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## **Identity Development in a Transracial Environment: Racial/Ethnic Minority Adoptees in Minnesota**

EMMA HAMILTON

*University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas, USA*

DIANA R. SAMEK

*Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama, USA*

MARGARET KEYES, MATTHEW K. MCGUE,  
and WILLIAM G. IACONO

*University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA*

*It has been argued that transracially adopted children have increased risk of problems related to self-esteem and ethnic identity development. We evaluated this hypothesis across four groups of transracial adoptees: Asian ( $n = 427$ ), Latino ( $n = 28$ ), Black ( $n = 6$ ), mixed/other ( $n = 20$ ), and same-race White adoptees ( $n = 126$ ) from 357 adoptive families. No mean differences were found in adoptees' ratings of affect about adoption or of curiosity about birth parents. Some differences were found in general identity development and adjustment. There were notable differences in communication about race/ethnicity across groups and between parent and child report.*

**KEYWORDS** *transracial, adoption, identity, communication*

While the majority of adopted children are well-adjusted, research has consistently demonstrated that adoptees are at an increased risk for adjustment problems relative to non-adopted offspring (Hollingsworth, 1997; Keyes, Sharma, Elkins, Iacono, & McGue, 2008; Lanz, Iafate, Rosnati, & Scabini, 1999; Sharma, McGue, & Benson, 1996; Werner, 2000). It has been hypothesized that transracial and transethnic adoptees, defined as adopted children

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Address correspondence to Emma Hamilton, University of Texas at Austin, 4209 Avenue B, Austin, TX 78751. E-mail: emmahamilton@utexas.edu

belonging to a different racial/ethnic group than their adoptive parents, are at increased risk for problems related to self-esteem and ethnic identity development (Docan-Morgan, 2011; Hollingsworth, 1997; Mohanty, Keokse, & Sales, 2006), particularly as adoptive parents are more likely to be White than of color in the U.S. (McRoy, 1989; Simon, 1984). In fact, the National Association of Black Social Workers and the National Indian Child Welfare Association have historically opposed transracial adoptions, arguing that children of color cannot fully develop a cultural identity when raised in a primarily Anglo home environment (McRoy, 1989; Simon & Altstein, 1996). Despite past controversy, transracial adoptions have been a common practice for more than 50 years, and thousands of U.S. citizens internationally and transracially adopt each year (United States Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2012).

A growing body of research has evaluated whether transracial adoptees are as well-adjusted in adulthood as adoptees that are the same race/ethnicity as their adoptive parents. Previous studies have utilized longitudinal research designs in order to assess adult outcomes of transracially adopted youth. Several of these studies have found that transracial adoptees were generally similar in overall identity, behavioral, and academic adjustment compared to same-race adoptees (Brooks & Barth, 1999; Feigelman, 2000; Simon, Altstein, & Melli, 1994). For example, Vroegh (1997) found no significant differences in adoptee self-esteem, quality of life, the quality of parent-child relationship, or adoptee perception of parent satisfaction with child school performance in a comparison of 34 transracial and 18 same-race Black adoptees ( $M = 17$  years). Interviewer-noted adjustment was also measured and compared; a comparable proportion of transracial adoptees (24%) and same-race adoptees (22%) exhibited some maladjustment (e.g. pregnancy, temporary estrangement from adoptive family, poor affect regarding adoption).

Other studies have found no significant differences in transracial versus same-race adoptees on perceived self-worth and self-esteem (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007; McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale, & Anderson, 1982; Vroegh, 1997). Seminal research by Andujo (1988) found no significant differences in self-esteem between 30 same-race and 30 transracially adopted Latino adolescents ( $M = 14$  years). Moreover, several studies have documented that, counter to expectation, same-race White adoptees were more likely to have externalizing disorders, mental health referrals, and school expulsions, compared to transracial and international adoptees (Brooks & Barth, 1999; Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2005; Keyes et al., 2008). Notably, all adoptees in these studies were placed prior to 4 years of age. This suggests that transracial adoptees do not have a greater likelihood of mental health disorders or serious behavioral problems, at least when they are placed with their adoptive parents early in life.

