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# ADOPTION AND RACIAL/CULTURAL SOCIALIZATION IN DIVERSE ADOPTIVE FAMILIES: ASSOCIATIONS WITH DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS, ACADEMIC OUTCOMES, AND PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

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As families in the United States (U.S.) are increasingly diverse in race and family structure, it is essential to understand family socialization around identity and possible associations with family relationships and child development. In this study, we investigated adoption communicative openness (i.e., how parents talk about adoption) and racial/cultural socialization among 96 adoptive families (46% completed transracial adoption) with lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parents and school-age children ( $M_{age} = 8$  years) who lived across the U.S. We found that these practices (described by parents) were associated with children's reports of parent-child relationships and children's teachers reports of their academic functioning. We discuss the importance of considering distinct forms of identity socialization practices, as reported by different informants, among adoptive families diverse in race and parental sexual orientation, and as related to associations with individual outcomes and family relationships. We describe how our results could inform future research, policy, and practice.

Adoption by sexual and gender minority adults has increased over recent years in the United States (U.S.; Farr & Goldberg, 2018). Same-sex couples are more likely to complete adoptions, including transracial adoptions (TRA), than are different-sex couples (Goldberg & Conron, 2018). This is in part due to progressive adoption policy expanding who can adopt children (Farr & Goldberg, 2018) but also because many lesbian and gay (LG) adults report adoption as their preferred method as a pathway to parenthood (Goldberg et al., 2012). Thus, we were interested in exploring dynamics of diverse family socialization among TRA families with LG parents. Specifically, we examined adoptive communicative openness (ACO), or how families talk about adoption, as well as racial/cultural socialization (RCS), or how families instill a set

of values and beliefs about racial/cultural groups (Seol et al., 2016). We also investigated how ACO and RCS practices were associated with child academic functioning and parent-child relationships. Exploring these family dynamics are important in that ACO and RCS have been found to be associated with similar child outcomes among same-race White adoptive families and non-adoptive families of color, respectively (e.g., greater social competence; Hughes et al., 2016; Simon & Farr, 2020). That is, ACO and RCS are found to be associated with positive child outcomes regardless of group membership. We explored these dynamics from the perspective of family systems theory, which posits that individual development cannot be comprehensively understood without considering the whole family context (Cox & Paley, 2003).

### ADOPTIVE COMMUNICATIVE OPENNESS

As would be expected from family systems theory (Cox & Paley, 2003), research has demonstrated that supportive, open, and ongoing dialogue about adoption between parents and adopted children (i.e., ACO) is important to a variety of family dynamics and outcomes for adoptees across their development. ACO has been linked with adoptees' self-esteem, behavioral adjustment, information seeking about their adoption and birth families, satisfaction with birth family contact, and closeness to their adoptive parents (Farr et al., 2014). Factors that affect whether and how adoptive families engage in ACO include children's developmental stage as well as variations in the type of adoption (e.g., international, structurally open, from foster care, transracial, etc.; Brodzinsky, 2006). For instance, among a sample of adoptive parents diverse in parental sexual orientation with school-age children (adopted as infants in the U.S.), Simon and Farr (2020) found that TRA families reported engaging in less ACO and more RCS as compared to same-race adoptive families. This could reflect a prioritizing of socialization based on what social identities are perceived as most salient within adoptive families.

Children's age and developmental stage are also particularly relevant in considering ACO. Brodzinsky (2011) describes how ACO is crucial during middle childhood given the new questions and concerns that children often have at this time due to increasing cognitive skills that promote a more complex understanding of family (i.e., birth/adoptive) and adoption-related loss. Children's enrollment in full-time formal schooling is also a hallmark of middle childhood (Eccles, 1999). As adoptive parents play a critical role in affirming their school-age children (Brodzinsky, 2011), examining outcomes in academic functioning and parent-child relationships are of interest in their possible associations with ACO during this developmental period.

### Racial/Cultural Socialization

Racial/cultural socialization (RCS), which is generally described via the two common domains of preparation for bias and cultural socialization (Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2018), is also important to children's outcomes and family functioning in TRA families (Montgomery & Jordan, 2018) and in non-adoptive families of color (Hughes et al., 2016). Here, we focus on cultural socialization practices that emphasize children's cultural heritage and racial/ethnic pride (Vonk

