

How is parent reported family race/ethnicity related to parents' understanding and explanation of adoption bias?



Xian Zhang*, Raimy Shin*, Anna Kimura*, Alexandria Cinney*, Kel Boland*, Ana Jurca*, Jenna Kupa*, Jessica Matthews**, Ellen Pinderhughes*

*Tufts University **University of Massachusetts Amherst

INTRODUCTION

Microaggressions (MA) depict messages, comments, behaviors, or attitudes that are sent either in innocent, unintentional, ignorant, or veiled ways (Sue et al, 2007).

- MAs: difficult to recognize and navigate
- Harmful effects if unaddressed (e.g. lower self-esteem) (York, 2016).

Project goals: understand how adoptive parents are thinking about MAs and addressing this issue with their children.

Adoptive parents

- **Transracial adoptive family (TRA):** parent and child are not of the same race (e.g. in our sample, mostly White parents adopting children of color)
- **Same-race family:** parent and child are of the same race (e.g. White parent adopting White child)

METHODS

Sample

- Adoptive parents: 113 parents (84% White, 84% Straight, 85% BA/BS or more). 77 identified as TRA families (74%)
- Adoptive children/target youth (TY): M=12.5 years; 68% international adoptees

Data collection

Parents responded to 6 MA scenarios as part of an online survey about adoptive parenting

1. "Unwelcome curiosity"

"What were you likely to think when someone expressed unwelcome curiosity about the way your child looks?"

2. "Destiny"

"What were you likely to think when someone said you and your child were destined to be a family; it was meant to be."

3. "Lucky"

"What were you likely to think when someone said your child was lucky to be adopted by you?"

4. "Poor/young BP"

"What were you likely to think when someone said your child's birth parents must be very poor/young/drug addicts?"

5. "Real family"

What were you likely to think when someone asked if you were worried your child would want to find their real family?

6. "Wrong birth country"

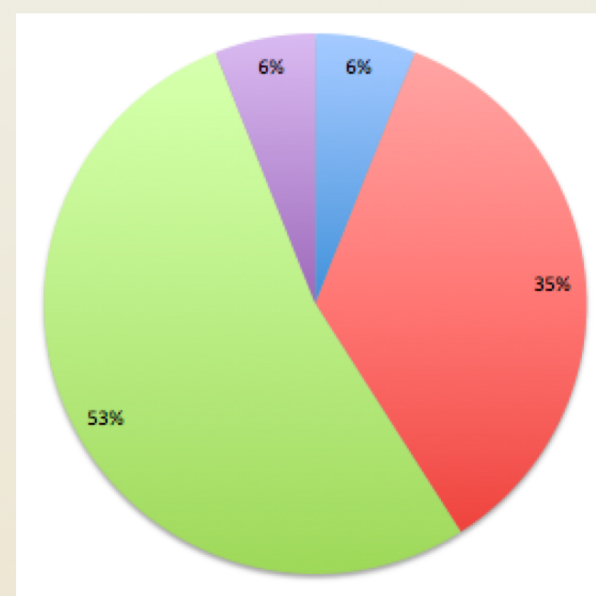
What were you likely to think when someone guessed the wrong birth country for your child?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What do adoptive parents think about the bias experiences they have with their children? How do they talk to their children about these experiences?
- How do transracial adoptive and same-race adoptive families differ in these processes?

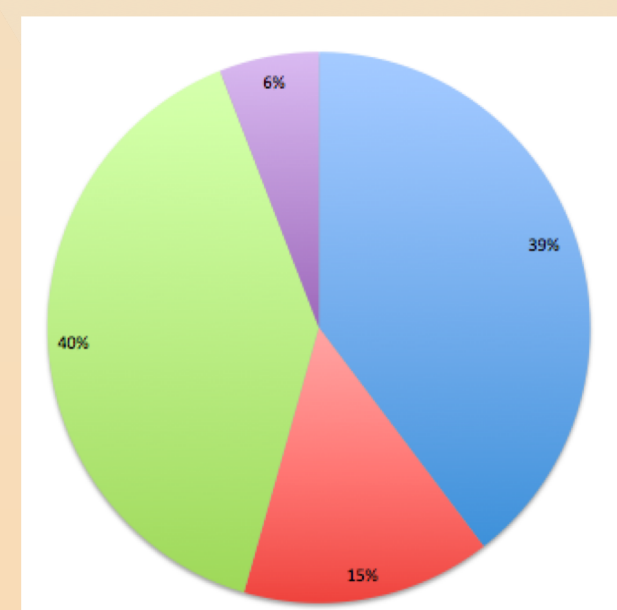
FINDINGS

"Unwelcome Curiosity" (forced-choice):



