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# Predicting Non-African American Lesbian and Heterosexual Preadoptive Couples' Openness to Adopting an African American Child

*Despite increases in transracial adoption, African American children remain the least likely to be adopted. No research has examined the factors that predict prospective adopters' willingness to adopt an African American child. This study used multilevel modeling to examine predictors of willingness to adopt an African American child in a sample of 48 lesbian couples and 65 heterosexual couples. Individuals pursuing public adoption were more willing than those pursuing private domestic adoption, and heterosexuals pursuing international adoption were more willing than heterosexuals pursuing private domestic adoption. In addition, younger persons, White persons (rather than non-African American racial minorities), lesbians, and individuals who perceived their neighborhoods as more diverse were more likely to be willing to adopt an African American child.*

Transracial adoption has been the subject of debate in the United States since the 1960s (Smith, McRoy, Freundlich, & Kroll, 2008).

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A central concern is whether White parents can socialize racial minority children to develop healthy racial identities and to cope with racism effectively. The National Association of Black Social Workers has taken a stand against the placement of African American children, in particular, in White homes (Smith et al.). From their perspective, the socialization needs of African American children are notably different from those of White children, in that they must be taught coping strategies for dealing with institutionalized racism. Another perspective, however, is that with training, White parents may be able to develop the skills needed to provide such socialization (Smith et al.). Although many child welfare associations agree that race-matching in adoption is often ideal, they acknowledge that this ideal cannot always be realized, given that the number of racial minority children in foster care exceeds the number of racial minority adopters, and African American children are less likely to be adopted than children of other races (Barth, 1997). Indeed, although African American children represented 16% of the population under 18 in 2003, they represented 36% of the foster care population, whereas White children represented 61% of the population and 38% of children in foster care (USDHHS, 2004).

Alarm over the overrepresentation of African American children in foster care and concern that race-matching policies unfairly limit White adopters' ability to adopt transracially influenced

the enactment of the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994, which prohibits the denial of a child's adoptive placement on the basis of race, color, or national origin. MEPA has been criticized for mandating ''an unyielding color-blindness that is counter to the best interest of children'' (Smith et al., 2008, p. 7). Thus, the role of race in adoptive placements continues to be debated.

Such debates continue alongside upward trends in transracial adoption by White parents, the largest pool of adopters (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002). Although White parents tend to prefer to adopt inracially, a decline in adoptable White infants over the past 25 years has led many parents to consider adopting transracially (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes). Yet not all adopters have accommodated by adopting across racial lines. Some maintain a strong desire to adopt inracially, believing it is easier for both the child and the parents (Goldberg, 2009). Others are open to adopting transracially, but only children of specific races, which tend not to include African American. Indeed, White heterosexual couples are often more open to adopting Asian, Latino, and multiracial children than ''fully'' African American children (Brooks, James, & Barth, 2002).

### Racial Hierarchies and Racial Preferences

The overrepresentation of African American children in the child welfare system is both a reflection and consequence of societal racial hierarchies. From a critical race perspective, race has historically been a fundamental organizing principle in U.S. society (Delgado & Stefancie, 2001), resulting in socially constructed racial hierarchies (Chang & Demyan). White persons occupy the top rung of the hierarchy, with all other races and ethnicities falling below (Lee & Bean, 2007). Asians are often regarded as ''model minorities,'' stereotyped as intelligent, obedient, and beautiful (Chang & Demyan). Somewhat less favorable stereotypes are present for Hispanic persons (e.g., they are associated with manual labor; Kao, 2000). African Americans are often the recipients of the most negative stereotypes, being considered stupid and lazy (Lee & Bean). As Shiao, Tuan, and Rienzi (2004) pointed out, the United States ''is moving beyond its historic hierarchy of Whites over non-Whites to an emergent hierarchy of non-Blacks over Blacks'' (p. 2).

Racial hierarchies are reflected in adoption, such that certain racial groups are preferred over others (although preferences necessarily shift over time, given the historically constructed nature of race; Delgado & Stefancie, 2001). In a survey of White parents who had adopted domestically, in which parents were asked to retrospectively report on their racial preferences during the adoption process, nearly the full sample was willing to adopt a White child (98%), whereas 83% were willing to adopt a Latino child, 81% were willing to adopt an Asian child, and 64% were willing to adopt an African American child (Brooks et al., 2002). Most of those willing to adopt an African American child were ''slightly willing''; only 21% were ''extremely willing.'' Mirroring these preferences, Barth (1997) found that the odds of being adopted through child welfare were more than five times as great for White children as for African American children.

Racial hierarchies are evident in the decision making of international adopters as well. In 2000, 13% of adopted children in the United States were foreign-born; of these, 48% were from Asia (Kreider, 2003). Individuals who adopt from Asia may do so because they feel that Asian children are more assimilable to mainstream (White) culture than other minority race children (Ishizawa, Kenney, Kubo, & Stevens, 2006). Shiao et al. (2004) studied White adoptive parents of Korean children and found that parents often chose to adopt from Korea because of their perception that Korean children were ''exotic yet assimilable'' and ''baggage free . . . and saveable'' in contrast to African American children, who were viewed by some parents as unadoptable owing to perceived ''damage, irredeemability, and marginalization'' (pp. 7–8).

Given such racial hierarchies in adoption, and the fact that African American children are less likely to be adopted than any other racial group, we sought to examine the factors that predict willingness to adopt an African American child. Consistent with a critical race perspective (Delgado & Stefancie, 2001), we recognize that the overrepresentation of African American children in child welfare is likely rooted in systemic problems such as poverty. In turn, we believe that although long-term solutions are needed that address the roots of racial inequities in the child welfare system (Curtis & Denby, 2004), increasing the number

of non-African American adopters is one short-term solution for decreasing the number of African American children without homes.

