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# Parenting Transracially Adopted Youth: An Evaluation of Support Services

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Parenting Transracially Adopted Youth:  
An Evaluation of Support Services

By

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MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the  
School of Social Work  
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

Committee Members  
Pa Der Vang, Ph.D., (Chair)  
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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation

### **Abstract**

Transracial adoptions involve the adoption of a child of one racial/cultural group by parents of a different racial/cultural group. In the United States, transracial adoptions commonly involve the adoptions of African American children by white parents. These transracial adoptions are often accompanied by challenges beyond those expected with same race adoptions. This research study was designed to evaluate the services that social workers provide to families to deal with the challenges that they face. The results showed that cultural support services received less time than other types of trainings offered to adoptive families. In studying the relationships between services offered and family ability or child development areas, the results were generally inconclusive suggesting weak but not statistically significant relationships. However, the results showed statistically significant negative relationships between other trainings offered and child development areas. These results can likely be attributed to awareness of child development issues associated with transracial adoptions on the part of the social workers.

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## **Introduction**

This is a quantitative research projects that explores the question “Which adoption support services best support positive transracial adoption placements?” An online survey was distributed to professional social workers that work with transracial adoptions via qualtrics.com. Seventeen professional social workers participated in the survey. These professional social workers provided information about the types and amount of educational services that they offer to transracial families as well as the outcomes they see with families in children.

The purpose of this study was to identify the correlation between services provided and successful transracial adoptive placements. Existing literature argues that transracial adoptive families face challenges beyond that associated with same race adoptions. By identifying services that are provided to transracial families and their correlation with positive transracial adoption outcomes, improvements can be made to better prepare families for the challenges that they may face.

## **Review of the Literature**

The literature covers many aspects of transracial adoptions and the support services that are utilized. Practices regarding adoptive parent support in transracial adoptions are inconsistent throughout agencies and continue to evolve. It is important to take all aspects of transracial adoptions into consideration in adoptive parent support.

## **Adoption**

*Adoption Nation*, a book written by Adam Pertman, describes adoption as a revolution that is changing the nation’s view of family. “Adoption, once a clandestine



process shrouded in shame, is rapidly metamorphosing into a radically new process that is both sweeping the nation and changing it” (Pertman, 2000, p.79). As adoption is becoming more openly discussed and widely accepted, cultural views are shifting. Adoption is now discussed in terms of the adoption triad involving the child, birth parents, and adoptive parents. “Adoption is becoming a more widely accepted alternative to parenting for birth parents and to having biological children for adoptive parents” (Claridge, 2014, p.112).

### **Transracial Adoption**

To fully understand the implications of race in adoption, it is important to understand how individuals experience racism. “Every individual struggles with unproductive messages about race passed on from the larger society. This hits hardest on children and youth who lack the life experience to understand the context and the ability to respond with maturity” (Honour, 2013, p.47).

In recent history, the number of transracial adoptions has continued to rise. With that came much controversy. It is no doubt that adoption itself can create a number of challenges for the family that was created in that matter; whether it be attachment, identity development, behavioral issues, or a number of other things. However it can be argued that transracial adoptions add their own unique set of challenges. It is said that “transracially adopted children are vulnerable to experience a range of psychopathologies including poor racial identity and self-esteem” (Burrow, 2001, p.2).

Although transracial adoption is an adoption of a child from one racial/cultural group by parent(s) from another racial/cultural group, most transracial adoptions in the

United States involve white parents adopting African American children (Burrow, 2001; Malott, 2012, p.384). Many professionals urge the benefits of placing a child with a family of the same racial group if possible, however the rise in transracial adoptions can be largely attributed to the rise in the number of children of color in out of home placement along with the lack of foster and adoptive homes with parents of color. It has been noted that “transracial adoptees must struggle to integrate an identity that includes acceptance of their own physical appearance, their birth heritage, and the heritage of their upbringing” (Vonk, 2001, p.249). Unfortunately, parents are often ill-equipped to assist their children in developing their racial/cultural identity that differs from that of their own. “Essentially, while same-race placements may be ideal, balancing the positives and negatives of transracial adoption with the realities of the out-of-home system would perhaps serve the best interests of children more promptly” (Burrow, 2001, p.3).

Elizabeth Vonk (2001) suggested in her study *Cultural Competence for Transracial Adoptive Parents*, that using the same three pillars that measure cultural competence to frame services for transracial adoptions; racial awareness, multicultural planning, and survival skills. Racial awareness in the context of transracial adoptions requires the parents to be aware of the different experiences their child will have due to their race; experiences that the parents never experienced. “It cannot be assumed that ‘white benefits’ will be extended to a child of color who lives with European American parents” (Vonk, 2001, p.250). Racial awareness also requires parents to be aware of the role race plays in their lives whether it be their own ideas and biases, that of their family, or that of their community.

