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Associations between Discussions of Racial and Ethnic Differences in Internationally Adoptive Families and Delinquent Behavior among Korean Adopted Adolescents

Kayla N. Anderson^a, Richard M. Lee^b, Martha A. Rueter^a, and Oh Myo Kim^{b,1}

Kayla N. Anderson: and02584@umn.edu; Richard M. Lee: richlee@umn.edu; Martha A. Rueter: mrueter@umn.edu; Oh Myo Kim: kimrt@bc.edu

^aDepartment of Family Social Science, University of Minnesota, 290 McNeal Hall, 1985 Buford Avenue, St. Paul, MN, USA 55108

^bDepartment of Psychology, University of Minnesota, N218 Elliott Hall, 75 East River Road, Minneapolis, MN, USA 55455

Abstract

Internationally adopted adolescents may have more delinquent behavior than non-adopted adolescents. One explanation is these adolescents experience discrimination and loss of culture, and adoptive parents are not adequately addressing these experiences. However, studies have not examined the effects of family discussions of racial and ethnic differences within adoptive families on adopted adolescents' delinquent behavior. To test this relationship, this study utilized data from 111 U.S. internationally adoptive families with 185 South Korean adopted adolescents (55% female, *M* age = 17.75). During an observational assessment, families discussed the importance of their racial and ethnic differences, and adolescents completed a delinquent behavior questionnaire. Analysis of covariance showed differences in adolescent delinquent behavior across three ways adoptive families discussed racial and ethnic differences; adolescents whose families acknowledged differences had the fewest mean delinquent behaviors. There were no significant differences in delinquent behavior between adolescents whose families acknowledged or rejected the importance of racial and ethnic differences. However, adopted adolescents whose families held discrepant views of differences had significantly more problem behavior than adolescents whose families either acknowledged or rejected the importance of racial and ethnic differences. Clinicians, adoption professionals, and other parenting specialists should focus on building cohesive family identities about racial and ethnic differences, as discrepant views of differences are associated with the most adoptee delinquent behavior.

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Correspondence regarding this manuscript should be sent to: Kayla N. Anderson, Department of Family Social Science, University of Minnesota, 290 McNeal Hall, 1985 Buford Avenue, St. Paul, MN, USA 55108. and02584@umn.edu, telephone: 1-574-261-0450, fax: 1-612-625-4227.

¹Oh Myo Kim is now located in the Counseling, Developmental, and Educational Psychology Department at Boston College.

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Keywords

delinquent behavior; externalizing behaviors; international adoption; family functioning; cultural socialization

1. Introduction

Worldwide, nearly a million children have been adopted internationally since 1945 (Selman, 2012). In the United States, the largest number of international adoptions involves South Korean children. It is estimated more than 110,000 Korean children have been adopted by predominantly White American families. Today, 59% of internationally adopted children are from Asian countries (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2013), with more than 105,000 Asian adopted children living in U.S. households with White parents in 2009 (Krieder & Raleigh, 2011). More than 80% of international adoptions are considered transracial with White parents and children who are racial and ethnic minorities in the United States (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2013). This study focuses on families with at least one adolescent who was adopted internationally and transracially as a young child from South Korea.

In recent years, the adjustment of internationally adopted children has been prevalent in research (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2005). Although most adoptees function well, several studies suggest internationally adopted persons who were adopted as young children may have higher rates of delinquent and criminal behaviors in adolescence compared to non-adopted adolescents (Hjern, Lindblad, & Vinnerljung, 2002; Verhulst, Althaus, & Versluis-den Bieman, 1990a). Moreover, externalizing behaviors, including delinquency, increase at a faster rate among internationally adopted persons who were adopted as young children than non-adopted children as children age into adolescence (Verhulst & Versluis-den Bieman, 1995). The aforementioned faster trajectory and higher rates of delinquency in adolescence are often attributed to pre-adoption adversity (e.g., adverse living conditions in countries of origin; Verhulst, Althaus, & Versluis-den Bieman, 1992) and poor self-regulatory behavior compared to non-adopted or domestically adopted children (Rutter, 2005). However, adoption scholars (Lee & the Minnesota International Adoption Project Team, 2010; Mohanty & Newhill, 2006) have noted there is a need to look beyond pre-adoption adversity and self-regulatory difficulties in childhood as precursors to delinquent and other externalizing behaviors in adolescence (Loeber, Burke, & Pardini, 2009; Stevens et al., 2008).

In support of this position, racial or ethnic discrimination may be related to externalizing behaviors, including delinquency, among internationally adopted children even after accounting for pre-adoption adversity (Hjern et al., 2002; Lee & the Minnesota International Adoption Project Team, 2010). Moreover, prominent scholars examining race-related issues in Asian internationally adoptive families have suggested that greater delinquency and other externalizing behaviors in adolescence may be related to the family's ability or inability to constructively discuss racial and ethnic differences (Lee, 2003; Mohanty & Newhill, 2006). Presently though, there is limited research on the relationship between family discussions

about racial and ethnic differences and adopted adolescents' delinquent behavior. Guided by a cultural socialization framework (Hughes et al., 2006), this study examined the association between how international, transracial adoptive families discuss racial and ethnic differences and South Korean adopted adolescents' delinquent behavior.