Nonetheless, there does appear to be consistent evidence that transracial adoptees experience some detriment in racial/ethnic identity, which

may have an indirect influence on subsequent adjustment (DeBerry, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1996; Feigelman, 2000; Hollingsworth, 1997). Research has also shown that, perhaps as a result of dissimilar appearance to adoptive parents, transracial adoptees are more preoccupied with their adoptive identities and searching for their biological parents than same-race adoptees (Hollingsworth, 1998). Attitude regarding adoption and curiosity about birth parents have been posited as important mediators in identity development and adjustment in adulthood (Berry, 1991; Godon, Green, & Ramsey, 2014; Hollingsworth, 1998) and may be particularly important for transracial adoptees compared to same-race adoptees (Hollingsworth, 1997; Sarubbi, Block-Lerner, Moon, & Williams, 2012).

A particularly controversial and long-standing argument posits that White families may be minimizing the cultural background of their adoptees, as evidenced in early seminal research (Andujo, 1988; McRoy et al., 1982) as well as more recent reports (Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt, & Gunnar, 2006; Johnston, Swim, Saltsman, Deater-Deckard, & Petrill, 2007; Reinoso, Juffer, & Tieman, 2012). Examples of minimizing cultural background may include infrequent or nonexistent engagement in cultural socialization practices with adoptee, unpreparedness to address extrafamilial discrimination with adoptee, or use of primarily Anglo markers to describe adoptee (i.e. colorblindness). This presents a significant issue for adoptive families, as parental support of cultural socialization is positively associated with psychological adjustment and self-esteem in transracial adoptees (Mohanty et al., 2006; Yoon, 2000).

Despite the many studies addressing identity development among adoptees of color, there is a paucity of research regarding communication patterns in transracial environments, a necessary research avenue when attempting to address questions of parental cultural competency. Brodzinsky (2005) defines communicative openness within the adoptive family as a “willingness of individuals to consider the meaning of adoption in their lives, to share that meaning with others, to explore adoption related issues in the context of family life, to acknowledge and support the child’s dual connection to two families, and perhaps to facilitate contact between these two family systems in one form or another.” Communicative openness has been found to be positively associated with adjustment and self-esteem in adoptees (Brodzinsky, 2006; Grotevant, Rueter, Von Korff, & Gonzalez, 2011; Lanz et al., 1999). For transracial adoptees, communicative openness regarding adoptive status as well as the child’s racial/ethnic and cultural background are all important.

As a result of the physical dissimilarity in transracially adoptive families, transracial adoptees undoubtedly become aware of their race/ethnicity and adoptive status at an early age. Thus, familial communication is important for the adoptee to manage and understand their peers’ and society’s curiosity over their heterogeneous family composition. Docan-Morgan (2010) stresses that adoptees and adoptive parents are frequently confronted with opinions

of the nature of the family “norm,” in which families comprise biologically related and racially homogenous members. How parents respond to such opinions and the extent to which they speak with their child about racial issues is a highly important yet understudied topic. Recent research has found that adoptees may tend not to report experiences of racial derogation to their White parents, endorsing reasons such as perceived and past parent unresponsiveness, self-protection, and desire to “blend in” to the family (Docan-Morgan, 2011). Some research suggests that White adoptive parents tend to avoid discussing discrimination with transracial children, adopting a colorblind attitude (Tigervall & Hubinette, 2010). Other research suggests that when parents communicate to those outside the family regarding their transracially adoptive family, the communication tends to be positive. Parents are seen as “protectors” (guarding ethnic and cultural identity), “educators” (building identity; Suter, Reyes, & Ballard, 2010), or endorsing use of adaptive communication techniques that support family identity (e.g., answer directly, educate; Suter, 2008). However, more research is needed that addresses how both parents and children perceive race-related communication in the transracially adopted child–parent relationship.

The purpose of the present study was to build on and extend prior research by comparing transracially and same-race adopted children’s ratings on affect about adoption, curiosity about birth parents, general identity development, and several indicators of adjustment. We focus on communication about race and ethnicity as an element of identity development in the home and compare parent and child reports of racial/ethnic communication within both transracially and same-race adoptive families. Mean differences are compared across transracial adoptee groups (Asian, Latino, Black, other/mixed) in addition to same-race White adoptees, building on prior research that has generally grouped several groups of transracial adoptees together (Brooks & Barth, 1999; Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007) in comparison with same-race White adoptees. Both parent and child report are evaluated in terms of mean differences in communication about race and ethnicity, building on prior research evaluating only the adopted child’s (Docan-Morgan, 2011) or adoptive parent’s report (Suter, 2008; Suter et al., 2010).

