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An exploratory study of transracial adoptions : African American perspectives

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Tarn C. Martin
An Exploratory Study of
Transracial Adoptions:
African American
Perspectives

ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to determine if what the National Association of Black Social Workers states; that African American children raised by Caucasian adults are at risk for being outcast by the African American community. The NABSW believes that transracial adoptees are not able to develop a healthy sense of self when raised by Caucasians.

For this study I interviewed 8 participants who identify as African American who were between the ages of 18-47. The participants were asked a series of questions in regards to their development and how they have fared being raised by Caucasian parents. Most of the participants were raised in communities where there were other people of color although a few were raised in rural predominately white areas.

The findings of the research in this study showed that transracial adoptees do experience difficulties but the difficulties were not related to being raised by Caucasian parents but were more related to basic adolescent developmental issues that most children experience and difficulties with society having to do with race but not usually in relation to their parents.

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF TRANSRACIAL ADOPTIONS:
AFRICAN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES

A project based upon an independent investigation
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2009

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This thesis could not have been accomplished without the assistance of many whose contributions are gratefully acknowledged. I wish to thank all the people who have helped me financially and supported me emotionally through this process. I want to give special thanks to my thesis advisor for his patience, guidance and enthusiasm. I would also like to thank all those who helped me in finding participants for this study. The study of transracial adoptions is very important to me as I am a transracial adoptee. Transracial adoptees are a population that is growing rapidly and for that reason there is a great need for future research in order to know best how to serve this group in the clinical setting. The perspectives and the opinions of the adoptive parents and siblings are equally important to understanding how best to aid this population and their families. The parents and siblings; be they biological or other adoptees, were not studied in this paper however this is an area that should be recognized especially for clinical practice and is also an area which I hope to research in the future. Adoption can be a very difficult and emotionally charged subject therefore I am truly thankful to those who participated and shared their stories and opinions with me ...and now with you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Transracial adoptions have been a controversial subject for many years. There are questions concerning the ethics regarding transracial adoptions. Specifically, many African Americans support same race adoptions because they believe black children have difficulty incorporating a healthy racial and ethnic identity development when adopted by Caucasian parents. Another concern stemming from many African Americans is that it is often difficult for transracial adoptees to integrate into the African American community when they are raised by Caucasian parents; the possibility of social exclusion from one's racial group is believed to be much greater.

Although much of the current research supports the concerns and opinions of those who oppose transracial adoptions, this research also generally omits opposing perspectives. For example, Leslie Hollingsworth (1998) is an adoption expert and states that same race adoptions are best for children. She believes there are many roadblocks that make it difficult for African Americans to adopt African American babies. She feels the best way to help African Americans adopt African American children is to implement policies that aid in same race adoption for example, changing such policies as poverty and social inequality ; although this is important it is a seemingly difficult request to fulfill (Hollingsworth, 1998).

Another limitation recognized that is consistent throughout much of the research is the difficulty with sample size when a study is conducted. There are several different levels to this limitation. For example, in many studies researchers found the sample to be too small, not economical, not diverse enough, or educationally diverse. Many researchers suggest keeping

these limitations in mind for future research. One article suggest that researchers who are looking to study multiracial people should consider using a blended approach; using both a qualitative measure as well as a quantitative measure thereby allowing for generalizability of findings (Miville, Constantine, Baysden, & So-Lloyd, 2005).

The opinion of the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) is that transracial adoptions negate the ability for African Americans to become embedded in their biological culture. A qualitative approach in conjunction with a flexible method to study the effects of transracial adoptions is used in this study. Twelve to Fifteen participants will be interviewed and obtained using a snowball method. Each of the potential participants will be contacted via phone or will be met in person. Initially, questions to assure that the participants fit the requirements of the said study will be asked and if interested, the potential participants will be asked to complete an informed consent form. Finally, each participant will meet at a mutually compatible place where the interview will take place.

This study will focus on the effects of how transracial adoptees raised specifically by Caucasian parents fare in American society as adults. The said argument from the NABSW; that African American children adopted specifically by Caucasian parents, does in fact create a deficit in respect to the adoptees building a healthy sense of self will be researched in this study. This study will also look at adult perspectives and experiences of transracial adoptions: Are transracial adoptees outcast socially by their said racial group? Is there a consistent internal struggle to choose one particular race and if so what are the feelings and coping mechanisms used?

My hope is for this study to appeal not only to transracial adoptees but also will contribute to the field of social work; specifically in the ever growing field of multicultural

therapy. Likewise, I am hopefully that this study will aid not only aid social workers /counselors working with multicultural clients but also will contribute to the breakdown of stereotypes and racism that continues to persist in our country.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of this paper will be on transracial adoptions specifically pertaining to persons identifying as African American who were adopted by Caucasian parents. This study will also examine other aspects of adoption including the history of transracial adoptions, the Adoption and Safe Families Act, the controversy over transracial adoptions, the effects of racism in conjunction to adoption, adoptions today and the implications for helping professionals.

The National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) argues that African American children should not be adopted and/or raised by Caucasian adults but should be raised only by African American adults. They believe African American children who are raised by Caucasian adults are not able to attain a healthy sense of themselves during their adolescent years which in turn will ultimately make it very difficult for these persons to acclimate as adults to African American culture but also into a pervasively Caucasian society.

This research will look at the effects of racism in conjunction with the argument from the NABSW in respect to how transracial adult adoptees fare in this country. This study will include excerpts of interviews from adult transracial adoptees and will conclude with a brief regarding the future of transracial adoptions; looking into whether being transracially adopted does create a chasm in which the cultural identity of the African American adoptee is lost. In this study how social workers can better serve transracial adoptees and their parents will be discussed and finally, this study will look into what is warranted in order to better serve this population. All of the information in this paper pertaining to the title African American will reflect persons who identify as Negroid, Black, bi-racial or multiracial.

The History of Transracial Adoptions

There was never a kind of- Oh, by the way...It was just kind-of that we weren't white...you know you are black and you were adopted...where we came from-our parents ...it was always like- very natural. Like for the longest time I thought that being adopted meant transracial adoption-like I didn't know that there was any other way...I remember meeting someone who was adopted and her parents who adopted her were white too and being like...What? No you're not... It was just sort of part of growing I think. (pp.1-2)

A child who identifies as belonging to one race who is adopted into a family belonging to a different race is considered a transracial adoptee. Most transracial adoptions occur between Caucasian parents and children of color. Beyond adoption of African American children, in recent years many Caucasian parents have adopted children from India, China, and South America.

During the 1950's, adoption from within the United States had declined as measures of birth control became more available and acceptable. Adopting children of color eventually became more prominent an option for women and families as well as international adoptions as programs to support women who desired to adopt became more readily available (Hollingsworth, 2002). Between the years of 1967 and 1972, transracial adoptions reached the ten-thousands in the United States.

The first wave of transracial adoptions began between the years of 1939-1945 during World War II. Many parents were killed in the war leaving their children orphaned. Later in the 1950's, military conflict erupted between North and South Korea. This war would later be known as the Korean War. This war also left many children orphaned. The adoptions that

occurred during this period were thought to be altruistic as they provided the orphaned children with permanent households regardless of their race.

New legislation referred to as the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) was enacted in 1994. The Multiethnic Placement Act prohibited federally subsidized adoption agencies from delaying or denying child placement on grounds of race or ethnicity (U.S. Public Law 103-82). This act was later amended by the Interethnic Adoption Provisions in 1996. This legislation by Senator Howard Metzenbaum of Ohio was passed in both houses of Congress. This bill was passed to secure the well being of all children placed for adoption but also allocated tax credits up to 5,000 dollars to adoptive families with income not exceeding 75,000. These funds were given out annually and were meant to be used specifically for adoption expenses (Hollingsworth, 1998).

