

Relationship Quality Between Multiracial Adolescents and Their Biological Parents

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National survey data were used to compare single-race white and minority adolescents with multiracial adolescents in terms of relationships with their parents. Three relational dimensions were considered: association/interaction, communication, and emotional closeness. Comparable relationship quality was found between parents and adolescents in all three groups, except that multiracial boys and their fathers were found to be less emotionally close and communicative. Implications for research are discussed.

Interracial and interethnic marriages are becoming increasingly common in the United States. As a consequence, the population of multiracial/multiethnic children has grown dramatically, with approximately 100,000 born each year during the last decade (Root, 1996). A related paper (Cooney & Radina, 2000) examined emotional and behavioral adjustment issues experienced by multiracial and multiethnic adolescents (referred to hereafter as multiracial, but including children from either cross-racial or cross-ethnic marriages). That analysis revealed that while multiracial teens have some areas of concern (especially around school), they usually showed few differences in adjustment from white adolescents or, especially, from single-race minority adolescents.

Here, a similar approach is used to examine the neglected topic of family interaction in multiracial families, especially the quality of parent-adolescent relationships. Adolescence marks a critical period in the parent-child relationship, with offspring and their parents struggling to renegotiate issues of independence, rights, and responsibilities (Cooper, Grotevant, & Condon, 1983; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Even though parents and children typically spend less time together during this period (Youniss & Smollar, 1985), conflict between them may

increase (Smetana, 1989; Steinberg, 1988). However, maintaining a positive connection to parents during adolescence is beneficial for adjustment: parents can offer validation for the new identities that adolescents are likely to be rehearsing (Bell & Bell, 1983; Cooper et al., 1983), and continued parental support and involvement predicts high self-esteem (Demo, Small, & Savin-Williams, 1987) and above-average academic performance (MacCoby & Martin, 1983) for adolescents.

Multiracial adolescents are likely to require even stronger, more supportive relationships with their parents than are other adolescents because of the unusual challenges they confront. While all adolescents face issues concerning identity formation, fitting in with peers, and school transitions, such tasks can seem even more difficult and stressful for multiracial youth (Gibbs, 1987; Gibbs-Moskowitz-Sweet, 1991). Thus, determining whether family relationships present any special strengths or problems for multiracial adolescents should prove useful in understanding which factors are associated with their well-being and adjustment across various settings.

As has been argued elsewhere (Cooney & Radina, 2000), research on multiracial children and adolescents is somewhat limited in quantity, scope,

and methodological rigor. It focuses heavily on identity development and, for the most part is based on either clinical samples or small, nonrepresentative convenience samples. To help extend this body of literature, the study reported here used data from a large, nationally representative study of adolescents to conduct a systematic comparison of the parent-child relationships among two groups of single-race adolescents, white and minority, and a group of their multiracial peers.

Several issues have arisen in prior research that may affect the quality of relationship between multiracial children and their parents. To generate the research hypothesis for this study, these issues are grouped into three sets of processes: adolescent identity formation, parental marital processes, and parenting practices.

Adolescent Identity Formation

Much attention has been devoted to the special challenges faced by adolescents in establishing a racial identity when each parent is of a different racial or ethnic group (*Gibbs & Moskowitz-Sweet, 1991; Gordon, 1964; Henriques, 1974*). Several models of biracial identity development (*Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990*) have contended that multiracial individuals consciously decide to ally themselves with one racial/ethnic group over another in forming their identity during adolescence. This notion raises the question of how they decide on both group alliance and, consequently, the parent with whom to align more closely (*Brown, 1990; Greenacre, 1971*). Clinicians have claimed that this process is problematic for many biracial adolescents, who feel divided family loyalties as a result of the struggle (*Gibbs & Moskowitz-Sweet, 1991*).

