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# Zahra or Zoe, Arjun or Andrew? Bicultural Baby Names Reflect Identity and Pragmatic Concerns

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**Objectives:** Ethnic first names are a visible product of diversity in the West, yet little is known about the psychological factors that influence naming preferences and choices among bicultural individuals. **Method:** Participants in Studies 1a (South Asian Canadians;  $N = 326$ ) and 1b (Iranian Canadians;  $N = 126$ ) were prospective parents who completed an online survey with measures of naming (consequences of ethnic naming, naming preferences) and psychological factors related to naming: heritage and mainstream acculturation, ethno-cultural continuity. Study 2 participants ( $N = 211$ ) were parents of an Indian background living in three English speaking countries (Canada, United States, UK). They completed an online survey with measures of naming (consequences of ethnic naming, names as markers of cultural identity, actual naming choices) and psychological factors: heritage and mainstream cultural identifications, ethno-cultural continuity. **Results:** Across all 3 studies we observed a strong preference for ethnic over mainstream names. In Studies 1a and 1b heritage acculturation and motivation for ethno-cultural continuity predicted stronger preference for ethnic names. In contrast, a preference for mainstream names was predicted by mainstream acculturation and expectations of negative consequences of ethnic names. In Study 2 choice of an ethnic name was positively related to beliefs about names as markers of ethnic identity, and negatively related to expectations of negative consequences of ethnic names. **Conclusions:** Baby naming among ethnic minorities is a complex cultural decision, reflecting both identity and pragmatic concerns. Implications for studies of acculturation and identity, and future research directions are discussed.

## Public Significance Statement

First names are an important part of our identity and can convey a lot of important social information about us, especially those identifying with more than one culture. Across three studies we found that cultural minorities often view names as a way to ensure the continuation of their ethnic cultural heritage, while also being aware that having an ethnic name can have drawbacks in a mainstream Western society.

**Keywords:** acculturation/cultural identification, baby naming, consequences of ethnic naming, ethno-cultural continuity, names as markers of identity

The cultural landscape of many Western countries has changed greatly over the years, as immigration has become increasingly diversified. A very visible, but often overlooked, cultural product ensuing from this diversity is personal names. In Canada, for

instance, the repertoire of first names has vastly expanded over the years. Although Anglophone names remain at the top of the popularity lists (Francophone in Québec), names such as Ahmed, Malik, or Aisha are increasingly common (e.g., Service Alberta,

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2013). In the United States, names such as José and Gianna made it into the top 100 most common names in 2015 (Social Security Administration, 2016), and the name Mohammed has been one of the top 20 most popular names in the United Kingdom several years in a row (Office for National Statistics, 2016). This richness and diversity in personal names is an explicit product of multiculturalism in the West.

Considering the universality of naming and the significance of personal names for the self and social identity, relatively little attention has been paid to how names are chosen and the psychological factors behind name choices. In this research we examine naming preferences and choices among bicultural individuals: those who identify with and have internalized two different cultures, to varying degrees (see Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000). These individuals are often first- or second-generation immigrants, and often identify with both the mainstream culture and their heritage or ethnic culture. Being exposed to these two sets of cultural norms and values means that these bicultural individuals have access to two different sets of potential names: one derived from their heritage culture and another from the mainstream culture. This situation presents unique opportunities as well as unique challenges for naming decisions. Existing research on baby-naming comes primarily from disciplines other than psychology, most notably sociology (e.g., Becker, 2009; Gerhards & Hans, 2009). Such research, while important, has often focused on predictors (i.e., birth records, citizenship status) that cannot speak to the psychological experience of baby-naming. In the present set of studies, we utilize the established psychological frameworks of acculturation (Berry, 1997) and cultural transmission (Gezentsvey Lamy, Ward, & Liu, 2013) to understand key motivations behind naming in bicultural individuals. The bidimensional acculturation framework (Berry, 1997) posits that it is important to consider individuals' orientation and immersion with both their heritage and mainstream cultures. Research utilizing bidimensional acculturation and identity frameworks has shown their independent effects on culturally relevant topics, such as interracial/interfaith dating (Cila & Lalonde, 2020; Uskul, Lalonde, & Konanur, 2011), gender attitudes (Phinney & Flores, 2002), sexual attitudes (Ahrold & Meston, 2010), and psychological functioning (Kim & Omizo, 2006), among others. This literature suggests that acculturation to mainstream culture is associated with attitudes and behaviors that are in line with mainstream norms and values, whereas acculturation to the heritage culture is related to behaviors and attitudes that are in line with norms and values of one's heritage culture. Applying these theoretical frameworks to the novel topic of baby-naming among bicultural individuals provides a structure for examining the psychological underpinnings of both attitudes (naming preferences) and behavior (name choice) in culturally diverse samples.

It is important to note that, unlike some other racial or ethnic markers (e.g., skin color), names are cultural products that result from a purposive act (Sue & Telles, 2007). They do not carry a financial cost, are equally accessible to all groups, and are malleable (Watkins & London, 1994). Thus, name choice is arguably a manifestation of parental hopes and visions for one's child, reflecting acculturative processes and concerns about ethno-cultural continuity.

## Names as Markers of Cultural Identities

Choosing a name for one's child is a product of conscious deliberation. In addition to providing social and cultural information about its bearer, name-choice can reflect what parents want others to see in their children's names (e.g., ethnic or religious belonging). In fact, transition to parenthood is a time when individuals take time to reflect on their own "identity-roots" and decide whether and how such identities might be transmitted to their offspring (Zittoun, 2004, p. 143). Among immigrant families or minorities, this is the time when identities are negotiated and decisions are made about how to best position a child in the world. As Sue and Telles (2007) put it, choosing a name is a cultural decision. Choosing a mainstream name may be seen as an indication of parental mainstream acculturation (or assimilation), whereas choices of ethnic names may be seen as an indication of ethnic maintenance or separation from the mainstream culture. For instance, the increase in the use of African American names by Blacks in the United States after the 1960s is usually interpreted as a voluntary affirmation of a separate and unique Black identity (Fryer & Levitt, 2004), reflecting a desire to go back to one's roots (Lieberson & Mikelson, 1995). Conversely, adoption of Anglicized names among adult immigrants in the United States may be perceived by majority group members as an intention to assimilate, which could possibly lead to more positive attitudes and behavioral intentions toward them (Zhao & Biernat, 2017).

Little is known, however, about the psychological factors influencing naming choices. The limited research on baby-naming among bicultural individuals suggests that connectedness with one's heritage culture is important. For instance, Becker's (2009) interviews with Turkish parents in Germany revealed that these parents were more likely to choose a Turkish name for their German-born children if they were highly traditional and religious. Similarly, when immigrants' social networks consisted primarily of individuals from their ethnic group, they were more likely to choose ethnic names for their children (Gerhards & Hans, 2009). In the present set of studies we go beyond these demographic variables to employ established measures of key psychological constructs: heritage culture acculturation (Huynh, Howell, & Benet-Martínez, 2009; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000) and identification (Cameron, 2004). Moreover, we argue that it is essential to consider not only identification with the heritage culture, but also the motivation to transmit that culture to future generations. This temporal element—important for the survival of one's ethnic group—is captured by the construct of ethno-cultural continuity (Gezentsvey Lamy et al., 2013). Gezentsvey Lamy and colleagues (2013) note that this construct focuses on the role of individual agency in actively transmitting the heritage culture to future generations. Because of its future-focus, ethno-cultural continuity is important for understanding a range of behaviors and outcomes, including expectations for (future) children and family. For instance, cultural continuity has been examined in the context of endogamy intentions and selective dating among Jews and Māori in New Zealand (Gezentsvey Lamy et al., 2013), as well as its relationship to acculturation strategies (Ryabichenko & Lebedeva, 2017). In line with this theorizing, recent qualitative work suggests that by giving their children ethnic names, bicultural parents are ensuring that at least part of their heritage culture lives on (Cila & Lalonde, 2020). It is because of its future focus that we believe an

examination of ethno-cultural continuity can enhance our understanding of naming decisions beyond that provided by heritage cultural identification, which is focused on the present.