Unfortunately, the developmental needs of transracial adoptees have been neglected by the practice and policy of adoption for many years. Although the Interethnic Placement Act prohibits states and agencies to delay placement of a child for the purpose of finding a racial or ethnic match and the act also prohibits agencies to deny the opportunity on the basis of race, color or national origin, to any persons wanting to adopt or foster a child, the act also prohibited agencies to work with adoptive parents around racial issues that could prove challenging. Agencies were not permitted to under the act to create race specific programs that could benefit transracial adoptees and their parents because all programs would need to be applicable to all parents regardless of race (Lee St. John, 2008).

There are particular situations where agencies are able and should take into consideration the race or ethnicity of the potential adoptive parents. This consideration is only valid if the child is older. For example, if the child is aware of racial and ethnic differences. This

consideration must also be based on the concerns and/or circumstances that are present in an individual case. It is thought that infants and young children are not able to determine their needs pertaining to race /ethnicity; In this case consideration is not valid (MEPA, 2009).

The U.S. Census Bureau reported that 40.2 million African Americans live in the U.S. as of July of 2006. That year, African Americans made up 13.4% of the total U.S. population which shows an increase of one half million from 2005 (U.S Census Bureau, 2008). Transracial adoptions in the U.S. have become more prevalent in recent years. One source estimates that 1,000 to 2,000 African American children are adopted by Caucasian parents each year (Transracial, 1994).

Much of society believes transracial adoptions generally include Caucasian parents with either Black or Asian adoptees while in fact there are not many Caucasian to Black adoptions as there are Caucasian to bi- racial or Multi-racial adoptions. There is speculation that the reasoning behind this is due to adoptive parents feeling it will be easier if the child is not too dark. This fear is validated as racism in this country remains prevalent. Non traditional families or multiracial families often experience racism whether it be overt or covert racism because they defy the ideals for many of what it means to be a family. This is also another concern stemming from the NABSW; because multiracial families often encounter racism, the result may be emotional or psychological difficulty for the adoptees of these families (Samuels, 2009).

Adoption and the Safe Families Act

In 1997, former President Bill Clinton signed the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA). The act has similar components to the 1980 ASFA act but was updated to meet the current needs of children. The new act was initiated due to the number of children in the foster care system waiting for permanent placement, to place children into homes in a timelier manner, to assure safety to children in these placements and to ensure that the welfare system would work in an ethical manner. Unfortunately, there are some negative aspects to the act (Gelles, 1998).

One of the provisions to the act is the per child incentive payments to states in order to encourage an increased number of completed adoptions for children in foster care. Although this sounds as if it would be beneficial for children who are waiting to be adopted, it could also be more damaging to the child. Some feel the provision only ensures that the parents and foster child/ren will be permanently separated which is not always in the best interest of the child/ren. The reason children are placed in foster care is often a result of poverty which in many cases is connected to drug use. If a parent is in treatment for drug or alcohol use, they are usually permitted to attend a rehabilitation program as a means for reclaiming their parental rights. The problem is rehabilitation programs generally last a total of 18 months and termination of parental rights may occur before the rehabilitation program has been completed (McGowan, 2000).

The Adoption and Safe Families Act should be evaluated at the policy level to determine its impact on young children particularly, from different racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds. There is empirical evidence that shows the lack of adoption opportunities for African American children and children with special needs. There are many who are opposed to trans-racial placements particularly for African American and Native American children (Kemp

& Bodonyi, 2000). Native American children have some protection under the Indian Welfare Act.

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 was enacted in direct response to the large number of children who were removed from their families and their tribes. The failure to acknowledge tribal relations and cultural and social aspects of Indian communities by states was another reason for the ICWA. If known that a child has some Indian heritage, it is the obligation of the case worker to determine if the child belongs to a federally recognized Indian tribe. If a child is of mixed race with Indian heritage but is not considered an “Indian Child” under the ICWA, the child will then be protected against any discriminatory decisions in regards to placement under the Interethnic Placement Act. (MEPA, 2009)

There are many other factors that can contribute to the delay of placement such as, high case loads, court delays or distinctive physical and emotional needs of children who have experienced abuse or neglect that make it difficult to obtain out of home care. Upon learning that the child will soon be entering out of home care, the most efficient way to reduce such delays in the process of adopting is for the agency to complete a comprehensive and well documented assessment of each child’s needs in terms of placement. Also recommended is for agencies to include a comprehensive plan to help recruit persons looking to adopt. The plan includes but is not limited to:

- A list of waiting children that include a description of specific characteristics
- Strategies to aid with linguistic barriers
- Fee structures that are non-discriminatory
- Incorporating strategies that will enable agencies connection to many parts of a community (MEPA, 2009).

The Controversy over Transracial Adoptions

I have no idea... I think that I identify as being a black person who has tremendous amount of white privilege and someone who has insight into a bunch of things that other people don't have insight into... and as a teacher that is a really important part of how I am able to relate to the students and how they're able to relate to me...and we grapple with ah...stuff that others cannot. I identify as mixed and there's a complexity to that... I feel comfortable on both sides. (pp.6)

In 1972, The National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) passed a resolution stating that black children should only be adopted by black people because they felt in order for black children to gain an overall healthy perspective of their selves; encompassing their race and culture and in some cases religious aspects, they must be raised with black people. The NABSW believes that when Caucasians raise black children, the way these children view themselves is affected; the possibility that they may adopt negative views of their said race increases (Hollingsworth, 1999).

Because there are subsidies for adopting children of color as there are for children of special needs, there is speculation that African-Americans who are fighting for same race adoption rights are doing so in order to be able to collect on these subsidies. The NABSW and many African-Americans agree that African-American children will be outcast from their culture and have difficulty with the development of their identity if adopted by Caucasians (Hollingsworth, 1998). However, there are also many people (Caucasian and African American) who argue against requiring same race adoptions, stating that there are many children in foster care in need of permanent homes who if they are destined to wait for a same race adoption, they may spend the majority or all of their adolescence in foster care. Many parents who are looking to adopt feel if a

couple is willing to care for a child, they should be afforded the opportunity to do so regardless of race.

For many years Caucasian parents are more likely to adopt children from overseas before adopting an African-American child from within the U.S. Although it is impossible to determine outcomes of placement patterns for groups of children, a study conducted by Thoburn, Norford and Rashid provided information that indicates Caucasian parents are more likely to adopt black children who were born to one Caucasian parent. It is speculated that the persistent lack of healthy white infants may be a prominent reason for this phenomenon. However, many parents state preferring children who identify as “part-White”. Reasons supporting this choice are (1) the parents feel they will have more in common with the child. (2) They feel because they partially share a racial heritage, they feel they will be able to relate more to the child. (3) The guilt associated with taking a child away from its’ natural heritage is lessened. (4) Parents feel that having a child who is racially mixed will demote the negativity from others. Some parents feel adopting transracially is a way to continue testimony to the civil rights movement (Samuels, 2009).

Billups, (2008) cite Obama’s rise to the presidency as opening up more awareness of the multiracial population in the U.S. The article lends evidence about the complexity of being a multi-racial person. Multiracial Americans are the fastest growing demographic group in the United States. The number of multiracial people living in the U.S rose last year to about 5.2 million, according to the latest census estimates. Carolyn Liebler, a sociology professor at the University of Minnesota who specializes in family, race and ethnicity states, "Multiracial unions

have been happening for a very long time, but we are only now really coming to terms with saying it's OK, I don't think we've nearly tapped the potential. Millions are yet to come out.”

