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ABSTRACT

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As interracial adoption emerged since the 1950’s, there has been a huge controversy on it concerning the possibility of cultural conflicts between adopted children and adoptive families. Although research has examined how adoptive families have influenced adopted children’s identity, there are still few comparative studies on African-American adoptees. This study will thus focus on Black children adopted by White families compared to Black children adopted by Black families in order to understand how these children perceives their racial identity. It will aim at examining what the adoptive parents have taught their child about their native culture, how such experiences could be similar or different from one group to another, and how these have influenced in establishing their child identity. In order to do this study, interviews were conducted asking a White and Black mother different questions about their adoption experience regarding their child understands of their racial identity. The results suggested that the mother has the largest influence on a child developing their racial identity by what they allow their child to come in contact with. Outside influences that the child comes in contact place a major emphasis on the child’s cultural awareness. Additionally, when an adoptive mother informs their adopted child about their racial identity, they are more satisfied with being in a family with a different racial background.

Approved: __________________________________________________________

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION
Overview of Background

Adoption has been known to exist for thousands of years. It is the legal act of permanently placing a child with a parent or parents other than the birth parents by giving the parental responsibilities and rights of the biological parents to the adoptive parents (Fulker, Cherny, & Cardon, 1993). When the adoption is finalized, there is no legal difference between biological and adopted children. Many children are placed for adoption as a result of the birth parents’ decision that they will not be able to take care of the child adequately (Fulker et al., 1993). In other cases, some biological parents involuntarily lose their rights as a parent. This usually occurs when the children are placed in foster care because they were abused, neglected, or abandoned. Eventually, if a parent cannot resolve the problems that caused or contributed to the harm of the child, a court may terminate their parental rights and the child may be adopted (Janus, 1997).

In the later part of the 1930s, many children were in need of adoption, but there were not many homes available for them. During that time, there was much emphasis placed on finding the “perfect infant” that shared the most physical resemblance to the family. Once contraceptives became more accessible, abortions became lawful, and more White mothers began keeping their unwed child, there was a decrease in adoptions of the “perfect baby” (Daniel, et al., 1973). In addition, the number of children that were considered “hard to adopt” increased.
Children that were considered to be “hard to adopt” were classified as non-White (Daniel, et al., 1973). Typically, African-Americans became the largest group of non-White children up for adoption. Therefore, a number of methods emerged in response to the increasing needs for adopting Black children including: (a) Adoption became less restrictive; (b) social workers began recruiting more Black families; (c) single parents were given the right to adopt; (d) foster home care became permanent; and (e) subsidized and transracial adoptions were allowed as well (Barth, Brooks, Bussiere, & Patterson, 1999).

Of such methods, transracial adoption has particularly created controversy. Transracial adoption is an adoption of children of one racial background to another racial background (Anderson, Lauderdale, McRoy, & Zurher, 1982). The first recorded adoption of an African-American by a Caucasian family took place in Minnesota, 1948 (Carp, 2002). This was the time of the Jim Crow Laws era implying, “separate but equal.” The Jim Crow era was a time between 1876-1965 when laws were made to keep segregation in business, schools and public places (Williams, 1968). This was an era in which discrimination and slavery were most prominent. Therefore, many families that chose this form of adoption became targets for violence.

According to Johnson (1976), even though a child living in an adoptive family is better than living in an institution, it has not been clear whether a White home is in the Black child’s best interest, particularly in developing his/her racial identity. For example, Chimezie (1975) cited as a foundational investigator in
transracial adoption, suggested that while a White family can provide food, shelter, and clothing, it is still uncertain whether parents can fulfill a Black child’s need for cultural awareness and appropriate information about his/her psychological and social needs. The Black child’s needs may be similar or different from those of a White child. There also have been arguments that most White families adopted Black children for humanitarian reasons (Hollingsworth, 1999). Therefore, the question of whether transracial adoption is in the best interest of that child has continually been debated.

Statement of the Problem

As previously understood, it is important to find out if transracial adoption can be related to any type of neglect of a child’s racial identity. Children develop self-concept by the end of middle school (Samuels, 1977). A child may pick up certain characteristics due to their social environment as well as different relationships such as: parents, peers, close friends, and romantic partners (Harter, 1998). Of these important relationships, parents and their support play a crucial role in shaping a child’s identity. In this study, I plan to examine the question of how, in the context of transracial adoption, parents provide pertinent knowledge of the child’s cultural background in order to establish the child’s positive racial identity. I will ask parents and children a variety of questions focused on racial awareness. Parents will be asked how they provide their child with information about their racial background. Children will be asked how they perceive the information their parents and others provide, if done so in that family.
Purpose of Study

This study will focus on Black children adopted by White families compared to Black children adopted by Black families in order to understand how these children perceive their racial identity. The role the mothers played in helping to shape their child’s identity will be closely explored in this study as well. The purpose of having a dual perception will be to understand the correlation between the child and mother in shaping the child’s racial identity.

Therefore, an ecological framework that looks at different factors that influence a child’s development (Brofenbrenner, 1979) will be used to conduct this study. I will be looking at this study through an ecological view. I will look at all factors that play a role in shaping a child’s racial identity. The main reason to focus on the mothers of the children that have been adopted is because the mothers play an important role in negotiating a majority of the factors that their children come in contact with. Moreover, this study will look closely at how African-American children raised by Caucasian families perceive themselves, families, and their culture. The questions guiding this study are:

1. How do transracially adopted African-American children construct cultural awareness that is similar to or different from inracially adopted African-American children?
2. What outside influences help construct a child’s racial identity?
3. What strategies do mothers use to help their child construct a racial identity?
Limitations

One limitation of the study is that since the information may be sensitive, the participants may not feel comfortable being fully open. Particularly mothers may choose not to be open because they may fear losing their child. If participants are not willing to open up completely, this may cause a lack of accuracy in data analysis. Another limitation is that since only a small number of people are partaking in the research, the information given may not be representative of adoptive families in general. Finally, the effect that fathers and/or other members of the child’s social environment have on the child will not be able to be determined because they were not interviewed.

Definition of Terms

*Cultural awareness (competence):* Refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. Cultural competence is comprised of four components: (a) awareness of one's own cultural worldview, (b) attitude towards cultural differences, (c) knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews, and (d) cross-cultural skills.

*Racial identity:* Refers to a person's self-affiliation (or categorization by others) as a member of a cultural group (Vonk, 2001).

*Adoption:* The act of permanently placing a child with a parent or parents other than the birth parents by giving the parental responsibilities and rights of the biological parents to the adoptive parents (Fulker, 1993).

*Transracial adoption:* Adopting outside of one's own racial background.
Inracial adoption: Adopting within one’s racial background.

Identity: The individual characteristics by which a thing or person is recognized or known (Erickson, 1994).

Caucasian/White: Both terms refer to social categories with which people identified themselves. This term is used interchangeably throughout this study. According to Omi and Winant (1986), the “frequent shifts of ethnic identity and the political significance of its contingency helps to explain was a movement in time from referring from White’s to Caucasians (p.53). In this theoretical statement about race, both terms were used, not to offend any race by use of term, but rather to eliminate repetition of the same word to describe a group of people.

African-American/Black: Both terms refer to social categories with which people identified themselves. This term is used interchangeably throughout this study. Again, Omi and Winant (1986), argued the “frequent shifts of ethnic identity and the political significance of its contingency” helps to explain the movement in time referring from Blacks to Afro-Americans to African-Americans (p. 53). In this theoretical statement about race, both terms were used, not to offend any race group by the use of a particular term, but rather to eliminate repetition of the same word to describe a group of people.

Organization of the Thesis

The thesis will commence with this Introduction, chapter one. It will be followed by chapter two, the Review of Literature, which will include a critical review and thorough analysis of the literature to gain research on this topic such as
transracial adoption, cultural differences, and identity. The next chapter will be

*Methodology*. This chapter will describe the research design that will be followed in
the study. It will include the sample criteria, recruitment strategies, data collection,
and analysis of data. Next will be the *Results*. This chapter will examine the data
found from the research. Finally, the *Conclusion* will be presented. An overview of
the study’s findings and a discussion on them will be included in this chapter.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides an overview of the current literature on transracial adoption. I examine the literature on adoption outcomes for children, issues and controversies regarding transracial adoption, and identity formation of children adopted outside of their racial background. I conclude with a brief summary of findings, outline what is needed in the scholarly literature, and provide detail on how my study will enrich this field of research.

Background of Transracial Adoption

Adoption connects the triad of birth families, adoptees, and adoptive families on a long term basis. Adoptive parents may wish to adopt due to infertility, compassion for adoptees, or to avoid passing on inheritable diseases (Daniel, et al., 1973). Another reason one may adopt a child is due to abandonment, in which a child is found and the birth parent is never traced (Daniel, et al., 1973; Johnson, 1976). Birth parents may place children for adoption because they are unable to adequately care for them. They may have failed to receive the resources they need to parent, or because they are pressured by their own parents or others to allow their children to be adopted (Johnson, 1976; Liow, 1994; McRoy, 1989).

In the 1930’s, the number of children in need of adoption exceeded the availability of homes. For those that were willing to adopt, emphasis was placed on having the “perfect infant” a child whose physical characteristic are similar to those of the adopting family (Daniel, et al., 1973, p. 145). In matching families, the adoptee’s skin color, background, and intellect were taken into consideration with
effort to complement the characteristics of the prospective parents (Hogan & Siu, 1998).

After World War II, the number of people adopting children increased and the availability of infants awaiting adoption decreased. The emphasis was now to find the “perfect family” (Daniel, et al., 1973, p. 145). This consisted of a legally married, childless White couple, who were devout, respected in their community, and prosperous (Daniel, et al., 1973). These families wanted to adopt a child whose physical characteristics closely resembled those of the adopting family. These stereotypes of the “perfect family” and “perfect child” still remained. For this reason, African-American children were the largest number of children that needed placement.

An issue stated by Grape and McRoy (1999) concerned the large amount of time African-American children stayed in foster care when compared to any other minority group. A Black child with a darker complexion was found to stay in foster care even longer. The American Civil Liberties Union conducted a review of court files and found that New York adoption workers who engaged in placement practices favored treatment for children with more Caucasian features (Grape & McRoy, 1999). Being an African-American with darker complexion limited adoptive opportunities for these children.

Another focus of researchers concerned the length of time children spend in foster care. Chimezie (1975) argued that the issue is not the number of Black parents available to adopt, but the number of non-White children who need homes. The
requirements that agencies placed on adoptive families created the biggest concern. Many Black families were denied the right to adopt because they did not meet the standards of the “good life” or “perfect family” particularly economic security when compared to White families (Chimezie, 1975, p. 297). Due to these restrictions placed upon Black families, the availability of Black homes was limited.

Chimezie (1975) and McRoy (1989) suggested that a White family’s ability to provide the basic necessities such as clothes, food, and shelter also are important but not exclusive. Some believe that African-American children are at an advantage when placed with Black families. McRoy (1989) stated that they can gain self-concept and develop a sound projection of their future.

Due to the need of homes for African-American children, a large number of approaches were taken to find families to adopt these children. In order to decrease the amount of time children waited for homes, social workers put forth great efforts, such as extending the requirements, in finding placements for children (Carter-Black, 2002; Hogan et al., 1998). For example, recruitment of more Black families, single parent adoptions, permanent foster home care, and subsidized adoptions were now allowed to take place (Daniel, et al., 1973). Transracial adoption also was authorized. White parents adopting Black children became the largest number of transracial adoptions (Barth et al., 1999; Hogan et al., 1998). However, White families believed they were being denied the opportunity to adopt Black children solely because of race (Carter-Black, 2002; Daniel, et al., 1973). Due to these concerns, White families began to testify in court against social workers for not allowing them to adopt
children of color (Barth et al., 1999), thus leading transracial adoptions to create controversy because some believed that these forms of adoption were not serving the best interest of the child.

In 1997, a federal law, Interethnic Placement Act (IEP), prohibited a state from delaying or denying adoption on the basis of race, color, or national origin (Barth et al., 1999). If any state was to violate this law, their funding would be reduced. The purpose of this act was to increase the adoption rate and decrease the amount of time children of color were in foster care (Barth et al., 1999; Daniel, et al., 1973; Hogan et al., 1998). These laws also were used to prohibit social workers from denying a Black child adoption by a White family based on racial concern (Carter-Black, 2002; Hogan et al., 1998). If the family’s profile addressed the best interest of the child regardless of race, such as financially able to provide for a child and a stable environment, the new law allowed transracial adoptions to occur (Barth et al., 1999). The IEP also gave individuals the right to sue federal court if this law, not allowing them to adopt based solely on race, was violated.

Controversy: The Best Interest of the Child

The studies mentioned in the previous section suggested that transracial adoption can have positive or negative outcomes. Scholars who dispute the appropriateness of transracial adoptions base their particular research on what seems to be in the best interest of the child, and focus on whether these children are able to gain a racial identity and awareness of their African-American culture (Chimezie, 1975; Hollingsworth, 1998). In contrast, scholars in favor of transracial adoption
emphasize the physical needs and care of the child (Johnson, 1976; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Simon, 1996). The specific influences on children involved in transracial adoptions and the outcomes of these placements are discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

A child’s development can be hindered due to the effects of adoption. Loss, rejection, guilt, shame, grief, identity, intimacy, and mastery/control are all, in spite of the situation, characteristics that adoptees will face (Janus, 1997). Because these are expected issues that evolve from the nature of adoption, research has focused on whether or not transracial adoption is in the best interest of the child. According to McRoy and Zurcher (1983), quality of parenting was deemed more important for child development outcomes rather than the race of the child and adoptive family. Scholars suggested that adoption does not hinder a child’s awareness of race (Simon, 1996) in that Black children can be adopted by White families and still be able to have a positive self-concept (Johnson, 1976). African-Americans adopted transracially may develop a positive self-concept because Blacks and Whites of comparable social class have many similarities (Furstenberg, 2007). As a result, studies by Simon (1996) and Johnson (1976) suggested it is better for a child to be adopted transracially, then to linger in the system. The longer the child is in the foster-care system, the less likely they are to become adopted (Earlywine et al., 1973).

Others have suggested alternatives to transracial adoptions. For instance, Hollingsworth (1998) stated that transracial adoption does not have to be the only
way out for Black children if other leading factors are improved such as: (a) policies favoring adoption by foster care parents; (b) the availability of same-race families to adopt children of color; (c) the abundance of children in out-of-home care unavailable for adoption or with special needs; (d) disparities in child welfare services related to ethnicity; (e) misleading data on the number of children of color who are in foster care; and (f) poverty as an underlying cause of out-of-home placements.

Predominantly, social workers place emphasis on the importance of placing children in an environment that serves their best interest, which includes placing children in a home that shares their same racial/ethnic background (Hogan et al., 1998). According to Carter-Black’s study (2002), the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) consistently state that the ability of the family to meet the child’s needs is the most important determinant in making foster care placement. An issue that NABSW discovered, but did not agree with, was the response of parents choosing to adopt who implemented a color blind approach for the child’s upbringing, which implies that children will recognize all races being the same; there are no differences due to skin color. Caseworkers generally felt it was important for the families to help children recognize their differences and to nurture that understanding (Carter-Black, 2002; Hogan et al., 1998; Johnson, 1976). Although both Black and White social workers felt that transracial adoption was not ideal, they stated that it could be successful and preferable for the child if the alternative was to drift or linger, i.e., either going to different foster homes or remaining in the system (Carter-Black, 2002; Fenster, 2002).
Influences on Child Developmental Outcomes in Transracial Adoptions

*Transracial Adoptees’ Adjustments*

Research has been conducted on how a transracially adopted child will adjust in a transracial environment. Focusing on personal and racial identity, researchers have suggested that the social environment for Black children must provide racial identity development, knowledge and acceptance of their cultural heritage, and racial socialization (Carter-Black, 2002; Hollingsworth, 1999). A child’s setting influences not only their self-identity but also their physical and development growth.

