

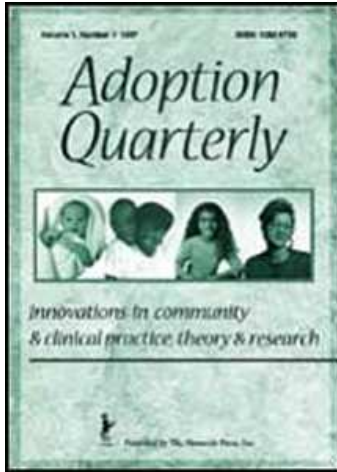
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### Transracial Adoption by Lesbian, Gay, and Heterosexual Couples: Who Completes Transracial Adoptions and With What Results?

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## **Transracial Adoption by Lesbian, Gay, and Heterosexual Couples: Who Completes Transracial Adoptions and With What Results?**

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*Who completes transracial adoptions and with what results? This study explored pathways to and outcomes of transracial adoption among 106 families headed by lesbian (n = 27), gay (n = 29), and heterosexual (n = 50) couples. Transracial adoptions occurred more often among lesbian and gay than among heterosexual couples, and they occurred more often among interracial than among same-race couples. Lesbian and gay couples were more likely than heterosexual couples to be interracial. Transracial adoptions were also more common among those who gave child-centered reasons as compared to adult-centered reasons for adoption. There were, however, no differences in adjustment between transracial and inracial adoptive families. Implications for child welfare agencies and for legal and policy debates are discussed.*

*KEYWORDS, adoption, transracial, lesbian and gay, sexual orientation, motivations to adopt*

Who completes transracial adoptions, and what implications do these adoptions have for children who are adopted? Transracial adoption, defined as the placement of children with a parent or parents of a different race, usually refers to the domestic or international adoption of racial or ethnic minority

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children by White parents (Vonk & Angaran, 2001). Racial minority children are overrepresented in the child welfare system in the United States; many more racial minority children than White children are waiting to be adopted (Brodzinsky, Smith, & Brodzinsky, 1998; Brooks & Goldberg, 2001; Brooks & James, 2003). Most prospective adoptive parents are White, and transracial adoptions have become more common than they once were (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002; Brooks & James, 2003). A need still exists for more prospective adoptive parents who can provide children with permanent homes (Bradley, 2007; Brodzinsky et al., 1998; Ryan, Pearlmuter, & Groza, 2004). Lesbian women and gay men may be more open than heterosexual adults to transracial adoptions (Goldberg, 2009), suggesting that they might be candidates to fill this need. Questions remain, however, as to whether lesbian and gay adults are more likely than others to undertake transracial adoptions and, if so, with what results for children.

Both transracial adoption and adoption by lesbian and gay adults have been topics of considerable debate in the United States. Transracial adoption has historically been a controversial topic in child welfare policy and practice in the United States (Brodzinsky et al., 1998; Rushton & Minnis, 1997; Smith, McRoy, Freundlich, & Kroll, 2008). The placement of African American children with White parents has been a particularly sensitive subject (Brodzinsky et al., 1998). In 1972, the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) advocated same-race placement for African American children, which slowed transracial adoption by White families (Alexander & Curtis, 1996). This resistance led to policy changes by many child welfare organizations, such as the Child Welfare League of America, suggesting that inracial placements were to be preferred over transracial placements for children in need of adoption. As a result, transracial adoptions occurred less often in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Brodzinsky et al., 1998).

Opponents of transracial adoption have argued that placing children in homes where family members are of a different race than the child impedes positive racial identity development and causes long-term psychological problems in adoptees (Brodzinsky et al., 1998; Shireman & Johnson, 1986). On the other side, advocates of transracial adoption have noted the disproportionately large number of racial minority children in the child welfare system and the relative lack of minority foster or adoptive parents (Brodzinsky et al., 1998). Throughout the 1980s, research pointed to the advantages of transracial adoption (Alexander & Curtis, 1996). In 1994, the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) was signed into law in the United States, and it prohibits discrimination on the basis of race in foster and adoptive placements (Alexander & Curtis, 1996). With more racial minority children in the child welfare system than racial minority foster or adoptive families available, the practice of transracial adoption has become more widely accepted in recent years.