1.1. Cultural Socialization in Internationally Adoptive Families

The cultural socialization framework suggests parents of ethnic minority children engage in activities or discussions about their cultural history and racial discrimination that improves children's heritage awareness and assists children in working through discrimination, resulting in better behavioral development (Hughes et al., 2006). Importantly, cultural socialization is more complicated in international, transracial adoptive families, because ethnic minority children are adopted into predominantly White families (Krieder & Raleigh, 2011). White adoptive parents are more likely to have limited knowledge of the child's birth culture and less first-hand experience with discrimination (Lee, 2003). Thus, White adoptive parents must be intentional about seeking opportunities to engage with the adopted child's racial and ethnic heritage (Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt, Gunnar & the Minnesota International Adoption Project Team, 2006).

Cultural socialization has primarily been studied in terms of whether adoptive parents support and adopted children engage in activities related to their ethnic background, such as eating ethnic food and attending culture camps (Vonk, Lee, & Crolley-Simic, 2010). Although some internationally adoptive families engage in these activities (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2008), many White adoptive parents downplay the importance of the adopted child's birth culture and racial experiences (Berququist, Campbell, & Unrau, 2003; Samuels, 2009). Adoptive parents that suggest cultural socialization is important tend to engage in these activities only a few times per year (Kim, Reichwald, & Lee, 2013). Yet, cultural socialization is related to positive outcomes for internationally adopted persons, including ethnic identity development (Basow, Lilley, Bookwala, & McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 2008) and well-being (Mohanty, Keokse, & Sales, 2006).

Despite literature suggesting delinquent behaviors may be a prevalent negative outcome among internationally adopted adolescents (Hjern et al., 2002; Verhulst et al., 1990a), there is limited research on the association between cultural socialization and externalizing behaviors, including delinquency, for international adoptees. Johnston and colleagues (2007) found parental cultural socialization efforts were linked to fewer externalizing behaviors among youth adopted from Asia. Manzi and colleagues (2014) suggest parental cultural socialization is indirectly related to fewer behavior problems among adolescents and young adults adopted from Latin America. Looking beyond international adoption, DeBerry, Scarr and Weinberg (1996) found family racial socialization was indirectly associated with an aggregate measure of delinquent, academic, and social problems in a study of domestic transracially adopted African American youth. Similarly, Hughes and colleagues (2009) found cultural socialization was indirectly associated with less antisocial behaviors among non-adopted African American and White youth. Parental efforts in helping the adoptee learn about his/her heritage and address discrimination may be negatively related to externalizing behavior, including delinquency, for internationally adopted adolescents.

Previous cultural socialization studies have relied on parent or youth self-reports of engagement in cultural socialization activities, but these studies have not captured how families discuss the child's heritage, discrimination, and racial and ethnic differences within the family. Using a mixed-method approach, Hughes and colleagues (2008) reported that same-race families' self-reports of cultural socialization do not always align with actual conversations and behaviors related to cultural socialization. Parent self-report of cultural socialization has also been found to not match with actual observed family discussions about race and ethnicity in a small sample of internationally adoptive families (Kim et al., 2013). In other words, self-reports of parent cultural socialization efforts may not adequately capture each family member's experiences with cultural socialization. This suggests more research attention must be given to actual family discussions about racial and ethnic differences in internationally adoptive families.

1.2. Acknowledging Racial and Ethnic Differences Within the Family

One method to examine how cultural socialization discussions occur within adoptive families is to investigate the extent to which families are able to acknowledge racial and ethnic differences during family conversations. Stemming from theoretical work about the importance of how families discuss adoption-specific differences (Brodzinsky, 1987, 1990, 1997; Kaye & Warren, 1988; Kirk, 1964), how racial and ethnic differences within the family are discussed and acknowledged is considered a fundamental but understudied component of cultural socialization in international, transracial adoptive families (Kim et al., 2013; Kirk, 1984; Lee, 2003; Rojewski, 2005; Shiao & Tuan, 2008). In some families, racial and ethnic differences between family members are comfortably acknowledged and the importance of each person's background is supportively discussed among family members. In other families, the existence or importance of racial and ethnic differences to their families is rejected. Finally, some other families are unable to agree about the importance and extent to which they discuss their racial and ethnic differences, resulting in "discrepant views of differences" within the family.

International, transracial adoptive families acknowledging the importance of their racial and ethnic differences embrace their multi-racial and/or multi-cultural family status (Kim et al., 2013; Kirk, 1984; Shiao & Tuan, 2008). This may be manifested through open discussion about the importance of the adopted adolescent's racial and ethnic heritage or familial engagement in cultural socialization activities. To acknowledge the importance of the families' differences, non-adopted family members also accept and actively support the adolescent's racial and ethnic experiences. Indeed, they may interpret the adopted adolescent's discrimination experiences as discrimination against the entire family. In short, all family members must accept, participate in, and support cultural activities or conversations that acknowledge the importance of the adopted adolescent's heritage. Moreover, the theory suggests parents must do more than send the adopted adolescent to learn about his/her culture sans parental or sibling engagement with the adoptees' birth culture, as these efforts may make the adopted adolescent feel different from the family.

