

Caucasian Parents' Experiences of Adopting African-American/Biracial Children:
A Phenomenological Exploration

by

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ABSTRACT

The transracial adoption of African-American and biracial children has been the subject of much criticism and debate. Many of the criticisms levied against transracial adoption rest upon concerns about Caucasian parents' motives in adopting these children and their ability to parent minority children effectively (Hollingsworth, 1999). Despite these concerns, little research has been conducted that explored the motives and experiences of parents who had chosen to adopt African-American or biracial children. The small body of literature that has explored the experience from the parents' perspective is largely outdated (e.g., Falk, 1970; Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Grow & Shapiro, 1975), defined transracial more heterogeneously (e.g., Dore, 1995; Flores de Kistler, 1995; Lazarus, Evans, Glidden, & Flaherty, 2002), or did not focus on the experiences of couples (e.g., Moosnick, 2001). Given the many changes in adoption policy and overall societal views that have taken place since this past research took place, as well as the particular challenges that African-American and biracial children face in the adoption system, more current exploration of the topic was warranted. This study uses a phenomenological methodology in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of a complex experience that has been the subject of much debate.

The sample consisted of 6 heterosexual, Caucasian married couples (12 participants) who had adopted an African-American or biracial (with at least one African-American birth parent) child. Participants had adopted within the past 5 years and their child was 2 years of age or younger when placed in their homes. A total of

four interviews were conducted with each participant (2 couple interviews and 2 individual interviews). Participants were asked to describe the process of adopting their child and what it was like to become a father/mother through transracial adoption. Five categories emerged from their experiences, including: (1) making the decision to adopt transracially, (2) my child is African-American/biracial and a member of our family, (3) we are tuned into your perception of us, (4) the impact of transracial adoption on our lives, and (5) reflecting on our experience. In addition, themes that emerged as part of these categories are reported and discussed.

Participants' descriptions of their experiences offer insight into the delicate balance that they attempt to strike between normalizing their children's experiences within their homes and recognizing the role of race in their children's and families' lives. Results indicate that participants must negotiate a new boundary between their families and outside influences as a result of the adoption, and that they are especially tuned into the perceptions of their families, friends, and the African-American community. Overall, participants were able to share how thankful they are for the chance to raise their children, and how they would not change the choices they had made. Results were situated within the existing literature and the clinical, research, and policy implications of the current study were discussed. Finally, the limitations and researcher's personal reflections on the study were included.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Families created through transracial adoption represent a small but growing population in the United States (Hansen & Simon, 2004). Although their numbers are limited, these families are surrounded by debates about the advisability of their family arrangements. The highly visible nature of these families, due to the difference in color between parents and children, elicits many questions about the state of race relations in the United States. The level of criticism which surrounds these family arrangements highlights the fact that race continues to be a volatile issue (Fogg-Davis, 2002). Their very nature as a highly visible representation of debates about race provides additional challenges to families whom are already facing a stressful transition in life.

Feminist family therapists have called for a re-evaluation of the ways in which practitioners think about and treat diverse family types (Goodrich, 2003). These diverse family types include gay and lesbian families (Halstead, 2003), step-families (Bernstein, 2003), single-parent families (Goodrich, 2003), multicultural and biracial families, and families created through adoption (Eldridge & Barrett, 2003). The challenge posed to the field of family therapy has been to better understand and respect the cultures that these families represent (Doherty, Boss, LaRossa, Schumm, & Steinmetz, 1994; Turner, Weiling, & Allen, 2004). The hope is that in developing an atmosphere of understanding and respect, family therapists will be better equipped to assist these families in the unique challenges that face them.

This research study explored Caucasian American couples' motivations for and experiences of transracially adopting an African-American or biracial child of African-

American descent. The experiences of these families were explored from the decision to adopt through finalization of the adoption. This topic is close to my heart in two very important ways. The first is my own experience of becoming a mother through the process of transracial adoption and the second is my identity as a feminist family therapist and scholar.

As a mother, I have found myself frustrated by the lack of current information on the experiences of others who have forged this path before me. It has been difficult to learn about the criticism that has been levied at my particular family arrangement, and at the same time I have craved information on how to be the best parent to my daughter, given the particular challenges that face her personally and our family as a whole. As I spoke to other families that I met who had also adopted transracially, I heard echoes of my own desires for more direction, understanding, and connection with other families who had also adopted across racial lines. Thus, part of my motivation in conducting this study was to add to the knowledge base for families like mine.

My identity as a feminist also informed my desire to conduct this study. As I read through the literature on transracial adoption, it struck me that there are many minority viewpoints that are represented in the argument of how best to care for minority children in general, and African-American/biracial children overall. Those voices include the African-American community, the families who have chosen the route of transracial adoption and have therefore transformed the racial identity of their families, and the children who are impacted by growing up in these families. Although there appears to be mostly dissent in these positions, I believed at my core that there exists a joint passion for the lives of the children involved, and that there may be room for the groups involved

to support one another. In order to get to that place, a logical first step appeared to be exploring the positions of those most heavily invested in the phenomenon of transracial adoption. This study represents a first step in that direction. In this study, I strive to give voice to stories that have not been heard in hopes that these stories will create more understanding about what parents experience as they form their families in a different, and many times, controversial manner.

Additionally, the field of family therapy has called for better understanding of the context and experiences of the diverse individuals and families that we treat. The families formed through transracial adoption are in the process of merging two cultures and dealing with the emotions, concerns, and joys that are part of the process. My hope is that a better understanding of these couples' experiences will result in more options for children in need of homes as well as allowing family therapists to better assist future families in preparing for transracial adoption and the specific challenges it presents for all members involved. Additionally, I hope this study may lead to the creation of interventions that are more relevant and respectful to the lives of those that we hope to assist.

Contextual Issues

Transracial adoption is "the joining of racially different parents and children together in adoptive families" (Silverman, 1993). Statistics on the number of adoptions, transracial or same race, which had taken place annually between the years of 1975-1995 were at best inconsistent and probably unreliable (Hansen & Simon, 2004). The responsibility for obtaining data on these adoptions did not fall to a federally coordinated effort; rather data were collected at the state level. Data collection that did take place did

not routinely separate transracial adoptions from same race adoptions, which limited the ability of researchers to estimate trends in transracial adoptions during this period (Hansen & Simon, 2004). Surveys that did examine the prevalence of transracial adoption during this time period found somewhat different trends. In 1987, the National Center for Health Statistics estimated that 1% of the sample they questioned were Caucasian mothers who had adopted African-American children (NCHS, 1990). The North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) surveyed adoption agencies between the years 1989-1990 and found that 22% of the African-American children placed by these agencies had been placed transracially (NACAC, 1991).

In the year 1995, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) was implemented. AFCARS requires that agencies submit information on any children covered by Title IV-B/E of the Social Security Act, which were any children who were in foster care or who were adopted after any involvement with a state agency (Hansen & Simon, 2004, p. 48). AFCARS represents an important move toward a more complete understanding of trends in adoption and in transracial adoption specifically. However, the data that are reported include only children who have been adopted through public agencies and the few private agencies who volunteer data. The majority of private agency and independent adoptions that take place are not represented in AFCARS data (Hansen & Simon, 2004). The result is that any analysis of trends in adoption is likely to either underestimate or overestimate trends that are taking place (Hansen & Simon, 2004).

Proponents of transracial adoption have voiced concern that because of the stigma associated with transracial adoption, many agencies do not accurately report on these

adoptions for fear of attracting attention from the National Association of Black Social Workers, who represent the most vocal opponents of transracial adoption (Simon, Alstein, & Melli 1994). This concern may be alleviated by the Adoption Incentive Program, an outgrowth of the Adoption and Safe Families Act which was put into law in 1997 (Hansen & Simon, 2004). This incentive program encourages accurate reporting of adoptions by paying bonuses to states that increase the number of adoptions of children from foster care (Hansen & Simon, 2004). Hansen and Simon (2004) used AFCARS data from fiscal year 1995 to 2001 to estimate the number of transracial adoptions that took place during that time period. They defined transracial adoption as the adoption of a child of color by Caucasian parents, and collapsed distinct racial categories into one category. Through these analyses, the authors estimated that transracial adoptions overall had been increasing in the time period examined. Transracial adoptions increased from 10.8% in 1995 to 15.4% in 2001. There was however, a dip in the number of adoptions across racial lines between 1998 and 1999. The authors also found that almost 17% of the African-American children adopted in the year 2001 were adopted transracially by Caucasian parents. This meant that 2,442 African-American children adopted with the help of a state agency were adopted transracially. Although there is a growing trend in the number of children of color who are adopted transracially, AFCARS data seem to indicate that the rate of Caucasian children being adopted transracially remains more consistent, at two to four percent. There do seem to be one or two states in which the transracial adoption of Caucasian children is higher than average, but in none of these areas does the transracial adoption of Caucasian children by African-American parents seem to be the trend (Hansen & Simon, 2004).

Although growth appears to be happening in the number of transracial adoptions that have been taking place since 1995, the plight of African-American children in the child welfare system seems to have gone largely unchanged. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found children of color (African-American, Hispanic, Asian American, and Native American) accounted for 60% of the children waiting for permanent placement in the childcare system and that African-American children in particular accounted for 42% of the children awaiting adoption (2001). There is no argument between proponents and opponents of transracial adoption about whether or not African-American children in the child welfare system are at a disadvantage, only disagreement about what is the cause and cure for that disadvantage (McRoy, 1989; Simon, Alstein, & Melli, 1994).

In the overall population of adoptions that take place every year, the transracial adoption of African-American children by Caucasian parents represents a very small, but growing proportion (Hansen & Simon, 2004). Although the numbers are small, this remains an important population to study because of the serious questions that these families elicit about overall race relations in the United States, why people choose to create the families that they do, and how we can assist families who are outside of traditional arrangements in facing the challenges that they encounter daily.

Transracial adoption encompasses many different family arrangements. These families include: single parent families; families headed by heterosexual or homosexual parents; children adopted domestically and internationally; families with or without siblings (both biological and adopted); and a diversity of ethnicities represented by both parents and children. Although the experiences and challenges of all of these family

arrangements are important and meaningful, examining all of their experiences is beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, for the purposes of this study the definition of transracial adoption will refer to a specific subtype of this more global definition and is more narrowly defined as the domestic adoption of an African-American or biracial infant or toddler by a heterosexual married couple in which both partners are Caucasian.

The journey to adoption itself presents a family with numerous challenges to work through and decisions to make. Some of the challenges include the cost involved with the adoption process (Alexander & Curtis, 1996), family and societal views about adoption (Alexander & Curtis, 1996), resolving emotional grief concerning any infertility diagnoses that may be present (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003), and intrusive questions, interviews, and visits to determine suitability to parent (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003).

Transracial adoption compounds this experience by adding more complexities and questions. Transracial adoption, particularly the adoption of African-American and biracial children by Caucasian parents, has been the subject of much controversy (Hollingsworth, 1999). The ability of Caucasian parents to assist African-American or biracial children in developing a positive racial identity, learning how to deal with racism and oppression, and developing the skills, perspectives, understanding, and style necessary to fit into, understand and support the African-American community has been questioned and sometimes heavily criticized (Hollingsworth, 1999). Critics of transracial adoption have called these families “second best” in comparison to families of similar racial background (Chimezie, 1975, p.296; Hayes, 1995). In addition, most proponents of transracial adoption state that same race placements are the best option for all children,

when possible, and transracial adoption should only be considered as an option when a minority family is not readily available (Simon & Alstein, 2002).

The National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) has been the most vocal group in their opposition of transracial adoption. At a 1972 meeting, just one year after the peak year for transracial adoptions of African-American children in the United States, the organization put forth this resolution,

Black children belong physically and psychologically and culturally in black families where they can receive the total sense of themselves and develop a sound projection of their future. Only a black family can transmit the emotional and sensitive subtleties of perceptions and reactions essential for a black child's survival in a racist society. Human beings are products of their environment and develop their sense of values, attitudes, and self concept within their own family structures. Black children in white families are cut off from the healthy development of themselves as black people. (National Association of Black Social Workers, 1972, pp. 2-3)

In 1973, the year following this strong statement against transracial adoption, there were only half as many transracial adoptions of African-American children as there were in 1971 (Kennedy, 2003). The NABSW has softened its position somewhat, but continues to support its position that transracial adoptions should only take place under the strictest of conditions. "Transracial adoption of an African-American child should only be considered after documented evidence of unsuccessful same race placements has been reviewed and supported by appropriate representatives of the African-American community" (NABSW, 1994, p. 4).

Although it seems that this type of social pressure has impacted the number of transracial adoptions that have taken place since 1972, it is difficult to determine what type of impact these statements have had on the population of parents who make the decision to adopt transracially. Only one research study could be located that specifically addressed the impact of these statements for adoptive parents. Simon & Alstein (2002)

conducted a longitudinal study of parents who had adopted transracially beginning in 1972, they found that 80% of their sample felt bothered by the statement made by the NABSW, and that although it did not impact their decision to follow through with the adoption, a small percentage reported that it influenced their decisions about future adoptions. Although there are several memoirs written by parents who have adopted transracially (e.g., Bates, 1993; Rush, 2000; Wolff, 2000), none of them directly addressed the opinions of the NABSW. However, many of the authors commented on issues that the NABSW has brought to the foreground, such as a Caucasian parents' ability to assist an African-American child with developing and understanding their own racial identity (Wolff, 2000).

In addition to questioning the abilities of these parents to appropriately raise African-American or biracial children, their motives have also come under scrutiny. Both supporters and critics of transracial adoption question the motivations that drive parents to adopt across racial lines (Kennedy, 2003). The most popular speculation about motivations for transracial adoption relies on the theory of supply and demand. The number of transracial adoptions that took place per year began to rise in the 1960s and 1970s. The peak year for transracial adoption of African-American children was 1971, when 2,574 adoptions took place (Kennedy, 2003). This surge coincides with a shortage of Caucasian infants and toddlers available for adoption due to increased use of contraceptives, changes in abortion laws, and more accepting attitudes toward single parenting (McRoy & Zurcher, 1983). When faced with longer wait times or the possibility of not parenting at all, it is thought that these parents "compromise" and are willing to adopt a minority child (Bradley & Hawkins-Leon, 2002).

In some private agencies, couples may have reduced fees when adopting a non-Caucasian child. In the agencies that use a variable fee structure, the fees are set lowest for adoption of African-American and biracial (African-American/Caucasian) children (e.g., www.adoptadvisory.com; www.adoptionaccess.com; www.adoptionsbygladney.com). Although these adjusted fees are rationalized by agencies as necessary to encourage placement of “hard to place” children, it is unclear if these financial differences play a role in the decision to adopt transracially. In reviewing the research, I could not find anything that directly addressed financial considerations in the decision to adopt transracially.

Defining who is considered African-American or biracial is particularly pivotal to this discussion. The term biracial refers to anyone who has “genetic parents belonging to two different races” (Steinberg & Hall, 2000). For the purposes of this study, the term biracial will refer to individuals who have one genetic parent who is African-American and one genetic parent who belongs to a different race. In the United States, lay and research language commonly used the term “mulatto” to describe biracial individuals of partial African-American ancestry. However, this term has many negative connotations and is considered especially offensive to many. Although usage of this word has reemerged among biracial individuals themselves (Steinberg & Hall, 2000), I believe that language is a particularly powerful tool and should be used with extreme caution. I believe that although some words are “taken back” by a portion of the population in order to reduce the power that the word originally had, these words should not automatically be included in everyone’s vocabulary. Therefore, the term “mulatto” will not be used

further in this study. When describing research where this was the primary term used, the term biracial individuals will be used instead.

The decision to include not only couples who have adopted African-American children, but also parents who have adopted biracial children stems from the recognition that biracial individuals will be defined by society as African-American and will therefore be treated as such (Chimzie, 1975; Wright, 1998).

Previous Research

A review of the research literature suggests that little is known about the actual experiences of transracial adoptive parents throughout the process to adopt. In this study, the adoption process includes parents' motivations to adopt, the impact of social messages about transracial adoption on the decision to adopt, preparations for the adoption, and the reactions of family members, friends, and acquaintances.

Literature exploring transracial adoption has focused primarily on policy issues related to whether or not transracial adoption is a viable option for African-American and biracial children of African descent (e.g., Bradley & Hawkins, 2002; Courtney, 1997; Funderberg, 1998; McRoy, 1989). Although some of this literature points to studies that have been conducted as support for their argument, most of this literature consists of position pieces rather than research studies. A limited number of research studies of the transracial adoption of African-American children could be located. The majority of research studies conducted have focused on measuring outcomes for children adopted transracially. Specifically, researchers have explored children's and adolescent's adjustment (Burrow, Tubman, & Finley, 2004; Feigelman, 2000; Feigelman & Silverman, 1984; Vroegh, 1997; Weinberg, Waldman, van Dulmen, & Scarr, 2004);

educational performance (Brooks & Barth, 1999; Burrow et al., 2004; Rosenthal, Groze, Curiel, & Westcott, 1991; Weinberg et al., 2004); mental health (Bagley, 1993; Burrow et al., 2004); self esteem (Feigelman & Silverman, 1984; McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale, & Anderson, 1982; Vroegh, 1997); and perceptions of family relationships (Burrow et al., 2004; Rosenthal, Groze, Curiel, & Westcott, 1991; Simon & Alstein, 2002).

Additionally, research has focused on assessing the development of racial identity in children (DeBerry, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1996; McRoy et al., 1982; Simon & Alstein, 2002), adolescents (Vroegh, 1997), and adults (Baden, 2002; Brooks & Barth, 1999) who were adopted transracially.

More recently, a few studies have begun to examine positive family functioning characteristics of special needs adoptive families. Zabrieskie and Freeman (2004) explored this concept and included families who had adopted transracially, which many times are referred to as special needs adoptive placements in the adoption community. Their sample was a sub-sample from a larger study and consisted solely of parents who had transracially adopted African-American/biracial children. Another very recent strand of research in transracial adoption has been the development and testing of a cultural competence training program for parents considering transracial adoption (Vonk & Angaran, 2001; Vonk & Angaran, 2003). This research is encouraging, however; both studies examined very specific aspects of transracial parenting and the development of a training program. The current study explored the experience of becoming transracially adoptive parents, rather than the experience of parenting, although the participants did reflect on their experience of parenting transracially, as well. In addition, the methodology employed for the current study allowed participants to define the important

aspects of the experience for themselves, rather than limiting exploration to one particular aspect of the experience.

A large number of the studies that have conducted research on parents' experiences of transracial adoption are dated (Falk, 1970; Feigelman & Silverman, 1984; Grow & Shapiro, 1975; McRoy, et al., 1982; Priddy & Kirgan, 1971; Simon & Alstein, 1977) and given the many changes in adoption policy and overall societal views, more current exploration of this topic is warranted. In more recent studies of transracially adoptive parents, the researchers defined transracial adoption more heterogeneously, including parents who had adopted Asian and Latino children, in addition to parents who had adopted African-American or biracial children (Dore, 1995; de Kistler, 1995; Lazarus, Evans, Glidden, & Flaherty, 2002; Moosnick, 2001; Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003). Additionally, some of these studies examined parents who had adopted a child with a developmental disability (Lazarus et al., 2002; Rosenthal et al., 1991), which arguably changes the experience of parenting dramatically. Although conclusions are drawn about the views and experiences of parents, some studies examined only mothers' experiences (Moosnick, 2001), did not have complete study information on the fathers (Lazarus et al., 2002) or did not specify who was interviewed, but instead referred generically to parents (Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003). Some studies used questionnaires, rather than open-ended interviews to elicit information from participants (de Kistler, 1995), thereby limiting the scope and depth of information that could be elicited.

No recent research study could be located that phenomenologically explored the experiences of both mothers and fathers who had specifically participated in the

transracial adoption of an African-American or biracial child. Previous studies have not focused exclusively on this population and the specific experiences that they bring with them. The current study adds to the current literature by exploring the experiences of Caucasian mothers and fathers who specifically adopted African-American or biracial children. The nature of the open ended interviews allowed for the discussion of a wide range of issues regarding the participants' experiences and motivations in adopting.

Sample Considerations

In this research project, I explored the experiences of heterosexual mothers and fathers during the transracial adoption process (the time period from contemplating adoption through finalization of the adoption). However, participants expanded their discussion to include their current experiences as transracially adoptive parents. As discussed earlier, parents who adopt transracially are diverse on a number of factors. I made the decision to limit some of these differences in order to narrow the focus of the study and examine the experiences of the given population at a deeper level than has previously been done. Therefore, in determining which parents would be included, a number of demographic characteristics were considered.

In the United States, transracial adoptions have typically included Caucasian Americans of European descent parenting minority children of various ethnic backgrounds, who have been born both in the United States or Internationally (Vonk & Angaran, 2001). These Caucasian parents experience life in the United States in a significantly different manner than minority parents due to white privilege and the pigmentocracy that continues to exist in our society. "A pigmentocracy is a group-based social hierarchy based largely on human skin color, spanning across ethnic, religious,

gender, and socio-economic groups” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/pigmentocracy>). The impact of skin color, as well as racial differences, has been a determining factor in transracial adoptions in the past (Kennedy, 2003) and likely continues to impact individuals and families of transracial adoption (McRoy & Grape, 1999). These differences are likely to impact the experience of these parents in thinking about transracial adoption, making decisions about transracial adoption, as well as understanding and relating to the children that they parent. I would expect more experience with racism on the part of minority parents, and would therefore expect a different level of understanding from these parents toward their childrens’ and families’ experiences of racism. As stated earlier, one of the major arguments against transracial adoption is the presumed lack of experience parents have with racism and the impact that will have on their child. Because Caucasian parents are the most common participants in transracially adopted families and it is their capabilities as parents of tranracially adopted children being questioned, the scope of the current study was limited to their experiences.

Along similar lines, adoptive families are headed by both heterosexual and homosexual couples. The rights and desirability of children being adopted by gay and/or lesbian parents has been the subject of controversy (Minter, 1999). This controversy, in addition to the controversy over transracial adoption itself, places these couples in a unique, and likely more stressful position, than heterosexual couples adopting transracially. This added stress, which is born out of these couples’ own minority status and experiences of discrimination, is likely to impact the experiences and behaviors of the couples throughout the process. Therefore, because heterosexual and homosexual

parents can reasonably be expected to experience transracial adoption in significantly different ways, this study limited its scope to the experiences of heterosexual couples.

This study was limited to married couples. The majority of adoption agencies require that couples applying to adopt must be married for a minimum of one to three years (Foltz, 1999). Single parents have also historically found it more difficult to proceed with adoption (Foltz, 1999). This combined with the idea that the process of deciding to parent as well as the actual experience of co-parenting versus parenting alone is different, led me to limit the scope of the study to couples who have been married for one year or longer.

The majority of couples who apply to adopt are interested in adopting a child two years of age or younger (Pierce, 1999b). The issues that arise with the adoption of an older child require special consideration in and of themselves, and therefore I would expect that the experiences and motivations of parents who adopt older children would be significantly different than those that adopt a child under the age of two years. Therefore, I limited my study to couples who have adopted a child up to the age of two years.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative methodology in order to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon that has been the subject of much speculation and very little research. The basis of qualitative research is a constructivist philosophy, which holds that knowledge is co-constructed and cannot be understood outside of context and the personal meaning that individuals bring to it (Creswell, 1998). In an attempt to describe participants' experiences in a rich and meaningful way, the philosophical tradition of Husserlian descriptive phenomenology was followed (Husserl, 1964, 1970). I

examined participants' experiences based upon their memories of events that have already taken place. After examining the methods available to me and research conducted within these traditions, I selected Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological approach to guide my research and analysis.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Transracial Adoption

Transracial adoption in the United States has a long history, although many of the early adoptions took place “unintentionally.” The two most common situations were that the parents adopted a child that they presumed was white and found out later that the child had African-American lineage and decided to continue parenting or they knowingly adopted an African-American child with light skin and represented the child to others as white (Kennedy, 2003). One of the first documented instances of an intentional transracial adoption took place in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1948 (Kennedy, 2003). Around this same time, Pearl Buck started Welcome House, one of the first private agencies in the country to encourage transracial adoption, including but not limited to African-American-Caucasian adoptions (Herman, 2007, Kennedy, 2003).

These situations highlight the importance of how race was defined. Historically in the United States, several states ascribed to the “one-drop” rule to determine who was to be considered African-American. The “one-drop” rule defined a person as African-American if they were in any way physically or ancestrally considered to be African-American (Kennedy, 2003). This was highlighted in adoption practices by the regular use of examinations to distinguish a child’s racial heritage and the guarantee by adoption agencies that any child who was determined to be Caucasian and later determined not to be, could be returned (Nordlie & Reed, 1962). Opponents of transracial adoption also used the historical significance of the “one-drop” rule to justify the concerns about the adoption of mixed-race or biracial children. Audrey Russell addressed the National

Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) at its 1972 meeting, stating, “by immutable law, a drop of black blood has made one black for generations...and now to satisfy the whims of arrogant white America, they have suddenly become something different and are adopting the whiteness in them” (Fraser, 1972 in Hayes, 1995, p. 2-3). Chimezie (1975) stated that it would be naïve to believe that a biracial individual would not be categorized and treated as though she were African-American, that only “those who have no trace of black features such as thick lips, broad noses, and kinky hair” (p. 298) would be treated as though they are not African-American. He concluded then, that biracial individuals belonged to the African-American community and should only be adopted by African-American families.

Collecting data on transracial adoption has always been difficult due to the voluntary and inconsistent collection of such data. During the period of 1944 to 1975, data on finalized adoptions were collected across states by the Children’s Bureau and the National Center for Social Statistics. Between the years of 1975 and 1995, no data was collected at a federal level and instead the information that exists was collected by a number of different organization on a voluntary basis. None of these data distinguishes transracial adoptions from same race adoption (Hansen & Simon, 2004).

The years 1953 to 1958 represented the first nationally coordinated effort to locate homes for African-American children, named the National Urban League Foster Care and Adoption Project. The focus of this effort was to place African-American children in same race placements, although several Caucasian parents inquired about the possibility of adopting transracially (Herman, 2007). This effort was initiated because of the recognition that African-American children were underserved in the child welfare and

adoption system, resulting in more African-American children than Caucasian children entering the temporary care system and fewer finding permanent placements through adoption (Herman, 2007). It was one year after the end of this project, in 1959, that the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) stated in their *Standards for Adoption Service* that “children placed in adoptive families with similar racial characteristics, such as colour, can be more easily integrated into the average family group and community” (CWLA, 1959 in Hayes, 1995, p. 2).

Several systemic changes in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in major changes in transracial adoption. The women’s liberation movement began to reduce the stigma associated with pregnancy outside of marriage, abortion, and single parenting (Fogg-Davis, 2002). These changes in social perception, along with the widespread use of artificial birth control were accompanied by a decrease in the number of healthy Caucasian infants placed for adoption (Hollingsworth, 1998; Kennedy, 2003). The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s also paved the way for legally and socially sanctioning transracial adoption by promoting the importance of racial integration and harmony (Hayes, 1995) and addressing some of the other discriminatory practices, like bans on interracial marriage and segregation of schooling that governed the public and private lives of African-Americans (Fogg-Davis, 2002). This change in atmosphere was reflected in the publication of a revised *Standards for Adoption Service* by the CWLA, which encouraged agencies to assist couples and families on adoption across racial lines (Hayes, 1995).

Throughout the 1960s several groups continued to publicize the predicament of African-American children in the foster care system. One group of Minnesota social

workers combined efforts with a civic organization named Parents to Adopt Minority Youngsters (PAMY). By 1965, this program had facilitated twenty transracial adoptions of African-American children (Kennedy, 2003). In the 1960s the Child Welfare League reversed its longstanding opposition to transracial adoption (Smith, 1996). All of these changes resulted in a significant increase in the number of transracial adoptions of African-American children. This upswing peaked in 1971, when 2,574 African-American children were placed transracially, almost 35% of the African-American population who were adopted nationally that year (Bartholet, 1991; Kennedy, 2003)

One year later, in 1972, the NABSW issued a statement opposing the transracial placement of African-American children in Caucasian homes as a form of harm to the children, African-American families, and the African-American community as a whole (NABSW, 1972). In light of their statement, many changes in transracial adoption took place quickly. In 1973, the rate of transracial adoptions of African-American children fell to 1,091, roughly half what it had been just two years earlier (Auld, 1993). Social workers, prospective adoptive couples, and participating agencies became less vocal about their support of transracial adoption (Kennedy, 2003) or ceased transracial adoption completely for fear of criticism or backlash from the NABSW (Smith, 1996). Additionally, in the year following the NABSW's statement, the CWLA altered its *Standards for Adoption Service* back to its original statement that same race placements were preferable to transracial adoption (Hayes, 1995).

At roughly the same time, a parallel process was occurring with the transracial adoption of Native American children. This parallel process exposed some of the same processes as the opposition to the transracial adoption of African-American children. In

the late 1960s and early 1970s, Native American children were being adopted by white middle class Americans in very large numbers (Smith, 1996). Research on states with large populations of Native Americans estimate that 25% to 35% of Native American children were being removed from their homes and placed in foster care, adoptive homes, or institutions. In 1969 a survey of 16 states indicated that about 85% of the children placed in foster care were living in non-Native American homes (Kennedy, 2003).

Concern about the growing trend of removing Native American children from their homes and placing them in white homes for foster care or adoption culminated in the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 (Smith, 1996). The ICWA was predicated on three major harms that the transracial adoption of Native Americans would possibly cause. The first was the removal of Native American children from their homes without just cause. Concern about this harm was supported by the disparity in removal and placement rates between Native and white children. The second was the placement of Native American children with non-Native families, which they felt resulted in the loss of cultural identity. The third and last concern related to who had the right to make decisions about the future of Native-American children, state agencies or the tribes themselves (Kennedy, 2003).

The practical application of ICWA was that if a child resided on a reservation, then child placement decisions were made exclusively by the tribe. If a child did not reside on a reservation then the state courts and the tribal courts had concurrent jurisdiction in child placement decisions, however, tribal preferences were considered more heavily. If the state made a decision in the placement of a Native American child, the following preferences were given: “(1) a member of the child’s extended family; (2

) other member's of the [Native American] child's tribe; or (3) other [Native American] families" (ICWA in Kennedy, 2003, p. 487). The legal requirements for ICWA continue to this day. These preferences are almost identical to the preferences that the NABSW requested for the placement of African-American children in their 1972 statement, six years prior to the implementation of ICWA.

No formal rules for same race placements of any other children (Caucasian, African-American, Asian, etc.) became part of the federal law governing adoption; however, there were individual informal and formal policies that many state and private agencies followed which included the same guidelines of looking within the child's extended family, then within same race arrangements, and last looking at transracial placements (de Kistler, 1995). There is a question about whether these rules are applied equally across racial lines (e.g., a Caucasian child being placed with an African-American family for adoption), but the literature has not adequately dealt with this issue. The practice of Caucasian children being adopted transracially is rare, (Hansen & Simon, 2004); even more rare is the practice of Caucasian children being adopted by African-American parents (Smith, 1996). In fact, as late as 1977, South Carolina had a law that allowed Caucasians to adopt African-Americans, but forbade African-Americans from adopting Caucasian children (Griffith & Duby, 1991).

Although in the 1980s and early 1990s no federal policy banned transracial adoption, some states continued to have adoption guidelines and policies about race, ethnicity, and language for social service agencies to follow (Smith, 1996). Race matching policies also continued to be dominant for most entities who arranged child care and adoptions for children removed from their homes in the United States (Kennedy,

2003). During this same time frame, however, a counter trend occurred and there was growth in the number of international transracial adoptions, especially of children adopted from Asian and South American countries (Smith, 1996). The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 was passed through Congress, which made permanency planning a national priority. This act also established a subsidy to assist in the permanent placement of “children at risk,” which included children of color, children of advanced age, sibling groups, and children with handicaps (Legislative History, 1980 in Curtis, 1996).

The Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) was passed by Congress in 1994. The Act was introduced by Senator Howard Metzenbaum (Curtis, 1996) and it represented the first federal law to take a stance on the role of race in adoption proceedings. The MEPA prohibited agencies that receive federal funds from making decisions about transracial adoptions based solely upon the race of the parties involved. It did, however, allow race to remain one of many factors considered in the placement of children in foster and adoptive homes (Park & Green, 2000), but put into place sanctions for agencies that used cultural, ethnic, or racial criteria as the sole purpose for delaying or denying a child placement (Khumoetsile-Taylor, 2004). Agencies that did not comply with the MEPA were at risk of losing federal funding (Curtis, 1996). Proponents of transracial adoption felt that the qualifications in the MEPA, as well as the absence of penalties to encourage cooperation rendered the MEPA useless and many agencies continued to operate by the same race matching policies that they had before (Bradley & Hawkins-Leon, 2002).

The passage of MEPA represented a move away from prohibiting transracial adoptions. The NABSW also moderated its position on transracial adoption in 1994.

The new statement supported allowing Caucasian parents to foster or adopt African-American children if all efforts to find African-American parents for the child had been attempted and failed. Their position stated that a representative of the African-American community be the one to determine whether this criterion had been met or not (Fogg-Davis, 2002).

The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) was implemented in December of 1995. This is a mandatory system of data collection on children who were adopted through state agencies or private agencies in contract with a public child welfare agency (Hansen & Simon, 2004; Hollingsworth, 1998). AFCARS provided the first opportunity to examine trends in adoption, and specifically transracial adoption between states and over time. It also represented the first federally coordinated data collection on adoption since 1975 (Hansen & Simon, 2004).