## METHOD

### Participants and Procedure

This study uses data from the Sibling Interaction and Behavior Study (SIBS, McGue et al., 2007), a longitudinal project initiated in 1999 through the Minnesota Center for Twin and Family Research (MCTFR) at the University of Minnesota. Families consisted of a pair of adolescent siblings and their rearing parents. Eligibility for Wave I assessment (1999–2003) required that adoptive families include an adopted adolescent between the ages of 11 and

21 and a second adolescent in the home who was not biologically related to the adopted adolescent. The second child could have either been (a) biologically related to the parents or (b) like the first child, adopted and not related biologically to parent or sibling. It was required that all participating families had siblings no more than 5 years apart in age.

A total of 694 individual adoptees (from 409 adoptive families) composed the adoptive sample. Within our 409 adoptive families, 30.3% ( $n = 124$ ) included both adoptee and a second biological child of one or both of the adoptive parents, and 69.7% ( $n = 285$ ) included two adopted siblings. All adoptees were placed in adoptive homes at infancy (prior to 2 years of age) by three large, private adoption agencies in Minnesota. Average age of placement was 4.7 months ( $SD = 3.4$ ); however, 96% were placed by age 1 year. At the follow-up assessment (3.5 years later; 94% retention of full sample) two adoptees from two different families were excluded due to sibling ineligibility (one because she was found to have mild intellectual disability that would hinder self-report portions of the assessment and the other because she was found to be biologically related to her participating sibling); thus, the total adoptee sample size was 692 from 409 families.

The purpose of the present study was to compare transracial adoptees to domestic White adoptees on several indices of identity and adjustment. The vast majority of adoptive parents were White (98.4% of mothers and 97.8% of fathers); thus, transracial adoptions in this study were limited to cases where adoptive parents were White and adoptees were not White ( $n = 427$  Asian,  $n = 28$  Latino,  $n = 6$  Black,  $n = 20$  mixed/other). The total sample size for White adoptees was  $n = 126$  (all adoptive parents were White). Thus, excluding the 48 families in which one or more parent was not White, the total sample size for this study was 607 adoptees from 357 families.

In terms of country of origin, nearly all Asian adoptees ( $n = 421$ ) and Latino adoptees ( $n = 27$ ) were born outside of the U.S. and were internationally adopted. Three out of the 6 Black adoptees were born in the U.S., and nearly all other/mixed adoptees (85%) and White adoptees (98%) were born in the U.S. When analysis was restricted to the subsample of international adoptees, the pattern of results was comparable to that reported here for the total sample of adoptees. On average, the 607 adoptees assessed in this study were 14.9 years old at wave 1 ( $SD = 1.92$ ) and 18.3 years old at wave 2 ( $SD = 2.16$ ). Out of the 607 adoptees, 301 (55%) were female and 276 were male.

## Measures

Measures for this study primarily came from wave 2 of SIBS, during which expanded measurement of ethnic and adoptive identity was conducted ( $M$  age = 18.3 years,  $SD = 2.16$ ). Included measures centered on (a) general

identity, (b) opinions about adoption, (c) adjustment outcomes, and (d) perceived communication about race and ethnicity within the parent–child relationship. Each of the following scales required participants to respond using a 4-point scale (1 = *definitely true*, 2 = *probably true*, 3 = *probably false*, and 4 = *definitely false*).

#### GENERAL IDENTITY

General identity was measured using the Personality Supplement for Siblings questionnaire (Sharma, McGue, & Benson, 1998), which measured adoptees' overall sense of well-being (e.g., "I have a good sense of who I am"; 13-item scale,  $\alpha = .88$ ). This composite was scored so that a higher score reflected a stronger sense of identity and overall well-being.

#### NEGATIVE AFFECT ABOUT ADOPTION

Affect regarding adoption was measured using the Opinions About Adoption questionnaire (Sharma et al., 1998), which measured adoptees' attitudes regarding their adoption and adoptive status (e.g., "I think my parents would love me more if I were their birth child"; 12-item scale,  $\alpha = .87$ ). This composite was scored so that a higher score reflected a greater degree of negative affect.

#### CURIOSITY ABOUT BIRTH PARENTS

Curiosity about birth parents was also measured using the Opinions About Adoption questionnaire, which measured adoptees' level of curiosity about their birth background and birth family (e.g., "I wish I lived with my birth parents"; 10-item scale,  $\alpha = .88$ ). This composite was scored so that the higher the score, the more curiosity.