In addition to the importance of heritage identity, an inevitable aspect of the bicultural experience is to consider identification with or acculturation to mainstream society. Acculturation in this context has sometimes been inferred from the degree of contact with majority group members. For instance, the greater the contact, the higher the chances of giving one's child a mainstream name (Gerhards & Hans, 2009). Other scholars have used new homeland language proficiency and citizenship status as proxies for acculturation to mainstream society and found that these increase the likelihood of parents giving their child a mainstream name (Becker, 2009). Those who have resided for longer in a host country have also been more likely to give their children mainstream names (Abramitzky, Boustan, & Eriksson, 2016). Acculturation, however, is a process that involves more than just contact with majority group members, language proficiency, or national citizenship. In this research, we use a measure of acculturation that assesses how much an individual is engaged with the mainstream culture (Ryder et al., 2000), as well as a measure of mainstream cultural identification (Cameron, 2004).

### Pragmatism in Naming Choices

Research has also shown that names are not trivial labels. Having a unique or otherwise uncommon name predicts various negative life outcomes (Abramitzky et al., 2016; Gebauer, Leary, & Neberich, 2012; Goldstein & Stecklov, 2016; Mehrabian, 2001). There is a growing literature suggesting that minority group members who have ethnic names may experience discrimination in the job market (e.g., Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Kaas & Manger, 2012) and in the rental housing market (Carpusor & Loges, 2006). A name can also lead to being the target of teasing by friends and peers (Edwards & Caballero, 2008). In some instances, young children have been flagged on no-fly lists simply because of cultural aspects of their names (Murphy, 2016). Minority group members who have an ethnic name are aware of these consequences and may engage in strategies to mitigate these negative effects. For instance, recent work on resume "Whitening" has found that job-seekers downplay their racialized identities by adopting American-sounding names, in the hopes of improving their chances of employment (Kang, DeCelles, Tilsik, & Jun, 2016). Such considerations are apparently not lost on bicultural parents. As Cila and Lalonde's (2020) qualitative study suggests, expectations of negative consequences for ethnic names are an important motivator in mainstream naming preferences and choices. In our current studies, we offer the first quantitative examination of how perceived negative consequences for ethnic names influence naming preferences and choices from an acculturation and ethno-cultural continuity framework.

### Overview of the Current Research

Choosing a name for one's child is one of the very first decisions new parents must make, and this decision will have lifelong consequences for the child. Bicultural parents might choose a name for their child motivated by a desire to convey ethnic group membership or a desire to affiliate with the mainstream culture, but

they may also be motivated by more pragmatic concerns. The goal of the present research was to examine the role of both identity-related and pragmatic factors on naming preferences and choices for bicultural individuals. Studies 1a (South Asian Canadians) and 1b (Iranian Canadians) examined four possible predictors of name preferences using prospective parents: acculturation to heritage culture, acculturation to mainstream culture, motivation for ethno-cultural continuity (all three reflecting identity motivations), and expectations of negative consequences of ethnic naming (reflecting pragmatic concerns). Study 2 examined actual naming choices in a group of recent parents of an Indian cultural background, residing in Canada, the United States, and the UK. In addition to the four predictors examined in Studies 1a and 1b, Study 2 also assessed the relationship between perceptions of names as markers of cultural identity and actual name choices. Although this relationship has been discussed in the qualitative literature (e.g., Cila & Lalonde, 2020; Edwards & Caballero, 2008), Study 2 offers its first quantitative assessment using a new theoretical framework. Overall, we expected that identity and pragmatic concerns would predict baby-naming choices and preferences. More specific predictions are presented for each study.

### Studies 1a and 1b

Given that many people spend considerable time thinking about what to name their children, and some do so even before they have a child, we believe it is important to gain an understanding of naming both retrospectively and prospectively (Cila & Lalonde, 2020). Therefore, we began our inquiry by looking at naming preferences among prospective parents from two bicultural groups: South Asian Canadians (Study 1a) and Iranian Canadians (Study 1b). South Asian Canadians constitute one of the largest ethnic minority groups in Canada, and Iranian Canadians constitute a smaller, but quickly growing cultural group (Statistics Canada, 2017). Including these two groups also allows us to test the relationship between key variables for a broader regional category (i.e., South Asian) and a specific nationality-level one (i.e., Iranian). Importantly, both groups have strong linguistic and cultural ties to their heritage culture (e.g., Corbeil, 2012), making them ideal candidates for the study of naming. Participants for both studies were prospective parents (i.e., young adults without children of their own). The focus, therefore, was on naming preferences rather than actual name choices. Although we cannot know for certain whether all our participants will eventually become parents, there are cultural reasons to expect this to be the case. Many collectivistic societies, including India and Iran, emphasize marriage and having children as a way of strengthening the bonds of family and society (e.g., Hojat, Shapurian, Nayerahmadi, Farzaneh, Foroughi, Parsi, & Azizi, 1999; Mehta & Kapadia, 2008).

Across Studies 1a and 1b, we expected that stronger identification with the heritage culture would predict a preference for ethnic names, and stronger mainstream acculturation a preference for mainstream names. Importantly, we hypothesized that stronger motivation to transmit the heritage culture would predict a preference for ethnic names, above and beyond heritage acculturation. Finally, greater concerns about negative consequences of ethnic names should predict a preference for mainstream names.

## Study 1a Method

**Participants.** Three-hundred and 26 South Asian Canadian undergraduate students (241 women;  $M_{\text{age}} = 19.25$ ,  $SD = 1.97$ ) in the Toronto area participated in this study in exchange for course credit (between 2014 and 2016). Participants identified with one of three major ethnic groups: Indian ( $n = 183$ ), Pakistani ( $n = 71$ ), and Sri Lankan ( $n = 72$ ), and all were students at a large multicultural university in Canada. Most participants were Canadian citizens (92.9%), and the rest were permanent residents. Over half of the sample was born in Canada (61.3%). Among those born abroad the average age of arrival in Canada was 7.55 ( $SD = 5.22$ ).

**Procedure and measures.** Participants completed an online survey consisting of the measures described below. Unless otherwise noted, all variables were measured on a 7-point rating scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*).

**Vancouver Index of Acculturation (VIA; Ryder et al., 2000).** The VIA is a 10-item measure that assesses heritage acculturation (e.g., “I would be willing to marry a [heritage cultural group] person”) and mainstream acculturation (e.g., “I often participate in mainstream Canadian cultural traditions”). Items were rated on a 9-point rating scale with higher mean scores indicating stronger acculturation to heritage ( $\alpha = .90$ ) and mainstream cultures ( $\alpha = .83$ ).

