2012

The Intersectionality of Race, Adoption and Parenting: How White Adoptive Parents of Asian Born Children Talk About Race Within the Family

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THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF RACE, ADOPTION AND PARENTING:
HOW WHITE ADOPTIVE PARENTS OF ASIAN BORN CHILDREN TALK ABOUT
RACE WITHIN THE FAMILY

A Dissertation Presented

by

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Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

February 2012

Social Justice Education

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

share their stories. Hopefully, together we will make a difference in the lives of other adoptive families. I am indebted to all of you.

The Social Justice Education program has taught me about systems of privilege and power and how they are unequal among groups of people. Barbara Love taught me about racism, Maurianne Adams taught me how to be a researcher and Ximena Zuniga guided me early on in the SJE Proseminar and at the end served on my dissertation committee. A special thanks to all of you.

Recognizing I needed to learn more about adoption, I made an appointment with Hal Grotevant, a well known and highly respected researcher in the field of adoption working in the psychology department at UMass. His knowledge, support, guidance and access to resources have enabled me to create a dissertation that is much stronger than it would have been otherwise. Thank you so much Hal, I am very grateful.

Joe Berger, who works in the Higher Ed program, served as the chair of my committee. I hesitated to ask Joe to serve as the chair of my committee because I was not one of his students and I knew he had a full workload but I also knew I needed his expertise. It has been such a joy and honor to work with you Joe. I will always be grateful to you for your generosity, your ongoing feedback and your willingness to get me through the dissertation process. It is not possible for me to thank you enough!

I worried how I was going to manage school, work and family. Our children were 5, 7 & 9 when I started and as I finish they are now 11, 13 & 15. Josh, Jess and Corey never complained about my ongoing school responsibilities and were all very happy for me when I finished. I know I was a bit more stressed at times because of school, but my kids were wonderful and I am grateful to them. My partner, Dan Gerber, has been

amazingly supportive throughout the long doctoral process. He encouraged me early on to go for my doctorate even though it would have a significant impact on our life. As I went off to a late afternoon class or night class semester after semester leaving him in charge of three children, he never gave me a hard time even though he had his hands full with three young children and was often tired from his own full day of work. A heart felt thanks to you Dan for your ongoing encouragement, helpful insights, willingness to pick up my slack and your easygoing attitude about the entire process – xo to you.

Clearly, completing my doctorate was a group effort. I put my hands together and bow in gratitude to all of you.

ABSTRACT

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FEBRUARY 2012

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Transracial adoption has been a controversial form of adoption since it came into
vogue in the United States in the 1950s. In 1972, The National Association of Black
Social Workers (NABSW) established a decree stating transracial adoption was akin to
cultural genocide because they were concerned that under the tutelage of White parents,
Black children would not learn the skills needed to survive in a racist society.   Whereas
the NABSW was looking out for the well being of domestic children of color, there was
no corresponding advocate for children of color adopted internationally.

Recognizing that large numbers of children are adopted from Asia, racism is still
an issue for people of color and not all White people are aware of the extent that racism
exists in our society, I set out to learn if and how White adoptive parents of Asian born
children talk about race related issues within the context of the family. This dissertation
shares the insights and experiences of White parents from nine families who adopted
children from Korea and the Philippines. The goal of the study was to learn if and how
White parents talk to their Asian born children about racism, how comfortable and

confident they feel having those conversations and who they turn to when they need help in supporting their children around race related issues.

The results indicate that before children reached adolescence, they were much more open and willing to share upsetting events with their parents. Pre-adolescent youth turned to their parents for comfort, support and guidance. During the teen years, communication between parents and children decreased thus limiting the parent's influence about imparting wisdom about how to navigate race related situations. The final chapter offers recommendations for practice, research and policy.

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INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

Statement of the Problem

Transracial adoption, the process of White parents adopting children of color, has

been a controversial form of adoption since it came into vogue in the United States in the

1950s. (Vonk, 2001). Prior to the 1950s, domestic transracial adoption was essentially

nonexistent. The domestic transracial adoption movement gained momentum in the

1950s, but lost steam by the early 1980s. The rise and fall of domestic transracial

adoptions did not occur in a vacuum, but rather linked to the shifting social and cultural

milieu of the 1960s. Legalized abortion, proliferation of birth control and greater

acceptance of single parenting led to a decrease in White children being available for

adoption (Eng, 2003). At the same time, the Civil Rights movement was taking place and

society became more accepting of the blending of minority children with White families.

The persistence of racism in the United States precluded many Black families from

participating in formal adoptions that can be costly hence limiting the pool of potential

Black adoptive families (Simon & Altstein, 1992; Quiroz, 2007). All of these changes

led to an increase in domestic transracial adoption in the late 1960s and early 1970s

(Carp, 2004).

As transracial adoption grew, the National Association of Black Social Workers

(NABSW) expressed their opposition stating that it was akin to cultural genocide,

meaning that under the tutelage of White parents, Black children would not learn the

skills needed to survive in a racist society. In the early 1970s, the NABSW made a

formal declaration stating:

Humans develop their sense of values, identity, self concept, attitudes, and basic

perspectives within the family group. Black children in white homes are cut off

from the healthy development of themselves as Black people. Only a Black

family can transmit the emotional and sensitive subtleties of perception and

reaction essential for a Black child's survival in a racist society.

NABSW, 1972, p. 1049

Soon after the declaration of NABSW's decree, transracial adoption decreased

significantly. In 1971, there were 2,574 Black children adopted by White parents and by

1987, that number dropped to an estimated 1,200 (Lee, 2003). As the rates of domestic

transracial adoption decreased, the rates for international transracial adoption increased.

In 1992 there were 6,427 children adopted transnationally by families in the US and by

2005 that number more than tripled to 22,728 children (Quiroz, 2007). Some of the

primary factors leading to the increase in transnational adoption included Americans

responding to the needs of children orphaned from World War II and the Korean War, the

fall of communist governments in Eastern Europe and the media's presentation of the

condition of children living in orphanages, particularly those in Romania (Hollingsworth,

2003).

Given the growth of transnational adoption, how prepared are individual parents

and we as a society to care for the influx of international transracially adopted children

particularly as it relates to race? Studies have shown racial discrimination has negative

psychological consequences for minority adolescents including low self-esteem (Rivas-

Drake, Hughes, & Way, 2007) stress and depressive symptoms (Sellers, Copeland-

Linder, Martin, Lewis, 2006). Do White parents, who have not had first hand

experiences with racism, have the skills needed to minimize the impact of the psychological consequences of racial discrimination their children will undoubtedly experience? In a study conducted by Samuels (2009), in-depth interviews with adult transracial adoptees revealed that the majority of White parents had not prepared their children of color for racial discrimination. Samuel's article, which focuses on race and parenting, is a rare find in the adoption literature. The following paragraphs highlight how I determined Samuel's article was indeed a rare find.

A review of existing literature in key research databases (ERIC, Academic Search Primer (ASP, and PsycINFO) reveals a paucity of research on transracial/transnational adoption, race, ethnicity, and parenting. In searching these databases, I listed transracial adoption and race and recorded the results. Next, I used those same two terms but added the term parenting and recorded the results again. I did this same process for all three databases with the results listed below. Since I did not get many results for transnational adoption, I also used the term international adoption.

As Table 1 indicates, there is much more information available on transracial adoption than there is on transnational or international adoption. Unfortunately, the challenge with using the word "transracial" as a search term is that transracial may refer to domestic or international adoption. Some of the articles identified as transracial adoption are internationally focused (Bergquist, 2003, "Caucasian Parents and Korean Adoptees: A Survey of Parents' Perceptions") whereas others are domestically oriented (Hollingsworth, 1998, "Promoting Same-*Race Adoption* for Children of Color") and still others address transracial adoption domestically and internationally (Lee, 2003), "The

Transracial Adoption Paradox: History, Research, and Counseling Implications of

Cultural Socialization).

Table 1: Database Research on Adoptive Parenting Issues Relating to Race and Ethnicity

	ERIC			ASP			PsycINFO				
TRA		+par			+par			+par			
Race	31	2		95	7		53	4			
Ethnicity	13	1		31	3		8	1			
TNA											
Race	0	0		6	0		5	0			
Ethnicity	0	0		1	0		0	0			
International Adoption											
Race	2	0		8	1		8	1			
Ethnicity	2	0		7	0		3	0			

Of particular interest to me is the overlapping of the search terms "parenting"

(+par) with "race" and "ethnicity." The bold numbers highlight the articles that are

adoptive parent focused in relation to race or ethnicity. The numbers suggest there is not

an abundance of information available on race and ethnicity as related to adoptive

parenting issues. Findings from this preliminary database research indicate that there is a

need for more research as it relates to parenting international transracial adoptees.

<u>Purpose of the Study</u>

The purpose of this study is to determine if and how White parents of transracially

adopted Asian adolescents talk about race related issues with their adopted children. If

they do talk about race, what is the content of the conversations, who initiates the dialog

and what prompts the discussion? I also want to learn how comfortable and confident

parents feel when they speak to their children about race. If parents are not talking to

their children about race, I want to know why. I also want to learn if there is a gap between recognizing the need to support their children of color around race related issues and knowing how to effectively engage with their children about race. Finally, I want to learn where parents find the knowledge they need to talk with their Asian born children about race. The research questions for this study stem directly from the purpose of the study. The next section lists the research questions.

Research Questions

This dissertation seeks to provide the answers to the following questions:

1. Do White adoptive parents of Asian born adolescents talk to their children about issues of race and racism? If so, what do parents and children say to each other? Who initiates and what prompts the dialogue?

2. Do parents feel confident and comfortable in their ability to address race related issues with their children? If needed, whom do parents turn to for guidance about race related questions?

3. Is there a gap for parents between knowing they need to support their children of color around racial survival skills and recognizing they do not know how to provide their children with the needed racial survival skills?

4. If parents are not talking to their children about race related issues, why is that?

A qualitative methodological approach frames this study. Strauss & Corbin (1990) define qualitative research as, "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (p.17).

Strauss and Corbin further elaborate on their definition by stating that anyone who wants to find out more about a phenomenon in which little is known will be drawn to qualitative research (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Given the dearth of knowledge about this topic, a qualitative research approach is best suited for this study. The primary strategy used to address the research questions will be a case study approach in which qualitative interviewing of White adoptive parents of Asian born adolescents will be the primary method for collecting data. Chapter three of this dissertation summarizes a more detailed description of qualitative research as it relates to this study and the specific qualitative research approaches utilized.

Significance of the Study

This study will be of interest to anyone interested in the field of adoption, especially practitioners who provide post-adoption services to families. This study will also be of interest to White parents who have or are considering adopting children of color particularly those of Asian descent.

This study is significant for several reasons. As outlined in the "Statement of the Problem" section, a review of the literature indicates that there are few scholarly articles written on race, transracial/transnational adoption, and parenting. In 2005, over 22,000 transnational adoptions occurred with the majority of the adoptions also being transracial. By 2010, the number of international adoptions dropped to just above 11,000 (US Department of State, 2010). According to the National Survey of Adoptive Parents (2009) eighty four percent of the international adoptions are transracial adoptions which underscores the importance of White parents needing to be aware of how race affects

their children of color. One recently published article states that although Asian

transracial adoptees adjust well to their adoptive families, they still struggle with their

racial identity (Lee, Miller, & Alvarez, 2009).

Are Asian transracial adoptees struggling with their racial identity? If so, is it

because their White parents are incapable of supporting their racial identity? Are White

parents equipped or prepared to engage in a meaningful and helpful dialogue with their

children of color about race related issues? These are questions at the heart of the

controversy surrounding transracial adoption. This dissertation provides intimate insight

into the race related conversations that are happening between White parents and their

Asian born children. The hope is that these insights will give adoptive parents and

adoption practitioners tools they can use to help minimize the racial identity struggles

many transracial adoptees seem to experience (Lee, Miller, & Alvarez, 2009).

Learning the basis for the controversy surrounding transracial adoption will help

White parents and adoption practitioners understand the centrality of race for

transracially adopted children. Not knowing how to address issues of racial

discrimination is one of the privileges associated with being White (Kendall, 2006). It is

an assumption of this researcher that a) White parents of children of color need to be

aware that racism is an issue in our society, b) white privilege prevents White parents

from completely understanding the role racism plays in the lives of their adopted children

of color and c) parents have a responsibility to educate their children of color about racial

navigational skills so that their children can survive as healthily as possible in a society

that discriminates against people of color.

Historically most of the literature addressing racism has focused on White and Black individuals. African Americans and Asians or Asian Americans experience racism but the experience is not exactly the same for each community. The literature review section of this paper highlights racial discrimination commonalities and differences between African Americans and Asian or Asian Americans. Recognizing the Asian community experiences racism differently than the African American community, the research component of this paper focuses solely on the experiences of Asian transracial adoptees.

Definitions

Throughout this dissertation, I use the phrase "race related issues" as an all-encompassing phrase that takes into consideration the issues of race, racism, prejudice, and discrimination. An example of the usage of this phrase is, how will White parents of Asian born adoptees address race related issues with their children? This question takes into account that White parents may be discussing a wide range of topics that are race related such as a racist comment the child experienced, a "joke" overheard by the child or confusion the adolescent is experiencing regarding Asian stereotyping.

Another phase used in this paper is "racial navigational skills." Racial navigational skills is very much as it sounds, a process of navigating or addressing issues or circumstances that arise that are race related. For example, what sort of racial navigation skills might a person of color use when a security guard is following him or her in a department store? Some examples of a racial navigational skill are confrontation with the alleged perpetrator, processing a situation with a third party or ignoring a

situation. There are other race related terms used in this paper such as racism, white privilege, and colorblind but they are defined within the paper at later points.

There are three adoption related terms that need to be defined; transracial adoption, transnational adoption, and adoption triad. Transracial adoption is "the joining of racially different parents and children together in adoptive families" (Lee, p. 714, 2003). Transracial adoptions may be domestic adoptions or international adoptions. In the vast majority of the adoptions, the adopting parents are White and the children are of color. Within the context of this paper, transracial adoption will always refer to White parents adopting children of color unless otherwise noted. Historically within the United States it was White parents adopting Black children but as the number of international adoptions have increased dramatically it is now too the case that transracial adoption includes children from other parts of the world such as South America and Asia.

Transnational adoption refers to international, inter-country, or overseas adoption. I use all four terms interchangeably.   Transnational adoption may or may not be transracial however, usually it is. As with domestic transracial adoptions, transnational transracial adoptions are also primarily White parents adopting children of color.

The last term to be defined is "adoption triad." The adoption triad refers to all three parties involved in an adoption; the child, the adoptive parent(s) and the birth parent(s). Six out of ten Americans are part of the adoption triad or know someone who is (Kahan, 2006).

This dissertation is divided into five chapters including chapter one; the introduction to the study, chapter two; the literature review, chapter three; the methodological approach to the study, chapter four; findings and chapter five; discussion and implications of the findings.

The first chapter sets the stage by defining the problem, stating the purpose and significance of the research, and defining key terms. The second chapter of this dissertation begins with a discussion of liberation theory which provides the guiding axiological principle on which this dissertation is grounded. Next in the literature review is an overview of the history of adoption in the United States including the rise and fall of transracial adoption both domestically and internationally along with the controversy surrounding transracial adoption. The literature review also defines and documents the historical existence of racism in our society for African Americans, Asians, and Asian Americans. The theoretical section on racism then leads to a section that documents the lived experience of transracial adoptees as it relates to race. The lived experience of transracial adoptees section offers quotes from the adoptees about their experiences of racism as they grew up in White households with parents who loved them but who did not have first hand experience or knowledge about racism. The final section of the literature review focuses on adoptive parents and the challenges they face raising children of color.

The third chapter of this dissertation is the methodology section. The chapter begins by identifying, theoretically describing, and practically applying the proposed methodological approach of the research proposal. The chapter then summarizes the

conceptual framework of the research project including the research design, interview

questions, role of the researcher, selection of participants, and data analysis. Limitations

of the study are included in the final section of chapter three.

Findings for this dissertation are presented in chapter four.   This chapter is rich

with the voices of the respondents and commonalities among the interviewees are

identified and quotes are shared to highlight the themes.   The final chapter, chapter 5,

offers a discussion of the findings. The research questions posed in chapter one are

revisited and answered based upon the results of the study. Implications for practice,

policy and future research are also explored.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to synthesize the social justice related concepts of liberation theory, racism, microaggressions, color-blind theory, and white privilege with adoption. The chapter starts with a discussion of liberation theory which is the underpinning of this study. I then summarize the history of adoption in the United States including domestic and international adoption. The following section gives an overview of transracial adoption (domestically and internationally) and highlights some of the historic and current controversy involving transracial adoption. After the section on transracial adoption, the literature review segues to the section on racism. Racism is at the heart of the controversy surrounding transracial adoption. Specifically the concern is that White adoptive parents of children of color are not capable of providing their children with the racial survival skills so needed by any person of color living in this society. Coupled with racism is a newer concept/notion of racism known as microaggressions. Derald Wing Sue is one of the leading experts on microaggressions. I summarize some of the more prominent articles written by Sue and his colleagues. The final two sections of the literature review involve studies and testimonies from transracially adopted children and their White adoptive parents. The transracial adoptees share testimonies highlighting the love they have for their adoptive parents and the race related challenges they face being raised by White parents. The final section focuses on White adoptive parents and also offers testimonies by parents regarding the challenges they face trying to raise a child of color.

Liberatory Consciousness

We live in a society marked by individuals who are dominant and subordinate. Members of a dominant group are those who have power and privilege over another group whereas, members of a subordinate group are those who are disadvantaged and lack power and privilege. In this study, the White adoptive parents are in the dominant role while their Asian born children are part of the subordinate group. As will be discussed further along in this chapter, one of the tenets of white privilege is White people are socialized to not be aware of their power and privilege. However, some White people possess a liberatory consciousness and are aware of the dominant and subordinate positions in place in our society along with the power differentials between groups. Embracing a liberatory consciousness means individuals, "live their lives in oppressive systems and institutions with awareness and intentionality rather than on the basis of the socialization to which they have been subjected" (Love, 2000, p 470).

Much of this study is devoted to racism; defining, describing, offering examples and highlighting the negative impact racism has on people of color in general and Asian born adoptees of White parents specifically. Elaborating on all of the perils of racism as it relates to transracial adoption would be pointless if I did not believe there was hope for change. Liberation theory does not place blame on individuals who are part of an oppressive system, but rather supports intentionality to change systems of oppression. Liberation theory gives us hope that there is a better way.

History of Adoption in the United States

In order to understand the current trends, policies, and practices related to adoption, one must look at adoption within a historical and socio-cultural context. The following paragraphs address some of the more prominent events in the history of adoption in the United States including the informal customs of child transfer, the first US adoption law, the orphan trains, and the concept of matching and how the importance of matching has shifted over time.

During the colonization of the United States in the 1700s, there were informal customs of child transfers that mirrored English policy (e.g., indenture). Parentless children lived in institutions known as orphanages. The orphanages established rules for placing children with families. The children were "put out" or rather placed in homes for domestic service, indenture, and apprenticeship. The putting out of children into families was often nothing more than a way for a family to obtain cheap labor. When a child who was put out to a family died, the family usually returned the body of the child to the orphanage for burial purposes. This tradition suggests the children were not seen as family members to be loved but rather cheap labor. These practices were used throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for children who were not taken into the homes of their relatives (Sokoloff, 1993).

The onset of the industrial revolution of the 1800s along with extensive immigration to the United States created an increased number of urban homeless children. The informal practices of caring for orphan children used in the 1700s were no longer adequate. Given the number of responses to the increased number of dependent children emerged during the nineteenth century including foundling homes, "orphan

trains", and formal practices of adopting children (Zamostny, O'Brien, Baden & Wiley, 2003).

The first U.S. adoption law passed in Massachusetts in 1851. The Act to Provide for the Adoption of Children in Massachusetts (known as the Massachusetts Adoption Act) formalized the process in which the biological parents' parental rights were terminated, and it ensured heir rights for adopted children (Kahan, 2006; Zamostny, O'Brien, Baden & Wiley, 2003). This act also set the stage for adoption related laws to be established under state authority rather federal authority (Pertman, 2000).

After the creation of the Massachusetts Adoption Act, major cities created foundling homes. The purpose of the homes was to provide children with the basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing. Some of the foundling homes were public facilities whereas others were private (Pertman, 2000). "These well-intentioned refuges rapidly turned into disease-ridden warehouses where at least as much harm as good was accomplished" (Pertman, 2000, p. 22).

The need for laws and regulations arose in part from the abuses that occurred in the unregulated policy environment of adoption. One of the most infamous domestic examples of abuse as it relates to adoption involved Reverent Charles Loring Brace's Orphan Trains. In 1853, the Rev. Brace founded the New York Children's Aid Society (Carp, 1998). He decided to work in the poorest section of New York City in an effort to rescue children whom he referred to as "heathens and barbarians." The best thing for these children, he contended, would be to get them out of the city, into the fresh air of the country, living and working on farms. Between 1854 and 1890, approximately 90,000 children, ages 2 to 14, boarded trains headed west (Kahan, 2006). A point of interest is

that only about half of the children were actually orphans. "Brace wanted to disassemble slum families. Notice to birth parents was not required" (Kahan, 2006, p. 55).

The children who rode the orphan trains and the families who informally adopted them did so in a very public and visible manner. This was not the case for formal adoptions that were taking place during the same time-frame. During the late 1800s and well into the first half of the 1900s, there was a veil of secrecy around adoption. The veil of secrecy stemmed from the sense of shame often felt by all members of the adoption triad: the adoptive parents for their perceived infertility, the adopted child for being unwanted, and the birth mother who was often pregnant out of wedlock (Haslanger & Witt, 2005).

In an effort to support and maintain the veil of secrecy surrounding adoption, children's birth certificates were often changed. When children were adopted, their birth certificates were altered by removing the name(s) of the birth parent(s) and replaced with the names of the adoptive parents. It was as if the child was "begotten" by the adoptive parents. It was common for the adopted child to be unaware of his or her adoption status. In order for the secrecy of adoption to hold true throughout the child's life, there needed to be strong, visible similarities between the child and the adopted parents. The possibility of an adoptive relationship being revealed was less likely if the child shared the same visual characteristics of her parents such as skin, eye, and hair color. (Haslanger & Witt, 2005; Modell & Dambacher, 1997). The need for strong visible similarities between the child and her adopted parents led to the practice of matching.

Matching refers to the practice of placing a child with parents who match the child's physical, emotional, and cultural characteristics including religion and race (see

Table 2.1). Children were not placed with certain families if their hair or eye color did

not match that of the adopting parents. An adopted child who looked like his or her

adopted parents had a greater likelihood of bonding, which enhanced the chance of a

successful adoption. Matching was a strategic approach to a successful adoption. It was

usually not possible to look at a family and distinguish the adopted child from the

biological child. The matching process helped to conceal adoption from the public and

from the child (Modell & Dambacher, 1997).

Table 2.1 presents the findings from a survey given to adoption agency personnel

in 1954 in an effort to determine which matching characteristics they thought were most

important when placing a child with an adoptive family (Simon & Altstein, 1992).

Table 2.1: Matching Factors Adoption Agencies Considered Important

Matching Factors	Important		Total Number of Responses
	Yes	No	
Level of Intelligence and Intellectual potential	253	1	254
Religious background	240	13	253
Racial background	240	10	250
Temperamental needs	235	12	247
Educational background	204	41	245
Physical Resemblance to child	212	30	242
Geographic separation from Natural parents	192	49	241
Cultural background	195	40	235
Nationality background	163	69	232
Physical characteristics of Child's family	187	42	229

Source: Simon & Altstein, 1992, p. 3

The steadfast practice of matching started to crumble with the onset of the sexual revolution of the 1960s. The sexual revolution brought about many changes to the morals and values of many Americans. The shifting lifestyles of Americans had a direct impact on the policies and practices associated with adoption. In 1970, eighty percent of children born to unwed mothers were placed for adoption. By 1984, the trend had completely reversed itself with eighty percent of unwed mothers raising their children rather than relinquishing them for adoption (Simon & Altstein, 1987).

Another way that adoption changed during the 1960s and 1970s was that it lost its taboo characterization. Adoption was no longer only for couples who could not conceive. Fertile couples saw adoption as a way to start or enlarge a family. Fewer children (as in fewer healthy White babies) were available for adoption and more couples wanted to adopt hence creating a shortage of children for the traditional form of matched adoption. As a result, the definition of what an appropriate adopted family looked like changed. Out went the old rules of matching and in came new rules (Carp, 2004). As the norms, demographics, and mores of our society changed, so, too, did the adoption practices and policies. The new milieu that emerged from the 1960s created the possibility of transracial adoption.

<u>History of Transracial Adoption</u>

New values, new lifestyles, and the demands of members of the dominant culture led to new adoption policies and practices. A study conducted in 1955 by Michael Shapiro determined that at any given time, there were between two and eight approved White adoptive homes available for every White child waiting to be adopted. On the

other hand, there was only one Black family approved for every ten to twenty Black children waiting to be adopted. By 1970, the number of non-White children available for adoption still exceeded the number of minority-approved homes that were available and there were still more White adoptive homes available for White children waiting to be adopted (Simon & Altstein, 1992). Table 2.2, adapted from the work of Lucille Grow (1970), outlines the approved home/available children ratio broken down by race.

