealed that many parents were concerned with maintaining bilingualism in their young children. Blogs on this topic include trilingualeducation.wordpress.com, bilingualmonkeys.com, and bilingualkidsrock.com. Some of the experiences outlined in these blogs corroborated the experiences conveyed by the parents involved in this study.

Among this qualitative sample, the majority parents' support provided to the minority parents was found to have an important effect on children's minority language abilities. Incidentally, only one American parent was not overtly supporting German. Coincidentally this was the family where English was the most dominant with over 90% of the interactions. In this household, the German parent reported English was the default language even when the American parent was not present.

Based on the findings, it is safe to conclude that bilingualism is a fragile phenomenon. While all parents reported a certain degree of familiarity with German among their first born child, the chances that the second child would become bilingual were thought to be lower. Adding another majority language speaker in the household influenced younger siblings into becoming dominant in the majority language. This was called “sibling effect” (Schwartz et al., 2010, p. 120). This phenomenon pointed to older children’s choosing to speak the majority language most of the time as being the biggest threat to the minority language. Two events occurred. First, the siblings tend to spend most of the time together, and second, the proportion of minority language speakers in the house suddenly decreased significantly. This means the majority language became more prevalent during the younger sibling’s early language development than it was for the older sibling. To this extent, Spolsky (2007) concluded that minority parents could control the language process in their family unit as long as the older child did not undercut the parents’ efforts of establishing a minority language policy. Parents reported two events which may have correlated and reinforced each other. First, the older sibling switched preference to English just around the time the younger sibling was born. This usually occurred at the same time with the older child starting preschool which parents saw as the second event contributing to their young children being raised in a prevalent majority language environment. At this point the majority culture environment asserted its dominance through making friendships with kids in the mainstream American culture daily life (e.g., grocery store, doctor’s office, and playground).

Regardless of the current level of familiarity with the minority culture, all parents hoped their children’s biculturalism and bilingualism would be an asset in their professional careers. As their own experiences have shown, parents expected bilingualism and biculturalism would provide their children with a competitive advantage on their resumes, the ability to build connections and trusting relationships in international business settings, and the tools to learn a new language (not only a foreign language but also coding and scripting etc.). These expectations were in line with those of Moin, Schwartz, and Leikin (2013), who argued that parents tended to make assumptions or form expectations that are not necessarily based on scientific research but rather on what they considered common sense.

This research provides binational parents with valuable insight into the push-and-pull negotiation children may experience as a function of the majority and minority cultures coming together. Also, this study may serve to raise parents’ awareness about the moment when the majority culture becomes more prevalent in their household and some ways to resist its dominance. While biculturalism seems to be a more attainable status in binational families, bilingualism seems to be a more strenuous process for most families. Parents may benefit from realizing that more parents share their struggles and ultimately learn viable, new techniques from each other. Last, this research aims to encourage parents to communicate openly about the plans around their children’s bilingualism and biculturalism. Achieving biculturalism and bilingualism is a two people process where both parents need to get involved, support each other’s efforts, and, most importantly, show their children pride of their achievements to continuously encourage and inspire them.

This study had several limitations. This research was qualitative in nature and, therefore, more studies should be conducted to validate the findings. In addition, this research analyzed

only two cultures, American and German, but the combination of other minority and majority cultures may yield different results. Last, since all parents interviewed were at one point enrolled in the German Saturday school program, all parents seem to be dedicated to promoting bilingualism and biculturalism in their families. Future research should focus on recruiting participants who are not necessarily enrolled in a minority language school program to understand whether parents' level of commitment toward the minority culture would be similar. While this research attempted to provide answers to the four research questions, other interesting topics also came up. For example, future research could study whether there is a gender bias in binational children who succeed in becoming bilingual, whether minority language mothers are more successful at raising bilingual children than minority language fathers, and whether minority maternal grandmothers are more influential than minority paternal grandmothers in promoting the minority language.

To summarize, this research studied the dynamics of bicultural families using the identity negotiation theory (INT) framework proposed by Ting-Toomey (1999). Specifically, this paper showed how parents from different cultural backgrounds promoted their own cultures with their children, maintained children's interest into belonging to both cultures, and expected their bicultural children's academic achievements. In such environments, children would develop own identities based on the binational cultural values. As collaboration across cultures in the global economy becomes mainstream through lower barriers around international travel or virtual communication, the results from this study can help both parents and educators prepare children to succeed in a highly interconnected world where multiculturalism and multilingualism become the norm.

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