**Motivation for ethno-cultural continuity.** We assessed individual motivation to transmit one’s heritage culture to future generations using six items from Gezentsvey Lamy et al.’s (2013) measure of motivation for ethno-cultural continuity. (e.g., “Ultimately, I would like my children to identify as [ethnic group name]”;  $\alpha = .90$ ).

**Negative consequences of ethnic naming.** A three-item measure was developed for this study: “A [ethnic group] name will only make life harder for my son/daughter”; “A [ethnic group] name might make my son/daughter the target of teasing and bullying”; and “A mainstream Canadian name would make my son/daughter’s life easier”. Participants responded separately for sons ( $\alpha = .87$ ) and daughters ( $\alpha = .85$ ), but given that there were no differences in ratings based on child’s gender,  $t(325) = 0.29$ ,  $p = .77$ ,  $d = .02$ , 95% CI [-.04, .06], the final measure was averaged across target gender.

**Name preferences.** Name preferences were assessed with four items. Two of the items asked about preferences for ethnic names separately for sons and daughters (i.e., “I would like to give my son/daughter an ethnic name”). The other two items asked about preferences for mainstream names separately for sons and daughters (i.e., “I would like to give my son/daughter a mainstream name”). Given that scores on name preferences did not differ by gender of child ( $ts < 1.52$ ,  $ps > .13$ ,  $ds < .08$ ), we averaged across gender to create one composite score for ethnic name preferences ( $r = .85$ , 95% CI [.82, .88]) and another one for mainstream name preferences ( $r = .82$ , 95% CI [.78, .85]).

## Results

**Descriptive analyses.** Descriptive statistics and correlations between measures are reported in Table 1. Overall, participants indicated a stronger preference for ethnic ( $M = 4.92$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ ) compared to mainstream names ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ),  $t(325) = 10.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.96$ , 95% CI [.76, 1.16].<sup>1</sup>

**Predicting name preferences.** Our four key predictors operate at two distinct levels. Acculturation to ethnic and mainstream cultures represents individual levels of *present* engagement with heritage and mainstream cultures. In contrast, motivation for ethno-cultural continuity and negative consequences of ethnic naming have a *future*-focus. This conceptualization is reflected in our data analytic strategy. Specifically, two hierarchical regression models were used to predict ethnic and mainstream name preferences, with acculturation to heritage and mainstream cultures entered in Step 1 and motivation for cultural continuity and perceived negative consequences of ethnic naming entered in Step 2. Results from both regression analyses are presented in Table 2.

**Predicting ethnic name preferences.** As expected, acculturation to heritage culture was positively associated with preferences for an ethnic name,  $B = .77$ ,  $p < .001$ . Acculturation to mainstream Canadian culture was negatively related to ethnic-name preference,  $B = -.23$ ,  $p = .004$ . Inclusion of motivation for ethno-cultural continuity and perceived negative consequences of ethnic names in Step 2 added to the predictive power of the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .04$ ,  $\Delta F(2, 321) = 9.72$ ,  $p < .001$ . As hypothesized, motivation for ethno-cultural continuity emerged as a statistically significant predictor of ethnic name preferences, above and beyond acculturation to heritage culture, such that stronger motivation to transmit one’s ethnic culture to future generations was associated with a stronger preference to choose an ethnic name,  $B = .40$ ,  $p < .001$ . We also observed that perceived negative consequences of ethnic naming was negatively related to preferences for ethnic names,  $B = -.10$ ,  $p = .04$ .

**Predicting mainstream name preferences.** In line with predictions, acculturation to mainstream Canadian culture was positively related to preferences for a mainstream name,  $B = .42$ ,  $p < .001$ . Acculturation to heritage culture was negatively related to mainstream name preferences,  $B = -.36$ ,  $p < .001$ . Including motivation for ethno-cultural continuity and perceived negative consequences of ethnic names in Step 2 added to the predictive power of the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .05$ ,  $\Delta F(2, 321) = 10.16$ ,  $p < .001$ . As predicted, a greater concern about ethnic names being associated with negative consequences predicted a preference for mainstream names,  $B = .19$ ,  $p < .001$ . On the other hand, stronger motivation for ethno-cultural continuity predicted lower preference for mainstream names,  $B = -.27$ ,  $p = .02$ .

## Study 1b Method

The main goal of Study 1b was to replicate our findings from Study 1a with a new cultural group, namely Iranian Canadians. Further, this allows us to test our key relationships at a more

<sup>1</sup> Ethnic or mainstream name preferences did not differ by gender of participant ( $ts < 1.02$ ,  $ps > .31$ ). Women, however, scored higher than men on measures of heritage acculturation mainstream acculturation, and motivation for ethno-cultural continuity, all  $ts > 2.34$ ,  $ps < .02$ . But men scored higher than women on perceived negative consequences of ethnic names,  $t(324) = 2.30$ ,  $p = .02$ . Participants’ responses to most measures did not differ by place of birth (Canada vs. abroad;  $ts < 1.53$ ,  $ps > .13$ ), except for acculturation to Canadian culture, with those born in Canada scoring higher on this measure compared to their foreign-born counterparts,  $t(324) = 2.42$ ,  $p = .02$ . Participant gender or place of birth was not strongly associated with either outcome variable ( $Bs < .27$ ,  $ps > .13$ ) and their inclusion in the main analyses had no effect on the pattern of results. Therefore, the reported results do not account for either.

Table 1  
*Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations Among Main Study Variables for South Asian Canadians (Study 1a)*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2	3	4	5	6
1. Heritage acculturation	6.86	1.40	.37***	.80***	-.14*	.58***	-.22***
2. Canadian acculturation	6.95	1.03		.20***	.06	.09	.16**
3. Cultural continuity	5.52	1.23			-.12*	.58***	-.28***
4. Consequences	3.11	1.58				-.19**	.25***
5. Ethnic name preference	4.92	1.71					-.42***
6. Mainstream name preference	3.35	1.56					

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

focused level: with a group that is bound by the same heritage nationality and a shared heritage language. The procedure and measures used were identical to those in Study 1a, and we expected the same pattern of results.

**Participants.** A total of 126 participants (90 women;  $M_{\text{age}} = 21.41$ ,  $SD = 5.61$ ) completed the survey in exchange for course credit. Data were collected at the same location as Study 1a during 2015–2016. Participants were Canadian citizens (71.4%) or permanent residents (27.8%), with one participant not reporting their status (.08%). Most participants (80.2%) were born outside of Canada and their mean age of arrival in Canada was 12.65 ( $SD = 6.56$ ).

**Procedure and measures.** The internal reliabilities for each measure were as follows: (1) acculturation to mainstream Canadian culture,  $\alpha = .81$ ; (2) acculturation to heritage culture,  $\alpha = .89$ ; (3) motivation for ethno-cultural continuity,  $\alpha = .89$ ; and (4) consequences of ethnic names,  $\alpha_{\text{sons}} = .82$ , and  $\alpha_{\text{daughters}} = .86$ . Similar to Study 1a, no differences in perceived consequences were observed based on child's gender,  $t(125) = 1.50$ ,  $p = .14$ ,  $d = .06$ , 95% CI [-0.01, .13], so the final measure averaged across gender. Name preference was measured with a single item, asked separately for sons and daughters. Similar to Study 1a, we averaged across gender to create one composite score for ethnic name preferences ( $r = .93$ , 95% CI [.91, .95]) and another one for mainstream name preferences ( $r = .82$ , 95% CI [.75, .87]), since name preferences did not differ by gender of child for both ethnic and mainstream names,  $t_s < .92$ ,  $p_s > .36$ .