In 1996, Congress revised the MEPA with the Inter-Ethnic Adoption Amendment (IAA). The IAA strengthened the position of the MEPA by disallowing agencies to use race as a criterion for placement at all. However, like the MEPA, the IAA only applies to those agencies that receive federal funding; those that do not receive such funding are allowed to proceed as they had before, with most using some degree of a race matching policy (Kennedy, 2003). In addition, an Adoption Assistance section was included, which allows a tax credit to families with incomes below \$75,000 per year. This credit can be used to assist with qualifying adoption-related expenses (Hollingsworth, 1998).

The Adoption and Safe Families Act (AFSA) was enacted in November of 1997. The purpose of this act was to respond to growing concern with policies and procedures that resulted in the failure to remove children from homes that presented a serious danger

to them (Pierce, 1999a). The result of this act has been to shorten the time span in which states had to hold permanency hearings and to pay a financial incentive to encourage states to move children toward adoption (Pierce, 1999a). Concerns regarding AFSA are that it results in more emphasis on adoption than on family reunification, which has particular consequences for African-American children who are overrepresented in the out-of-home childcare system (Khumoetsile-Taylor, 2004).

The transracial adoption of African-American/biracial children fell dramatically after the initial statement by the NABSW voicing their concerns about the arrangement. However, a recent analysis of AFCARS data indicates that the transracial adoption of African-American/biracial individuals is increasing once again (Hansen & Simon, 2004). This new surge of transracial adoptions is accompanied by a continued debate over the advisability of placing African-American/biracial children in Caucasian homes.

Opponents of Transracial Adoption

The opposition to transracial adoption centers around five main issues: (1) the abilities of Caucasian parents to parent African-American and biracial children (Hayes, 1993); (2) the role of transracial adoption in detracting attention from the larger issues of why so many children of color enter the system in the first place; (3) why there are so few African-American families approved for adoption; (4) concerns about the preservation of the African-American family (Hollingsworth, 1998); (5) and who should have the right to determine what is best for African-American children (Chimezie, 1975).

Opponents of transracial adoption question the ability of Caucasian parents to assist African-American/biracial children in developing a full sense of who they are as African-American/biracial individuals (Howard, Royse, & Skeryl, 1977; McRoy et al.,

1982). Critics state that the white privilege that Caucasian parents have experienced throughout their life precludes their abilities to assist their African-American/biracial children in acquiring the skills necessary to deal with the type of oppressive and systematic racism that these children will face (Chestang, 1972; Triseliotis, 1989). Patton-Amani (2002) asks whether Caucasian parents of African-American/biracial children ever question their own ideas and assumptions about race and whether they would teach their children how to deal with racism in an effective manner. Additionally, opponents report concern that children of transracial adoption will fail to develop a secure sense of identity around what it means to be an African-American/biracial individual (Chimezie, 1975; Courtney, 1997; Hollingsworth, 1998; McRoy, 1989; Smith, 1996). If this identity does not develop, concerns are raised that children of transracial adoption will lose their ability and possibly their desire to connect with the larger African-American community, which would result in losses for both the individual and the community (Hollingsworth, 2002; Park & Green, 2000). In addition, there is concern that children of transracial adoption would be rejected by the Caucasian community, leaving them with no supportive community at all (Hayes, 1993). Critics report that there is a heightened risk that transracially adopted children will internalize the racism that they experience and be ill equipped for the experience of living life as a minority person in the United States (Hollingsworth, 2002).

The humanistic or “colorblind” attitude toward transracial adoption has been heavily criticized (Hayes, 1993; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983). This perspective is based on the assumption that everyone’s role as part of the human race is more important than individual ethnic and cultural distinctions. Parents who have adopted transracially and

espouse these values tend to emphasize the similarities between all people and de-emphasize the differences (Hayes, 1993). Critics argue that, at best, this perspective represents an unacceptable ignorance about the way in which modern society functions (Khumoetsile-Taylor, 2004), and at its worst masks suppressed feelings of racism (McRoy & Zurcher, 1983). Either way, this perspective is thought to handicap children of transracial adoption because it does not prepare them for the realities of how they will be treated by the larger society (Khumoetsile-Taylor, 2004).

A second concern for opponents of transracial adoption is the role that it has played in detracting attention from larger systematically racist practices that have brought so many African-American/biracial children into the out of home childcare system and that also serve to keep them there longer than Caucasian children and children of other minority groups (Courtney, 1997). Smith (1996) points out that African-American/biracial children are often removed from the home because of issues related to poverty and neglect influenced by poverty, rather than issues related to abuse. Additionally, an increased poverty level is also linked to increased rates of sexual abuse, educational neglect, and physical abuse (Lindsey, 1991; Hollingsworth, 1998; Pelton, 1989). Given that African-American families are at a greater risk of being at or below the poverty level in this country, they are at increased risk of having their children removed from their home (McRoy & Oglesby, 1997). Hollingsworth (1998) further points out that once involved in the out of home childcare system, African-American families are not provided the same level of services aimed at reunification as Caucasian families who have entered the system.

Opponents also criticize the lack of efforts to recruit and approve African-American families and individuals to become adoptive parents (McRoy & Oglesby, 1997). Critics report that the problems in recruitment and retention are tied to three major factors. The first is the dominance of Caucasian females as adoption agency workers, most of whom have not received training in cultural competency (McRoy & Oglesby, 1997). The second factor is the dominance of Eurocentric standards in the adoption field that keep many interested African-American families from being approved for adoption. These standards include requirements that applicants be married (Rodriguez & Meyer, 1990), separate bedroom requirements, and agency fees (NACAC, 1991). The third factor is the reluctance of adoption agencies to implement specialized minority adoption programs (McKenzie, 1993). The North American Council on Adoptable Children found that agencies who implement these specialty programs place 94% of their African-American children in same race arrangements, while only 51% of African-American children are placed in same race families in traditional programs (Simon et al., 1994).

Critics of transracial adoption have also questioned the co-occurrence of transracial adoption with larger system changes on the social and legislative level that have served to disadvantage poor and working class African-American families and individuals, while concurrently creating additional options for Caucasian middle class families and individuals. In the 1970's, the NABSW was one of the first to point out that interest and push for reform in policies surrounding transracial adoption occurred at the same time as changes in social attitudes toward pregnancy and parenting outside of marriage, attitudes and availability of birth control, and attitudes toward abortion which

resulted in a decline in the availability of healthy Caucasian infants (Patton-Amani, 2002). Opponents of transracial adoption state that when attitudes of openness toward transracial adoption of African-American/biracial children are examined more closely it becomes apparent that Caucasian parents are interested in adopting healthy African-American/biracial infants, not necessarily the older children or children with disabilities that are likely to get stuck in the child welfare system (Hollingsworth, 1998).

The final main argument of opponents follows from the first two. If Caucasian parents do not have the ability to adequately parent African-American/biracial children; if the presumed inadequacy of these parents affects not only the children, but the greater African-American community as well; and if the predominately Caucasian child welfare system and the American judicial system cannot be trusted to place the needs of African-American children and families above the desire of the Caucasian middle class to adopt healthy infants of any color, who should ultimately have the right to determine the destiny of these children (Kennedy, 2003; Khumoetsile-Taylor, 2004).

Proponents of Transracial Adoption

Proponents of transracial placements are often in support of the importance and even preferability of same race placements (Simon & Alstein, 2002). However, their concern with the perceived overemphasis on same race adoptions and the prohibitions toward transracial adoptions reflects the belief that there are insufficient numbers of African-American families to care for all the African-American children who are in out of home care and require an adoptive family (Kennedy, 2003). Therefore, they postulate that if transracial placements are delayed or denied, African-American/biracial children in particular will be kept in foster care longer and their chances of permanent placement

will be reduced (Kennedy, 2003; Khumoetsile-Taylor, 2004). The consequences of delayed placement are proposed to be more serious than those associated with the challenges the African-American/biracial adoptee is likely to face growing up in a Caucasian family (Kennedy, 2003).

In addition, proponents express concern that opposition to transracial adoption is a form of racism in itself and that it represents a practice that violates constitutional sanctions against discrimination (Khumoetsile-Taylor, 2004; Modell & Dambacker, 1997). Proponents state that not only are the constitutional rights of adoptive parents violated by matching policies, but equal opportunity rights for children of color are violated as well (Kennedy, 2003). Bartholet (1995) points out that if race cannot be used as a factor to bar marriage or custody arrangements in biological families, it should not be applicable in adoptions either.

Opponents and proponents alike refer to the research on transracial adoption to support their positions, both sides claiming that findings support their position (Hollingsworth, 1998; McRoy & Grape, 1999; Simon & Alstein, 2002). Therefore I will now summarize the research on transracial adoption, specifically the adoption of African-American/biracial children.

The bulk of research on transracial adoption has been conducted in an attempt to address the concerns that have been voiced about this arrangement (Lee, 2003). The majority of the research addresses three main themes: the adjustment of the adoptee to being adopted transracially (Bagley, 1993; Burrow et al., 2004; Grow & Shapiro, 1974; Johnson, Shireman, & Watson, 1987; Silverman, 1980; Simon & Alstein, 2002; Vroegh, 1997); the development of an ethnic identity within the adoptee (Bagley & Young, 1979;

Corbett, 1997; McRoy et al., 1984; Shireman & Johnson, 1986; Simon & Alstein, 2002; Tizard, 1977; Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003); and the experiences, motivations, and or reflections of the parents about adopting across racial lines (Falk, 1970; McRoy et al., 1984; Moosnick, 2001; Priddy & Kirgan, 1971; Simon & Alstein, 2002; Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003; Zastrow, 1977). The following three sections will summarize the state of the research in these areas.

Adjustment of Adoptee

Research on transracial adoption has examined the adjustment of children in these types of family arrangements to determine whether or not the outcome can be considered successful. The majority of these studies were conducted, or initiated, as the debate about transracial adoption was brought to the forefront in the early 1970's (Grow & Shapiro, 1974, Johnson et al., 1987; Alstein & Simon, 1977). Three studies followed children of transracial adoption and their families longitudinally and were able to assess adjustment at different family and individual developmental stages (Johnson et al., 1987; Silverman, 1980; Simon & Alstein, 1977). The majority of more recent research in the area of adjustment consists of follow-up waves to these earlier studies (Brooks & Barth, 1999; Feigelman, 2000; Simon & Alstein, 2002; Vroegh, 1997).

One of the difficulties with making any conclusive statements about the adjustment of children in transracial adoptive families based on these studies concerns the lack of consistency in operationally defining and measuring adjustment. Adjustment has generally been assessed from parental reports (Brooks & Barth, 1999; Feigelman & Silverman, 1984; Grow & Shapiro, 1975; Johnson et al., 1987; Shireman & Johnson, 1975; Simon & Alstein, 2002; Weinberg et al., 2004), although some studies utilized the

child's report (Bagley, 1993; Burrow et al., 2004; Grow & Shapiro, 1975; McRoy et al., 1982; Simon & Alstein, 2002; Vroegh, 1997; Womack & Fulton, 1981), teacher's report (Grow & Shapiro, 1975), interviewer's assessment (Shireman & Johnson, 1975; Shireman & Johnson, 1986), and/or the social worker's assessment of adjustment (Shireman & Johnson, 1980). Adjustment was defined and measured as behavioral problems evidenced (Brooks & Barth, 1999; Feigelman, 2000; Grow & Shapiro, 1975; Johnson et al., 1987; Simon & Alstein, 2002; Weinberg, Waldman, van Dulmen, & Scarr 2004), severity of difficulties experienced (Johnson et al., 1987), physical problems (Feigelman & Silverman, 1984; Weinberg et al., 2004), difficulties with school (Simon & Alstein, 2002; Weinberg et al., 2004), self-esteem (Bagley, 1993; McRoy et al., 1982; Vroegh, 1997), degree of satisfaction with adoption (Bagley, 1993; Feigelman & Silverman, 1984; Womack & Fulton, 1981), quality of relationships (Vroegh, 1997), permanence of placement (Moffatt & Thoburn, 2001), and intelligence (Womack & Fulton, 1981). Studies also varied in terms of their utilization of measures to assess the construct under scrutiny.

Overall, these studies indicated mixed findings in terms of how children were adjusting to transracially adoptive homes. Studies have varied in terms of whom they have utilized as a comparison group for their participants. Caucasian same race adoptees (Bagley, 1993; Brooks & Barth, 1999; Burrow et al., 2004; Feigelman & Silverman, 1984), African-American same race adoptees (McRoy et al., 1982; Johnson & Shireman, 1987), other ethnic minority group transracial adoptees (Brooks & Barth, 1999; Feigelman & Silverman, 1984; Simon & Alstein, 2002), Caucasian biological children (Simon & Alstein, 2002), and African-American biological children (Johnson &

Shireman, 1987) have all been used as comparison groups for African-American/biracial transracial adoptees. When compared with Caucasian same race adoptees, African-American/ biracial transracial adoptees reported more psychosomatic symptoms (Burrow et al., 2004). Other than this finding, there were no significant differences found between the two groups in terms of overall adjustment (Bagley, 1993; Brooks & Barth, 1999; Feigelman, 2000; Feigelman & Silverman, 1984; Silverman, 1977). When compared with African-American same race adoptees, there were no significant differences found between the two groups in terms of adjustment (Burrow et al., 2004; McRoy et al., 1982; Moffatt & Thoburn, 2001; Shireman & Johnson, 1975; Shireman & Johnson, 1986; Vroegh, 1997). When compared with other minority group transracial adoptees, including Colombian (Feigelman & Silverman, 1984), Korean (Feigelman & Silverman, 1984; Simon & Alstein, 2002), Asian (Burrow et al., 2004; Moffatt & Thoburn, 2001; Weinberg et al., 2004), Native American (Burrow et al., 2004; Simon & Alstein, 2002; Weinberg et al., 2004), and Latino adoptees (Simon & Alstein, 2002), results were once again mixed. Three studies indicated no differences between the different types of transracial adoptees that they examined (Moffatt & Thoburn, 2001; Simon & Alstein, 2002; Weinberg, 2004). Simon and Alstein (2002) indicated that there were no differences between the different groups during any of the four waves of data collection. However, other studies have noted differences among different groups of transracial adoptees. Feigelman and Silverman (1984) found that Korean children who were transracially adopted were slightly more likely to have growth problems and discomfort about their appearance than either Colombian or African-American/biracial transracial adoptees. African-American/biracial transracial adoptees reported three or more

adjustment problems compared with Latino transracial adoptees (Feigelman, 2000). Additionally, adoptive parents of African-American/biracial children were more likely to report that their children were discriminated against than adoptive parents of Latino or Asian children (Feigelman, 2000). In contrast, Burrow et al. (2004) found that African-American/biracial children raised by Caucasian parents reported higher levels of self-worth than Asian transracial adoptees.

Research on comparisons between transracially adopted childrens' adjustment compared with biological childrens' adjustment is consistent with the overall research in this area. In the past, research has shown that the general population of children who were adopted were more prone to adjustment concerns than the general population of children who were raised with their biological parents (Silverman, 1993). There was no indication that transracial adoptees fared worse than same race adoptees in comparison with biological children's adjustment. These findings indicate that the adjustment concerns that transracial adoptees reported may be more related to being adopted than the race differences in their families. While some authors found that adoptees were more likely to have lower levels of adjustment (Weinberg et al., 2004; Womack & Fulton, 1981), other studies found no difference between the adjustment and outcome scores for these two groups (Simon & Alstein, 2002).

Making sense of these conflicting findings is further confounded by some important limitations of the studies that bring the findings into question. The majority of studies suffer from small sample sizes and unequal group sizes, which make comparisons between the groups difficult if not impossible. These limitations threaten the internal

validity of the studies and lead the reader to question the differences or lack of differences found between the groups.

Racial Identity Development

A major point of contention in the debate concerning the transracial adoption of minority children in general, and African-American/biracial children in particular, is whether or not adoptive parents are able to assist their children in developing a positive racial identity (Chimezie, 1975; Hollingsworth, 2002; McRoy, 1989). In order to answer this question and to better understand the experience of adoptees who are racially different than their families, researchers examined the development of racial identity for these individuals.

Parents' Belief Systems

One of the first assumptions to be checked was whether or not parents believed the development of a strong racial identity was important and what behaviors, if any, they implemented in order to assist their children in the development of their racial identity. Studies indicated that transracially adoptive parents were mixed in their opinion of whether or not it would be important for their child to positively identify with his or her birth culture. When asked whom they would like their children to identify with, Simon and Alstein (2002) found that parents of transracially adopted children were more likely to state no preferences or to prefer that their child identified with both races (birth and adopted) or the overall human race. Vidal de Haymes and Simon (2003) found their sample of parents to be divided about the importance of attention to matters of race and culture in their child's development. These findings were consistent with several other studies on racial identity development in transracial adoptions, which found that a

majority of transracially adoptive parents tended to stress a “color-blind” philosophy on racial identity, which says that a person’s membership in a racial/ethnic/cultural group is not as important as their membership in the human race (Corbett, 1997; McRoy et al., 1982; Shireman & Johnson, 1986). McRoy et al. (1982) found that 82% of parents stressed that their children were biracial and were reluctant to accept the notion that the child would be socially and legally defined as black. There are several possible interpretations for this finding. Given the lack of contact that this particular sample had with the African-American community, the authors were inclined to interpret this as possibly indicating the parents’ discomfort with their child’s racial background. Corbett (1997) examined the experiences of adult adoptees and found that 72% of his participants believed that their parents placed emphasis on their birth culture as important to their development. However, only 44% reported that they believed that their parents had a multi-cultural, rather than an European emphasis with respect to parenting. In contrast, when expectations shifted for transracially adoptive parents, they shifted towards a desire for the child to assume a black identity. In comparison to expectations for their first child, a higher percentage of participants expected the second child that they adopted transracially to identify with African-American culture. The authors indicate that the participants may have become more sensitized to the importance of racial identity from their first adoption experience (Simon & Alstein, 2002).

Parents’ feelings about racial identity issues for their child may be an important key in how children determine whom they will identify with. Studies found that parents who indicated a wish for their child to identify with the African-American race were more likely to have children who expressed an African-American identity than parents

who wished their children to identify with the Caucasian race, the human race, or neither race (Bagley & Young, 1979; Grow & Shapiro, 1974; Johnson et al., 1987; McRoy et al., 1982; Simon & Alstein, 2002). Parents who integrated their children's birth culture into their own lives through reading materials and encouraged their children to read about their birth culture were more likely to have children who identified themselves according to their birth culture, rather than their adoptive culture (Feigelman & Silverman, 1983). These findings have led to concern about the impact on transracial adoptees of being encouraged to develop a "color blind" philosophy on life, when in reality the color of their skin will have an impact on how they are treated by society at large.

Integration of Birth Culture

Another key component of racial identity development for transracial adoptees may be how well their parents' ideals about the importance of providing opportunities for racial identification are put into action. In other words, the next logical question is how do parents who do believe that integrating their child's culture into their family life is important translate that belief into action, if at all. Findings indicated that the majority of parents did not integrate their child's culture into their family life to the degree that they had originally intended to, and for those who made initial efforts to encourage biculturalism in the family, those efforts decreased over time (DeBerry et al., 1996). Vroegh (1997) found that the majority of parents in her study had done nothing in particular to foster adoptees' racial identities. This was consistent with findings that indicated that the majority of transracially adoptive families continued to live in predominately Caucasian neighborhoods (Flores de Kislner, 1995; McRoy et al., 1984; Shireman & Johnson, 1986; Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003). An exception to this rule

were the participants in Feigelman and Silverman's (1984) study, 68% of whom reported to living in an integrated or African-American community. The majority of parents (Tizard, 1977), and adult adoptees (Vroegh, 1997) reported that their parents had done nothing in particular to assist the adoptee in their development of a positive racial identity, and reported low to moderate contact with the African-American community (Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003). A small percentage of parents reported that adopting an African-American/biracial child changed the status of their family from Caucasian to interracial. Parents who identified their family as interracial were more likely to have African-American/biracial peers of their own and to encourage frequent social contact between their child and the greater African-American community (McRoy et al., 1982).

Racism and Discrimination

Another aspect of the parent-child relationship with respect to the issue of racial identity development is how parents are able to support their children and assist them in dealing with discrimination. Vroegh (1997) found that most participants reported no racial incidents. However, this finding stands in contrast to most others in which one-third to over half of transracial adoptees reported that they had experienced racial discrimination (Shireman & Johnson, 1975; Simon & Alstein, 2002; Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003). Slightly over half of the adoptees who experienced discrimination told their parents about the experience (Simon & Alstein, 2002). The majority of individuals who shared their concerns with their parents reported that their parents had comforted them, but had also minimized the experience and failed to take action (Simon & Alstein, 2002; Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003). Shireman and Johnson (1986) found that parents minimized overt racial slurs and discrimination as "general name calling and

troubles of childhood” (p. 50). Corbett (1997) found that 61% of adult adoptees felt that their parents had not taught them how to deal with racism. These findings stand in contrast to parents’ perceptions about the discrimination that their children faced and their actions in response. Parents were less likely to report that their children had encountered racism, than adoptees were to report for themselves. In fact, some adoptees reported that their parents did not always recognize racism in school or other experiences (Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003). Parents were also more likely to report that they took swift and firm action to protect their children in the face of racist remarks or actions (McRoy & Zurcher, 1983). Overall, there seems to be inconsistency between the way parents and adoptees view parents’ actions in response to racism and discrimination, with adopted children reporting more negative experiences than their parents.

The measurement of transracial adoptees’ racial identity development has suffered from some of the same concerns as the measurement of transracial adoptees’ adjustment. The concept of racial identity has lacked consistency in its operational definitions and in its measurement. Some of the variation in definitions and measures is due to the developmental stage of the child/adolescent/young adult being studied.

Racial Preference

Racial preference of transracial adoptees has been measured in terms of childrens’ responses to the Clark Doll test (Shireman & Johnson, 1975; Shireman & Johnson, 1986; Simon & Alstein, 2002), how parents reported that their children felt about their ethnic heritage (Grow & Shapiro, 1974; Tizard, 1977), whether children have reported a desire to be Caucasian or “another color” (Simon & Alstein, 2002), adolescents’ and young adults’ choice of dating partners and friends (Corbett, 1997; Feigelman & Silverman,

1984; McRoy et al., 1982; Simon & Alstein, 2002; Vroegh, 1997), and adolescents' and young adults' attitudes toward other African-American/biracial individuals (Brooks & Barth, 1999; Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003).

Results of the Clark Doll test indicated that the children in transracially adoptive homes did not show a preference for the white doll over the brown doll (Shireman & Johnson, 1980; Simon & Alstein, 2002), and in fact, were less likely to show a "white preference" than African-American same race adoptees (Shireman & Johnson, 1980). When parents were asked to assess how their children felt about their racial identity, findings were mixed. Grow and Shapiro (1975) found that approximately one-third of their sample reported that their child was proud of his/her racial heritage, 44% were indifferent, and 24% were described as having attitudes with negative connotations (e.g., confusion, embarrassment, or anger). Tizard (1977) found that, overall, participants reported that their children seemed unaware of their racial identity. "Several" of these parents also reported that they did not have positive feelings about their child's cultural origins, which supports the idea that parents' feelings and perceptions can have an impact on children's development of a positive racial identity. In examining racial preferences, Simon & Alstein (2002) asked adoptees if they had ever desired to be Caucasian or another "color." Sixty percent reported that there had never been a time that they wanted to be the same race as their parents. Transracially adoptive children and Caucasian biological children showed no difference in terms of whether or not they had every desired to be another "color."

Transracially adopted adolescents were more likely to have predominantly Caucasian friends and to date Caucasian partners than were same race adoptees (McRoy

& Zurcher, 1983; Vroegh, 1997). These findings are consistent with studies that examined the friendship and dating patterns of transracial adoptees; however, these studies did not have a same race adoptee comparison group (Corbett, 1997; Simon & Alstein, 2002). Feigelman and Silverman (1984) found that 39% of transracial adoptees reported having close friends who were black. They also found a larger portion of families who lived in integrated neighborhoods than others studies, but it is not clear if the two findings were correlated. In addition to being more likely to choose Caucasian friends and dates, a few studies found African-American/biracial adoptees made ambivalent or negative comments about the individuals in their birth culture (Brooks & Barth, 1999; Vidal de Haymes, 2003).

Racial identity

The racial identity of transracial adoptees has usually been measured by how adoptees self-identify in terms of race (Bagley & Young, 1979; Corbett, 1997; Shireman & Johnson, 1986; Vroegh, 1997) or how parents reported that the adoptees self-identified (Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Flores de Kislner, 1995; McRoy et al., 1982; Simon & Alstein, 2002); however, it has also been measured in terms of adopted childrens' esteem or comfort level with their appearance (Brooks & Barth, 1999; Grow & Shapiro, 1975; McRoy et al., 1982).

Studies that explored how transracial adoptees self-identified show mixed findings, but almost all reported that a percentage of adoptees self-identified as white (Bagley & Young, 1979; Feigelman & Silverman, 1984; McRoy et al., 1982; Shireman & Johnson, 1986; Simon & Alstein, 2002). Biracial transracial adoptees were more likely to self-identify as white (Bagley & Young, 1979), as were adoptees whose parents

reported a “color blind” philosophy of parenting (Bagley & Young, 1979; McRoy et al., 1982). Findings were mixed in terms of whether transracial adoptees self-identified differently than same race adoptees. Shireman and Johnson (1986) found no differences between the groups, while McRoy et al. (1982) found that same race adoptees were more likely to identify as African-American. Studies exploring the esteem of adoptees and their comfort with their appearance indicated that there was not a difference between self-esteem levels for transracially and same race adopted children (Simon & Alstein, 2002) and adolescents (McRoy et al., 1982), but that a minority of adoptees felt uncomfortable about their appearance related to race (Brooks & Barth, 1999; Grow & Shapiro, 1975; McRoy et al., 1982). Some studies have found that this comfort level seemed to be correlated with parent’s own attitudes toward racial difference; the more parents espouse positive African-American attitudes, the more adoptees appear to be comfortable with their appearance related to race (Grow & Shapiro, 1975; McRoy et al., 1982).

Results of the inquiry into the development of positive racial identity have been mixed. Although many researchers have reported the results of their studies as indicating that children of transracial adoption are able to develop a strong and positive African-American identity (Feigelman & Silverman, 1984; Simon & Alstein, 2002; Vroegh, 1997), others question their interpretation of the results (Hollingsworth, 1997; McRoy et al., 1982). Hollingsworth (1997) completed a meta-analysis of the effect of transracial adoption on children’s racial and ethnic identity and self-esteem. She found a small to moderate effect of transracial adoption on adoptees’ racial/ethnic identity indicating that transracial adoptees may have a more difficult time with issues of positive racial identity. In addition, she found that transracial adoptees’ racial/ethnic identity decreased with age.

Hollingsworth (1997) reported the need for additional constructs to be examined in relation to positive racial identity development, including preparations for living in a racist society and the healthy development of oneself as an African-American individual.

Parents and Transracial Adoption

A substantial portion of the research that has been done on the transracial adoption of African-American/biracial children has utilized the perceptions of the parents to further our understanding of the experiences of the children involved (Lee, 2003). Research on the parents' personal experience of adopting transracially is limited and much of the research is dated (Falk, 1970; McRoy et al., 1982; Priddy & Kirgan, 1971; Zastrow, 1977).

Characteristics of Parents

Demographically there were several characteristics that parents who adopted transracially had in common with one another. Parents who adopted transracially were generally older than parents who adopted traditionally (within their race); however, this finding was not consistently true for all studies (Zastrow, 1977). Transracially adoptive parents had attained higher levels of education (Falk, 1970; McRoy et al., 1982; Priddy & Kirgan, 1971; Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003; Zastrow, 1977), were more likely to have higher income levels (Falk, 1970; Rosenthal et al., 1991; Zastrow, 1977), and were more likely to have one parent stay at home (McRoy et al., 1982). Parents who adopted transracially were more likely to be fertile and to already have biological children in the home than traditional adopters (Falk, 1970; Alstein & Simon, 1977; Zastrow, 1977); however, this finding did not always hold true (Moosnick, 2001; Priddy & Kirgan, 1971).

Motives of Parents

The motivations of parents who adopt transracially has been the subject of much scrutiny and speculation. Theories of supply and demand hypothesize that as the supply of healthy Caucasian infants diminished, these parents became more open to the idea of adopting transracially (Kennedy, 2003). However, as shown above, the majority of parents who adopted transracially were fertile and already had healthy, Caucasian, biological children in their home (Falk, 1970; Simon & Alstein, 1977; Zastrow, 1977), and there is no indication that they could not have another child biologically if they wanted. In comparison to parents who adopt within their race, these parents were more likely to discuss “child centered” or social motives when talking about why they decided to adopt (Zastrow, 1977). Reasons given included providing a home to a child that needed one, and because of concerns about over-population (Zastrow, 1977). Parents who adopted within their race were more likely to state “parent-centered” motives, such as they desired a child/more children, had special feelings for a child (Falk, 1970), or they wanted a companion for an existing child (Zastrow, 1977). In two of the studies that were reviewed, the participants were diagnosed with infertility and/or did not have children previous to the adoption (Moosnick, 2001; Priddy & Kirgan, 1971). Moosnick (2001) did not specifically ask the mothers that she interviewed about their motivations for adopting transracially; however, she did report that the mothers who adopted African-American/biracial children did not enter the process specifying their preference for an African-American/biracial child, but rather changed their mind after looking into other types of adoption first. Priddy and Kirgan (1971) found that half of the transracial placements were agency-initiated, and that 83% of those who initiated a transracial

placement on their own adopted for social consciousness reasons compared to 25% of the agency-initiated couples.

Although the cost involved in adoption varies based on the race of the child being adopted, only two studies provided information about comments that adoptive parents had made in relation to the cost involved with adopting an African-American/biracial child. Moosnick (2001) reported that one of her participants, who had not adopted an African-American/biracial child, made this comment about the process: “a white baby will cost you this much, international this much, and a black baby I can get real cheap” (p. 81). Vidal de Haymes and Simon (2003) found that several participants reported that the lower cost involved with the adoption of African-American/biracial children contributed to a perception that they were “lower class,” “desperate,” or “cheap.” Despite these comments, neither of these studies indicated that cost had been a motivating factor in the decision to transracially adopt an African-American/biracial child.

Studies that examined the experiences of transracially adoptive parents have explored three main areas of their experiences in the process: parents’ experiences with family, friends, neighbors, and the greater community; parents’ experiences with the adoption process; and parents’ level of satisfaction with adopting transracially.

Experiences with Extended Family

The majority of research on parents who have adopted transracially explored their experiences with family (Falk, 1970; Moosnick, 2001; Priddy & Kirgan, 1971; Rosenthal et al., 1991; Simon & Alstein, 2002), friends (Falk, 1970; Rosenthal et al., 1991; Simon & Alstein, 2002; Zastrow, 1977), neighbors (Falk, 1970; Grow & Shapiro, 1974; Simon

& Alstein, 2002; Zastrow, 1977), and the greater community (Moosnick, 2001; Simon & Alstein, 2002; Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003; Zastrow, 1977) in relation to their adoption.

Priddy and Kirgan (1971) found that the majority of transracially adoptive parents (70%) reported that they rarely or never saw their own parents, which was consistent with Falk's finding that transracial parents visited their families less often than parents who adopted within their race (1970). It is unclear whether these findings are due to the experiences that parents have had with their extended family due to the adoption, or if this pattern was established before the adoption and contributes some understanding to how these families may be better suited to deal with the possible negative response of family to their decision to adopt transracially. Falk (1970) also found that couples who adopted across racial lines were less likely to report that relatives were the most influential person in their decision to adopt than parents who adopted traditionally, while Simon and Alstein (2002) reported that none of the participants included their own parents in the decision making process of whether to adopt. Both findings lend credence to the idea that some relationship patterns between these parents and their extended families were established before the adoption occurred. Moosnick (2001) found that mothers who reported a willingness to adopt Asian, but not African-American/biracial children reported concerns about their extended families' reactions had they adopted African-American/biracial children.

Parents who adopted transracially reported significantly more negative comments and less support about their decision from extended family than parents who adopted within their race (Falk, 1970; Moosnick, 2001; Rosenthal et al., 1991; Zastrow, 1977). In

fact, the majority of participants who adopted transracially reported some type of negative reaction from relatives at some point, if not multiple points, in the adoption process and beyond (Simon & Alstein, 2002; Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003). Among parents who had adopted transracially, those who have adopted African-American/biracial children reported the least amount of support from extended family (Moosnick, 2001). The majority of parents reported that negative reactions to the adoption resolved over time and that the child has been accepted by all, or most, of their family including those members who initially voiced concerns (Grow & Shapiro, 1974; Simon & Alstein, 2002). A small minority of parents reported that they continued to experience ongoing relationship difficulties with members of their extended family due to the adoption, and some reported family cut-offs that had not been resolved (Simon & Alstein, 2002). Parents reported that continued negative responses from family members included: grandparents who became uncomfortable appearing in public with their transracially adopted grandchildren and continued to explain to others that the child is adopted, relatives who refused to touch the child, and parents who had been disinherited (Zastrow, 1977).

Experiences with Friends

Overall, parents reported that friends had been more supportive of their decision to adopt transracially than extended family members (Falk, 1970; Simon & Alstein, 2002; Zastrow, 1977). Findings on the difference in experience between transracially adoptive parents and parents who adopted within their race are mixed (Falk, 1970; Rosenthal et al., 1991; Zastrow, 1977). Zastrow (1977) found that neither transracially adoptive families nor families who adopted traditionally reported any intense opposition or criticism from

friends. In addition, Simon and Alstein (2002) found that 27% of participants felt that friends had drawn closer since they adopted transracially, compared with 9% who reported negative changes in the friendships, and 64% who reported no change. Also, Grow and Shapiro (1974) found that friends were 100% supportive in parents' decision to adopt transracially. In contrast Falk (1970) and Rosenthal et al. (1991) found that transracially adoptive couples reported less approval and more criticism from friends for their adoptions than couples who adopted traditionally. In addition, Falk (1970) found that parents who adopted traditionally were more likely to be influenced by the opinion of friends than parents who had adopted transracially.

