Experiences with Birth Culture, Identity, and Feeling Different: Insight from Transracial Adoptees

Morgan McDowell
St. Catherine University

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Experiences with Birth Culture, Identity, and Feeling Different:
Insight from Transracial Adoptees

by

Morgan McDowell, BSW

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the
School of Social Work
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Master of Social Work

Committee Members
Michael Chovanec, MSW, Ph.D, LICSW, LMFT (Chair)
Amy Lary White, MSW, LICSW
Carolyn Brown, MSW, LGSW

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

Ethnic and racial socialization of transracially adopted children has been acknowledged as a vital social work practice area in the adoption community. Transracial adoptees are often torn between two cultures and attempt to navigate their identity in a racialized society. Parents play a critical role in supporting the development of their child’s ethnic and racial identity. The primary purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between parental involvement and engagement with their adopted child’s birth culture and the child’s ethnic identity development and sense of belonging and acceptance. Using an online survey design, the study recruited 62 transracial adoptees between the ages of 20 and 55. The results showed that as parents placed more value and importance on learning the values and heritage of their child’s birth country, the child identified less feelings of being different. However, over half of the respondents (56.5%) reported no emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country and no respondents (0%) reported too much emphasis. Twenty-four respondents (38.7%) rated the amount of emphasis as “Just the right amount.” Additionally, multiracial participants reported the highest feelings of being different compared to the other ethnic groups represented in the sample. The findings suggest that parental efforts for socializing children to their ethnic and racial culture are crucial.
Acknowledgements

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List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1. Gender ........................................................................................................................................ 29
Figure 2. Ethnicity .................................................................................................................................... 30
Figure 5. Age ........................................................................................................................................... 31
Figure 3. Community Description ........................................................................................................... 32
Figure 6. Adopted Siblings ..................................................................................................................... 33
Table 1. Sum of Experiences and Learning the Ethnic Culture Scale Scores ........................................... 34
Figure 9. Sum of Experiences and Learning the Ethnic Culture Scale Scores .......................................... 35
Table 2. Sum of Ethnic Identity Scale Scores .......................................................................................... 36
Figure 10. Sum of Ethnic Identity Scale Scores .................................................................................... 36
Table 3. Sum of Feeling Different Scale Scores ...................................................................................... 37
Figure 11. Sum of Feeling Different Scale Scores ................................................................................... 38
Table 4. Amount of Emphasis ................................................................................................................. 39
Figure 4. Amount of Emphasis ................................................................................................................. 39
Table 7. Conversations about Race ......................................................................................................... 40
Figure 7. Conversations about Race ......................................................................................................... 41
Table 10. Relationship between Experiences and Learning the Ethnic Culture Scale Score and Feeling Different Scale Scores ........................................................................................................ 42
Figure 8. Adoptee Experiences and Learning the Ethnic Culture Scale Scores and Feelings Different Scale Scores ..................................................................................................................... 43
Table 11. Descriptives for Amount of Emphasis and Feeling Different T-Test ........................................ 45
Table 12. Amount of Emphasis and Feeling Different T-Test ................................................................. 45
Table 13. Descriptives for Ethnicity and Feeling Different Scale Scores ................................................. 46
Table 14. ANOVA for Ethnicity and Feeling Different Scale Scores ..................................................... 47
Table 15. Tukey for Ethnicity and Feeling Different Scale Scores..........................48
Table 16. Homogenous Subsets for Ethnicity and feeling Different Scale Scores..............49
Figure 7. Adoptee Experiences and Learning the Ethnic Culture Scale Scores and Ethnic Identity Scale Scores.................................................................50
Table of Contents

Introduction .............................................................................................................................................. 1
Literature Review ................................................................................................................................... 4
Conceptual Framework .......................................................................................................................... 21
Methods.................................................................................................................................................. 23
Findings................................................................................................................................................... 28
Discussion............................................................................................................................................... 63
References ............................................................................................................................................... 71
Appendix A: Survey.................................................................................................................................. 81
Appendix B: Informed Consent .................................................................................................................. 86
Appendix C: Agency Script. ..................................................................................................................... 88
Appendix D: Flyer..................................................................................................................................... 89
Introduction

Transracial adoption (TRA) is defined as the adoption of a child of a different race or ethnicity than the adoptive parents (Fenster, 2004). The formal practice of adoption began in the 1800s in the U.S. (Zamostny, O’Brien, Baden, & Wiley, 2003). Transracial adoption increased significantly from the mid-20th century through the end of the 20th century (Jacobson, Nielsen, & Hardeman, 2012). World War II and the Korean War resulted in Americans adopting German, Japanese and Korean children. The Indian Adoption Project is a significant illustration of transracial adoption that occurred from 1958 to 1967. The Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Child Welfare League of America took Indian children from their families on reservations in order to integrate them into majority culture (Fanshel, 1972). A decline in TRA began in the first decade of the 21st century. The National Survey of Adoptive Parents (NSAP) reports that 39% of adoptees have a parent of a different racial or ethnic group (Jacobson, Nielsen, & Hardeman, 2012). The U.S. Department of State reports that almost 200,000 children have been adopted from another country over the last decade (n.d.). Transracial adoption has been a controversial practice in the United States, as well as within the field of social work (Fenster, 2004).

Legislation such as the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA), the Interethnic Placement Act (IEPA) and the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) has shaped transracial adoption. The MEPA was passed in 1994 by the United States Congress due to the long periods of time minority children spent in foster care (Mapp, Boutte-Queen, Erich, & Taylor, 2008). This act prevented workers from denying an adoptive placement solely due to the parents being a different race than the child (McRoy, Oglesby, & Grape, 1997). Before the act was developed it was common for agencies to not place an African American
child into a transracial adoption, which caused waiting periods of up to 18 months for many African American children (Bartholet, 1992). Due to confusion regarding implementation of MEPA, the IEPA was passed in 1996. This act outlawed race to be considered in placement decisions unless it was deemed important for that specific child (Mapp, Boutte-Queen, Erich, & Taylor, 2008). In public agencies, it was decided that race cannot be considered when two placements are equal (Nadel, 1998). A year later the ASFA was passed to further reduce the number of children in the child welfare system (Mapp, Boutte-Queen, Erich, & Taylor, 2008).

The topic of TRA is controversial and holds a variety of opinions and perspectives. Some support this practice because they believe it is better for a child to be placed in a loving permanent home than remain in out-of-home placement (Courtney, 1997). On the other hand, TRA has been called “cultural genocide,” and opponents point out the challenges of being an outsider to both their racial community and the racial community they grow up in (National Association of Black Social Workers, 1991; Hayes, 1993).

Parents play a significant role in the development of their children and their ethnic and racial identity. The Hague Convention on the Protection of Children states that the eligibility criteria to adopt internationally should include an adoptive parent’s dedication to the child’s identity development (Mohanty, Keokse, & Sales, 2007 p. 154). The Hague Convention is an international agreement devoted to ensuring intercountry adoptions act in the best interest of the child (U.S. Department of State, n.d.). A descriptive study by Trolley, Wallin, and Hansen (1995) found that parental acknowledgement of their child’s birth culture is crucial. Acceptance of the child’s birth culture helps the child to accept the
different components of his or her identity (Mohanty & Newhill, 2006). The following quote is from a transracial adoptee that shared her story as an adult.

Parents who adopt transracially need to plan how they're going to raise their children. A parent can't allow mere circumstance to determine a child's life. A transracial child needs someone who can see what he or she sees, someone the child can identify with. History has shown us that black children in interracial homes have issues that children in same-race homes don't have to deal with. Regardless of what color the foster or adoptive parents are, if they're committed to being good parents, they must pursue and maintain cultural bonds for their adopted child. (Simon & Roorda, 2000, p. 359)

The topic of transracial adoption is relevant for social work because of the profession's value of social justice and the dignity and worth of the person. Of the half million social workers in the U.S., about 16% work in child services and 12% in family services (National Association of Social Workers, n.d.). It is important for social workers to be educated and knowledgeable about evidence based adoption practices that act in the best interest of the child. Adoption agencies are typically the main contact and source of information for parents. Adequate preparation and education is necessary for parents to help their children navigate a racialized society. This research study examines the value that adoptive parents place on their child's birth culture and ethnic identity and how it affects the child's ethnic identity development and sense of belonging and acceptance, which was explored through online surveys to adult transracial adoptees.
Literature Review

Due to the controversial nature of transracial adoption (TRA), there is a wealth of literature regarding this topic. To date, research on TRA is composed of descriptive field studies on the psychological outcomes of the racial and ethnic identity development of adoptees (Lee, 2003). This analysis of available literature will also consider reasons for adopting, support and criticism of TRA, and parent recommendations.

Motivating Factors

Families choose to adopt for a variety of reasons. Based on the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth, “three-quarters of women seeking to adopt a child had impaired fecundity or were surgically sterile” (Jones, 2008, p. 2). For some parents adoption is viewed as the second best alternative to biological parenthood or as a last option (Bachrach, London, & Maza, 1994; Brodzinsky & Huffman, 1988). However, according to Falk (1970) in a study of 186 transracially adopting couples, couples interested in TRA were more likely to indicate humanitarian reasons as their explanation for adoption compared to parents adopting a child of their own race, who more often stated they wanted to have a child or another child. More transracially adopting couples than inrace couples already had biological children (Falk, 1970). Transracially adopting couples referred to the child’s needs as the most important reason for adopting. Couples adopting a child of their race desired a child or more children or had special feelings about or for the child (Falk, 1970). Spiritual beliefs were also found to affect parents’ motivation for adopting transracially (Moonsick, 2004; Vonk et al., 2007 cited in Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2011). Spiritual beliefs are demonstrated in a qualitative study of eight Caucasian international transracial adoptive mothers who all referred to God in some manner. Most women felt
that the adoption of their child of color was a part of God’s plan (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2011).

Preparation

Adequate preparation and education for families adopting transracially is critical. Adoption agencies are typically the primary source of information, support, and resources (Welsh, Viana, Petrill, & Mathias, 2007). The services provided vary significantly as some agencies “provide little beyond child placement services, while others consistently pursue ‘best practices’ in social work and offer comprehensive pre- and post-adoption services” (Welsh et al., 2007, p. 290-291). Kallgren and Caudill (1993) conducted a study of seven agencies in four major metropolitan areas in three states. They found that 50% of agencies educated parents about family reactions to TRA. Only 60% of the agencies encouraged transracially adoptive parents to be a part of a racially diverse environment such as their neighborhood and school. Only two of the seven agencies went above state-mandated home studies by offering racial awareness training programs, literature such as books, articles, pamphlets, and booklists covering key transracial adoption issues, or both. Two agencies held a support group for parents of foreign-born children, and only one agency had a support group for parents of children of all ethnicities (Kallgren and Caudill, 1993). Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt, Gunnar, and The Minnesota International Adoption Project Team (2006) supported this finding by claiming that most adoption agencies do not have standard guidelines for services related to cultural socialization for adoptive families. However, agencies are beginning to implement online sources that are reaching a larger number of adoptive parents (Welsh et al., 2007).
Legislation from the MEPA and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 provide strict guidelines around agency preparation on the basis of race, color, or national origin (RCNO) in public foster care adoptions. An agency is not allowed to assess, or ask prospective parents to assess, their ability to parent a child whose RCNO differs from the parents. An agency cannot require prospective parents to complete different or additional steps in order to parent a child with a different RCNO. Trainings for parents about parenting a child of a different RCNO can be offered if they are available to all parents (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). This legislation does not impact international or private domestic adoptions.