Table 2.2: Approved Homes and Available Children, by Race and by Agency Auspices

	Approved Home			Children Available	
Race	Number	Percentage		Number	Percentage
White	21,416	93		18,392	82
Non-White	1,584	7		4,045	18
Total	23,000	100		22,437	100

Source: Simon & Altstein, 1992, p. 7.

The voices of White couples wanting to adopt grew louder and louder. If they could not adopt White children, then they wanted to adopt children of color. The demands of the dominant culture brought about the practice of transracial adoption (Lee, 2003).

Transracial adoption, either domestically or internationally, is the most visible of all adoptions because the physical characteristics of the child and parent are clearly different (Lee, 2003). Transracial adoption refers to "the joining of racially different parents and children together in adoptive families" (Lee, 2003, p. 712). In the majority of domestic and international transracial adoptions, White parents are adopting children of color (Lee, 2003).

The first formal documentation of transracial adoption in the United States

occurred in the late 1950s. From 1958 to 1967, the Indian Adoption Project initiated the

removal of Native American children from their homes on reservations and placed them

with White families in an effort to mainstream them into the dominant culture (Park &

Green, 2000). The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) and the Bureau of Indian

Affairs collaborated on this project (Lee, 2003). In Wisconsin in 1968, the likelihood of

removal of a Native American child from his home was 1,600% greater than for non-

Native Americans (Simon & Altstein, 1992)!

The shortage of White children available for adoption, the large number of Black

children waiting to be adopted, the lack of Black foster and adoptive families, and the

abundance of White families wanting to adopt along with the demands of the dominant

society triggered the practice of transracial adoption (Simon & Altstein, 1992). The

dynamic of blending members from the dominant community with members from the

minority community, however, was not without social and political controversy (Lee,

2003).

The National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) was opposed to

transracial adoption stating that it was akin to cultural genocide. They felt that under the

tutelage of White parents, Black children would not learn the skills needed to survive in a

racist society. In 1972, the NABSW made a formal declaration stating:

> Humans develop their sense of values, identity, self concept, attitudes, and basic
>
> perspectives within the family group. Black children in White homes are cut off
>
> from the healthy development of themselves as Black people. Only a Black

family can transmit the emotional and sensitive subtleties of perception and

reaction essential for a Black child's survival in a racist society

(NABSW, 1972, p. 1049).

The NABSW and others who were opposed to transracial adoption felt that

because White parents had not experienced what it is like to be a minority, they would

raise Black children who were, "psychologically defenseless and incapable of

understanding and dealing with the racism that exists in our society" (Simon & Altstein,

1992, pp. 16-17).

Another reason NABSW opposed transracial adoption had to do with the issue of

identity. Parents of Black children have the task of developing a positive racial identity

in their children. In a society that discriminates against people of color, this is not always

an easy task. Black parents have learned racial survival skills simply by having to

navigate issues of race on a daily basis. White privilege and colorblind lenses often

prevents White parents from being able to understand and impart the skills their children

of color need to exist in a racialized society (Simon & Altstein, 1992). The topic of white

privilege is addressed in the racism section of this literature review.

Magazines popular within the Black community sometimes featured articles about the

adoption of Black children. Often included in the magazines were articles about the

transracial adoption of Black children. In the summer of 1974, *Ebony* magazine devoted

an entire issue to the Black child with the adoption issue woven into many of the articles.

The following sentiments were from one reader, but apparently, the other letters had a

similar theme: "Whites are responsible for having produced a racist society. Their act of

adopting Blacks is insulting and psychologically damaging and dangerous" (Simon & Altstein, 1992, p. 15).

Some White parents who had already adopted children of color were offended by the position taken by the NABSW. They felt they were indeed capable of parenting their children of color adequately. Advocates of transracial adoptions argued that it prevented children from languishing in institutional settings. Transracial adoption also prevented children of color from bouncing around from one foster home to another. Transracial adoption, they argued, enabled a child to live in a permanent home with a family that was committed to loving them and caring for their needs (Hollingsworth, 1998). Some opponents of transracial adoption acknowledge there are White parents who have adopted minority children and have offered the children love and stability at a critical time in the child's life (Berry, 2000).

Multi-ethnic Placement Act and Interethnic Adoption Provision

After the National Association of Black Social Workers stated they believe children of color should be adopted by parents that match the race of the child, the number of Black children adopted by White parents dropped dramatically from 2,574 in 1971 to an estimated 1,400 in 1987 (Lee, 2003; Hollingsworth, 1998). As a result, many minority children who were eligible for adoption remained in group homes or foster care because there were not enough families of color to adopt the children (Jennings, 2006).

Grounded in a "best interest of the child" standard, the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994 was set in motion in an effort to minimize the amount of time children of color remained in long-term care (Jennings, 2006; McGinnis, Smith, Ryan & Howard,

2009). The MEPA limited the emphasis placed on race or ethnicity when determining

who would be permanent parents for a child. MEPA prevented agencies from "denying

or delaying the placement of a child solely on the basis of race, color, or national origin

of the adoptive or foster parent involved" (Davidson & Davidson, 2002, p. 20).

Advocates of transracial adoption cited NABSW's race matching policy as the

reason children of color languished in temporary placements. Despite the creation of the

Multi-Ethnic Placement Act, concerns remained that it did not go far enough in reducing

barriers to transracial adoption. Before regulations to implement MEPA were even put in

place, legislators created another act known as the Interethnic Adoption Provision (IEP)

(Jennings, 2006). The Interethnic Adoption Provision prevented adoption caseworkers

from taking race or ethnicity into consideration when placing a child with a family.

Some people referred to the IEP as a "gag clause" on issues related to race (Davidson,

2002). The provision strengthened sanctions against agencies that did not comply with

the mandated policy (Jennings, 2006).

MEPA and the IEP presented more controversy onto the transracial adoption

stage. In a socio-political climate of the rights of White people prevailing over those of

color, MEPA and the IEP were seen, by some, as another example of white privilege

bestowed upon White people. Opponents of MEPA and the subsequent IEP stated the

provisions reflect and accommodate the desires of the dominant culture, specifically

White heterosexual adoptive parents over Black birth parents, their children, and

prospective Black adoptive parents (Quiroz, 2007). "Absorbing African American

children into a White hegemonic system is promoted as race-neutral, altruistic, and

advantageous to children of color" (Quiroz, 2007, p. 19).

Ultimately, MEPA and the IEP had little impact on the waiting period for children of color eligible for adoption. Whereas the amount of time African American children remained in foster care declined by 10 months from 1998 – 2005, this trend is attributed to the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 and not MEPA-IEP. The Adoption and Safe Families Act shortened the amount of time biological parents could have before the termination of their parental rights thus children were legally free for adoption sooner than they had been in the past. White families continue to adopt young Black children just as they had prior to the passage of MEPA and the IEP and older children of color continue to languish in foster care or group home placements. After a decade of failure on the part of MEPA and IEP, new strategies are needed to find permanent homes for children of color, particularly older children (Smith, McRoy, Freundlich, & Kroll, 2008).

While the number of domestic transracial adoptions were decreasing, the number of international transracial adoptions were increasing (Simon & Altstein, 1987). The following section offers an account of international adoptions trends, concerns involving transnational adoption and common elements of domestic and international, transracial adoption.

<div align="center">History of International Adoption</div>

During the 27 year span beginning in 1948 and ending in 1975, approximately 54,500 children were adopted in the United States through inter-country adoption. In the subsequent eight years, 1976 to 1984, an equal number of foreign-born children were adopted. Seventy percent of the children were from four different countries: Korea, Colombia, Mexico, and India. Over half of the children adopted were from Korea due in

large part to the Korean War and the subsequent economic ravages and social dislocation produced by the war (Simon & Altstein, 1987).

Eng (2003), Freundlich (2000), and Hollingsworth (2003) outline five time waves associated with transnational adoption. They start their chronology after World War II and end at the beginning of the twentieth first century.

U.S. Time Waves for International Adoption

1. Post World War II saw the first wave of international adoptions in the United States. Americans responded to the needs of children who were orphaned from the war. Most of these children were White and came from the European countries of Greece and Germany (Hollingsworth, 2003) and Poland (Eng, 2003). Between 1948 and 1953, 5,814 children were adopted from European countries (Hollingsworth, 2003). Most of the children adopted during this period were of the same race and culture as their adoptive families (Freundlich, 2000).

2. The second wave of adoption occurred after the Korean War (1950-1953). Since then, South Korea, with support from western-based religious and social service agencies, placed over 150,000 children in the United States (Eng 2003). Many of the children were biracial or of mixed race with US military fathers and Korean mothers. After the war, the Korean adoptions continued but the children were generally fully Korean (Freundlich, 2000).

3. The beginning of the 1970s marks the third wave of adoption here in the United States. During this time, a large number of children were adopted from Central and South America. In 1973, this group of adoptees represented only 8% of all transnational adoptions; however, by 1993 that percentage rose to 32%. By 1997,
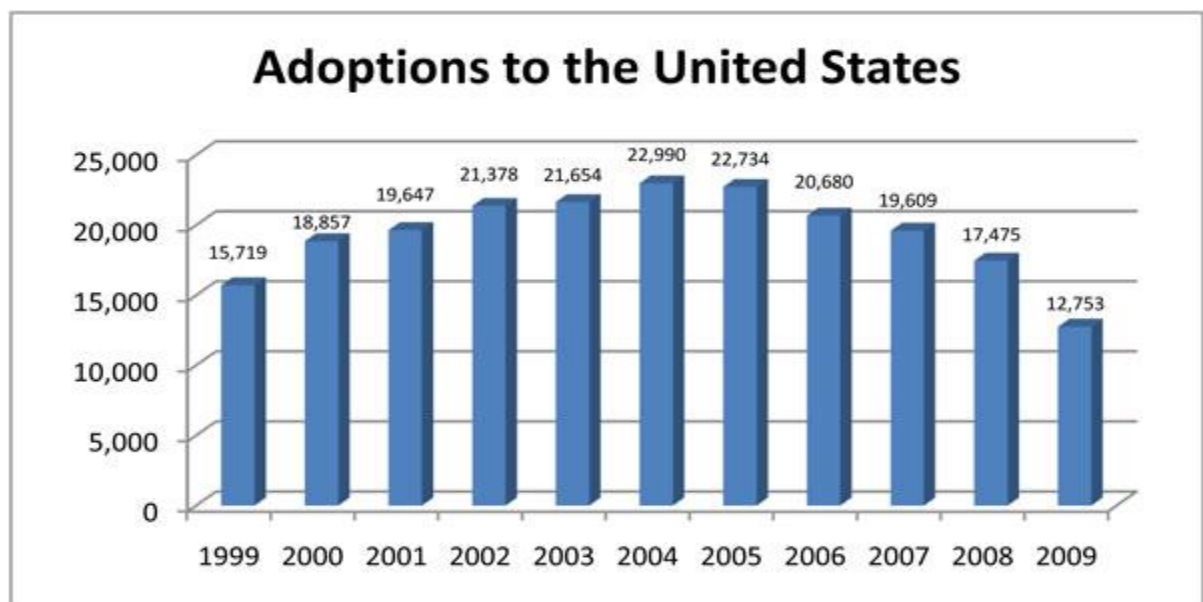
the percentage decreased to 10%. Freundlich (2000) states the rise of adoptions in Latin America was due to the relative ease of the international adoption process. Hollingsworth (2003) suggests the reason for the decline was due to concerns from sending countries about having children removed from their culture.

4. The fall of communist government in Romania in 1989 marks the onset of the fourth wave of adoption. Many of the adoptions from countries in Central and Eastern Europe were due in large part to the media representation of the condition of children's lives in the orphanages (Freundlich, 2000). In time, the number of available children from these countries also began to decline again due to the sending countries' concerns about out of country placements (Hollingsworth, 2003).

5. The last few years of the twentieth century is marked by girls being adopted from China. In 1993, three hundred and thirty children were adopted in the United States from China. By 2000, 5,053 children were adopted from China into the U.S. This is due in large part to China's one child per family policy. Male offspring are valued more highly than females because sons carry on the family line and care for their parents as their parents get older (Freundlich, 2000). That the Chinese adoptees are essentially all girls speaks to the lower status of females in Chinese culture (Hollingsworth, 2003).

Since the time that Eng, Freundlich, and Hollingsworth wrote their articles, the number of transnational adoptions has actually decreased. The bar graph below (Figure 2.1) shows the number of children adopted from overseas for the last ten years. As indicated by Figure 2.1, the number of transnational adoptions continued to rise and

peaked in 2004 with 22, 990 adoptions occurring. Since 2004 the number of

transnational adoptions have steadily decreased with 12,753 adoptions occurring in 2009

(United States Department of State, 2009). According to Selman (2009), the decline of

inter-country adoption stems from a decreasing number of children available from

sending countries. For example, China had a growing concern about the number of

single women wanting to adopt, many of whom were in same sex relationships. The

China Centre for Adoption Affairs put an end to single parent adoptions and required that

only heterosexual couples who had been married at least two years could adopt from their

country. This new requirement stemmed the tide of the ever-increasing number of girls

adopted from China (Selman, 2009).   In March of 2011, China changed its policy again

regarding who is eligible to adopt. Single women between the ages of thirty to fifty who

can document that they are divorced, widowed or not homosexual are now eligible to

adopt special needs children from China (U.S. Department of State, 2011).

 Figure 2.1 Adoptions to the United States

Source: US Department of State, 2009

What is going on in the U.S. that leads couples to look overseas for children to adopt rather than pursue domestic adoptions, especially when the number of Black children living in foster care or group homes is still high (Park & Green, 2000)? The answer to this question is not simple, as there are several reasons for this trend. Transnational adoption provides couples with a much greater opportunity of adopting an infant rather than an older child. The waiting period for transnational adoptions varies depending on the sending country; however, the average waiting period for a child adopted transnationally is shorter. Another reason couples turn to transnational adoption is based upon a new trend of open adoptions in the United States (Ayers-Lopez, 2008; Grotevant, Wrobel, Van Korff, Skinner, Newell, Friese, & McRoy, 2007). Open adoption allows the birth mother and her child to have direct or indirect contact. Many adoptive parents prefer severing the connection between the biological parent and child (Hollingsworth & Ruffin, 2002). In the words of one adoptive parent, "When I get on that airplane, I know no one is going to come and get my baby" (Hollingsworth & Ruffin, 2002, p. 88). These issues, coupled with the decreased availability of healthy White infants, have led couples to look overseas for children to adopt (Eng, 2003). Despite the increased popularity of transnational adoption, there are concerns about adopting children from other countries.

Concerns Regarding International Adoption

Problems that plague international adoption put all members of the adoption triad at risk. The profit margin of inter-country adoptions sometimes leads to the procurement

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of children in methods that are clandestine, illegal, and not always in the best interest of the child. The lure of making huge profits has led to abuses such as child kidnapping and trafficking. The lack of standards for international adoption enabled the continuation of human rights violations primarily involving birth mothers and their children. In May of 1993, participants of the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect to Inter-country Adoption (THC) addressed concerns regarding international adoption (Simon & Altstein, 2000).

The Hague Convention is an internationally developed framework that calls for monitoring inter-country adoptions and sets minimum uniform standards for all those who signed the agreement. One of the goals of the THC was to abolish the black market baby trade that has plagued foreign adoption. The THC prevented the exorbitant costs of transnational adoption by prohibiting improper financial gain to any member involved in the adoption transaction (Simon & Altstein, 2000). Despite the best efforts of the THC and the CRC, concerns surrounding international adoption still exist.

As transnational adoptees leave their country of origin to start a new life in a foreign country, the right to their identity is jeopardized. The children experience many losses including the loss of their biological family, their homeland, their customs, and usually their language. Survival in the new country requires assimilation into a foreign community and a letting go to varying degrees of their cultural heritage (Eng, 2003).

Opponents of transnational adoption claim that the practice of international adoption occurs because of the socially unjust circumstances that exist in many of the sending countries. Birth mothers and children rarely have as much power and privilege as those who seek to adopt transnationally. Infertile, affluent, Western couples are able

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to have their parental needs met by exploiting family poverty and adopting children who serve as commodities to meet their needs. For example, in an effort to address population growth, China has had a one-child policy since 1979. In 1997, 98% of children adopted from China were females. Transnational adoption helps support the practice of gender discrimination in China (Rios-Kahn, 1998).

Proponents of transnational adoption state that the adoption of orphaned children is in the best interest of the child. Many of the children are rescued from horrendous conditions that they would not be able to escape from otherwise (Rios-Kohn, 1998). Proponents maintain that adopting a child from an impoverished country is a socially just act. These advocates feel they are reaching out and helping children who are in desperate need and at the same time bringing attention to the situations from which these children come (Hollingsworth, 2003). Simon and Altstein (2000) conclude from their review of empirical studies that transracial adoption, either domestically or internationally, serves the best interest of the child. The children felt loved, secure, and attached to their adopted parents (Simon & Altstein, 2000). Hollingsworth, (2003) concluded international adoptees showed few, if any, negative consequences and experienced some benefits, "such as those associated with having a family that is built across lines of racial and cultural differences" (Hollingsworth, 2003, p. 2).

Concerns Common to Domestic and International Transracial Adoptions

Race is a common element of concern in regards to transracial adoption both nationally and internationally. On the domestic front, I have highlighted the stand taken by the National Association of Black Social Workers. They are clearly opposed to

transracial adoption suggesting it is akin to cultural genocide. In 1993, international child advocates convened and created the previously mentioned Convention of the Rights of Children. This document opposed transnational adoption on the basis that children have a right to their identity and by removing them from their birth country, they lose access to their identity specifically as it relates to their biological family, their homeland, their race, and their ethnicity (Eng, 2003).

Power and privilege are other common elements related to transracial adoption within and beyond the U.S. borders. Table 2.2 (in the section on the history of transracial adoption) shows there were more White families wanting to adopt than there were White children available for adoption. White people wanted children to adopt and started adopting children of color despite our history of racial matching. Although the NABSW spoke out against transracial adoption, the federal government responded with MEPA and IEP. These two federal mandates prevented social workers from considering the issue or relevance of race when deciding with whom to place a child. MEPA and IEP essentially silenced the voice of the NABSW and others who opposed transracial adoption. The following section highlights the role of race, racism, colorblindness, and white privilege as it relates to transracial adoption.

<u>Race</u>

The Social Construction of Race

Many of us feel we understand the concept of race, yet when asked to explain what race means, we stumble over our words. "The very concept of 'race' defies clear definition" (Smith, McRoy, Freundlich & Kroll, 2008, p. 18). It may seem easy to distinguish between those who are Black versus those who are White, yet there is no

scientific evidence showing race is determined by distinct biological categories. "The

evidence reveals that race is largely a social construction that fails to meet the criteria of a

meaningful biological concept" (Blackburn, 2000, p. 4). Omi (2000) offers a similar

sentiment, "most scientists feel that racial classifications are meaningless and

unscientific" (Omi, 2000, p. 73). The biological explanations of race have been

discredited. In place of a biological explanation is a social construction explanation

(Fogg-Davis, 2002; Feagin, 2000; Bell, 2007). Race as a socially constructed

phenomenon means the classification of racial categories are a product of human

invention used to justify white domination (Zuniga & Castaneda, 2000).

One way to highlight the social construction of race in American society is to look

at the categories listed on the U.S. census. The racial and ethnic categories listed on the

U.S. census are a reflection of what is happening in our society at any given time. For

example, the first census was conducted in the late 1700s. Separated on this form from

the general population was a section for property owners who invariably were White

males. Today, that sort of classification would never exist but in the late 1700s it was

historically accurate. The racial and ethnic categories on the census form are fluid and

change over time (Omi, 2000). There is a new category for those who wish to identify as

multiracial thus indicating that we are a society that has a growing community of people

who are multiracial. This category never would have appeared on the initial census

because it would not have been historically accurate but today it is. The multiracial

category and other classifications have their problems. How the state defines a particular

classification is not necessarily how an individual self identifies. In the 1980 and the

1990 census, forty percent of Hispanics only marked "Hispanic" and did not choose a

racial category. The racial category options were American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, White, or Other. It was estimated that ninety five percent of those who marked the "other" category were Hispanic. Most Hispanics have white skin and yet they have not been afforded white status here in the United States (Omi, 2000). This is another example of the census being an historical reflection of how race and ethnicity are viewed, how racial and ethnic categories are fluid, and how race is a socially constructed phenomenon.   The following section looks more closely at Asians and how laws within the United States have defined their racial categorization.

<p style="text-align:center">Racial Categorization of Asians and the Law</p>

Within the United States there is a racial binary of black and white. Hispanic has emerged as a racial category but what about those who are from Asia? Asians have been racialized as "others" and have thus been unable to assimilate into mainstream US society (Pyke & Dang, 2003). Our immigration and naturalization laws historically denied entry and citizenship to those who are from Asia. "The process of exclusion served not only to constitute Asians racially but to define the meanings of whiteness" (Koshy, p. 165, 2001).

> The right to exclude was the central principal…of whiteness as identity, for mainly whiteness has been characterized not by any inherent unifying characteristic, but by the exclusion of others deemed 'not white'. The possessors of whiteness were granted the legal right to exclude others from the privileges inhering in whiteness…The courts played an active role in enforcing this right to exclude-determining who was or was not white enough to enjoy the privileges accompanying whiteness *(Harris, 1993, p. 1736).*

Jim Crow laws asked "Who is Black?" whereas US immigration laws begged the question "Who is White?" The courts were left to make this decision. Different Asian groups used different strategies to establish their white identity. By establishing their whiteness Asians hoped to enjoy similar rights and benefits that their European American immigrant counterparts were enjoying. The strategies for establishing a white identity included skin color (only an option for some Asians), anthropological classification as White and their ability to assimilate into mainstream US culture (Koshy, 2001).

Some Asian groups had already been classified as Mongoloids and thus were easy to dismiss as being non-White. Their non-White status also made it clear that they would not be granted US citizenship. Other Asians (those from the West and South Asia) had been classified as Caucasian thus creating more of a challenge for the courts to deny them their desire to be identified as White and subsequently US citizens as well.   The courts had to not only determine who was White, but also why someone was deemed White (Koshy, 2001).

Ultimately the courts conferred the status of White only on West Asians, all others were deemed non-White. Their findings were based on the concept of "common understanding" which is to say that the courts relied on popular opinion of who is White and who is not. Essentially the courts enabled people already identified as White to decide who is and who is not White (Koshy, 2001).   "The gradual shift in the courts to a reliance on popular opinion sharply restricted the constituency of those who were legally recognized as 'whites' and thereby broadened the exclusionary range of whiteness" (Koshy, p. 173, 2001). The court's decision is another clear example of how race is

socially and politically constructed rather than biologically based (Kim, 2001). The next section highlights some of the challenges Asians experience living in the United States.

The Impact of Ethnicity and Non-White Status

If Asians are not Black and they are not White then what are they? "…[Asians] have consistently occupied a stratified space between Blacks and Whites since the mid 1800s" (Pyke & Dang, 2003, p. 150). They are known as the forever foreigners. Unlike their European American counterparts Asian Americans are not able to claim membership of the white mainstream. Third and fourth generation Asian immigrants are still seen as ethnic and often are asked "Where are you from?" When the response is "Chicago" the next question all too often is "No, where are you really from?" Another common comment is "Your English is so good" which is usually a real insult because more often than not, English is the only language they speak (Cheryan & Monin, 2005). Even though some Asians have been in the US for numerous generations, they are still considered to be non-citizens (Pyke & Dang, 2003). While reading a list of Asian American donors, Ross Perot said, "So far we have not found an American name" (Pyke & Dang, 2003, p. 150).

Although the United States is seen as a melting pot, Asians are still deemed as Other. African Americans are accepted because they are a people who were wronged, Europeans are accepted because they are viewed as the conquerors, Native Americans can lay claim to being assimilated because they were here first and most Latino/a and Puerto Ricans are accepted because they were colonized. This leaves Asians out in the cold so to speak. They are not accepted as part of the American landscape (Ohnishi & Sandhu, 1997).

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Asians often heard the taunt "FOB" which stands for fresh off the boat. In other words, they were too ethnic or not white enough. Those who were labeled as FOBs were identified as such due to the use of their native language or speaking English with an accent, donning attire that is more appropriate for their homeland and socializing with immigrants rather than host nationals. Referring to someone as Fresh off the Boat is a taunt that comes from within the Asian community and usually from other Asians who had managed to make some in roads in regards to assimilation (Pyke & Dang, 2003).

The other side of the FOB coin is being referred to as "whitewashed". This term is used for those who have assimilated too much and have let go of their ethnic ties and traditions. Signs that someone is whitewashed is when someone refuses to speak their native language, has few if any Asian friends including sexual partners, is not aware of or does not engage in ethnic traditions, eats American foods and dresses like mainstream White Americans (generally of European descent) (Pyke & Dang, 2003). .

If one does not want to be referred to as FOB or whitewashed then she or he must find some sort of middle ground, but where is that middle ground? The middle ground is found in one's ability to balance Americanization with their ethnic identity. This is also known as being bicultural. The space between FOB and whitewashed is sometimes referred to as the safe zone since being identified as occupying the space at either end of the continuum is usually considered an insult. The bicultural middle is an ambiguous and shifting location and often named by naming what it is not, specifically FOB or whitewashed (Pyke & Dang, 2003).