Problems with fitting in extend beyond the family. Based on his clinical observations, Bowles (1993) contended that parental expectations, as well as societal attitudes about minority racial status, often contribute to biracial adolescents' racial confusion. For example, multiracial individuals may experience social stigmatization by peers and members of particular racial groups because of their physical appearance. Indeed, in minority groups, social acceptance or rejection is based on the degree to which individuals possess physical characteristics similar to those of the group (*Brown, 1990*). Being pressured to identify with a single ethnic/racial group may exacerbate multiracial adolescents' feelings that they cannot identify

with both parents, and so may lose part of their racial or ethnic heritage. Consequently, feelings of emptiness, alienation, and abandonment may develop, as adolescents perceive they do not quite belong and remain outside the group (*Bowles, 1993*).

As noted, how these processes affect parent-adolescent relationships in biracial families is unknown. If, in fact, the identity formation process requires choosing one racial or ethnic identity over another, then the adolescent may feel distant or emotionally isolated from the parent of the race not chosen (*Bowles, 1993; Herring, 1992*). It has been argued that if adolescents could embrace both parents' ethnic or racial heritages, they might be able to adjust more positively, at least as far as family life is concerned (*Bowles, 1993*).

Parental Marital Processes

The marital environment in the family also influences the quality of relationships between adolescents and their parents. Numerous studies have revealed significant associations between heightened marital conflict and reduced parent-adolescent closeness, especially for father-child dyads (*Booth & Amato, 1994; Peterson & Zill, 1986*). Marital conflict may pressure children to take sides with one parent over the other (*Cooney, 1994*). Fathers in troubled marriages may receive less parenting support and assistance from their wives, and thus be less informed about and involved with their children (*Belsky, 1979*). Fathers in such marriages may generalize their emotional and behavioral withdrawal from the marriage to the family at large, thereby jeopardizing their relationships with their children (*Fauber, Forehand, Thomas, & Wierson, 1990*). Regardless of which mechanism is operative, the direction of effects remains the same, with poorer marital relations predicting reduced parent-adolescent closeness, particularly for fathers.

Heightened conflict is thought to exist in heterogeneous marriages—those involving people from different social, religious, ethnic, or racial backgrounds—because of the potential for disagreement over values and traditions (*McGoldrick & Preto, 1984; Xie & Goyette, 1997*). Indeed, interracial marriages have a higher likelihood of dissolution than do unions involving partners of the same racial background (*Felmlee, Sprecher, & Bassin, 1990; Price-Bonham & Balswick, 1980*). Given this literature on marital conflict and parent-

adolescent relationships, it seems that poorer quality relations with parents can be expected for multiracial than for single-race adolescents.

Parenting Practices

Variations in parenting practices may also contribute to differences in parent-adolescent relationships in both multiracial and single-race families. According to Gibbs (1987) and Herring (1992), parents of multiracial children are often overprotective, trying to shield them from anticipated stigmatization and rejection by society. As a result, multiracial adolescents may have become emotionally overdependent on their parents, or they may rebel against the excessive control and push for premature or excessive freedom (Gibbs, 1987).

Ambivalence about their children's multiracial make-up is supposedly not uncommon among parents of multiracial offspring (Herring, 1992). They may also deny that it is an issue, "behaving as if the society were truly color-blind and minimizing problems experienced by the child and the family in interracial encounters" (Gibbs, 1987, p. 275). Certainly, such parental reactions may influence parents' interaction and communication with their children, and may ultimately affect the quality of relations between them. How these parenting processes affect the adolescent and parent-adolescent relations may also depend on the adolescent's experiences with the outside world and whether these have been consistent with the messages and information shared by the parents. As Brandell (1988) pointed out, multiracial offspring, like all children, benefit from a "nurturing and empathic parental environment" (p. 180).

In sum, the literature provides substantial evidence that multiracial adolescents are likely to differ from adolescents whose parents are of the same race/ethnicity in terms of the quality of relationships they report with their mothers and fathers. The literature regarding possible identity struggles, interparental conflict, and differences in parenting practices for multiracial adolescents leads to expectations of less close and involved relationships between these adolescents and their parents than are reported in single-race families.