The Transracial Adoption Parenting Scale (TAPS) is a tool designed to assess the cultural competence of transracial adoptive parents (Massatti, Vonk, & Gregoire, 2004). The scale was developed due to the strong stance throughout literature that parents adopting transracially “need to possess or develop considerable expertise related to race and culture to help children develop positive racial identity” (Massatti, Vonk, & Gregoire, 2004, p. 43). The 36-item Likert-type scale consists of the three components of racial awareness, multicultural planning, and survival skills. A study of 1,781 transracial adoptive parents was conducted to assess the reliability of the TAPS. Although it is not currently widely used within adoption agencies, it holds the potential of being a thorough, valuable, and reliable instrument to measure cultural competence among TRA parents (Massatti, Vonk, & Gregoire, 2004).

**Identity Development**

Numerous studies emphasize the importance of helping transracial adoptees develop their identity in a racialized society (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2011; Hayes, 1993;
EXPERIENCES WITH BIRTH CULTURE, IDENTITY, AND FEELING DIFFERENT

The quantity of information and studies regarding identity development for transracial adoptees demonstrates its significance. Samuels (2009) asserted that understanding transracially adopted children as racial beings is essential in order for parents to help their children navigate a racial society. Hayes (1993) agreed and stated, “The effort to instill a sense of ethnic identity and an awareness of cultural heritage is seen not as an option but as a necessity. It is maintained that there is no acceptable alternative” (p. 304). It is essential for the family to acknowledge and accept their child’s race (Kallgren & Caudill, 1993). McRoy and Zurcher (1983) considered an understanding of the child’s ethnic and cultural heritage as “an essential right” for the child (p. 142).

Racially diverse neighborhoods and schools are important for the evolvement of ethnic identity for transracially adopted children (Kallgren & Caudill, 1993; Samuels, 2009; Godon, Green, & Ramsey, 2014; Kim, Reichwald, & Lee, 2013). It is beneficial for families to pursue services and individuals in the community that support a child’s race (McRoy & Zurcher, 1983). Diverse communities offer individuals who share the child’s racialized status and experiences (Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997). McGinnis, Smith, Ryan, and Howard (2009) conducted a study of 468 adult adoptees that found that Korean adoptees raised in Caucasian communities suffered more racist incidents than adoptees in more diverse settings. An atmosphere with more racial and ethnic minorities helps adoptees accept their appearance (Feigelman, 2000). It has also been found to lead to less rejection of their own ethnicity and race (Juffer, Stams, & van IJzendoorn, 2004).
Outsider

Transracial adoptees face challenges due to not completely fitting into white culture or their culture of origin (Godon, Green, & Ramsey, 2014; Robinson-Wood, 2011; Ramsey & Mika, 2011; Samuels, 2009; Butler-Sweet, 2011; Juffer & Tieman, 2009). “The juxtaposition of privilege enjoyed by their white adoptive families and the racism suffered by their birth group may be especially disconcerting to transracial adoptees” (Ramsey & Mika, 2011, p. 90). Transracial adoptees are noticeably different from their adoptive families while also being unable to fully assimilate into their birth culture (Godon, Green, & Ramsey, 2014). This can develop a deep sense of difference (Lifton, 1994). In a study of 176 seven-year-old children adopted from Sri Lanka, Korea, and Colombia to the Netherlands, 46% of the children wanted to be Caucasian like their parents (Juffer & Tieman, 2009). In a different study, interviewees explained feeling “distressed and fragmented” as they tried to navigate both groups (Godon, Green, & Ramsey, 2014, p. 14). They are often torn between two cultures and feel that they need to decide which norms to assume (Robinson-Wood, 2011). Transracial adoptees do not feel accepted for who they are from either group. As one example, being a part of white culture challenges acceptance as African American (Samuels, 2006). Adoptees may face judgment about “acting white” or not “acting black” enough (Butler-Sweet, 2011, p. 202). Informants identified “acting white” as equivalent to middle-class and suburban culture while “acting black” was reflective of urban poverty (Butler-Sweet, 2011, p. 205). It can be a lifelong struggle to feel out of place in both majority and minority culture.
**Criticism of Transracial Adoption**

Transracial adoption faces significant opposition and criticism. Some argue that TRA will damage a child’s sense of racial identity (Chestang, 1972; Chimezie, 1975; National Association of Black Social Workers, 1991; Small, 1984). Controversy exists about whether Caucasian parents are able to help a child of color develop a healthy ethnic identity and be equipped to deal with racism (Jacobson, Nielsen, & Hardeman, 2012; Lee, Crolley-Simic, & Vonk, 2013). Opponents point out the challenges of being an outsider to both their racial community and the racial community they grow up in, resulting in severe mental and emotional effects (Hayes, 1993). Chestang (1972) discussed the challenges of being “an alien in the white community and a traitor in the black community” (p. 103-104). This causes stress and anxiety trying to assimilate (Hayes, 1993). It is noteworthy that the harshest criticism against TRA is based on studies from 1972-1994. The Multiethnic Placement Act and the Interethnic Placement Act were passed in 1994 and 1996 to foster better adoption practices.

**Support of Transracial Adoption**

Although challenges associated with transracial adoption exist, there is research that promotes this practice. Hayes (1993) stated that several studies discovered that TRA has a success rate similar to the success rate of adoption in general. Mapp, Boutte-Queen, Erich, and Taylor (2008) also found the effects of TRA to be similar with other adoptions. Reinoso, Juffer, and Tieman (2013) reported no significant differences between international and domestic adoptees on cognitive development (Van IJzendoorn et al., 2005), self-esteem (Jufer & Van IJzendoorn, 2007) and attachment (Van den Dries et al., 2009). A study by McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale, and Anderson (1982) matched these
findings that no significant difference was found in self-esteem scores between African American adopted children raised in a Caucasian or African American family. In addition, Alexander and Curtis (1996) examined literature and concluded that in general TRA was supported and there was no evidence that it was harmful.

Research demonstrates that Caucasian adoptive parents are aware of the importance of discussing race and ethnicity while also providing opportunities for the child to explore their birth culture (Lee et al., 2006; Scroggs & Heitfeld, 2001). A major argument for TRA is that it provides a permanent home for children, which is better than the alternative of an out-of-home placement (Courtney, 1997). Simon (1996) utilized the Kenneth Clark doll test with 324 children in adoptive families composed of Caucasian biological children and adopted children of color. The study found that unlike all other previous doll studies, Caucasian biological children and adopted children of color did not prefer the Caucasian doll. Additionally, the Caucasian and African American children were able to correctly identify their race. Simon (1996) concluded that TRA allowed both Caucasian biological children and adopted children of color to be aware of race and respect physical characteristics. In a study of 366 transracial adoptees, only 5% agreed with the NABSW stance opposing transracial adoption (Simon & Alstein, 1996). Our society is becoming more diverse where “our understanding of what a family looks like is being altered every day,” which leads to more tolerance and acceptance of individuals in minority culture (McGinnis et al., 2009, p. 3; Reinoso, Juffer, & Tieman, 2013).

Attitudes about Transracial Adoption

A variety of opinions regarding TRA exist. Adoption of African American children by Caucasian parents is the greatest source of disagreement (Fenster, 2004; Courtney, 1997).
Children of color, especially African American children, often have long stays in out-of-home care (Butler-Sweet, 2011). Some support removing abused and neglected children from harmful situations while others believe TRA is damaging and detrimental (National Association of Black Social Workers, 1991). Different perspectives are held by the general public, professionals, adoptive parents, and African Americans.

**General Public.** In a poll by CBS This Morning in 1991 of 975 adults, 70% of Caucasian Americans did not think race should be a factor in adoption, and 71% of African Americans responded that race should not be a factor. A Gallup survey in 1971 found the same results in a national sample (Simon, 1996). Discussion and conversations about TRA and the debate is demonstrated by coverage by talk shows such as *Donahue, Oprah, Maury Povitch, Geraldo*, and *Montel Williams* as well as *20-20*, *CNN, 60 Minutes, Black Entertainment TV, CNBC* and *The Today Show* (Simon, 1996).

**Professionals.** Perspectives about TRA differ among professionals. Fenster (2004) found that optimism about the future of race relations was the most significant predictor of attitudes about TRA among both African American and Caucasian social workers. On average the respondents were in favor of TRA and believed that children should be exposed to their culture and history (Fenster, 2004). The American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Adoption and Dependent Care argued that the emotional, social, and psychological effects on African American children raised in Caucasian families are controversial and challenging to predict (Mapp, Boutte-Queen, Erich, & Taylor, 2008). The Child Welfare League of America supported TRA as a way to provide a permanent home for a child, but holds that it is preferable to place children in a family of their own racial background (Chimezie, 1975). Howard, Roysen and Skerl (1977) raised a striking question
for social workers: “How does the prevention of transracial adoption help to solve the problem of racism?” (p. 188). Chestang (1972) strongly opposed TRA, but concludes that if TRA adoptees “survive, [they] have the potential for becoming catalysts for society in general” (p. 105).

**Parents.** Transracial adoptive parents hold insight and opinions about TRA due to personal experience. Simon (1996) conducted a twenty-year longitudinal study with 96 families who adopted transracially. When asked if, with the knowledge of hindsight and their personal experience, they would adopt a child of a different race, 92% of parents responded yes. Four percent said they were not sure and 4% said no. Two of the three parents who said no clarified that it was due to physical and emotional concerns that the parents were not aware of at the time of adoption. They said that race was not an issue. In a study by Falk (1970) 93% of couples that adopted a child of their own race or another race felt that the word “son” or “daughter” meant the same when used for an adopted or genetic child.

In Simon’s (1996) longitudinal study, the researcher also posed a question about if the parents would recommend TRA to other families. Eighty eight percent said yes, 3% responded no and 17% were not sure. Twenty years later 90% said yes, and eight years earlier 85% said yes. Reasons families provided for adopting transracially include, “Do it because you want a child and because you believe you will love that child as if you had given birth to it,” “Don’t do it to show how ‘liberal’ or ‘enlightened’ you are,” “Don’t listen to what other people say-do what you feel you want to do,” and “Ask yourself if caring for a child is the most important thing” (Simon, 1996, p. 86-87). A study by Falk (1970) compared transracial adoptive parents to parents who adopted a child of the same race. A
considerably lower percentage of couples who adopted transracially would recommend families to adopt as they did. A majority of transracial adoptive couples felt that it is more challenging to raise an adopted child of another race than their own (Falk, 1970). It is important to note that Falk’s study is 44 years old and acceptance of racial differences and the structure of families looks different than it did in 1970.

