Lesbian, Gay, and Heterosexual Adoptive Parents' Socialization Approaches to Children's Minority Statuses

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Abstract

This study examined the narratives of 82 adoptive parents (41 couples: 15 lesbian, 15 gay male, 11 heterosexual) of young children (*M* age = 5.81 years) with a focus on understanding parents' socialization practices and strategies surrounding race (among parents of children of color), and family structure (among lesbian or gay [LG] parents). Most parents described an *engaged* approach to socialization surrounding their children's racial minority and LG-parent family statuses, employing strategies such as (a) holding parent–child conversations aimed at instilling pride, (b) seeking communities that reflect their child's identities (more often LG than heterosexual), and (c) educating about racism and heterosexism. Some parents described a *cautious* approach in which they acknowledged their child's racial background and LG-parent family status but were cautious about not being overly focused on their differences. A minority of parents (more often heterosexual than LG) described an *avoidant* approach, whereby they did not discuss their child's differences.

Keywords

adoption, gay, lesbian, race, socialization

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Families are becoming increasingly diverse in the United States (Goldberg, 2010), such that the heterosexual, two-parent family with biologically related children is no longer the dominant norm. For example, an increased number of same-sex couples are building families (Goldberg, 2010), often through adoption; indeed, in the last 10 years, the number of same-sex couples who have adopted children has doubled, and same-sex couples are now at least four times as likely as heterosexual couples to adopt (Gates, 2013). Both same-sex and heterosexual couples who adopt tend to be non-Latino White, whereas the children they adopt are often of color (Kreider & Lofquist, 2014). Transracial adoption is particularly common among White same-sex couples (Goldberg, 2009), possibly in part because they view themselves as having unique strengths (e.g., exposure to stigma) that will help them to empathize with children of color (Richardson & Goldberg, 2010).

Both adopted children of color and children with lesbian or gay (LG) parents possess minority and potentially stigmatized identities. In both cases, parents are faced with the task of socializing their children to understand, and hopefully develop positive ideas about, the multiple and often visible ways in which they differ from societal norms. Although parents' comfort with and ability to impart such messages and tools may vary, in part based on whether or not they share some aspect of their child's minority status (i.e., they do not, in the case of White parents of color; they do, in the case of LG parents), in the absence of such socialization, children might not possess the emotional resources (e.g., pride, self-esteem) needed to withstand the stresses of navigating their minority statuses in the broader society, or the tools needed to understand and cope with stigma (i.e., racism and heterosexism). Insomuch as (a) families represent one of the primary contexts in which learning and development take place (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) and (b) parents are key socializing agents, parents' messages about identity and difference (e.g., all skin colors are beautiful, they were "wanted," being part of a two-mom family is "special") can play a powerful role in fostering pride and empowerment in children, thus protecting them against the shame and internalized stigma associated with minority stress (Neblett, Smalls, Ford, Nguyen, & Sellers, 2009). Parents' socializing efforts regarding difference are especially important in the early years (kindergarten, early school-age), as this is the stage when children begin to develop awareness of racial differences, as well as recognize other differences within and across families (Brodzinsky, Schecter, & Henig, 1992; Park, 2011). It is only at around age four to six years that most children begin to identify and differentiate among people of different races, family structures, and ways of entering families (i.e., birth or adoption; Guerrero, Enesco, Lago, & Rodríguez, 2010). At the same time, children's understanding of these domains is simplistic and still

emerging (Aukrust & Rydland, 2009). In talking to children about their race and LG-parent family structure, parents must consider what level of information their child can handle, cognitively and emotionally, and seek developmentally appropriate socialization strategies (Brodzinsky, 2011; Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012).

Using a sample of primarily non-Latino White adoptive parents of young children (6 years old, on average), this qualitative study sought to understand how LG and heterosexual parents approach the socialization of their children with regard to their race (among parents of children of color) and family structure (among LG parents).[1] How do they talk about race and family structure and what messages do they seek to convey? What strategies do they use to socialize children to understand and feel empowered about aspects of their personal and family identities? How do they view their children's developmental status as shaping their socialization practices? Findings have implications for counselors who work with LG-parent-headed and transracial adoptive families, as such families may seek support in navigating and socializing their children around their multiple identities.

Racial Socialization

People of color are vulnerable to various forms of racism in society; likewise, the level, nature, and type of racism that people of color experience vary based upon their specific racial and ethnic background (Samuels, 2009). Children of color who are raised by White parents (i.e., adopted transracially) are exposed to general racism (e.g., racist stereotypes), as well as insensitive inquiries related to the racial differences between them and their parents (e.g., "Is that your mother?"; Samuels, 2009, p. 83).

Racial socialization has been defined as promoting racial awareness and pride, as well as teaching about racism and providing children with tools for responding to and coping with racism (Lee, 2003). The literature suggests a number of strategies that parents may employ to accomplish racial socialization, including (a) talking about racial and ethnic differences (Anderson, Lee, Rueter, & Kim, 2015) and racial bias (Peck, Brodish, Malanchuk, Banerjee, & Eccles, 2014), (b) participating in social or recreational groups of the child's race, (c) seeking out role models of the child's race, (d) celebrating holidays connected to the child's racial and cultural background, and (e) living in a diverse neighborhood (Vonk, Lee, & Crolley-Simic, 2010). Our study explores how parents describe socializing their children around race under a specific set of circumstances, namely, when the children are young, adopted, and of color, whereas the parents are White and, in some cases, sexual minorities.

Racial socialization typically unfolds more easily and naturally in families in which parents and children share the same race; not sharing their child's race limits the ability of White adoptive parents to meaningfully discuss racial experiences, prepare their children for such experiences, and foster pride in their children's racial identity (Friedlander et al., 2000; Lee, 2003). Research on racial socialization by White adoptive parents has revealed variability in racial socialization behaviors (e.g., Anderson et al., 2015; Barn, 2013), with some parents, especially in early studies, engaging in limited racial socialization, such that they lived in mostly White communities and downplayed their children's race (Bergquist, Campbell, & Unrau, 2003; Else-Quest & Morse, 2015; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983). Such behaviors, which have been found to limit or undermine racial identity development (McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Neblett et al., 2009), are consistent with an *assimilationist* perspective, whereby parents prioritize their child's assimilation into the majority White culture (Lee, 2003). A variant of this approach is a "humanistic strategy that emphasizes a 'colorblind' orientation" (Lee, 2003, p. 721), whereby parents' "humanitarian beliefs" (i.e., people are all the same, love is most important) drive their de-emphasis of race (Barn, 2013; Orbe, 1999). A "colorblind" approach may be more common in transracial adoptions where White parents have adopted children who have a lighter skin tone, as opposed to children with darker skin, because the former group of children tends to more closely resemble their parents and are thus seen as assimilating more easily into mainstream culture (Gianino, Goldberg, & Lewis, 2009).