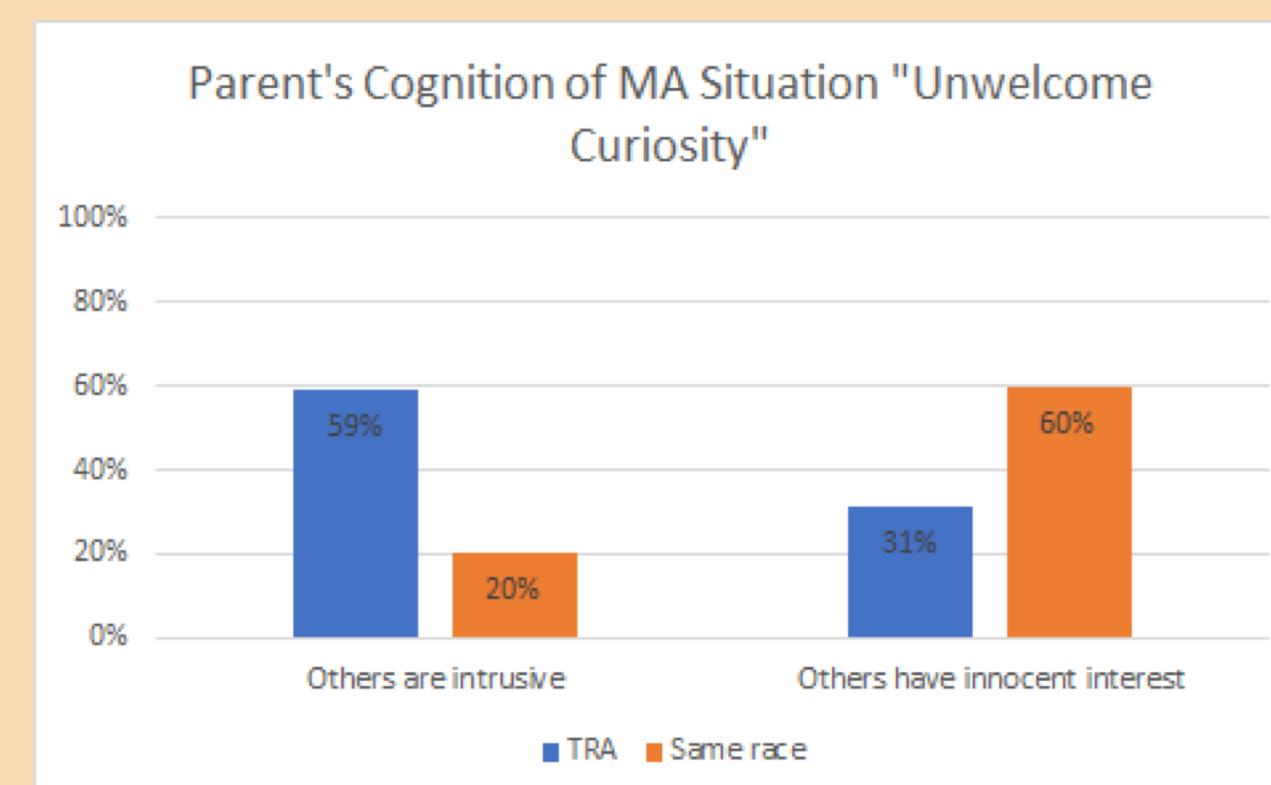
What parents thought (forced-choice)	N=34
I thought it was okay.	2 (6%)
I thought it showed their innocent interest that was too much.	12 (35%)
I thought they were being intrusive.	18 (53%)
I didn't know what to think.	2 (6%)

"Destiny" (forced-choice):



What parents thought (forced-choice)	N=48
I agreed. (MA)	19 (40%)
I thought that some people might see adoption only as a good thing.	7 (15%)
I thought it was unfair to child and their birth mother.	19 (40%)
I didn't know what to think.	3 (6%)