METHOD

Data Source

This study used data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) (Bearman, Jones, & Udry, 1997), a survey of the gen-

eral health and well-being of a nationally representative sample of U.S. adolescents, grades 7–12. A total of 90,000 adolescents nationwide completed an in-school survey for the study, and a subsample of 12,105 of these students and their 18,000 parents was then randomly selected to complete an in-home interview. The response rate for the study was 78.9%.

In the Add Health study, the sample was stratified in order to overrepresent certain groups of adolescents; among those of interest to the present study were black, Chinese, Cuban, and Puerto Rican adolescents (Bearman, Jones, & Udry, 1997). Analyses for the present study were based on a subset of the Add Health data made available for public use. This subsample included 6,504 adolescents, representing 50% of the original nationally representative core sample of the Add Health project, plus 50% of the black oversample that was drawn for the study. In using the data, sampling weights were applied to correct for selection probability and nonresponse to the survey; thus, the original weighted sample used in these analyses is comparable to the U.S. population of adolescents in terms of race, sex, and age composition. This feature of the sample is an improvement on past studies in terms of representativeness and size.

To eliminate the potential confounding effect of parental separation and divorce on parent-adolescent relations, the present analysis was limited to adolescents whose biological parents were currently married and living together. These selection criteria resulted in a sample of 2,901 adolescents (approximately 45% of the public-use sample) and the biological parent who responded to the parent interview (mostly mothers).

Sample

For purposes of this investigation, the term multiracial was defined on the basis of parent responses to questions about their racial/ethnic backgrounds. The responding parents of sample adolescents were asked to specify a racial classification for themselves and their spouse from the following: white, black/African American, American Indian/Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander, or Other; to indicate whether they were of Hispanic origin; and to indicate whether their classification entailed more than one category (e.g., Hispanic and black, Asian and white and black). Comparisons of the reported classifications for the two parents were then made. Adolescents whose re-

spondent parent belonged to a single racial/ethnic group (this included white Hispanics, who were classified as Hispanic to capture their minority group membership) matching that of the other parent (e.g., black mother-black father, Hispanic mother-Hispanic father) were categorized as single-race. Where either one or both parents were identified as multiracial themselves (e.g., white/black mother-white father, white/black mother-Asian-white father), or where the racial/ethnic background of the two parents did not match (e.g., Asian mother-black father), the adolescent was classified as multiracial.

The final sample used in the analyses consisted of 1,870 (69.5%) single-race white, 534 (20%) single-race minority, and 284 (10.5%) multiracial adolescents. This reflects the loss of 213 cases (7%) due to missing data that could not be estimated for the racial/ethnic classification variables or the dependent variables.

Descriptive statistics for the multiracial and two single-race groups (white and minority) are presented in TABLE 1. The adolescent sample had a slightly higher proportion of girls than boys, and their average age was nearly 16 years. Parents were in their early forties, on average, with most reporting relatively high marital quality. The multiracial and single-race adolescents did not vary significantly on any of these indicators. However, white single-race parents reported more education than either single-race minority or multiracial adolescents' parents.

Measures

Control variables. Five control variables were considered for inclusion in the multivariate analy-

ses: adolescent age and sex, and parent age, education, and marital quality.

Age of both the parent (only the respondent's was available) and the adolescent may influence parent-adolescent relationship quality (*Vandenberg, 1988*), and thus were considered in the analyses. Sex of the adolescent, which is known to distinguish the quality of relationships teens report with their parents (*Youniss & Smollar, 1985*), was controlled. Parents' education level was included as it is associated with both the likelihood of forming a heterogamous marriage (*Lichter, 1990*) and the quality of parent-child relationships (*Cooney, Petersen, Indelicato, & Palkovitz, 1993*). Because parental education is regarded as a proxy measure for the family's socioeconomic status, it was indexed by the education level of the more educated parent. Finally, given the notion that the quality and stability of racially heterogamous marriages (producers of multiracial children) are relatively low, it seemed important to control for influence of marital quality on the relationship between parents and their multiracial adolescents. Two questions were summed to measure parents' marital quality: "On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your relationship with your current spouse?" (scored 1=completely unhappy, 10=completely happy), and "How much do you fight or argue with your current spouse?" (scored 1=a lot, 4=not at all). Scores on this summated scale ranged from 2 to 14 (high score=higher quality), with a Cronbach's alpha of .43.