We examined the predictors of a willingness to adopt African American children in a sample of 48 lesbian and 65 heterosexual preadoptive couples. The participants in our sample were mostly White, but other races (not African American) were also represented. African American individuals and their partners were not included given that African American adopters, who are rare, almost uniformly adopt inracially (Smith-McKeever, 2006). We included adopters of other races because we recognized the possibility that, like White prospective parents, they may choose to adopt transracially. An Asian American adopter, for example, might prefer to adopt inracially but may ultimately consider adopting transracially when she or he realizes that the number of adoptable Asian children in the United States is very small. In the current study, we aim to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the predictors of openness to adopting an African American child?
2. What role, if any, does sexual orientation play in influencing openness?

### Predictors of Openness to Adopting an African American Child

Although there is evidence that adopters may avoid adopting African American children, there is little research on who is open to adopting an African American child, and why. In an effort to identify potential predictors of openness, we drew upon the research on transracial adoption. In doing so, we distinguished between three types of influences. We considered whether adopters' *route to parenthood, personal characteristics* (properties of the person), and *social characteristics* (aspects of the social environment) were related to openness. Both personal and social factors can be conceptualized as *resources,* in that aspects of one's identity (e.g., gender) and environment (e.g., neighborhood diversity) may enhance openness to adopt an African American child.

*Route to Parenthood.* The *type of adoption* pursued may be related to openness. People who adopt via child welfare are often aware of the preponderance of African American children in the system and may be more open to adopting an African American child, if only to increase their chances of getting a child quickly (Brooks & James, 2003). International adopters typically seek to adopt a child of a specific race that rarely includes Black and, thus, may be less open. Alternatively, by virtue of pursuing a transcultural, often transracial adoption, they may perceive themselves as racially tolerant and may espouse openness to adopting an African American child, even though, by adopting abroad, they are avoiding realization of this possibility (although they could conceivably adopt an African American child via a future domestic adoption). Finally, White persons pursuing private domestic adoption often choose this route precisely because they believe that it affords them the best chance of adopting a White infant (Siegel, 1993) and, thus, may be the least open.

The increased presence of multiracial families in society (Kennedy, 2003) and personal comfort with visible differences among family members may lead some couples to pursue adoption electively as opposed to by default – that is, as a function of failed conception efforts. These ''preferential adopters'' might in turn be less concerned about the race of their child than persons for whom adoption was not ''chosen.'' That is, they may place less value on physical (racial) similarities among family members than those who tried to conceive. Thus, *preferential adoption status* may predict openness, such that preferential adopters are more open.

*Personal Resources.* Personal characteristics, such as race, may predispose individuals to adopt an African American child. Non-African American racial minorities may be more open to adopting an African American child because of their perception that they are able to empathize with their experiences of racism and are well suited to socialize them to develop a positive racial identity. Or, non-African American racial minorities may prefer children of their own race because they feel responsible for these children or are simply more comfortable adopting inracially. Indeed, most African Americans adopt African American children (Smith-McKeever, 2006) and Hispanic persons who adopt internationally typically do so from Latin America (Ishizawa et al., 2006).

Another marginalized identity that may predispose persons to adopt an African American child is *sexual minority status.* Because of

their own experience of being viewed as ''undesirable,'' lesbians may be more open than heterosexuals to adopting children who are seen as ''undesirable'' by society. Research on lesbian adoptive families suggests that many of the children in these families are a different race than their parents (Gates, Badgett, Macomber, & Chambers, 2007). Such multiracial family-building may be purposeful: Bennett (2003) studied 15 lesbian couples who had adopted from abroad and found that many women wanted to create multicultural families.

Rejection from their biological families has led many lesbians to create families of choice that are based more on affective ties than biological ties and to embrace definitions of family that are not predicated upon physical resemblance (Weston, 1991). Further, lesbian partners cannot conceive a child who is their genetic combination, which may lead them to feel less pressured to simulate (via racial similarity between parent and child) the biogenetic relationships that ''should'' exist. Such factors may further facilitate openness to adopting an African American child.

Alternatively, some lesbians may hesitate to adopt an African American child because they believe that being raised by two mothers, being adopted, and being Black when one's parents are White will be too much for a child to handle. Aware they will need to socialize their child to understand both their adoptive status and their gay-parent family, lesbians may be overwhelmed by the prospect of raising an African American child. They may also worry about resentment from the African American community, given the controversies surrounding transracial adoption.

*Gender* may also affect willingness. Given women's relative marginalization in society, and that women tend to identify with lower status groups and men with higher status groups (Fine & Bowers, 1984), women may be more open than men to adopting an African American child. Consistent with this, Hollingsworth (2000) found that women in the general U.S. population were more likely to approve of transracial adoption than men. In turn, both heterosexual and lesbian women may be more open to adopting an African American child than men.

*Age* may also influence willingness. Society in general and families specifically are becoming increasingly multiracial and multicultural (Kennedy, 2003). Consequently, younger adopters are more likely to have been exposed to a more liberal set of social attitudes and behaviors regarding race during their formative years. Older adopters are more likely to have been exposed to explicitly racist or separatist societal ideologies (Davis, 2001) and may be less open to adopting an African American child. Consistent with this, there is evidence that attitudes toward transracial adoption have become more positive over the past few decades (Hollingsworth, 2000).

Another personal resource that may impact willingness is *education.* One study of international adopters found that White parents with less education were more likely to adopt children from abroad who were of their own race than White parents with a college education or more (Ishizawa et al., 2006). The authors suggest that this may be attributable to greater tolerance of racial differences among the highly educated. Thus, it would appear that educated people may be more willing to adopt an African American child. However, the impact of education may not extend to greater openness to African American children; indeed, the couples in this study were all pursuing international adoption, largely from South American, Korean, and European countries.

Finally, *income* may be related to willingness. Persons with fewer resources may be more likely to adopt through child welfare where African Americans are overrepresented and, in turn, to be open to adopting African American children, because they are aware of their limited options and wish to get a child quickly. In support of this, Brooks and James (2003) compared White parents who were, in retrospect, willing to adopt African American children and those who were not and found that a greater percentage of willing parents than unwilling parents said that they had chosen the route to adoption that they had taken (public) because it was most affordable (21.4 vs. 14%). Thus, openness to an African American child may connect with having fewer resources.