et al., 2010), which is one of several dimensions of RCS practices (e.g., egalitarian messages; Hughes et al., 2016), and has been found to occur more frequently than preparation for bias among TRA families (Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2018). Contextual factors are critical to consider in examining variations in RCS, such as parent and child gender and race, among adoptive and non-adoptive families (Hughes et al., 2016). Parental sexual orientation may also relate to contextual variations in RCS. Among adoptive families, it is not uncommon for White (generally heterosexual) adoptive parents or their transracially adopted children to describe colorblind<sup>1</sup> or avoidant socialization approaches related to race (Killian & Khanna, 2019). This is particularly concerning given that children reinforce and reproduce messages of racial bias given to them by parents (Hagerman, 2015), even if parents themselves report that their children have no racial biases (Vittrup, 2016). Among LG and heterosexual adoptive parents, however, it appears less common for adoptive LG than heterosexual parents to describe avoidant approaches (Goldberg et al., 2016). Thus, it is of interest to know more about the ways in which adoptive families headed by same- and different-sex couples may differentially engage in RCS.

How RCS is linked with outcomes, particularly among TRA families, has been somewhat mixed (Montgomery & Jordan, 2018). Academic functioning is a particularly noteworthy outcome of interest among adoptive families, given that RCS has been demonstrated to be associated with academic adjustment (e.g., school belonging) among transracially adopted children (Seol et al., 2016). Little work, however, has directly explored possible associations between RCS among adoptive families and children's academic functioning in middle childhood. This is somewhat surprising given that middle childhood is the stage of development where children begin formal schooling (if they had not already) and are increasingly aware of difference (i.e., in terms of race, adoptive status, etc.; Brodzinsky, 2011) as a result of heightened social comparisons and gains in cognitive and social/emotional skills (Eccles, 1999).

Similarly, few studies investigating RCS and associated child outcomes among TRA families have exclusively focused on parent-child relationship quality as a dependent variable of interest. However, some work has found that when adoptive parents engage in more cultural socialization with their transracially adopted children, adoptees describe greater perceptions of parent-child closeness in their adoptive families (Montgomery & Jordan, 2018). Given that parent-child relationship dynamics in adoptive families may be linked with salient aspects of difference (e.g., race; Brodzinsky, 2006), exploring parent-child relationship quality is of interest among transracial adoptive families with LG and heterosexual parents and school-age children.

## Current Study

Here, among a racially diverse sample of adoptive families with LG and heterosexual (LGH) parents, we sought to examine specific features of ACO and RCS, and how they were linked with school-age children's outcomes, specifically their perceptions of parent-child relationships and their teacher-reported academic functioning. Data from parents, children, and children's teachers were collected regarding family socialization practices, parent-child relationships, and academic functioning, respectively. In this way, findings from this multi-method study represent the perspectives of adoptive parents, adopted children, and children's teachers. While exploratory, we queried whether there were differences in the ways LGH parents reported engaging in ACO or

RCS with their children. Based on existing literature (Montgomery & Jordan, 2018) and predictions aligned with family systems theory (Cox & Paley, 2003), we expected that ACO and RCS would share positive associations with our outcomes of interest.

## METHOD

### Participants

Data represented here were provided by participants between 2013–2014 at the second wave (W2) of the Contemporary Adoptive Families Study. At W2, the sample was comprised of 96 two-parent adoptive families (26 with lesbian, 29 with gay, and 41 with heterosexual families;  $N=186$  parents) with school-age children ( $M_{age} = 8$  years, range: 5–12 years; 48 girls, 48 boys). Approximately half (46%) completed TRA. Families lived across the U.S., particularly along both coasts and in the South, and all families had completed private domestic infant adoptions. Fewer than half of children were White, yet this was the largest racial/ethnic group, followed closely by Black and multiethnic children and then smaller groups of single-race Latino/Hispanic children or those of another race/ethnicity. Most parents were White (81%), well-educated (i.e., college degree), middle-upper class (with considerable variation), in their mid/late 40s, and worked full-time. Families, in our sample, were considered to have completed a TRA if at least one of the parents did not share the same racial/ethnic identity (Montgomery & Jordan, 2018). Additional demographic information has been reported in Simon and Farr (2020).

### Procedure

The second author visited each family at W2 (Farr, 2017). Parents were individually interviewed through their preferred format (in-person, phone, or online chat) by trained graduate students about adoption and family life. Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed by trained undergraduate students. Parents, children, and teachers also received questionnaires via Qualtrics that were completed individually (the second author assisted children by reading aloud). Parents reported on their adoption process and how they talk about diverse identities as a family (e.g., racial/cultural identity). Children received questions about their relationships with their parents. Children's teachers completed a form to assess children's academic functioning. The Institutional Review Boards at the University of Kentucky and University of Massachusetts Amherst approved the study.