## Results

**Descriptive analyses.** Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations are reported in Table 3. Similar to Study 1a, here too we observed a stronger preference for ethnic names ( $M = 5.06$ ,  $SD = 1.69$ ) compared to mainstream names ( $M = 3.51$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ),  $t(125) = 6.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.97$ , 95% CI [.66, 1.28].<sup>2</sup>

**Predicting name preferences.** Our data analytic strategy was the same as in Study 1a. Results from both regression analyses are presented in Table 4.

**Predicting ethnic name preferences.** As predicted, acculturation to heritage culture was positively associated with preferences for an ethnic name for one's child,  $B = .82$ ,  $p < .001$ . Acculturation to mainstream Canadian culture was not strongly related to ethnic name preferences,  $B = -.18$ ,  $p = .12$ . Importantly, however, including ethno-cultural continuity and perceived negative consequences of ethnic names in Step 2 added to the predictive power of the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .05$ ,  $\Delta F(2, 121) = 5.60$ ,  $p = .005$ . As

hypothesized, ethno-cultural continuity predicted ethnic name preferences, above and beyond acculturation to heritage culture,  $B = .38$ ,  $p = .005$ . In other words, stronger motivation to transmit one's heritage culture to future generations was associated with a stronger preference for ethnic names. On the other hand, perceived negative consequences of ethnic naming was not strongly related to ethnic name preferences, although a negative association was observed,  $B = -.14$ ,  $p = .08$ . Note, however, that due to sample size this study has less statistical power than Study 1a.

**Predicting mainstream name preferences.** As hypothesized, acculturation to mainstream culture predicted a preference for mainstream names,  $B = .53$ ,  $p < .001$ . Acculturation to the heritage culture was negatively related to mainstream-name preferences,  $B = -.31$ ,  $p = .001$ . Inclusion of ethno-cultural continuity and perceived negative consequences of ethnic names in Step 2 added to the predictive power of the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .05$ ,  $\Delta F(2, 121) = 3.66$ ,  $p = .03$ . In line with predictions, stronger perceptions that ethnic names are associated with negative consequences predicted a greater preference for mainstream names,  $B = .22$ ,  $p = .008$ . A stronger motivation for ethno-cultural continuity was not associated with preference for mainstream names,  $B = -.04$ ,  $p = .80$ .

## Structural Equation Model on Combined Samples (1a and 1b)

As there is potential multicollinearity between the variables of interest that may not be adequately accounted for by hierarchical regression modeling, we also conducted structural equation modeling (SEM, with Maximum Likelihood as the estimator) using both Study 1a and 1b samples to allow for the simultaneous modeling of covariances between the variables in addition to the regression paths. The initial measurement model was established by allowing all variables to be measured as latent variables, with

<sup>2</sup> Independent samples  $t$ -tests indicated that none of the predictor or outcome measures differed by gender of participant, all  $t_s < 1.65$ ,  $p_s > .10$ . Place of birth (Canada vs. abroad), on the other hand, did have an effect on four of the six main measures. Compared to people born abroad, those born in Canada scored lower on ethnic name preferences, acculturation to heritage culture, and motivation for ethno-cultural continuity, all  $t_s > 3.16$ ,  $p_s < .002$ , but higher on acculturation to Canadian culture,  $t(124) = 2.89$ ,  $p = .005$ . Preferences for mainstream names and perceived consequences of ethnic naming did not differ by place of birth, both  $t_s < .57$ ,  $p_s > .57$ . Importantly, inclusion of place of birth in the regression analyses did not have any effect on the pattern of results, so the presented results exclude this variable.

Table 2  
*Predicting Name Preferences Among South Asian Canadians (Study 1a)*

Variables	Ethnic name preferences			Mainstream name preferences		
	$R^2$	$B$	95% CI	$R^2$	$B$	95% CI
Step 1	.35***			.12***		
Heritage acculturation		.77***	[.66, .89]		-.36***	[-.48, -.24]
Canadian acculturation		-.23**	[-.39, -.08]		.42***	[.26, .59]
Step 2	.39***			.17***		
Heritage acculturation		.46***	[.27, .64]		-.12	[-.32, .08]
Canadian acculturation		-.16*	[-.32, .01]		.35***	[.19, .52]
Cultural continuity		.40***	[.20, .60]		-.27*	[-.48, -.05]
Consequences		-.10*	[-.19, .00]		.19***	[.09, .29]

Note. Beta values ( $B$ ) represent unstandardized regression coefficients.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

each variable's items as indicators. In the structural model, heritage acculturation, mainstream acculturation, ethno-cultural continuity, and perceived negative consequences of ethnic naming were allowed to directly predict both ethnic and mainstream name preferences. Measurement error was accounted for by allowing indicators to covary based on item similarity. Initial model fit was somewhat inadequate,  $\chi^2(558, N = 414) = 1536.82, p < .001$ , SRMR = .081, RMSEA = .065, 95% CI: [.061, .069], CFI = .904, TLI = .892. As a result, two post hoc modifications were made based on severity of the modification index (30.11 and 46.11) and theoretical considerations.<sup>3</sup> After modification, the model fit was improved,  $\chi^2(2, N = 414) = 74.35, p < .001$ . Final model fit for the new model was adequate,  $\chi^2(556, N = 414) = 1462.48, p < .001$ , SRMR = .080, RMSEA = .063, CFI = .911, TLI = .899. Although these model fit indices fall just short of the current rules of thumb for identifying excellent model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999), researchers have argued that these rules of thumb should be interpreted with caution and may be too restrictive in models with multiple factors, each assessed with multiple items (Marsh, Hau, & Wen, 2004).

The results of the SEM are largely consistent with the hierarchical regression results (see Figure 1). Heritage acculturation predicted ethnic name preferences,  $B = .50, p < .001$ . Mainstream acculturation had a small, negative association with ethnic name preferences as well,  $B = -.24, p = .004$ . Ethno-cultural continuity, again, predicted ethnic name preferences above and beyond either acculturation predictors,  $B = .35, p = .01$ . Perceived negative consequences of ethnic names had a small, marginal effect on ethnic name preferences,  $B = -.11, p = .07$ .

As before, mainstream acculturation predicted mainstream name preferences ( $B = .43, p < .001$ ), whereas heritage acculturation ( $B = -.21, p = .10$ ) and ethno-cultural continuity were not ( $B = -.16, p = .30$ ). Perceived negative consequences, however, predicted mainstream name preferences above and beyond the other predictors,  $B = .21, p = .001$ .