Dependent variables. Parent-adolescent relationship quality was assessed via a multidimensional approach that examined adolescents' self-reported feelings of closeness to each parent, as well as indicators of their involvement with each parent. This approach permitted a broader understanding of the dynamics of the parent-child relationship than would be gained by considering only one of its aspects. Although the use of self-report measures has occasioned much debate (*Cook & Goldstein, 1993; Lopez & Gover, 1993; Manfredo & Shelby, 1988; Perosa & Perosa, 1990*), measurement of this type is often used in exploring family dynamics and has been found to illuminate the respondent's unique perspective on family interactions (*Carlson, Cooper, & Spradling, 1991*). Perosa and Perosa (1990), evaluating common family self-report measures (e.g., Family Environment Scale, Family Assessment Device, and Structural Family Interaction Scale), found that many dem-

Table 1

ADOLESCENT SAMPLE: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

VARIABLE	PARENT RACIAL BACKGROUND			TEST STAT.
	SAME-RACE			
	WHITE (N=1870)	MINORITY (N=534)	MULTIRACE (N=284)	
Adolescent				
Male	49.0%	46.8%	48.6%	NS
Female	51.0%	53.2%	51.4%	
Age (mos.)	190.21 (20.35)	189.78 (21.21)	190.83 (20.86)	NS
Parent				
Education*	6.76 (1.99)	6.32 (2.48)	5.78 (2.59)	F=29.83*
Age	42.25 (5.04)	42.73 (5.64)	41.87 (5.60)	NS
Marit. Qual.	11.34 (1.88)	11.33 (1.96)	11.26 (1.97)	NS

*Reflects higher level of attainment of the two parents, coded as 1=<8th grade, 2=some high school, 3=vocational/trade school, 5=GED, 6=vocational/trade school after high school, 7=some college, 8=college graduate, 9=professional training beyond college. *p<.0001.

onstrated good convergent validity, thus indicating that self-report can accurately depict family dynamics.

Affectional solidarity has been described by Bengtson, Olander, and Haddad (1976) as the emotional/affective closeness experienced in parent-child dyads. In the Add Health study, adolescents answered several questions about their feelings toward each parent. Five of these questions formed the Affectional Solidarity Scale used in the current study. The first two, "How close do you feel to your mother/father?" and "How much do you think she/he cares about you?" were scored on a scale of 1–5, with high scores reflecting greater closeness/caring. The other three, "Mother/father is warm and loving," "Satisfied with communication with mother/father," and "Satisfied with relationship with mother/father" were scored on a Likert-type scale, with 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree). Cronbach's alphas for these scales were high for each parent (.88 for fathers, .84 for mothers), indicating strong internal consistency. These items are similar to questions on scales currently used to assess intergenerational closeness in the literature (Gronvold, 1988, p. 96-97).

Associational solidarity (Bengtson et al., 1976), which refers to the extent and ways of adolescents' interaction with each parent, is another salient dimension of parent-child relationship. It was measured by items similar to components of other scales currently used to measure this construct (Mangen & Miller, 1988). A summated scale was based on four items assessing whether adolescents had done each of the following with their mother or father in the past four weeks: gone shopping; played a sport; gone to a movie, play, museum, concert, or sporting event; and worked on a project for school (scored yes=1, no=0). Cronbach's alphas on this scale were .34 for mothers and .44 for fathers.

Communication with parents was measured separately from association, since preliminary analyses revealed that parent-adolescent discussion items did not correlate highly enough with the behavioral items for inclusion in the same measure. However, the items appeared to be significant factors in distinguishing relationships between adolescents and parents, warranting their inclusion in the analyses. For both mothers and fathers, four types of parent-adolescent discussion proved highly correlated and were used to form the Communication Scale: talked about someone you're

dating or a party you went to, about a personal problem you were having; about your school work or grades, about other things you're doing in school. As with the associational items, adolescents were asked about occurrence of these conversations in the past four weeks (scored as yes=1, no=0). Cronbach's alpha for the summated Communication Scales were .54 for mothers and .51 for fathers.