Children undergo adjustment issues in beginning a new life with a family other than their own. Because the discovery by transracial adoptees of their adoption will come at an earlier time than inracial adoptees, these children may be able to begin their identity development if information about their heritage is available in a way they are able to understand (Liow, 1994). Some have suggested that, generally, children who are adopted into families show more psychological problems and internalizing behavior than children who are in families with their biological parents (Abrams, Bronstein, Clauson, Frankel, & Stoll, 1993). Examples of such problems may be feelings of confusion, discomfort, placement issues (best possible match), ranking (their position in the family if other children are involved), and adjustment to other family members.

The environment in which the family resides also plays a major role in a child’s adjustment into their new family (Brody & Flor, 1998). Feigleman’s (2000) research showed that adoptive parents’ decision on where to live had a substantial
impact upon their children’s adjustments. Transracial adoptive parents residing in predominantly White communities tended to have adoptees that experienced discrimination and more discomfort about their appearance than those who lived in integrated settings (Hakimi-Manesh, Mojdehi, & Tashakkori, 1984).

Cultural Differences

Parenting styles. Scholarship about transracial adoption has also compared the different discipline, values, and beliefs between White and Black families. Race provides a framework that shapes parents’ views about children and childrearing practices (Garcia-Coll-Coll, 1990; Ogbu, 1981). Children that are adopted transracially may be at risk for trauma and early discovery of their adoption (Bronstein, Clauson, Frankel Stoll, & Abrams, 1993; Garcia-Coll 1990). There have been a number of issues raised about whether White parents’ style of childrearing is effective when raising a Black child. One concern involves how a White parent will address issues and teach coping mechanisms concerning racism? According to Barth et al. (1999), parents’ ability to respond to and prepare children for living in a racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse society is key to the successful coping of children, especially children of color.

Cultural competence is a key factor when parenting outside of one’s own race (Vonk, 2001). Vonk (2001) defined three dimensions of cultural competence. The first competency, racial awareness, demonstrates how the variables of race, ethnicity, culture, language, and related power status operate in one’s own and other’s lives. It understands the dynamics of racism, oppression, and other forms of discrimination.
The second competency involves multicultural planning, referring to the creation of avenues for the transracially adopted child to learn about and participate in his or her culture of birth. The third competency involves survival skills, referring to recognition of the need and ability of parents to prepare their children of color to cope successfully with racism. Research has varied on parent-child relationship quality between Black and White families. The qualities of parent relationships are strongly associated with a child’s social, psychological, and academic adjustment (Abrams et al., 1993). Parents in different race groups encourage explicit competencies in seeking to enhance their child’s development (Ogbu, 1981). This research presents ideas on how parents adopting outside of one’s own race may help their child gain an understanding of their racial awareness. Little research exists on differences between White parenting and Black parenting in rearing an adopted Black child. According to Ogbu (1981), parenting styles must be assessed for their adaptive or maladaptive qualities in interaction between individuals and their environment. When determining which childrearing technique is in the best interest of the child, one cannot generalize about types of parenting styles for an entire race group (Ogbu, 1981).

*Parent-child relationship.* Children typically do not have a full understanding of their adoptions until they are age 13 or 14 (Howe & Feast, 2000). However, by the time they are age 7, children may begin to see differences between themselves and their adoptive parents (Howe & Feast, 2000). Children in a transracial adoption may notice these dissimilarities earlier on. Noticing these differentiations, adoptees may begin to ask different things to help them understand why these dissimilarities exist.
The impact of adoption on identity formation can vary in different situations depending on things such as the form of adoption and the age of the child when the adoption occurred (Hakimi-Manesh, Mojdehi, & Tashakkori, 1984). Adoption has little impact on the identity formation process of adolescents adopted as children (Hakimi-Manesh, Mojdehi, & Tashakkori, 1984). It is not adoption per se but rather attachment between the adoptive parents and the adopted child that plays an important role in shaping a child’s identity (Affleck & Steed, 2001). However, research by Adams and Mathesis (2004) showed that there was a modest association between the family environment such as race, structure, morals, and values and identity style. The findings provided partial support for the theory that family relationships are an important predictor of individual differences in identity style during adolescence.

In a study on transracial adoption by Beckert, Marche, Strom, Strom, & Strom, (2003), the amount of time mothers spent talking to and doing things with their adolescents, the greater the impact on how the children rated their mother’s success of being an involved, supportive parent. Similarly, Turnage (2004) found significant positive relationships between global self-esteem and trust of their mother, and self-esteem and ethnic identity achievement. Adolescents who rated themselves as having high self-esteem scored high on the appearance evaluation and ethnic identity achievement measures. This research underscores how parents’ perceptions of children aid in the development of children’s identity and self-esteem (Turnage, 2004).
Discipline is another factor that emerges regarding cultural differences in families because forms of discipline vary across culture groups (Baumrind, 1997; Brody & Flor, 1998; Caughy et al., 2003). The literature suggests that Black and White parents have differences in parenting styles. Their approach to discipline may vary between the two cultures (Brody & Flor, 1998). According to Lareau (2002), it also may vary due to socioeconomic status. This research was not based on transracial adoption, rather the differences of family systems between White and Black families. According to Brody and Flor (1998), the concept of a no-nonsense (very limited tolerance for inappropriate behavior) approach to parenting used in Black families includes a high level of firm control in addition to displays of warmth and affection. This style may function to protect children from dangerous environments while promoting self-regulation. Physical punishment is more normative in Black than White homes (Baumrind, 1997). In research by Caughy et al. (2003), White mothers who participated in their program showed higher use of inductive/authoritative (reasoning, diversion, negotiation, time out, ignoring, and withdrawal of privileges) discipline strategies than Black mothers.

As children grows older and begins to enter the middle childhood and adolescent years, issues related to their transracial adoption may emerge. For instance, if children are raised with their birth family and then become adopted into a new family, their understanding about how they became a part of that particular family may surface. Children raised outside of their racial background, additionally, may not feel as comfortable in performing or engaging in activities or tasks that
would normally be accepted in their culture (Cherney & Cardon, 1994; Grape & McRoy, 1999). The transracial adoptees’ confusion can trigger thoughts such as, “why is happening amongst individuals of my own race/ethnic group, but not taking place within my family?” (Adams & Matheis, 2004; Grape et al., 1999). These types of questions lead to concerns about what is and what is not acceptable.

Identity

All children try to find out who they are and where they belong in society (Carter-Black, 2002). However, for adopted children, this task is more complicated. Often, they lack the information to answer these questions, and may have additional questions. Therefore, transracial adoptees may have an even harder time adjusting because they are not only being raised outside of their biological family but also outside of their racial background (Adams et al., 2004). From the research, discovering one’s own identity may have the possibility of being the most difficult adjustment (Adams et al., 2004; Erickson, 1968; Hollingsworth, 1998; Johnson, 1976).

Transracial adoption may place concern on how it will affect a child’s perception of their racial identity. A child’s self-esteem has an impact on their self-identity (Bronstein et al., 1993; Grape-Coll, 1990). Self-concept provides an important motive for behavior (Cherny et al., 1994; Grape-Coll, 1990). Results from research by Anderson, Laduerdale, McRoy, and Zurher’s (1982) on self-esteem and racial identity, however, revealed that children adopted transracially and inracially showed no significant difference in self-esteem.
Research also revealed that transracially adopted children are able to identify themselves accurately. Simon (1996) conducted a 20 year study on transracial adoptions. Her findings revealed that there was an absence of White racial bias amongst the Black transracially adopted children when given the doll test, a test that asks a number of questions regarding “better” characteristics of Black and White dolls. The Black and White participants accurately identified themselves on other projective tests. There was also no negative reaction to Blacks or preference for Whites. Overall, Simon’s results showed that the adoptees demonstrated that transracial adoption appeared to provide the opportunity for children to develop awareness of race, and respect for physical characteristics. What is most important from this study, however, is evidence that children are able to or understand their culture. This was identified by the doll test that was mentioned previously.

Identity is based on a personal identity and genetic make-up and may include a variety of things such as religion, heritage, and morals. A sense of identity is tied to reproduction. For example, two African-American parents will biologically create an African-American child. Being African-American is out of that child’s control and part of their identity. The desire of gaining self-concept is what a child will be faced with on a consistent basis (Erickson, 1968; & Garcia-Coll, 1990). When a child is born into a certain family, culture and race, part of their identity derives from this context (Garcia-Coll et al., 1990). The relevance of family resemblance is one aspect of personal identity.
Adoptive parents lose that sense of genetic tie when choosing to adopt (Cherny & Cardon, 1994). Children placed after infancy have a possible chance of developmental delays, attachment disturbances, and posttraumatic stress disorder (Derdeyn et al., 2005). If adopted when they were young, adoptees typically have no recollection or knowledge of their biological family. As a consequence, some adoptees may look at themselves as incomplete, lacking, or in progress (Janus, 1997). Therefore, transracially adopted children also are faced with trying to develop their racial/ethnic identity (Treutler & Epkins, 2003). They may be faced with physical uncertainties such as physical traits that are unlike their adopted parents. They have daily reminders that they look nothing like their adoptive parents. Their peers will see this as well, which can create low self-esteem and encourage identity issues. Without having developed an identity, they feel a lack of well-being and adaptation (Cherny & Cardon, 1994).

Although it is believed that identity formation is an ongoing process, this process tends to strengthen during adolescence (Treutler & Epkins, 2003). Adolescence is a time when children begin to think about who they are and how they fit in with the family. As defined by Erickson (1968), healthy identity development in adolescence requires the establishments of relationships with parents that allows for individual freedom in making decisions while still maintaining some degree of closeness.
Summary

Achieving a sense of identity is a developmental task that all children undertake (Erickson, 1968). For transracial adoptees, achieving self-identify may be more complicated. As children age and develop, there is a possibility that they will ask for more information about themselves. It is important for parents and caregivers to have that information ready in some form or another to communicate with children. Tension exists regarding the benefits and costs of transracial adoptions for children among practitioners and scholars. A review of the literature suggests that there is little agreement on whether or not transracial adoption is in the best interest of the child. According to my review, there appears to be little research on this topic, especially current research. In existing research, emphasis has been on how transracial adoption affects the identity of children adopted outside of their race. Limitations to the studies, stated previously, appear to be a lack of the adoptees’ feelings or opinions on ways in which they may be able to gain an understanding of their identity. There also is little emphasis on whether children feel that identity development is more important than having a home with a loving family.

Parents and caseworkers have differing opinions about what is truly in the best interest of the child. One voice missing from the literature is that of the child. There need to be more studies conducted with adults who have experienced transracial adoption, thus allowing them to reflect on their early childhood years and to share their perspectives about their family contexts.
The studies in this literature review did not focus on the child as the microsystem, which could address the factors that will influence child development. For instance, there has been a lack of attention on the impact of neighborhoods on families and consequently, on a child’s sense of identity when in a transracial adoption. Additionally, there is a lack of information in general regarding a child’s ability to adjust to a new family and how parenting style affects a child’s identity. Not much research has covered information about any differences between childrearing between Black and White mothers and their adoptees. As shown in previous research, “parent-child” attachment plays a major role in identity formation. More research should be conducted on other ways in which a parent-child relationship can benefit from a transracial adoption. It is important to understand whether the transracial parent-child relationship influences adoptees’ perceptions about the importance of their racial background.

Theoretical Framework

According to Bulbolz and Sontag (1973), the interaction between a family and its environment is a family ecosystem. Ecological framework helps us to understand the influence of external factors on families. According to Gilgun (1992) and Daly (1992), understanding those influences enhances knowledge about family interactions and individual human development. Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological framework (1979) outlines an ecological model for understanding child development in the context of families and broader systems.
According to Brofenbrenner (1979), a developing child is influenced by nested systems that include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. A microsystem is the context in which the development of persons (in this case, the adopted child) occurs. The family is the core microsystem where the development takes place. The adopted child coexists within their family which is their microsystem. Another example of a microsystem can be the place where members (mother and father) work. A mesosystem is a relationship between two or more microsystems. For instance, the relationship between work and family as it influences child development would be considered a mesosystem. An example of this would be a mother having to work during the time her child is home from school and not being able to help with any school work or spend time with her child before she goes back to school. This type of situation may have an effect on the child’s attachment and/or emotional development. An exosystem is an environment in which persons participate. This does not directly impact the developing child. The child’s physical environment such as the neighborhood, school, and home can have influence on the child. That same environment can in turn be influenced by, those that are residing and interacting in that environment. An ecosystem can indirectly have an effect on the child’s external environment such as the family, school, and community. A macrosystem consist of the values, norms, and general cultural context that make up ecology of human development. For instance, adoption laws and perceptions of the appropriateness of adopting across race may influence children as they construct identity. The first three environmental systems make up the macrosystem.
Adaptation is the foundation of ecological theory (White & Klein, 2002). Brofenbrenner (1979) suggested that children’s exchanges with exosystem and environment, such as community and school, will aid in their growth and adaptation. Children that have been adopted outside of their racial background will have to face some form of adaptation because of their adoption and because parents are from a different race. How these children adapt to these family arrangements will be constructed by the four levels of systems, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem, and the effect they have on a particular child (Samantarai, 1996).

For this study, I will use an ecological lens in examining the experiences of transracial adoptees. This perspective suggests that when addressing transracial adoption, it is critical to address the variety of influences and outside factors that may influence the development of a child. Using an ecological lens, this research can also look at what issues influence the parents, what factors influence these issue, and how they collaboratively shape child development. This study will focus on how a child is directly or indirectly influenced by these nested systems and how their self concept is shaped in response to these influences.

Significance of Study

In conclusion, due to changes over time, transracial adoption is now becoming more accepted, suggesting that current research is critical for understanding the experiences of transracial adoption. For instance, adoption is now more common among gay and lesbian couples and single parents (Daniel et. al., 1973). Because adoption criteria have expanded for those choosing to adopt, transracial adoption has
not been as present in the current literature. My research is important to this field because it is bringing transracial adoption back to the surface. In addition, this study will also employ an ecological theoretical framework, which will provide an inclusive lens for understanding child development and outcomes in these families.

This research will take a dyadic approach by getting information from the parents as well as the child. Getting the parent’s perspective will be helpful because parents play a major role on the development of their children in the children’s early years. Also, gaining the children’s point of view will be advantageous because he/she can provide his/her perceptions of his/her adoption. Having both the child and parent’s perceptions will allow for comparison between the two which will permit for new themes to emerge.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The study investigated the racial identity development of African-American adoptees. The study specifically investigated the different influences in the adoptees’ lives that aid in the development of their cultural awareness. Additionally, comparisons between African-American children adopted by Caucasian parents and African-American children adopted by African-American parents were examined for differences and/or comparisons in the development of racial identity by the adoptees within the two different forms of adoption. In this chapter, I provide the method of research. Outlined below, I highlight participant criteria, the recruitment strategy, methods of data collection, and data analysis. Additionally, I address issues of confidentiality and include the semi-structured protocols I used for this study (see Appendix A and B).

Participants

This study consisted of 4 family dyads including 4 adopted children and 4 adoptive mothers (N = 8). Participants involved in this study met the following criteria: a) an African-American child living in an adoptive home between the ages of 9–17 years of age; b) an adoptive mother who lives with the child. My decision to include both mothers and children acknowledges that children as young as four can provide insight about their lives (Irvin, 2005). In order to understand across households that contain both inracial and transracial adoptions, 50% of the child participants had adoptive parents who were African-American and 50% of child
participants had adoptive parents who were Caucasian, non-Hispanic. Participants were from middle class families, as identified by mothers.

The ages of the adoptive mothers varied between ages 42-52 years of age. The average age was 48.5 years. The adoptees ranged in ages between 9-16 years. The average age was 12.25 years. Three of the mothers were married and one mother was divorced. All of the mothers’ husbands and one mother’s ex-husband adopted the adoptee that participated in the study. The two Caucasian mothers obtained at least a bachelor’s degree. The two African-American mothers obtained a high school diploma as their highest level of education. The two Caucasian mother-African-American child dyads resided in Ohio and the two African-American mother-African-American child dyads and only one dyad, African-American parents-African-American child, resided in Illinois.