## Discussion of Studies 1a and 1b

For both studies, the observed relationships were in line with predictions. On the one hand, stronger acculturation to the heritage culture and a stronger motivation to transmit one's heritage culture to future generations predicted a preference for ethnic names. On the other hand, stronger acculturation to Canadian culture and

stronger perceptions of negative consequences of ethnic naming predicted a preference for mainstream names. Importantly, these two studies provide initial quantitative evidence that motivation for ethno-cultural continuity plays an important role in naming preferences, above and beyond the role of heritage acculturation. At the same time, name preferences were also associated with pragmatic concerns, related to the negative consequences of ethnic names. Interestingly, we observed an overall stronger preference for ethnic names compared to mainstream names for one's future child among both our samples. This preference is also in line with the relatively strong motivation for ethno-cultural continuity reported in both samples.

The main limitation of Studies 1a and 1b is the focus on name preferences among a nonparent sample. That said, since having a baby is a highly significant event that many people think about or plan in their future, it is important to examine what factors people consider prospectively for naming preferences. It is an open empirical question, however, whether these same factors apply to actual name choices. We address this question in Study 2.

## Study 2

Study 2 aimed to establish the ecological validity of our previous observations and refine the theoretical understanding of naming within a cultural psychological framework. To this end, we recruited only bicultural parents and examined actual name choices. In addition, we empirically examined how parental perceptions of names as markers of ethnic identity are related to actual name choices. Someone who views ethnic names as important for signaling their child's ethnic-group membership would be more likely to choose an ethnic name. By assessing the role of this additional predictor, we can gain deeper insight into the extent to

<sup>3</sup> We allowed measurement error covariances between these indicators (number of covariances): (a) perceived negative consequence items that mention "son" (3); (b) perceived negative consequence items that mention "daughter" (3); (c) perceived negative consequence items that share the same wording except "son/daughter"; (d) ethnic and mainstream name preference for daughter (1); (e) ethnic and mainstream name preference for son (1); (f) heritage and mainstream acculturation that share the same wording (10). We further allowed error covariances based off modification index (MI) and theoretical consideration: (a) heritage acculturation items 7 and 8 (related to cultural practices/values), MI: 30.11, (2); (b) mainstream acculturation items 7 and 8 (related to cultural practices/values), MI: 46.11 (2).

Table 3  
*Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations Among Main Study Variables for Iranian Canadians (Study 1b)*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2	3	4	5	6
1. Heritage acculturation	6.57	1.37	.25**	.71***	-.08	.64***	-.19*
2. Canadian acculturation	6.40	1.07		.06	.20*	.06	.30**
3. Cultural continuity	5.48	1.20			-.08	.60***	-.19*
4. Consequences	3.54	1.52				-.19*	.31***
5. Ethnic name preference	5.06	1.69					-.35***
6. Mainstream name preference	3.51	1.51					

. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

which conscious perceptions of names as identity markers actually predict naming decisions. The relationship between cultural identities and naming has been discussed in the qualitative literature. For instance, Edwards and Caballero's (2008) interviews with parents of mixed cultural backgrounds suggested that conveying a sense of cultural identity and affiliation was an important factor in naming their children. Similarly, Cila and Lalonde (2020) suggest that ethnic naming can be seen as a way for bicultural individuals to maintain a sense of connection to their heritage culture and signal belongingness with their ethnic communities. In the present study, we quantitatively examine perceptions of names as markers of identity alongside other key predictors, thus testing its relative importance for naming choices. Our predictions parallel those for Studies 1a and 1b. In addition, we predicted that perceiving names as markers of ethnic identity would be associated with a greater likelihood of choosing an ethnic name for their child.

## Method

**Participants.** Participants for this study ( $N = 211$ ;  $M_{\text{age}} = 40.86$ ,  $SD = 8.80$ ) were recruited through Qualtrics Panels in 2018, using the following eligibility criteria: be of an Indian cultural background; either first- or second-generation immigrant; a citizen or permanent resident of Canada ( $n = 77$ ), the United States ( $n = 96$ ), or the United Kingdom ( $n = 38$ ); and have at least one child born in their country of residence. For each child, only one of the parents participated in the study (i.e., no couples). The decision to recruit only participants of an Indian cultural background was done for three reasons: (1) consistency: in line with our large sample in Study 1a; (2) representativeness: Indians are among the largest ethnic groups in the three countries sampled; and (3) familiarity: Indians have access to both Indian and English names given that India was a former British colony. Just over half of participants were male (51.7%), with the vast majority born outside of their current countries of residence (89.5%). Most were citizens (64.5%) or permanent residents (35.5%). For those born outside of their countries of permanent residence, the vast majority were born in India (95.1%), and the mean age of arrival in their adoptive countries was 24.22 ( $SD = 9.54$ ).<sup>4</sup>

The modal number of children was 2 ( $M = 1.73$ ;  $SD = 0.74$ ) and the modal number born in their adoptive countries was 1 ( $M = 1.57$ ;  $SD = 0.71$ ), with a median year of birth of 2008 for first-borns and 2011 for last-borns. Average age of children at time of data-collection was 10.4 years ( $SD = 7.41$ ). In 93% of cases the partner was of the same ethnic and religious background as the respondent. The vast majority of participants were highly educated

(46.4% had a university/college degree, and 50.0% had a Master's degree or PhD). Participants also reported being of high socioeconomic status ( $M = 7.32$ ,  $SD = 1.69$ , measured on a 10-point scale, with 1 = *worst off* and 10 = *best off*).

**Procedure and measures.** Data for this study were collected in 2018 through an online survey that consisted of the measures described below. Unless otherwise noted, responses to the following measures were on a 7-point scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree* and 7 = *Strongly Agree*).

**Children's names.** For each child, participants wrote down the child's first and middle name (if applicable), together with their gender and year of birth.

**Cultural identification.** We used three items to assess participants' identification with their heritage and mainstream cultures ( $\alpha = .88$ ). This measure is theoretically related to the acculturation measure used in Studies 1a and 1b, but has the advantage of brevity. Items were selected from Cameron's (2004) three-factor model of social identity: "Being Indian[Canadian/American/British] is an important part of my self-image"; "I feel strong ties to other Indians[Canadians/Americans/British]"; and "In general, I'm glad to be Indian [Canadian/American/British]."

**Motivation for ethno-cultural continuity.** This was the same measure used in Studies 1a and 1b, and it demonstrated good reliability in this sample ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

**Consequences of names.** A four-item measure assessed beliefs about the negative consequences of ethnic names (2 items) and positive consequences of mainstream names (2 items; reverse coded). Three items were adapted from Studies 1a and 1b, and a new item was added ("An English name will put my child at an advantage in Canadian/American/British society"). Factor analysis showed that all four items fell into a single factor, and the resulting

<sup>4</sup> Most participants resided in large and diverse cities in their respective countries. Specifically, over 80% of the Canadian respondents resided in or around the Greater Toronto Area or the Metro Vancouver Area, with the rest residing in other large cities. Almost 50% of the United Kingdom sample resided in London, and the rest resided primarily in other large cities such as Birmingham, Manchester, or Leicester. The American sample was more diverse in terms of residence, but a clear majority of around 80% lived in or around large and diverse cities such as New York, Chicago, and Atlanta. Country of residence (United States, Canada, United Kingdom) was independent from baby name choices,  $\chi^2(6, 210) = 2.55$ ,  $p = .86$ . In addition, responses to all but one of the main study measures were independent of country of residence,  $F_s < 1.56$ ,  $p_s > .21$ . The only measure that differed by residence country was mainstream identification,  $F(2, 207) = 3.84$ ,  $p = .02$ , where Canadian participants scored higher than both U.S. and UK participants.