#### ADJUSTMENT OUTCOMES

Adjustment scores measured using the MCTFR-developed Opinions and Attitudes questionnaire. This questionnaire was only administered to participants aged 15 and younger. Approximately 40% of the sample was 16 or older at the wave 2 assessment and so only completed this questionnaire at wave 1 ( $M$  age = 14.9 years,  $SD = 1.9$ ). The wave 2 assessment was used with the remainder (60%) of the sample ( $M$  age = 18.3 years,  $SD = 2.2$ ).

*Antisocial behavior.* Antisocial behaviors measured the adoptees' likelihood to engage in externalizing or maladaptive behaviors (e.g., "I'd rather tell my parents a lie than admit I had done something that would make them angry"; 8-item scale,  $\alpha = .86$  for both waves 1 and 2). A higher score indicated more antisocial behaviors.

*Prosocial behavior.* The prosocial scale measured the adoptees' likelihood to engage in adaptive or socially acceptable behaviors (e.g., "I usually

will go out of my way to help other kids at school, even if they aren't my friends"; 10-item scale,  $\alpha = .81$  for wave 2 and  $\alpha = .72$  for wave 1). A higher score indicated more prosocial behavior.

*Aggression.* The aggression scale measured the adoptees' likelihood to engage in aggressive or violent behaviors (e.g., "If someone calls me a name, that is reason enough to fight"; 8-item scale,  $\alpha = .90$  for wave 2 and  $\alpha = .87$  for wave 1). A higher score indicated more aggression.

*Pro-family.* The family scale measured the adoptees' involvement in family-related activities and adherence to parental guidelines (e.g., "I enjoy doing things with my family";  $\alpha = .87$  for wave 2 and  $\alpha = .86$  for wave 1). A higher score indicated more pro-family behaviors.

#### PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION ABOUT RACE AND ETHNICITY: CHILD REPORT

The adoptees' perceived communication about race and identity with parents was measured using the Race and Culture: Adoptive Adolescent/Young Adult Questionnaire (Yoon, 2000), which measured the adoptee's perception of communication and environmental support by parents regarding the adoptee's racial/ethnic background (5-item scale,  $\alpha = .59$ ). Items were "I feel comfortable talking about racial issues with my parent(s)," "If someone made fun of me because of my race, I would feel comfortable telling my parent(s) about it," "My parent(s) would feel uncomfortable about my dating someone who is from a different race than I am," "My parent(s) don't talk with me about my racial background," and "My parent(s) have talked with me about how to respond to racial taunts." As the alpha was somewhat low for this measure, we additionally compared mean differences on the item deemed most relevant to communication about race/ethnicity with parent report; "My parents don't talk with me about my racial background." For both the scale and the item, a higher score indicated more communication about race and ethnicity.

#### PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION ABOUT RACE AND ETHNICITY: PARENT REPORT

The adoptive parents' perceived communication about race and ethnicity with children was measured using the same items as described in the above child-reported version, in the Race and Culture: Parent Questionnaire (Yoon, 2000; e.g., "I don't talk with my child about his/her racial background"; 5-item scale,  $\alpha = .61$  for mother report and  $\alpha = .63$  for father report). Again, because the alpha was low, we selected for comparison with adoptee report the item most relevant to our research question; "I don't talk with my child about his/her racial background." For both the scale and the item, a higher score indicated more communication about race and ethnicity.

## Data Analysis

The purpose of this paper was to examine differences in measures of general and adoptive identity, adjustment, and perceived racial/ethnic communication across transracial (Asian, Latino, Black, mixed/other) and same-race White adoptee groups. Adoptees in this study were nested within families. To deal with this, the CLUSTER specification, which adjusts standard errors for correlated family observations, in the Mplus, 6.12 software (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2014) was used. First, we report any significant differences at the omnibus level (comparing all 5 groups at once). If there were any differences at the omnibus level, we report all possible pairwise differences. Significant differences were detected by constraining means to be equal and using the chi-square difference test to compare variant and invariant models. Effect sizes of any significant differences are reported using Cohen's standardized mean difference, or  $d$  (Ellis, 2009). Small effect sizes are generally those around .2 to .3, medium or those from .5, and large or those .8 or more (Cohen, 1988).

