Introduction

• Transracial and transethnic adoptees are argued to be at increased risk for problems related to self-esteem and ethnic identity development (Arikan, 1988; Docan-Morgan, 2011; Hollingsworth, 1997), particularly as adoptive parents are more likely to be white than of color in the U.S. (McRoy, 1989; Simon, 1984).

• Previous studies have found equal adjustment of transracial and same-race adoptees (Brooks & Barth, 1999; Simon, Aizawa, & Malt, 1994). Other studies have argued that transracial and same-race adoptees have similar levels of self-esteem and self-worth (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007; Vroegh, 1997).

• There is also evidence that transracial adoptees experience detriment in racial/ethnic identity, and this in turn may have an indirect influence on adjustment (DeFerrey, Scan, & Weinberg, 1996; Feigelman, 2000; Hollingsworth, 1997).

• Communication of race/ethnicity in the transracial adoptive home presents a gap in the research. Because of physical dissimilarity, transracial adoptees become aware of adoptive status at an early age, thus warranting investigation into the ways families support and help manage their child’s development of identity.

Method

• Variables measured included: General Identity (13-item scale, α = .88), Affect Regarding Adoption (12-item scale, α = .87), Curiosity About Birthparents (10-item scale, α = .86), Prosocial (10-item scale, α = .79 for Wave 2 and α = .73 for Wave 1), Antisocial (8-item scale, α = .85 for Wave 2 and α = .85 for Wave 1), Aggression (8-item scale, α = .87 for both Wave 2 and Wave 1), Family (8-item scale, α = .85 for Wave 2 and α = .87 for Wave 1).


Results

• Mean scores were compared across our same-race group and transracial groups using a series of ANOVAs.

• Subsequent analyses were conducted that corrected for non-independence of the data using the COMPLEX specification (clustering by family) with Mplus 6.12 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2014).

Figure 1. General and Adoptive Identity between Transracial and Same-Race Groups. No significant differences were found in identity, affect about adoption, and wondering about birthparents.

Figure 2. Adjustment between Transracial and Same-Race Groups. No significant differences were found in 4 measures of adjustment: antisocial, prosocial, and pro-family behaviors. However, significant differences in aggression were found, F(4, 587) = 3.404, p = .009. Asian adoptees have significantly lower levels of aggressive behaviors than white (p = .002) and Mixed/Other adoptees (p = .01).

Figure 3. Parent and Child Report of Racial/Ethnic Communication in the Home. Mothers of all transracial adoptees reported talking with their child about race/ethnicity significantly more than mothers of white adoptees, F(4, 533) = 34.261, p < .001.

• Fathers of all transracial adoptees reported talking with their child about race/ethnicity significantly more than fathers of white adoptees, F(4, 543) = 12.111, p < .001.

• Asian and Latino adoptees reported talking with their parents about racial/ethnic identity more than white adoptees, F(4, 544) = 8.701, p < .001 and F(4, 544) = 8.701, p = .003, respectively. However, Black and Mixed/Other adoptees did not report significantly more communication than white adoptees. Only Asian and Latino adoptees agreed with parent report of R/E.

Conclusion

• Our results generally provide support that transracial and same-race adoptees are similar in terms of their overall adjustment, curiosity about birth parents, and general and adoptive identity.

• On the other hand, our results suggest a pattern of disagreement in parent and child perceptions about communication of race/ethnicity across transracial and same-race adoptees. Parents may be overestimating the degree of communication about race/ethnicity with their Black and Mixed adopted children.

• An important consideration is the widespread color-blindness in the United States, particularly by whites due to the privilege they have experienced in regards to race relations. Race is considered a highly polemic and taboo topic to be avoided in daily conversation (Guinsoo, 2007).

• Color-blindness may lead to a skewed parental perception of how often race really is being brought up in the home, or the degree to which it is important to discuss issues about race and ethnicity. Adoptees may be experiencing discrimination among their peers and in other social situations which would warrant a greater need for communication with parents.

References

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References available upon request.