Those who identify as bicultural recognize that their ties to their ethnic identities prevent them from ever being fully Americanized. The bicultural group believes that

those who present as being whitewashed are only kidding themselves. They feel there

are essential differences between Asians and Whites and that as non-Whites they will

never be accepted into mainstream US white culture (Pyke & Dang, 2003). "This view

complies with the racial classification schema and ideology of the dominant society that

mark Asians as forever ethnically distinct from Whites" (Pyke & Dang, p. 158, 2003).

Any discussion of race and ethnicity also needs to involve a discussion of racism. The

following section defines and elaborates on racism within the United States.

<p style="text-align:center">Asians as "Model Minorities"</p>

Asian Americans are often referred to as the "model minority". The current

stereotypical image of Asian Americans is that they are smart, studious and hardworking.

(Ngo, 2006). Counteracting this seemingly positive image is that Asian Americans are

also disloyal, boring, socially inept and incapable of assimilating into mainstream

American culture (Yu, 2006).   From the mid 1800s to post World War II, Asians were

often portrayed as "unsavory foreign contaminants" (Wing, 2007).

The model minority stereotype has been in existence in the United States since the

1960s. It is a by-product of conscious and unconscious efforts by White elites to hide or

misrepresent the racism that Asian Americans and other non-White groups experience in

the United States   The model minority stereotype feeds into the myth of meritocracy and

makes it harder for minority communities to complain about the inadequate education

their children are receiving (Yu, 2006). The model minority stereotype is an image that

has many people thinking that Asian Americans are "outwhiting" the Whites (Ngo,

2006).   This is a dangerous position for Asian Americans to be in because they are seen

as a competitive "foreign" threat to White Americans.   People of color express anger at

Asian Americans because they feel Asian Americans have made advances by aligning themselves with White Americans (Wing, 2007). The model minority stereotype is a gross generalization and does not fit with the experience of many Asian Americans (Ngo, 2006).

<div align="center">Racism</div>

There are many definitions of racism; however, I have chosen two to highlight for this literature review. I chose the first definition for its simplicity and the ease of embracing, remembering, and understanding, whereas the second definition is more comprehensive. The first definition of racism is simply "discrimination on the basis of race" (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 2000, p25). A note of caution with this definition is, as highlighted in the previous section, race is a term not easily defined, and it changes over time; therefore, this definition is a start, but it is not complete.

The second definition of racism comes from Bell (2007) and it elaborates on how race impacts all minority groups. Bell defines racism as:

> A system of advantage based on race and supported by institutional structures, policies, and practices that create and sustain benefits for the dominant White group, and structure discrimination, oppression, and disadvantage for people from targeted racial groups. Racism is a social expression of power and privilege, the consequence of discriminatory policies in the past that endure, always adapting to new circumstance but ultimately prevailing through practices of inequality that continue and sometimes manifest in new but persistent ways.

<div align="right">Bell, 2007, p.118</div>

As we see from Bell's definition, racism can no longer be defined in terms of the simplistic binary of black and white. Hispanics, Native Americans and Asians need to be included as well. Asian Americans have been part of American society for over 150 years, yet they do not share the same legacy as African Americans, so their experience as a targeted minority is similar to African Americans in some regards and yet different as well. When social scientists study the effects of racism on people, they usually target African Americans rather than Asian Americans. Since 2000, a growing amount of literature has focused on racism as it relates to the Asian American community (Alvarez, 2009). The following paragraphs offer a brief overview of how racism has impacted laws and policies targeting Asians and Asian Americans living in the United States.

The Chinese Exclusion act of 1882 is an early example of racism toward people from China (Wu, 2002). The Chinese exclusion Act of 1882 marked the first time the United States closed its doors to any immigrant population. This act specifically prevented Chinese laborers from entering the country for ten years and prevented all U.S. based Chinese from applying for citizenship (Tuan, 2005). One Chinese immigrant complained about this Act by saying, "They call us 'Chink'. They think we are no good. America cut us off" (Takaki, 1993, p. 8). This act was extended in 1892, 1902 and 1904. It was not until 1924 that the Chinese Exclusion Acts were repealed (Wu, 2002).

The Immigration Act of 1907 was referred to as the "Gentleman's Agreement". This act requested the Japanese government to voluntarily restrict the number of Japanese laborers entering the United States but did not put any restrictions on Japanese women and family members. There was strong anti-Japanese sentiment at this time in the United States however, the Japanese represented a strong and growing global power and

occupied an elite status among the other Asian countries hence our doors remained open to Japanese immigrants until 1924 (Koshy, 2001).

While immigration laws from 1882 to 1965 severely restricted Asian immigration, the doors to our country remained open for most European immigrants (Koshy, 2001). The immigration act of 1965 ended a policy of years of discrimination and exclusion (Wu, 2002). In 1970 there were 1.4 million Asians living in the United States. As of the year 2000, there were 11.9 million Asians living in the US thus comprising 4% of the total US population. This vast increase in numbers of Asian immigrants is due directly to the 1965 immigration act (Koshy, 2001).

More recent examples of discrimination toward the Asian community include the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and English-only initiatives. Ethnic specific business taxes, residential segregation codes, prohibitions against receiving an education, owning property, and anti-miscegenation laws are further examples of racism toward Asians and Asian Americans (Alvarez, 2009). The murder of Vincent Chin by two men in 1982 who called him racial slurs as they were beating him to death and were later acquitted is another sad example of racism against the Asian community (Taun, 2005). Just as race is very fluid in its definition, so too is racism. The following section looks at how racism has changed over the years.

Microaggressions & the Asian American Experience

Racism today looks different than racism in the past. Racism of the past was overt, blatant and left no doubt about the intention of the offender. The person receiving the insult knew exactly where he or she stood in the eyes of the offender. Today, overt

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racism is not publicly tolerated to the degree it once had been. This is not to say that racism is no longer an issue, if only that were true. Overt racism has morphed into covert racism which leaves the recipient often spending a significant amount of energy wondering if a particular comment or action was intentional or unintentional (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yasso, 2000). Racism of today is sometimes referred to as microaggressions. Racial microaggressions are defined as, "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slights and insults that potentially have harmful or unpleasant psychological impact on the target person or group" (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007, p 72).

Sue, Capodilupo, Nadal & Torino (2008) define three types of microaggressions: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidation. The microaggression that most clearly correlates with traditional racism is microassaults. Microassaults are verbal epithets, behaviorally based (i.e. someone not getting a loan, job or home because of the color of their skin), or offensive visual displays. A microinsult may be verbally or behaviorally oriented and is rude or demeaning to the individual's racial identity. The last form of microaggression Su and his colleagues defines is microinvalidation. Microinvalidations are actions that demean the person of color by excluding or negating their feelings or experience. Microinvalidations and microinsults are unconscious and unintentional whereas microassaults are deliberate and intentional. "POC [people of color] do not just occasionally experience racial microaggressions. Rather they are a constant, continuing and cumulative experience" (Sue, Capodilupo, Nadal & Torino, 2008, p 277).

Asians are often seen as the model minority, honorary Whites, and a community of people who do not experience racism despite the long and documented history of racism experienced by Asians. Because Asians are often viewed as the model minority there has not been a strong focus on the experiences of racism toward the Asian community. In 2007, Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, did conduct a study that looked at microaggressions directed at Asian Americans. They learned that microaggressions experienced by Asian Americans are different from microaggressions experienced by other marginalized groups. Ten self-identified Asian Americans participated in a focus group that involved a semi-structured interview and a brief questionnaire that looked at demographics of the participants. Eight microaggression themes targeting Asian Americans were identified. These themes are: 1) alien in own land, 2) ascription of intelligence, 3) exoticization of Asian women, 4) Invalidation of interethnic differences, 5) denial of racial reality, 6) pathologizing cultural values/communication styles, 7) second class citizenship, 8) invisibility. This study suggests despite the belief that Asian Americans have succeeded in U.S. society, racism, prejudice, and discrimination continue to impact their lives on a daily basis. What impact does racism have on people of color? The next section explores the question of the psychological impact of racism on the lives of people it affects.

Psychological Impact of Racism

Alvarez (2009) identified numerous studies that all concluded the consequences of racism have a negative impact on the psychological and physical well-being of Asian Americans (Beiser & Hou, 2006; Fisher & Wallace, 2000; Noh & Kaspar, 2003). He

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offers a very powerful statement about the impact of racism; "Exposure to racism, more so than combat, was a robust predictor of psychological disorders" (Alvarez, 2009, p. 410). Sixty-nine percent of Asian Americans are first generation immigrants; therefore, there is not the long-standing generational history with racism that the African American community has experienced. Turning to elders for guidance is most likely not an option for Asian immigrants or their children. Learning how to understand and cope with race related issues for the Asian community can therefore be challenging (Alvarez, 2009). One way the Asian American community has collectively addressed discrimination has been to develop a pan Asian ethnic identity (Kibria, 1998).

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the dominant White community in the US often collectively referred to Asian immigrants of as "Asiatics" or "Orientals." The so-called Asiatics only associated with members of their own ethnic groups and did not form social or business relationships that would suggest there was any sort of pan-ethnic Asian identity. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s changed that. Inspired by the Civil Rights movement, American born Asian students mobilized "Asian Americans" as a way for members of that community to join in solidarity to address issues of racism and discrimination. "Asian American" replaced "Oriental," a term that never held currency for the Asian community (Kibria, 1998). "The term Asian American became a social and political identity and a racial identity to fight racism" (Chang & Kwan, 2009, p. 115).

How is it, despite all the advances that have been made in regards to addressing issues of racism, it still exists in our society? Explicit racism as it relates to housing and hiring are now unlawful. However, to suggest that racism is no longer an issue in the

United States is just not true (Feagin, 2000). "…these problems are too deeply embedded in the history and culture in the United States to be eliminated simply by changing a law" (Zuniga & Castaneda, 2000, p. 61). Bonilla-Silva (2003) states that today's racism is kinder and gentler than the racism that existed in the past. He refers to today's racism as "racism lite." People of color are still highly segregated in the communities in which they live and, therefore, in the schools their children attend. Jim Crow laws are illegal and yet we still live as though segregation was the law of the land (Zuniga & Castaneda, 2000; Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

In what other ways does racism manifest itself in society today? Feagin (2000) talks about the "second eye" concept, which is the process that people of color often experience when they encounter a situation in which they are not treated appropriately. Was the slight toward the person of color committed because the person is prejudiced, rude, ignorant, or indifferent? The conclusion of the mental processing thus determines how the person will respond to the situation (Feagin, 2000). One older woman of color indicated that every day when she leaves her house, she puts on her "shield." This shield helps her prepare for the discrimination and the insults she knows she is bound to experience when in public. Another person of color indicated she worries about things that white people do not have to waste time worrying about. She worries about being pulled over, about her teenage son being shot at by a police officer, and she worries about being accused of shoplifting (Feagin, 2000). Why do people of color have worries that White people do not? The inequities that result from racism happen not only because of the subordination and domination of some races, but are also magnified by the benefits of

white privilege in our society. The following section elaborates on the concept of white privilege.

White Privilege

White privilege refers to "the unfair advantages White persons routinely have over persons of color, in daily life, and the institutional permission granted in the United States to be dominant over people of color" (Davidson & Davidson, 2002, p. 24). White people are socialized not to recognize their white privilege; therefore, many Whites remain oblivious to the power they are afforded simply by being White. Even those who are fair minded, socially aware, and never utter a discriminatory comment still benefit by being White (Kendall, 2006). McIntosh (1989) offers examples of how Whites benefit by being White including:

- the freedom to associate exclusively or primarily with members of your own group
- the level of social acceptance one can assume across varying contexts
- the ability to see members of your groups in a positive light in the records of history, in texts, in media, and as role models
- the freedom from stereotyping
- the ability to be oblivious to other groups
- the freedom of harassment when shopping.
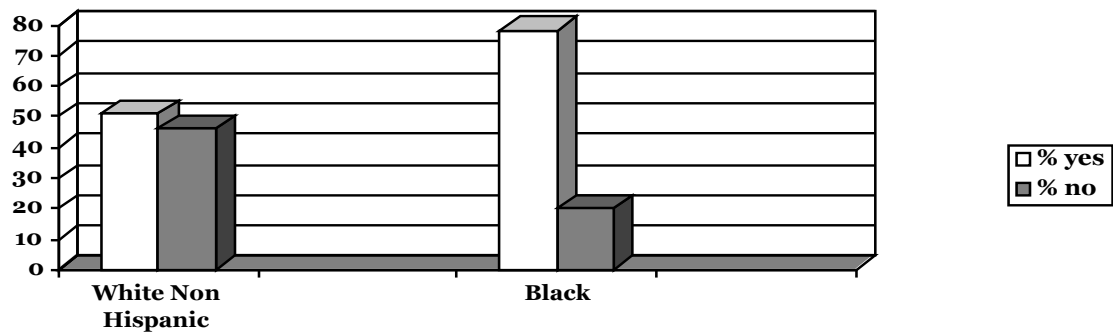
(McIntosh, 1989, p.10)

Asians or Asian Americans, more so than Whites, are ostracized for:

- Having strange names
- Being too smart or too passive
- Eating "strange" food
- Practicing a different religion

(Chou & Feagin, 2008, p. 71)

Figure 2.2: Do You Think Racism Against Blacks is or is Not Widespread in the US?

Source: USA Today Gallup poll June 5, 2008 – July 6, 2008

As seen in Figure 2.2, national data from a Gallup poll conducted in 2008 reveals almost half of all Non Hispanic Whites believe racism against Blacks is not widespread. This is in contrast to almost 80% of Blacks who feel racism is widespread in the United States. Whites may feel that people of color are not discriminated against, but people of color do not agree (USA Today Gallup poll June 5 2008 – July 6, 2008). "Most people of color in the United States, on a daily basis, think twice about how they can best survive the day without experiencing paternalism, insults, or much, much worse" (Quiroz, 2007, p.18). The privilege of whiteness enables White people to be oblivious to the effects of race and racism (Lucal, B., 1996). This lack of awareness about the challenges people of color face on a daily basis is one of the trappings of white privilege (McIntosh, 1988).

Many Whites believe in the myth of meritocracy. Meritocracy is the belief that if someone works hard enough, regardless of their social identity, then they will succeed. Meritocracy is a myth because we still live in a society that discriminates against subordinate groups in areas such as employment, housing, education, and health care (Bell, 2007). Colorblind is another concept that is similar to white privilege but not exactly the same. White privilege is not the only social phenomena that is both a cause

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and effect of racism in our society; The concept of colorblindness is a related concept that helps maintain hegemonic racism.

Colorblind

What does it mean to be "colorblind" in today's society? Simply put, it means that we do not see the color of someone's skin as being important or relevant (Quiroz, 2007). According to Fogg-Davis (2002), the word "colorblind" is really an oxymoron. The word "color" suggests that color is visible; however, the concept of colorblindness suggests just the opposite -- that color is invisible. "Color-blind ideology relies on race-neutral language to support the argument that race is no longer a factor in opportunity and achievement in America" (Quiroz, p. 13, 2007). It is the character of the person and not the color of his or her skin that is relevant (Quiroz, 2007). This is an appealing concept to many people (particularly those who are White) because it seems to right old wrongs such as colonization, economic exploitation, slavery, and the aftermath of slavery (Fogg-Davis, 2002). Colorblindness provides "a space that is free of guilt, self reflection, and political responsibility" (Henry Giroux, p 15, 2006).

There are three underlying assumptions associated with colorblind theory:

- racism no longer exists
- meritocracy is a reality
- race conscious policies are not necessary and in fact are discriminatory

(Quiroz, 2007).

The problem with having a colorblind ideology is that it denies reality. As noted above, we still live in a society that has segregated schools and communities, pay inequities, and job discrimination. Colorblindness masks the advantages that White people have in our society and helps to maintain structural racism (Bell, 2007).

I will close this section on colorblindness with a quote from Fogg-Davis:

"The necessary corrective for centuries of racism is not colorblindness but a strong commitment to nondiscrimination as a moral principle that extends beyond equal-protection law into the realm of private racial choices."

<div align="right">Fogg-Davis, 2002, p. 9</div>

The first two sections of this paper have looked at adoption and race/racism as separate entities. The following section builds on those two sections and shows the overlap between adoption and race/racism particularly as it relates to transracial adoptees. As a reminder, in this paper, transracial adoptees are adoptees of color raised by White parents. I highlight studies that conclude racism is an issue for transracial adoptees but I also intentionally bring to life transracial adoptees voices by sharing their narratives. The methods used in a study can always bring the conclusions into question but there is no disputing someone's opinion.

<div align="center">Transracial Adoptees and Racism</div>

"The most publicly debated and emotionally contentious issues in adoption policy and practice are those related to race."

<div align="right">Samuels, 2009, p. 80</div>

Transracial adoptees grow up with White families, often living in predominantly White communities attending predominantly White schools. Many of these adoptees have little access to adults or peers who share their racial and/or ethnic background. This circumstance leaves the children feeling alone, isolated, and lacking a community of people who understand their lived experience. The lack of a racial referent group puts the adoptees in a position of having to fend for themselves in a race conscious society that discriminates against people of color (Samuels, 2009).

In the 2009 study conducted by Gina Samuels, the transracial adoptees she interviewed spoke about some of the advantages of growing up in a White family. Advantages included travel, access to a good education, and their middle- to upper-middle class status. However, the adoptees also indicated that these advantages came at a cost. They felt racialized, they felt different, and they felt disconnected from themselves in regards to their race (Samuels, 2009). President Obama, although not adopted, shares a similar struggle about feeling disconnected from his race:

> Away from my mother, away from my grandparents, I was engaged in a fitful interior struggle. I was trying to raise myself to be a Black man in America, and beyond the given of my appearance, no one around me seemed to know exactly what that meant.

Obama, 2004, p. 76.

Although there is not a monolithic transracial adoptee story, many speak about the challenges they faced being a person of color growing up in a White family. Existing research such as Samuels' (2009) demonstrates that the voices of transracial adoptees can be very powerful. The following paragraphs highlight experiences from transracial adoptees that show how racism is a salient aspect of their lives.

> Accusations are easy to make when you are adopted by White parents and you yourself did not come into the world with white skin. For a long time I was angry. Angry that people stared at my family, angry that my parents never experienced racism, angry that I had to struggle with the intricacies of racial discrimination by myself.

Wright, 2006, p. 28.

I did not have any power to keep from being the physical embodiment of a

political process that stamped its approval on transracial adoptions in a country

founded on the enslavement and oppression of people of color.

Diehl, 2006, p. 32.

Sixteen year old Adam, who is a transracial adoptee, reflects on when he was ten;

When I was about 10 years old, I remember kids saying stuff that really upset me,

like, 'At least I know who my *real* parents are.' Or, 'You're so bad even a Black

family didn't want to adopt you.' Some days I came home and just cried.

Wolfington, 2007, p. 17.

One Korean adoptee recalled being called "a little Chinese shit" when she was in

preschool. She went on to say, "No one (else) in my family endured this since they all

'looked like everyone else'" (McGinnis, Smith, Ryan & Howard, 2009, p. 40).

The salience of racism for an adoptee may not always be readily apparent to

others. Outward appearances of adoptees do not always indicate how well they have

adjusted. "Asian adoptees may adjust well to their adoptive families and community, but

their success does not mean that they don't struggle with transnational and transracial

issues in their lives" (Lee, Miller, & Alvarez, 2009, p. 348). Anecdotally, the movie

Adopted (Lee, 2005) is a perfect example of one Asian adoptee's struggle despite her

outward appearance of success. Jennifer is a 32-year-old Korean adoptee who lived with

a White family in a blue-collar, rural, White community. Clearly, her adoptive parents

loved her, and in many ways, she was successful. She was the first one in her family to

graduate from college, she lived independently, she owned a car, and she had a good, professional job. Yet, she struggled with her identity. The only image she had of Asian women was submissive and available, so she followed that path. She also became dependent on drugs and subsequently entered rehab. Through her narrative, it is clear that being a minority in a majority community took a toll on her emotional psyche.

The above quotation and story highlight transracial adoptees struggle with experiencing race related issues. Whereas the quotes may seem anecdotal, they are supported by research findings. After reviewing numerous studies (Bagley, 1991; McRoy, 1991; McRoy et al. 1982, McRoy and Zurcher, 1984; Simon and Altstein, 1987), Freundlich (2000) concluded that children who are adopted across racial lines experience more race related challenges than their in-racially adopted peers. Another study by Westhues and Cohen (1994) found that eighty percent of the transnational adoptee respondents had reported experiencing an unpleasant comment or situation based on their race or ethnicity.

Research that is more recent offers similar results to the studies outlined above. A study conducted by McGinnis, Smith, Ryan & Howard (2009) determined that eighty percent of the Korean born transracial respondents (n = 179) indicated they had experienced discrimination from strangers, seventy-five percent experienced discrimination from classmates, and thirty-nine percent reported experiencing discrimination from their teachers (McGinnis, Smith, Ryan & Howard, 2009)! The respondents also stated their parents were insensitive to issues of race and could not understand that racism was even an issue. This lack of support and understanding heightened the transracial adoptees' sense of isolation. One respondent stated, "Sticking

a child in a place where no one else looked like them in a dinky town is in my opinion child abuse" (McGinnis, Smith, Ryan & Howard, 2009, p. 41).

Racial and ethnic isolation impacts an adoptee's capacity for racial and ethnic pride. Pride in one's race and ethnicity plays an important role in an adolescent's sense of self-esteem. International adoptees growing up with families from different racial and ethnic backgrounds are less likely to develop positive racial and ethnic identities than their peers who grow up in same racial and ethnic families (Freundlich, 2000). "A central component of racial identity development is coming to terms with one's racial identity as a minority in relation to the majority" (Chang & Kwan, 2009, p 124).

Is the racial identity development process of Asian transracial adoptees different than African American or biracial transracial adoptees? What space do Asian transracial adoptees occupy on the transracial adoption landscape? I have found more scholarly research on African American and biracial transracial adoptees than on Asian transracial adoptees. "We know very little about the history, psychological development, and well being of Asian adoptees" (Lee, Miller, & Alvarez, 2009, p. 337). This lack of knowledge about the Asian adoptee experience is an emergent criticism of the international adoption movement. Asian adoptees are often overlooked by the Asian American community (Lee, Miller, & Alvarez, 2009). They experience discrimination in the United States, rejection by immigrants from their birth country, and are treated as outsiders in their birth country (Freundlich, 2000).

There is less controversy about Asian transracial adoption than there is about African American domestic transracial adoption. One explanation suggests racism is still a black-white issue whereas Asian are perceived as "honorary whites" and thus not

subject to the same level of discrimination. This line of reasoning suggests Asians are a non-relevant racial group that can be ignored in the racial discourse of this country. Another explanation is that many people view Asian adoption as a humanitarian act hence decreasing the level of controversy (Lee, Miller, & Alvarez, 2009).

McGinnis (2009) recommends a series of changes to adoption related policy and practice. The two recommendations related to this research project center on racial socialization of the transracial adoptee. The first recommendation is "Develop empirically based practices and resources to prepare transracially and transculturally adopted youth to cope with racial bias" (McGinnis, Smith, Ryan & Howard, 2009, p. 7). This recommendation suggests arming transracial adoptees with the tools they need to navigate race related issues increases self-esteem and enhances their comfort level as related to race. The second recommendation, "Expand parental preparation and post-placement support for those adopting across race and culture" (McGinnis, 2009, p. 7) directly relates to the first recommendation but explicitly puts the responsibility of imparting racial socialization skills in the hands of the adoptive parents. The following and final section of this literature review focuses on McGinnis's second recommendation regarding expanding parental preparation for those parents who have adopted children from a different race.

<div align="center">Parenting Transracial Adoptees</div>

The first section of this literature review outlines why some people are in favor of transracial adoption and why some people are opposed. The following quote by Berry (2000) frames my position on White parents adopting children of color:

> The ultimate question may be not whether transracial adoption is 'good' or 'bad'
> for children, but, rather, what research-based strategies can be implemented to
> make the experience beneficial for the children involved?
>
> (Berry, 2000, p. 230)

I would add, "to make the experience beneficial for the children *and their adoptive families*." Family Systems Theory, which generates from General Systems Theory, states that the family is a whole unit and cannot be fully understood if it is subdivided into individual parts. Members of the family do not act independently but rather as a part of one inter-connected system. Family Systems Theory dictates when one member is having difficulty it affects the entire family not just the one member who is in distress (Steinglass, 1987).

Early in the history of transracial adoption, advising White adoptive parents to take a colorblind approach in regards to parenting their children of color was the norm. Folding their minority children into the dominant culture was the parental mandate (Vonk, 2008). The problem with colorblind ideology is that it ignores, hides, and denies that racism is still an issue in the United States. Transracially adopted children of colorblind White parents have no space to discuss problems they are facing, thus leaving them without the necessary tools needed to navigate race-related issues. The colorblind parental approach is no longer the gold standard (Davidson & Davidson, 2002).

Parents may not consciously take on a colorblind parenting lens; however, they may not be aware that racism is an issue for their children, or they may minimize the significance of racial taunting (Freundlich, 2000). Whereas colorblind ideology may not be promoted by adoption practitioners, it is still a reality within some families with transracially adopted children. In a study conducted by Gina Samuels (2009), twenty-

three out of twenty-five transracially adopted respondents noted their parents embrace some level of colorblindness. The adoptees described their parents as being unable to understand or appreciate the difficulty that being a person of color presents. The adoptees also stated that their parents did not talk about race proactively but rather reactively (Samuels, 2009). A White foster parent who had biracial children living in her home said, "We tell them that in this home we just let our White sides show" (Samuels, 2009, p. 82).