## RESULTS

### Identity and Attitudes About Adoption

Descriptive statistics for all dependent variables across adoptee ethnic status are shown in Table 1. Outcomes of the pairwise comparisons are also noted in Table 1. Beginning with general identity, results showed a significant difference at the omnibus level,  $\chi^2(4) = 10.73, p = .03$ . Pairwise comparisons showed that transracial other/mixed adoptees had a significantly lower mean ( $M = 20.22, SD = 4.94$ ) than transracial Asian adoptees ( $M = 23.96, SD = 7.83; \chi^2(1) = 6.58, p = .01; d = .57$ ) and same-race White adoptees ( $M = 23.37, SD = 7.09; \chi^2(1) = 6.58, p = .01; d = .52$ ). No other significant differences were found. There were no significant differences in negative affect about adoption ( $\chi^2(4) = 6.17, p = .19$ ) or curiosity about birth parents across transracial and same-race groups ( $\chi^2(4) = 4.66, p = .32$ ). Thus, overall, there were limited differences in general attitudes and affect about adoption across transracial and same-race White groups, but there was some indication that transracial other/mixed adoptees have lower general identity that is not specific to transracial or adoptive status.

### Adjustment Outcomes

The same-race White and transracial adoptee groups scored similarly in two of the four measures of adjustment. No significant differences were found in antisocial behaviors ( $\chi^2(4) = 5.04, p = .28$ ) or pro-family behaviors

**TABLE 1** Descriptive Statistics on Study Data by Transracial Status

	<i>M (SD)</i>					
	Total ( <i>N</i> = 607)	Black ( <i>n</i> = 6)	Latino ( <i>n</i> = 28)	Asian ( <i>n</i> = 427)	Mixed/Other ( <i>n</i> = 20)	White ( <i>n</i> = 126)
<b>Adoptive identity development</b>						
General identity	23.62(7.56)	20.17(5.34)	22.83(6.57)	23.96 <sup>a</sup> (7.83)	20.22 <sup>ab</sup> (4.94)	23.37 <sup>b</sup> (7.09)
Negative affect about adoption	45.38(5.92)	47.40(5.73)	47.35(4.55)	45.44(5.82)	46.67(4.41)	44.48(6.62)
Curiosity about birth parents	27.24(7.34)	28.20(7.26)	29.43(5.32)	26.99(7.38)	28.89(9.69)	27.34(7.12)
<b>Adjustment outcomes</b>						
Antisocial	16.64(5.93)	15.00(7.43)	16.54(5.91)	16.48(6.03)	16.30(6.00)	17.34(5.52)
Prosocial	28.67(4.99)	29.00(6.26)	28.25(4.69)	29.03 <sup>a</sup> (5.07)	28.60(3.84)	27.56 <sup>a</sup> (4.78)
Aggression	14.86(5.39)	16.17(6.79)	15.36(5.83)	14.44 <sup>a</sup> (5.31)	16.95(6.44)	15.78 <sup>a</sup> (5.20)
Pro-family	20.10(4.86)	20.17(4.36)	20.93(5.68)	20.03(4.92)	20.95(4.51)	20.02(4.59)
<b>Parent-child communication about race/ethnicity</b>						
Mother report scale	3.61(.43)	3.93 <sup>aefg</sup> (.10)	3.58 <sup>bf</sup> (.35)	3.71 <sup>cc</sup> (.34)	3.68 <sup>bg</sup> (.52)	3.22 <sup>abcd</sup> (.52)
Mother report item	3.75(.60)	4.00(.00)	3.80(.50)	3.84(.44)	3.75(.58)	3.38(.93)
Father report scale	3.49(.47)	3.87 <sup>aefg</sup> (.10)	3.41 <sup>bf</sup> (.36)	3.59 <sup>cc</sup> (.39)	3.43 <sup>bg</sup> (.50)	3.11 <sup>abcd</sup> (.56)
Father report item	3.53(.75)	4.00(.00)	3.58(.58)	3.64(.64)	3.56(.63)	3.05(1.02)
Child report scale	3.49(.47)	3.04(.48)	3.25 <sup>c</sup> (.48)	3.17 <sup>b</sup> (.53)	3.11(.62)	2.84 <sup>ab</sup> (.58)
Child report item	3.09(.92)	2.80(.84)	3.33 <sup>a</sup> (.87)	3.23 <sup>b</sup> (.81)	2.89(.96)	2.59 <sup>ab</sup> (1.07)

*Note.* *M* = Mean, *SD* = standard deviation. Group means that are denoted by paired alphabetical superscripts are significantly different at *p* < .05 (for example, White and Asian groups differed significantly in prosocial behaviors, as denoted by <sup>a</sup>). Higher scores indicate a higher incidence of the measured variable for all items. Means did not vary significantly for variables in which no means are superscripted, with the exception of mother and father reported items (could not be tested because there was no variance for the transracial Black adoptee group, *n* = 6).