Other transracial adoptive parents have been described as engaging in fairly intensive racial socialization, whereby they explicitly acknowledge racial differences and seek out racially conscious, inclusive educational and social opportunities (Friedlander et al., 2000; Smith, Juarez, & Jacobson, 2011). Such efforts are consistent with an *enculturation* perspective, whereby parents believe in the value of, and make efforts to promote, racial and ethnic awareness and pride (Lee, 2003). Alongside efforts to promote a positive racial identity in children, parents sometimes engage in preparation for racism (i.e., *racial inculcation*) or teach their children coping skills to help them prepare for and deal with racism (Lee, 2003; Smith et al., 2011). Although little research has examined racial inculcation in adoptive parents, existing work suggests that few White adoptive parents engage in preparation for racism; they more often downplay racist comments, regardless of the child's race or ethnicity (samples included Black, Latino, and Asian children; Friedlander et al., 2000; Johnson, Shireman, & Watson, 1987). This is consistent with qualitative research on adult adopted persons of color, many of whom recall their parents avoiding the topic of race during their childhood and failing to prepare them for racial bias (Docan-Morgan, 2010; Samuels,

2009). Little is known about the extent to which, and how, adoptive parents prepare young children for racism, namely, the conversational strategies that they employ, the tools they use to stimulate conversation, and the developmental considerations they make in approaching discussions.

In general, research on racial socialization by White adoptive parents has almost exclusively focused on parents with school-age children (Anderson et al., 2015; Friedlander et al., 2000; Smith et al., 2011). Little attention has been given to how socialization processes might be uniquely shaped by children's developmental context, whereby parents with younger children engage in particular approaches or considerations related to their children's age. Relevant studies have found (a) child age to be positively related to White adoptive parents' level of racial socialization (Johnston, Swim, Saltsman, Deater-Deckard, & Petrill, 2007; Robinson-Wood, 2011), and (b) in approaching adoption-related discussions, parents reported considering their children's cognitive ability to engage in such conversations (Freeark, Rosenblum, Hus, & Root, 2008) and tended to keep conversations brief and infrequent if they believed their children would be overwhelmed by the complexity of the topic (Harrigan, 2009). Yet little is known about how, at a qualitative level, parents view their children's developmental stage as shaping their racial socialization approach.

An additional gap in the scholarship on racial socialization by White adoptive parents is that it has almost exclusively focused on heterosexual parents (but see Goldberg & Smith, 2015). LG parents have been found to be more open to adopting children of color and more likely to complete transracial adoptions (Goldberg, 2009), but it is unknown whether they approach racial socialization differently than heterosexual parents. They may more easily acknowledge racial differences, and talk openly about race (and diversity in general), compared with heterosexual parents because (a) they built their families outside of the traditional heteronormative family model and (b) their children and families hold multiple, and fairly visible, intersecting minority statuses (i.e., their children are adopted, of color, and have LG parents). Their personal vulnerability to and experiences with stigma related to their sexuality might also render them more comfortable discussing racial stigmatization, as well as more intent on preparing children for it (Goldberg, 2009).

LG-Parent Family Structure Socialization

Heterosexism is pervasive throughout society, and includes the belief that heterosexuality is "normal" and heterosexual relationships are superior to same-sex relationships (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005). Families headed

by two fathers may be viewed as less capable of nurturing children because they are missing a "mother figure," and families headed by two mothers may be criticized for failing to provide children, particularly sons, with a "father figure" (Goldberg, 2010). In turn, children may be plagued with questions about their family structure (e.g., "Where's your mom?" "Why don't you have a dad?"). Given that children with LG parents are vulnerable to heterosexism, their parents are tasked with the responsibility of socializing them to resist heterosexist societal messages and to develop a sense of pride and comfort in their family structure.

Very little research has explored LG parents' socialization strategies regarding their family structure: that is, why and how they talk to their children about (a) what it means to have two moms or two dads and (b) heterosexism. In a small study of adopted youth with lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) parents, Gianino et al. (2009) found that most participants recalled conversations about having LGB parents as emphasizing their "specialness" and family diversity, as opposed to discussing heterosexism and strategies for handling discrimination. In a few cases, youth wished their parents had spent more time discussing difficult situations that they might encounter (e.g., teasing about having two moms) and language for handling such situations. An earlier study of six lesbian-mother families with children aged 7–16 years found that most parents minimized their children's exposure to homophobia; however, some parents had talked with their children about homophobia and how to respond to homophobic situations (Litovich & Langhout, 2004). Thus, research suggests that LG parents may tend to employ positive messaging about family diversity, as well as protective strategies (i.e., avoiding exposure to homophobia), rather than preparing children for stigma; yet we know little about when, how, or why these or other strategies may be chosen.

Parents often feel that conversations about sexuality are not appropriate for young (i.e., prepubescent) children. Parents also express concern that discussions about discrimination will overwhelm young children (Harrigan, 2009). Thus, conversations about membership in an LG-parent family, as well as the associated topic of sexual orientation–based discrimination, may be especially challenging for LG parents of younger children. Yet it is important for parents to hold such conversations, even with children at young ages. For example, a study of 84 lesbian-mother families of 5-year-old children found that "despite their mothers' efforts to shield them from the harsh realities of discrimination," 18% of children had experienced homophobia from peers or teachers (Gartrell et al., 2000, p. 546). Given that young children with LG parents may encounter inquiries about the unique nature of their family structure (Gianino et al., 2009), as well as heterosexism (Gartrell

et al., 2000), and that these may be especially hard topics for LG parents to address, further research is needed on how LG parents approach family structure–related socialization with prepubescent children.

The Current Study

Prior research has (a) primarily focused on racial socialization processes as opposed to LG-parent family structure socialization, (b) relied heavily on samples of heterosexual parents, and (c) primarily examined parents of older (i.e., school-aged) children. The current study builds on this work to examine parents' socialization practices regarding their minority statuses (i.e., being of color, having two moms or dads), using a sample of LG and heterosexual adoptive parents of children who were primarily of kindergarten age.

The primary research question driving the study is "How and why do parents provide socialization regarding their children's minority identities, both with respect to race and family structure?" By exploring the narratives of LG and heterosexual parents, most of whom adopted children of color, we can enrich our knowledge of the strategies that parents engage in and the challenges that they face when parenting children with multiple minority statuses and generate insights that can inform counseling practice with diverse families, particularly during the early years when parents are developing their approaches to various forms of socialization (Hughes et al., 2006).

Method

Data were derived from individual, in-depth interviews with 82 adoptive parents in 41 couples (15 lesbian, 15 gay male, and 11 heterosexual-parent families). Of these, 11 lesbian, 12 gay male, and all 11 heterosexual couples had adopted children of color. Children's average age was 5.81 years (range 4–11, $SD = 1.40$).

Procedure

All of the couples in the study had participated in a prior study on the transition to adoptive parenthood, which focused on couples who were both first-time parents and adopting their first child (see Goldberg & Smith, 2009; Goldberg, Smith, & Kashy, 2010). These couples were originally recruited during the preadoptive period (i.e., before they adopted) from over 30 adoption agencies throughout the United States. They were recontacted approximately five years after they had adopted and invited to participate in the current study. Both members of each couple were asked to complete an

in-depth questionnaire packet (see Goldberg & Smith, 2014, 2015); then, a subsample of individuals were asked to participate in in-depth, individual interviews. In identifying those who were invited to be interviewed, we made an effort to ensure diversity in family type (i.e., lesbian, gay, heterosexual), type of adoption, and child race and gender.

Participants responded to open-ended questions regarding their socialization practices around race and family structure in 1-hr telephone interviews facilitated by the principal investigator or a trained graduate student. Questions about race were only asked of parents of children of color (including biracial and multiracial children); questions about LG-parent family structure were only asked of LG parents. The following questions—the development of which was informed by the limited research in this area and our interest in racial and family structure socialization—were used in our analysis: (a) Do you talk to [child] about race? Having LG parents? How? (b) What types of messages or lessons are you trying to teach [child] about families? What types of messages or lessons are you trying to teach [child] about race? About multiracial families? About LG-parent families? (c) Have you started talking to [child] about race? About how his or her family is different from some other families in terms of being a multiracial family? (*If no*: When/how do you think you might start talking to them about it?) (d) Have you talked about the issue of having two moms/dads? About how your family is different from some other families? (*If no*: When/how do you think you might start talking to them about it?) (e) How important is it for [child] to learn about/have information about his or her racial/ethnic heritage/culture/country of origin? If important, how have you sought to teach [child] about his or her racial/ethnic heritage or culture/country of origin?