In other international, transracial adoptive families, families reject the importance of talking about racial and ethnic differences (Kim et al., 2013; Kirk, 1984) and use a color-blind

approach in conversations about racial and ethnic differences (Lee, 2003; Shiao & Tuan, 2008). That is, these families suggest racial and ethnic differences are not important considerations within their family by quickly ending conversations about their families' racial and ethnic diversity. In addition to not seeing racial and ethnic differences as important, families who reject differences may diminish the importance of the adopted adolescent's racial and ethnic heritage during their conversations. Some internationally adoptive families disagree, or have discrepant views of differences, about the importance of racial and ethnic diversity in their family (Kim et al., 2013). For instance, some parents may express a colorblind attitude to race and ethnicity but adopted adolescents respond that racial and ethnic experiences are salient life experiences to take into account. Conversely, other parents are acutely aware of the importance of racial and ethnic differences within the family but adopted adolescents are not interested in discussing these issues. Qualitative assessment of discrepant views of differences suggests family members may not only disagree about whether racial and ethnic differences are important in their family, but also how well the family acknowledges and supports these differences (Kim et al., 2013).

In line with the cultural socialization framework (Hughes et al., 2006), it has been theoretically suggested that families acknowledging the importance of racial and ethnic differences would have adolescents with more positive adjustment than families who reject the importance of differences (Kirk, 1984). However, the discrepant views of differences category has not yet been theoretically or empirically tied to adopted adolescent adjustment. In the present study, we empirically examine the relationship between how families discuss the importance of racial and ethnic differences - as the three categories of acknowledge, reject, and discrepant views of differences - and South Korean adopted adolescents' delinquent behavior.

1.3. The Current Study: Research Questions and Hypotheses

Building upon the aforementioned research, the primary research question is whether family discussions about the importance of racial and ethnic differences are related to South Korean adopted adolescents' delinquent behavior. Two hypotheses are delineated below.

H1: Adopted adolescents whose families acknowledge differences will have fewer delinquent behaviors compared to families rejecting differences.

H2: Adopted adolescents whose families have discrepant views of differences will differ in delinquent behavior from the other two discussion categories. The direction of this association cannot be predicted a priori due to limited research on the discrepant family category.

Relationships between demographic data and how families discussed racial and ethnic differences were also examined to ensure South Korean adopted adolescent delinquent behavior were not related to demographic differences between the three possible discussion categories.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

Participants were a subset of families from Wave 2 (a follow-up wave of the initial study sample) of the Sibling Interaction and Behavior Study (SIBS; Wave 1: $N = 617$ families; $n = 409$ adoptive families, $n = 208$ non-adoptive families) with at least one adolescent who was adopted internationally before 2-years-old. Due to the prevalence of South Korean international adoptees in the U.S. (Selman, 2012), the majority of adoptive families in the study had adoptees from South Korea (71%). This study included families that had at least one adolescent adopted from South Korea as a young child. Additional inclusion criteria were: (a) both parents were White, (b) families discussed the importance and role of race and ethnicity in their families at Wave 2, and (c) a Korean adopted adolescent was present during the racial and ethnic discussion.

Of the full sample of 617 families, 545 (88% retention) participated at Wave 2 and 368 of these families (68%) responded to questions about race and ethnicity in their family. Four families (1%) were removed due to poor videotaped sound quality. Of the families responding to questions about race and ethnicity, 229 were adoptive families (63%) and 166 of these families had Korean adoptees (72%). Three families (2%) were removed because parents were non-White and 50 families (31%) did not have Korean adoptees present during the racial and ethnic discussion. Two families (2%) were removed due to missing adoption status.

The final study subsample included 111 families that met all inclusion criteria. Each family had two adolescents, at least one of which was a Korean adoptee. Most families had two adopted adolescents (83 families; 75%), while 28 families (25%) had a South Korean adopted adolescent and a non-adopted adolescent. Regardless of the second adolescents' adoption status or if adopted, country of origin, both adolescents were invited to participate in the race and ethnicity discussion. To provide a picture of delinquency not confounded by adoption status (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2005) or diversity in early adversity experiences (Fensbo, 2004), only delinquent behavior of Korean international adoptees was assessed. Thus, 111 transracial, adoptive families with at least one Korean international adoptee discussed the role and importance of race and ethnicity in their families; within these families, delinquent behavior for 185 Korean adopted adolescents was examined. The analyses accounted for similarities between Korean adopted siblings using nested data methods (see Section 2.4.1, below).

