Lesbian and Heterosexual Preadoptive Couples' Openness to Transracial Adoption

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This study uses data from 147 White preadoptive couples (54 lesbian, 93 heterosexual) to examine adopters' subjective explanations for why they are open or not open to adopting transracially. Participant perceptions of racial-ethnic diversity in their communities and families, perceptions of family support or nonsupport, and attitudes about race were among the factors they cited as influencing their openness. These findings hold important implications for training and service delivery in transracial adoption.

Keywords: adoption, diversity, lesbian, race, qualitative

Transracial adoption has been the subject of debate for the past four decades (Griffith & Bergeron, 2006; Smith, McRoy, Freundlich, & Kroll, 2008). Some scholars and adoption advocates argue that racial and ethnic matching in adoption facilitates children's development of a healthy racial identity, whereas others maintain that racial matching is not realistic (Smith et al., 2008), given that the number of children of color in foster care far exceeds the number of racial minority adopters (de Haymes & Simon, 2003; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2006), and Caucasian children tend to be adopted at two times the rate as non-Caucasian children (Barth, 1997). Furthermore, some scholars have argued that race-matching policies discriminate against White adopters by limiting their ability to adopt transracially (Smith et al., 2008).

Such concerns influenced the enactment of the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994, which prohibits the denial or delay of a child's adoptive placement on the basis of race, color, or national origin. Furthermore, the 1996 amendment of MEPA by the Removal of Barriers to Interethnic Adoption Provisions (IEP) maintains that agencies that receive federal funding may not consider race in placement decisions, except in unusual circumstances. MEPA has been criticized for mandating "an unyielding color-blindness that is counter to the best interest of children" and for prohibiting agencies from "assessing families' readiness to adopt a child of another race/ethnicity, preparing families for transracial adoption in any way that is not provided to those who adopt within race, and considering families' existing or planned connections with the child's racial/ethnic group" (Smith et al., 2008, pp. 7–8). In contrast, the Hague Convention, which regulates international adoption practices (and which was signed by the United States in 2000 and ratified in 2008) actively addresses children's racial and ethnic needs by requiring that prospective adopters receive training related to transracial adoption, as well as counseling related to the child's racial and ethnic background (Smith et al., 2008).

Thus, significant debate exists as to whether race should be a consideration in the adoption process, both with regard to the selection of adoptive parents, as well as the training offered to prospective adopters (Smith et al., 2008).[1] These policy debates continue alongside upward trends in transracial adoption by Caucasian parents, who constitute the largest pool of adoptive parents (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002). These trends reflect what Simon and Alstein (1992) call an "accommodation to reality," as the number of adoptable Caucasian infants has declined over the past 25 years as a result of the legalization of abortion, the increased availability of contraceptive methods, and the rising trend for single mothers to parent their children (Bausch & Serpe, 1999; Miller & Coyl, 2000). Thus, although Caucasian men and women typically prefer to adopt inracially (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002), practical constraints (e.g., the desire to adopt a child in a short period of time) may lead some individuals to consider adopting transracially. Others, though, may adopt internationally from European countries to have more control over the race of their child (Hollingsworth & Ruffin, 2002). Indeed, the number of East European children being adopted by U.S. parents has steadily increased (Kreider, 2003). While such trends do in part reflect international politics (e.g., the greater availability of children from certain countries), they also suggest that racial matching is important to many parents (Riley, 1997). The continued rise in children adopted from Eastern Europe is particularly

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[1] The Study Group on Race, Ethnicity, and Culture defines race as "phenotypic differences that arise from genetic or biological dispositions, such as skin color and hair texture" (Murray, Smith, & Hill, 2001, p. 912), ethnicity as "perceived group membership based on nationality, ancestry, or both," and culture as a broad construct that includes "individual differences within families, their values, beliefs, and practices" and "family roles; communication patterns; affective styles; and values regarding personal control, individualism, collectivism, spirituality, and religiosity" (p. 913). In light of such definitions, it is important to recognize that discussions of race (particularly in the context of transracial adoption) are often more concerned with the social construction of race, or sociorace (Helms & Talleyrand, 1997) rather than the more traditional scientific classification of race.

striking in light of evidence that these children often suffer major deficits in cognitive and medical well-being (Judge, 2003).

Little research has explored prospective adopters' perceived motivations for adopting transracially or inracially. Such research is important in that, regardless of MEPA's formal policies, many adoption practitioners, scholars, and policymakers continue to believe that race represents an important consideration in the adoption process, and that parents who intend to adopt transracially can benefit from training that prepares them for the challenges of adopting transracially (Smith et al., 2008). For example, in its 2000 Standards of Excellence for Adoption Services, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) reiterated its belief that failure to consider race in the adoption process does not serve children's best interests (CWLA, 2000). Similarly, the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute maintains that "racially sensitive education" should be a core aspect of the adoption preparation process for individuals who are adopting children of a different race (Brodzinsky, 2008). Such "racially sensitive education" can be informed by an understanding of how prospective adopters understand and explain their decision-making with regard to adopting, or not adopting, transracially. For example, knowledge of the factors that prospective adopters invoke (and do not invoke) in explaining their willingness or unwillingness to adopt transracially may inform the design and implementation of training materials. Such knowledge can also, on a more general level, enable practitioners to both (a) better support those adopters who are open to adopting, or intend to adopt, transracially, and (b) provide education and training that address the concerns of adopters who are hesitant to adopt transracially, thereby potentially increasing the pool of adoptive parents who are willing to adopt transracially.

The goal of the current study is to shed light onto preadoptive parents' subjective explanations of why they are or are not open to adopting a child of a different race—that is, how they subjectively construct and explain their openness or lack of openness to adopting transracially.[2] This study focuses on White couples only, in that this represents the largest group of adopters and the group that is the most likely to adopt transracially (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002). Furthermore, this study examines the perspectives of both lesbian and heterosexual preadoptive couples, given that (a) there is some data to suggest that lesbians may be more open to adopting transracially than heterosexual persons (e.g., Gates, Badgett, Macomber, & Chambers, 2007); and (b) an increasing number of lesbians are currently adopting (Gates & Ost, 2004).

Theoretical Perspective

The current study is informed by a symbolic interactionist perspective. Symbolic interactionism emphasizes the interaction between the person and their environment (Blumer, 1986; Goffman, 1959) and asserts that people develop a sense of self through interaction, which in turn influences motivation (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). According to this perspective, people are constantly in a process of interpretation and definition as they move from situation to situation; by extension, situations and objects have meaning only through people's interpretations. Furthermore, one's social locations and life experience inevitably influence one's interpretations, and these interpretations in turn determine one's actions. From this perspective, then, meaning

does not emanate from the intrinsic makeup of the "thing" that has meaning (e.g., race) and nor does it arise from the psychological elements of the person who is doing the interpreting; rather, meaning arises in the process of interaction between the two (Blumer, 1986). In turn, interactions and meanings are situated and context-dependent: The actor selects, regroups, and transforms the meanings in light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action (Blumer, 1986).

In part, how individuals interpret, define, and respond to situations, and therefore create meaning, is shaped by the contexts that structure individual lives (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). That is, individuals' social locations (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, and race) serve to structure individuals' experiences and interactions, such that their sense of self and meaning-making are shaped by their group membership(s), and, specifically, the shared group meanings and relative power or lack of power associated with these memberships (Longmore, 1998). For example, from this perspective, lesbians' marginalized status as sexual minorities may facilitate empathy and identification with other marginalized groups (e.g., racial minorities), leading them to approach the prospect of transracial adoption more positively than dominant group members. Additionally, their membership in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community may expose them to certain ideals and values that facilitate openness, such as expansive notions of family (Weston, 1991) and alternative notions of kinship that prioritize affective bonds over blood ties (Hayden, 1995; Weston, 1991). Alternatively, it is possible that lesbians' awareness of their marginalized status leads them to engage in "stigma management" (Goffman, 1963): They may be resistant to adopting transracially out of concern that it would bring unwanted visibility to their families.

Thus, in this study, participant attitudes about race and transracial adoption (and their motivations to adopt transracially) are viewed as arising out of their individual social locations (e.g., sexual orientation, race), their interactions with others (including members of their own and other racial groups, as well as influential persons in the adoption process such as extended family), and their interpretation of their immediate context (e.g., their perceptions of community diversity). In turn, a woman who identifies as a lesbian, perceives herself as an open-minded person, has had extensive contact with members of other racial groups, and perceives her town as racially diverse and her family as racially tolerant might be expected to be more open to transracial adoption than a heterosexual woman with limited interracial contact, whose identity does not include a concept of herself as racially tolerant, and who lives in an area that she perceives as nondiverse and/or racist.