Teaching children racial navigational skills is a natural process for ethnic minority families. For White parents of transracially adopted children, the teaching of racial navigation skills is *not* a natural process. White parents must engage in explicit instruction rather than modeling racial navigational strategies (Lee, Miller, & Alvarez, 2009). In a study conducted by Karis (2004), one parent indicated she side stepped talking with her children about racism because she felt like an outsider who had nothing to offer; "As a White Caucasian woman, I don't have any of those tools to teach them that" (Karis, 2004, p. 167). Possessing racial navigational skills is not essential for the health and well-being of White parents, yet that very skill set is vital for their children to live healthy and productive lives (Karis, 2004).

Explicit instruction of racial navigational skills does not come easily for all parents. One transracial adoptee stated, "You know my parents never discussed race with me…EVER" (Samuels, 2009, p. 87). The following quotation is from another transracial adoptee and highlights her experience with her White parents' inexperience with race:

> What could my parents teach me, when they don't know what it's like to be
> around White people and always be different? You're always alone from the git-

go, even though you're NOT. Even though your family is *there* with you-you're

always still alone.

<div align="right">Samuels, 2009, p. 86</div>

For parents who do not engage in dialogue about race with their children, either

intentionally or unintentionally, the cost is high for their children. Even if a child is loved

as much as possible within the family unit, the child also lives outside the family, and

outside the family, the transracially-adopted child is treated as a minority. Without

proper parental preparation, transracial adoptees may encounter some hurtful and

challenging experiences. Feelings of isolation, depression, and alienation may occur

(Smith, McRoy, Freundlich & Kroll, 2008).

Lee (2009) conducted a longitudinal study that looked at White adoptive parents'

ability to support their adopted children of color regarding race related issues. Lee

wanted to know if White parents were able to prepare their adopted children of color for

bias. "Preparing for bias" refers to the process of educating children about discrimination

and stereotypes. Preparing for bias also entails discussing with children the harsh reality

of how racism may affect their lives. According to the adoptee and parent respondents in

the study, preparation for bias was only engaged in "rarely to sometimes." Interestingly,

parents reported higher engagement on this topic than their children reported for their

parents (Lee, 2009).

Those who are in favor of and those who oppose transracial adoption agree that

transracial adoptive parents have the important responsibility of instilling a positive sense

of racial and ethnic pride in their children (Quiroz, 2007). These same parents also need

to be able to educate their children of color about how to handle issues of racism and

discrimination (Simon & Altstein, 1992; Massatti, Vonk, & Gregoire, 2004). "Parents who choose to adopt across ethnic or racial lines should be aware of the increased difficulties that their children face and make a lifetime commitment to helping their children adjust" (Berry, 2000, p. 227). For many adoptive parents, providing tools for their children to address racial issues is not an easy task. The following quotation is an example of one parent's struggle:

> Today I took my two-year-old girl to a garden center. I was talking to the owner, who kept doing that double-take we all know and dislike. He blurted out, 'What is she, Mexican?' I said yes (first mistake). He continued with his unsolicited critique of Mexican culture. In my fantasy, I told him off and stalked out. In reality, tears starting welling up in my eyes and I slipped away. How can I expect her to deal with comments like that if I can't?
>
> Ito-Gates & Dariotis, 2010, p. 40

Another White adoptive parent had a similar sentiment, "the privilege of being White puts us at a disadvantage for helping our children cope in the world" (Harrigan, 2009, p. 643). The good news for the children of these women is that they are aware of the need to prepare their children for the realities of a society that treats members of minority communities unfairly.

Given the challenges noted above, how can a White parent effectively parent a child of color if she or he believes discrimination against people of color is only a minor issue or does not exist at all when, in fact, it is an issue that has significance for people of color on a daily basis (Bell, 2007)? If White parents have never experienced racism first hand, how can they provide their children of color with the tools they need to survive in a

racialized society? The following paragraphs summarize work done by Vonk (2001) and

Vonk & Massatti (2008) that addresses the racial and ethnic gaps White parents of

transracially adopted children experience.

Vonk (2001) discusses the idea of cultural competence. She defines cultural

competence as "a unique set of attitudes, knowledge, and skills that enables parents to

meet their children's needs related to racial and cultural socialization" (Vonk, 2001, pp.

204-205). Even though there is a long history of transracial adoption in the United

States, the idea of cultural competence is a relatively new concept. We know in the past,

a color blind approach to parenting was often utilized (Vonk, 2001).

Vonk outlines the three areas of cultural competency needed for parents who are

adopting transracially: racial awareness, multicultural planning, and survival skills. In

regard to racial awareness, parents of transracially adopted children need to be aware of

the extent that race plays in our society and the impact race will have on their children.

Since White parents are part of the dominant culture, it is very possible that they will not

be as insightful and perceptive about issues related to racism, oppression, and

discrimination as Black parents. Examining their own beliefs about their children's race

and ethnicity is an important component of racial awareness. Another important

component of racial awareness is for parents to be aware of the positive and negative

stereotypes associated with their children's race and ethnicity. Being able to recognize

the covert and overt forms of racism that exist in our society is an important aspect of

being racially aware (Vonk, 2001).

Multicultural planning constitutes Vonk's second cultural competence.

Multicultural planning refers to the process of connecting the adopted children with the

customs and culture of their birth country. The final cultural competency Vonk defines is survival skills. "Survival skills refer to the recognition of the need and the ability of parents to prepare their children of color to cope successfully with racism" (Vonk, 2001, p. 251). Specific skills needed for this competency are the ability to talk openly about race and racial issues, role-playing responses to race related issues, interrupting inappropriate "jokes," and validating their children's feelings in regards to race related issues. Children need to have the space to express their concerns and to feel comfortable asking questions rather than having to internalize those feelings (Vonk, 2001).

Vonk and Massatti (2008) solicited information 912 adoptive parents of either Korean or Chinese born children. All of the parents were White and two thirds were women (65.1%). The authors identified barriers that interfere with parents' cultural competence. One of the barriers involved living in a homogeneously white community. White parents who raised their children of color in a white community had more difficulty connecting their children with racial and ethnic peers. Another barrier Vonk and Massatti identified was the lack of support from adoption agencies. Parents indicated they would like help from adoption agency personnel regarding their own and others' perceptions of racism.

Vonk & Massatti (2008) also evaluated adoptive parents' level of cultural competency as related to several factors including: participation in post adoption support groups, sex of the parent, and traveling to the child's home country. They found parents' participation in post-adoption support groups to have the greatest impact on parents' cultural competency. Mothers, more so than fathers, were more inclined to participate in culture related events with their children thus suggesting sex of the parent relates to

cultural competence. The study found a direct relationship between parents' cultural competence and traveling to their children's birth country at the time of adoption. The authors speculate that parents traveling to their children's birth country may then have a better understanding of their children's heritage (Vonk & Massatti, 2008).

Despite the challenges Vonk and Massatti identified, studies have shown that it is possible for transracially-adopted children to fare well with their White adoptive parents (Simon & Altstein, 2000; Hollingsworth, 2003). However, this optimistic note needs to be received with caution. Simon and Altstein (2000) note that loving one's transracially adopted child is not enough. White parents have to expand their worldview to include information about their children's race and ethnicity. Treating their children in a colorblind manner is not in the best interest of the children and could even be detrimental because it denies the children's racial and cultural heritage (Simon & Altstein, 2000). According to Quiroz (2007), "Colorblind ideology relies on race-neutral language to support the argument that race is no longer a factor in opportunity and achievement in America" (Quiroz, 2007, p. 13). Jennifer's parents in the movie *Adopted* embraced a colorblind approach, and it was clearly to the detriment of their daughter (Lee, 2005).

In November of 2009, McGinnis, Smith, Ryan, and Howard released a study entitled, "Beyond Culture Camp: Promoting Healthy Identity Formation in Adoption." This study consisted of responses from 179 adoptees born in South Korea and adopted by White parents and on 156 Caucasian adoptees born in the US and raised by two White parents. One of the findings of the study was, "Coping with discrimination is an important aspect of coming to terms with racial/ethnic identity for adoptees of color" (McGinnis, Smith, Ryan & Howard, 2009, p. 5). This finding reinforces the quotations

of adoptees and results of studies highlighted above. Based on this finding, the

recommendation that follows is, "Expand parental preparation and post-placement

support for those adopting across race and culture" (McGinnis, Smith, Ryan & Howard,

2009, p. 7).

In order to "expand parental preparation," we need to determine our starting point

and we need to believe that change is possible. As stated at the beginning of this chapter,

this research project embraces a liberatory consciousness lens indicating that I believe

expanded parental knowledgeable about race and racism is possible. This study uncovers

what White adoptive parents are saying to their Asian born children about race related

issues. It is my hope that this study will raise the awareness of the adoption community

about the degree of race related conversations that are occurring between White adoptive

parents and their Asian born children. Knowing where the strengths and weaknesses are

for families about race and racism will enable professionals to target their support

services more effectively which will then hopefully lead to more intentional and

meaningful conversations about race between Asian born children and their White

adoptive parents.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

Transracial adoption has been a norm in the United States since the 1960s. This practice is controversial and challenging because of the combination of transracial adoptees experiencing racism (Samuels, 2009) and White adoptive parents steeped in white privilege (Bell, 2007). White parents educating their transracially adopted children about racial navigational skills is not an innate process for the parents. This has been an understudied issue, and the literature is missing empirical information particularly about White parents of Asian born children educating their children about race related issues. Therefore, the goal of this study is to generate new knowledge in regards to if and how White adoptive parents address racial navigational skills with their Asian born children.

This chapter summarizes the method this researcher formulated in order to conduct this study. It is divided into three sections. The first section addresses the role of the researcher as it relates to qualitative research and situates the researcher with the research. The second section presents the conceptual framework of the study, which is essentially a synthesis of the literature review. The final section is an explanation of the research design. Included within the research design narrative is the participant selection and data analysis process. The specific interview questions are included in Appendix A.

Researcher Role

Generally, there is not a methodical, step-by-step process to follow when engaging in qualitative research. The researcher has to be ready to roll up her sleeves,

engage with the participants, and go with the participants wherever they might go. Often the researcher must respond spontaneously to unexpected situations that arise. The proper response may not always be evident. The researcher should have the, "capacity to make reasoned decisions and to articulate the logic behind those decisions" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 25). The interest of the participants should take precedence over the needs of the researcher and the research project. All of these factors had the potential for coming into play with this research project, therefore, a qualitative research approach was utilized.

As I situate myself in this research project, I am mindful of two topics, reflexivity and subjectivity. Peshkin (1988) defines subjectivity as "the quality of an investigator that affects the results of observational investigation" (p. 17). In other words, who are we and how does our identity affect our ability to do research objectively? A researcher needs to explore and be conscious of the connection between who they are as a researcher and how that identity influences the implementation and analysis of a research project (Wagle & Cantaffa, 2008). As I engaged in my research, I needed to think about how my identities that are associated with this research (a White adoptive mother of a Filipino boy) influenced how I conducted the research, how I analyzed the data, and how I drew conclusions from the data analysis. I needed to be actively aware that my subjectivity was capable of affecting the process and outcome of the research inquiry.

As I formulated a research design for this project, I was also conscious of reflexivity. Etherington (2007) defines reflexivity as "an ability to notice our responses to the world around us, to stories, and to other people and events, and to use that knowledge to inform and direct our actions, communications, and understanding"

(Etherington, 2007, p. 601). This means the researcher has to be alert at all times and ready to change course at any moment depending on what comes up in the inquiry process. Reflexivity refers to the unknowns, the unexpected, the "how do I respond based upon what my interviewee just told me?" Ethics dictates that the subject's interests always come first (Etherington, 2007). As I talked with respondents about their personal stories, the conversation was not always easy or comfortable. There were a couple of times when I needed to take off my "researcher hat" and replace it with my "caring acquaintance hat." One time, as one of the interviewees talked about a letter her son had written to his birth mother, the interviewee teared up and needed to pause. In that moment the interview stopped. I metaphorically stepped back and gave her time to compose herself. When she seemed ready to re-engage, I asked if she was ok. "We can take a break if you want or we can stop" I offered. It was an easy, natural and genuine response that I imagine most researchers would consider. She assured me she was fine and we continued. Reflexivity and subjectivity informed and guided all of the interviews I conducted. The next section, the conceptual framework, provides a milieu for how the research was conducted.

Conceptual Framework

As outlined in the literature review, the centrality of race is real for people of color living in the United States (Feagin, 2000). Numerous authors state that race is a socially constructed phenomenon rather than a biological construct (Kendall, 2006, Blackburn, 2000, Omi, 2000, Feagin, 2000). Slavery and Jim Crow laws no longer exist and yet due to the extent that racism has been embedded in our society, changing a few

laws does not change people's attitudes, actions, or beliefs. Segregated communities continue to exist because of de facto norms rather than de jure mandate (Zuniga & Castaneda, 2000, Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Bonilla-Silva (2003) states that today's racism is kinder and gentler than the racism that existed in the past; he refers to today's racism as "racism lite."

Even though contemporary racism may not be as blatant and overt as it was in the past, the psychological ramifications remain strong and prevalent. Alvarez (2009) offers a powerful statement about the impact of racism; "Exposure to racism, more so than combat, was a robust predictor of psychological disorders" (p. 410). Feagin (2000) refers to a "second eye" concept. The second eye concept entails people of color having to process various situations in which White people slighted them. The person of color needs to determine if the offender was intentionally rude, ignorant, indifferent, or prejudice in an effort to determine how to respond to the situation.

The "second eye" concept complements the "100 ergs of energy" theory that was conceptualized by an African American man quoted in Feagin's article (2000). Every person starts each day with one hundred ergs of energy. People of color invariably use some of their ergs processing events that may or may not have been blatantly discriminatory. The processing process thus depletes the number of ergs of energy the person of color has available. At the end of the day the White person, who has not needed to use up so many ergs of energy, still has enough energy to engage in a variety of other activities whereas the person of color is exhausted from all of their mental processing (Feagin, 2000).

Many White people believe that racism is no longer a problem in the United States often citing our African American president as evidence. People of color usually disagree. "Most people of color in the United States, on a daily basis, think twice about how they can best survive the day without experiencing paternalism, insults, or much, much worse" (Quiroz, p. 18, 2007). Many Whites still believe in the myth of meritocracy. Meritocracy is a myth because we live in a society that discriminates against subordinate groups in areas such as employment, housing, education, and health care (Bell, 2007). The lack of awareness about the challenges people of color face on a daily basis is one of the trappings of white privilege (McIntosh, 1989).

National data show that most children adopted internationally are children of color adopted by White parents (U.S. Department of State, 2009). As noted in chapter one, the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) was very clear in their disapproval of domestic transracial adoptions stating it was akin to cultural genocide. Their concerns stem from the belief that White parents do not have the ability to equip children of color with the racial survival skills needed to exist in today's racialized society (NABSW, 1972). Within the United States there is not a comparable NABSW jurisdictional body overseeing the adoption of Asian born children by White parents. However, if there were such an organization one cannot help but wonder if the organization would hold similar concerns as the NABSW. Asians and Asian Americans experience discrimination just as African Americans experience discrimination.

In the United States there is a history of racism toward Asians. The Chinese Exclusion act of 1882 is an early example of racism toward people from China (Wu, 2002). Immigration laws from 1882-1965 severely restricted Asian immigration while

the doors to the United States remained open for most European immigrants (Koshy, 2001). The internment of Japanese Americans during WWII and English-only initiatives are more recent examples of discrimination experienced by the Asian community. Ethnic specific business taxes, residential segregation codes, prohibitions against receiving an education, owning property, and anti-miscegenation laws are further examples of racism Asians and Asian Americans experience in the United States (Alvarez, 2009).

What impact does the historical legacy of racism toward people of color and the simultaneous experience of white privilege by Whites have on Asian born children adopted by White parents? President Obama, who is biracial and raised by his White mother and White maternal grandparents, has spoken about the challenge of trying to figure out what it means to be Black when the only connection he had to being Black was his skin color (Obama, 2004). Is the same not true for our Asian adoptees growing up with White parents?

Transracial adoptees who are now young adults have voiced love for their adoptive parents, appreciation for growing up middle class but they have also expressed their frustration about being a child of color in a White dominated household (Samuels, 2009). One Asian born adoptee growing up with a White family talked about her anger about having to struggle with the intricacies of racial discrimination all by herself (Wright, 2006). Another Asian adoptee spoke about the pain of being called "a little Chinese shit" and the loneliness of enduring that sort of discrimination within her all White family (McGinnis, Smith, Ryan & Howard, p. 40, 2009).

The reality of the impact of racism for Asian born adoptees being raised by White parents who experience all the trappings of white privilege forms the conceptual

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framework of this paper. Although the number of children being adopted internationally is decreasing there are still close to 200,000 internationally adopted children who were adopted in the last ten years, living in the United States today (Source: US Department of State, 2009). In order to successfully raise children of color there needs to be a process whereby parents provide their children with racial survival skills. The question remains, how do White parents educate their children of color about racism when the White parents have no first hand knowledge of racism?

This study examines how White parents engage with their Asian born adoptees about race related issues. By interviewing White parents of Asian born adoptees it has been possible to gain a clearer understanding of how the parents address the issue of race related issues with their children. The goal of this study has been to identify common themes among the parents.

Even if there are common themes among the parents, it is important to keep in mind that each family situation is unique. Attempting to develop a formulaic model of how to address race related issues with our children may be challenging. Barth (2010) talks about the importance of clinicians utilizing a common elements approach when addressing treatment needs of adoptees and their families rather than a manualized approach. The common elements approach takes into account the uniqueness of each situation and allows the clinician to draw from many sources, including the most current research, when addressing the needs of the client. The manualized approach suggests that one size fits all and remains static rather than dynamic (Barth, 2010). A common element approach is the intent of this study as well. The intent is that this study is to serve as one of many tools parents and post adoption support workers will be able to

utilize when trying to determine the best way to support Asian born adoptees. The next

section summarizes the research methodologies that have been employed in this study.

Research Design

Johnson and Christensen (2004) state that qualitative inquiry is inductive and,

"the major objective of this type of research is exploratory or discovery" (p. 360).

Theories or hypotheses are not predetermined, but rather may be formulated after the

collection and careful analysis of the data. It is the goal of this research project to learn

how White parents support their adopted Asian children around issues of race. The

inductive nature of this research project therefore lends itself to a qualitative inquiry

approach.

There are many types of approaches to qualitative research including

interviewing, case studies, ethnography, and grounded theory. Gubrium and Holstein

(2002) present numerous types of interviews in their edited textbook including survey,

qualitative, in-depth, life story and focus group interviews. Within this wide range of

options, my research uses a case study approach that draws upon qualitative interviewing

as the primary source of data collection.

A case study approach tells a story about a bounded system. A bounded system

refers to a set of interconnected parts that come together to make a whole unit (Johnson &

Christensen, 2004). The bounded system in this study is the White adoptive parents, their

Asian born children and the relationship they share in regards to engaging in

conversations about race related issues. "Case-studies are in-depth and detailed

explorations of single examples (an event, process, organization, group, or individual)"

(Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p.104). The goal of a case study is to learn how the entity being studied operates or functions. The approach to collecting data for a case study varies widely. The collection of data may be from interviews, documents and/or observations (Berg, 2004).

Data for this case study were collected using a qualitative interviewing approach. Qualitative interviewing, as defined by Warren (2002) is a guided conversation, "based on conversation with researchers asking questions and listening and respondents answering" (p. 83). Unlike most conversations, qualitative interviews are often asymmetrical conversations with the respondent doing most of the talking and the interviewer listening, probing, and asking for clarification (Johnson, 2004). As with qualitative research in general, qualitative interviewing employs a constructionist approach. The interviewer has the responsibility to make meaning of the data rather than acting as a tool that retrieves factual, objective information. "The object of qualitative interviewing is to discern meaningful patterns within thick descriptions" (Warren, 2004, p.87). With all of the interviews complete and the analysis finished, I have descriptions about each parent's transracial adoption story and common themes about how they collectively address issues of race and racism with their children. The following section looks at the process of participant selection that will be used for this study.

Participant Sampling Method

Eleven White parents, representing nine families, of Filipino and Korean born adoptees were selected for this research study. Initially I planned to interview three parents each of Chinese, Korean, and Filipino adolescents. In the process of selecting

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participants I learned that most of the children adopted from China were young teenagers. In an effort to obtain data that was as rich as possible I decided to interview only parents who had children who were older teens or young adults which therefore eliminated the group from China. Two of the respondents had children in their teens and younger children as well. When appropriate, comments and insights about the younger siblings were also folded into the interview.

I chose Asia as the focus on my research for several reasons. The first is that information about Asian born adoptees growing up in White families is lacking from the literature even though Asian countries have been some of the top sending countries of adoptees for many years. I also have a personal interest in Asia because my adopted son was born in the Philippines. I initially choose to interview parents of Korean and Chinese adoptees because they have traditionally been the two largest sending countries in Asia and would therefore make it easier to find potential participants. I choose the Philippines because my son is Filipino hence there is a strong personal interest and there is very little adoption related information about children born in the Philippines.

The criteria for selecting participants to interview were very specific and germane to the study therefore, the nine families were chosen using a purposive sampling approach. Purposive sampling, as the name implies, is an intentional process of choosing research participants that fit a specific category (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). "Purposive samples are selected in order to ensure that certain types of individuals or persons displaying certain attributes are included in the study" (Berg, 2004, p. 36).

The initial identification of participants occurred with the assistance of key informants. The key informants I used were faculty from UMass and Hampshire

College, staff from adoption based organizations with whom I have a personal connection and Wide Horizons, the adoption agency my partner and I went through when we adopted our son. Wide Horizons ended up yielding the most participants. I sent an e-mail off to someone I did not know at Wide Horizons but their response was heart warming:

> Hi, Jen.
>
> Thank you for your email. We are happy to help you with your doctoral research project. I have asked our Post Adoption Team to send an email "blast" about your research to families who normally receive the quarterly newsletter. I also will have our database administrator sort through families whose children would be in the range of 13-23 years and are adopted from China, Korea and the Philippines. I cannot give you the families contact information because of confidentiality issues, but I will send emails to those families for whom we have email addresses.
>
> I think it might be reassuring to other WHFC adoptive families if they knew the researcher was an adoptive parent through WHFC. Would you be willing to include that in the paragraph you wrote below? I understand if that is not something you want to include if it would impact your research.

I was happy to tailor my paragraph to include information about being an adoptive parent. The following information is what was sent via e-mail from Wide Horizons to Wide Horizon adoptive parents who fit the criteria of my study:

> Greetings from Wide Horizons! I hope you and your family are well.
>
> I am writing to share information about an independent adoption research study. The research study is being conducted by one of our adoptive moms who is working on her PhD at UMASS Amherst. Wide Horizons has not released your contact information to the researcher, but we have agreed to forward this researchers request for participants along to our families. Wide Horizons is not a sponsor of this research project, but we do support and value the importance of post adoption research. If you are interested in learning more, please contact Jen Dolan directly.

The following message comes directly from Jen Dolan, the researcher:

Hello,

My name is Jen Dolan and I am a doctoral candidate at UMass Amherst seeking the opportunity to talk with White adoptive parents of Asian born adolescents for my dissertation research. I am interested (and excited) in hearing your adoption story and learning about encounters you and your child have experienced with race related issues. I anticipate the need to meet with you on two occasions, probably for 1 or 1.5 hours each time. I live in western MA and would like to conduct the interviews in person. I am specifically looking for parents of Chinese, Korean and Filipino adolescents or young adults. All information will remain confidential. I too am a WHFC parent - my son is from the Philippines and he is 10 years old. I anticipate this research will help me with my own parenting and I am hoping it will help other current and prospective parents as well.

For more information, please contact me at jhdolan3@gmail.com or 413 545-0547

Thank you so much,

Jen Dolan

I had anticipated that snowball sampling would be another form of identifying participants in addition to purposive sampling. Snowball sampling refers to the process of finding participants for a study by asking current participants if they know other people who fit the participant selection criteria (Berg, 2004). As it turned out, the above contact with Wide Horizons yielded fifty parents who were interested in participating in the study hence the snowballing tactic was not necessary.   Not all of the individuals who contacted me fit the needed criteria. Some were immediately excluded because they lived far away (Las Vegas and Georgia), and others were excluded because they had children who were not even in their teen years yet. I considered briefly including parents who had children from Vietnam and Cambodia but I did ultimately reject them in large

part because I had enough parents who had children from Korea, China and the Philippines. Then, as I looked closer at the demographics of the Korea, China and Philippine group, I realized that the parents who had children from China all had children who were in their young teens hence I decided to eliminate that group as well.

Ultimately, I interviewed nine families; four who had children from Korea, four who had children from the Philippines and one that had children from both countries. In addition there was one family that had a domestically adopted child, one family that had children adopted from El Salvador and another family that had a biological child. Seven mothers, one heterosexual married couple, and one father were interviewed during the first round of interviews. The second round of interviews consisted of six mothers, two heterosexual married couples, and one father. Eight of the respondents were married and one was divorced; all of the parents were White. The interviewer did not ask the age of the interviewees; however, it appeared that all interviewees were between late thirties and early fifties.