Data Analysis

Participants' responses were examined via qualitative analysis. Namely, interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a thematic analysis of the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) by focusing on participants' descriptions of their socialization processes and practices. Our analysis was informed by existing research on socialization, as well as theories of racial socialization (Lee, 2003), adoptive family functioning (Brodzinsky, 2006, 2011), and the LG-parent family life cycle (Goldberg, 2010). Specifically, we focused on possible intersections of gender, sexual orientation, race, and other social locations, and children's developmental stage.

To develop themes, we used a process of analytic triangulation, by which each of the four authors independently coded the data. This process ensures that multiple interpretations are considered, thus enhancing the credibility of

the analysis (Patton, 2002). The four coders constitute a diverse group of individuals with regard to sexual orientation and parenting statuses, which ensured that multiple perspectives were represented. We took a reflexive approach to coding, discussing our social positioning and the possible influence of our biases throughout the coding process (Gergen & Gergen, 2003). We also engaged in an iterative process of coding that involved a continual back and forth between the data and our emerging analysis. Our initial codes stuck closely to the data (e.g., "parent takes child to Black church"), but were refined and collapsed into more abstract codes (e.g., "fostering connections with communities of color") and organized within a hierarchy of codes (e.g., "fostering connections" is an example of "engaged racial socialization"). Upon forming clearly articulated codes, we applied focused coding, using the most significant codes to sort the data. The focused codes, which are more conceptual and selective, became the basis for what we refer to as the themes. At this stage, we examined whether any themes were more or less salient for LG versus heterosexual parents, for men versus women, or for parents of children of color versus parents of White children.

We engaged in check coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) throughout the analysis process to help us clarify our categories and definitions and to provide a reliability check. That is, we independently coded the data and examined the level of consistency in our codes. In calculating intercoder agreement, we examined our coding of all of the data. Early on, intercoder agreement ranged from 80%–85% (number of agreements / [number of agreements + disagreements]). We discussed coding disagreements at weekly meetings and used these discussions to refine our scheme, to resolve disagreements, and to clarify our categories. Intercoder agreement using our final scheme ranged from 90%–100%, indicating good reliability and consistency of findings between coders. The final scheme was established once we had verified agreement among all of the coded data (see Table 1). For each theme, we indicate the number of participants who endorsed it. When both members of a couple endorsed a theme, this is specified. To protect the confidentiality of participants and their children, pseudonyms are used in the presentation of results.

Results

Description of the Sample

An analysis of variance revealed that the average family incomes for lesbian-, gay-, and heterosexual-parent families differed significantly, $F(2, 37) = 5.60$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = 0.23$, such that gay couples had higher annual family incomes

Table 1. Major Themes for Race and Family Structure Socialization, for the Full Sample (*N* = 82) and by Group

Themes	Total (*n*, %)	Lesbian (*n*, %)	Gay (*n*, %)	Hetero (*n*, %)
Race	*n* = 68	*n* = 22	*n* = 24	*n* = 22
Engaged Approach	32 (47%)	13 (59%)	13 (54%)	6 (27%)
Promoting racial pride through conversations about skin, hair, and history	25 (37%)	11 (50%)	8 (33%)	6 (27%)
Fostering connections between their children and communities of color	24 (35%)	10 (45%)	12 (50%)	2 (9%)
Educating their children about racism through conversations about history and current events	20 (29%)	10 (45%)	6 (25%)	4 (18%)
Cautious Approach	23 (34%)	8 (36%)	8 (33%)	7 (32%)
Avoidant Approach	13 (19%)	1 (5%)	3 (13%)	9 (41%)
LG-Parent Family Structure	*n* = 60	*n* = 30	*n* = 30	n/a
Engaged Approach	44 (73%)	25 (83%)	19 (63%)	n/a
Promoting pride in having same-sex parents through conversations about family diversity	26 (43%)	11 (37%)	15 (50%)	n/a
Fostering a sense of belonging through community building	26 (43%)	15 (50%)	11 (39%)	n/a
Educating children about heterosexism through conversations about contemporary laws and attitudes	16 (27%)	10 (33%)	6 (20%)	n/a
Cautious Approach	16 (27%)	5 (17%)	11 (37%)	n/a

Note. Some participants engaged in multiple types of socialization strategies within the larger theme of engaged socialization. Hetero = heterosexual; LG = lesbian or gay; n/a = not available.

(*M* = $184,000, *SD* = $97,614) than lesbian couples (*M* = $104,200, *SD* = $40,722), *p* = .046; heterosexual couples (*M* = $107,500, *SD* = $40,850) did not differ from lesbian couples, *p* = .99, or gay couples, *p* = .07. Regarding education, 34% of parents had bachelor's degrees, 30% had master's degrees, 18% had doctorates, and 12% had associate's degrees/some college, and 6% had high school diplomas or had passed the general educational development (GED) test. Education level did not differ among lesbians, gay men, heterosexual women, and heterosexual men, $F(3, 76) = 1.62$, *p* = .19.

The average age of children was 5.81 years (SD = 1.40); child age did not differ by family type, $F(2, 38) = 0.21$, $p = .81$. Most were adopted via private domestic adoption (59%); the remainder were adopted internationally (21%) and via public domestic adoption (foster care, 20%). Forty-nine percent of couples adopted boys, 46% adopted girls, and 5% adopted siblings (boy/girl). Chi-square tests revealed no differences by family type in adoption route, $\chi^2(2, n = 41) = 5.23$, $p = .26$, or child gender, $\chi^2(4, n = 41) = 4.95$, $p = .29$.

The majority of parents were White (85.6%), followed by Multiracial (4.4%), Latino (3.3%), African American (2.2%), and Vietnamese (1.1%); 3.4% of parents did not provide this information. Parent race did not differ by family type, $\chi^2(2, n = 77) = 5.81$, $p = .06$. Children were mostly of color: 32% were biracial or multiracial, 23% were Latino, 17% were White, 16% were Asian, 10% were African American/Black, and 2% were Native American. Regarding parent–child racial match, in 77% of cases, the parent was White and the child was of color. In 14% of cases, both parent and child were White. In 8% of cases, the parent and the child were both of color. In 1% of cases, the parent was of color and the child was White. There were no differences in child race, $\chi^2(2, n = 41) = 3.33$, $p = .19$, or parent–child racial match, $\chi^2(2, n = 37) = 2.35$, $p = .31$, by family type.

Seventy-eight percent of children were in preschool or kindergarten; 12% were in first grade; and the remaining 10% were in second through fifth grade. Forty-four percent of children attended public schools; the rest attended private schools. There were no differences in child grade, $\chi^2(6, n = 41) = 4.56$, $p = .60$, and school type, $\chi^2(2, n = 41) = 1.23$, $p = .54$, by family type.

Thirty-two percent of families lived in the Northeast of the United States, 29% lived on the West Coast, 20% lived in the Midwest, 17% lived in the South, and 2% in Canada. Sixty-three percent lived in metro areas; the rest lived in nonmetro areas. Neither region, $\chi^2(8, n = 41) = 5.11$, $p = .75$, nor urbanicity, $\chi^2(2, n = 41) = 2.23$, $p = .33$, differed by family type.