There has also been substantial debate surrounding lesbian and gay adoption. At the present time, adoption by lesbian and gay adults is legally

permissible in some parts of the United States, but not in others (Patterson, 2007). For example, the adoption of children by same-sex couples is legal in California, New York, Massachusetts, and a number of other states (Gates, Badgett, Macomber, & Chambers, 2007; Kaye & Kuvalanka, 2006). On the other hand, Florida bars any lesbian or gay individual from adopting children, and Mississippi prohibits same-sex couples from adopting (Matthews & Cramer, 2006). A number of states, including Arkansas and Utah, also bar unmarried couples from adopting; this policy effectively prohibits same-sex couples (who cannot marry in these states) from becoming adoptive parents (Associated Press, 2008; Gates et al., 2007; Matthews & Cramer, 2006; Patterson, 2007; Wald, 2006). Recently, Kentucky and Tennessee have considered legislation that would limit foster care and adoption to heterosexual married couples (Hipps, 2009). In sum, the extent to which sexual orientation of prospective adoptive parents should be considered when placing children in adoptive homes remains controversial.

Research can inform debates about both transracial adoption and adoption by lesbian and gay adults. Although the qualitative experiences of transracially adopted children may be substantially different than those of inracially adopted children (Bagley, 1993), empirical research has not found transracial adoption to place either children or parents at risk for maladjustment (Alexander & Curtis, 1996; Rushton & Minnis, 1997). Rather, children adopted transracially have been described as well-adjusted (Brodzinsky et al., 1998; DeBerry, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1996; Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007; Moffatt & Thoburn, 2001; Shireman & Johnson, 1986). This research has, however, been limited to studies of transracial adoptions by heterosexual parents.

Research has also indicated that lesbian and gay adults are capable parents (e.g., Patterson, 2002; Tasker & Patterson, 2007) who are as satisfied in their relationships as are heterosexual couples (Kurdek, 2005). The healthy development of children born to lesbian and gay parents has also been documented by numerous studies (e.g., Anderssen, Amilie, & Ytteroy, 2002; Bos, van Balen, & van den Boom, 2007; Patterson, 2006, Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). Specifically regarding lesbian and gay adoptive parents and their children, a study by Erich, Leung, and Kindle (2005) reported that adoptive family functioning is similar among families headed by lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parents. More recently, Farr, Forssell, and Patterson (2009) have reported that psychological adjustment of parents and children in adoptive families headed by lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parents is high. Drawing on data from the same sample of families discussed in the current report, Farr and her colleagues (2009) found that psychosocial adjustment of adopted children was unrelated to parental sexual orientation. These studies did not, however, compare transracial and inracial adoptions among lesbian-, gay-, and heterosexual-parented families.

There is little research involving samples of transracial adoptive families headed by both same- and other-sex couples (Ryan, 2007). Some studies address the motivations of heterosexual parents to adopt children (e.g., Bausch,

2006; Hollingsworth, 2000), but there is little research specifically addressing the motivations of transracial adopters or of lesbian and gay adoptive parents (e.g., Brooks & James, 2003; Goldberg, 2009). Furthermore, the studies that have been conducted have often involved only pre-adoptive parents. Thus, willingness to adopt racial minority children has been examined, but data regarding rates of transracial adoption have been sparse or nonexistent. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, there has been no research addressing child development and family outcomes in transracial adoptive families that included lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parents. A small number of studies about transracial adoption have included lesbian and heterosexual adoptive parents (e.g., Goldberg, 2009), but no study has simultaneously included gay adoptive fathers. Gay fathers have been particularly underrepresented in the research literature as compared with lesbian mothers (Tasker & Patterson, 2007).

This study was designed to learn more about who undertakes transracial adoptions and with what results for children and parents. Working with a sample of lesbian-, gay-, and heterosexual-parented adoptive families, it was anticipated that more same-sex than other-sex couples had completed transracial adoptions. It was also expected that, in accordance with earlier findings (e.g., Rosenfeld & Kim, 2005), more same-sex than other-sex couples were involved in interracial couple relationships. Couples' reported motivations for adoption were also explored to assess the degree to which they might be related to transracial adoptions. In addition, child development and parenting were evaluated in transracial and inracial adoptive families headed by lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples. Despite potentially different pathways to transracial adoption among the three groups of parenting couples, similar outcomes were expected in terms of child adjustment, parenting approaches, and levels of parenting stress among transracial and inracial adoptive families.