All of the families lived within a 2.5 hour radius of Amherst Ma. and resided in either Connecticut or Massachusetts. Three of the interviews were conducted at the participant's place of residence, and four were at their place of work. I met with one respondent at her work site for the first interview and her home for the second interview. The last person to be interviewed was at first interviewed in her home and then, due to a number of rescheduled appointments because of snowstorms and the distant location of the participant, the second interview was conducted over the phone. As with the in-person interviews, the phone interview was also recorded and transcribed.

<u>Procedure</u>

Based upon the type and amount of information to be collected, two separate interviews were necessary for this study. The first interview gave the interviewee time to get to know me and respond to non-threatening questions. With rapport established during the first interview I was able to be more direct with my questions during the second interview, and I could ask the tougher questions about race. Testing the interview questions with a pilot interview helped to determine the approximate length of time needed for the interviews and it tested the effectiveness of the interview instrument. After the pilot interviews, I estimated each interview would take at least 1 to 1.5 hours. I was very conscious of the time commitment this study required of the participants and I was a bit anxious about that and worried people may not want to participate because it required too much of their time. The most important lesson I learned from the pilot interview was that many people really enjoy telling their adoption story and they are happy to help others who are in a similar situation. That knowledge gave me confidence that I would be able to find enough people to interview which, as we know, ended up not being an issue at all. As it turned out many of the interviews, particularly the at-home interviews, lasted closer to two hours and some went 2.5 hours.

During the pilot interviews I also learned that I needed to group the interview questions under topic headings rather than having one ongoing list of 40 questions. Having the questions grouped under topic headings helped to create an interview that fit together well and flowed better than a series of disjointed questions. Being able to say throughout the interview, "the next group of questions looks at X" worked out really well and I feel gave the interview a more professional tone.

The first set of questions for the first interview focused on background information such as why the parent(s) decided to adopt and why from Korea or the Philippines. I was a little nervous asking the participants why they decided to adopt because I knew for many, if not all, it would be due to infertility which felt like a personal topic to be sharing with a stranger. None-the-less I did ask why they decided to adopt knowing they could choose to answer it any way that felt comfortable to them. Most seemed to almost expect the question and were very candid which admittedly surprised me a little since this was one of my very first questions during the first interview and we were still essentially strangers to one another. I also asked about their child's living arrangements prior to the adoption and about the adoption process. The first set of questions provided a context for information obtained from the next part of the interview and it provided time for a rapport to develop between the interviewee and myself. The parents who adopted children from Philippines traveled to the Philippines to bring their child(ren) home hence they had a lot to talk in regards to the adoption process about during that first interview. My first two interviews were with parents who had adopted children from the Philippines. Most of the parents who had adopted children from Korea did not travel to Korea; hence, their adoption process story was fairly short. I found myself floundering a bit during the first interview I conducted with a family who had adopted from Korea. We were only 40 minutes into the interview and they had essentially answered all the questions that the Filipino families had taken 1.5 to two hours to answer!

The second interview focused on what I had thought would be race related issues, but ended up being a more general discussion that included race related issues but more

broadly it was about discrimination based on race, ethnicity and adoption. These topics

were at the heart of this research project. Some of the questions asked include, how

comfortable do you feel talking to your child about race, whom do you turn to when you

have race related questions and what advice do you have for White parents who are

thinking about adopting children from Asia? For a complete list of questions, please see

appendix A for the interview questionnaire.

All interviews were audio taped, with permission of the interview subject, and

then transcribed into a word processor. Audio taping captures the interviewee's words as

accurately as possible. Since the interviews were audio-taped, I was be free to note body

language, jot down points I wanted to have clarified or other questions I wanted to ask.

Recognizing that talking about family and race may be awkward or uncomfortable at

times, I wanted to be careful about how the interviewee was doing during the interview. I

was very clear that there was no right or wrong answer and that the participant could pass

on any questions and that the interview could be stopped at any time. My first priority

was always to honor and respect the interviewee.

As the researcher, I did everything possible to ensure confidentiality of the

participants and their family members. Pseudonyms have been used in all documents,

audiotape files are stored in a secure location, and when orally discussing an interview,

the content of the interview has not and will not be associated with a specific person.

Despite the precautionary steps that have been taken, confidentiality can not be 100%

guaranteed. Informing participants prior to the interview of this reality is the ethical and

most accurate stance to take (Rossman and Rallis, 2003). The wording about

confidentiality on the consent form that each participant signed was, "Every effort will be

made to protect the confidentiality of the interviewee's identity." This was true and will remain true throughout the life of this project.

Data Analysis

Rossman and Rallis (2003) define data analysis as "the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of data collected" (p. 278). After transcribing all the interviews myself, with the exception of one, the next step was to further immerse myself in the data and become as familiar as possible with all the information. After immersion, Rossman and Rallis suggest an incubation period or time away from the data, which then leads to insights about important themes. After incubation, the coding phase of the research project begins. Transcribing the interviews was a time consuming, tedious process, but very effective at reminding me of what was said during the interviews. My work, family and school schedule lent itself to a naturally occurring incubation period!

Coding is a process involving condensing data into manageable themes. Straus and Corbin (1990) define coding as "the process of analyzing data" (p. 61). Codes are labels applied to chunks of words, sentences or whole paragraphs (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). Coding is another word for evidence and the coding process provides evidence of a category or theme (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). There are two main types of coding - open coding and axial. The first step, open coding, is the process of applying labels without restrictions. The goal of open coding is to discover meaning in the coded phenomena. Axial coding then entails putting the open coded data back together in a way that makes connections among categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The open coding process required that I set aside the interview protocol, look at the data with a fresh non interview protocol biased eye and let the data tell their own story without allowing my predetermined thought process to influence the configuration of the coding process. This was not an easy task but if I were to truly embrace the inductive approach I claimed to be using, it was a necessary process to undertake.

A line-by-line analysis is often the first step in coding however, a researcher may choose to do a paragraph-by-paragraph or entire document analysis. I chose to code line by line. It took awhile to get into a rhythm with the coding process and it was, like transcribing, a slow process but after a few starts and stops I was able to go through all eighteen transcripts and code them. One struggle I had was that some phrases fit under more than one category such as "Her school friends became more important to her than attending the annual Harvest party." This phrase could have been labeled as "friends" or "cultural event." Whenever I had any doubt, I double labeled within the text of the transcript so the quote above was labeled as both "friends" and "cultural events".

Coding then leads to the creation of concepts. Concepts are, "conceptual labels placed on discrete happenings, events, and other instances of phenomena (Straus & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). Based upon the coding process I ended up with forty concepts (see appendix B). I then went through every page of all of the transcripts and marked the location of each specific concept. I created a form for that process and I refer to it as my Concept Location Form (see appendix C). Although it was time consuming, this form provided a tool that helped me to create an organizational structure that enabled me to locate the interviewee's responses to each specific concept. The next step was to summarize the results of each of the concepts. Using my Concept Location Form as a

guide, I documented each family's response to all the concepts on yet another form which I refer to as a Concept Summary Form (an abbreviated blank example can be found in appendix D). With the Concept Summary Form I first listed all of the interviewee's responses separately about each of the concepts and then I summarized their responses in aggregate. The summary combined all of the family's responses and enabled me to make comments such as, "Most families believed xyz" or "Only a few of the families experienced abc".

Concepts then lead to categories. Categories are a grouping or classification of the concepts (Straus and Corbin, 1990). Naming the concepts and the categories is at the discretion of the researcher (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). From the forty concepts I developed eight categories. Rossman and Rallis (2003) advise the researcher that creating categories is much like arranging clothes in one's closet. Clothes can be arranged any number of ways such as by color, by season, or type of clothing. There is not a right or wrong way to categorize; it is at the discretion of the owner of the clothes or, in the case of research, the researcher. I spent a fair amount of time arranging and rearranging the forty concepts in an effort to categorize them in a meaningful manner. Ultimately the eight categories I created from my concepts include; background information, external influences, parents and adoption, child, birth country/ birth family, parent(s) and child, discrimination and resources. I arrived at these categories almost as one comes up with words while playing scrabble; I arranged and rearranged the concepts in different configurations until I had groupings that made sense and did not leave any concepts unaccounted. Like any categorization exercise, the final structure maximized

between group differences among the concepts while minimizing the within group differences.

Developing a core category is the next step after whittling down data from individual words to concepts to categories. A core category is a category in which other categories cluster (ChangingMinds.org, retrieved 5/24). The core category "gives central meaning to the conclusions of the research and is often the 'holy grail' the researcher is seeking" (ChangingMinds.org, retrieved 5/24/10, p. 4). From the eight categories I developed two core categories. Developing two core categories from eight categories was easier than creating eight categories from forty categories, but it still involved arranging and rearranging of categories. The first core category includes, what I refer to as, the "main characters" of the data; White adoptive parents, Filipino and Korean born adoptees and discrimination. In addition to the "main character" core category, I developed a second core category I refer to as the "discrimination dialogue" category. The "discrimination dialogue" category describes how parents and adoptees respond to discriminatory comments individually and together.

Limitations

Although this study contributes to the knowledge of White adoptive parents' experiences with race related conversations with their Asian born children, several limitations are apparent. This study does not include the perspective of the adoptees; hence, the information presented is limited to the parent's perspective. I use the term "Asian born adoptees" throughout this study however, I actually only spoke to White adoptive parents who had children from the Philippines and Korea. Adoptive parents

who have children born in other Asian countries such as Vietnam or China may have very different experiences. Also, the parents I interviewed were from a small specific region within the United States which may also alter or impact the results. The final limitation is the small number of parents that were interviewed. The information learned from this study is potentially transferable, but not generalizable. Transferabilty refers to the extent to which findings from one sample can inform our understanding of another sample (Shenton, 2004). Generalizability is the extent to which the results from one sample can be applied to an entire population (Polit & Hungler, 1991).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to competent practice and ethical conduct. If a study is done in a competent manner, but does not meet ethical standards then is it not considered trustworthy (Rossman and Rallis, 2003). There are a number of steps that need to be taken in order to ensure trustworthiness of the data. For qualitative research, some of the strategies used to promote trustworthiness are low-inference descriptors, reflexivity, and participant feedback. The use of low-inference descriptors involves using descriptions or phrases that are very similar to the respondent's terminology. Low inference descriptors also involve the use of quotes which I utilized throughout chapter four. I discussed the concept of reflexivity in the beginning of this chapter but it is good for me to always be conscious of my potential bias and how that may affect the study. Participant feedback is another mechanism for enhancing trustworthiness of a study. For a few of the interviews I needed to go back to the respondents and ask for clarification of comments they had made. Each respondent seemed happy to clarify so I feel confident that the results

described in chapter four are accurate and truly reflect what the respondents were trying to convey.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

This study presented a unique opportunity to learn how White adoptive parents support their Asian born children in navigating issues of discrimination based on race, adoption and ethnicity. The literature review section documents how racism persists in the United States and is an issue for transracially adopted children. This qualitative research study utilized a case study approach in an effort to learn about the conversations that exist between White adoptive parents and their Korean and Filipino born children as related to race, ethnicity and adoption. Qualitative interviewing was used as the primary method for collecting data. Ultimately, the goal has been to develop recommendations that will be helpful to other White adoptive parents, their Asian born children and post adoption support workers.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

"It's easy to latch on to all of the commemorations but then to think of it as a race issue, you have to do a little bit more about that."
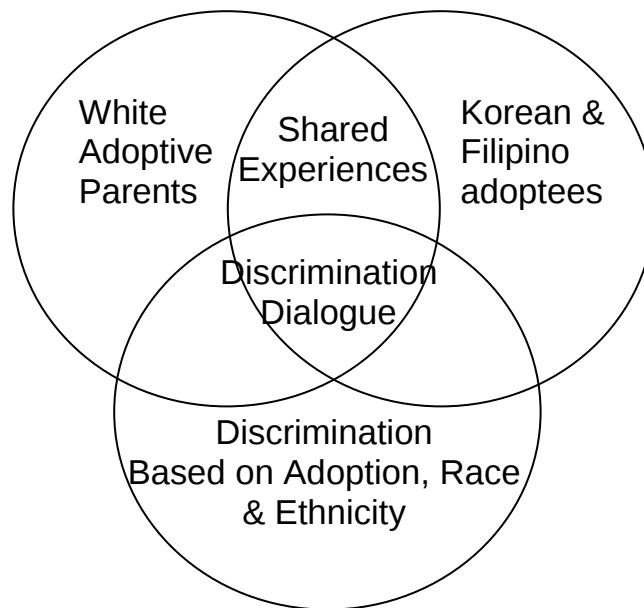
Adoptive parent

Introduction

This chapter offers an examination of the results of the interviews that were conducted during the winter of 2010 – 2011 with White adoptive parents of Korean and Philippine born children. The chapter begins with an explanation of the "key players." Key players include White adoptive parents, their Asian born children, and discrimination experienced by the children based upon their adoption, racial, and ethnic status. The shared experiences between children and parents are also included in this section (see Figure 4.1 below). After the key players have been described, the relationships among them are examined and described. Specifically, I address how parents and children talk about discrimination within the family and with the "perpetrators". Questions to be answered include: How do parents, on their own, respond to discrimination that stems from their child's adoption status, race, and/or ethnicity? How do children, on their own, respond to discrimination stemming from their adoption status, race, and/or ethnicity? How do parents respond to situations when they are taking the lead in conjunction with their children, how do children respond when they are taking the lead in conjunction with their parents, and what does a joint child parent response look like? All of these responses will be explained and highlighted with appropriate

quotes for each section. Figure 4.1 offers a graphic illustration of how the first part of

this chapter is framed.

Figure 4.1: The Relationship between White Adoptive Parents, their Asian Born
Children and Discrimination Based on Adoption, Race and Ethnicity

White Adoptive
Parents — Shared Experiences — Korean &
Filipino adoptees — Discrimination Dialogue — Discrimination
Based on Adoption, Race
& Ethnicity

<u>White Adoptive Parents</u>

As mentioned in chapter three, nine families participated in this study. Six

mothers and three fathers were interviewed and all of the parents were White. All but

one of the families were raising only adopted children. Most of the parents appeared to

be in their forties.   There are numerous topics that the interviewer and interviewee

explored that are pertinent primarily to the parents. The topic areas include community,

the adoption process, extended family, and philosophies parents have developed

regarding adoption. The following paragraphs describe the White adoptive parents in

regard to the topic areas. One important note before describing the parents: in an effort to

maintain the promise of anonymity I made to each of the parents, particularly for the minority of fathers who participated, I have decided to use the pronoun "she" for all of the parents and will identity all parents as either parents or mothers.

In an effort to get to know the interviewees and to understand some background information about their current situation, I asked the parents about the adoption process they experienced. This also gave them time to get comfortable and to get to know me before I launched into more serious topics such as race and discrimination. The next paragraph highlights some comments, insights, and concerns that parents had during the adoption process but by no means is exhaustive of all that they shared. I have chosen comments that are related to race and ones that had commonality across many families.

Nearly all of the respondents indicated they read many books on adoption as they prepared for the arrival of their child. They read adult books, and they purchased books they could read to their children about adoption. Another sentiment expressed by many parents was that, having been through unsuccessful, ongoing, and in some cases painful medical procedures to have a biological child, they were ready and wanting to be adoptive parents. Raising a child of a different racial and ethnic background was not a big concern; "We were ready to be parents….We didn't really think about if it was going to be black, white, purple, or green to tell you the truth." Another parent said, "I think by the time we got to adoption we were just running towards it, you know what I mean, no holds barred, you know what, I will just handle whatever comes." One couple looked at adopting a child from India, but one of the parents was not comfortable raising a child with skin that dark. Another parent was not sure she could love a non-biological child. "I always wondered if I could love an adopted child, nothing to do with race cause you

know I wanted my blood, and that went away like instantly, but that was my fear. Going

through the process it was my fear, paying all that money and seeing pictures of him, I

was scared, but it went away instantly."

I also asked the respondents about the racial make up of their extended family and

how welcoming they were. Most came from all White immediate families, but over half

of the families had members who had adopted or married someone who was biracial,

African American, Native American, Thai, Korean, or Filipino. The Thai extended

family member made it a point to make sure the kids and their parents were aware of race

related issues he had experienced as a child and about issues he anticipated his nieces and

nephews might experience. The parent seemed appreciative of his involvement and said,

"He'll be able to comment when I am unable to have an impact."

Several or extended family members did not understand why the respondents

were adopting outside of the United States; "Why not American? You could go through

DSS," or "Why are you going to another country when we have children here that need

homes?" One family member worried about the adoption process; "My father's reaction

was one of concern about the adoption process. At the time, there were a lot of stories in

the news about adoptions that had gone bad or people on the take…but there never was a

concern about adopting a child of Asian descent or anything like that." A couple of the

families did have to address inappropriate comments from extended family members --

their parents. According to one interviewee, "My parents went from saying horrible

things about Asians, and as they evolved, they still said horrible things about the Asians

'but the Koreans are different', so there was that migration." Another similar comment

was, "We took my in-laws to a Chinese restaurant just to expose them to an Asian

culture, and my father-in-law just went into I would say, bigoted poke fun mode."

Despite some initial concerns, comments, and questions by some extended family members, all families reported that overall their children were loved, embraced, and accepted by extended family members: "Our kids were embraced like they were biological and White, and there never was anything from our family racially" and "They were just so thrilled from day one" and "My mother-in-law adored them. I mean those were her grand children from the minute, they were at the airport."

During the course of each interview, the parents spontaneously shared thoughts and philosophies they have developed about adoption over the years as adoptive parents. There was not a prompt from me for these comments but they emerged in just about every interview. I think it is important to capture some of the parental thoughts about adoption because it offers a context in which the adoptees are living. The following paragraph summarizes and pulls together some of the shared thoughts and beliefs the parents had about adoption.

Many of the parents verbalized that adoption was not part of their original vision for having a family. "It's a different image, it's not exactly what we were thinking, but on balance, of course, it works really well." Another parent shared how adoption is a solution based on loss; "I think there is a certain loss of culture. I think there is an inevitable problem that's going to be created, and I see it in [my son] as he tries to figure out who he is. But I think what I always try to say is, it's not like biological; White children have issues too." A couple of the mothers expressed discomfort with the term "birth mother." One mother stated she would talk to her son while he was asleep and say

"birth mother" so that she could get used to saying it, and in time she could talk directly to him and say "birth mother".

One comment shared by a number of the parents was in regards to adolescent behavior. They said it was hard to know what behaviors were adoption related and which ones were just normal teenage rebellion. One interviewee said it was helpful having a cousin with children of a similar age. She could then understand that much of her son's behavior mirrored her cousin's children's behavior hence easing (although not eradicating) her concern that her son's behavior was adoption related. A couple of the parents mentioned that they forget their children were born in another country, "…you don't see Korea, you don't see Manila, you don't see Cebu, you just see your child." One final comment that I thought was interesting came from only one interviewee and that had to do with political location. "We appear to be conservative, we are probably moderate, but we kind of transcend into this liberal culture that I am not sure would have embraced us or would have seen us as moderate people if we did not have these kids who were adopted from overseas."

This section has focused on the White adoptive parents. It looked at the adoption process, the make up and support of extended family, and parent's thoughts about adoption. The next section turns its attention toward the adopted children.

Korean and Filipino Born Adoptees

The nine families interviewed had a total of twenty six children. Ten of the children were Korean and twelve were Filipino. Nine were males and thirteen were females. There were three other adopted children represented in these families -- one

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White female and two White males adopted from El Salvador. In addition, there was one

biological female among all of the families. Most of the children are currently in their

late teens but they range in age from eight to twenty six.   The age at which the children

were adopted ranges from three months to fourteen years old. Table 4.1 offers a more

thorough explanation of some of the demographics of the adoptees.

Table 4.1: Demographics of the Adoptees

	Korean	Filipino	Male	Female	Current age	Age at adoption	Other children
	X		X		15	5 months	White f, adoptee
		X	X		18	1 year	
		X		X	16	1 year	
	X			X	18	4.5 months	1 bio f, age 16
	X		X		8	7 months	
	X		X		18	3 months	
	X			X	16	5 months	
	X		X		17	4.5 months	
	X		X		26	18 months	
		X		X	22	3.5 years	
		X		X	19	3 months	
	X		X		14	10 months	
	X			X	12	8 months	
	X			X	8	6 months	
		X		X	24	8 years	
		X		X	16	13 months	
		X	X		14	15 months	
		X		X	Deceased	14 years	2 older adopted boys from El Salvador
		X		X	22	8.5 years	
		X		X	19	22 months	
		X		X	17	5 months	
		X	X		15	2 years	
Totals	10K	12P	9M	13F			22 K & F adoptees + 4 other children not included in this study

In regards to the children's birth family, there was not an extensive amount of information on any of the birth parents; particularly the birth fathers. However, most children, according to their parents, seemed more interested in their birth mothers. Most of the adoptees had just tidbits of information about their birth parents such as, she liked to read, she was a dancer, he was a drug dealer, he worked overseas, the child was named after his birth father, she liked roses, she didn't tell anyone she was pregnant, and she abandoned her children. Some knew that their birth mothers stayed in a home for unwed mothers, and some knew their birth parents did not have an ongoing loving relationship. A number of the adoptive parents had information that the birth parents believed in the importance of education. One birth mother was believed to be killed; "There was a massacre in a village the village where she (the child) was found and she was found underneath a woman and we are assuming that woman is her birth mom." One child at age six or seven worried about what his birth mother would think of him; "Once he had a big emotional break down saying that he hoped his birth mother would be proud of him or he was afraid he birth mother wouldn't be proud of him." A couple of the children wanted to know how tall their birth parents were so they could project how tall they would be. One young adoptee was worried that her birth mother might find her and take her away, "You know she always wanted this reassurance that she could meet her but she could still stay with us, 'but I just want to meet her, what if she wants me to stay with her?'"

Some of the parents provided information about their child's birth country. Parents who had adopted children from Korea spoke about how Korea is engaging in more intra-country adoptions and that international adoption has decreased. Those who

do adopt from Korea can now travel to Korea and bring back their child, which was not the case when most of the interviewed parents were adopting their children. The norm was that the children were escorted on the plane ride to the United States and then given to the adoptive parents at the airport. Another norm in Korea was for the orphans to be placed in foster homes rather than orphanages which is more the norm in the Philippines. One parent of Filipino girls who were adopted at eight and early teens worried about the supervision they received in the orphanage; *"They used to take in homeless people, the nuns wanted to spread Christ love, and some homeless man would show up on their doorstep and need a place to sleep, and they would let him sleep at the orphanage, with two nuns supervising 20 children, so there was a lot of questionable behavior."* Also in the Philippines, a couple of the parents talked about single birth mothers being ostracized and how there is much shame associated with giving birth out of wedlock. According to one parent, "they are very ashamed that this has happened, that they have to give up their kid or run away from that, and they might be ashamed that they have to keep it a secret."

There was only one mention of a disrupted adoption and that came from one of the parents who adopted from the Philippines. Disruption is defined as; "..the failure or breakdown of an adoptive child's placement" (Coakley & Berrick, p. 101, 2008). A disrupted adoption invariably means the child leaves the home and is sent to yet another location which may or may not end up being a permanent placement for the child. The mother stated her older Filipino daughter was actually first adopted by a family in Boston but the adoption was disrupted. At age fourteen, after a year with her first family, the girl was adopted by a second family, one of the parents I interviewed. This was the first disrupted adoption the Philippines had experienced, so the government considered

closing their older children's adoption program. The interviewee said she and her husband wrote to the inter-country adoption board in an effort to prevent the older adoption program from closing. "We sent a picture of [B] and said how happy we were and don't feel bad about making the first mistake. You sent her halfway around the world and you were only off by 100 miles!" Much to their delight, the program was not closed.

I talked with the parents about their children's birth identity and their adoptive identity and discussed how the two are obviously different. For children who are adopted transracially and transnationally, as were all of the children in this study, the disconnect between their birth and adoptive identities is more significant than those children who are adopted domestically and intra-racially. I specifically asked parents how they thought their children navigated those two identities. The following paragraph summarizes the parent's perspective on how their children manage those two identities, if having two identities is an issue, which identity is more salient for each of their children, and if that changed over time.

One parent seemed to feel that having two identities was not an issue for her children; "I think my kids have assimilated to the culture that they're in. And even though they know they're Asian, the mirror that they see back at them is mostly White." A couple of the parents said they don't see Korea or the Philippines when they see their child, they just see their child. Another parent said, "The minute you adopt you just always know there are two lives here." The age of the child currently and age at the time of adoption seemed to play a role if the child identified more with her birth culture or her adoptive culture. Those in high school seemed to want to blend in as much as possible

and most fore fronted their adoptive identity. Some of the children were able to say they are American citizens but they were born in Asia. One adoptee told his parent, "I'm more comfortable in America, but I'm not completely comfortable there, and I'm not comfortable in Korea either." This same adoptee's parent said, "I think he just feels pretty much American, and I think that people see him as Asian and that bothers him…I think he feels people initially treat him as Asian until he talks. People who know him relate to him as American." Another child who was of high school age seemed to blend her identities together, "My daughter [M] will often say that she is Irish and Dad's German and she's Filipino so she sees herself as a mix, so I think she really likes that heterogeneity." For the youth who were out of high school, parents reported that they seemed to be more cognizant of their birth identity. One parent related, "As he's gotten older, he's more aware that other people see him as the other." Another parent of an out of high school adoptee stated, "I think [A] is searching for an identity… he is trying to figure out who the hell he is, and he knows who he is not." Another parent referring to her daughter stated, "Once she got out of the house and into college and made her own friends she always seemed to migrate to the immigrant community." A parent of children adopted at an older age said, "For years I would describe them as lost when it came to distinguishing the two [identities] because they had no personal information about their birth family. It seemed to affect them more than the other kids, but it could also be that they were there [in their birth countries] longer, so they remembered more and so could miss more."