The Role of Social Location and Context in Openness to Transracial Adoption

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, *sexual orientation* is a key social location that may impact how preadoptive parents

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[2] In the current article, the term "openness" is used in reference to individuals' attitudes toward transracial adoption—i.e., their openness or willingness to adopt transracially. This should not be confused with openness in adoption, which refers to contact between birth families and adoptive families.

construct the possibility of adopting transracially. That is, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, lesbians' stigmatized minority status and membership in the gay community expose them to certain experiences, values, and norms that may shape their behavior in significant ways (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). In this way, lesbians' marginalized status, vulnerability to practical barriers in the adoption process, and the social accessibility of adoption (via increasingly visible gay adoptive communities; Gates et al., 2007) may lead them to approach transracial adoption with greater willingness than heterosexuals. U.S. Census data suggest that lesbians are significantly more likely to have adopted internationally than heterosexual couples, a finding that may reflect women's efforts to avoid heterosexism and discrimination in domestic adoption, or, alternatively, genuine interest in transracial or transcultural adoption (Gates et al., 2007). In support of the latter possibility, Bennett (2003) studied 15 lesbian couples who adopted internationally and found that many women described themselves as being drawn to the idea of building multiracial and multicultural families. She suggested that women's experiences as stigmatized individuals might make them more open to adopting a different-race child.

The social location of *race* is also instrumental in shaping individuals' perspectives on transracial adoption. White adopters are aware, on some level, that their racial category is typically regarded as affording a greater level of privilege and power than other racial categories (Storrs, 1999). In turn, they may also be aware that they lack the socialization experiences and shared social meanings that are specific to other, non-White racial groups: indeed, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, racial socialization is in part accomplished through interaction with members of one's racial group (Hollingsworth, 1999; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Thus, in determining whether they are willing and able to provide adequate socialization opportunities to a child of a different race, White adopters may consider their *social and contextual resources*.

Such considerations may be prompted by the advice and recommendations of adoption workers. Indeed, although MEPA regulations prohibit specialized training for families who plan to adopt transracially, MEPA does allow training regarding transracial adoption if it is offered to all families, irrespective of their racial preferences and intentions (Smith et al., 2008).[3] Such training often encourages applicants to assess whether they possess the resources to provide adequate socialization opportunities for a racially or culturally different child (Vonk & Angaran, 2001). For example, prospective adopters may be encouraged to consider the level of racial/ethnic diversity in their communities and neighborhoods, and to actively seek out racial/ethnic resources if they are committed to adopting a child of color (Roorda, 2007; Zuniga, 1991). Some research suggests that lack of community diversity represents a potential challenge for transracial adoptive families (Bennett, 2003; de Haymes & Simon, 2003). For example, several studies have found an association between the degree of diversity in adopted children's communities (including the size of the racial/ethnic population to which the child belongs) and their cultural competence (Thomas & Tessler, 2007), racial identity (McRoy, Zurcher, Lauerdale, & Anderson, 1984), self-esteem (Yoon, 2004), and comfort with their appearance (Feigelman, 2000). Being exposed to same-race adult role models (e.g., adults in one's parents' social network) has also been positively linked to children's self-esteem (McRoy et al., 1984) and cultural competence (Thomas &

Tessler, 2007), although Westhues and Cohen (1998) found no association between exposure to same-race adults and adolescents' comfort with their ethnic identity. While these studies can be criticized for their small samples (Feigelman, 2000; McRoy et al., 1984), high attrition (Feigelman, 2000), and reliance on the Internet for recruitment (Thomas & Tessler, 2007), their findings suggest that social network diversity may have implications for the adjustment of transracially adopted children. In turn, prospective adopters' *perceptions of diversity within their social networks and communities* may affect the degree to which they feel equipped to parent transracially.

In addition to considering the racial and ethnic diversity of their social networks and communities, prospective adopters may also be advised to inventory the degree to which their social networks are supportive of transracial adoption (Brodzinsky, 2008). Family nonsupport and racism represents one of the major challenges faced by multiracial heterosexual (de Haymes & Simon, 2003; Shiao, Tuan, & Rienzi, 2004) and lesbian (Bennett, 2003; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002) adoptive families; indeed, one study of over 750 heterosexual adoptive families found that inracial adoptive families perceived higher levels of social support from family members and friends than transracial adoptive families (Rosenthal & Groze, 1992). Thus, prospective adopters' *perceptions of family support for adopting transracially* may impact their willingness to adopt transracially, such that adopters who perceive their families as having negative attitudes about racial minorities or transracial adoption might be less open to adopting transracially, whereas adopters who perceive their families as racially tolerant and inclusive might be more open.

Prospective adopters' attitudes about transracial adoption are also affected by *societal and cultural discourses* regarding family, kinship, and adoption. Specifically, prospective adopters are exposed to widespread cultural values that couples should have children, these children should be biologically related to them, and biological parenthood is superior to social parenthood (Hayden, 1995). Indeed, North American ideologies of kinship prioritize biogenetic connections, and these connections are often presumed to be indexed by observable indicators of physical similarity (Hayden, 1995; Wegar, 2000). In turn, physical resemblances among family members are viewed as definitive markers of family relationships, and family members who are physically dissimilar from one another are often mistaken to be unrelated (Wegar, 2000). Because kinship and physical similarly are so deeply intertwined in our collective understanding of "family," adoptive couples may wish to minimize the visibility of their child's adoption (and, thus, their exposure to social stigma and questioning) by adopting inracially (Miall, 2000; Wegar, 2000). They may believe (as some advocates of race matching do; see Griffith & Bergeron, 2006) that children who look like their adoptive parents will more easily attach to and identify with their parents, and may enjoy better long-term adjustment. Thus, the relative importance of hav-

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[3] Such training, while not universal, appears to be widely practiced, particularly by public adoption agencies. For example, one survey of 410 private agencies and 447 public agencies found that all of the public agencies and 65% of the private agencies indicated they provided instruction and training regarding transracial adoption to all preadoptive parents (Vonk & Angaran, 2003).

ing a *physically similar* (i.e., seemingly "natural" or "biological") child may shape openness to adopting transracially.

Lesbians may be less likely to internalize these societal discourses, in that they are exposed to alternative ideologies about family that emphasize affective ties in defining kin relations (Weston, 1991). Indeed, in that lesbians tend to perceive less support from their families of origin than heterosexual men and women (Goldberg & Smith, 2008; Kurdek, 2005), some scholars have suggested that they compensate for this lack of support by creating "families of choice" that are based on close relationships and shared values as opposed to blood ties (Oswald, 2002; Weston, 1991). Consistent with this notion, some studies have found that lesbians do rely more on support from friends than family than heterosexuals (e.g., Downs & James, 2006; Kurdek, 1988, 2005), although a few studies have found no differences in perceptions of friend support (Goldberg & Smith, 2008; Kindle & Erich, 2005). Furthermore, these close friendships are often described in familial terms by lesbian women themselves, who highlight the mutual love and support that characterize these relationships (Carrington, 1999; Oswald, 2002). Thus, in that their kinship networks are not necessarily bound together by physical resemblance or racial similarity (the hallmarks of heterosexual biogenetically created families), lesbians may engage more expansive notions of family that are not defined by physical resemblance. Furthermore, lesbians' unique relational context—that is, their inability to conceive a child that is biologically related to both partners—may cause them to experience less pressure or desire to simulate the biogenetic relationships that "should" exist. In turn, lesbians may be less likely to emphasize physical similarity in making decisions about the race of their adoptive child, in that passing as a biogenetic family may be less important to them. On the other hand, some lesbians may feel that they are noticeable enough as a two-mother family and wish to minimize their vulnerability to social stigma (Goffman, 1963), and may thus emphasize physical similarity as a reason for preferring a same-race child.