Adoptive families were recruited from the three largest adoption agencies in one mid-western U.S. state. In the full sample of adoptive families, 90% of families were located; 63% of located families participated. To participate, families must have had at least one parent and two adolescents fewer than five years apart in age, live within driving distance of the university where the research lab is located, and have children without disabilities. All adopted adolescents were not biologically related to other adopted siblings and were adopted prior to two years of age to minimize diversity in pre-adoption adversity experiences. The full sample of adoptees was representative of the population of adoptive families in this state at the time of data collection (McGue et al., 2007). In this study's subset of Korean adopted

adolescents, there were slightly more females than males (101 females, 55%). The average adolescent was 17.75 years old at Wave 2 ($SD = 1.82$; $min. = 13.67$, $max. = 22.21$). Families had average incomes between \$60,000 – \$70,000. Parents were highly educated with two-thirds of mothers (67%) and fathers (68%) holding a bachelor's degree or higher.

Differences between Korean internationally adoptive families meeting and not meeting inclusion criteria were tested. There were no differences in adolescent delinquent behavior in eligible and ineligible families at Wave 1 or Wave 2. We also assessed the extent to which eligible and ineligible families had differences in interaction quality, including communication, warmth, and control at Wave 1. Of the few significant interaction differences (3 of 36; 8%), codes had mean differences of less than 0.5-point apart on a 9-point scale, suggesting eligible and ineligible Korean adoptive families had substantively similar interaction characteristics.

2.2. Procedure

Families visited the research lab using university IRB procedures to complete questionnaires, observational assessments, and informed consent forms with predominantly White interviewers. For their participation, all family members received a small honorarium. Participants completed self-report questionnaires individually without interaction between family members; none of the questionnaires completed prior to the observational assessments were regarding cultural socialization or the adopted adolescents' racial or ethnic identity. The videotaped observational assessments occurred in a research lab designed like a dining room; all family members sat around a dining room table. Families were aware that their conversations were videotaped and cameras were placed inconspicuously in bookcases throughout the room.

During the observational assessment, families received a set of index cards containing questions about potential family conflicts. One index card included questions related to the role and importance of race and ethnicity in the family (see Section 2.3.1, below); this was the fourth card for families to discuss. Families were instructed to discuss each card in order before moving on to subsequent cards; families were given 15 minutes to discuss cards and were not required to finish. Families discussing the racial and ethnic differences card and meeting inclusion criteria were included in the sample ($N = 111$ families). While plausible families with more in-depth conversation during the earlier cards would not reach the race and ethnicity card, thus not meeting study inclusion criteria, minimal differences in tested family interactions were found between eligible and ineligible families.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. Discussion of racial and ethnic differences—Families discussed the importance of race and ethnicity in the family during an observational assessment with the following prompts: (a) how do our ethnic and racial backgrounds affect us as a family? (b) Provide an example of when your ethnicity or race has been an issue for you, and (c) How well do we talk about ethnicity or race in our family? The second author and his research team drew upon the literature on racial and ethnic socialization in transracial and international adoption to generate these questions.

Using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify thematic categories and a modified Consensual Qualitative Research approach (CQR; Hill et al., 2005; Hill, Thompson, & Nutt Williams, 1997) to achieve consensus among raters and ensure coding validity, transcripts of each family's race and ethnicity discussion were analyzed. Based on these transcripts, families were placed into one of three categories, including acknowledge, reject, and discrepant views of differences. Coding of these discussions were conducted by a female doctoral student, a male undergraduate student, and a female undergraduate student. Internationally adopted Korean American coders were deliberately chosen because of similar experiences with assessed families and likelihood of understanding the nuances in family discussions about race and ethnicity. To mitigate personal experience biases, the team discussed biases including feelings about adoption, experiences as an adopted adult, and adoption research knowledge. Moreover, consensual coding and an outsider auditor process were used to enhance validity and protect against coding biases.

The coding team met on a weekly basis to learn and understand the coding process, review cases, and discuss difficult cases until reaching consensus. The coders also were blind to the study hypotheses and the adolescents' self-reported delinquent behavior. To establish initial reliability, the team reached consensus on 83% of 24 cases where all three coders independently reached the same code. Cases were then divided among the three coders to code; cases where the code was not immediately clear were brought to the weekly meeting to discuss as a coding team ($n = 17$ cases). Following procedures outlined in CQR (Hill et al., 1997, 2005), the team read the case aloud to each other, reviewed the coding manual, and arrived at a consensus regarding the final code. To further ensure coding validity, an outsider auditor process was used in ambiguous cases. The outsider auditor process included consultation and consensus of the case with the second author's research lab that included a psychology professor, graduate students, and undergraduate students of varied racial and ethnic backgrounds and adoption status.

After initial coding, the coding manual and codes for each family were refined one final time to account for the overall tone of the families' conversation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, if a participant acknowledged difference in any way ("I mean, you are Korean") but then stated race and ethnicity did not impact the family, this case was originally coded as *Discrepant Views of Differences*, even though the overall tone of the conversation was *Rejection of Differences*. The team subsequently refined the coding manual in regards to the *Discrepant Views of Differences* category (original $N = 79$ cases). To be coded as discrepant, family conversations had to be pervasively discrepant and marked by disagreement among family members. To be coded as acknowledgement or rejection of differences, family members must have all reached the conclusion that race and ethnicity was either important or unimportant to the family. A final round of recoding resulted in 23 families acknowledging differences, 26 families with discrepant views of differences, and 62 families in rejection of differences. These categorizations are consistent with Shiao & Tuan (2008), who found approximately 50% of families with South Korean adopted children rejected the importance of racial and ethnic differences, suggesting validity for our qualitatively coded data.