### Materials

#### *Adoptive Communicative Openness (ACO)*

We assessed five dimensions of family adoptive communication openness (i.e., ACO; Neil et al., 2007) coded from individual parent interviews. These dimensions are 1) communication with the child about adoption, 2) promotion of the child's dual connection to the adoptive and

birth family, 3) empathy with and tolerance of child's feelings about adoption, 4) empathy toward the birth family, and 5) communication with the birth family. Semi-structured interviews with parents included specific attention to ACO via questions modified from previous adoptive family research (i.e., Grotevant & McRoy, 1998), including, “do you talk with [child name] about adoption?” and “how comfortable is [child name] with talking about their adoption?”

The first author and two trained undergraduates coded interview transcriptions for ACO content using the codebook developed by Neil et al. (2007). The codebook consists of five subscales (the dimensions described above), each on a scale of 1 to 5, with higher average scores (the three coders' ratings) indicating greater ACO. Higher scores indicate higher quality and more proactive socialization practices for each dimension, adjusted for how often these practices occur, whether they are feasible for the family (e.g., no communication with birth family members is possible), and children's developmental stage. To resolve disagreements, coders met weekly to discuss independently generated ratings. All available data from parent interviews (171 of 186 parents; 8% missing data) were coded. Reliability for all five subscales was acceptable (i.e.,  $k = .70-.79$ ); for additional codebook details, see Simon and Farr (2020).

### *Racial/Cultural Socialization (RCS)*

To assess parents' engagement in cultural socialization, which is one dimension of RCS, parents responded to nine items developed for the National Survey of Adoptive Parents (Vonk et al., 2010). Each item involves a dichotomous response (0 = *no*; 1 = *yes*) about parents' perceptions of their family's engagement with various RCS activities. For example, the first item is, “Has your family been involved in religious, social, tribal, or recreational activities that reflect their race or ethnicity or culture?” Another example item is, “Has your family read books to your child about their racial or ethnic or cultural group or heritage?” The overall measure showed good reliability (i.e.,  $\alpha = .80-.89$ ; Simon & Farr, 2020). Of the 186 parents, 174 completed this measure (6% missing data).

### *Child Academic Outcomes*

To assess children's academic functioning, children's primary school teachers completed the 113-item Teacher Report Form 6–18 (TRF; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). Here we focused on teachers' ratings within the TRF of children's overall academic performance as well as in particular subjects. Teachers rated specific subjects from 1 (*far below grade performance*) to 5 (*far above*). Scores are converted into standardized *T* scores for Academic Performance because raw scores on the TRF are sex- and age-specific. Of the 96 children involved in W2, 83 of their teachers provided these data (13.5% missing). The TRF showed excellent reliability in this sample (see Farr, 2017 for more details on this sample).

### *Parent-child Relationships*

To evaluate parent-child closeness, children responded to the 28-item Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Children completed these items for each parent separately across three subscales: trust (e.g., “My parent respects my feelings”), alienation (e.g., “I get upset a lot more than my parent knows about”; reverse-scored), and

communication (e.g., “*I feel my parent does a good job as my parent*”). The second author read each question to children and used the same language that the child used to refer to each individual parent (e.g., *mama, mommy*). The scale is from 1 (*Almost never or never true*) to 5 (*Almost always or always true*). We used all three subscales to create a total average measure of parent-child closeness; higher average total scores indicate greater levels of parent-child closeness. Complete data were reported here on this measure for 179 of the 186 parents in the sample from 87 of the 96 children (4% missing data). The IPPA measure showed good reliability (i.e.,  $\alpha = .80-.89$ ; Farr & Vázquez, 2020).

### Data Analytic Plan

First, we provide descriptive information for all variables of interest. Following, we describe analyses that investigated potential group differences based on same- or different-sex headed households<sup>2</sup> and TRA status, primarily conducted with hierarchical linear modeling (HLM). HLM was used to address interdependent responses (e.g., two parents reporting for the same child), shared variance among dependent variables such as parent-child relationship quality (i.e., IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), and intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs) greater than suggested cutoffs (i.e., 25%; Guo, 2005). We examined the unconditional models for our variables of interest (i.e., outcome variables with no predictors) and found that all ICCs exceeded the suggested cutoff ( $\geq 57\%$ ), which confirmed the need for HLM. As HLM focusing on family relationships typically relies on assigned sex at birth as a distinguishing feature, same-sex couples may be considered “indistinguishable dyads.” Therefore, we followed guidelines by Smith et al. (2013), who specify ways to account for the unique structure of same-sex parent families in HLM analyses. HLM7 (Raudenbush et al., 2011) was used to conduct our analyses. Missing data for all variables were generally low (< 10%) with the exception of academic functioning (moderate; 13.5%). We addressed missing data by using full information maximum likelihood (FIML). Finally, same-sex parents were more likely than different-sex parents in this sample to complete TRA Farr et al. (2010). To address the potential concern of confounds between family type (i.e., same- and different-sex parents) and TRA (or same-race adoptions), we initially included both demographic variables in all models.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Results and Group Differences