Prospective adopters' attitudes toward transracial adoption are also influenced by *societal discourses about race*. Specifically, individuals' willingness to adopt transracially is likely shaped by the degree to which they internalize dominant racial stereotypes and myths, the extent to which they perceive race as an essential quality of individuals as opposed to a socially constructed category, and their relative interest in and valuing of racial diversity. Indeed, Caucasian parents are advised to examine their beliefs about race, culture, and racism before adopting a non-Caucasian child (Deacon, 1997), and to determine whether they are able and willing to assist their child in preparing for and dealing with societal racism (Roorda, 2007). Some research, in turn, suggests that individuals who value multiculturalism and diversity may be more open to adopting a child of color (Bennett, 2003). In addition, Brooks and James (2003) found that people with humanitarian convictions (e.g., they believed that all children deserve a family) were more willing to adopt Black foster children than those who lacked these convictions. Optimism about race relations (e.g., the belief that people of different races can live in harmony) is also associated with positive attitudes toward transracial adoption (Fenster, 2005). In that positive racial attitudes are facilitated by contact with racial minorities (McClelland & Linnander, 2006), it is possible that adopters who have *relationships with racial minorities* (e.g., as friends and family) may be more likely to value

diversity and in turn to express greater openness to adopting transracially. Indeed, national survey data indicates that individuals with prior interracial contact are more likely to seek out racially diverse social groups and to be interracially married (Emerson, Kimbro, & Yancey, 2002).

Finally, in that individuals' motivations and actions are inevitably affected by situational and contextual constraints on their behavior (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993), *practical considerations* may also affect some couples' openness to transracial adoption. A qualitative study of White infertile women who were seeking to adopt found that most women who were open to adopting transracially were motivated mainly by perceived availability: that is, they were aware of the shortage of healthy White infants (Jennings, 2006). Furthermore, research indicates that couples who pursue public adoption often do so because they cannot afford private adoption (Brooks & James, 2003). Aware that many of the children in foster care are non-White, they may realize that it is in their best interest to be open to a child of color if they wish to be parents in a reasonable amount of time. Likewise, some couples may adopt internationally for reasons of perceived convenience: Shiao et al. (2004) studied adoptive parents of Korean children and found that some couples pursued international adoption because they believed that they were unlikely to be placed with a White child via domestic private adoption within a reasonable amount of time. Adoptive couples may also adopt internationally because of general concerns regarding domestic adoption (e.g., fears about the impermanency of these placements) (Webber, 1998), which may reflect broader cultural discourses and myths about adoption (Miall, 2000).

The current study explores White lesbian and heterosexual preadoptive couples' subjective explanations as to why they are open or not open to adopting transracially. Data from 54 lesbian couples (108 women) and 93 heterosexual couples (186 individuals) are included. Couples had already completed a home study as part of the adoption process and were currently waiting for a placement. Thus, these couples' progress in the adoption process is suggestive of a strong intention to adopt, although potentially, not all of them will go on to adopt.

Research Questions

There has been no known focused investigation of lesbian and heterosexual preadoptive parents' motivations surrounding transracial adoption. Thus, drawing from the existing literature, as well as a symbolic interactionist framework, I posed the following questions:

1. Given their unique social location and social context, are lesbians more likely than heterosexual men and women to express an openness to adopt transracially?

2. How do prospective adopters explain their openness or nonopenness to adopting transracially? That is, what factors do they consider or draw upon in explaining their openness to transracial adoption?

3. Do lesbian and heterosexual prospective adopters provide similar or different reasons as to why they are open or not open to adopt transracially?

Method

Participant Recruitment

Inclusion criteria for the study were: (a) couples adopting their first child, and (b) both partners becoming parents for the first time. Adoption agencies throughout the United States were asked to provide study information to clients who had not yet adopted. Census data were utilized to identify states with a high percentage of lesbians (Gates & Ost, 2004), and effort was made to contact agencies in those states. Over 30 adoption agencies agreed to provide information to their clients, who were asked to contact the principal investigator for more information about the study. Both heterosexual and lesbian couples were targeted through these agencies in an effort to facilitate similarity on geographical location and income. Agencies that declined to assist typically cited (a) staff/time constraints or (b) they worked with few lesbian clients. Because some same-sex couples may not be "out" to agencies about their sexual orientation, I also enlisted gay/lesbian services and organizations, such as the Human Rights Campaign, a large national gay political organization, to assist in disseminating study information. Given my interest in investigating *White* couples' perspectives on transracial adoption, I excluded couples in which one or both partners were members of a racial minority group from the present study.

Members of each couple were interviewed separately over the telephone during the preadoption phase. Separate interviews were conducted to obtain each partner's subjective constructions and interpretations of the adoption process. All couples had completed their home study (an evaluation of the prospective adoptive family that is required of all adoptive parents) and were waiting for a child to be placed with them. On average, interviews (which covered a range of topics, including but not limited to those discussed in the present study) lasted 1 to 1.5 hours. Participants were also sent a packet of questionnaires to complete within a week of the interview, which took about 30 minutes to complete. Participants returned them in postage paid envelopes.

Description of the Sample

Sample demographics appear in Table 1. Lesbian and heterosexual couples did not differ in geographical location, $F(1, 142) = 3.87$, $p > .10$. Fifteen lesbian couples (28%) lived on the West Coast, 24 (44%) lived on the East Coast, 7 (13%) lived in the Midwest, 7 (13%) lived in the South, and 1 (2%) lived in Canada. Among heterosexual couples, 32 (34%) lived on the West Coast, 37 (40%) lived on the East Coast, 7 (8%) lived in the Midwest, 10 (10%) lived in the South, and 7 (8%) resided in Canada. Lesbians, heterosexual women, and men were of similar ages, $F(2, 285) = .79$, $p > .10$. Heterosexual couples' average relationship duration was longer than lesbians', $F(1, 142) = 5.41$, $p < .05$.

Heterosexual and lesbian couples did not differ in average family income, $F(1, 142) = .03$, $p > .10$, although heterosexual men earned a higher annual salary than lesbian and heterosexual women, $F(2, 285) = 6.01$, $p < .01$. No differences between the three groups emerged in terms of educational attainment, $F(2, 285) = .37$, $p > .10$. Among lesbians, 7 women had achieved a high school degree (6.5%), 5 (4.5%) had an associate's degree, 7 (6.5%) had some college, 34 (31.5%) had a college degree, 43 (40%) had a master's degree, and 12 (11%) had a PhD/MD/JD. Among heterosexual women, 7 women had achieved a high school diploma (7.5%), 2 (2%) had an associate's degree, 7 (7.5%) had some college, 33 (35.5%) had a college degree, 36 (39%) had a master's degree, and 8 (8.5%) had a PhD/MD/JD. Among heterosexual men, 1 had obtained less than high school (1%), 7 (7.5%) had a high school diploma, 5 (5%) had an associate's degree, 14 (15%) had some college, 35 (38%) had a college degree, 21 (23%) had a master's degree, and 9 (10.5%) had a PhD/MD/JD.

Heterosexual couples were more likely than lesbian couples to have tried to conceive, $\chi^2(1, 142) = 14.15$, $p < .001$. In 32 lesbian couples, at least one partner had tried to become pregnant; in 22 couples, neither partner had tried. Among heterosexual couples, 77 had tried to conceive, whereas 16 had not. Couples did not differ in the length of time that they had been waiting for an adoptive placement, $F(1, 142) = 2.58$, $p > .10$, but they differed with regard to the type of adoption they were pursuing, $\chi^2(1, 142) = 14.28$, $p < .01$. Fifty-four percent of lesbian couples ($n = 29$) and 53% of heterosexual couples ($n = 49$) were pursuing open domestic private adoption; 31% of lesbians ($n = 17$) and 10% of heterosexuals ($n = 9$) were pursuing public domestic adoption; and 15% of lesbians ($n = 8$) and 37% of heterosexuals ($n = 35$) were pursuing international adoption.

Table 1

Sample Demographics (N = 54 Lesbian Couples, N = 93 Heterosexual Couples)

	M (SD)				
	Lesbian couples	Heterosexual couples	Heterosexual women	Heterosexual men	Test
Geographical location					$F(1, 142) = 3.87$
Age (years)	38.72 (5.76)		37.88 (5.12)	38.80 (5.81)	$F(2, 285) = .79$
Relationship, in years	7.65 (3.66)	9.44 (4.91)			$F(1, 142) = 5.41^*$
Annual family income ($)	121,992 (97,625)	124,436 (68,566)			$F(1, 142) = .03$
Personal income ($)	61,014 (58,710)		48,380 (39,489)	76,047 (52,589)	$F(2, 285) = 6.01^{**}$
Education					$F(2, 285) = .37$
Tried to conceive					$\chi^2(1, 142) = 14.15^{***}$
Wait time (months)	6.16 (5.50)	8.85 (11.38)			$F(1, 142) = 2.58$
Adoption Type					$\chi^2(1, 142) = 14.28^{**}$

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

Open-ended Questions

Participants were interviewed by the principal investigator and trained graduate student research assistants. The semistructured interview schedule, which was designed for the current study, was pretested on several prospective adoptive parents. The interview was subsequently revised based upon participant feedback, as well as unexpected themes that emerged in these early interviews. To facilitate similarity in interviewing style and method across interviewers, the interview schedule was designed in such a way that it included a series of standard questions that were asked of all participants, which were accompanied by sample probes. All interviewers underwent rigorous training prior to administering the interview schedule to participants.