Secondly, multicultural planning refers to the creation of opportunities for transracially adopted children to participate in events to learn about their race or culture and to socialize with individuals of like race (Vonk, 2001, p.251). It has been observed that children who are adopted transracially often avoid individuals of their race because it is difficult for them identify, with pride, to their race.

Lastly, survival skills refer to a parent's ability to prepare their child to cope with racism (Vonk, 2001, p.251). It is often easy for parents to tell a child to ignore remarks or instances of racism, but in fact that can be damaging to their racial identity. Because the parents have not had the same experiences of racism, it is important that they work with their child to create healthy coping skills. This research will focus on these three areas as well.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This section discusses the theoretical ideologies that the researcher is using as a framework for the study. Specifically, the research focused on Family Systems Theory and Ecological Systems Theory. Family Systems Theory helps to address the specific micro level practices of support for families while the ecological systems theory applies a broader approach in regards to race.

#### **Family Systems Theory**

Family systems theory, introduced by Dr. Murray Bowen, suggested that individuals must be understood in the context of their families, rather than in isolation from one another. This theory "provides users with a holistic framework that centers attention on the interactive and bidirectional nature of relationships within families with

adolescents” (Levesque, 2011, p. 963). Family systems theory helps social workers to understand how children who are adopted transracially will be supported by their families and what services are needed to strengthen that support. It helps social workers to understand that the responsibility for racial identity development goes beyond the individual adoptee.

### **Ecological Systems Theory**

The ecological systems theory is grounded in the belief that human development is influenced by varying environmental systems. “The purpose in formulating the ecosystems perspective was to encourage social workers to view situations holistically, attending simultaneously to people, their families, and whatever other systems might be important to their needs” (Lehmann, 2001, p. 69). Systems such as family, school, work, community, and friends play a role in human development. These systems occur at different levels from micro to macro and can help us understand why people behave differently in different situations. Applying ecological systems theory to transracial adoptions and support services, we can explore racism on a macro and meso level identifying agency approaches to cultural/racial support services. We can also explore racism on a micro level examining how experiences of racism and discrimination directly impact families and how they react in those situations.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

This study addresses the research question “Which support services help produce positive transracial adoptive placements?” This is a quantitative study using surveying

techniques to analyze the effectiveness of a variety of services offered for transracial adoptions. The survey questions developed by the researcher analyzed experiences of social workers providing transracial adoption services and evaluate the effectiveness of each in fostering successful adoption placements.

### **Sample**

The research sample consists of individual social workers who have professional experience working with transracial adoption placements. Participants are registered with the MN Board of Social Work. The researcher obtained a random list of 999 social workers through the MN Board of Social Workers. The researcher sent out the survey to each of the 999 professionals with specific criteria for participation. The participation criteria required participants to be working with transracial adoption placements for a period of at least two years, having been somewhat involved in at least seven transracial adoptive placements, and having post placement contact with the clients. There was no exclusion criteria identified, participants simply had to meet the inclusion criteria. It was expected that a majority of the 999 professionals would not be able to participate, however, it was expected that the sample size would still be substantial.

After the initial distribution of the survey, the researcher did not receive the expected number of participants. For further recruitment, the researcher used a snowball method pass along the survey to other qualified professional social workers.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

Prior to taking the survey, participants were asked to read and agree to a consent form (Appendix A) stating all risks and benefits associated with the participation in the

study. By continuing the online survey, participants were consenting to participate. The survey was voluntary and the results were kept completely anonymous further reducing the risk associated with participation; the researcher was unable to identify who completed the survey. Because the sample consisted of professionals, they were not considered a vulnerable population for participation. The researcher received approval from the IRB before any data collection.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected using Qualtrics, an online survey system. Participants were asked a number of questions designed by the researcher to assess their experiences with different supports for families who adopted transracially (Appendix B).

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher used SPSS to gather descriptive data which included type of adoption setting, age of worker, number of years working in that setting, type of services offered, and time of services offered. Correlation statistics were used to analyze the relationship between support services offered and family and child outcomes.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The strengths of this research include a quantitative approach and research of professional social workers. Much of the previous research has been focused on transracial families and adoptees themselves and has taken a qualitative approach. This research will provide a different perspective than those previous. Although the perspectives of families and adoptees is very valuable, the expectation of this research is

that professional social workers are able to provide a less biased perspective because they are not as personally invested in the adoptions.

Limitations of the research include the sample of subjects. Because all of the subjects are associated with the Minnesota Board of Social Work, that could have unknown implications on their responses. It limits the sample of subjects to those that work within the state of Minnesota which could influence both their practices and their views on race; because they live in the same area, they are likely exposed to similar experiences and views regarding race. Because an individual's view of race is largely affected by their life experiences, including data gathered from individuals residing in other areas would likely alter the results.