Descriptive results for all variables are in Table 1. Parents reported moderate levels of all five ACO dimensions (means above the midpoint of 2.5). Further, while there was substantial variation in individual scores, mean scores for all five types of ACO were within 0.5 units of one another. Most RCS practices were endorsed by more than 50% of the sample (with substantial variation across items). The most commonly endorsed item was *having friends that share their child's background* (86.8%; RCS-3), followed by *reading culturally relevant books* (72.3%; RCS-4), *moving to attend a racially/culturally diverse school* (66.7%; RCS-9), *moving to a racially/culturally diverse neighborhood* (64.6%; RCS-8), *choosing multicultural*

TABLE 1  
Descriptive Results

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Lesbian mother families (n= 26)</i>	<i>Gay father families (n= 29)</i>	<i>Heterosexual parent families (n= 41)</i>	<i>Transracial adoption families (n= 44)</i>	<i>Same-race adoption families (n= 52)</i>	<i>Total families (N= 96)<sup>a</sup></i>
Racial/Cultural Socialization (RCS; % Yes) <sup>b</sup>						
1. Religious, social, tribal, or recreational groups or activities	47.7%	44.2%	50.6%	59.5%	38.5%	48.0%
2. Chosen childcare providers, teachers, or other role models	65.9%	32.7%	39.0%	58.2%	31.9%	43.9%
3. Friends who share their background	95.5%	78.9%	87.2%	92.4%	82.1%	86.8%
4. Read culturally relevant books	81.8%	76.9%	63.6%	88.6%	58.5%	72.3%
5. Racial/Ethnic holidays	59.1%	50.0%	60.3%	55.7%	57.9%	56.9%
6. Prepared foods	50.0%	46.2%	57.7%	44.3%	59.0%	52.3%
7. Chosen multiracial/cultural entertainment	75.0%	61.5%	55.3%	76.0%	50.5%	62.2%
8. Moved to a culturally diverse neighborhood	68.2%	69.2%	59.5%	69.6%	60.4%	64.6%
9. Lived or moved to attend a culturally diverse school	72.7%	68.6%	62.0%	73.1%	61.5%	66.7%
Adoptive Communicative Openness <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) <sup>c</sup>						
1. Communication about adoption	3.40 (.72)	3.18 (.68)	3.07 (.62)	3.09 (.56)	3.27 (.75)	3.19 (.67)
2. Promotion of dual connection	3.29 (1.14)	3.23 (.81)	3.22 (.70)	3.02 (.72)	3.42 (.93)	3.24 (.86)
3. Empathy toward feelings about adoption	3.27 (.92)	3.31 (.62)	3.20 (.64)	3.17 (.68)	3.32 (.74)	3.25 (.72)
4. Empathy toward birth family	3.18 (1.06)	3.17 (.80)	3.16 (.66)	3.07 (.79)	3.25 (.83)	3.17 (.82)
5. Communication with birth family	3.13 (1.20)	3.24 (.90)	3.21 (.83)	2.95 (.81)	3.41 (1.02)	3.20 (.96)
Parent-child closeness <sup>c</sup>	4.56 (.40)	4.33 (.52)	4.49 (.47)	4.37 (.54)	4.53 (.41)	4.46 (.47)
Academic functioning	48.41 (8.58)	47.42 (7.03)	49.32 (9.70)	48.62 (7.28)	48.20 (9.63)	48.53 (8.64)

*Note.* Racial/Cultural socialization items and ACO dimensions have two reporters (each parent) where possible; Parent-child closeness is a single average score reported by children for both parents; Academic functioning is a single report score for each target child from their teacher. <sup>a</sup>Sample size varies slightly throughout due to missing data. <sup>b</sup>Additional descriptive information for the measure can be found in Simon and Farr (2020). <sup>c</sup>Additional descriptive information for the measure can be found in Farr and Vázquez (2020).



*entertainment* (62.2%; RCS-7), *participating in racial/ethnic holidays* (56.9%; RCS-5), *preparing culturally relevant foods* (52.3%; RCS-6), *participating in recreational activities* (48.0%; RCS-1), and finally, *choosing specific childcare providers* (43.9%; RCS-2). For our outcome variables, children's academic functioning<sup>3</sup> reflected scores typical of the population (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). Further, children's mean score (between 4–5 on the scale) of their own reports of parent-child closeness were between “often true” and “almost always or always true.”