RESULTS

The adolescent sample did not differ significantly on the control variables of adolescent age and sex, parent age, or marital quality. However, parental education showed substantial group differences, with white single-race parents reporting more education than parents in the other groups, and single-race minority parents reporting more than multiracial parents.

Bivariate Comparisons

Adolescents' scores on the three dimensions of parent-child relationship quality were compared for the single-race white and minority groups and the multiracial group. In TABLE 2, results are presented separately for boys and girls, and for mothers and fathers. No significant bivariate effects of multiracial status were found for either boys or girls in terms of relationship with their mothers. Multiracial adolescents did not differ from their single-race peers on reports of affective closeness, behavioral association (contact), or communication (talking) with their mothers. Single-race minority girls, however, reported significantly less talking with mothers than did either white or multiracial girls.

In contrast, findings for father-adolescent relationships revealed several significant differences by race/ethnicity, though primarily for boys. Multiracial girls reported more contact with their fathers than did either white or single-race minority girls. For multiracial boys, though, the relationship was more complex: they reported significantly less affective closeness with their fathers than did single-race white or minority boys; on the other hand, they did not differ from these two groups on measures of contact or behavioral involvement. (Single-race minority boys reported significantly less behavioral association with their fathers than did white boys). As with emotional closeness, however, multiracial boys reported less communication with their fathers than did the other groups

Table 2

BIVARIATE COMPARISONS OF WHITE, SINGLE-RACE MINORITY AND MULTI-RACE ADOLESCENTS: ADJUSTMENT OUTCOMES.

GROUP	MOTHER			FATHER		
	TALKING	MOTHER CONTACT	CLOSENESS	TALKING	FATHER CONTACT	CLOSENESS
Male						
White	1.72 (1.19)	1.17 (0.90)	22.61 (2.52)	1.43 ¹ (1.16)	1.15 ¹ (1.08)	22.01 ¹ (3.09)
Single-race minority	1.56 (1.19)	1.03 (0.80)	22.68 (2.62)	1.36 ¹ (1.20)	0.89 ² (0.97)	21.88 ¹ (3.39)
Multirace	1.64 (1.21)	1.12 (0.92)	22.65 (2.76)	1.10 ² (1.10)	1.12 ^{1,2} (1.01)	21.19 ² (3.80)
Test Statistic	F=2.14	F=2.57	F=.09	F=4.92**	F=5.96**	F=3.82*
Female						
White	2.23 (1.27)	1.37 (0.88)	22.19 (3.21)	1.50 (1.15)	0.89 ² (0.99)	21.40 (3.79)
Single-Race Minority	2.00 (1.27)	1.28 (0.84)	21.88 (3.52)	1.40 (1.11)	0.72 ² (0.99)	21.00 (3.82)
Multirace	2.23 (1.33)	1.41 (0.84)	22.22 (3.16)	1.38 (1.24)	0.94 ¹ (1.05)	21.32 (3.48)
Test Statistic	F=3.51*	F=2.06	F=1.00	F=1.37	F=3.39*	F=1.24

Note. Means in same column with same superscript are not significantly different.

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$.

of boys. Individual chi-square analyses (not shown) of the four items on the communication scale indicated extremely strong differences in father-adolescent communication between multiracial boys and the other two groups on three of the four items. The greatest differences were evident on items concerning school. While 53% of both white and single-race minority boys reported talking with their fathers about school work or grades, only 40% of multiracial boys did so. Multiracial boys were also much less likely to talk about other aspects of school with their fathers than were single-race boys (31% and 43%–44%, respectively).

Multivariate Analyses

Given that there were some background differences in these three groups of adolescents (see TABLE 1), the next step was to discover whether multiracial status was significantly associated with these same parent-adolescent relational outcomes once background factors were controlled.