Experiences with Neighbors

Grow and Shapiro (1974) found that almost half of their participants were concerned about what type of relationship their child would have with neighborhood children. Zastrow (1977) also noted this concern among his participants. Although Grow and Shapiro did not measure parents' perceptions of their neighbors' reactions to the adoption, three other studies explored the experiences of these parents in relation to their neighbors (Falk, 1970; Simon & Alstein, 2002; Zastrow, 1977). The concern that the parents in Grow and Shapiro's study expressed seems to be valid as Zastrow (1977) found that 18% of transracially adoptive parents reported that their child had been called a racially derogatory name by neighborhood children. In terms of the parents' relationships with their neighbors, he found parents reported that their neighbors were less enthusiastic and supportive than their friends, but were also accepting. Thirteen participants reported disapproving comments from neighbors regarding the adoption. This finding is consistent with Simon and Alstein's (2002) finding that a minority (6%)

of neighbors responded negatively when the parents adopted transracially. However, Simon and Alstein also found that parents reported significantly more concerns and negative reactions from neighbors seven years later during their second wave of data collection. During the third wave of data collection, twelve years after the initial data were collected, parents reported no negative responses or concerns from neighbors. Falk (1970) found that in comparison with parents who have adopted within their race, transracially adoptive parents reported less support for their adoptions from their neighbors. Overall, it seems that neighbors do express more concern about transracially adopted children than same race children, and that this reaction changes (for the negative and the positive) over time. There seemed to be no indication of what could have caused the change in reactions from the neighbors, both for the positive and for the negative; however, one possible explanation could be the age of the child and their activity level in the neighborhood. Neighbors indicated the most concern about the adoption when the children were at an age that they were likely to play in the neighborhood, and less concern when the children were too small to play in the neighborhood or adolescents who may have lost interest in neighborhood activities.

Experiences with larger community

When discussing the parents' experience of the larger community and their perceptions of the adoption, two particular "communities" were examined. The first was the opponents of transracial adoption, who are most visibly connected with the NABSW and its position on transracial adoption. The second was strangers that the family would encounter on a daily basis. Simon and Alstein (2002) found that 80% of their sample reported that the campaign waged by the NABSW and Native American groups bothered

them, but did not alter their decision about adopting or their behavior toward the adoption. A minority did report that the argument impacted their decision to adopt subsequent children. The majority reported that their feelings ranged from guilt to anger, and that they thought more about racial issues and felt a stronger desire to know others who were racially different than themselves. Vidal de Haymes and Simon (2003) did not mention the NABSW in particular, but did note that the parents in their study were initially reluctant to participate because of their larger experience with people who oppose transracial adoption and their uncertainty about the motives of the researchers in conducting the research. In addition, a few of the participants reported that they did not feel that the African-American community was supportive of their family. Participants reported that the two common assumptions made about their family by others were that they deserved pity and a concern about their motives for adopting transracially. In contrast, Moosnick (2001) found that the mothers of African-American/biracial children in her study reported that they remained aware of the evaluation of African-American women about the way that they care for their children. She reported that these mothers, when compared with the mothers that adopted within their race or adopted Asian children, maintained a sense of shared ownership of their children with their racial/ethnic community. This shared ownership and awareness resulted in the adoptive mothers seeking out African-American women to assist them in the care of their children.

Parents who have adopted transracially reported that the visibility of their racial difference often raised unwanted questions (Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003), curious stares, surprise, puzzled reactions (Zastrow, 1977), and more serious inappropriate and/or racist occurrences (Moosnick, 2001; Zastrow, 1977). It appears from these findings that

parents continue to be aware of the controversy surrounding their adoptions, both within and outside the African-American community, and although these do not necessarily alter the decisions that these parents make about their adoptions, it is unclear whether these messages impact their willingness to reach out for help with their children from the African-American community in particular.

Experiences with the Adoption Process

Three studies explored parents' experiences with the adoption process and adoption workers (Grow & Shapiro, 1974; Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003; Zastrow, 1977). Overall, parents reported that they were satisfied with the services that they received from the agency (Grow & Shapiro, 1975; Zastrow, 1977); however, Vidal de Haymes and Simon (2003) found that many of their participants were not satisfied because they did not feel adequately supported in their decision to adopt transracially. Parents in their study reported that social workers seemed to oppose transracial adoption, and that some of these workers gave minimal assistance in the process and were more helpful to families that adopted within their own race. The parents reported more concern about African-American social workers' attitudes toward transracial adoption, but also reported that Caucasian social worker were likely to provide less assistance to transracially adoptive families. Although Zastrow (1977) and Grow and Shapiro (1974) found that parents were satisfied with services, their participants were not without concerns about the process and recommendations for changes that could benefit future families adopting transracially. Zastrow (1977) found that 85% of the couples that adopted transracially questioned certain aspects of the adoption process. Grow and Shapiro (1974) found that most families did not believe that they had received

information of practical value from their social worker (e.g., how to care for African-American/biracial skin and hair), did not view their social worker as a confidant, and viewed post-placement visits as a requirement rather than a facilitating service. In those instances where post-placement contact was found to be helpful, mothers found the social worker's "supportive role" to be most helpful, while fathers were more likely to report that the ability to discuss general or specific problems was most helpful. Specifically, families felt that social workers were more helpful with specific concerns like how to meet other transracially adoptive families, and less helpful with more ambiguous concerns, like what types of reactions to expect from family, friends, and neighbors and how to deal with those reactions.

Parents' Recommendations

Zastrow (1977) asked his participants for recommendations on how agencies could improve their practices. These were the top five recommendations made by the participants: increasing staff commitment to transracial adoptions; increasing the promotion of transracial adoptions; better informing prospective transracial adoptive applicants about the experiences that they are likely to encounter; subsidizing adoptions for low income families; and making the process feel less intimidating by basing it on an enabling approach rather than a diagnostic approach. Vidal de Haymes and Simon (2003) found that their participants' recommendations were more directed at assisting the parents with resources and supports that would allow them, in turn, to assist their children with developing a healthy racial identity. Their recommendations included: practical assistance on how to find materials, classes, or other resources to assist children in the development of a healthy racial identity and dealing with racism; a program to match

families with a “cultural mentor” family who shares the same ethnicity and culture as their child; develop a forums to assist white adoptive parents in their process of recognizing and combating their own and their extended networks’ racist thoughts and behaviors; and to educate workers to see transracial adoption as a viable option.

The differences between the recommendations made could very likely be influenced by the time period in which these couples adopted their children. The couples in Zastrow’s study were adopting in the early to late 1970’s when the debate over transracial adoption was at its height. This may help to explain why their first two recommendations dealt with the attitude of the agency toward transracial adoption. However, Vidal de Haymes and Simon’s (2003) finding that their participants felt unsupported in their decision to adopt transracially and their final recommendation to educate workers on the viability of transracial adoption lends credence to the idea that adoptive families continue to be affected by the controversy over transracial adoption, which has not yet been resolved.

Satisfaction with Adoption

Overall, parents reported being very satisfied with the child they adopted and the adoption (Grow & Shapiro, 1974; Zastrow, 1977). Satisfaction with the adoption was measured in several different ways. In addition to being asked if they felt satisfied with the adoption (Grow & Shapiro, 1974; Rosenthal et al., 1991; Zastrow, 1977), participants were asked about the impact the adoption has had on their lives (Grow & Shapiro, 1974; Simon & Alstein, 2002), whether they believed it would have been easier to adopt a white child (Morrison, 2004), if they had any regrets (Morrison, 2004), and whether they would recommend transracial adoption to others (Falk, 1970; Simon & Alstein, 2002).

Parents who have adopted transracially and parents who have adopted within their own race were found to be similar in terms of their satisfaction level with the adoption and in the aspects of parenting they draw satisfaction from (Zastrow, 1977; Rosenthal et al., 1991). When there are differences between the two, transracially adoptive parents reported more satisfaction with respect to race-related areas such as their own increased awareness and concern for people who are subjected to discrimination (Zastrow, 1977) and seeing other people's racial attitudes change (Falk, 1970). Parents who adopted transracially and within their own race were also similar in terms of the number and types of dissatisfactions they expressed with the adoptive experience. Only a few of the dissatisfactions expressed by the transracially adoptive parents appeared to be related to race (Zastrow, 1977).

Parents were able to report on several ways in which the adoption and parenting a child of another race had impacted their lives. Simon and Alstein (2002) found that participants felt that their lives had been broadened and enriched, and that it had made them more sensitive to racial issues. In addition, over half of their participants felt that the adoption had impacted their marriage, with 41% of the mothers and 33% of the fathers seeing the change as positive. Grow and Shapiro (1974) found more promising results, 70% of fathers and 63% of mothers reported that their marriage had been happier since the adoption of their child.

Morrison (2004) asked participants if they believed that it would have been easier if they had adopted a Caucasian child. Forty-three percent said "no", 43% said "maybe", and 14% said "yes." The majority of parents reported that adopting a Caucasian child

would have taken longer. When asked if they regretted their decision to adopt transracially, all participants responded that they did not.

Two studies examined whether or not parents would recommend transracial adoption for other parents. Overall, they found that transracially adoptive parents would encourage others to adopt transracially (Simon & Alstein, 2002); however when transracially adoptive families were compared to families who had adopted with their own race, same race families were more likely to recommend others to adopt within their own race than transracially adoptive parents were to recommend that others adopt transracially (Falk, 1970). Simon and Alstein (2002) also found that as time progressed, a smaller percentage of participants were willing to recommend transracial adoption, although the percentage of those willing to make the recommendation still remained high. Ninety percent of parents were willing to recommend to others to adopt transracially in 1972, compared with 85% in 1984, and 80% in 1991. In contrast, in 1991, 92% of their participants reported that they would have done it over again if given the chance. This finding supports the idea that willingness to recommend transracial adoption to others may reflect more than simply how satisfied participants were with the arrangement themselves.

Feminist Family Therapy and Transracial Adoption

Feminism has historically been defined as the movement to abolish sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression (hooks, 2000). Feminism has been criticized for its focus on oppression that takes place along gender lines to the exclusion of oppression that is the result of racism (Zinn, 1990). More recently, feminists have brought attention to the intersection of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and ability status, and the impact

these social constructs have on women's lives and choices (hooks, 2000; Goodrich, 2003).

Feminism has often been classified as the type of movement that places the needs and concerns of women against the needs and concerns of men, thereby only having applicability for women (hooks, 2000). However, the core of feminism deals with ending oppressive power, which would result in the ability to develop new and different types of relationships between men and women (Silverstein, 2003). While feminists call for more research to be conducted on the lived experience of women, this does not preclude research that includes both the perspectives of men and women, and how the two make sense of their experiences together (De Reus, Few, & Blume, 2005). This perspective is especially important when dealing with another relationship in which power is likely to play an important role: the development of a parent-child relationship across racial lines.

Feminist ideals in research call for researchers to remain focused on understanding the experiences of those who have been marginalized in society (McDowell & Fang, 2007). Adoptive families who have crossed racial lines represent a unique mix of the majority culture and minority culture combined in one family. Understanding how these individuals create a family together and how issues of race and gender are lived out is an important step in better understanding how members of the majority and minority culture interact with one another, and how they are impacted by greater societal messages.

The field of family therapy has been challenged to better understand the lived experiences of minority families, in order to create interventions that are applicable to

these families, rather than attempting to make families fit into pre-existing models and ways of intervening (Turner et al., 2004).

Feminism, as a lens, is important to the current study because of its focus on the importance of the larger social context on children, couples, and families and the way that they live out their lives. Research has indicated the importance of the social context in the lives of transracially adoptive families (Khumoetile-Taylor, 2004; Moosnick, 2001). Therefore, the lens of feminism has been applied to the development of this project and will continue to guide the implementation, analyses of findings, and discussion of the project.

Personal Reflections

As a final step in the bracketing process, I will reflect on my own experiences both as a feminist and as a mother through transracial adoption. I will start by telling you a little about myself. I am a blue-eyed, light brunette Caucasian woman. Specifically, I am Norwegian and Lebanese and I come from families who are very aware and proud of their cultural heritage. I have been married since June of 1995 and am currently a doctoral student in Marriage and Family Therapy. As a feminist, I believe that a person's life and experiences cannot be separated from the larger societal context in which the person is embedded. I believe that power plays an important role in everyone's life, and that it is important to be aware of the ways in which we use our power to disenfranchise those around us and the ways in which it has been used to disenfranchise us. I also believe that, because of the way in which power has been unequally distributed in our society, certain groups have been given a voice and others have been silenced. I believe that it is my duty, as a feminist, to find an outlet for the voices that have not been heard.

These beliefs are part of the driving force behind the current study; however, they are also part of my struggle with the current study as well. While I recognize that the couples I will interview may have been silenced because of their choice to adopt transracially, I do not consider them to be a marginalized group. One of the things I recognize is that as Caucasian parents of minority children, we still retain our majority status and are only subjected to the possibility of racial discrimination through our children. I struggle with the dichotomy of that position, while I also embrace that it is part of the experience of being a transracially adoptive parent.

Becoming a parent through transracial adoption has also impacted the way in which I think about and experience my dissertation project. My experience in many ways led me to ask the questions posited here and to want to strive to hear the answer and voices of others, which may be different from my own.

My husband and I became parents through adoption because of infertility. Although I do not believe that is a complete picture. Adoption was always a part of the plan for us, but something we planned to do when life seemed more certain and we could really explore our options. Infertility led us to explore our options earlier than we anticipated. The decision to adopt transracially was an easy one for me. I felt like it would be a personal contradiction to say that I believed that all people are equally important, loveable, and worthy... but, I only want a white child. It was never a question for me whether or not I could love a child who was not related to me biologically or was racially different. The question I did struggle with was how the greater ethnic/racial community that my child came from would respond to the adoption, and how that would impact our ability to connect with this community and help our child to connect. In order

to get a sense of what this would mean, my husband and I talked to several friends of ours who represented the various communities that we believed our child may be a part of. We talked about their thoughts about transracial adoption in general, and how they felt about our decision to adopt transracially. We asked their opinion about how to prepare for a child of their particular racial background and whether they would be willing to be a support for us in raising our child. We received a lot of support from these conversations, but we were also able to talk about the diversity of opinions that exist on this topic within each of the racial/ethnic groups that we were discussing.

Another aspect of making the decision to adopt transracially was discussing our family's possible reactions to our decision and to the child. While we believed that overall there would be support for us, we both recognized that some individuals in our family would likely struggle with our decision. We came to an agreement that our child would always come first, and that we would make decisions regarding our relationships with extended family based on what was best for our child. I was aware that this might mean distancing ourselves from family members who were not supportive and refused to be accepting. Overall, our families have been very supportive, but we have had to have some difficult conversations about racism and some of its more subtle forms with members of our family. While these conversations have been difficult, I believe they have been an important part of my personal growth as a feminist and a mother, in other words I believe that they have helped me to live out my principles.

As an adoptive mother of a biracial (African-American, Latina, Caucasian) daughter, I believe it is a very important part of my role to help her develop a positive racial identity and to learn to deal with the racism that she will face as a minority woman

in this society. I also believe I cannot do this alone. I believe it will take a community to raise my child and that this community needs to be made up of individuals of all ethnicities, but particularly those who share her ethnic/racial background. I believe that an important part of becoming a transracially adoptive parent was acknowledging that I am no longer part of a Caucasian family, but an interracial one, and that all members' ethnic/racial heritages need to be a part of the culture of my family. I also believe it is important for me to have close ties with the African-American and Latina community, and that as much of a priority as it was for me before the adoption, it is even more so now. There are times I struggle with the idea that I can not be everything to my daughter. I feel sad when I think that one day she will probably tell me that she wishes that she had an African-American or Latina mother, one who could share her experiences on a level that I will never be able to. However, at the same time I am hopeful that my knowledge and acceptance of the limits of my abilities as her mother will allow me to connect her to others who can understand and support her in ways I cannot.

One of the hardest parts of writing the literature review for me was examining how researchers measured satisfaction with the transracial adoptive experience. I do not believe that whether or not a person would recommend transracial adoption to others is a reflection of whether they are satisfied. One of the reasons I say this is because, although I am highly satisfied with my decision to adopt transracially, I would not necessarily recommend that others follow suit. Transracial parenting is different than traditional parenting, and I believe the decision to commit to this type of adoption is an individual one and not one to be taken lightly. My personal bias is that individuals should have a commitment to issues of diversity, should make a commitment to the child's racial ethnic

community, and should be cognizant and committed to working through issues of racial discrimination and prejudice before becoming transracially adoptive parents. I believe that if we, as adoptive parents, do not make these commitments, we risk harm to our children.

Last, becoming a parent through transracial adoption has heightened my sense of white privilege in my personal life. I believe that this has been an important process, but it has also been a difficult one. It is hard to know that the color of my skin betrays my daughter daily. It is hard to recognize all the privileges that have been granted me, through no effort on my part, that she will be denied because of the color of her skin. Part of what I have had to recognize is that the very privilege of being able to adopt my daughter was yet another privilege afforded me because I am white. I believe that part of my duty to her is to use the power I have been given to try and change the inequities that I see around me.

Although I have not been able to bracket my entire experience as a feminist and as a transracially adoptive mother, I have attempted to deal directly with my experiences as they relate to the current study.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of Caucasian, heterosexual couples who have adopted an African-American or biracial child. Husserl's phenomenological principles were used in the development of this study (Husserl, 1964, 1970) and the implementation of the study was guided by methodological procedures developed by Colaizzi (1989).

Descriptive Phenomenology

The objective of the current study was to elicit a full and rich description of the experience of Caucasian couples who chose to adopt transracially, specifically African-American or biracial children. The questions that guided this study were "If you were to describe to someone, the process of adopting 'child's name', what would you say?" and "If you were to describe to someone what it is like to become a mother/father through transracial adoption, what would you say?"

The current study was guided by phenomenological principles, which allowed the participants to describe their experience of transracial adoption in depth and allowed them several opportunities to clarify and expand on their thoughts and feelings about their experiences.

My choice in methodology was informed by the importance of remaining consistent with two main feminist tenets: experience and reflexivity (Taylor, 1998). The first was the importance of remaining consistent with the feminist tenet of "experience" or "giving voice to women and men whose experiences have been marginalized or ignored in traditional research" (Taylor, 1998, p. 365). The majority of the literature in

the area of transracial adoption speculates about the experiences and motivations of parents as they adopt transracially, based on a limited number of outdated studies.

Descriptive phenomenology allowed the couples in this study to inform me, the researcher, about what has been important about their own experience and allowed them to define what this experience meant to them. This tenet is consistent with the motivation behind descriptive phenomenology. Husserl was driven by the idea that many important life experiences are not adequately captured by the study of scientific constructs, and must be captured in a new way (Husserl, 1964, 1970). Husserl embraced context as informing our understanding of one's experience, rather than contaminating it.

The second consideration was remaining consistent with the tenet of reflexivity. Reflexivity is the idea that the researcher's own experiences, feelings, and actions have developed out of the context in which the researcher finds her/himself. This context and its resulting experiences, feelings, and actions impact all aspects of the research in which the researcher engages. Therefore, it is important that the researcher be aware of her/his own experiences, biases, and reactions throughout the process, in order to allow the voices of the participants to be heard (Taylor, 1998). This tenet is consistent with the motivation behind descriptive phenomenology, in which the researcher brackets her/his experience throughout the process of research in an effort to limit the impact of her/his own experience on the research.

I want to be clear that although the experience of adopting transracially has been a marginalized topic, I am not implying that Caucasian, heterosexual couples are a marginalized population. These families represent a dichotomy between the privilege of

being in the majority in this country (the parents) and the disadvantages of being in the minority in this country (the children).

Data Collection

Sampling and Selection

Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were used to recruit participants (Nelson, 1996). Heterosexual, Caucasian couples who had transracially adopted an African-American or biracial child were invited to participate in the study. Specific criteria that the participants had to meet in order to participate in this study were clearly outlined and assisted the researcher in determining a couples' fit prior to inviting them to participate. These initial criteria included: (a) the participants must both be Caucasian, (b) the participants must have been married for a period of at least one year prior to the adoption, (c) both the wife and the husband must be able and willing to participate in the study, (d) the participants must have adopted an African-American or biracial child (defined as a child with at least one African-American biological parent), (e) the participants must have adopted the child when he or she was 2 years of age or younger, (g) the adoption must be finalized, and (h) the finalization of the adoption must have taken place no more than five years ago. I recruited six couples for this study. Four of the couples met all of the criteria for the study. Two couples met six of the seven initial criteria for inclusion in the study. Given the small population that the sample was being drawn from, I determined, in consultation with my internal and external auditors, that their contributions to the study were more significant than the violation of the criteria. One couple had not yet finalized the adoption of their child, but would be finalizing the adoption within two months of the initial interview. In one couple, the wife was

biologically Caucasian/Mexican-American. However, she reported that because she was raised in a Caucasian family and was not physically recognizable as a Mexican-American, she did not consider herself biracial. Eight other couples inquired about the study. Two did not meet the criteria for the study because one member of the couple was not racially and culturally Caucasian (one wife was African-American, one husband was Latino). Three met the criteria, but ultimately decided not to participate. Two did not give a reason for not participating. One reported that she and her husband were too busy with their child to participate.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited through two local social workers who conduct home studies for families waiting to be approved for adoption and who provide follow-up services to families during the adoption process. Although several other social workers were contacted as a means of recruitment, most did not respond or reported to me that they could not cooperate due to agency policy. A letter of introduction (Appendix B) was provided to the social workers, along with envelopes and postage, to be sent to couples they had worked with in the past. This letter detailed the project and provided information on how to contact the researcher to schedule an interview or to answer further questions. A recruitment flier (Appendix E) was also placed on selected adoption related forums on the internet, which service adoption agencies throughout the United States. A flier was sent to adoption support groups which were located through the internet. These support groups were located in Texas, Minnesota, Michigan, and Idaho and were all specifically targeted at families who had adopted transracially. Fliers were also posted at churches, children's stores, daycares, pediatricians' offices, and parents'

day out programs. In addition to all of the above, I verbally informed acquaintances of mine within the adoption community about my research project, gave them flyers, and requested that they distribute information about the study to anyone who might meet my research criteria.

Six couples participated in this study. In each case, the woman made initial contact regarding the study and took the steps involved in setting up the interviews. I did not talk to any of the men until the initial interview. Five of the couples initiated contact with me, and I initiated contact with one couple. One of the couples learned about the study through one of the social workers who was contacted and agreed to send out recruitment material. I knew one couple who had adopted transracially and met the criteria for my study. I contacted this couple, invited them to participate, and they agreed. This couple also shared information about my study with a support group that they were attending through their agency, which resulted in a third couple who made contact with me and was invited to participate. The fourth couple learned about the study through the flier posted on an adoption-related forum, and the remaining two couples learned about the study from fliers distributed to them at their adoption-related support groups. When the couples completed the questionnaires they were asked to create pseudo-names for themselves that would protect their confidentiality. The names chosen by the couples were: Ross and Rachel, Billy and Jane, Alex and Anna, RT and ARB, Mike and Lynette, and Jack and Jill. Table 1 contains relevant personal and family related information about the husbands and table 2 contains relevant personal information about the wives.

Table 1: Demographic Information for Husbands

	Ross	Billy	Alex	RT	Mike	Jack
Age	33 yrs	38 yrs	43 yrs.	37 yrs.	37 yrs.	39 yrs
Education Area	Masters Education	Bachelor's Fine Arts	Masters Business	High School N/A	Some College Business	Associate Degree Business
Occupation	Computer Programmer	Photographer	Marketing Executive	Production Worker	Self- Employed	Realtor
Religious Preference	Protestant	None	Protestant	Protestant	Catholic	Non- denominati onal
Cultural Heritage	American	European	German/ Austrian	English	Irish/ German/ Italian	German/ Polish
Joint Yearly Income	\$75,000- \$89,999	\$75,000- \$89,999	\$150,000 +	\$60,000- \$74,999	\$15,999- \$29,999	\$150,000 +
Length of Marriage	10 yrs.	14 yrs.	11 yrs.	14 yrs.	14 yrs.	8 yrs.
Infertility Diagnosis	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
# Children	2	2	2	2	1	5
# Children Adopted	2	2	2	2	1	2
Type of Adoption	Private Agency	Private Agency/ Lawyer	Private Agency	Facilitation Center/ Private Agency	Private Agency	Private Agency
Age of Target Child	5 yrs.	4 mos.	3.5 yrs	22 mos.	4 yrs.	4 yrs.
Race of child	African- American	African- American	African- American/ Japanese	Caucasian/ African- American	African- American	African- American

Table 2: Demographic Information for Wives

	Rachel	Jane	Anna	ARB	Lynette	Jill
Age	36 yrs	36 yrs	43 yrs.	35 yrs.	34 yrs.	39 yrs
Education Area	Bachelor's History	Masters Education	Bachelor's Business	Bachelor's Nursing	Some College Medical	Bachelor's Social Work
Occupation	Homemaker	Teacher	Homemaker	Nursing	Administrative Assistant	Realtor
Religious Preference	Protestant	None	Protestant	Protestant	Catholic	Non- denominat ional
Cultural Heritage	Mexican American/ Caucasian	Multi- European	Polish American	Scottish/ Irish/ French	French/ German	Polish/ Italian
Joint Yearly Income	\$75,000- \$89,999	\$75,000- \$89,999	\$150,000 +	\$30,000- \$44,999	\$15,999- \$29,999	\$150,000 +
Length of Marriage	10 yrs.	14 yrs.	11 yrs.	14 yrs.	14 yrs.	8 yrs.
Infertility Diagnosis	No	No	*No	Yes	Yes	No
# Children	2	2	2	2	1	5
# Children Adopted	2	2	2	2	1	2
Type of Adoption	Private Agency	Private Agency/ Lawyer	Private Agency	Facilitation Center/ Private Agency	Private Agency	Private Agency
Age of Target Child	5 yrs.	4 mos.	3.5 yrs	22 mos.	4 yrs.	4 yrs.
Race of child	African- American	African- American	African- American/ Japanese	Caucasian/ African- American	African- American	African- American

Note: *Medical condition makes pregnancy dangerous for participant

Procedure

I interviewed each couple both together and individually for my study. The experience of making the decision to adopt and completing the adoption process is one that involves both partners as individuals, and in turn has the strong potential to have an impact on the relationship itself. I was interested in both the couples' joint and individual experiences of the process, focusing on how the couple negotiated the process of becoming parents transracially, and how they in turn reconstructed that experience in an interview together. I also wanted to see if differences emerged in their experience when shared jointly and when shared individually.

Participants who wanted more information on participating in the study were asked to call or e-mail me a phone number where I could reach them in order to schedule an interview and to answer any questions that they might have. During this initial contact, participants were screened for inclusion criteria (Appendix A). If they met the criteria, an interview time was scheduled. Each couple was asked to set aside 2 hours for the initial interview. I made arrangements to protect the confidentiality of the participants by making sure that only I and the participants would be present during the interview. Two of the six initial interviews were conducted face to face in the participants' homes. The remainder of the initial interviews and all of the follow-up interviews were conducted via telephone.

I spent the first few minutes of the interview joining with the participants and establishing a sense of rapport. I thanked them for their time and reminded them that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions that I was asking. I emphasized that I was interested in their particular experiences of transracial adoption, and I would

like for them to be as open and honest as possible. Once again, I reminded them that they did not have to answer any question that they were not comfortable with and that they could stop the interview at any point. In order to remain consistent with my feminist framework, I let the participants know that I have also adopted transracially and that I was happy to answer any questions that they have about my experiences at the conclusion of our interviews together (Lather, 1991).

For the interviews that were conducted in person, I went over the informed consent form with the couple at the initial interview. For the interviews that were conducted over the telephone, I e-mailed the consent form to them and told them to let me know if they had any initial questions. The couples sent the completed consent forms back to me before the initial interview. In addition, I went over the informed consent with the couple before we began the initial interview. In addition to the consent forms, each couple also completed a brief demographic form (Appendix G). Once both members completed the consent and demographic forms, we began the interview. For those couple interviews that were conducted over the telephone, they used a speaker phone. After completing the couple interview, I thanked the participants for their time and requested permission to conduct the individual interviews with each of them. One member of the couple excused his/herself from the room until the interview was concluded. The participants would then trade places for the second individual interview. Although it is possible that the spouse was listening in on the interview, I do not believe that this was the case. It generally took a couple of minutes between individual interviews for the second participant to be brought back in the room, and then a couple more minutes for both members of the couple to return to the phone after the second

individual interview. Upon completing all three interviews with the couple, I thanked them for their time and requested permission to contact them for a follow-up interview in the near future. All agreed to participate in each of the interviews.

All interviews were audio taped using a digital voice recorder. All interviews were transcribed by an outside service, saved onto an USB drive, and password encrypted to ensure confidentiality. To further ensure confidentiality, I also removed any identifying information of the participants or anyone else mentioned in the interview from the transcriptions. I substituted the given name of all participants with the pseudo-name chosen and given names of other individuals with their relationship to the participants. In order to check for accuracy of the data and to make sure that I maintained a connection with the data, I concurrently listened to the tapes and read through the transcripts during data analysis.

Interview structure. I used the couple interview guide (Appendix H) to loosely structure the interviews. I began by asking the participants to describe the process of adopting their child. Additional probes were used to assist the participants with sharing more about their experience. However, these probes were only introduced once the participants had completed answering the original question and describing their experience. Additional areas that were probed included: financial resources, response of family and friends, special preparations made prior to the adoption, and whether the couple had experienced any racism/oppression as a result of their decision.

At the conclusion of the couple interview, I asked the participants if they would still be willing to spend additional time talking to me individually. All participants agreed to complete the individual interviews. I let the participants decide who wanted to

be interviewed first and second based on what would be convenient for them. Upon completion of the individual interviews, I thanked the couple for their participation, assessed their willingness to schedule a second interview and proceeded to schedule the second interview. I informed the participants that the purpose of the second interviews was to gain any additional insight that they have had about their experiences after having “sat with the interview” for awhile, and a chance for me to follow up on any questions that I had after listening to the first interview. All agreed to a second set of interviews.

Upon completion of the first interviews, I listened to the taped interviews and reflected on the experiences that the participants had shared. I made personal notes that included any non-verbal reactions of participants or other observations that I made. I spent time bracketing my own experience of the interview and personal reflections or reactions that I had. Finally, I compiled a list of additional probes for the second interview based on information gained from the first interview. These probes focused on areas that I wanted the participants to expand on or in which I required clarification of their meaning. In preparation for the second interview, I e-mailed participants a copy of their couple summary and their own individual summary. Each participant received these summaries at their personal e-mail address in order to protect the confidentiality of their individual summaries. At the second interviews, I asked for their reflections on the summaries, as well as any additional information that the participants had thought of related to the phenomena in question since the first interview. At the end of the second interview, I asked the participants if they were willing to be contacted a third time, by e-mail. I told them the purpose of the third contact would be to share with them the

preliminary findings of the study and to receive feedback about how the findings compared with the participants' experiences (step 7 of the data analysis).

The e-mail contact was conducted after my initial analysis had been completed in order to complete a member check (Colaizzi, 1989). This step was completed after I formulated an exhaustive description of the phenomena. All agreed to be contacted. No one had anything additional to share at that stage.

Interview techniques. The phenomenological interview is a practice in allowing participants to share fully their experience of a phenomena. I spent the beginning of the interviews talking casually with the participants in order to create an atmosphere in which they would feel comfortable sharing, and in order to allow us to join with one another. I shared with participants that I had also adopted a child transracially and that I would be willing to talk with them about my own experiences after the interviews were completed. It was important to me to be open with the participants about my own experiences, given their willingness to share such an important and personal part of their lives with me. I also felt that they deserved to understand more about my own experiences, given that this has impacted me as a researcher who has been entrusted with the analysis and dissemination of their own stories.

During the interviews, I used additional prompts like "Please tell me more about that" and "Could you give me an example." When I was confused about something that a participant shared, I would ask them if my interpretation of what they were saying was correct. This allowed them to correct me in the moment, and perhaps elaborate on a point that was important to them. In the face to face interviews, I used non-verbal cues, including eye contact and nodding to let them know that I was following what they were

saying. However, these non-verbal cues did not work on the telephone. I was resistant to providing verbal cues that I was listening while on the telephone, because these interfered with the quality of the sound recording. Instead, I let the participants know that I would be very quiet while they were talking and until I was sure that they had completed their thought, in order not to interrupt their flow or interfere with the recording. All reported that they understood.

Interviews. I conducted 2 joint couple interviews and 2 individual interviews with each of the twelve participants within a time period of five months. The first joint interviews with the participants lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours. The first individual interviews lasted between 15 minutes and 40 minutes. The second interview was held once I completed a summary of the participants' interviews and we were able to coordinate schedules. The time gap between the first and second interviews ranged between three weeks to five months. Such a time gap, as well as having access to their initial interview and the summary of how I had been thinking about what they shared allowed participants to contemplate their experiences. The time span also allowed me to immerse myself in the transcripts and audio recordings of the participants own interviews, as well as to complete initial interviews with other participants that allowed me to identify follow-up questions. The second joint interviews with participants lasted between 30 minutes and 55 minutes. The second individual interview with participants lasted between 10 and 15 minutes. In the second set of interviews, I allowed participants to reflect on the initial interviews and the summary statements that I had shared with them. I asked the participants to reflect on whether I had accurately understood their experience and if there was anything that they wanted to change or add. I also asked any

additional questions that had occurred to me after immersing myself in their interviews and conducting interviews with other participants. At the end of the second interview, I asked the participants if I could contact them by e-mail a third time to send them the initial results of the study, which was the first draft of the results section, and to allow them any further feedback on the results that they would like to provide.

