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## Identity-based socialization and adopted children's outcomes in lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parent families

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### ABSTRACT

We investigated associations among three parent socialization practices (racial/cultural socialization, adoptive communicative openness, LGBT family socialization) and related child outcomes (social competence, understanding of adoption) among 96 lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive parent families with school-age children ( $M_{age} = 8$  years). No socialization practices differed as functions of child sex or parental sexual orientation. Parents in trans-racial (versus same-race) adoptive families reported higher racial/cultural socialization and lower adoptive communicative openness. Higher racial/cultural socialization was associated with higher LGBT family socialization; the latter was also associated with higher adoptive communicative openness. Although no parent-reported socialization practices were associated with children's understanding of adoption, child-reported LGBT family socialization was correlated with greater understanding. Moreover, when simultaneously considering parent-reported socialization, higher child-reported LGBT family socialization statistically predicted greater social competence. These findings provide insights about how socialization practices relate to one another and to preadolescent child outcomes among adoptive families representing diverse identities.

### KEYWORDS

Child social competence;  
Lesbian and gay parents;  
Socialization practices;  
Transracial adoption;  
Understanding of adoption

Identity-based socialization<sup>1</sup> is a broad term to describe how parents<sup>2</sup> impart morals and values to their children related to identities such as adoption, race, or ethnicity; these socialization practices have been shown as linked with positive youth outcomes, such as increased psychological well-being and self-esteem (Hughes et al., 2006a, 2006b, 2016). One type of identity-based socialization is racial/cultural socialization,<sup>3</sup> which has been found to predict positive outcomes such as social competence (e.g., ability to have positive social interactions and relationships; Tran & Lee, 2010, 2011). However, socialization can also be understood in the context of other and multiple identities such as in the case of transracial adoption<sup>4</sup> (i.e., a parent adopts a child of a different race, most commonly white parents and children of color; Farr & Patterson, 2009; Jacobson et al., 2012; Zhang & Lee,

2011) or being part of a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) parent family, which could also include consideration of transracial adoption (Goldberg et al., 2016). Thus, parents may engage in identity-based socialization as related to their own and their children's racial/ethnic, adoptive, and sexual orientation identities.

Compared with different-sex couples, same-sex couples are more likely to adopt children (21.4% of same-sex couples compared to 3% of different-sex couples; Goldberg & Conron, 2018) and they are also more open to transracial adoptions (Goldberg, 2009). Thus, exploring the adaptive nature of socialization among families diverse in race, adoptive status, and/or sexual orientation can further our understanding of identity-based socialization and related outcomes. In particular, it is of interest to explore outcomes related

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<sup>1</sup>We use the term, identity-based socialization, to describe any form of socialization related to identity, such as racial/ethnic identity, adoptive status, and/or sexual orientation.

<sup>2</sup>Although socialization may occur in many ways (e.g., children are socialized related to identity by teachers in schools), we refer here to parent socialization (unless noted otherwise).

<sup>3</sup>Our understanding of racial/cultural socialization here is enculturation, a form of racial/cultural socialization that focuses on children's cultural heritage and encouraging ethnic pride that has shown to be adaptive and positive for youth (Lee et al., 2006; Vonk et al., 2010).

<sup>4</sup>Although there is not one "ideal" definition of a transracial adoption, we consider families in our study to have completed a transracial adoption if children have at least one parent of race different from their own (Marr, 2017).

to identity (e.g., children's understanding of adoption or knowledge of sexual minority identities) or relationships, such as social competence (i.e., positive adaptive functioning with children's peers, often in the context of school, extracurricular activities, and participation in other organizations; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). This research may be particularly relevant in the United States, as same-sex marriage was only made legal relatively recently, and there has been a rise in the number of married same-sex couples (Goldberg & Conron, 2018), many of whom will become or who are already adoptive parents. Specifically, exploring identity-based socialization may provide further information on how best to prepare same-sex parents for the adoption process and raising adopted children in a family with diverse identity compositions (e.g., same-sex couples who complete transracial adoptions).

The goal of this study was to contribute knowledge about three forms of parent socialization practices (i.e., racial/cultural, adoptive, LGBT family) and related child outcomes among a sample of lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive parent families, approximately half of whom had transracially adopted children. To provide a conceptual framework for our study, and in the context of positive identity development, we first review literature on these three forms of parent socialization: racial/cultural socialization, adoptive communicative openness, and LGBT family socialization. Further, we describe the literature about child outcomes associated with adaptive identity-based socialization, particularly children's understanding of adoption and social competence. We specifically focus on social competence as a child outcome of interest, given that greater social competence has been linked with greater self-esteem and lower levels of stress over the lifespan (Luecken et al., 2013), and because no research has investigated how identity-based socialization practices may be connected with social competence among adoptees. We also include discussion of children's perceptions of LGBT family socialization and children's knowledge of sexual minority identities (e.g., "gay"), as these are newly emerging areas of study related to child development in adoptive families with sexual minority parents. As families with diverse identity compositions (e.g., multiracial families, same-sex parent families, adoptive families; Goldberg & Conron, 2018; Marr, 2017; Vespa et al., 2018) become the "norm" rather than the exception in the U.S., exploring how family processes (e.g., adoptive communicative openness) may relate to children's outcomes could potentially support this

growing demographic group of families in encouraging beneficial parenting practices.

### ***Racial/cultural socialization with transracial adoptees***

Racial/cultural socialization, which includes messages from parents to children about racial/ethnic identity and cultural knowledge (Hughes et al., 2016), is an important family dynamic to investigate in the context of transracial adoption. Racial/cultural socialization is also context-dependent (Hughes et al., 2016), with factors such as children's age and sex playing important roles (Priest et al., 2014). For example, some parents report engaging in positive racial/cultural socialization messages when children are as young as four to five years old (i.e., preschool age; Suizzo et al., 2008). Many behavioral outcomes (e.g., social competence; Tran & Lee, 2010, 2011), however, have not been studied as related to racial/cultural socialization until children are in early adolescence (e.g., parent-child relationship attachment, positive self-concept; Hughes et al., 2016; Priest et al., 2014). This may reflect the fact that racial/cultural socialization often steadily increases from early childhood through late adolescence, and as such, the positive impacts of socialization may take time to emerge. Child sex also appears to be differentially associated with racial/cultural socialization. Parents with girls often engage in recreational activities related to the child's cultural heritage or background while parents with boys often celebrate holidays and special events related to their child's cultural heritage or background (Vonk et al., 2010). This suggests that demographic characteristics are continued areas of interest for racial/cultural socialization research. Thus, it is relevant to investigate possible associations between positive racial/cultural socialization messages and social competence are present at earlier stages in children's development (such as among preadolescent children) or if differences are present based on child sex.

Research has also demonstrated that the ways in which parents engage in racial/cultural socialization can vary (Hughes et al., 2016). In the context of transracial adoption, white parents may face difficulty in understanding the perspective of racial/ethnic minority individuals. Given the absence of a shared racial/ethnic identity with their child, white adoptive parents may struggle with how to effectively engage in racial/cultural socialization with their transracially adopted children (Samuels, 2010). This may hold true even if only one parent is white, in a two-parent adoptive

family, as has been observed in research with nonadoptive multiracial households such that white parents often feel challenged with how to engage in adoptive racial/cultural socialization (Csizmadia et al., 2014).

There are also a number of unique dynamics that transracial adoptees may face because of the intersection of their adoptive and racial/ethnic identities in addition to having parents who are likely white and not adopted. For example, Black transracial adoptees often report experiencing more race-based discrimination compared to their white parents and racial/ethnic minority adoptees broadly also report lower levels of family racial/cultural socialization than do their parents (Chang et al., 2017; Montgomery & Jordan, 2018). Part of this could be that white parents may engage in avoidant (e.g., changing topics when asked about race) or colorblind (e.g., emphasizing that everyone is the same and that race does not matter) approaches to racial/cultural socialization, leading transracial adoptees to feel misunderstood and less likely to report experiences of racial discrimination to their parents (Chang et al., 2017). It is also the case that even in multiracial (nonadoptive) households in which parents are of different races, a white parent may still engage in avoidant or colorblind approaches to socialization (Csizmadia et al., 2014; Rollins & Hunter, 2013). Indeed, research has shown that transracial adoptees often feel excluded by peers from both majority (i.e., white) and minority (e.g., Asian, Black) groups and struggle to experience a sense of belonging among family members because of discrepancies between their own burgeoning racial/ethnic identity and familial acceptance (Goss et al., 2017; Samuels, 2010). Much of this research, however, focuses on retrospective narratives from adult transracial adoptees; thus, there is a need to investigate how children's social and behavioral outcomes are related to racial/cultural socialization at earlier points in development.

Finally, research has shown that racial/cultural socialization predicts increases in long-term beneficial outcomes for transracially adopted youth such as increased school engagement (Seol et al., 2016), positive identity development (Ferrari, Barni, & Rosnati, 2015; Hu et al., 2017), fewer internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Johnston et al., 2007) and increased friendships among other transracial adoptees (Langrehr & Napier, 2014). Thus, encouraging parents to engage in racial/cultural socialization can support transracial adoptees over time. What is not known, however, is whether such positive outcomes, such as social competence, among preadolescent children are

associated with racial/cultural socialization in transracial adoptive families or families diverse in parental sexual orientation.

