



Published in final edited form as:

J Adolesc Res. 2012 November ; 28(1): . doi:10.1177/0743558411432636.

Cultural Socialization in Families with Adopted Korean Adolescents: A Mixed-Method, Multi-Informant Study

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Abstract

Transracial, transnational families understand and transmit cultural socialization messages in ways that differ from same-race families. This study explored the ways in which transracial, transnational adoptive families discuss race and ethnicity and how these family discussions compared to self-reports from adoptive parents and adolescents regarding the level of parental engagement in cultural socialization. Of the thirty families with at least one adolescent-aged child (60% female, average age 17.8 years) who was adopted from South Korea, nine families acknowledged racial and ethnic differences, six families rejected racial and ethnic differences, and fifteen families held a discrepancy of views. Parents also reported significantly greater engagement in cultural socialization than adolescents' reports of parental engagement. However, only adolescent self-reports of parental engagement in cultural socialization matched the qualitative coding of family conversations.

Keywords

International adoption; cultural socialization; transracial family; Korean adoption; mixed-methodology

Introduction

The mental health and well-being of transracially and transnationally adopted children and adolescents has received considerable attention in recent years, but there remains limited empirical research on the racial and ethnic experiences of this population, including the way in which racial and ethnic issues are discussed within families. Recent survey research suggests that White adoptive parents are aware of the importance of addressing race and ethnicity and make intentional efforts to expose their children to cultural activities and to discuss racial issues (Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt, Gunnar, & the International Adoption Project Team, 2006; Scroggs & Heitfeld, 2001; Tessler, Gamache, & Liu, 1999). However, adoption professionals, adoptive parents, and transracially and transnationally adopted adults often have divergent opinions about adoptive parents' preparedness and competency to provide culture-specific parenting to their children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Massati, Vonk, & Gregoire, 2004; Trenka, Oparah, & Shin, 2006). These discrepancies may reflect the different racial and ethnic expectations or experiences of parents and children, as well as methodological limitations of past studies that have generally relied on single-informant survey reports. Using a mixed-method, multi-informant study design, we assessed how families with children adopted internationally from South Korea addressed issues of race and ethnicity using self-report data and videotaped family

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

conversations. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to answer the questions, “*How do members of transracial, transnational adoptive families discuss race and ethnicity?*” and “*How do family discussions about race and ethnicity compare to self-reports from adoptive parents and adolescents regarding the level of cultural socialization within the family?*”
Cultural Socialization Using Shared Fate Theory

Kirk’s ([1964], 1984) theory of “shared fate” is premised on the understanding that there is a societal stigma toward childless or infertile individuals and couples who elect to adopt as a means to form a family. In response to this stigma, some adoptive parents reject inherent differences between adoptive and biological families. Other adoptive parents respond to the societal stigma by acknowledging differences between adoptive and biological families and finding common cause (or a shared fate) with the adopted children and the children’s birth families. According to Kirk, the psychological adjustment and health of the family depends on this level of acknowledgement or rejection of differences. Parents who are able to openly and supportively acknowledge these differences are more likely to have a healthy and adaptive level of family functioning, including better interpersonal and communication skills within the family.

Shared fate theory (Kirk ([1964], 1984) provides a useful lens and framework for understanding how transnational and transracial adoptive families handle inherent ethnic and racial differences (Benson, Sharma, & Roehlkepatain, 1994; Lee, 2003; Noy-Sharav, 2005; Rojewski, 2005; Shiao & Tuan, 2008). Specifically, transnational and transracial adoptive families may acknowledge or reject ethnic and racial experience of family members. In order for White parents to “share fate” with their racial and ethnic minority children, there needs to be an acknowledgment that racial and ethnic differences exist in the family, and an understanding that these differences hold meaning for the family. Shiao and Tuan (2008), for example, found in a qualitative study of 59 adopted Korean American adults that half of the participants grew up in families that rejected ethnic and racial differences and the other half were raised in families that acknowledged such differences. They noted, “parents in this [latter] group were also more willing to address the significance of race and racism in America...[T]hey were willing to comfort their children and advocate on their behalf if necessary” (p. 189). In other words, it is more than just acknowledging differences and celebrating cultural diversity that matters; in fact, it is possible to acknowledge difference in a way that creates distance between parents and children. To acknowledge difference in a way that shares fate on the matter of race and ethnicity, adoptive parents and their children must understand that these differences have meaning for the family and be willing to discuss these issues in an open, supportive manner.

Cultural socialization, which refers broadly to the lifelong developmental process by which individuals learn about the salience and meaning of race and ethnicity in their lives (Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1990), captures the manner and extent to which transnational and transracial adoptive families acknowledge or reject ethnic and racial differences within the family. Through observation of their parents, siblings and extended family members, as well as by instruction and opportunity, children learn to live as members of ethnic and racial groups by developing group pride and belonging, practicing customs and traditions, and acquiring culture-specific life skills, values and languages. Over the course of time, these messages and practices become internalized and serve as a source of identity development. In the case of transnational and transracial adoptive families, however, the different racial and ethnic make-up of the family can complicate cultural socialization (Lee, 2003).