Qualitative Findings

We found similar themes across race and LG-parent family structure, such that parents' approach to socialization varied from Engaged (direct and purposeful), with the goal of promoting racial awareness and pride; to Cautious Acknowledgment, such that parents tentatively acknowledged difference (i.e., we "don't dwell on it"), with the goal of helping their child to feel "normal"; to Avoidant, such that parents minimized and avoided discussions about race.

Engaged Approach to Racial Socialization: embracing difference and diversity. Some parents described an engaged approach to racial socialization (see Table 1) which was characterized by their endorsement of at least one of the following direct and purposeful strategies: (a) They sought to communicate directly about race, with the goal of instilling racial pride; (b) they looked for communities of color; and (c) they talked to children about racism.[2] Most of these parents engaged in multiple strategies.

Promoting racial pride through conversations about skin, hair, and history. Some parents described efforts to promote racial identity development and cultivate racial pride by engaging their children in conversations about their race, skin tone, and hair. They also used books, photographs, and other materials to impart historical and cultural information about race.

First, parents asserted that they focused on "positive messages" surrounding their child's race and engaged their child in "positive race talk" (e.g., commenting about how different skin colors are beautiful and speaking positively about the child's skin tone or racial background), with the goal of "helping [children] to feel pride" and enabling "[them] to feel comfortable in [their] own skin." Lee, a White lesbian mother, said, "We are always saying to [her], you have beautiful brown skin, you have beautiful Black hair. We happen to have White skin." In contrasting their own skin tone or hair with their children's, parents often added that their children's characteristics were similar to their birth parents', in this way affirming the reality of their child's adoption and the ties between their child and the birth family. Greg, a White heterosexual father of a 5-year-old African American son, explained, "We've talked about the fact that his skin color is different from ours and that his birth parents have different color skin than Mommy and Daddy, and his is the same as his birth parents."

Sometimes, parent–child conversations about skin tone were in response to children's internalization of messages that Whiteness is normative and superior. Tim, a White gay father, shared how his 5-year-old African American son, Ian, said to him that their family was made up of people of "different colors," adding that this was

> "because of me." I said, "Well, it's not because of you—I mean, all of us, we have a skin color and are just different." Ian said, "Yeah, but it's my skin color that's different." The way he said it, it was just kind of internalizing the [idea], "I'm the one who's the odd person out."

Parents tried to counter these types of messages by reiterating their child's skin color (and sometimes hair) as "part of who they are, which is special,"

and highlighting the multiracial nature of their family ("We are all different . . . it's not just you who is different").

In addition, in an effort to facilitate their child's racial identity development, parents also drew upon race-themed children's books (e.g., about Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks), as well as photos of their child's birth parents and/or country of origin, which they used to impart lessons about their child's personal and cultural history. Betty, a White lesbian mother of a 4-year-old, explained, "She has pictures of her birth parents—her birth father was Puerto Rican. We have books about being Latina. We've taught her lullabies in Spanish." Michael, an African American gay father of a 7-year-old African American daughter, acknowledged that he could offer a "Black perspective" and engaged in conversations about race more often than his White partner. However, Michael also noted that neither he nor his partner could provide "the Black female perspective." So, Michael read his daughter "bell hooks and Paula Giddings and poems by Maya Angelou . . . things about women of color's struggle," to help her to understand oppression and privilege in such a way that she would not take on a "victim mentality" but would become "empowered."

Fostering connections between their children and communities of color. In addition to engaging in conversations about race and racial diversity, some parents—particularly LG parents—engaged in community-building efforts aimed at fostering connections with others who shared their child's race, thus supporting their children's racial identity development and racial pride. For example, half of these parents (all LG) stated that they had chosen schools that were racially diverse, which in three cases had required moving and in one case involved turning down a job because it would have meant living "in a place where the kids would be like the only Black people in the county."

Some LG parents described explicit efforts to expand their friendship networks to include families that shared their children's racial or ethnic background. Other parents described seeking out babysitters of color for their children, as well as community activities and establishments (e.g., salons, barbershops, dance classes, churches) where they could make contact with people who share their child's race. Frank, a White gay father, noted how, after his daughter complained that her hair "wasn't pretty," he began taking her to a hair salon that specialized in African American hair. The experience of being in this environment, and developing relationships with the African American women working at the salon, "empower[ed] her to realize that she's more than her hair." Notably, several LG parents acknowledged having experienced dual concerns related to both standing out as a White person and also encountering homophobia, as they believed that communities of color

"could possibly reject us for being gay, though that hasn't happened yet." Despite such discomfort, they "plowed ahead" with establishing connections with communities of color because they saw it as important for their children.

Educating children about racism through conversations about history and current events. Some parents engaged their children in conversations aimed at educating them about racism, talking directly about racism and racial inequities: "We talk about racism, White privilege, with the message that even though people look different, everyone is equal . . . [it's not right to] judge people by how they look," stated Trevor, a White gay father of a 6-year-old Latino son. Books and movies were often used as the stimuli to begin such conversations. Henry, a White gay father, said that he had first introduced racism to his 5-year-old Latino son in the context of the movie *Hairspray* by saying, "They didn't think that Black people or people of darker skin should dance with people who have lighter skin. Isn't that kind of silly?"

Lessons about racism were typically grounded in describing historic racism. Events such as the Civil Rights Movement and important figures (e.g., Jackie Robinson, Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks) were often highlighted to illustrate how things "used" to be. Caroline, a White lesbian mother, spoke to her 5-year-old Latina daughter about historic racial discrimination (e.g., segregation in the use of water fountains), which she emphasized was "not right" and that everyone "has the right to be who they are." Contemporary racist beliefs and practices were less often discussed, with a few exceptions. Greg, a White heterosexual father of a 5-year-old African American son, described how he

> talked [to son], when we travel to the South, about how it wasn't that long ago that there would have been different bathrooms for Whites and Blacks. And we try, at an age-appropriate level, to talk about the fact that this wasn't all that long ago, and still today there's racism.

Marisa, a White heterosexual mother of a 6-year-old biracial son (Black and White), described how the death of Trayvon Martin (a Black teen) by a White man had prompted her, at the advice of a Black friend, to talk with her son about the realities of contemporary racism, and the fact that "even though he's a good boy, he's gonna have to be extra good" to avoid racist persecution.

A few parents noted that it was their children's personal encounters with racism that catalyzed discussions about racism. Theresa, a White heterosexual mother, described how someone had made "Asian eyes" at her 5-year-old daughter, prompting a conversation about racist stereotypes. Frank, a White

gay father, explained that his 7-year-old daughter "gets picked on at school for being Black . . . so we talk about the diversity in our own family, and how racism is wrong. I mean, I get hostile looks sometimes for having a Black daughter." Thus, for these families, such conversations about racism were not "abstract," but specific and personally relevant.

Most of these parents stated that their children's developmental level had shaped how they approached such discussions, whereby they felt that it was important to broach issues of racial bias, but tried to "keep things simple." Noreen, a White heterosexual mother, discussed with her 6-year-old African American daughter the fact that "'some White people don't like Black people.' She said, 'Why?' and I said, 'They're just not being loving; there's no reason. God loves Black people just like he loves White people.'" Noreen expressed that she "plan[ned] to talk more about racism with more nuance" as her daughter grew older. Sometimes, parents "weren't sure" how much their children understood about racism based on these conversations: "I think she gets it a little, but she's still young." However, by explaining what racism is, and that racism is wrong, parents were setting the stage for their children to consciously recognize racism so that they might be more likely to respond to it as they grew older.