Interviews were transcribed to capture participants' thoughts in their own words. Identifying details were removed to ensure confidentiality and pseudonyms are used in replace of actual names. Data for the study are derived from several open-ended questions, which were designed to probe participants' subjective understanding of their racial preferences.

1. Do you have certain preferences regarding the race of the child that you hope to adopt?

2. Are you open to adopting a child of a different race? Why or why not?

3. Are there any challenges that you anticipate, raising a child of a different race?

4. How did you choose what type of adoption to pursue?

(*For international adopters):* How did you choose that particular country?

Data Analysis

Coding. Grounded theory methods were used in the analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I, the author, and a research assistant coded the data. We engaged in a process of analytic triangulation, which involves having multiple persons independently analyze the same data and compare their findings. This ensures that multiple interpretations are considered and lends itself to verification of the soundness of the emerging coding scheme (Patton, 2002). We first engaged in line-by-line analysis to generate initial theoretical categories and to suggest relationships among key categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Consistent with grounded theory, we drew upon the literature to sensitize us to particular concepts and constructs (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Special attention was paid to participants' interpretations and constructions, and effort was made to identify patterns and contrasts in the data. Next, we engaged in focused coding, which uses initial codes that frequently reappear in order to sort the data (e.g., community diversity, family support). This coding is more conceptual in nature than initial coding (Charmaz, 2006).

Both coders engaged in this process of inductive analysis by independently coding and then discussing, the narratives. Throughout the analysis process, we wrote memos to capture our ideas about the emerging categories. Sharing these memos enabled us to develop a consensual and nuanced understanding of the data

and facilitated our analysis. We engaged in check coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) throughout the analysis process to help us clarify our categories and definitions and to provide a reliability check. That is, both coders analyzed the data. Coding disagreements were discussed and often led us to refine our scheme and to clarify our coding categories. Early on, intercoder agreement ranged from 74% to 80% (number of agreements/number of agreements + disagreements). Intercoder agreement using our final scheme ranged from 88% to 95%, indicating good reliability of our inductive analysis.

The availability of data from both members of each couple presents both opportunities and challenges. We analyzed the data from both members of the dyad, given that the coding process revealed that the categories of analysis were often constructed at the individual, rather than dyadic level: that is, there was significant within-couple variability with regard to individuals' openness to transracial adoption, as well as their explanations of openness.

Results

Three sets of data analysis are presented. First, χ^2 analyses are utilized to compare heterosexual and lesbian preadopters' openness to transracial adoption. Second, lesbian and heterosexual participants' subjective explanations for openness and nonopenness are presented. Third, data on those couples in which partners disagreed about their openness are discussed.

Lesbian Versus Heterosexual Couples: Openness to Transracial Adoption

The responses from 54 lesbian couples (108 individuals) and 93 heterosexual couples (186 individuals) were coded for the analysis. χ^2 tests revealed that lesbians were more likely to be open to adopting transracially: 91% of lesbian adopters and 68% of heterosexual adopters indicated that they were open to adopting a child of color, $\chi^2(1, 294) = 19.92, p < .001$. Ninety-eight lesbian women were open to adopting transracially, and 10 were not, whereas 126 heterosexual individuals were open (65 women, 61 men) and 60 were not (28 women, 32 men).

Not all partners within couples agreed about their openness (see Table 2). In 47 lesbian couples (87% of lesbians), both partners agreed that they were open to adopting a child of color. In three couples (6%), both partners agreed that they were not open to adopting a child of color. In four couples (7%), partners' self-reported openness differed, with one partner reporting that they were open and one partner reporting that they were not. Among heterosexual couples, in 51 couples (55%) both partners agreed

Table 2
Within-Couple Agreement on Openness (N = 54 Lesbian Couples, N = 93 Heterosexual Couples)

	Within-couple agreement		
	Lesbian	Heterosexual	Total
Agree: Open to child of color	47	51	98
Agree: Not open to child of color	3	18	21
Disagree on openness	4	24	28
Total	54	93	147

that they were open, in 18 couples (19%) both partners agreed that they were not open, and in 24 couples (26%) partners had discrepant reports. Within these 24 heterosexual couples, in 14 cases, women were open but their husbands were not, whereas in 10 cases, men were open but their wives were not. Among these 24 discrepant couples, women were no more likely than men to be the ones who were open, $\chi^2(1, 48) = 1.33$, $p > .10$.

Subjective Explanations for Openness

All participants provided at least one explanation for why they were open or not open. A minority of participants provided more than one reason. Table 3 summarizes the explanations provided by participants who described themselves as open to adopting transracially.

Racial/ethnic minority friends and family members. A total of 27 lesbian participants (28% of open lesbians) and 24 heterosexual participants (19% of open heterosexual participants) named the presence of racial minority friends and family members as a factor that had contributed to their openness, $\chi^2(1, 224) = 2.27$, $p = .09$. These participants emphasized that the availability of racial/ethnic minority individuals in their social networks led them to feel prepared to take on the challenges and opportunities of adopting transracially. Viewing their friends and family as valued "resources" in the racial socialization of their child, some participants specifically sought to adopt children of races that were represented in their networks. Noted Brooke, a heterosexual woman:

> We have a really racially diverse group of friends, so we said that we were open to the races we tend to have more friends in. We knew that then we really would feel like, we had enough of a stake in it that the child could understand their race or ethnicity. A lot of our friends are Asian, so we'd be perfectly fine with Asian. Hispanic we're totally open to. I speak Spanish, and a lot of my friends are South American so that wouldn't bother us.

Here, Brooke describes how the presence of racial/ethnic "resources" within her and her husband's friendship network facilitated their openness to adopting transracially; at the same time, the presence of *certain* racial/ethnic groups (and the absence of others) led them to set limits on exactly what races they were open to.

Some participants expressed their sense that the presence of racial/ethnic minority children and adults within their families indicated that their families would likely be accepting of their decision to adopt transracially. That is, they perceived their families as already diverse and were therefore hopeful that they would welcome additional diversity. Stated Alicia, a lesbian woman:

> Kids of other races within the family is not a foreign concept in either of our families. One of my cousins married a Black woman and they have two children who are biracial. Beth has numerous cousins who are Black. So the concept of having someone of another race in the family is not foreign, and that was a factor in us feeling like, yeah, this could work.

We live in a diverse community. Lesbians were particularly likely to emphasize the diversity of their communities in explaining why they were open to transracial adoption. Twenty-seven lesbian women (28% of open lesbians) and 12 heterosexual participants (10% of open heterosexuals) emphasized the diversity of their neighborhoods and communities, $\chi^2(1, 224) = 12.46$, $p < .001$. Lesbian and heterosexual participants appeared to attach different meanings to "community diversity," which may reflect their different social locations. Lesbians often invoked community diversity in a general sense, emphasizing the presence of people of "all different races, genders, and sexual orientations" as well as "lots of adopted families" in their geographical area. Heterosexuals' descriptions of diversity were more specifically tied to the racial-ethnic makeup of their communities. In explaining why she was open to adopting transracially, Dee, a lesbian, said:

> Yeah, I think it'll be hard [raising a child of a different race]. I think it'll be a challenge. But what is really key is, I think where we live is so supportive, so diverse. There are a lot of gay couples, and a lot of couples who have adopted and adopted kids of other races . . . . And just in general, people are adopting at an unbelievable rate from other countries, so I just feel like our kid will grow up in an incredibly diverse environment no matter what.