Table 4  
*Predicting Name Preferences Among Iranian Canadians (Study 1b)*

Variables	Ethnic name preferences			Mainstream name preferences		
	$R^2$	$B$	95% CI	$R^2$	$B$	95% CI
Step 1	.42***			.17***		
Heritage acculturation		.82***	[.65, 1.00]		-.31**	[-.49, -.12]
Canadian acculturation		-.17	[-.40, .05]		.53***	[.29, .76]
Step 2	.47***			.21***		
Heritage acculturation		.55***	[.31, .79]		-.25 <sup>†</sup>	[-.51, .01]
Canadian acculturation		-.07	[-.30, .15]		.45***	[.20, .69]
Cultural continuity		.38**	[.11, .65]		-.04	[-.33, .25]
Consequences		-.14 <sup>†</sup>	[-.29, .01]		.22**	[.06, .38]

Note. Beta values ( $B$ ) represent unstandardized regression coefficients.

<sup>†</sup>  $p = .07$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

measure demonstrated good reliability ( $\alpha = .86$ ). Items were scored so that higher scores indicated a greater concern for negative consequences of ethnic names.

**Names as markers of ethnic identity.** Four items were developed to assess participants' perceptions of names as markers of ethnic identity: "A name that reflects my Indian heritage will help my child identify as a member of my ethnic community," "A name that reflects my Indian heritage will help my child better connect to my ethnic community," "I see my child's name as a way for me to carry on my Indian heritage to future generations" and "An Indian name is like a badge of honor that my child will wear with pride"; ( $\alpha = .90$ ).<sup>5</sup>

**Demographics.** At the end of the survey, participants completed a number of demographic questions (e.g., age, gender, place of birth, religious affiliation, education, socioeconomic status).

## Results

**Descriptive analyses of name choices.** Names were independently coded by the first author and a coder of an Indian cultural background using the following coding categories: (a) name only reflects ethnic culture/language; (b) name only reflects mainstream culture/English language; (c) name reflects both cultures; or (d) name does not reflect either culture. Initial interrater reliability was acceptable ( $K = .81$ , 95% CI [.75, .87]), and discrepancies were resolved through discussion to attain complete consensus (i.e., final  $\kappa = 1.00$ ).

Most participants gave their first-born child an ethnic name ( $n = 146$  or 69.2%; e.g., Anjun, Priya), with a mainstream name being next most popular ( $n = 37$  or 17.5%; e.g., Andrew, Jessica). Names common in both cultures were least common ( $n = 10$  or 4.7%; e.g., Maya, Sereena). The remaining participants ( $n = 17$  or 8.1%) provided a name that could not be meaningfully coded (e.g., AJ, SK), and one participant did not provide a name (0.5%). An almost identical distribution was observed with regard to last-born children's names. Therefore, we focused our analyses on the first-born.<sup>6</sup>

Name choices (ethnic, mainstream, or both) were not associated with the gender of the child,  $\chi^2(2, N = 193) = 0.50, p = .78$  or participant's place of birth (host country vs. home country,  $\chi^2(2, N = 192) = 4.27, p = .12$ ). Further, child's age (or year of birth) was not strongly related to any of the study variables,  $r_s < .09$ ,

$p_s > .20$ . Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations are presented in Table 5.

**Predicting name choices.** Given the very small number of names common in both cultures, our main analyses focused on names coded as either ethnic or mainstream. To account for the categorical nature of this outcome variable, we ran a sequential logistic regression (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) with type of name as the outcome variable (mainstream = 0, ethnic = 1). The four key predictors from Studies 1a and 1b were entered in Step 1 (heritage identification, mainstream identification, cultural continuity, negative consequences), and the new predictor of names as a marker of ethnic identity entered in Step 2. Results of the logistic regression analysis are presented in Table 6.

In Step 1, the 4-predictor model correctly predicted 80.6% of the outcomes (99.3% for ethnic and 2.9% for mainstream). Interestingly, only perceived negative consequences of ethnic names predicted the odds of the outcome, so that a one unit increase in perceived negative consequences was associated with a 33% decrease in the likelihood of choosing an ethnic name (controlling for the other predictors). When names as identity markers was entered in the model in Step 2, the overall model improved ( $\Delta R^2 = .24, \chi^2(5, N = 180) = 42.60, p < .001$ ), and the rate of correctly predicted outcomes increased to 84.4% (96.6% for ethnic names and 34.3% for mainstream names). Perceived consequences of ethnic names was still related to the odds of choosing an ethnic

<sup>5</sup> Participants were also asked three questions about perceptions of names as markers of mainstream identity (e.g., "An English name would help my child identify with mainstream Canadian/American/British culture"). This measure, however, showed a very high correlation with perceptions of negative consequences of ethnic names,  $r = .86, p < .001$ . Given the clear conceptual distinction between the two measures, we decided against creating a composite score that averaged across both of these measures. In light of this, as well as to avoid problems with multicollinearity, we excluded names as markers of mainstream identity from further analysis. We note, however, that inclusion of this measure did not alter the overall pattern of results.

<sup>6</sup> About 48% of the parents indicated giving their child a middle name. Choices of middle names (ethnic vs. mainstream) were not independent from choices of first names (ethnic vs. mainstream),  $\chi^2(2, N = 89) = 9.05, p = .003$ , such that those parents who chose ethnic first names for their children were also more likely to have chosen ethnic middle names. Similarly, those who chose mainstream first names also were more likely to choose mainstream middle names.