Cautious Approach to Racial Socialization: emphasizing similarity over difference. In contrast to parents who described a purposeful, engaged approach to racial socialization, some parents described a more muted, cautious approach (see Table 1). Like the engaged parents, these parents typically asserted that racial socialization was important but also endorsed concerns that "too much" racial socialization could be harmful or difficult for several reasons: (a) fear of making the child feel "different," (b) their child's developmental level, and (c) their own lack of comfort and knowledge.

Most of the cautious parents said that they explicitly acknowledged differences between their skin color and their child's skin color (insomuch as most of these parents were White and their children were of color) but did not "make a big deal about it" or "harp on racial differences," which they believed could cause their child to feel "singled out" and would negatively affect their self-esteem and sense of belonging in their family and community. As Leslie, a White heterosexual mother of a 7-year-old Asian son, stated, "I don't think it's in Sam's best interest to be told over and over that he's different and he's not like us . . . Difference is not a message that he needs to be hearing." To help resolve the conflict between feeling compelled to acknowledge race but fearing that too much discussion would make their child feel different, these parents tended to emphasize similarities across people, such as stressing that "everyone is the same inside," that "God makes everyone different, he

created you to look like you look—but we also just talk about how, you know, we're all Christians." However, parents sometimes expressed uncertainty over this approach. Carly, a White heterosexual mother of a biracial 8-year-old daughter, shared, "I struggle between, do you want to bring up the differences, or do you want to bring up the similarities? For now, we're going the similarities route." Thus, although these parents felt that race was necessary to acknowledge, their narratives also suggested that focusing on similarities felt safer than the deeper discussions about race that the more engaged parents utilized.

In addition to highlighting concerns about the negative effects of "talking too much" about race, some parents expressed that, although they believed racial socialization was important, their children were too young to understand or were uninterested in discussing race or racial difference, rendering such discussions infrequent. In turn, although such conversations were currently not "relevant," they "plan[ned] to go into more detail" about race as their children grew older.

Finally, several heterosexual parents explained that although they saw racial socialization as important, their socialization efforts were limited because of their own lack of comfort and knowledge (e.g., because they were White). Carly, a White heterosexual mother, said, "It's hard, because I don't instinctively know, in the way that perhaps an African American parent would, how to talk about [race and racism] at an age-appropriate level." Such discomfort was a barrier to talking about race and seeking out communities of color for their children—namely, the strategies that engaged parents took. Noreen, a White heterosexual mother, described how her 6-year-old African American daughter had seen "Black people coming out of this church, and asked, 'Why don't we go to that church, Mom?' And . . . it's hard because we're connected with *our* church . . . So it's a difficult—it's just weird." Thus, these heterosexual parents contrasted with those (mostly LG) parents who voiced feelings of discomfort during the process of fostering connections with communities of color, but who tolerated such feelings to prioritize their children's connections.

Avoidant Approach to Racial Socialization: minimization of difference. A minority of parents endorsed an avoidant approach to race (see Table 1). All but two lived in rural areas and, thus, may have been exposed to little racial diversity or may have felt a high level of pressure to acculturate (Lee, 2003). These parents endorsed some of the same barriers to racial socialization as cautious parents, but unlike that group, tended to perceive race as "not important" and thus espoused "colorblind" views of their family and society.

In many of these cases, parents explained the lack of importance of race by noting that their child looked like them (e.g., was biracial or light-skinned). Thus, their children were rarely seen as a person of color, and/or the racial differences between them were rarely raised within their family or in public, so racial differences were seen as unimportant. As Josh, a White gay father of a 7-year-old biracial son, asserted, "I don't see us as a multiracial family, so no, we don't talk about [race]." Likewise, Dave, a White heterosexual father, stated that their 5-year-old daughter was biracial and "looks like us," presumably eliminating the need for racialized conversations.

A few parents reported avoiding discussions about race by changing the topic when it was brought up. Aaron, a White heterosexual father of a 6-year-old biracial daughter, tended to respond to his daughter's questions about race and racial differences by comparing race with other physical features such as eye color or clothing: "Kids have this interest in defining people by obvious characteristics, which tends to be their color. So yesterday I half-jokingly said, 'That Black man is wearing blue shoes. Why don't you talk about the man in the blue shoes?'" This strategy of deflecting discussion away from race presumably had the effect of discouraging further conversations on the topic.

In a few cases, parents stated that they not only believed that talking about race was unnecessary, but also felt that such discussions could have only negative consequences: "I don't see what good can come of it." James, a White gay father of a 5-year-old African American son, said:

> [Talking about race] makes too big a deal out of it. Why do we have to have special conditions around somebody's race? [Why should we] teach them something different? Because they're going to have a different experience because of their skin color? Everybody has a different experience because of all kinds of things. I'm . . . race agnostic. It's not an issue—it shouldn't be, but it is.

Engaged Approach to LG-Parent Family Socialization: embracing difference and diversity. As with race, some LG parents described an engaged (i.e., direct and purposeful) approach to socialization related to having two moms or dads, such that they (a) engaged in open communication about their family structure, with the goal of instilling pride in it; (b) aimed to build communities of support; and (c) talked to their children about heterosexism[3] (see Table 1). As with race, most engaged parents used multiple socialization strategies.

Promoting pride in having same-sex parents through conversations about family diversity. Some participants described engaging in regular and ongoing parent–child conversations about family diversity, with the goal of fostering a sense

of comfort with and pride in their family structure. These parents stated that they tried to communicate the message that "families are all different," that "some families have two moms, some have two dads, and some have a mom and a dad" and "our family is special." In some cases, children's books (e.g., *And Tango Makes Three, The Family Book*) were employed as a starting point for conversations about family diversity and the "unique and wonderful" nature of their families. In a few cases, parents specifically noted that in emphasizing the notion that "all families are different," they were careful not to suggest that LG-parent families were the dominant family type: "We do not try to make it sound like we're typical either."

These parents—insomuch as they were LG themselves—seemed attuned to the negative messages about LG-parented families that their children would encounter in society, and sought to buffer their child against negative messages by instilling a sense of confidence and pride in their family structure. Nathan, a White gay father of a 5-year-old Latino son, said, "We've told him that some people might tell him that having two dads is different, but that's something he should be proud of."

Fostering a sense of belonging through community building. In addition to engaging their children in direct conversations aimed at comfort and pride in their family structure, some parents made efforts to develop relationships with other lesbian-, gay-, bisexual-, and transgender- (LGBT) parent families, with the hope of fostering a sense of connection and community, as well as LGBT family pride, in their children. Trevor, a White gay father of a 6-year-old Latino son, exclaimed, "We want to make a point of connecting with other same-sex families, [because it] says to child, 'Look, just like us!' and instills [the idea] that difference is special." Some parents had joined formal LGBT-parent family groups (e.g., Rainbow Families) or attended LGBT-parent family gatherings, which they perceived as offering their children an affirming environment where they could play with other children and meet families "like us." Attending Pride parades and same-sex weddings were also seen as valuable vehicles for instilling a sense of community and belonging in their children. In this way, connecting with other LGBT-parent families, as well as attending LGBT community events, served to both highlight (a) membership in a larger community (normalization) and (b) the "specialness" of their minority family structure. Furthermore, in a few cases, parents described how they chose to move to school districts that were gay-affirming, efforts that presumably increased the chance that their children would enjoy acceptance, and develop positive views, of their family makeup.