Thus, Dee emphasizes the ways in which her community is inherently diverse, implicitly suggesting that what her future child needs is not necessarily to have his or her racial and cultural

Table 3

Why Open to Adopting a Child of Color? Reasons for Openness (N = 98 Open Lesbians; N = 126 Open Heterosexuals)

	Lesbian (N)	Lesbians who are open (%)	Heterosexual (N)	Heterosexuals who are open (%)	Total	χ^2(2-sided tests)
Have minority race friends and family members	27	28	24	19	51	$\chi^2(1, 224) = 2.27^+$
Live in diverse community	27	28	12	10	39	$\chi^2(1, 224) = 12.46^{***}$
Family support for transracial adoption	7	7	1	.8	8	$\chi^2(1, 224) = 6.45^*$
I can relate to this culture/ethnicity	12	12	8	6	20	$\chi^2(1, 224) = 2.36^+$
Practicality (expense, time)	11	11	19	15	30	$\chi^2(1, 224) = .71$
This race of child is healthier	2	2	7	6	9	$\chi^2(1, 224) = 1.77$
We are already different	7	7	1	.8	8	$\chi^2(1, 224) = 6.45^*$
Why not?	28	29	65	52	93	$\chi^2(1, 224) = 12.03^{***}$
Total	121	124[a]	137	109.6[a]	258	

[a] Percentages exceed 100 because some participants named more than one reason.
$^+ p < .10$. $^* p < .05$. $^{***} p < .001$.

identity mirrored, but rather to exist in a community in which people of all different races, identities, backgrounds, and families are accepted and embraced. Her perspective is uniquely shaped by her perspective as a White, lesbian woman: that is, she anticipates that her child will experiences challenges to his or her self-concept as a function of his or her racial minority status, adoptive status, and status as the child of lesbian parents, and she therefore values a community that will positively reflect and shape her child's multiple identities.

In contrast, Kate, a heterosexual woman adopting from China stated, "We live in a very multicultural city. The Chinatown is very big and there are lots of Chinese activities going on—lots of associations of families doing things together." By emphasizing the availability of Chinese activities and families in her community, Kate suggests that she views these contextual factors as resources that will help her child to establish his or her racial, ethnic, and cultural identity.

Family support for transracial adoption. For some participants, having the explicit support of their families was instrumental in their decision to adopt transracially. Seven lesbians (7% of open lesbians) and one heterosexual man (.8% of open heterosexuals) noted that their family members' expressions of support for transracial adoption had facilitated their own willingness to fully commit to the possibility of adopting transracially, $\chi^2(1, 224) = 6.45$, $p < .05$. Some participants acknowledged that they would not feel fully comfortable adopting transracially if there was any indication that their child would not be accepted by their extended family members, and, thus, they had specifically probed their families for their attitudes about transracial adoption prior to committing to a particular course of action. Stated Corinne:

> We talked a little bit about it with my parents, when we were deciding how open to be on the paperwork and so on, and they said, "Oh, no big deal. We'll have a grandkid and that's all that matters." We were relieved. It helps to have their support. I don't perceive there will be any issues with anyone in our family.

Thus, for Corinne and others, their perception of support within their families of origin was instrumental in their decision to consider adopting transracially.

I can relate to this culture/ethnicity. For 12 lesbians (12% of open lesbians) and eight heterosexual participants (6% of open heterosexuals), feeling a kinship to or affinity for a specific racial/cultural group led them to consider the possibility of adopting transracially, $\chi^2(1, 224) = 2.36$, $p = .097$. These individuals tended to be drawn to a particular racial-ethnic and/or cultural group that was different from their own, often because of some prior experience with that group. Some had close relationships with members of a particular group, or had grown up in or lived in communities heavily populated by members of a particular group. In this way, prior contact with racial minorities had influenced their current attitudes toward transracial adoption (Emerson et al., 2002). Said Eloise, a lesbian:

> I come from an African American community. Although I'm Caucasian, I was raised in that part of a community so I understand a lot of the nuances. Also, my first boyfriend was from Jamaica. I also had a longtime girlfriend who was African American. Race hasn't really been a big barrier for me. It feels very natural to adopt an African American child.

In explaining his desire to adopt a child of Asian or Hispanic background, Victor stated, "I lived in Southeast Asia when I was little so I feel an affinity for Asian culture and Asian people. I also lived in Puerto Rico, so I feel an affinity for Latino, Hispanic people, and I also speak Spanish so I felt very comfortable with and familiar with those three." Indeed, participants who were adopting internationally who were drawn toward a particular culture or country often explained this in terms of having lived or worked in that country, or being able to speak the language native to that country. Such experiences fostered a sense of familiarity with a particular culture, such that it no longer seemed foreign but "a second home, the kind of place that I can imagine returning to again and again."

Practicality. Eleven lesbians (11% of open lesbians) and 19 heterosexual participants (15% of open heterosexuals) were open to adopting transracially for practical reasons, $\chi^2(1, 224) = .71$, $p > .10$. Some participants were open to adopting transracially because they were concerned that limiting themselves in terms of race would mean "waiting forever." That is, they were aware that there were far more racial-ethnic minority children available for adoption (both in the public welfare system and through private adoption) than White children, and thus did not wish to be overly selective in their criteria as they were worried that this might lead to "years of waiting for the perfect White baby." In this way, they viewed their openness to transracial adoptions as a practical response to the realities of contemporary adoption. Explained Brian:

> We started looking at African American programs when we first heard that there was a greater need for adoptive parents. These programs tend to have a shorter waiting period and that just sounded like, well, you know, that's great for us! Obviously then we had to, you know, really do our research and look into what it meant, not go into it lightly, not just say, "Oh, well, you know, race doesn't matter to us and so we'll just adopt a child of any race."

Several participants also noted that they had explicitly pursued international adoption because of uncertainties about domestic adoption (e.g., concerns about open adoption; concerns about lengthy wait times for infants) (Shiao et al., 2004; Webber, 1998). Several lesbians noted that they could not afford to be too choosy about race when so few agencies were willing to work with them and so few birth mothers (in open adoption) were willing to choose them. Said Clara:

> Originally we weren't like "Oh, let's adopt an African American baby." It was "Let's adopt," and then we began to look in all the different agencies and possibilities. This was the only adoption agency that was willing to take us. We just ended up being with them and they ended up being folks that dealt primarily with African Americans. So it seemed easier to just go with them rather than seek out an agency that wouldn't be ok with us.

For Clara and her partner, the practical realities of adopting as a lesbian couple in a conservative Midwestern town led them to adapt their expectations and priorities, thereby leading them to take a different course of action than they might have if they had been in a position of greater power (Longmore, 1998). Likewise, some lesbians were told that they were unlikely to be prioritized for a White infant—such children were likely to go to "young, rich, heterosexual couples"—and they were therefore advised that they should consider adopting transracially.

Health. Two lesbians (2% of open lesbians) and seven heterosexual participants (6% of open heterosexuals), all of whom were pursuing international adoption, emphasized that their first priority was to adopt (internationally) a child that was not raised in an orphanage, and, in turn, a child that would be relatively healthy, $\chi^2(1, 224) = 1.77$, $p > .10$. These participants had chosen to adopt children from countries such as China and Guatemala because of their reputation for providing good preadoptive care. Thus, health and developmental considerations were more important than racial considerations and therefore served to dictate the race of the child that they would adopt. Stated Tess, a lesbian:

> I've read a lot of research about the health of the children. In Guatemala they have about 90% of the children in foster care, not in orphanages. That was a big thing for me. I see a lot of kids in my therapy practice adopted from Russia with sensory issues. The kids from Guatemala are very healthy. There aren't issues of drug or alcohol abuse of the mothers.

We are already different. Lesbians were particularly likely to highlight their own sense of being "different" in explaining why they were open to adopting transracially, $\chi^2(1, 224) = 6.45$, $p < .05$. Seven lesbians (7% of open lesbians) and one heterosexual woman (.8% of open heterosexuals) noted that their own families were already "different" from the mainstream and it therefore felt "wrong" to discriminate against a child on the basis of their race. Lesbians described this difference in terms of their sexual orientation, whereas one heterosexual woman described it in terms of her status as an adoptive parent. These women felt that their families were unusual enough that adding one more aspect of diversity to the mix would not pose impossible challenges:

> There are some people that might be Caucasian and would look specifically for a Caucasian child so they wouldn't look so out of the norm. And I mean for us—because there are some people that would look at us strange already because of our orientation or how we act, just adding a person of another race to that wouldn't make a difference to us.

Furthermore, several lesbians articulated their sense that their own experiences as minorities might make them more sensitive to the challenges and barriers faced by a child of color. Stated Irene, "I think on a really simple level, we get differences in a way that other people might not. The empathy can be a little more real or something. Just understanding people that are different. And I've had the chance to think about that because I've had to." Likewise, Deborah explained, "We know what it's like to be discriminated against and—even though we don't know what it's like to be denied something because of the color of our skin, we still know what it feels like. So we feel like we have some knowledge that we can share." These women, then, perceived their status as stigmatized minorities as sensitizing them to the challenges that a racial minority adopted child might encounter, and thereby felt equipped to empathically parent a child of color.

