
The Intersection of Multiple Minority Identities: Perspectives of White Lesbian Couples Adopting Racial/Ethnic Minority Children

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In order to analyse the salience of race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and adoptive status for lesbian adoptive parents, this study examined the challenges and strengths described by 20 White lesbian couples (40 women) who were adopting racial/ethnic minority children from within the United States. Data from two time points (pre- and post-adoptive placement) were analysed qualitatively. Results indicated that the majority of women voiced concerns about raising racial/ethnic minority children in a 'White privileged' society. Many women reported facing a lack of understanding from others and were aware of multiple layers of stigma. However, having faced discrimination themselves as sexual minorities, many also perceived themselves as possessing unique strengths (e.g., experience coping with stigma). Many women expressed feeling that by drawing on support from their communities as well as their own awareness of and experience with diversity issues, they could prepare their children for the challenges they might face.

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Interest in studying transracial adoption has increased as the number of White parents adopting racial/ethnic¹ minority children in the United States has increased (Smith, McRoy, Freundlich, & Kroll, 2008). This increase is due in part to the disproportionate number of racial/ethnic minority children who are waiting to be adopted (Smith et al., 2008). However, research suggests that the placement of racial/ethnic minority children with White parents is complex because, in the absence of same-race parental

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role models, transracially adopted children may struggle more with racial/ethnic identity formation and discrimination (Smith et al., 2008).

Alongside the rising trend in transracial adoption in the United States, there has been an increase in the number of children adopted by lesbian and gay parents (Gates, Badgett, Macomber, & Chambers, 2007) and a corresponding increase in research on lesbian/gay parent families' experiences (Goldberg, 2010). Some research has shown that lesbian couples are more open to transracial adoption than heterosexual couples (Goldberg, 2009) and are more likely to complete transracial adoptions than heterosexual couples (Farr & Patterson, 2009). Because there are stigmas associated with racial/ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, and adoptive families, multiracial lesbian parent families may have to contend with multiple forms of stigma. Given that many lesbian/gay parent families are multiracial, and that little research has explored the experiences of lesbian/gay transracial adoptive parents (Goldberg, 2009), the current study focuses on 20 White lesbian couples who recently adopted transracially. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the kinds of challenges that transracial adoptive lesbian parents perceive in regard to their multiple minority identities: that is, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and adoptive status. Furthermore, of interest is the extent to which they feel prepared to overcome perceived challenges.

In order to contextualise our study, we first review the literature surrounding transracial adoption. Notably, most of the literature on transracial adoption focuses on heterosexual parents only. Then we review the research on lesbian/gay parents and their children, including the limited literature on lesbian/gay parents' experiences with transracial adoption.

The Transracial Adoption Debate

While there are no legal barriers to adopting transracially in the United States, the topic of transracial adoption has been controversial for the past several decades (Bradley & Hawkins-Leon, 2002). To date, the majority of empirical studies has found that transracially adopted children have similar adjustment and developmental outcomes to inracially adopted children (e.g., in terms of academic success, parental attachment, mental health, and self-esteem; Brooks & Barth, 1999; Burrow & Finley, 2004; Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007; Vroegh, 1997). However, other studies have suggested that transracially adopted youth may struggle with feelings of sadness, loss, and a sense of difference (e.g., Friedlander et al., 2000).

Notably, research on transracial adoption has tended to concentrate on psychosocial and developmental outcomes and, until recently, has focused less on the development of racial and ethnic identity. Some research has found that White parents may not adequately handle issues surrounding racism (Bradley & Hawkins-Leon, 2002), and that transracially adopted children may struggle to form a unified racial/ethnic identity (DeBerry, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1996). At the same time, other research on the racial/ethnic identities of transracially adopted youth has not found evidence for concern. For example, Vroegh (1997) found that the majority of her sample of transracially adopted adolescents reported comfort with their racial/ethnic identities.