In several cases, parents noted that cultivating friendships with other LGBT-parent families was challenging—because there were few same-sex

parents in their area, or because they did not feel a sense of "connection" with those whom they did meet. Shawn, a White gay father of a 5-year-old African American daughter, said, "We've tried hanging out with other lesbian/gay parent families, and we keep looking for it, but find it hard to build that connection. We just haven't found the right fit."

Educating children about heterosexism through conversations about contemporary laws and attitudes. Some parents engaged their children in conversations aimed to educate them about, and, more rarely, to prepare them for, heterosexism. Parents explained to them how, for example, they did not support "some laws [featured] in the news, because they would have a bad effect on gay and lesbian families," and "not everyone thinks that gay people should be able to get married." Kristin, a White lesbian mother of a 4-year-old Latina daughter, noted, "We talk about how some people think gays and lesbians shouldn't have the same rights, and explain some of the experiences of discrimination we've had." At the same time, Kristin chose to "protect [daughter] from exposure to [her] extended family which doesn't accept [her] being gay," illustrating how parents tried to minimize children's exposure to heterosexism while also educating them about it.

In a few cases, discussions of heterosexism and homophobia were prompted by children's or families' direct encounters with them. Stacy, a White lesbian mother of Latino siblings, said:

> Our son has started experiencing homophobia from peers [and] I've had to point out to him, "Well, why do you think that's a word that people think it's okay to call someone?" and explain to him that, [in their minds], being a fag is a really bad thing.

Greta, a White lesbian mother, described how her 5-year-old biracial daughter had a friend who said that having two moms was "gross." Greta responded by acknowledging that some people don't "like or agree with" same-sex couples having children, explaining that "you love who you love, it doesn't matter who it is," and taking her daughter to a same-sex wedding to celebrate same-sex commitment. Thus, Greta sought to counter negative messages by communicating what she considered to be the more important message of love.

In describing how they talked to their children about heterosexism, these parents often highlighted their children's developmental status to contextualize both their approach and their children's response to such discussions. Mindy, a White lesbian mother of a 6-year-old biracial daughter, stated, "We've said, 'Some people don't think two women or two men should be

together.' She's like, 'What??' So we try to have those conversations at an age-appropriate level—to keep the conversation at a level she understands." These parents felt that it was important for their children to be aware of and have a basic understanding of heterosexism at their age, but were also cognizant that a more detailed conversation would be more appropriate as their children grew older. They also emphasized that communications about heterosexism had to be developmentally sensitive in order not to interfere with their simultaneous goal of fostering their children's family pride.

Cautious Approach to LG-Parent Family Socialization: emphasizing similarity over difference. Some parents described a more tentative approach to talking to children about their having same-sex parents (see Table 1). These parents voiced a belief that addressing the reality of their family structure was important—like the engaged parents—but they also articulated concerns that too much discussion could be harmful or difficult for fear of making the child feel "different" and due to the child's developmental level.

Most of these parents asserted that, rather than highlighting the ways in which their family was unique, they preferred to "emphasize similarities" between their family and other family types (e.g., heterosexual couples, single parents) with the goal of helping their child "see [their] family as normal." They chose to focus on "how we're all alike; that's my philosophy," out of a desire to "teach that our family is normal." Emphasis on similarities as opposed to differences or diversity (i.e., normalizing messages) was especially prominent in gay-father families, and this approach seemed to be more individual, as opposed to shared by both members of a given couple.

Some parents also mentioned their children's developmental level as a reason for focusing more heavily on similarities and not "dwelling" on the "uniqueness" of their family structure. Namely, they felt that their child was too young to understand what it means to have two dads or two moms, and believed that if they did try to emphasize how their family was special or might face stigma, this message "would go right over [their] head[s]"; "I don't feel like [my child] would grasp it." Carlos, a Latino gay father, explained about his 5-year-old Latino son:

> We don't talk about being a gay or adoptive family very often with him, although he brings up the word "mommy" when he's playing with animals. So he knows the concept, and I wonder if he's curious about not having a mommy . . . We'll discuss it when he's older and it comes up.

Several gay men acknowledged an awareness that their children would increasingly notice their family's difference "from the mainstream" in the

future, because "there's no mommy, and that stands out." Ethan, a multiracial gay father of a 6-year-old Latino son, noted that "Children's literature is geared toward the mother. Everyone has a mother. So I'm [prepared] to address that as he gets older."

These parents, in particular, felt that their children were "too young" to understand "any negative side effects associated with being a gay parent family"; in turn, talking about heterosexism specifically seemed unnecessary or inappropriate. Seth, a White gay father of a 5-year-old White daughter, "emphasize[d] that all families are different, all families are okay. But we don't tell her, 'Someone might not like you because you have two dads.' She's young, she [doesn't need] that."

Discussion

This study explored race- and LG family-related socialization among adoptive parents of young children. To the best of our knowledge, it is the first study to explore in depth parents' socialization of their children around having LG parents. It is also the first to qualitatively assess LG parents' racial socialization.

Racial Socialization: Engage, Neutralize, or Avoid

Our findings are consistent with, but also more nuanced than, prior research on racial socialization by adoptive parents. Consistent with some prior work, our findings suggest that there is variability in racial socialization approaches among White adoptive parents (e.g., Anderson et al., 2015). About half of parents of children of color took an engaged approach to racial socialization. They endorsed enculturation attitudes similar to those described in past literature (Lee, 2003) and also sought to raise awareness about racism; however, as in prior work, racial inculcation (preparation for how to respond to racism) was rare, which was likely related to their children's developmental status (Friedlander et al., 2000). About one third of parents in our study endorsed a more restrained, cautious approach to racial socialization, whereby they acknowledged but were careful not to emphasize their children's minority race, often because they did not want their child to feel too "different." Consistent with the existing literature, some parents also voiced anxiety regarding their own competence for handling direct conversations about race (Harrigan, 2009; Robinson-Wood, 2011). Finally, a minority of parents—mostly heterosexual—endorsed an avoidant approach to racial socialization, whereby they did not talk about race or racial difference, typically because they did not believe it was relevant to their family (e.g., because their child

was multiracial and "looked White"), thus endorsing attitudes akin to the assimilationist, colorblind perspectives described in past literature (Barn, 2013; Lee, 2003). Although not voiced directly by parents, some may have downplayed differences because they believed that the most adaptive strategy for their children was to assimilate or "fit in" to dominant norms of White, biogenetically related, heterosexual-parent families (Lee, 2003).

Our findings on racial socialization add to the literature in several ways. First, we observed diversity in parents' perspectives on the role of children's developmental status with regard to racial socialization. Past work has found that White heterosexual adoptive parents of older children are more likely to engage in racial socialization than parents of younger children (Johnston et al., 2007; Robinson-Wood, 2011). In our sample, some parents explained their avoidance of racial discussions by asserting that their children were not cognitively primed to understand such conversations. Other parents described how they had considered their children's age, but in so doing, they sought to address race in a developmentally sensitive manner (e.g., by keeping discussions simple and trying not to overwhelm their children; Harrigan, 2009; Pahlke et al., 2012).