Transracial couples were asked what surprised them the most about TRA. The two most common answers with 22% and 21% were “there have been no major surprises” and that the only surprise was how smooth and successful the experience was (Simon, 1996). Sixteen percent of the respondents were most surprised about the lack of information they received about their child’s physical, emotional, and social background and the difficulty of identity issues in teen years.

**African Americans.** In general, African Americans have more concerns regarding TRA than Caucasians. The NABSW (1991) referred to TRA as “cultural genocide” and considered it not in the best interest of African American children. Opposition was most frequently due to challenges associated with developing a cultural and ethnic identity (Mapp, Boutte-Queen, Erich, & Taylor, 2008; Fenster, 2004). Fenster (2004) concluded that opposition is partially due to African American children losing their African American identity and being lost to the African American community. African Americans felt this was more damaging than waiting for a placement with an African American family (Fenster, 2004). In a sample of 10 African American private agencies, child welfare workers believed TRA is potentially harmful to African American families (Mapp, Boutte-Queen, Erich, & Taylor, 2008). African American social workers debated the ability of a Caucasian family to successfully pass on an African American identity and provide coping mechanisms for
living in a racist society (Simon, 1978). Similarly African American social workers in Fenster’s (2004) study were more critical of TRA than Caucasian social workers, were less optimistic about the future of race relations, and were more passionate about spreading African American awareness. Also noteworthy, African American social workers “identified more strongly with their own ethnic group than did White respondents” (Fenster, 2004, p. 59).

On the other hand, support of TRA by African Americans also exists. Support was due to respondents’ beliefs that adoption is better for children than institutional care (Howard, Royse, & Skerl, 1977; Simon, 1978). There was support despite strong beliefs that African American children lose their identity due to concern about the child’s well-being and development (Fenster, 2004). In a study of 150 African American households in Dayton, Ohio, the majority felt that being in a loving Caucasian home is better than being in foster care or in an institution (Howard, Royse, & Skerl, 1977).

**Parenting**

The lack of introducing and encouraging a strong sense of ethnic identity and knowledge of cultural heritage is the main argument against TRA (Hayes, 1993). Support of TRA is dependent on parents doing everything they can to provide information about the child’s cultural heritage and encouraging a strong sense of racial identity (Hayes, 1993). However, there is not significant proof that parents who try to do these things raise children who are happier and more integrated into their families and communities (Hayes, 1993). Yet the necessity of nurturing a child’s ethnic identity and cultural heritage is seen as incontestable (Hayes, 1993).
Research shows that parental support of the child’s racial heritage is critical (Mapp, Boutte-Queen, Erich, & Taylor, 2008; Mohanty & Newhill, 2006). Literature classifies a family’s racial stance as racially dissonant or racially aware, which influences healthy identity development and self-esteem (McGinnis et al., 2009). Benson, Sharma, and Roehlkepartain conducted the largest study of adoptive families in the United States as of 1994 and identified a nurturing environment, openness about physical differences and psychological similarities, and positive role models of their own race as factors that help adoptees adjust. In addition to typical quality parenting involving warmth, love, and support, adoptees need to be exposed to their birth culture (Mohanty & Newhill, 2006).

Level of Involvement. There is a wide spectrum of the degree to which parents engage in discussion and participate in activities related to their child’s race and culture (Ramsey & Mika, 2011; Kim, Reichwald, & Lee, 2013; Robinson-Wood, 2011; Lee et al., 2006). At one end are parents who do not acknowledge differences. They may give their child a Westernized name and steer away from talking about their child’s background. At the other end are parents who help their child incorporate both the past and present (Ramsey & Mika, 2011). A study with 13 Caucasian mothers of non-Caucasian children also found a variety of racial awareness levels and practices related to ethnicity and race (Robinson-Wood, 2011).

Several studies discovered active parent involvement. Friedlander (2003) asserted that many, if not most, families learn about the child’s birth culture. Crolley-Simic and Vonk (2008) interviewed eight mothers who adopted children of a different race internationally. All mothers reported that they participated in activities to racially socialize their children. Additionally, in a qualitative study of internationally adopted children of
EXPERIENCES WITH BIRTH CULTURE, IDENTITY, AND FEELING DIFFERENT

color, the parents joined adoption support groups and educated themselves and their children about their birth culture. Furthermore, most parents had family members who had been adopted or had racial, ethnic, or religious diversity in their families before adopting (Friedlander et al., 2000).

On the contrary, studies also demonstrated lack of parent involvement. Some parents minimized or did not accept the racial differences between themselves and their children (Bergquist, Campbell, & Unrau, 2003). In a study utilizing in-depth interviews of 25 adult Black-White multiracials, only four participants believed their parents offered opportunities for racial socialization while growing up (Samuels, 2009). Another study identified a discrepancy between parent report of cultural socialization and child report. Parents identified more involvement than children perceived (Kim, Reichwald, & Lee, 2013). Two studies discovered good intentions from parents; however the information was not constructive (Godon, Green, & Ramsey, 2014; Friedlander, 2003). One study found that despite families trying to educate themselves, they did not provide “authentic and meaningful information” (Godon, Green, & Ramsey, 2014, p. 22-23). Additionally, another study found that parents believed that information along with love would remedy the challenges of being a minority in a Caucasian community (Friedlander, 2003).

Parents assuming a colorblind attitude where they disregard and do not acknowledge racial differences is also found among adoptive parents. This can be an attractive approach where parents reject racism and value people as people (Omi & Winant, 1994). However, participants in an Extended Case Method (ECM) study reported parental colorblindness made adoptees feel racially isolated and their experiences invalidated (Samuels, 2009). Parental colorblindness results in children navigating a
racialized world on their own (Samuels, 2009). A study by Robinson-Wood (2011) backed up this concept by stating that Caucasian mothers who do not offer racial socialization do not provide adequate support to help their children foster healthy racial identities. Adoptees’ criticisms of parental colorblindness did not insist their parents be African American or multiracial. However, adoptees wanted parents to recognize needs related to being a different race. This may mean that parents seek outside resources and individuals who identify with the child’s racialized status and experiences (Samuels, 2009).

**Self-Esteem.** A higher self-esteem is one of the many benefits of parents who acknowledge their child’s race and provide socialization (Mohanty, Keokse, & Sales, 2007; Mohanty & Newhill, 2006). Adoptee self-esteem is related to a sense of belonging to their adoptive family and feeling valued by the majority culture. In a study of 82 adult transracial adoptees, Mohanty, Keokse, and Sales (2007) found that ensuring a multicultural environment allows adoptees to feel less like an outsider. Adult Asian adoptees who felt their parents were supportive of cultural socialization reported higher self-esteem. A separate study also found the self-esteem of adoptees to be connected with parents’ cultural competence and exposure to birth culture. Parents recognized their child’s understanding of their culture of origin as related to their identity and adjustment (Mohanty & Newhill, 2006).

**Developmentally Appropriate.** It is important for conversations and interventions related to a child’s adoptive status and their birth culture to be developmentally appropriate (Brodzinsky, Singer, & Braff, 1984; Kim, Reichwald, & Lee, 2013). Parents struggle with determining when and what to tell children about their adoption. Additionally, questions continue to emerge throughout their development (Brodzinaky,
Singer, & Braff, 1984). “Being adopted can be something that colors a person’s relationship with their adoptive parents, her emerging sense of self, and the intimate relationship she forge for the rest of her life” (Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992, p. 7). Issues of adoption will be revisited, consciously and unconsciously, throughout an adoptee’s development. There is no “developmental endpoint for this process” (Friedlander, 2003, p. 746). Kim, Reichwald, and Lee (2013) encourage parents to involve their child in decisions about the amount of socialization based on their developmental stage. Cultural activities and events look different as a child progresses through life stages. Parents often wait for their children to take the lead. Although cultural socialization and conversations should not be forced on a child, it is recommended to encourage children to explore their culture of origin (Kim, Reichwald, & Lee, 2013).

**Public Reactions.** Transracial adoptees and families often have to face public reactions and comments. In a study of 13 mothers who adopted transracially, a common theme was that strangers reacted with “surprise, disbelief, and in some cases displeasure once they realized the mother and child were a family” (Robinson-Wood, 2011, p. 337). People stared and asked questions such as, “Is that your mother?” requiring public explanations (Robinson-Wood, 2011; Samuels, 2009, p. 83). Additionally, extended families sometimes express disapproval of adopting transracially. Nine out of 25 multiracial adoptees discussed racially prejudiced extended family members (Samuels, 2009).

**Practical Application.** Several research studies offer ideas and suggestions of how to involve an adopted child and the whole family in cultural socialization (Godon, Green, & Ramsey, 2014; Mohanty, Keokse, & Sales, 2007; Samuels, 2009). Mohanty, Keokse, and
Sales (2007) offered ideas such as reading books and watching videos when the child is young. Establishing relationships with children from the adoptee’s country of origin, attending cultural camps, and traveling to their birth country are suggestions as the child develops. A study by Godon, Green, and Ramsey (2014) also discussed parents encouraging their child to be involved in diverse communities and local ethnic groups. Providing practical language skills, cultural information, and opportunities to visit their birth country were recommended over short-term cultural experiences such as culture camps and annual picnics (Godon, Green, & Ramsey, 2014). The Donaldson Adoption Institute carried out an innovative and the most extensive study to date of identity development in adult adoptees. The overarching theme was that identity development needs to go “beyond culture camp” and be more fully integrated and ongoing (McGinnis, Smith, Ryan, and Howard, 2009, p. 8). The concept of including the whole family and not just educating the child about their background was recommended (Godon, Green, & Ramsey, 2014). This offers a shared family experience and not placing the responsibility on the adopted child (Mohanty, Keokse, & Sales, 2007).

The topic of TRA has been researched and analyzed extensively. A host of opinions and perspectives are held regarding this practice and how adoption agencies and parents should approach TRA. Research clearly demonstrates that introducing a child of a different race into a family is multifaceted and requires planning and intentionality.

**Summary**

Transracial adoption is a complex practice that social workers play a significant role in. Preparation and education for adoptive parents is critical. Adoptees face numerous challenges living in a racialized society with parents who cannot identify with their racial
status. This research will explore the value that adoptive parents place on their child’s birth culture and ethnic identity and how it affects the child’s ethnic identity development and sense of belonging and acceptance.
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used to conduct this research on parental involvement and engagement with their adopted child’s birth culture and identity development is referred to as triple quandary. Boykin and Toms (1985) developed this conceptual framework which focuses on ethnic socialization of minority children. This framework was created due to the complexity of African American family life in America. “The demands that result from having to cope within the American social context are multifaceted and inherently contradictory” (Boykin & Toms, 1985, p. 33).