After completing the final analysis, I sent the results to the participants via e-mail and informed them that I would be happy to receive any feedback that they had to share. The time gap between the second interview and the third contact ranged between one month to three months. The only feedback received after the third contact was appreciation for receiving the results and the opportunity to participate in the study.

Data Analysis

Once the tapes were transcribed and I had read through the transcriptions while concurrently listening to the tapes, I coded the data. I used Colaizzi's (1989) approach to analyzing descriptive phenomenological data to guide my analysis for this study. Colaizzi (1989) developed seven procedural steps for analyzing descriptive data, which are outlined below:

- (1) The first step was to read all the participant's descriptions, also called protocols, in order to "acquire a feeling for them" (Colaizzi, 1989, p. 59). In accomplishing this step, I read all the participant protocols several times to understand their experiences. In addition, I read the protocols while concurrently listening to the tapes in order to gain the insight that vocal inflection would give to my feeling about them.

- (2) The second step was to return to each individual protocol and “extract significant statements” (Colaizzi, 1989, p. 59). This process involved identifying phrases or sentences that were relevant to the phenomenon in question. Once these were identified, I coded them. Phrases that were not significant or related to the phenomenon in question I marked as non-significant and these were not included in the analysis. An example of non-significant data was a statement made by one of the participants about the birth great-grandmother of their daughter and what a hard-working woman she was: “We also met the grandmother, because [the birthmother] was living with the grandmother, and the grandmother was caring not only for her mother, but also several other family members. Obviously a very hardworking woman. Put up with a lot of stuff from a lot of family members.”
- (3) The third step was to “formulate meanings” (Colaizzi, 1989, p. 59). This process involved attempts to make clear the meaning behind all of the significant statements that have been extracted. It is in this step that Colaizzi leaves the most room for the individual researcher and her/his process, saying that “the phenomenological researcher [is] engaged in something which cannot be precisely delineated, for here he is involved in that ineffable thing known as creative insight; he must leap from what his subjects say to what they mean” (Colaizzi, 1989, p. 59). Colaizzi cautions that although it is important for the researcher to make meaning out of the original data, he/she must be cautious that these meanings remain connected to the original data.

In steps two and three, I attempted to get at the meaning of each significant statement without moving away from what the participant had shared with me. For example, one of the participants said, “We do get sometimes double takes you know at the mall or you know when we’re all together people sort of kept a or you know they see [our son] kind of at the end of the aisle and they see us at the other end of the aisle and they think he’s lost.” I reflected on the meaning of this statement and coded it: “We don’t register as a family to others.” Another participant reported that, “So, so it’s been really eye opening. I think you know we get different reactions if it’s the four of us together rather than if it’s just one of us with the child. They just assume that the other parent looks a certain way or so I guess it’s, it’s been eye opening in that respect.” I reflected on the meaning of this statement and coded it: Assumptions are made about our family.

- (4) The fourth step was to repeat the above steps for all the protocols and then organize the meanings that he/she has formulated into “clusters of themes” (Colaizzi, 1989, p. 59). This step allowed me to look for themes which are common among the participants’ protocols. For example, I organized the two formulated meanings above into a theme: we are more visible. In order to examine the themes that were common to all the subjects protocol, I used a table to assist me in putting different themes together. I also created a category in which I placed data that did fall into the emerging themes and was not shared by several participants.

- a) In order to make sure that the “clusters of themes” did not deviate from the original intent of the data, I referred them back to the original data in order to “validate” them (Colaizzi, 1989, p. 59). This was done by asking two questions. First, was there anything in the original data that was not accounted for in the cluster of themes? And second, was there anything in the cluster of themes that was not in the original data? In the places where the cluster of themes was not validated, I returned to the preceding steps and re-analyzed the data.
- b) At this point in the data analysis discrepancies may be noted among and/or between the various clusters and the researcher must rely on his/her “tolerance for ambiguity” to accept that what may seem illogical may remain valid (Colaizzi, 1989, p. 61). I adhered to this step by not placing judgement on what was said, but rather retaining seemingly contradictory statements as valid and relevant to the participant’s experience. For example, one participant reported that, “Two, the fact that it costs two to three times as much money to adopt a white kid as it does a black kid is just –ridiculously offensive that they’re basically, again, seeing it as a commodity, making a lot of money for it. We just – I just find that to be appalling,” and “There’s no emotional value attached with spending twice as much or three times as much to basically – that sounds bad. Again, I’ll probably rewind this later. But to purchase – because ultimately, it’s a transaction, which sounds bad on tape, again. But, I mean, it is.” I did

not use logic to judge these are contradictory statements about the participant's attitude toward the monetary aspect of adoption, but rather accepted them as a real and valid struggle the participant engaged in regarding the reality of the financial aspect of adoption, and his repugnance of how the financial aspect reflects deeper concerns with the system. I formulated the meaning as: price differences between children based on race and included these both within the theme of: love is not determined by race, but experience may or may not be.

- (5) The fifth step entailed taking the results that had been accumulated and integrating them into an "exhaustive description" of the topic (Colaizzi, 1989, p. 61). I have provided my exhaustive description of the phenomenon in the results section.
- (6) The sixth step is to "formulate the exhaustive description in as unequivocal a statement of identification of its fundamental structure as possible" (Colaizzi, 1989, p. 61). I have provided my statement of identification in the results section. I have also provided a structure of themes to assist the reader in understanding the participants' experiences of transracial adoption.
- (7) The seventh and final step was to validate the findings. I followed Colaizzi's (1989) recommendation and achieved this step by returning to the participants, asking them how the results compared with their experiences, and working any new data into the final product of the research findings.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In conducting a qualitative inquiry, one of the most basic questions becomes whether or not the findings are worth being considered and taken seriously. The trustworthiness of the study establishes its credibility and begins to answer this pivotal question (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In phenomenological research in particular, whether or not the data is considered trustworthy depends on the extent to which the findings of the study are able to reflect the essence of the phenomenon from the participant's perspective (Baker, Wuerst, & Stern, 1992).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest four criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. "Credibility" refers to the criteria that the findings of the study should reflect the experiences of the participants in all their multiplicity. In accordance with their recommendations, I interviewed my participants four times (twice jointly and twice individually). I also completed a member check upon completion of the initial data analysis to re-check my findings against the participants' experiences and to give them an additional opportunity for reflection, or to correct any misinterpretation I may have made. In addition, I made use of an internal auditor or "peer debriefer" to assist me in remaining cognizant of my biases, my personal process and to assist me in bracketing my experiences so that I could best represent the experiences of my participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). I met with the internal auditor monthly throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing process. I integrated feedback from the internal auditor into the final analysis for this

project. Additionally, I participated in reflexive journaling as a means of bracketing my experience throughout the study.

“Transferability” refers to the criteria that potential individuals who would like to apply the findings of the study to another time or place have sufficient information to deduce the similarities or differences between the “sending and receiving” contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In accordance with their recommendations, I have compiled a thick and detailed description of the time and context in which the research took place, in order that someone interested in making a transfer can making an informed decision (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

“Dependability” and “confirmability” are interrelated concepts and both refer to the criteria that the findings be based upon sound and reliable methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). “Dependability” and “confirmability” are the qualitative researcher’s equivalents for “reliability” and “objectivity” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In accordance with their recommendations, I kept an audit trail and engaged an external auditor to review the transcripts, my reflexive journal, the analyses, and other related materials to ensure that sound methodology was practiced and that there is a logical flow to the findings asserted. The external auditor is an expert in qualitative research and her feedback was integrated into the final analyses of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality

The confidentiality of the participants was protected in several ways. At the beginning of the study, each participant chose a pseudo-name, by which he/she has been and will continue to be referred to in all future publications and presentations. All data

collected on digital recording was numerically coded, saved to an USB drive, and password encoded. Access was granted to only myself and members of my research team. All data transcribed was saved to an USB drive and was password encoded. All saved copies of the data were password encoded. The USB drive was kept in a locked cabinet that only myself and my research team had access to. Once the digital recordings were transcribed, I removed identifying information, such as names, locations, and names of agencies involved with the family. I removed any other information that could be used to identify the participants. Protecting spouses' confidentiality from one another was more complicated. During the face to face interviews, it was clear to me that the participant and I were alone during the individual interviews, and on the telephone the participants reported that they went into the other room while their partner was being interviewed. However, there is no guarantee that this was the case. In returning the participants' summaries to them, I e-mailed them to the personal e-mail address that they provided to me, rather than sending a joint e-mail with all three summaries. My experience with the couples was that they shared their individual interviews with one another before they spoke with me; however, they were given the choice by receiving their summaries individually.

Benefits and Risks of Participation

Prior to their participation, I informed all participants about the possible risks and benefits associated with participating in this research. I also informed them of their right to not answer any question, to end the interview(s) at any time that they chose, and to discontinue participation in the study at any time that they chose.

The possible risks associated with participation in this study were that questions being asked could elicit painful memories or create uncomfortable emotions. There were several steps that I took in order to offset these risks. I am a clinician and although I am clear that this was a research interview and not a therapy session, I monitored affect throughout the interview for signs of distress. I also provided the participants with a list of clinical resources, adoption-related support groups, and relevant websites for their assistance.

The possible benefits associated with participation in this study were that the participants' contribution benefits the existing literature and research on transracial adoption and will assist others to better understand the experience of Caucasian parents who adopt African-American and biracial children. In addition, their contribution may promote more effective interventions and more sensitive policies that have the potential to benefit couples with similar experiences. In addition, participants were given a list of relevant readings on transracial adoption for themselves and their child, they received the findings of the study; and they were given a certificate of appreciation for their contributions.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study focused on understanding Caucasian parents' experiences of adopting African-American/biracial children. Descriptive phenomenology was selected to explore the participants' experiences, following Colaizzi's (1989) recommendations to analyze the findings of this study. The interviews were semi-structured following interview guides in all of the joint and individual interviews.

The participants' contextual information and background will be presented first in order to give the reader a feeling for the participants themselves and an introduction to the way in which their families are organized. Next the findings of the study will be presented. The findings have been organized into two levels: categories and themes. Categories represent the broadest level of the participants' experiences with themes representing the more detailed level of their experiences. Relevant quotations were selected from all participants' interviews to represent their experiences in their own words. Finally, a summary of the findings is presented.

Participants

Six couples (twelve participants) were interviewed for this study. Each participant completed two couple interviews and two individual interviews. All participants were selected for inclusion in the study because they were Caucasian, had adopted an African-American/biracial child, and met at least six of the seven criteria set forth for the study (Appendix A). Presented below are brief biographies on the couples who participated in this study, including contextual and background information relevant

to the study itself. Participants' information has been disguised to protect their confidentiality. This has included the use of pseudo-names, which the participants picked for themselves, as well as the exclusion of any identifying information or information that the participants were not comfortable sharing.

Ross and Rachel

Ross (33 years) and Rachel (36 years) have been married for ten years. They are parents to two African-American children through adoption. The oldest, their son, is five years old and the youngest, their daughter is two years old. Ross and Rachel do not suffer from infertility concerns and chose adoption as their first choice in creating a family. Ross and Rachel intentionally chose to work with an agency program that focused on placing African-American/biracial children for adoption. Both reported that they knew that they wanted to adopt a minority child from the beginning of their process, and that after considering all their options, they decided that adopting African-American children, as opposed to children from other minority groups, was important to them.

Billy and Jane

Billy (38 years) and Jane (36 years) have been married for fourteen years. They are parents to two daughters through adoption. Their oldest daughter is eight years old and was adopted internationally from an Asian country. Their youngest daughter is 4 months old, African-American, and was adopted domestically. Both reported that they have suspected, but undiagnosed infertility concerns. Jane reported that they never considered any type of infertility treatment and it was not a difficult choice to decide on adoption as a way to create their family. She also reported that they never wanted to adopt a Caucasian child.

Alex and Anna

Alex (43 years) and Anna (43 years) have been married for eleven years. They are parents to two daughters through adoption. Their oldest daughter is seven years old, Latina, and was adopted domestically. Their youngest daughter is three and a half years old, African-American/Japanese and was adopted domestically. Anna reported that she does not struggle with infertility, but that due to a medical condition she is not able to carry a pregnancy to term safely. She reported that when they adopted their second daughter, they had not been planning to adopt a Caucasian child. She also reported that they moved out of their comfort zone by adopting a biracial child.

RT and ARB

RT (37 years) and ARB (35 years) have been married for fourteen years. They are parents to two children through adoption. Their oldest child is a daughter, seven years old, Native American/Mexican/Hispanic, and was adopted domestically. Their youngest child is a son, twenty-two months, African-American/Caucasian and was adopted domestically. ARB reported that they had confirmed infertility and worked with an agency that specializes in working with infertile couples. She reported that initially they had not been open to adopting a biracial child, but that they changed their minds after talking to the director of their agency and praying about the adoption.

Mike and Lynette

Mike (37 years) and Lynette (34 years) have been married for fourteen years. They are parents of one daughter through adoption. Their daughter is four years old, African-American, and was adopted domestically. Lynette reported that they have

suspected, but not confirmed infertility. She reported that they were open to children of any race from the beginning of the process.

Jack and Jill

Jack (39 years) and Jill (39 years) have been married for eight years. They are parents of two children through adoption and three children through birth. Their eldest child is a son, twelve years old, Caucasian, and is Jack's child from a previous marriage. Their next child is a son, ten years old, African-American, and was adopted domestically. Their third child is a son, nine years old, Caucasian, and is Jack's child from a previous marriage. Their fourth child is a son, six years old, Caucasian and is biologically their child. Their last child is a daughter, four years old, African-American, and was adopted domestically. Jack and Jill report that they planned to adopt where there was a need, and were told that this need existed with African-American children in the United States.

Findings

Analysis of the participants' experiences as they were expressed in the interviews resulted in the following thematic categories and themes. An outline of the categories and themes can be found in table 3.

Category I: Making the Decision to Adopt Transracially

Participants shared their process of making the decision to adopt, making the decision to adopt transracially, and ultimately making the decision to adopt an African-American or biracial child. This process began when they first considered adoption as an option in growing their families and moved through their ultimate decision to adopt transracially. Participants shared experiences that both exemplified the parts of the process that they found to be easy or smooth and those that they really struggled with.

However, although they shared experiences that were more difficult, it was important to them to clarify that adopting their children had been the right decision and had ultimately been worth any struggles that they experienced. This was reiterated several times throughout the interviews. Participants were reflective of the ways in which adoption was different than birthing children, and how others' perceptions of this difference impacted them as well. At times the participants felt a need to justify their motivations in adopting their children and to clear up any misconceptions about why they had adopted. All of the participants experienced their decision making to be a matter of narrowing the choices that were presented to them in the adoption field overall. None of them reported entering the process knowing that they would adopt an African-American/biracial child. Based on the participants' reports of their experiences, three themes emerged: how adoption is different than birthing a child, narrowing our choices and helping others understand our choices.

Theme 1: How adoption is different than birthing a child

Participants were able to reflect on how the experience of adopting a child is different than birthing a child, whether for the better or the worse. Although it was important to them to communicate that they were happy that they had adopted their children and that aspects of the adoption went much smoother or easier than expected, they also communicated about the aspects of the process that made adoption more difficult. One area that participants noted was how many steps they had to go through to justify their ability to be parents in comparison to parents who birth their children.

Billy offered his perspective on the many steps involved in adoption:

I mean for me, what I hate about the process is I hate filling out the forms. I hate the required especially if you're already an existing parent, I hate all the little

class type education things they make you do. Not that I think people shouldn't be tested or screened a little bit emotionally anyway before they have kids, especially people that have their kids naturally, but I've never been one for paperwork and a lot of seems very repetitious. We've been fingerprinted by the states, feds, and everything else, so many, and local police so many times, its just, it seems like "can't you just pull those from the last ones and kinda run them through?" But they don't. So a little bit of, some of that gets a little repetitious.

Ross added, "Because a lot of people I mean, during the adoption process we sort of joked that maybe we can just go out and have a kid, but to adopt you have to have CPR training. You have to have first aid training. You have to read things. You have to talk about parenting and discipline." Jill summed up an overall message that although the adoption of their children went well, adoption is different than the norm in becoming a parent, and therefore the whole process is a learning experience. "Well, I would say that it was fairly easy to do...I think the whole experience of adoption is something that you need to get used to."

In addition to the steps involved in adoption, participants reflected on the cost involved, and how these costs have impacted their choices regarding family planning. Participants talked about financial aspects unique to adoption, and how they prepared for these expenses. All of the husbands and all but one of the wives discussed the financial implications of adoption. All agreed that adopting was an expensive way to grow their families, and that it had made an impact on some aspect of their choices whether it was timing, number of children, or choice of agency and program. Participants struggled with the business side of adoption and how at times it felt like they were paying for their children. Overall even though adoption was an expensive way in which to form their families, participants agreed that they were financially able to handle it. Anna shared:

Well it wasn't like "oh let's just go out and have another kid." It was a conscious like "how are we going to make this work." The adoption fees are expensive and

you have to plan. It's just like any other financial decision that you make. You have to have the money all up front, even if you pay it out monthly. It's a big deal. It's not just "oh let's go have a million kids." Our situation, it was a stretch, but it worked.

RT discussed some of the unexpected costs that came along with adoption and how those impacted future adoptions:

Well, we had plenty of money to adopt, but once we got into the process and the birthfather ended up taking us to court for custody, that kind of, that drained our finances. [There were] five and a half years in between adoptions we had some time to sort of recuperate and you know, save back up some money and pay some loans off.

Lynette discussed her initial feelings at the cost of the adoption and how she was able to resolve that in her mind, "so, yeah, as far as initially, you get sticker shock looking at the adoption fees, but with the agency we chose, we knew that included birth parent counseling and court costs and paying of employees. So, in my mind I could justify the costs."

Billy commented on how ultimately their income allowed them to adopt if that is what they wanted to do. He also highlighted the aspect of adoption that felt more like a business, "I mean, ultimately, you can look at it, say we're working middle-class Americans, and if we wanna buy something, we're gonna come up with a way to come up with the money and do it." Alex commented on the business aspect of adoption:

But it is a little, it's just different. When we adopted [our daughter] it's like you walk in there with a check and you walk out with a baby. That was one of the weirdest parts for me. It's almost like you're going in and paying for a child, which I understand you're paying for the services, but it was like one of the last things wrapping up there was the exchange of money, and then out the door you go with a baby. Right?

In addition to dealing with the differences between the process of adoption and giving birth, participants discussed some emotional aspects of the experience that are

similar and different. These included dealing with the perceptions that others hold about adoption being a less satisfactory avenue to having children. Participants described how others questioned whether you are missing out on something if you adopt instead of having biological children. Participants described how special it was to adopt and how it does not impact their feelings for their children. The exception was the one couple who had children both through adoption and biologically. Both the husband and wife talked about the greater difficulty they experienced in the process of bonding with the child they adopted.

Anna described the innuendo that she receives from her friends about the difference between adoption and having children biologically, “My friends will still ask me sometimes in a couched way like, they’ll ask questions in an indirect way about how can you love your child as much. I sense that from them. Like well your adopted child or your da, da, da child, or well my natural child.” In a similar vein, Rachel described how her sister-in-law feels about the difference between adoption and pregnancy:

I had this phone conversation with his sister after their second child...and so she was telling me that I just needed to be pregnant. It’s the most wonderful thing in the world and I kept telling her I said you know I don’t, I don’t feel that need to, to have that pregnancy to be a mom and it’s the whole. I mean I don’t think she had any problems with us adopting but just that that’s a whole biological birth. You need to have this experience and I don’t feel like I’m missing out...I mean I think she has great love and affection for [our son] and [our daughter] but it’s just that still whole biological birth, the whole pregnancy and how it’s such a wonderful thing and that’s like this, this whole process, the adoption process is a wonderful thing too and I wouldn’t trade that.

Ross expanded on the misconception in society about how adoptive parents love their children, “In terms of being the same, I mean I think, I think adoption in general still has kind of a stigma so people don’t understand that when you adopt a kid, you really

love them the same as if they came out of your body.” In a similar vein RT shared, “[They are] just like [our] own biologically. We don’t really think of it that way.”

Anna reflected that maybe lack of experience leads to the misconceptions, “Going through the experience of adopting a child and loving this child no matter- I don’t know, I think adoption is one of those things you don’t understand until you have actually done it.”

Jack and Jill, the only couple in the study who had both the experiences of having children biologically and through adoption had a slightly different perspective. Although they did not discuss others’ feelings about the difference between biology and adoption, they reflected on their own experiences. Jill shared:

That, with bonding, and like [my husband] said, handing you a baby. You go from not having a baby to all of the sudden, somebody handing you a baby, and as prepared as you think you are, you’re not... No, I mean I had the same feelings, in terms of being protective and wanting to take care of her and wanting her close to me. It was just different than my biological son. I don’t know how different people react. I mean some people say that they put the baby in your arms and you’re automatically bonded. Maybe some people are like that. I wasn’t.

Jack added, “It’s just a hard for me, it was harder, well just in it takes a little longer to bond...But in all fairness, I don’t bond real well with the little ones. I mean, when all of the kids were born, I’m just not a big baby guy.”

Theme 2: Narrowing our choices

The choices in adoption are varied, parents can choose to adopt domestically or internationally, and through an agency, the state, or a private entity. In addition, parents can be selective in terms of the gender, ethnicity, age, and ability status of the children that they are willing to adopt. Participants spent time reflecting on some of the choices that were available to them in the adoption process and how they ultimately chose to

adopt domestically, through an agency, and decided on their openness to adopting an African-American/biracial child.

Five of the participants shared that they had considered adopting internationally before ultimately deciding that adopting within the United States was a better choice for their family. Although some participants had originally considered Africa as a country to adopt from, others also considered China and South American countries. Participants shared several different reasons for changing their mind about international adoption, including finding a domestic program that was a good fit for them, not meeting age requirements for countries that they were considering, and the time and expensive nature of international adoption. Rachel shared how age requirements influenced their choices, “so we did consider international, different race, different culture. I think we looked at China but we weren’t old enough at the time.” She went on to elaborate on the journey she took from wanting to adopt internationally to her decision to adopt within the states:

I felt compelled to adopt from Africa. That’s just the culture I feel connected to and- and then we went with [name of agency] and found the [name of domestic program] they have, the [name of domestic program-specifically working with African-American children], that was just a good fit of I guess filling our, our calling so to speak to adopt.

Mike discussed his reasoning for choosing domestic adoption over international adoption:

And then find out about the differences between international adoption opposed to local...just the process of going through an international agency seemed too time consuming and costly and the availability of us having to go somewhere and both having to be there for a period of time. It just didn’t seem something that we could handle at the time.

In addition to entering the adoption process by contemplating international adoption, it was common for the participants to lack a clear idea as to the ethnicity they

would specify or seek in the child that they would adopt, if they specified at all. Jane shared, “Well, when we started the adoption actually, I don’t think we knew for sure what race.” Although they were not clear about race or ethnicity, there was a common experience of entering the field of adoption knowing that they would not adopt a white child. Although not all the participants explained their initial decision not to pursue the adoption of a Caucasian child, several did. Rachel and Jill both shared the mindset that adopting where there was a need was an important motivating factor in narrowing their choices in adoption. Rachel reflected:

I don’t know that we sought out to find kids of other races but...I think we thought that that was something that we’d be willing and comfortable to parent with and so...but then also knowing that there was a need for parents that would be willing to work with that program [which specializes in the adoption of minority children]...I guess we just wanted to be parents and to adopt and obviously we knew there was probably more of a need for parents of certain kids from a certain culture.

Jill shared how becoming educated on where there was a need assisted them in changing their initial direction in adoption. “Then we found out that there wasn’t an overwhelming need in [that country], so we asked our social worker where the need was, and she said the United States, with African-American children...we just wanted to adopt where there was a need.”

An additional factor that influenced the narrowing process for participants was the difference in availability of minority children and Caucasian children and how this impacted the wait time involved for a child. Anna discussed the impact of being open to African-American/biracial children on their wait time, “but since we were much more open to blacks in particular, or bi-racial children, we were getting slammed, what I would consider slammed, two in one month with opportunities.” Billy discussed how the wait

difference impacted their decision, “the reason we never decided, we never even considered adopting a white kid, an American white kid, one, the wait’s a lot longer, and [my wife] wasn’t gonna really wait that long.” Lynette shared, “which just from the research we did, we knew that getting a Caucasian child placed in your family, you would probably wait longer than you would for an African-American.” Jill was the only woman in the study who had a biological child. She shared her perspective which she believed might be different based on her lack of an infertility concern. “We can have children, so adopting a white child and being in line for a year or two to adopt a white infant just didn’t make sense to us.”

All, but one of the couples interviewed had adopted more than one child. None of the parents had adopted a Caucasian child, either time. Therefore, participants commented on both their decision to adopt transracially the first time, and their motivations behind making a similar decision the second time. Participants who had two children of color reported that part of their motivation in adopting an African-American or biracial child the second time around was their belief that it would be a positive experience for their existing child to have a sibling who also was not Caucasian. Therefore their choices in the second adoption were already partially narrowed by the choices that they had made in the first. Anna shared:

Since we already had a child that was different from us in some way that we wanted another child for her to have something in common with, so there would be two of them and two of us and they would have each other and we would have each other...we wanted her to have a compatriot in some way other than just being a sister. Someone else that looks like her...even when we adopted for the first time we said “yeah, and if we ever adopt again we are going to make sure that [our daughter] has someone that looks like her so she can look in the household and see another person that looks like her instead of two Caucasian parents.”

Rachel added, “you know like [my husband] said I think our hope is that they will be a support system for each other and not feel like they’re the only one out there.” In addition to their own feelings about the importance of minority status similarity for their existing children, participants reported that their children voiced wanting a sibling of color, or being thankful that they had a sibling of color. Billy reflected on his older child’s perspective, “[our older daughter] really wanted another kid in the family who was brown, to be quite honest, I mean, she didn’t wanna be...the only one.”

Although the participants reported that they were fairly open in terms of racial preferences from the beginning of the adoption process, most of the participants reported that they did not enter the adoption process planning to adopt an African-American or biracial child. They shared that something happened along the way that either led them to consider adopting an African-American child or to reconsider their reservations. Anna discussed how she and her partner became more open to adopting an African-American child through their process of adoption:

And then through this whole process, through learning and meeting people and discussion, it’s just like all the walls came tumbling down, so by the time we adopted [our daughter] it was like “hey, welcome into our world. We don’t care if you are purple. You are a child and we love you and you are going to be our daughter.” So it was a real growing experience from starting point A to the ending point B.

RT discussed how their agency director had been instrumental in assisting them with thinking through their concerns and being more open:

I think our decision to be more open to go into bi-racial adoption instead of just strictly Caucasian or a Caucasian Hispanic mix. That being bi-racial with African-American mixture...let’s just say, [the director] at [our adoption agency] had kind of put a little seed in our, planted a small seed early on and..... we were just talking and we said, “you know, what’s the big deal about bi-racial.” When we really come down to it and think about it and have to ask, in fact, our daughter is biracial as well. Because here we are Caucasian, our daughter is a whole

different mixture of races than we are. So, why not open our eye a little bit and our heart a little bit more to that mixture for ourselves and see what, just to see what that would...

Theme 3: Helping others understand our choices

A part of the process for participants was helping others understand the choices they made in choosing to adopt an African-American/biracial child. Participants shared experiences that ranged from simply wanting others to understand what motivated them to feeling as though they needed to defend the choices that they had made to others. Sometimes participants felt as though others placed motives upon them, such as being noble or doing their children a favor.

It was a common experience for participants to receive praise for their willingness to adopt their children. However, this placed them in an uncomfortable position and it was important to them to stress that they did not do their child a favor. Participants also referred to the racial aspect of the praise that they received, noting that others often referred to how noble it was of them to adopt African-American/biracial children, as though their children should be lucky that anyone adopted them because of their race. They also shared that sometimes they did not know how to respond when others praised their choices.

Ross shared his struggles with people's perceptions and especially the idea that they were adopting a child that no one else would want:

We've never deliberately tried to, you know people sort of say "oh what a good thing you've done- to adopt black children...how you guys are doing great things" and it's like you know, why? Because we're parents? I mean being a parent's hard enough you know but people just have this sense that oh you, you just are doing great. "You're doing God's work or you're whatever because you adopted kids that are a different color that no one else would want or something" and I hear that.

Anna discussed her response to these perceptions, “my dad was so thrilled that we could do it again because he was a little bit more you are going to change some kid’s life. Instead of no, it’s the other way around. They change our life.” Lynette added, “I brought [our daughter] into work one day and one of our patients had mentioned we’re these great people because we adopted an African-American child. This has nothing to do with why we adopted her. We’re as fortunate to have her as she is to have us.”

In addition to clarifying that they did not do their children a favor, participants also made it clear that they did not adopt for political reasons and did not want their children to represent a cause. Participants were aware of the political implications involved in the adoption of their children, but instead of being a motivating factor in their adoption, it was often the reason that gave them pause in making the decision. Anna reflected on how the political side of adoption almost motivated them not to adopt an African-American child:

I don’t think at that point we had said African-American because we were, as I said to [my husband], living in [our state], I don’t want to be the couple that makes a political statement to the world and walk around with our child...that’s the political part of it that I didn’t want way back in the beginning when we were thinking about whether to adopt black children or not. That’s the part I dreaded was not knowing what, and you know now it’s nothing that would have stopped me, and it wouldn’t stop me again.

In a similar vein Rachel shared, “I mean we didn’t adopt them for that reason just to make some kind of social statement trying to correct all the wrongs that have been done in America in the last, you know, 200 or 300 years.” They were also clear that they did not want to place their children in the position of having to represent a cause. Rachel’s husband Ross reflected, “I mean it’s sort of like you wanna be open and strive for justice but not make your kids the cause...I’m just careful not to make them the cause.” Jill

added, "I don't wanna put my children in a position where they're in the spotlight because their mom's out picketing, saying everybody's the same."

At times participants felt as though family members were asking them to justify their decision to adopt transracially. The majority of questions surrounding their decision had to do with why they had chosen to adopt an African-American/biracial child.

Participants shared what a discouraging experience this was and the anger that this brought up in them. Rachel talked about the experience of being questioned in front of her extended family:

I don't know if we made the announcement or my mom made the announcement. She was telling that we were adopting and talked about the program and so my grandmother in the restaurant with all these people around having their Thanksgiving meals, says, "Why do you wanna adopt a black baby". You know just kind of that, with that tone in her voice like what are you doing and so then you know oh course that just embarrassed us and made us mad and we're like we're not gonna have this discussion in a restaurant over Thanksgiving dinner and so.

Jill shared how her history with her family had informed their ideas about why she had chosen to adopt an African-American child. She highlighted what was true for many participants, that her family members' concerns centered on how the adoption would affect them:

Well, my family is extremely racist. I grew up in a very racist family pretty much across the board. At one period in time, I dated an African-American man, and my family actually disowned me, for more than two years. So a big part, when we decided to adopt, my family had this notion that we were adopting a black child so that I could punish them for the rest of their lives, which is really amazing to me, because it's the rest of my life, too. Obviously, adopting a child...My family called me, and my grandma, who's in her 80's, called and said, 'What are people gonna think of the family?' Everything was... very centered on them and what people were gonna think about them and how they were going to handle it and what they were going to say to people. So that was pretty difficult for us to deal with.

For the majority of participants, questions about why they would make this choice came from an older generation of family members and they attributed many of their concerns to the generation in which they were raised. Billy shared his perceptions on why his grandparents were the only members of the family that were not supportive and how they chose to handle it:

My grandfather...when we were doing the Panama thing, he gave us some money for that. He goes, "Well, I don't care what kinda baby you get, as long as it's not a black baby." So we never, he knows, I think, that our kids are all brown, but we really never explained it to him...well, they've always been, they have always been, they grew up when things were strictly separate, and they aren't openly comfortable with the whole thing.

Category II: My child is African-American/biracial AND a member of our family

Another category emerged which reflected participants' struggles to balance the messages that they send to their children regarding the importance of their race and their child's role in the family. The majority of participants reflected on the idea that it was important for them to acknowledge their child's identity as an African-American/biracial individual, to prepare for what it would mean to parent an African-American/biracial child, and to assist their child in making connections within their own culture. However, they also stressed the ways in which parenting their children were unrelated to race and the importance of allowing their child to just be a member of their family and not overemphasize the differences between their child and the rest of the family. It was important for these parents that their children felt accepted and a part of their families, rather than feeling like an outsider who does not quite fit. A part of this process for participants was understanding their own feelings about race and how these have impacted their decisions in becoming a family and their feelings about their child. Based on the participants' reports of their experiences, four themes emerged: we prepared to

parent an African-American/biracial child, love is not determined by race but experience may or may not be, we have a duty to connect our child to his/her culture, and conversations about race/adoption are open but not forced.

Theme 1: We prepared to parent an African-American/biracial child

Participants took steps to prepare to adopt and raise an African-American/biracial child, both before and after the adoption took place. However most reported that the majority of their preparations took place after their children were already in their home because they did not know for sure that they would be adopting an African-American/biracial child until shortly before placement of the child in their home. Given that all the children who were adopted were placed at birth or shortly thereafter, a lot of the preparations were also centered on simply getting ready to have a baby in the home. Although participants agreed that the transracial aspect of the adoption impacted their lives, many described how the overall process of just becoming and being a parent changed their lives the most. They focused on the aspects of preparing for a baby and becoming a parent that are independent of a racial difference. Lynette reflected:

Most of the time, you know, now we're just a family. You know, we're for the most part, until somebody reminds us. You know, we're just like any other family. We have other, you know, sometimes with the different races we just have things we have to be more mindful of than other families do. But, you know, when you're of the same race there's things that we have to do that other families don't. But for the most part we're [our daughter's] parents, regardless of the differences in our races.