Two specific types of cultural socialization experiences – ethnic socialization and racial socialization – that occur within transracial, transnational families reflect an

acknowledgement of ethnic and racial differences. *Ethnic socialization* refers to the acquisition of knowledge, values, and beliefs about one's ethnic heritage through activities, customs, practices, and materials, as well as the development of group pride and belonging. Adoptive parents' engagement in ethnic socialization typically involves activities that occur outside the home, and place a greater emphasis on cultural knowledge rather than cultural values and beliefs (Scroggs & Heitfeld, 2001; Song & Lee, 2009). *Racial socialization*, also known as *preparation for bias* (Hughes & Chen, 1997), refers to the awareness of race and oppression in society and the preparation for racism and discrimination through open discussions, opportunities to experience racial diversity, and acquisition of appropriate behaviors for different racial situations. Surveys of parents with children adopted transracially or internationally suggest the majority of parents are prepared and willing to talk with their children about racism and discrimination (Lee et al., 2006; Rojewski, 2005; Scroggs & Heitfeld, 2001; Tessler et al., 1999), although the quality of these conversations is not well understood.

The extent to which transracial, transnational families engage in these different cultural socialization activities varies considerably (Lee et al., 2006; Scroggs & Heitfeld, 2001; Tessler et al., 1999). While some families may make a concerted, ongoing effort to create a culturally inclusive environment, the default cultural socialization experience reflects a rejection of differences in which assimilation to the parents' ethnic and racial background is emphasized (DeBerry, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1996; Lee, 2003; Shiao & Tuan, 2008). Phinney (1989) described the default cultural socialization for White individuals as reflective of the fact that dominant group members do not need to understand minority group members to function in society. In these instances, minority children are raised as members of White families and feelings of sameness among family members are promoted. Shiao and Tuan (2008) observed that parents who reject ethnic and racial differences tend to have more colorblind racial attitudes and socialize their adopted Korean children as White members of society. Also, transracially adopted individuals living in predominantly White communities demonstrate more discomfort with their appearance compared to adopted individuals living in communities with more racial and ethnic minorities (Feigelman, 2000). Not surprisingly, many transracially adopted individuals who grow up under conditions of assimilation reject their own ethnicity and race and instead may identify as White (Benson, Sharma, & Roehlkepartain, 1994; Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000; Juffer, Geert-Jan Sams, & van IJzendoorn, 2004).

Cultural socialization has been studied primarily as a parent-driven phenomenon, and research in this area has tended to rely on self-report survey data from parents about their efforts to engage with their children in meaningful ways about ethnicity and race. This approach has methodological limitations as White parents and racial minority children may understand cultural socialization very differently. Interviews and surveys of transracially, transnationally adopted individuals (Samuels, 2009; Shiao & Tuan, 2008; Song & Lee, 2009) suggest that, in contrast to parent self-reports, adoptive parents often downplay racial and ethnic differences between parents and children. A recent study of non-adopted ethnically diverse families with middle-school aged children by Hughes et al. (2008) similarly found large discrepancies between self-reports and qualitative interviews with parents and children on cultural socialization. Survey measures also are likely to produce arbitrary statistics that are not reflective of family processes as they occur in "real life" (Kazdin, 2006). Moreover, communication dynamics are usually overlooked in self-report survey data as members of the family may inadvertently or intentionally silence discussion on race and ethnicity by emphasizing a colorblind approach to life that alter the conversation to more race-neutral topics (Samuels, 2009).

While cultural socialization is a process that occurs throughout a lifetime, it is particularly salient during adolescence and emerging adulthood. During these developmental periods, the individual is exploring and establishing different aspects of identity outside of the immediate family (Arnett, 2004; Erikson, 1968). The struggle to articulate the adopted child's ethnic and racial identity is evident in a number of these family conversations, especially in light of the child's developmental stage, and there is a wide variation of ethnic and racial identity exploration. This variation is due to both individual differences and forms of cultural socialization. Children receive messages and understand ethnic and racial differences as either something bad or something valued, and during adolescence and emerging adulthood, the individual resolves these positive and negative feelings about their own and other groups, and formulates the degree to which he/she identifies with these groups (Phinney, 2006). Ethnic and racial socialization within the family helps to communicate and form the adolescents and emerging adult's cultural identity (Hughes, 2003; Schwartz, Zamboana, Rodriguez & Wang, 2007), though we are still less sure of the qualitative nature of this transmission, particularly when applied to transracial families.

Study Purpose

To address the limitations and discrepancies found in previous research, we designed a mixed-method, multi-informant study with the aim of shedding greater light on how families with children adopted internationally from South Korea discuss race and ethnicity and how these discussions are related to the self-reports of adoptive parents and adolescents regarding the level of cultural socialization within the family. We also sought to understand how discrepancies (or consistencies) in self-reports between parents and teens might manifest themselves during real-time interactions among family members.

Specifically, we examined cultural socialization in transracial, transnational adoptive families with at least one adopted Korean child utilizing a triangulation method wherein both self-report and family interaction data were analyzed (Denzin, 1978; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). We first examined the consistency between parents' and adolescents' self-reports of parental involvement or engagement in cultural socialization. Drawing upon shared fate theory (Kirk, [1964], 1984), we next qualitatively analyzed the family conversations to identify families who accept racial and ethnic differences and families who reject such differences. We hypothesized that parents and children from families that acknowledged racial and ethnic differences would be more likely to report engagement in cultural socialization compared to parents and children from families that rejected such differences. Finally, by exploring the richness of the qualitative data, we examined the dynamic ways in which children and parents expand upon and challenge one another in the process of cultural socialization.