Multiracial adoptions have also become more prevalent in recent years by way of interracial marriage and birth. Social acceptance in this particular group is believed to be rising due to prominent figures such as newly appointed President Obama and Tiger Woods who has spoken openly and publicly about his racial background. Initially and still on occasion he is scorned for not identifying as just African American (Multiracial, 2009)

There are a several different theories about how bi racial and multiracial people develop. A study by Poston posits bi and multi racial individuals go through a series of developmental stages. According to Poston, there are 5 stages of development; personal identity which generally occurs in childhood, choice of group categorization which focuses on parental influence, as well as societal, and communal which aid in an individual's choice of identifying to a particular race. The enmeshment stage highlights the complexities within an individual around feelings of guilt around choosing to identify more closely with one race over another. Next an individual enters the appreciation stage where the individual begins to explore outside their chosen group and finally the integration stage where individuals find value in other groups while identifying closely with another group (Miville, Constantine, Baysden and So-Lloyd, 2005). The majority of participants in this study stated that they do not feel conflicted in terms of identity and that they generally feel comfortable around people belonging to another race.

Like I don't feel isolated by my white friends but I feel ... like they really don't see me because they're not aware like... they don't understand... so that's hard like um... having that- like being friends but not really being friends with people and then there's like my black friends and actually I don't have that many but... I don't know... there's a part of me that feels much more insecure by knowing there are differences they don't

share with me but with the white group the part about race is so big- sometimes it's not but it usually is and I'm just like it's really – really hard. (pp. 4)

The fact remains that multi-racial people are not only a growing group but also a dominate group although seemingly hidden. The year 2000 was the first time Multi-racial people were able to fully identify themselves in the census. More than seven million people checked more than one category on the U.S. census (Miville, Constantine, et al., 2005).

The primary concern of the NABSW is shared with the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute. In recent years the institute issued a report in agreement with the NABSW stating their findings to be that Transracial Adoptees specifically African Americans adopted by Caucasian adults have higher rates of behavioral problems and have difficulties interacting with other black people. The study also suggests that race should be a factor for Caucasians wanting to adopt transracially. They believe that people who want to adopt that do not have an African American heritage should be screened to determine if they are able to aid an adoptee in development of self esteem. Likewise, the institute states that it is equally important to have the ability to teach African American adoptees how to defend themselves against racism (Lee St. John, 2008).

Another concern/suggestion in regards to raising transracial adoptees is implementing cultural tools and being able to discuss issues of race, culture as well as racial and cultural differences when the child is ready. Below is a conversation that reflects the interaction between a mother and daughter supporting this suggestion: Kelly Kenny (African American) tells how once she and her then three-year-old, Elena (African American/Caucasian), were in the ladies

room when Elena looked curiously at her mom's partially bare legs and then at another woman's black stockings and asked:

Mommy, you black? Yes, Mommy is Black and daddy is white. And I'm...? Asked Elena... Smiling- turning the question over to her daughter to help her think about her own identity- I'm brown! Said Elena (Nakazawa, 2003).

According to a study done by Gina Samuels (2009), children who are adopted transracially are often raised in Caucasian communities with strong cultural contexts. These children have reported feeling much discomfort with their appearance and often struggle in social situations that require interacting with African American adolescents; however there were indications of high levels of attachment with the parents and there are also reports of the adolescents succeeding in meeting their educational goals.

I lived a life that was just multicultural. I was just always around all kinds of people who were smart and deep thinkers- who had been active during the civil rights movement and Vietnam so I think in that effort... and then I think educationally- when I was at Latin school- where I wound up leaving... there was really some stuff going on with the sort of white- good old boys teaching there- so my parents were very understanding of that- understanding of the challenges- took my side and had empathy and had an understanding of what was going on and they made a commitment to finding me an educational setting that was going to work for me. (pp. 4)

The Effects of Racism on Transracial Adoptees

One other time I went to camp in West Roxbury and we were in a fieldtrip to the beach and a couple of kids said to me- So are you Greek? And I said -well that is how I always referred to myself- I said I'm half black and half white and they said -oh so you're a nigger? And I said- oh... well, I guess so. Cause I did not know what to do in that situation. (pp.4)

Although most people will state that racism has changed in this country, especially since electing an African American President, many of those belonging to the African American community would still disagree. Many feel racism in the United States today is just more covert than overt; still many African Americans believe this to be a worse form of racism. Microaggressions or subtle insults are an example of covert racism; Sometimes they are visual insults and sometimes verbal (Miller & Garran, 2007). For example, an immigrant man who has only been speaking English for a few years asks a store clerk where he might find olive oil. The clerk questions what he was asking for and then asked the man where he was from. To many, this is would be considered a simple question but to the immigrant man it can be very harmful emotionally and/or psychologically. Microaggressions such as the previous example are thought to create a division between groups and can often interfere with one's capacity to function in many settings (Sue, W.D., Capodilupo, M.C., Torino, C.G., Bucceri, M. J., Holder, B. M. A., Nadal, L. K.& Esquilin, M. (2007).

In his book *Racism without Racist: Color- Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, Eduardo Bonilla- Silva refers to racism today as color-blindness. He states that in today's society, Caucasians use the language of liberalism in order to separate minorities from acquiring "good things". He uses the following example to reference this. "I am all for equal opportunity; that's why I oppose affirmative action!" He continues on noting how many Caucasians feel minorities have ample opportunity to succeed, therefore they are less concerned about minorities in general (Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

Transracial adoptions defy the monocentric and biological race and norms of what it means to be a family; in most areas of American, people still believe that family consist of all members

within the family sharing the same racial identity; many of those people do not agree with transracial adoptions. The first experience with racism for many transracial adoptees, whether it covert or overt, generally occurs around the same time when they realize they are viewed as “different” in comparison to their parents.

As an adult I learned that other people didn't view me as white or they did not view me as the same as my parents and...I did have some understanding of that – you know- going up to the counter to pay for stuff and I would be with my mom and people would say.. Are you guys together? You know so that came in... my mom use to get so pissed off...”OF COURSE WE ARE!!!!” You know- But my parents... in my mind are not a different race than me- they just aren't and they're my parents and I don't think that you can have um... I don't think that you can be of a different race than your parents but I think that that s because were... not to sound cliché but we were told we are of the human race. We are all one and we can have parents who don't look like us. (pp.2)

On a daily basis transracial adoptees are consistently questioned by strangers as to how they identify. This positions many transracial adoptees to a place of needing to defend their selves. Some transracial adoptees are viewed as betraying their race if they choose to identify with both or all races that encompass their being.

I identify myself as Black –African American ... because... I do that because that's what people... that's what people see when they look at me and I don't know when that awareness came about- I mean specifically... but, I am more-so now that I have a son who is and I try to be aware and I try to look at how other people are because I don't know I guess... because I don't identify myself... I am a person...so to be categorized in any way is odd... but I guess that is how we operate in this country... we categorize and organize. (pp.3)

Identity organizes people; sometimes positively but often negatively for minorities such as transracial adoptees as identity is how we view ourselves in comparison to others. Everyone has an identity and this identity often changes as we develop and interact more with others in our communities. Erik Erikson (1963, 1968) believed identity to be the bridge connecting

adolescence and adulthood. He stated during this stage that people become more aware of personal aesthetics as well people become more aware of how they are viewed by others. This is a time when people determine which groups they relate to most. Individuation and differentiation also tend to take place during this period. These processes are a driving force for creating divisions between social groups (Miller & Garran, 2007).

Racism is also a driving force of divisions of groups and can and often does create a great deal of emotional distress. This distress sometimes results in other psychological disorders such as depression or anxiety; a concern stemming from the NABSW and the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute. Being an individual who identifies as multiracial can be complex. Some feel the growing population of multiracials is helping to defy racial barriers. This view tends to be a representation of the Caucasian community. Many minorities do not share this same view. Many perceive multiracials as a group that defies the African American race (Samuels, 2009).