The triple quandry theory provides a beneficial framework for considering transracial adoption and the impact of ethnic socialization. This conceptual framework served as the theory behind the study conducted by Mohanty (2008), which is what the survey instrument was adapted from. Many different systems and environments interact within the adoption process. A few examples include the adoptive family, the adoptive family’s support network, the adoption agency, the adoptive family’s community, the country of the adoptive family, the country of the adoptee, the biological parent, and the care setting the adoptee resided in prior to adoption. All of these systems affect an adoptee’s development and identity formation. This study considers the interactions of mainstream American society, minority culture, and country of origin with the adoptive parents and transracial adoptee.

This theory involves three aspects that all interact: navigating mainstream American society, minority culture, and the African American cultural experience (Boykin and Toms, 1985). The first theme, mainstream culture, is typically the easiest for adoptive parents (Mohanty, 2008). Parents are often unaware that they are passing on mainstream
American beliefs and values. Adoptees learn these values through interaction with a variety of systems such as employers, judicial systems, and mass media (Boykin and Toms, 1985). Most transracial adoptive parents naturally teach Anglo-American culture (Mohanty, 2008).

The second theme includes racial socialization and minority culture (Boykin & Toms, 1985). Many transracial adoptive parents are unfamiliar with racial issues and prejudice. By adopting a child of a different race, families become interracial and experience racism and prejudice (Mohanty, 2008). “This status breeds an experience that brings its own unique set of forces, responsibilities and necessities for negotiation” (Boykin & Toms, 1985, p. 44). It is important for adoptive parents to be prepared and help their child cope in a racialized society.

The final theme is focused on parents orienting adoptees to their birth culture. It has become more prevalent for adoptive parents to teach their children about their culture of origin (Mohanty, 2008). Boykin & Toms (1985) discuss nine elements significant to African American culture that often clash with mainstream culture. However, adoptive parents often help their child feel proud of their birth culture (Mohanty, 2008).

A strength of Boykin and Toms’s (1985) framework of ethnic identity development is identifying the complexity a child of color faces as they interact with a variety of values, cultures, and systems that often conflict. It speaks to the challenges that are critical for transracial families to consider and be aware of. A limitation of this framework is that it does not explicitly address adoptive families’ socialization approaches. However, the three themes of ethnic socialization are significant in transracial adoptive families. Additionally, it was specifically developed for socialization related to African American culture.
Methods

Research Design

The research was conducted through an online survey with adult transracial adoptees. An online survey allows for responses from a wider population (Dillman, 2000). Additionally, an online survey is inexpensive and flexible (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 2011). The researcher hoped to obtain a larger sample size due to participants being able to complete the survey at a convenient time for them without a significant time commitment. Qualtrics, a program that designs online surveys, was used.

Sample

The sample was recruited through key informants, adoption agencies, adoption support groups, adoptee forums, online adoptee networking, sites and online discussion boards throughout the United States. Snowball sampling was used where “we start with a few cases of the type we want to study, and we let them lead us to more cases, which in turn lead us to still more cases, and so on” (Monette et al., 2011, p. 151). Participants were encouraged to forward the link to other potentially interested adult transracial adoptees. Snowball sampling is recommended for accessing a sample that is difficult to find (Anastas, 1999). A follow-up notice about the study was sent out a few weeks after the first recruitment effort. The expected sample size was 60 to 75 adoptees. Participants were 18 years old or over. Their parents were a different race than them. Participants included domestic and international adoptees.

Protection of Human Subjects

This research was reviewed by the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board to ensure the protection of human subjects. Participation was voluntary, and
EXPERIENCES WITH BIRTH CULTURE, IDENTITY, AND FEELING DIFFERENT

participants were informed that they could withdraw from completing the survey at any time. Participants had the option to send an email to the researcher if they wanted the findings sent to them. Their survey responses were not linked to their email address. Qualtrics provided information on the project as well as informed consent for participants explaining the purpose of the study. Only the researcher and supervising faculty member had access to the actual surveys, which did not contain any identifying information. The survey responses were locked in a file cabinet and/or password protected computer. All data was destroyed upon completion of this research project in May 2015.

Instrument

Participants completed an online survey consisting of quantitative questions based on the Ethnic Socialization Scale, Revised Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM), and Belongingness and Ethnic Self-Perception Scale (see Appendix A). One qualitative question was incorporated at the end of the survey. Demographic information was also included such as the participant’s gender, age, age at adoption, country of origin, and ethnicity. The participant was asked for the ethnicity of their adoptive mother and father and if their adoption was domestic or international.

The Ethnic Socialization Scale was developed by Mohanty (2008). Thirteen of the items were adopted from the Transracial Adoption Parenting Scale (TAPS) by Massatti, Vonk, and Gregoire (2004). TAPS was developed for transracial adoptive parents. Thirteen of 36 items were deemed appropriate for adoptees. Six new items were added to show the contrasting effect of each ethnic and racial socialization factor on adoptees. A Likert-type scale ranging from Not At All Important (1) to Extremely Important (5) was used. Sample items are: “My parents provided opportunities for me to learn values and traditions of my
birth culture” and “My parents provided opportunities for me to feel pride in my racial heritage.”

The emphasis parents placed on birth culture was also measured (Mohanty, 2008). Adoptees were asked to rate the amount of emphasis their parents placed on learning the heritage and culture of their birth country with the options of Not at all, Just the right amount, or Too much.

The Revised Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) was used to measure the ethnic identity of international adoptees (Phinney, 1992). It is composed of 12 items that range from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (4). Sample questions are: “I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs,” “I have a strong sense of belonging to my ethnic group,” and “I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.” This scale has been used successfully by different researchers to measure ethnic identity among adolescents and young adults from diverse ethnic groups (Roberts et al., 1999; Phinney, 1992). Roberts et al. (1999) reported that the internal reliability of the MEIM is .81. Two additional items related to discrimination were added to the second section to match the section about ethnic identity in the study conducted by Mohanty (2008). The items include “I have been teased or insulted because of my ethnic background” and “I have experienced negative reactions from others about my skin color.”

To measure marginality, a subscale of the Belongingness and Ethnic Self-Perception Scale was utilized (Mohanty, 2008). The marginality subscale includes 7 items. Items were scored on a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (6). Sample items for the subscale marginality are: “I feel I am different from the
majority in the culture” and “I feel a sense of incompleteness because of my adoptive status.”

The survey ended with one qualitative question that asked the most significant thing they would like parents adopting a child of a different race to know. This allowed participants the opportunity to comment on important aspects of parenting that they feel strongly about.

Data Collection

The data was collected through online surveys nationally. The researcher collected written agreement from adoption agencies and therapists that work with adoptees to distribute flyers to adult transracial adoptees regarding the study. Interested participants were given a flyer, which included a description of the research study, the researcher’s contact information, and a Web address to the survey. Information about the study and a link to the survey was posted on adoptee forums, online adoptee networking sites, and online discussion boards.

Data Analysis

Quantitative questions were analyzed using the statistical analysis program called SPSS (Monette et al., 2011). The researcher utilized several descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics included frequency distributions, histograms, a bar chart, and measures of central tendency and dispersion to examine the demographic information. In addition, the researcher conducted several inferential statistics in order to examine whether or not there was an association between different variables. The inferential statistics included correlations, scatter plots, and T-tests in order to identify the relationships that exist, or may not exist, between the varying survey scales.
The qualitative question was analyzed using the grounded theory method. It is one of the most well-known approaches in qualitative research (Padgett, 2008). The analysis involves inductive coding, memo writing, and integrating theoretical frameworks (Padgett, 2008). Concepts that emerged from the question were noted, or coded, next to the text. Codes were organized into categories. Recurring codes were grouped into themes.
Findings

Sample

Sample population characteristics were analyzed using frequency distributions and descriptive statistics. The sample consisted of 62 adult transracial adoptees across the United States. States represented in the sample include Minnesota, Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Colorado, Washington, South Dakota, New York, Maryland, Wisconsin, Michigan, Oregon, Alabama, Virginia, and Nebraska. The majority of the sample was female. Fifty-two respondents identified themselves as female, while only 10 respondents identified themselves as male (Figure 1). The majority of the sample was Asian or Asian American. Thirty-two respondents (51.6%) are Asian or Asian American, 13 respondents (21.0%) are Black or African American, eight respondents (12.9%) are Hispanic or Latino, two respondents (3.2%) are White or Caucasian, five respondents (8.1%) are Multiracial, and one respondent (1.6%) identified as Other and specified Ethiopian (Figure 2). The age of the sample ranged from 20 years to 55 years with a mean age of 31.26 years (Figure 5). Fourteen respondents (22.6%) grew up in an urban setting, 18 respondents (29.0%) grew up in a large town, 19 respondents (30.6%) grew up in a small town, and 11 respondents (17.7%) grew up in a rural setting (Figure 3). The majority of the sample was raised with one or more adopted siblings. Fifteen respondents (24.2%) do not have an adopted sibling and 46 respondents (74.2%) have one or more adopted siblings (Figure 6).
Figure 1. Gender
Figure 2. Ethnicity
Figure 5. Age

Mean = 31.26
Std. Dev. = 8.242
N = 61
Figure 3. Community Description
Descriptive Statistics

Experiences and Learning of the Ethnic Culture. The research question for this study was: What is the distribution of sum of Experiences and Learning the Ethnic Culture scale scores? Participants were asked to rate 20 statements based on how important they thought each development activity was to their parent. The response options were Not At All Important (1), Slightly Important (2), Moderately Important (3), Very Much Important (4), or Extremely Important (5). The scale scores could range from a total of 0 to 120. Table 1 shows that, of the 57 respondents, the mean scale score was 45.59 with a standard deviation of 23.31. The minimum response was 20 and the maximum response was 100.
Ten participants had a scale score of 20, indicating they answered Not At All Important to all 20 statements. The histogram (Figure 9) shows that the bulk of the data is situated to the left of the mean and the right tail of the distribution is longer. The distribution of responses is positively skewed. Overall, respondents felt parents valued cultural activities and experiences as slightly important.

Table 1. Sum of Experiences and Learning the Ethnic Culture Scale Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sum_Q15</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>Statistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum_Q15</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>45.49</td>
<td>23.317</td>
<td>.665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(listwise)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethnic Identity. The research question for this study was: What is the distribution of sum of Ethnic Identity scale scores? Participants were asked to rate 12 statements that describe feelings about ethnicity. The response options were Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Agree (3), and Strongly Agree (4). The scale scores could range from a total of 12 to 48. Table 2 shows that, of the 56 respondents, the mean scale score was 33.39 with a standard deviation of 6.95. The minimum response was 21, and the maximum response was 48. Overall, respondents agreed with statements related to a strong ethnic identity.
Feeling Different. The research question for this study was: What is the distribution of sum of Feeling Different scale scores? Participants were asked to rate seven statements that describe feelings about belongingness and acceptance. The response
options were Strongly Disagree (1), Moderately Disagree (2), Slightly Disagree (3) and Slightly Agree (4), Moderately Agree (5), and Strongly Agree (6). Items five and seven were reverse scored. The scale scores could range from a total of 7 to 42. Table 3 shows that, of the 56 respondents, the mean scale score was 22.38 with a standard deviation of 8.05. The minimum response was 7, and the maximum response was 38. Overall, respondents slightly disagreed about feeling different from majority culture.