## METHOD

### Participants

Adoptive families were recruited through five adoption agencies in the United States. Using the agencies' domestic adoption records, all two-parent families were identified who lived in the same household with an adopted child between 1 and 5 years of age and in a jurisdiction where joint adoptions are legally recognized for both same-sex and other-sex couples. The primary cooperating agency, in the Mid-Atlantic United States, identified 44 same-sex couples (23 female same-sex couples and 21 male same-sex couples) and 73 other-sex couples who were eligible. All were invited to participate. Families were contacted by letters, e-mails, and/or phone calls, depending upon the available information in agency files.

Sixty-three families (33 same-sex-parented; 30 other-sex-parented) who completed a domestic adoption with the cooperating agency agreed to participate. Thus, response rates were 75% for same-sex couples and 41% for other-sex couples. Families headed by same-sex couples were more likely to agree to participate than were families headed by other-sex couples,  $\chi^2(1, n = 44) = 12.70, p < .001$ . The most common reason parents gave for nonparticipation was lack of time.

As a result of recruiting families from four additional agencies in the Northeast, the South, and along the West Coast of the United States, 43 families headed by 11 female same-sex couples, 12 male same-sex couples, and 20 other-sex couples agreed to participate. The adoptive families contacted the researcher directly after receiving an e-mail or a letter from the agency director inviting participation. Due to concerns about confidentiality, the number of families who were eligible to participate could not be disclosed by these agencies, so participation rates cannot be calculated for this subsample.

The final sample consisted of 106 families with a total of 212 parents and 106 children. Participation was entirely voluntary, and the researcher obtained written consent from all participating parents. The study was approved by the University of Virginia's Institutional Review Board.

Demographic characteristics of participating transracial and inracial adoptive families are shown in Table 1. There were 56 same-sex-parented families, including 29 male couples and 27 female couples, and 50 other-sex-parented families. Parents averaged 42 years of age and children averaged

**TABLE 1** Demographic Information About Transracial and Inracial Adoptive Families Headed by Lesbian, Gay, and Heterosexual Parents

	Transracial Adoptive Families ( <i>n</i> = 45)	Inracial Adoptive Families ( <i>n</i> = 61)	<i>t</i> -Test or $\chi^2$ Test
Parents ( <i>n</i> = 212)			( <i>df</i> = 211)
Age, years	42	42	<i>t</i> < 1
Race (% non-White)	19	20	$\chi^2 < 1$
Education (% graduate degree)	55	51	$\chi^2 < 1$
Work status (% full-time)	78	76	$\chi^2 < 1$
Annual family income (\$K)	149	179	<i>t</i> = 1.44
Same-sex parented family	67%	43%	$\chi^2 = 12.02^*$
Interracial relationship	33%	0%	$\chi^2 = 47.37^*$
Religious affiliation	62%	63%	$\chi^2 < 1$
One child in household	49%	62%	$\chi^2 = 3.79$
Children ( <i>n</i> = 106)			( <i>df</i> = 105)
Age at visit, months	35	37	<i>t</i> < 1
Sex (% girls)	41	56	$\chi^2 = 4.43$
Race (% non-White)	100	21	$\chi^2 = 129.43^*$
Developmental delays	11%	3%	$\chi^2 = 5.15$

Note. \**p* < .05.

A Bonferroni correction was applied to control alpha inflation in the face of multiple comparisons.

3 years of age. Eighty-one percent of parents were White ( $n = 171$ ) and 19% were non-White ( $n = 41$ ). Parents were generally well-educated. Most worked full-time and had family incomes above national averages (see Table 1). The sample was composed of 86% same-race couples ( $n = 91$ ; 78 White couples and 13 Black couples) and 14% interracial couples ( $n = 15$  couples). About half of the sample was drawn from the East Coast. Most families lived in Maryland or Washington, DC ( $n = 56$ ), but some lived in New York ( $n = 7$ ), another Northeastern state ( $n = 4$ ), or a Southern state ( $n = 7$ ). About one-third of the sample was drawn from the West Coast, with some living in Washington ( $n = 6$ ), Oregon ( $n = 8$ ), and California ( $n = 18$ ). Most families (74%) lived in an urbanized area (over 1,000 people per square mile), and of these families, 20% lived in an urban area with over 10,000 people per square mile. Only 19% of the sample lived in rural areas (fewer than 500 people per square mile). All parents in this sample were the legal parents of their adopted children. The majority of adoptive families had one child living in their household.