To be coded as *acknowledgement of differences*, all family members had to acknowledge and accept the importance of racial and ethnic differences in the family. Families also must have indicated race and ethnicity was integrated into their lives in a concrete, symbolic, or behavioral way. For example, families discussed engaging in explicit (e.g., celebrating Korean holidays) or implicit forms (e.g., conversations about living as an Asian person in the U.S.) of familial cultural socialization or demonstrated willingness to talk about times when race and ethnicity was salient to their family. Additionally, all family members must have acknowledged racial and ethnic differences as an important aspect of the family identity.

To be coded as *rejection of differences*, all family members had to reject that race and ethnicity affects the family in any meaningful way. In this category, family members indicated that these conversations were unimportant in their family. Families also may have indicated a color-blind approach to racial and ethnic differences, where families did not believe race had any bearing on how they saw or interacted with the Korean adopted adolescent.

To be coded as *discrepant views of differences*, at least one member of the family rejected the importance of family racial and ethnic differences while at least one other member acknowledged the importance of their racial and ethnic differences. For example, a parent may have indicated they incorporated cultural activities into their family (acknowledgement of differences), while an adolescent indicated the family did not engage in any cultural activities, did not do so often enough, or was not supportive of the adolescents' heritage when differences were discussed (rejection of differences). Alternatively, an adolescent may have indicated they discuss the family's racial and ethnic differences (acknowledgement of differences), while a parent suggested the family does not support racial and ethnic differences and the adolescents' cultural heritage as much as they would have liked to (rejection of differences). It is important to note any conversation marked by discrepancy among family members, regardless of which adolescent or parent was in disagreement, is reflected as a family with discrepant views about the importance of racial and ethnic differences.

2.3.2. Adopted adolescent delinquent behavior—Broadly, delinquent behavior includes a “wide range of behaviors, from truancy and running away from home to aggravated assault and homicide” (Thornberry & Krohn, 2000, pg. 41). Delinquent behavior was measured using the Delinquent Behavior Inventory short form (DBI; Gibson, 1967). The DBI short form contains 21 items self-reported by adolescents on a three-point scale (0 = *never*, 1 = *once*, 2 = *more than once*). The DBI captures mild to major offensive behaviors that occur in adolescence. In accordance with the above definition, sample items include “cutting classes at school,” “smashing, slashing, or damaging things,” stealing things out of cars,” “annoying, insulting, or fighting other people (strangers) in public,” “attacking an enemy or someone in a rival gang in a public place,” and “using any kind of a weapon in a fight.” This measure has demonstrated reliability and validity in adoptive samples (Burt, McGue, Krueger, & Iacono, 2007), and the DBI short form was highly correlated with the full length DBI ($r = .99$) in Wave 1 of the present study. Responses were summed ($M = 5.78$, $SD = 6.45$, $\alpha = .89$).

2.3.3. Covariates—Adolescent age, sex (1 = *male*, 2 = *female*), and parent-adolescent conflict were used as covariates in the present study due to their known association with adolescent delinquency (e.g., Bongers, Koot, van der Ende, & Verhulst, 2003, 2004; Burt et al., 2007).

To account for general parent-adolescent conflict, adolescents reported on their perceived conflict with mothers using the Parental Environment Questionnaire (PEQ; Elkins, McGue, & Iacono, 1997). The PEQ has demonstrated reliability and validity in adoptive populations (Rueter, Keyes, Iacono, & McGue, 2009). The PEQ conflict scale contains 12 items reported on a 4-point scale (1 = *definitely true* to 4 = *definitely false*). Items include “I often seem to anger or annoy my parent” and “My parent and I often get into arguments.” Responses were summed and reverse coded as necessary; higher scores indicate more conflict ($M = 23.86$, $SD = 7.36$, $\alpha = .89$).

2.4. Data Analysis

2.4.1. Data analysis plan—The race and ethnicity discussion was coded for the families meeting study inclusion criteria. Some families had more than one adopted Korean adolescent, resulting in a sample that included multiple children within the same family ($n = 185$ adolescents from 111 families), suggesting the presence of shared family variance (Cook, 2012). To reduce the possibility of producing inflated F-values due to shared variance, this study used the MIXED MODELS command in SPSS. A nested ANCOVA was used to examine differences in adopted adolescent delinquent behavior across the three discussion categories, while holding constant differences in adolescent sex, age, and general parent-adolescent conflict.

2.4.2. Missing data analysis—Missing data at Wave 2 ranged from < 1% to 22%, with most variables missing < 1%. The delinquent behavior scale had 22% missing data. Missing data were compared across participants with complete data on all variables and participants missing data on any variable using independent samples t-tests and chi-squared tests. Participants with complete data had younger adolescents ($M = 17.18$ and $M = 18.69$, non-missing and missing data, respectively; $t = -5.51$, $p < .001$), fewer delinquent behaviors at Wave 1 ($M = 3.37$ and $M = 5.83$, non-missing and missing data, respectively; $t = -2.39$, $p = .008$), and were more often male ($\chi^2 = 4.83$, $p = .028$). Other demographic traits, parent-adolescent conflict, and Wave 2 adolescent delinquency did not have differences between participants with complete and incomplete data.