Method

Participants

The sample was drawn from the Sibling Interaction and Behavior Study (SIBS) which is a longitudinal study that consists of 409 adoptive and 208 non-adoptive families, each with an adolescent sibling pair (no more than four years apart in age) and one or both of their parents (see McGue, Keyes, Sharma, Elkins, Legrand, & Johnson, 2007, for a more complete description of the SIBS recruitment and sample). Researchers contacted adoptive families through the three largest private adoption agencies in Minnesota. Approximately two-thirds (63%) of adoptive families and more than half (57%) of non-adoptive families who were contacted agreed to participate. South Korea was the largest group of internationally adopted individuals in this sample. There were 248 transracial adoptive families with at least one child adopted from South Korea; a total of 369 Korean American adopted individuals

existed within these 248 families. To control for effects of the country of origin, for this study, we focused on transracial, transnational families that consisted of White parents and at least one child adopted from South Korea. Additionally, we only looked at data from the first follow-up assessment because it was the only time when racial and ethnic questions and surveys were administered.

Of the 248 SIBS families in the follow-up assessment, we randomly selected 30 families and coded the qualitative data of their family conversations surrounding race and ethnicity. There were 30 transracial adoptive parents (90% mothers, average age = 43.5 years) and a target child (60% female, average age 17.8 years) adopted from South Korea before one-year of age. At the time of the family interviews, the age of the adopted Korean child ranged from 14 to 22 years old. We limited our study sample to 30 families (roughly 13% of the total number of families) in order to perform an in-depth qualitative analysis. Fifteen of the families were composed of two Korean adopted children; eleven families had one Korean adopted child and either a White biological child or a non-Korean adopted child; and four families had only one Korean adopted child.

Fourteen families in this sample reported an income greater than \$80,000. All but one father had a full-time job, whereas fourteen mothers had a full-time job and the remaining mothers were part-time workers or homemakers. The majority of the parents (90%; $N = 54$) had at least some college education and 15 parents had a post-college degree. Parent's occupational status was coded using the Hollingshead occupational scale, with 7 indicating "major professional" and 1 indicating "unskilled" jobs (Hollingshead, 1975). For parents who were employed full-time, over half of the parents held professional occupations. Overall, the parent's demographics in our sample are reflective of the overall sample (McGue, Keyes, Sharma, Elkins, Legrand, & Johnson, 2007).

Procedures

Quantitative survey procedures—Parents and adopted Korean adolescents each completed parallel versions of a 6-item scale developed for the SIBS to measure parental engagement in cultural socialization (see Table 1). A rating scale with anchors "1=definitely true", "2=probably true", "3=probably false", and "4=definitely false" was used for each scale. Unlike other cultural socialization scales that focus only on parental report of the experiences of the child (e.g., Hughes & Johnson, 2001), we developed items that assessed both parents' and adolescents' perceptions of the level of parental engagement in cultural socialization with the child. For example, "My parent(s) try to help me meet people from my own race so I can learn more about it" (adolescent report) and "I try to help my child find out about his/her racial group, such as its history, traditions, and customs" (parent report). Scale items were reverse-scored so the total scale score reflected more parental engagement in cultural socialization.

Qualitative family interaction task procedures—Each family received a set of index cards comprised of a series of questions. For this study, we focused on a set of questions that asked participants to describe how issues related to race and ethnicity are discussed or negotiated within the family. The youngest sibling present during the interaction task read each of the following three questions related to race and ethnicity and family members were asked to participate in a discussion.

1. How do our ethnic and racial backgrounds affect us as family?
2. Provide an example of when your ethnicity or race has been an issue for you.
3. How well do we talk about ethnicity or race in our family?

Qualitative data coding procedures—Each of the family interaction tasks was transcribed verbatim from videotapes and the printed transcripts were coded by a coding team. The coding team consisted of an adopted Korean American psychology graduate student, a U.S.-born, non-adopted Korean American research assistant with a B.A. in psychology, and a U.S.-born, non-adopted White undergraduate student majoring in anthropology - all of whom were familiar with both the study and issues specific to adoptive families. The team discussed possible biases at the beginning of the coding process and coding questions and discrepancies were discussed during weekly meetings until the coders reached consensus. The qualitative coding focused on the thematic content and coherence of the family conversations (Fiese & Spagnola, 2005), and used Kirk's (1964, 1984) theory surrounding rejection and acknowledgement of differences as the framework for developing the codes. Using this theoretical framework, but focusing on racial and ethnic differences, coders separated transcripts into one of three categories: *Acknowledgement of Differences*, *Rejection of Differences* and *Discrepancy of Views* (one member acknowledges differences while another rejects differences; see Table 2). In this phase of coding, the family transcripts were coded as a whole and each family conversation was coded into only one category. As these categories were already developed and are mutually exclusive, interrater reliability was high, and the coding team established an 85% agreement.

The second phase of the coding involved multiple readings of the transcripts, in which each member of the coding team independently developed categories relevant to cultural socialization. The coding team then decided upon these categories through consensus, conferred with an external auditor as a reliability check, and developed a coding book that included a list of categories and detailed definitions. These five categories focused on the content of the conversations and included: *Colorblindness*, *Ethnic Socialization Activities*, *Racial/Ethnic Identity*, *Racial Socialization/Preparation for Bias*, and *Child-Choice* (see Table 3). These categories are not mutually exclusive and individual transcripts often contained more than one category. The coding team established an 80% interrater agreement using four of the thirty (13%) cases in the study. During weekly meetings, any discrepancies were arbitrated through a consensus process. Transcripts of the thirty conversations were entered into the qualitative software program NVivo (QSR, 2006).