Children in the sample were adopted at birth or during the first few weeks of life. There were 53 boys and 53 girls in the sample. Children were 55% non-White ( $n = 58$ ) and 45% White ( $n = 48$ ). In the sample, 42% ( $n = 45$ ) were transracial adoptive families (i.e., at least one parent was White and the adopted child was a child of color) and 58% ( $n = 61$ ) were inracial adoptive families (i.e., parents and their adopted child were of the same race). The most typical example of a transracial adoptive family was a White couple with a Black or biracial child. Among inracial adoptive families, 21% ( $n = 13$ ) were Black couples with Black children.

Transracial and inracial adoptive parents and children were, on the whole, demographically similar. Transracial and inracial families were not significantly different in terms of parent age, education level, religious affiliation, family income, urban versus rural residence, number of children in the household, child sex, child age, child age at adoption, or child developmental status. Despite a few differences, transracial and inracial adoptive families were generally well matched (see Table 1). No parents in the sample were biologically related to their adopted child, and all intentionally became adoptive parents. We have reported demographic differences and similarities as a function of parental sexual orientation elsewhere (Farr et al., 2009).

In addition to children and parents, 76 teachers or outside caregivers of the children provided data for the study, representing a 72% response rate for the sample of 106 children. There was no difference in response rate between teachers of transracial and inracial adoptees. Most teachers or outside caregivers were female. Most had attended at least some college. Their average length of experience in teaching or childcare was 11 years. Thus, teachers or caregivers were predominantly women who were experienced in their teaching or caregiving roles. There were no significant demographic differences between teachers of transracial and inracial adoptees.

## Materials

We collected data regarding child adjustment, parenting approaches, and parental adjustment, as well as parents' motivations to adopt children.

### CHILD ADJUSTMENT

Children's behavioral adjustment was assessed using the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) as well as the Teacher Report Form (TRF) for children 18 months to 5 years old (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000). Both measures include subscales of internalizing and externalizing behavior problem scores, as well as a total behavior problem score. All 100 items are rated on a scale from 0 to 2 (0 = not true; 1 = somewhat or sometimes true; 2 = very true or often true). The internalizing behavior subscale assesses children's somatic complaints, anxiety, depression, and withdrawn behaviors. An example item is "looks unhappy for no good reason." The externalizing behavior subscale assesses children's disruptive, aggressive, and delinquent behaviors and includes items such as "hits others." The total behavior problem score is a summary score of the internalizing and externalizing behavior problems in addition to problems with attention, thought, sleep, and social behavior.

The CBCL and TRF were chosen for this study because they are widely used instruments, with national norms available for clinical and nonclinical populations as a function of child age and sex (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000). To compare across age and sex of children, the age and sex-specific raw scores on the CBCL and TRF were converted to standard *T* scores. Higher *T* scores represent a greater number of behavior problems. The population mean for total behavior problems on the CBCL has been found to be  $50.1 \pm 9.9$ , and for the TRF,  $50.0 \pm 10.6$ . Clinical means for total behavior problems have been found to be  $61.7 \pm 11.1$  and  $62.2 \pm 9.6$  for the CBCL and TRF, respectively (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000). After 8 days, the test-retest reliabilities (*r*) for the total problems scale were .90 and .88 on the CBCL and TRF, respectively. Across all scales, the mean *r* was .85 on the CBCL and .81 on the TRF after 8 days (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000). Stability correlations were .61 over 12 months for the CBCL and .59 for the TRF over 3 months (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000). The validity of the CBCL has been demonstrated in a number of studies (e.g., Cohen, Gottlieb, Kershner, & Wehrspann, 1985). For more details about the construct, content, and criterion-related validity of the CBCL, see Achenbach and Rescorla (2000).

### PARENTING APPROACHES AND PARENTAL ADJUSTMENT

Parenting stress was evaluated through use of the Parenting Stress Index–Short Form (PSI/SF; Abidin, 1995). The PSI/SF consists of 36 items with three 12-item subscales: Parental Distress, Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction, and Difficult Child. For each item, respondents rate their extent

of agreement or disagreement (5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree). The three subscales assess separate aspects of parenting stress. The Parental Distress subscale evaluates individual perceptions of the parenting role experience; an example item is "I feel trapped by my responsibilities as a parent." The Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction subscale measures the degree to which a parent feels that his or her child meets expectations in the parent-child relationship; an example item is "I expected to have closer and warmer feelings for my child than I do and this bothers me." The Difficult Child subscale assesses children's behavioral challenges; an example item is "my child seems to cry or fuss more than most other children." A total stress score can be tallied from the scores of the three subscales and provides an indication of overall parenting stress. The total stress score assesses stress related to parenthood but excludes stressors that may stem from other events or roles in a parent's life. Higher scores on the PSI/SF indicate higher levels of parenting stress, with a mean of  $71.0 \pm 15.4$  from a large sample of parents (Abidin, 1995). Total stress scores of more than 90 suggest clinical levels of parenting stress. Over a period of 6 months, the PSI/SF has demonstrated a test-retest reliability of .84 (Abidin, 1995). For a detailed discussion of the validity of the PSI/SF as compared with other similar parenting scales, see Abidin (1995).