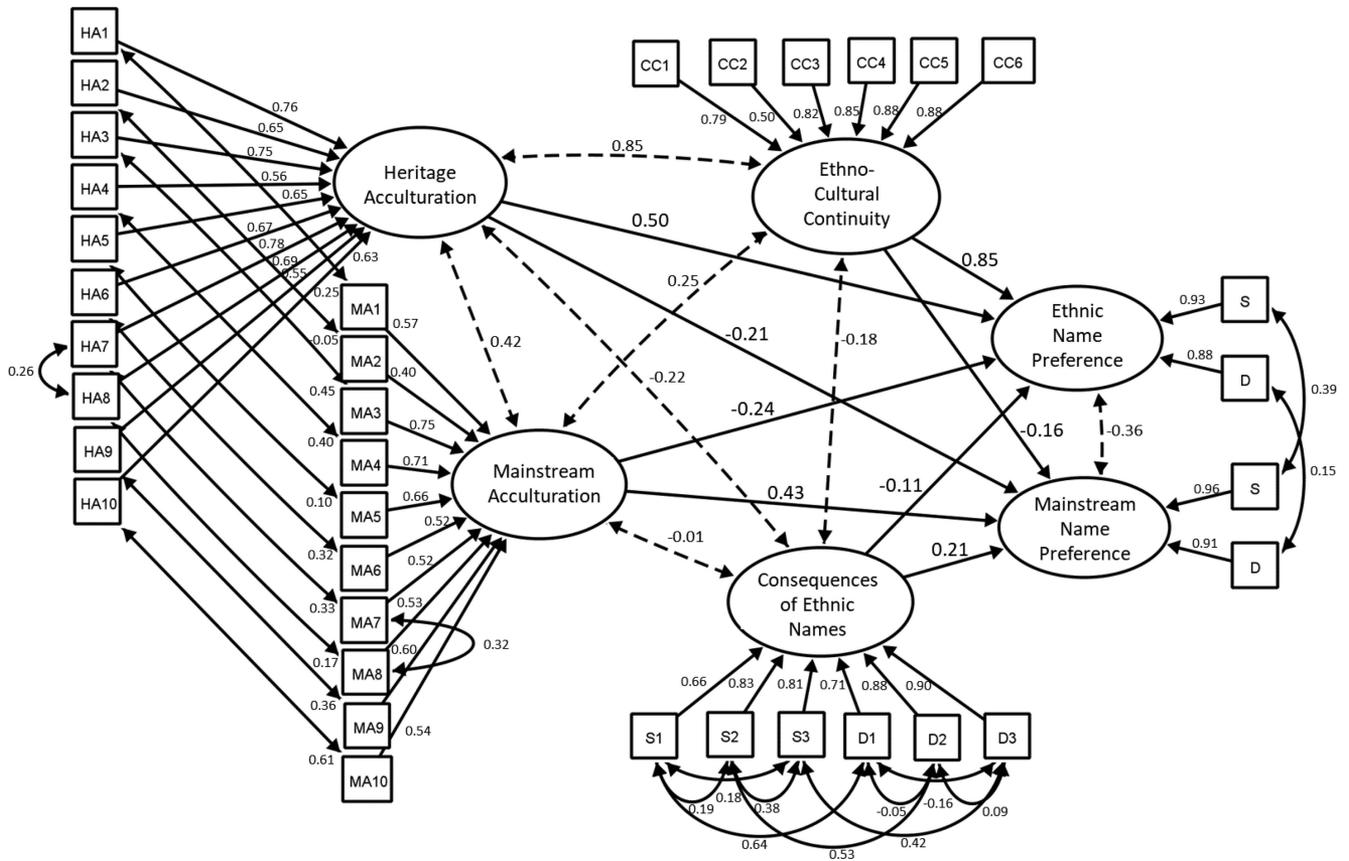


Figure 1. Structural equation model (Studies 1a and 1b). HA = heritage acculturation; MA = mainstream acculturation; CC = ethno-cultural continuity; S = son; D = daughter.

name, such that a one unit increase in this variable was associated with a 47% decrease in the likelihood of choosing an ethnic name, controlling for the other predictors. Importantly, perceptions of names as markers of ethnic identity was also related to the odds of choosing an ethnic name, such that a one unit increase predicted a 2.5 times increase in the likelihood of choosing an ethnic name. Surprisingly, once names as markers of identity was entered in the model, higher scores on cultural continuity were related to lower odds of choosing an ethnic name, the opposite of what was predicted. In the statistical literature this is referred to as a negative confounding effect, which typically suggests that the relationships between the predictors might follow a mediational pathway (MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000).

**Testing an exploratory mediation model for ethnic naming.**

Although we hypothesized that ethnic identity and ethno-cultural continuity would positively predict choices of ethnic names, our results did not support this hypothesis. Given the theoretical relevance of these predictors, as well as the possible mediational relationship suggested by the observed confounding effect, we explored whether these two predictors have an indirect effect on naming choices. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the ethno-cultural continuity framework (Gezentsvey Lamy et al., 2013), and a recent qualitative analysis of baby naming (Cila & Lalonde, 2020) informed our conceptualization of this exploratory mediational model. Specifically, we theorized that individuals who

report stronger ethnic identification would be more motivated to transmit their heritage culture to future generations and would be more likely to see names as a vehicle for cultural transmission. Given the exploratory nature of this analysis, we also tested alternative models connecting the three identity-related variables (heritage identity, ethno-cultural continuity, and perceptions of names as markers of ethnic identity) to name choice. Results from the mediational model, using PROCESS (a path analysis modeling tool; Hayes, 2018), revealed two statistically significant indirect effects of ethnic identity. The first indirect effect of ethnic identity on ethnic name choice operated through its association with perceptions of names as markers of ethnic identity, *OR* = 1.12, 95% CI [1.02, 1.40]. The second statistically significant path model revealed a serial mediation, with ethnic identity predicting ethno-cultural continuity (mediator 1), which in turn predicted perceptions of names as markers of cultural identity (mediator 2), which in turn predicted choices of ethnic names, *OR* = 1.15, 95% CI [1.05, 1.38]. A third indirect path tested was not statistically significant: from ethnic identity to name choice, through ethno-cultural continuity, *OR* = .86, 95% CI [.65, 1.04].

**Discussion**

Study 2 improved upon the ecological validity of Studies 1a and 1b by recruiting a group of actual parents and examining how

Table 5  
*Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations Among Main Study Variables for Indian Parents Living in the West (Study 2)*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2	3	4	5
1. Heritage identification	5.92	1.23	.18**	.49***	-.15*	.33***
2. Mainstream identification	5.79	1.23		-.09	.06	.03
3. Cultural continuity	5.54	1.06			-.24***	.46***
4. Consequences	3.68	1.67				-.01
5. Names as markers of ethnic ID	5.13	1.46				

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

perceptions of names as markers of cultural identity are related to actual name choices. Overall, we found that a large proportion of parents chose ethnic over mainstream names for their children. These findings mirror the stronger preference for ethnic over mainstream names observed in Studies 1a and 1b and are in line with previous qualitative work (Cila & Lalonde, 2020). The likelihood of parents choosing an ethnic name (over a mainstream name) increased the more they viewed names as ethnic identity markers and decreased with greater perceptions of negative consequences of ethnic names. We also observed two indirect pathways through which ethnic identification is related to naming choices. These analyses were exploratory in nature, however, and therefore should be interpreted with caution. That said, the observed patterns underscore the cultural richness and complexity of naming decisions. In addition, an important limitation of this study is worth noting: the temporal distance between when the naming decision was made and parents' reported levels of cultural identification and motivation for ethno-cultural continuity. Although this presents a limitation that needs to be addressed in future research, we did not observe any association between child age and our study variables, making it unlikely that time since the naming decision is a powerful influence on our results. This is also in line with literature on the stability of ethnic identity, which shows that among first generation immigrants (which represent the vast majority of our participants in Study 2), acculturation to heritage culture tends to stay relatively stable over time (Cheung, Chudek, & Heine, 2011; Chudek, Cheung, & Heine, 2015; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1992). Nevertheless, our current design does not permit making causal inferences, a limitation that future work could

address by recruiting expectant parents and following up with after the child has been born and named.

### General Discussion

Although the arrival of a new baby is a happy and exciting time for parents, the process of choosing a baby name can be challenging. Bicultural parents in particular may face the additional task of navigating multiple cultural and linguistic influences.

One of the most robust observations of this research was a strong preference for ethnic over mainstream names, across both nonparent and parent samples, from a variety of countries. Similar preferences for ethnic names have been observed with bicultural parents in other Western countries (Becker, 2009; Gerhards & Hans, 2009). In the highly diverse contexts where our research was conducted, it is not surprising that individuals might feel comfortable and even encouraged to embrace their ethnic identity. Choices of names may therefore be considered a truer reflection of parental acculturation orientations and can underscore efforts toward ethno-cultural maintenance. It is interesting to note that cultural belongingness can be provided by surnames as well, so parental decisions to further root the child within a particular cultural background by choosing an ethnic first name really highlight the importance of maintaining the heritage culture.