### ***Adoptive communicative openness and related child outcomes***

Adoptive communicative openness, broadly, refers to family discussions about adoption, including adoptive identity (Grotevant et al., 2011). Specifically, adoptive communicative openness involves how parents talk to their children about adoption in developmentally appropriate ways. This commonly includes the promotion of children's connection to two families (i.e., birth and adoptive) and empathizing with children's potentially negative, ambivalent, or complicated feelings about adoption (Brodzinsky, 2006; Skinner-Drawz et al., 2011). The abilities for parents to engage in these discussions and introduce these possibly difficult topics (e.g., explaining why a birth parent placed the child for adoption) are integral to helping children understand their adoptive identity (Brodzinsky, 2011). In these ways, adoptive communicative openness can be understood as adoption socialization (Goldberg & Smith, 2016). Further, parents who engage in communicative openness surrounding adoption may be able to reduce future concerns such as children's behavioral problems (Grotevant et al., 2011) and encourage positive well-being into adolescence (Ferrari et al., 2015). Although research has investigated how adoption communication is related to children's broader socioemotional skills (Soares et al., 2017), no research has yet examined whether adoptive communicative openness is related to social competence. Supporting children's social competence via adoptive communicative openness may lead to more positive adoptive identity development as children gain the socioemotional skills (Soares et al., 2017) needed to navigate potentially difficult emotions that arise during middle childhood (Brodzinsky, 2011).

An additional child outcome relevant to adoptive communicative openness is children's understanding of adoption. Adoption research often points to the importance of adoptive communicative openness as a way that parents can scaffold children's understanding of adoption, given that children grapple with both positive and negative feelings about their adoption as they grow older (Brodzinsky, 2006; Grotevant et al., 2001). While positive feelings about adoption are substantially easier to navigate, feelings of adoption-related loss that often emerge during middle childhood can be more difficult for parents to discuss with

their children (Brodzinsky, 2011). Thus, adoptive communicative openness can serve to preemptively support children as questions emerge throughout children's development.

Studying adoption socialization among other types of identity-based socialization is also important given that in some contexts (e.g., Korean culture camps), adoption socialization is associated with a reduction in depressive symptoms but racial/cultural socialization is not (Baden, 2015). Another possibility is that if children experience negativity from others, such as microaggressions, it may be unclear to a child which identity (e.g., race/ethnicity vs. adoptive) is targeted, especially in the case of transracially adopted children (Baden, 2016). Further, other characteristics such as child sex may influence identity-based socialization practices, with mixed results showing how adoption socialization varies for parents of sons and daughters (i.e., no differences versus adoption socialization being higher among adopted daughters; Brodzinsky, 2006; Freeark et al., 2005). Thus, investigating multiple forms of identity-based socialization among families diverse in identity composition may further elucidate the nuances through which identity-based socialization practices are associated with child outcomes (e.g., social competence). This is especially important given that previous research typically focuses on same-race or different-sex parent families in efforts to minimize heterogeneity and "noise" in the findings, rather than directly investigate possible differences or similarities among families diverse in identity composition (Garber & Grotevant, 2015). To our knowledge, no work has focused on associations between adoptive communicative openness and specific child outcomes, such as social competence or understanding of adoption, among preadolescent children who are adopted transracially or by same-sex parents.

### ***LGBT family socialization and related child outcomes***

Previous work with adoptive families finds that same-sex parents engage in socialization of their children based on their identity as LGBT parents (i.e., LGBT family socialization; Goldberg et al., 2016; Wyman-Battalen et al., 2019). LGBT family socialization represents the discussion of relevant LGBT issues, culture, history, and related possible bias that children might experience (Oakley et al., 2017). From a theoretical standpoint, extant literature on LGBT family socialization has been developed from research on racial/cultural socialization broadly (Goldberg & Smith, 2016;

Hughes et al., 2016) and among adoptive family samples (Wyman-Battalen et al., 2019).

Despite parallels among types of identity-based socialization (e.g., racial/cultural socialization and LGBT family socialization), important differences should also be acknowledged, such as how parents might uniquely describe experiences tied to specific identities related to race, adoption, or sexual orientation. For example, racial/cultural socialization often occurs in the context of monoracial racial/ethnic minority families (all family members are of the same race) or multiracial households (Hughes et al., 2016; Priest et al., 2014). Further, multiracial families in which one parent is white and monoracial white families may also engage in racial/cultural socialization practices that are distinct from racial/ethnic minority parents, such as a greater likelihood of endorsing colorblind ideologies (Hagerman, 2014, 2016). In transracial adoptive families, in which children, but not the parents, often have a racial/ethnic minority identity (e.g., an African American child with a white parent; Vonk et al., 2010), parents are called to navigate the realities of racial/cultural socialization (e.g., reflecting on their possible colorblind ideologies; Khanna & Killian, 2015).

In contrast, when considering LGBT family socialization, it is likely that only the parent (not the child) has an LGBT identity. It may be that the distinct identities of each family member influence both the qualitative and quantitative nature of those family socialization practices. As an example of qualitative differences, an LGBT parent would likely feel comfortable navigating conversations about disclosure to others about family structure (e.g., having two fathers) because that parent has individually experienced marginalization as someone with an LGBT identity (Giesler, 2012; Vinjamuri, 2016), yet a white parent may find it challenging to instill an interest in the racial, ethnic, and/or cultural heritage of their transracially adopted child (Goar et al., 2017). Similarly, in terms of quantitative differences in socialization, African American parents typically engage in racial/cultural socialization with their children more often than white parents, regardless of their children's racial/ethnic identity (Hughes, Rodriguez, et al., 2006b).

An additional consideration is the visibility of sexual minority identities. For example, people may not be immediately aware that an individual is a sexual minority, nor would they be aware that a child is a member of an LGBT family unless additional context is provided (e.g., both fathers from a same-sex parent



family drop their child off at school). It may be that LGBT family socialization functions similarly to adoptive communicative openness in terms of associations with disclosure dynamics and social competence among children who have LGBT parents. Indeed, research has shown that children with LGBT parents report struggling with the decision to “come out” about their family for fear of rejection or negativity (e.g., being teased for having a gay parent; Farr et al., 2016). Thus, one possible way LGBT family socialization could be beneficial to children is through parents’ support or coaching (e.g., role-playing) so that children feel confident in deciding *to whom* and *how* they disclose their parents’ sexual identity. Finally, with a dearth of research on LGBT family socialization (Wyman-Battalen et al., 2019), continued investigation of possible associations with characteristics found to also influence other forms of identity-based socialization such as child age, sex, and race, are important arenas for research. LGBT family socialization is especially relevant to explore given the historical marginalization that LGBT people have faced in the U.S. (and elsewhere), which in turn may be felt by the children of LGBT parents (e.g., other children may ridicule a child for having same-sex parents; Giesler, 2012; Vinjamuri, 2016).

Given the context-dependent nature of identity-based socialization, it may not be surprising that reports of socialization are often inconsistent between parents and children (Hamilton et al., 2015; Killian & Khanna, 2019). While this research has largely been conducted in the context of racial/cultural socialization, the presence of inconsistent reporting may also apply to LGBT family socialization. Consistency in reporting is an especially important consideration when families who have diverse identity compositions engage in socialization based on shared and non-shared identities related to race/ethnicity (i.e., racial/cultural socialization when parents and children are of different races), adoptive status (i.e., adoptive communicative openness when parents have adopted children), or having same-sex parents (i.e., LGBT family socialization when parents are LGBT and children are not). Report (in)consistency is critical to consider in influencing our understanding of family dynamics (Montgomery & Jordan, 2018). For example, parents who endorse colorblind ideologies may report little to no racial/cultural socialization, while children who receive these messages may still report them as forms of racial/cultural socialization (Hamilton et al., 2015). It may also be that parents over- or under-estimate the quality or quantity of identity-based socialization

that occurs within the family (Hughes et al., 2016). Further, research on consistency of reports from parents and children about LGBT family socialization is relevant given that same-sex parents who complete transracial adoptions are an understudied yet growing demographic family group in the U.S. (Gates, 2014, 2015; Goldberg & Conron, 2018).

Finally, to the best of our knowledge, empirical research has not yet investigated whether LGBT family socialization shares associations with children’s behavioral outcomes (e.g., social competence) as do racial/cultural socialization and adoptive communicative openness (Ferrari et al., 2015; Hughes et al., 2016). Only one study to date has investigated constructs similar to LGBT family socialization (e.g., parental beliefs about sexual minority socialization) in connection to adopted children’s adjustment (Wyman-Battalen et al., 2019). The researchers found that greater parental endorsement of the importance of LGBT family socialization was related to children’s better psychological adjustment, specifically among those families whose children had greater emotional problems at the time of adoptive placement. However, this research only investigated beliefs about LGBT family socialization rather than actual socialization practices. Thus, it is important to extend previous research in two ways: (1) include parents’ and children’s reports of LGBT family socialization, and (2) investigate whether age- and context-dependent knowledge may be effectively communicated to children with same-sex parents. For instance, previous research has suggested that most elementary school-age children with heterosexual parents cannot provide an accurate definition of sexual minority identity terms such as “gay” (Farr, Salomon et al., 2019). Thus, it is of interest to explore whether children of same-sex parents know what “gay” means and how this knowledge might connect to their perceptions of LGBT family socialization.