*Social Resources.* As individuals consider their willingness to adopt a Black child, they may consider their social networks and communities in evaluating whether they possess the resources to socialize an African American child to develop a healthy racial identity and to cope with racial discrimination (Brodzinsky, 2008).

They may be encouraged by adoption workers to evaluate how supportive their family members are of their decision to adopt, and to consider how family might react if they adopted a different-race child (Brodzinsky, 2008). Family nonsupport and racism represent major challenges faced by multiracial heterosexual (Shiao et al., 2004) and lesbian (Bennett, 2003) adoptive families, and can contribute to familial tensions. Consequently, *perceived social network support for adoption* was considered as a predictor of openness. Given that lesbians may rely more on friends than biological kin for support (Weston, 1991), social network support was operationalized as inclusive of both family members' and friends' support for adoption. And, in that suspected racism within one's family network is a possible deterrent to adopting an African American child, *social network concerns related to child race* was also considered as a predictor.

In addition to considering their social network resources, adopters may be encouraged to evaluate their community resources (e.g., the degree of racial diversity in their neighborhoods) in determining their willingness to adopt transracially (Brodzinsky, 2008). Research has linked the degree of diversity in adopted children's communities to their racial identity (McRoy, Zurcher, Lauerdale, & Anderson, 1984) and comfort with their appearance (Feigelman, 2000). In turn, adoption professionals have emphasized the importance of considering one's racial and ethnic community in deciding whether to adopt transracially (Smith et al., 2008). Thus, *perceptions of neighborhood racial and ethnic diversity* and the *actual racial makeup of participants' neighborhoods* (as measured by the U.S. Census) may be related to willingness.

The current study seeks to build on and extend the limited research (Brooks et al., 2002; Brooks & James, 2003) on predictors of willingness to adopt an African American child. Further, our study includes lesbian couples, who are increasingly likely to adopt (Gates & Ost, 2004). We examined potential predictors of willingness to adopt an African American child among 48 lesbian and 65 heterosexual prospective adoptive couples.

## METHOD

### *Participant Recruitment*

Inclusion criteria were (a) couples must be adopting their first child, and (b) both partners must be becoming first-time parents. 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 agencies agreed to provide information to clients, who were asked to contact the principal investigator for details. Both heterosexual ($n = 65$) and lesbian couples ($n = 48$) were targeted through agencies to facilitate similarity on geographical location and income. Because some lesbians may not be ''out'' to their agencies, we also enlisted national gay and lesbian organizations to assist with recruitment. Given our interest in studying non-Black adopters' openness to transracial adoption, we excluded couples in which one or both partners were Black.

### *Procedure*

Members of each couple were interviewed separately over the telephone in the preadoption phase. All couples had completed their home study and were waiting to be placed with a child. These semi-structured interviews lasted about 1–1.5 hours. Participants were sent a questionnaire packet to complete within a week of the interview, which they returned in postage paid envelopes.

### *Description of the Sample*

Lesbian and heterosexual couples had been in their relationships for similar lengths of time, 7.78 years ($SD = 3.77$) and 8.88 years ($SD = 3.91$). Lesbian and heterosexual couples had been waiting for similar lengths of time for a placement, 6.51 months ($SD = 5.20$) and 8.09 months ($SD = 10.22$). Lesbian and heterosexual couples had similar family incomes, $M = \$126,645$ ($SD = \$101,159$) and $M = \$124,359$ ($SD = \$72,617$). Lesbians, heterosexual women, and men also had similar educational levels. Among lesbians, 8 (8%) had a high school diploma, 9 (9%) had some college or an associate's degree, 28 (29%) held college

degrees, 38 (40%) held master's degrees, and 13 (14%) held a PhD, MD, or JD. Among heterosexual women, 6 (9%) had a high school diploma, 6 (9%) had some college or an associate's degree, 23 (35%) had college degrees, 28 (44%) had a master's degree, and 2 (3%) had a PhD, MD, or JD. Among heterosexual men, 1 (2%) had less than a high school degree, 3 (5%) had high school diplomas, 14 (21%) had some college or an associate's degree, 21 (32%) had a bachelor's degree, 18 (28%) had a master's degree, and 8 (12%) had a PhD, MD, or JD. Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) showed no significant differences in any of these characteristics.

### Measures

*Outcome.*

Willingness to adopt an African American child. In the context of the open-ended interview, participants were asked, ''Do you have certain preferences regarding the race of the child that you hope to adopt?'' and, subsequently, ''Are you open to adopting a child of a different race – that is, are you open to adopting transracially?'' They were then asked to specify what races they were or were not open to adopting. Based upon participants' responses, they were categorized as either ''open to adopting an African American child'' (i.e., if they stated that they were open to a ''Black'' or an ''African American'' child) (1) or ''not open'' (0).

*Route to Parenthood.*

Type of adoption. Type of adoption was coded as a couple-level variable as all persons were pursuing the same type as their partners. Couples were pursuing one of three types: private domestic open adoption, public domestic adoption, and international adoption. For the first set of models (see the section Analytic Strategy), we dummy coded international adoption and public adoption, with private domestic adoption being the default category, as it was the most common type. For the second set, international adoption was dummy coded, in order that all remaining parameter estimates could be interpreted for domestic adopters (i.e., when international adoption equals 0).

Preferential adopter. A single item asked whether couples had tried to have a biological child (0 = *did not try*, 1 = *tried*). Responses to

this item were recoded using effects coding, such that those who did not try to have a biological child were considered preferential adopters (1) and those who did try to conceive were considered not to be preferential adopters (−1).

*Personal Characteristics.*

Race or ethnicity. Effects coding was used to code race (individual of color = 1, White = −1).

Sexual orientation. Sexual orientation was effects coded (lesbian = 1, heterosexual = −1).

Gender. Gender was effects coded (female = 1, male = −1).

Age. Participants' age in years was mean-centered.

Income. Family income (based on individuals' reports of their salaries) was mean-centered.

Education. Education was coded from 1 to 6, 1 = *less than high school*, 2 = *graduated high school*, 3 = associates' *degree or some college*, 4 = *college degree*, 5 = *master*'s *degree*, 6 = PhD, MD, or JD. The education variable was mean-centered.