My former roommate was white and he had a single so he um... well, they came at him and he was drunk and they were drunk and a man who ... a dark skinned man – they were darker skinned- went to Bronx High so they were also not as economically fortunate as most of the other black students in the school- though they were certainly as smart. So they started calling him a racist and one of them pushed him and you know I held him back- you know so he wouldn't do something stupid. But then I would up having to get them out as well... they got mad so they put up signs calling me a house nigger and then the whole campus kind-of erupted.(pp.1)

It can be said that racism is often the root cause of internal conflicts between multiracials and biracials. Even under the African American umbrella racism is often a point of contention as multiracials and biracials sometimes have difficulty navigating between the races; some having stronger feelings than others regarding culture dependant of course upon on how they are raised and the community in which they are raised. This can be exceptionally difficult for transracial

adoptees as they sometimes find issues around culture and race more difficult to navigate due to having Caucasian parents. Segregation is more present among minorities as we enter into a multidimensional African American society. The hierarchy that exists between Caucasians and African Americans is now present in another dimension; amongst minorities (Miller & Garran, 2007).

Adoption Today and the Future of Transracial Adoptions

“Marriage is for white people” is the title of an article from the Washington Post (2006). The article discusses the disparity in marriages in our country. The author is an African American teacher whose sixth grade student stated during a class discussion that “Marriage is for white people.” She then looked at the statistical figures of marriage in the U.S. and found that her student was correct. African Americans have the lowest marriage rate of all racial groups. The article also discusses how due to a number of circumstances such as education and employment, many black women are making the decision to refrain from marriage (Jones, 2006).

A study conducted by Orthner and Mancini looked at the leisure patterns between interracial couples. They found that families that are cohesive and spend much of their leisure time together, appear to have more satisfactory marriages in comparison to those who do not spend as much time together. The families who do not spend as much time together appeared to have less satisfactory marriages (Hibbler & Shinew, 2002). This may be why the marriage rate of African Americans is so low; generally in minority families, both parents have to work and sometimes have to work two jobs to provide for their family and thus leisure time is not allotted.

I really value that my mother is Irish and I am half Irish and my wife is half Irish. That is like an important connection. I have always joked that my children are going to be thoroughbreds... yeah- so that has always been a thing for me. There was an interesting moment with my parents when my daughter was born... So my parents came out to ... you know... meet their new grandchild... so they brought my parents to the other room thinking I would be there... so I wound up finding out they were there and wheeling down the hall and she is my first flesh and blood... so I brought her down the hall to them and they looked at me and I just started balling and my mother sis as well because they saw her and we all knew what that moment was. (pp.7)

With the decline of marriage within the African American community, and complexities within the system which make it difficult to adopt transracially, the question remains as to the fate of African American children waiting to be adopted specifically if they were to be waiting specifically for African American parents. In 2006, five hundred and ten thousand children were in foster care. Thirty two percent were black and nine percent were multiracial. The number of black children exiting foster care that year was twenty seven percent and nine percent were multiracial. The number of Caucasian children exiting foster care was forty six percent (Adoption, 2009).

Much of the research to date about transracial adoptions assumes that to be adopted transracially comes with a myriad of problems; psychological and emotional. It is believed that in order for transracial adoptees to thrive in western culture, they must have a connection to their African culture. In the 1960's and 1970's it has been argued that many agencies made adoption of an African American child more accessible for Caucasian adults over African American adults. Today, the criteria for Caucasians looking to adopt minority children, has not changed significantly. However, many African Americans still carry the reference of being inept participants in becoming adoptive parents or parents in general; therefore adoption rates of African American adults adopting African American children remain low.

For Caucasians not much has changed although it is preferred but not mandated for transracial families to live in multiracial neighborhoods and it is assumed that they will recognize the child's race by way of disclosing historic events in relation to the racial background of the child. (Hayes, 1993) However, this way of thinking assumes that all African Americans would be the same if raised with certain cultural aspects and in fact is in its' own right a form of racism. If society continues to think about transracial adoptees in this manner, then they are in a sense promoting the continuation of racism.

Multi-racial and bi-racial adults are thought to have much difficulty not only in figuring out identity but also where they fit in to western society. However, this appears to be more of a Caucasian outlook of transracial adoptees. Much of society feels that bi-racial and multi racial adults are forced to choose a race and this can be anxiety provoking and also contributes to racism. For example, Tiger Woods has been criticized by the black community because he does not limit his identity to just one race. He states that he prefers to recognize all races of his being. He does not identify solely as a black man as many in the black community feel he should (Billups, 2008).

[A]h... that's a difficult one... because I've always been pretty comfortable with who I am- and it never was a big issue about... big sign- about you know if I'm black or white or if I do this or do that and you know I'm ... I've met people who have crises with who they are and I just.. I think that ... I think that my foundation... my parents gave me a strong enough foundation that was grounding and I am- just like... I am who I am... and even today- you know I- I gotta say that I identify more black than anything else... but again I'm comfortable with who I am so it's hard to say how that evolved.(pp.2)

Because there is a decline in marriages in the African community, if we are to limit adoption of African American children to be solely adopted by African American adults, there is a good possibility that many African American children will spend the better part of their

adolescence in foster care. The future of transracial adoptions lies in the hands of policy makers and society. With more research pertaining specifically to the experiences of transracial adoptees current research will be more supported and will better aid clinicians working with this population.

When working with any population it is important to be educated to the possible difficulties that may arise. It is also important to remember that all subjects should be treated individually as populations of people do not always share the same experiences; particularly transracials adoptees. Although the participants in this study all shared similarities in terms of experiences the way they interpreted these experiences were different. The National Association of Black Social Workers should consider focusing efforts toward educating persons who work with this population by way of learning more about the internal effects(psychological and emotional) of transracial adoptees; more specifically, from the adoptees themselves.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study presents findings from a qualitative research project about transracially adopted African American adults using partially structured interviews in hopes of eliciting and exploring narrative accounts of the participants' developmental experiences as transracial adoptees. A sample of convenience was collected using a snowball method. A structured interview was conducted. Each participant responded to 14 questions pertaining to their experiences as a transracial adoptee and how they fared in society. Each interview lasted on average one half hour depending on how much information participants were willing to share. The attempt was made to conduct each interview in person but due to the geographic disbursement of the participants, some interviews were conducted over the phone. The phone interviews were conducted using a digital recorder and a landline using speakerphone.

Although I was hoping to obtain 12-15 participants, I was only able to generate responses from a total of 8 participants. All participants were asked the same set of questions. The age range of the participants was 18-47. Three males and five females were interviewed.

Sample Eligibility Criteria

It must first be noted that this population is disparate and was therefore difficult to recruit. As noted previously, multiracials although a growing group are not typically known as multiracials but identify and are identified by most of society as African Americans or blacks.

Specifically, African American adults who were adopted and raised by Caucasian parents are an even more disparate group making this study even more difficult to conduct.

This study was conducted with a total of 8 participants; 3 males and 5 females. All participants identified under the African American umbrella; either as black, biracial, multiracial or African American. All participants were over the age of 18 with the oldest being 47. Participants were from varying places around the United States. One participant was from Arizona, one from Pennsylvania another from Ohio and the remaining from Massachusetts. All participants were asked a series of questions in a structured interview and all participants were conversant in English.

Obtained Sample

This study began with 2 eligible participants. Over a 9 month span I was able to secure a total of 8 participants. While conducting this study I was interning at a local college as a counseling intern and was fortunate to have access to the list serve of the college which I had hoped would generate many potential participants. However, I did not secure any participants using this method. I then proceeded to post an email through Facebook the recruitment letter to specific friends whom I thought might know of others that would fit the qualifications of this study. This generated two of my participants as one of my friends had gone to school with two persons who met the criteria.

I was fortunate that one of these participants knew of three other potential participants who fit the criteria of this study. My final participant was obtained through another friend. There were a few potential participants I was alerted to who were said to be very interested in participating but were disqualified due to not meeting certain study criteria and I believe due to

the delicacy of the subject some potential participants who fit the criteria, declined the offer to participate in this study.