### Current study

The purpose of this study was to investigate parent socialization based on racial/cultural identity, adoptive status, and sexual orientation (i.e., identity-based socialization) and associations with child outcomes to extend the knowledge base about child development and family processes among a growing demographic of families diverse in identity composition (i.e., same-sex parent and transracial adoptive families). This study used a multi-informant approach from parent and child survey and interview data collected from a

larger longitudinal study with lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive parent families (Farr, 2017). Data for this study were contributed by 96 families, including their respective 96 school-age children ( $M_{age} = 8$  years,  $SD_{age} = 1.66$  years, range = 5–12 years) at one time point. Our specific research questions explored to what extent adoptive parents engage in identity-based socialization, as well as whether socialization differs based on demographic characteristics (e.g., parental sexual orientation, transracial adoption status, child age, child sex), given previous research indicating possible differences in socialization dynamics and outcomes based on these factors (Goldberg & Smith, 2016; Hughes et al., 2016; Priest et al., 2014). We were also interested in how different identity-based socialization practices may be associated with one another given the diverse identity compositions of our sample. In the case of LGBT family socialization, we examined consistency between parent and child reports, as data regarding both were available. Further, we were interested in whether parent or child reports of LGBT family socialization were associated with children's ability to accurately define the word gay. Based on our conceptual framework and previous literature, we also queried whether racial/cultural socialization, adoptive communicative openness, and LGBT family socialization would be associated with child outcomes (e.g., understanding of adoption, social competence) while also considering covariates (e.g., parental sexual orientation, transracial adoption status, child age, etc.). Lastly, in the case of LGBT family socialization among LG-parent families, we asked whether these associations would differ depending on whether socialization practices were reported by parents or children.

Although our study was exploratory because we did not preregister a data analytic plan or hypotheses, we did anticipate that several demographic characteristics would be associated with identity-based socialization, given previous research (Goldberg et al., 2016; Goldberg & Smith, 2016; Vonk et al., 2010). Specifically, we anticipated that greater identity-based socialization would be related to older child age (e.g., Goldberg & Smith, 2016), greater RCS would be more likely among transracial (vs. same-race) adoptive families (e.g., Priest et al., 2014), and different levels of identity-based socialization could occur in families with daughters versus sons (e.g., Hughes et al., 2016). Given a dearth of related evidence, however, we did not make any hypotheses as to whether parental sexual orientation might be related to identity-based socialization. Given that same-sex parent families are

a fast-growing demographic group in the U.S. (Goldberg & Conron, 2018), it is of interest to descriptively report about the qualitative experiences of these families. In addition, previous research has indicated that adoption socialization and racial/cultural socialization are related to children's race in the household, especially transracial adoption (Goldberg et al., 2016; Goldberg & Smith, 2016). Thus, we anticipated that greater levels of adoptive communicative openness would be associated with greater levels of racial/cultural socialization.

Further, we did not make any hypotheses related to how identity-based socialization would be associated with children's social competence, as no research has yet investigated this question among a sample of children in middle childhood. We did anticipate, however, that adoptive communicative openness would be positively related to children's understanding of adoption (i.e., parents who report high levels of adoptive communicative openness would have children who are high in their understanding of adoption; Brodzinsky, 2006, 2011). Additionally, we anticipated that children with LG parents would be more likely to define sexual minority identity terms (e.g., gay) when higher levels of LGBT family socialization (only measured among LG-parent families) were reported by parents and children in those families.

## Method

### Participants

The sample represented here are children and their parents who were participants in Wave 2 (W2) of the Contemporary Adoptive Families Study (Farr, 2017). Wave 1 (W1) data were collected between 2007 and 2009; W2 data were collected between 2013 and 2014. W1 began with 106 families (27 lesbian, 29 gay, and 50 heterosexual couples), each with at least one "target" child who was between 1 and 5 years old (Farr et al., 2010). Roughly half of the original sample includes families with lesbian or gay (vs. heterosexual) parents and roughly half of the sample represents multiracial (i.e., individuals of different racial/ethnic identities) and racial/ethnic minority (vs. white) families (Farr et al., 2010). Lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples were recruited from five private adoption agencies throughout the U.S. Participating agencies were located in jurisdictions that allowed legal adoption by same-sex couples, had worked with openly LG-parent families in the past, and had previously placed infants with LG couples through domestic adoption. All children were domestically adopted

**Table 1.** Demographic information for participating families at wave 2.

Variable	W2 ( <i>N</i> = 96 families)			
	Lesbian mother families ( <i>n</i> = 26)	Gay father families ( <i>n</i> = 29)	Heterosexual parent families ( <i>n</i> = 41)	Sample ( <i>N</i> = 96) <sup>a</sup>
Family				
Household income (\$K)	166 (79)	183 (127)	145 (76)	165 (97)
Transracial adoption <sup>b</sup>	46%	59%	35%	46%
<b>Parents</b>	Lesbian parents ( <i>n</i> = 49)	Gay parents ( <i>n</i> = 57)	Heterosexual parents ( <i>n</i> = 80)	Sample ( <i>N</i> = 186)
Age (in years)	47.85 (5.59)	45.65 (4.78)	47.29 (5.91)	47.48 (5.58)
Race (% white)	78%	86%	80%	81%
Work status (% full-time)	71%	81%	75%	76%
Education (% college degree or higher)	94%	91%	86%	89%
<b>Child</b>	Lesbian mother families ( <i>n</i> = 26)	Gay father families ( <i>n</i> = 29)	Heterosexual parent families ( <i>n</i> = 41)	Sample ( <i>N</i> = 96)
Race (% white)	36%	31%	44%	38%
Age (in years)	8.48 (1.66)	8.21 (1.47)	8.38 (1.79)	8.35 (1.65)
Sex (% girl) <sup>c</sup>	64%	38%	51%	50%

Note. SDs are given in parentheses. <sup>a</sup>Some data are missing throughout; only data used in analyses are represented here. <sup>b</sup>Percentage of transracial adoptees for this study across families. <sup>c</sup>The term child sex (versus gender) is used throughout the manuscript given that this was the wording used in the demographic questions presented to parents in describing their children.

during infancy. At the time of initial recruitment, most families lived in the Mid-Atlantic U.S., the District of Columbia, as well as along the East and West coasts and Southern U.S. (for more information, see Farr et al., 2010).

W2 began about 5 years after W1, with 96 of the original 106 families participating (91% retention; see Table 1 for demographic characteristics). Sample sizes may not always total 96 families for all measures represented because some data are missing throughout (e.g., incomplete reporting). In the next section, we describe missingness for each of our variables of interest. At W2, 55 families were headed by lesbian mothers (26 families; *n* = 49 parents) or gay fathers (29 families; *n* = 57 parents), while 41 families were headed by heterosexual parents (*n* = 80 parents). Among these families, 7 of the 49 lesbian mothers and 2 of the 80 heterosexual parents identified as bisexual; no parents in the gay fathers group identified as bisexual. Most parents were white (81%), in their mid to late 40's (*M* = 47.5 years, *SD* = 5.58), and had a college degree or greater (90%). In terms of a specific racial/ethnic identity background, the largest group represented was white parents (*n* = 151) followed by Black (*n* = 29), multi-ethnic (*n* = 3), Latino/Hispanic (*n* = 2), and Asian (*n* = 1). Parents were often in upper-middle to upper-class income brackets with considerable variation (household income: *M* = \$20,5725, *SD* = \$200,563, *Mdn* = \$160,000). Most worked full-time jobs (57%).

Target children in the W2 sample (*N* = 96) were primarily of color (37% of children were white) and in middle childhood (*M* = 8 years, *SD* = 1.66, range = 5–12). There were equal numbers of girls and boys (48 boys, 48 girls) and almost half of the children were transracially adopted (46%; note that all transracial

adoptions in this sample involved children who represented racial/ethnic minority backgrounds and had at least one white parent). Children were considered transracially adopted if at least one of their parents did not share their racial/ethnic identity, an approach used in previous research on transracial adoption (Jacobson et al., 2012; Zhang & Lee, 2011). In terms of specific racial/ethnic identity background, the largest group represented were white children (*n* = 35) followed by African American (*n* = 30), multi-ethnic (*n* = 24), Latino/Hispanic (*n* = 3), and other (*n* = 4). In considering whole families (*N* = 96), 39% were those in which all members were white (*n* = 37), 8% were Black (*n* = 8), and the remaining 53% were multiracial (*n* = 51). Of the multiracial families, 21% represented those in which one parent was of the same race as the child and one parent was of another race (*n* = 11) and 10% represented multiracial families in which both parents were of another race than the child but at least one parent was also a racial/ethnic minority individual (e.g., one Asian parent, a white parent, and a Black child; *n* = 5). The remaining 59% of multiracial families represented those who were white and had children with a racial/ethnic minority identity (*n* = 35).