Results

Quantitative Analysis

We examined the correlation between parent and adolescent scales to determine the level of agreement between parents and adolescents regarding parental engagement cultural socialization. The correlation between parent and adolescent versions of the cultural socialization scale was .62 ($N = 28$, $p < .01$), suggesting consistency between parents and adolescents as to the meaning of cultural socialization. Next, we conducted a paired-samples t-test to determine whether there was consistency between parents' and adolescents' perceptions of the amount of parental engagement in cultural socialization. Parents ($M = 3.05$, $SD = .74$) reported significantly greater engagement in cultural socialization than adolescents' reports of parental engagement ($M = 2.71$, $SD = .79$), $t(27) = 2.68$, $p = .012$, two-tailed.

Next, the qualitative data was coded into three broad categories: rejection of differences, acknowledgement of differences and discrepancy of views. Among the 30 families, there were six families coded as *rejection of differences* in which family members explicitly agreed that race and ethnicity had no effect on their family. There were nine families coded as *acknowledgement of differences* in which family members agreed that race and ethnicity had an effect on the family. The remaining fifteen families were coded as *discrepancy of*

views in which family members disagreed on whether race and ethnicity had an effect on the family.

We hypothesized that parents and adolescents who acknowledged differences within the family would report greater parental engagement in cultural socialization than those who either rejected or held a discrepancy of views regarding racial and ethnic differences among family members. We conducted a series of one-way analysis of variance tests using Kirk's (1984) family types as our independent variable and parents' and adolescents' self-reported perceptions of parental engagement in cultural socialization as our dependent variable. Contrary to hypothesis, no significant differences were found in parents' self-reported engagement in cultural socialization across Kirk's family types, $F(2, 25) = 1.94, p = .16, \eta^2 = .13$; although parents from families that acknowledged racial and ethnic differences had a mean score of 3.42 ($SD = .64$) on self-reports of engagement in cultural socialization compared to parents from families that rejected ($M = 2.63, SD = .51$) or held discrepant views ($M = 3.00, SD = .79$) on ethnic and racial differences. Consistent with hypothesis, there was a significant group difference in adolescent reports of parental engagement in cultural socialization, $F(2, 27) = 10.48, p < .001, \eta^2 = .44$. Adolescents from families that either acknowledged or held a discrepancy of views regarding racial and ethnic differences among family members reported greater parental engagement in cultural socialization than adolescents from families that categorically rejected ($M = 1.78, SD = .57$) racial and ethnic differences within the family. No significant differences were found between adolescents from families that either acknowledged ($M = 3.31, SD = .42$) or held a discrepancy of views ($M = 2.66, SD = .75$) regarding racial and ethnic differences between family members.

Qualitative Analysis

Rejection of differences—Families in this category agree that race and ethnicity do not matter in their lives and emphasize that family members are essentially all the same. The following conversation with a White mother, her adopted Korean American son, Andrew (age 21), and her biological White son, Brian (age 20) illustrates rejection of difference. All names have been changed to preserve anonymity.

How do our ethnic or racial backgrounds affect us as a family?

Brian: "It doesn't"

Provide an example of when your ethnicity or race was an issue for you.

Andrew: "When?"

Brian: "Come on..."

(Mom shrugs)

Andrew: "Alright, next."

How well do we talk about ethnicity or race in our family?

Brian: "Never."

Andrew: "Exactly, moving on."

Mom: "Because it's not really an issue, is it?"

Andrew: "No, it doesn't seem to be."

Although coded as rejection of differences, a more nuanced analysis of the conversation reveals that there is little space allowed for discussion regarding race and ethnicity. For instance, when the adopted Korean American child, Andrew, slightly engages in the conversation, Brian encourages the family members to move on to the next question and

Andrew confirms that it is time to move on until the next question. The mother remains in the background until finally asking, “*It’s not really an issue, is it?*” Race and ethnicity, as an issue, is silenced in this particular conversation. There also were no objections to the assertion that race and ethnicity had no effect on the family in the other family conversations coded as rejection of differences.

Colorblindness, defined as the claim not to see or acknowledge race or ethnicity in people, is an underlying theme of every rejection of differences conversation. In these conversations, racial and ethnic differences are minimized or overlooked when they are actually salient lived experiences. For example, one White mother says to her son, Conrad (age 17), “*See when I look at you I don’t see Asian, or White, or whatever, I just see you.*” After Conrad replies with “*Mhmm,*” the mother ends with “*My babies.*” Although the mother is aware of Conrad’s race, she chooses not to see his race as something that is relevant to his identity. These colorblind statements appear innocuous and may represent a parent’s attempt to simply see the adopted child as his/her child; however, a potentially integral part of the child’s identity is invalidated by intentionally choosing not to “see” a child’s race or ethnicity.

Additionally, an adoptive parent’s desire to create stability and permanence may lead to a rejection of differences (Kirk, 1964, 1984). In the following conversation, a mother forgets her Korean American sons are a different ethnicity and race, and recounts times when people mention Daniel (age 18) and his brother’s different shaped eyes.

Mom: “I go back to when you guys were in the grocery cart at Target or whatever, and someone said, “Oh, did you adopt them?” I’m like, how would they know that? I forget that you’re Korean because you’re my kids and you don’t see color...”

Daniel: “I’d just be like ‘duh.’”

Mom: “Oh be quiet.”

The choice to forget about race, and claim not to “see color” is not unique to transracial adoptive parents, but reflects a societal encouragement to “see beyond” race on ideological grounds (Plaut, 2002). In this conversation, the Korean American son, Daniel, responds to his mother’s story by stating that he would just say “*Duh*” to such people, reflecting a base level awareness that he is a different race than his mother.