( $\chi^2(4) = 1.51, p = .82$ ). There were significant differences in prosocial behaviors ( $\chi^2(4) = 11.37, p = .02$ ). Pairwise comparisons showed transracial Asian adoptees had a significantly higher mean on prosocial behavior ( $M = 29.03, SD = 5.07$ ) than same-race White adoptees ( $M = 27.56, SD = 4.78; \chi^2(1) = 9.52, p = .002; d = .30$ ). No other significant differences were found. Significant differences were also found for aggression ( $\chi^2(4) = 12.90, p = .01$ ). Pairwise comparisons showed Asian adoptees endorsed significantly lower levels of aggressive behaviors ( $M = 14.44, SD = 5.31$ ) than same-race White adoptees ( $M = 15.78, SD = 5.20; \chi^2(1) = 6.86, p = .009; d = .25$ ). No other significant group differences were found. In total, there were limited differences between transracial and same-race adoptees, but with some indication that same-race White adoptees have somewhat more maladjustment relative to transracial Asian adoptees.

### Parent-Child Communication About Race/Ethnicity: Parent Report

Among adoptive mothers, significant differences were found in communication of race/ethnicity at the omnibus level,  $\chi^2(4) = 59.63, p < .001$ . Pairwise comparisons showed mothers of same-race White adoptees talked less about race ( $M = 3.22, SD = .52$ ) compared to all other transracial groups, including mothers of transracial Asian adoptees ( $M = 3.71, SD = .34; \chi^2(1) = 47.46, p < .001; d = 1.12$ ), mothers of transracial Black adoptees ( $M = 3.93, SD = .10; \chi^2(1) = 11.37, p < .001; d = 1.90$ ), mothers of Latino adoptees ( $M = 3.58, SD = .35; \chi^2(1) = 10.72, p < .001; d = .81$ ), and mothers of transracial other/mixed adoptees ( $M = 3.68, SD = .52; \chi^2(1) = 3.75, p = .05; d = .88$ ). Additionally, mothers of transracial Black adoptees reported talking more about race ( $M = 3.93, SD = .10$ ) with their children than mothers of transracial Asian adoptees ( $M = 3.71, SD = .34; \chi^2(1) = 56.05, p = .01; d = .88$ ), mothers of transracial Latino adoptees ( $M = 3.58, SD = .35; \chi^2(1) = 3.76, p = .05; d = 1.36$ ), and mothers of transracial mixed/other adoptees ( $M = 3.68, SD = .52; \chi^2(1) = 7.44, p = .006; d = .67$ ).

As the alphas for this scale were low, we confirmed the same pattern of results in the item deemed most relevant "I don't talk with my child about his or her racial background." As described in Table 1, the same pattern of mean differences were found, with the exception of similar means in transracial Latino and Asian adoptee groups for this single item (significant differences could not be tested because there was zero variance in the transracial Black group,  $n = 6$ ). Altogether it appears that mothers reported a greater degree of communication about race in all transracial groups than mothers of same-race White adoptees.

A similar pattern was found for father-reported communication about race/ethnicity. A significant difference was detected at the omnibus level,  $\chi^2$

(4) = 52.62,  $p < .001$ . Pairwise comparisons showed fathers of same-race White adoptees talked less about race ( $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = .56$ ) compared to all other transracial groups, including fathers of transracial Asian adoptees ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = .39$ ;  $\chi^2(1) = 44.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $d = .99$ ), fathers of transracial Black adoptees ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = .10$ ;  $\chi^2(1) = 11.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $d = 1.89$ ), fathers of Latino adoptees ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = .36$ ;  $\chi^2(1) = 9.46$ ,  $p = .002$ ;  $d = .64$ ), and fathers of transracial other/mixed adoptees ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = .50$ ;  $\chi^2(1) = 3.75$ ,  $p = .05$ ;  $d = .60$ ). Additionally, fathers of transracial Black adoptees ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = .10$ ) also reported talking more about race with their children than fathers of transracial Asian adoptees ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = .39$ ;  $\chi^2(1) = 7.62$ ,  $p = .006$ ;  $d = .98$ ), fathers of transracial Latino adoptees ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = .36$ ;  $\chi^2(1) = 15.58$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $d = 1.74$ ), and fathers of other/mixed adoptees ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = .50$ ;  $\chi^2(1) = 12.01$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $d = 1.22$ ).