We found that some, but not all, of our variables of interest differed significantly as a function of family type (i.e., same- or different-sex parents) and/or TRA (vs. same-race) status (see Table 2). We found that same-sex parent households reported significantly greater *communication about adoption* as compared to different-sex parent households,  $p = .042$ . No significant differences between same- or different-sex parent households were found for the other ACO dimensions,  $ps > .360$ . We also found that TRA families reported significantly lower *promotion of a dual connection*,  $p = .014$ , and *communication with birth family*,  $p = .013$ , as compared to same-race families. There were no other significant differences between TRA and same-race families for the other three dimensions of ACO,  $ps > .061$ .

In the context of RCS practices, we found no significant differences between same- and different-sex parent households,  $ps > .129$ . However, we found significant differences in RCS items 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7,  $ps < .042$ , based on TRA status. Specifically, TRA families were more likely to report engaging in behaviors that reflected their child's racial/cultural background, such as *involvement in recreational activities* (RCS-1), *choosing specific child care providers* (RCS-2), *having friends that share their child's background* (RCS-3), *reading culturally relevant books* (RCS-4), and *choosing multicultural entertainment* (RCS-7). We did not find significant differences between TRA and same-race families in RCS items 5, 6, 8, and 9,  $ps > .181$ . All analyses reflecting significant group differences based on family type or TRA status are provided in Table 2, while full tables that include non-significant findings can be found at [https://osf.io/yaezn/?view\\_only=ebd30e692963481fb4c01e62c9deb68d](https://osf.io/yaezn/?view_only=ebd30e692963481fb4c01e62c9deb68d).

We found no significant differences in academic functioning between same- and different-sex parent households,  $t(81) = -.75, p = .456$ , as well as between TRA and same-race families,  $t(79) = -.42, p = .677$ . Finally, we found no significant differences in child-reported parent-child closeness (IPPA) between same- and different-sex parent households,  $p = .674$ , nor between TRA and same-race families,  $p = .086$ .

### Associations among Socialization Practices and Outcome Variables

We first analyzed initial models with all variables of interest (i.e., ACO dimensions or RCS items) and then used backwards deletion to develop final models examining associations between ACO or RCS and child outcomes (academic functioning or parent-child closeness). ACO explained a significant proportion of variance in academic functioning scores,  $F(7, 147) = 3.29, p = .003, R^2 = .09$ . We found significant positive associations between *communication about adoption* and *with birth family* with academic functioning,  $ps < .004$ . Parents who engaged in greater levels of these ACO dimensions had children with greater academic functioning. Further, *promotion of a dual connection* was significantly negatively associated with academic functioning. Parents who engaged in greater *promotion of a dual connection* had children with lower academic functioning. In the final model of ACO practices, we found

TABLE 2  
HLM Results Assessing Group Differences in Racial/Cultural and Adoptive Communicative Openness

Variable	Coeff	SE	t	df	p
RCS-1 Intercept $\beta_0$					
Intercept $\gamma_{00}$	.42	.07	5.87	91	< .001
SG $\gamma_{01}$	-.08	.08	-.93	91	.354
TRA $\gamma_{02}$	.24	.08	2.80	91	.006
RCS-2 Intercept $\beta_0$					
Intercept $\gamma_{00}$	.29	.07	4.45	91	< .001
SG $\gamma_{01}$	.06	.09	.69	91	.495
TRA $\gamma_{02}$	.26	.09	2.86	91	.005
RCS-3 Intercept $\beta_0$					
Intercept $\gamma_{00}$	.82	.05	15.43	91	< .001
SG $\gamma_{01}$	-.02	.06	-.28	91	.783
TRA $\gamma_{02}$	.12	.06	2.06	91	.042
RCS-4 Intercept $\beta_0$					
Intercept $\gamma_{00}$	.53	.08	6.92	91	< .001
SG $\gamma_{01}$	.12	.08	1.53	91	.129
TRA $\gamma_{02}$	.29	.07	4.18	91	< .001
RCS-7 Intercept $\beta_0$					
Intercept $\gamma_{00}$	.46	.07	6.51	91	< .001
SG $\gamma_{01}$	.09	.08	1.17	91	.245
TRA $\gamma_{02}$	.25	.08	3.17	91	.002
Communication about adoption Intercept $\beta_0$					
Intercept $\gamma_{00}$	3.15	.09	33.73	84	< .001
SG $\gamma_{01}$	.24	.12	2.06	84	.042
TRA $\gamma_{02}$	-.22	.12	-1.9	84	.061
Promotion of dual connection Intercept $\beta_0$					
Intercept $\gamma_{00}$	3.37	.12	27.93	84	< .001
SG $\gamma_{01}$	.11	.16	.644	84	.522
TRA $\gamma_{02}$	-.42	.17	-2.51	84	.014
Communication with birth family Intercept $\beta_0$					
Intercept $\gamma_{00}$	3.35	.15	22.38	84	< .001
SG $\gamma_{01}$	.09	.19	.50	84	.626
TRA $\gamma_{02}$	-.47	.19	-2.54	84	.013