Missing data were imputed using expectation maximization in SPSS 22.0. All data were screened prior to imputation ensuring missing data were due to incomplete item response, consistent with best practices (Acock, 2005). Imputation is preferred to a traditional method of missing data analysis because it provides complete datasets and accounts for the effects of missing data on statistical inference during the imputation process (Johnson & Young, 2011).

3. Results

In this subset, more than half of the families were in rejection of differences (62 families, 56%). The remaining families were distributed between acknowledging differences (23 families, 21%) and discrepant views of differences (26 families, 23%). Data analyses suggest there were minimal demographic differences across the three race and ethnicity discussion categories. There were no differences between families on mother and father education, family income, father or adolescent age, adolescent sex, or the sibling composition of families (e.g., both adopted or one adopted and one not-adopted sibling) across the three race and ethnicity discussion categories. General parent-adolescent conflict was also not significantly associated with how families discussed racial and ethnic differences. Maternal age was different across the three race and ethnicity discussion categories, $F(1, 569) = 3.37, p = .035$. Mothers with families in rejection of differences were younger ($M = 47.08, SD = 3.60$) than mothers in acknowledgement of differences ($M = 48.50, SD = 4.05$). Although the difference was substantively minimal, maternal age was tested as a covariate to check for differences that may affect study outcomes. Maternal age was not associated with delinquent behavior and was removed from final analyses.

The nested ANCOVA used to test this study's research question indicated that family discussions about the importance of racial and ethnic differences were indeed associated with Korean adopted adolescent delinquent behavior, $F(2, 85) = 8.23, p = .001$. Estimated marginal means suggest families in acknowledgement of differences had adolescents with the fewest mean delinquent behaviors ($M = 3.99, SE = 0.81$), while adolescents whose families held discrepant views of differences had the highest mean delinquent behaviors ($M = 8.38, SE = 0.76$). Adopted adolescents whose families were in rejection of differences had the median level of delinquent behaviors between the three categories ($M = 5.64, SE = 0.51$).

Planned comparisons between the three race and ethnicity discussion categories during the aforementioned nested ANCOVA analysis provide information about study hypotheses (H1, H2). Although Korean adolescents whose families acknowledged differences had fewer mean delinquent behaviors than families in rejection of differences, this difference was not statistically significant, $\eta_p^2 = -1.65, p = .086, 95\% \text{ CI } [-3.54, 0.24]$ (reference: rejection of differences). Thus, hypothesis 1 was not supported. However, in corroboration with hypothesis 2, adolescents whose families held discrepant views of differences differed in delinquent behaviors from the other two racial and ethnic differences discussion categories. Families in acknowledgement of differences had Korean adopted adolescents with significantly fewer delinquent behaviors compared to Korean adopted adolescents in families with discrepant views of differences, $\eta_p^2 = -4.39, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-6.59, -2.18]$ (reference: discrepant views of differences). Results also suggest Korean adopted adolescents whose families held discrepant views of differences had more delinquent behaviors than adolescents whose families were in rejection of differences, $\eta_p^2 = 2.74, p = .004, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.92, 4.55]$ (reference: rejection of differences).

Study covariates of adolescent age, $F(1, 157) = 6.97, \eta_p^2 = 0.55, p = .009, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.14, 0.97]$, and sex, $F(1, 163) = 15.38, \eta_p^2 = 3.09, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [1.53, 4.64]$, were related to adolescent delinquent behavior, such that older adolescents and males had more delinquent

behavior. Parent-adolescent conflict was also associated with adopted adolescent delinquent behavior, $F(1, 175) = 44.64$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.37$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.26, 0.48], such that more parent-adolescent conflict was associated with greater adopted adolescent delinquency. The effects of these covariates on adolescent delinquent behaviors are in line with previous research on these variables (Bongers et al., 2003, 2004; Burt et al., 2007; Verhulst & Versluis-den Bieman, 1995).

4. Discussion

This study examined the association between how international, transracial adoptive families discuss racial and ethnic differences and South Korean adopted adolescents' delinquent behavior. Guided by a cultural socialization framework (Hughes et al., 2006), more than half of the families were coded as rejection of differences with the other half of families roughly split between acknowledging differences and discrepant views of differences. This aligns with other studies on international adoptive families suggesting many White parents downplay adopted children's racial and ethnic differences (Bergquist et al., 2003; Samuels, 2009).