In a similar vein, Alex shared:

A lot of times I just, it's out of my mindset in terms of the race issue. To me, it's more of just the parent/kid dynamic is the dominant thing that's on an ongoing basis. How do you be a good dad and what does that mean...yeah, for me all the huge potential concerns about adoption and transracial kids, all that kind of goes behind you when you are sleep deprived, changing diapers, doing the raising, brushing teeth for little kids and did all the stuff.

Billy described preparing for their daughter to come home, “I mean, we didn’t go and buy a bunch of Martin Luther King posters and put them in her room or anything like that. We just, we decorated the nursery like you would with any other kid, and just regular baby in the house kinda stuff.”

Ross summed up the experience of becoming a parent:

I mean I think parenting in general is a big responsibility. Just dropping everything you know I mean pretty much from, it’s the same thing when biological birth you know here’s the baby and all the sudden the world changes and you know. So it’s the same thing you know I mean when you have short notice. We went to [our agency]. They handed you the baby and your life changes and you know. So I mean just in general being a parent I think is, is a big challenge, a big chore, responsibility.

Although participants did feel that their major early preparations dealt with having a baby in the family overall, they also discussed those early preparations that did directly focus on the fact that they would be raising African-American/biracial children. Of these preparations, most revolved around reflecting the multicultural nature of their family in their homes, reading about parenting issues they would face, learning more about black history, and identifying more concrete issues that they would face like taking care of skin and hair. They discussed the importance of having others to turn to for advice and guidance in their preparations.

Participants who had girls reported that they had purchased multicultural dolls as a way of preparing for the inclusion of their children’s culture in their home. Lynette shared, “and then she has dolls of different, you know, different races or colors. But those are all things that were kind of after the fact. I guess, because we didn’t know the race of our child.” Jill expanded on their reasoning for the dolls, “we made a point to get

our daughter African-American dolls, as well as white dolls and Asian dolls and Hispanic dolls...so everything in our home is not all a bunch of white people, I guess.”

Additionally, participants attempted to represent their children’s culture in their homes by making a point of buying children’s literature that featured children of African-American descent. For some participants, this was the main way in which they attempted to prepare their home for the adoption. Mike shared:

But that also put in our heads after the adoption some of the literature we buy now or books that we buy are more inter-racially or more African-American related about adoption. You know, she can see pictures of other African-American child[ren] or babies. Instead of buying the book with the Caucasian child and it’s talking about adoption. We look for African-American literature based on that.

Jill reported, “we made a point to go out and get books with the main characters who are African-American.” Rachel reflected on the idea that buying books was one of the few things that they did to prepare their home for a multicultural child, “I think we’ve, we tried to do even before we got [our son] to get books that weren’t just filled with white kids and so. And then...and so for the most part I don’t know that we did a lot to prepare the house necessarily except for buying a few children’s books.”

Participants shared that in addition to preparing their homes for the arrival of their children, they attempted to prepare their lives by exploring ways to integrate the culture of their children into their lives and to prepare for the journey ahead. Participants admitted that their efforts in this area have remained fairly minor. Participants used reading as one of the main ways to learn about transracial adoption and to prepare for the journey ahead. While some of the reading was part of continuing educational requirements with agencies or social workers that the participants were working with, others sought out readings on their own. Participants reported that they continue to read

as new issues arise in their families, and that they anticipate re-reading some material as it becomes more relevant to their situation in the future. Anna discussed how reading is one of the main avenues that she uses to prepare herself for new experiences, “but before the adoption took place, I’m always, I like to know as much as possible before getting into something. And so I read all these essays on this website... about transracial adopting and the issues that come up. That was one of the most helpful things.” Rachel shared how they read as a part of agency requirements:

But we said, we did have to read like we had to do like a continuing ed requirement I guess for [our agency] for a, I guess every six months that we were still on the waiting and approving process. So you know I think we read it, a couple of books and just about racial identity and then I read Rachel Walker’s autobiography about Black, White, and Jewish.

In a similar vein, Jill shared, “I read a lot of books, and I actually took some classes at the adoption agency regarding transracial adoption and how to deal with it, how to deal with the backlash from white people, and how to deal with it with black people.” Mike discussed how he tries to keep up with news or history related to the African-American population so that he can assist his daughter with questions she may have in the future:

Right, you kind of every time I read that news or I look at a situation or something like that, I tend to gravitate towards the African-American a little more to try to find out their side of it or try to educate myself a little bit more about the situation. Or things on the news, I tend to gravitate towards that a little more, so I’m trying to educate myself a little bit more. So, down the line if [our daughter] asks a question about a situation in history, I can say, you know, I’m able to point it out a little bit more I guess.

In addition to reading on parenting issues and current events, two of the participants discussed how they used the study of African-American history to prepare for the multicultural aspect of their homes and families and included their children in

celebrating the history as they got older. Mike shared how he used his love of history overall to help him connect with this new aspect of his family:

I used to read a lot but I was looking at African-American literature and things like that that were adult oriented. So, I educated myself a little bit more on that but, you know, I'm a big history buff anyway. I tried to, I've always been big on Black History Month and stuff like that through employment before. So, I kind of prepared on a lot of that.

Anna talked about ways in which she includes her daughter in these lessons, "the things we do now are we...we read about Martin Luther King all the time. My older daughter thinks he's just this fabulous hero... we celebrate the day."

Participants found that a big part of their preparation had to do with learning how to care for their children's hair and skin, since it was significantly different than their own. The women especially were continually looking for help and new ideas in this area. There seemed to be great significance around learning to care for daughter's hair especially and recognizing this aspect of grooming as very important for the child's ability to connect with others who are culturally similar to her and for the participants' own recognition as good caregivers among the African-American community. Anna reflected on how she reaches out to others for advice in the area of skin and hair care:

But anyway because of the different skin tones, I'm having to learn how to care for her skin. And so I have a friend who has given me a lot of pointers. And then I also will keep my eye out. I've met a couple other Caucasian women who have African-American daughters and if their hair looks good I'll say, "hey what do you do?" We'll just get into this conversation.

She added that learning to take proper care of her daughter's hair and skin have larger implications for her daughter's self image:

Take care of them properly, make them comfortable. Like her skin is dry. I have to put lotion on it at least once a day, maybe twice a day. I want her to be proud of her curly hair and not see it as "oh mom's always complaining about it." That's something that's a big deal. And then "oh mom doesn't have time to do

my hair.” I want her to celebrate her curliness and the other parts of her culture, which we are still learning about.

Billy shared that even though he has very curly hair, learning to care for his daughter’s hair is a completely different experience, “people think I have a white man’s afro. It’s nothing- it’s not the same at all. I mean, you can’t wash and condition her hair like you would mine. I’d just, you know... its different stuff.” Rachel highlighted the difference between caring for her son’s hair and learning to care for her daughter’s, “and you know [our son] was kind of hit and miss for awhile and then with [our daughter], with having a girl, it’s been a whole new ball game...”

Rachel reflected on how she has really internalized the message that her ability to take care of her children in terms of appearance will have an impact on their ability to connect to their culture:

She kind of laid down the line for us that you have to figure out the skin and the hair. I mean she’s like you just have to and she says like you have to make sure that your kids are always dressed well and their hair looks good because kids are gonna pick on them for school, at school...and that really stuck with me that she really, I mean really hit home with me.

She added, “I just I feel somewhat of a pressure to have them presentable or have us presentable in a sense that we’re not, we’re gonna be okay in, in the white society but they’re also gonna be okay in the black society.”

Most participants reflected on how the issues directly related to raising a child of a different race were not surfacing until their children were older, therefore although they were able to prepare some ahead of time there was also a continuous nature to their preparations. Ross shared:

And for me, that kind of stuff I think is coming up again because I mean I’ve read that stuff and whatever. And it’s like until now I think, they’ve been sheltered with us in the home and now it just it feels like we’re about to start something

new with kindergarten. So some of those things are gonna come up that haven't. So I've found myself more motivated to try to read more now because it's more an issue now ...

In preparing for their children, participants received advice from varied sources. Although some shared that they received help before their child was placed with them, most reported that the help came after their child was home. Participants were not uniform in where they received advice and help. While some felt that their agencies provided a lot of information, others felt like the agency offered very little. One reported that they did not receive any guidance at all. Regardless of where the help came from, it was noted as an important part of their preparations and a needed source of support. Lynette discussed how she was able to connect with a parent group to assist in her preparations, "But that wasn't through the agency. It just so happened that our adoption worker had adopted transracially. She was like, 'Hey, my family meets and some other families meet. Are you interested in getting together with us?'"

Jill discussed how her African-American friends and acquaintances were a source of support:

I made calls to some of my African-American friends to ask them, "How do I do this? How do I do that? How do I take care of her skin?" I still do that to this day, because I'm still trying to get it right...In meeting some of the African-American people that we have adopting [our daughter], they have kinda instructed us and taught us how to deal with the African-American community, and the backlash that we get from some of those people in adopting an African-American child.

Rachel discussed the importance of on-going education seminars in receiving help, "So, and then they have ongoing panel discussions and things like they had a seminar called True Colors where they went and had a panel discussion of talking about

hair and skin and all sorts of different things. And so just the ongoing education I think has been good.”

Theme 2: Love is not determined by race, but experience may or may not be

The experience of adopting transracially pushed participants to really think about their feelings about race. These feelings were complex and spanned several aspects of their parenting, including how they feel about their children and the choices that they make related to raising their children. All of the participants reflected on how the race of their children does not determine their children’s value and does not determine how they feel about their children. They were able to reflect on how their awareness of their child’s race fades at times and is not always a part of their conscious awareness. The participants differed in terms of their thinking about how race has and will continue to impact their child’s experiences outside of the home. The majority of participants shared a recognition that although race is not a defining factor in their relationship with their children, it will be a defining factor in their children’s experiences outside of their home because it is still an issue in society. For these participants, it is this recognition that pushes them to remain aware of the impact of race and to express a willingness to address racial issues with their children. A minority of participants (two couples) shared that race does not have more of an impact on their child’s experience than other issues. These participants in turn, placed less emphasis on ways that they could address their child’s race in their family and less importance on assisting their child with the development of a racial identity.

Participants discussed the idea that race is not a factor in how they feel about their children, and that ultimately they simply wanted to be parents. RT shared, “I don’t really

think [adopting a biracial child] was that much different...and I didn't feel like it was any, any different as far as transracial. I didn't really think about that too much." His wife, ARB added, "It's not a definition or anything. We don't look at it as saying, 'oh, well she's Native American, Hispanic, and Caucasian and he's African-American/Caucasian,' no, it is just my son and my daughter."

Mike reflected on their ultimate desire to become parents to a child, rather than a certain type of child, "Yeah, it didn't matter to us at that point. We saw the acceptance of the other family members within the family and we wanted a child so badly it didn't matter. And it doesn't matter at all. We knew that whatever child we would get, we would love." Similarly, Ross shared how important it was to be open and just to become parents:

[adopting an African-American child] was certainly something that we were open to and, not that we're sort of blind to color in the sense that it doesn't matter, but that it didn't matter to us necessarily what color our kids were. It didn't matter in terms of them being our kids or not or whatever...I think it's just a matter of being open and ultimately it didn't really matter to us what color the kids were or anything. We wanted to be parents.

Alex reflected on the fact that there are differences, but that ultimately a child is a child, "yeah, there's differences, but in the grand scheme of things they are both going to have different issues in different cultures, different role models, but in the grand scheme of things it's a baby."

In addition to noting that color did not matter in their feelings toward their children, some of the participants commented on the idea that race became less salient with time and sometimes they even forget about the differences between themselves and their children. Alex shared:

And the second issue is the you look different from me, I look different from you transracial issue, which is, I catch myself, I totally forget about and then I'll be walking with the kids hand in hand down a street or a store and look into the mirror and I'm like "wow, I'm really pink and pasty and these kids are beautiful and brown with curly hair. Don't we make a funny sight."

Jill also shared that she notes the difference more often when others bring it to her attention, "I mean, we know they're black, obviously, but I don't look at them and...I don't even think about it until people stare at us when we're out in public."

Ross reflected on how his awareness of the differences has faded over time, "when the kids, while [our son] especially, when he was very little and we'd just gotten him, I just remember when I'd look at him I'd think about the fact that he was black and he was a different skin color and, now it's like it doesn't even matter."

Although participants shared that race was not a determining factor in their personal feelings toward their children, the majority reflected on how race continues to be an important factor in our society and how that fact would ultimately impact their children's experiences. Participants discussed how racism is evident within adoption itself, and discussed how important it was to assist their child in understanding and being able to deal with the racism that they will face.

Mike shared, "I kinda have a feeling that we'll run into situations that will happen just because that, unfortunately, the American society still hasn't gotten over racial differences." Rachel reflected on the idea that society believes that it has come farther than it has, "there is a lot of, I think, racial tension still and I just don't know that, I think we think that we've come a long way, but I don't think that we have."

Anna discussed the racism aimed at transracial families in particular, "the U.S. has so much baggage about it. I'm not saying every place in the U.S. is like this, but, like

I said [our city] is probably the best place in [our state] to be raising transracial, to have this kind of unit.”

Participants shared their awareness of how race plays a role, even in adoption. Two participants noted the differences in adoption costs based on race, and commented on their concerns about the practice. Billy reflected, “...the fact that it costs two to three times as much money to adopt a white kid as it does a black kid is just ridiculously offensive that they’re basically, again, seeing it as a commodity, making a lot of money for it...I just find that to be appalling.” Similarly, Jill noted:

It bothered me in the sense that when they talk about the cost of adoption, its half of what it is, its half to adopt an African-American child compared to a white child, which, not that we wanted to spend the extra money, but it’s just kinda, I don’t know. That’s weird to us, because it’s like a price on you because of what your nationality is or your color.

Although Lynette did not share an opinion on how she felt about the difference, she noted the price difference as well, “Ours didn’t, but when we were researching, I noticed some where if you were interested in adopting an African-American child it costs less. Which, now that I look back, I had forgotten all about that...”

Part of the experience of adopting transracially for these parents was acknowledging the fact that their children will face racism. Participants discussed their expectations about what this will look like for their children in the future and how they are preparing their children to deal with racism.

The majority of parents in the study had children who are not school aged yet or just beginning school. They discussed the idea that age will impact their children’s experiences of racism, and although the majority have not experienced a lot of, or any racism currently, they expect to in the future. Lynette shared:

My hope is we don't. Will it probably happen? I would say yes. I feel like once [our daughter] is in school and has- cause as children get older, you know, they pick up on their parent's viewpoints and I don't want to say racism, but it could be racism...and it seems like the other families that we know who have adopted transracially, its kind of like, once you get into school, maybe kindergarten not so bad, but first and second grade is when the questions come out. And sometimes the racial slurs and that sort of thing. So, I don't, if it happens to the other families, it's a chance that it would happen to us as well.

In the same vein, Ross shared their expectations for the coming year as their son starts school. "I think [our son] starting kindergarten this fall and I think that's gonna change the landscape a lot just because you're gonna, we're gonna be interacting with a lot more kids and a lot more families."

Alex shared his expectations for the teen years:

Yeah, I'm expecting it as we get into older school situations, as kids get to be 14, 16, whatever years old and they have a different perspective on the world and they are not sure about things, maybe they are fearful about things. I think as kids unfortunately learn about racism at an early age and it comes through the school environment, I think we will start to see a lot more of that. But not in first grade.

Participants explored how they are beginning to talk to their children about racism and deal with incidents when they occur. Rachel talked about the importance of talking with their kids about racism, "you just don't wanna ignore it because I mean obviously it's, I don't know. It's who they are and they're gonna have to face questions and jokes and jeers." Ross summed up their responsibility toward their children, given the state of race relations in the U.S., "So I sort of sometimes I tell myself don't forget to help prepare the kids in a way. You know because you don't wanna...be blind to skin color because it's obviously still a big deal."

Although participants recognize the importance of addressing racial issues with their children and preparing them to deal with the struggles that may lie ahead, they also

discuss how difficult it is to have these conversations and how they go about working with their children.

Anna shared her ideas of how to discuss racism with children:

So I think its like baby steps where you get the kids to understand the history of African-American culture in this country, how it all started...so we are having these little conversations and how wrong that is and how they changed the laws, but there is still left over attitudes. So we are having the conversation. I think we are having the conversation a lot, but I just don't even recognize it as that because it's so little. Its just little bits and little pieces here and there instead of one big giant okay here is the racism lecture. I think kids learn better by building on the little building blocks regardless of whatever topic you are trying to teach them about.

Participants also shared how difficult it is to have to explain to their children what racism is and how it will affect them. For those who have watched their children experience racism first hand, the pain intensified. Alex shared his struggles with talking to his young daughter about racism in the United States:

To me one of the hardest things is walking with my daughters through the whole pathway of racism issues and the United States and in the South in 2007 and beyond where, that's hard enough no matter if you are a transracial or not transracial family, to walk a black three year old through and try to describe why people do the things they do.

Jack described the pain involved in watching their child experience racism and then pulling themselves together to help their child deal with it:

Yeah, I, its horrible. I mean, for the older child that...for him to cry because somebody called him a name, first initially wants you to go choke whoever did it, and then when you come off that, it's "all right, what are we gonna do to take the steps to have this not happen again"...I think [my wife] has done a real nice job of just not letting it go. Not going to the child and saying, "Hey, its okay. This thing's gonna happen." We kinda take the approach of it's not okay.

Two of the couples (four participants) reflected on the idea that race does not necessarily determine experience. This was significantly different than the positions taken by the other couples. For one couple, RT and ARB, the fact that their children

physically resemble one another and them in significant ways has limited their visibility as an adoptive family. It also seems to affect how these parents believe race will function in their lives. ARB reflected on these similarities:

Well, the funny thing is that everybody says that our daughter and [son]...both favor us really more than a child biologically probably would because they both have really dark eyes. And [my husband] has dark eyes. I have naturally curly hair and they both have naturally curly hair. And they both have, they're both dark complected. Now, neither one of us is really dark complected, but they both favor each other in similarity that way.

Similarly, RT focused on the similarities between them:

[Our son] is not full-fledged African-American. He's, his skin tone is like our daughter's and actually, I mean, they look like they have the same skin tone. You know, they're both that dark complected, especially when they're out in the sun. They turn dark real quick. And we're a little lighter, but you know, I guess if you see us in pictures and stuff you know, everybody's just kind of just a nice family.

Three of the participants reflected on the idea that race is one of many differences that exists between people, and that this difference is not more significant than others.

Jane discussed the difficulties that her children may face and normalized them in light of difficulties other children face:

It doesn't have to do with race or background...overweight or if you have glasses or if you're skinny, too skinny, too tall, too short- people will make jokes and comments... I think there may be difficulties, like [my husband] said. I mean, maybe or maybe not. When it's time to choose your prom date, I mean if you're the one kid in class with braces and nobody asks them to, or whatever, the little dance, then they're gonna come home crying about that. It's possible that someone here or anywhere could say, "I don't want my little boy who's whatever, Caucasian or from Mexico, to go to prom with a girl who's not from Mexico." Or it could be anything...but we kinda came to that conclusion. I mean kids have that potential. I mean, you hate to think of it as a parent, but they have the potential for somebody to hurt their feelings about anything.

RT focused on the similarities between races, and our common role as human beings, "I don't see it that way. I mean, I don't look at African-Americans as being oh,

their color. I don't look at them as being different from us. Yeah, they have a different background, so does everybody else. You know, we're all human beings."

Theme 3: We have a duty to connect our child to their culture

The importance that participants placed on the role of race in shaping their children's experiences also seemed to have an impact on what they believed their role was in facilitating their child's relationship with his or her culture. Part of the responsibility for adopting an African-American/biracial child for most of the participants was accepting the added responsibility of teaching their child about his/her culture of origin and helping the child become connected to that culture. Efforts to create these connections took several different forms, including learning a new culture themselves and being concerned about creating opportunities for their children to be exposed to diverse peoples, including but not limited to African-Americans. For those participants that did not place as much emphasis on the role of race in their children's experience, they placed less emphasis on the responsibility to assist their child with making these connections or questioned what it means to foster a child's racial identity.

Participants reported learning about their children's culture in an effort to create connections. For participants, these connections were not necessarily limited to their child's culture, but also involved being open to other cultures in general. Alex shared, "we kind of dove into the culture as through a number of different means. Through talking to friends, reading a ton." Ross talked about the need for this learning, even if it is uncomfortable, "but it's just sort of an extra thing because it requires us sometimes to go outside of our comfort zone or outside of our knowledge area maybe to learn more and do more."

Anna talked about the importance of this process for being able to provide understanding to their children:

Yeah, you can't parent with any sort of understanding unless you have an understanding or gain one quickly. There's a certain part of it that parenting is parenting, but then I think you owe your children the respect of being interested and wanting to learn and able to [help] them learn, able to give them direction at least that they should search in. Help them seek those avenues out even if you can't provide it.

In addition to learning about the community, participants felt that it was their duty to become connected to the African-American community and to facilitate connections for their children. Rachel reflected on this need, "we should definitely seek out more of a black community and be involved in that...I mean we know that we need to be seeking that out more and providing that interaction." Anna shared the importance of this step for her child, "I do not want her to be in an all Caucasian world and then be dumped into college or high school some day and then when all of a sudden she's not going to know culture things." Jill concurred, "I think all our children need to be exposed to the cultures. I don't think it's fair to put a black child in a white family and pretend that the child isn't black."

Mike summed up the way in which their decision to adopt outside of their race creates a responsibility not only to their child, but also to the community itself. He highlighted the connection between his child and the community that creates this joint responsibility:

But I don't know, as being responsible or more involved in the community, I think that it's almost a responsibility on our, as adopted people to raise the child, in any ethnicity that they are. I mean, whether we adopted a Korean or Middle Eastern or somebody that's Native American; I think it's the responsibility of the parents to really be involved in that community just for the sake of the child.

Even those participants who recognized the importance of taking this step for their children also acknowledged how difficult it can be to attempt to make these connections. Ross talked about how uncomfortable it can be to take that step:

I think that, people just naturally tend to kind of, all things being equal, group together in groups that they feel comfortable with whether its skin color or whatever that, socioeconomic status, whatever. And so sometimes it's hard to break out of these groups and so to find communities and event or cultural events and take them to places where they'll be exposed to, to more things I think is important...

Participants' recognition that exposing their children to their cultural community is important to their children's development, leads to concerns about the lack of diversity in the neighborhoods that they reside in and the impact that this lack of diversity will have on their children. For some, this was not a concern that they felt like they had been educated about before adopting their children. Lynette shared:

The only concern that we have now and just things we weren't educated on were, like now we live in a neighborhood or an area that's not very diverse racially. It's pretty much Caucasian families...so, we're actually sending out daughter out of the school district we live in based on that...So, if I knew then what I know now, I would have chosen a different neighborhood.

Jill shared this concern, "the concerns were, I mean, we live in a mostly white community, so I think the concerns were how were we going to deal with the issue of living in a white community?" Ross shared their struggle between wanting diversity for their children and balancing that with the other things that he feels like their community provides:

You know certainly [our town] is still very segregated in a lot of ways and so to think about how in this community would we provide cultural experiences for the kids...that's hard because then you think about how well rounded kid that got a good education and you think about the bigger city that may be more diverse and they they have less of a chance for education or the schools are not as good or overcrowded. I mean there's just so many variables to try to weigh. I mean how do you?

Anna shared some of Ross's concern, but also discussed her worry that her daughter would only see the portion of the African-American community that is struggling economically. She discussed the struggle between wanting her child to have connections in the community, but also wanting her child to benefit from the social class that they are in:

Also, just the support in the community for the children to see, we were concerned with them having enough role models outside of our household, but of their races. I'll just say it a million times, the kids need to see people like them, in [our younger daughter's] case African-American, of all [socio-economic] strata. Like not just the poverty ridden ones. And it seems like in certain cities, the city is segregated and the only people that you see are of a certain social class that you may or may not have anything in common with and you may not want your children attending that school or whatever.

A minority of the participants (3 participants) did not place as much emphasis on the importance of taking specific steps to connect their children to their culture of origin. This was either communicated directly in the interview or communicated indirectly based on the issue not receiving much attention throughout the interview. One couple continuously emphasized the perspective that color does not matter and did not go into much detail as to how adopting transracially is different or entails different responsibilities than adopting a same race child. Although they did not directly state that this was not a priority, they did not discuss it as one either. One participant, however, was able to talk about his struggle with the idea of promoting his daughter's racial identity. Billy shared, "Well, seriously, what are you gonna do to promote her blackness?... I don't think that, some of these questions maybe, I'm trying not to be an idealistic person, but, I mean, there shouldn't be anything you really should have to do. I mean, it's just, it's another kid."

Theme 4: Conversations about race/adoption are open but not forced

When reflecting on their discussions surrounding race and adoption, participants attempted to strike a balance between overemphasizing differences and not talking about important issues at all. They were clear that they do not want their children to be defined either by their race or the way in which they became part of the family, however they also do not want their children or anyone else to get the impression that they are ashamed. It is important to these parents that their children feel the freedom to talk about any issues related to race and adoption that they want or need to, and therefore they want the door to remain open. A part of this struggle is determining not only how much to talk about adoption/race with their children, but also determining how much and when to talk about it with others. Participants reported that overall they do not go out of their way to talk about adoption and race, but that they discuss it if someone asks or if something comes up. ARB shared, “I don’t wear a banner that says my children are adopted. If the conversation warrants talking about it than I’ll talk about it.”

Rachel discussed talking with her children about race and adoption, “if it happens in the conversation, it happens, we don’t necessarily seek out to talk about, ‘hey, remember you were adopted and that sort of thing or the color of your skin’.”

Jill shared that, “I probably talk about it more than [my husband] does, just because I’ve had people in the community come to me and, or people who I don’t even know that well come and ask questions about how to deal with it, what the process is, what made us want to adopt transracially.”

One aspect of talking about race in the family is discussing the differences in skin color. Three of the participants discussed how they have introduced the subject of skin

color into their families, and the importance of balance when it comes to these conversations. Anna shared:

We've had this dialog going about we don't want to pretend that we're all one color and we want to rejoice in the fact that we are all different and yet we are all one family... I hope that our kids grow up thinking yes there are all different colors in the world, but its not the color that makes the person and that our family has been a living example of that.

Ross and Rachel identified with the struggle between making skin color an approachable topic and not allowing skin color to define their children. Rachel shared, "I try to encourage that talk about, well you know, we talk about the skin color and we don't try and make it, I don't...try and make it a forced conversation.... I guess I want them to feel comfortable enough to ask those questions and don't feel like it's a taboo subject to talk about." Ross added, "But...in general we try to find other ways to identify people than their skin color even when we're talking about you know 'see the one black kid out there you know that's my [son].' You know we try not to say stuff like that. They say 'oh which ones your kid?' 'The kid in the red shirt or the kid that's rolling on the ground you know causing problems.'" [laughter].

Category III: We are tuned into your perception of us

A category that emerged dealt with participants' awareness and reactions to others' perceptions of them and the choices that they have made. Participants were especially aware of and tuned into the perceptions of family, friends, and the African-American community. Participants described the reaction that others had when finding out that the adoption was transracial and their experiences with others in their lives since the adoption of their children. Participants differed in terms of their experiences with the various groups, and their perceptions of how others view them, however, they had a

shared experience of placing more emphasis on the opinions of some than of others. One significant trend throughout the themes was that one couple had a significantly more negative experience with all three groups discussed. While all of the other participants discussed more positive or mixed experiences, one couple felt a lot of criticism and were able to pinpoint several negative interactions with members of their family, friends, and the African-American community. Based on all of the participants' reports of their experiences, three themes emerged: support from family means a lot, our relationships with friends, and our relationship with the African-American community.

Theme 1: Support from family means a lot

Participants found their families to be somewhat split in terms of the amount of support they have offered. A couple of participants felt that their families had been supportive all along. RT shared, "They supported us in the decision. They didn't have any problem with that." Most participants reported that their parents and siblings were supportive, while more removed family members were more likely to question their decision or make racist comments. Participants shared the perspective that support from family, especially close family was important to them. Mike reflected that although they struggled with negative responses, supportive close family members were very important. "But we're also fortunate that we're very close to our siblings where [were we] not so close it might have been different. But we've got family all over the country and they were accepting."

For those participants who felt that family had not reacted as they had hoped initially, most reported that by the time the children were in the home they had adjusted and treated the children as members of the family. Anna reported:

And we were pretty sure they would be just fine and of course they have risen above and beyond and they love these children as their own grandchildren, nieces. It's not like there's a difference between "oh you guys adopted and oh you guys adopted transracially." It's just one big package it feels like in this house. And now they are just our children to our relatives as well.

One couple, more than any of the other participants, reported significantly more strife in their family when they chose to adopt transracially. Alex discussed their preparation to cut ties with their family, if their family had chosen not to accept their children, "Right. Kinda came to the point where we decided that if you're not gonna accept our family with the adopted kids, or if you're not gonna accept the adopted kid in there you can't see the other kids, as well."

Theme 2: Our relationships with friends

The majority of participants reported that their friends had been very supportive and open. They attributed a lot of this to their friends' attitudes of openness overall. Friends' support meant a lot to the participants, and they were happy that these individuals were able to celebrate their families with them. Ross shared:

I never really had any concerns that any of my friends wouldn't be open or wouldn't respond well...I think everybody's been really open and accepting and I can't think of any situations that are. You know in terms of some of our friends come from our church community and our church community in general, tends to be more open and welcome to all different kinds of people.

In a similar vein, Jane shared, "I'm not sure that it has any more so than if we had biologically birthed a baby, or if we had adopted a Caucasian baby. But at the same time, we are usually with a pretty open-minded group of friends... we just have more kids, and everyone's like 'all right'." Anna shared friends' excitement for their opportunity to become parents, "a lot of people were telling us you guys are going to be such great

parents...I think by the point we adopted, by the time we adopted they were just happy that we were able to parent some children.”

One couple separated their close friends from more distant friends or acquaintances. They reported that while their close friends have been very supportive, acquaintances have been positive about the adoption, but behaved in racist ways. Participants viewed an inconsistency between the messages that they received from these acquaintances about their decision to adopt and their children versus the messages that were communicated about the African-American community overall. They discussed incidents in which distant friends would say something nice about their child and then turn around and make a racist joke or devaluing comment about the more general population of African-Americans. Jill commented, “Well, I think [my husband’s] friends were positive, but at the same time, I don’t know. They’re still telling the black jokes and saying the words and saying ‘But I have black friends’ and that irritates me.” Jack acknowledged the individuals with these attitudes, but reported that he felt like they were more acquaintances than friends:

I think what [my wife] is referring to is some of the outside, of our ignorant friends will just continue for life to do that, and then when my kids come around, they slap them on the back and tell them how much they love them... I think that’s more the exception than it is, by a long shot, the friends that we hang out with. We had talked about not long ago, that I don’t think we ever heard a racist comment out of those guys prior to us even talking about the adoption. Now, that’s with our core group of friends.

Theme 3: Our relationship with the African-American community

All participants reflected on their relationship with the African-American community, their hopes for that relationship, and their experiences with the community since adopting their children. The participants’ experiences with members of the

African-American community varied greatly from feeling accepted into the community at a new level to feeling rejected and judged negatively for their relationships with their children. All of the participants attempted to make sense out of their experiences with the community. They offered ideas such as location in the country affecting sentiments to gender and experiences of the individual impacting their view.

The majority of participants felt that individuals within the African-American community were very accepting of them and their family arrangement. Some within this group acknowledged that there is diversity in the larger communities' views of transracial adoption, but reported that they themselves had had mostly positive experiences. Lynette expressed, "I don't know if I can say the whole community. Overall, the interaction that we've had has been positive." Ross shared his experience of not only having positive experiences, but feeling as though he has been accepted at a new level:

I'd say for the most part the overwhelming majority of, of black people that interact with us are very warm and friendly and almost give us the sort of the special insider treatment almost. I mean even the kids' granddad has expressed that. Like at work whenever he shows pictures and they see that his grandkids are black, that he's immediately more accepted into the black community...I guess I'd just add that what I was saying earlier just about you sometimes feel more connected or people engage you more than I think they would, black people specifically in terms of being more open and coming over to talk to you or just you know they see a picture of your family and all of a sudden they feel more connected to you or it seems that they do.

In a similar vein, Jane shared:

Well, I think if you meet a stranger on the street, they're a little more open-minded to you. Coworkers and so forth, coworkers who are African-American I think are a little more excited. They don't come right out and say it, like 'Oh, thank goodness you got an African-American baby. We're so happy.' But they seem a little more excited about this adoption.

Jane tempered this response with the following observation:

I mean it's too complex of an issue. I think you can find people who are very proactive and say if other African-American families aren't parenting by adoption or whatever, then sure, we need someone to. Please, if you're willing to adopt... that's great. I think, though, that there are some people that are very against it, and that, I mean, it's just such a broad possibility.

Not all of the participants shared the view that the majority of their experiences have been positive. Anna expressed that they have been faced with very different reactions based on the individual:

And you know, I feel that from different, African-Americans will give me different feelings, different vibes. Some of them are like great. "This is so wonderful that you guys have done", they are just like loving the kids and so you can see they are so happy on their faces this family unit. And then you come across other African-Americans that just look at you like "what are you doing?" [There is] major disapproval.

One couple reported a very different experience than the other participants in the study, and saw the African-American community as overall holding a very negative view of the transracial adoption of African-American children. However, even this couple reported a couple of positive experiences. Jill reflected that, "for the most part, I think that the African-American community responds quite negatively towards white people adopting African-American kids." Jill offered some alternative views on why individuals have responded to her the way that they have, "And I think it's because they think...the black women think that I have a black cousin or a black boyfriend, and for whatever reason, they're offended by that. Because I do tend to get stared at and get dirtier looks when [my husband's] not with me when I'm with the kids." She also shared:

I think a lot of the African-American people haven't been around a lot of whites in their lifetime, either. We live in different communities and we're raised differently. So I think it's one of those things where if you don't know, then I think you're afraid of it, or there's that ignorance there regarding the other race.