Multivariate regression estimates of the effects of multiracial status on relationship outcomes for boys—controlling for parental age, education level, and marital quality, and for adolescent age—are presented in TABLE 3. Although only parental education differentiated the two groups of adolescents (see TABLE 1), the other relevant factors were retained because they are known to play a role in parent-child relationship quality. TABLE 3 shows single-race white and minority groups contrasted with the multiracial adolescents, who comprised the omitted comparison category in this analysis. The regression analyses were based on weighted data to account for the oversampling of particular racial/social class groups.

As can be seen in TABLE 3, racial/ethnic status had no significant effects on adolescent boys' relationships with their mothers. In fact, few background factors made much difference to this dyad. Boys with more educated parents talked more to their mothers, as did older boys. The latter, how-

Table 3

MULTIPLE REGRESSION ESTIMATES:^a PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP OUTCOMES FOR MALES

PREDICTOR VARIABLE	MOTHER			FATHER		
	TALKING	MOTHER CONTACT	CLOSENESS	TALKING	FATHER CONTACT	CLOSENESS
Parent						
Education	0.03*	0.014	0.014	0.05**	0.045***	0.03
Age	0.01	-0.004	0.001	0.002	-0.008	-0.01
Marital quality	0.01	0.01	0.21***	0.01	-0.009	0.35***
Adolescent						
Age (mos)	0.01***	-0.01***	-0.02***	0.003*	-0.012***	-0.03***
White ^b	0.07	0.04	0.06	0.22*	-0.015	0.84**
Single-race minority ^b	-0.15	-0.17	-0.06	0.22	-0.242*	0.49
Adjusted R ²	0.03	0.11	0.05	0.01	0.08	0.07
df	6	6	6	6	6	6
N	1288	1288	1288	1288	1288	1288

^aAnalyses based on weighted data.

^bOmitted comparison category is multirace males.

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

ever, performed fewer activities with their mothers and felt less emotionally close to them. Finally, boys whose parents reported a higher quality marriage also reported greater closeness to their mothers.

Father-son relations were significantly affected by racial/ethnic status, as the bivariate results suggested. On two of the three outcomes, communication and affectional solidarity, white boys reported higher scores than did their multiracial peers, consistent with the bivariate findings. Other predictors of father-son relations resembled those for mother-son relations. Greater parental education predicted significantly more communication and contact for boys, and higher marital quality was associated with greater affective closeness between sons and fathers. However, sons' increasing age showed mixed effects, as it did with mothers, leading to increased communication but reduced contact and emotional closeness between fathers and sons. Finally, single-race minority boys performed fewer activities with their fathers than did multiracial boys.

Multivariate results for girls' relationship with their parents are presented in TABLE 4. A few effects of racial/ethnic status were found, but in the opposite direction than hypothesized. In mother-daughter relations, white girls reported significantly less behavioral contact with their mothers than did multiracial girls. The other predictors of mother-child relations were similar to those for boys: more parental education predicted greater communication and contact between mothers and daughters, as did daughters' age, although increased age was linked to reduced behavioral contact and affective closeness. Mothers' increasing age also appeared to reduce affective closeness,

while parental reports of a higher quality marriage were associated with greater closeness.

With fathers, the results revealed no significant differences between multiracial girls and white or single-race minority girls. Like the other parent-adolescent relationships, however, father-daughter relationship quality was positively associated with marital quality (predicting greater communication, contact, and closeness for fathers and daughters), and parental education. Increasing adolescent age predicted reduced behavioral contact and closeness, and increased communication. While older girls report talking more to their fathers, this effect was countered by a lower level of communication between daughters and older fathers.

In sum, multivariate models based on relationship data reported by adolescents themselves indicated that multiracial adolescents' relationship with parents were about the same as those of the other groups, with the exception of the father-son relationship. Multiracial boys reported significantly less communication with and emotional closeness to their fathers than did white boys. For girls, the few significant group differences actually favored multiracial adolescents, who reported greater behavioral involvement with their mothers than did white girls.