Sample findings

I was alerted to two other potential participants through one of the initial participants. One did not meet the criteria as she was multiracial but was not adopted. The other participant did not feel comfortable in participating in the study. Initially, due to the ease of obtaining the initial two participants I believed it would not be difficult to recruit other members. It was my assumption that because this population is vast and continues to grow, I would easily be connected to other potential participants. At closing this turned out to be correct but not until I made use of the internet was I able to use a method referred to in theoretical terms as the snowball method. Although I had originally hoped to collect a larger sample, I was only able to obtain 8 participants and this in itself was difficult. This was somewhat discouraging as I learned of others who fit the criteria for the study but did not choose to participate.

Data Collection

To conduct this study I used a series of questions that were broad and invited discussion from each participant. Each interview was audio taped and lasted approximately 1-half hour. All interviews were conducted and transcribed by the author and all participants are labeled for anonymity. Example: Participant A. Each interview consisted of 14 questions listed below. All participants appeared willing to examine and share their experiences.

- At what age were you adopted?
- How did you identify racially growing up?

- Did that evolve overtime- if yes... how so?
- At what age did you become aware of racial differences?
- How do you identify your parents?
- Did this realization change your relationship with your parents if at all?
- Currently, would you say that race plays into the relationship with your adoptive parents?
If yes...how?
- How did it evolve over time? Differentiation or connectedness-
- Was there any particular point that you became concerned about racial difference?
- How did race enter your awareness of your sense of self?
- Did this awareness aid you in your understanding of your race- cultural aspects of your race?
- How do you identify today?
- Do you feel that your parents are supportive of who you are- race
- Do you feel that your cultural needs were met by your parents?

I chose this line of questioning in hopes of eliciting more information pertaining to their views and understanding of their experiences in terms of what it means to be a transracial adoptee. Initially I had compiled a series of questions that I thought gave the participants more opportunity to share their stories. It was suggested that my initial questions were not focused enough and that I would not obtain necessary information that would be useful to this study. Some of the participants noted the questions asked appeared to carry an assumption that there is a problem with being a transracial adoptee. Some participants stated that they felt offended by the assumption that all transracial adoptees suffer emotionally.

The majority of the participants appeared very comfortable in answering the questions used. Most gave more information than was asked. Many of the participants had difficulty answering question number 4 as most could not recall the exact time they became aware of racial differences but stated that they always knew they were “different”.

Many of the participants found some of the questions difficult to discuss. Although all continued to answer the questions but occasionally paused for short periods of time to contemplate before answering the question. Although the subject matter is delicate I believe the questions encouraged the participants to move from a viewpoint of lived experiences to examining their experiences through a different lens. Being aware that this may elicit some emotion I compiled a list of counselors/ therapist from Massachusetts and other mental health contacts from around the country which were issued to all participants. Three of the eight interviews were conducted in person and the remaining five were conducted over the phone. To conduct the interviews over the phone the phone was set to speaker and a digital recorder was used.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

All Participants in this study stated feeling comfortable in African American communities as well as Caucasian communities. Most reported difficulties around racism. The major findings were that transracial adoptees did fare well in society and are comfortable with their identity as an African American. All participants reported having difficulties throughout their lives. However, most of the participants reported the difficulties in relation to discrimination as opposed to being raised by Caucasian parents.

The National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) feels that African American children should only be adopted by African American adults. They believe that African American children who are raised by Caucasian parents have difficulty developing strong sense of self. Furthermore, they believe that transracial adoptees have difficulty integrating into the African American community because they are not acquainted with the culture. Being a transracial adoptee myself I was perplexed and intrigued by this statement but in researching further found that the focus of much of the research to date assumes there is psychological and emotional pathology associated with this population. The personal opinions of transracial adoptees did not appear to be noted in most articles and this was the premise for my wanting to research this population further. I was hoping to disseminate more of the opinions of the adoptees.

The analysis produced a few patterns in respect to identity among the participants researched: 1. Developmental progression and expression of racial identity was important in gaining a positive sense of self. 2. Navigating racial difference between family and friendships

was at times difficult regardless of race. Most of the participants in this study stated feeling close to their friends and family despite any racial difficulties and only one participant reported having much difficulty in regards to his Caucasian family although he also stated that the majority of his friends are of the Caucasian race. This participant responded as such when asked what his relationship was like with his parents:

It's probably disconnected- yeah probably worse... as I get older it gets worse because I understand more and they're not- like they're really not educated enough and they're very... also like- ignorant to understanding the truth so... I don't bother with them. (pp.1)

Continued research of the argument from the NABSW found that: 1. There was not much research on transracial adoption in general although this population is expanding rapidly and it is also a growing topic of interest particularly since the recent induction of President Obama. 2. Much of the literature that does exist focuses mainly on the well being of the adoptees in conjunction with the argument from the NABSW but does not include the opinions/voices of the adoptees.

The information extracted from the transcriptions of the interviews was studied and the majority of the participants stated feeling very comfortable with being a transracial adoptee and identifying under the African American umbrella. Most did not find it difficult to integrate into the African American community or communities that are predominately Caucasian. One of the main difficulties the majority of the participants encountered was related to societal racism. Some of the participants reported finding it difficult to discuss racial issues and experiences with their parents; some stated they also found it difficult to talk with their Caucasian friends about racial issues.

Transracial adoptees do often experience difficulties in society pertaining to race and state feeling pressure to explain “what” they are, how they identify and why they choose to identify this way. Participant C talks about a related experience he encountered in school.

We were on a fieldtrip to the beach and a couple of kids said to me- so what are you Greek? And I said, well, that is how I always referred to myself- I said I’m half black and half white... and they said, ‘ Oh so you’re a nigger? And I said oh- well- I guess so- ‘cause I did not know what to do in that situation. (pp. 4)

As stated previously, racism continues to be a determining factor for difficulties met by African Americans and transracial families alike. Although most of the participants in this study identified racism as a direct difficulty in their relationships with family and with friends, adoption was not identified as being a deficit to most participants. However, most participants state that the implementation of culture was noted as being a positive attribute to the development of a strong sense of self in relation to identity which many of the participants stated brought a sense of comfort.

No they definitely tried to include... they ... and I have to say this... I remember being 9 or 10 and actually being a little irritated with them... you know it was like we had to go out to the Kwanza festival and we had to grow up... we had to do this or we had to do that... and I remember thinking like... enough already- Cause they made such a big effort and I remember it was really important to them that we had role models... they were always looking for black babysitters...to watch us... um I think part of the reason why we moved ... they felt like there were a lot of multiracial families in the area ... we joined multiracial groups and they were always looking for black families and they wanted us to be around... you know... role models. I remember my grandmother sending us ... we really wanted cabbage patch dolls and she sent us black cabbage patch dolls and I found out later that this was a big thing for my mom and she told all my family members that she did not want us to have white dolls and we could only have black dolls.. um so that was really a way for her to ... culture us. You know... I wasn’t aware at the time but now I go back to the house and I look at all these... you know all our children’s books that we had that were always about African American people and the music that we listened to and the types of shows that we went to. (pp.3)

It is clear why most researchers' who have studied this population state there is a need for further research as there remains much controversy over the well being of the adoptees. Likewise, there is a strong need for measures to be taken in order to ensure the well being of transracial adoptees. For example, would it be best for transracial adoptees (specifically of African American descent) to be raised by African Americans? Or is it best for transracial adoptees to be placed in a Caucasian home which incorporates African American culture? The participants in this study with the exception of one all state their experiences to be positive. There is research supporting the black community's concerns for the safety and cultural welfare of transracial adoptees. But again, there is more and more evidence indicating that there are no harmful effects from transracial adoptions.

A meta analysis study conducted by Juffer and H. Van Ijzendoorn (2007), determined that not only do transracial adoptees have a positive sense of self but International and domestic adoptees also fare well in terms of self esteem. They determined that despite pre adoptive trauma experienced by some of the adoptees, the adoptive family context acted as a buffer and a protector which resulted in the adoptees' ability to show resilience. The more than 10,000 adoptees studied showed no significant difference in fundamental levels of self esteem in comparison to the more than 33,000 non adopted subjects. Yet there remains a strong need for African American children to be adopted because so many of the children currently remaining in foster care are African American.