Because all of the participants identified themselves as white, that is a weakness of the research. This research focuses on how race plays an important role in adoption for transracial families. The results would be strengthened by including individuals who identify with different racial groups because their different perspectives and experiences of race would provide a more comprehensive study.

Lastly, the greatest limitation of this research was the small sample size. Because the researcher did not gain the anticipated number of participants, much of the data was found to not be statistically significant.

## **Results**

### **Sample Characteristics**

Sample characteristics were analyzed using descriptive statistics and frequency distributions. The sample was comprised of 17 respondents. Each of those respondents

were social work professionals who had experience with transracial adoptions and all practiced in the same Midwest state. As viewed in Table 1, of the 17 respondents that participated in the survey, 11 or 64.7% of them reported working for private adoption agencies. The remaining 6 or 35.3% of them reported working for public adoption agencies. Each of the respondents were asked to categorize their adoption work into one of three categories including “domestic”, “international”, or “both”. Of the 17 respondents, 10 or 58.8% of them stated that they worked in domestic adoptions, 1 or 5.9% of them stated that they worked in international adoptions, and 6 or 35.3% of them stated that they worked in both domestic and international adoptions (Table 2).

*Table 1*

*Adoption Setting*

	Frequency	Percent
Private	11	64.7
Public	6	35.3
Total	17	100.0

*Table 2*

*Adoption Type*

	Frequency	Percent
Domestic	10	58.8
International	1	5.9
Both	6	35.3
Total	17	100.0



Respondents were asked to report on the number of years they have worked, or had previously worked, with transracial adoptions. Of the 17 respondents, the minimum number of years reported was 2, the maximum number of years reported was 38, and the average number of years reported was 10.24 (Table 3). Respondents were asked to report on their age in years. Of the 17 respondents, the youngest was 31 years old, the oldest was 59 years old, and the average age was 47.29 years old (Table 4).

*Table 3*  
*Years of Experience*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
How many years have you worked (did you work) in that setting?	17	2	38	10.24	8.467

*Table 4*  
*Age of Participants*

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
How old are you?	17	28	31	59	47.29	10.239

The respondents were also asked to categorize their racial identity into one of six categories: “White”, “Black or African American”, “American Indian or Alaska Native”, “Asian”, “Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander”, or “other”. Of the 17 respondents who answered that question, all 17 or 100% of them identified as “White”.

### **Support Services**

Participants were also asked to report on the support services that they provided to transracial families. The respondents were first asked to report when they provided support services regarding culture. They were asked to choose from the following categories: “before placement”, “after placement”, “both before and after placement”, or “we do not provide support services regarding culture”. As Table 5 demonstrates, 2 (11.8%) participants responded that they provide cultural services before placement, 1 (5.9%) provide these services after placement, 13 (76.5%) provide these services both before and after placement, and 1 (5.9%) do not provide any type of these services.

*Table 5*  
*Time of Support*

	Frequency	Percent
Before placement	2	11.8
After placement	1	5.9
Both before and After placement	13	76.5
We do not provide support services regarding race and culture	1	5.9
Total	17	100.0

Respondents were asked to report how many hours of training were provided to adoptive families in each of the following areas: cultural self-awareness, racism, white privilege, identity development, language, and other (Table 6). The researcher used this information in correlation statistics that would identify if more hours spent on trainings would influence the outcomes for families and children. On average, respondents provided 3.03 hours of cultural self-awareness training with the minimum being 0 hours and the maximum being 8 hours. Hours for racism training averaged at 2.13 with the minimum being 0 hours and the maximum being 8 hours. On average, respondents provided 1.03 hours on white privilege with the minimum being 0 hours and the maximum being 8 hours. Families received, on average, 2.41 hours of identity development training with the minimum being 0 hours and the maximum being 8 hours. Hours spent on language training averaged 0.38 hours with the minimum being 0 hours and the maximum being 2 hours. Most of the time was spent on other training with the

average being 12.14 hours, the minimum being 0 hours, and the maximum being 40 hours.