### Materials and procedure

At W2, families were visited in their homes by the second author. Parents and children individually filled out questionnaires via Qualtrics online survey software. The second author assisted children in completing their survey online by reading questions aloud and ensuring their chosen responses were appropriately selected. In addition, children and each parent were interviewed separately. Parent interviews



included questions about children's overall development and different socialization practices such as racial/cultural socialization, adoptive communicative openness (ACO), and LGBT family socialization. Children's interviews included questions regarding perceptions of family relationships and knowledge about adoption. If parents were LG, children were also asked about their knowledge of sexual minority identities. Parent interviews were conducted in person, by phone, or via online chat (depending on what participant preferences) by trained graduate student researchers. Child interviews took place during the home visit, conducted by the second author. Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed by trained undergraduate research assistants. Informed consent from parents and assent from children were obtained at both waves. Following participation, a debriefing letter was provided to families. No financial compensation was given to participants. The study was approved by the University of Kentucky, University of Virginia, and University of Massachusetts Amherst Institutional Review Boards.

### **Racial/cultural socialization**

All parents were given the Racial/cultural Socialization questionnaire, a nine-item measure involving dichotomous responses about future or current racial/cultural socialization adapted from the National Survey of Adoptive Parents (NSAP; Vonk et al., 2010). NSAP was a nationally representative survey of households with adopted children in the U.S., conducted via 2,089 telephone interviews with parents representing a variety of pathways to adoption (e.g., private versus public; Vandivere et al., 2009). Racial/cultural socialization items assess whether parents have engaged in practices that familiarize children with their race, ethnicity, and birth culture. Each item (e.g., *"Has your family participated in racial/ethnic holidays that reflect his/her race or ethnicity or culture?; Has your family had friends who share his/her racial or ethnic or cultural background?; Has your family read books to your child about his/her racial or ethnic or cultural background?; Has your family lived in or moved to a racially or culturally diverse neighborhood?"*) is assessed dichotomously (no/yes). The sum of all items provides a total score; higher scores indicate greater racial/cultural socialization. Total scores range from 0 (i.e., "no" to all items) to 9 (i.e., "yes" to all items). In this sample, the racial/cultural socialization measure demonstrated good reliability ( $\alpha = .83$ ). Of the 186 parents, 174 completed the racial/cultural socialization measure.

### **Parent interviews: Adoptive communicative openness**

Interviews with all parents focused on questions assessing adoptive communicative openness as a form of adoption socialization (e.g., *"do you talk with [child] about adoption?"*, *"when did you tell [child] s/he was adopted?"*, *"how comfortable is [child] with talking about his/her adoption?"*), including any particular language used and the quality of conversations about adoption; questions were modified from other similar studies of adoptive families (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998). Two trained undergraduate research assistants and the lead author coded responses for adoption socialization based on a codebook developed by Neil, Grotevant, and Young (2007). The adoption socialization codebook consists of 5 subscales: (1) communication with the child about adoption (e.g., how parents create a climate of openness in adoption communication), (2) promotion of the child's dual connection to two families (e.g., how parents encourage the child's connection to birth family), (3) empathy with and tolerance of child's feelings about adoption (e.g., adoptive parent's comfort with the full range of the child's feelings about adoption), (4) empathy toward the birth family (e.g., understanding why someone places a child for adoption), and (5) communication with the birth family (e.g., frequency of or openness to (future) communication, accounting for open vs. closed adoptions).

Subscales are coded on a scale of one to five, with higher scores indicating greater communication, promotion of dual connection, and empathy. Coders individually assigned codes to parent interviews in their entirety and then met to resolve disagreements weekly. Per the methods set forth in the codebook by Neil et al. (2007), scores were averaged across all five subscales (with one score for each parent) – adoption communication ( $\kappa = .75$ ), promotion of the child's dual connection to two families ( $\kappa = .77$ ), empathy with and tolerance of child's feelings about adoption ( $\kappa = .72$ ), empathy toward the birth family ( $\kappa = .70$ ), and communication with the birth family ( $\kappa = .76$ ) – for a total adoption socialization score ( $\kappa = .74$ ) that reflected acceptable reliability (Neil et al., 2007). Interviews for 171 of 186 parents were available to code and calculate adoptive communicative openness scores.

### **LGBT family socialization**

LG parents only completed the Sexual Minority Parent Socialization scale (Oakley et al., 2017), a 20-item measure assessing reported socialization of

parents related to their diverse family structure and parental sexual identity within the past year. Items are measured on a one to five scale from “Never” to “Very often” (e.g., “*done things with your child to celebrate gay pride*,” “*talked to your child about the fight for equality among the LGBT community*,” “*talked about being gay or lesbian with someone else when your child could hear*”). Children with LG parents also specifically responded to a complementary 20-item measure of the sexual minority parent socialization (Oakley et al., 2017). Children were read questions aloud by the second author and asked to respond with how often certain socialization behaviors (e.g., “*Have your parents ever taken you to an event with lots of gay people, like parades?*,” “*Have your parents ever talked about gay people fighting for equal rights, like marriage?*”) had occurred in the last year on a one to five scale from “Never” to “Very often”. Individual parent and child scores were separately averaged across all items; higher scores indicated greater LGBT family socialization. Good reliability among this sample was found across all 20 items for parents ( $\alpha = .85$ ) and for children ( $\alpha = .88$ ). Among LG parents, 95 of 106 represented here completed the LGBT family socialization measure. Among the 55 total LG parent families represented at W2, 47 children completed the complementary LGBT family socialization measure.

### **Children's knowledge of sexual minority identities**

Given that little research has investigated whether school-age children can define the words gay or lesbian (Farr et al., 2019), we included an interview question specifically for children with LG parents to assess their ability to define these sexual minority terms. During interviews, children were asked, “*Have you heard the word gay before?*” followed by questions to ensure that they understood the identity (i.e., “*How would you describe what being gay means?*”) rather than another use of the term (e.g., “gay” being slang for stupid). Children's responses were scored dichotomously (no/yes), with 0 = inaccurate and 1 = accurate. For example, a child who responded by saying “*gay means men that are married*” was scored as accurate. Krippendorff's alpha was calculated for this measure because of the dichotomous variable responses; reliability was good ( $k\text{-alpha} = .82$ ; Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). Among the 55 total LG parent families represented at W2, 48 children were interviewed and asked about their knowledge of sexual minority identities.

### **Children's understanding of adoption**

Children were interviewed about their understanding of adoption with questions modified from other similar adoption studies (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998). Questions explored children's understanding of adoption and diverse family structures (e.g., “*What does it mean to be a parent?*”, “*Is there any other way of becoming a parent besides 'having' a baby?*”, and “*How do people go about adopting a child?*”). The Children's Understanding of Adoption scale (Brodzinsky et al., 1984) was used to globally rate children's responses to interview questions. This scale ranges from levels 0 to 5, with level 0 indicating no understanding and level 5 indicating a sophisticated understanding of adoption (e.g., adoption is understood as permanent through various laws and policies). Level 0 generally includes children around age 5.5 years or younger, and level 5 typically includes children age 13 and older. The age range in our study (5-12 years), however, was narrower than the range represented in the study by Brodzinsky et al. (1984). To adjust for this, levels 0-1, and levels 4-5, respectively, were collapsed to create a scale of 1-4 (rather than 0-5). Three trained undergraduate research assistants and the lead author coded child interviews with this adapted scale. All four coders independently rated child interviews and met each week to resolve disagreements. Coders demonstrated excellent reliability via Cronbach's alpha given the ordinal nature of the data ( $\alpha = .96$ ). Of the 96 total children represented at W2, 88 provided survey responses for calculating children's understanding of adoption scores.

### **Social competence**

The Child Behavior Checklist 6-18 (CBCL/6-18; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001) is a parent-report measure that was used to assess children's social competence. The CBCL/6-18 includes various scores for internalizing and externalizing behavior problems in addition to other subscales. The social competence subscale, which we focused on here, is comprised of questions that assess frequency of contact with friends, behavior with others, behavior alone, the number of organizations in which children participate, and mean level of participation in these organizations. Scale responses to these questions vary, with some prompting parents to rate their child on a scale of 0 (Less active) to 3 (More active), while other questions prompt parents to rate their child on a scale of 0 (Worse) to 2 (Better). Scale items are aggregated for a total social competence subscale score, with higher scores indicating greater social competence.

(Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). This subscale score is then converted into a standardized  $T$  value that accounts for population averages of children in similar age and gender groups which are  $50.00 \pm 10.0$  (Achenbach, 1991; Achenbach et al., 2002). This allows for use of the measure while accounting for relevant demographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender) known to be related to behavioral adjustment. Further, clinical cutoff scores for the CBCL measure are 40.00 or lower which indicate poor behavioral adjustment (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000). Of the 186 parents surveyed, 181 parents completed the social competence subscale of the CBCL measure to account for 95 of the 96 total children at W2.