4.1. Acknowledgment and Rejection of Differences

Contrary to our hypothesis, no differences existed in South Korean adopted adolescent delinquent behavior between families that acknowledged or rejected the importance of racial and ethnic differences. It is possible some families in rejection of differences believe this is the most supportive environment for their family (Shiao & Tuan, 2008). For example, rejecting differences while cultivating a warm, supportive environment may foster a family context that results in fewer delinquent behaviors in these families. Acculturation research suggests assimilation strategies are related to positive adjustment (Rudmin, 2003). In the same way, rejecting differences may reflect an assimilation strategy for internationally adopted adolescents and their families (Lee, 2003). Another possibility is adopted adolescents may not yet have reached a developmental stage where racial and ethnic differences are salient experiences. Most adopted adolescents live in White communities where pressures may exist to de-emphasize racial and ethnic differences (Krieder & Raleigh, 2011). Some adoptees may not begin exploring the importance of their racial and ethnic differences until they have left their communities of origin (Hubinette & Tigervall, 2009). For some adolescents and their families, rejecting differences may reflect adopted adolescents' adaptive behavior into their communities and cultures of adoption. Future studies should test these explanations and consider if the family context moderates associations between rejection of differences and delinquent behavior.

Nevertheless, similar delinquent behavior levels between families in acknowledgment and rejection of racial and ethnic differences are surprising given cultural socialization research on adopted children suggests supporting racial and ethnic differences is associated with positive adjustment (Johnston, Swim, Saltsman, Deater-Deckard, & Petrill, 2007; Lee, 2003; Mohanty et al., 2006). However, methodological differences between past cultural socialization research and this study inform discrepant findings. First, family discussions about race and ethnicity and cultural socialization are related but distinct constructs (Kim et

al., 2013). While cultural socialization is an individual measure of cultural activities a child engages in (Hughes et al., 2006), this study utilizes a family-based measure assessing how families discuss the role and importance of racial and ethnic differences (Shiao & Tuan, 2008). The use of individual versus family-based measurement may lend itself to differing results (Kreppner, 2002). Studies using the cultural socialization framework have also examined externalizing behavior (Johnston et al., 2007; Lee & the Minnesota International Adoption Project Team, 2010), instead of examining delinquency specifically. Given delinquency is potentially salient in samples of adolescents adopted internationally as children (Hjern et al., 2002; Verhulst et al., 1990a), we tested adopted adolescents' adjustment particularly in regards to delinquent behavior. Future research should examine the impact of discussing the role and importance of racial and ethnic differences in dyadic versus systemic, family-level contexts on adolescent behavioral adjustment, including delinquency. The unique impact of cultural activities and discussions about racial and ethnic differences on adolescent behavioral adjustment should also be addressed in subsequent research.

4.2. Discrepant Views of Racial and Ethnic Differences: Implications for Adjustment

Families with discrepant views of differences were prevalent in this study, reflecting 23% of our sample of Korean internationally adoptive families. In practice, above general parent-adolescent conflict, results suggest adolescents whose families have discrepant views of differences have 2.1 times the mean level of delinquency compared to families acknowledging differences, and almost 1.5 times the mean level of delinquency compared to families rejecting differences. It must be noted that elevated delinquent behavior activity does not necessarily mean the adolescent has a recorded criminal history or should be considered a delinquent teenager; instead, these scores suggest these individuals engage in more delinquent and potentially criminal behavior. The discrepant category's prevalence, and its implications for adjustment, suggests studies examining discussions about race and ethnicity in adoptive families should keep in mind a substantial proportion of families do not agree on if or how well the family acknowledges racial and ethnic differences. It is also important to consider that the discrepant views of differences category may be underreported given power dynamics within families and the potential desire of adopted adolescents to reduce conflict by not expressing or downplaying their own beliefs about the importance of racial and ethnic differences (see Wrobel, Kohler, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2003). Despite this possibility, we did not find differences in parent-adolescent conflict between the three discussion of racial and ethnic differences categories.

The concept of shared reality from Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCPT; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2004, 2006) suggests agreement between family members about a particular topic leads to better family relationship quality, which decreases adolescent behavior problems. In this study, families with discrepant views of differences were unable to agree about the importance and/or the extent to which the family acknowledges race and ethnicity. If families are unable to agree about the importance of this topic, they may not provide a supportive context for adolescent adjustment. By contrast, families in acknowledgement and rejection of differences do agree about their family's stance towards discussing racial and ethnic differences. Therefore, familial agreement about the importance of differences may

provide a context that decreases adolescent problem behaviors. Given this theoretical perspective, it is not surprising that families unable to agree about the importance of differences have adopted adolescents with significantly more delinquent behavior than the other two categories. Of course, this is only one possible theoretical explanation for why discrepant views of racial and ethnic differences within the family is related to more delinquent behaviors in transracial, internationally adopted adolescents.

This study suggests disagreements about race and ethnicity in adoptive families, regardless of which family members supported or rejected the importance of race and ethnicity in the family, is related to adolescent delinquency. Future studies should unpack disagreements to examine if there are differences in adoptees' adjustment between families where: (a) parents support racial and ethnic differences while adopted adolescents do not, (b) adopted adolescents want to learn more about their racial and ethnic heritage but parents are not supportive of these discussions, or (c) adopted children and their siblings (either adopted or not-adopted) are in disagreement about the importance of race and ethnicity in their adoptive families. It is also important to consider why discrepancies among family members occur. Family members may have had different experiences that affect the salience of discussing racial and ethnic differences. For example, adopted adolescents may have experienced discrimination but have not discussed these instances with their parents for a variety of reasons (Tuan & Shiao, 2011). Although racial and ethnic issues may be salient for adolescents, parents may not realize the salience of this issue for their children. Future research should explore how unique experiences among family members may contribute to or alter how families react to discrepancies within the family about the importance of discussing racial and ethnic differences.