Parental attention to children's racial/ethnic identity and experiences is important, in that as members of a minority group, their children will inevitably face

stigma throughout their lives. Some scholars have proposed that transracially adopted children are at risk for not learning certain coping mechanisms (DeBerry et al., 1996), and that White parents do not know how to prepare their children for the kind of racism that they themselves have not experienced (Bradley & Hawkins-Leon, 2002). Empirical research suggests that White adoptive parents often take a colour-blind approach to transracial adoption, believing that race will not be an issue for their children (Taylor & Thornton, 1996). This colour-blind — if well-meaning — approach to racial/ethnic minority children may allow some parents to overlook potential challenges their children will face (Dorow, 2006).

Some scholars have contended that White parents who are colour conscious can aid their children by understanding and communicating their own personal limitations as members of the White majority, at the same time striving to teach their children skills to cope with discrimination (Samuels, 2009). Furthermore, it is possible that when White adoptive parents acknowledge the importance of their children's racial/ethnic and cultural backgrounds, they are better able to foster healthy racial/ethnic identities in their children (Rojewski, 2005).

Given the unique struggles of transracially adopted youth, and the importance of parental colour-consciousness, this study attempts to understand how White lesbian adoptive parents understand and anticipate the barriers that lie ahead for their families. Most of the research on the beliefs and experiences of White parents who adopt transracially has focused on heterosexual couples. Yet it is particularly important to study lesbians' beliefs and experiences regarding transracial adoption, because they and their families are potentially vulnerable to multiple forms of discrimination. Furthermore, it is important to examine the ways in which their experiences as sexual minorities might be relevant to their experiences as parents of racial/ethnic minority children.

Same-Sex Couples' Perspectives on Transracial Adoption

In addition to transracial adoption, another topic of controversy concerns the adjustment of children raised by lesbian/gay parents. Numerous studies have demonstrated that lesbian/gay parents demonstrate equivalent parenting competence as compared to heterosexuals (e.g., Bos, van Balen, & van den Boom, 2004; Goldberg & Smith, 2009), and that the children of lesbian/gay and heterosexual parents do not appear to differ from each other in terms of mental health and psychosocial outcomes (Flaks, Ficher, Masterpasqua, & Joseph, 1995). Indeed, a large body of research has suggested that lesbian and gay parents in general provide loving and stable homes for their children (Goldberg, 2010).

However, some scholars have argued that lesbian/gay parent families *are* different, not because they are incompetent parents or produce unstable children, but because they face unique experiences living in a heteronormative society: namely, sexual minorities (and by extension, their children) face marginalisation and lack of privilege due to their sexual orientation (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005). Society tends to view lesbian mother families as less acceptable because they do not conform to traditional gender standards — that is, they lack a male parent and they do not receive many of the traditional forms of recognition (e.g., marriage) that are typically awarded to families (Goldberg, 2010). Additional challenges may be

experienced by lesbians with *adopted* children. For example, adoptive parents in general often struggle with societal notions that adoptive families are less 'real' than biologically related families (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003). Lesbian mothers might face multiple levels of stigma, then, due to both their sexual orientation and their child's adoptive status.

In addition to facing stigmas surrounding sexual orientation and adoption, lesbians with transracially adopted children may also experience challenges related to race and ethnicity. For example, similarly to heterosexual parents, they may struggle with the reality of needing to prepare their children for discrimination and helping them to foster a healthy racial/ethnic identity. Little research, though, has addressed the relative salience of race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and adoption for lesbian/gay adoptive parents. One exception is Bennett (2003), who interviewed 15 lesbian couples who had pursued international, primarily transracial, adoptions. Bennett briefly observed that due to their children's racial and ethnic minority status, parents anticipated future challenges related to racism and felt that the elements of race/ethnicity, parental sexual orientation, and adoptive status made their families 'multiply diverse' (p. 87).

Given their status as stigmatised sexual minorities, and their vulnerability to (and potential experience with) discrimination and stigma, it is important to study the unique challenges that lesbian couples face as transracially adoptive parents. This study aims to answer the following research questions: In the pre-adoptive period, what kinds of challenges do lesbian couples anticipate regarding adopting transracially? As sexual minorities, do women perceive themselves as possessing unique strengths to cope with the realities of raising children who are both adopted and also belong to a racial/ethnic minority group? Finally, once they become parents, what kinds of negative — and positive — experiences do they describe as White lesbians parenting racial/ethnic minority children?