Her husband Jack reflected that as a family, their experiences with the African-American community are mixed, “But it’s a case-by-case deal. I mean, we can go to a restaurant and sit next to an African-American family, and they can be nice as pie to you, and then we can be at a football game and get glared at by people.”

About half of the women who participated in this study seemed especially tuned into the perceptions of the African-American community and talked about the importance of receiving acceptance. They expressed the hope that the community would see their motives in adopting their children as being pure and would recognize their ability to create good homes for their children. Anna shared:

I feel like I’m a sincere enough person if they would stop and talk to me or talk to us for the reasons of why we did this they would find out that we are really good people and have no desire to take control of the black culture or water it down or anything. And that we have very, very good intentions with our children to keep them apprised of what’s going on in their culture.

Lynette talked about an encounter that she had with an African-American woman where she was concerned about the woman’s appraisal of her. “And I felt like this is a child of her race. Maybe I was concerned that she, you know, felt like [our daughter] shouldn’t be in our family or shouldn’t be my child. Maybe in that sense I felt I needed to justify this with this person that I don’t even, you know, I don’t even know.” Rachel specifically addressed her desire to please the community. “I guess I’m wanting more to please the, the black community in knowing that this is a good home for them because I know that there is a lot of injustice and there’s a lot of racial history and tension...”

Category IV: The impact of transracial adoption on our lives

All participants were able to talk about the impact that the adoption of their children had on their lives. The changes that they discussed were profound and life

altering. This experience has had implications for their identity as a family, the way in which the public interacts with them, their relationships with one another, and the manner in which they view the world. They reflected on both the exciting and the challenging aspects of these changes. The three main themes that emerged were: we have a new family identity; we are more visible or not visible at all; and adopting transracially has strengthened us.

Theme 1: We have a new family identity

Participants explored how adopting has changed their family identity. They reflected on how they are no longer a white family, but they are not a black family either. Participants explored how losing their identity as a white family has exposed them to subtle experiences of prejudice and forced them to learn ways to deal with this. Their discussion reflected their struggle with these new experiences and their ambivalence about naming these experiences racism. They defined themselves as having moved away from being a white family with the adoption of their children. Billy reported that part of the adoption was being prepared to have a new definition as a family, “we don’t mind having a biracial or multicultural family, so that was not a factor.” In a similar vein, RT discussed how adopting their eldest child changed their family, “She’s Mexican, Hispanic, and Native American and she’s a mixture and we’re just a rainbow family.” Anna expanded on how their new definition as a family changed the experiences that they can expect to have, including increases the chances of being exposed to racism:

Yeah, I mean I wouldn’t be surprised. It’s kind of in the back of our minds probably a little bit. Because we are aware of, we are a minority family and we are aware of the black experience in this country. So you almost are, not waiting for it, it’s not that. That sounds too. You are aware it could happen. Our eyes are not closed to it and yet at the same time we are not seeking it out. In fact, it probably rolls off our back like water off a duck most of the time if it ever

happens. I'm talking about the little looks and stuff. That sort of stuff I just let it roll off. So I guess that would be sort of racism. I don't know. I don't know what these people are thinking. But in the future maybe something will happen.

Others also reflected on how they notice and experience subtle prejudice aimed at themselves or their children since they adopted. Participants sometimes struggled with how to define these experiences and how to respond to them. Jill shared how others feel a need to highlight the behavior of her African-American children:

It's like we have five kids; three are white, two are black, and it's like people feel that they have to comment on the black ones, like their behavior, how good they are, how sweet they are, how cute they are. Its like its because they're black...it's just, and I think people do that just because they think they're doing the right thing, but in the same aspect, its also extremely annoying to us, I guess.

Jill expanded on why she believes that others respond the way that they do, "I interpret it as ignorance, just, not ignorance in the fact that people are stupid. I mean, because a lot of them are friends, but just that they feel that they have to go above and beyond to prove to us that they're not racist. Which I don't need anybody to prove to me they're not racist."

Ross reflected on how racism they have faced has all been subtle, although it could have been different in another place:

I would say that if we've experienced racism its been subtle like people looking or you know a kind of double take or like even just subtle racism in our family like why do you wanna adopt a black baby kind of stuff...but I think we've been fortunate that we've not had, I mean as an extreme example, a burning cross placed in our front yard. I mean we haven't had that kind of extreme oppression that that you could get in some parts of the country, I would guess...and we haven't had people just outright tell you to our face you know why are you doing that or you're, you're not, you know whatever.

ARB discussed situations of subtle racism that she had faced at work and how she had handled them:

A couple of my co-workers made kind of strange comments when I first came home with [our son] after about 2 ½ to 3 weeks of being gone, after he was born, but outside of those couple of people [pause] and my response back to them was, one of them asked if he was Native American too. I said, “no, he is not. He is African-American/Caucasian.” And I turned around and walked off, because to me...I was kind of ticked off that they even assume that he is the same ethnic background as our daughter. And two, it felt like it was none of their business anyway. But I felt like I had to put them back in their shoes so they didn't bug me about it again.

Anna reflected on how the racism that they face may be subtle because of their ethnicity and how it might be different if they were African-American:

Nobody is overtly racist that we know. And I bet the majority of the population isn't overtly racist. I mean at least to us because we are white parents. I wonder if we were black parents walking around with our black kids what it would be like. I think maybe they give us a break or something. But there is something that feels a little different once in awhile.

Participants acknowledged that they are not a black family, and therefore their children would miss out on some of the subtleties of black culture that they would likely receive from being raised in a black family. Participants empathized with the position that their children would be in and expressed concern about what it would be like for them to grow up without the benefits involved in a black family. They also discussed ways that they try to find supplements for what their family cannot provide. Anna shared, “I mean it's never going to be exactly like growing up in an African-American family. We know that, but something that through the variety of experiences at least provide them an outlet for seeing what that's like. Whether it's for a sleepover in someone's house, a good friend, whatever as they grow older.” In a similar vein, Rachel reflected on the position that her children would be in as black children with white parents:

I think our kids kind of have, I don't know, kind of stuck in the middle I guess. They'll kind of be, they're gonna be raised in a white culture which you know

maybe has more chances for education or for extracurricular things or whatever that maybe some of the people don't from the black culture. But at the same time they're gonna, white people are still gonna see them as black and they're still gonna have those prejudices and so...and I mean they're at, there's definitely cultural subtleties that they're not gonna get from us just because of who we are.

Billy summed up his concerns about his daughter's experiences growing up in their family, "will she be harassed for having a couple of white parents? You know..."

Theme 2: We are more visible or not visible at all

A common experience for couples was that adopting transracially had changed the visibility status of their families. In some instances they had become highly visible to those around them, which had in turn opened them up to questions and assumptions they would not have had to deal with if they had adopted children of their own race. The flip side of this is that in some instances they lost their recognition as a family at all and others struggled to make sense of how they fit together. All but one of the couples discussed this change in visibility and their feelings related to it. The couple who did not address this issue shared that their children resemble them physically and are often assumed to be related biologically. Participants were mixed in terms of how this change impacted them and how they navigated experiences based upon it.

Participants reflected on the loss of privacy that they experience around their adoption due to the visible nature of the differences between themselves and their children. Participants considered what it will be like for their children to lose the privacy around their family formation. Alex summed up the visibility difference between transracial and same race adoptions, "The way it's different is it is very clear externally that this kid is a) adopted and b) transracial." Ross shared:

If you adopt a child into the same race then it's not so readily apparent to everybody and so it's easy for an adoptive parent to, if they choose, to keep that a

secret or to not be so open in talking about it. So, I think, when they're a different race, it's generally obvious to people that they're adopted if, if they take the time to ask... Obviously if, if the kids in any adoption situation, if the kids are the same culture or race as the parents it's not always obvious to the outsiders that they're adopted. But when people realize they're our kids obviously you'd say "oh they're adopted or they say sometimes you're fostering." "No, they're adopted." But because of that it's, it's just sort of in your face more.

Anna reflected on how it would have been different if they had adopted a

Caucasian child:

I've imagined sometimes adopting a Caucasian child and wondering what it would be like, and it would just be less out there. I would be less visible, and the adoption itself would be less visible. You as a parent/child thing would be less visible. No one would look at you twice. It wouldn't be as big deal. They wouldn't look at you for the same reasons that they are looking at us now.

Rachel, who was adopted as a child, shared how her children's experience would be different than hers because of the visibility issue, "So I was able to hide the fact that I was adopted if, if I wanted to. You know it's not really out there and you know [our son] and [our daughter] don't have that luxury."

Participants expanded on how their children receive a lot of attention because of the ways in which they are different. They reflected on how being noticed for your differences is not necessarily a good thing, even if the feedback appears to be positive on the surface. Anna shared some of the comments that strangers make to her child about her hair, "Oh it's so beautiful. I wish I had your hair. Everybody wants their hair. You don't know what I have to do to get curly hair." Alex added how things would be different if they were not part of a Caucasian family, "Or wouldn't happen if they had black parents. And they were around black friends all the time. If they were around 20 other kids who had curly hair too, nobody would say 'oh my goodness, look at that hair."

Isn't it curly?" Anna added, "I think the kids get tired of people touching their hair. So that probably wouldn't happen with a Caucasian kid."

Ross expanded on the idea that strangers feel comfortable touching their children:

And its like, its just amazing how many people touch your children that don't even know them it seems...it's just weird, I think our kids because they're a different color get a lot more attention than they would if they had parents that were black because its like we'll be at the mall or something and just people will come up and touch them or talk to them or interact with them and you wonder if they would have done that if, if they'd looked just like us.

Another aspect of being more visible was that strangers felt entitled to ask them very personal and intrusive questions about their families. Lynette shared her experience of being asked personal questions by someone she doesn't know:

Yeah, very personal. And it's like, okay, this is not even an acquaintance. I don't even know this woman's name. So, I can't say it was negative. I felt very uncomfortable or taken by surprise. Whatever it was about all these questions that, you know, and I wasn't even sure it was for the right reasons, these questions were being asked.

Mike shared, "I think I almost have to explain myself everyday at some point or another...but I just feel like at least once a day I'm explaining to somebody because I run into so many people." Jill reflected on the experience she has as a mother who adopted African-American children after having Caucasian children biologically, "I just think it's different in the fact that, again, you have to deal with the people's questions, not understanding why you would try to, or want to adopt a child of another race, or even adopt period, if you could have your own children." Jack added, "It it's a white child, then that question probably never gets asked if people don't know that the child was adopted."

Lynette also discussed her struggle with how to handle these questions now that her children are getting old enough to understand what is going on:

You know, people see us and it's obvious that, you know, she's not our birth child. So, we get the, "Is she yours?" We get that and people say, "Is that your daughter?" "Yes, it is." Like we're not to answer questions that aren't asked. We've learned to answer questions, you know, to me which are nosey questions...especially that [our daughter] is older now. I shouldn't be having this conversation. You shouldn't be asking me these questions in front of my child.

She added her response when faced with these questions:

Yeah, I mean we have standard answers for different situations. It's like first it's none of their business and second, if it's really someone we really want to engage we have like interesting comments or some level of honesty that we will talk about with them. We are not dishonest. We always are honest, but what I am saying is we can reply to them while still guarding our kids' privacy.

Although most participants shared that people asked intrusive and inappropriate questions, a few of the participants also shared that they would prefer that people asked the questions that they were thinking, rather than simply staring at their family. Rachel shared, "and we'd almost rather people'd come up and ask us and let us tell the story rather than just make these assumptions and you know people will just really outright stare and their mouths will drop open." In a similar vein, Lynette preferred that someone ask her the question, rather than another individual who may not provide as good of an answer, "I would much rather if somebody's going to ask that question, I'd rather have me be the person to answer it than somebody else who might come across rudely or too defensively. Because I feel like I've gotten pretty good about answering questions in a way that, you know, not offensive and not defensive."

Although they are highly visible, participants reflected on the idea that a lot of times they do not register to others as being a family, or they can see others attempting to figure out how they fit together. Ross shared, "we do get sometimes double takes you know at the mall or you know when we're all together people sort of...you know they see [our son] kind of at the end of the aisle and they see us at the other end of the aisle and

they think he's lost." Anna added, "We walked into a store, I've got a kid on each hand and you can see the clerk's wheel spinning like they are trying to figure this out. Why is this a family unit, or whatever is going through her head. It's interesting." In a similar vein, Billy shared, "There are always those people who can assume we're babysitting, I guess...just because you never know what people are thinking."

While the couples did not necessarily express negative feelings about this lack of recognition that they are related, Rachel reflected on the importance of preparing her children for other peoples' definitions of family, "I really think about how people can be so narrow minded as what makes a family and, and what, how that's made up and just trying to prepare our children to, I mean for them to feel comfortable in themselves and our family, but also make them aware that not everyone's going to see it like we see it."

Theme 3: Adopting transracially has strengthened us

It seemed important for participants throughout the study to emphasize that their adoptions have been a positive experience, even when they involved struggle. When considering the impact of the adoptions on themselves and their relationships, participants reflected that the experience made them stronger and more accepting.

Although participants felt that they had strong relationships going into their adoption experiences, they reflected that going through the experience of adopting transracially and facing some of the added challenges of the adoption process and issues surrounding race had only made their relationships with their spouse and their family stronger. RT shared, "I think it has brought us closer just by all the trials that we were going through with the adoption. I think it has brought us together." Alex expanded on this idea, "The whole process of being parents together, of going through the whole

adoption process and doing the transracial thing has impacted us as a couple in a very positive way. We've gone through a bunch of challenges and grown together." In a similar vein, Rachel addressed how the intricacies involved in the process itself strengthened an already strong relationship with her husband:

I think [my husband] and I had a good marriage before we decided to adopt, but I, again I don't think we can reiterate how thankful we are for the conversations that we've had because of the process and...I think it helps us be parents...And I would say that's one of the benefits of, of having adopted. Just with the paperwork, it gave [my husband] and I a lot of time to really sit down and kind of get on the same page as far as not only parenting, but you know parenting a child of a different race and how we were going to approach things.

Jack shared how the adoptions have brought not only the couple closer, but their whole family. "I think it was one of the best things we've ever done, as far as bringing our family closer together...as far as how it affects our relationships, any of the struggles with that racism stuff just brings us closer together." Jill added, "I mean not our extended family, but our immediate family, our children and ourselves, we have become closer because we do realize the importance of sticking up for each other and loving one another, because we're a family, and that's just the way it is."

On a very personal level, participants reflected on how their awareness of racism and the world has changed since adopting. Participants viewed this as a positive change and one that made them stronger as individuals. Jill shared:

Well, I think it's just changed me in the fact that, I mean, I always knew that there was racism, and I always knew that there was hatred, and I always knew that there was ignorance. I think that when you adopt a child transracially, you just get a slap in the face when you realize how bad it really is, and that we haven't changed as much as people would like to think that we have.

ARB reflected on how adopting across racial lines has expanded her viewpoint:

I think I look at the world through rosy glasses now because I see everything. I don't look at just, I think I was looking that way even before [our son] though

because our daughter has such a mixed background as well. I look at everything. I don't just look at one side. I see two sides to everything now. I appreciate all the mixture of every nationality everybody has to bring.

Lynette shared how her sensitivity to comments about both race and adoption has changed, "I guess, yeah, you're more perceptive of what people say about other races and about adoptions. Those are things that if we hadn't adopted we wouldn't be aware of or be offended by, depending on the context." Alex discussed feeling more in tune with the African-American community in particular, "You are much more in tune to their perspective or an African-American's perspective. And depending on you know all sides. I am much more in tune to what is going through the head of an African-American dad of an African-American three year old because I kind of put myself in his place."

Category V: Reflecting on our Experience

Participants reflected on their experiences overall and their feelings about the decision that they had made in adopting transracially, and whether they would recommend that others follow in their footsteps. An additional part of this reflection process included their hopes and fears surrounding how their children would be impacted by the adoption and come to feel about it as they grew older. Participants felt that they had made the right decision in adopting their children. Several of them explored how this is how their family was meant to be. However, this did not translate into a uniform recommendation of transracial adoption to others. There was a recognition that there are special challenges involved in adopting outside of one's race and that this might not be the best choice for everyone. As participants considered their hopes for their children, they expressed wishes that were specific to the adoption and those that represented more universal desires for their children's growth and development as a person. The three

major themes that emerged were: we wouldn't do anything different, not everyone should adopt transracially, and, I want my children to have a positive experience.

Theme 1: We wouldn't do anything different

Participants were willing to express both positive and challenging aspects of their experiences adopting their children, however, they ultimately shared they would not do anything differently, and that this was the way that their family was meant to be. Ross, who adopted two African-American children through the same agency reflected on how they had not chosen to do anything different even when they had a choice. "Well in terms of adoption in general, I mean we chose to do the same program. The second time we chose to go through the same organization. So just in the broad sense we had the opportunity to do it again and we didn't change anything...But I mean I think if I had to do it again I would, wouldn't change a thing."

Lynette shared:

And not every situation is easy but the ones we're [going to] encounter I'm sure will get more difficult, but I wouldn't, you know, trade her for anything. And this is a child we could have never, I mean, maybe her personality, but we could never have conceived this child. So, I feel especially blessed that she's our child and we're her parents.

ARB reflected, "I think where our children [are concerned], or who are supposed to be our children because they both are who we are supposed to have. I don't know. It just is well suited to our family." In a similar vein Rachel added, "but you know again, it goes back to the this is how this family was meant to be made."

Theme 2: Not everyone should adopt transracially

Although participants were satisfied with the decision that they had made to adopt transracially, this feeling did not necessarily translate into the idea that transracial

adoption is the right choice for everyone. Instead, they recommended that couples interested in adopting transracially consider what the experience will be like and whether their family is ready for the challenges involved. Two couples (four participants) reported that they would recommend transracial adoption based on the individual couple. Mike reported “I always look at the individual friends before I can make that decision.” Jack expanded on what couples need to know before they decide to adopt transracially:

Some people, some families just can't, aren't, don't have the makeup to be able to handle the ignorance. At that point, I'd have to say you're better off adopting white kids if it's that much more comfortable for you...the other part is that they just may not feel like they're strong enough, or that they wanna go through the hassle of handling the racism. I don't think it necessarily means that they're racist. It just might mean that that's just not a good fit for their family.

Lynette offered further criteria for families thinking of adopting transracially:

But yeah, it would depend on the person and the family whether I would suggest it. Just 'cause that child grows, you know. I've done reading where the child grows up and an African-American grows up in a Caucasian family and didn't know they should give their child exposure to other African-Americans, you know. And [the kids] didn't know how to interact with other African-Americans.

Jill added one final thought, “So I recommend it if you're ready and prepared. I mean, I don't think you can ever be fully prepared, but if you're ready and you believe you can handle it and your family can handle it, then I think yeah, I do recommend it.”

Theme 3: I want my children to have a positive experience

Participants shared their hopes for their children to have a positive experience in their homes and to be able to see their adoption as a good part of their lives when they are older. They wished for a sense of validation from their children that they were able to provide for them in the most important ways and that their children had not been lacking for being raised with white parents. There was an awareness that the children would likely go through a period of time in which they did not look upon their adoptions

favorably, however, parents expressed the hope that the choices that they made would ultimately be viewed as the right choices and that their children would benefit from being a part of their families. Additionally participants shared the hope that their children would grow into strong individuals equipped with the skills that they would need to navigate the world.

Participants shared their desire for their children to ultimately be comfortable with their adoption and their family. Lynette elaborated:

As far as hopes go, I mean my only hope is for our daughter not to ever feel, be uncomfortable in her own family, which I think at some point as the teenager things like that will arise...but in the overall, after she's matured that she won't look back and wish she were raised in a different family. That we'd given her enough African-American influence where she feels comfortable with that part of herself and doesn't feel like we've denied her anything or that she's been denied anything major being in a Caucasian family.

Similarly, Rachel expressed:

I think our main goal is just to do right by the kids so that they feel like they've gotten a good home but also a sense of who they are and where they came from...I don't want my kids to have the hang up about being raised in a different culture and I know it's gonna happen...and I don't want them to have a hang up about being adopted.

Ross shared his hopes that his children would be able to look back and see that he and his wife tried to give them the skills that they would need to be successful in the world:

I mean I just hope that, I mean I think kids in general sort of get to that period where they're rebellious and they hate their parents and everything's wrong. So I mean I hope that when they go through that, I mean I hope that, I hope that when they go through adolescence and they end up in college and into adulthood they can look back and see that we did try to provide and that we did give them a sense for who they are and a sense for you know what it means to be, you know different but independent and strong and have a sense of self worth...so I mean beyond anything in the short run I mean I think ultimately you know they'll go through adolescence like everybody else and have problems and kids make fun of each other for stupid reasons anyway. So I think my hope would just be that at

the end of it all sort of you know that they can look back and feel proud of what we've provided for them.

Another shared hope was that their children would grow into strong individuals who have a positive sense of self. Rachel focused on what her children would need to survive in the world, "They're gonna need a good sense of self-worth and self confidence and to, just to be human in this common age but also to be a black child being raised in a very white centered society." Jane shared their goals in raising their children, "we'll just try our best to raise a really strong kid who can handle negativity, who can face it and be strong, we hope."

Alex and Anna shared their hope that their children would have the type of self worth that would extend to their relationships with others. Anna reflected:

Yeah, but I think the transracial part, what more could you ask for then a kid's just innate understanding that different is okay and that we don't have to match and having empathy for others that don't fit into their exact culture, or whatever it is that they come across that's different, that they will have an empathy for those people. Whether its immigrants or the weird kid at school, who knows, I just hope they come away with an understanding that we love humans because they are human, not because they look or act a certain way.

Alex added:

Yeah, I guess mine would be the same kind of thing is that they would be blessed with kind of the best of both worlds. In other words having strong security and knowledge of their own culture and race, but also having a deep understanding of others. That would be great...but I mean if you back down and just kind of the simple stuff is we are shooting for kids to be safe and healthy and reach their potential and be happy, happy kids and good people.

SUMMARY

In summary, the phenomenon of adopting an African-American/biracial child transracially presented the participants with many opportunities for reflection, growth, and the opportunity to redefine themselves as a family. At the same time, it presented

challenges that the participants continue to struggle through, while ultimately offering them what they hoped for, the opportunity to expand their families and love children. Overall, it appeared to be a struggle for balance in the lives of the participants. These couples were attempting to balance their ability to create their own definition of themselves as a family and live life as a family with the sometimes pressing influence of others' expectations. The fact that they have adopted across racial lines has made them more visible and more open to the opinions and influences of those outside of the family. These couples were attempting to define the line between themselves and these outside influences, attempting to determine how much influence others should have and how much they themselves should have.

The participants began their journey by learning about the adoption process itself and exploring the ways in which it is different than birthing a child. They navigated through the experience dealing with both their own experiences with the differences, as well as the preconceptions of others about what it means to adopt. Throughout this process, they were also narrowing their choices within adoption and making important decisions about what criteria would be important to them in growing their families. They considered many different factors while going through the adoption process, including international versus domestic adoption, their financial constraints and choices, the impact of a sibling on any existing children, and their openness to race in the adoption process. A part of this process was also helping others understand the choices that they had made and sometimes feeling as though they had to justify their choices to others.

A strong value for the participants was that people's worth should not be determined by the color of their skin, and that the color of their children's skin did not

determine their own feelings for them. At a more practical level, once the participants had adopted their children, they struggled with the balance between allowing their child to simply be a member of the family, which included adjusting to the normal struggles that go along with parenthood and addressing the issues that come along with parenting an African-American/biracial child. Participants approached this balance in a variety of ways which reflected their own feelings about race and their beliefs about the role that it would play for their children.

In addition to considering these factors, they were tuned into the perceptions that others held of them and had to deal with the reactions of others to their adoption. This included the response of family, friends, and the African-American community.

Participants found that the validation of some individuals was more important than others. Although participants have found a lot of support among these individuals, they have encountered negative attitudes as well. These participants continue to deal with the reactions of others to their family, especially due to the highly visible nature of their family.

The experience of adopting transracially has had an important impact on the lives of the participants. It has altered many aspects of their lives, including their family identity. Participants expressed no longer being a white family, but also not being a black family. Instead they were left to create a new definition for themselves. A part of this new identity meant struggling with issues that they had not encountered at such a personal level before, specifically racism. Participants struggled with naming racism, but were attempting to assist their children in dealing with its impact. Adopting transracially has also increased their visibility within the community. This increased visibility has

resulted in dealing with intrusive questions, comments, looks, and even touches.

Participants were especially aware of how this increased visibility impacts their children and intrudes on their privacy. Participants struggled with how best to address the reactions from others. Overall, they felt that the experience had strengthened both their relationships and themselves as individuals.

In considering their experiences, participants expressed that even given the challenging aspects, they would not choose to do anything different. In fact, many have been given that opportunity in the adoption of an additional child and continued to adopt transracially. Although participants agree that this was a positive experience for them, this did not translate into a belief that transracial adoption was for everyone, and there are several considerations that they believe that others would need to think about before embarking on this journey. Participants also looked to the future with the hope that they would raise well adjusted children who were prepared to deal with the difficulties that they might face. They shared the hope that even if their children went through a period in which they were critical of their adoptions, they would ultimately come to view them as positive experiences and would not regret being raised by white parents.

Table 3. Outline of Thematic Structures

Category I: Making the Decision to Adopt Transracially

Theme 1: How adoption is different than birthing a child

Theme 2: Narrowing our choices

Theme 3: Helping others understand our choices

Category II: My Child is African-American/biracial and a Member of our Family

Theme 1: We prepared to parent an African-American/biracial child

Theme 2: Love is not determined by race, but experience may or may not be

Theme 3: We have a duty to connect our child to his/her culture

Theme 4: Conversations about race/adoption are open but not forced

Category III: We are Tuned into your Perception of Us

Theme 1: Support from family means a lot

Theme 2: Our relationships with friends

Theme 3: Our relationships with the African-American community

Category IV: The Impact of Transracial Adoption on Our Lives

Theme 1: We have a new family identity

Theme 2: We are more visible, or not visible at all

Theme 3: Adopting transracially has strengthened us

Category V: Reflecting on our experience

Theme 1: We wouldn't do anything different

Theme 2: Not everyone should adopt transracially

Theme 3: I want my children to have a positive experience

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present chapter is to discuss how the findings of the current study fit within the existing literature on parents who have adopted transracially. Based on these results, I will discuss some specific research, clinical, and policy implications. I will also discuss the limitations of the current study and my personal reflections on completing this study.

Discussion of Findings

The current study is an exploration of Caucasian parents' experiences of adopting an African-American/biracial child. Although research has been conducted examining parents' experiences of adopting transracially, these studies have combined the experiences of parents who have adopted from several different minority groups. No current studies could be found that specifically examined the couples' experiences of adopting an African-American/biracial child in particular, and no studies were found that examined their experiences from a phenomenological perspective. This study was conducted in order to explore this experience from a deeper perspective and to examine whether the contextual differences that exist between now and the time in which the majority of research was conducted on this topic have resulted in different experiences. In this section of the discussion, I will connect the findings of this study back to the existing literature base and explore the implications of the current findings in relation to it.

Characteristics of Parents

Previous literature has explored the characteristics of parents who have adopted transracially. The majority of studies found these parents to generally be older than parents who had adopted within their own race (Zastrow, 1977). Although the current study did not explore the experiences of parents who had adopted within their own race as a comparison group and did not include a random sample, all participants were in their thirties and forties, with the majority being in their late thirties.

The current study's findings remained consistent with previous research in that the participants had attained higher levels of education (Falk, 1970; McRoy et al., 1982; Priddy & Kirgan, 1971; Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003; Zastrow, 1977). In the current study, all participants had at least a high school education, while the majority had completed college, and three had gone on to complete a Master's degree. Also consistent with previous findings, participants had higher than average income levels with four out of the six earning over \$75,000 a year (Falk, 1970; Rosenthal et al., 1991; Zastrow, 1977).

The participants also diverged from previous research in a couple of important ways. While previous studies found that participants who adopted transracially were more likely to have one parent stay at home (McRoy, et al., 1982), only two out the six couples interviewed had a stay at home parent. One explanation for the difference in these findings is the dated nature of the previous study. The rate of dual earning families has continued to increase in the last twenty years (Becker & Moen, 1999); therefore this difference may simply reflect a nationwide trend, rather than something specific to transracial adoption.

Additionally, while the majority of past studies have found that parents who adopted transracially were more likely to be fertile and to already have biological children in their home (Falk, 1970; Simon & Alstein, 1972; Zastrow, 1977), this study was more consistent with past research in which this trend did not hold true (Moosnick, 2001; Priddy & Kirgan, 1971). In the current study, although only two couples had a documented infertility diagnosis, one couple suspected an infertility problem and one wife had a medical condition which made pregnancy dangerous for her. Out of all six couples, only one couple had biological children. In reflecting on the inconsistency in the literature, the climate of the times in which the data was collected may help explain the difference. The majority of research that found that couples who adopted transracially were more likely to be fertile took place in the 1970's, a highly political time period still focused on the civil rights movement. There is also evidence in these studies that parents who adopted transracially were at least somewhat politically motivated in their reasons for adopting a minority child (Zastrow, 1977). In contrast, in the current study participants made it clear that they had not adopted to make a political statement. Therefore, the difference in the demographics of these adopters may be a reflection of the times and their differing motivations for adopting.

Motivations for Adoption

The majority of writing that has taken place regarding the transracial adoption of African-American/biracial children has involved debates regarding the advisability of these arrangements (e.g., Chimezie, 1975; Hayes, 1993; Hollingsworth, 1998, Howard, et. al, 1977; McRoy et al., 1982). One of the concerns at the heart of the political

discussion lies in the motivations of the parents who are adopting outside of their race (Kennedy, 2003).

Theories of supply and demand have hypothesized that as the supply of healthy Caucasian infants declined due to reduced stigma regarding out of wedlock births, increased access to birth control, and relaxed laws regarding abortion, infertile parents became more open to the idea of adopting transracially (Kennedy, 2003). This theory did not remain consistent with most previous findings which indicated that the majority of parents who adopted were not infertile and in fact, already had healthy Caucasian children at home (Falk, 1970; Simon & Alstein, 1972; Zastrow, 1977), but it might have been consistent with the minority of previous research on this topic. Moosnick (2001) and Priddy and Kirgan (1971) reported that their participants were diagnosed with infertility and/or did not have children in the home prior to adopting. The findings of the current study are more consistent with those studies that seem to partially support the hypothesis discussed above, however, this theory does not seem adequate to fully describe the participants' motivations in adopting outside of their race. All but one couple in the current study were childless when they entered the adoption process and all of their children came to them through adoption. Out of these five couples, four of them reported either medically confirmed or suspected infertility. In addition, the majority of participants in the current study noted that the shorter wait time involved in adopting a minority child factored into their decision. These findings taken together would indicate that supply and demand may have had an influence on why they chose to adopt African-American/biracial children. However, a part of their explanation concerning why differential wait times were a factor may broaden the understanding of their motivations.

Participants indicated that waiting longer just to have a Caucasian child did not make sense for them because they did not value parenting a Caucasian child more than a minority child. Participants did not indicate that they had compromised in the adoption of their children; that originally they had wanted a Caucasian child, but then came to the decision to accept a minority child based on availability and wait times. All of the participants reported that they had entered the adoption process knowing that they would not seek to adopt a Caucasian child. Therefore, it seems as though the value they attached to skin color may have influenced their decision to adopt more than factors related to supply and demand.

Another aspect of parental motivation that has been explored regarding the decision to adopt transracially is whether the motivations stated were more “child-centered” or “parent-centered.” Previous research indicates that parents who adopted transracially were more likely to discuss “child-centered” or social motives for their adoptions (Zastrow, 1977). Parents in those studies reported that they adopted in order to provide a home for a child that needed one or because they were concerned about overpopulation. In contrast, parents who adopted within their own race, stated more “parent-centered” reasons for adopting, such as they desired a child/more children or they had special feelings for a child (Falk, 1970). The findings of the current study are somewhat conflicting. Parents in this study reported both “child-centered” and “parent-centered” motivations for adopting. Consistent with “child-centered” motivations, parents reported they wanted to adopt where there was a need. However, consistent with “parent-centered” motives, they reported that ultimately they simply wanted the opportunity to be parents and to have a child to love. It seems important to note that although parents

considered the larger impact of their adoption decisions, they were quick to dismiss the idea that they had adopted to make a political statement or that they had done their children a favor.

In considering why parents in the current study stated both motivations in their decision making process it seems important to return to what they have in common with both groups of previous adopters. Similarly to those who had adopted within their race, participants in the current study were more likely to struggle with infertility issues and less likely to already have children in the home when they first made the decision to adopt. Therefore, their primary reason to consider adoption was to become parents. However, the participants in the current study had also chosen to pursue the adoption of a minority child instead of a Caucasian child and had to reflect on what made them narrow their choices in that direction. It was in contemplating that decision that they were able to reflect on their desire to parent a child who might otherwise struggle to find a family.

Once parents made the decision to adopt outside of their race, the pertinent question became why they specifically chose to adopt African-American/biracial children. Only one study examined this question. Moosnick (2001) found that mothers who had adopted African-American/biracial children did not enter the process specifying a preference to adopt an African-American/biracial child, but rather changed their mind after examining other options. In this study, similar findings were obtained as participants reported that although they had always been open to adopting outside of their race, they did not enter the adoption process planning to adopt an African-American/biracial child. Participants reflected that their choice to adopt an African-American/biracial child had been influenced by a number of reasons, including the

influence of an agency worker, the discovery that African-American/biracial children face a lot of discrimination in the adoption process, or simply the realization that the specific color of the child's skin did not matter to them.