DISCUSSION

The study reported in this article revealed very few differences between multiracial adolescents and their single-race peers in quality of parent-adolescent relationships. It should be noted, however, that the findings are based on adolescents' own reports of the relationship, and such reports may overlook less positive unconscious feelings

Table 4

MULTIPLE REGRESSION ESTIMATES:^a PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP OUTCOMES FOR FEMALES

PREDICTOR VARIABLE	MOTHER			FATHER		
	TALKING	MOTHER CONTACT	CLOSENESS	TALKING	FATHER CONTACT	CLOSENESS
Parent						
Education	0.06**	0.06***	0.05	0.06**	0.068***	0.07
Age	-0.01	-0.006	-0.04*	-0.02*	-0.006	-0.04
Marital quality	0.01	0.002	0.17**	0.06***	0.26*	0.49***
Adolescent						
Age (mos)	0.01***	-0.009***	-0.03***	0.01***	-0.012***	-0.03***
White ^b	-0.06	-0.17*	0.19	0.02	-0.166	0.16
Single-race minority ^b	-0.22	-0.17	0.009	-0.006	-0.204	0.08
Adjusted R ²	0.06	0.07	0.04	0.05	0.09	0.11
df	6	6	6	6	6	6
N	1363	1363	1363	1363	1363	1363

^aAnalyses based on weighted data.

^bOmitted comparison category is multirace females.

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

for their parents. Nevertheless, these reports deserve attention, particularly in light of the long history of self-report methods in family and adolescent development research, where they have been shown to provide a useful perspective on parent-child relationships. Moreover, since the use of projective testing—a way to tap unconscious or pre-conscious feelings—is not an option with this data set, self-report is the remaining dependable method for discovering adolescents' problems and needs for intervention.

One of this study's significant findings was contrary to expectations. Specifically, the data indicated that white girls had less interaction with their mothers than did multiracial girls (see TABLE 4), and multiracial girls reported more contact with their fathers than did girls in either single-race group (see TABLE 2). Therefore, no problematic relations with either mother or father were evident for multiracial girls along the dimensions considered. In contrast, multiracial boys reported significantly lower levels of paternal relationship quality, in terms of both less communication and less emotional closeness, than did white boys. With this exception, multiracial adolescents' reports of relationships with their parents were of comparable quality to those of their peers of single-race backgrounds.

Multiracial girls reported significantly more behavioral contact with mothers than did white girls, and more contact with fathers than either group of single-race girls. This finding is most likely to be understood in the context of the protective parenting style often exhibited by parents of multiracial adolescents (Gibbs, 1987; Herring, 1992). Parents' desire to protect their multiracial offspring from discrimination and prejudice may result in adolescents spending more time with their parents and becoming emotionally and social dependent on them (Gibbs & Moskowitz-Sweet, 1991). Why this finding was specific to daughters and mothers in this study needs further explanation, which may lie in sex differences in family interaction and relationships. First, mothers tend to be more relationship-focused than fathers (Hastings & Grusec, 1998), and may thus pay more attention to this protective function. Second, the task of separation-individuation is sometimes considered to be more difficult for daughters than for sons (Lapsley, Rice, & Shadid, 1989). Third, multiracial adolescent girls are likely to experience struggles in fitting in with peer groups and participating in social or school

activities. This may be less true for their male counterparts, who can often gain entrance and acceptance through extracurricular activities or sports (Gibbs, 1998). Thus, the results regarding time spent together by mothers and their multiracial daughters may represent mothers' greater sensitivity to their daughters' need for protection and heightened struggle with separation-individuation and peer acceptance.

Indications that multiracial boys had more problematic relations with their fathers than did boys in the single-race groups also warrants explanation, which may lie in generally recognized issues between teenage boys and parents, especially fathers, and in special issues confronting multiracial boys. First, the literature suggests that compared to girls, boys rely more on their parents than on other sources of support (Ryan, Stiller, & Lynch, 1994). This reliance may produce strain in the father-son bond for multiracial boys, who tend to be more emotionally vulnerable than other boys (Cooney & Radina, 2000), particularly since fathers appear less comfortable than mothers in dealing with negative or depressed emotions (Leadbeater, Blatt, & Quinlan, 1995). Thus, the multiracial boy who is feeling somewhat troubled may perceive an especially large gulf in his relationship with his father, as his father shies away from recognizing and dealing with his son's negative emotions.