*Table 6*  
*Hours of Training*

		Cultural self-awareness	Racism	White privilege	Identity development	Language	Other
N	Valid	16	16	15	16	16	14
	Missing	1	1	2	1	1	3
Mean		3.03	2.13	1.03	2.41	.38	12.14
Median		2.25	2.00	.00	2.00	.00	8.00
Mode		2	2	0	2	0	2 <sup>a</sup>
Minimum		0	0	0	0	0	0
Maximum		8	8	8	8	2	40

Respondents used Likert scales to assess their families’ abilities in a number of different areas (1 representing the family having little to no ability- 5 representing the family having complete ability) (Table 7). Respondents reported on their families’ ability to provide cultural experiences for their children with a mean value of 3.06, a minimum value of 2.0, a maximum value of 5.0. Respondents reported on their families’ ability to teach their child how to react during experiences of racism or discrimination with a mean value of 3.06, a minimum value of 1.0, and a maximum value of 5.0. Respondents reported on their families’ ability to cope and process experiences of racism

and discrimination with their child with a mean value of 3.0, a minimum value of 2.0, and a maximum value of 5.0. Respondents reported on their families’ ability to understand how their past experiences affect how they view race with a mean value of 3.33, a minimum value of 2.0, and a maximum value of 5.0. Lastly, respondents reported on families’ overall preparedness to adopt transracially with a mean value of 2.93, a minimum value of 2.0, and a maximum value of 5.0.

*Table 7*  
*Families' Abilities*

		To provide cultural experiences	To cope and process experiences of racism or discrimination with their child	Overall preparedness to adopt transracially	To teach their child to react during experiences of racism or discrimination	To understand how their past experiences affect how they view race
N	Valid	16	15	15	15	15
	Missing	1	2	2	2	2
Mean		3.0625	3.0000	2.9333	3.0667	3.3333
Median		3.0000	3.0000	3.0000	3.0000	3.0000
Mode		3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Minimum		2.00	2.00	2.00	1.00	2.00
Maximum		5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

Respondents also used Likert scales (1-5) to assess the children placed with their adoptive families on the following developmental areas: attachment, racial identity development, self-esteem, and adjustment (Table 8). For their responses 1 represented very underdeveloped and 5 represented a healthy level of development. Respondents rated their attachment with a mean value of 3.31, a minimum value of 2.0, and a maximum 5.0. Respondents rated their racial identity development with a mean value of 2.87, a minimum value of 1.0, and a maximum value of 4.0. Respondents rated their self-esteem with a mean value of 3.33, a minimum value of 2.0, and a maximum value of 5.0. Respondents rated their adjustment with a mean value of 3.19, a minimum value of 1.0, and a maximum value of 5.0.

*Table 8*

*Child Development*

		Attachment	Racial identity development	Self-esteem	Adjustment
N	Valid	16	15	15	16
	Missing	1	2	2	1
Mean		3.3125	2.8667	3.3333	3.1875
Mode		3.00	3.00	4.00	4.00
Minimum		2.00	1.00	2.00	1.00
Maximum		5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00

### **Effects of Support Services on Families and Children**

Correlation statistics were used to analyze the relationships between hours spent on cultural self-awareness trainings and outcomes for families (Table 9). The relationship between number of hours spent on cultural self-awareness training and families ability to provide culture experiences showed a weak positive relationship ( $r=.307$ ) but it was not statistically significant ( $p=.266$ ). It also showed weak positive relationships with families' ability to react during experiences of racism or discrimination ( $r=.379$ ), families' ability to cope and process experiences of racism with their child ( $r=.197$ ), families ability to understand how their past experiences view race ( $r=.098$ ), and families overall preparedness to adopt transracially ( $r=.294$ ). However, all of these findings were not statistically significant with p values of .182, .500, .739, and .308 respectively. The correlation between cultural self-awareness training and child development was also analyzed (Table 10). It was found that cultural self-awareness training had weak negative correlations with attachment ( $r= -.114$ ), self-esteem ( $r= -.102$ ), and adjustment ( $r= -.310$ ) and no correlation with racial identity development ( $r=.000$ ). However all of these findings were not statistically significant with p values of .685, .729, .261, and 1.0 respectively.

*Table 9*

*Correlation of Cultural Self-Awareness and Family Ability*

		Cultural self-awareness
Cultural self-awareness	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	16
Families' ability to provide cultural experiences	Pearson Correlation	.307
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.266
	N	15
Families' ability to teach their child to react during experiences of racism or discrimination	Pearson Correlation	.379
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.182
	N	14
Families' ability to cope and process experiences of racism or discrimination with their child	Pearson Correlation	.197
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.500
	N	14
Families' ability to understand how their past experiences affect how they view race	Pearson Correlation	.098
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.739
	N	14
Families' overall preparedness to adopt transracially	Pearson Correlation	.294
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.308
	N	14



*Table 10**Correlation of Cultural Self-Awareness and Child Development*

		Cultural self-awareness
Cultural self-awareness	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	16
Attachment	Pearson Correlation	-.114
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.685
	N	15
Racial identity development	Pearson Correlation	.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000
	N	14
Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	-.102
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.729
	N	14
Adjustment	Pearson Correlation	-.310
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.261
	N	15

Correlation statistics were used to analyze the relationships between hours of racism training provided to families and family outcomes (Table 11). Hours of racism training had weak positive relationships with families' ability to provide cultural experiences ( $r = .307$ ), families' ability to teach their child to react during experiences of racism or discrimination ( $r = .237$ ), families' ability to cope and process experiences of

racism or discrimination with their child ( $r = .135$ ), families' ability to understand how their past experiences affect how they view race ( $r = .050$ ), and families' overall preparedness to adopt transracially ( $r = .146$ ). However, all of these findings were not statistically significant with  $p$  values of .267, .414, .646, .865, and .618 respectively.