Parenting behaviors were investigated using the Parenting Scale, consisting of 30 items measuring the effectiveness of parent discipline techniques (Arnold, O'Leary, Wolff, & Acker, 1993). The Parenting Scale includes three subscales: laxness (e.g., "When I say my child can't do something, I let my child do it anyway"), overreactivity (e.g., "I get so frustrated and angry that my child can see I'm upset"), and verbosity (e.g., "I threaten to do things that I know I won't actually do"). The laxness subscale includes 11 items and measures the extent to which parents observe misbehavior but do not discipline their child. The overreactivity subscale includes 10 items and measures parents' emotional reactivity during disciplining incidences with children. The verbosity subscale includes 7 items and measures the extent to which parents engage in begging, coaxing, or lengthy explanations as discipline methods with their child. Respondents answer items on a scale from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating less effective parenting and more dysfunctional child discipline. An average of all three subscale scores provides a Total Parenting Scale score. The population mean is  $2.6 \pm .6$ , the clinical mean is  $3.1 \pm .7$ , and the test-retest reliability of the Parenting Scale over a period of 2 weeks is .84 for the Total Parenting Scale score (Arnold et al., 1993).

#### MOTIVATIONS TO ADOPT

Adoptive parenting couples' motivations to adopt were assessed using a self-report questionnaire developed for the present study. All parents were asked to fill out a "Motivations to Adopt" form, in which they could select any of

10 items that applied to their family's experience. Parents could also add information about what led them to adoption if they wished. Example items include "there are many children in need and waiting to be adopted," "my partner and/or I faced challenges with infertility," and "my partner and/or I did not have a strong desire for biological children."

### Procedure

All eligible adoptive families were initially contacted with a letter or an e-mail from the director of one of the cooperating adoption agencies that described the study and invited participation. Telephone calls followed the letters or e-mails for those families who adopted through the primary cooperating agency. These calls were made by a researcher and provided an opportunity for the researcher to describe the study further and to request participation. Due to concerns about confidentiality, telephone numbers of families recruited from the four additional cooperating agencies could not be disclosed.

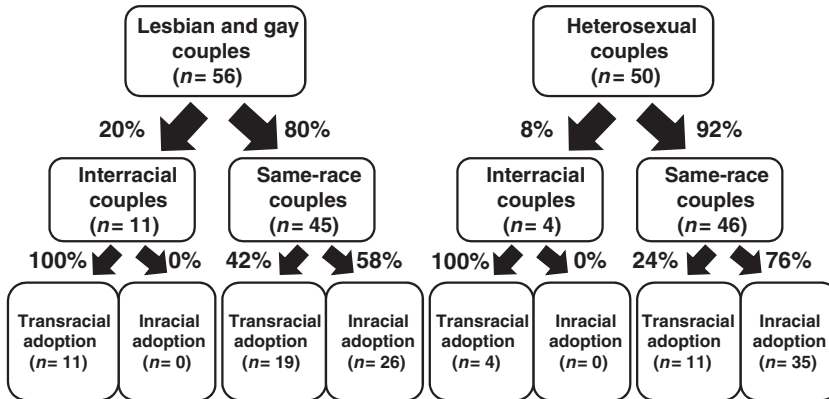
After families agreed to participate, a researcher scheduled a 2-hour home visit. During this visit, parents completed a demographic information form and the questionnaires described above. Participating families also asked their child's teacher or day care provider to fill out the teacher report form, which was mailed back to the researcher in a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

## RESULTS

The results are presented in two main sections. In the first section, findings with regard to the identities of transracial adoptive families are presented; these findings address the question, "who is most likely to complete transracial adoptions?" In the second section, results with regard to parent and child outcomes are presented; these findings address the question, "what are the results of transracial adoptions for parents and children?"