Recruitment

I used a snowball sampling strategy to recruit my participants (Patton, 2002). Three informants provided contact information of the families that participated in the study. I chose these informants because of a current relationship I held with them. I knew that they held relationships with or knew families that fit the criteria for my study. Once I received the names of potential participants from key informants who indicated their willingness for me to contact them, I contacted them by phone, described the study, and determined if they met the study criteria and were willing to participate. Because child participants were under the age of 18, I made initial contact with their mothers. One of the mothers asked her child if he/she wanted to
participate in the study, and the other three mothers volunteered her child for participation in the study. All of the adopted children assented to participation. Once willingness to participate was indicated, we determined a time to meet to conduct the interview in a place that was mutually convenient. Participants were able to contact me through my cell phone number or via email for any questions or concerns that may have emerged during recruitment. All of the initially recruited participants agreed to participate.

One family was difficult to recruit for the study due to time conflicts. Of all the times scheduled and rescheduled, we finally met 1-1/2 months after we had originally agreed to meet.

Confidentiality

This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University on April 16, 2008. Since this approval is only valid for one year, the research was re-approved March 29, 2009. Before each interview, mothers had the opportunity to read the consent form. If they had any concerns or questions about the consent form, they were encouraged to ask questions, which I answered.

Mothers gave their consent as well as assent for their children to participate in the research by signing an informed consent (see Appendix B). Children were offered a verbal assent form. If they were old enough, they read it themselves. As part of the informed consent process, participants agreed to be audio taped. Once informed consent was secured, the interviews began. All of the mothers received a copy of the consent and assent forms to keep for their records.
Due to the taping of interviews and the subsequent transcriptions, pseudonyms were given for each family member. We also changed the age of the child to reassure confidentiality. In addition to the audiotapes, a master list, linking families to their responses, was kept in a secure locked file cabinet in my office, where only I have the key. Along with the audiotapes and master list, the signed consent and assent forms were kept in the locked file cabinet as well. The tapes and transcripts will be destroyed after completion of this study to ensure confidentiality.

Data Collection

For this study, the data were interviews and field notes. After the participants were recruited and agreed to participate in the study, a formal interview was held at participants’ homes. After review and signing of the consent and assent forms, the interview began and was tape-recorded. All participants agreed to have the interviews tape recorded for their child as well as them. To ensure confidentiality, I expressed to the participants that the tapes would be destroyed after completion of study.

Observation Process

In addition to interviewing all participants, I also had the opportunity to observe one dyad over multiple occasions because I shared a coach/athlete relationship with one of the adoptees. During our time spent together, I observed the conversations he had with me regarding race including questions that he asked. I observed him without him being aware that I was observing him.
Interview Process

Interviews utilized a semi-structured protocol (see Appendix A). Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility, therefore, new domains may emerge (Daly, 2007). There were two protocols per dyad. There was a protocol for the child interview and there was a protocol for the mother interview. The mothers were interviewed first and then the child interview followed.

The interview questions were designed to provide opportunities for the participants to present information about racial awareness and self-concept. In order for the participants to gain the best understanding of the questions, on-the-spot interpretations were solicited. Additional care was made regarding the multiple influences of the interviewer and the participant on the emergence of information regarding family experiences. Questions for parents also were geared towards parenting methods used to inform children on gaining understanding of their culture. The interview questions covered cultural understanding and importance. The parent interview questions began with asking participants to provide a brief narrative of their adoption experience. Then, questions on how parents help their child to develop their racial identity followed. The child interview questions began by asking them to provide a brief narrative of their adoptive experience. Questions about the child’s perception of his/her racial identity then followed. Questions about the child’s feelings about his/her adopted family were asked as well. To end, the child was asked to reveal how he/she interacts with individuals in his/her immediate environment such as at school and his/her neighborhood. Data also included
demographic information about participants. Field notes, as outlined in Patton (2007) occurred during and immediately after the interview.

*Child interview.* The children’s interviews were intended to be conducted privately in order to eliminate any discomfort the child might have due to the answers they were providing. I wanted to support both the children and mothers’ responses by looking closely at both perspectives. There was some concern about the children’s responses because in three of the four children’s interviews, the mothers listened in on what the child shared. To alleviate concern, I agreed to let them listen. Parents may use an authoritative parenting style (i.e., high support and warmth with high demands and expectations) or an authoritarian parenting style (i.e., low support and warmth with high demands and expectations; Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987). In this study, if the children had mothers that parented in one of these two styles, their mother listening to their interview could have placed a strain on the amount of information children were willing to reveal. If there was information a child wished to disclose, but the child knew there was a chance it did not meet their mother’s approval, there is a high chance that the child might not provide this information. As mentioned by Irwin (2005), it is common for adults to help their child find words when speaking and for the child to look at his/her parents for cues of accuracy. Having the child’s true understanding and feelings about his/her racial awareness and comfort in his/her family was key to this research. The child providing this type of information would allow me to understand his/her point of
view clearly. Having the parents listen to the interview might have hindered this understanding. One child interview was conducted privately.

    Child interviews ranged from 20-45 minutes depending on how interested the child was in participating in the interview. The more interest the child had in doing the interview, the more information he/she provided about his/her adoption experience.

    The children’s interview focused on how they perceive their racial identity and culture. In the interview, I asked for life course reflection on both past and current family experiences and feelings about personal and culture identity. The questions were used to identify: (a) children’s understanding and feelings of the African-American culture, (b) their feelings about being an African-American, and (c) the amount of comfort they have with other African-Americans. They also were asked to present any feelings/thoughts they might have associated with their adoption. I used different strategies with the children to ensure that they felt as comfortable as possible, such as joking with them and playing with them whenever they got off task when answering certain questions. According to (Daly, 2007), this can occur by switching roles. Allowing the children to ask questions helps build rapport and encourages them into providing their experiences (Daly, 2007). I identified a sequence of events and carried out an analysis of the narrative style used when they were telling their stories. They were asked questions about their level of understanding of the information their parents are trying to provide about their racial
identity. When anything was unclear to participants, the information were made clear by the researcher.

*Mother interview.* All mother interviews were conducted privately and lasted approximately 1 hour in length. Mothers were asked about their parenting methods in order to gain more understanding about children’s perspectives on their cultural heritage and background. Mothers also were asked questions pertaining to how and if they are able to help their children build self-identity as well as gaining an understanding of their cultural background. If mothers chose not to intentionally focus on race awareness, they were asked to elaborate on their efforts to facilitate racial identity development or lack of focus on this issue. Other questions posed to mothers included what ways the parents supported their children to build the children’s identity and awareness of their African-American culture.

**Data Analysis**

The data were transcribed verbatim immediately following the interview. The goal for the analysis was to gain all of the perceptions, viewpoints, and ideas from participants. According to Daly (2007), qualitative data seeks to provide detailed descriptions and accounts of cultural experiences. Interpretation of these descriptive accounts can occur in relation to four areas: (a) Key Events: different significant events that occur that may help understand values and traditions of the individuals being studied; (b) Patterns: activity or behavioral patterns identified and compared to participants in the culture; (c) Space and Time: where and how events and activities occur; and (d) Cultural Meanings and Themes-beliefs, practices, values, symbols, and
world view assumptions about the nature of commonly held experiences (Daly, 2007; Spradley, 1980). The analysis of the data collected will focus on these four areas.

I also followed the four steps for data analysis suggested by Gay and Airasain, (2002) including: (a) Reading and memoing: becoming familiar with the data and of the main themes reflected in it; (b) Describing: providing a detailed description of the setting, participants, and activities; (c) Classifying: coding pieces of data, categorizing them and grouping them by themes; and (d) Interpreting: making sense of the data in order to derive general understanding and conclusions.

I reviewed the transcripts frequently and noted common themes across interviews. To begin, I did a narrative analysis of participants’ adoption story and the impact it placed on their lives (Gilgun et al., 1992). The narrative analysis also included the description of parent-quality relationships provided by the parents, in addition to the historical time change noted by some participants. I also coded any mention of “race work” (anytime the mother did a specific task, or used certain strategies, and or work-related activities to promote race identity development), “outside factors” (different factors that have an influence on the child’s development such as school, peers, environment, family, parent(s), and “cultural identity awareness” (children’s understanding of what they believe to be their cultural identity and how they came to that understanding).

The codes were developed in both parents’ interview and children’s interviews. The codes constructed from themes that emerged from the child interview consisted of the following:
1. Adoption Story (child): The child’s narrative about their adoption experience.


3. Perception of Parent: The child’s feelings or perceptions about their adopted parents.

4. Child to Parent Similarities/Differences: Similarities and/or differences that the child experiences with their parent(s).

5. Connectedness/Parent-Child: Any mention of the quality of the relationship and connectedness that the parent feels they share with their child.

6. Relationship Quality: The adopted child’s biological parents and the role they have in their lives.


8. Discrimination/Feelings of Differences: Any mention of feelings of discrimination or difference with others.

9. Fitting In: Any mention of similarities with others.

10. Role Models: Specific individuals that the children identified and admired.


12. Cultural Identity: The child’s sense of or awareness of their or their parents’ cultural identity.
The codes constructed from themes that emerged from the mother interview consisted of the following:

1. Adoption Story: The mother’s narrative about their adoptive experience.
2. Reasons for Adopting: The parent’s reasons for adopting a child.
3. Impact of Adoption (Complications/Benefits): The complications and benefits associated with adopting a child.
4. Outside Perceptions/Opinions: Ways in which parents coped with outside perceptions and/or opinions.
5. Parent to Child Similarities/Differences: Similarities and/or differences that the parent feels they share or differ from with their child.
6. Connectedness/Parent-Child Relationship Quality: The quality of the relationship and connectedness that the parent feels they share with their child.
7. Cultural Identity (parent): The parent’s sense of or awareness of their or their child’s cultural identity.
8. Support: Support provided to parents regarding the adoption and parenting.
9. Father Involvement: The amount of time or involvement that the adopted father has in their adopted child’s life.
10. Time Changes (Adoption): Historical change regarding perceptions of race and adoption.

Additionally, the transracial adoptions parent and child responses were compared to inracial adoption parent and child responses. Similarities and difference were distinguished between the two forms of adoptions. The parent responses also were
compared to the child responses. Any correlations of cultural understandings from
the mothers’ responses to the children’s responses of understanding were analyzed
from these data.

Summary
In order to understand and gain detailed, in-depth information regarding how
children who have been adopted perceive their racial background/identities and how
parents create family contexts for the development and socialization of their children,
qualitative research was the best method to use for this study. Using interviews and
observations, I was able to utilize the qualitative methods as outlined by Patton
(2002). This research method allowed for elaboration and thick, rich detailed
description regarding both child and parent personal experiences of inracial and
transracial adoption. From the literature reviewed, adoption may have different
effects on a child’s development, self-identity, and self-esteem depending on a variety
of contextual factors (Cherny, 1994). In particular, transracial adoption may
influence how African-American children negotiate their personal identities because
they may lack a perception of who they are both biologically as well as racially.
Therefore, an important element of this study was the input from both the mother and
adoptee from a transracial adoption. In addition, having input from both mother and
child of an inracial adoption for comparison purposes between the two adoptions
situations was vital.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

This study investigated the racial identity development of African-American adoptees adopted by Caucasian parent(s) in comparison to African-American adoptees adopted by African-American parent(s). My research questions were (a) How do transracially adopted African-American children construct cultural awareness that is similar or different than inracially adopted African-American children; (b) What influences/factors affect a transracially adopted African-American child’s cultural identity development compared to inracially adopted African-American children; and (c) What are the strategies that mothers use to help their child construct a racial identity? In this study, I focused on different strategies used by adoptive parents to nurture racial identity among their adopted children as well as the influences of others regarding how African-American adopted children negotiate their self identity. This chapter provides an overview of the results and analysis based on intensive individual interviews with four mother-child dyads. In the first section, I provide a description for each family dyad including background and demographic data. In the second section, I describe the motivations, process of adoption through narrative analysis of the mothers’ adoption stories, and the impact it has placed on these adoptive families. In the final section, I will discuss the themes that emerged from analysis of the data. Specifically, I identify three main themes pertaining to racial identity and awareness expressed by the participants in my study from both the perspectives of the African-American adoptees and their adoptive mothers. These
themes were threefold. The first theme was “Exosystem/Outside Influences,” which is, as described in the ecological theoretical framework used in this study, different factors that have an influence on the child’s development such as school, peers, environment, family, parent(s). It will also look at how their parents may be affected by outside influences such as their job and community and how those influences affect the development of their child’s racial identity. The second theme was “Race Work,” which describes the work mothers do regarding specific tasks strategies, and or work-related activities to promote race identity development. The third theme was “Identity Awareness,” which focused on children’s understanding of what they believe to be their cultural identity and how they came to that understanding. The third theme also includes the mother’s understanding of her child’s cultural identity and how she believe her child was able to gain that understanding.

Background and Demographic Data

Lauren and Jasmine

Lauren is a 42-year old Black, middle class woman who is employed as a homemaker. She is married to a Black male who provides the income for their home. His highest level of education completion is a Bachelor’s degree in Engineering. Lauren has completed 3 ½ years of college and still plans to obtain her degree in Early Childhood. With her husband, Lauren has adopted two children. Jasmine is a Black female, aged 14 years and the oldest child in the family. She is the participant of focus for this study. She has completed the 8th grade. She currently attends a
multicultural high school. This family currently resides in a large urban community in Northeast Illinois which is located in a predominantly Black neighborhood.

*Lena and Jayla*

Lena is a 52-year old Black middle class woman and is employed as a child care provider for 25 years. She is divorced from a Black male. They have been divorced currently for 5 years. He is the biological father of Lena’s three children. He also adopted Jayla prior to the divorce. Lena’s ex-husband also was a financial provider for this family. His highest level of education was completion of a high school diploma. Before they were separated, this family was classified as upper middle class. Now that Lena is the primary caretaker in this family and no longer receiving any assistance from her ex-husband, they are now a middle class family. She has obtained her High School Diploma. She also has obtained her state license to become a home child care provider. She has adopted one child and has given birth to three other children. Jayla is her adopted Black daughter. She is 16 years old. She is the third oldest child. Jayla’s highest level of education completion is the 10th grade. The school she attends is somewhat mixed, but primarily Black. This family currently resides in a large urban city in Northeast Ohio in a predominantly Black neighborhood.

*Ann and Eugene*

Ann is a 49- year old White, middle class woman who is employed as a homemaker. She is married to a White male. He provides the income for this family. Her husband currently teaches at a university in Ohio. Ann has completed 4 years of
college and has obtained a bachelor’s degree. She and her husband have adopted one child and have no other children. Eugene is her 8-year old Black son whose highest level of education completion is the 2nd grade. This family currently resides in a small, rural town in Southeastern Ohio in a predominantly White neighborhood.

*Margaret and Mariah*

Margaret is a 51-year old White middle class woman. She is married to a White male and both parents hold doctoral degrees and are employed at a local university. She and her husband adopted one child and have one biological child. Mariah is her adopted Black daughter. Mariah’s adoptive brother is 16 years old and is currently in high school. Mariah is a 10 years old. Her highest level of education completion is the 4th grade. She attends a predominantly White school. The school includes a small population of children from international families. This family currently resides in a small, rural town in Southeastern Ohio in a predominantly White neighborhood.

*Adoption Story*

In the following section, participants’ brief narratives about their adoption experiences are highlighted. Challenges faced when adopting and reasons for adopting were influences accentuated in their narratives. “Historical change,” referring to the adoption process in past times compared to current times relating to race, was also emphasized in the adoption stories. In addition, they described the quality of their relationship with their adopted child. The children made very little mention of their adoptive story if they gave one at all. The adoptive children gave
brief stories of their adoption that were given to them by their parents. Not all of the children provided an adoption story.

*Family 1 (AA_AA): Lauren and Jasmine*

Lauren described the adoption of her two children, underscoring the differences in each of her children’s adoption processes.