Theoretical Framework

Our theoretical perspective is one that emphasises intersectionality; or, the 'meaning and consequences of multiple categories of social group membership' (Cole, 2009, p. 170). That is, in order to understand families with multiple minority identities, it is important to attend to the complexity of interactions among these dimensions of identity. The experiences of multiracial, lesbian parent-led adoptive families are particularly complex because they are impacted by multiple forms of stigma. From this perspective, it is important to attend to the ways in which multiple identities are viewed as separate, as well as to the extent to which they constitute a greater whole (McCall, 2005).

Furthermore, there may or may not be similar experiences of oppression among different forms of identity (Risman, 2004), and thus it is important to examine whether one group of a stigmatised minority (i.e., lesbian parents) feels equipped to handle the effects of oppression toward another group (i.e., children of a racial/ethnic minority). Given a lack of research in this area, an intersectional lens thus informed and guided our study of lesbian women who adopt transracially.

Method

Description of the Sample

Data from 40 women (20 couples) at two time points were analysed. At Time 1, couples were waiting to be placed with their child. Time 2 occurred 3-4 months post-adoptive placement. All couples were in committed, same-sex relationships and were adopting a child together for the first time. Couples had been in a relationship for an average of 7.95 years ($SD = 3.56$). All participants self-identified as White. Participants' mean age was 37.43 ($SD = 5.96$). They were, on average, highly educated and financially secure: 77.5% of women ($n = 31$) held at least a bachelor's degree, and couples' mean annual family income was \$96,568 ($SD = \$38,171$). Couples resided in diverse regions of the U.S.: 40% ($n = 8$ couples) lived in the South, 30% ($n = 6$) lived in the Northeast, 25% ($n = 5$) lived in the West, and 5% ($n = 1$) lived in the Midwest.

All couples adopted domestically from within the United States. Sixty per cent ($n = 12$ couples) pursued private domestic open adoption, which often involves some form of ongoing contact between adoptive parents and birthparents (Grotevant, McRoy, Elde, & Fravel, 1994). The remaining 40% ($n = 8$) pursued adoption through the child welfare system (i.e., public domestic adoption). All of the couples adopted children of a different race/ethnicity from their own. Sixty per cent of the sample ($n = 12$ couples) adopted children whom they identified as biracial or multiracial, 25% ($n = 5$) adopted children whom they identified as African American, and 15% ($n = 3$) adopted children whom they identified as Hispanic or Latino/a. Children's ages at the time of adoptive placement ranged from 0 (newborn) to 16 years, with an average of 14.81 months ($SD = 43.67$). Forty-five per cent of the sample ($n = 9$ couples) adopted girls, 35% ($n = 7$) adopted boys, and 20% ($n = 4$) adopted mixed-gender sibling groups.

Participant Recruitment and Procedures

This study utilises data from a larger study on the transition to adoptive parenthood. Inclusion criteria for the study were (a) couples were adopting for the first time, and (b) couples were becoming parents for the first time. Adoption agencies throughout the United States were asked to provide information about the study to clients who had not yet adopted, and interested clients were instructed to contact the principal investigator for more information.

Upon agreeing to participate, participants were mailed two questionnaire packets, two informed consent forms, and two stamped envelopes, and they were asked to return the consent form with the questionnaire packet. Partners were then interviewed separately over the telephone, following a semi-structured interview format. Interviews averaged between 1 and 1.5 hours. Time 2 occurred 3-4 months post-adoptive placement, when partners were asked to complete a second set of questionnaires and were again interviewed separately over the telephone. Open-ended interviews were transcribed verbatim. We assigned pseudonyms to participants in order to protect confidentiality.