4.3. Study Strengths & Limitations

Several methodological strengths bolster confidence in study results. Observational data were used to capture discussions about the importance of racial and ethnic differences in internationally adoptive families with South Korean adopted adolescents. This approach reduces biases associated with positive parental reporting about their families' ability to discuss racial and ethnic differences (Kim et al., 2013) and is more likely to capture the full range of cultural socialization families engage in (Hughes et al., 2008). This study examined systemic conversations about the importance of racial and ethnic differences in the family; to our knowledge, these conversations have not been captured in transracial, internationally adoptive families. As research suggests family conversations are different in dyadic versus systemic settings when three or more family members are present (Kreppner, 2002), the use of family-level observational data is a strength because it elucidates how multiple family members engage in discussions about race and ethnicity with adopted adolescents.

Of course, study limitations and generalizability must be considered. Selection biases for families excluded because a Korean adoptee was not present or due to non-response on the race and ethnicity card should be considered. It appears plausible families with more positive communication may have discussed cards preceding the race and ethnicity card at greater length, not reaching the race and ethnicity card. However, post-hoc comparisons of observed family interactions (e.g., communication, warmth, control) suggest only 8% of

tested family interaction measures showed differences between eligible and ineligible internationally adoptive families with South Korean adoptees, and these differences were substantively small in nature. Coupled with the lack of adolescent delinquent behavior differences between eligible and ineligible adoptive families, we believe selection biases related to inclusion criteria were minimal.

As this sample focused on families with at least one South Korean adopted adolescent, caution should be exercised when interpreting these findings for other transracial adoptive groups or family forms. Without further examination, we cannot know if differences exist in discussions of racial and ethnic differences due to variance in social stigma across other racial or Asian ethnic minority groups (Docan-Morgan, 2010) or access to resources aiding in discussion of racial and ethnic differences (Vonk et al., 2010). Families with recently adopted children may be encouraged by adoption agencies to discuss the child's racial and ethnic background (Berbery & O'Brien, 2011; Rojewski, 2005) while families adopting less recently may have had less assistance. Moreover, this study included only adolescents who had been adopted internationally prior to two years old. As delinquent behaviors may be higher in adolescents that were adopted internationally at older ages (e.g., older than two years old; Verhulst, Althaus, & Versluis-den Bieman, 1990b), this study's results may not generalize to the delinquent behaviors of late-adopted children. Moreover, children adopted after early childhood may have stronger connections to their birth culture, which may influence the extent to which the family discusses racial and ethnic differences. Within these constraints, this study illustrates that the extent to which internationally adoptive families with South Korean adoptees discuss racial and ethnic differences is related to delinquent behavior for adolescents that were adopted as young children.

5. Conclusions

Concerns about adopted adolescents' behavioral adjustment, particularly delinquency, have been prevalent in research in recent decades (Hjern et al., 2002; Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2005; Verhulst et al., 1990a). This study adds to the body of literature on internationally adoptive families indicating how families support racial and ethnic differences has an impact on adolescent adjustment. In particular, disagreement about the role and importance of race and ethnicity within the family is related to an increase in adopted adolescent delinquent behavior. Future research should examine how internationally adoptive families build cohesive family identities about racial and ethnic differences so practitioners can counsel adoptive families on best practices to engaging with racial and ethnic differences. As this study has potential implications for other transracial populations (e.g., foster or step-families), researchers should focus on replicating results in other transracial adoptive and non-adoptive families.

This study has important implications for professionals and clinicians working with adoptive families. Research suggests post-adoption support groups and parenting resources are vital in building parents' cultural competence and boosting engagement in cultural socialization activities (Vonk et al., 2010; Vonk & Massatti, 2008). While these cultural activities have been found to bolster adoptee adjustment (Yoon, 2001), this study indicates agreement among family members, regardless of whether the family acknowledges or rejects the

importance of racial and ethnic differences, is vital in preventing or reducing adolescent delinquent behavior. Professionals or clinicians working with adoptive families should stress the importance of communicating about racial and ethnic differences until family consensus is reached. Professionals should also encourage adoptive families to revisit this conversation often as children grow and develop. While some families wait to discuss their racial and ethnic differences until children broach the subject (Tessler, Gamache, & Liu, 1999), we believe professionals working with adoptive families should encourage parents to proactively initiate conversations about their family's view on the importance of racial and ethnic differences to prevent unknown discrepancies between family members. In doing so, we hope to reduce delinquent behaviors among international, transracial adopted adolescents.

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Highlights

- Most transracial adoptive families reject any discussion of race/ethnicity
- How families discuss race/ethnicity is related to adoptee delinquent behavior
- No differences in acknowledging or rejecting race/ethnicity for delinquent behavior
- Family disagreements about race/ethnicity role related to most delinquent behavior
- Focus on creating cohesive family identities about race/ethnicity role in family