### Data analytic plan

First, we conducted descriptive analyses for identity-based socialization and child outcome variables as related to several demographic factors. Bivariate correlations were used to assess associations among socialization and child outcome variables, as well as associations with child age. Independent samples  $t$ -tests were conducted to evaluate differences in socialization and child outcomes as a function of transracial adoption status and child sex. When considering variables that had two reporters (e.g., parent reports of identity-based socialization) we used both data points instead of averaging across scores (i.e., degrees of freedom change based on whether variables included one or two reports per family). Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) were utilized to examine whether socialization and child outcomes differed by parental sexual orientation. Inclusion of covariates (e.g., child age) for subsequent analyses were determined from the above analyses.

Next, we investigated whether identity-based socialization predicted child outcomes. We conducted multiple linear regression (MLR) to assess child outcomes when there was only one score per family for that outcome (e.g., children's understanding of adoption), and we used HLM to account for nonindependent data in cases where there were two scores for the same child on a particular outcome (i.e., parent reports of children's social competence). HLM was also necessary given that the intra-class correlation for the unconditional model predicting children's social competence was 46%, higher than the 25% cutoff suggested for the use of HLM (Guo, 2005). We followed guidelines for HLM described by Smith et al. (2013) for analyses involving data from indistinguishable dyads (e.g., same-sex couples). The overall HLM

model can be described as  $Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j} + \beta_{2j} + e_{ij}$  at level 1, and  $\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \mu_{0j}$  at level 2. At level 1,  $Y_{ij}$  is the outcome variable (i.e., social competence),  $\beta_{0j}$  is the intercept, other  $\beta$  values indicate predictor variables of interest (e.g., socialization practices) or covariates (e.g., child age), and  $e_{ij}$  represents within-couple variance (i.e., error term). At level 2,  $\gamma_{00}$  is the fixed effect and  $\mu_{0j}$  represents between-couple variance (i.e., error term; Smith et al., 2013). Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) estimation was used to account for missing data, and all variables were treated as fixed effects. Analyses were conducted using the software HLM7 (Raudenbush et al., 2011).

## Results

### Descriptive information

Descriptive results for all variables of interest are presented in Table 2. Parents reported engaging in racial/cultural socialization ( $M = 5.53$ ,  $SD = 2.74$ ), LGBT family socialization ( $M = 2.47$ ,  $SD = .55$ ), and adoptive communicative openness ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = .67$ ) at moderate frequencies. Racial/cultural socialization scores (maximum score of 9) suggested that parents have engaged in several activities related to their child's ethnic or cultural background. When considering adoptive communicative openness (maximum score of 5), based on our coded assessment of interview data (Neil et al., 2007), parents appeared to be effective in communicating with their children about adoption, but may have felt challenged by difficult conversation topics (e.g., incarcerated birth parent). LGBT family socialization scores (maximum score of 5) reported by LG parents suggested that parents engaged in socialization with their child between "rarely" and "sometimes" in the past year. LGBT family socialization scores reported by children of LG parents, however, reflected even lower frequencies ( $M = 1.84$ ,  $SD = .61$ ), between "never" and "rarely" in the past year. In addition, fewer than half of children with LG parents (43.75%) correctly defined the word gay (no = 27, yes = 21). Children's understanding of adoption scores (maximum score of 4) were also coded as moderate ( $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = .97$ ) for example, children often recognized different pathways to parenthood (e.g., having adoptive versus birth parents), but some struggled to accurately explain differences in these pathways (Brodzinsky et al., 1984). Finally, parents' reports of children's social competence scores ( $M = 47.75$ ,  $SD = 9.33$ ) indicated overall positive social adjustment (as it is not

**Table 2.** Means and standard deviations of variables of interest by parental sexual orientation.

Variable	W2 (N = 96 families)					
	Lesbian mother families (n = 26)	Gay father families (n = 29)	Heterosexual parent families (n = 41)	Transracial adoption (n = 44)	Same-race adoption (n = 52)	Total (N = 96) <sup>a</sup>
ACO <sup>b</sup>	3.33 (.90)	3.25 (.58)	3.19 (.44)	3.11 (.58)	3.34 (.63)	3.22 (.62)
RCS <sup>c</sup>	6.36 (1.82)	5.24 (2.24)	5.27 (2.81)	6.33 (2.10)	4.96 (2.66)	5.59 (2.51)
LFS <sup>d</sup>	2.48 (.57)	2.49 (.40)	–	2.51 (.53)	2.46 (.58)	2.46 (.45)
C-LFS <sup>e</sup>	1.86 (.56)	1.82 (.66)	–	1.84 (.65)	1.79 (.57)	1.84 (.61)
LG Def <sup>f</sup>	50.00%	38.46%	–	46.15%	40.91%	43.75%
CUA <sup>g</sup>	2.38 (1.02)	2.32 (.98)	2.21 (.96)	2.35 (1.01)	2.15 (.94)	2.27 (.97)
Social competence <sup>h</sup>	48.95 (9.48)	47.58 (6.16)	49.09 (8.43)	48.74 (8.49)	47.35 (8.00)	47.79 (8.16)

Note.

<sup>a</sup>Data are missing throughout; only data used in analyses are represented here.

<sup>b</sup>ACO = Adoptive Communicative Openness. Scores range from 1 to 5 with higher scores indicating greater ACO.

<sup>c</sup>RCS = Racial/cultural Socialization. Scores range from 0 to 9 with higher scores indicating greater RCS.

<sup>d</sup>LFS = LGBT Family Socialization. Scores range from 1 ("Never") to 5 ("Very often") with higher scores indicating greater LGBT family socialization.

<sup>e</sup>C-LFS = Children's Reports of LGBT Family Socialization. Scores range from 1 ("Never") to 5 ("Very often") with higher scores indicating greater reports of LGBT Family Socialization.

<sup>f</sup>LG def = Children's Knowledge of Sexual Minority Identities. Scores represented are the percentage of children who knew the definition of the word gay.

<sup>g</sup>CUA = Children's Understanding of Adoption. Scores ranged from 1 to 4 with higher scores indicating greater understanding of adoption.

<sup>h</sup>Social Competence = CBCL Social Competence subscale. Scores represented are standard *T* scores; higher *T* scores represent greater social competence.

**Table 3.** Correlations among identity-based socialization, children's outcomes, and demographic characteristics.

Variable	ACO <sup>a</sup>	LFS <sup>b</sup>	RCS <sup>c</sup>	CUA <sup>d</sup>	C-LFS <sup>e</sup>	LG Def <sup>f</sup>	S-Comp <sup>g</sup>	C-Sex <sup>h</sup>	TRA <sup>i</sup>
ACO	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
LFS	$r(93) = .23^*$	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
RCS	$r(167) = -.02$	$r(93) = .26^*$	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
CUA	$r(162) = -.07$	$r(89) = .19$	$r(163) = .10$	–	–	–	–	–	–
C-LFS	$r(88) = .01$	$r(87) = .24^*$	$r(88) = .13$	$r(45) = .34^*$	–	–	–	–	–
LG Def	$r(87) = -.14$	$r(85) = .07$	$r(87) = -.13$	$r(48) = .47^{**}$	$r(45) = .45^{**}$	–	–	–	–
S-Comp	$r(170) = -.06$	$r(95) = .26^*$	$r(172) = .20^{**}$	$r(168) = .26^{**}$	$r(92) = .35^{**}$	$r(91) = .10$	–	–	–
C-Sex	$r(171) = -.09$	$r(95) = -.18$	$r(174) = .01$	$r(87) = -.01$	$r(46) = -.19$	$r(48) = -.13$	$r(181) = -.08$	–	–
TRA	$r(171) = .18$	$r(95) = -.02$	$r(174) = -.28^{***}$	$r(65) = -.11$	$r(47) = -.02$	$r(48) = -.05$	$r(181) = -.08$	$r(95) = -.18$	–
C-Age <sup>j</sup>	$r(171) = -.21^{**}$	$r(95) = .12$	$r(174) = .21^{**}$	$r(86) = .59^{***}$	$r(47) = .31^*$	$r(48) = .47^{**}$	$r(181) = .21^{**}$	$r(94) = .13$	$r(93) = -.05$

\* $p < .05$ .

\*\* $p < .01$ .

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Note.

<sup>a</sup>ACO = Adoptive Communicative Openness;

<sup>b</sup>LFS = LGBT Family Socialization;

<sup>c</sup>RCS = Racial/cultural Socialization;

<sup>d</sup>CUA = Children's Understanding of Adoption;

<sup>e</sup>C-LFS = Children's Reports of LGBT Family Socialization.

<sup>f</sup>LG Def = Children's Knowledge of Sexual Identities (0 = No, 1 = Yes).

<sup>g</sup>S-Comp = CBCL Social Competence.

<sup>h</sup>C-Sex = Child Sex (0 = Girl, 1 = Boy).

<sup>i</sup>TRA = Transracial adoption (0 = Yes, 1 = No).

<sup>j</sup>C-Age = Child Age.

substantially different from the population average of  $50.00 \pm 10.00$ ; Achenbach, 1991).

### Associations among variables of interest

Correlations between all variables of interest appear in Table 3. We first describe associations among different identity-based socialization practices. Next, we discuss associations among various possible covariates (e.g., demographic characteristics) and socialization practices, and then we describe associations among those possible covariates and child outcome variables.

Finally, we report associations among socialization practices and child outcomes.