Across all studies we observed that choices and preferences for baby names are informed by both pragmatic and identity concerns, although the pattern of relationships varied somewhat between studies. Although we observed a direct relationship between strength of heritage acculturation on naming preferences, its rela-

Table 6  
*Predicting Ethnic Name Choices of Indian Parents Living in the West (Study 2)*

Variables	$\chi^2$	$R^2_N$	<i>B</i>	<i>OR</i>	95% CI
Step 1	11.63*	.10			
Heritage identification			-.02	.98	[.68, 1.44]
Cultural continuity			-.22	.80	[.51, 1.27]
Mainstream identification			-.14	.87	[.61, 1.24]
Consequences			-.40**	.67	[.52, .87]
Step 2	42.60***	.34			
Heritage identification			-.20	.82	[.53, 1.25]
Cultural continuity			-.62*	.54	[.32, .91]
Mainstream identification			-.23	.80	[.54, 1.18]
Consequences			-.63***	.53	[.38, .74]
Name as marker of ethnic ID			.92***	2.51	[1.71, 3.68]

Note. *OR* = odds ratio; 95% CI corresponds to the *OR*.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

tionship with name choice seemed to be transmitted indirectly. The importance of heritage acculturation and identity strength in naming decisions is also illustrated by name changes adopted by immigrants once they move to a new country. For instance, among immigrants of a Korean background living in a metropolitan city in Canada, those who identified strongly with their Korean culture tended to keep their Korean names and not Anglicize them (Kim, 2007). The second identity-related construct we examined was ethno-cultural continuity, and here too we found that it independently predicted preferences for ethnic names, but its relationship to name choice was indirect. It is possible that this lack of direct replication reflects our sample characteristics. Since cultural continuity is future-focused, it would have a more direct relationship with naming preferences, which are also future-focused. With actual parents, however, regardless of what they actually named their kids, it is possible that their future hopes for cultural continuity are now more independent of the children's names. Importantly, our third identity-related construct, perceptions of names as markers of ethnic identity, showed the strongest relationship with actual name choice, further lending support to the idea that names can be a vehicle for cultural transmission.

We observed similarly mixed results for mainstream acculturation. Whereas mainstream acculturation directly predicted mainstream naming preferences, it was not related to actual name choice. One possible explanation is that in the highly diverse contexts where our participants lived (large, multicultural cities), one is likely to encounter a wide range of diverse names on a daily basis. When pressures to assimilate are low and opportunities for ethnic maintenance are strong and even encouraged, bicultural individuals might not see a direct connection between their acculturation to mainstream culture and adoption of mainstream names (Cila & Lalonde, 2020). Therefore, one might find that mainstream acculturation predicts name choice in less multicultural contexts. Yet another possibility is that this lack of a relationship between mainstream identity and actual name choice mirrors some recent suggestions in the qualitative literature that point primarily to pragmatism as a key factor resulting in mainstream naming choices (Cila & Lalonde, 2020). In other words, it is possible that when ethnic minorities choose ethnic names for their children they do so in large part as a way of affirming group membership and ensuring intergenerational cultural transmission. When they choose mainstream names, however, they do so primarily because of pragmatic considerations and not necessarily as a way of signaling belongingness with the mainstream culture.

The most consistent relationship we observed across all three studies was related to pragmatic considerations regarding the negative impact of ethnic names. Some of these concerns might be rooted in parents' experiences, including frequent mispronunciations and deeper questions about identity (Cila & Lalonde, 2020). Giving the child a mainstream name might reflect a strategy to help the child "pass" as a full member of mainstream society, facilitating the child's identification and belongingness with the dominant culture and acceptance by others. Bursell (2012) argues that individuals who are members of stigmatized groups might engage in name-changing as a strategy to distance themselves from the stigma associated with their group. Taken together, these findings reflect the innate complexity of baby-naming among bicultural individuals, highlighting the interplay of motivational (i.e., ethno-cultural continuity), symbolic (i.e., names as markers

of cultural identity), and pragmatic (i.e., avoiding negative consequences of ethnic naming) functions of baby naming.

There are multiple ways to achieve cultural transmission, and here we demonstrate that ethnic naming is one way to ensure some, cultural continuity. Interestingly, a sense of continuity is important for minority groups in general, not just those who immigrate. For instance, Aboriginal Peoples in Canada are now using names as a way of reclaiming their identity and revitalizing their languages (Government of Northwest Territories, 2017; Hwang, 2018) and the maintenance of ethnic names may be particularly important among those who have experienced colonization (e.g., Thompson, 2006).

### Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although our studies make an important and novel contribution to the psychological literature on naming, research on this topic is still in its early days. It is important that future work extends to other cultural and linguistic groups, using large samples of first- and later-generation immigrants, and examines other possible predictors, possibly in combination with a dyadic approach. This topic also lends itself to a variety of different theoretical approaches. For instance, optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991) focuses on the competing motivations for uniqueness and belongingness, but how these motivations relate to name choice is an empirical question. Specifically, the belongingness motivation could operate at both the heritage group level (i.e., motivation to belong with one's ethnic community) and mainstream culture level (i.e., motivation to belong with mainstream society). Similarly, the rejection-identification model (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999) could offer additional insights into the role that perceptions of pervasive and stable prejudice and discrimination may have on parental decisions of baby names, through their effect on ethnic identification and mainstream culture disidentification.

It is important to emphasize that our results reflect the highly multicultural context where the studies took place. In smaller, more culturally and linguistically homogenous environments, or in contexts that emphasize assimilation over multiculturalism, we might not see this pattern of findings (Khosravi, 2012). Context plays an important role in naming decisions, with societal constraints influencing naming choices (Obukhova, Zuckerman, & Zhang, 2014). Similarly, not all ethnic or cultural groups might show similarly high preferences for ethnic names. We believe that future research would also benefit from a more nuanced approach that includes other factors, such as pronunciation (e.g., some ethnic names are easier to pronounce than others, and may thus be more appealing to prospective parents), and parent-child name similarity (Cila & Lalonde, 2020). Another demographic that might be especially interesting to study from a cultural perspective is mixed-culture children. Mixed-culture couples constitute an increasing demographic in many multicultural societies (e.g., Bialik, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2016). Little is known, however, about how mixed couples negotiate their cultural identities in the process of naming their children (cf. Edwards & Caballero, 2008).

Lastly, just as cultures change and evolve over time, so does the repertoire of first names. Gerhards and Hans (2009) refer to this as boundary shifting, whereby names that were once considered foreign have become part of the mainstream. This shift in perceptions of what constitutes a mainstream name in highly multicult-

tural environments has been recently discussed in qualitative work (Cila & Lalonde, 2020). From this perspective, names can be considered as both a cultural product and an antecedent of cultural change.

## Conclusion

Personal names are an important part of our self and our social identity, and the importance of the “social” aspect takes on special significance in multicultural societies. Although choosing a name for one’s child can be a challenging process for almost everyone, the task may be especially daunting for bicultural individuals, who can be influenced by multiple forces related to the transmission of one’s heritage culture and immersion in mainstream culture. Because of the highly malleable nature of personal names and the many symbolic and practical functions they serve, the study of personal names should be a fruitful avenue of research for scholars of culture and identity.

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