Correlation statistics were also used to analyze the relationships between hours of racism training and child development (Table 12). Racism training had weak positive relationships with attachment ( $r = .064$ ) and racial identity development ( $r = .293$ ). However it had weak negative relationships with self-esteem ( $r = -.025$ ) and adjustment ( $r = -.195$ ). These findings were not statistically significant with  $p$  values of .820, .310, .934, and .487 respectively.

*Table 11*

*Correlation of Racism Training and Family Ability*

		Racism Training
Racism Training	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	16
Families' ability to provide cultural experiences	Pearson Correlation	.307
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.267
	N	15
Families' ability to teach their child to react during experiences of racism or discrimination	Pearson Correlation	.237
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.414
	N	14
Families' ability to cope and process experiences of racism or discrimination with their child	Pearson Correlation	.135
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.646
	N	14
Families' ability to understand how their past experiences affect how they view race	Pearson Correlation	.050
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.865
	N	14
Families' overall preparedness to adopt transracially	Pearson Correlation	.146
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.618
	N	14

Table 12

*Correlation of Racism Training and Child Development*

		Racism Training
Racism Training	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	16
Attachment	Pearson Correlation	.064
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.820
	N	15
Racial identity development	Pearson Correlation	.293
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.310
	N	14
Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	-.025
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.934
	N	14
Adjustment	Pearson Correlation	-.195
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.487
	N	15

Relationships between hours spent on white privilege training and family outcomes were analyzed using correlation statistics (Table 13). It was found that white privilege training had weak negative relationships with families' ability to provide cultural experiences ( $r = -.044$ ), families' ability to teach their child to react during experiences of racism or discrimination ( $r = -.016$ ), families' ability to cope and process

experiences of racism or discrimination with their child ( $r = -.373$ ), families' ability to understand how their past experiences affect how they view race ( $r = -.245$ ), and families' overall preparedness to adopt transracially ( $r = -.071$ ). However, all of these findings were not statistically significant with p values of .880, .958, .209, .419, .818 respectively.

Relationships with white privilege training and child development was also studied using correlation statistics (Table 14). White privilege training also had weak negative relationships with attachment ( $r = -.089$ ), racial identity development ( $r = -.050$ ), self-esteem ( $r = -.214$ ), and adjustment ( $r = -.286$ ). All of these findings were not statistically significant with p values of .761, .872, .483, and .321 respectively.

*Table 13*

*Correlation of White Privilege Training and Family Ability*

		White Privilege Training
White Privilege Training	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	15
Families' ability to provide cultural experiences	Pearson Correlation	-.044
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.880
	N	14
Families' ability to teach their child to react during experiences of racism or discrimination	Pearson Correlation	-.016
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.958
	N	13
Families' ability to cope and process experiences of racism or discrimination with their child	Pearson Correlation	-.373
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.209
	N	13
Families' ability to understand how their past experiences affect how they view race	Pearson Correlation	-.245
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.419
	N	13
Families' overall preparedness to adopt transracially	Pearson Correlation	-.071
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.818
	N	13

*Table 14**Correlation of White Privilege Training and Child Development*

		White Privilege Training
White Privilege Training	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	15
Attachment	Pearson Correlation	-.089
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.761
	N	14
Racial identity development	Pearson Correlation	-.050
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.872
	N	13
Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	-.214
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.483
	N	13
Adjustment	Pearson Correlation	-.286
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.321
	N	14

Correlation statistics used to analyze the relationships between identity development training and family outcomes (Table 15). It was found that identity development training had weak positive relationships with families' ability to provide cultural experiences ( $r = .406$ ), families' ability to teach their child to react during

experiences of racism or discrimination ( $r = .293$ ), families' ability to cope and process experiences of racism or discrimination with their child ( $r = .157$ ), families' ability to understand how their past experiences affect how they view race ( $r = .063$ ), and families' overall preparedness to adopt transracially ( $r = .196$ ). However, all of these findings were not statistically significant with  $p$  values of .134, .308, .591, .830, and .501 respectively.