Table 3. Sum of Feeling Different Scale Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Statistics</th>
<th>N Statistic</th>
<th>Minimum Statistic</th>
<th>Maximum Statistic</th>
<th>Mean Statistic</th>
<th>Std. Deviation Statistic</th>
<th>Skewness Statistic</th>
<th>Std. Error Statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sum_Q20</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>22.38</td>
<td>8.051</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>.319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Amount of Emphasis. The research question for this study was: What amount of emphasis did adoptees report their parents placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country? Participants were asked “Rate the amount of emphasis that your adoptive parents placed on learning the values and heritage of your birth country.” They were provided the options: Not at all, Just the right amount, or Too much. Over half of the respondents (56.5%) reported no emphasis on learning the values and heritage of their birth country and no respondents (0%) reported too much emphasis. Twenty-four respondents (38.7%) rated the amount of emphasis as “Just the right amount.”
Table 4. Amount of Emphasis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of Emphasis</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>59.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just the right amount</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>95.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing System</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conversations about Race.** The research question for this study was: What is the distribution of parent importance of talking about race and racism openly within the family? Participants were asked to think about the cultural activities their adoptive
parents provided while they were growing up and rate how important they thought 20 different development activities were to their parents. Due to a prevalent theme of race when adoptees were asked, “What is the most significant thing you wish parents adopting a child of a different race knew?” the researcher analyzed data for how participants ranked the development activity of “Talking about race and racism openly within the family.”

Participants were given the option to rank parent importance as Not At All Important (1), Slightly Important (2), Moderately Important (3), Very Much Important (4), or Extremely Important (5). The findings of this study in Table 7 show that 21 respondents (33.9%) answered Not At All important, nine respondents (14.5%) answered Slightly Important, five respondents (8.1%) answered Moderately Important, nine respondents (14.5%) answered Very Much Important, and 12 respondents (19.4%) answered Extremely Important.

Table 7. Conversations about Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Importance of Talking about Race and Racism</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not At All Important</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Important</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Important</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Much Important</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>78.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Important</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>90.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing System</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The research question for this study was: What is the relationship between participants' Experiences and Learning the Ethnic Culture scale scores and Feeling Different scale scores? The research hypothesis for the study was: There is a relationship between respondents’ experiences and learning the ethnic culture and respondents’ feelings of being different. The null hypothesis was: There is no relationship between respondents’ experiences and learning the ethnic culture and respondents’ feelings of being different.
Table 10 and Figure 8 show the inferential statistics of the relationship between the two variables, Experiences and Learning and Feeling Different. The calculated correlation ($r = -.272$, $p < .05$) indicates a weak, negative correlation. Therefore, as participants ranked a higher importance parents placed on experiences and learning of the ethnic culture, their feelings of being different decreased.

The results of this study indicate that participants' experiences and learning of the ethnic culture may also predict participants' feelings of being different.

Table 10. Relationship between Experiences and Learning the Ethnic Culture Scale Scores and Feeling Different Scale Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum_Q15</th>
<th>Sum_Q20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Correlations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum_Q15 Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.272*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.044</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum_Q20 Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-0.272*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.044</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
The research question for this study was: Is there a difference between mean Feeling Different scale scores for respondents who answered not enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country and respondents who answered just enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country? The research hypothesis for the study is: There is a difference between respondents who answered not enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country and respondents who answered just enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country on their Feeling Different scale scores. The null hypothesis for the study was:

Figure 8. Adoptee Experiences and Learning the Ethnic Culture Scale Scores and Feeling Different Scale Scores
p-value < .05, r = -.272

**Amount of Emphasis and Feeling Different.** The research question for this study was: Is there a difference between mean Feeling Different scale scores for respondents who answered not enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country and respondents who answered just enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country? The research hypothesis for the study is: There is a difference between respondents who answered not enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country and respondents who answered just enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country on their Feeling Different scale scores. The null hypothesis for the study was:
There is no difference between respondents who answered not enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country and respondents who answered just enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country on their Feeling Different scale scores.

Table 11 and Table 12 show the results of the T-test comparing the mean Feeling Different scale scores of respondents who answered not enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country and respondents who answered just enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country. Respondents who answered not enough emphasis had a mean Feeling Different scale score of 24.33. Respondents who answered just enough emphasis had a mean Feeling Different scale score of 19.57. The difference between these mean scale scores was 4.77 points. Therefore, respondents who answered just enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country identified fewer feelings of being different than respondents who answered not enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country.

The Levene’s Test of Equality of Variance for the independent samples T-test is .41. Since .41 is greater than .05, the Levene’s Test is not significant. Therefore, the p-value for this T-test is .028. Since the p-value is less than .05, the results of this data are statistically significant. As a result, I reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference between respondents who answered not enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country and respondents who answered just enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country on their Feeling Different scale scores. Therefore, there is a significant difference between respondents who
answered not enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their 
birth country and respondents who answered just enough emphasis was placed on 
learning the values and heritage of their birth country on their Feeling Different scale 
scores.

Table 11. Descriptives for Amount of Emphasis and Feeling Different T-Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Amount of Emphasis</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sum_Q20 Not all</td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24.33</td>
<td>8.080</td>
<td>1.407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just the right amount</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19.57</td>
<td>7.285</td>
<td>1.519</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12. Amount of Emphasis and Feeling Different T-Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum_Q20 Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.686</td>
<td>.411</td>
<td>2.260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>2.303</td>
<td>50.417</td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ethnicity and Feeling Different.** The research question for this study was: Is there 
a difference between Asian or Asian American respondents, Black or African American 
respondents, Hispanic or Latino respondents, and multiracial respondents on their Feeling 
Different scale scores? The research hypothesis for the study is: There is a difference
between Asian or Asian American respondents, Black or African American respondents, Hispanic or Latino respondents, and multiracial respondents on their Feeling Different scale scores. The null hypothesis for the study was: There is no difference between Asian or Asian American respondents, Black or African American respondents, Hispanic or Latino respondents, and multiracial respondents on their Feeling Different scale scores.

An ANOVA was conducted to compare the four main ethnicities in the sample and Feeling Different scale scores. This test was conducted to discover whether ethnicity had an effect on Feeling Different scale scores. The ANOVA was calculated using the scores of 54 respondents showing mean Feeling Different scale scores based on ethnicity. Asian or Asian American respondents (N=31) had a mean scale score of 23.16, Black or African American respondents (N=11) had a mean scale score of 19.45, Hispanic or Latino respondents (N=8) had a mean scale score of 16.5, and multiracial respondents (N=4) had a mean scale score of 33.25 (Table 13).

Table 13. Descriptives for Ethnicity and Feeling Different Scale Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval for Mean</th>
<th>Lower Bound</th>
<th>Upper Bound</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sum_Q20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23.1613</td>
<td>8.30701</td>
<td>1.49198</td>
<td>[20.1143, 26.2083]</td>
<td>20.1143</td>
<td>20.1143</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>38.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19.4545</td>
<td>6.08874</td>
<td>1.83582</td>
<td>[15.3641, 23.5450]</td>
<td>15.3641</td>
<td>15.3641</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>28.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.2500</td>
<td>4.50000</td>
<td>2.25000</td>
<td>[26.0895, 40.4105]</td>
<td>26.0895</td>
<td>26.0895</td>
<td>27.00</td>
<td>37.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>22.1667</td>
<td>8.10486</td>
<td>1.10293</td>
<td>[19.9545, 24.3789]</td>
<td>19.9545</td>
<td>19.9545</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>38.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 14 further shows the results of the ANOVA conducted to test for differences between ethnicity of respondents and their Feeling Different scale scores. Since the p-value is < .001, there is a significant difference between participants with different ethnicities and their Feeling Different scale scores.

Table 14. ANOVA for Ethnicity and Feeling Different Scale Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>859.829</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>286.610</td>
<td>5.466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>2621.671</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>52.433</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3481.500</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15 displays the results of the Tukey Post-Hoc which shows those groups that have a statistically significant difference between mean scores. This Tukey compares the mean Feeling Different scale scores for the respondents who identified as Asian or Asian American, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, or multiracial. Significant differences were found between Black or African American respondents and multiracial respondents with a mean difference of 13.79, which is significant at a p-value of < .05. There was also a significant difference between Hispanic or Latino respondents and multiracial respondents with a mean difference of 16.75, which is significant at a p-value of < .05. Significant differences were not found between Asian or Asian American respondents and multiracial respondents with a mean difference of 10.09, with a p-value of .054.
Table 15. Tukey for Ethnicity and Feeling Different Scale Scores

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Sum_Q20

Tukey HSD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) EthnicityR</th>
<th>(J) EthnicityR</th>
<th>Mean Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower Bound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>3.70674</td>
<td>2.54127</td>
<td>.470</td>
<td>-3.0469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>6.66129</td>
<td>2.87151</td>
<td>.107</td>
<td>-.9700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>-10.08871</td>
<td>3.84704</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>-20.3126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-3.70674</td>
<td>2.54127</td>
<td>.470</td>
<td>-10.4604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.95455</td>
<td>3.36465</td>
<td>.816</td>
<td>-5.9873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>-13.79545*</td>
<td>4.22789</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>-25.0314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-6.66129</td>
<td>2.87151</td>
<td>.107</td>
<td>-14.2926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>-2.95455</td>
<td>3.36465</td>
<td>.816</td>
<td>-11.8964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>-16.75000*</td>
<td>4.43425</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-28.5344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>10.08871</td>
<td>3.84704</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>-.1351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>13.79545*</td>
<td>4.22789</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>2.5595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>16.75000*</td>
<td>4.43425</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>4.9656</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.
Table 16. Homogeneous Subsets for Ethnicity and Feeling Different Scale Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Subset for alpha = 0.05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 8.029.
b. The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used.
Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

**Experiences and Ethnic Identity.** The research question for this study was: What is the relationship between participants’ Experiences and Learning the Ethnic Culture scale scores and Ethnic Identity scale scores? The research hypothesis for the study is: There is a relationship between respondents’ experiences and learning the ethnic culture and respondents’ ethnic identity. The null hypothesis was: There is no relationship between respondents’ experiences and learning the ethnic culture and respondents’ ethnic identity.

Figure 7 shows the inferential statistics of the relationship between the two variables, Experiences and Learning and Ethnic Identity. The p-value was .116. Although the p-value was close to significance, it was greater than .05, so the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, this data did not support the research hypothesis that there is an association between respondents’ experiences and learning the ethnic culture and respondents’ ethnic identity.
Gender and Feeling Different. The research question for this study was: Is there a difference between male participants' and female participants' Feeling Different scale scores? The research hypothesis for the study is: There is a difference between male respondents and female respondents on their Feeling Different scale scores. The null hypothesis for the study was: There is no difference between male respondents and female respondents on their Feeling Different scale scores.