### Associations among socialization practices

Regarding parent-reported socialization practices, racial/cultural socialization was significantly correlated with LGBT family socialization,  $r(93) = .26$ ,  $p = .011$ ; greater racial/cultural socialization was linked with greater LGBT family socialization. Adoptive communicative openness, however, was unrelated to racial/cultural socialization,  $r(167) = -.02$ ,  $p = .818$ . Further, adoptive communicative openness was significantly associated with LGBT family socialization,



$r(93) = .23, p = .029$ ; greater adoptive communicative openness was linked with greater LGBT family socialization. Specific to LGBT family socialization, parent and child reports of LGBT were significantly correlated,  $r(87) = .24, p = .029$ .

### ***Associations between socialization practices and demographic factors***

Regarding associations between demographic characteristics and parent-reported socialization practices, there were only significant differences uncovered as a function of child age but not child sex or parental sexual orientation. Specifically, we found that child age was significantly associated with racial/cultural socialization,  $r(174) = .21, p = .006$ , and adoptive communicative openness,  $r(171) = -.21, p = .007$ . Children who were older received more racial/cultural socialization as well as less adoptive communicative openness as compared to younger children. Independent sample  $t$ -tests revealed that racial/cultural socialization,  $t(172) = -.14, p = .887$ , adoptive communicative openness,  $t(169) = 1.13, p = .260$ , and LGBT family socialization,  $t(93) = 1.72, p = .089$ , did not differ by child sex. Using ANOVA, we also found no differences as a function of parental sexual orientation in racial/cultural socialization,  $F(2, 171) = 1.58, p = .208$ , or adoptive communicative openness,  $F(2, 168) = .45, p = .637$ . Among LG-parent families, there were no differences in LGBT family socialization between lesbian and gay parents (previously reported among this sample; Oakley et al., 2017). Independent sample  $t$ -tests comparing specifically children with lesbian mothers and with gay fathers showed no differences in children's reports of LGBT family socialization,  $t(93) = -.69, p = .495$ .

Specifically, among LG-parent adoptive families, independent sample  $t$ -tests indicated that children's knowledge of sexual identities did not differ as a function of having lesbian mothers versus gay fathers,  $t(92) = 1.12, p = .267$ . In addition, children's ability to define sexual identities was significantly associated with children's reports of LGBT family socialization,  $t(43) = -3.32, p = .002$ , but not parents' reports,  $t(83) = -.67, p = .502$ . That is, children ( $M = 2.10, SD = .58$ ) who accurately defined "gay" also reported greater LGBT family socialization as compared to children ( $M = 1.56, SD = .51$ ) who did not accurately define "gay".

Transracial adoption status was linked with racial/cultural socialization and adoptive communicative openness but not LGBT family socialization. Parents who completed transracial adoptions ( $M = 6.22,$

$SD = 2.39$ ) engaged in greater levels of racial/cultural socialization than parents who completed same-race adoptions ( $M = 4.79, SD = 2.90$ ),  $t(172) = 3.57, p < .001$ . Further, parents who completed transracial adoptions ( $M = 3.08, SD = .59$ ) described significantly lower adoptive communicative openness than parents who completed same-race adoptions ( $M = 3.33, SD = .72$ ),  $t(169) = -2.38, p = .018$ . Thus, in our HLM analyses, we included an interaction term between racial/cultural socialization and transracial adoption status as well an interaction term between adoptive communicative openness and transracial adoption status. As more same-sex (versus different-sex) couples adopted across race, we conducted two-way ANOVAs to account for parental sexual orientation and transracial adoption status related to racial/cultural socialization and adoptive communicative openness. There was a significant main effect related to racial/cultural socialization for transracial adoption status,  $F(1, 161) = 12.46, p = .001$ , but not parental sexual orientation,  $F(2, 161) = 2.45, p = .089$ , and the interaction effect was not significant,  $F(2, 161) = 2.46, p = .088$ . Similarly, a two-way ANOVA showed a significant main effect related to adoptive communicative openness for transracial adoption status,  $F(1, 161) = 7.98, p = .005$ , but not parental sexual orientation,  $F(2, 161) = .60, p = .549$ , and the interaction effect was not significant,  $F(2, 161) = 3.02, p = .052$ . Thus, it seems that transracial adoption, and not parental sexual orientation, was associated with racial/cultural socialization and adoptive communicative openness. Lastly, LG parents who completed transracial adoptions did not differ in their reports of LGBT family socialization from LG parents who completed same-race adoptions,  $t(93) = .15, p = .881$ .

### ***Associations between child outcomes and demographic factors***

Regarding associations between demographic characteristics and child outcomes, independent sample  $t$ -tests revealed that neither transracial adoption status,  $ps > .337$ , nor child sex,  $ps > .596$ , were significantly associated with either child outcome variables (i.e., understanding of adoption, social competence). No significant differences in either child outcome variable were uncovered as a function of parental sexual orientation using ANOVA,  $ps > .949$ . Child age, however, was significantly correlated with both child outcome variables, namely, understanding of adoption,  $r(86) = .59, p < .001$ , and social competence,  $r(92) = .23, p = .030$ . Older children had greater understanding of adoption and social competence as compared to



**Table 4.** Multiple linear regression (MLR) analysis of socialization practices predicting children's understanding of adoption (including child age as a covariate).

Variable	B	SE (B)	$\beta$	t	p
Intercept	-1.40	1.01		-1.38	.175
ACO <sup>a</sup>	.04	.19	.03	.19	.847
RCS <sup>b</sup>	-.07	.06	-.15	-1.21	.233
LFS <sup>c</sup>	.07	.30	.03	.23	.819
C-LFS <sup>d</sup>	.31	.21	.19	1.47	.149
Child age	.40	.08	.64	4.77	<.001
R <sup>2</sup>			.49		
F(5, 37)		7.03			<.001

Note.

<sup>a</sup>ACO = Adoptive Communicative Openness.

<sup>b</sup>RCS = Racial/cultural Socialization.

<sup>c</sup>LFS = LGBT Family Socialization.

<sup>d</sup>C-LFS = Children's Reports of LGBT Family Socialization. When measures include LFS or C-LFS, only LG-parent families are included in analyses.

younger children. To account for this, child age was included as a covariate in subsequent MLR and HLM analyses.

### Associations between socialization practices and child outcomes

Finally, we examined associations between parent-reported socialization practices and children's outcomes (understanding of adoption and social competence). Racial/cultural socialization was not significantly correlated with children's understanding of adoption,  $r(84) = .05$ ,  $p = .628$ . However, racial/cultural socialization was significantly correlated with social competence,  $r(172) = .20$ ,  $p = .008$ , such that greater racial/cultural socialization was associated with children's greater social competence. Adoptive communicative openness was not significantly correlated with either child outcome variable,  $ps > .466$ . LGBT family socialization was not significantly correlated with children's understanding of adoption,  $r(46) = .17$ ,  $p = .260$ . LGBT family socialization was significantly correlated, however, with children's social competence,  $r(95) = .26$ ,  $p = .011$ , such that greater parent-reported LGBT family socialization was associated with greater competence. Children's reports of LGBT family socialization were significantly correlated with their understanding of adoption,  $r(45) = .34$ ,  $p = .022$ , as well as their social competence,  $r(46) = .37$ ,  $p = .011$ . Children who reported greater LGBT family socialization also had a greater understanding of adoption and greater social competence.

### Predictions of children's outcomes from Identity-Based socialization

Following descriptive and correlational analyses, we conducted MLR and HLM analyses including child age as a covariate to assess whether identity-based

**Table 5.** HLM Results assessing whether socialization practices predict children's social competence.

Variable	Coeff	SE	t	df	p
Intercept $\beta_0$					
Intercept $\gamma_{00}$	48.00	1.01	47.62	44	<.001
ACO $\beta_1$					
Intercept $\gamma_{01}$	-1.73	1.29	-1.34	36	.189
RCS $\beta_2$					
Intercept $\gamma_{02}$	.47	.34	1.36	36	.183
LFS $\beta_3$					
Intercept $\gamma_{03}$	2.51	1.69	1.49	36	.145
C-LFS $\beta_4$					
Intercept $\gamma_{04}$	3.40	1.70	2.36	36	.024

Note. Coeff = Unstandardized coefficients; ACO = Adoptive Communicative Openness; RCS = Racial/cultural Socialization; LFS = LGBT Family Socialization; C-LFS = Children's Reports of LGBT Family Socialization.

socialization predicted children's outcomes. The MLR results revealed that child age predicted children's understanding of adoption, but not adoptive communicative openness, LGBT family socialization (parent or child reports), nor racial/cultural socialization (see Table 4). Thus, older children demonstrated more sophisticated understanding of adoption. Next, we conducted HLM to assess whether identity-based socialization predicted children's social competence. To begin, we included the covariate of child age as well as two interaction terms (between transracial adoption and adoptive communicative openness and between transracial adoption and racial/cultural socialization, respectively), along with all socialization predictor variables. Following this we engaged in a stepwise approach to investigate the most parsimonious (and effectively powered) model that included our variables of interest (i.e., socialization practices). Thus, because they were not significant covariates, we removed both interaction terms and children's age. The final model included all three parent-reported socialization practices (i.e., adoptive communicative openness, racial/cultural socialization, LGBT family socialization) and children's reports of LGBT family socialization. No parent-reported measures significantly predicted children's social competence. However, children's reports of LGBT family socialization were significantly predicted by children's social competence. That is, children who reported greater levels of LGBT family socialization felt more social competent (see Table 5).