*Social Resources.*

Social network support of adoption. Participants were asked three questions regarding how supportive their social network was of them adopting. Specifically, they were asked how supportive their family, their partner's family, and their friends were. They answered on a 5-point scale, from 1 = *very unsupportive,* to 5 = *very supportive*. In order to reduce the total number of variables in the statistical models, responses were summed and averaged to create a composite measure of support for adoption. Social network support was mean-centered.

Concern over race of child. If participants indicated that their families, partners' families, or friends were anything but *very supportive* they were asked whether they were less than very supportive because of (a) concerns about adoption in general, (b) concerns about them adopting a child of a different race, (c) concerns about the fact that they were gay, or (d) other. In this study, we are concerned only with whether social network concern about the race of the child impacted participants' openness. Concern about race was effects coded (concern = 1, no concern = −1).

Perception of neighborhood racial and ethnic diversity. Participants were asked to indicate how racially or ethnically diverse they perceived their neighborhoods. They responded on a 3-point scale: 1 = *not at all diverse*, 2 = *somewhat diverse*, 3 = *very diverse.* This variable was mean-centered.

Actual racial diversity of neighborhood. We used U.S. Census estimates of the racial diversity of the area designated by the couples' zip code (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The percentage of the population that was African American was used to represent actual neighborhood racial diversity. This variable was mean-centered.

### Analytic Strategy

As we examined partners nested in couples, it was necessary to account for the shared variance between couple members (i.e., the within-couple correlations in the outcome scores). Multilevel modeling (MLM) permits examination of individual and dyad level variables, accounts for the extent of the shared variance, and provides accurate standard errors for testing the regression coefficients relating predictors to outcome scores (Sayer & Klute, 2005). Specifically, MLM adjusts the error variance to account for the interdependence of partner outcomes within the same dyad, resulting in more accurate standard errors and associated hypothesis tests.

An additional methodological challenge is introduced in the study of dyads when there is no meaningful way to differentiate the two dyad members (e.g., male or female). In this case, dyad members are considered to be exchangeable or interchangeable (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). The hierarchical linear model (HLM) for the cross-sectional analysis of indistinguishable dyads is a two-level, random-intercept model in which partners (Level 1) are nested in couples (Level 2).

Level 1: $Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}$ (Age) $+ r_{ij}$
Level 2: $\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}$ (Family income)
$\qquad\qquad + u_{0j}$
$\qquad \beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11}$ (Family income)

where $i = 1, 2, 3 \ldots$ for each individual, and $j = 1, 2, 3 \ldots$ for each dyad.

The Level 1 model is an intra-dyad model in which predictors measured separately for each dyad member (e.g., age) are entered (Goldberg & Smith, 2008). The intercept of the unconditional model represents the average for the dyad. This intercept varies across dyads (as indicated by $u_{0j}$) and is treated as an outcome variable at Level 2. The Level 2 model is an inter-dyad model, in which predictors that distinguish between dyads (e.g., family income) are entered. Although there are equations for each Level 1 predictor as well as the intercept at Level 2, only the intercept is allowed to vary. This limitation of the dyadic model is a function of the limited information available at Level 1, where there are only two members per dyad (Kenny et al., 2006).

The MLM program HLM6 (Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, & Congdon, 2004) was used to estimate all parameters. As the outcome is dichotomous in nature, we used the hierarchical general linear model (HGLM) for binomial distributions as implemented in HLM6. This requires the use of a logit model at Level 1, where Prob $(Y = 1|B) = P$ and the Level 1 HLM model becomes

$$\text{Log}(P/[1 - P]) = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j} \text{ (Age)}$$

Estimation was made using an approximation based on a Laplace transform. This approach produces a more accurate approximation to maximum likelihood (ML) parameter estimates and is preferable to penalized quasilikelihood (PQL), the default estimator for binomial distributions in HLM (Raudenbush et al., 2004; Raudenbush, Yang, & Yosef, 2000). In addition, the Laplace transform enables the creation of deviance statistics, allowing for model comparison testing.

*General Strategy.* We conducted two separate sets of HLM models. The first set examined whether aspects of the route to parenthood (preferential adopter, type of adoption) were related to openness and whether these effects were moderated by sexual orientation. The second set examined how personal and social resources were related to openness. For both sets, we fit a series of hierarchical models. Specifically, (a) we fit an unconditional model with no predictors. Then, (b) all predictors were entered individually and in combination to check for multicollinearity. Next, (c) the group of predictors under consideration were entered. Model comparison tests were used to assess overall improvement in model fit. Finally, (d) interactions were entered separately and in conjunction with one another. Only significant interactions were retained and reported.

Dichotomous variables were generally coded using effects coding $(-1, 1)$, so that the estimates

for other predictors would be across the sample, rather than only for the default category. As a result, the reported differences between groups should be interpreted as 2× the parameter estimate. One exception is the adoption type, which was dummy coded (0, 1). In the first set of analyses, adoption type has three categories. These three groups are more easily examined using dummy coding, which allows for the default category to be private domestic adoption. International adoption was again dummy coded in the second set of models. This enabled the remaining parameter estimates to be interpreted for domestic adopters (i.e., when international adoption equals 0), because this is the group most likely to be adopting domestically and, in turn, the most likely to adopt an African American child. Predicted probabilities were obtained by inserting values of the variables of interest into the combined HLM equation, where the probability equals the exponentiated value divided by one plus the exponentiated value (holding other predictors constant). For example, the predicted probabilities for age were based on the equation:

$$\text{Probability} = \text{Exp}(\gamma_{00} + \gamma_{10}[\text{Age}])/1 + \text{Exp}(\gamma_{00} + \gamma_{10}[\text{Age}])$$

The values used for calculating the predicted probabilities for continuous variables were the mean and one standard deviation above and below the mean. For dichotomous variables, the assigned values were used (-1 and 1 for effects coded variables and 0 and 1 for dummy coded variables). For all analyses, there were 224 participants nested within 113 couples.