Correlation statistics were also used to analyze the relationships between identity development training and child development (Table 16). Results showed weak negative relationships with attachment ( $r = -.096$ ), self-esteem ( $r = -.153$ ), and adjustment ( $r = -.230$ ). It also showed a weak positive relationship with racial identity development ( $r = .066$ ). All of these results were found to be statistically significant with  $p$  values of .735, .602, .409, and .822 respectively.



*Table 15**Correlation of Identity Development Training and Family Ability*

		Identity Development Training
Identity Development Training	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	16
Families' ability to provide cultural experiences	Pearson Correlation	.406
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.134
	N	15
Families' ability to teach their child to react during experiences of racism or discrimination	Pearson Correlation	.293
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.308
	N	14
Families' ability to cope and process experiences of racism or discrimination with their child	Pearson Correlation	.157
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.591
	N	14
Families' ability to understand how their past experiences affect how they view race	Pearson Correlation	.063
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.830
	N	14
Families' overall preparedness to adopt transracially	Pearson Correlation	.196
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.501
	N	14

Table 16

*Correlation of Identity Development Training and Child Development*

		Identity Development Training
Identity Development Training	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	16
Attachment	Pearson Correlation	-.096
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.735
	N	15
Racial identity development	Pearson Correlation	.066
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.822
	N	14
Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	-.153
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.602
	N	14
Adjustment	Pearson Correlation	-.230
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.409
	N	15

Correlation statistics were used to analyze the relationships between language training and family outcomes (Table 17). Results found weak negative relationships with families' ability to provide cultural experiences ( $r = -.266$ ), families' ability to teach their child to react during experiences of racism or discrimination ( $r = -.132$ ), families' ability to cope and process experiences of racism or discrimination with their child ( $r = -.436$ ),

families' ability to understand how their past experiences affect how they view race ( $r = -.468$ ), and families' overall preparedness to adopt transracially ( $r = -.244$ ). All of these results were found to not be statistically significant with p values of .339, .653, .119, .092, and .401 respectively.

Correlations statistics were also used to analyze the relationship between language training and child development (Table 18). Results showed weak negative correlations between language training and attachment ( $r = -.324$ ), racial identity development ( $r = -.274$ ), self-esteem ( $r = -.430$ ), and adjustment ( $r = -.346$ ). However, all of these results were found to not be statistically significant with p values of .239, .344, .125, and .206 respectively.

*Table 17*

*Correlation of Language Training and Family Ability*

		Language Training
Language Training	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	16
Families' ability to provide cultural experiences	Pearson Correlation	-.266
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.339
	N	15
Families' ability to teach their child to react during experiences of racism or discrimination	Pearson Correlation	-.132
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.653
	N	14
Families' ability to cope and process experiences of racism or discrimination with their child	Pearson Correlation	-.436
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.119
	N	14
Families' ability to understand how their past experiences affect how they view race	Pearson Correlation	-.468
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.092
	N	14
Families' overall preparedness to adopt transracially	Pearson Correlation	-.244
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.401
	N	14

Table 18

*Correlation of Language Training and Child Development*

		Language Training
Language Training	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	16
Attachment	Pearson Correlation	-.324
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.239
	N	15
Racial identity development	Pearson Correlation	-.274
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.344
	N	14
Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	-.430
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.125
	N	14
Adjustment	Pearson Correlation	-.346
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.206
	N	15

Relationships between hours spent on “other” unspecified training and family outcomes were analyzed using correlation statistics (Table 19). It was found that “other” trainings had weak negative relationships with families’ ability to provide cultural experiences ( $r = -.074$ ), families’ ability to cope and process experiences of racism or discrimination with their child ( $r = -.183$ ), families’ ability to understand how their past

experiences affect how they view race ( $r = -.067$ ), and families' overall preparedness to adopt transracially ( $r = -.205$ ). It also showed a very weak positive relationship with families' ability to teach their child to react during experiences of racism or discrimination ( $r = .003$ ). However, all of these findings were not statistically significant with p values of .811, .569, .837, .523, and .992 respectively.

Relationships with "other" trainings and child development was also studied using correlation statistics (Table 20). "Other" training also had weak negative relationships with attachment ( $r = -.494$ ), and racial identity development ( $r = -.334$ ). These findings were not statistically significant with p values of .068 and .288 respectively. It also found that "other" trainings had strong negative relationships with self-esteem ( $r = -.591$ ) and adjustment ( $r = -.687$ ). These results were found to be statistically significant with p values of .043 and .009 respectively.