Note. Eight separate models for each variable are presented here, results are combined into a single table for succinctness. Unstandardized coefficients; RCS = Racial/Cultural Socialization. SG = The intercept for parent sexual orientation, 0 = different-sex parent household, 1 = same-sex parent household. TRA = The intercept for family with parents who completed a transracial adoption, 0 = same-race adoption, 1 = transracial adoption. A full table with all HLM results can be found at: [https://osf.io/yaezn/?view\\_only=ebd30e692963481fb4c01e62c9deb68d](https://osf.io/yaezn/?view_only=ebd30e692963481fb4c01e62c9deb68d)

a significant positive association between *promotion of a dual connection* and parent-child closeness,  $p = .037$ . Parents who more strongly encouraged their children’s connections to their adoptive and birth families had children who reported greater parent-child closeness (see Table 3).

RCS practices explained a significant proportion of variance in academic functioning,  $F(9, 144) = 2.18, p = .033, R^2 = .06$ . We found that only RCS items 4 and 5 were significantly associated with academic functioning (other RCS practices were not significant,  $ps > .05$ ).

TABLE 3  
HLM Results Assessing whether Racial/Cultural Socialization or Adoptive Communicative Openness Predicts Parent-Child Closeness

Variable	Coeff	SE	t	df	p
Intercept $\beta_0$					
Intercept $\gamma_{00}$	4.59	.09	52.18	87	< .001
SG $\gamma_{01}$	-.03	.16	-.18	87	.861
TRA $\gamma_{02}$	-.58	.25	-2.35	87	.021
RCS-1 $\beta_1$					
Intercept $\gamma_{10}$	.33	.11	2.90	66	.005
SG $\gamma_{11}$	-.44	.15	-3.01	66	.004
TRA $\gamma_{12}$	-.02	.16	-.14	66	.892
RCS-2 $\beta_2$					
Intercept $\gamma_{20}$	.21	.09	2.30	66	.025
SG $\gamma_{21}$	-.22	.12	-1.81	66	.076
TRA $\gamma_{22}$	.24	.14	1.65	66	.103
RCS-3 $\beta_3$					
Intercept $\gamma_{30}$	-.29	.11	-2.73	66	.008
SG $\gamma_{31}$	.35	.17	2.06	66	.043
TRA $\gamma_{32}$	.24	.23	1.01	66	.317
Intercept $\beta_0$					
Intercept $\gamma_{00}$	3.99	.29	14.02	80	< .001
SG $\gamma_{01}$	.51	.28	1.83	80	.071
TRA $\gamma_{02}$	-.07	.28	-.25	80	.806
Promotion of dual connection $\beta_2$					
Intercept $\gamma_{20}$	.17	.08	2.13	71	.037
SG $\gamma_{21}$	-.17	.08	-2.09	71	.040
TRA $\gamma_{22}$	-.01	.09	-.15	71	.884

Note. Two separate models are presented here, one for racial/cultural socialization and one for adoptive communicative openness. Unstandardized coefficients; RCS = Racial/Cultural Socialization. SG = The intercept for parent sexual orientation, 0 = different-sex parent household, 1 = same-sex parent household. TRA = The intercept for family with parents who completed a transracial adoption, 0 = same-race adoption, 1 = transracial adoption.

Specifically, *reading culturally relevant books* (RCS-4),  $p = .041$ , was significantly and negatively associated with academic functioning, while *participating in culturally relevant holidays* (RCS-5),  $p = .003$ , was significantly and positively associated with it. There were no significant associations across remaining items between academic functioning and whether the family was headed by same- or different-sex parents, or characterized by TRA,  $ps > .549$ .

In the final model of RCS practices predicting parent-child closeness, we found significant positive associations between parent-child closeness and RCS items,  $ps < .025$ . Households with parents that engaged in RCS practices such as *involvement in recreational activities* (RCS-1), *choosing specific childcare providers* (RCS-2), and *having friends that share their child's background* (RCS-3) had children that reported greater parent-child closeness compared to households in which parents did not engage in these behaviors (see Table 3).