Why not? Race is not a barrier. Twenty-eight lesbians (29% of open lesbians) and 65 heterosexual adopters (52% of open heterosexuals) simply emphasized that they were "open to any child, regardless of race," that they were "accepting of any child" and that they "just [didn't] care about [race]", $\chi^2(1, 224) = 12.03$, $p < .001$. Thus, these participants were open because it had never occurred to them *not* to be. Important to note, these individuals did not view themselves as "color blind": that is, they did not deny that race was a salient social category in society, but viewed it as a "problem" only from the perspective of outsiders. For example, Helen, a heterosexual woman explained, "I don't think either of us care about race. I mean, we care in regards to that we care about whatever race or ethnicity our child is—and I wouldn't say that we're color blind. I don't mean that. But um, no, it's really not an issue. From our perspective."

Similarly, Marsha, a Lesbian, stated:

> I don't have a preference at all. I'd be happy to have any child. I guess I never considered limiting ourselves. Race is less important than other things, you know? I think that having a child of a different race is not necessarily a problem—I'll just have to make sure that I educate myself and help them stay true to their cultural history. I think it's important for them to have a sense of belonging and understanding of where they are from.

Thus, Marsha and others acknowledged that they currently lacked the resources they would need to adopt transracially but emphasized their interest in doing everything they could to provide for a child of color if and when they were placed with one. For example, some participants noted a lack of racial diversity within their social networks and neighborhoods, but indicated that this would change with the introduction of a different-race child into the home. Stated Theo:

> It's not an issue for us. It's an issue from the outside world. But we're working under the assumption that we *will* be a multicultural family. We will have a Chinese American daughter, but *we* will be a Chinese American family. We're going to try to learn Chinese, take lessons. We're going to look at a school that teaches Chinese culture and language that is actually local. So we are planning to do the things we need to, get the right resources, because we realize that right now we don't have a ton of knowledge.

In many cases, then, participants acknowledged that they might encounter challenges with respect to family support, community diversity, and so on, but held the attitude that as long as they were personally committed to adopting a child of color, other things would "fall into place." In this way, their personal meaning-making about race—that is, their racial attitudes and values—was more influential in their decision-making than the perceived presence of social and contextual resources.

Subjective Explanations for Nonopenness: Perceived Barriers to Adopting a Child of Color

Table 4 summarizes the explanations provided by participants who were *not* open to adopting a child of a different race.

We live in a nondiverse community. Three lesbians (30% of nonopen lesbians) and 14 heterosexual participants (23% of nonopen heterosexuals) explained that they were not open to adopting a child of color because they lived in a nondiverse, racially homogenous community or neighborhood, $\chi^2(1, 70) = .21$, $p > .10$. They expressed concern that the lack of diversity would be a problem in terms of accessing appropriate resources for themselves and their children, and worried about the effect that this nondiversity might have on their child's personal and racial-ethnic identity development. Stated Eric:

Table 4

Why Not Open to Adopting a Child of Color? Barriers to Adopting a Child of Color (N = 10 Nonopen Lesbians; N = 60 Nonopen Heterosexuals)

	Lesbian (N)	Lesbians who are open (%)	Heterosexual (N)	Heterosexuals who are open (%)	Total	χ^2(2 sided tests)
Live in a nondiverse community	3	30	14	23	17	$\chi^2(1, 70) = .21$
Family nonsupport/racism	1	10	7	12	8	$\chi^2(1, 70) = .02$
Physical nonresemblance	3	30	25	42	28	$\chi^2(1, 70) = .49$
Personal prejudices/racism	1	10	2	3	3	$\chi^2(1, 70) = .93$
Too difficult	5	50	21	35	26	$\chi^2(1, 70) = .83$
Total	13	130[a]	69	115[a]	82	

[a] Percentages exceed 100 because some participants named more than one reason.

My wife and I, we really checked out our area that we live in. It's a primarily Amish society that we live in, out here in the farmlands, and it's something like 99% Caucasian in our town. That's a problem the child would have. I don't think we could do anything about it, about the area that we live in. So we don't really feel open because of where we live.

In some cases, participants viewed their communities as being nondiverse and also racist, which impacted their willingness. For example, Nadia, a heterosexual woman, stated: "Our friends that clean our house for us, they're Hispanic, and one of them was born here, speaks English, and she experienced racism at the grocery store here in [city]. It's really awful! So that was part of our consideration. We know that people are kind of backward about race in this place."

Thus, these participants perceived themselves as having responsibly assessed their community and social resources to determine whether they could adequately provide for a child of color (Roorda, 2007). This assessment, however, had led them to conclude, by their own reports, that their existing resources were insufficient.

Family nonsupport/racism. One lesbian (10% of nonopen lesbians) and seven heterosexual participants (12% of nonopen heterosexuals) explained that they were not open to adopting a child of color because of expressed or suspected racism and resistance on the part of family members, $\chi^2(1, 70) = .02, p > .10$. Some participants noted that their families had struggled with the fact that they were adopting, and they felt that adding "the race issue" would make it even harder for their families to accept their child. Stated Annette, a heterosexual woman:

The thing that's limiting us is that both of our extended families would probably give us a hard time if it wasn't Caucasian. Our families would not treat them well if we did a transracial adoption. So I feel it's best if we adopt a Caucasian child because otherwise the grandparents and uncles would give us and the kid a real hard time and that's not fair.

Thus, Annette's interactions with family members that she perceived as racist caused her to reflect upon how her family's racism might affect a transracially adopted child, and, in turn, to conclude that to adopt transracially might not be in the best interests of the child.

Physical nonresemblance (We want our child to look like us). Three lesbians (30% of nonopen lesbians) and 25 heterosexual participants (42% of nonopen heterosexuals) strongly desired a

child that looked like them, $\chi^2(1, 70) = .49, p > .10$: "I want the child to be White, to be more like me and my husband, because we are both White." Believing that a racially different child would bring unwanted attention to their families, they therefore prioritized physical and racial similarity in the adoption process. Explained Larissa, a heterosexual woman: "We have a family business, so we are very recognizable in the community. So to put a child with differences out there—well, they would be readily identifiable. That wouldn't be fair to the child. So we knew that we wanted similarity; it makes things easier." Here, Larissa suggests that the idea of being "readily identifiable" would be a harm factor to the child. However, she also intimates that it might draw unwanted attention to the family, and ultimately concludes that similarities "make things easier."

For some participants, racial similarity was important insomuch that it would deflect questions about adoption. That is, appearing physically similar would cause others to "view us as a family." As one man stated, "We always wanted a child that would resemble us. I would like people to look at us and think, 'This is a family.' I want them to immediately know that, and for there not to be any question. It would make every trip to the grocery store that much easier." Such statements suggest that societal discourses that define families as biologically related and physically similar have very real implications for the perceptions, motivations, and concerns of at least some preadoptive parents (Wegar, 2000).

A few participants felt that they would probably be able to "bond" better with a child that looked like them, perhaps reflecting their internalization of the notion that biological ties are important for bonding and love (Miall, 2000). For example, one woman stated, "I just think it would be easier to connect with someone who looks like they could've come from me."

Personal prejudices/racism. Few participants acknowledged their own racism as shaping their willingness to adopt transracially. One lesbian (10%) and two heterosexual participants (3%) acknowledged personal biases and stereotypes that made it difficult for them to imagine adopting a child of a different race, $\chi^2(1, 70) = .93, p > .10$. Stated Vanessa, a lesbian:

I'm not super proud to say that I - I guess I feel like I don't feel capable of raising a child of a different race. Just my own racism or worries about the world's racism—it did seem like more of a daunting challenge than I thought I could embrace and I felt like already we have been dealing with so many challenges. So I was just like, let's do the easiest thing.

It is just too difficult. Five lesbians (50%) and 21 heterosexual participants (35%) explained that they were not open to adopting a child of color because they felt that it was simply too difficult, $\chi^2(1, 70) = .83, p > .10$. They did not feel personally prepared or "equipped" to adopt a child of a different race, noting that it felt like "too huge of a responsibility" and something that would require "a lot of footwork." Thus, they questioned their own ability or willingness to seek out the appropriate social and contextual resources in order to adequately socialize their child to develop a strong racial/ethnic identity. Stated Betty, a heterosexual woman:

> We did think briefly about adopting from China. But my husband felt like, and now I feel like, a big part of raising a child that is a different ethnicity is, you really have to do the work. You have to know about their heritage. It's really fair for them that they know. Like I have a friend who is adopting a little girl from China, and she spent hours collecting information on Chinese heritage and holidays and traditions. She feels like basically it's her duty. I kind of agree with her. But I personally don't feel like I'm equipped—I feel like it's too much for me. I feel like taking on a child that's adopted is going to be enough.