Acknowledgment of differences—Family members in this category acknowledge that ethnic and/or racial backgrounds affect the family in some way. There is a wide range in the quality and appropriateness within the category. Kirk’s conceptualization of acknowledgement of differences emphasizes an open environment in which adoptive parents are willing to openly engage in difficult issues related to the adoption, reflecting a healthy communication style within the adoptive family. In our sample, the acknowledgement of differences category often reflects an open communication style, but there is a diversity regarding the quality of communication. Some family conversations reflect Kirk’s notion of “shared fate” and other families acknowledge difference in a way that is neither healthy nor constructive. For the latter families, the acknowledgment of differences serves as a barrier or separation between parents and children, instead of a common “fate” that they both share. This may include an inappropriate overinsistence of differences (Benson et al., 1994; Brodzinsky, 1990; Noy-Sharav, 2005) in which feelings of discomfort are manifested in an artificial insistence or overemphasis of the child’s culture.

The following conversation is an example of an adoptive parent who acknowledges racial and ethnic differences in daily life experiences, emphasizing the way in which their family’s unique racial and ethnic background has influenced many important decisions in their life,

even as the adopted Korean son, Eric (age 17), is reluctant to acknowledge race and ethnicity affecting the family.

Eric: They don't affect us. I don't see it affecting us.

Mom: Eric, it affects us everyday because we've made a ton of decisions in our lifetime because of that.

...

Eric: It doesn't affect us at all. We're...we mix two cultures that's how it affects us, a little bit.

Mom: Yeah, that's true. It affects us in where we live, and where you go to school. Those are choices that we made based partly on [race and ethnicity], where we go to church...

Eric: I guess so...

Mom: We chose that church because of our family, that we'd fit in there.

Although Eric initially denied the relevance of ethnicity and race in the family, he later acknowledges his satisfaction with their conversations about race and ethnicity, as illustrated by his reply to how well they discuss ethnicity and race in the family, *"Talk about it? Well I'd say pretty good...it's not that big a deal, but when we do, we talk about it well."*

Families who acknowledge differences are more likely to engage in various *ethnic socialization* practices, including explicit or extrinsic cultural activities and more subtle efforts that attempt to transmit the adopted child's ethnic culture (Lee et al., 2006; Scroggs & Heitfeld, 2001; Tessler et al., 1999). In this study, the majority of ethnic socialization activities referred to explicit or extrinsic isolated activities that often occurred in the distant past (i.e., not in the past year). Common examples of ethnic socialization included eating or cooking Korean food, displaying artifacts (books, dresses, art), and attendance of language school and culture camp as younger-aged children. Interestingly, the emphasis often is on the physical or tangible activity, and generally do not involve more subtle, daily socialization efforts (e.g., a discussion about the adopted individual's identification as an adopted Korean American).

There were a number of conversations that reflected ambivalence regarding ethnic socialization. Family members would initially deny that race and ethnicity had any affect on the family and then would acknowledge sporadic, extrinsic efforts. For example, a Korean adopted male, Frank (age 15), stated, *"Well, we're Korean...umm other than eating Korean food sometimes and having Korean stuff hanging on our walls, it doesn't affect us as a family."* A similar comment was made by another Korean adopted male, Greg (age 20), who stated, *"I don't know, Mom and you [Dad] do a lot of things for Korean culture, so that's really good I guess, but I don't know how it affects us."* FF and GG were able to identify that their families participate in explicit ethnic socialization but were unable to articulate how, if at all, it affects the family. This may reflect a lack of understanding about the word "affect," as some interpreted the word "affect" as something negative, or it may reflect the fact that the family is not affected at a level beyond extrinsic ethnic socialization.

The *racial/ethnic identity* theme includes discussions surrounding the adopted individual's racial and/or ethnic identity that move beyond ethnic socialization activities to a discussion about what it means to live as a racial minority in America or as an adopted Korean American. In the following conversation, a White mother recounts a previous conversation in which her Korean American daughter, Hannah (age 16), said that *"the Asians"* were calling her *"whitewashed."*

Mom: "I don't know...I thought it was interesting though when you said that you know they called you whitewashed or something...the Asians..."

Hannah: "Mom, you might want to say this to me before you tell the camera."

Mom: "Well, I mean, you're not Asian but you're not White, so you're kinda..."

The mother concludes that Hannah is neither Asian nor White and that she is at a loss as to how to classify Hannah racially. The message communicated to Hannah is that her racial identity is either nonexistent or difficult for even her mother to identify. Hannah's experience with other Asian Americans further complicates her ethnic identity development, as she is neither "Asian enough" nor racially White.

Discrepancy of views—In this category, one family member denies that racial and ethnic backgrounds affect the family in some way, and another family member acknowledges that race and ethnicity have some impact on the family. This discrepancy between a parent and child reflects a lack of shared fate regarding the effect of racial and ethnic backgrounds. This category includes cases of incongruence among individuals regarding how much cultural socialization actually occurred within the family. In some cases, cultural socialization efforts were questioned and then were quantified. For instance, parents would wonder whether or not they participated in cultural socialization "enough." In other cases, parents and children disputed each other's levels of interest or effort. One adopted Korean American daughter accused her mother of never speaking about race or ethnicity "*unless it's for [Korean culture camp] because [Mom] doesn't want to talk about it.*" The mother replied by asking, "*What opportunities do we have? What events have happened that make us need to talk about it?*" This response places the burden on the daughter to come up with opportunities and events in which the family might have discussed race and ethnicity, and also classifies these discussions as reactions to some other event. In this conversation, the 14-year-old daughter replies to her mother's questions by stating, "*Or... we could just talk about it.*"

The following conversation between a White mother and her adopted Korean American daughters, Izzy (age 16) and Jessica (age 14), illustrates the incongruence experienced by parents and children regarding cultural socialization.