### RESULTS

#### Descriptive Statistics

*Route to Parenthood.* Descriptive statistics on the predictors are presented in Table 1, with differences between lesbians and heterosexuals tested using ANOVAs and chi-square tests. Lesbians were more likely to be preferential adopters, $\chi^2$ (1, 112) = 7.40, $p = .01$. Heterosexuals were more likely to be pursuing international adoption, $\chi^2$ (1, 112) = 5.10, $p = .02$, whereas lesbians were more likely to be pursuing public adoption, $\chi^2$ (1, 112) = 6.18, $p = .01$. Sexual orientation was unrelated to the likelihood of pursuing private domestic adoption. Twenty-five heterosexual and 9 lesbian couples were pursuing international, 7 heterosexual and 14 lesbian couples were pursuing public, and 33 heterosexual and 25 lesbian couples were pursuing private domestic adoption. Of the 25 heterosexual couples adopting internationally, 14 were adopting from China, 4 from Guatemala, 3 from Taiwan, 2 from Poland, 1 from Russia, and 1 from Columbia. Of the 9 lesbian couples adopting internationally, 7 were adopting from Guatemala, 1 from Vietnam, and 1 from Nepal.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for Outcome and Predictors by Sexual Orientation*

| | Lesbians (*M, SD*) | Heterosexuals (*M, SD*) | Test | *p* Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participant age | 38.74 (6.08) | 37.60 (5.58) | $F$ (1, 223) = 3.76 | .06 |
| Family income | $126,645 ($101,159) | $124,359 ($72,617) | $F$ (1, 112) = .01 | .98 |
| Education | 4.40 (1.11) | 4.19 (1.06) | $F$ (1, 223) = 2.26 | .13 |
| Social network support for adoption | .61 (2.58) | 1.21 (8.26) | $F$ (1, 223) = 12.60 | .001 |
| Social network concerns about race | −.67(.75) | −.78(.63) | $F$ (1, 223) = 1.67 | .20 |
| Perceived racial diversity | .20 (.73) | −.14(.76) | $F$ (1, 223) = 11.68 | .001 |
| Percentage of African Americans | 9.42 (9.23) | 5.25 (7.83) | $F$ (1, 112) = 6.71 | .01 |
| | **%** | **%** | | |
| Open to adopting African American child | 66 | 36 | $\chi^2$ (1, 223) = 18.34 | .000 |
| Preferential adopter | 47 | 20 | $\chi^2$ (1, 112) = 7.40 | .01 |
| International adoption | 19 | 38 | $\chi^2$ (1, 112) = 5.10 | .02 |
| Domestic public adoption | 29 | 11 | $\chi^2$ (1, 112) = 6.18 | .01 |
| Domestic private adoption | 52 | 51 | $\chi^2$ (1, 112) = .02 | .52 |
| Participant race (of color) | 8 | 7 | $\chi^2$ (1, 223) = .16 | .44 |

*Personal Resources.* The sample was mostly White (92%), with no significant differences in race based on sexual orientation. Of the non-White participants, 7 identified as Latina or Latino, 6 as multiracial, 3 as Filipino, 1 as Korean, and 1 as Tibetan. Lesbians were older at the level of a trend, $F (1, 223) = 3.76$, $p = .06$. Lesbians and heterosexuals did not differ in family income or education.

*Social Resources.* Lesbians perceived less support regarding adoption from their networks, $F (1, 223) = 12.60$, $p = .001$, but were no more likely to report network concerns over child race. Lesbians perceived their neighborhoods as more diverse, $F (1, 223) = 11.68$, $p = .001$, and their neighborhoods had larger percentages of African American residents, $F (1, 112) = 6.71$, $p = .01$.

### HLM Models Predicting Openness

*HLM Unconditional Model.* The unconditional model (Model 1 in Table 2) had an intercept that was not significantly different from zero, indicating that, on average, participants were not open to adopting an African American child.

*Route to Parenthood.* As aspects of the route to parenthood differed for lesbians and heterosexual couples (i.e., preferential adoption status, adoption type), it is useful to examine how such routes may be related to openness as well as how these relationships may differ for lesbians and heterosexuals. The first set of conditional models examined how aspects of couples' route to parenthood were related to openness (Table 2). Model 2 showed that preferential adopters were not more likely to be open; however, couples pursuing public adoption and those pursuing international adoption were more likely to be open than those pursuing private domestic adoption.

When sexual orientation was added to the model (Model 3), lesbians were found to be more likely to be open than heterosexuals. Public adopters and international adopters remained more likely to be open, even after controlling for sexual orientation. Interactions between the predictors and sexual orientation were subsequently tested, and the only significant interaction (Sexual orientation × International adoption) was entered into Model 4. This interaction indicated that the openness of international adopters varied according to sexual orientation. Among international adopters, the probability of being open was .69 for heterosexuals but only .45 for lesbians, with heterosexual international adopters 1.4 times more likely to be open than lesbian international adopters. For private domestic adopters (the default category), the probability of being open was .03 for heterosexuals and .63 for lesbians, such that lesbians pursuing private domestic adoption were 21 times more open than heterosexuals pursuing the same route. Comparing the probability of openness of private domestic adopters to those of international adopters showed that lesbians pursuing private

Table 2. *Route to Parenthood Predicting Openness to Adopting an African American Child*

| | Model 1 (Unconditional) $\gamma$ (*SE*) | Model 2 (Route) $\gamma$ (*SE*) | Model 3 (Sexual orientation) $\gamma$ (*SE*) | Model 4 (Interactions) $\gamma$ (*SE*) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Intercept | −.07 | −1.11 (.44)* | −1.34 (.57)* | −1.38 (.59)* |
| Preferent adopt | – | −.04 (.34) | −.38 (.40) | −.48 (.40) |
| Public adopt | – | 2.42 (.92)* | 2.49 (1.07)* | 2.38 (1.04)* |
| International adopt | – | 1.83 (.71)* | 2.57 (1.07)* | 1.69 (.85)* |
| Sexual orientation | – | – | 1.36 (.40)** | 2.14 (.56)*** |
| International × Sexual orientation | – | – | – | −2.65 (.87)** |
| Deviance | 687.76 | 676.36 | 661.65 | 650.25 |
| Number of parameters | 2 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Change in deviance | – | $\chi^2 = 11.40$, $df = 3, p = .01$ | $\chi^2 = 14.71$, $df = 1, p = .000$ | $\chi^2 = 11.41$, $df = 1, p = .001$ |

*Note*: The change in deviance chi-square test is based on comparing the deviance statistic of the current model to that of the prior model. Adoption type is dummy coded so that private domestic adoption is the default category.