A second contribution of our study is that it shed light on the range, function, and utility of materials that adoptive parents of young children utilize in stimulating discussions about race. Parents who took a more engaged approach, for example, used a variety of historical and cultural education materials, such as children's books about the Civil Rights Movement or songs in Spanish, to situate conversations about race in a historical and cultural context. Some parents also used photos of, and stories about, their children's birth parents to help their children make sense of their race and the racial differences that they observe in their adoptive family; this also helped to ground their children's experience in the reality of their (transracial) adoption. Drawing connections between their child's race and birth parents may help children develop a stronger and more secure sense of racial identity (Vonk et al., 2010), as well as a more positive adoptive identity (Brodzinsky et al., 1992). In contrast, parents who endorsed a cautious approach to racial socialization tended to conceptualize and focus on race primarily in terms of physical characteristics such as skin tone. They did not tend to situate discussions of race within the context of history, culture, and birth family history, or use educational materials to facilitate conversation. In turn, they tended to highlight their concerns that too much discussion of physical differences would make their children feel out of place in a majority White family and community.

A third contribution is that we examined racial socialization strategies in both heterosexual and LG-parent families, which led us to document a few

important differences across family structures that can broaden research and theory pertaining to racial socialization. We found that LG parents were more likely to take an engaged or cautious approach to racial socialization, and less likely to be avoidant around discussions of race, compared with heterosexual parents. Furthermore, among parents who described an engaged approach, LG parents were more likely to describe participating in "positive race talk" than heterosexual parents, perhaps because they have come to experience their own sexual minority status as a source of positive difference, and may generalize this view to seeing other sources of differences (e.g., race) as a source of pride, leading them to engage in more intensive socialization around these differences (Richardson & Goldberg, 2010). Furthermore, despite reporting some anxiety about not fitting in or facing homophobia when intersecting with communities of color, LG parents were also more likely than heterosexual parents to describe a commitment to fostering connections with communities of color. Indeed, LG parents often rely on LGBT communities for support against marginalization (Power et al., 2014), and in turn may be especially able to relate to how important it is for their children to connect with communities of color. Furthermore, their possibly greater tolerance for situations in which they feel like outsiders may stem, in part, from the fact that they have had extensive experience with not "fitting in" with—and standing out from—traditional norms surrounding coupling and families (Oswald et al., 2005).

As noted in prior work, parents are the most influential socializing agents during early childhood and have the potential to empower their children with messages that may help to protect them against stigma associated with their minority statuses (Neblett et al., 2009). In line with this, the LG parents in our study showed a tendency to do more in the way of educating their children about racism, possibly because they have personal experience with stigma, and thus may have felt more at ease with the task of preparing their children for possible discrimination. Given that prior work suggests that adopted youth of color often wish that their parents provided more preparation for racial stigma when they were young (Gianino et al., 2009; Samuels, 2009), the willingness of LG parents to engage in this form of socialization represents a strength. This finding also has implications for theories about racial socialization, as it suggests that White adoptive parents who possess stigmatized statuses beyond race (e.g., disability) may find it useful to draw from these statuses in approaching the issue of racism with their children (Richardson & Goldberg, 2010). Perhaps even talking directly to children about one's own experiences of stigma, and one's own repertoire of strategies for handling such experiences, may be a meaningful socialization strategy.

Although few parents overall claimed to minimize racial differences, heterosexual parents, particularly men, were the most likely to report an avoidant approach (e.g., to change the subject when race was brought up). Heterosexual parents—especially fathers—may feel greater pressure to conform to heteronormative models of family building, be conscious of the ways in which their families deviate from dominant family norms (heterosexual couples with biological children), and thus be especially likely to feel discomfort or uncertainty associated with discussing their child's racial minority status (and racial differences within the family; Robinson-Wood, 2011). This finding, coupled with the greater likelihood of LG parents to endorse a racially conscious approach to socialization, can inform theorizing about racial socialization as it suggests that parents who possess multiple privileged statuses may tend to minimize their children's race, whereas parents who occupy multiple minority statuses may be more sensitive to the centrality of race in society, and the need to socialize their children around race (Goldberg, 2009).

LG-Parent Family Structure Socialization: Engage or Neutralize

Our work on LG-parent family structure socialization builds on a small body of work in this area indicating that LG parents may be more likely to discuss positive aspects of family diversity with their children than to prepare them for potential stigma, which in turn may be recalled by youth as inadequately preparing them to handle heterosexist encounters (Gartrell et al., 2000; Gianino et al., 2009). Our research similarly found that few parents described engaging in preparation for heterosexism per se; rather, they sought to "set the stage" for later conversations about bias, which they often felt were currently inappropriate due to their children's young age. Furthermore, those who did talk about heterosexism with their children sought to keep such discussions "age appropriate," and to offset them with positive messages (Gartrell et al., 2000).

Our work goes beyond prior work to explore the perspectives of both lesbian and gay parents (not just lesbian mothers; Gartrell et al., 2000; Litovich & Langhout, 2004) and to explore in greater detail the range and depth of, and reasoning behind, parents' socialization approaches. We found that, overall, lesbians were somewhat more likely to report an engaged approach than gay men and to endorse certain strategies such as parent–child conversations aimed at promoting pride and LGBT community building. Lesbians' greater socialization around their children's identities may not only reflect aspects of their sexual minority status (i.e., deviation from dominant heteronormative family building models, personal experiences with discrimination; Richardson

& Goldberg, 2010), such that they are particularly sensitive to sources of difference and potential stigma (Litovich & Langhout, 2004), but also their gender socialization as females (and good communicators; Gotta et al., 2011), which may foster greater ease with both seeking out support and also having difficult conversations (Lubbe, 2008).

For White gay men and lesbians, building connections with LGBT communities in general, and LGBT family communities specifically, is in many ways easier than seeking out and fostering connections with communities of color for their children, insomuch as they are members of the LGBT community and such efforts are more natural and less awkward to pursue (similar to the greater ease by which parents of color are able to enhance their children's racial socialization [Hughes et al., 2006]). And yet, some aspects of this process may be difficult for some LG parents, depending upon their location (e.g., if they live in a rural area) and also whether they "click" with the other same-sex couples that they meet, as noted by some participants in our study.

Gay fathers were more likely to emphasize a cautious approach to family structure socialization than lesbian mothers, such that they prioritized communication about how their families were similar to others over discussion of the ways in which they were different, unique, or "special." Given the centrality of mothers to contemporary ideas about families (Freeark et al., 2008), gay men may be especially sensitive to ways in which their children may be labeled as different due to not having a mom, leading some to highlight similarities across family structures. For others, heightened sensitivity to potential scrutiny by outsiders may prompt them to talk with their children about heterosexism. Indeed, among those LG parents who endorsed an engaged approach to family structure socialization, we found that gay men tended to address heterosexism with their children more often than lesbians, possibly because (as hinted at in our data) they suspected that their children would face more inquiries about their lack of a female parent.

Comparing Racial Socialization and LG-Parent Family Socialization

When examining socialization approaches across domains of race and family structure, it is notable that LG parents were more likely to endorse an engaged approach to family structure socialization than racial socialization, likely reflecting their membership in the LG minority category. For example, whereas many of the White LG parents likely had personal experiences with heterosexism, they lacked experiences with racism, making this form of marginalization more difficult to meaningfully discuss with their children.