Items five and seven were reverse scored. Male respondents’ mean Feeling Different scale score was 18.4. Female respondents’ mean Feeling Different scale score was
23.24. The difference between these mean scale scores was 4.84 points. Therefore, female respondents identified more feelings of being different than male respondents.

The Levene’s Test of Equality of Variance for the independent samples T-test is .682. Since .682 is greater than .05, the Levene’s Test is not significant. Therefore, the p-value for this T-test is .085. Although the p-value is close to significance, it is greater than .05, so the results of this data are not statistically significant. As a result, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference between male respondents and female respondents on their Feeling Different scale scores. Therefore, there is not a significant difference between male respondents and female respondents on their Feeling Different scale scores.

**Gender and Ethnic Identity.** The research question for this study was: Is there a difference between male participants’ and female participants’ Ethnic Identity scale scores? The research hypothesis for the study is: There is a difference between male respondents and female respondents on their Ethnic Identity scale scores. The null hypothesis for the study was: There is no difference between male respondents and female respondents on their Ethnic Identity scale scores.

Questions 19 and 20 were excluded from the Ethnic Identity scale score since they pertained to public reactions to adoptees’ ethnic background and skin color and not directly to ethnic identity. Male respondents’ mean Ethnic Identity scale score was 33.6. Female respondents’ mean Ethnic Identity scale score was 33.35. The difference between these mean scale scores was .25 points. Therefore, male respondents felt more comfortable with their ethnic identity than female respondents.
The Levene’s Test of Equality of Variance for the independent samples T-test is .575. Since .575 is greater than .05, the Levene’s Test is not significant. Therefore, the p-value for this T-test is .918. Since the p-value is greater than .05, the results of this data are not statistically significant. As a result, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference between male respondents and female respondents on their Ethnic Identity scale scores. Therefore, there is not a significant difference between male respondents and female respondents on their Ethnic Identity scale scores.

**Community and Ethnic Identity.** The research question for this study was: Is there a difference between community designations of participants and Ethnic Identity scale scores? The research hypothesis for the study is: There is a difference between urban and large town respondents and small town and rural respondents on their Ethnic Identity scale scores. The null hypothesis for the study was: There is no difference between urban and large town respondents and small town and rural respondents on their Ethnic Identity scale scores.

The two categories urban and large town were combined. The categories small town and rural were combined. Questions 19 and 20 were excluded from the Ethnic Identity scale score since they pertained to public reactions to adoptees’ ethnic background and skin color and not directly to ethnic identity. Urban and large town respondents’ mean Ethnic Identity scale score was 33.83. Small town and rural respondents’ mean Ethnic Identity scale score was 32.88. The difference between these mean scale scores was .95 points. Therefore, urban and large town respondents felt more comfortable with their ethnic identity than small town and rural respondents.
The Levene’s Test of Equality of Variance for the independent samples T-test is .347. Since .347 is greater than .05, the Levene’s Test is not significant. Therefore, the p-value for this T-test is .615. Since the p-value is greater than .05, the results of this data are not statistically significant. As a result, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference between urban and large town respondents and small town and rural respondents on their Ethnic Identity scale scores. Therefore, there is not a significant difference between urban and large town respondents and small town and rural respondents on their Ethnic Identity scale scores.

**Community and Feeling Different.** The research question for this study was: Is there a difference between community designations of participants and Feeling Different scale scores? The research hypothesis for the study is: There is a difference between urban and large town respondents and small town and rural respondents on their Feeling Different scale scores. The null hypothesis for the study was: There is no difference between urban and large town respondents and small town and rural respondents on their Feeling Different scale scores.

The two categories urban and large town were combined. The categories small town and rural were combined. Items five and seven were reverse scored. Urban and large town respondents’ mean Feeling Different scale score was 22.13. Small town and rural respondents’ mean Feeling Different scale score was 22.65. The difference between these mean scale scores was .52 points. Therefore, small town and rural respondents identified more feelings of being different than urban and large town respondents.

The Levene’s Test of Equality of Variance for the independent samples T-test is .26. Since .26 is greater than .05, the Levene’s Test is not significant. Therefore, the p-value for
this T-test is .812. Since the p-value is greater than .05, the results of this data are not statistically significant. As a result, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference between urban and large town respondents and small town and rural respondents on their Feeling Different scale scores. Therefore, there is not a significant difference between urban and large town respondents and small town and rural respondents on their Feeling Different scale scores.

**Amount of Emphasis and Ethnic Identity.** The research question for this study was: Is there a difference between mean Ethnic Identity scale scores for respondents who answered not enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country and respondents who answered just enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country. The research hypothesis for the study is: There is a difference between respondents who answered not enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country and respondents who answered just enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country on their Ethnic Identity scale scores. The null hypothesis for the study was: There is no difference between respondents who answered not enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country and respondents who answered just enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country on their Ethnic Identity scale scores.

Respondents who answered not enough emphasis had a mean Ethnic Identity scale score of 32.79. Respondents who answered just enough emphasis had a mean Ethnic Identity scale score of 34.26. The difference between these mean scale scores was 1.47 points. Therefore, respondents who answered just enough emphasis was placed on
learning the values and heritage of their birth country felt more comfortable with their ethnic identity than respondents who answered not enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country.

The Levene’s Test of Equality of Variance for the independent samples T-test is .24. Since .24 is greater than .05, the Levene’s Test is not significant. Therefore, the p-value for this T-test is .44. Since the p-value is greater than .05, the results of this data are not statistically significant. As a result, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference between respondents who answered not enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country and respondents who answered just enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country on their Ethnic Identity scale scores. Therefore, there is not a significant difference between respondents who answered not enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country and respondents who answered just enough emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country on their Ethnic Identity scale scores.

**Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity.** The research question for this study was: Is there a difference between Asian or Asian American respondents, Black or African American respondents, Hispanic or Latino respondents, and multiracial respondents on their Ethnic Identity scale scores? The research hypothesis for the study is: There is a difference between Asian or Asian American respondents, Black or African American respondents, Hispanic or Latino respondents, and multiracial respondents on their Ethnic Identity scale scores. The null hypothesis for the study was: There is no difference between Asian or
Asian American respondents, Black or African American respondents, Hispanic or Latino respondents, and multiracial respondents on their Ethnic Identity scale scores.

An ANOVA was conducted to compare the four main ethnicities in the sample and Ethnic Identity scale scores. This test was conducted to discover whether ethnicity had an effect on Ethnic Identity scale scores. The ANOVA was calculated using the scores of 54 respondents showing mean Ethnic Identity scale scores based on ethnicity. Asian or Asian American respondents (N=31) had a mean scale score of 34.35, Black or African American respondents (N=11) had a mean scale score of 33.81, Hispanic or Latino respondents (N=8) had a mean scale score of 33.13, and multiracial respondents (N=4) had a mean scale score of 27.00.

Since the p-value is > .001, there is not a significant difference between ethnicities. The Tukey Post-Hoc shows those groups that have a statistically significant difference between mean scores. This Tukey compares the mean Ethnic Identity scale scores for the respondents who identified as Asian or Asian American, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, or multiracial. This test determines that there are no significant differences amongst these different groups.

**Advice for Adoptive Parents**

Respondents were asked: “What is the most significant thing you wish parents adopting a child of a different race knew?” Forty-nine adoptees responded to this question. Themes that emerged were race, providing education, opportunities, and discussions to learn about birth culture, identity, supporting the adoptee’s choice, pace, and exploration of their birth culture, remembering the adoptee’s birth family and origin, diverse
environment, and identifying as a multiracial family. For the purpose of this paper quotes will be italicized.

**Race.** Race was the most prevalent theme that adoptees wanted parents to be aware of with 45% (22 out of 49) of participants discussing the importance. The theme was widely expressed throughout responses. The central idea of this theme is that race matters. It is important for parents to acknowledge race and not ignore the presence of differences. Parents should offer education and tools to navigate a racialized society. This theme was supported by the following quotes:

*Race matters. We do not live in a “post-racial” world and never will.*

*Learn how to affirm and encourage your kid to explore their racial identity. Internalized oppression is very real.*

*Understand white privilege and what this means to both your transracially adopted child and you as non-ethnic parents.*

*You are probably colorblind racists.*

*How racism and prejudice WILL affect their child.*

*It doesn’t matter how privileged and wealthy you are, I will still be stereotyped, sexualized (for being an Asian woman) and teased for the color of my skin. Every day I suffer from vulgar, hateful, racially charged insults, please hear me; and understand that it is a struggle and pain you may never understand.*

*Help me navigate through and deal with those who are racist.*

*Love is not enough to protect them from racism.*
Race matters. Even if racial difference does not “matter” within your family, it will matter in the larger social context, and adoptive parents have to be the ones to create a safe environment to explore and discuss race, racism and discrimination.

Hopefully adoptive parents are open to having discussions about race, discrimination and prejudice, arming children with coping mechanisms that will shield them from microaggressions and other biases and stereotypes they may face in their adoptive communities.

**Education, Opportunities, and Discussions.** Another widespread theme identified by 41% (20 out of 49) of respondents was providing education, opportunities, and discussions to learn about their birth culture. This theme encompasses the parents’ role in helping their child learn about and engage with their birth culture. This theme was supported by the following quotes:

*How important culture becomes as the child grows up.*

*It's important for adopting families to ensure the child learns about their culture.*

*Teach as much as possible.*

*“All you need is love” is not enough.*

*Understanding the culture and trying to engage the child in it.*

*Love is not enough. It is a very big part of raising a healthy and well-adjusted child, but it’s not enough.*

*The child’s birth culture is a relevant topic and very important to integrate and at the very least, discuss, as the child grows with his/her adoptive family.*

**Identity.** The theme of identity was addressed by 37% (18 out of 49) of adoptees in the data. This theme addresses the challenges of identity development for transracial adoptees and wanting to feel accepted. Participants expressed feeling like an outsider and
not fully a part of their birth culture or adoptive culture. This theme was supported by the following quotes:

*Help them to determine who they are as a person of color and as an adopted person.*

*How important educating them about their birth culture, race, etc. is because no matter how you are raised, they will need to understand and know those things in order to develop a strong, healthy identity.*

*Understand the important struggle of our dichotomous identity: I am not American, and yet, I am not Korean. Your identity is not my identity, even though WE are a family.*

*We all need to be loved and cared about as if we were your own.*

*I will never be white. I can never replace the real kid they wanted. I am not adequate, but I am not here to please anyone.*

*We will never fully feel that we are 100% a part of one culture. Instead we are a hybrid of two very different cultures.*

*Take them wholly as your own.*

*The child will always feel on the outside looking in. As a child you are still figuring out who you are and your identity.*

*I wish parents of adopted children knew what it felt like to be the “outsider,” the one who didn’t belong.*

**Choice, Pace, and Exploration.** Another theme revealed in the data by 20% (10 out of 49) of participants was supporting the adoptee’s choice, pace, and exploration of their birth culture. This theme stresses allowing the child freedom in their pursuit of their origin and ethnic identity. This theme was supported by the following quotes:
Don’t push the child’s differences on them. Wait for the child to ask questions or show interest.