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

Table 3. *Personal and Social Resources Predicting Openness to Adopting an African American Child*

| | Model 1 (Unconditional) $\gamma$ (SE) | Model 2 (Personal) $\gamma$ (SE) | Model 3 (Social) $\gamma$ (SE) | Model 4 (Interactions) $\gamma$ (SE) | Model 5 (International) $\gamma$ (SE) | Model 6 (Final Model) $\gamma$ (SE) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Intercept | −.07(.25) | −.53 (.58) | −.23 (.79) | −.09 (.77) | −.91 (.73) | −1.21(.64)* |
| Sexual orientation | – | 1.41 (.38)*** | 1.29 (.40)*** | 1.45 (.45)*** | 1.73 (.48)*** | 1.72 (.47)*** |
| Family income | – | .02 (.04) | .03 (.04) | .03 (.04) | .03 (.05) | – |
| Percentage of African Americans | – | – | −.03(.04) | −.04(.05) | −.03(.05) | – |
| International adoption | – | – | – | – | 2.19 (.78)*** | 2.20 (.75)*** |
| Gender | – | −.34(.29) | −.36(.29) | −.43(.29) | −.45(.30) | −.48(.29) |
| Of color | – | −.96(.59) | −1.05(.71) | −1.11(.72) | −1.20 (.63)* | −1.21 (.58)** |
| Age | – | −.08 (.04)* | −.07 (.04)* | −.08 (.04)* | −.09 (.04)** | −.09 (.04)** |
| Education | – | −.20(.23) | −.17(.25) | −.15(.25) | −.24(.26) | – |
| Support for adoption | – | – | −.09(.16) | −.05(.17) | −.06(.17) | −.09(.16) |
| Race concern | – | – | .49 (.43) | .50 (.46) | .42 (.47) | – |
| Perceived diversity | – | – | 1.07 (.44)** | 1.15 (.47)** | .98 (.49)** | .93 (.47)** |
| Support × Sexual orientation | – | – | – | .32 (.17)* | .35 (.17)** | .36 (.17)** |
| Deviance | 687.76 | 665.82 | 657.10 | 653.54 | 645.43 | 648.18 |
| Number of parameters | 2 | 8 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 10 |
| Change in deviance | | $\chi^2 = 21.94$, $df = 6$, $p = .002$ | $\chi^2 = 8.72$, $df = 4$, $p = .07$ | $\chi^2 = 3.56$, $df = 1$, $p = .06$ | $\chi^2 = 8.11$, $df = 1$, $p = .005$ | $\chi^2 = 2.95$, $df = 5$, $p < .50$ |

*Note:* The change in deviance chi-square test is based on comparing the deviance statistic of the current model to that of the prior model. International adoption is dummy coded ($1 = $ *international* and $0 = $ *domestic*) so that all of the other parameter estimates are based on domestic adopters. Gender was retained in the final model as a control because it had an effect on the other coefficients.

$^* p < .10$; $^{**} p < .05$; $^{***} p < .01$.

domestic adoption were 1.4 times more likely to be open than lesbians pursuing international adoption, whereas heterosexual couples pursuing private domestic adoption were actually 23 times *less* likely to be open than heterosexual couples pursuing international adoption. Public adoption remained related to openness, such that regardless of sexual orientation, the probability of public adopters being open was .73. Lesbians pursuing public adoption were only 1.2 times more likely to be open than lesbians pursuing private adoption, whereas heterosexuals pursuing public adoption were 24.3 times more likely to be open than those pursuing private domestic adoption. Preferential adoption status remained unrelated to openness.

The second series of models examined personal and social resources as predictors of openness (Table 3). First, in Model 1, the unconditional model was refit to provide a baseline.

*Personal Resources.* In Model 2, the personal resources of individuals and couples were considered. Namely, sexual orientation of the couple, family income, and gender, race (of color, but not African American), age, and education of the individual were entered as covariates. Sexual orientation was significantly related to openness, such that lesbians were more likely to be open. Age was marginally significant ($p = .06$), such that older adopters were less likely to be open. Income, gender, and education were unrelated to openness. Interactions among all variables and gender, race, and sexual orientation were tested, but none were significant. The inclusion of personal resources accounted for a significant improvement in model fit over the baseline model.

*Social Resources.* In Model 3, the social resources of individuals and couples were taken into account. Social network support for the adoption, social network concerns about race, perceived neighborhood racial diversity, and actual racial diversity were added to the model. Of the social resources, only perceived neighborhood diversity was significantly related

to openness, with more diversity related to more openness. Support for adopting, concerns over race, and actual diversity were unrelated to openness. Sexual orientation remained significant and age remained marginally significant. The full social resource model accounted for a marginally significant improvement in model fit compared to the personal resources model ($p = .07$).

*Interactions.* All two-way interactions of the social resource predictors with sexual orientation, race, and gender were tested. In Model 4, the only interaction that neared significance (Sexual orientation $\times$ Support) was entered in the model. The interaction was marginally significant ($p = .06$), with lesbians who perceived high support more open than those who perceived low support. Perceived diversity remained a significant predictor of openness, and age remained marginally significant. This model was a better fit than the prior model at the level of a trend ($p = .06$) and a significantly better fit than the personal resources model ($\chi^2 = 12.04$, $df = 5$, $p = .03$).