Thus, Betty's observation of her friend's cultural socialization efforts, combined with conversations with her husband, led her to question her own willingness and ability to provide for a child of a different race, ethnicity, and/or culture.

Some participants noted that they were not so much worried about the work of socializing their child, but worried that regardless of what they did, it would simply be "too difficult for the child." They imagined that a racial minority child might have needs or experiences that they could not relate to or accommodate and that they might ultimately "fail [their] child." Stated Tim:

> We gave it a lot of consideration. The issues of racism in this country are overwhelming. We learned that the National Association of Black Social Workers lobbied against the adoption of Black children by White parents . . . . I guess there would be too much of a concern on our part, that we'd have regrets, that there'd be problems of identity for the child. I couldn't deal with the child feeling like it grew up with the wrong family. I feel like trying to accommodate a child of a different race by providing it with people of that race would be a challenge—for the child and for us. I just don't think we're up for that.

Thus, Tim's exposure to the complexities of the transracial adoption debate caused him to consider quite seriously the potential challenges and work involved in raising a child of color, which led him to ultimately conclude that he simply wasn't "up for that."

For lesbians, the above concerns were accompanied by the added worry that having two mothers, being adopted, *and* being of a different race was simply too much to put on a child:

> I think for me, I just feel like, there's still so much racism in our country. So to be growing up—a part of me felt like, Gee it's so—we're two women, so the child's already different. And the child's adopted to begin with. And the child has two moms. And the child is a boy, let's say, and then [let's say he's] African American? I felt like, Ugh, too hard.

Thus, rather than viewing their marginalized status in society as an asset that might uniquely sensitize them to the challenges faced by a racial minority child, some lesbians emphasized their sexual orientation as but another potential source of discrimination that their child would encounter. In turn, they evaluated the prospect of adopting transracially as "too hard."

Within-Couple Agreement About Openness/Nonopenness

Heterosexual partners were significantly more likely to differ in their perspectives on openness than lesbians, $\chi^2(1, 147) = 7.50$, $p < .01$. As Table 2 indicates, partners in 7% of lesbian couples had discrepant perspectives on openness, whereas partners in 26% of heterosexual couples had discrepant perspectives. The qualitative data provide some insight into the nature and consequences of such differing perspectives. Couples in which one partner was open and one was not generally resolved this conflict by restricting their adoption search to consider same-race children only, typically because the partner that was not open felt more strongly about the matter:

> I really didn't care. My wife wanted White kids because she didn't like the fact that if you adopted a Black kid or an Asian kid and you went to the supermarket and somebody saw you, they would immediately know that the kid was adopted. I didn't care about that, I still don't. But she seemed to have a strong preference for that. And she did the research and found that there were plenty of Eastern European Caucasian kids to adopt, so being pragmatic, I said fine, if you have a hang-up with that, we'll just adopt White kids.

Discussion

This study provides several important insights into lesbian and heterosexual adopters' constructions of transracial adoption. First, the data suggest that the social location of sexual orientation may have implications for how prospective adopters approach the prospect of adopting transracially. Specifically, lesbians in the current study were more likely to be open to adopting transracially than heterosexual participants. But beyond this, these lesbians' narratives reveal that they are acutely aware of their marginalized status in the adoption process. This awareness, in turn, has interesting and divergent implications for their willingness to adopt transracially, with some women viewing their sexual minority status as a strength and others viewing it as a potential liability. Second, these data indicate that prospective adopters draw upon a range of contextual, situational, and personal considerations in deciding whether to adopt transracially; knowledge of these factors may in turn have implications for preadoption training, education, and support.

Explanations for Openness

In explaining their openness to adopting transracially, many participants emphasized the presence of racial/ethnic diversity within their families and communities. Their narratives suggest that they realized that having access to same-race adults might facilitate their child's racial socialization (McRoy et al., 1984; Thomas & Tessler, 2007), and they therefore regarded their racial minority social network members as "resources" in this endeavor. In addition, it is possible that close relationships with racial minorities not only *directly* impacted their openness (by helping them to feel more equipped to parent a child of color) but *indirectly* (and perhaps unconsciously) shaped their attitudes toward transracial adoption, in that contact with racial minorities tends to increase

interracial comfort (Emerson et al., 2002). In this way, adopters' ongoing interactions with racial minorities may have led them to attach particular meanings to race and transracial adoption, which in turn governed their choice of action—that is, to consider adopting transracially (Blumer, 1986). In some cases, participants explicitly identified their prior interactions with members of a particular racial, ethnic, or cultural group as influential in their decision to adopt a child of (a) *particular* race(s). This is consistent with prior research that suggests that contact with members of a particular racial minority group increases majority members' preference for and acceptance of that group (McClelland & Linnander, 2006).

Although both lesbian and heterosexual participants described the diversity of their communities as a factor that influenced their willingness to adopt transracially, lesbians were more likely to emphasize community diversity, which may reflect their greater sensitivity to the importance of community climate (i.e., as a function of their own experiences with heterosexism) (Oswald, 2002). Furthermore, it is notable that lesbians and heterosexuals attached different meanings to "diversity," perhaps due to their differing social locations (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Lesbians tended to conceptualize diversity fairly broadly, noting the inclusion of racial/ethnic minorities, adoptive families, same-sex couples, and gay-parent families in their communities, whereas heterosexual preadopters tended to focus on the presence of specific racial/ethnic groups. Because of their multiply marginalized status in society, lesbian adopters may have been more concerned about the degree to which their *families* would be mirrored and accepted, whereas heterosexual adopters were more narrowly focused on their child's racial/ethnic identity.

Lesbians' status as stigmatized minorities might also explain why they were particularly likely to emphasize their families' support for transracial adoption as a factor in their openness. Because of the stigma associated with homosexuality, lesbians are at risk for compromised family support in general (Kurdek, 2005), and may be especially vulnerable to nonsupport when they announce their decision to parent (Johnson & O'Connor, 2002). In turn, lesbians may be particularly sensitive to further alienation and disapproval by their family members on the basis of their child's race, and may therefore choose to actively assess their family's support before committing to a course of action. Johnson and O'Connor (2002) found that lesbian parents who adopted transracially sometimes encountered resistance from family members: Some reacted negatively because of their own racist beliefs, while others expressed concern for the child (they believed it would be too difficult for a different-race child to grow up with lesbian parents). Thus, for some lesbians, their attitudes and motivations toward transracial adoption are heavily impacted by the feedback that they receive from family members (Blumer, 1986).

Consistent with a symbolic interactionist perspective, individuals' decisions regarding transracial adoption were also impacted by situational constraints (and their perceptions of those constraints) (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). For example, concerns about lengthy wait times for White infants led some participants to consider a transracial domestic placement. For others, general concerns about domestic adoption led them to pursue an international (and thus transcultural) adoptive placement (Hollingsworth & Ruffin, 2002). Participants who were committed to pursuing an international placement often chose countries that they perceived as taking particularly good care of their adoptable children; in that these countries were typically non-European, their decision to prioritize the health of their child necessarily dictated that they were likely to receive a transracial, transcultural placement. Lesbians' decision-making was additionally constrained by the practical reality of which agencies were willing to work with them, which sometimes determined the type of child (i.e., racial minority) they were likely to be placed with. Further, some lesbians were told that they were unlikely to be prioritized for a White child and were therefore encouraged to consider adopting transracially. Thus, lesbians' devalued status as prospective parents had implications for their decision-making in the adoption process, in some cases leading them to consider children that they might not have been open to. This mirrors prior research that suggests that lesbians may be more likely to be matched with special needs children; in this way, adoption workers are sometimes suspected of engaging in a practice of trying to match the "least desirable" applicants with the "least desirable" children (Goldberg, Downing, & Sauck, 2007).

For some lesbian participants, however, their stigmatized status and personal experiences of discrimination led them to purposefully declare an openness to adopting transracially. Their experiences of being different, discriminated against, and in some people's eyes, "undesirable" led them to feel that they might be particularly good parents to children that were themselves vulnerable to discrimination and perceptions of undesirability. In this way, they redefined their own stigma in a positive manner, choosing to emphasize the ways in which it would positively benefit their parenting (Goffman, 1963). Furthermore, rather than constructing the additional visibility of having a transracially adopted child as a liability and a burden, they emphasized the ways in which they were already visibly different in society. Thus, the possibility of becoming even more noticeable as a multiracial family was perceived as manageable (Goffman, 1963).