More recent previous research has explored the impact of price differences in the adoption of children of color, specifically African-American/biracial children, on motivations to adopt. Despite comments made about the differences in price, neither Moosnick (2001) nor Vidal de Haymes and Simon (2003) found that lower costs associated with the adoption of African-American/biracial children had been a motivating factor in the parents' decision to adopt transracially. This is consistent with the findings of this study. Participants in the current study were aware of and discussed the price differences related to race in the adoption of children. However, none of them reporting that this was a motivating factor in their decision to adopt African-American/biracial children. In fact, participants reported feeling that cost differences in adoption based on race were an example of racism. Parents did report overall that adoption was expensive, and that expense had an impact on their choice to adopt domestically, the timing of their adoptions, and the number of years between adoptions.

Experiences with Extended Family

Researchers have investigated the experiences that parents have had with their extended families related to the adoption of their children. Findings indicated that the majority of parents who adopted transracially had experienced some type of negativity from relatives (Simon & Alstein, 2002; Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003), and that those who had adopted African-American/biracial children reported the least amount of support from family. This finding held partially true in the current study, participants were split

about their experiences with family. Some felt supported, while others did not. However, for the majority of those who felt that their families responded in a negative way toward their adoption, they were more likely to report that the negative members were more removed from them, either genetically or emotionally to begin with.

Participants in the current study reported that the majority of negative feedback that they received from their family came in the form of questions or negative comments about their decision to adopt an African-American/biracial child. They reported that older members of the family were more likely to make comments or ask questions. Past research did not indicate a generational difference in negative feedback received. This could possibly indicate a pattern of more openness and acceptance of racial differences in younger generations. It could also reflect a more surface difference in generations with the acceptability of making racist comments. While individuals may continue to hold racist views, there is more of a societal value that those views not be expressed out loud. Therefore, the younger generations might feel less comfort in voicing their concerns for fear of being named racist. The second explanation seems consistent with one participant's experience that when other individuals in her life made inappropriate comments, they also felt a need to report that they "were not racist" or that they "had black friends."

Past research also indicated that the negative reactions to the adoption resolved over time and that participants indicated that their children had been accepted by most, if not all of their family, including those who had originally indicated concern (Grow & Shapiro, 1974; Simon & Alstein, 2002). However, a minority of participants had continued to experience problems with their family members related to the adoption

(Simon & Alstein, 2002). Participants in the current study also reported that most of the initial concerns were resolved or no longer created conflict in their families. They saw their children as being accepted and not viewed as the “adopted” or “black children” in the family. For those who did indicate that concerns had not been resolved, the majority reported that they were not close to the dissenting members, therefore their lack of acceptance did not have a big impact on the parents’ lives and they were able to avoid contact with these members without major concerns.

Experiences with Friends

Researchers have also explored the experiences that parents have had with their friends regarding the adoption of their children. Past studies have found that friends were overall more supportive of their decision to adopt than family members (Falk, 1970; Simon & Alstein, 2002; Zastrow, 1977). However, Falk (1970) and Rosenthal et al., (1991) also found that transracially adoptive couples received less approval and more criticism than couples who had adopted traditionally. In the present study, no comparison was made between samples. However, participants did report that their friends were very supportive of their adoptions and had been accepting of their children. One concern that was voiced by one couple in the study concerned the continued racist comments that some of their friends make. They reported that these friends, whom they define as acquaintances, are supportive of their adoptions and interact in a positive manner with their children, but continue to make racist comments about minority groups overall. For these friends there does not seem to be an awareness of the incongruity of the messages that they are sending. They appear to see the children in the family as separate from the racial communities that they are part of.

Experiences with Neighbors

Grow and Shapiro (1974) found that about half of their participants were concerned about what type of relationship their children would have with neighborhood children. Other researchers examined participants' experiences in relation to their neighbors and found that while some neighbors were supportive, many had experienced their neighbors as disapproving of their adoptions and their children (Falk, 1970; Simon & Alstein, 2002; Zastrow, 1977). There also appeared to be a reaction change over time, with reactions becoming more negative as the children became older (Falk, 1970). While participants in the current study did not reflect on their experiences with their neighbors, they did indicate concern about the lack of diversity in their neighborhoods and the potential impact that it could have on their children. They recognized the importance of their children being exposed to others who look like them. However, participants also struggled with their desire to live in a more racially diverse area and their desire for their children to benefit from some aspects of living in the communities that they did, specifically the quality of the educational systems. They struggled with which would ultimately be more important in their children's development. Although they did not note this specifically, they appeared to be struggling with an aspect of living in a racist society overall; the differential distribution of resources based on race, which often makes an appearance in the educational system (Tatum, 2007). While these parents recognized that their children are not Caucasian, they still want them to benefit from some of the privileges that they have been given as white members of society (Tatum, 2007). Whereas it would be easy to criticize these parents as not recognizing the challenges that their children will face as minority members of society, their overall interviews did not

communicate this. Rather, they appeared to want to provide their children with the best of everything, which seems to be a common parental experience.

Experiences with the Larger Community

Researchers have explored participants' experiences with the larger community, including the overall community in general and the African-American community in particular. In past studies, a common experience that participants discussed was the manner in which the adoption of their children raised their visibility within the community. They reported that this increased level of visibility resulted in unwanted questions (Vidal de Haymes, 2003), curious stares, surprise, and puzzled reactions (Zastrow, 1977), and more serious inappropriate and/or racist occurrences (Moosnick, 2001; Zastrow, 1977). These findings remain consistent with the experiences of participants in the current study. Five of the six couples reflected on how the adoption of their children had increased their visibility within the community and opened them up to intrusive questions and looks. The couple that did not express this increased level of visibility reported that their children were more visibly similar to them, and that many outsiders did not seem to recognize that they were adopted, let alone adopted transracially.

One aspect of being visible that was not addressed previously is how this visibility impacts their children. Participants reflected on how this increased visibility limits the privacy that their children experience around their adoption. One participant was adopted as a child and discussed specifically the loss of privilege that her children will have around their ability to keep their private lives private. Participants also noted that their children receive a lot of comments regarding their appearance and the ways in

which they are different than the white culture (e.g., hair texture and skin color).

Although these are couched in positive terms, they are still a constant reminder to the children of how they are different and do not fit. Participants discussed how this is not necessarily a positive experience for their children and how it likely would not occur if they were racially similar to their children. These findings raise important questions for further exploration. The first is, given that children become more sensitive to differences between themselves and other as they grow older, specifically during the pre-adolescent and adolescent years (Westeringh, 2002), how will the visibility of these children's differences impact their experiences and their feelings about being raised in Caucasian homes. Anecdotal data shows that this is a significant area of concern for these children (Farber, 2007). The second question that is left unanswered is how parents respond to these losses of privacy and what actions they take to protect their children from intrusions from others.

A second aspect of becoming more visible that previous research did not address was the loss of automatic recognition as a family. Participants in the current study noted that if their children were in physical proximity to them, outsiders often had difficulty figuring out how they are all related to one another. There is not the automatic assumption of a parental relationship. In addition, if their children are not physically close to them, there is no recognition that they are connected to their children at all.

Previous research did not explore the impact of this increased level of visibility on the parents at a very in-depth level. Therefore, the current study is able to shed light on what this experience is like for parents. Participants reflected on their ambivalence about how to deal with some of the issues that arise from their increased visibility, including

how to address intrusive questions. While they are concerned about protecting their children's privacy, especially as their children grow, they are also concerned about educating the public and making sure that questions that others have are addressed in a non-defensive and appropriate manner. The participants are not ashamed of their family arrangements and do not want the general public to have a negative or uninformed perception of transracial adoption.

Within the larger general community, participants' experiences with the African-American community in particular have been explored. Past research has focused specifically on participants' experiences with and perceptions of opponents of transracial adoption, most notably those who are connected with the NABSW. Simon and Alstein (2002) found that 80% of their sample was aware of and bothered by the position taken by the NABSW and Native American groups that opposed transracial adoption. Overall, they reported that their decisions regarding the adoption of their children were not impacted by the group's position, although a minority of participants reported that they declined to adopt subsequent children based on the argument. In contrast to past research, participants in the current study focused less on groups organized around the opposition to transracial adoption and focused more on their relationship to the African-American community overall. In fact, although one couple referred to "the organization" that does not agree with transracial adoption, no one named the NABSW specifically. One possible reason for this shift in focus is the different contexts that these participants found themselves in while adopting their children. Although there is still debate about whether or not transracial adoption is advisable or not, many opponents have relaxed their position somewhat (Fogg-Davis, 2002). Legislation, such as the Multiethnic

Placement Act and the more recent Inter-Ethnic Adoption Amendment have also been implemented to reduce and even eliminate racial matching policies that were more common when past research was taking place (Kennedy, 2003). Therefore the political pressures that were in the forefront during the 1970's and 1980's have become more of a backdrop and do not impact participants' experiences as much as they once did. An additional finding that would support this idea is that although past research found that participants were sometimes discouraged from adopting African-American/biracial children by social workers and agencies (Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003; Zastrow, 1977), none of the current participants reported such responses.

More recent research has explored participants' experiences with the African-American community in general and focused less attention specifically on the opposition. Consistent with findings from the current study, Vidal de Haymes and Simon (2003) reported that their participants did not mention the NABSW in particular, but seemed aware of the opposition to transracial adoption. However, in contrast, they reported that some of their participants expressed concerns about the motives of the researchers conducting the study. The participants in the current study did not express any concerns about my motivations in conducting the study; instead they talked about what an important study it was and how thankful they were that I was conducting it. One reason for the difference may be that the participants in the current study were aware of the fact that I had adopted a multi-racial child myself and that I was transparent about my motivations in conducting the study. It is not clear if past researchers included the same levels of self-disclosure.

In addition to their concerns about opponents to transracial adoption and the motivations of the researchers, a few of the participants reported that they did not feel that the African-American community at large was supportive of their choice to adopt transracially (Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003). This remained consistent with a small minority (one couple) of the participants in the present study. The majority of participants felt like their positive experiences had outweighed their negative experiences, and even the couple who had experienced mostly negative reactions was able to reflect on some positive interactions. Overall, participants reported that they felt like the African-American community was mixed in terms of its support of transracial adoption.

Moosnick (2001) found that the mothers of African-American/biracial children in her study remained tuned in and aware of the evaluation of African-American women regarding how well they were able to care for their children. In comparison to mothers who had adopted Asian or Caucasian children, they maintained a sense of shared investment in their children with the community. This resulted in these mothers seeking out African-American women to assist them in the care of their children. The current study did not examine the experiences of parents who had adopted Asian or Caucasian children, however, participants discussed their awareness of the evaluation of the African-American community in general. Although both husbands and wives were tuned into their experiences with the African-American community, the women expressed more of a desire for the approval of the community than the men. They especially sought a sense of confirmation that African-Americans could see them as having pure motives in adopting their children and would understand that their goal was to “do right” by their

children. In contrast to the Moosnick study, this did not necessarily result in reaching out for help in the care of their children. One reason for this difference may be access to the community. Past research did not indicate how much access the participants felt that they had to the African-American community, however, some participants in the current study indicated that they felt like there were a low number of African-American families in their community and not as many resources to access.

Moosnick reported that her participants felt a shared investment in their children with the community. While the participants in the current study did not express this shared investment, they did talk about the importance of connecting their children with the community. Their reports indicate that they felt like the African-American community would be an important part of their children's development, and that their acceptance within the community would be vital.

Racial Identity Development

The most significant criticism levied at Caucasian parents who adopt African-American children is their lack of ability to assist their children in the development of a positive racial identity (Chimenzie, 1975; Hollingsworth, 2002; McRoy, 1989).

Researchers have explored several aspects of the transracial adoption experience that they believe have an impact on this ability, these include: parents' belief system, parents' integration of the child's birth culture, and parents' ability to assist their children in dealing with racism and discrimination.

Parents' Belief System. One of the first assumptions that researchers explored in relation to parents' ability to assist their children in developing a positive racial identity is whether or not parents believed that this was an important part of their job and what

behaviors they implemented to assist their children in the development of this identity. Studies found that parents who indicated a wish for their child to identify with the African-American race were more likely to have children who expressed an African-American identity than parents who wished their children to identify with the Caucasian race, the human race, or neither race (Bagley & Young, 1979; Grow & Shapiro, 1974; Johnson et al., 1987; McRoy et al., 1982; Simon & Alstein, 2002).

Past studies indicated that transracially adoptive parents were mixed in their opinion of whether or not it would be important for their child to positively identify with his or her birth culture. Simon and Alstein (2002) found that parents of transracially adopted children were more likely to state no preferences or to want their child to identify with both races or the overall human race. Vidal de Haymes and Simon (2003) found their sample of parents to be divided about the importance of attention to matters of race and culture in their child's development. These findings were consistent with several other studies on racial identity development in transracial adoptions, which found that a majority of transracially adoptive parents tended to stress a "color-blind" philosophy on racial identity, which says that a person's membership in a racial/ethnic/cultural group is not as important as their membership in the human race (Corbett, 1997; McRoy et al., 1982; Shireman & Johnson, 1986).

In the current study, participants were not specifically asked which culture they would like their children to identify with. Findings from the current study are mixed, but differ slightly from the existing literature. Participants did not agree as to the balance between maintaining a "color-blind" approach to the adoption and parenting of their children. Overall, participants reported a "color-blind" mentality when it came to their

own feelings toward their children. They reported that their children's color was not a determining factor in how they felt toward them. However, the majority of participants acknowledged that the world is not "color-blind" and that their child's race would impact their experience. A minority of participants in the current study downplayed the role that race would play in their child's life.

McRoy et al. (1982) found that 82% of parents stressed that their children were biracial and were reluctant to accept the notion that their child would be socially and legally defined as black. This finding received only partial support in the current study. Participants in this study did not distinguish between being African-American or biracial, instead focusing on their child's identity as an African-American. The exception was one couple, who was clear about their child's identity as being biracial and emphasized his physical similarities to the rest of the family. This couple did not address how their child would be defined by society, other than to indicate that he was often mistaken as a biological child.

Simon and Alstein (2002) found that in comparison to expectations for their first child, a higher percentage of participants expected the second child that they adopted transracially to identify with African-American culture. The authors indicated that the participants may have become more sensitized to the importance of racial identity from their first adoption experience. The current study did not directly assess any changes that occurred between the adoption of the couples' first child and their second child. However, the majority of couples had adopted a second minority child after the first, and indicated the importance to their family of having multiple members who were not Caucasian. The participants' forethought in making this decision indicates that their

concern for their child's racial identity and comfort came before the adoption of the second child, not after.

Integration of Birth Culture. Another important component of racial identity development for transracial adoptees may be how well their parents' ideals about the importance of providing opportunities for racial identification are put into action. Findings indicated that the majority of parents did not integrate their child's culture into their family life to the degree that they had originally intended to, and that efforts to integrate cultures decreased with time (DeBerry et al., 1996; Vroegh, 1997). This remains consistent with findings that indicated that the majority of transracially adoptive families continued to live in predominately Caucasian neighborhoods (Flores de Kisler, 1995; McRoy et al., 1984; Shireman & Johnson, 1986; Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003). Of the participants in Feigelman and Silverman's (1984) study, 68% were living in an integrated or African-American community. The majority of parents (Tizard, 1977), and adult adoptees (Vroegh, 1997) reported that their parents had done nothing in particular to assist the adoptee in their development of a positive racial identity, and reported low to moderate contact with the African-American community (Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003). Parents who integrated their children's birth culture into their own lives through reading materials and encouraged their children to read about their birth culture were more likely to have children who identified themselves according to their birth culture, rather than their adoptive culture (Feigelman & Silverman, 1984).

The current study examined parents' experiences of adoption and therefore did not elicit information from the children about their experiences and did not explore the impact of their decisions on their children. In addition, this study was conducted while

the children were still very young, with the oldest just entering school. Therefore some of the findings above cannot be addressed by the current study. However, some of the findings apply. While parents did discuss concerns about the lack of diversity in their communities, they did not indicate a plan to move to a more diverse area or any indication that they had moved in preparation for their adoptions, which remains consistent with findings from previous studies. In addition, parents' efforts to integrate their children's birth culture into their own lives were explored. Participants reported that they felt like they had taken limited steps to integrate their children's birth culture into their homes and their lives, but the steps that they did take included reading about and talking to their children about African-American history, reading about issues current to African-American concerns, and purchasing books and dolls that reflected their children's ethnicity.

Racism and Discrimination. Another aspect of the parent-child relationship with respect to the issue of racial identity development is how parents are able to support their children and assist them in dealing with discrimination. Researchers have found that parents underreported racial incidents in relation to the reports of transracial adoptees themselves (Shireman & Johnson, 1975; Simon & Alstein, 2002; Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003; Vroegh, 1997). Past research has also indicated that although over half of adoptees shared their experiences of discrimination with their parents (Simon & Alstein, 2002), their parents minimized the experiences and failed to take action where necessary (Simon & Alstein, 2002; Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003). Shireman and Johnson (1986) found that parents minimized overt racial slurs and discrimination as "general name calling and troubles of childhood" (p. 50). Although the current study did not

explore children's perceptions of their parents' abilities and actions in this area, the findings have relevance for assumptions that represent the core of the overall concern. One of the assumptions that lies behind this overall criticism and the findings that accompanied it is that parents will not be able to recognize racism when it happens and name it appropriately. Two findings from the current research seem especially significant in addressing this concern. The first finding that had implications for parents' ability to recognize racism is how parents believed that race would impact their children's experiences overall. While the majority of participants in the current study indicated that race would be a significant factor in their children's lives and that they would always be viewed in light of their minority status, two couples downplayed the significance of race. One couple explored how their child would experience difficulties related to their race, but emphasized the similarity between that experience and other reasons that children have for being singled out and teased in school (e.g., being overweight or wearing glasses). The inference was that issues related to race should be handled in a similar manner as issues related to other differences. The second couple did not really address how race was likely to impact their child's life, but continued to emphasize how their child was physically similar to them, implying that his race would not affect him.

Most participants were able to discuss racist behaviors of those surrounding them and to highlight racism that exists in society at large. What was less apparent is how participants specifically referred to such incidents. Many of the participants in the current study reported several incidents in which either they themselves or their children were treated differently based on race. However they also questioned whether or not to

name these incidents as racism; in some cases, even downplaying their partner's perceptions of a person as racist or an event as racism. It is unclear why participants were reluctant to use the term racism. One possible explanation is that as Caucasians, they are reluctant to name any behavior aimed at them as racism, believing that only those in the minority population experience racism. This may represent a lack of truly grasping the ways in which their decision to adopt a minority child has changed their own status within the community. A second possible explanation is that participants may underestimate the impact of racism on their lives and the lives of their children. While they have the sense that something they have experienced is not okay, they may not fully recognize the degree to which these experiences are racist. Although this was representative of many participants' experiences, it was not true across the board. A minority of the participants were not only able to discuss racist events that had taken place, but were clear that these were examples of racism and needed to be addressed as such. Either explanation as to why some participants downplay racism and others are able to recognize and name it leaves the question of how these differences emerged. Why do some participants recognize racism more clearly and why are they able to feel more confidence in naming it? The answers to these questions have serious implications for whether the adoption of minority children by Caucasian parents should be taking place in the first place and how decisions should be made about whether parents are ready to take that step or not. If the ability to recognize and address racism is a learned skill, then research needs to take place to address how to develop this skill within parents wanting to adopt minority children.

The second assumption is that parents will not address racism when it happens and will not be able to prepare their children for the experiences that they will face. Past research offers conflicting information on this topic, based on whether the parents or the children are discussing their perceptions. The current study offers only glimpses, but does not address this issue directly. A little over half of the participants did not discuss how they addressed any specific incidence of racism, however the remainder of the participants were able to talk about an incident of racism that they had faced and how they were able to respond. These responses included challenging the person who made a comment to them, either in private or in a public forum, and talking to their children about racism they have faced and how to handle it. One particular finding of the current study lends credence to the idea that the participants recognize the importance of addressing racism that their children will face. Participants discussed the importance of creating an open atmosphere in the house in which their children could talk about issues related to race if they came up. They reported a desire to be aware of how race was impacting their children's lives and recognition that they had a responsibility to help their children deal with any concerns that would arise. Because the participants in the current study were not asked specifically how they responded to incidents of racism, the question that we are left with is whether the parents who did not share that information have not addressed these issues in their lives or chose not to share that facet of their experience in the interview. A more detailed exploration of this issue is needed.

The third assumption is that parents will not recognize the white privilege that they have access to and will not recognize their own racist beliefs, which will in turn impact their children negatively. It is in addressing this assumption that I am moving

farthest away from the findings of my study and any previous research conducted. I can only make inferences from comments that were made in the current study. Two participants did report that recognizing their own prejudices and values were an important part of parenting. Only one participant specifically referenced her white privilege in discussing her experience of adopting. Outside of these two comments, not one person addressed their own privilege directly or their own prejudices, other than to report that they did not have any toward other races. However, in addressing the importance of assisting their children in the development of a strong racial identity, two participants referenced stereotypical images of the African-American community, including a focus on athletic skills, eating Popeyes' chicken, and dressing like a gangster. This would indicate an internalization of some of the stereotypes regarding what it means to be African-American. Although the participants were not asked directly if they had considered the stereotypical nature of these comments, they did not volunteer any information to indicate that they did. Further studies are needed to explore participants own racial stereotypes and values and how they impact their parenting of children across racial lines.

Family Racial Identity

In addition to the impact of transracial adoption on the racial identity of children, it is important to understand the impact on a family's racial identity overall. In past research, one study has explored how adopting across racial lines impacted family identity. McRoy et al., (1982) found that a small percentage of parents reported that adopting an African-American/biracial child changed the status of their family from Caucasian to interracial. In contrast, the majority of participants in the current study

explored how adopting has changed their family identity. They reflected on how they are no longer a white family, but they are not a black family either. A part of losing their identity as a white family meant being exposed to subtle experiences of racism and attempting to learn how to deal with them. The recognition that they are not a black family meant acknowledging that their children would miss out on certain subtleties of the culture that would come within a black family. Although participants noted that they were no longer a white family and not a black family, few of them offered a definition for themselves. Only two couples defined themselves as a multiracial family. Little research has been conducted that offers us much of an understanding about families' experiences of this loss of identity and process of rebuilding a new one. Future research needs to explore this process, as well as its implications for all members of the family.

Satisfaction with Adoption

Past research has shown parents to be very satisfied with their decision to adopt transracially (Grow & Shapiro, 1974; Zastrow, 1977). Parents who adopted transracially were as satisfied with their adoptions as those who chose to adopt within their own race (Rosenthal et al., 1991; Zastrow, 1977). When there were differences between the two groups, parents who had adopted transracially reported more satisfaction with their own increased awareness and concern for people who are subjected to discrimination (Zastrow, 1977) and watching other people's racial attitudes change (Falk, 1970). Although the current study did not utilize a comparison group, the findings were similar in that participants reported a great deal of satisfaction with their adoptions. All of the participants reported that they would make the same choice; in fact, most had made a similar choice in subsequent adoptions. Although participants expressed their

satisfaction with the adoption, unlike past participants they did not discuss specific aspects of adopting transracially that they were most satisfied with.

Another aspect of the adoption that researchers explored related to satisfaction was the ways in which parents felt that their lives had been altered by adopting and parenting a child of another race. Simon and Alstein (2002) found that participants felt that their lives had been broadened and enriched and they had become more sensitive to racial issues. In addition, over half of the participants felt that the adoption had impacted their marriage, with a little under half seeing the change as positive. In the current study, participants also felt that their lives had been enriched by the adoption of their children; they specifically noted that they had become more aware of the impact of discrimination on the lives of others and more sensitive to that experience. Similar to the past study, participants felt that the adoption had impacted their marriage; however, in contrast to that study all the participants reported the impact as being positive and strengthening an already strong relationship.

A final factor that researchers linked to participants' satisfaction was their willingness to recommend transracial adoption to others. Overall, they found that transracially adoptive parents would encourage others to follow suit (Simon & Alstein, 2002), however, when compared to families who had adopted within their own race, transracially adoptive parents were less likely to recommend that others adopt transracially than same race families were to recommend traditional adoption (Falk, 1970). Simon and Alstein (2002) also found that as time progressed, a smaller percentage of participants were willing to recommend transracial adoption, although the numbers still remained high. The current study did not utilize a comparison group and

was not a longitudinal exploration of the participant's experiences, therefore the findings cannot be compared to those who adopted traditionally and it is not clear how the participants in the current study would respond in the future. However, participants did discuss their willingness to recommend that others adopt transracially. Parents in the current study were more reserved with their recommendations than previous adopters. They reported that they would have to know more about the family wanting to adopt before they could make a recommendation. They reported that although they are in support of transracial adoption, they believed that certain factors should be considered before a couple should proceed. This finding, in conjunction with past findings indicates that more than satisfaction with their own adoption impacts participants' willingness to recommend that others follow in their footsteps.

Implications and Recommendations

Research Implications

The results of this study point to the diversity of experience that is common among the phenomenon of Caucasian parents adopting an African-American/biracial child. Participants' descriptions offer insight into their motivations and experiences while making the decision to adopt and while beginning to parent their child. Future research is needed to understand the experiences of other parent groups who choose to adopt across racial lines. As discussed previously, characteristics such as sexual orientation, majority versus minority status, marital status, age, ethnicity, gender, and ability status of the child adopted could all impact the experiences of the parents.

Participants in the current study discussed the fact that they were open to adopting outside of their race when they began the adoption, but that they were not necessarily

planning to adopt an African-American/biracial child. They were then able to talk about making the ultimate decision to adopt an African-American/biracial child in particular. Future research studies are needed to better understand the choices that adopters make in the process and how differing levels of openness are determined, not only toward race, but toward age and ability status as well.

One of the impacts of adopting transracially that has been validated in both past and current research is the loss of privacy and the increased visibility that occur as a result of the adoption. Participants reported that they became more visible in public, while their definition as a family was not easily recognized. Participants in the current study were able to talk about the impact that this change in visibility status has had for them and their concerns about the impact that it currently has for their children. However, more research needs to be conducted in order to better understand the impact that this loss of privacy has on the children in these arrangements. Of particular interest would be how children navigate this increased visibility during their adolescent years when the pressure to blend in becomes the strongest.

Although studies have explored the experiences that parents who have adopted transracially have with family, friends, neighbors, and the community. These studies have not examined how participants have navigated that terrain and specifically how they have addressed the concerns that have arisen in their interactions with the various groups. Participants' abilities to address racism from both individuals and the greater community has been explored, however, the specific ways in which these participants define racism and address racist thoughts and behaviors have not been addressed. The current study indicated that several participants discussed racist events or individuals, but did not

necessarily name them as such, while others were more likely to define these events and individuals as racist and then discuss how they intervened in those situations. More research is needed to understand the differences here, and why some participants have a greater level of comfort in naming racism and possibly dealing with it.

One of the factors thought to impact parents' ability to recognize and address racism is their overall belief system related to color. Past research has raised concerns that the majority of parents who adopt transracially approach the world from a color-blind point of view. This view suggests that an individual's membership within the human race is more important and deserves more focus than their membership within their individual ethnic culture. The concern with this position is that it does not take into consideration the impact that race and ethnicity will have on the children involved in these arrangements. In the current study, the majority of participants separated their feelings about their children from their beliefs about how their children would be treated within society. All of the participants reported a "color-blind" approach to their personal relationships with their children, stating that race did not determine their desire to have their child as a part of the family or their relationship with their child. However, the majority of participants were able to recognize that despite their own feelings, the society at large would interact with their child in a different way and would value them less because of the color of their skin. Therefore, they recognized that part of their role as parents would be to prepare their child for what they might face. The differences in findings suggest that there may be levels of a "color-blind" approach to parenting that need to be better understood through future research. While it is important for parents to recognize society's view of their children and how that will impact their experience, most

individuals would agree that it is also important for parents to value their own children equally, regardless of color. Development of a theory which explores the ways in which parents' idealism around color interacts with their realistic assessment of the impact of color in this society could lead to interventions that would assist these parents in navigating the difficult terrain around race.

Anecdotal evidence from the current study introduces the idea that although parents who adopt transracially may identify themselves as not having prejudices toward their children's cultures, they may need to consider the stereotypes that they have internalized from society and the impact these have on their parenting. Future research studies need to explore these issues as well.

It has been posited that addressing one's own beliefs about race is an important process in assisting one's children with the development of a healthy racial identity. The next step might be to understand what a healthy racial identity is and how to assist children in its development. The majority of participants in the current study reported that they believe that it is important for them to assist their children in developing a healthy connection with their culture and assisting them in their understanding of their identity as members of the African-American community. However, for a minority of participants there was confusion about what that meant. In addition, even for those who talked about the importance of this process in the lives of their children, there did not seem to be a clear understanding of how that could be accomplished. Future research studies need to more clearly define a positive racial identity and what steps parents can take to assist their children in developing one. Particularly if parents' ability to do so

should be a determining factor in whether or not they are prepared to parent minority children, there need to be clear guidelines as to what this looks like.

A related concept to children's racial identity is the family's racial identity. Limited research has been conducted to better understand how transracial adoption impacts a family's view of itself and the way in which it defines itself. Past research in conjunction with the current study suggest that the process of adopting transracially may result in the loss of racial identity for a family and the need to develop a new one. However, more research needs to be conducted to better understand why some families appear to make this transition, while others continue to see themselves as a white family. Additionally, research needs to better understand the steps involved in letting go of one family identity and creating a new one, as well as the implications that this holds for all members of the family.

One of the ways in which the adoption field has attempted to encourage adopters to remain open to adopting minority children is by implementing cost differences in adoption based on race. Participants in the current study commented on those differences and the ways in which they represent racism in the system, they also reported that this difference in cost was not the motivating factor behind their willingness to adopt transracially. Based on this finding, the decision to reduce adoption costs based on the child's race, rather than to adjust the costs based on the family's financial standing does not appear to be productive. In addition, past research has indicated that the cost of adoption, as well as institutionalized racism has kept African-Americans from adopting through the formal adoption system. It appears that a different approach to the costs involved in adoption would be more productive in making sure that all children were

provided the opportunity to be part of a forever family. More research is needed to determine how best to assist all those seeking to adopt in being able to proceed financially, without inadvertently placing a price value on children based upon their race.

Clinical Implications

Precluding a discussion of how therapy might be beneficial to these families, it is important to stress that the participants in the current study did not indicate, or imply in any way, that they were in need of therapeutic services. However, although they did not imply this need, the knowledge gained from a better understanding of their experiences can provide information on what might be important to these families if they do present for therapy. In addition, it provides indications of how an educational or preventative approach might be helpful to families who are considering adopting transracially.

In this study, while participants were very open to sharing their perspective and their experiences, they were also vigilant about their need to defend their adoptions and their motivations for engaging in those adoptions. These families face a great deal of scrutiny and questioning from the world at large about the arrangement of their families. In addition, the field of psychotherapy overall has been known to pathologize family arrangements that differ from the norm and to lack a thorough understanding of these families and the issues that they are likely to face (Goodrich, 2003; Turner, Weiling & Allen, 2004). These families are likely to face very particular challenges based on their existence within a society based on both racism and adoptism (Frasch & Brooks, 2003). Adoptism is “a belief that forming families by birth is superior to forming families by adoption [and] that differences in family-building structures or methods produces an inherent superiority in families of a particular structure or method” (Steinberg & Hall,

2000, p. 108). These concerns together create several suggestions for the therapy field in addressing the concerns posed by this population.

The first suggestion that emerges out of the findings of the study is the need for therapists to become educated on the particular contexts of race and adoption in society, as well as the importance of becoming familiar with the research that informs us about the particular issues that these families will face. This is an important step in addressing the challenge posed to the field of family therapy to better understand and respect the cultures that these families represent. It is through this understanding that practitioners will be able to approach these families in a respectful manner and avoid using the therapy room to reinforce the standards that society has already placed on these families.

Transracially adoptive families are a clear example of multi-systemic families. Their experience highlights the impact that larger systems (e.g., extended family, community, society values) have on the family, as well as the impact that the family has on sub-systems (e.g., children's racial identity development). Therefore, systemic therapies that focus on addressing concerns from multiple system levels, like Feminist Family Therapy (FFT), would be especially useful in the treatment of these families. FFT represents a good choice of models to explore these families' experiences through because of its focus on understanding the ways in which society's values around gender, race, sexual orientation, age, and ability status impact the family and how the family can keep those forces external and deal with their impact on a daily basis. FFT is also a particularly good choice because it avoids pathologizing the family for normal responses to the external forces that it is facing. This is especially important for families who face criticism on a regular basis simply because of their existence.

In addition to addressing the societal messages that these families face. It will be important for therapists to be comfortable dealing with several systems at once and assisting the families in navigating their relationships within these systems. The families in the study discussed their need to learn new ways to interact with family, friends, strangers in the community, individuals within the African-American community, adoption workers, and members of their children's communities. It will be essential that therapists understand these families' contexts enough to assist them in developing or strengthening existing support networks, which in turn will help them in face the challenges ahead. Equally important is maintaining a strengths based approach to therapy that emphasizes what these families bring to their challenges, rather than viewing them as a problem within themselves. This strength based approach should assist therapists in lowering these families' radar for criticism, which should allow client families to be reflective and open about areas of difficulty and their need for assistance, rather than focusing on defending their existence to the therapist.

An important aspect of a therapist's training in assisting these families should be a focus on understanding and developing sensitivity to multiple cultures, not simply the culture of adoption and the specific culture of transracial adoption. These families represent a number of different racial and ethnic cultures within one system, and some parents feel only partially educated on the particular cultures that their child represents. The therapist can act as a conduit to information about the children's birth culture(s) and assist families in implementing these cultures within their own homes. However, this will only be possible if the therapists themselves are familiar with a variety of different cultures.