They allowed me to participate as much or as little as I wanted to. They have always been so supportive to me when I have desired to inquire and learn about the culture/country I came from.

How important it is to be secure enough to support their desire to want to know more about their birth country, family, etc. without being threatened by it.

Don’t try too hard to integrate and immerse your child into their cultural group. In the end, it is up to the child to make a decision of how much they want to be attached or unattached to her culture. It’s up to the parent to provide opportunities and support, but also not to push the agenda.

Each child processes the levity of transracial adoption differently.

**Remembering the Adoptee’s Birth Family and Origin.** Another theme voiced by 16% (eight out of 49) of respondents was remembering the adoptee’s birth family and origin. This theme integrates feelings of loss and unanswered questions about their origin. This theme was supported by the following quotes:

*Try and keep ties of biological family. I don’t know who I look like. I don’t know who I get my personality tendencies from. My hair from.*

*Learn to praise that child’s birth family at all times no matter how much information is known about the family.*

*How important it is to make it okay to talk about the feelings associated with the grief and loss of the biological family throughout the lifetime of an adoptee as these will change depending on the circumstance and adoptee’s age.*
I think it is important for parents to recognize that the happy day of their child’s arrival is intrinsically tied to someone else’s, an always familiar stranger’s day of terrible loss.

I think it’s important for adopting parents to know that while the adoption process is lovely and wonderful, there are times it is also a bittersweet endeavor. While the adoptive parents feel that their family is now "complete,” the adoptive child may perhaps feel the opposite, crippled with questions of "incompleteness" surrounding their family and the reasons why they were adopted in the first place. I think it’s important for adoptive parents to bear in mind that the child they are bringing into their family came from and has origins from another. Adoptive parents must realize that the child is being transplanted-stripped away from the smells, sights, sounds, feelings, cognitive and body memories of their own biological families and cultures-into another.

**Diverse Environment.** Twelve percent (six out of 49) of adoptees expressed the significance of a diverse environment. This theme involves interacting with others that look alike and originate from a similar ethnic origin. This theme was supported by the following quotes:

*Exposure to other Asians was not enough. It was not until I met other Asian Americans that I started to feel less ashamed of how I looked, and that was not until high school.*

*Korean adoptions were normal where I grew up.*

*Importance of finding people of the same race as the adoptee to interact with regularly.*

*It’s important for adopting families to ensure the child has the opportunity to meet other adoptees from their country.*

*The importance of growing up in diverse cultures.*
If I live in a small town where I am the only person of color and every day I suffer from vulgar, hateful, racially charged insults, please hear me.

It is important to raise them in a diverse culture to minimize feelings of isolation.

**Multiracial Family.** A final theme addressed in the data by 10% (five out of 49) of respondents was identifying as a multiracial family. This theme emphasizes the entire family understanding and accepting what having a child of a different race as part of their family will look like. This theme was supported by the following quotes:

- *That you have to become a member of the cultural/racial group from which your child comes from. You have to be prepared to become a multiracial family, to be willing to take on a new identity as an “adopted” member of your child’s cultural/racial group.*

- *I think that it is extremely important for parents who are adopting a child of a different race to make sure that every member of the family feels comfortable with activities and living arrangement.*

- *You are knowingly adopting a child from a different race and accepted yourself that you are going to have a nontraditional family.*
Discussion

Sample

The sample consisted of 62 transracial adoptees 18 years old or over across the United States. States represented in the sample include Minnesota, Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Colorado, Washington, South Dakota, New York, Maryland, Wisconsin, Michigan, Oregon, Alabama, Virginia, and Nebraska. The majority of the sample was female, Asian or Asian American, and grew up with adopted siblings. It is notable that a significant amount of the literature focused on African American transracial adoptees, and this sample consisted of 51.6% Asian or Asian American adoptees and 21.0% Black or African American adoptees. Participants were recruited through key informants, adoption agencies, adoption support groups, adoptee forums, online adoptee networking sites, and online discussion boards throughout the United States.

Data and Themes

There was a statistically significant relationship between amount of emphasis parents placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country and Feeling Different scale scores (p=.028). There was also a statistically significant relationship between Experiences and Learning the Ethnic Culture scale scores and Feeling Different scale scores (p=.044, r = -.272). As parents placed more value and importance on learning about the child's birth culture, the child identified fewer feelings of being different. In the literature on TRA there is controversy over whether Caucasian parents are able to help a child of color develop a healthy ethnic identity and be able to deal with racism (Jacobson, Nielsen, & Hardeman, 2012; Lee, Crolley-Simic, & Vonk, 2013). This study shows that parents can be effective in helping their child develop a racial and ethnic identity. The
majority of the respondents ranked the amount of emphasis their parents placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country as “Not at all.” No respondents ranked the amount of emphasis their parents placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country as “Too much.” Research shows that parental support of the child’s racial heritage is critical (Mapp, Boutte-Queen, Erich, & Taylor, 2008; Mohanty & Newhill, 2006). Providing education, opportunities, and discussions to learn about birth culture was identified by 41% of respondents (20 out of 49) as a significant element for adoptive parents to be aware of. Parents play a large role in helping their child learn about and engage with their birth culture.

There was a statistically significant relationship between ethnicity and Feeling Different scale scores (p=.01 and .002). Multiracial respondents (mean scale score of 33.25) had the highest feelings of being different compared to Black or African American respondents (mean scale score of 19.45) or Hispanic or Latino respondents (mean scale score of 16.5). This may be due to additional challenges of navigating two or more different races and cultures while being raised by parents of yet another race and culture. The research or qualitative responses did not speak to feeling different based on ethnicity.

There was not a statistically significant relationship between Experiences and Learning the Ethnic Culture scale scores and Ethnic Identity scale scores. There also was not a statistically significant relationship between amount of emphasis parents placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country and Ethnic Identity scale scores. This could be due to the small sample size. The relationship between Experiences and Learning the Ethnic Culture and Ethnic Identity scale scores was close to significance (p=.116). Future research should continue to explore the relationship between these
variables. Literature speaks to the necessity of parental support of the child’s racial heritage (Mapp, Boutte-Queen, Erich, & Taylor, 2008; Mohanty & Newhill, 2006).

Roehlkepartain (1994) identified a nurturing environment, openness about physical differences and psychological similarities, and positive role models of their own race as factors that help adoptees adjust. However, research findings do not show significant proof that parents who provide information about the child’s cultural heritage and encourage a strong sense of racial identity raise children who are happier and more integrated into their families and communities (Hayes, 1993).

There was not a statistically significant relationship between male and female respondents and Ethnic Identity scale scores or Feeling Different scale scores. The relationship between male and female respondents and Feeling Different scale scores was close to significance (p=.085). The research or qualitative responses did not speak to differences based on gender. Future research should continue to explore the relationship between these variables.

There was not a statistically significant relationship between ethnicity and Ethnic Identity scale scores. The research or qualitative responses did not speak to differences based on ethnicity. Future research should continue to explore the relationship between these variables.

There was not a statistically significant relationship between Ethnic Identity scale scores or Feeling Different scale scores based on the size of community adoptees grew up in. The question in the survey did not capture if diversity was present in their community. Urban and rural areas are changing, and the size of a community does not necessarily equate to diversity present. Research discussed the importance of racially diverse
neighborhoods and schools for the evolvement of ethnic identity (Kallgren & Caudill, 1993; Samuels, 2009; Godon, Green, & Ramsey, 2014; Kim, Reichwald, & Lee, 2013). Twelve percent (six out of 49) of adoptees in this research study expressed the significance of being raised in a diverse environment in the qualitative question.

This study found that much of the information derived from the research study was consistent with the information in the literature review. There was overwhelming agreement between the literature and the participants regarding challenges associated with being adopted and having parents of a different race. The literature and data revealed themes of race, identity, supporting the adoptee’s choice, pace, and exploration of their birth culture, and identifying as a multiracial family. Research supports the necessity of the family acknowledging and accepting their child’s race (Kallgren & Caudill, 1993; Samuels, 2009; Mohanty, Keokse, & Sales, 2007; Mohanty & Newhill, 2006). In addition, the struggles associated with identity development for transracial adoptees are widespread in research. They are often torn between two cultures and feel that they need to decide which norms to assume (Robinson-Wood, 2011). Kim, Reichwald, and Lee (2013) support adoptee’s choice and feel that cultural socialization and conversations should not be forced on a child. Additionally, several research studies discuss involving an adopted child and the whole family in cultural socialization (Godon, Green, & Ramsey, 2014; Mohanty, Keokse, & Sales, 2007; Samuels, 2009). The entire family’s stance on adopting a child of a different race influences healthy identity development and self-esteem (McGinnis et al., 2009). In the qualitative question, respondents from this study also discussed the importance of remembering the adoptee’s birth family and origin and the loss associated with leaving their birth country and birth family.
Limitations/Recommendations for Future Research

Limitations exist in this research project. The use of snowball sampling and the lack of a random sample limits the generalizability of this research. It would be beneficial to have access to contact information for all adult transracial adoptees through private adoption agencies and state organizations across the country. Finances and confidentiality restricted that option for this research. More than half of the study sample was female. The findings may be influenced by gender differences related to ethnic and racial socialization practices and ethnic identity development. The survey solicited voluntary respondents who may have distinct experiences related to their experiences and identity different from adoptees unwilling to participate. Adoptees may have chosen to participate because they felt that they did not receive adequate support of their birth culture and racial and ethnic identity. Expanding this research project to include a larger sampling would give more validity to the themes that have been addressed in this paper and further investigate statistically significant relationships. Adding an incentive for participants could increase the sample size.

The survey asked adoptees to reflect on their experiences, which may be limited by their ability to accurately remember. The ages of respondents ranged from 20 years old to 55 years old. They could magnify or diminish parental involvement. Future research should explore ethnic identity and feeling different for different age groups and consider developmental stages. It would also be beneficial to consider how parent education and preparation changed from an adoptee that is currently 20 years old and an adoptee that is 55 years old. It would be valuable to conduct a study that involves the adoptive parents and adopted child. The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) could be used to assess
the intercultural competence of the parent. The assessment assesses “the capability to shift
cultural perspective and appropriately adapt behavior to cultural differences and
commonalities” (IDI, LLC, 2015, p. 1).

Integrating a question related to the diversity present in the adoptees’ communities
would be beneficial. This survey asked about the size of community adoptees grew up in,
however the question did not capture if diversity was present in their community. The size
of a community does not necessarily equate to diversity present, and literature supports
the importance of racially diverse neighborhoods and schools.

