The Role of Developmental Comprehension in Understanding Microaggressions Conveyed by Transracially-Adopted Children
The Tufts University Adoption and Development Project
Anthony M. DeBenedetto; Ellen E. Pinderhughes, Ph.D.

Introduction

- Transracial adoptees (TRAs) typically experience challenges in the development of identity.
- TRAs often experience bias in the form of microaggressions (MAs) that may affect their self-perception.
- TRAs experience both racial microaggressions (RMAs) and adoption microaggressions (AMAs) (Baden, 2016) from an early age, and may repeat them without fully comprehending the impact of these messages.
- Children’s cognitive capacities affect their ability to comprehend complexities associated with adoption (Brodzinsky et al., 1984) and racial difference, therefore, as children age, the frequency and content of the microaggressions internalized/conveyed may change.
- TRAs in the same adoptive family may convey similar MAs due to a similar experience of cultural and adoption socialization.

Methods

- Data was taken from a larger sample (The Tufts Adoption and Development Project) in which TRAs were interviewed about topics of race and adoption.
- TRAs ages 4-11 (M=7.95, SD=1.82) were included in this study if they were a part of a sibling dyad (N=14).
- Interviews were coded to identify both experienced and internalized/conveyed AMAs and RMAs when children’s discourse contained bias.
- Data were analyzed for trends in cognitive developmental age. 7 children ages 4-7 (M= 6.54, SD=0.96) and 7 children ages 8-11 (M=8.36, SD= 1.26) were analyzed as preoperational (PO) and concrete-operational (CO) (Piaget, 1952) respectively for trends in internalized/conveyed MAs.
- 7 sibling dyads were included in the sample. Families were included in the sibling analysis if they had 1 child in each PO and CO developmental stage (n=5).

Results

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<th>Family 1</th>
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<th>Family 3</th>
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Common Adoption Microaggressions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tr>
<td>Biology is best/normative</td>
<td>“They might want a child and they can’t have one in their family.”</td>
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<td>Shameful/inadequate birth parent</td>
<td>“Children are place for adoption—sometimes parents cannot take care of their children…they could be on drugs…they get a baby at the orphanage.”</td>
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<td>Phantom birth parent</td>
<td>“Adopted mother” says “can I please have this baby?” and “biological mother” says “give me 1000 bucks.”</td>
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<td>Discomfort in talking about adoption</td>
<td>“Sometimes I don’t like talking about adoption.”</td>
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By Age Group

- CO children internalized/conveyed more AMAs than PO children.
- CO children internalized/conveyed fewer RMAs than PO children.
- CO children notably conveyed more: biology is best/normative; shameful/inadequate birth parent; phantom birth parent; possible discomfort in talking about adoption.

Sibling Dyads

- CO children internalized/conveyed more total AMAs (m= 5.3, SD= 1.87) than their PO siblings (m=3.4, SD=0.55).
- CO children internalized/conveyed a comparable number of RMAs (m=0.6, SD=0.89) as their PO siblings (m=0.8, SD=0.84).
- CO children internalized/conveyed “Phantom birth parent” AMAs: more times in 2 families; fewer times in 1 family; an equal number for 1 family.
- CO children internalized/conveyed “Biology is best/normative” AMAs: more times in 4 families; an equal number for 1 family.
- CO children internalized/conveyed “Possible discomfort in talking about adoption” AMAs: more times in 1 family; an equal number for 1 family; fewer times for 3 families.

Discussion

- TRAs may internalize and convey more AMAs than RMAs because of higher awareness due to greater racial socialization than adoption socialization.
  - Increased adoption socialization and education may increase adoptees’ understanding of adoption, thus decreasing number of AMAs conveyed.
  - Adoption is a multifactorial entity with many components, including adoptive and birth families, and financial transactions.
  - CO children have a greater adoption vocabulary (Brodzinsky, 1984), than their PO counterparts, but lack the abstract thinking to consider all of the complexities of adoption process.
  - Thus, CO children may convey more complex AMAs by only considering one aspect of adoption.

- TRAs possible discomfort with talking about adoption may be lessened through family socialization and discussion.

Limitations

- Limited sample size to only include sibling dyads.
- Only 5/7 families included siblings of different developmental level.
- Does not include other developmental levels (formal operational, adulthood) due to study constraints.

Future Directions

- Further studies to examine a wider range of ages of TRAs and MAs.
  - Including adolescents, adults.
- Further studies with a larger samples that specifically examine TRAs’ families and sibling dyads.
  - Effects of family adoption socialization and discussion on internalized/conveyed AMAs.
  - Environmental adoption socialization/education on internalized/conveyed AMAs.
- Patterns of AMAs within sibling dyads.

Acknowledgements

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References