As the alphas for this scale were low, we confirmed the same pattern of results in the item deemed most relevant, "I don't talk with my child about his or her racial background." The same pattern of means was found (significant differences could not be tested because there was zero variance in the transracial Black group,  $n = 6$ ). Altogether it appears that fathers reported a greater degree of communication about race in all transracial groups than fathers of same-race White adoptees, particularly fathers of transracial Black adoptees.

#### Parent-Child Communication About Race/Ethnicity: Child Report

There was also a significant difference in child's report about communication with parent at the omnibus level,  $\chi^2(4) = 25.82$ ,  $p < .001$ . Pairwise comparisons showed same-race White adoptees talked less about race with their parents ( $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = .58$ ) than transracial Asian adoptees ( $M = 3.17$ ,  $SD = .53$ ;  $\chi^2(1) = 30.26$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $d = .59$ ), and transracial Latino adoptees ( $M = 3.25$ ,  $SD = .48$ ;  $\chi^2(1) = 9.008$ ,  $p = .003$ ;  $d = .77$ ). However, there were no significant differences in children's report of communication about race with parents between same-race White ( $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = .58$ ) and transracial Black adoptees ( $M = 3.04$ ,  $SD = .48$ ;  $\chi^2(1) = .82$ ,  $p = .37$ ) or between same-race White ( $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = .58$ ) and transracial other/mixed adoptees ( $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = .62$ ;  $\chi^2(1) = 3.02$ ,  $p = .08$ ).

As the alphas for this scale were low, we confirmed the same pattern of results in the item deemed most relevant "My parent(s) don't talk with my about my racial background"; again, Asian and Latino adoptees reported significantly lower means than same-race White adoptees (results Asian:  $\chi^2(1) = 40.76$ ,  $p < .001$ ; results Latino:  $\chi^2(1) = 8.26$ ,  $p = .004$ ). There were no differences in Black ( $\chi^2(1) = .26$ ,  $p = .61$ ) or other/mixed ( $\chi^2(1) = 1.41$ ,  $p = .24$ ) reports compared to those of same-race White adoptees. Thus, there is discrepancy between child and parent report in this pattern

of means across transracial and same-race groups. This pattern of means shows that Black and other/mixed transracial adoptees may not necessarily agree with their parents regarding the degree to which they talk about race.

## DISCUSSION

In terms of identity development and attitudes regarding adoption, our findings are consistent with those of Brooks and Barth (1999), Juffer and van IJzendoorn (2007), McRoy et al. (1982), and Vroegh (1997), among others, and provide support for the hypothesis that transracial and same-race adoptees are largely similar in overall adoptive identity and adjustment. In fact, as mentioned above and in the case of aggression and prosocial behavior, same-race adoptees evidenced a higher rate of maladaptive behavior compared to transracial (Asian) adoptees, consistent with prior research (Brooks & Barth, 1999; Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2005; Keyes et al., 2008).

In terms of racial/ethnic communication, mothers and fathers of transracial adoptees reported significantly more communication than mothers and fathers of same-race adoptees. Parents of Black adoptees reported the highest level of racial/ethnic communication. This pattern of findings was not completely paralleled in the child report. Differences in reports between transracial groups suggest that racial/ethnic communication is not uniform in all transracial adoptive homes; Asian and Latino adoptees reported talking more about their race/ethnicity with their parents than White adoptees, while Black and mixed/other adoptees did not.