I have two totally different adoptions. They were 10 years apart. With the 14 year old, it took exactly almost 9 months to the day from when we first made a call. And I went to different adoption agencies when we first thought about it. And it was overall an easy experience. You know it was a pleasant experience. We lived in Hyde Park for so many years that most of my friends are in Hyde Park, there were a lot of adoptions in Hyde Park so it was just something that was just natural. You know I told her how she was 9 days old when we went to see her and she um and she was sick at the time that we got her and I didn’t know, they didn’t know it. They claimed they didn’t know it but Dennis was holding her and I was standing above him and I asked people to walk out the room and I was gonna tell him I don’t know about this child and then she smiled at us and he said, “No, this is the one.” You know because back then they would call you with the child and you go see the child and you say yes or no and then you have to come back the next day to get the child so…she looked and she smiled
at him and we just knew that was the child. But she had pneumonia at the time and we didn’t know that.

When Lauren was asked the reasons she and her husband opted for adoption, she stated:

Because back then when I was younger I was gonna need fertility treatment and it was just too much money. Just entirely…I mean back then insurance companies didn’t pay for it and so you know I just didn’t wanna go through all that. And I was young you know in my mid 20’s early to mid 20’s. I just…it was just natural. I said well I’ll just adopt a kid you know so that’s what we did.

Jasmine was asked to give a brief narrative of her adoption process and she stated, “I don’t know. I just know that I was adopted when I was a baby.” This was her understanding of her adoption experience. As her mother mentioned later, Jasmine never asks about her adoption, but she is aware that she is adopted. Her mother also has no records of her birth mother; therefore she was unable to provide her child with information.

The relationship between Lauren and Jasmine was described by Lauren as being “natural.” She stated:

I feel no different then my friends who have birth children you know.

It’s been great. I love being at home with them you know. I quit working about when my oldest was four so I been home about ten
years and do what the whole school thing you know and taking them to different ballets or soccer or something. It’s been so natural. I don’t even notice that they’re you know.

Jasmine described the relationship between her and her adoptive parents as positive by sharing:

Well my mom and dad are really great to hang out with and I really like them. I feel very connected. I think that’s just interesting to me because different races in my family. I like this family you know. We do fun stuff together. Yea, I feel a part of my family

When asked what made her feel connected to her family, she explained, “Because we are all Black and we love each other.”

Lauren and Jasmines relationship appears to be positive. Jasmine shared a positive relationship with both her parents and felt connected to them.

Family 2 (AA_AA): Lena and Jayla

Lena gave a narrative description of her “Adoption Story.” She stated:

My adoption story is quite interesting. I have two kids, a boy and a girl, and I was unable to conceive children. So, I decided to adopt a little girl. Her name is Jayla and actually after I adopted I ended up having another child.

When Lena was asked about her reasoning for adopting, she stated, “Because I wanted to have three kids and I couldn’t have anymore kids after my second.”
When Jayla, Lena’s daughter, was asked to describe her adoption story, she stated, “Oh well, I was adopted because my mom could not afford to take care of me. I was a little mad about that because she kept my other brothers and sisters but that’s about it.” From this statement, Jayla is aware that she is adopted and knows why she was given up for adoption. Her mother informed her of why she was adopted.

Lena’s relationship with Jayla was described as, “I love that I chose to adopt her and did not give up with the battle back and forth with her biological mom. She means a lot to me.”

Jayla described her relationship with her parents as:

I love my family and we get along great. I am a part of this family. I feel like me and my family share a lot of things in common…We all love family. We like to spend time together. We like to have fun. We like to do a lot together. I feel good about being an African-American in my family because my family is African-American.

Jayla shared that she feels connected to her family. From their interviews, it appeared that Lena and Jayla shared a positive relationship. Jayla stated being an African-American makes her feel as though she fits into her family. The love she feels she receives from her family also played a part in the relationship quality she has with her mother and family. The quality of their relationship appears to be dependent on the love she feels she receives in addition to fitting in with her family based on race.
Family 3 (C_AA): Ann and Eugene

Ann’s adoption story highlighted the challenges she and her husband faced in adopting their son. She mentioned that she and her husband did not want to have their own children, so they decided to adopt. They began to research about adoption, and it was then that she recognized that African-Americans were in adoption process the longest. In their process to adopt, they felt as though it was a selling process, as described by Ann, they had to go through when attempting to adopt with the first agency. They felt it was a selling process because the agencies wanted them to market themselves as the best family for that specific child waiting to be adopted. They then chose to use another adoption method. Ann stated:

We went to private adoption agencies. Then we went to foster care agencies, then we went to foster care agencies. We researched all the different ways to adopt a child. And the private adoption agencies and the adoption agencies that were more focused on getting a perfect child into your home just turned us off really badly, really badly. I mean we just…they’re like showing you how to sell yourself to some White knocked up teenager in the Midwest and it just wasn’t what we were about. So when we went to the foster care agency, it was right after they passed that law in the 90’s that foster kids had to be placed if the parent…could be fast tracked…into an adopted home if the birth parent had lost other children to foster care and to adoption in the past. And so that sounded like a good way to adopt for us, that we would
foster the child for a while then eventually it would become an adoption.

Ann and her husband had to wait four years to officially adopt their son. She recalled how she felt the agency depicted the process to them. She mentioned how she could not fully adopt Eugene until he was four, although he was with them at the age of nine months. They had to deal with Eugene’s birth mother trying to get him back. They also had to deal with the frustration when they moved to another city and the agency’s failure to keep in contact with them. She mentioned that she had to go through an adoption agency at her new resident location in order to get them to contact the agency where she was originally from to finalize the adoption.

When Ann was asked about her reasoning for adopting, she stated that she had already had a hysterectomy because of some health issues. She also mentioned that she never really wanted any kids until she had gotten into her thirties where she felt like something was missing. When she and her husband met, she felt that the time was right for her to now have a kid and they both shared the same viewpoints about having children.

When asked why she and her husband adopted a child specifically outside of their race, Ann mentioned a number of different things. She also mentioned the health issues she had gone through with adopting a child outside of her race. Ann stated that she and her husband were very interested in adopting a needy child and where they lived at the time, most of those needy children were African-Americans children exposed to drugs She also stated that they wanted a boy. Ann mentioned
how no one was interested in adopting African-American boys. She stated that they were willing to take whatever, but it was more likely for them to get an African-American boy. Ann also explained her interests by stating, “But we were both more interested in African-American culture and African-American’s path through history and all that so that was part of why we were more interested probably in having an African-American child and we didn’t care if the child didn’t look like us.”

When Eugene was asked to speak about his adoption story, he stated, “I can’t remember back that far.” As Ann stated earlier, she was not able to provide information about his adoption until he is 18. Therefore, Eugene is unaware of much about his adoption and was unwilling to share what he did know. Ann stated that Eugene does ask questions about his adoption, but she can only answer them to a certain degree. Eugene was not engaged in the interview and wanted it to go as fast as possible, therefore, he may have had more information to give regarding this question, but did not want to in order to speed up the interview process.

Ann described her relationship with her son within the context of family and community:

We’re also very cellular family. We have lots of friends in the community, but we also just spend a lot of time just as us because we go on these long vacations and stuff. We’re very together family I think more than most because with the home schooling and the long vacations, it’s like I think we’re a much closer family than lots of families and so we don’t really even pay attention to it.
Eugene described his relationship with his parents as positive because “They’re very nice to me and I love them and they love me back. I just like being around my parents. Because the family adopted me and I think if they didn’t want me, they wouldn’t have adopted me so that’s why I feel a part of them.” Ann and Eugene share a positive relationship as well.

*Family 4 (C-AA): Margaret and Mariah*

Similar to Ann, Margaret and her husband also described the adoption of their African-American child by focusing first on the agency that helped them in their process:

> We worked through Catholic social services in Columbus and they generally place newborns, but we actually were expecting to have a boy because we were interested in dealing with, taking a child that maybe would not be acceptable to a lot of people. We were happy to have an African-American child. Our understanding was the boys were, you know, not adopted so that was something that we really kind of expected and then what happened was Mariah was kind of languishing in foster care. She was 10 months old and so when we heard about that, we just immediately said, “Yea you know, we wanted her.” And so she you know we had to wait a few days and do all that stuff and then she came to us at 10 months and has been here ever since. It was finalized about 6 months after that.
When Margaret was asked about why she and her husband adopted, she stated, “We just wanted to adopt children who had trouble finding families you know.” In addition, she was having fertility problems. When thinking about adoption, she became pregnant and put it off. Once they relocated, they decided that they were going to go through with the adoption that they had researched earlier, which was a needy child.

When Margaret was asked why she and her husband decided to adopt outside of their race, she replied:

I think we would have just taken you know….I mean I think, I forget the term they use…difficult to place or whatever… basically, I think we would take any race but in Columbus I would expect primarily it would be White and African-American babies and so we were just opened to whatever baby needed a home.

As mentioned earlier about Eugene, Mariah as well was not very interested in doing the interview after a certain amount of questions were asked. When asked to provide a narrative of her adoption story, she stated, “I don’t know.” She is aware that she is adopted, but is unaware of the actual story. Her adoptive mother mentioned that she did not bring this information up unless Mariah asked her. She felt that this is the best way to handle this situation due to her being such a young age.

Margaret described her relationship with Mariah, “Like a present that’s always being unwrapped.” She felt that her adoption was a gift to her in a way that
she does not have with a biological child. She did not want to denigrate the natural way of having a child, but she liked being able to have done both.

When Mariah was asked if she felt like a member of her family, she stated, “A member, well even though I’m brown compared to my family which is White. I just wish they were brown.” As suggested by Adams et al., (2004), transracial adoptees may have an even harder time adjusting due to the fact of not only being raised outside of their biological family but also outside of their racial background. This appears to be the case for Mariah’s situation.

Narrative Analysis Summary of Adoption Story

As Daniel et al., (1973) mentioned that adoptive parents may wish to adopt due to infertility. All four mothers had some sort of complications with conceiving a child, which led them to make the decision to adopt. The two White mothers that adopted Black children both mentioned that they adopted to help save a Black child. Both mothers were aware that Black boys were the least likely child to become adopted; as a result, that particular race became their preference to adopt. Both White parents also stated that due to the geography in which they were adopting, they knew that it was a strong possibility for the adopted child to be Black. In Margaret’s case, she decided to adopt the little girl in order to keep her from lingering in the system longer, but her intentions were to adopt a boy. As mentioned in the literature, there was controversy about a White family’s willingness to adopt for humanitarian reasons such as saving the poor Black child who can’t be adopted (Daniel et al., 1973). On the other hand, Furstenber (2007) and Johnson (1976) suggested that it is better for a
child to be adopted then to linger in the system longer as was the case for Margaret and Mariah.

Both of the Caucasian parents that adopted the African-American child mentioned a reason for adopting was to help out a Black child that was least likely to become adopted. Interestingly, both of these families also had higher levels of education. Therefore, they both did some sort of research to acquire knowledge about adopted/foster children and where Black children stand in the overall adoption process. As a result, they were more informed about what children needed to be adopted. These are also the two families who mentioned historical time change. They recognized that their child will have to face racial issues due to their choice to adopt transracially, but they did not believe it will affect them as much today as it would if they had been adopted in previous times. In contrast, both of the Black mothers mentioned their reason for adoption was based solely on wanting a child or wanting another child.

The adopted children’s narrative of their adoption varied between the two groups. The two children that were transracially adopted were unaware or had no adoption story to provide. They were both aware that they were adopted, but they also physically can see that distinction. Both parents mentioned that they had not shared an adoption story with their child. Ann could not provide an adoption story to her child because of regulations given to her by the adoption agency she chose to go through. Margaret did not provide an adoption story with her child because she felt her daughter was too young. She also felt that if her daughter brought any questions
about it to her attention then she would then inform her child to the best of her ability of what she wanted to know. Jasmines also was unaware of her adoption story, but it was because her adoption was closed, meaning there were no records on or contact with her birth mother or family. Jasmine also had not obtained any information because, according to her mom, she does not ask about it. Jayla, on the other hand, was aware of her adoption process and knows why she was adopted. Her mother provided her with this information. These two children are also older, thus, opening the possibility of leading them to have a better understanding of their adoption process.

The relationship quality between the adopted child and their adoptive parent also was described. Attachment between adoptive parents and the adopted child play a role in shaping the child’s identity (Affleck & Steed, 2001). A relationship between the adopted child and the mother is important for identity development. The relationship that the adopted mother shares with his/her child will help the child’s connectedness/feeling of comfort with his/her parent. The quality of relationships between the two families varied for different reasons. Both Jasmine and Jayla felt connected to their families mentioning the fact that they are Black and their family is Black. All of the children did feel as though they were loved by their mothers. Therefore, most of the children felt connected because they felt appreciative of their parents adopting them. Three of the four children felt connected to their families. Eugene as well as the other two inracially adopted children felt connected because their parents loved them and they loved their parents in return. The only discrepancy
revealed was one child feeling a limited connection due to the outward appearance that differed from her parents. Mariah did not feel connected to her parents because she wanted them to look like her physically as far as race. She never stated that she wished to be White, rather she wished for them to be Black.

To conclude, there has been a difference in the two types of adoptions seen as early as the general adoption story from the reason the parents chose to adopt, to the differences in the parents providing their child with information about their adoption. Thus far, of all the adopted children, one Black inracially child is the only one that is aware of why she was adopted. The inracially adoptees mother did not mention that they were adopting their child because there was a need to adopt Black children or that Black children were least likely to be adopted.

Historical Time Change

“Time Change” was mentioned by both the parents who adopted transracially. They described “Time Change” as the change over time for the adoption process. They both used the term to refer to race. Ann makes reference to historical time change when she said:

But there’s so many different families now that skin color doesn’t match among the different members of the family that I don’t think it’s an issue like it was 35 years ago. Ninety nine percent of the time I don’t think there’s any complication especially with our new president. I think people are thinking that race is over you know what I mean.
And I don’t think that’s true or the prisons wouldn’t be full of Black men.

Margaret mentioned “Time Change” when she said:

I just feel really strongly that things have changed, are changing, will continue to change you know. And I think I’m realistic about that. I don’t think it’s a stupid hope. I think that having a Black president is a real big deal. I think that has to be good for everybody you know what I mean…That things are becoming more normal.

It’s enough to deal with that and I think having the difference on top of that is rough for her but I think she’ll handle it, but it’s a challenge. It’s something she’s always gonna have to deal with and I can only hope that and I truly do hope and believe that by the time she’s 25 it won’t matter as much as it did 5 years ago you know what I mean. That it’s not gonna be as problematic and that people are just gonna shrug about it more you know that’s my hope.

These two families both agreed that race was not as big of an issue as it once was. Their hope was that because race appears to be less of an issue than in previous historical time, their children will be less affected by their transracial adoption. They both agreed that racism still exists, but it is not as prominent as previous times.

Impact of Adoption

Adopting a child influenced these families in numerous ways. There were benefits as well as complications discussed by all of the families in this study. All of
the parents agreed that having this adopted child has impacted their lives. They mentioned that having the adopted child allowed them to have a child to love. Ann did mention that she also had the opportunity to be helpful to this child. She stated that he would have few options if they had not adopted him. Margaret mentioned, “it’s a wonderful thing to do.” Lauren felt that the adoption of her daughter worked well with few problems. She mentioned that the children fit in well, that the family accepts them, and that the family does not see them any different from any blood related member. She also mentioned that she believed her adopted children feel comfortable in the family as well. When Lena was asked to describe how the adoption has impacted her life she says, “It made me appreciate how important being a parent is. I brought a child into my family and raised her as my own.” Both of the mothers mentioned how this adopted child being in their lives impacted their family.

When Margaret was asked how the adoption of a child outside of her race impacted her life, she said that it made her and her husband aware of “things that they wouldn’t have known.” She also stated:

    Complicated, I guess just in helping with the issues around adoption.
    And the racial thing too, but I just think that you know we’ve gotten involved in groups and I think adoption does involve a loss and there’s just gonna be issues that come up about that and that’s hard just feeling for her and watching her as she deals with it.
She also mentioned that complications did arise due to her daughter feeling different from her family. Margaret said that she felt the need to support her daughter and help her with her time of adjustment.