### Who Is Most Likely to Complete a Transracial Adoption?

As expected, the findings revealed that more same-sex than other-sex couples had completed transracial adoptions. Indeed, fully two-thirds of the transracial adoptions represented in this sample had been completed by same-sex couples. Seen from another perspective, the results showed that 54% of same-sex couples, but only 30% of other-sex couples, had completed transracial adoptions. In other words, most same-sex couples did and most



**FIGURE 1** Pathways to Transracial Adoption for 106 Adoptive Families Headed by 56 Same-Sex Couples and 50 Other-Sex Couples.

other-sex couples did not complete transracial adoptions; this difference was significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 212) = 12.02, p < .01$ .

Why were same-sex couples more likely than other-sex couples to complete transracial adoptions? One reason was apparently that more lesbian women and gay men were involved in interracial couple relationships than were heterosexual women and men, and those in interracial couple relationships were much more likely than others to have completed transracial adoptions. Eleven of 56 (20%) same-sex couples were interracial, as compared to only 4 of 50 (8%) other-sex couples,  $\chi^2(1, N = 212) = 5.90, p < .05$ . Every one of the interracial couples in this sample had completed a transracial adoption. These findings are summarized in Figure 1, which shows that, in part because they were more likely to be involved in interracial couple relationships, same-sex couples were more likely than other-sex couples to have completed a transracial adoption.

Couples' reports about their motivations for adoptive parenthood were also related to their likelihood of having completed a transracial adoption (Table 2). Couples who reported child-centered reasons for adopting (e.g., "there are many children in need and waiting to be adopted") were more likely to have adopted across race (50%) than within race (34%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 212) = 5.54, p < .05$ . On the other hand, couples who reported adult-centered reasons for adopting (e.g., "challenges with infertility") were less likely to have completed a transracial adoption (35%) than an inracial adoption (52%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 212) = 6.29, p < .05$ . This pattern held true both for same-sex and other-sex couples.

On the other hand, many factors were unrelated to transracial adoption. These included parental age, education level, family income, religious affiliation, urban versus rural residence, and number of children (see Table 1). Several of the reported motivations for adoption were not related

**TABLE 2** Likelihood of Transracial Adoption as a Function of Attitudinal Variables

Reported Motivation to Adopt	Transracial Adoption ( <i>n</i> = 45)	Inracial Adoption ( <i>n</i> = 61)	$\chi^2$ Test df = 1
Wanted to have children	42%	58%	$\chi^2 < 1$
Challenges with infertility	35%	52%	$\chi^2 = 6.29^*$
There are many children in need and waiting to be adopted	50%	34%	$\chi^2 = 5.54^*$
Have friends or family that were adopted	36%	64%	$\chi^2 < 1$
Did not want to be pregnant	38%	64%	$\chi^2 < 1$
Did not have a strong desire for biological children	44%	56%	$\chi^2 < 1$

Note. \**p* < .05

to likelihood of transracial adoption, including wanting to have children, having friends or family with adopted children, not having a strong desire for biological children, and not wanting to be pregnant (see Table 2).

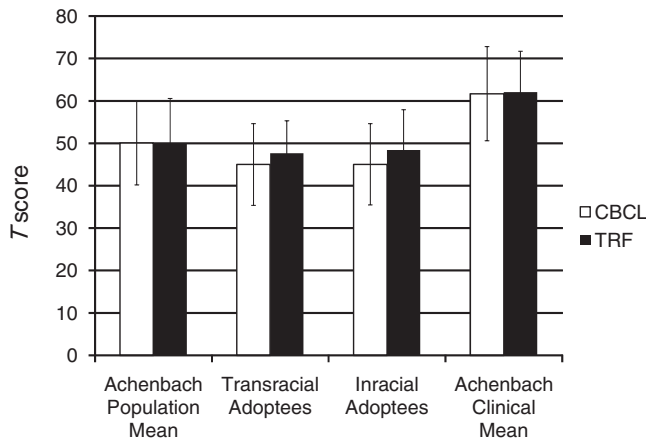
### Outcomes of Transracial Adoptions for Parents and Children

As expected, assessments of child development and parenting revealed no significant differences in parent or child adjustment between transracial and inracial adoptive families (Table 3). According to reports of both parents and teachers, children in both family types were functioning well. Average scores for internalizing, externalizing, and total behavior problems were significantly below clinical cutoffs. There were no significant differences in