Siblings seem to play an important role in the lives of the adoptees. All of the families, except one, had more than one child. The child without siblings wished at times

for a sibling, but as he has gotten older his response is often, "Being the only child pays off once again." In most other families the sibling connections seemed strong to the parents although they have waxed and waned over the years. In one family, the older brother pulled away from his younger sibling once he hit his teen years, but his parent felt that was normal adolescent development. The boy is now older, and the two siblings are once again very close. When these same two children were younger, the parent related, "When they were little, the teachers used to tell us that he would hold her hand and walk her to class and give her a kiss, and she would go to class, and then he would go to his class…Every milestone that could have been scary for her, he was there holding her hand, walking her through it." The younger sister is very loyal to her brother and will never betray him. He was her protector and provided her with security, and it seems that is embedded in their relationship.   "My kids have each other, so they look at each other, and they see a reflection of themselves in each other. They share a commonality in each other that I think reinforces who they are." Another strong sibling group was enhanced because they were the only two children on their street when they were younger, which forced them to spend time together. In another family, years ago when the children were younger and new children were being adopted into the family, there were adjustments that needed to be made. One child said, "You know I like the big girl but when is she going home to her own house?" The children also asked about another new arrival in their home wanting to know, "when is the baby going to her next home?'

I asked the parents about their children's friends. I wondered if most of the friends were also adopted and of Asian descent or if they were primarily White children. Most of the youth had a wide circle of friends although in some cases, the parents were

not always pleased with the choice of friends. Two thirds of the families indicated their children had a close friend while they were growing up who was Asian and most often adopted as well. However, there were some children who only had White friends. This may be in part because most of the families lived in White communities. One parent stated, "I do wish she had somebody else in her grade who looked like her."

I asked about the schools the children attended and their school experiences as the children grew up. Most of the children attended predominantly White schools, which makes sense since most families lived in predominantly White communities. One adoptee attended a school that had a boarding population of Korean students. Initially there was not a strong bond for the adoptee with the Korean boarding students, but in time, the bond grew, and he became accepted by the non-adopted Korean students. In regards to handling discrimination that the children experienced at school or on the school bus, the schools seemed to have procedures in place to handle the issues. For example, one had an anti-bullying program already established called TIGER so when something happened the students knew exactly what to do. A couple of the parents mentioned there was a class discussion after an event occurred that did not identify the alleged offender or targeted student; "It made [L] feel better that it was not just brushed over."   There were a few occasions when the principal was involved because of a teacher referral or because the child felt comfortable going directly to the principal.

Another aspect of the school experience mentioned by a number of the parents was in regards to a family tree exercise that was invariably presented in third grade. In order to complete the assignment, children needed to present information about their biological family. This is a difficult task for adopted children because most know very

little about their biological family. Referring to the teacher, one parent said, "She's standing in the front of the class and she says you all are going to do the family tree exercise except you [A] because you don't have a family." In regards to this same exercise, another parent did not know how to advise her child about the assignment, and she then stated, "The teachers don't know what to do either." On another note, one parent felt her daughter's adoption status was not taken into account by the school; "I don't want to accuse the school of missing things with [her daughter] or not being aware of things but you sometimes feel, she's adopted you know, and I have to remind the school…" Another parent said, "It's hard because you are not at school with them to know what is going on."

The topic of height was not specifically addressed, yet it wove itself into the conversation for many of the respondents. Four stated being short was an issue for their children. It did not matter if they were male or female. One of the boys loved going back to his birth country because the girls were shorter than him, even in heels! One mother stated that her son was always the shortest in the class, and he really had a hard time with that. The girls' height limited their options in dancing and joining the Navy Nursing Corps.

Most of the children were of dating age, and the topic of dating across racial lines was asked. Most of the youth who lived in predominantly White neighborhoods were either not dating or primarily dating White peers. "All the girls my son has dated have been White, light haired, light eyed." Another parent stated, "I think he is gravitating toward Asian females. Before he had no choice because there weren't any in town, I mean there were a few but not many, but he dated his White classmates, but nothing

serious." Now the son is out of the house and has started dating an Asian woman and the parent stated, "I think that is where he is going to find his comfort zone." On the other hand, two parents reported that their sons and daughters do not find Asian men or women attractive, and, therefore, they are not interested in dating someone from Asia. One family that lives in a diverse community indicated that the children have dated across racial lines and that they are more drawn to teens of color. However, this parent's children had dated someone from a White family and the parent was concerned; "I was a nervous wreck because I knew they were dating someone from a family that was very racist. That happened two or three times." One final comment came from a parent who wondered how the parents of his/her children's friends reacted when meeting their children for the first time, "I always wonder what it's like to be [P] for the first time she is taken over to someone's house; like has the boy told the parents 'oh P is Korean' or is it just [child's name], she's this and this and this and then she walks in the house, and they are taken aback… I'd always like to be a fly on the wall."

I asked the parents what they thought their children's views were on adoption. To the chagrin of the parents, some of the children stated they were glad their adoptive parents did not adopt any White children or have any biological children. They were worried that those children would be loved more than they were loved. The parents were clear that was not possible, but the response by one sibling group was, "How would we know, we have never seen you with anyone else other than us?" The parents indicated their children had a range of emotions in regards to how they felt about being adopted. Some were angry, some sad, and some did not care. The few who indicated they did not care were in their teen years and very embedded in high school. A couple of the children

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seemed fixated on their birth mothers and their birth experience and asked questions such as, "Did she hold me, how long did she hold me, what time was I born?" One older teen expressed confusion as to why adoptees get angry at their birth mothers, "As far as I can tell, it seems that mostly birth mothers are poor and it seems to me most of the adopted kids I know, they are in really good families -- really rich families -- so it seems to me it just worked out." This same young adult at age six or seven broke down and said he hoped his birth mother would be proud of him.

It seemed evident that most of the children went through different developmental stages about how they felt about being adopted. One older teen recently looked at her adoption file and noticed things that had not been important to her in the past, such as her birth mother's signature. Some of the children expressed a desire to look like their adoptive parents and to be White. They wanted to fit in more with their peers or to be "undercover", as one parent related. But their appearance and their adoption status made that more difficult. One adoptee felt he was always being stared at and that was upsetting to him. One final comment about adoptees and their feeling about being adopted comes from a child who is now a young adult. When she was very young, she worried that her birth mother would find her, "She used to be very concerned that her birth mother would find her, 'what happens if my birth mother finds me?' or she always had a desire to see to find her birth mother and to meet her birth mother, and she would say, 'but I just want to meet her, what if she wants me to stay with her?' You know she always wanted this reassurance that she could meet her but she could still stay with us. She wanted everybody to live in the same house eventually, so it was like she wanted to know everything, but she didn't want anything to change."

<u>The Shared Relationship between White Adoptive Parents and their Children</u>

White adoptive parents and their children have a shared relationship which is depicted in Figure 4.1. The shared relationship highlights events and experiences parents and children shared together. In this study, the shared experiences include the community in which the family lives, cultural events parents and children engaged in together, and return trips to the child's birth country.

In regards to the communities in which the families live, most lived and continue to live in predominantly White communities. The respondents indicated where their children grew up was "lily white," "sheltered," or that it was like "living in a bubble." In regards to the lack of diversity in their community, one parent said, "it's unfortunate," and another stated, "I do wonder what it will be like when they go out into the world." One family considered living in a more diverse community; "…for these kids, it's better to be in the city where they are going to go to school with kids that look like them, but we didn't know the city." Another parent said, " I know that they have to feel at some level alone." One of the parents indicated they were concerned about the lack of diversity in their community, and this family did eventually move to a more diverse town. Regarding their move, the parent stated, "It makes me very conscious of how I wish we had moved years ago." One final comment by a parent in regard to their community was, "Another parent said, "they are a majority in our home, but once they walk out the door, they are a minority."

All of the families talked about the importance of connecting their children with their children's birth culture. Most participated in cultural events sponsored by the adoption agency or participated in international days at their schools, attended picnics,

went to dance shows, attended Filipino Independence Day events in Boston, and read books about adoption and race together. Many of the children tired of the cultural events as they got older and preferred to engage in activities they had going on in their own lives such as participating in sports or other school based events. The following comment was echoed by many of the parents, "When she was younger, we went to a lot of different cultural events, but as she got older, she was more interested in other things such as sports or being with her school friends." One activity that many families mentioned that the kids did not grow out of was cooking and eating food from the child's birth country.

All of the families were open to going back to their child's birth country, but only a few of the children had gone back. Children in one family were more interested in going to Disney World than their birth country. One family put off a return trip because they were worried their daughter might run away while she was there. One parent went back with the one child who was interested. The families that had not gone back had children who had no interest in visiting their birth country so the parents followed their lead. For those that did go back, it sounded like it had a powerful impact and was a significant experience for the adoptees. One wrote a letter to his birth mother to leave in a file letting her know he was not mad at her and that he hoped to meet her someday. One parent described the trip as, "a loving connection to their culture." The trip seemed to help instill a sense of cultural pride in the young people, "He didn't know what that culture was living here, but when we took him there, he saw it and loved it…. My son had national pride after the trip." That same parent said the trip was "magical" for her son and that it "got into his soul". That the Filipino women were shorter than him, even in heels, may have added to his pleasure of the trip! One of the parents wanted the trip

back to be an awareness of what their life may have been like had they not been adopted, "You know, for my kids, I wanted them to see the poverty – I wanted them to be able to appreciate what their life could've been like…" Returning to her orphanage was such an emotionally overwhelming experience for one adoptee, she actually passed out in the courtyard of her orphanage upon arrival. A group of adoptive families who had all been traveling together were sitting around eating and talking one evening. One of the parents asked the adoptees how it was for them being in their birth country. All of the youth sighed and indicated it was great being surrounded by people who looked like them. Referring to the trip back, one parent reflected, "This is how my kids spend their entire life because I was the one White guy in a sea of Filipinos, and they come home, and they are the one dark skinned kid in a sea of White." This same sentiment and awareness was expressed by other parents who had returned to their child's birth country as well.

The next section introduces the topic of race, racism, and white privilege and then looks at specific examples of how the adopted children were discriminated against based upon not only race but adoption and ethnicity as well. That section is followed by how parents and children responded to the discriminatory questions, comments and actions that targeted the children.

<u>Discrimination Based on Race, Adoption, and Ethnicity</u>

Due to the lack of available information in the literature, I went into the interviews looking for examples of discrimination that were based primarily on race. What I found was that some parents reported race was not an issue for their children. I also found that the issues that did arise were about adoption, ethnicity, and race. Many

parents were also very forthcoming about their own positionality in regards to racism and

recognized their white privilege. In looking at race and adoption, one parent said, "The

challenge is the racial and the adoption, and I think the adoption thing is harder for the

kids to come to grips with than the racially different. That's from my perspective now.

From their perspective it might not be." Since I did not interview the adoptees, I do not

have a response to that comment, but I feel it is an interesting question worth pursuing in

the future (see chapter 5). A number of the parents were vociferous about stating they

are not a minority and therefore do not know what it is like to experience racial

discrimination, "We can not understand what it is like to be singled out because of our

race," "I don't have a frame of reference for discrimination; I've never felt it" and "I've

seen how far minorities have come in this country, so we talk first hand, not that I have

ever been discriminated against."

There were a number of parents who reported that race was not an issue for their

children. They made comments such as; "I don't think it has been the issue for them," "It

doesn't seem to be an obstacle to him being Asian," "We didn't have anything to respond

to" and "We didn't see racism being a problem. You deal with it when it happens." For

some of the parents, it was not always easy for the parent to comment on the impact

racism has played in the life of their child because communication between parent and

child was not always that extensive. "It doesn't seem to have been an issue for the other

two, but I don't know about [J]. I don't get a lot of info from him, so I really don't

know," "He doesn't bring it home much," "Maybe it [discrimination] happens to them, I

just don't know", and "I'm sure it [being Asian in a White dominated society] did bother

her; I never saw it though." I asked another parent if they could shadow their child all

day long would there be race related issues that came up that she is not hearing about and the response was, "I would say there is stuff that comes up that is race related that I think because our kids are so assimilated into their environments and they are seen as kind of EuroAsian, but you are really not, that people will take the liberty to say and do things because there's a comfort level with our kids that's there." Two similar comments by other parents are as follows, "I think people are more accepting of people adopting from Asian countries" and "I think as Asian kids, they can fit into a community a lot easier than the African Americans can unfortunately maybe not by some middle school or high school kids but in society in general. People somehow treat them differently; that's just my experience." There was one family that had children from Asia and Central America and the darker skinned children from Central America seemed to have more race related issues than their Asian born siblings, but that was not a question I asked directly, so I can not say that definitively. This is another interesting question/comment that I will pick up again in chapter 5.zs

Examples of Discrimination

Adoption

I have divided specific examples of discrimination into three categories: adoption, race, and ethnicity. This section looks at examples of discrimination based on adoption, and these examples fall into two categories: comments that were directed at the adoptee and comments that were directed at the adoptive parents. Comments the adoptees had to handle would often times revolve around language such as, "I'm going to go home and show my report card to my REAL mother" which was quipped by one young girl to her

adopted friend. Another adoptee heard from a classmate, "You're adopted because your

real family didn't want you." Other children were outed about being adopted when they

had to work on the long-standing Family Tree exercise often presented in third grade. A

couple of the adoptees were told in front of the whole class they did not have to do the

exercise because they did not have a family. Not all of the teachers were that harsh, but

the exercise presented a challenge for a number of the children, "The teacher ended up

segregating my daughter from the rest of the group by singling her out as an adopted

kid." Parents had their own share of comments that they had to field from friends,

family, and strangers alike. "People are really quite bold with the questions they ask"

was a comment made by one parent. A question that parents frequently heard which may

fall under the heading of "stupid questions" rather than discrimination was; "How much

did the baby cost?" The only good news with this question is that it was usually asked

when the child was not cognitively able to comprehend the question. Other questions

parents often heard from strangers were, "Are they real siblings,?" "Is that your real

child?" and "Whose child is that?" One parent while attending a soccer game with her

newly arrived infant son was asked by a stranger, as she leaned into the stroller to look at

him, "Does he have SARS?" (severe acute respiratory syndrome).   The next section

looks at discrimination that is based on race related issues.

Race

        Recognizing that many of the parents did not see race as an issue for their

children, it should not be surprising that the number of examples of discrimination based

on race were somewhat limited. Those that were mentioned primarily centered on issues

of their children being considered and classified as a model minority. The phrase "model minority" was not used by any of the parents but their descriptions fit with the definition of model minority. Asians are assumed to be smart and to do well academically but that was not true for all of the children of the interviewees. Many of the adoptees had to address the high expectation teachers and others had of them in regards to being a good student. One parent said, "I think he suffers from some of the positive prejudice. People assume he is going to be really good at math, that he's really academic oriented, and he isn't." Another parent stated, "People thought because my kids were Asian they were brilliant academically" which was true for one of children but not so for the other child. One child lamented to her parent, 'everyone expects me to be good in math."

A couple of the parents mentioned that Martin Luther King Day (MLK) was often discussed at school, and it brought up questions for their children that I feel are worth mentioning. One child wanted to know if he would have had to sit at the back of the bus. Another child wanted to know if he was Black. One parent mentioned the talk around MLK made her child uncomfortable, "…they all looked to her as if the only nonWhite kid in the class was going to know everything about MLK." One other issue that came up for one child was based on her skin color. While on the playground one day during recess a boy announced, "Nobody play with [x]. Don't touch her. She has germs that make her skin black."

One of the older adoptees shared a story with her mother that happened the week-end before I conducted the interview. The adoptee was at a local bar celebrating a close friend's birthday. While they were at the bar, there was someone ranting and raving about how he hates all Asians and was making ongoing derogatory comments about people

from Asia. Unfortunately this was not the first "big broad based slam against Asians"

that this young woman had experienced.

Another issue mentioned by some of the parents was the exoticization of their

daughters. "The biggest problem I've seen with my girls is from adult men. They tend to

look at them as exotic, beautiful, sexual beings and have no compunction, older men in

particular, about saying things to them even when I am standing there," shared one

parent. Another parent was conscious of how he was viewed as he walked with his adult

daughter and wondered if people actually thought his daughter was his girlfriend, which

made him self conscious and uncomfortable. Another parent shared that her husband is

uncomfortable sometimes because he too wonders what others are thinking when he is

out with his daughters. This same parent said, "He had them out for pizza once, and

some old man in the corner is like 'lucky you, you got two of them' or something like

that." The next section shifts from examples of discrimination based on race to examples

of discrimination based on ethnicity.

Ethnicity

The parents I interviewed recounted examples of discrimination that were

centered on other children making fun of their children based on their appearance with

the eyes being a central focus. Being called "Chinese eyes," "Chink eyes," or "slit eyes"

seemed to happen frequently.   One parent said that when her child was in second grade a

class mate kept saying, "Open your eyes as wide as you can." When her daughter

responded that her eyes were open as wide as they could be and that's just how they are,

the classmate asked, "Why aren't your eyes wider?" Another child had a classmate tell

her that she shouldn't even bother being in school because she will never make it since she is Chinese. Of course she wasn't Chinese, but the classmate never took the time to figure that out.

Parents shared that their children were often identified as being from the wrong ethnic group, and this was an issue for many of the children. "People tend to like put them all in one big melting pot because they can't figure out where they come from, and they don't want to take the time to be sensitive about, 'can I ask where you are from?'. They just want to name it, you're Korean or something like that and they don't have a clue." Referring to her son, one mother said, "I know he gets a little bit of being mistaken for Chinese which drives him insane, that really bothers him a lot." None of the parents I interviewed had children adopted from China, yet the majority were called Chinese, although not all in a pleasant sort of way. According to one of the parents, "Most people can not tell the difference between Japanese, Chinese, Korean, or Filipinos." One adoptee who worked with a friend who was also Asian was often confused with his Asian co-worker, so they two decided they would switch clothes and when [X] was called [Y] would respond and vice versa. His parent explained, "He just thinks it's a riot that people can't tell them apart. It makes him mad as well, but he also thinks it's pretty funny." Another comment that came up highlighted someone's lack of geographic prowess. The parent was asked if Korea was in China!

This section has highlighted some of the discrimination that adoptees have experienced based upon being adopted, their race, and ethnicity. The examples of discrimination are obviously based on the parent's perspective; hence if the adoptees were asked the same questions, it would be unclear the degree of overlap that would

exist. It is evident that all the parents care about their children, but developmentally most adolescents pull away from their parents and engaged in less communication than when they were younger. Because children who are transracially and transnationally adopted are juggling more potential risk factors than their non-adopted peers or their intra-racially adopted peers, the lack of communication or awareness of what is going on in the child's life is not too surprising. The following section gets at the heart of this dissertation which is how parents and children navigate the tricky waters of responding to the discriminatory comments that were highlighted in the previous section. But, one final quote before leaving this section. I found the following quote to be shocking and almost too hard to believe, but I know the mother was sincere. I feel the following incident shows just how far we have not come in regards to embracing diversity! One family had recently moved to a new town with their adopted children. While attending a 4th of July celebration on the town commons, the interviewee ran into the realtor who had sold them their home. "I made a comment about how welcoming [the town] was and how much we enjoyed being there and the realtor said, 'oh, it's a lovely community, see we let you people in.'"

<center>Parent and Child Responses to Discrimination</center>

So far, I have discussed the relevant background and experiences of the White adoptive parents, the Korean and Filipino born adoptees, and the discrimination the adopted children experienced. I described the White adoptive parents based on why they decided to adopt, the adoption process, their extended family, and the thoughts that they shared about adoption. The Korean and Filipino adoptees were highlighted by discussing their birth family, their birth country, their friends, their school, their thoughts on being

transracially adopted, and their sense of self through the lens of their adoptive parents. The experiences and events that overlap between parents and children such as community, cultural activities they participated in, and what it was like to go back to their birth country (for those who did) were also described. And finally, specific examples of discrimination based on adoption, race, and ethnicity experienced by the families were described. The next section looks at how discrimination overlaps with the parents and the adoptees and how parents respond to discrimination, how the adoptees respond, and how they respond together. Figure 4.2 offers an outline of this next section.

Figure 4.2: Parent Child Discrimination Response

PARENT CHILD
DISCRIMINATION RESPONSE

Key: Parent   Co-Response   Child
         Response   Response   Response

Parent   Parent/Child   Joint   Child/Parent   Child
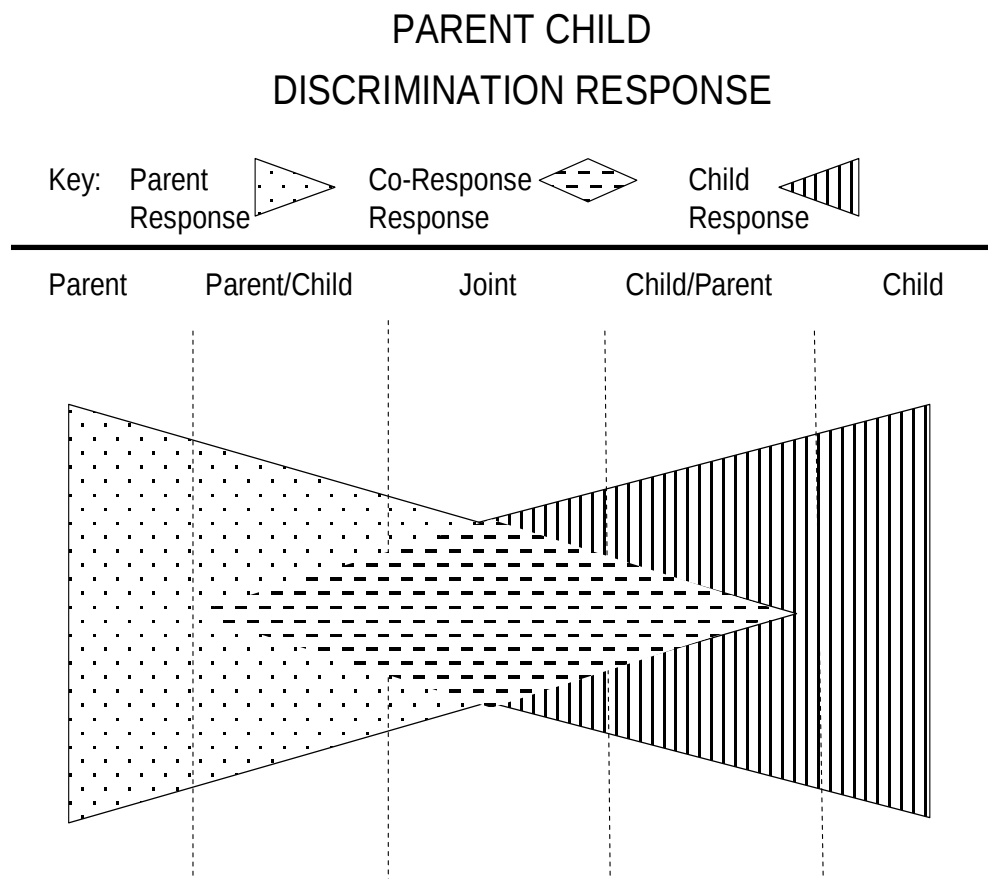
Figure 4.2 is a subset of figure 4.1 and refers to the three sections of the circle diagram in which "Discrimination Dialogue" is written. This figure is known as the discrimination dialogue diagram. There are five columns within the diagram with each column representing different ways in which families respond to discrimination. Reading figure 4.2 from left to right, the first column refers to parents responding on their own to discrimination. The three sections in the middle, represented by the diamond, refer to parents and adoptees co-responding to discriminatory situations. The first of these three sections has the parent taking the lead, but with child involvement. The center column represents parents and children responding together, and to the right of the center column refers to children taking the lead against discrimination, but with parental involvement. The final column on the far right refers to the child responding to discrimination completely on her own. There was a temptation to place a timeline at the bottom of the diagram starting with the adoptee's childhood on the left and ending with their adulthood on the right, but the responses by the parents did not fit into a linear or a progressive model. My intent is to display how discrimination was responded to and by whom.

This first section looks at how parents alone responded to discriminatory issues that arose. There seemed to be four main groups of people that the parents were responding to: extended family, the school, other parents/friends, and strangers. A number of parents said that comments they heard left them speechless because they were not expecting them or because the comments were so egregious. One parent said she practiced ahead of time things she might say to people, and another parent stated that she read a fair amount about how to side step derogatory comments and how to educate people. Another parent mentioned how the discriminatory comments became more

awkward for her once her children were cognitively old enough to understand what was being said. On a similar note a parent stated, "I tried never to be upset with anyone in front of my child because I felt that somehow given their developmental phases they would think that somehow they had done something wrong, they were at fault, they were the cause of upset..." One other comment came from a parent who shared "You don't want to keep saying 'I've got to armor myself' but that's what I needed to do."