Margaret also described the impact her adoption has placed on her life as a learning experience. She stated:

I think it’s given me much greater awareness. We still haven’t even formed the front of it you know. There’s just so many things that I realized just from reading and just being aware that you suddenly, there is this thing about when they talk about White privilege. It’s possible with the best intentions just not to know stuff.

Complications did arise in all families. In Lauren’s particular family, complications arose regarding the lack of medical information. Lauren stated, “The complicated part of it has been not knowing the medical history. That has been you know for like certain medications that one child might have to take, but I don’t, you know, it’s just trial and error. I don’t know family history of heart disease or anything so that’s the hardest part.”

Ann described Eugene’s learning difficulties such as ADHD. She mentioned that this was caused by being a drug-exposed unborn child. She mentioned how she was used to working, and now she is a “stay at home mom” to provide additional educational and emotional support for Eugene. Ann also expressed her adoption process being another complication. She mentioned how the agency was giving them problems and prolonging their adoption process. She stated that Eugene’s birth
mother had an influence on the prolonging of the adoption process because she kept trying to bring them to court for different reasons so that “the mother can remain out of jail as long as possible.” She also suggested that when they moved, the adoption agency did not keep up with their case which kept them from adopting Eugene until he was 2 years old.

Lena’s complications were somewhat similar to Ann’s situation. She stated:

The complications that it faced was the fact that her biological mom decided that she wanted her back. It was hell. We dealt with this battle for 7 years. We had gotten her at birth and then after 9 months her mom decides that she wants her back. She kept going back and forth on whether or not she wanted to keep her. She had kept all her other children so we knew it might be a risk. Eventually, we ended up keeping her but we did not fully adopt her until she was 7 years old.

We have her as our own now and that’s about it.

Lena and Ann both went through difficult periods dealing with their adopted child’s birth parents, thus, complicating their adoption process. They both feared that the adoption would not be permanent. In both of these situations, because of the biological parents having some sort of existence in this process, it prolonged each one of their adoptions and made their adoption process very difficult.
Summary

There were different types of effects placed on the families that adopted outside of their race compared to the families that adopted within their own racial background. There were also some similarities between the two forms of adoption. These adoptions have impacted these families by allowing them to raise a child. All of the families expressed feelings of joy about their decision to adopt and the happiness it brings to their lives. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, one of the White parents felt as though she was helping the child by adopting him. She felt that not only was he a benefit to her life, she was also a benefit to his life. This relates to Daniel’s (1973) article that suggested that White families adopt to save a needy Black child.

The other White parent approached her adoption as an educational experience. Due to her education, she was familiar with conducting research. Being that adoption was new to her and her continued desire to support her daughter since her daughter feels that she is different from her family, Margaret used this approach to provide support to her child. This may also be the best way she knows how to educate herself which, in turn, allowed her to educate her child about her racial identity. Therefore, this adoption process made the families that have chosen to adopt outside of their race more aware of the African-American culture.

The adoption process caused complications in two of the adoptions as far as dealing with issues with birth parents. These situations have had no direct impact on the child. Medical records not being unavailable may affect the child in the future, but
have not thus far. These complications have not hindered the child’s racial identity development.

Exosystem/Outside Influences on Racial Identity Development

In this section, I describe the different influences the adopted children had on their racial identity development. As Brofenbrenner (1979) suggested, a child’s exosystem, which includes a child’s, neighborhood, school, family, and home, may influence a child’s identity development. There were many outside influences that had an effect on the adopted child that emerged from the data. These outside influences ranged from the child’s neighborhood, peers, school, and family. These influences, regardless of which particular one, all had an effect on the child’s awareness of their racial identity in some form. These particular influences also determined whether or not the children in this study experienced discrimination. A Black child’s social environment must provide racial identity development, knowledge, and acceptance of their cultural heritage (Carter-Black, 2002; Hollingsworth, 1999). The children’s exchange with their peers, family, and neighborhood helped aid in the development of their understanding of themselves as an African-American (Brofenbrenner, 1979).

This section will begin with discrimination and or assimilation from outside and within. It will first describe the child’s immediate environment, the family. It will then proceed to describe their relationships within their community, their peers, their environment, sports and school which also influence their identity. All of these influences, both positive and negative, emerged from the data.
Discrimination/Assimilation from Outside and Within

Family

Ann and Margaret both identified racism from some family members regarding their adoption decisions. Ann described a story about her mom not accepting her decision at first but then eventually getting over her negative feelings. She stated:

Well my family’s from Florida and my mom when she met him for the first time...she’s from New York City. Very prissy, upper class lifestyle, like they had like house staff and all that stuff and she came from the bourgeoisie. And when she got in the car and Eugene was in the car seat behind her, the first time she ever met him, he was still a tiny baby, she reached behind her and rubbed his little leg like (gave example of rubbing her arm and frowning) this like he was gonna give her a disease or something and said, “That’s the first time I’ve ever touched an African-American child.” I said, “Huh, come along way huh mom?” But she was upset at first about stupid stuff...“Don’t you realize people are gonna think your husband is Black?”....And of course I say, “Oh, cool!” She never understood me very well. So she was a little, you know because she’s so old school and had spent much of her adulthood in the South, she had issues about it, I think more than any of the rest of my family.
Margaret shared a similar situation with her mom and her brother and sister-in-law. She stated:

Just the one…my husband’s sister and brother-in-law. The brother-in-law is just an outright racist and the sister I think basically is too but I think she’s a more gentle person about it but when she was first, and again we didn’t have a lot of contact with them before the adoption, but when my husband talked to her on the phone about it, she said it was a bad idea and uh yea you know. So we just went ahead with it. She’s actually visited and I think once or maybe twice and uh you know I think she would be able to come on board but he is helpless. But like I said, I’m fine with that. You know, we just don’t see them that often. So that’s the only direct negative comment that’s ever been made to us so far. I’m not sure my parents were really on board at the beginning and again I think not because they’re racist. But I’m sure they may have some doubts about that it might be difficult but they are pretty into it now you know and my parents are divorced but I don’t know, it’s just funny.

These two families both dealt with family members not accepting their child because of their race. On the other hand, Lauren stated, “I told them from day one that they were adopted and my family doesn’t see them any different. Everyone accepts them and the children except that they’re adopted...” Lena stated that her family accepts her adopted child just as they accept her other three children. Neither
she nor Lauren has had to deal with family members not accepting their adopted children because of their race. As the ecological theoretical framework suggested, racism, which is a still occurring historical event, have affected these mothers, which in turn can have an effect on the child. Racism would be classified as a mesosystem as described by Brofenbrenner (1979). It can affect the child because he or she is not “preferred” by their adoptive family members because of their race. Therefore, the parents are not likely to let their child interact with these certain family members in order to keep their children from harm of any form.

Community

Both Margaret and Ann mentioned that they have never experienced disrespect by anyone when out in public, but there have been stares or double looks. Ann mentioned that, to her knowledge, Eugene had only noticed three times in his entire life that people were looking at him due to differences that he shares with his parents. She also added, “I’ve had a Black kid say, ‘How come you’re Black and your mom’s White?’ I’ve had that. You know at the junior Olympics some kid asked him, ‘How come your mom’s White?’ and he said, ‘Because I’m adopted.’ So he’s starting to be more aware of it.” Margaret shared that Mariah is noticed by a lot of African-American people. She stated, “We do go to cities and she gets a lot of attention and it’s really interesting you know. People really notice her like the people who work in the museums or whatever. They’ll interact with her and be really nice to her.” Overall, other than a double look/stare or an act of kindness, there has not been any negative feedback given from outside individuals.
Interestingly, according to transracial adoptive parents residing in predominantly White communities, adoptees that experienced discrimination and more discomfort about their appearance live in predominantly White communities, similar to Eugene and Mariah, than those who lived in integrated settings (Hakimi-Manesh, Mojdehi, & Tashakkoi, 1984). The opposite of these findings has occurred in this study. Neither of the White parents mentioned any discrimination of any sort about their adoption situation. Their neighborhood also consists of many working professionals who hold advanced educational degrees. In this case, the children’s neighborhood has had a positive effect on their racial identity development within a family with a different racial background, because it has been accepted within the community. This, in turn, has an effect on the child’s self-esteem. They now have a level of comfort within their family.

**Peers**

For Mariah and Eugene, friends were able to see that their races differed from their parents and that their adoption status was assessed. Both children mentioned that their friends do not care about them being adopted, and that their friends like them for who they are. Eugene admitted, however, that he feels “a little bit different, just a little tiny bit. I can’t really identify to them so it would just be a little bit different” when referring to fitting in with his friends. Jasmine and Jayla’s friends were unaware that they were adopted. Jayla stated that her best friend knows but none of her other friend knows about her adoption. Jasmine also mentioned that none of her friends are aware that she is adopted. She stated,
Well I haven’t told my friends that I was adopted…some things I won’t tell my friends. It’s between me. I guess to me, I think it’s important that I don’t tell my friends that I was adopted because it’s kinda personal. They don’t need to know that.

She expressed discomfort with her friends knowing she is adopted. Because they are assessed to be biological children based on race, these two girls were able to determine how and when they shared their adoption status with others. Mariah and Eugene, however, were unable to make these choices of disclosure in the same way. This can have a positive or negative effect on the children who were adopted transracially. If they did not wish to share that they were adopted as the other two inracial children did, they are now forced because of their racial difference from their adoptive parents. This may have an effect on the transracially adopted children’s self-esteem as far as fitting in with their peers. Acceptance by peers is critical at this age (Erickson, 1968). Not having a family that shares the same racial background automatically sets the child apart from his/her peers, let alone the fact that they are adopted. The relevance of family resemblance is one aspect of personal identity.

When a child is born into a certain family, culture and race, part of their identity derives from this context (Garcia-Coll et al., 1990). In this instance, the children’s peers accepted them and their adoption situation. This may change as the children get older and are more concerned about fitting in. Right now, they are able to be accepted because, at this age, their peers really do not have a true understanding of the type of family these children co-exist
Environment

A child’s environment consists of their family, school, and community (Brofenbrenner, 1979). All four families believed that the child’s environment was very important to their development. Lauren felt that Jasmine’s attendance at a multicultural school has helped her development. She felt that her dealing with different types of races opposed to be associated with only one, helped her to understand the complexity of things such as being adopted. She also felt that the people within her environment helped teach her about being an African-American. Lena suggested this as well. She stated, “Our community is majority Black which can also aid in her identity development.” Lauren mentioned that Jasmine’s aunt was a big influence as far as helping her know/learn her identity. Lauren stated, “She’s a little more Afrocentric.” Lauren also mentioned Jasmine took in different things from her environment such as what individuals say and do that also helps her develop her racial identity. This goes back to White and Klein (2002) when they suggested adoption is the foundation of ecological theory. The exchanges a child makes with its environment aids in their development.

Margaret and Lena both described how they wished to live in a bigger city where their child could interact with more African-Americans. They both suggested that there are not many African-Americans in their children’s lives due to the cities that they live in. Lena expressed:

And I’ll give anything if we lived in a city or some place where she wouldn’t be one of two Black kids in the class. And I would like to
have more African-Americans in her life and we just happen to live in a small town in Ohio. So Ohio’s problematic you know being in a small town. I wish we were in a place where there were just more people that looked like her, you know.

Margaret and Lena both agreed that living in a bigger city would be more beneficial to their children’s racial development. The environment in which the family resides also plays a role in a child’s adjustment and an adoptive parent’s decision on where to live has a substantial impact upon their children’s adjustments (Brody & Flor, 1998; Feigleman, 2000). On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, living in Southeastern Ohio has limited them in dealing with racial issues. Both Lena and Margaret felt that by not living in bigger cities, they do not have to face discrimination regarding their adoption situation. Ann mentioned how living in New Jersey, she dealt with Muslims not caring for her decision to adopt an African-American child. Additionally, Margaret mentioned that she heard of a story of kids being bullied in North Carolina because they were adopted outside of their race. Margaret stated that Mariah has not had to deal with any issues like that in the town they live in. Lena and Lauren both felt that the people that live in their city were very accepting of their adoption decision.

Sports

Eugene is an athlete that participated in multiple sports. Being involved in a sport allowed him to interact with members in his community as well as outside his community. Ann felt that this one sport in particular plays a major role on his racial
identity development. Ann mentioned how Eugene’s track coach has an influence on him. She stated:

Well he does track and his track coach is Black and she teaches him how to be Black (laughing). He’s got you. He’s learning how to be Black from [coach]. ’ [Coach] says I gotta do this with my skin. [Coach] says I gotta do that with my hair.’

She felt that by Eugene having an African-American coach being in his life, he can more fully understand and develop his racial identity. Ann and Lauren both mentioned that the relationship that their children share with certain individuals have influenced their identity development. This is another example of how the children’s environment and external environment affect their development (Brofenbrenner, 1979).

School

All four children stated that they have learned about Martin Luther King Jr. and Barack Obama from their school environment or their home environment. Jasmine stated:

Yea, I learned certain things in school like we were working on this project for Black History month and I was working with another partner and we were doing Barack Obama and the other kids were doing like Martin Luther King and all these other people from the past and we were going to have this Black history month play at school. So I kinda like learn a lot. To me, I think it’s really important that we
keep celebrating Black history month so that things can go better for everyone.

They all stated, when asked about any specific individuals they learn about in their environment, that they learn about these two figures. No additional figures came from any of the children. What the child learned in school had an influence on their development (Brofenbrenner, 1979).

Media

Media also had an impact on the child perception of Barack Obama. All three families emphasized how the media portrayed Barack Obama which influenced their child’s feelings about racial identity. The children learned about Barack Obama at school and then return home to watch him on television. This is where exosystem and environment merge by one affecting the other. Lauren mentioned that Barack Obama is a positive Black influence for the children to see on television. Margaret and Lena both mentioned that their child seeing Barack Obama on television is a great influence on their Black identity. In addition, Ann stated:

Well he knows he’s a Black kid. And you know we worked really hard on the Obama campaign and he was in the Obama office almost all the time with all these White people working on getting a Black man elected president. It was really cool. But people talked about race constantly. The news was talking about race constantly. And I think for the first time, he really got more of a social identity about being Black more than a personal identity about being Black.
The children learned about these things at school and later returned to their home environment to validate what they have learned. They also learned from what their parents have suggested about the figures as well. This African-American, Barack Obama, is such an important figure in the current time of this study, by becoming the first African-American president; it has placed an huge impact on respondents’ answers. It has also had an effect on the children’s proposed role model. Two of the four children identified Barack Obama as their role model.

Role Models

The children were asked to identify their role models and their reason for choosing those particular people. Each person identified played some role in their lives whether it was personal or from something they have seen or heard. Jasmine stated:

Role models? I guess one would be Martin Luther King. Second would be Barack Obama because they both. Well first Martin Luther King, he changed like he made that speech about “I Have a Dream” and that one day we can all go to the same school and we can be friends like to a White friend and stuff and Barack Obama he made a difference because it’s just exciting for mostly Blacks cuz we haven’t had a Black president ever so that’s why I like them two.

Eugene stated, “Barack Obama, Michelle Obama, and all the Obama kids and that’s it. Because they’re Black and because he’s the President of the United States.”
Jayla stated, “My mother, because she’s so independent. She a single parent and she’s raising the family on her own. And never complains. She always sticks to her promises and she does whatever to make sure we’re happy.”

All of the children with the exception of Mariah had an African-American person as a role model. Mariah stated, “My doll. This one (pointing to the Black doll she was playing with). Her name is Fergie. Because I like her.” She chose no human being as her role model, White or Black. She was aware of learning about an African-American, Martin Luther King Jr., in school like the other children mentioned. This was the only time she mentioned anything about an African-American other than stating that she has one Black friend.

The children were not obligated to say that they had a Black role model but interestingly they all had one. Although Mariah’s role model was not human, her role model was a Black doll. The two human role models that were chosen are two of the most popular role models in American culture. Therefore, if they strived to be something great, which usually describes a person’s role model, they chose two African-Americans that have had major impacts on America. Mariah chose what she felt comfortable with. This doll might be her role model because this is one of the closest resemblances she shares with anyone in her microsystem, which is where the adopted child coexists within their family (Brofenbrenner, 1979).