It is notable that many participants did not provide highly specific reasons as to why they were open to adopting transracially. Indeed, rather than responding to the question of *why* they were open, some participants simply responded, *why not?* While asserting that they recognized that having a multiracial family would be challenging, they did not view it as an insurmountable obstacle, but something that they would adapt and accommodate to. Of interest are the conflicting messages in these individuals' narratives: on the one hand, "race doesn't matter" (to them) but on the other hand, they often emphasize their intentions to engage in racial and cultural socialization, given that race *does* matter (to their child). In this way, they use the language of colorblind ideology (McClelland & Linnander, 2006) but at the same time assert their willingness to act on behalf of their child's racial socialization. Are these participants truly conscious of and intentional about the psychological, social, and material resources that they will need to foster their child's racial and cultural competence? Or do they lack a critical race consciousness and are they paying lip service to "racial awareness"? Indeed, parents who claim not to "see" race in their children may be challenged when it comes to empathizing with their child's struggles, advocating on behalf of their child, and understanding the need to establish a multiracial family identity. For this reason, adoption preparation training should aim to enhance all prospective adopters' racial awareness and sensitivity, as such awareness will greatly benefit

those who ultimately adopt transracially (McRoy, Mica, Freundlich, & Kroll, 2007; Smith et al., 2008),

Explanations for Nonopenness

Participants who were not open to adopting a child of color also invoked contextual considerations in explaining their decision-making. Some participants, perhaps influenced by the preadoptive training that they received during the home study process, had purportedly assessed their social and community resources and concluded that they were insufficient to meet the needs of a racial/ethnic minority child. Furthermore, some participants noted the presence of racism in their extended families, which they believed would create a hostile environment in which to raise their child. These participants can perhaps be viewed as responsibly shielding a future child from potential alienation in their communities and families: Rosenthal and Groze (1990) found that the approval of extended family members was related to the success of the adoptive placement. On the other hand, their explanations may be viewed as rationalizations—that is, some participants may have felt personally uncomfortable with adopting a child of color (perhaps in part *because* of their own experiences living in or being raised in racially nondiverse environments) but chose not to acknowledge this, preferring to legitimate their lack of openness by pointing to their racism in their communities and families. To view themselves as unprepared or unwilling to adopt transracially may have been inconsistent with how they wanted to see themselves (Goffman, 1959): Indeed, only three nonopen participants acknowledged personal biases and racism as a reason for limiting themselves to considering White children. Additionally, some participants may have been reluctant to disclose such biases out of fear of being judged by the interviewer.

Many participants, particularly heterosexual individuals, acknowledged that their unwillingness to adopt transracially was rooted in their desire to minimize the visible differences among family members, and to adopt a child that looked like "one of the family." Some suggested that invasions of privacy and constant questioning would be particularly challenging for their *child,* and thus wished to spare their *child* such unwanted scrutiny. Others grounded this preference in their *personal* desire to avoid unwanted attention regarding their child's race and adoption, and therefore to pass as biogenetically related families, which may reflect their internalization of societal privileging of biological parentage (Wegar, 2000). Consistent with this, Ben-Ari and Weinberg-Kurnik (2007) interviewed 13 adoptive mothers and found that some women expressed the desire to be seen as "normal" biological mothers and to be accepted by society at large. In turn, they sought to minimize the fact that they become parents via adoption (e.g., they avoided talking about the adoption and focused on their similarities with biological mothers). Thus, a desire for a physically similar child may reflect participants' heightened awareness of the possibility of scrutiny and stigma, and their desire to avoid such experiences.

Many participants acknowledged that a primary barrier to adopting transracially was their perception that it was simply too difficult. Some were unwilling to make the commitment that they perceived as necessary to raise a racial minority child. Others were not concerned so much about their personal commitment to racial socialization, but wondered whether it was possible for a White couple to raise a racial minority child with a healthy self-image. In this way, they appeared to be influenced by broader ideologies concerning race, adoption, and identity (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Lesbians, aware of the additional layer of "difference" that their own stigmatized status would confer upon a child, were particularly likely to concern themselves with the multiple differences that a transracially adopted child would have to hold in their identity (Goffman, 1963).

Discrepancy Within Couples

It is interesting but not surprising that some partners within couples differed in their openness to transracial adoption. Ultimately, however, the decision of whether to adopt a child of a different race is a couple decision; thus, all couples in which one partner was not open ultimately decided that they would limit their search to White children. This finding has implications for practitioners, whose goal should be to assist couples in communicating about and resolving their differences early in the adoption process. Notably, heterosexual couples tended to differ more in their perspectives on openness than lesbians. Perhaps lesbian couples are more likely to endorse similar perspectives because they have engaged in more discussion about their feelings and concerns about transracial adoption, leading them to find common ground. Some scholars suggest that lesbians are more communicative in part because of their common socialization as women; consistent with this, some studies have found higher levels of emotional intimacy in lesbians' relationships than heterosexuals' (e.g., Schreurs, 1994).

Implications for Adoption Practitioners

The finding that lesbians are more open to adopting transracially than heterosexual couples suggests that lesbian adopters may play a role, albeit a statistically small one, in helping to reduce the number of children of color who lack permanent homes. This finding also suggests that an important role for adoption professionals may lie in providing special training and education to the increasing number of lesbians who pursue transracial adoptive placements. These families may encounter particular challenges based upon their visibly different family structure and therefore their vulnerability to stigma (Brodzinsky, 2008). However, they may also possess certain strengths: For example, because of their own experiences as stigmatized minorities, lesbians may be at an advantage in terms of empathizing with their children's experiences of discrimination.

Furthermore, these findings hold important implications for practitioners who seek to provide sound training and education pertaining to transracial adoption. Given the apparent salience of participants' perceived community and familial resources in their decision-making regarding transracial adoption, adoption practitioners should actively assess such perceptions and should seek to provide support to those participants who, for example, perceive their communities as nondiverse but who are open to suggestions about how to create an ethnically and racially diverse milieu. Receiving support and guidance in this area may ultimately move some prospective adopters from a place of being unwilling to consider a transracial adoptive placement (e.g., because of their perceived inadequacies) to a place of greater openness. In addition

to assisting adopters in assessing their community/familial resources, professionals should assist adopters in assessing their own attitudes and beliefs regarding transracial adoption in order to help them make more informed decisions regarding their ability to take on the challenges of transracial parenting (Vonk & Angaran, 2001). Furthermore, adopters should be educated about the importance of making a lifelong commitment to their child's racial socialization: Indeed, openness to transracial adoption does not necessarily lead to active socialization efforts (McRoy et al., 1984; Simon & Alstein, 1992). Professionals can facilitate such efforts by helping parents to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to facilitate their children's racial identity development and to help their children cope with racism and stigma (Roorda, 2007; Smith et al., 2008).

Limitations and Conclusions

The current study is limited in a number of ways. First, the current sample is financially affluent and well-educated. There is evidence that adopters with less education and fewer resources might be less open to adopting transracially (Ishizawa, Kenney, Kubo, & Stevens, 2006). Second, the current study excludes gay men, who, like lesbians, are increasingly adopting as a means of becoming a parent (Gates & Ost, 2004). Future studies should explore gay men's attitudes toward transracial adoption, as this would enable researchers to tease apart the independent and combined effects of gender and sexual orientation on openness to transracial adoption. Third, the current study's recruitment avenues (i.e., a limited number of adoption agencies and gay/lesbian organizations) necessarily introduces sampling bias; the agencies and organizations that agreed to assist with the current study (and the individuals who chose to participate) are likely not representative of the population as a whole. Fourth, this study did not investigate prospective adopters' openness to *specific* races, although this emerged as a theme in the analysis. Future research should specifically examine the preferences and attitudes that prospective adopters display regarding the adoption of children of specific races. Fifth, this study focuses solely on the preadoptive period. Of interest is the rate at which self-described "open" participants actually adopt transracially, and, in turn, the degree to which they ultimately put into practice their intentions to provide for their child's racial socialization. Sixth, the number of lesbians who were not open to adopting transracially was small. Because of this, there may have been insufficient statistical power to detect differences in heterosexuals' and lesbians' reasons for nonopenness. Despite these limitations, this study provides insights into the attitudes and perceptions of preadoptive parents regarding transracial adoption. Future research may gain a more in-depth understanding of these processes by (a) following couples over time, and (b) probing more deeply the role of participants' biases and beliefs about race in the adoption process.

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