**Implications for Social Work**

The purpose of this research study was to gather data on parental involvement and
engagement with their adopted child’s birth culture and identity development and how this
affects the child. There was a statistically significant relationship between amount of
emphasis parents placed on learning the values and heritage of the adoptee’s birth country
and Feeling Different scale scores. The relationship between Experiences and Learning the
Ethnic Culture scale scores and Ethnic Identity scale scores was close to significance. This
research speaks to the importance of adoptive families being educated and informed to
best raise their child in a racialized society. Themes of race, providing education,
opportunities, and discussions to learn about birth culture, identity, supporting the
adoptive’s choice, pace, and exploration of their birth culture, remembering the adoptee’s
birth family and origin, diverse environment, and identifying as a multiracial family were
also identified in the qualitative question. This research can educate future adoptive
families and adoption agencies. Resources, education, and support for adoptive parents
and adopted children will enhance the adoption experience. It is also important for clinical
social workers to understand attachment issues, loss, identity challenges, and racism adopted children may experience and struggle with. Social workers can take key leadership roles in providing support and education for adoptive families.

Another noteworthy finding for the field of social work is that multiracial participants had the highest Feeling Different scale score. There was a statistically significant relationship between ethnicity and Feeling Different scale scores. This is important for social workers to be aware of in order to best support multiracial individuals. Support groups or organizations that support multiethnic groups may be beneficial. Multiracial adoptees may face additional challenges finding where they fit as they navigate their identity composed of two or more different races and cultures while being raised by parents of yet another race and culture.

**Conclusion**

The practice of transracial adoption elicits a variety of opinions and perspectives. Being adopted involves challenges, and the child being a different race than their adoptive parents brings additional obstacles. Parents play a significant role in the development of their children and their ethnic and racial identity. An adoptive parent’s dedication to the child’s identity development is crucial for the well-being of the child (Mohanty, Keokse, & Sales, 2007). This research study examined the value that adoptive parents place on their child’s birth culture and ethnic identity and how it affects the child’s ethnic identity development and sense of belonging and acceptance, which was explored through online surveys to adult transracial adoptees.

A strength of this research was that it examined experiences with birth culture, ethnic identity, and feeling different from the perspective of the adoptee. The survey
included quantitative questions as well as a qualitative question that gave adoptees a voice and allowed them to share their recommendations due to personal experiences. Fifteen different states from across the United States were represented in the sample. This study has implications for adoptive parents and adoption agencies. The research provides more information and education that will better equip parents of transracial adoptees. Parent involvement and support is imperative to promote the best interest of transracial adoptees.
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**EXPERIENCES WITH BIRTH CULTURE, IDENTITY, AND FEELING DIFFERENT**


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EXPERIENCES WITH BIRTH CULTURE, IDENTITY, AND FEELING DIFFERENT


Appendix A

FUTURE TRANSRACIAL ADOPTIVE PARENTS: INSIGHT FROM ADOPTEES

This purpose of this research is to explore the value that transracial adoptive parents place on their child's birth culture and ethnic identity and how it affects the child's ethnic identity development and sense of belonging and acceptance. The survey begins with demographic information. Questions related to your experiences growing up, your ethnic identity and feeling different are included.

1. Please indicate your gender:
   ____ 1) Male
   ____ 2) Female

2. Current age: _______

3. Your age at adoption: _______

4. Your country of origin: _______

5. Your ethnicity is:
   (1) Asian or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others
   (2) Black or African American
   (3) Hispanic or Latino, including Mexican American, Central American, and others
   (4) White, Caucasian, Anglo, European American; not Hispanic
   (5) American Indian/Native American
   (6) Multiracial; Parents are from two different groups
   (7) Other (write in): _________________________

6. Your adoptive mother's ethnic group is:
   (1) Asian or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others
   (2) Black or African American
   (3) Hispanic or Latino, including Mexican American, Central American, and others
   (4) White, Caucasian, Anglo, European American; not Hispanic
   (5) American Indian/Native American
   (6) Multiracial; Parents are from two different groups
   (7) Other (write in): _________________________
7. Your adoptive father’s ethnic group is:
   (1) Asian or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others
   (2) Black or African American
   (3) Hispanic or Latino, including Mexican American, Central American, and others
   (4) White, Caucasian, Anglo, European American; not Hispanic
   (5) American Indian/Native American
   (6) Multiracial; Parents are from two different groups
   (7) Other (write in): ________________________________

8. In your adoptive family, how many sisters and brothers do you have? ________

9. If you have siblings in your adoptive family, how many are adopted? __________

10. Which designation most closely describes the community where your adoptive family resided while you were growing up?
    _______Urban (approximate population of 50,000 or more)
    _______Large town (approximate population of 10,000-50,000 people)
    _______Small town (approximate population of 2,500-10,000 people)
    _______Rural or farm (approximate population of less than 2,500 people)

11. Was your adoption:
    _____1) Domestic
    _____2) International

**Section I. Experiences and Learning the Ethnic Culture**

Think about the cultural activities your adoptive parents provided while you were growing up. For each item below, please rate how important you think each development activity is to your parent. For example, if your parents felt that “learning values and traditions of your birth culture” is (or was) very important, you would choose “4” on the 1 to 5 scale. Please rate each item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not At All Important</th>
<th>Slightly Important</th>
<th>Moderately Important</th>
<th>Very Much Important</th>
<th>Extremely Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Learning values and traditions of my birth culture.

13. Appreciating the fine arts, such as music and dance, of my birth culture.
14. Learning the history of the people of my birth country.

15. Feeling pride in my racial/ethnic heritage.

16. Including traditions of my birth culture, such as ethnic holidays, in my family celebrations.

17. Teaching what to do when a non family member uses racist language.

18. Learning the language or dialect of my birth culture.

19. Talking about race and racism openly within the family.

20. Visiting my country of birth.


22. Establishing relationships with children from my birth culture.

23. Establishing relationships with adoptees from different racial and ethnic background.

24. Seeking support and advice from adults of my race/ethnicity about how to cope with prejudice and discrimination.

25. Living in an integrated neighborhood with neighbors who reflect my race and ethnicity.

26. Learning about racial differences.

27. Being proud of my skin color.

28. Educating me about the realities of prejudice, bias, racism, and discrimination.

29. Teaching me a variety of coping strategies from which to choose when faced with prejudice or bias.

30. Going to schools that have a diverse student body in terms of race and ethnicity.

31. Attending culture camps too frequently.

32. Rate the amount of emphasis that your adoptive parents placed on learning the values and heritage of your birth country.

   _____ 1) Not at all
   _____ 2) Just the right amount
   _____ 3) Too much
Section II. Your Ethnic Identity

Transracial adoptees come from different ethnic backgrounds than those of their adoptive parents. An important aspect of their identity is feeling comfortable with their own ethnic background. Each statement below describes feelings about ethnicity. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement by clicking a number on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Please read each item carefully.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

33. I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.

34. I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.

35. I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.

36. I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.

37. I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.

38. I have a strong sense of belonging to my ethnic group.

39. I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.

40. In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.

41. I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group and its accomplishments.

42. I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.

43. I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.

44. I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.

45. I have been teased or insulted because of my ethnic background.

46. I have experienced negative reactions from others about my skin color.
Section III. Feeling Different

Please use the following scale to indicate how much you agree with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Moderately Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Moderately Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

47. I feel I am different from the majority in the culture.

48. I feel a sense of incompleteness because of my adoptive status.

49. I don’t know what ethnic group I belong to.

50. I feel isolated because of my adoptive status.

51. I have a clear sense of who I am as an adopted person.

52. I feel I don’t belong to either American or to my birth culture.

53. I feel accepted by the people of my own ethnic group.

What is the most significant thing you wish parents adopting a child of a different race knew?

Thank you for taking your time to complete this survey.

If you are interested in the findings, feel free to email morgan.m.mcdowell@gmail.com. Your survey responses will not be linked to your email address. The results will be sent to you when the research project is complete.
Appendix B

Future Transracial Adoptive Parents: Insight from Adoptees

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Introduction:
You are invited to participate in a research study investigating how the value that adoptive parents place on their child's birth culture and ethnic identity affects the child's ethnic identity development and sense of belonging and acceptance. This study is being conducted by Morgan McDowell, a graduate student at St. Catherine University under the supervision of Dr. Michael Chovanec, a faculty member in the School of Social Work. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you are a transracial adoptee 18 years old or over. Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to be in the study.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to better understand the role parents play in the racial and ethnic identity development of adopted children to educate future adoptive parents. Approximately 60-75 people are expected to participate in this research.

Procedures:
If you decide to participate, you will first be asked to read a consent form and state that you understand what the consent form means. You will be asked to complete an online survey composed of quantitative questions, which will take approximately 10-15 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of being in the study:
The study has a risk because it may include sensitive topics about your experiences as a transracial adoptee. Participation is voluntary, and you may end the survey at any time.

There are no direct benefits for participating in this research except that you are helping further research about transracial adoption.

Confidentiality:
Any information obtained in connection with this research study will be anonymous. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable.

I will keep the research results in a locked file cabinet and/or password protected computer in my home and only I and my advisor (Michael Chovanec) will have access to the records while I work on this project. I will finish analyzing the data by the end of May 2015. I will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you.

Voluntary nature of the study:
Participation in this research study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with St. Catherine University in any way. If
you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without affecting these relationships.

**Contacts and questions:**
If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Morgan McDowell, at 712-541-7783. You may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later, the faculty advisor, Michael Chovanec, PhD, LICSW at 651-690-8722, will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739 or jsschmitt@stkate.edu.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**
You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Clicking to continue to the survey indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after clicking that you agree to participate, please know that you may withdraw from the study.

I consent to participate in the study.
Appendix C

Agency Script

My name is Morgan McDowell, and I am an MSW student at the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University. I am under the supervision of Michael Chovanec, Ph.D., LICSW, Associate professor. I am conducting a research study on how the value that transracial adoptive parents place on their child’s birth culture and ethnic identity affects the child’s ethnic identity development and sense of belonging and acceptance.

I am contacting your agency/program due to your involvement with adoptees. Would you be willing to distribute flyers to transracial adoptees 18 years old or over regarding my research study? Interested participants will complete an anonymous quantitative online survey.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I greatly appreciate it. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Morgan McDowell, LSW
morgan.m.mcdownell@gmail.com
712-541-7783
Are you a transracial adoptee 18 years old or over?

Would you be willing to share some of your experiences to better inform adoption agencies and adoptive parents?

You are invited to participate in an online survey.

The survey will explore the value that adoptive parents place on their child’s birth culture and ethnic identity and how it affects the child’s ethnic identity development and sense of belonging and acceptance.

This study is being conducted by Morgan McDowell, a graduate student at the School of Social Work, St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas.

The online survey will take 10-15 minutes.
Participation is voluntary and will remain anonymous.

For more information visit:

https://qtrial2014az1.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_6XoKVQAuCBNxCjH

Please forward this study information to other transracial adoptees who may be interested.