TRA vs. Same-race Families – Cognition of MA



UNWELCOME CURIOSITY (open-response) - Parents who thought MA was unfair

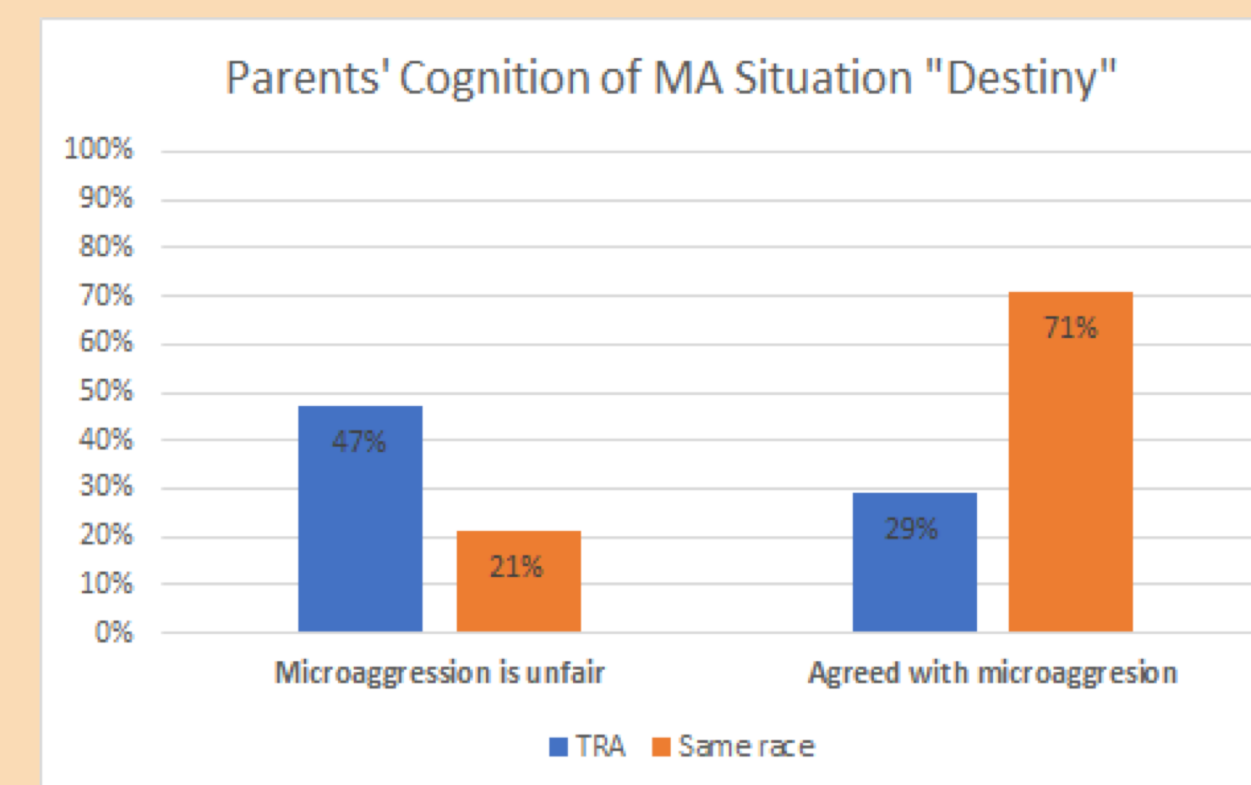
Educated - 29%	"We say that when people act weird around us, it shows us that they haven't spent much time in diverse settings, and that they need to get out more."
Validated - 26%	"People are curious and he should feel proud of his roots."
Developed strategies with the child - 24%	"I told him he didn't have to answer anyone else's questions about it, but if he wants to share his background he can."

DESTINY (open-response) - Parents who thought MA was unfair

Educated - 37%	"It's just not true that adoption was 'meant to be'. that God doesn't set it up so families lose their children so other families can get them."
Validated - 21%	"It is okay to be sad that you are adopted, it's okay to be mad, and it's okay to miss your birth mom. We love you."
Developed Strategies with the Child - 5%	"People have deeply felt assumptions about adoption and unless there is a good reason to challenge those assumptions, it's better to move on"

DESTINY - Parents who agreed with MA

Conveyed the microaggression to child - 20%	"We sure were destined to be a family."
--	---



DISCUSSION

Implications

- Need to educate same-race families about how to handle "Destiny" comments
- Parents agree most with "Destiny" MA (40%)
- Few parents who see the "Unwelcome Curiosity" microaggression as intrusive communicate this to their child
- Parents more likely to develop strategies with child for "Unwelcome Curiosity" scenario compared to others

Big Picture

- Adoptive parents do not always share their cognitions of others with their children
- Actions that parents engage in to help TY depends on specific MA scenario
 - Most parents in "destiny" scenario chose to provide background education
 - Many parents in "unwelcome curiosity" scenario chose to provide strategies to deal with the MA

Future Research

- What are the impacts on children's outcomes when parents agree with MAs/convey MAs to TY?
- How prepared are TRA parents to develop strategies with their child, given that they have different life experiences?
- How can adoption professionals prepare families?

REFERENCES

Baden, A. L. (2016). "Do you know your real parents?" and other adoption microaggressions. *Adoption Quarterly*, 19(1), 1-25.

Sue, D. W., Bucceri, J., Lin, A. I., Nadal, K. L., & Torino, G. C. (2007). Racial microaggressions and the Asian American experience. *Cultural diversity and ethnic minority psychology*, 13(1), 72.

York, S. (2016). *Roots and Wings: Affirming Culture and Preventing Bias in Early Childhood*. St. Paul: Redleaf Press

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Tufts University
 Researchers and professionals who provided feedback on survey development
 Families who participated

Questions or comments, please contact
 Xian Zhang xian.zhang@tufts.edu
 Ellen Pinderhughes ellen.pinderhughes@tufts.edu