Another study looked at transracial and same-race adoptions and found that transracial adoptees fared about the same as their same-raced counterparts. What the researchers were most surprised by was that black children adopted by black parents were found to have higher rates of depression than the white children adopted by Caucasian parents (Burrow and Finley, 2004).

Through the course of my research and interviews it is my understanding that transracial adoptees specifically African Americans who are raised by Caucasian parents do experience difficulties but these difficulties were reported by the participants as typical adolescent difficulties. Racism from society toward their multiracial family was also another difficulty noted. Most stated they believe the difficulties they encountered were unrelated to being transracially adopted with the exception of societal racism.

Certainly in terms of identifying as a person of color and you know identifying... as part of a group who has been marginalized and continues to be marginalized and I feel like that... struggle continues but in terms of ...like... whether I have personal conflicts around family... I don't and actually that's something that's always bothered me... the confused mulatto or the confused um...adoptee- that has always been – I think for me it's just ... I think that being told from the get-go that like... you were adopted – your mother is white and you're black- you know...that's just the way it is... I remember from high school or maybe it was probably college... friends being like- oh but don't you feel confused? Or you know you just say like- NO... I don't actually! You're white and I'm black and there's really – you know- nothing to be confused about. If anything I was confused as to why other people were confused. (pp.5)

In respect to culture of the transracial adoptees, the NABSW and others who are opposed to transracial adoptions as well as those who are opposed to same race adoptions feel when a child is adopted transracially, it is important that the culture of the adoptee be supported in the home. In this study, culture was noted as helpful to the adoptees ability to cultivate a sense of self. Although most of the participants whose parents incorporated culture felt that it was helpful, several mentioned at times feeling inundated with cultural aspects and felt it unnecessary at the time. It is also important to note that overexposing a child to culture could have an opposing effect if they are not ready. Exposing adoptees to culture should be done carefully as it is possible to leave the adoptee with a negative view of their race. A fundamental way of

addressing the adoptee's culture is to have artifacts that reflect the culture of the adoptee. i.e., toys, books, etc.

You know, when I was a kid ...um... for Christmas asking for dolls...baby walk a lot... Baby talk a lot... but they only came in the white. Then my mother would always pass on to me this little black doll that wouldn't do anything- couldn't even bend.... Because they never put money into those dolls right... like the joints were like straight and I was like... OK- why is she giving me this crappy ass doll- why didn't I get the doll that I asked for? I didn't ask for this doll it's just OK – It's cute and all but it doesn't... I didn't want the doll because it didn't do anything... because the resources were not put into that doll... that says something about our kids' right? I wanted a doll that could- you know- chew food...digest it... and poop it out! And the little black doll didn't do it. (pp. 2)

All participants in this study discussed difficulties as being related to racism but also normal developmental issues unrelated to being adopted. All reported presently as having a good understanding of who they are in the world in opposition to whatever beliefs society holds. Most participants in this study stated that their parents raised them as children as opposed to minority children and stated that their parents did not raise them to recognize one race more than another but that attempts were made to acquaint them with their race either through introduction to a member of their said race or by way of incorporating cultural artifacts into the home.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Transracial adoptees are a population that has not been studied at length. I began researching this population and subject matter; aware of the stance from the National Association of Black Social Workers. Much of the research compiled to date assumes transracial adoptees have psychosocial and emotional difficulties. Furthermore, most of the research does not focus on the view points of the adoptees. This is something this study attempted to address.

Transracial adoption is a subject that is very important to me as I am a transracial adoptee. I identify as multiracial, was adopted by Caucasian parents and I was raised in rural Vermont. I remember watching an episode of Oprah years ago and she was discussing transracial adoption. One of her guest was a young transracial adoptee who identified as an African American man. I recall him being very angry about having been raised by Caucasian parents. I remember thinking how terrible I felt hearing him speak of his parents in such a negative way; thinking about how his parents must have felt. Although I do not share his feelings on adoption, it did elicit more thought about how I identify. I remember feeling fortunate that I was afforded such an amazing childhood with amazing parents.

How one acquires an identity has much to do with the environment in which development occurs. Religion, education, customs and mannerisms and basic traits such as how one chooses to dress are all dependent on one's identity. Identity is how one sees oneself in conjunction to ones surroundings particularly in relation to other groups. How one feels in conjunction to other groups can and often determines how they choose to define themselves (Garran & Miller, 2007).

As humans we have an innate need to be part of a group. In Western culture group affiliation is common. If an individual is not identified as being part of a group then it is stereotypically assumed that the individual is different or does not belong. Belonging to a group does not guarantee and individual will be viewed in a positive light likewise, groups are often judged by other groups and are often judged negatively. However, groups that are viewed negatively can still carry intergroup pride. When groups label other groups negatively, racism is often the root cause of division that occurs between the groups. Many of the transracials adoptees in this study were raised in predominately white communities but reported feeling comfortable with their identity and their community regardless of the differences with the exception of racism which appeared to play a major role in their difficulties as adolescence and adults. The adoptees of this study appeared to become more aware of issues around race and ethnicity as adults as opposed to in early adolescence.

Growing up there were always some... there were issues of stigma... my parents' extended family they were maybe not so sensitive... so there were sort of these questions of are these your real daughters and how did they fit in to the larger family... um... but I think that – that just feeling... um I think on my part... feeling a little shame- or feeling like there was a maybe-attached to my identity.. and then having that confirmed by my parents by hearing them share things that they had felt from their families- in terms of even before- before I was adopted- the expectations and feeling that their family members had... and even while growing up- I moved to MA when I was 7 with them and prior to that we lived for 3-4 months in NH. In a very rural – very white area and I don't actually have memories of this - I have the memories of being told this by my parents that the neighbors has a little girl our age and they wouldn't let her come over and play with us...um because we were black.. because my sisters and I were black ... I do remember vividly there being a little girl but I don't remember not being able to play with her because we were black but my parents have very vivid memories and they were angry and that was a main reason why we left NH...and again, I think it just fed into my feelings... ok- I'm different and maybe that's a bad thing or maybe there is something that I have associated with that... I think high school for me- sort of middle school- high school was really for me – a really sort of coming... really thinking about my identity and really coming into my own. (pp. 2-3)

Although the NABSW argues that the social adjustment of most transracial adoptees is difficult for the adoptees, in this study I found the opposite to be true. However, there is evidence supporting some of the themes of the argument from the NABSW. For example, a study by Feigelman (2000) looked at the adjustment of transracially and in-racially adopted young adults and found no adjustment deficits although higher rates of adjustment disorders were recognized in adult transracial adoptees that had experienced discrimination. He also found that when adoptive families raise their children in multiracial neighborhoods they are better adjusted in comparison to those raised in predominately white neighborhoods.

I had thought that I would find conflicting ideologies in regards to experiences from participants in this study and although experiences were different, the overall result in regards to whether the participants felt that being adopted and raised by Caucasian parents has limited them in respect to integrating the African American community was the same. The participants in this study all reported feeling connected to the African American community as well as the Caucasian communities.

A study conducted by Yancey, (2003) found that blacks have more difficulty integrating to the dominant culture in comparison to other minorities. This is thought to be true due to feelings of alienation blacks experience in conjunction to larger society. Evidence shows that discrimination toward African Americans makes it difficult to marry interracially as that it is less acceptable to marry a black as opposed to other minorities.

I asked participants if they ever felt isolated from either African Americans or Caucasians. I asked this question as it seemed relevant to learning more about how adult transracial adoptees fare. A study looking at the leisure patterns of interracial couples looked specifically at social networks and isolation. The study reveals the difficulties around social

interactions in conjunction to societal demands. Friends and family members of the couples appeared to have difficulty around issues of race. Such experiences as this appeared to impact the couples' ability to live healthily within the structure of society. An important finding was that interracial couples were forced to research leisure activities to ensure safety (Hibbler & Shinew, 2002). Most of the participants in this study reported not feeling isolated from either race. A theme throughout this study was how much of society assumes that transracial adoptees have difficulty in respect to identity.