How well do you talk about ethnicity or race in our family?

Mom: "We talk about being Danish and being Korean."

Izzy: "How much?"

Jessica: "We don't talk about being Korean."

Izzy: "We don't"

Jessica: "We don't"

Mom: "Yeah, we do."

Izzy & Jessica: "No, we don't."

Mom: "You don't think you talk about being Korean?"

Izzy: "Because I'm American"

Mom: "Oh so you're saying that you don't talk about it. We've had a lot of classes and we've gone to Korean camp."

Izzy: "Yeah, but I think that was like 5 years ago though."

Mom: "Well, I don't bring it up everyday, 'Gee good morning, how does it feel to be Korean?'"

Throughout the conversation the mother continues to identify ethnic socialization activities (i.e. classes, Korean camp), and later references her daughter's traditional Korean dress and her "*beautiful Korean hair*." Nevertheless, it is interesting that both Jessica and Izzy are insistent that the family does not "talk about being Korean." This discrepancy in ethnic socialization activities (i.e. Korean camp vs. talking about being Korean American) highlights of the importance of examining both the quality and the type of socialization experiences from the perspective of parents and children.

A discrepancy of views between a parent and child often reflects different experiences with *racial socialization*, or *preparation for bias*, defined as teaching or preparing children for experiences with prejudice (Hughes & Chen, 1997). Conversations within this theme include discussions that address previous discrimination, with a focus on parental reactions and non-reactions to incidences of discrimination. In the following conversation, the adopted Korean American daughters, Katherine (age 15) and Lily (age 17), recognize that their mother's advice of ignoring discrimination is not sufficient. The conversation begins with Katherine mentioning incidents of discrimination at her school and stating that these discriminatory comments do not bother her anymore.

Mom: "So as far as an example, you were just saying it's just other kids at school saying things right?"

Katherine: "It's like the most common thing in the world."

Mom: "Right, that's..."

Lily: "It's just people being, it's people being ignorant and..."

Mom: "Yeah."

Lily: "But you [Mom] I think, we've mentioned it to you before and you blow it off. I don't know."

Katherine: "What?"

Mom: "What?"

Lily: "She does... You kind of just blow it off, like, 'Oh.'"

Katherine (to Mom): "You say, 'Just ignore it.'"

Lily: "'Just ignore it, be a bigger person, it doesn't matter.' I think Dad just has a better handle on it than you do for some reason."

In this case, the mother's advice to ignore the problem is perceived by her daughters as "*blow[ing] it off*," whereas the father is perceived as more willing to engage in racial socialization conversations.

An issue that arose in some cases involved the child's right to choose how much, or how little, cultural socialization to participate in, and the parent's reaction to the child's level of interest. This type of cultural socialization, often referred to as "*child choice*," places the responsibility upon the child to either notify parents when they want to engage in cultural socialization or respond positively to the adoptive parents' attempts at cultural socialization (Tessler, Gamache, & Liu, 1999). In certain cases, the adoptive parent referenced a time when they tried to discuss or participate in aspects of cultural socialization when the adoptee was young, and then never tried again because it was perceived as a negative experience. In the following excerpt, a mother discusses previous socialization attempts with her Korean American son Michael (age 21) when he was a child.

Michael: "I don't think we ever talked about it."

Mom: “Maybe only, I think we tried, when you were younger we tried to do things that maybe reflected more of your cultural heritage, but you really didn’t...”

Michael: “I didn’t really care.”

Mom: “You didn’t care, that was part of it, and we tried to you know, you know like, last year we went to that Korean restaurant but you didn’t even go with us to that.”

Michael: “I did.”

Mom: “That’s right, you did. It was good food.”

Michael: “I didn’t think so.”

The mother forgetting that Michael was present is even more surprising because it does not appear that this family visits Korean restaurants on a regular basis (i.e. “last year we went to that Korean restaurant”). In this case, as in other families, children might not want to participate in all the activities their parents suggest, but as the child develops mentally and emotionally, future openings to participate in cultural socialization may arise.

Discussion

We set out to understand how transracial, transnational adoptive family members talk with each other about ethnicity and race, and how these conversations compare to self-report survey data from both adoptive parents and adolescents. Based on self-report survey data from White adoptive parents and Korean American adolescents, there appears to be a common understanding about the meaning of cultural socialization. There also appears to be a mismatch in perceptions regarding the extent of parental engagement in cultural socialization, with parents reporting greater engagement than what was perceived by their children. This self-report discrepancy is consistent with other studies (Hughes, 1997; Birman, 2006) that demonstrate that cultural socialization and acculturation are reported differently from the perspectives of parents and teens. Parents and teens may conceptualize the type, amount and quality of cultural socialization differently, and these differences may affect individual perceptions of cultural socialization.

We found a similar discrepancy when we compared survey data with qualitative data obtained from the family interaction task. Adolescent self-reports of parental engagement in cultural socialization matched the family coding, but parent self-reports did not; that is, adolescents from families that reject differences reported lower amounts of cultural socialization than adolescents from families that acknowledge differences or hold discrepancy of views. By contrast, parents from families that reject differences reported similar amounts of cultural socialization as parents from families that acknowledge or hold discrepancy of views regarding differences. These results demonstrate that parental self-reports of cultural socialization in adoptive families are not always consistent with adolescent reports or observational data. Parents in this sample seemed to over-estimate their engagement in cultural socialization with their children. This discrepancy likely reflects a lack of common understanding regarding cultural socialization and, as Kirk ([1964], 1984) noted, a lack of shared fate between parents and children. Interestingly, from the adolescents’ perspective, the lack of significant difference between families that acknowledge differences or hold a discrepancy of views suggests that only one family member needs to acknowledge racial and/or ethnic differences within families.