### Discussion

Our findings represent a contribution to scholarship on identity-based socialization among families with diverse identity compositions (i.e., adoption, race, sexual orientation) and young children. We found that parents do engage in identity-based socialization and

that some socialization practices were associated with one another, including evidence to suggest agreement between parent and child reports of LGBT family socialization. We also found that some forms of identity-based socialization varied across children's age and transracial adoption status but not across parental sexual orientation or child sex. Further, children's age was significantly associated with all variables of interest (e.g., socialization practices and child outcomes) except for parent-reported LGBT family socialization. Further, parent-reported socialization practices were not significantly associated with children's understanding of adoption nor social competence. We did find, however, that child-reported socialization (i.e., LGBT family socialization) was significantly associated with children's knowledge of sexual minority identity (i.e., ability to define the word gay), their understanding of adoption, and their social competence (as reported by parents). In sum, these findings provide both mixed support for our hypotheses as well as important implications for future research.

Descriptively, regarding child outcomes, our results generally align with previous research. In terms of children's understanding of adoption, children typically recognized adoption as a pathway to parenthood, but some struggled to describe differences between birth and adoption and their overall understanding about adoption was relatively limited (e.g., "my daddy told me"), consistent with other studies of preadolescent adopted children (Brodzinsky et al., 1984). Children's social competence scores indicated that they were well-adjusted and there were no significant differences by parental sexual orientation in children's social competence. These findings are supported by a large literature on children who are born to and adopted by their sexual minority parents (Moore & Stambolis-Ruhstorfer, 2013). This work adds further evidence to the notion that family processes, rather than parental sexual orientation, are most closely tied with children's outcomes (Farr, 2017).

Interestingly, fewer than half (43.75%) of the children with LG parents were able to accurately define the word "gay." This former finding aligns with previous research on children with heterosexual parents in middle childhood, as fewer than 25% of children (who did not have LG parents) were found as able to define "gay" (Farr et al., 2019). From our finding, it appears possible that more children with LG parents are able to define "gay" as compared with their peers with heterosexual parents, yet this task still appears to be challenging for children in this age group (given that fewer than half of children in our sample were able to

do so). This direct comparison, however, has not yet been empirically explored. Regardless, children with LG parents who could define "gay" also reported greater LGBT family socialization. Thus, it appears that children's understanding of sexual identity terms, such as "gay", was connected to their reported experiences of LGBT family socialization, although future research is necessary to explore the direction of effects.

In terms of the frequency of socialization behaviors, we found that parents reported moderate levels of all three forms of identity-based socialization, which aligns with previous research among similar samples investigating socialization based on racial/ethnic, adoptive, and sexual minority identities (Goldberg et al., 2016; Goldberg & Smith, 2016). However, this work has emphasized parent approaches to identity-based socialization (e.g., engaged versus avoidant approaches, direct versus indirect socialization) and did not include child reports or reference to related child outcomes. Thus, our findings are among the first to describe identity-based socialization practices, and relevant child outcomes, using both parent and some child reports among a largely multiracial sample of lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parent families with preadolescent children. Our results are noteworthy in indicating that parents have often begun racial/cultural socialization, adoptive communicative openness, and LGBT family socialization by the time children are school-age, given that all three forms of identity-based socialization were described among families in this sample.

Among socialization practices, we found that parents' reports of positive racial/cultural socialization and LGBT family socialization were positively associated with one another and that LGBT family socialization and adoptive communicative openness were positively associated with one another. The associations of LGBT family socialization with racial/cultural socialization as well as with adoptive communicative openness may be related to the higher proportion of transracial adoptions among same-sex couples compared to different-sex couples (Farr & Patterson, 2009). Racial/cultural socialization and adoptive communicative openness, however, were not significantly correlated, which was contradictory to our initial hypothesis. Relatedly, we discovered that parents who completed transracial adoptions engaged in more racial/cultural socialization but less adoptive communicative openness than parents who completed same-race adoptions. Together, these findings may reflect that parents "prioritize" (whether intentionally or not)

different forms of socialization (e.g., racial/cultural socialization versus adoptive communicative openness) based on what they believe to be most salient to their child and/or the identities for which their child has expressed interest. Among sexual minority parent adoptive families, it may be that discussions about pathways to parenthood (i.e., adoption) naturally overlap with conversations about what it means to be an LGBT family. However, this possibility warrants further research exploration.

When considering how demographic characteristics varied among some but not all forms of identity-based socialization, it is relevant to acknowledge that middle childhood is a particularly important time for adopted children as they often begin to develop the cognitive capacity to grapple with more difficult questions related to identity (e.g., “why did my birth parent place me for adoption?”; Brodzinsky, 2011). Children’s age was related to positive racial/cultural socialization and adoptive communicative openness but not parent-reported LGBT family socialization. First, parents may assume that as children age, they learn about the process of adoption and thus engage in less adoptive communicative openness. This aligns with our finding that children’s understanding of adoption increased across age, even in the context of less adoptive communicative openness (indeed, as we describe more later, adoption understanding was not tied with adoptive communicative openness). Second, substantial research has found that racial/cultural socialization increases as children age even among preadolescent children (Hughes et al., 2016), so it is unsurprising that we uncovered this as well. To our knowledge, only one other study has examined possible associations between children’s age and identity-based socialization beyond racial/cultural socialization (Goldberg & Smith, 2016), so our results among transracial adoptees with LG parents represents a contribution to the literature. Finally, parents may engage in moderate levels of LGBT family socialization over time regardless of children’s age (at least across middle childhood). Perhaps because LGBT family socialization is focused on a shared familial identity rather than children’s individual identities (i.e., adoptive, racial/ethnic, etc.), related socialization behaviors may be less directly tied to particular developmental stages. This finding also indicates that LGBT family socialization and racial/cultural socialization are family processes with both distinct and parallel features (Goldberg & Smith, 2016; Wyman-Battalen et al., 2019).

Further, children’s age was significantly associated with all other child-reported variables (i.e., children’s understanding of adoption, social competence, knowledge of sexual minority identities, and children’s reports of LGBT family socialization) in a positive direction. That is, older children (as compared with younger children) had a greater understanding of adoption, greater social competence, were able to identify the word “gay” (i.e., knowledge of sexual minority identities), and described greater LGBT family socialization. These significant associations with child age further speak to the context-dependent nature of identity-based socialization practices. Our findings underscore the importance of considering children’s developmental stage in the context of families with diverse identity compositions. Socialization practices based on different identities (e.g., racial/cultural, LGBT family, adoption) can help to foster positive identities, and in turn, cultivate beneficial outcomes such as greater psychological well-being (Ferrari et al., 2015) and social competence. It is clear then that children’s development in relation to socialization practices will continue to be an important area for further study amidst growing family diversity in the U.S.

Related to associations between demographic characteristics and other variables of interest, we found that children’s sex and parental sexual orientation were not related to any identity-based socialization practices or child outcomes, which in some ways contradicted our initial hypotheses (Vonk et al., 2010). In terms of child sex, it may be that differences are more likely to emerge when racial/cultural socialization practices considered are highly specific (e.g., celebrating holidays, recreational activities). In contrast, when investigating broader conceptualizations of racial/cultural socialization (e.g., including cultural socialization, preparation for bias, etc.), child sex differences no longer emerge. Another possible explanation may be that child sex differences begin to appear during adolescence and parents do not differentiate based on child sex during middle childhood (Hughes et al., 2016). The finding that there were no significant associations by parental sexual orientation in socialization or child outcomes aligns with previous literature that often reports no significant differences among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parent families with regard to these family dynamics (Farr & Patterson, 2013; Goldberg & Smith, 2013; Van Rijn-van Gelderen et al., 2018), but also extends this research to new findings about identity-based socialization practices and specific outcomes related to adoption and social

competence. Finally, children's transracial adoption status was not associated LGBT family socialization, nor with child outcomes, which aligns with earlier findings regarding child and family outcomes with this sample when children were preschool-age (Farr et al., 2010).

We found that some identity-based socialization practices were correlated with child outcomes. Specifically, parent-reported LGBT family socialization and positive racial/cultural socialization were significantly associated with children's social competence (as reported by parents). However, when simultaneously entered into our regression and HLM models, no parent-reported socialization practices were associated with either child outcome (i.e., children's understanding of adoption and social competence), contrary to our expectations. Previous research has shown that parents often overestimate their levels of racial/cultural socialization, which may also be the case here (Hughes, Bachman et al., 2006a; Hughes, Rodriguez, et al., 2006b), it could be that parents simply overestimate all forms of identity-based socialization. It is also possible that the results reflect the young age of our sample – parents accurately report their levels of socialization, but children are too young to internalize the messages (Hughes, Rodriguez, et al., 2006b; Hughes et al., 2016). Although previous research has shown that communications surrounding adoption are related to children's understanding of adoption (Brodzinsky, 2006), this work has largely not included samples diverse in identity composition such as same-sex parent families or transracial adoptees. Thus, it may be that adoption communication is only related to children's understanding of adoption when children are older, or that this relationship is qualified by demographic characteristics such as adoptees in multi-racial versus same-race families. In sum, these reasons may explain why, in general, we found few associations between parent-reported socialization practices and child outcomes.