This overall pattern of results suggests the majority of transracial adoptees in our sample (Asian and Latino adoptees,  $n = 455$ ) agreed with parents that communication of race/ethnicity is taking place in the home. In the case of Black and other/mixed adoptees, we wonder whether they might be experiencing elevated levels of discrimination that they are uncomfortable discussing with their White parents, particularly if issues of race/ethnicity are being actively avoided or deemphasized in the home (Docan-Morgan, 2011). Colorblind or avoidant attitudes (Quiroz, 2007) by part of the parent have been associated with lower levels of parental enculturation and racial socialization of transracial adoptees, or a de-emphasis on the child's racial/ethnic identity (Bergquist, Campbell, & Unrau, 2003; DeBerry et al., 1996; Lee et al., 2006; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983).

It is perhaps more likely that in the case of our Black and mixed adoptees ( $n = 26$ ), there is some discomfort by part of the child in discussing race/ethnicity with parents. Indeed, Brodzinsky (2006) asserts that parents and children frequently differ in their report of communication about adoption within the family. Research investigating adoptees' understanding

of their adoptive status suggests a fluid developmental process in which cognition and familial communication patterns are ever-shifting (Brodzinsky, Singer, & Braff, 1984; Wrobel, Kohler, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2003). Given the mean age of our sample ( $M = 18.3$ ) and that adolescence is marked by complex psychosocial development (Erikson, 1968), this fluidity suggests that adoptees, as they mature, may differ in their reports of communication within the family. Furthermore, research involving non-adopted and adopted persons has found self-protection to be a recurring theme exhibited by children in topic avoidance with parents (Docan-Morgan, 2011; Golish & Caughlin, 2002). Parents may be attempting to broach racial/ethnic topics with their Black and mixed children, reporting higher levels of communication, while children, in turn, avoid discussion and inevitably report lower frequencies of communication.

There are notable limitations to this study. First, the sample size, especially our number of Black, mixed, and Latino adoptees, was disproportionately small when compared to our large number of Asian adoptees. Replication is thus warranted using larger samples of transracially adopted Black, mixed, and Latino adoptees to be sure of the extent and magnitude of effects. We were also unable to evaluate for gender differences and parent-child correlations of communication about ethnicity given the small subsample size of many of the groupings. Second, caution is warranted when comparing results that come from mid-adolescence versus late adolescence, which is the case with our adjustment measures. Third, comparing adolescents of color reared in an Anglo environment with domestically adopted Whites reared in a same-race family does not perfectly highlight meaningful differences between transracial versus same-race rearing environments. An ideal research design would include a control group of adoptees of color raised by same-race parents, similar to that presented by Andujo (1988) and Vroegh (1997); however, this type of design was not possible with our sample. Finally, it is unclear how transracially adopted siblings may be communicating with one another about race and ethnicity and whether the degree of comfortable communication about such matters may offset the impact of a lack of parent-child communication about race and ethnicity. Exploration sibling communication presents a next step in delineating the transracial environment.

Future research would benefit from additional in-depth investigations into the ways in which parental communication of race/ethnicity during adolescence affects the transracial adoptee in adulthood. Since research has shown not only that parents of transracial adoptees tend to de-emphasize their child's racial background (Andujo, 1988; Bergquist et al., 2003; McRoy et al., 1982) but also tend to select which cultural competencies their children acquire (Thomas & Tessler, 2007), it would be beneficial to know what transpires in adulthood, such as whether transracial adoptees more often seek White or same-race peers, romantic partners, or neighborhoods. Baden,

Treweeke, and Ahluwalia (2012) outlined a process called “reculturation,” in which many “assimilated” transracial adoptees take steps later in life to seek out their birth parents, to reclaim their culture, and to understand their birth background. Furthermore, a qualitative study would be of particular interest in depicting the nature and content of conversations about race and ethnicity between parent and child. Thus, the implications of this study first call for further research on communication patterns and perceptions of parent and child within the transracial home environment.

In conclusion, the present study supports similar levels of identity development and adjustment in transracial/transethnic and same-race adoptees. Communication of race/ethnicity within the transracial environment, a topic that has been previously understudied, was found to be perceived homogeneously in most adoptive families (Asian and Latino adoptees,  $n = 455$ ). For Black and mixed families ( $n = 26$ ), however, there appears to be a possible disconnect. It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the present study, including small sample sizes and a limited number of questions and scales available for analysis on the concepts of communication about race/ethnicity within the adoptive parent–child relationship. With our findings, however, we hope to further the knowledge of how adoptive families create and maintain a transracial environment. In addition to furthering empirical research on the topic, we hope our findings shed positive light on transracial adoption in the eyes of public health officials and the general public.

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