*International adoption.* In Model 5, international adoption was included as a control, as international adopters generally predetermine the race of the child they will adopt (typically not Black) by selecting a specific country from which to adopt. Surprisingly, international adopters were more likely to be open when compared to domestic adopters. The interaction of sexual orientation and support remained significant, as did neighborhood diversity. Age became a significant predictor. Race became related to openness at the level of a trend ($p = .06$), with persons of color less likely to be open than White persons. There were no significant findings for income, gender, education, race concerns, or actual diversity. This model was a significantly better fit than the prior model.

*Final model.* Next, nonsignificant predictors were trimmed to increase power to detect effects (Model 6). Although unrelated to openness, gender was also retained, as its presence affected other parameter estimates. International adopters were 22.9 times more likely to be open as domestic adopters. The interaction between sexual orientation and support remained significant, such that lesbians were more likely to be open regardless of the amount of support, but those

with high support were more open than those with low support. The probability of being open was .50 for lesbians with support 1 standard deviation (*SD*; 1.83) below the mean, .62 for those at the mean, and .73 for those with support 1 *SD* above the mean. The probability of being open was .11 for heterosexuals with support 1 *SD* below the mean, .05 for those at the mean, and .02 for those 1 *SD* above the mean. Lesbians with mean levels of support were 12.4 times more likely to be open than heterosexuals with mean support. Race became a significant predictor, with White adopters 6.2 times more likely to be open than adopters of color. Age was a significant predictor, with older persons less likely to be open. The probability of being open was .33 for a person 1 *SD* (5.82 years) below the mean age, .23 for a person of mean age, and .15 for a person 1 *SD* above the mean. Perceived neighborhood diversity remained significant, such that more diversity was related to more openness. The probability of being open was .00 for a person whose score was 1 *SD* (.77) below the mean, .23 for a person at the mean, and .61 for a person 1 *SD* above the mean. Model comparison tests showed no decrement in fit from the full model.

## Discussion

This study is unique in its evaluation of openness in the preadoptive period, its examination of both personal and social resources as predictors of openness, and its inclusion of same-sex and heterosexual preadoptive parents. We found that, on average, non-African American prospective adopters were not open to adopting an African American child, which is consistent with Brooks and colleagues' (2002) finding that White adoptive parents recalled less of a willingness to adopt an African American child than children of other races. Such reluctance may reflect non-African American adopters' concerns about their ability to provide adequate racial socialization to an African American child, as well as worries about the stigma that they and their child might face. Some adopters' unwillingness likely reflects their internalization of negative stereotypes about Blacks and Black adopted children specifically (Lee & Bean, 2007).

### The Route to Adoption and Openness

Certain factors did differentiate persons who were open from those who were not. Public

adopters were more open than private domestic adopters, regardless of sexual orientation. Among heterosexuals, international adopters expressed more openness compared to private domestic adopters. Public adopters may have chosen this route to adoption because of their knowledge that African American children are overrepresented in the child welfare system, and, in turn, out of a desire to adopt an African American child (Brooks & James, 2003). Also, in that persons who adopt through child welfare are encouraged to consider not only their feelings about child race but their preferences regarding child age, gender, and special needs (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002), they may ultimately weigh child race less heavily than other factors, and thus espouse openness to adopting a Black child. International adopters' openness was likely rooted in different factors. For example, their self-reported openness may be fueled by a perception of themselves as racially and culturally tolerant, by virtue of the fact that they are seeking a transcultural adoption. Finally, the relative nonopenness of private domestic adopters (particularly heterosexuals) may reflect the fact that persons who select this route tend to do so precisely because they possess strong preferences about child characteristics (e.g., they prefer a White infant; Siegel, 1993) and wish to avoid the possibility of being placed with a racial minority child, which is more likely in international and public adoption.

Contrary to expectation, participants who had not tried to conceive were not more open to adopting an African American child. Thus, although preferential adopters would appear to be motivated by altruistic tendencies or by personal values that minimize the importance of physical resemblances among family members, such values did not translate to greater openness. It may be that preferential adopters are more open with regard to certain aspects of their adopted child, but this openness does not extend to adopting an African American child. Indeed, they may be more open to adopting transracially, but feel that Black children are ''too different'' (Shiao et al., 2004).

### Personal Resources and Openness

Notably, lesbians were more open to adopting an African American child. As persons who are marginalized on the basis of their sexual orientation, lesbians may feel more open to other persons with marginalized identities and view themselves as equipped to support their child in the face of discrimination. Alternatively, lesbians may feel less pressure to create families that mirror the biologically related nuclear family, in that by pursuing parenthood in the context of a same-sex relationship, they are necessarily creating families that lie outside of the heterosexual nuclear family ideal (Weston, 1991). It is also possible that as persons who are regarded as less ''optimal'' adopters by virtue of their sexual orientation (Matthews & Cramer, 2006), lesbians feel they are not in a position to be ''choosy'' and thus express greater openness. Regardless of why they are open, our findings suggest that non-African American lesbian adopters may play a role, albeit a statistically small one, in reducing the number of African American children without homes.

Consistent with research on attitudes about transracial adoption in the general population, age predicted openness to adopting an African American child (Hollingsworth, 2000). The fact that younger participants were more open may reflect historical changes; they may have been exposed to a more liberal set of societal ideologies about race than older persons and may therefore possess more tolerant attitudes about race (Davis, 2001). This finding may signify a continued trend toward greater openness among prospective adopters, meaning that future generations of adopters might be even more open to adopting African American children.

Consistent with research suggesting that racial minorities tend to adopt inracially (Ishizawa et al., 2006; Smith-McKeever, 2006), racial minorities were less open to adopting an African American child. Racial minorities may prefer to adopt inracially for similar reasons as White parents (e.g., they may believe that sharing the same race will make life ''easier'' for both them and their child). They may also feel responsible for adoptable children of their own race or feel that they have something unique to offer them with regard to racial socialization. Future work can explore whether openness varies within non-African American racial minorities (i.e., certain groups may be more open to adopting an African American child than others).