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were analysed using qualitative methods. Specifically, we conducted a thematic analysis (Aronson, 1994; Boyatzis, 1998). This entailed reading through transcripts and identifying themes and patterns of experiences that emerged from the participants' narratives. We analysed data from both members of each couple. Special attention was paid to the words participants used in describing ideas about their children's racial/ethnic minority status and their own status as sexual minorities. We then generated codes from these themes, refined our categories, and further specified our categories by generating subthemes in order to understand the data more comprehensively (Aronson, 1994). We used the most significant codes and sub-themes to organise the data, and we referred back to the literature in order to form a coherent story line building on the identified themes (Aronson, 1994). Our intersectional perspective shaped our analysis of the data, in that we paid special attention to how various aspects of identity — that is, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and adoptive status — individually and collectively influenced women's perceptions and experiences. Of particular interest was whether (and how) these forms of identity intersected to form multiple layers of perceived stigma at Time 1, and how women planned to overcome barriers related to stigma and discrimination. We further examined how women described their lived experiences at Time 2 in relation to their multiple minority statuses.

Results

We begin with an analysis of participants' perceptions of transracial adoption prior to their adoptive placement. We outline their anticipated challenges and concerns regarding their family's multiple minority statuses and their descriptions of how prepared they felt to raise racial/ethnic minority children. Then, we present data from Time 2 (3-4 months post-adoptive placement). We illuminate couples' experiences as 'triple' stigmatised families (i.e., families that must contend with stigma due to the child's race/ethnicity, the parents' sexual orientation, and the child's adoptive status), and we then analyse the positive experiences that women described having as newly formed multiple minority families.

Time 1: Perceived Challenges of White Lesbian Couples Parenting Racial/Ethnic Minorities

At the first time point, before being placed with a child, the majority² of women in the sample anticipated challenges centring on discrimination and a lack of understanding from others toward their families. Sixteen women noted worries about discrimination that were focused on the macro (societal) level. Eleven of these women reflected on the potential for multiple layers of stigma. One participant, Elaine, stated:

Whatever child ends up coming to us and being part of our lives, they've got a couple of strikes against them ... Two moms, adopted, and one of the things we've thought about is we're going to be adding a third, if we get into any of the racial issues.

Similarly to Elaine, another participant, Andrea, also noted concerns regarding multiple minority statuses:

I think when it comes to transracial adoption, or cross-cultural adoption, coping with and figuring out how to manage all of the stuff that comes your way, and the racism that comes, and all the questions that are so clear because you've adopted this child. Um, not to mention being a same-sex couple adopting a child.

For five women, race/ethnicity appeared to be the most salient factor in regards to overcoming societal discrimination — perhaps because as White women, they were members of a privileged group who had not experienced racism themselves. Indeed, some women questioned whether they were sufficiently prepared to handle racism their children would likely face. For example, Judy expressed: 'As parents of children of colour, a big part of what you have to teach them is how to deal with racism in the world. I don't know as much about that.'

Considering challenges their families would face at a more local level, 16 women expressed fears that their children would face discrimination from within the community, neighbourhood, and schools — particularly from their children's peers. Nine women noted the potential for discrimination based on multiple minority identities. For example, women such as Phoebe described living in gay friendly areas but also described feeling 'nervous' that their children would be discriminated against by their peers, if their children were of a different race/ethnicity *and* had two mothers.

Four women expressed concerns that their children would feel uncomfortable because they lived in very 'White' communities. Three others appeared to worry more about their children being teased for having two mothers. In general, however, these 16 women did not express that these challenges felt insurmountable. One participant, Samantha, explained: 'So those are the concerns — we need to pay attention to it and take a few steps to make sure that they don't affect her life in a bad way.'

Finally, while many couples in the study described their families of origin as being supportive, eight women anticipated that they would face a lack of acceptance from them. Two women anticipated tensions from family members regarding adoption — and transracial adoption in particular — while three others worried specifically about the impact of their families' racist views. Zoe offered, 'I think that eventually they would find an acceptance but it will take their own personal time.' Three more women, such as Casey, described a lack of acceptance toward their sexual orientation:

My family is not very accepting of me being gay. I'm not even sure that I'll tell them before or after I adopt. They tried to break up our wedding! I don't really want them to be involved with our children, because I don't need them talking about negative information about gays and lesbians being parents.

Ultimately, Casey expressed that she did not want her family to have a relationship with her child due to the extremely negative impact they might have. For women who had been rejected by their families due to their sexual orientation, concerns about intolerance from family members appeared to be the most salient.