It appeared, however, that multiracial boys could make the same kinds of emotional connections as their peers to their mothers. The fact that mothers tend to be more relationship-focused in their parenting than fathers, more often encouraging relationship maintenance and trying to alleviate anxiety in their children (Hastings & Grusec, 1998), may explain why they were better able than fathers in this study to avoid distancing from their multiracial sons, even when their sons were somewhat troubled.

Another issue in considering the present findings is the four-item communication scale. Although this scale had acceptable internal reliability, a greater choice of communication items in the Add Health survey might have enabled construction of a more reliable scale, and hence different study findings. Information on parent-child discussions about relevant issues (e.g., involvement in sports teams, church groups, or volunteer activities) beyond those of dating and school were not available. Therefore, this study's analysis may underestimate the level of communication that exists

between adolescents and parents in general. However, there is no reason to believe that the limited list of topics would bias comparisons of adolescents of different racial/ethnic groups. Also, the two school-related items on the scale may have been especially informative about father-son communication because school is an area of concern for multiracial children, especially boys. According to Bowles (1993), multiracial boys, particularly those with white fathers, may believe that as members of minorities they face barriers to school achievement, and eventually, to career goals, that their fathers did not have to overcome. Bowles spoke of this as the "invisible ceiling" (p. 421). He claimed that multiracial boys' feeling that they are unlikely to match their fathers' achievements creates a zone of discomfort in the father-son relationship. Findings from a related study (Cooney & Radina, 2000) have indicated that multiracial boys are, in fact, more likely to face problems of grade retention and expulsion or suspension at school, which would be consistent with this argument. Unfortunately, in the current study's analysis, the sample of multiracial adolescents is too small for further division based on the racial/ethnic background of each parent (e.g., to compare white fathers-black mothers with Asian fathers-white mothers). Certainly, this is an issue that warrants further research, although with larger samples of multiracial adolescents.

If parents do not recognize or know how to deal with the racism and prejudice that their multiracial children may experience, they may be unable to help them develop the coping strategies needed to deal with environments outside the home (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman, 1990). Thus, the communication problem between fathers and multiracial sons identified here could become increasingly serious as the adolescents age and experience more settings—e.g., school and work—in which minority populations have not received equal opportunities in the past.

The present study, then, indicates that for the most part, reports of multiracial adolescents do not differ significantly from those of their single-race peers as to the quality of relationships they maintain with their parents. This is possibly due to the extra efforts made by parents of multiracial offspring to secure healthy environments, interactions, and relational outcomes for their children. Only in the case of fathers and sons does it seem that the needs of multiracial youth are not being

met. Future work should therefore focus more closely on this dyad, attempting to identify the factors or processes that put this relationship at greater risk. Finally, studies that employ multiple sources of information (e.g., both parent and adolescent reports, clinical projective tests) about the quality of parent-adolescent relationships would help provide greater insight into the validity of the findings presented here.

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This research is based on data from the Add Health project, a program project designed by J. Richard Udry (PI) and Peter Bearman, and funded by grant P01-HD31921 from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development to the Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, with cooperative fundings participation by the National Cancer Institute; National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism; National Institute of Deafness and Other Communication Disorders; National Institute of Drug Abuse; National Institute of General Medical Sciences; National Institute of Mental Health; National Institute of Nursing Research; Office of AIDS Research, NIH; Office of Behavior and Social Science Research, NIH; Office of the Director, NIH; Office of Research on Women's Health, NIH; Office of Population Affairs, DHHS; National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, DHHS; Office of Minority Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, DHHS; Office of Minority Health, Office of Public Health and Science, DHHS; Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, DHHS; and National Science Foundation. For data files from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health: Jo Jones, Carolina Population Center, 123 West Franklin Street, Chapel Hill, NC 27516-3997 [E-mail: jo_jones@unc.edu].