There was considerable variability in conversations coded as acknowledgement of differences. The majority of family conversations reflected Kirk’s ([1964], 1984) notion of “shared fate” while others acknowledged difference in a way that created distance between

parents and children. Families whose acknowledgement of differences reflects Kirk's notion of shared fate are more likely to engage in explicit or extrinsic cultural activities as well as more subtle efforts at transmitting elements of the adopted child's ethnic culture (Lee et al., 2006; Scroggs & Heitfeld, 2001; Tessler et al., 1999). It is possible that families who either over-acknowledge differences or acknowledge differences in a way that does not "share fate," but rather create distance between parents and adolescents, may actually produce results similar to those associated with rejection of differences (Brodzinsky, 1990).

Parents in our sample had a tendency to reference their engagement in more overt or extrinsic types of ethnic socialization activities (i.e. culture camp or visiting a Korean restaurant), but did not mention engagement in conversations surrounding discrimination or racial and/or ethnic identity. This finding is consistent with previous research that has found that parents, possibly in an effort to engage in a shared fate, encourage children to learn more about their ethnic heritage through ethnic socialization activities (e.g. learning to use chopsticks, eating ethnic food; Scroggs & Heitfeld, 2001; Tessler, Gamache, & Liu, 1999), although qualitative data from our study show that adopted individuals may not always perceive extrinsic ethnic socialization experiences as engaging their racial or ethnic identity, and desire more conversational engagement around topics related to discrimination or racial/ethnic identity. This discrepancy may reflect distinct forms of cultural socialization activities, ethnic socialization and racial socialization, that can occur in transracial, transnational families, beyond the default parenting practice of assimilation (Lee, 2003).

Surveys of adoptive parents with children adopted transracially or transnationally suggest the majority of parents are prepared and willing to talk with their children about racism and discrimination (Lee et al., 2006; Rojewski, 2005; Scroggs & Heitfeld, 2001; Tessler et al., 1999), but our study demonstrates variance in the frequency, type and quality of these incidents of racial socialization. There also is a discrepancy of views regarding conversations around racial identity, racism and discrimination. Research has found that perceived discrimination is positively related to behavioral problems, emotional distress, and lower self-esteem for transracially adopted individuals (Cederblad et al., 1999; Hubinette & Tigervall, 2009). At the same time, some members of transracial adoptive families may feel less fluent and less comfortable discussing racial socialization. For many families, ethnic socialization activities (e.g. going to Korean camp, visiting a Korean restaurant, etc.) were easier to identify and discuss than racial socialization activities (e.g. being a minority in the United States, understanding one's racial identity, etc.). The results indicate that racial socialization is more challenging to engage in and parents may feel uncomfortable raising the topic of racial socialization with their Korean American children.

There are a number of implications from the results of this study. Though there are individual differences among children regarding the extent they are comfortable exploring and discussing racial and ethnic differences in the family, parents are encouraged to continually engage with their children about the amount and quality of cultural socialization that is most comfortable at the child's particular developmental stage. Parents are encouraged to consider both ethnic and racial socialization experiences, and to expose and engage adopted children in developmentally appropriate conversations around racial differences within the family and community. Parents who are uncomfortable engaging in racial socialization often wait for their children to "choose" to voice their interest in discussing such matters. While a parent is not encouraged to force a child to learn about his/her culture if it is not in the best interest of the child or not developmentally appropriate, there remains a need to encourage interest in cultural exploration and to look for future opportunities to discuss the child's culture (Huh & Reid, 2000). It is particularly important for parents to discuss the day-to-day lived experience of the child's culture as an adopted Korean American growing up in a predominantly White environment. If a child feels that

the parents are uncomfortable discussing racial issues, these conversations are quickly aborted and these issues avoided (Docan-Morgan, 2010). If a parent places the responsibility on the child to raise the issue of race or ethnicity, a “child choice strategy,” it implies that learning about the child’s race and culture is not particularly important to the parents.

Interestingly, the majority of parents in our sample believed they are comfortable speaking about race and ethnicity with their child and that they were encouraging their child to learn more about their racial and ethnic identity and culture. Yet the family conversations reflected a diversity of comfort and competence levels, with one mother actually making “Asian eyes” to her children while a White father in another family is learning and speaking Korean to his children at home. Future recommendations, especially in regards to policy change, surround the need for a systematic and comprehensive training program for transracial adoptive parents that move beyond knowledge and extrinsic aspects of culture, and instead to develop racial awareness (for parents and children) and multicultural planning (McPhatter, 1997; Vonk & Angaran, 2003).

There were a number of limitations in this study, including the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the families, as well as possible cohort effects related to the eight-year span during which study participants were adopted. This cohort of adopted Korean Americans may have had similar pre- and post-adoption experiences. It is important to replicate these findings with other cohorts of adopted Korean youth and their families, as well as with families who adopted children from other countries, such as China or Guatemala. The parents who adopted from South Korea during this time also may have similar beliefs, values and parenting styles, particularly if these adoptive parents were exposed to similar messages from their adoption agencies and social workers regarding cultural socialization. It is important to note that the adoptive families within our sample adopted their child approximately 17 years ago, and throughout the years, there has been an increase in resources and education regarding the importance of racial and ethnic socialization. At the same time, the type, quality and frequency of racial and ethnic socialization within transracial adoptive families remains a salient issue, and the results of this study add to the growing body of research examining the many layers of cultural socialization. Finally, this study did not examine differences between families with one versus multiple children who were adopted from South Korea. Future research should address the impact of sibling relationships on ethnic and racial socialization.