Parents who took a cautious approach to socialization often worried that stressing difference would make their child feel abnormal or out of place. Yet there is an important distinction to be made regarding the location of "difference" when a parent discusses LG-parent family socialization versus racial socialization. In the case of race, the difference being discussed centers upon the physical body of the child, and how his or her skin, face, and/or hair differ from that of the parents and other people in the community. Thus, parents may fear that overemphasizing racial difference may make the child feel like he or she does not belong in their family, affecting the child's self-esteem (Brodzinsky, 2011). In contrast, in the case of having an LG-parent family, the source of difference lies in the parents' relationship (and the gender combination of the two parents) and how that differs from other families; the child herself is not the direct source of difference. In turn, parents' concern about overemphasis of difference surrounding family structure likely centers primarily on not wanting the child to feel unusual among peers and the broader heteronormative society; indeed, not of concern is making the child feel out of place within the immediate family.

Notably, parents may have more access to concrete tools to discuss race and racism in developmentally appropriate ways than they have to discuss LG family structure. Many parents described using children's books (e.g., about civil rights history), but none referenced any educational materials about LG subcultures or figures in history. Although some children's books about LG parents exist (and were referenced), few situate LG people in a historical context and few describe heterosexism (Kelly, 2012). Thus, LG parents may find that they have fewer resources to foster conversations related to LG-parent socialization.

A final finding of note is that we documented relative similarity within couples in terms of partners' approaches to race but more variability with regard to family structure, particularly gay fathers' approaches to family structure socialization. This finding suggests the possibility that children receive different things from each parent. For example, one parent may be the primary initiator of socialization efforts, and the other parent may hold back. Past work on heterosexual couples suggests that mothers are more often the ones to engage their children in conversations about difficult or complex topics (Freeark et al., 2008). In LG couples, the primary/secondary communicator distinction often evolves as a function of other factors (e.g., who has a closer relationship to the child; Goldberg, Downing, & Sauck, 2008). Furthermore, our data hinted at the possibility that, in interracial couples, this distinction might evolve along racial lines where racial socialization was concerned, such that the parent of color was more likely to engage the child in certain forms of socialization (e.g., talking about empowerment) than the

White parent. This echoes a trend found in multiracial biological-parent families, whereby the White parent is sometimes less likely than the parent of color to emphasize race as a topic of discussion with his or her biracial children because it is not as salient to the parent's individual experiences as a person who is not of color (Orbe, 1999).

Implications for Counselors

Our data point to many practical ways that adoptive parents can and do seek to support their children's positive identity development, and highlight a variety of developmentally appropriate tools (e.g., books) that they utilize to stimulate conversations about race and family structure (Anderson et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2011). As our study found that about one third of parents are cautious about socialization, wanting to socialize their children but feeling unsure about how to do so and voicing concern that too much discussion may cause harm, it seems that many parents are in need of some guidance. Counselors can introduce parents to developmentally appropriate materials that will help them establish new ways of talking about race with their children that go beyond physical differences and foster racial pride by situating race in cultural, historical, and birth family contexts (Peck et al., 2014). Counselors can also help parents seek out child care providers and other adults who reflect their child's race and/or family structure who can serve as role models (Vonk et al., 2010). Selecting schools with racial and family structure diversity is another way that parents can support children's positive identity development (Mohanty, 2013).

Counselors who work with families that are LG-parent headed and/or adoptive must have a solid sense of the developmental literature to effectively support parents in explaining issues of race and family structure to children in age-appropriate ways. In working with parents of young children, counselors should encourage them to be "attuned to their children's needs for . . . information," and should "support parents in creating a family atmosphere that makes it comfortable for children to ask . . . questions about their backgrounds and current family status" (Brodzinsky, 2011, p. 201).

Counselors should be sensitive to parents' concerns about introducing issues of identity and difference (e.g., surrounding race and family structure) "too early" or "too much." Such concerns should be validated, insomuch as focusing on only differences within the family or across families could certainly overshadow other important aspects of the child or cause the child to experience heightened sensitivity to such differences (Brodzinsky, 2011). Yet counselors should also be aware that (a) young adults who were adopted often describe wishing for more open discussion of their racial minority

status (Docan-Morgan, 2010; Samuels, 2009) and family structure (Gianino et al., 2009) in childhood, and that (b) silencing conversation around race and family structure can negatively affect parent–child relationships and child identity development (Garber & Grotevant, 2015).

Counselors should be aware that differences in socialization approach may exist between parents, whereby one parent emphasizes difference and diversity more than his or her partner. Differences should be acknowledged and discussed, as discrepant parent views on difference have been linked to adverse child outcomes (e.g., delinquency) in adolescence (Anderson et al., 2015).

Limitations and Conclusion

The fact that we interviewed adoptive parents of young children is a limitation in that we did not also interview a group of parents with older children for comparison purposes, or examine parents' socialization strategies over time. We do not know if the parents who expressed caution regarding socialization due to the young age of their children engaged in more socialization as their children matured. Future work can build on our findings to examine how early socialization practices affect parents' socialization practices as children approach adolescence—a developmental period where identity formation is especially salient for youth in general and for adopted youth specifically (Kim, Reichwald, & Lee, 2013).

Our sample was quite heterogeneous: three different groups of parents were represented (lesbian, gay, and heterosexual). Most, but not all parents, had adopted a child of color, and most, but not all parents, had young children. We also had too few parents of color to systematically examine differences in socialization approaches by parent race. We also grouped diverse children of color together (e.g., African American, Asian American, Latino/a) because of the small sample, the exploratory nature of the study, and its many foci (i.e., we examined three types of parents and two types of socialization). Future work can explore patterns of socialization according to specific child racial and ethnic background characteristics. Indeed, the socialization practices of a parent who adopted internationally from China, for example, may differ in meaningful ways from a parent with a domestically adopted African American child, because Asians face different racial stereotypes and different experiences of discrimination than African Americans in U.S. society. In addition, children's race may intersect with gender to affect parent socialization practices. For example, parents of African American girls may have different conversations about race than parents of African American boys, given that experiences of discrimination vary by gender (Goldberg & Smith, 2015). Future work can explore parents' socialization practices as they relate to the intersection of children's race, ethnicity, and gender.

A final major limitation of our study is the educated and affluent nature of the sample. Family resources inevitably affect parents' choice of communities, schools, and social networks; parents with fewer resources may be more limited in terms of the types of socialization opportunities they can provide for their children. Future work should seek more socioeconomically diverse samples of LG and adoptive parent families.

This study extends prior research and theorizing on racial socialization in adoptive families by highlighting several novel considerations that may shape the nature, extent, and type of racial socialization employed by parents. Results suggest that parents actively consider their children's developmental status in approaching racial socialization, naming ways in which they sought to simplify messages or avoid certain topics (e.g., racial discrimination). Our findings also provide insight into how and why the socialization approaches of LG and heterosexual parents may differ from each other, and may differ on the basis of domain (race vs. family structure). Future research should build on our finding that some parents expressed a tension between wanting to protect their children and seeking to educate them, reflecting an awareness of their children's young age. Following families into middle childhood and especially adolescence would provide insight into whether and how parents' socialization approaches evolve as their children develop a more nuanced sense of identity.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Notes

1. It is important to note that this study does not address ethnic socialization (i.e., "children's cultural retention, identity achievement, and in-group affiliation in the face of competing pressures to assimilate to the dominant society" (Hughes et al., 2006, p. 748) because it is beyond the scope of this article (see Anderson, Lee, Rueter, & Kim, 2015; Mohanty, 2013, for more information about ethnic socialization in adoptive families).
2. Of note is that only 34 (of 41) of the couples adopted children of color; thus, the sample percentages are out of 68.
3. Of note is that 30 (of 45) of the couples in the study were lesbian/gay; thus, sample percentages are out of 60.

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