Our findings suggest that several established predictors of openness to transracial adoption may not extend to African American children. Although women in the general population are more open to adopting transracially than

men (Hollingsworth, 2000), gender did not predict openness, indicating that women's greater openness may not extend to African American children, at least among couples who are actively involved in the adoption process. Further, despite evidence that well-educated persons are more likely to adopt transracially among international adopters (Ishizawa et al., 2006), education was unrelated to openness. These findings may reflect the pervasiveness of racial hierarchies in adoption whereby African American children are perceived as the least desirable of all racial groups. Members of groups that tend to report tolerant racial attitudes (women, educated persons) may hesitate to adopt an African American child because of (a) internalized racism, or (b) consciousness of the stigmas associated with Blackness in U.S. society and, in turn, concerns about their ability to meet the needs of an African American child.

Contrary to expectation, income was unrelated to openness, suggesting that lack of financial resources may not be enough to prompt consideration of an African American child. Thus, although finances may affect route to parenthood (i.e., persons with fewer resources seek out public adoption; Brooks & James, 2003), they may not have implications for racial preferences.

### Social Resources and Openness

Consistent with hypotheses, the social resources available to non-African American individuals were related to their openness to adopting an African American child. Perceived neighborhood racial diversity was associated with greater openness; the objective measure of racial diversity, however, was not. Perhaps persons who perceived their neighborhoods as more diverse felt encouraged by the (perceived) presence of a multiracial community that could support their child's racial or ethnic identity development, and, in turn, felt more equipped to parent an African American child. That is, perhaps perceptions of diversity *facilitated* their openness. Alternatively, perceptions of neighborhood diversity may be an *artifact* of openness. Persons who were open may have come to perceive their communities as more diverse (perhaps because they were looking for that diversity), whereas those who were not open may have rationalized this by citing the lack of diversity in their neighborhoods. The lack of association between our

objective indicator of diversity and openness might appear to support the latter interpretation, but this indicator is imperfect. Indeed, examining neighborhood characteristics such as racial diversity is complex, and the use of zip codes as an indicator for neighborhoods may be problematic in that there may be several ''neighborhoods'' within a given zip code (Weiss, Ompad, Galea, & Vlahov, 2007).

Network support for adoption was positively related to openness for lesbians only. Perhaps lesbians, who may experience less validation for their parental aspirations (Weston, 1991), are especially sensitive to their families' and friends' supportiveness of their efforts to adopt. Should they perceive any hint of nonsupport, they may not wish to risk further alienation by adopting a Black child. Of course, the fact that network concern about child race was unrelated to openness complicates interpretation of this finding. One possibility is that in many cases, family members are not forthright about their reasons for being less than enthusiastic about adoption, leaving adopters uncertain about the source of their families' nonsupport. In turn, adopters may hesitate to adopt an African American child, even in the absence of strong evidence that their families' concerns stem from racism. It is also possible that the measures used to assess support for adoption and concerns over race were inadequate indices of these phenomena.

### Limitations

There are several limitations of this study. First, our analyses are cross-sectional; thus the direction of causation between our predictors and outcome is unclear. For example, it is possible that being open to adopting an African American child leads non-African American adopters to view their communities as more diverse. Second, stated openness may not match actual openness. As we did not include a social desirability measure, we have no way of knowing how much responses were impacted by social desirability. We did, however, ask participants to volunteer which races they were open to, which may have reduced this bias. We would expect more bias had we asked directly, ''Are you open to adopting an African American child?'' Future work should include a social desirability measure. It should also follow adopters over time in order to examine the degree to which their preadoptive preferences are consistent with their adoption choices.

Third, we did not assess racial attitudes. A racial identity development scale might help to elucidate the degree to which openness reflects naïve beliefs about race and transracial adoption (e.g., the belief that ''race doesn't matter'') as opposed to an informed decision-making process whereby persons have thoughtfully considered the challenges and opportunities associated with raising an African American child. From a critical race perspective (Delgado & Stefancie, 2001) this distinction is important, in that a ''color-blind'' approach denies the social and material consequences of racism, and non-African American parents who assume this perspective may be doing their African American child a disservice by failing to acknowledge and confront racism.

Fourth, we did not examine the racial makeup of participants' support networks. Future research might examine the racial makeup of individuals' networks to determine whether having African American friends or family members impacts openness. Fifth, the use of single item measures (e.g., for perceived neighborhood diversity) could have limited our reliability and validity. Future research should include multiple item measures designed specifically to assess aspects of the adoption experience. Finally, this study did not include gay men. Gay men may demonstrate less, equivalent, or greater openness in comparison to lesbians.

## *Implications for Practice*

These data suggest that non-African American lesbian adopters may be more open to adopting an African American child than non-African American heterosexual adopters. In that lesbians who adopt African American children are vulnerable to unique challenges based upon their susceptibility to being stigmatized, adoption workers may wish to provide specialized training to these families (Brodzinsky, 2008). At the same time, professionals should be sensitive to the strengths that lesbians may bring to adoptive parenting: Because of their own experiences of marginalization, they may be particularly empathic toward children with marginalized identities. Also, our data indicate that social contextual factors (e.g., perceived neighborhood diversity) may shape openness. Professionals should develop sensitivity to how non-African American adopters' perceptions of their social resources may impact their attitudes

about transracial adoption, and should support adopters in addressing social resource deficits, especially if they are interested in adopting an African American child. For example, adopters may choose to move to a more diverse community or seek out friends who are supportive of their adoption plans (Brodzinsky).

It is important not to presume that openness necessarily implies awareness of the unique socialization challenges associated with parenting an African American child. Nor does openness imply preparedness. In her study of 15 White lesbian couples who adopted transracially, Bennett (2003) found that most mothers felt that parental sexual orientation would represent the ''main challenge'' for their children, not race. Thus, non-African American parents who are open to adopting an African American child may not be prepared for the challenges that their families might face as a function of the unique race-related stigmas confronting African Americans in the United States. Professionals should emphasize racial awareness in their training of all prospective adopters, and should provide non-African American adopters with education about how to support racial identity development in African American children (Smith et al., 2008). Such efforts should help adopters to make informed decisions about adopting an African American child, as opposed to taking a ''color-blind'' approach or, alternatively, ruling out the possibility of adopting an African American child because of misinformation or fears that can be corrected via education.

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