Identifying as a person of color... and identifying as part of a group that has been marginalized and continues to be marginalized and I feel like that- that struggle continues but in terms of like whether I have personal conflicts around family or whatnot... I don't... and actually that's something that's always bothered me... the confused mulatto or the confused um... adoptee... I think for me it's just... I think that being told from the get-go that like... you were adopted... your mother is white and you're black. You know... That's just always the way it is... It was probably college... friends being like- oh but don't you feel confused? Or you know and you just say like- no- I don't actually! You're white and I'm black and there's really you know- nothing to be confused about. If anything I was confused as to why other people were confused. (pp. 4-5)

The civil rights movement was influential to the development of transracial adoptions specifically pertaining to African American children. However there was conflict as some African Americans such as Dr. King felt integration to be crucial for the well being of African Americans but African American separatists challenged integration. They felt that African Americans who integrated would then create a split between the middle class and working class which would ultimately result in a breakdown of African American culture (Hayes, 1993).

I was born and I was adopted and that was just a part of my life and it was not major cause my parent did not make a big deal out of it... I also am black and that was not a major deal either cause my parents were hell bent on - People are people. So, I had a rude awakening as an adult that everybody else doesn't see the world like that. (pp.1)

One of the promising aspects of the study was learning that the three sisters who had never spoken with one another about race have begun talking not only about race but also about their experiences around being adopted. This study also brought interest in facilitating a group of transracial adult adoptees to share their experiences from childhood to present.

In my final placement as a graduate student, I was instructed to complete an anti racism project within the organization. My co worker and I decided to try bridging two organizations within the building. One of the organizations employed many people of color specifically women. We thought it would be good to talk with some of the women from the organization and try to connect them to the other organization that unfortunately was lacking in clients of color. My co-worker and I were invited to talk with a group of women about the counseling services provided from the organization where I was interning. One woman reported that there was much concern surrounding the lack of clinicians of color and how many of the women of color had voiced they would not feel comfortable discussing personal difficulties with a Caucasian counselor.

I responded by stating that I felt it most important in the counseling setting that the client feels comfortable but how I also felt it was important not to assume things about a counselor based on race; as clients would not want clinicians to make assumptions about them based on the color of their skin. The woman responded by stating that there is also stigma attached to meeting with counselors of color as she stated that there are many people of color who feel judged by clinicians of color. Clinicians are privileged and have not shared the same experiences as the client and therefore they look down on the clients of color. This example shows how difficult it can be for Caucasian therapists to work with a client(s) of color.

Two clinicians of color shared their experiences as privileged women of color. They discuss how they are initially perceived as positive role models but also speak to the difficulties that can arise. Often times clients will compare themselves to clinicians and in later reflecting, may begin to think poorly about their self which can ultimately hinder the therapeutic allegiance. This can interfere with building trust in the therapeutic relationship. When the client idealizes the clinician, this can and often does foster difficulty in the relationship if the client believes that the clinician has had a perfect life without any difficulties. This not only sets up a hegemonic status but also can upset the emotional balance of the clinician. (Ferguson & King, 1997).

It is important to understand racial identity and culture in order to obtain a good understanding of how best to work with a multiracial client; if the client is adopted this becomes another element that should be addressed in the clinical setting. Having a clear sense of client's identity enables us as clinicians to be more self aware and thus we are better able to identify themes that may be shared with clients such as oppression, privilege and power or lack thereof. Many have attempted to figure out how clients and workers with differing identities can best work together (Miller & Garran, 2007).

All participants in this study identified under the African American umbrella; some identified as black, biracial, multiracial and one participant identifies as Negro. Because multiracials are a newly identified group as well as a growing group it is difficult to track developmental changes including social and emotional. A longitudinal study of transracial adoptees would give more understanding as to the difficulties surrounding race and culture that transracials often experience.

In conclusion, the argument from the NABSW; that transracial adoptees suffer from identity issues remains a salient issue that is becoming more recognized as the population of

multiracials expands. Implications for clinicians working with this population are ongoing. As more research is conducted more information pertaining to this population will give us insight as how best to address the difficulties this population often experiences.

The concerns of the NABSW are validated in some cases and this study gives strength to some of the concerns stemming from the NABSW. Transracial adoptees can and sometimes do experience difficulties around identity development. Likewise, multiracial families often do experience racism. However, this study shows that same-race adoptions are not necessary or important to positive identity development for Transracial adoptees. What is revealed in this study is that transracial adoptees experiences around identity and culture deemed difficult were noted by the participants as being a normal part of development pertaining particularly to adolescence and the majority of difficulties that the adoptees experienced in conjunction to racism were imposed upon them from society and were not a result of being raised by Caucasian parents but being a minority. That is not to say that the families as a whole did not experience racism.

This study has shown that cultural awareness should be a component of transracial adoptions however; it appears that particularly Caucasians who are willing and wanting to adopt African American children have been exposed in some capacity to the culture of African Americans. For example, some of the participants stated that their parents were either involved in or at the very least grew up during the civil rights movement and reported this being one reason why they specifically chose to adopt an African American child.

The majority of participants in this study reported no difficulties integrating African American communities and/or Caucasian communities, nor do they appear to be lacking in self esteem in conjunction to being transracially adopted. However, difficulties that did emerge

surrounding normal adolescent development are different for people of color whether they be adopted or not, particularly in western society due to persistent racism that continues to plague western culture. Participants reported adolescence as a period when recognized difficulties such as low self esteem emerged and acknowledged low self esteem to be related to racism; marked by microaggressions and overt racist remarks from peers and within the communities which they inhabited as opposed to being the effects of being transracially adopted. Racism continues to affect many different facets of transracial adoptees and multiracial families alike and can be experienced in a myriad of settings; from the grocery store to the therapeutic setting.

Because racism continues to affect the lives of transracial adoptees and their families; it is important to note that clinicians; particularly Caucasian clinicians who work with this population, need to have a strong level of awareness as to the difficulties transracials and multiracials have endured for many years surrounding race issues; otherwise an uncomfortable dyad in the clinical setting might occur (Suchet, 2004).

Clinicians generally strive to bring about change but as different populations of people emerge, it has become increasingly difficult to achieve competency and conscientious practices particularly with such populations as multiracials and transracial adoptees. The vast majorities of clinicians in western society are Caucasian and may experience difficulty in multicultural clinical settings due to the heavy influence of their own culture. This influence can create a deficit when working with minorities. It also should be noted that multiracials are the least likely group to seek counseling services which also makes it difficult to study in the clinical setting and/ or work with this population (Hamilton-Mason, 2004).

Although I did not explore the pathways of development to adulthood in this particular study, it is an area which I hope to research in the future. While conducting this study many of

the participants questioned if I would be interviewing their parents or siblings. Although it would have been useful to study the families at large it was not possible for this particular study. I do believe that studying the parents and siblings of transracial adoptees would be beneficial in learning more about the family dynamics of multiracials which in turn would aid clinicians who wish to work with this population.

There are ways to support development of the transracial adoptee child. This study suggest multiracial families with adopted children during the adolescent years seek psychotherapy as a means to acknowledging and exposing the difficulties of the transracial adoptee and the experiences of being a multiracial family. This study found that psychotherapy is believed to be beneficial to multiracial families, particularly multiracial families with adopted children in order to ensure that the adoptees are able to process difficulties as changes in identity emerge with development. It is imperative that clinicians have a strong awareness of the difficulties around racism that often pervades this population and their families. Counseling could also be helpful to the parents of the adoptees in gaining a better understanding of the difficulties the adoptees may encounter and could create an understanding and empathy within the family which would enable the family to bridge the gap that in some cases occurs because the adoptee does not feel that the parents understand the difficulties adoptees often faces because he/she belongs to a race that has been and continues to be oppressed.