Another limitation includes the difficulty of understanding the subtext of the conversations and the conflation of the terms race and ethnicity, especially as represented in informal conversations among family members. The prompt questions asked families to talk about both “racial and ethnic” experiences, and the vast majority of the families did not separate racial experiences from ethnic experiences. While we acknowledge that race and ethnicity are distinct concepts, we paired them together throughout this paper because the prompt question and the frequent conflation of race and ethnicity. There also exists both a clear dialogue that is expressly spoken and a dialogue that remains unspoken. The unspoken subtext of the conversation represents the participant’s inner thoughts, emotions and motives. Li (2001) defines the use of a racial subtext as “the hiding of racial signification in a benign discourse and conveying it in coded language.” In the case of transracial adoptive families, there are many reasons why a family as a unit or individual family members would demonstrate reluctance to discuss issues of race and ethnicity. Kirk ([1964], 1984) hypothesized that adoptive parents who reject differences may hold unresolved feelings regarding the adoption experience, and previous research indicates that adopted Korean Americans may also minimize race in an attempt to protect their adopted parents from feeling either hurt or uncomfortable (Docan-Morgan, 2010; Shiao & Tuan, 2008).

The issue of race and ethnicity within adoptive families has a number of political and highly emotional viewpoints, and this study is part of an ongoing discussion on the importance of racial and ethnic socialization for transracial adoptive families. The knowledge gained from this study can provide important information for parents of transracially adopted individuals regarding the need to help children process their experiences as racial minorities. These family conversations reveal the complexities of cultural socialization and the differing ways adoptive parents and adopted children, within the same family, understand cultural socialization. A mixed-method, multi-informant approach to studying cultural socialization allows for a nuanced understanding of how themes of race and ethnicity are negotiated within the context of transracially adoptive families.

Acknowledgments

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The research was supported in part by a NIMH K-01 award (MH070740) to Richard M Lee, and in part by USPHS Grants (Grant Number AA11886 and Grant Number MH066140) awarded to Matt McGue.

The authors would like to thank Matt McGue, Lisa LeGrand, Meg Keyes, Moin Syed, Kevin Hynes, Amy Westmoreland, Alex Nelson, Alison Hu, The Race, Ethnicity, Migration & Mental Health Lab, and the Narrative, Identity, Culture and Education Lab at the University of Minnesota for their contributions.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Items on the Adolescent (N = 30, $\alpha = .94$) and Parent (N = 28, $\alpha = .94$) Cultural Socialization Scales

Adolescents/Parents	M	SD
1. My parent(s)/I try to help me/my child find out about my own/his/her racial group, such as its history, traditions, and customs	2.83/3.11	1.02/.79
2. My parent(s)/I try to participate in cultural practices of my own/my child's racial group, like eating food, listening to music, or celebrating holidays/learning the language	2.56/2.89	.97/1.03
3. My parent(s)/I try to help me/my child meet people from my own/his/her race so I can/in order to learn more about it	2.60/2.89	.93/.88
4. My parent(s)/I try to find out about my own/my child's racial group, such as its history traditions and customs	2.97/3.36	.89/.83
5. My parent(s)/I try to meet people from my own/my child's race so they/I can learn more about it	2.33/2.96	.88/.79
6. My parent(s)/I hardly ever encourage me/my child to participate in cultural practices of my own/his/her racial group, like eating food, listening to music, or celebrating holidays/learning the language	2.77/3.11	.94/.83

Table 2

Description of Broad Coding Categories

Theme	<i>n</i>	Description	Sample Response(s)
Acknowledgement of Racial and Ethnic Differences	9	Acknowledgement that racial and/or ethnic differences affect family members	<i>"It affects where we live, where you go to school, and where we go to church"</i>
Discrepancy of Views	15	Some denial and acknowledgement that racial and/or ethnic differences affect family members	<i>Child: "You never want to talk about it"</i> <i>Parent: "What's there to talk about?"</i>
Rejection of Racial and Ethnic Differences	6	Denial that racial and/or ethnic differences affect family members	<i>"It's not really an issue"; OR, "When I look at you, I don't see Asian...I just see you...my babies"</i>

Table 3

Description of Response Themes

Theme	Description	Sample Response
Colorblindness	Claiming not to see or acknowledge racial or ethnic differences in people	<i>"I forget that you're Korean because you're my kids and I don't see color."</i>
Ethnic Socialization Activities	Explicit or extrinsic efforts to transmit the adopted child's ethnic culture	<i>"We eat Korean food sometimes and we have Korean stuff hanging on our walls..."</i>
Racial/Ethnic Identity	Discussions about adoptees' racial/ethnic identity or what it means to live as a racial minority	<i>"Well, I mean, you're not Asian, but you're not White, so you're kinda..."</i>
Racial Socialization or Preparation for Bias	Teaching or preparing children to respond to experiences with racial prejudice/discrimination	<i>"Just ignore it. Be a bigger person. It doesn't matter."</i>
Child-Choice	Placing the responsibility on the child to lead in ethnic/racial socialization	<i>"We tried...last year we went to that Korean restaurant but you didn't even come with us to that."</i>