We did find, however, that children's reports of LGBT family socialization predicted their social competence (as reported by parents). That is, children who reported greater levels of LGBT family socialization also had greater social competence. This indicates that in middle childhood, children's (vs parents') reports of LGBT family socialization may be more directly connected to their outcomes. Our findings that child, but not parent, reports of socialization were associated with child outcomes, specifically in terms of children's reports of LGBT family socialization and their understanding of adoption, further aligns with

and extends previous socialization literature (Hughes et al., 2016). Our findings speak to the context-dependent nature of socialization (i.e., differences in parent-child reports that reflect the experiences of individuals with different identities or ages within families), which is also supported by the racial/cultural socialization literature (Hughes, Bachman et al., 2006a). Child reports of racial/cultural socialization and adoption communication have often been found as more predictive of child outcomes than are parent reports (Reinoso et al., 2013). Broadly then, it is important to note that while parents' reports of LGBT family socialization did not predict young children's outcomes, children's reports of this socialization were positively associated with social competence. Continued study of LGBT family socialization is needed, especially in exploring whether and how future parent and child reports of LGBT family socialization positively predict children's social competence over time.

Returning to possible explanations for the discrepant associations among types of identity-based socialization practices, as well as to further consider discrepant associations between socialization practices and different child outcomes, our findings may relate to the unique nature of individual identities. Although racial/ethnic and sexual minority groups have aspects of shared culture and history, and as such, LGBT family socialization research is often studied with a parallel framework to racial/cultural socialization (Oakley et al., 2017; Wyman-Battalen et al., 2019), adoptive communicative openness may be distinct from racial/cultural socialization and LGBT family socialization. Adoptive identities may not have shared culture and histories commonly associated with racial/ethnic and sexual minority groups. Rather, adoptees may focus on relationships to adoptive family members and families of origin (Brodzinsky, 2011). Differences in identity then, may help to explain the lack of association between adoptive communicative openness and children's social competence (that we discuss later), as well as between adoptive communicative openness and racial/cultural socialization. Previous research with sexual minority parents has shown that the frequency of identity-based socialization is related to whom in the family holds the identity of interest (e.g., parents of color engage in more frequent racial/cultural socialization; Goldberg & Smith, 2016). This work has found links between adoption and sexual minority identity-based socialization when "indirect" socialization was considered (e.g., modeling conversations with others while the child is present) but not with "direct"



socialization (e.g., discussing with a child how to cope with microaggressions; Goldberg & Smith, 2016). It may be that when “indirect” and “direct” socialization practices are considered as one construct (as we did here), only some associations were present, such as links between racial/cultural socialization and LGBT family socialization.

Taken together, our results indicate unique dynamics particularly relevant to sexual minority parent families, who also are more likely to adopt children (and to adopt children of color) than are heterosexual parent families (Goldberg & Conron, 2018). We found that children’s reports of LGBT family socialization were linked with children’s social competence such that child reports of greater LGBT family socialization predicted greater social competence. These findings may represent the underpinnings of family processes (i.e., identity-based socialization; Oakley et al., 2017; Wyman-Battalen et al., 2019) by which same-sex parent families may support their children (e.g., to be resilient following microaggression experiences on the basis of having same-sex parents; Farr et al., 2016) and could be one explanation as to why studies have consistently shown comparable adjustment outcomes for children with sexual minority and heterosexual parents (Moore & Stambolis-Ruhstorfer, 2013).

### ***Strengths, limitations, and future directions***

These findings are from a multi-informant design study using survey and interview data from parents and children, which represent several strengths and contributions to the literature. An additional strength is the simultaneous consideration of identity-based socialization practices and child outcomes, which to the best of our knowledge has not occurred among such a sample. However, this work also has limitations. This sample of adoptive parents is generally well-educated, white, and relatively wealthy (with considerable variation in household income) and may not apply to all pathways to parenthood. The demographics of this sample, however, do reflect parents who complete private domestic adoption (Vandivere et al., 2009) and may generalize to individuals who chose this pathway to parenthood.

The small sample size and specific demographic characteristics (i.e., parents who completed private domestic adoptions) preclude analyses that could also provide information as to how identity-based socialization practices function within families with diverse identity compositions. For example, having a larger sample size and greater diversity of children’s racial/

ethnic backgrounds could allow for greater precision in assessing how socialization of varying identities may function (e.g., socialization among Asian American families is much less likely to focus on discrimination, but in contrast, these socialization messages are common among African American families; Hughes, Rodriguez, et al., 2006b). A larger sample size may also have allowed for analyses based on the composition of the family by gender identity (e.g., comparing two father families with daughters and two mother families with sons). Further, we included different-gender couples in our analyses as part of the heterosexual groups and participants in same-gender couples in the lesbian or gay groups in our analyses, a method that has been used in other research investigating the experiences of sexual minority and heterosexual adoptive parents (e.g., Brodzinsky & Goldberg, 2016; Wyman-Battalen et al., 2019). This collapsing of sexual identities occurred because the initial recruitment information for this study specified lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive parents, and so that we could preserve power in our analyses. Unfortunately, this collapsing of individual sexual identities (i.e., bisexual) into our larger three categories (i.e., lesbian, gay, or heterosexual) may further contribute to the bierasure that bisexual individuals potentially face (Hackl et al., 2013) given that participants did not explicitly self-identify in our three analytic groups. Future research should investigate a broader array of sexual and gender minority identities.

Moreover, child-reported measures were only available for LGBT family socialization, and not for racial/cultural socialization and adoptive communicative openness, so future research should incorporate parent and child perspectives for additional socialization practices. Although our measures did capture some different aspects of identity-based socialization, they did not directly assess the ways in which identity-based socialization behaviors actually occurred or the related unintentional processes in which parents may engage. For example, if a parent showcases colorblind attitudes (e.g., all races have equal opportunities in the U.S.; Neville et al., 2000), as a result of believing that discussing racial issues leads to unnecessary anxieties (Morgan & Langrehr, 2019) or that race doesn’t matter once a child joins a family (Killian & Khanna, 2019), then it may be that children’s reports of racial/cultural socialization would not align with parent reports.

Further, transracial adoptive families characterized by one white and one racial/ethnic minority parent who shares the race of the child is also a growing area



of interest that we could not further investigate given the size of our subsample. The presence of a white parent (i.e., the dominant racial group with substantially greater institutional power and access) in particular cannot be understated in how it may influence family context and in turn, the variety of different racial/cultural messages that a child receives (Hughes et al., 2006, 2016). One way in which to investigate the possibility of nuances in racial/cultural socialization in families in which one parent and a child share a racial/ethnic minority identity while another parent does not (i.e., white) could be to use observational methods (e.g., ethnographic methodology, observations of family conversations) to provide key information as to the nuanced ways in which racialized family dynamics occur in the household. In addition, the way in which we conceptualized transracial adoption in this study was based on whether at least one parent was of a different race than the child and thus we were not able to fully explore the complexities of racial dynamics among these families (Marr, 2017).

An additional limitation to note is that these results were cross-sectional. Thus, we cannot suggest causality, and future work should use longitudinal methods to rectify this limitation. Many of the analyses presented in this work are bivariate correlations. Given the age range of the children in our sample and significant associations with many of our variables, future work should consider the possible impact of children's age on identity-based socialization practices and children's behavioral outcomes (i.e., social competence). Additional research is also needed that represents samples with more diverse pathways to parenthood, more diverse samples (e.g., education, racial/ethnic identity, noncisgender identities), and children of different age groups.

### Implications and conclusions

Our findings represent a starting point for uncovering nuances in three forms of socialization among families with diverse identity compositions, particularly in providing descriptive information, associations among socialization practices, and related children's outcomes – little of which have been reported previously. These findings are relevant to practice when considering the greater likelihood of same-sex couples (as compared to different-sex couples) to adopt and to do so transracially (Goldberg, 2009; Goldberg & Conron, 2018). As such, our study provides direction for future research and practice with families with diverse identity compositions. Investigating LGBT family

socialization from both parents' and children's perspectives has potential for informing clinical work with sexual minority parent families. Given that LGBT family socialization may positively relate to children's social competence, practitioners can engage in efforts to support parents in socialization practices with their children to potentially address social and behavioral concerns. It may even be that LGBT family socialization shares positive associations with children's social competence in families without LGBT representation (e.g., heterosexual adoptive parents with heterosexual children) such that socialization around different forms of diversity is positively impactful for all youth. However, future research is necessary as our data cannot directly speak to this possibility.

In sum, it is noteworthy that multiple forms of identity-based socialization occur among families with adoptive parents diverse in parental sexual orientation and their preadolescent children, and that children's reports of some of these socialization practices appear to be positively related to children's social adjustment.

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