Summary

The exosystem played the largest role of the four other systems in the ecological framework. This is the most dominant system consistently shown
throughout all four families. There were positive and negative effects from being a part of this system. Beginning with environment, most of the things the children came in contact in their environment made their racial identity awareness stronger. The adoptees were all accepted by their peers. The transracially adopted children were the only two children that revealed to their peers about their adoption. They were still accepted, thus, helping the children obtain higher levels of self-esteem in addition to feeling positive about themselves. Also, being involved in a sport within their community allowed one of the adoptees to have more exposure to African-Americans. Overall, the community as a whole is accepting of the transracially adopted children. The inracially adopted children did not have to face any forms of discrimination due to their adoption situation.

The negative impacts from their environment included media/societal stereotypes. This affected three children. Because the media portrayed certain things about images, these children were physically unhappy with themselves. There were certain characteristics that were not necessarily looked down upon, but they were not praised as much as others, therefore they were unhappy because they did not possess those characteristics. These are characteristics that all of these African-American children possess. This placed a negative impact on the children’s racial identity perception. Another negative factor that did not directly impact the children, but impacted their exosystem was racism which is an historical event. This historical event in turn impacted some of the White family members’ perceptions of Blacks therefore, leading them to not be keen of their transracially adopted family member.
If these children somehow find out about their family members’ negative feelings, it may have a harmful impact on their racial identity development. This may lower the children’s self-esteem, thus, causing them to have confusion about their self-concept. Overall all of these factors played a major role on the development of the adoptees’ racial identity. How these children adapted to these family arrangements was constructed by one of the four levels of systems that had an effect on the child (Samanatrai, 1996).

Race Work

Some of the mothers talked about the effort they made to help their children learn about African-Americans or African-American history. This type of family work, race work, refers to any tools or strategies used by parents to infuse their family experiences with African-American culture. In addition, race work also was used by parents to help develop their children’s racial identity. As described by Ogbu (1981), when determining childrearing techniques, one cannot generalize certain types of parenting styles for an entire race group. However, the results of the present study suggest that the two different races used different strategies to promote the identity development of their children.

Race work was a consistent theme that was seen in all of the families. However, strategies were used, in different ways for different reasons. Race work was used by Lauren and Lena to help their children construct a positive image of African-Americans. Race work was used by Margaret and Ann to help their child relate to
African-Americans and to help their children gain a racial understanding of that particular culture. Lauren illustrated:

Yea from day one, I have always picked out for like pediatricians and dentist and everything, the girls have always gone to African-American female doctors. So that I want them to know that…I wanted it to just be normal that they see a Black doctor and a female so that it’s not a big deal you know. That was real important to me because they, I kinda know the area in which they came from which was a lower socioeconomic background with both children and I wanted them to just know that African-Americans can be doctors and lawyers and you know this is just a normal part of their lives.

Lauren explained that she felt that it was important for her children to recognize that there are positive role models in the African-American community. She mentioned earlier how the children coming from a low socioeconomic background, they may have negative images in about African-Americans. She felt that it was her job to help them see that there are positive role models in the African-American community and the children can be just like those positive role models. Lauren also mentioned that during Black History Month, she likes to be involved in her child’s school on different committees. She also mentioned that she tries to help her daughter recognize important Black people outside of just one month out of the year. Lena described the same thing as Lauren mentioned to incorporate African-Americans into her daughter’s life. She also suggested:
I mean I try to buy her books about Black African-American figures so she can get a sense of identity and know about important historical figures. Also when I buy her toys, I try to buy her Black dolls so she can get a sense of identity through that but other than that I don’t think there’s anything else.

The commonality that both African-American mothers shared was their technique to promote their children’s racial development was by advocating African-American role models. As mentioned earlier, these parents already felt that their children have a basic understanding of their racial identity. They now wanted to make their children aware of successful Black individuals to remove the stereotypes that currently exist due to societal views. These mothers’ techniques were to use Black positive role models to persuade their children to be a successful Black individual.

Ann felt that it was very important for Eugene to interact with African-Americans. She as well as Lena both mentioned how they try to bring African-Americans into their children’s lives so they are exposed to that culture. They also mentioned that because of the city they live in, their children are not exposed to as many African-Americans as they would like for them to be. Ann tried many different ways to incorporate African-Americans into Eugene’s life which would be considered to be her form of race work. She first stated:

I try to get him Black friends. I try to get him around African-American people. And you know, we try to get Eugene as many exposures as we can. I really think the Obama campaign really got him
thinking about the social aspects of being Black more than anything else. We went and stayed with a Black family in Pennsylvania when we were working on the Obama campaign and he got to see how like the insides of a Black middle class works. It was the same as ours so he thought that was cool. He gets it incidentally and historically but not very much real life like. I try to engage some African-American folks that have children in the community, but I don’t seem to be able to connect with them. Maybe because I don’t go to church. I don’t know. He might play with a Black kid for an afternoon and I’ll try to set up play dates and they just never seem to pan out. I don’t know.

As mentioned by Furstenberg (2007), transracially adopted African-Americans may develop a positive self-concept because Blacks and Whites of comparable social class have many similarities. Similar, Eugene had more confidence in fitting in with his family because with his visit with the Black family, he felt that he and his family shared some of their same similarities. This made him feel more comfortable with his adopted family because now he saw firsthand how it would be if he lived with a Black family. He did not notice much change.

She also mentioned how she tries to implement African-Americans into his lessons. She stated that she did Civil Rights education with him. She also stated that next year she would like to incorporate more of the Underground Rail Road historical event into his lessons.
Ann tried to implement African-Americans in form of holiday as well such as trying to incorporate Kwanza elements around Christmas time. As mentioned earlier, additionally, Ann tried to incorporate sports into her child’s life to promote African-Americans. Ann incorporates African-Americans in many different forms in her child’s life.

On the other hand, Margaret suggested that she really did not incorporate as much African-American culture into her child’s life due to her daughter’s age. She stated:

There are times that I don’t really go into things because she’s so young and I think I don’t want with her already dealing with being different, being adopted and being racially different from her family and racial minority in her school environment and so on. I think if we were a Black family, we wouldn’t be talking about things because we wouldn’t have had that issue. And so I think that we have probably put off some things m to try and let them come as they come sort of. So it’s not just to burden her with in addition to what she’s already dealing with.

She felt that it would be a lot easier for her daughter to understand African-American culture if she were in a Black family. Comparable to Garcia-Coll-Coll (1990) and Ogbu, (1981), race provides a framework that shapes parents views on children and childrearing practices. She also mentioned that she will help provide resources and “keep it on the level of reading and stuff like that” to incorporate
African-Americans into her life. The reason Margaret felt that it is important for Mariah to provide her with this type of information is because “she doesn’t like being different.”

Lena as well as Lauren both bought their daughters Black Barbie dolls as a tool to recognize pretty African-American dolls, but they also mentioned how they do not put a great emphasis on toys. Actually, all mothers mentioned that they do not put a large emphasis on toys. Books and dolls were seen in all four families as a tool that was given to their child to help them with the understanding of African-Americans. Every parent mentioned them in their interview. Margaret suggested:

   We’ve had toys and stuff, but she was ambivalent about them. I think I would like to do that more with her when she’s more open to it you know. So for example, she’s had dolls…when I finally broke down and got her a Barbie doll, I got her a brown Barbie doll. It was sort of a light brown with very brown hair. It was really nice, but she wasn’t really that into it you know what I mean.

As mentioned earlier, hair was another issue for children. This is an age where children begin to focus a lot on their image. However, two parents used a form of race work to deal with this matter. Margaret and Lauren both applied different strategies to better their child’s opinion about their hair. Lauren described her ways to improve her child’s perception of her hair as:

   I buy books about you know the hair thing is a big thing with my daughter, my oldest daughter. It’s something about… I had very long
hair, not very long but long hair when we go her and she would you
know unfortunately, well fortunately and unfortunately, going to a
school that is mixed she would see a lot of girls. Caucasian women
with long straight hair and she got caught up into that for a while, so I
cut my hair off cause I used to tell her it’s what’s in your head not
what’s on your head you know.

Margaret had outsiders influence her daughter’s perception of her hair. She
described it in story format stating how she had taken her daughter to visit a friend of
hers. He also had two daughters, but they lived with their mother. He was no longer
with the mother of his children. She continued to express how he went on to tell
Mariah how beautiful she was and how beautiful her hair was. Margaret’s friend
influenced her daughter’s self-esteem when she received positive comments about her
appearance that she did not like. As Margaret mentioned, she can tell Mariah a lot of
times how nice her hair is, but her hearing it from someone else encouraged her to
accept the compliment. This particular influence helped improve her self-esteem,
which in turn may aid in the development of her racial identity.

In both of these cases, these children had an influence intentionally sought out
by their mother to help them feel better about their hair. These strategies have helped
inspire their child which in turn will help them to feel more accepting of their
personal images.
Father Involvement

As reported by mothers, the three families with fathers still involved in their lives suggested that fathers also participate in some form with helping their child develop a racial identity. Even though Lena was currently divorced, she said that her husband did have an influence on her daughter’s racial identity when they were still married. Lauren suggested that the fact that her husband is in the household is a way for her daughter to gain insight on positive African-Americans. She stated that there are a lot of single Black mothers, so for her daughter to have her father in her life is an advantage. Lauren stated that Jasmines’ adoptive father shows her how “a Black male should treat a woman.” Lauren believed that Jasmine saw her father as another Black, positive role model. Lena responded, comparable to Lauren’s statement, that when her ex-husband was involved in her adopted daughter’s life, he would advise his daughter about positive qualities to look for in African-American men. He also gave his daughter advice on how a positive African-American woman should portray herself. He provided his daughter with examples of characteristics she should seek out to be like or look for in a Black male.

Ann suggested that her husband was involved by reading to his son. She stated, “My husband reads him to sleep and he usually reads him stories that are like way beyond what other children get read to sleep. Eugene gets a lot stuff from both of us just talking about our hero’s, and just talking about Civil Rights, and talking about the trajectory of African-American history.” Ann revealed that when Eugene asks different questions about race, her husband would give him very direct, lengthy
detailed answers. Margaret’s husband, similar to Ann’s, stated that Mariah’s father does more of a discussion with her as far as informing her about her racial identity. He also reads books to her. He, in addition to his wife, provided her with different resources such as books and things that she can review on her own now or in her future to help aid in her identity development. Margaret also indicated, “If Mariah brings any questions to her adoptive father’s attention, he then answers them the best possible way.”

Some of the father that were involved in the child’s lives played a major role on their development by doing different things to promote positive characteristics of African-Americans as described by Lauren and Lena. Additionally, other fathers contributed to developing their child’s racial identity by reading to their child and having discussions with their child such as Ann and Margaret’s husbands. Both of the Black adoptive fathers provided positive reinforcement of Blacks and how they feel their daughters should depict them. They provided examples by either being the example themselves or distinguishing between negative and positive characteristics they would like their daughters to seek out in African-Americans and take on as an African-American. The two White fathers’ way of informing their child about African-Americans was explained through reading different book to them. They responded to the conversations initiated by the children, regarding African-Americans. They did not initiate these conversations.

The explanation as to why these two races educate their child differently about their racial awareness can be assumed because of education level. The White fathers
both hold at least a master’s degree. The two Black fathers hold a bachelor’s degree or lower. The White fathers may be more willing to teach their child through reading and discussion because this is how they have learned and are used to learning in a more formal way. Whereas, the Black fathers may have also learned that way but understand better through example, therefore they taught how they learn or the best way they are able to learn. If they learned by teaching, they will teach. If they learned by example, they will provide examples. These were the fathers’ best forms of method to provide their child with an understanding of their racial identity.

Race work was used by all of the mothers in the study. In addition to the race work the mothers provided according to the mother’s, all of the adoptive fathers had contributed in some way a form of race work as well. The parents all used race work regardless of race, but there was a difference in the type of race work used by the parents. The two White mother’s shared one form of race work, that was the same strategy used by all of the mothers in the study, which was reading to their child about African-Americans. The two Black mothers used the same form of race work. Margaret also used those same tactics used by the two Black mothers which were promoting positive, successful African-Americans. Ann used the most strategies to incorporate African-American cultural awareness into her child’s life and to help her child gain his racial identity by involving different African-Americans in his life, placing him in certain sports, teaching topics related to African-American culture, and celebrating different African-American holidays.
Due to the two Black mothers both mentioning that their child will gain a racial identity from co-existing in a Black family, they were less likely to use a great deal of race work strategies. They placed more importance on the child having a positive self-image rather than an understanding of African-Americans. One White mother felt that it was very important for her child to be involved with Blacks, therefore, she used a great deal of strategies to promote his understanding of his racial identity. The other White mother felt it was important, but did not feel it was age appropriate for her to teach her child about racial awareness yet. She felt that it was important for her to address it if the child brought it to her attention. The adoptees gained their awareness of Black culture through their parents’ form of race work.

**Cultural Awareness of Children**

Cultural Awareness was the understanding of African-American culture that was perceived by the children in the study. Cultural awareness also recognized how these children related to African-Americans. Additionally, it focused on how the adoptees identified themselves in the context of being Black.

**Birth Parents**

In Eugene’s case, he was not able to find out about his birth parents until he is 18. He is unhappy with this as he stated, “But the thing I don’t like I have to wait til I’m 18 to know what my real parents…all about the history of my parents. I don’t like that so that’s mostly all I have to say about that.” His adopted mother stated:

Well he knows a little bit about his birth family as much as I can tell him. He knows that this birth family is from New Jersey. He’s starting
to think about his mom a little bit too. He asks questions about it once
and a while which is always hard now. When he was little I could say,
“She was sick and couldn’t take care of you.” And that was enough
and now it’s not. I’m trying to figure out the teenage answer now that I
had to answer 10 year old questions. It’s usually him being curious
about something or him hearing me talk about how his birth mom is
dyslexic and he’ll get all interested all of a sudden.

Ann wanted to inform her child about his biological mother, but was unaware
on how to address it properly.

Mariah was also very interested in her birth parents. Her mother, Margaret
mentioned how she would ask questions about her mother out of the blue just as
Eugene does. But just as Jasmine’s adoption situation, Margaret had no information
to provide to her daughter about her biological mom because there were no available
records. In their situations, these children will not be able to receive any information
about their biological family. Jasmine, on the other hand, may not be affected by this
lack of information because, according to her mother, Lauren, she did not ask or
make any comments about her “real mother.”

Jayla’s situation is different. She met a member of her biological family. She
identified with her biological family as well as her adopted family, but she considered
her family to be her adopted family. According to Lena, Jayla often asked about her
biological mother and is confused as to why her biological mother was able to keep
her other children but not Jayla. Lena said that Jayla struggles with the decision her birth mother made.

All the children are aware that they are adopted and some of the children are very curious about their birth parents. The relevance of family resemblance is one aspect of personal identity. If adopted young, adoptees typically have no remembrance or knowledge of their biological family, therefore, leaving some transracially adopted children to feel incomplete or lacking (Janus, 1997). Therefore, transracially adopted children also are faced with trying to develop their racial identity.

*Racial Understanding*

Racial understanding describes the awareness of a particular race. The children’s perceptions of what they think about African-Americans and Caucasians were all taken into account in this study. It is important to understand the feelings of these children regarding race in order to understand how they perceive their culture and how they perceive their culture related to another.

Jasmine and Eugene believed that being African-American is about having a different skin color. Jasmine suggested, “African-American is just our skin color like brown like we have darker skin and they’re different types of Black people.” When African-Americans were described, Jayla suggested, “African-Americans are strong individuals who have overcome a lot.” All of the children were in agreement stating that they liked Black people. When Jasmine was asked to describe her feelings about African-Americans, she stated
Well I just wanted to say...never mind...I don’t wanna be rude. I guess there’s a lot of Blacks that like sag their clothes like the boys from the hood. Like they just like drink, smoke, and curse and stuff.