Time 1: Perceived Strengths of White Lesbian Couples Parenting Racial/Ethnic Minorities

While many participants articulated concerns about the kinds of challenges their families might face, the majority of women also gave voice to the strengths that they could draw from in raising transracially adopted children. Twenty-seven women

described aspects of their communities that they believed would facilitate successful parenting of transracially adopted children. Nineteen of these women spoke specifically about their community's racial and ethnic diversity as a perceived asset. These women described feeling that community support, diversity, and inclusiveness could help them to parent their children in a culturally sensitive way.

Six other women focused on the diverse makeup of their community in terms of sexual orientation. They described feeling that living in a gay friendly area (populated by other sexual minorities and/or allies) was an asset to raising their families, inasmuch as it would allow them to feel comfortable being 'out' and would also allow their children to feel a sense of community. Two participants, including Paige, noted the salience of both race/ethnicity and sexual orientation in their communities: 'We live in a very diverse and progressive area, so there are plenty of adopted kids around, there are transracial families around, there are lesbian parents around. So we're basically committed to living in a place where we won't be outcasts.' Indeed, for most of the women in the sample, having diverse communities they could draw on was viewed as a strength that might offset some of the challenges they anticipated.

In addition to relying on support from their communities, participants also drew on their own internal resources for strength. Eight women expressed that acknowledging their own White privilege could help prepare them and their children for race-related issues and concerns. These women spoke explicitly of their values of being colour conscious as opposed to colour blind (Samuels, 2009), and they voiced their belief that it is best for everyone to be informed and open about racial/ethnic identity. Andrea revealed:

I think the biggest thing has been trying to really own our own privilege and our own anxiety about really helping this child live into the fullness of who they are ... How can we do justice to this child's culture and life as a White female couple? I think what we came to was that ultimately, I think it's better to have two conscious White people than two unconscious White people.

These women, then, felt that 'owning' their privileges, rather than ignoring or minimising them, could bring awareness to their children's unique struggles and, in turn, better equip them to foster their children's unified identities (Rojewski, 2005).

Drawing on another kind of personal and psychological strength, six women felt that as sexual minorities, they could help to bridge differences between themselves and their children. That is, having insider knowledge of what it's like to be a minority could provide them with the experiences and insight to socialise racial/ethnic minority children to the realities of prejudice. For example, Paige noted that '[we are] having to make sure that we are prepared for the negative reactions that we get, and have good, positive ways to deal with that. Andrea and I are very capable of doing that, we're both out as individuals, so we don't live in a fear-based system.' Thus, a number of women felt that, as sexual minorities who were attuned to issues of difference and prejudice, they could better prepare their children for discrimination they might face.

Time 2: Negative Experiences as White Lesbian Couples Parenting Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Approximately three months after bringing their children home, participants reflected on their experiences now that being a multiracial family was a reality. The

majority of these women reported that they had already experienced some challenges, most of which were related to discrimination and misunderstanding or confusion from others.

Nine women described experiences of prejudice and discrimination from others. Six of these women described race/ethnicity as being a more salient issue than sexual orientation in these encounters. Samantha, who adopted an African American baby girl via public adoption, stated succinctly: 'Race trumps everything. People are far less interested in the fact that we're lesbians.' Conversely, two women noted feeling discriminated against because of their sexual orientation. Bridget, who adopted a biracial baby boy via open adoption, noted that in her town, 'two women are much worse than the biracial [aspect].' Lastly, one participant — who adopted a biracial baby daughter via open adoption — noted her family's experience with prejudice on both of these accounts (race/ethnicity and sexual orientation).

Twenty women described experiencing others' confusion and misunderstanding related to their family make-up. Participants described these experiences as stemming more from ignorance — or sometimes simple curiosity — rather than from fear or hatred. For 16 of these participants, other people's confusion and persistent questioning centred primarily on the race/ethnicity of their children. Paige, who adopted an African American baby boy via open adoption, noted that 'nobody assumes he's local. It's quite remarkable.' In this way, women encountered people's automatic assumptions that adoption — and transracial adoption in particular — signified something that was foreign and different.