Table 19

*Correlation of Other Training and Family Ability*

		Other Training
Other Training	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	14
Families' ability to provide cultural experiences	Pearson Correlation	-.074
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.811
	N	13
Families' ability to teach their child to react during experiences of racism or discrimination	Pearson Correlation	.003
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.992
	N	12
Families' ability to cope and process experiences of racism or discrimination with their child	Pearson Correlation	-.183
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.569
	N	12
Families' ability to understand how their past experiences affect how they view race	Pearson Correlation	-.067
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.837
	N	12
Families' overall preparedness to adopt transracially	Pearson Correlation	-.205
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.523
	N	12

*Table 20*

*Correlation of Other Training and Child Development*

		Other Training
Other Training	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	14
Attachment	Pearson Correlation	-.494
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.086
	N	13
Racial identity development	Pearson Correlation	-.334
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.288
	N	12
Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	-.591*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.043
	N	12
Adjustment	Pearson Correlation	-.687**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009
	N	13



## **Discussion**

### **Sample Population Characteristics**

The goal of this research study was to examine support systems that are offered to families who adopt transracially and their effectiveness in family outcomes and child development. As discussed in the introduction and literature review, families who adopt transracially need additional beyond families who adopt children of their same race.

Findings from this study provide descriptive data on the type of adoption setting that respondents work in. The study found that 64.7 percent of participants worked in private adoptions and 35.3 percent worked in public adoptions. The type of setting that adoption workers are in will likely impact the type of funding that they will have and therefore the type of services that they offer. Due to the sampling method, it was expected that there would not be an even distribution of public and private adoption workers. This could potentially skew the data to be more representative of private adoption agencies and the support services they offer.

The findings showed that 58.8 percent of participants worked in domestic adoptions, 5.9 percent worked in international adoptions, and 35.3 percent were working with both domestic and international adoptions. The type of adoptions could largely impact the view of culture in adoption. It may be assumed that when adoptions occur domestically, that the child will share the same culture as their adoptive parents. With international adoptions, however, the cultural differences are more obvious and individuals make a larger effort to preserve culture.

On average, the participants in the study had 10.24 years of experience working with transracial adoptions with the most experience being 38 years and the least experience being 2 years of experience. Adoption, like many industries, is rapidly changing. Social workers that are newly entering the field will have received different training in regards to the role of culture in adoption. As adoption laws change, children who are adopted internationally are generally older than they were years ago. Because of this, children have exposure to their culture of origin before they are adopted.

Of the 17 research participants, all of them categorized their racial identity as white. As social workers that facilitate transracial adoptions, the importance of race and culture are affected by how the individual workers view their own race and culture. For families who are receiving support on racial and cultural issues, it can be nice to get the perspective of a social worker or individual who has experienced the issues being addressed.

### **Support Services**

Participants were asked to report on when they provide services. The majority (76.5 percent) of participants stated that they provided support services both before and after placement. Only one participant reported that they did not provide any services in regards to race and culture. These findings show that adoption social workers and agencies are finding value in providing support services for race and culture to families' and children who are joined by transracial adoptions.

In describing the hours spent on trainings, participants stated that they spent roughly 2 hours in the areas of cultural self-awareness, racism, and identity development.

However, the participants reported that they spent on average of 0 hours on both language and white privilege. Because the parents who are adopting transracially in the United States are primarily white, it is important that they understand how they have been affected by white privilege and that they understand that their children will not share those experiences. Also, because international adoption trends are moving towards older child adoptions, language should be taken into consideration. Parents are not receiving support services to understand how they will be affected by communication difficulties and are unprepared for that added stress.

Participants were asked to use Likert scales to assess their families' ability to provide cultural experiences, to cope and process experiences of racism or discrimination with their child, to teach their child to react during experiences of racism or discrimination, to understand how their past experiences affect how they view race. In every one of these categories, participants' average rating of their clients was about a 3. Participants were also asked to use Likert scales to assess child development in the areas of attachment, racial identity development, self-esteem, and adjustment. In each of these areas participants reported values averaging about 3 as well. With each of these areas averaging roughly the same number, these scales did not provide the value that they were intended to. Because of this, many of the correlation statistics were found to be not statistically significant.

### **Effects of Support Services on Families and Children**

Correlation statistics used to describe the relationships between cultural self-awareness training and family abilities showed weak positive relationships ( $r=.307, .379, .197, .098, .294$ ). These results suggest that cultural self-awareness trainings are an

effective tool to be used by adoption social workers when supporting families. However, cultural self-awareness training had, in general, negative relationships with child development areas ( $r = -.144, -.102, -.310$ ). These results suggest that families who receive cultural self-awareness training have children who are underdeveloped in a number of areas.