## DISCUSSION

These results are noteworthy, as research has addressed children's outcomes associated with RCS but less often with ACO (Priest et al., 2014), and rarely among an adoptive family sample diverse in parental sexual orientation. Moreover, no single study to our knowledge has specifically examined academic functioning and parent-child closeness as related to ACO and RCS. Despite variations in socialization practices based on demographic characteristics, this study highlights how RCS may be linked with close relationships of parents and children in TRA families with LG and heterosexual parents. The findings also support the important role of ACO (Brodzinsky, 2006) and extend socialization practices as being connected to children's academic functioning. As such, this study, grounded in family systems theory (Cox & Paley, 2003), may be informative to law, policy, and practice relevant to TRA and sexual minority parent adoption.

Our descriptive findings align with and extend the literature on the experiences of families diverse in adoptive, racial/cultural, and sexual identities. We found that all parents, on average, seem to engage in all five dimensions of ACO to a similar moderate degree (i.e., 3.17 to 3.25). This provides evidence that adoptive parents, beyond considerations of other identities in the family, likely engage in ACO as a priority (Pinderhughes & Brodzinsky, 2019). As for RCS practices, there was a large gradient in terms of what practices were endorsed (44% to 87%). Given that the least common item was still endorsed by 44% of the sample indicates that parents do engage in RCS and place importance on their child's racial/cultural identity development.

Our sample also ranked practices such as moving to a *culturally diverse neighborhood* and/or *school* substantially higher than past research (Vonk et al., 2010), although these may be explained by children's developmental stage. It may be that because children in our sample were in middle childhood, considerations of *neighborhoods* and where one's child attends *school* were particularly salient (Eccles, 1999). We also found that academic functioning scores were typical of the population (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001), suggesting overall positive academic performance. Further, we found that children reported feeling high levels of closeness with their parent(s), which has been reported on elsewhere (Farr & Vázquez, 2020).

We did not uncover group differences (TRA status or parental sexual orientation) related to our outcome variables of academic functioning or parent-child closeness. We also found no differences in ACO or RCS based on parents' sexual orientation, with one exception. LG parents engaged in greater *communication about adoption* than did heterosexual parents. One explanation is that LG parents may have experience navigating identity-based stigma and discrimination and thus, are motivated to have identity-relevant conversations with their children (Goldberg et al., 2016). A related possibility is that children with same-sex parents are more likely to be asked about their family structure (e.g., questioned about birth parents; Farr et al., 2016) compared to children with different-sex parents - as a result, *communication about adoption* may involve broader, family-wide conversation about family structure. Past research on family RCS with White parents, has found that while initial conversations around race are difficult, they can produce long-lasting promotive outcomes for youth (Hagerman, 2017).

There were significant differences in ACO based on TRA status, however, such that parents who completed transracial adoptions were coded to have lower *promotion of a dual connection*

and *communication with birth family* compared to same-race adoptive parents. No such differences characterized the other three ACO dimensions. One explanation is that parents (un)intentionally make decisions about the conversations they regularly have with their children. As a result, TRA parent families may spend less time discussing adoption and instead discuss RCS, whereas (White) same-race adoptive parents may only discuss adoption (Killian & Khanna, 2019). It may also be that parents engage in *lower promotion of dual connection* with transracially adopted youth because of the potential racial discomfort (Hagerman, 2015) that may come with conversations around a dual connection to families of different races and ethnicities.

There were also differences in RCS practices based on TRA status. Specifically, parents in TRA versus same-race families were more likely to endorse engaging in *recreational activities* (RCS-1), *choosing specific childcare providers* (RCS-2), *having friends that share their child's background* (RCS-3), and *reading culturally relevant books* (RCS-4) as related to their child's racial/cultural identity. One explanation for these differences is that these practices reflect activities that are relatively easy to accomplish for families. Thus, these activities may be particularly common among TRA families (Hughes et al., 2016).

We found mixed support for our exploratory hypotheses that identity-based socialization would be positively associated with child outcomes. In the context of ACO, we found that *communication about adoption* and *with birth family* were positively associated with academic functioning. Further, we found that *promotion of a dual connection* was negatively associated with academic functioning, yet positively associated with parent-child closeness. These findings indicate the complexities of ACO within the family system (Cox & Paley, 2003), given that dimensions of ACO were positively and negatively associated with academic functioning and parent-child closeness. Specifically, *communication about adoption* and *with birth family* appear to be promotive factors in adopted children's development, which has been supported in the literature (Von Korff & Grotevant, 2011). These dimensions may reflect transparent communication in the family system which could encourage children to better communicate their own needs (e.g., increased psychosocial engagement; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019) in the classroom and improve academic functioning. These findings also align with research on same-sex parent headed households such that family processes, rather than parent sexual orientation, are typically not associated with relevant child outcomes (Patterson, 2017).