Another reason this study suggests counseling for transracial adoptees and their families is due to the belief that the therapeutic setting may also be a place where the adoptee can feel comfortable sharing his/her experiences with the parents feeling they have an ally. The parents are also able to share their experiences in the clinical setting, which may create empathy that is recognized by the adoptee as well. This is not often seen as race amongst multiracial families is

often a topic riddled with stress and therefore not often addressed in the therapeutic setting or in the home. Stress appears to be a major component that creates resistance in discussing matters of race within families. This study suggests counseling could also aid in alleviating stress for not only the adoptees but also other members of the family.

Particularly in this study, the adoptees fare well in several different societies; clinicians working with or who wish to work with this population should further study how transracial adoptees fare particularly on an individual basis. How we treat transracial adoptees in the clinical setting should not be based solely upon factors such as race, culture or religion; all aspects that encompass an individual should be recognized and taken into account during the assessment period to ensure sensitivity to the clients' presenting problems. Furthermore, how we treat transracial adoptees should not be based solely upon what research literature states about this population. It is true that transracial adoptees can and often do at times experience fundamental difficulties particularly during the adolescent years but also into adulthood however, how they process these difficulties tends to be different. For example, one participant said she talks with people and play drums.

Studies of any population usually offer generalizations about a population which can aid researchers and clinicians in gaining a better overall understanding of the group. In this study participants shared one common trait which is to be a transracial adoptee and although there are many shared aspects of being a transracial adoptee, it does not mean the experiences happened the same way or at the same time or even that the adoptees processed the experiences, be they negative or positive, in the same manner. It is important not to assume persons belonging to a specific sub-group all share the same experiences, morals or cultural aspects.

Multiracials are a growing group and as they continue to grow, the number of transracial adoptees will most certainly increase. Further research is necessary and should increase as this population continues to grow. In future studies, it is important to research if/where transracial adoptees begin to feel different and what tools would aid them best in finding pathways into adulthood. Future research may provide more insight as how to work best with individuals from this population.

Testing the world
the new kitten
challenges rugs,
each ray of light,
the direction of warmth.

Like you
when you arrived
protesting loudly
the new arms against your skin,

and like the kitten
trust was a slow process
a luring from under the bed,
careful movements until another's hands
were proven to be without harm.

You were too little for words
had been passed from house to house,
the soles of your feet already tough,
each curl on your head
tightly wound and brisling.

You had no choice
but to take what was
taste and touch everything in the house
making it familiar until it was yours:
a crib, a teddy bear, a mother.

Lynn Martin

CHAPTER 6

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CHAPTER 7

APPENDICES

Appendix A-Approval Letter

March 11, 2009

Tarn Martin

Dear Tarn,

Your final set of revisions has been reviewed. We now approve your study.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your project. It is a very interesting and very timely topic. Many children of color who could be adopted continue to remain in foster care!

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: ROGER MILLER, RESEARCH ADVISOR

Appendix B-Informed Consent Form

Date:

Dear Research Participant,

My name is Tarn Martin and I am a graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting a research project designed to explore the question of whether transracial adoptions, specifically African American children adopted by Caucasian parents, are beneficial or detrimental to transracial adoptees. There is not much current literature on the topic of transracial adoptions with a perspective from adoptees. My hope is to contribute more literature on this topic to aid clinical social workers and counselors working with this ever growing population.

You have been asked to participate in this study due to your identity and experiences as a transracial adoptee. This study is being conducted for the Master's of Social Work degree at the Smith College School for Social Work, and may be used in possible future presentations or publications on this particular topic. If you should choose to participate in this study, a mutually agreed upon time and place which the interview can be conducted will be established between the researcher and yourself. This interview can be conducted either in person or via telephone and is expected to take approximately 50-60 minutes. The interview will consist of semi structured questions focusing on your personal experiences as a transracial adoptee. I will meet the participant in a mutually agreed upon location that is private and convenient. The ability to be conversant in English (the language used in this study) is a criterion for participation.

Although this subject may produce some emotional distress when reflecting on personal experiences, minimal risk from participation is anticipated. However, participation may trigger feelings related to your experiences as a transracial adoptee. Please utilize therapeutic resources available to you, if you should wish to process experiences that may arise during the course of the interview. A list of mental health resources will be provided. (See Appendix-F) Participants may be concerned with personal information being disseminated during the process of transcription. All identifying information provided by the participants will be confidential.

The benefits of being interviewed on this topic may include the participant gaining a greater understanding of their race and culture and of other transracial adoptee's struggles. I hope the information collected from this process will further aid counselors and mental health clinicians alike in their work with transracial adoptees.

Your confidentiality will also be protected by presenting the data in professional publications or presentations without reference to identifying information or characteristics. All data inclusive of this study will be kept secure in my possession for a period of three years as stipulated by federal guidelines after which time they can be destroyed or continued to be maintained securely. Your confidentiality will be protected in a number of ways. You will not be asked to identify your

name. Some illustrative quotes will be used in the thesis, but will be reported without identifying information. I will be the primary person handling the collected data. My research advisor will have access to the data collected during the interview including any transcripts or summaries created. Any other persons assisting with transcription will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement.

As a voluntary participant you have the right to refuse to answer any of the questions in the interview. You also have the right to withdraw from this study. If you should choose to withdraw from this study you may do so up to two weeks after the date of your interview. Should you withdraw, all materials pertaining to your participation in the study will be immediately destroyed. You may contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee as Smith College School for Social Work with any questions or comments at (413) 585-7974.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date:

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date:

Thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this study. If you have any questions or would like to withdraw from this study, please contact:

*** Please keep a copy of this consent form for your records.**

Appendix C-Recruitment letter

Dear Potential Research Participant,

My name is [...] and I am a graduate student at the Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting a research project designed to explore the perspectives of African American adult transracial adoptees. This study is being conducted for the Master's of Social Work degree at the Smith College School for Social Work, and may be used in possible future presentations or publications on this topic.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you identify as an African American adult who was adopted by Caucasian parents. You must be able to converse in English (the language being used to conduct this interview). In this study you will be given the opportunity to express both positive and negative aspects and experiences of being an adult transracial adoptee. If you choose to participate in this study, we will set up a meeting time at a mutually convenient location where you feel comfortable. This interview can be conducted either in person or via telephone. The interview will last approximately 50-60 minutes and will consist of semi-structured questions in regards to your experiences as a transracial adoptee. All identifying information from this interview will be kept confidential. There will be no financial benefit for acting as a participant in this study. Your participation will allow for your shared experiences to be recognized by clinical social workers, mental health clinicians and other transracial adoptees. In addition, your contributions will help provide information that is necessary to the continued work toward culturally competent counseling with this ever growing population.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

Please contact me at your earliest convenience to discuss scheduling an interview.

Appendix D-Interview Guide

Hello, Thank you for participating in my study. Your story and opinion is very important to not only me but to other people who will read this paper. This is a very important project to me as I too am a transracial adoptee. I think sharing your story will aid other transracial adoptees by learning that they are not alone in their feelings or understanding of what it means to be a transracial adoptee.

Questions ~

- At what age were you adopted?
- How did you identify racially growing up?
- Did that evolve overtime- if yes... how so?
- At what age did you become aware of racial differences?
- How do you identify your parents?
- Did this realization change your relationship with your parents if at all?
- Currently, would you say that race plays into the relationship with your adoptive parents? If yes...how?
- How did it evolve over time? Differentiation or connectedness-
- Was there any particular point that you became concerned about racial difference?
- How did race enter your awareness of your sense of self?
- Did this awareness aid you in your understanding of your race- cultural aspects of your race?
- How do you identify today?
- Do you feel that your parents are supportive of who you are- race
- Do you feel that your cultural needs were met by your parents?