Four participants, including Esther, who adopted an African American toddler boy via public adoption, noted the salience of sexual orientation: 'Out in public we got a few looks, but we thought it was more because we were lesbians than the mixed race thing — because that's pretty common now.' Because Esther described living in a community consisting of many multiracial families, she attributed the 'looks' people gave them to their sexual orientation.

Notably, the salience of their family's multiple minority identities refocused several women's attention to the scrutiny and challenges that their families would likely face in the future. Ariel, who adopted a biracial baby girl via open adoption, reflected: 'As a biracial adopted child with queer parents, I think she stands to have people peering into her life a lot and making assumptions or judgements about her family. I don't see this as potentially difficult necessarily, but as possibly exhausting.' These women expressed some uneasiness that their children would have to face such burdens throughout their lives. However, they also noted confidence in their abilities to help them navigate such difficulties.

Time 2: Positive Experiences as White Lesbian Couples Parenting Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Many women — the majority of whom had also described negative experiences — voiced a number of positive experiences they had encountered as multiracial, lesbian parent-led adoptive families. Fourteen women discussed how, since adopting transracially, they had felt supported and welcomed by their communities and neighbours.

Seven of these women noted feeling welcomed specifically as a multiracial family. While several women described support to mean that they had not experienced any visible negative reactions from others — making race a ‘non-issue’ — the majority described having felt actively welcomed by their communities. Some women described feeling particularly welcomed by their children’s racial/ethnic or cultural groups of origin. Libby, who adopted an African American baby girl via open adoption, said that her African American friends had been emotionally and spiritually supportive of their adoptive placement, which was particularly meaningful for her, because she had ‘asked for their blessing’. She went on to say that ‘we’re going to need more support as [our daughter] becomes more aware of her colour, our colour’.

Three women noted feeling that their sexual orientation was not an issue — at least not yet — as visible lesbian parents. Samantha explained: ‘I think people are usually too polite to say anything if they think anything negative.’ Furthermore, one woman, Alice — who adopted a biracial baby girl via open adoption — described others’ support for her family’s adoptive status. She expressed feeling surprised by a positive outreach from friends who were biological parents: ‘I’ve been really touched by certain friends of mine.’

Lastly, three women described feeling supported in relation to their multiple minority identities. Sylvia, who adopted biracial siblings via public adoption and described living in a very ‘White’ community, expressed that her children appeared to be accepted at their school. She also noted the importance of there being other lesbian parents in her community: ‘So that’s nice, we’re not the only ones. It is not like we show up to school as the only women couple.’ For women such as Sylvia, having a variety of people who welcomed and accepted them appeared to have positively impacted their family’s wellbeing.

Describing psychological shifts since the adoption, seven women discussed having a renewed sense of resilience and understanding of diversity since adopting. These women often described strengths derived from their experiences as sexual minorities that would get them through any obstacles that lay ahead. For example, Bridget noted: ‘I’ve had 15 years to prepare for negative reactions, and their shock or their behaviour doesn’t really ruffle my feathers anymore, because I’ve had to deal with that so many times.’ Echoed Olivia, who adopted biracial twins via open adoption:

I’m just banking on Natalie and I being able to teach them about dealing with other people’s ideas ... and learning to deal with hurtful statements and things like that. I mean, Natalie and I had to deal with that all of our lives, and we’re okay.

These women described feeling that while potential race-related tensions might arise, they were better prepared to handle them because they had experienced similar tensions related to sexual orientation. In this way, their resilience was seen as a benefit to themselves and their children.

Lastly, five women described enthusiasm for the possibilities that could emerge from their new status as multiple minority families. Women such as Paige explained that because they were now a multiracial family, they would have meaningful opportunities to connect with another culture: ‘I really do look forward to the positives that will come from it, learning more about African American history and culture and hopefully having some more interaction with that culture.’ Other

women discussed the idea that their family status could present opportunities to educate others. For example, given her visible status as a transracial adoptive parent, Jenna, who adopted a biracial baby girl via open adoption, described her response to people's negative assumptions about adoption: 'It's opening people's minds. You know, people don't "get" open adoption. They're scared of it ... And so it's nice that our daughter gives us the opportunity to educate people.' Jenna thus implied that people's questioning and misunderstanding about adoption — and in particular open adoption, where there is potential for an ongoing relationship with birth parents — provided her with a means to teach people that adoption was not something to be scared of. For Jenna and other women, then, having a family with multiple minority identities was embraced as an opportunity for enriching their lives and having a positive impact on others.