In contrast, *promotion of a dual connection* may be a more difficult dimension of adoption communication with which to engage, as it implies the expansion of their family as a "living system" (Cox & Paley, 2003). These developmental considerations may underlie our result that *promotion of a dual connection* shared a negative association with academic performance, yet a positive one with parent-child closeness. Similar to research regarding RCS, the *promotion of a dual connection* may be associated with negative outcomes during middle childhood but becomes promotive over time (Priest et al., 2014). That is, while parents may initially struggle to frame conversations around an expanding family system, the long-term outcome of engaging in *promotion of dual connection* may outweigh these initial costs.

There was some support for our exploratory hypothesis that RCS would be positively associated with child outcomes. Celebrating *culturally relevant holidays* (RCS-5) was positively associated with academic functioning, yet reading *culturally relevant books* (RCS-4) was negatively associated with it. Participation in *recreational activities* (RCS-1), *choosing specific childcare providers* (RCS-2), and *having friends that share their child's background* (RCS-3)

were all positively associated with greater parent-child closeness. The discrepancy between *culturally relevant holidays* and *culturally relevant books* as related to academic functioning is intriguing, as discrepant family RCS messages have been linked with negative adoptee outcomes in TRA families (e.g., increased delinquent behavior; Montgomery & Jordan, 2018). That is, if parents emphasize socialization messages that are not reflected in the experiences children are having (e.g., participating in holidays; reading books), such as in households where colorblind socialization approaches are preferred (Vittrup, 2016), children may experience negative outcomes. These results underscore the need to further investigate the complexities of family RCS (Pinderhughes & Brodzinsky, 2019). Perhaps reading *culturally relevant books* provides a foundation of knowledge for children, and as they develop, becomes a more promotive factor – as appears to be the case for other RCS activities with high-quality parent-child relationships.

There are a number of strengths to this work, including the use of survey- and interview-based data and multiple informants (parent, child, and teacher reports), representing important contributions to the literature. Further, we investigated specific aspects of both ACO and RCS, moving beyond total or average scores. Research that has investigated ACO or RCS through an overarching measure may fail to capture the complexity of identity within family systems. Future research should also continue to investigate different dimensions of RCS, as our work focused solely on the cultural socialization dimension of RCS. We were also limited by our analyses of single-item measures (i.e., RCS) which may be less reliable than multi-item measures. Thus, future research should include additional measures of RCS that align with more common parenting practices (e.g., greater emphasis on reading books compared to the financial burden of moving schools). Our work is also limited by a sample who exclusively completed private domestic infant adoption - which is often characterized by predominantly White parents who are well-educated and upper-middle class, and thus, our results may not generalize to families representing other adoption pathways (Vandivere et al., 2009). Further, any family in which at least one parent did not share the racial/ethnic identity as their child was coded as a TRA family, which may be a limitation as it could potentially obscure family dynamics between family members who do share the same racial/ethnic identity. No singular way of denoting who is a TRA family has emerged in the family sciences (Montgomery & Jordan, 2018), and thus, research should consider different approaches to studying TRA families. Finally, our data are cross-sectional, so we cannot speak to the direction of effects across our results.

Our findings represent a step forward in research on the experiences of LG- and adoptive parents and their children, particularly in terms of identity-based socialization and outcomes of academic functioning and parent-child closeness. Further, our research can inform practice as a way of encouraging families to talk about adoptive and racial/cultural identities in promotive and nuanced ways, particularly among same-sex couples or those who are already part of TRA families. It is particularly interesting to find that specific dimensions of adoptive communicative openness and racial/cultural socialization practices are positively and negatively associated with teacher-reported academic functioning and child-reported parent-child closeness. Thus, our work provides additional evidence as to the diversity of experiences within family systems (Cox & Paley, 2003), and how family processes, rather than solely identity, are often more closely associated with child outcomes (Farr, 2017; Patterson et al., 2015).

## Notes

1. Color evasiveness is a more appropriate term as it does not equate blindness with ignorance (Syed et al., 2018) but we use colorblind to represent the broader literature cited here.
2. We compared a 2- (i.e., same- and different-sex) and 3-group (i.e., L, G, and heterosexual) model. Results, however, were generally the same. Thus, to retain power, we report models comparing same- and different-sex parent households rather than all three groups.
3. Throughout the results and discussion sections all references to academic functioning, in the context of our findings, is teacher-reported, which was removed for clarity and succinctness.

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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