Therapists will also need to be attuned to the impact of racism on these families and their children. The therapist can assist these families in raising their own awareness about racism in society overall and how it will play a role in their children's lives and their own. An exploration of issues like white privilege can help parents to better understand how their own experiences with the outside world are influenced by the color of their skin, and how their children will not experience the same privileges that they have been granted automatically. In addition, therapists need a willingness to explore how parents address racism when it arises and how they can better prepare their children to deal with present and future racist experiences.

Overall, openness to learning about the clients' context, experiences, and needs from the clients is essential in treating these families. The world of adoption represents a whole new arena for most therapists and it will be important for them to learn the rules of the culture, including a new language which remains respectful of all members who represent important figures in the lives of these families and who have a vested interest in their ability to thrive.

Policy Implication

An area of concern that both proponents and opponents of transracial adoption share is the overrepresentation of children of color within the foster care or out of home care system. The difference between each group's approaches to the problem lies in their proposed solutions. While opponents cite overall racism in the system as the cause of the problem and the system level to intervene at, proponents cite transracial adoption as a part of the possible solution. While the current study did not examine families who adopted through the state or foster care system, some aspects of the process of the study

have implications for how we propose to address the concern. Participants were difficult to find for the current study. The number of adopters who are open to parenting an African-American/biracial child is significantly smaller than the population of those who adopt overall. In addition, research indicates that it becomes more difficult to find families for children as the age of the child increases. Therefore, finding participants for my study, which examined families who adopted children age two and younger represents the largest pool of potential adopters. It is safe to assume that finding those families willing to adopt both an older child and an African-American/biracial child would be significantly more difficult. As these are the children who are most representative of those who are languishing in out of home care, transracial adoption does not seem like a significant solution to the problem posed.

Although transracial adoption may not represent the solution for children in out of home care, does this translate to the desirability of eliminating access to transracial adoption through the re-implementation of race matching policies? Most opponents of transracial adoption would say that race matching policies should be the norm in adoption. They criticize parents' abilities to adequately parent minority children and to prepare them for the challenges ahead. The findings of the current study are mixed in terms of their support of parents' abilities to meet the challenges that opponents to transracial adoption have posited. It is not entirely clear how parents identify and address racial incidents in their children's and their families' lives. It is also not clear how parents define racial identity development and the steps that they take to address these issues. However, although participants' skills may not be fully understood in terms of their ability to address issues related to minority youth, their overall willingness to learn

and implement the skills necessary was a constant theme throughout the current research. The argument of opponents to transracial adoption is based upon the idea that children learn the skills necessary to survive in society through their families. This indicates that these skills are a learned entity. If they can be learned by children, why not by parents who wish to adopt minority children? Therefore, rather than focusing on eliminating transracial adoption as an option for families and children, these findings indicate that mandatory training for parents interested in transracial adoption might assist parents in developing the skills that they need to have and report openness to developing.

Limitations

Although each individual participant was interviewed a total of four times, the findings of this study are limited to a group of six Caucasian heterosexual couples (twelve participants) who have adopted African-American or biracial infants or toddlers. Therefore the results of this study need to be considered within the particular context of the individuals who have participated, and care needs to be taken when generalizing the experiences of these participants to the greater population.

Additionally, the participants' responses in both the couple interview and the individual interviews remained very consistent with one another. This may represent the similarity of their perspectives. However, the interviews were constructed in a manner that the couple was interviewed together first, and then separately next. It could be that the experience of discussing the adoption in the presence of their spouse first, influenced how the participants reflected on their experience and what they shared in the individual interviews.

While two sets of the interviews took place face to face, the remaining interviews were conducted over the telephone. Although I was not able to note a pattern of differences between the interviews that were conducted on the telephone and those that were conducted in person, the possibility of the difference in medium impacting participants' comfort in sharing is always a possibility. In addition, for those participants that I interviewed in person, I was able to access non-verbal behaviors that were not available to me in the telephone interviews. Therefore I missed out on a level of richness in the telephone interviews which in turn likely influenced my understanding of the participants' experiences.

In order to accommodate the schedules of both partners and allow them to be interviewed together, the majority of interviews took place in the late evening, after the participants' children were in bed. There is a possibility that the timing of these interviews impacted the level of fatigue that the individuals felt and therefore impacted the reflections that they shared. While this did not seem to be an issue during the couple interviews (which took place first), the abbreviated nature of the individual interviews (which took place second) indicates that this may have been a factor.

Although I did not share my specific experiences with transracial adoption until the completion of the participants' interviews in the project, I was open with the participants about my own role as a member of the community from the beginning of the project. It is not clear what type of impact this disclosure had on the participants and what they felt open to share. Based on their comments, I believe that this had a positive impact on my relationship with them and may have enhanced the quality of the interview,

however it may have also impacted what they felt comfortable sharing or how they shared information.

As a member of this particular community, my thoughts and perspectives are likely to be different than someone who has never experienced transracial adoption personally. Therefore, my experiences may have influenced how I interviewed the participants and the lens through which I saw their experiences. However, I took great care with the methodological steps involved in phenomenological research to ensure that the results of my study were a reflection of my participants' experiences, rather than my own.

Personal Reflections

Conducting this study has been one of the most difficult and yet most satisfying aspects of my academic career so far. In this section, I would like to share with you part of my own journey as the researcher on this study and my reflections of what it was like to listen to the stories that were shared with me.

The willingness of these participants to trust me with this part of their lives overwhelms me. The feeling is akin to my experience when clients share their lives with me. I stand amazed at the openness that these participants showed and their willingness to be very self-reflective and to talk about issues that were sometimes difficult with a great deal of candor. Although I believed that it would be important from a feminist perspective to share with the participants that I, too, had adopted transracially. I have also struggled throughout the study with the implications of this transparency. I think this struggle mirrored a deeper struggle that I was experiencing as a person who is both a member of this population and a researcher. As a member of this population, I feel a

great deal of loyalty and connection to others who are walking a similar road. I believe that it is this connection that allowed my participants to feel that they could trust me with their story. I also believe that I had to struggle with this sense of loyalty in completing my task as a researcher in this study. As a researcher, it is my job to share all of the experiences that my participants discussed, even when I was conflicted about their stories or the implications these held for the community. I had a job to highlight reflections that were shared which I believed added support for the argument against transracial adoption, which in essence brings into question the validity of my family arrangement as well. At these moments it was invaluable to have those trusted researchers that I have shared my journey with to assist me in my struggle. They have helped to keep me honest to my participants' experiences, while validating my own concerns. However, I think in the end this process has strengthened me and given me a sense of peace inside myself and my own parenting. It reminded me that a good parent is not a perfect parent, and that honesty with oneself is so much more important than always trying to say the right thing.

The participants shared some perspectives that were especially difficult for me to hear. I was very upset by the stereotypes that some of the parents shared regarding what it means to be an African-American. In my journal, I reflected on the fact that I wished that I could erase their words, and at a deeper level, I wished that I was in a position to challenge them on their statements. In my opinion, those stereotypes are another form of racism. It was deeply disturbing to not only hear these parents' descriptions, but also to note the lack of insight about the nature of these comments and the implications of making such generalizations. It was equally as difficult to hear parents deny that race would be an issue for their children, or to listen to them equate racist experiences that

their children would face with being teased for wearing glasses. I found myself angry at some of the participants for their comments and concerned about how these attitudes would impact the experience of their children. I found myself asking the same questions that many opponents of transracial adoption ask, can Caucasian parents really understand racism and oppression in a way that allows them to be effective parents for African-American children? However, the recognition of racism as a problem by the majority of participants gave me hope.

A related issue that I really struggled with was why some participants had such a difficult time naming racist experiences as racism. They were clear that these events were not okay and even expressed strong feelings about them. However, they appeared ambivalent about using the word racism, sometimes defending others' actions as "ignorance." As a feminist, I have a deeply held value that it is important to name these experiences; that part of naming them is acknowledging the societal oppression that they represent. As a parent, I am afraid that if we do not name these events as racism, we risk trivializing them in our own minds and minimizing the experiences of our children. Consultation with my auditors and with trusted peers was essential in assisting me in processing these feelings and bracketing them throughout data collection, analysis, and writing.

As I reflect on the interview process I can only describe it as a deeply personal and moving experience. The participants shifted through various emotions as they described their experiences, sometimes joyful, angry, sad, and reminiscent. I too, felt myself move through many of these emotions. My participants became tearful as they recounted some of the more joyous or sad parts of their journey, and there were times that

I became tearful or choked up as well. In the couple interviews, the participants would sometimes finish one another's thoughts and sentences. At other times, they might turn to one another and ask questions. I enjoyed watching them engage each other around the subject of their child(ren) and their experiences. In a few of the couple interviews, the wives talked a lot more than the husbands and even talked over their husbands. I sometimes struggled with how to make more room for the men to talk, without alienating or shutting down the wives. While my therapeutic skills were valuable at these points, I was also very careful to remain in the role of the researcher rather than the therapist.

The process of analyzing the data was almost as powerful as collecting it. Although I did not transcribe the recordings, I did read the transcripts several times while listening to the tapes. This was enormously helpful in remaining in the spirit of the comments that were made while coding them and developing the themes. It was amazing how many of the things I had not heard or reflected on during the interview jumped out at me while listening to the recordings. This really allowed me to check my perceptions on what the participants had shared and to accurately talk about what I had heard. I also paid attention to my role in the interviews and made adjustments in future interviews when I felt like I had been too involved or too rushed.

One of the concerns that I ran into while analyzing the data was my own struggle with making sure that I was accurately reflecting what my participants experienced rather than imposing my own thoughts or beliefs on their experience. This resulted in an original draft of chapter four that sounded more like a content analysis than a phenomenology. Part of the process for me was to give myself permission to share the participants' experiences and stories with you, rather than simply repeating what they

said. As I thought about this struggle, I was reminded of my first days as a therapist. In reflecting clients' experiences and feelings back to them, I would often parrot their words. As I became more confident in my skills, I was able to reflect on the meaning behind the words and really capture what they were trying to say to me. It has been a similar process with this study. It amazes me how my participants had so much more trust in my ability to share their stories with you, than I had trust in myself. I hope that I was able to honor that faith.

Conducting these interviews highlighted to me the diversity of experience that exists even for parents who have gone through a similar process. I noticed that there were both a lot of similarities between myself and my experience and that of my participants and there were a lot of differences. Also where my experience was similar to one participant, it was divergent from another. I think that one of the most striking differences that I noted between my experience and that of my participants was that most of them had adopted two minority children and I have adopted one. Of those participants who struggled with infertility concerns, none of them had gone on to have biological children and I had. A difficult part of this realization for me was the shame that came along with it. In the field of adoption, there is so much written about the importance of a person in the family who "matches" the child. I continue to struggle with what it will mean for our daughter if she never has a sibling of color. A lot of times when one adopts, there is a feeling of being an outsider with those who have birthed children. The participants noted this difference in experience and how it impacted some of their relationships. I felt that same feeling of being an outsider in the adoption community when I gave birth to our second child, and felt it once again as the participants shared

their experiences. This feeling highlighted for me both the importance of feeling a part of a community (something that the participants had alluded to as well) and the ineptitude that we all feel as parents at ever living up to the responsibilities that we have taken on.

I set out on this journey to give voice to a group of participants that are rarely heard, but I gained so much more from the experience than I could have imagined. It was inspiring to know that there are other parents who are struggling with some of the same difficult questions that I am with respect to raising a minority child. Even in those moments of the interviews that there seemed to be more questions than answers, it was comforting to know that others ask some of the same questions or become angry about some of the same issues. There were moments when I had completed all of the participants' interviews, when we spent some time simply talking. These were the times that I gave the participants a chance to ask any questions that they had about me or my own experiences with transracial adoption. Although very few asked any questions beyond the ages of my children and where my daughter was born, we had small conversations on where to get good videos on taking care of hair and experiences with birthparents. In one instance, one of the mothers and I realized that their birthmother had actually attended an adoption support group that I was a member of. This led her to share a little bit about that relationship and some of the struggles that they were experiencing. I was once again amazed with the level of connection that seems to automatically exist between people with a shared experience. I was left with the question of how to truly thank these participants for letting me share their stories and I have found that the answer is in the question. These participants shared their experiences because they want them to be heard, just like they want to learn more. So the best way that I have to thank them is

to tell their stories and to continue to look for answers to the other questions that are posed by their experiences.

Conclusion

My goal in starting this project was to explore the experiences of Caucasian parents who had adopted an African-American or biracial child. The findings from this study have highlighted several aspects of the experience for this limited group of parents who chose to cross racial lines in forming their families.

Taking this journey with these six couples has brought me many challenges, benefits and taught me more than I could possibly express. I started this journey with the intention to learn more about transracial adoption, both for the benefit of others and for myself. An added benefit of this experience has been to take my own journey of self exploration farther and to hopefully make me a better mother to all of my children, as well as a better therapist to those who have taken a similar path. It is my hope that others learn from these participants as well, and feel more equipped to engage this population in an understanding and respectful manner. Thank you for being audience and participants in my journey, I hope that you too feel like you have benefited from the experience.

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APPENDIX A
SCREENING CRITERIA

I appreciate your interest in my research study. I am interested in learning more about the lives and experiences of Caucasian parents who have adopted a child transracially. In order to determine whether you are eligible for my study, I am going to ask you a few questions.

1. Are you Caucasian/non-Hispanic? If no, you are not eligible.
2. Were you and your partner married for a period of at least one year prior to initiating the adoption process of your child? If no, you are not eligible.
3. Are you both (husband and wife) interested and able to participate in the study? If no, you are not eligible.
4. Is your child African-American or biracial? If your child is biracial, is one of his/her biological parents African-American? If no, you are not eligible.
5. Was your child 2 years of age or younger when he/she was placed in your home for possible adoption? If no, you are not eligible.
6. Do either of you (husband or wife) have children from a previous relationship? If yes, you are not eligible.
7. Has your adoption been finalized? If no, you are not eligible.
8. Did the finalization of your adoption take place longer than five years ago? If no, you are not eligible.

If Participants Meet Full Criteria For Study:

When full criteria are met, I will inform the participants that they have met the full criteria for the study and I will describe the study to them. If they are interested in meeting, I will schedule a date, time, and location to meet with them. If we will be meeting at a neutral location, I will confirm the location and the directions to the location. If we will be meeting at the Family Therapy Clinic, I will provide them with directions and will remind them that I will be reimbursing them for any costs associated with parking on campus.

Upon meeting with the couple I will inform them about the study. I will then read the informed consent, answer any questions the participants may have and complete the informed consent if the participants are willing to participate in the project. If both partners agree to participate and complete the consent forms, I will ask them each to fill out the demographic questionnaire and complete the interview.

If Participants Do Not Meet Full Criteria For Study:

When full criteria are not met, I will let them know that they do not meet the eligibility requirements for my study, but I appreciate their time and willingness to interact with me about their experience. I will also ask the couple for any recommendations of anyone else who might meet the requirements for my study. I will provide the participants with contact information for the adoption group which best fits their situation (international vs. domestic), contact information for three clinical referral sources in town in case they would like additional peer or professional help, and websites dealing with transracial adoption. Additionally, I will provide them with a resource sheet listing books on the topic of transracial adoption.

APPENDIX B
LETTER TO SOCIAL WORKERS

Name of social worker

I am contacting you because as a Social Worker in the <name of city> community you are an important contact and resource. I am a doctoral student in Marriage and Family Therapy at Texas Tech University and I am writing to you in order to seek your assistance in identifying potential subjects for my dissertation research study exploring the experiences of couples who have transracially adopted African-American or biracial children. The purpose of the present study will be to gain a better understanding of the experiences of heterosexual Caucasian couples who adopt transracially, particularly during the time period between their decision to adopt and the finalization of their adoption. I believe that this study will be instrumental in developing a better understanding of these families and how we as mental health practitioners can assist them during this exciting and stressful time of transition.

The current research study will include two couple interviews and two individual interviews for each member of the couple, as well as one short demographic form for each participant to fill out. Prior to the beginning of the study, I (the researcher) will be visiting with potential participants in order to fully explain the study, answer any questions that arise, and obtain formal consent to participate. Participation in this study consists of two meeting times that should take approximately 1 ½ - 2 hours each, for a total for 3 ½ -4 hours total commitment.

As a social worker in the adoption field, I am writing to ask your assistance for the current study. I am requesting that you would examine your records for any couples who meet the following criteria: 1) both parents are Caucasian/non-Hispanic, 2) parents were married for one year prior to initiating adoption process of child, 3) parents adopted a child with **at least** one African-American biological parent, 4) the child was 2 years old or younger at placement, 5) the adoption has been finalized within the past five years. I am requesting that you would send one of the included letters requesting participation to those families who meet the criteria for this study.

My goal is to have the interviews complete by the middle of June. However, I realize that without your help this goal will be impossible to achieve. If you have any questions or concerns about this study or your important role in it, please do not hesitate to contact me at (806) 239-4753 or by e-mail at bobbi.j.miller@ttu.edu. You may also contact Karen S. Wampler, Ph.D. at (806) 742-5050 X 224 or by e-mail at karen.wampler@ttu.edu. Thank you in advance for your support in this request.

Sincerely,

Bobbi J. Miller, M.S., LMFT

APPENDIX C

LETTER TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Dear Parents,

My name is Bobbi Miller and I am conducting interviews with couples who have adopted an African-American or biracial child. I myself became a parent through transracial adoption and have sometimes struggled with the limited information available to understand the experiences of other families like mine, and especially to manage the unique challenges that myself and my husband experienced during our adoption process. Because of that I am trying to gain a better understanding of parents who adopt transracially and the fullness of that experience.

You are receiving this letter because your social worker identified your family as meeting the criteria for my study. If that is the case, I need your help. If you agree to participate in my study, I will be asking to meet with you as a couple, two separate times. During these meetings, I will spend time interviewing you as a couple and interviewing you individually. At the first meeting, I will also be asking you each to fill out a short demographic questionnaire. I anticipate that the first meeting will take approximately 2 hours of your time, and the second meeting will take approximately 1 ½ hours of your time. The focus of the interview will be on your experiences of adopting your child transracially, and will specifically focus on the time period between your decision to adopt and the finalization of your adoption. At the second interview, I will also be providing you with a summary of your interview and asking for your feedback on how accurately the summary matches your experiences. It is anticipated that the total time commitment would be 3 ½ - 4 hours. If you would be willing to participate, please contact me as soon as possible. Additionally if you know of anyone else who may be willing to talk to me, please feel free to pass along my contact information. You can contact me by e-mail at bobbi.j.miller@ttu.edu or you can reach me by telephone at 806-239-4753. You may also contact Karen S. Wampler, Ph.D. at (806) 742-5050 X 224 or by e-mail at karen.wampler@ttu.edu.

Your attention to this matter is greatly appreciated. Thank you in advance for your support in this request.

Sincerely,

Bobbi J. Miller, M.S., LMFT

APPENDIX D
SCRIPT FOR FACE TO FACE SOLICITATION

Hello, my name is Bobbi Miller and I am conducting interviews with couples who have adopted an African-American or biracial child. I myself became a parent through transracial adoption and have sometimes struggled with the limited information available to understand the experiences of other families like mine, and especially to manage the unique challenges that myself and my husband experienced during our adoption process. Because of that I am trying to gain a better understanding of parents who adopt transracially and the fullness of that experience. I am providing you with some fliers of advertisement about my study, I would appreciate you help in handing these out to anyone you believe might be eligible for my study. Do you have any questions for me?

Will be handing out the flier (Appendix E)

APPENDIX E

FLIER

TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

COUPLES ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH

Are you
married?

STUDY ON

Call for more
information
239-4753

EXPERIENCES OF

TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION

Feel free to pass
this information
on!

Have you adopted
a child within the
past 7 years?

Is your adoption
finalized?

Is your adoption
transracial?

We look forward to hearing from you and will be delighted to answer any further questions. If interested, you and your partner will be asked to participate in two meetings lasting about two hours each, you will be interviewed together and individually. The information that you share will be confidential.

Please contact:

Bobbi J. Miller, M.S. Doctoral Candidate (MFT)

Phone: (806) 239-4753

E-mail: bobbi.j.miller@ttu.edu

For any further questions, you may also contact:

Dr. Karen Wampler: 806-742-5050 X224

APPENDIX F
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

I hereby consent to participate in research conducted by Bobbi J. Miller, M.S. and Karen S. Wampler, Ph.D. with the Department of Allied and Professional Studies at Texas Tech University.

It has been explained to me and I understand that:

- A. The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of Caucasian couples who have adopted an African-American or biracial (at least one African-American birth parent) child. It is the hope of the researcher that this research will provide clinicians and researchers who work with others in similar positions with a better understanding of these experiences and therefore more knowledge about how to be helpful to other families in similar positions or with similar experiences.
- B. If I volunteer, my participation in this study will consist of the following: (a) I will meet with the Bobbi J. Miller two times over the next several months; (b) I will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire; (c) I will be asked to participate in two couple interviews that will last approximately *one* hour each, and two individual interviews that will last approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ hour each. The interviews will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. All tapes will be numerically labeled. If names are mentioned in the interviews, they will be deleted from the typed transcripts. At the beginning of my interview I will choose a pseudo-name, by which I will be referred to in all future publications and presentations. All data will be kept in a locked cabinet that only Bobbi J. Miller or her advisors will have access to. The questions that I answer will be kept confidential. (d) My participation is voluntary, and refusal to participate at any time will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. (e) Although the researcher recognizes that the topic of transracial adoption is a sensitive one, my honest feedback is very important in understanding the experiences of parents who adopt transracially. (f) There are no wrong answers.
- C. I understand the potential risks explained to me. The risks include being asked questions that may elicit painful memories or create uncomfortable emotions. Bobbi J. Miller has provided me with information about referrals to clinical resources, an adoption peer group, and useful websites. In addition, I know that I can contact **Bobbi J. Miller: 806-239-4753** or **Dr. Karen Wampler: 806-742-5050 X224** should any negative reactions occur as a result of my participation in this research.
- D. I understand the potential benefits of participating in this research: (a) My contribution will add to the existing literature and research on transracial adoption; (b) Through my participation, I will assist others to better understand the experience of Caucasian parents who adopt African-American and biracial children; (c) My contribution may promote more effective interventions and more sensitive policies that might benefit participants with similar experiences. (d) I

will receive a list including: a peer adoption group in town (if available), therapeutic resources, online resources, and a list of relevant readings for myself and my child. (e) I will receive reimbursement for any parking related charges that are incurred while I am actively participating in the interviews for this research.

- E. As a participant, I understand that I have the following rights during my participation in this research: (a) I can determine the pace of the interview. (b) I have the right to not answer any question. (c) I can withdraw from the study at any time and have any data collected from me destroyed or returned to me.
- F. I know that if I have any questions, concerns or comments I can contact the Texas Tech University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Office of Research Services, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409. Phone: (806) 742-3884. I can also contact the investigators, Bobbi J. Miller (806) 239-4753 or Dr. Karen S. Wampler (806) 742-5050 X224.
- G. My questions about this research project have been answered. I understand that if I have any further questions about the research project, I can contact Bobbi J. Miller at 806-239-4753 or e-mail her at bobbi.j.miller@ttu.edu, or Dr. Karen Wampler at 806-742-5050 X 224 or e-mail her at karen.wampler@ttu.edu.
- H. I further give consent to Bobbi J. Miller to perform the procedures referred to; report findings to government agencies, funding agencies, manufacturers, or scientific bodies; and to publish the findings. I understand that I will not be identified in any publications.
- I. By signing below, I agree that I have been told the purpose of the project, understand what is expected of me, have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and have a copy of this form for my own records.

Participant's Name (Print)

Participant's signature

Date

Interviewer's Name (Print)

Interviewer's signature

Date

Expiration date for this form:

APPENDIX G
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONAIRE

ID_____

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this questionnaire is to allow me to describe my sample. Please read and respond to all of the following questions. Be sure to check all boxes that apply to you. Please do not include your name on this paper. Feel free to ask any questions that you may have.

What is your gender? 1. Male
 2. Female

What is your current age? _____ years

Describe your cultural heritage (e.g., German, English): _____

What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

- 1. Completed some High school
- 2. Completed High school
- 3. Completed Trade school
- 4. Completed some college
- 5. Completed Associates Degree
- 6. Completed Bachelor's degree
- 7. Completed some graduate work
- 8. Completed Master's degree
- 9. Completed Doctorate degree

Major area of Study: _____

What is your current occupation? _____

What kinds of work do you do? _____

What is your religious preference?

- 1. Catholic 6. Jewish
- 2. Protestant 7. None
- 3. Non-denominational
- 4. Latter-Day Saint (Mormon)
- 5. Other (specify) _____

What is your approximate income before taxes yearly?

- 1. Less than \$15,000
- 2. \$15,000 – \$29,999
- 3. \$30,000 – \$44,999
- 4. \$45,000 – \$59,999
- 5. \$60,000 – \$74,999
- 6. \$75,000 – \$89,999
- 7. \$90,000 – \$104,999
- 8. \$105,000 – \$119,999
- 9. \$120,000 – \$134,999
- 10. \$135,000 – \$149,999
- 11. \$150,000 – above

In what month and year did you get married? _____

Have you been married previously?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

If yes, how many times?

- 1. One
- 2. Two
- 3. Three
- 4. Four or more, please specify: _____

How many children do you have?

- 1. One
- 2. Two
- 3. Three
- 4. Four or more, please specify: _____

Have you ever been pregnant/has your partner ever been pregnant?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

Have you ever attempted to get pregnant/get your partner pregnant?

- 1. Yes

2. No

Have you ever received an infertility diagnosis?

1. Yes

2. No

In what month and year was your child placed in your home?

In what month and year was your adoption finalized?

Was your first adoption arranged by:

1. Public Agency

2. Private Agency

3. Lawyer

4. Other, if so please specify: _____

Please answer the following questions regarding your children.

Child #1:

How old is your first child? _____

What is your first child's gender? 1. Male

2. Female

What is your first child's race/ethnicity (e.g., African-American, Chinese, biracial- African-American/Latina)? _____

Is your first child adopted? 1. Yes

2. No

Child #2:

How old is your second child? _____

What is your second child's gender? 1. Male
 2. Female

What is your second child's race/ethnicity (e.g., African-American, Chinese, biracial- African-American/Latina)? _____

Is your second child adopted? 1. Yes
 2. No

Child #3:

How old is your third child? _____

What is your third child's gender? 1. Male
 2. Female

What is your third child's race/ethnicity (e.g., African-American, Chinese, biracial- African-American/Latina)? _____

Is your third child adopted? 1. Yes
 2. No

Child #4:

How old is your fourth child? _____

What is your fourth child's gender? 1. Male
 2. Female

What is your fourth child's race/ethnicity (e.g., African-American, Chinese, biracial- African-American/Latina)? _____

Is your fourth child adopted? 1. Yes
 2. No

Child #5:

How old is your fifth child? _____

APPENDIX H
COUPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for choosing to be a part of this study. I really want to understand more about your experiences of transracially adopting an African-American/biracial child. I am particularly interested in the period of time between when you made the decision to adopt and when your adoption was finalized, so if it is okay with you we will focus on that period of time. There are no right or wrong answers because all of your experiences are important to me. I encourage you to share all that comes to your mind during this interview and to be as honest as possible. As we discussed before, you can stop the interview at any time that you would like and you can choose to skip any question that you would prefer not to answer. If you are confused about any question that I ask, please let me know. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Grand Tour Question (Couple Interview):

If you were to describe to someone the process of adopting ‘child’s name’, what would you say?

Probes:

- Describe the experience of adopting a child transracially.
- Describe how you came to the decision to adopt transracially.
- What influenced your decision to adopt transracially?
- Was infertility a factor in your decision to adopt?
- How did your available financial resources affect the adoption process?
- Tell me about any particular concerns that you had about adopting transracially. Any particular hopes.
- What does it mean to you to adopt and parent an African-American/biracial child?
- How did your family and friends respond to your decision?
- How do you believe the experience of adopting transracially is different from/similar to the experience of adopting a child who is similar to you in terms of race?
- How do you believe the African-American community feels about the transracial adoption of African-American/biracial children? Do you have any personal experiences that inform your view?
- Did you do anything special to prepare to bring an African-American/biracial child into your home? If so, what?
- Did you receive any guidance on what it would mean to adopt an African-American/biracial child? If so, what and from whom?
- How do you think adopting transracially has impacted your life and your relationships?
- If you had the experience to do over again, is there anything that you would do differently? If so, what?
- Has adopting transracially changed your view of and relationship to the African-American community? If so, how? Do you think it should?

- Did you experience racism/oppression as a result of your decision to adopt transracially? If so, what has that been like for you? If not, do you expect to in the future?
- How has this experience changed you? Your relationship?
- How often do you talk about this experience?
- Is there anything else that I should know about your experience?

APPENDIX I
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for being willing to speak a little more with me about your personal experiences. I really want to understand more about your experiences of becoming a father/mother through transracial adoption. Once again there are no right or wrong answers because all of your experiences are important to me. I encourage you to share all that comes to your mind during this interview and to be as honest as possible. As we discussed before, you can stop the interview at any time that you would like and you can choose to skip any question that you would prefer not to answer. If you are confused about any question that I ask, please let me know. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Grand Tour Question (Individual Interview):

If you were to describe to someone what it is like to become a father/mother through transracial adoption, what would you say?

Probes:

- Tell me about your specific role in making the decision to adopt transracially.
- What does it mean to be a father/mother of an African-American/biracial child? Is it different than fathering/mothering a Caucasian child? Is it different than fathering/mothering a Latino, Asian, etc... child?
- Did you feel like a parent in the way that you expected to before you adopted transracially? What do you relate that to?
- How did this decision impact your marriage?
- What, if anything, would you have done differently?
- Is there anything else that I should know about your experience? If so, what?

APPENDIX J
RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES HANDOUT

Thank you so much for your participation in my project. Here are some resources that you may contact or access if you feel a need to, as well as some books that may be helpful or of interest to you.

Therapeutic Services: (these may vary based on location of participants)

Family Therapy Clinic
Texas Tech Campus
Human Sciences Building
(806) 742-3074
Fee Range- \$10-\$50

Covenant Counseling Center
1302 Broadway
Lubbock, TX
(806) 747-3488
Fee Range- \$5- \$40

Dana Taylor, Ph.D.
8008 Slide Road, Benchmark Suite 17
Lubbock, TX
(806) 794-1336

Gabrielle Keenum, M.A.
8315 Indiana Ave. Ste. W205
Lubbock, TX
(806) 797-9701

Support Groups in the Community: (these may vary based on location of participants)

Domestic Adoption

Domestic Adoption Group (Lubbock, TX)
Children's Connections
Contact Person: Deborah Phillips or LeAnn Cairns
(806) 745-7995

Gladney Family Group
http://www.gladneyfund.org/aux_main.html
See website for contact information in your area

International Adoption Playgroup
Contact Person: Susan Camp
(806) 785-9075

Websites dealing with Transracial Adoption

Adoptive Families Magazine Website:

http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/culture_AfricanAmerican/

Summary: Includes links to articles and books dealing with various topics related to Transracial adoption.

NYS CCC Transracial and Transnational Resources:

<http://www.nysccc.org/T-Rarts/T-Rarts.html>

Summary: Includes links to articles and additional websites on various topics related to Transracial adoption.

Center for Family Connections:

http://www.kinnect.org/who_mission.html

Summary: Organization that provides workshops and trainings on adoption. Not specifically oriented to Transracial adoption, but does include material that may be helpful.

PACT: An Adoption Alliance

<http://www.pactadopt.org/press/articles/index.shtml>

Summary: Includes links to articles dealing with various topics related to Transracial adoption.

National Council for Adoption

<https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/>

Summary: National organization that promotes adoption. Good source of current information on trends in adoption and assistance for future adoptions.

North American Council on Adoptable Children

<http://www.nacac.org/>

Summary: National organization that promotes adoption for harder to place populations. Good information on Transracial parenting. Also sponsors a yearly conference.

Tapestry Books

<http://www.tapestrybooks.com/Default.asp?c=243941>

Summary: Publisher that provides books and additional materials on adoption.

Bibliography

- Inside Transracial Adoption, by Gail Steinberg & Beth Hallinan *Inside Transracial Adoption provides creative, confident, pro-active, and provocative guidance for parents who are experienced veterans or who are considering transracial adoption for the first time.*

- Different and Wonderful: Raising Black Children in a Race-Conscious Society, by Darlene Powell Hopson and Derek S. Hopson *Explores the sometimes tough, sometimes unspoken, questions that face that Black middle-class today, particularly parents.*
- I'm Chocolate, You're Vanilla: Raising Healthy Black and Biracial Children in a Race-Conscious World, by Marguerite A. Wright *This superb, rational, and highly readable volume answers a deeply felt need. Parents and educators alike have long struggled to understand what meanings race might have for the very young, and for ways to insure that every child grows up with a healthy sense of self.*
- Raising the Rainbow Generation, by Dr. Darlene Powell-Hopson. *A "through the ages" book that tackles the issues of race and cultural diversity. Important for me because of Zoe, our daughter, who at age 4 already makes comments about being "different." See below for a book on sibling diversity.*
- Dim Sum, Bagels and Grits: A Sourcebook for Multicultural Families, by Myra Alperson. *The author is an adoptive mother of an Asian child. She does describe her own experiences, but the book does not focus on the adoption of Asian children, but instead on building multicultural families.*
- Weaving a Family: Untangling race and adoption, by Barbara Katz Rothman. *The author is an adoptive mother of an African-American child, and is a sociologist. She describes her own experiences, but also clearly discussed the overall contextual issues that are important to Transracial parenting.*