**TABLE 3** Means, Standard Deviations, and *t* tests for Measures Between Family Types

Measures	Transracial Adoptive Families ( <i>n</i> = 61 families)		Inracial Adoptive Families ( <i>n</i> = 45 Families)		<i>t</i> -Test (df = 211)
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Child Behavior Checklist (1.5 to 5 years)					
Total BP	45.03	9.64	45.07	9.57	<1
Internalizing BP	44.00	10.30	42.88	9.11	<1
Externalizing BP	46.60	9.36	46.36	9.57	<1
Teacher Report Form (1.5 to 5 years)					
Total BP	47.68	7.65	48.48	9.43	<1
Internalizing BP	45.35	6.94	45.17	9.78	<1
Externalizing BP	49.94	7.45	50.26	9.39	<1
Parenting scale	2.56	0.49	2.56	0.44	<1
Parenting stress index					
Total parent stress	60.61	12.88	60.28	14.46	<1

Note. Numbers include 212 parent reports (for 106 children) and 76 teacher reports (for 34 transracial adoptees, 42 inracial adoptees); BP = behavior problems.



**FIGURE 2** Parent and Teacher Reports of Total Child Behavior Problems as a Function of Transracial Adoptive Status ( $N = 212$  parents;  $n = 90$  transracial and  $n = 122$  inracial adoptive parents;  $N = 76$  teachers). CBCL = Child Behavior Checklist for children 1.5 to 5 years of age. TRF = Teacher Report Form for children 1.5 to 5 years of age.

parents' or teachers' reports of children's behavior problems as a function of transracial adoptive status (see Figure 2). On measures of internalizing, externalizing, and total behavior problems, transracial adoptees did not differ from inracial adoptees. There were also no differences between boys and girls in number of behavior problems as reported by parents or teachers. Although correlations between parent and teacher reports of child behavior problems were moderate, they were significant; all agreed that on average children were well adjusted (see Table 3).

Regardless of whether they had adopted across or within race, parents reported similar parenting approaches and similar levels of parenting stress (see Table 3). On the whole, parents reported relatively low levels of parenting stress and utilized effective parenting techniques. Parents were well adjusted on average as compared to available population norms. Thus, as expected, structural comparisons between family types revealed no significant associations between transracial adoption status and the adjustment of parents and children.

## DISCUSSION

The main aims of this study were to identify couples who were likely to have completed transracial adoptions and to assess the overall success of these adoptions. Even though all couples adopted from the same agencies, we found that same-sex couples were more likely than other-sex couples to undertake transracial adoptions. Interracial couples were also more likely

than same-race couples to complete transracial adoptions. Same-sex partners were more likely than other-sex partners to be involved in interracial couple relationships. Those who gave child-centered reasons for adoption were also more likely than those who gave adult-centered reasons to have completed a transracial adoption. Regardless of how the adoptions came about, however, the current findings revealed no differences in adjustment among parents or children in interracial versus same-race families. Thus, the findings suggest both that transracial adoptions are more common among same-sex than among other-sex couples and that these adoptions are quite successful overall.

The first main finding was that transracial adoption was more common among same-sex than among other-sex couples. Why might this have been the case? The current findings reveal at least one possible explanation, namely that, consistent with findings from the United States census (Rosenfeld & Kim, 2005), same-sex couples were more likely than other-sex couples to be interracial. Because interracial couples were the most likely to complete transracial adoptions, the tendency of lesbian and gay individuals to enter into such relationships is also associated with their likelihood of completing transracial adoptions. Indeed, racial integration in lesbian and gay urban communities represents a potential strength of lesbian and gay parents who adopt children of color (Stacey, 2006).

The results indicated that lesbian, gay, and heterosexual interracial couples were more likely to adopt across race than were same-race couples. Increased contact with racial minority groups increases interracial comfort (Emerson, Kimbro, & Yancey, 2002), and this could be related to greater openness to transracial adoption. Couples who are interracial may perceive fewer barriers to racial diversity for their families and as a result may be more willing to adopt a child of color.

The results also showed that couples who gave child-centered reasons for adoption were more likely than others to have undertaken transracial adoption. Thus, a couple who gave as a reason for adoption the idea that "there are many children who need permanent homes" was more likely than one who gave an adult-centered reason (such as "struggles with infertility") to adopt across racial lines. At the same time, many other reasons that parents offered for adoptions were unrelated to the couples' likelihood of having completed a transracial adoption. For instance, "having friends or family members who had been adopted" and "not wanting to be pregnant" were unrelated to the likelihood of transracial adoption.