Discussion

Several limitations to the current study should be noted. By conducting a qualitative analysis of rich interview data, we discovered themes and patterns that may have been overlooked or missed in quantitative research (Goldberg, Downing, & Richardson, 2009). However, because our sample size was relatively small, and because qualitative research is inherently subjective (Charmaz, 2006), our findings should not be generalised to all White lesbian adoptive parents of racial/ethnic minority children. Furthermore, the sample was relatively affluent and highly educated. Future research should examine perspectives of lesbian parents who have less income and formal education, as such resources shape the kinds of communities that women can afford to live in and, therefore, their experiences of raising a transracially adopted child.

Notably, this study relies on self-report data. It is possible that some women may have experienced some internal pressure to present themselves in a mostly positive light. Future studies should include collateral reports (e.g., observational data combined with interview data). A notable strength of this study is that it used longitudinal data. Future research should follow families over a longer period of time and should incorporate how parents' attitudes toward race/ethnicity and their awareness of stigma might impact on children's identity development and wellbeing.

Despite some limitations, this study offered a valuable in-depth analysis of the complexities involved for White lesbian couples who adopt transracially. The majority of women in this sample appeared to be well attuned to issues of racial/ethnic identity and thus voiced concerns, as White women, about raising racial/ethnic minority children in a 'White privileged' society. In this way, women presented themselves to be more colour conscious than colour blind (Samuels, 2009). Furthermore, living in a heteronormative society, participants often voiced concerns that their families would have to contend with multiple layers of stigma. However, many of the women who anticipated challenges related to race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and adoptive status also described strengths to overcome these challenges, such as community support and experience handling prejudice and discrimination.

Importantly, at Time 2 — only three months post-adoption — the majority of women reported experiencing some form of prejudice or misunderstanding, often

directed at their children's race/ethnicity, which appeared to be the most salient form of 'difference' at this time point. Related to the intersection of their multiple minority statuses, participants also discussed a variety of positive experiences they had had. While many women highlighted relational and community support, perceived psychological strengths were also described as facilitating positive experiences — that is, a renewed sense of resilience and a sense that being a multiracial family would present them with new opportunities. In these ways, the women in this study again appeared to be mindful of the importance of attending to cultural differences (Samuels, 2009). Rather than pretending that any differences or stigma did not exist, most of the women described being vocal and open about an array of important issues. Their families' multiple minority identities lent themselves to particular challenges, and at the same time they provided these women with the opportunity to raise their children with a greater awareness and openness to differences.

Findings from this study can be of aid to professionals who work with lesbian parents who are considering or have completed transracial adoptions. It is important for professionals to understand the importance of community support for many of these women, and to help them build on strengths and resilience they have obtained as sexual minorities. Furthermore, while this study did not address long-term outcomes, it suggests that attention to differences — rather than hiding from them — can be a notable strength. Thus, adoptive parents in general can benefit from how the women in this study have anticipated challenges, learned to overcome obstacles, and in the process learned how to positively influence their families and society at large.

Endnotes

- 1 The terms *ethnicity* and *race* are often used interchangeably. *Race* has traditionally referred to shared biological and physical characteristics and *ethnicity* to cultural roots, patterns, and identities that may or may not be shared by members of the same race. While the terms are distinct from one another, there is often overlap, and we recognise that it is often difficult to separate the two (Cardemil & Battle, 2003). Thus, similar to many scholars, in this article we use the collective term *race/ethnicity*.
- 2 Of note is that there are overlaps among these groups, such that the same participant may be counted multiple times in different categories (for example, some women who anticipated discrimination on the broad societal level also articulated more specific forms of potential discrimination from within their communities).

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