In regards to family members, the parents often had to be very confrontive. One parent said they needed to buffer their child's environment; hence they had to have very candid conversation with their family members about appropriate and acceptable language. Another parent shared that before their first adopted child came home, a group of family members had dinner at an Asian restaurant. When her father-in-law started making inappropriate comments about the staff of the restaurant her husband spoke up and nixed the negative comments immediately. According to the interviewee, "My husband said, 'this is what your grandchild is going to look like so think about that' and that was the end of it.'"

Strangers seemed to have no problems asking adoptive parents inappropriate and intrusive questions. The parents had a variety of techniques they employed when responding to questions such as, "How much did the baby cost?" or "What's wrong with her?" Sometimes parents would try to educate the stranger ('Are they biologically related? No. Are they brother and sister? Yes.') but one parent said after a while, it got exhausting. Sometimes the parents just needed to move away from the offender. After a stranger asked a parent if her baby had SARS, the mother moved away from the offender because she said she didn't want to be angry. One of the parents said she tried to employ

humor whenever possible because she didn't want to feel bad after interacting with someone she didn't know. Another parent was shocked by some of the sexually oriented comments she heard while out and about with her older daughters. She would often say to the offender, "The mother is right here."

Not surprisingly, the parents had interactions with the schools their children attended from time to time. The Family Tree exercise, as mentioned previously, was mentioned by more than one parent as being problematic. More than one teacher singled out the adopted child in front of the class, creating embarrassing situations for some of the children (one student was happy not to have to do the assignment!). The parents spoke to the teachers and one indicated she was quite angry with the teacher but was able to work it out so that her child could do a variation of the assignment. Another parent was upset that her child had been outed about being adopted but having spoken to the teacher felt the teacher was doing her best. "I understand her intentions were one of inclusiveness, and she didn't realize how it was going to play out. I can't take her to task for that. I just can't. I can't make her feel bad about something that she was trying to do that she thought was a good thing." The parent of one child who was being teased at school stated, "...sometimes you feel like you are selling out if you're not being more vigilant or advocating. I don't want to accuse the school of missing things with Mary or not being aware of things, but you sometimes feel, she's adopted you know and I have to remind the school."

A couple of the parents mentioned talking with parents of an offending classmate. Both indicated it was not an easy call, but intervention was needed and a phone call was placed. The phone call seemed to handle the situation for both families. Another parent

choose not to talk with the parent of the child who said, "chinky eyes, chinky eyes" to her son. "We certainly did not confront the person who did it. We treated it as ignorant parents that created an ignorant child." Another parent was asked by a co-worker, "Why didn't you get an American?" The parent responded in what she thought was a joking manner, "Oh, we wanted to make sure he was smart" only to have the other person respond with an understanding nod!

Many of the parents said the comments and questions they experienced caught them off guard, and they sometimes stumbled over their responses, often wishing they had responded differently when they thought about the situation in retrospect. Most parents used a variety of techniques and approaches when addressing discriminatory issues that targeted their children. Parents tended to confront adult offenders directly, particularly if it was a family member. Learning how to respond to some of the more common questions and making an effort to respond in an educational manner was a task many of the adoptive parents embraced. "Are they real siblings?' was responded to by many parents by saying, 'We say biological rather than real' or "Yes, they are siblings but no, they are not biologically related." This technique of educating took patience and energy which sometimes waned for the adoptive parents over time. If other children were making the negative comments, the parents often spoke to the child's parents or to school personnel. Despite their interventions, one parent said, "Sometimes I feel at a loss. There's really no way to protect your kids… from what they hear and experience out in the mixed world we have."

The middle three columns of the discrimination dialogue diagram represent parents and children co-responding to discrimination. This section starts with an

explanation of how parents take the lead when addressing discriminatory issues, followed by parents and children co-responding, and ending with children taking the lead.

When parents took the primary lead in conjunction with their children while addressing issues that came up for their children based on adoption race or ethnicity, it involved preparing their child for what might happen, an in-the-moment modeling or an after-the-fact conversation. Many of the parents tried to explain to their children that people are going to make discriminatory comments, and they have to learn how to handle it and not let it get them down. One parent told her son "This is not the first; this is not the last; you are going to get picked on. You are Asian, therefore, you are different. It's going to happen and as a matter of fact even if you weren't Asian it might happen anyway." Another parent advised her child by saying, "I would always say there are so many good things besides getting stuck worrying about an ignorant person, so don't let that bog you down, and there are always going to be ignorant people for whatever situation whether it is racist or whatever." A similar piece of advice from another parent to her children was, "This kind of stuff is going to pop up in your life, and you can't make an issue of it all the time. You have to have a little bit of Teflon about it."

Some parents tried to offer their children responses they could have used in a particular situation. The parent of one child who was called "China boy" suggested to her son that he inform the offender that he is Korean not Chinese. Another parent told her daughter that she did not always have to respond to comments or share her life story. One mother let her elementary school age child cry and listened while she shared how it felt when a classmate told other children on the playground that she had germs, that's why her skin was dark, and no one should play with her.

As the children got older, some of the parents tried to educate their children ahead of time about what might happen to them because they are Asian. One mother was particularly nervous about her son attending his Junior Prom. Apparently the father of the son's date was known to be racist. "It feels awkward about having to counsel them about, not only the usual how a boy should treat a girl but what can happen even if the girl says yes and the father is mad, it can change in an instant." Another parent, also in an effort to prepare her child, shared with him "Because you have a different look, you are a different race from most of the people in this town you do have to be aware, and if you go into a store and you are loud, they may remember that it was the child of color, and I said 'that's just what it is.'" On a more general note, one parent said she likes to model humor so that her children will see how she is able to let go and move on, which is what she hopes her own children will do. Another parent said talking about how to respond to issues was easier when her son was younger because he listened to her more.

Most of the parents, especially when their children were still in grade school, responded to situations in a reactive manner. Many parents told their children teasing is a part of growing up, and they must learn how to handle it in a healthy manner. They comforted their children and, with some of the older children, tried to prepare them for what lay ahead.

In regards to an equal co-response, I have a minimal amount of data to offer for this section. An equal co-response really required parents and children to be proactive, to anticipate situations, and to prepare ahead of time how to respond to certain situations. One parent talked with her children and role played particular situations that might arise, and together they would brainstorm how the child could handle different situations. The

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parent got the idea from a book written by two Black psychoanalysts who had a lot of ideas on role playing. The authors were Black parents raising Black children, so although the issues were not exactly the same, they were close enough that the parent found the book and the process the authors laid out to be helpful. Another parent said, "I mean I am around blue collar workers tradesmen and stuff like that, and it can be pretty racist. I've told [son] what kind of remarks he might get sometimes." The parent did not say if he went on to brainstorm with his son how to handle various remarks he might hear, but he did prepare his son for what might lay ahead. Perhaps other parents engaged in a similar strategy, but if so, it did not come out during the interviews. This joint or co-response requires the parent and child to be proactive, to anticipate situations that might arise, and to practice their responses whereas most of the time parents and children were reactive to situations that had already occurred.

In this section there are a number of examples of children taking the lead in an effort to handle different situations but turning to one or both of their parents for comfort, support, and/or advice. One child came home after a particularly hurtful day of feeling isolated and rejected yet again because of her adoption status and because she is Asian and sat and talked with her mother. "The conversation we had that night was so frank, and she's trying to deal with the fact that she's got to do something about this issue, but everything she tries to do it just ends up blowing up in her face." One of the transracially adopted children from Central America prepared for a talk he was going to give with his mother about adoption. Although this young person is not Filipino or Korean, I feel it is worth noting his recommendation for parents. According to the mother, "He said he wanted me to tell other parents that they shouldn't assume that their children aren't

thinking about race every day, that we shouldn't be afraid to talk about it, and that talking is never going to make anything worse." The mother's response to her son's recommendation was, "I was a very conscious parent and tried to be very conscious of the fact that they are facing things about their race that I will never face and tried to make it open and discuss it all the time. What I thought was overkill, he thought was barely touching the surface." One final comment for this section comes from a child who was teased and shared the situation with his parents. When his mother asked him how he handled it he said, "Dad told me what to do." Mom was a little worried but no need, Dad's advice was to smile, say, "Have a nice day" and walk away!

This final section of how parents and children respond to discrimination focuses on how children alone respond. It is very interesting in that many of the parents described their children in regards to their personality which often then dictated how the child responded to different situations that arose. For example, one parent stated that her child was self confident and disarmed people with his social skills. Other comments were, "she's assertive," "doesn't internalize it," "likes to laugh and joke," "could take on the world," "tough as nails" and "upbeat." It's interesting to note that there were some similarities along gender lines. The girls tended to be more aggressive and reactive in their responses whereas most of the boys were, in general, more low keyed and passive. This distinction is highlighted by one mother who described her son and daughter by saying, "I would not call [daughter] argumentative, but if it was something about race or gender, she would address it. She is assertive, whereas he would act like it was no big deal."

The next group of examples highlight similarities in how the girls responded to discriminatory situations. When children were calling her brother "Chink eyes" on the bus, one girl stood up for her brother and announced to the offenders in a loud voice, "You're so stupid; he's not even Chinese; he's Korean" and then walked off the bus. Another sister noticed some kids were teasing her brother, so she and her friends went up to the group of kids and said, "Stop saying that." Another girl was having problems one day on the bus, and when she got off the bus, she immediately went to the principal's office and told the principal what happened, and that took care of the situation. A more general response on how to handle discrimination came from another parent who was referring to her daughter who apparently said to her mother, "I've just learned to just go forward and jettison those people who are being ignorant, and I'm fine with it."

In regards to the boys, parents described them as being more laid back, not aware they were being made fun of, passive, even indifferent. The boys almost seemed to have a back door approach or pre-emptive way of dealing with bullying or teasing. A few of them were described as being very popular, comfortable in their own skin, a Cassanova, easy going and athletic in a town where athletes have a lot of social capital. Referring to her son, one mother said, "[C] was able always to diffuse any bullying that might occur by disarming the person with his social skills." Another parent said her son, "…puts a good patina on things. He puts a positive interpretation on most things and most people." Another mother said if her son was being singled out in some way he would act like it was no big deal. Referring to her son, one mother said, "It didn't even occur to him as to why they would [tease him]. He thought he was really handsome, so what is there to make fun of?" One other comment from the mother of a boy was, "He doesn't feel

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vulnerable to being bullied…he doesn't react, he just doesn't accept it when somebody calls him a name."

Some of the parents described their children as being very attractive. One parent posed an interesting question; "He's very handsome, and she is beautiful…and I always wonder if somehow…it's a little bit too much for me, but I just wonder if that somehow their attractive looks helped their assimilation…" It is not a question I asked directly, but it is perhaps an interesting question to ponder or look into further.

The final comment for this section highlights how weary one set of children became due to all of the negative comments they endured over the years. In referring to her children the interviewee said, "They don't consider it a teachable moment anymore when somebody says something negative to them, they just get angry."

<center>Summary</center>

This section highlighted the results of the eighteen interviews conducted with adoptive parents about their Korean and Filipino born children. The first part of the interviews asked parents background information about why they decided to adopt, the adoption process, how their children were received, and how their children were progressing overall. The second interview looked more closely at identifying specific examples of discrimination the adoptees had experienced and how parents and the adoptees responded to those discriminatory comments. Initially, I anticipated learning about race related issues, but it became evident that the children experienced discrimination based not only on race but also on adoption and ethnicity as well. There were a wide array of techniques for handling the discriminatory comments which sometimes had parents or children handling the situation completely on their own or

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sometimes the response was shared with parents and children equally or with the parent or child taking the lead in conjunction with the other. It was tempting to incorporate a timeline on the bottom of figure 4.2 as a linear model of how parents and children respond to discrimination but the results did not enable that to happen as easily as I might have originally anticipated. Some children had personalities such that almost from the start, if there was an issue, they were going to address it on their own without any sort of coaching or practice preparation from their parents.

As I close out this chapter, I want to share one more quote that many of the parents expressed but I believe all of the parents would agree with. I asked the parents what were some of the joys they experienced in raising their children, "The joys, oh gosh, they are innumerable. Just I feel really blessed to have them; they are just great kids. We are really lucky."

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Overview of the Study

The initial purpose of this study was to examine if and how White adoptive parents of Asian born children support their children around race related issues. During the course of the interviews it became evident that focusing solely on race/racism was too narrow a focus. The White adoptive parents I interviewed shared that in addition to handling issues that were race related, their children also had to contend with negative comments about being adopted and about their ethnicity. I have therefore expanded the scope of purpose to focus on how White adoptive parents support their Asian born children around discrimination that is based on adoption, race and ethnicity. I am, however, retaining an emphasis on race. Ethnicity awareness is high for most adoptive families; this is evident by the number of families who participate in culture camps and attend culturally based festivities. Every parent I interviewed spoke about participating in adoption agency sponsored cultural events. Based on the interviews I conducted, there is awareness and support for adoptive parents to talk to their children about adoption. However, support and awareness seems to be lacking when it comes to having conversations between White adoptive parents and their children of color about race and racism.

Review of the Research Questions

This study was guided by four main research questions. Having conducted a thorough literature review, I was aware that research was lacking in regards to the

intersectionality of parenting, transracial adoption and race related issues. As a White

adoptive parent of an Asian born child, my interest in the topic and the research questions

in this study stems partly from questions I have been struggling with myself and that I

have been curious to learn more about. I told many of the people I interviewed that I was

engaging in self serving research and that I was grateful for their insights. I had two

goals for this study. The first goal was to learn how other adoptive parents handled

issues in which I knew I needed guidance. My second goal was to conduct a study that

would contribute to the knowledge base for adoption professionals and ultimately support

other adoptive families. Recognizing there was a gap in the literature about my area of

interest and embracing my own strong desire to learn valuable information, I

enthusiastically embarked on my investigation. My list of research questions are as

follows:

1. Do White adoptive parents of Asian born adolescents talk to their children about issues of race and racism? If so, what do parents and children say to each other? Who initiates and what prompts the dialogue?

2. Do parents feel confident and comfortable in their ability to address race related issues with their children? If needed, whom do parents turn to for guidance about race related questions?

3. Is there a gap for parents between knowing they need to support their children of color around racial survival skills and recognizing they do not know how to provide their children with the needed racial survival skills?

4. If parents are not talking to their children about race related issues, why is that?

The first research question was, "Do White adoptive parents of Asian born

adolescents talk to their children about issues related to race and racism? If so, what do

parents and children say to each other?" All of the parents at one time or another talked

to their children about race. Not surprisingly, there was a spectrum of responses to this

question with some parents talking at length to their children about race and others talking very little about the topic. Many of the parents shared how they responded on their own to situations they encountered, particularly when the children were very young. The situations the parents found themselves in were all quite similar; parents with young babies in strollers or in their arms often fielding questions such as, "How much did the baby cost?" or "Are they real siblings?" The parents recognized that the vast majority of comments were not meant to be hurtful despite the inappropriateness. Many of the parents crafted responses in an effort to educate those making the inquiries. For example, in response to the question, "Are the children real siblings?' the response was often, "Yes, they are siblings but no they are not biologically related." Just about all of the parents stated that although their primary goal was to respond to inquisitive strangers in a positive and informative manner; sometimes they were just too exhausted and responded in a ways that were not necessarily educational, and thus walked away from some encounters feeling drained and/or frustrated.

Sometimes parents responded to discrimination on their own and sometimes their children responded on their own. The parents stated that as their children grew older, especially the girls, it was not uncommon for the girls to respond to taunts directly to the offender without any parental involvement. At the end of the day the parents often learned how their children stood up for themselves by confronting offenders with comments such as, "Don't say that," or "You're so stupid, I'm not even Chinese." The girls were not necessarily looking for advice, comfort or support as they shared the day's events, but were merely informing their parents what had happened that day. Boys, on the other hand, seemed to be less confrontational than the girls. Parents shared how their

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sons often side stepped difficult situations by being popular, athletic, unaware or unfazed by derogatory comments that were directed their way.

The preceding paragraphs highlight how parents and children on their own responded to race related situations. However, the heart of the first research question asked do parents and children talk about race *together* and if so, what are they saying to one another? Many of the families did have race related issues that surfaced and only a couple seemed to proactively prepare or address discriminatory situations in an interactive manner with their children. For example, one family role-played potential situations that might arise in an effort to prepare their children for the racism they felt their children would inevitably encounter; thus addressing racism in a proactive manner. Since I did not interview the children, I do not know how effective a technique this was, but in a New York Times article, sixteen year old adoptee, Adam Wolfington, shared how his mother also role-played with him. He responded to the role playing by saying, "The next time it happened [negative comments based on adoption and race] I was ready. It felt great! I wasn't so scared, or hurt (as much), or embarrassed by those questions again" (Wolfington, New York Times, 11/17/2007). I don't know if the children of the parents I interviewed had the same response, but clearly for Adam Wolfington role-playing was very helpful.

Most families did not role-play, but rather responded reactively to race related situations as they arose - if and when the child decided to tell her parents about a particular incident. Often parents told me a common scenario in which their child would come home from school upset about something that had happened that day. The parents generally responded by advising their child to not get upset about the situation or by

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comforting their child and listening as their child shared the day's event. Down-playing

discriminatory events and comforting their children may have been a very effective and

positive response for these children, but since I did not interview the adoptees I do not

know. One transracial adoptee (not from my study) stated, "What I had been told about

race by my parents could be summed up in three words – Love is Colorblind….It is a

beautiful ideal, but I learned the limits of it by first grade…My wish is that instead she

had given me the gift of a simple acknowledgement: that our home may be colorblind,

but outside sometimes wasn't" (Wright, p. 28, 2006).

The parental response of encouraging their children to be understanding or not get

upset about race related issues embraces a valuing whiteness model rather than a

disrupting racism model. Assuming White racial innocence and White normalcy versus

challenging the existing racial hierarchy is the crux of the difference between parenting

methods of White versus Black parents in their efforts to teach their children of color

racial survival skills. Parental emphasis on minimizing the impact of a discriminatory

situation places prominence of the needs of the White offender over their child of color

(Smith, Juarez & Jacobson, 2011).

The opportunity for parents to comfort and brainstorm with their children seemed

to be a time limited opportunity. During the years preceding adolescence, most parents

were 'in the know' as to what was happening with their children throughout the day. As

the children got older there was less communication between parents and children and

thus there were fewer opportunities for teachable moments. One mother shared, "We use

to have great conversations when he was younger about things that happened at school.

As he got older he figured out how not to do that" thus decreasing the influence or impact

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the mother could have on her son. Awareness of the diminished communication between parents and children has important implications for practice which will be addressed later in this chapter.

The second research question was; "Do parents feel confident and comfortable in their ability to address race related issues with their children? If needed, whom do parents turn to for guidance about race related questions?" All of the parents pondered over this question about comfort and confidence regarding their ability to talk to their children about race related topics. Some vacillated in their response to the question, starting out by stating they were or were not confident and comfortable only to end their comments by suggesting the opposite from where they started. A couple of the responses illuminate why some of the parents bounced around in their response. Two parents indicated when their children were younger they were confident and comfortable in talking to them about race related issues because they were not challenged by their children. Their children accepted what they had to say without questioning or arguing ("We use to have great conversations when he was younger"). As the children got older and reached adolescence, it was more challenging for the parents to have meaningful conversations about difficult topics including race because their children did not listen to them as much as they had when they were younger. For example, one parent stated, "He would challenge anything I had to say." Another comment was, "[X] likes to be a contrarian. He wants to show his confidence level by being just 'no and this is why and I am an adult and I have thought this through and you are not going to make decisions for me or tell me how to think.'" As mentioned in the previous section, the lack of opportunity for parents to have meaningful conversations with their children once they

reach adolescence speaks to the limited window of opportunity that is available to parents to be supportive and engaged with their children; particularly as it relates to racism. It seems that if White adoptive parents hope to support their Asian born children to be as emotionally healthy as possible in a society that discriminates against them, then the foundation for engaging in meaningful conversations about racism needs to be established before the child reaches the teen years. However, if a parent lacks confidence and/or comfort regarding their ability to talk about racism then it seems they would be less likely to engage in conversations about race.

A couple of parents cited a low degree of confidence due to their lack of experience with racism. One parent said she was never sure of the right way to have a conversation with her child about race. Another parent said, "I always wonder if I was a person of color how I would do it better." The lack of confidence and comfort expressed by parents speaks directly to the problem statement for this study: Do White parents, who have not had first hand experiences with racism, have the skills needed to minimize the impact of the psychological consequences of racial discrimination their children will undoubtedly experience? A low degree of confidence and lack of experience also speaks to the National Association of Black Social Worker's decree; "…Only a Black family can transmit the emotional and sensitive subtleties of perception and reaction essential for a Black child's survival in a racist society." (NABSW, p. 1049, 1972). This lack of experience in talking about race or racism also is consistent with Samuel's (2009) findings from in-depth interviews with adult transracial adoptees that revealed the majority of White parents had not prepared their children of color for racial discrimination.

The second part of the second research question asked who parents turned to for guidance about race related questions. Just about all of the parents talked about having books they referenced or utilized. When the children were younger, most had children books they read to their children that touched on the topic of being different whether in regards to skin color or adoption. Some parents had adult books they referred to about race, culture and adoption related issues. The parent who role-played with her children recommended the book, "Different and Wonderful, Raising Black Children in a Race-Conscious Society" (1990), by Darlen Powell Hopson and Derek Hopson. The target audience of this book is not White adoptive parents of children of color, but rather Black parents raising Black children. She found scenarios in this book that she could act out or talk about with her children. The mother stated even though her children are Asian and the book is geared toward Black parents with Black children, the case scenarios offered in the book were applicable to her family as well; thus she found the book very helpful.

Some of the parents had someone they could talk to about race related issues, but the people they mentioned were often a spouse, sibling, or friend who was not a person of color. A few of the parents had relatives or friends of color who intimately understood the issues of racism, but most of the parents did not have a person of color in their life serving as a resource. One of the parents mentioned the adoption agency was a valuable resource and a few parents talked about attending conferences especially when adoptees participated in a panel or gave a talk and had a chance to share their experiences. According to one parent, "I like to hear adult adoptees talk. I like to hear all the mistakes other parents made in the hopes that I won't make every single mistake I could possible make!"

The third research question was, "Is there a gap for parents between knowing they need to support their children of color around racial survival skills and recognizing they do not know how to provide their children with the needed racial survival skills?" This research question assumes parents believe racism is an issue for their children and that they have a responsibility to educate their children about racial survival skills which was not the case for all of the parents. "We didn't see racism as an issue for our children" was a refrain I heard from some of the parents. Parents who do not see racism as an issue are not likely to provide support. It is not surprising that White people do not see racism as an issue for people of color. White cultural norms are assumed and pervasive in our society (Bell, 2007). Within White communities the norm is that there is silence about race. Race is often considered something other people have and the idea of racism is alien and not part of a White person's day to day existence (Tatum, 1997).

While I did not ask this question specifically to all of the parents, the data collected in the interviews indicate that there is not a gap for most parents between knowing they need to support their children of color around racial survival skills and recognizing they do not know how to provide their children with the needed skills. This conclusion is derived from quotes from parents suggesting race was not an issue for their children, the minimal amount of proactive engagement and dialogue between parents and their children about how to address discriminatory comments or situations and the impact white privilege has on White adoptive parents.

With one exception, parents did not express concern or seem to have anxiety about how their Asian born children were going to survive in a society that discriminates against them. I did not hear parents saying, "We live in such a racist society and as a

White person who has never experienced racism first hand, I have no idea how I am going to educate my kids about how to survive in a society that sees them and treats them as 'the other'." As mentioned previously, most parents encouraged their children to turn the other cheek or offered them comfort after a situation had occurred. One of the primary tenets of white privilege is that White people are socialized not to recognize their white privilege. White privilege prevents White people from being aware of the challenges people of color face on a daily basis (Davidson, 2002). If, for example, White adoptive parents are not aware of the degree of discrimination their children are facing, they are less inclined to educate themselves about how to educate their children about discrimination. White privilege prevents parents from recognizing they need to provide their children with racial survival skills.

The last research question was, "If parents are not talking to their children about race related issues, why is that?" Most of the parents I interviewed did not seem to have ongoing meaningful conversations about racism or discrimination with their children. While I did not ask this question directly, the results of the literature review in conjunction with the data indicate that parents are not talking at great length to their children about racism. One reason parents may not be engaging in intra-family conversations about racism is because transracial adoptees may feel reluctant to talk with their White parents about race related issues because they know their parents can not relate to the experiences first-hand and therefore lack the skills needed to respond to the situation (Docan-Morgan, 2010).

Lack of awareness that racism is an issue for their children is another reason parents are not talking with their children about racism. One of the trappings of white

privilege is that it prevents White people from being aware of the degree of racism that exists in our society (Tatum, 1997). A Gallup poll conducted in 2001 revealed that seven out of ten Whites believed that Blacks were treated the same as Whites (Quiroz, 2007). Whites may feel that people of color are not discriminated against, but people of color do not agree. "Most people of color in the United States, on a daily basis, think twice about how they can best survive the day without experiencing paternalism, insults, or much, much worse" (Quiroz, 2007, p.18). As mentioned in chapter two, a subsequent Gallup poll in 2008 asked Americans the following question: Do you think racism against Blacks is or is not widespread in the US? (USA Today Gallup poll June 5 2008 – July 6 2008). Almost half of the White respondents felt that racism was not an issue for Blacks whereas close to eighty percent of the Black respondents felt racism against Blacks was widespread (http://www.gallup.com/poll, 2008). Although the questions asked in the two Gallup polls are not exactly the same it does suggest that White Americans are becoming more aware that racism is an issue in our society.