These findings about the likelihood of transracial adoptions by different types of couples have important implications. Since racial minority children are overrepresented in the child welfare system in the United States (Alexander & Curtis, 1996; Brodzinsky et al., 1998; Brooks & Goldberg, 2001), and since most adoptive parents are White (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002), transracial adoptions are the ones most likely to redress imbalances between

waiting children and available adoptive homes. The willingness of lesbian and gay adults to adopt across racial lines suggests a powerful reason that child welfare agencies and others may benefit from recruiting prospective parents from lesbian and gay communities (Goldberg, 2009; Tyebjee, 2003).

The current findings also revealed that both transracially and inracially adopted children and their parents were well adjusted. There were no significant differences in terms of children's behavior or adjustment between families that had completed inracial or transracial adoptions. Both parents and teachers agreed that, on average, the children were well adjusted. Parents of transracial and inracial adoptees reported using similarly effective parenting discipline techniques and had comparable levels of parenting stress. These findings are consistent with existing findings on transracial and inracial adoptees and their parents, as well as those on lesbian and gay parents and their children (Anderssen et al., 2002; Brodzinsky et al., 1998; DeBerry et al., 1996; Erich et al., 2005; Farr et al., 2009; Patterson, 2006; 2007; Shireman & Johnson, 1986; Tasker & Patterson, 2007). Thus, despite different pathways leading to transracial adoption among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parents, both parents and children in these families appeared to be well adjusted.

The current findings can help to inform contemporary debates about transracial adoption and about adoption by lesbian and gay adults. A number of theorists and researchers have continued to suggest that inracial adoptive placements and placements with married heterosexual parents may be in the "best interests" of children and the community (Hollingsworth, 1998; Rushton & Minnis, 1997). Some have argued that it would be preferable for waiting children to be adopted inracially and/or with married heterosexual parents; regardless of whether this view is correct, it is not always possible for children to be adopted by same-race heterosexual married couples (Alexander & Curtis, 1996; Andujo, 1988; Brodzinsky et al., 1998; Hollingsworth, 1998). If transracial adoptions by lesbian and gay couples are not considered, some children may never be adopted. Children who are never adopted suffer many negative outcomes as compared to those who find permanent homes (Simmel, Barth, & Brooks, 2007; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). Hence, transracial placements of children with lesbian or gay couples may often serve children's best interests.

The current results could be useful to child welfare agency workers in identifying prospective transracial adoptive parents. These findings suggest that agency workers should be alert to the reasons that prospective parents give for considering adoption, inasmuch as these reasons may often be related to important decisions. The current findings could serve as a potential guide to agency workers who wish to reach out to couples who might be particularly likely to adopt racial minority children.

There are several strengths of the current study. All parents, regardless of sexual orientation, were recruited through the same five adoption agencies; thus, all parents adopted infants from the same group of adoptable children.

This is the first study to have recruited adoptive family participants in such a systematic manner. This is also the first study to address predictors and outcomes of transracial adoption among families headed by lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parents. This is also one of the first studies to elucidate some of the diverse configurations of contemporary transracial adoptive families (Frasch & Brooks, 2003; Samuels, 2009).

Some limitations of this study should also be noted. At the time of data collection, children were, on average, 3 years of age. Some children in the sample were probably too young to understand their adoptive status (Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992; Brodzinsky, Singer, & Braff, 1984). For those children who were adopted transracially, the process of coming to understand race and developing a racial identity in the context of a transracial adoptive family will likely happen only as the children grow older (Brodzinsky et al., 1992; Brodzinsky et al., 1984). The current data are entirely cross-sectional in nature, and it would be beneficial to assess child development and family functioning among these families again when children are older. Another issue is that only those families in which both parents had been awarded legal recognition were included here. It thus remains to be seen whether the current findings would hold true in jurisdictions that allow only one lesbian or gay parent in same-sex couples to be legally recognized. From a broader perspective, it will be helpful in future research to learn more about the ways in which social, cultural, and legal contexts affect well-being among inracial and transracial adoptive families headed by lesbian and gay parents.

Overall, the current findings are consistent with the view that regardless of parental sexual orientation, children can flourish in transracial adoptive families. Because a larger pool of prospective adoptive parents is needed and because adult capacities for success in parental roles are not linked with race or sexual orientation, the findings suggest that transracial adoptions by qualified lesbian, gay, or heterosexual parents can be in the best interests of children. If adoption agencies were to expand recruitment efforts to be more inclusive with respect to interracial and same-sex couples, then more children could be placed into permanent adoptive homes. In short, the current findings suggest that adoption agencies should work with all qualified prospective adoptive parents and that transracial adoptions should be advocated as creative approaches to family formation that are beneficial for children.

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