When analyzing the correlation between racism training and family outcomes the results showed weak positive relationships ( $r = .307, .237, .135, .050, .146$ ). This suggests that racism trainings are a useful support for families to develop the skills to address how racism affects their family. As individuals who have likely never experienced any racism towards them, they would presumably be ill-equipped to handle those situations without training. Racism training also had weak positive relationships with attachment and racial identity development ( $r = .064, .293$ ) in children and weak negative relationships with self-esteem and adjustment. When parents have the skills to bring race into their relationship with their child, it appears that it is helpful to their attachment with their parents and their racial identity development. However, it appears that it is not useful, and perhaps harmful to self-esteem and adjustment ( $r = -.025, -.195$ ).

Results showed that identity development training hours had positive relationships with family outcomes ( $r = .406, .293, .157, .063, .196$ ). Parents who receive support in identity development have better ability to understand and support their child through racial or cultural issues. However, this training also had negative relationships with attachment, self-esteem, and adjustment ( $r = -.096, -.153, -.230$ ).

Correlation results studying the relationships between “other” training and family ( $r = -.074, -.183, -.06, -.205$ ) and child outcomes ( $r = -.494, -.334, -.591, -.687$ ) showed

almost exclusively negative relationships. Although this could mean that those trainings are not doing enough to address the racial and cultural issues, it could also indicate a level of awareness on behalf of the professional social workers. As with other correlations that have shown negative results, it could indicate that social workers who are more aware of family and child challenges faced by transracial families are the social workers that are advocating for more training and support. Because the Likert scales used are subjective tools, it cannot be stated how accurate they are in getting a real idea of family ability and child development issues.

### **Implications**

The findings in this research are largely limited by the sample population. Because the number of participants were so few, the results are more easily skewed by outliers. Future researchers should be more intentional about how they recruit participants. Future researchers should strive to get a more even distribution of public and private adoption social workers as well as a more even distribution of domestic and international adoptions. The small sample size also affected the significance of the correlation tests that were run. Unfortunately due to this, almost all of the results were found to not be statistically significant. Future researchers should strive to have more participants so the data is valid. Gaining more participants could be done by opening up the inclusion criteria. The participants for this research were required to have at least two years of adoption work history, been part of at least seven trans-racial adoptions, and have some post placement contact with families and adoptees. Future researchers could alter those requirements to allow more social workers to become eligible and gain more participants.

In assessing family abilities and child development, there was little differentiation in the values reported by participants. Unfortunately, with those values staying stagnant, correlation statistics will not provide significant results. Future researchers should reassess how this question is written to assist participants in providing objective answers that are more easily measured than with a Likert scale.

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## Appendix A

You are invited to participate in this project because of your professional experience with transracial adoptions. This project is being conducted by Lanai Peer, BSW, and Master of Social Work student at St. Catherine University. The purpose of this survey is to explore the different services offered to transracial adoptive families and their effectiveness. The survey includes items about services utilized and effectiveness of placement. It will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Your responses to this survey will be anonymous and results will be presented in a way that no one will be identifiable. Anonymity will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationships with the researchers, your instructors, or St. Catherine University. If you decided to stop at any time you may do so. You may also skip any item that you do not want to answer. If you have any questions about this project, please contact Lanai Peer at [lanai.peer@stthomas.edu](mailto:lanai.peer@stthomas.edu). By responding to items on this survey you are giving us your consent to allow us to use your responses for research and educational purposes.

## Appendix B

### Survey Questions

1. What best describes the adoption setting that you work (have worked) in?
  - a. Public
  - b. Private
2. What best describes the adoption setting that you work (have worked) in?
  - a. Domestic
  - b. International
  - c. Both
3. How many years have you (did you) worked in that setting?
4. How old are you?
5. Which of the following describes your racial identity?
  - a. White
  - b. Black or African American
  - c. American Indian or Alaska Native
  - d. Asian
  - e. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
6. When do you provide support services regarding race/culture?
  - a. Before placement
  - b. After placement
  - c. Both before and after placement
  - d. We do not provide services regarding race/culture

7. How many hours of training do you or your agency provide to transracial families in each of the following areas? (round to the nearest half hour)
  - a. Cultural self-awareness
  - b. Racism
  - c. White privilege
  - d. Identity development
  - e. Language
  - f. Other (please specify)
  
8. Assess on a scale of 1-5 the families you have worked with in the following areas (1 represents the family having little to no ability and 5 represents the family being fully competent in their ability).
  - a. Families' ability to provide cultural experiences
  - b. Families' ability to teach their child to react during experiences of racism or discrimination
  - c. The families' ability to cope and process experiences of racism or discrimination with their child
  - d. The families' ability to understand how their past experiences affect how they view race
  - e. The families' overall preparedness to adopt transracially
  
9. Assess on a scale of 1-5 the children who you or your agency has placed transracially in the following developmental areas (1 represents very underdeveloped and 5 represents a healthy level of development)
  - a. Attachment

- b. Racial identity development
- c. Self-esteem
- d. Adjustment