Jasmine witnessed negative models of African-Americans due to the city in which she resides. This has not made her dislike Blacks; this has made her wish to be something different. She did mention that she is aware of positive Blacks, but those are not the individuals who are being portrayed in the media. On the other hand, Jayla, also witnessed negative models of African-Americans, but still feels honored to be an African-American. Once again, age may have an effect on this participant’s response. This brings to light parent efforts to consistently portray images and examples of positive Black role models.

The children appeared to feel the same about Caucasians. They think that majority of White people are fine but, they “do not care” for the White people that treat Blacks unfairly or wrong. For example, Jayla stated:

I personally wouldn’t call myself racist but just like everyone, there are some White people that I don’t like and there are some White people that I do like. I feel that even though Blacks are succeeding more, we still get judge, we’re either a thug, stuck on drugs, don’t have a father so that mean we really not going to be anything. I still feel that Whites believe that we are not capable of succeeding, so in that case they still tend to down grade us.
Jasmine and Jayla both seemed to share this same opinion about White people. Eugene and Mariah also shared the same feeling about White people. Eugene stated, “I thought they were good past the time of slavery. I don’t think they were good back then.” Overall, the children did not seem to dislike Caucasians, but they were aware of negative things that have been done in the past to Blacks by Whites. Some of the children pointed out that some of those things are still occurring today and they do not particularly care for those actions of White people who still carry on those types of behaviors.

*Image Management*

Hair is presented in society as a form of beauty. Certain hair types were made more acceptable in society than others such as the focus on long, silky hair. Hair of a courser texture is not represented as beautiful by society as a whole. Some African-Americans try to explain the importance of accepting their own hair as being beautiful. There is still a larger emphasis on longer, straight, silky hair which has an impact on African-Americans because this is not the type of hair majority of them have. In this study, it has negatively impacted the children’s self-esteem.

Three children commented on issues concerning image management in their attempt to find out who they are and where they belong in society (Carter-Black, 2002). As mentioned earlier, concerns about hair was a major issue that three children expressed. In this particular case, African-American children do not prefer to have their texture hair. Lauren stated that Jasmine complained about her hair all the time and wished she had “better hair.” Lauren said that Jasmine wanted her hair to be
long and silky like her Puerto Rican cousins. Similarly, Eugene and Mariah both mentioned how they wished that they had straight hair opposed to curly hair. These three children seemed to think that straight, silky hair was more acceptable or attractive than the type of hair they currently possessed. In addition to hair concerns, with the exception of Mariah, the other children expressed comfort with their identity as African-Americans. Eugene mentioned that he was fine with being an African-American. Mariah was fine with being an African-American, but she preferred for her family to be brown like her. Jayla had the highest level of self-esteem for being an African-American. She stated,

“...I feel that it’s an honor to be an African-American. I feel this way because we are now able to freely come and go as we please; we are now able to have decent job with reasonable pay without (the Whites) telling us what we can and can’t do. And we now have this opportunity because of the different people who fought for us in the past.”

As suggested by Treutler & Epkins, (2003), identity formation, as for Jayla, tends to strengthen during adolescence. Jayla is the oldest of the four children; therefore she has greater maturity and has had more time to develop her personal identity. Jasmine was the child who did not care to be an African-American. She stated that she preferred to be something else. When asked why, she responded:

“Well sometimes well I kinda well personally I just don’t see a lot of Blacks on television like models and all that and I just like sometime wonder what I would look like if I was maybe Latino or Asian or
White. Maybe like one day, I can like bleach my skin or something.

Just try something new.”

In her case, she feels as though she had not seen enough representation of African-Americans in the media. Therefore, she preferred to look more like something she saw more frequently that was represented as beautiful in the media. Jayla was the only one who did not prefer to be another race because she loved her race and was proud to be an African-American.

Racial awareness is affected by many different factors. This once again refers back to Brofenbrenner (1979). Outside factors influence a child’s development. As mentioned by Simon (1996), transracially adopted children were able to identify themselves accurately. The identity issues for all four children were race-related because their ideas were constructed by acceptance. Acceptance was determined in these children’s cases by societal views and family resemblance. The children wanted their image to favor those of their family members and peers or by what society made known as “beautiful” through media portrayals. These children had minor negative feelings toward another race. Outside of historical views on racism referring and current racism that is still occurring, the adoptees have a positive outlook on races outside of their own. These feelings have no impact on the children’s feelings about themselves or their adopted family.

Summary

The adoptive mothers were the most important factor concerning the child’s identity development and racial awareness. The relationships between both adopted
mother and adopted child were positive. In order to create an effective living environment, the mother’s scrutinized all of their child’s social interactions. Overall, it was the mother’s decisions that helped their child better understand his/her stance racially.

The classification process for transracially adopted African-Americans differs from the conventions seen in inracially adopted African-Americans. Although the mother’s reasoning for adoption varied among the two groups, it did not have an effect on the approaches they used to help their child advance within their identity. Racial awareness starts with the parenting techniques exhibited by the mothers. The range of social dealings the mother allows, greatly impacts how quickly the child recognizes their racial character.

The child’s residency, educational upbringing, extra-curricular activities, and the influence of media, are all key factors showcasing how the child begins to learn and accept their ethnicity. Although the mothers can typically control said issues, what was most difficult for mothers to manipulate were the child’s chosen peers. One mother did try to have some control over her sons’ friend selection involving him with people of similar racial descent; however this did not work in the mother’s favor for various reasons.

From an ecological perspective, each of the adoptee’s mother’s culture, Caucasian or African-American, influenced the child’s racial awareness. The amount of race work these mothers used to help their child develop their racial identity was based the amount of need of racial awareness they felt their child required. The
transracially adopted children’s’ mothers’ were White, and they lived in a predominately White neighborhood. All of their family members were White. Therefore, those children were constantly surrounded by a race unlike their own. The inracially adopted children were Black and they lived in a predominately Black community. The neighborhood or family the adopted child co-existed in influenced the amount of race work each mother did. In their case, they were constantly surrounded by people of their own race which had the possibility of allowing them to develop their racial identity outside of their mother’s race work. The amount of race work a mother did also depended on the importance of their child gaining a racial identity was to them. The environments in which these parents resided are the same one’s their child had to interact in. Whatever happens in the child’s environment has an effect on them. When those environments were affected by outside factors, it had an influence on the children’s identity development. However, majority of the child’s environment was controlled by the mother.

As Barth et al., (1999) suggested, parents responded to and prepared children for living in a racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse society. The mothers used different strategies to help their child develop their racial identity, some more than others. The mothers used the approaches they felt would most adequately reflect a positive outcome for their specific child. The children took this awareness and applied it to themselves to help them relate to their particular race. The African-American mothers were quicker to promote African-Americans through the use of examples, whereas the Caucasian mothers found it best to teach African-American
culture utilizing readings, pictures, discussions, and interactions with Blacks. Black mothers were less likely to use that similar approach as opposed to White mothers, because their child had already been exposed to African-American Culture. All of these strategies in some form helped to expand the adoptees’ cultural awareness.

All four adoptees had an understanding of their racial awareness. The two intracially adopted children differed on the self-acceptance levels. One of the daughters was proud to be Black and had no wishes of being anything different. The other, however, wished to be another race based solely on the depictions in the media. In addition to the fallacies of the media, her social environment greatly hindered her personal views. What was most odd in the juxtaposition of the two girls was that they lived in similar settings. Thus, another factor must be placing an influence on one of these children that is not affecting the other. Age may be that factor and or the relationship with parents. This was a determinant mentioned by Erickson (1968) suggesting that adolescence is a time when children begin to think about who they are. The older child may have identified who she was and has accepted it. She also has a very strong relationship with her mother mentioning that her mother is a role model. The younger adoptee may still be in the process of developing that identity and building a better relationship with her parent.

The transracially adopted children were satisfied with being Black. As mentioned above, they are not yet in the adolescence age range where they are still trying to figure out who they are and where they will be socially accepted. They were now comfortable with performing and engaging in activities or tasks that would
normally be accepted in their culture when they reach the age where they understand those differences. (Cherney & Cardon, 1994; Grape & McRoy, 1999). According to McRoy and Zurcher (1983), the quality of parenting was deemed more important for child outcomes rather than the race of the child and the adoptive family. In this study, race and the quality of parenting played a role in the development of the child’s racial identity development.

All of these factors played a role in children developing not only their general identity but also their racial identity. Different tools and strategies were used to promote racial identity. How these children perceived this information will determine how they identify their racial identity. Vonk (2001) described three cultural competencies, (a) racial awareness, (b) multicultural planning and (c) survival skills. All three competencies were revealed as themes in this study which were the basis to a trans-racially adopted child developing a racial identity. Overall, the adoptees in this study have basic self-concept and awareness of their culture, but due to their age, they are still in a process of developing their personal identity.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Children that are adopted outside of their racial background may struggle to develop their racial identity (Carter-Black, 2002; Chimezie, 1975; Grape & McRoy, 1999). African-Americans that are adopted by White parent(s) may be at a disadvantage when compared to African-American parent(s) who share the same race background with their child. A child’s development of any kind has multiple factors that influence their growth. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to investigate how parents help their adopted child develop racial identity/awareness and how that child perceives and embraces this information. This study examined the purpose and impact of adopting, the parent quality relationship, education level, resident location impact, discrimination, self-esteem, and mother as influence. In addition, this study also examined outside influences placed on the adoptees’ development. Race work done by parents was also investigated. Finally, the cultural awareness/understanding of the child was reviewed in correlation to the parents’ responses in order to determine whether children that are transracially adopted are able to understand and be aware of their own racial identity/background and their feelings about their culture.

Purpose and Impact of Adopting

This study revealed that all of these adoptions have impacted the lives of mothers and children in a positive way. The two mothers that adopted transracially did adopt their child because they were aware that African-American children were left in foster care the longest (Hogan & Siu, 1988). Hogan and Siu (1988) stated that
Caucasians adopt African-Americans to save them from lingering in the system. Both of the African-American mothers mentioned that they adopted solely because they wanted children. Adoption has had different impacts on the families varying with each adoption situation. There were no negative impacts necessarily regarding issues of race. Race was only a factor when determining the parents’ will to adopt. Another influence, geography, showed that the adoption location heightened the chances of parents receiving an African-American child.

Interestingly, both White mother’s reason for choosing to adopt were motivated by their desire to provide a home for a vulnerable child who may not have had access to a healthy home environment. Whereas these parents chose to adopt for humanitarian reasons, all mothers chose to adopt to fulfill their need of wanting a child or an additional child. Although, the motives for adopting a child varied, each mother self-benefited from their decision to adopt.

Mothers’ Control

The mothers played a major role in how the children developed their racial identity and gained racial awareness. The mothers in this study had control over what and with whom their child came in contact. How the mothers helped their child develop racial identity depended on that particular mother and what strategies she wanted to use to aid in that development. This intentional effort described in this study as race work describes the strategies these adoptive parents chose to help their child develop their racial identity.
Race Work

Race work emerged as a critical feature of the work involved in transracial adoptions discovered in this study. As described by Hochschild (1989), race work is a strategy used to promote racial awareness and coping strategies growing up in society. It is unpaid family work (reproductive labor) that some parents perform in addition to their employment which is known as productive labor (Peter, 2006). In some cases, families constructed racial awareness in the context of family work. As mentioned earlier, the children’s racial identity and cultural awareness were developed by different strategies and tools the mothers used to help their child identify with their own race. The strategies differed depending on the mothers’ race similarity and differences they had with their children and what they felt was important for their child to learn. The mothers’ strategies additionally varied between the two races. The father support that was mentioned by all of the mothers was very similar to the strategies used by mothers.

The strategies that the mothers chose to use to help develop their child’s racial awareness depended on how important they felt about their child gaining a racial identity. The African-American mothers did feel it was important, especially since they were African-American themselves. However, they did not put as much emphasis on strategies and tools to help their child gain a racial identity. They assumed that by being Black that their child would automatically be aware of his/her racial identity. They did, however, try to promote and make their child aware of successful African-Americans. They did this in order to help their child develop high
self-esteem about being an African-American. These mothers wanted their child to accept the fact that they are Black and to be proud of it.

The adoptive mothers’ approaches in aiding their child’s awareness of their cultural identity were similar, but there were some different approaches these mothers took in order to teach their specific child. The strategies that the Caucasian parents used to help their child develop their racial identity were different from each other. One of the parents believed that it was very important for her child to be culturally aware. The other parent felt that it was important, but from her response, she did not voluntarily aid in the development of her child’s racial identity development. This mother felt that she would address any racial concerns with her child as the child brought them to her attention. But, the mother expressed that her reasoning for not addressing these issues was because she felt her daughter was not at an age where she could gain a full understanding of her racial identity. Therefore, this mother’s approach to helping her child develop a racial identity was by providing her with clarification of uncertainties as they arose and the child brought them to her attention. She also provided her with future resources for when the child was able to understand and retain that information.

The other Caucasian mother used different strategies and approaches with helping her child develop racial identity. But then again, as mentioned earlier, she also felt that it was very important for her child to gain a racial identity. This mother used a number of different approaches that she felt would aid in his development
from the sports he participated in to the people she would bring into his life. Her strategies were the most directly race-related, more than any other mother.

Additionally, race work worked two-ways between the mother and child in one particular dyad. The mother explained how she felt that this adoption was educational for her. In order to educate her child about her race, she was educating herself sequentially to provide her daughter with accurate information. In this instance, the daughter is helping her mother in undertaking race work. Due to her lack of knowledge about her culture and her mother’s willingness to inform her, the mother was being educated about not only her daughter’s race but, also her race in relation to her daughter’s. The race work performed in this particular case would be educational learning from the mother to the child and vice versa.

Being that the mothers were the only other person interviewed in this study in addition to the child, they were identified as the main person in the child’s life that used race work. Teachers and others in the child’s community that they came in contact with may also be using race work for the child too. How they are using race work is very important to learn. Also, the significance of race work to these individuals will determine how often they are completing race work, if done at all. Those persons may not be aware of race work and it’s effect on a child’s development. Here again, if the teacher or others do decide to do race work, depending on what method or approach they take may in turn be a two-way form of race work between them and the child. There were no mothers that mentioned any community support groups that may assist adopted African American children in
developing racial awareness. One parent did mention a support group that she and her child went to help cope with their adoption situation. Therefore, mothers and potentially fathers are left with the responsibility of conducting race work in their families without much direction. This does not mean that mothers are the only individuals that perform race work; there was just limited acknowledgment for other’s that do.

Not having an actual father interview may not have allowed for understanding of how fathers are involved in undertaking race work. From what was presented by the mothers, the father used little race work. There may have been times when the mother was unaware of a father’s performance of race work with children. Having the father’s perspective would be crucial to this study. It would have been beneficial to see how someone else in the child’s immediate environment, other than the mother, played a role in racial identity development of the children.

The differences in the approaches taken by these two races had an effect on the child’s racial awareness. There was a link between the mother’s approach (race work) and the child’s racial awareness. The different approaches taken reflected in the children’s response to their understanding of their cultural awareness. The mothers who used strategies to promote their child’s racial identity development children were the most comfortable with being an African-American in their family. For the mother who chose not to elaborate on the ethnic difference unless brought to her attention by her child, this child appeared the most uncomfortable in her family.
Contrary to Ogbu (1981), there were different parenting techniques that the two different races used to help their child develop their racial identity.

**Parent-Child Relationship**

The study revealed that all of the mothers felt that they had a good relationship with their child (Affleck & Steed, 2001). From the children’s responses, this was evident. There was only one child that wished her parents looked like her. She reported a good relationship with her family, but does not feel as though she fits in physically. This can impact a child’s life and the development of racial identity. Transracially adopted children were faced with physical uncertainties such as physical traits that were unlike their adopted parents (Treutler & Epkins, 2003). Transracially adoptees did not want to embrace their culture because it was not evident in the immediate family.