One parent I interviewed said she would try to relate to her kids by sometimes referencing a time when she was in a somewhat similar situation as her children, but her children always dismissed her because she, as a White person, would never have a truly comparable experience. A Korean born adoptee raised by White parents who participated in a study by Docan-Morgan shared, "I have encountered many acts of discrimination or racism throughout my life. I never let my parents know about any of them...I don't think my parents could contribute much of any advice to any of my past experiences because they don't know what it is like to be in my shoes" (Docan-Morgan, 2010, p. 345).

About half of the respondents indicated that racism was not an issue for their children. One parent stated, "We didn't see racism being a problem." Perhaps racism was not an issue for many of these children or perhaps, as Docan-Morgan (2010) notes, the adoptees avoided telling their parents about race related issues because they felt their parents were unresponsive to their needs or they were trying to protect their parents. The following quote is not from my study but from a Korean adoptee who, at a young age, decided not to tell his parents about discriminatory issues he encountered: "I gave up telling my parents of these encounters by 2nd or 3rd grade…my parents had no real intelligent method of handling these situations. There was no preparation for how to deal with these, with the strong exception of providing parental love" (Docan-Morgan, 2010, pps 336-337).

As mentioned in the second research question, some parents were not talking about race or racism with their children because they lacked confidence or comfort which could potentially curtail conversations about discrimination. According to the Health Belief Model, behaviors or patterns are not likely to change if a person feels there is no need for behavior change and one's sense of efficacy for a particular task is lacking (Rosenstock, 1988). For this study, the "no need for behavior change" relates to the parents who do not see racism as an issue for their children. Lack of efficacy is evident by some of the parents who indicated they did not feel comfortable and/or confident talking about racism with their children. Not recognizing a need for change and a lack of efficacy are two of the primary reasons race related issues are not talked about between White parents and their Asian born children.

As with most inductive studies, in addition to finding the answers to the research questions I asked above, I also found out some information I was not expecting. For example, I had not anticipated adoption and ethnicity being as much of an issue for the adoptees as it apparently is, according to the parents. Many of the children were teased and ostracized because of the shape of their eyes and because of their adoption status. Interestingly, an article written by McGinnis, Smith, Ryan & Howard (2009) that focused on Korean transracial adoptees and domestic in-racial adoptees found that, based upon what the adoptees had to say, the Korean transracial adoptees struggled more with their racial status rather than their adoption status, although the issue of adoption never went away.

Another surprise for me, which in retrospect should not have been, was that height was an issue for many of the adoptees regardless of whether they were male or female. For females the barriers around height were related to diminished job opportunities as they reached adulthood. For males the height issue seemed to be based more on dating opportunities. My own son struggles with his short stature sharing with me, as did some of the parents that girls don't like to date short guys!

<u>Implications for Practice</u>

Findings from this research project leads to a number of suggestions about future practice for White adoptive parents of Asian born children. We know from adolescent development theory (Grotevant, 1998) that as our children enter their teen years there is a natural inclination for them to pull away from their parents and to question their parents in a way they did not when they were younger. Therefore, the first implication for

practice is that parents engage in conversations and problem solving about all forms of discrimination prior to their child's teen years.

If parents are to teach their children discrimination survival skills, the teachings therefore need to take place prior to the onset of adolescence. However, findings of this study raise some important questions, including: how will parents engage in that transfer of racial survival skills knowledge if they a) don't believe racism is an issue b) do not feel comfortable talking about racism c) do not feel confident talking about racism or d) are lacking the resources they need to engage in an effective conversation about race related issues? Therefore, the second implication for practice is that post adoption support organizations should offer work shops on family communication that has at least in part a focus on role playing scenarios for parents and children to work on together about how to address discrimination. These parent child workshops should be geared toward parents who have children in their pre-teen years.

To help facilitate a successful conference or workshop on family communication, it would be prudent on the part of the adoption agencies to have older adoptees sit on a panel and talk about race related issues with White adoptive parents. The adoptees would be sharing a counter narrative that debunks the myth that racism does not exist in their lives. White adoptive parents would therefore, be hard pressed to deny or dismiss what is being said to them by adoptees that mirror their own children. Additionally, there could be a workshop just for parents that ideally would be peer lead by other adoptive parents who completed a training program. While the parents are in this type of session, the children might also be in a similar session. The age of the adoptees would determine the content of the session , but essentially they would be learning how to apply appropriate

language to difficult experiences they had encountered. A final session that could be part of a larger workshop would be an activity for parents and their children that enabled parents and children to brainstorm discriminatory situations that had or might arise. Parents and children could then role-play possible scenarios. Ideally, this would all be done in one day although it is a lot to cover.

For parents who have older children (late teens and upward) it might be an interesting exercise to use the discrimination dialog diagram that appears in the previous chapter as a discussion tool. Parents and children, on their own, could identify examples of discrimination and plot them onto the discrimination dialogue diagram under the appropriate heading (parent only, parent child etc). They could then come together and have a conversation about each of their diagrams as they compare and contrast their responses. I feel it has the potential to be a very insightful tool for parents and adoptees alike. Recognizing the exercise could lead to some distress, it would be prudent to engage in this exercise in a setting in which there are others to talk with.

Because the location of workshops are not always geographically convenient or offered at a feasible time for everyone, other educational opportunities should also be provided to transracial families. The other options that post adoption support organizations could offer include books, workbooks, webinars, list serve or websites with case studies so that a family who is not able to attend a workshop can still find material that will enable them to learn about the impact race has on adoptees and to role play various situations with their children.

A third implication for practice is the idea of an agency adoption newsletter with an ongoing column written by young adult adoptees. The adoptees could, among other

topics, offer a narrative about life for transracial adoptees growing up in White households and the challenges they face. In addition to sharing their stories, the authors could also offer suggestions for parents, school personnel, social workers and other adoption related workers. Maybe there could be a "Dear Adoptee" column that gets answered by a panel of adoptees. Perhaps a group of 5-8 adoptees, could meet on an ongoing basis and be presented with a number of questions parents have asked and then they could respond to the questions. This might be a great way to involve older adoptees who are no longer interested in attending culture camps. This too could be a peer run endeavor being organized and facilitated by an adoptee older than the adoptees in the group. This endeavor would give the youth a chance to be with other adoptees and by helping adults interested in adoption they would be in a leadership role. The adoptees could also develop new friendships and, in a back door kind of way, get support and suggestions on how to handle certain situations they might be grappling with.

This study has implications for school counselors and teachers. School personnel see children at least six hours a day, five days a week, nine and a half months a year. If adopted children are having issues, it is likely that problem behavior will be exhibited throughout the course of the school day. Since the suicide of South Hadley teenager Phoebe Prince, apparently due to bullying, there has been heightened dialogue in the schools about bullying. Discrimination based on race, ethnicity and/or adoption fall under the rubric of bullying. Being aware that adopted children experience discrimination and are bullied because they are adopted will enabled school personnel to intervene more effectively on behalf of adopted children.

A final implication for practice based on this study stems from the lack of access to people of color the parents turned to when they had questions that were race related. I think it would be beneficial if the adoption agencies or a post adoption support organization could put together a qualified corps of volunteers to support transracial adoptive families. The volunteers would consist of adults from various countries that have sent children to be adopted and raised in the United States. The adult volunteers could work with a family to support them around race related issues, teach the family about cultural traditions, perhaps share some ethnic recipes, maybe even teach the family some of the adoptees birth country language. This would obviously be great for the adoptive family but might also be a really nice opportunity for the volunteer who may be a recent immigrant and wanting to maintain and share their cultural pride with members of their new country.

<div align="center">Implications for Policy</div>

There is enough research showing that transracial adoptees need more than just love from their White parents, they need racial survival skills that will enable them to address racism whenever needed (Samuels, 2009, Docan-Morgan, 2010, McGinnis, Smith, Ryan & Howard, 2009). With this in mind, it would help the transracial adoptees if the adoption agency could somehow maintain contact with the adoptive families and figure out a way to make appropriate workshops accessible to adoptive families. It is not an easy task because people move, lives get so busy and if parents are not recognizing that race is an issue then they will be less inclined to participate in any sort of trainings that addresses racism.

Another challenge is that organizing and hosting trainings is a lot of work which takes time and money. Most adoption agencies do not have excess funds to dedicate to such a training endeavor as outlined above and yet the need for ongoing training and support seems to be critical. Therefore, as part of the adoption process, a policy recommendation I am making is that the adoption agency charge an extra $250 (or some other amount) to the adoptive parents at the time of adoption that is earmarked as a training deposit. If the parents attend x number of training hours they would receive $200 back at the time of completion, a certificate would be awarded at a ceremony and the parents could then be on their way to participate in the trainings as a certified adoptive parent leader. Smaller adoption agencies could contract with larger adoption agencies and the larger adoption agencies could even contract with post adoption support agencies if they were so inclined.

<div align="center">Implications for Research</div>

The most obvious implication for research coming out of this study would be to conduct a similar study, but one in which White adoptive parents and their Asian born children are both interviewed separately. It would need to be done in a way so that parent and adoptee responses could be matched and yet presented anonymously. To enhance the likelihood of authenticity of responses from the adoptees, I think the adoptees would need to know that their responses would not directly identify their parents. A larger sample than I have conducted would lend itself to a greater likelihood of anonymity.

Another implication for research involves the concept of colorism. Colorism refers to, "the tendency to perceive or behave toward members of a racial category based

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on the lightness or darkness of their skin tone" (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007, p. 646). Individuals who have lighter skin and Caucasian features tend to be viewed more positively than those with darker skin qualities. Lighter skinned Blacks are more successful financially and politically, have less involvement with the criminal justice system and have more prestige than darker skinned Blacks (Hochschild, Weaver, 2007). Some believe that colorism has as much of an impact on individuals' and families' life course outcomes as race itself (Burton, Bomilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, Freeman, 2010).

One of the parents mentioned that she thought folks were more accepting of people adopting children from Asia than from other countries. I think the acceptance is not so much about Asia as it is that most children from Asia have light skin. Although I could not find any references in the literature about colorism in the Asian community, I would argue that children adopted from India experience more race based challenges than their lighter skinned Chinese counterparts. Another parent mentioned that her Filipino children, with their Spanish influence and darker skin, were associated more with being Latino than Asian. Rather than being perceived as smart as many Asian children are, her Filipino children were perceived to be affiliated with gangs and drug use. It would be interesting to explore the impact of skin color and the rate to which darker skin children are adopted, the degree to which they are embraced by extended family members and the larger community and the stereotypes they have to address versus their lighter skin adoptee counterparts.

Within this study the male and female adoptees responded differently to their experiences with discrimination. Overall, the females were aggressive and confrontational whereas the males were more passive with their responses. The sample

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size in this study was small. Would the results be the same with a larger study group? This observation leads to a third implication for research; do males and females respond differently to discrimination? Is adoption a variable that plays a role in how males and females respond to discrimination? Does the age of the children change the pattern of response as related to gender?

A final implication for research involves the salience of race, ethnicity and adoption over the course of an Asian adoptee's lifetime and which one takes center stage when. I know of one article by McGinnis, Smith, Ryan & Howard (2009) that looks at this issue but it was a secondary focus of the study. I would be curious if there are developmental stages adoptees go through that are associated with higher awareness of their racial, ethnic and adoption status over the course of their lifetime. Are there patterns or similarities for adoptees? If so, it could help professional to know what areas to target in regards to trainings or for therapists to be more in tune with issues that might be more central at any given time in an adoptees life.

It was also interesting for me to learn that many of the adoptees, without any sort of formal or conscious teaching on the part of the adoptive parents, handled discriminatory issues on their own. What I don't understand, and I am curious about, is why that is the case? Is it part of the child's genetically based personality? Did the children indirectly learn from their parents how to handle other sensitive issues so they transferred those lessons to their own situations? I also wonder if there is anything to, as my data suggested, girls being more confrontational than boys and if so, why?

<u>Conclusion</u>

I conducted this study partly because as a White parent of a Filipino adoptee, I felt I was lacking in the tools I needed to support my son around race related issues. How could I possibly provide him with the survival skills he needed to live in a racialized society when I myself had never experienced racism? I felt I knew enough about racism to know how devastating the impact can be on a person but not enough to know how to effectively educate my son about navigating through and/or around race related issues that he would invariably encounter and probably has already.

With all of these questions in mind, I started my literature review. I thought that perhaps my questions could be answered by doing some research. I learned that most of the research in the field of transracial adoption focuses on White parents who have adopted African American or biracial children domestically. There was very little information about the intersectionality of Asian born adoptees, parenting and race. Some of the domestic transracial literature could be applied to White families with Asian adoptees but recognizing that Asians are considered "Honorary Whites" and the "Model Minority" the issues are not exactly the same. Since I was seeking information about Asian born adoptees and information was lacking, I proposed and conducted a study I felt was needed not just for me (although the information I have learned has indeed helped me as a parent), but for the adoption community, particularly professionals who provide post adoption support services.

I was excited to have the opportunity to talk with other parents who were in a similar parenting position as I and to be able to learn from their experiences. I was curious if I was the only parent who felt at a loss, if other parents knew something I did

not know, if some parents did not recognize race as an issue, if I was overly concerned, if other parents had access to resources that I was not aware, etc? My questions seemed endless. Once my proposal was accepted I got to work at trying to determine how I would narrow my focus and what I would ask the parents. I had so many questions, but I wanted to be careful not to overburden the interviewees and I wanted to make sure every question was important and relevant to the study.

I was touched by the number of people who were willing to assist with this research (over fifty people offered to be interviewed), by the generosity of the participants' time (two interviews each lasting about 1.5 hours), by the forthcomingness of their responses and their desire to reach out and help not just me but hopefully other adoptive families as well. I was welcomed into their homes and their work places, offered refreshments and treated with great respect. It was an unusual relationship I had with the interviewees. I was not a friend as I was a complete stranger and yet I was not a detached professional either so I was friendly but needed to remain a little bit removed. It was a fine line I had to walk, one I am not use to walking but every interviewee invited me back for a second interview so it would seem that the interviewees were comfortable with the interviews.

I learned that all of the families adore their children even when their children present with a variety of challenges. Most families live in white communities although as some of the adoptees got older, their families moved to more diverse neighborhoods. Some parents perceived race to be an issue for their children and some did not. Most parents saw teasing as part of everyone's childhood experience and encouraged their children to let those negative comments slide off their back. A couple of families talked

proactively about what to do if a particular situation were to arise but most, if they heard about it at all, addressed the issue after the fact.

Finally, I learned that issues the adoptees faced go beyond race and includes ethnicity and adoption as well. I was clear I did not want the race issue to get lost in the mix, but I was also clear that I could not ignore the other issues of ethnicity and adoption. I therefore expanded the study to look at discrimination based on race, adoption and ethnicity.

This study opens up the intimate sphere of the family unit and examines how families communicate about a very sensitive topic – race. Findings from a preliminary database research I conducted indicate there is a need for more research as it relates to parenting international transracial adoptees. There are few articles that address the intersectionality of race, parenting and adoption and this study looks at that nexus particularly as it relates to communication about racism with Asian born adoptees. Racism is a serious issue that can have severe consequences for people of color. According to Alvarez, "Exposure to racism, more so than combat, was a robust predictor of psychological disorders" (Alvarez, 2009, p. 410). Learning if and how White adoptive parents of Asian born children talk to their children about racism is an important contribution this study has made to the adoption research field. Knowledge of communication patterns will offer guidance as to how adoption professionals can support White adoptive families with Asian born children as it relates to race.

Ultimately I learned that there is an amazing network of adoptive parents in Connecticut and Massachusetts who are wonderfully generous and willing to give of themselves in the spirit of supporting other adoptive families. I hope to be able to follow

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through with this research in such a way that the information herein will be useful to other transracially adoptive families.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Background information

1. Who are your children, what are their names, ages, and grade level in school were they adopted?
2. Could you begin by telling me a little about why you decided to adopt?
3. How did you decide to adopt a child from X country?
4. What were your child's living arrangements like prior to being adopted?
5. Please describe the adoption process you went through.
6. How old was <child's name> when s/he came to live with you in the US?
7. What did you do to prepare for the arrival of < child's name >?
8. Describe the first few months of living in the US with <child's name>.
9. Describe the first time your extended family members met <child's name>.
10. How is the relationship between extended family members and <child's name> then and now?
11. Is there anything else you would like to add about your process of adopting?

Race related questions
Background

12. Do you know your child's racial and ethnic identity? (*may need to re-define race and ethnicity*) If so, what is it?
13. Are there other children of the same racial or ethnic background in your child's school, classroom, town, or neighborhood? (ask for a percentage if possible otherwise few, some, a lot. Ask each separately)
14. How did you come to choose the community you live in and the school your child attends?
15. How would you describe the ethnic/racial make-up of your immediate family and extended family?
16. How many people do you know who share your child's race and/or ethnicity? How often does your family/child see or interact with these folks?

Racial identity questions about your child

17. Do you think your child associates more with her genetic racial and ethnic identity or with your genetic racial and ethnic identity? What leads you to that conclusion?

18. How do you think your child's name addresses or makes sense of the discrepancy between her biological versus adoptive family racial and ethnic identity?
19. Do you think in different settings (home, school, friends) your child might feel more connected with a particular racial identity (hers or yours or another)? What leads you to that conclusion?
20. Do you think others relate to your child more as a C/K/F Asian or a white <insert adoptive parents ethnicity>? Can you offer any examples? Has this changed over time?

Grammar school experiences
(Grades K-6)

21. How did you talk to your child about being adopted when she was young? Did the story change as she got older? Do you remember if race or ethnicity was ever part of that conversation? If so, how?
22. At what age do you think your child started noticing racial differences between herself and those around her? Can you tell me about a time when you became aware that your child was aware she was racially different from her peers?
23. Did Martin Luther King day ever spark any conversation about race or racism between you and your child? If so, can you tell me about that conversation? Were there any other holidays (Kwanza), something in the media (tv, radio, paper) that sparked a conversation?
24. As you think about your child in first grade…second grade…and third grade, were there any interactions your child had that you feel were race related? If so what were they? How about 4th, 5th and 6th grade?
25. Were there questions your child asked about race or racism? If so, what were those questions and how did you respond? How did you feel about your response?
26. Did you ever proactively bring up conversations about race/racism? What prompted you to do so?
27. In retrospect, do you wish you had done or said anything differently about race or racism during your child's grammar school years? If so, what?

Parents and race

28. As you were thinking about adopting, did you give any thought to what it might be like to raise a child of a different racial and ethnic background? Did you have concerns or was it a non-issue? Did the adoption agency say anything thought provoking in regards to race and/or ethnicity?
29. How was it for you being in public with a baby/young child who looked racially different from you?
30. Did you ever get comments from strangers? How about comments from family members or friends? What were some of those comments and how did

you respond, how did those comments make you feel? How did you feel about your ability to respond to those comments?

31. As your child got older and entered middle school/high school was the racial difference between you and your child more of an issue/less of an issue for you? How so?
32. Again, were there any comments from strangers or friends/relatives that were race related?
33. What sort of 1) joys, 2) challenges, or 3) noteworthy experiences have you had raising a child racially different than you?
34. What knowledge base do you draw from to talk with your child about race related issues? Is it books, friends, relatives, church, professionals?
35. Is there anyone you turn to for guidance about race related questions/comments? (who – are they a friend, a family member, a post adoption support person, is that person white or a person of color? Does the adult share the same racial or ethnic background as your child?)
36. Have your thoughts and/or understanding about race changed now that you are a parent to a child of color? If so, how?

Adoptees and race

37. Do you think race became more salient for your child as she left grammar school, entered and progressed through middle school and high school? If so, how?
38. How do you think it is for your Asian child growing up in a society that is dominated by white people?
39. Do you think dating across racial lines was ever an issue for your child?
40. Do you think the racial experience of an Asian person is different than for someone who is African American?

Race related conversations during the teen years

41. What sort of race related questions or comments did your teen bring up to either you or someone else during her adolescent years? Can you give me some examples and can you tell me what you think prompted the questions or comments?
42. How did you respond to your teen? How did you feel about your response?
43. Have you ever brought up the topic of race or racism with your teen? If so, think about one particular conversation and tell me what the context of the conversation was and what your goal was in bringing it up? Also, in regards to this same conversation, how did your child respond?
44. How did you feel about the conversation you referenced above at the time and how do you feel about it now?
45. Can you describe a time when you felt you needed to talk to your child about race related issues but did not know what to say?
46. As you think back on the times you have talked to your child about race, can you tell me, in general, how comfortable you usually feel engaging in that

conversation? (10 is totally comfortable and 1 is totally uncomfortable). Can you offer me an example or two?

47. Again, as you think back on the times you have talked to your child about race, can you tell me, in general, how confident you usually feel engaging in that conversation? (10 is totally comfortable and 1 is totally uncomfortable) Can you offer me an example or two?

48. If you were able to secretly shadow your child all day do you think there might be race related incidents that your child encounters that you never hear about? If so, why do you think your child is reluctant to talk with you? (may be too personal a question)

49. If you could wave a magic wand, what sort of resources do you wish you had to help guide you in an effort to support your child around race related issues?

In conclusion

50. Do you have any advice for a) adoption agency personnel working with adoptive parents in regards to addressing issues of race/racism for their Asian born children b) white couples (or single parents) who are thinking about adopting a child from Asia or c) white parents who are currently parenting a child of Asian descent?

51. Is there anything else you would like to add, other questions I should have asked?

52.   Do you have any questions for me?

LIST OF CONCEPTS

The numbers to the right of the concepts refer to how many times each concept appears in the transcripts.

Community-50
Extended family-58
Kid Friends-58
School-52 + high school – 3
Church/God -2
Parents and adoption-82
Strangers and adult friends-41 Par response to situations (child) – 46
Resources/magic wand-26 advice-21 Books/read-32 Culture camp/Cultural activities-22
Birth country - 23 Birth family (search)-48 Going back – 43
Adoption process Coming home Adjustment/prep -43 back story 26 Why adoption & K/P – 14 Foster family/foster care-16
Child Identity (in general) – 52 Child and adoption-39 Child personality/appearance-102 Height – 11 Dating -19 Siblings – 20 Gender -19
Par & child &/or adoption & race – 95 Joys – 5 Challenges -9
Race related/ethnicity - 111 Discrimination (comfort/confident) - 23 Black vs Asian-8 Child teased – 21 (Non) Asian stereotype - 12 Ethnicity – 4

CONCEPT LOCATION FORM

The number one after "family" in the top row refers to a specific family (2 is a different family etc) whereas the letters "a" and "b" refer to either the first interview or the second interview. The numbers within the chart reference the page number on which each of the concepts can be located. I have this information for each interview I conducted.

	Family 1a	Family 1b	Family 2a	Family 2b
Community	4,6,7,11	7	6,7,8,9	10
Extend family	3,4	5	5,9,11,16	
Friends	6,9	2,3,16	2,6,13,15	3,6
School	7,8	4,6,7	7,8,13,15	10
Child and adoption	10		15,16,17	2
Strangers and friends	3,5,6	3	6,7,12,13,14,16 18	3
Parents and adoption	6,9,10	7,9,10,11,17	10,18	2,4,10
Birth family	5,	7,8	10,11,13,17	
Books	4,5,6	1,11	4,10,14,15,17	6,13
Culture camp Cultural activities	4,5		9	1,12
Resources/magic wand		11,16		8,9,13
Birth country	12		2,14	
Adoption process Coming home Adjustment/prep	1,2,5		2,4,5	
Why ad & K/P	2		3	
Elementary school				
Height		14	17	
Ch-personality appearance	7,8,9,10,11	3,4,5,6,7,14,15	7,8,9,12,15,16	5,7
Bl vs Asian		12		
(non) Asian/ stereotypes		12,13	14	
Foster family	4	2,10	2	
Siblings	11		12,15,16	
Child Identity		2,3,4	14,15	2,3,5,8
College	9		9	9
High School	8			
Dating	10	10,13		

Multi racial family				
Par & ch /& or Adoption & race	5,8,10,11	5,7,10,12,13,14,15 16	10,11,13,14	2,3,4,6,7,8,9,12 14
Race related/ethnicity Discrimination (comfortable/confident)	7,8	5,6,9,12,13,14,15 16	4,7,8,14	5,7,8,9,10,11,12 13
Church/God			9,11	10
Gender				
Advice		17,18 wish, 19		6,12,15
Other's (non) adoptees experiences	3	8,9,11	13	2,4,9
Back story		2	2	
Going back	4,5	7,8	12	
Future				
Par response to situations (ch)	5,6,8		6,7,12,13,14,16 18,19	3,4 (5),8 (12)
Ethnicity		2,6		
Joys		9		
Challenges				8
Ch teased			7	5,11
Misc	Fam tree,9		8camp	10diversity

CONCEPT SUMMARY FORM

	Culture camp	Birth country
Family 1		
Family 2		
Family 3		
Summary		

In each box I documented how the family responded to each concept. I would be sure to mark the location of the information in case I needed to go back and reference the information for some reason. The summary combined all of the family's responses and enabled me to make comments such as, "Most families stopped having their children attend culture camp once they reached their teen years because the children were no longer interested."

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