**Education Level**

This study revealed that the amount of education the mothers completed seemed to have an influence on the way in which they went about helping their child develop a racial identity. This also varied between the two race groups. The Caucasian mothers had more education than the African-American mothers. The Caucasian spouses, additionally, had completed more years of education than the African-American fathers. Therefore, the approach taken and/or the strategies used to help their child develop a racial identity seemed to compare to the amount of education that the child’s parent had completed. This had an effect on the concepts the children had about their racial identity.
Neighborhood Influences

This study showed that the environment in which the families resided also played a role in the development of the child. The transracially adopted children resided in a predominantly White community. Therefore, those children were not exposed to many African-Americans. The inracially adopted children both resided in a predominantly Black neighborhood. So, not only were their adoptive parents Black, but they saw Black people on a daily basis in their community. This could have influenced the children’s racial identity development. As Carter-Black (2002) and Hollingsworth (1999) mentioned, a Black Child’s social environment must provide knowledge and acceptance of their cultural heritage. They can develop their racial awareness by watching and interacting with African-Americans, which in turns leads to development and awareness of their racial identity.

Discrimination

Transracially adopted children may have to undergo discrimination within their own family, in addition to outsiders looking in. This can also have an effect on them learning or wanting to learn about their culture. The inracially adopted children’s’ family members were accepting to them being a part of their family. The transracially adopted children both had at least one member of their family that did not accept them at one point based solely on race. This also can have a major effect on a child developing their racial identity. If the child is being discriminated against within their own family, they may have a harder time accepting themselves; therefore, they may have a harder time developing a positive race identity. Chimezie’s (1975)
mentioned how African-American children adopted by Caucasian families would have to face discrimination within their own family. This study supported this finding.

**Self-Esteem**

The self-esteem level for transracially adopted children was related to the lack of information that was provided by the family. One of the inracially adopted participants was an adolescent facing self-esteem issues regarding image acceptance by society. She is still in the developmental stage of identity development (Erickson, 1968). The transracially adopted children had issues with their image as far as race was concerned. They preferred their physical appearance to favor those of Caucasians, similar to what they saw in family and peers. They wished to fit in, therefore, being of another racial background from their family and peers may influence their self-esteem and racial identity.

**Child Perception**

In this study, all of the children were aware of their race identity. The children’s understanding was based on outside factors. How the children perceived themselves and their race was influenced by what they came in contact with as far as school, peers, media, environment, and family. As suggested by Brofenbrenner (1979), ecological theoretical framework, a child’s development is affected by four systems. The influences placed on the adoptee’s development fell into the categories that Brofenbrenner suggested such as the microsystem; the family in which the child
resides, the mesosystem, the relationship between the child’s school and the child’s family and the exosystem which is the environment that the child resides. (1979).

As Simon’s (1996) identified, all the children in this study acknowledged their race identity, but due to different influences each of the children came in contact with, some faced feelings of dissimilarities. How the children felt about themselves and others of their race all derived from what they were exposed to, interacted with, or came in contact with. If the parent that does not provide thing access to their racial culture, a transracially adopted child has the possibility of facing feelings of difference. They will want to embrace what they see and what is more evident in their lives, which was revealed in this study. On the other hand, this study identified that if the transracially adopted children has had different exposures related to their race, they are more likely to be accepting of the fact that they are racially different from their parents. As for inracially adopted children, they seem to feel comfortable with being with their families. Cherny and Cardon (1994) found that without having developed an identity, they feel a lack of adaptation, which was discovered in this study. They face identity issues as far as what is accepted in media and portrayed as beautiful in society which is normal for adolescents.

Conclusion

Research regarding African-American transracial adoptees and how they develop their racial identity by the Caucasian adoptive parents has had conflicting results (Chimezie, 1975; Derdeyn et al., 2005; Hollingsworth, 1999). Some of those studies showed that African-Americans adoptees were able to gain an understanding
of their racial identity; others say that there is no way for an African-American child to develop a racial identity from a Caucasian family. The results of this study revealed that African-American transracial adoptees were able to identify themselves as an African-American, but the child’s environment was key to their racial awareness.

This research also suggested that a mother plays the largest role in the child’s’ racial identity development. Overall, she is the control factor in the child’s life. The outside influences that the children come in contact with are mainly to the mother’s discrepancy. In contrast to other studies showing that one cannot generalize a difference in parenting styles between two races, this study also revealed that there is a difference between how African-American adoptive mothers help her inracially adopted African-American children develop a racial identity in comparison to how Caucasian adoptive mother help their transracially adopted African-American child develop his/her racial identity (Ogbu, 1981). Those differences affect how those children perceive themselves and their culture. To conclude, the mothers that did implement African-American awareness for their child’s lives, their adopted child was comfortable in their family and with their race. In contrast, the mother who chose not to perform race work had a child who felt the most uncomfortable in her family.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. The first restraint was the location in which the families resided. The transracially adopted participants resided
in a predominantly White neighborhood. The inracially adopted participants resided in a predominantly Black neighborhood. Since a child’s environment plays a major role on their development, the people residing in these neighborhoods could have an effect on the adoptees’ racial development. It would be interesting to see the Black parent’s amount of race work used, if these adoptive families lived in different residential neighborhoods or if all of the participants lived in the same area.

Second, the age of the children varied. Two children were already adolescents and engaged in trying to find out who they are and how they belong in society. The other two children are younger and their parents still have a major effect on the development of their identity. Therefore, these children are at an age where they closely identify with what their parents as opposed to the older children that are beginning, if not yet done so, to recognize their own likes and dislikes and what they prefer to identify with and as.

Third, three parents listened during their adopted child’s interview. The parents asked if they could listen to the interview and to ensure their level of comfort, I agreed. The parents did not respond at anytime during their child’s interview, but it may have made the child feel uncomfortable with telling the truth, giving negative responses, and/or giving more in-depth answers. Another limitation to this study would be not having a father interview. The father support mentioned was second hand information provided by the mothers. More in-depth answers on how (if) they help their children develop a racial identity would be beneficial to this study. Additionally, self-identification of class may have been inaccurate since participants self-identified their socioeconomic status. This income identification may have
been important to more accurately assess given that adoptions are expensive and raising a child as well as providing him/her with resources requires parental income. Finally, the willingness to participate in this study varied thus restricting the amount of information some of the participants revealed.

Implications for Future Research

This study has shown that a child being transracially adopted can have an effect on his/her racial identity and awareness. In order to understand how outside factors have influenced their child’s racial awareness it would be best to have qualitative interviews with other members with whom the child comes in contact. Using this method will increase understanding of the effect these individuals place on this child’s life and development.

Another possible approach to enhance this study would be to observe all of the children in their environment. If the children are young, it would be better to observe and interact with them. As seen in this study, I gained more information from one of the participants from a personal relationship we had prior to the actual interview. He was more open to asking questions and providing information about his racial identity. Therefore, observing the children and interacting with them may allow for more information to emerge.

Finally, the next step in understanding transracially adopted children contexts may be to examine those families where children are living in a predominantly Black community. If these children are residing in an all Black community, the development of their racial identity may vary from the transracially adopted children living in a predominately White community used for this study.
REFERENCES


Treutler, C. M., & Epkins, C. C. (2003). Are discrepancies among child, mother, and father reports on children’s behavior related to parents’ psychological


APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Racial Identity of Interracial Adoptees: A Comparative Study
of Adoptees in Caucasian Families and African-American Families

Porsche Buckner

Semi-structured Protocol for Mothers who have Adopted Children, Transracial Adopters (TA) and Within Race Adopters

1. To begin I will be asking you to provide basic background information about your self and your child.

Demographic Data

Age:
Race:
Sex:
Marital Status:
Occupation:
Education Level (highest level of completion):
SES:

Child

Age:
Race:
Sex:
Education level (highest level of completion):
2. *I am conducting a study how children develop their racial identity. I would like to ask you a few questions about your adoption experience. I would also like to discuss ways in which you help your child to understand his/her race and cultural identity. The following questions will aid me in understanding these issues.* Please share with me your experience of adoption.

- If not addressed in narrative, probe:
  
  What made you decide that you wanted to adopt?

- If adopted child outside of race, what made you decide that you wanted to adopt outside of your race?; Why did you choose this particular race to adopt?

- How has adopting this child impacted your life? Family?

- What are the benefits and/or complications associated with adopting a child?

- What are the benefits and/or complications associated with adopting outside of your race? (TA)

- Outside reactions and influences on adoption: How would you describe the reactions of others such as your friends, peers/co-workers, and family members?; Any race-related comments/opinions expressed (TA)?

3. Child and Family Identity: Please tell me about your child’s sense of him/herself in terms of race identity? In terms of family identity (i.e., identifying him/herself as a family member with you as parents?)

If not addressed in narrative on identity development, probe:
• What do you think contributes to your child’s sense of identity? Can you give me some examples?

• Does your child have an adoption story?

• What are the roles of peers, family members, etc. in your child’s identity development?

• Do you have special rituals, routines, and events in your family that promote identity development?

• How does the fact that your child is adopted influence your child’s development of identity that is true to his/her biological and cultural heritage?

• Are there specific things that you do to help your child develop a sense of identity that includes his/her biological and cultural heritage? Can you give me some examples? (i.e., events, toys, stories, etc.); How important is it that you facilitate these types of things?

• Are there specific things that you do to help your child develop a sense of identity that includes your biological and cultural heritage? How do you negotiate your cultural heritage with that of your child? Particularly regarding race (TR)?

• How do you think your child has been developing their racial identity?

• Do you and your husband both participate in helping your child develop their racial identity? If so, in what ways does your husband contribute?
Thank you for your participation in my interview. Are there any final comments or anything else you want to share regarding the adoption of your child and his/her personal and cultural identity?

Racial Identity of Interracial Adoptees: A Comparative Study of Adoptees in Caucasian Families and African-American Families

Porsche Buckner

Semi-structured Protocol for Children who Have Been Adopted

I am conducting a study how children develop their racial identity. I would like to ask you a few questions about your adoption experience and how you see yourself relating to African-Americans. The following questions will ask about your adoption experiences, identity and family experiences.

1. Tell me about your experiences as an adopted child in your family? (Probe: birth/adoption story; sense of family; role of parents; acknowledgement of birth vs. adopted family, etc.)

2. Individual and Family identity: I am interested in learning more about your personal sense of who you are. You as an individual and a member of this family. Can you tell me about this? (i.e., how do you identify yourself? How do you identify yourself as adopted (if at all); how connected do you feel to the family culture and identity of your adopted parents?
3. I am also interested in learning more about your sense of self in terms of race. How do you identify yourself in terms of your race?

4. What is African-American (Black) to you?
   a. How do you feel about African-Americans?

5. What is Caucasian (White) to you?
   a. How do you feel about Caucasians?

6. How do you feel about being an African-American? I am interested in learning more about you and your sense of family? How do you feel about being an African-American in your family? (Ask only if they identified as African-American in number three)

7. What are some similarities that you share with your family?
   a. How do you feel about those similarities?

8. What are some differences that you have with your family, if any?
   a. How do you feel about those differences?

9. Do you feel a part of your family? Why do you feel this way?

   Friends/Neighbors/Extended Family: How do your friends feel about you being adopted? About you being an African-American?

10. Can you describe your friend network to me? (Probe: When you think of your friends, do you have friends that are primarily African-American? Are you happy with the quality and number of your friendships? Has your adoption ever been an issue with your friends? Why or why not? Within your family, can you share with me experiences, stories, events or anything that you think
helps you to learn more about your race? Do you (or did you) have certain types of things (i.e., toys, books, etc. that helped you to understand your race and culture? Who are some of your role models? Why do you select them?

11. Do you see people that resemble (look like) you in your neighborhood or school?

12. Tell me about your experiences in school in terms of understanding your race and cultural background.
   (i.e., re there any lessons about African-American people at your school? If so, how do you feel about those lessons? (If older, please reflect on early childhood)

13. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your feelings regarding being adopted? Being an [African-American] within your family? Your community?

Thank you for your participation in my interview. Are there any final comments or anything else you want to share regarding what we have spoken about?
APPENDIX B: CONSENT AND ASSENT FORMS

Ohio University Consent Form

Title of Research: Racial Identity of Interracial Adoptees: A Comparative Study of Adoptees in Caucasian Families and African-American Families

Researcher: Porsche Buckner

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risk and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risk. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you. Copies of the questions that will be asked in the interview are attached and may be taken with you for further review.
Explanation of Study

I am interested in knowing if transracial adoption, adopting outside of one’s racial background, has an effect on the child’s understanding/recognition of their racial identity.

In this interview you will be asked a variety of questions about how you provide information to the child about their racial identity. You will use your best judgment when answering the questions. I ask that you be as honest as possible.

Each person interviewed will be interviewed individually for the best possible results. They should last approximately 20-30 minutes. Your participation is voluntary. If at any time during this study you wish to withdraw your participation, you are free to do so without prejudice. There will be no risk beyond everyday life and no compensation will be given. You do not have to give your name or any other private information about yourself if you do not wish to do so.

*Please refrain from providing information about any illegal activity.

Risk and Discomforts

There are not particularly any risks or discomforts anticipated based upon the research questions. Recalling the past, if there were any negative experiences, may be the cause of some discomfort. If so, the participant does not have to proceed with
that question or the interview as a whole. The interview will not continue without willingness to do so.

Benefits

This study has no benefit to the individual participants.

This study will increase understanding of child development issues related to transracial adoption.

Confidentiality and Records

The interview will be audiotaped to keep results accurate as possible. The data collected will be labeled with coded letters and corresponding numbers. Ex: Family A= Tape 1. The master key that links the name and code numbers and letter along with the tapes will be kept in a secure locker where only the primary investigator will have the key. The data may be shared with committee members only in order to process data accurately. Once research has been completed, the evidence left on the audiotapes and master list will be destroyed June, 2009.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

➢ Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU.

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact: Researcher: Porsche Buckner through email: pbuckner1@hotmail.com or phone: 708-710-7200 and Advisor: Lena Lee through email leer2@ohio.edu or phone: 740-593-2888.

If you have any question regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research and Compliance, Ohio University, 740-593-0664.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- You have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions
- Give my child permission to participate in this study
- Known risk to you have been explained to your satisfaction
- You understand Ohio University has no policy or plan to pay for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this research protocol
- You are 18 years of age or older
- Your participation in this research is given voluntarily
• You may change your mind and stop participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled

Signature______________________________________

Date_____________________

Printed Name__________________________________
Title of Research: Racial Identity of Interracial Adoptees: A Comparative Study of Adoptees in Caucasian Families and African-American Families

Researcher: Porsche Buckner

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risk and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risk. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you. Copies of the questions that will be asked in the interview are attached and may be taken with you for further review.

Explanation of Study

I am interested in knowing if transracial adoption, adopting outside of one’s racial background, has an effect on the child’s understanding/recognition of their racial identity.
In this interview you will be asked a variety of questions about how you perceive your racial identity. You will use your best judgment when answering the questions. I ask that you be as honest as possible.

Each person interviewed will be interviewed individually for the best possible results. They should last approximately 20-30 minutes. A copy of interview questions for you and your child are attached for you to review. Your participation is voluntary. If at any time during this study you wish to withdraw your participation, you are free to do so without prejudice. There will be no risk beyond everyday life and no compensation will be given. You do not have to give your name or any other private information about yourself if you do not wish to do so.

*Please refrain from providing information about any illegal activity.

**Risk and Discomforts**

There are not particularly any risks or discomforts anticipated based upon the research questions. Recalling the past, if there were any negative experiences, may be the cause of some discomfort. If so, the participant does not have to proceed with that question or the interview as a whole. The interview will not continue without willingness to do so.
Benefits

This study has no benefit to the individual participants.

This study will increase understanding of child development issues related to transracial adoption.

Confidentiality and Records

The interview will be audiotaped to keep results accurate as possible. The data collected will be labeled with coded letters and corresponding numbers. Ex: Family A= Tape 1. The master key that links the name and code numbers and letter along with the tapes will be kept in a secure locker where only the primary investigator will have the key. The data may be shared with committee members only in order to process data accurately. Once research has been completed, the evidence left on the audiotapes and master list will be destroyed June, 2009.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

- Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
- Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU.
Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact: Researcher: Porsche Buckner through email: pbuckner1@hotmail.com or phone: 708-710-7200 and Advisor: Lena Lee through email leer2@ohio.edu or phone: 740-593-2888.

If you have any question regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research and Compliance, Ohio University, 740-593-0664.

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