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TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION: AN INVESTIGATION OF HOW SCHOOLS SHAPE RACIAL IDENTITY

by

Lindsey M. Sowers-Zabelski

A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Services and Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Doctor of Education
at
Rowan University
April 5, 2021

Thesis Chair: Cecile Sam, Ph.D.

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Dedications

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. Without their unending support, I would never have been able to complete this work.

Brad, thank you for being such a steadfast partner in life. You have always pushed me forward and bore the brunt of teaming with me to parent and care for our home. Thank you for supporting me, listening to me, and making my degree and dissertation a priority, including whisking the kids away to Ocean City so I could write. I could never ask for a better best friend and life partner. I love you.

My parents, thank you for always supporting me in my education. You have always believed I could move forward with each of my degrees. Thank you for listening to me discuss my work and encouraging me to continue challenging myself. I thank the universe daily for gifting me with such amazing parents. I will be forever grateful for your unconditional love and belief in me as a person. I love you both so much.

My sister Allison, brother in-law Josh, niece and nephew Quinn and Levi, thank you for cheering me on from the sidelines and celebrating my milestones. Thank you for always being so supportive. Love you all!

My children, Ava, Charlie, Ben, Maya, Zoey, and Minnie Violet, you are my world. Thank you for listening to me discuss my work. Thank you for giving me space when I needed to write and putting up with me when I was exhausted and crabby. Thank you for forgiving me when I couldn't spend time with you because I had work to do. Thank you all for always supporting me and loving me. I love you all with all that I am.

The participants of this study and pilot study, thank you for sharing your stories. Thank you for supporting this study and teaching me so much. Your experiences and knowledge are valuable and powerful, and I hope you keep sharing them with the world.

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Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful for my chair, Dr. Cecile Sam. Thank you for continuously challenging me, encouraging me, and putting up with me at times to write a thoughtful and authentic dissertation. You have been one of the most important professors and teachers in my life, and I hope to now call you friend.

Thank you to Dr. MaryBeth Walpole and your insight and wisdom in this field. I am grateful for your support.

Dr. Sarah Ferguson, I have been grateful to you since I was in your Statistics class. I would not have made it without your support then or now! You will always be one of the best professors I have ever worked with.

To my colleagues and friends, thank you for asking about my work, helping me find participants, and encouraging me in my darkest moments.

To Christina and Jeff, my doctorate besties, we made it!

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Abstract

Lindsey M. Sowers-Zabelski
TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION: AN INVESTIGATION OF
HOW SCHOOLS SHAPE RACIAL IDENTITY
2020–2021
Cecile Sam, Ph.D.
Doctor of Education

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to investigate how schools, including educators and curriculum, shape transracial adoptees' racial identity development. International transracial adoptees and transracial adoptees who were adopted through foster care shared their school experiences through interviews. In addition, participants offered artifacts which they felt impacted their racial identity development, from their time in school, including photographs and past assignments, to further answer the research questions. Steward and Baden's (1995) Cultural-Racial Identity Model was used to frame which experiences affirmed or discounted participants' racial identity development. The data collected from this research suggested that school experiences and educators impact transracial adoptees' racial identity development. This study consisted of research that identified educators' actions, including building relationships with transracial adoptees and encouraging them to learn about and share their birth culture in the classroom, as well as normalizing teaching about cultures and diversity in the classroom, as important in affirming racial and cultural identity development.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Parenting and adopting someone else's child is an awesome responsibility and privilege (Smith et al., 2011). Adoption creates a family through legal contracts and social and emotional bonds rather than DNA (Raleigh, 2012). In the United States, according to the Survey of Adopted Parents, 38% of adoptions are private domestic, 37% are adoptions through foster care, and 25% of adoptions are international (ASPE, 2009). When taking adoption into account, caring parents and a loving home are the goals of this process; however, when considering transracial adoption, adopting a child of another race, there needs to be a place for racial and cultural identity development (Smith et al., 2011). As a society, in light of the continued practice of transracial adoption, it is time for families, social workers, educators, and transracial adoptees to work together and try to uncover if there are ways to support this special population better.

Every child should have the opportunity to acquire a racial identity. Many individuals, regardless of race or ethnicity, take for granted how we built our self-concept, while for some populations, it is a life-long struggle (Roorda, 2007; Tatum, 1997). Our personal identities are crucial vehicles that help us make sense of the world around us and impact our daily choices (Tatum, 1997). Our racial identity is formed through our experiences with our culture, our relationships, and the media. Many people in our society are concerned that children who are transracially adopted, individuals adopted outside their race, will forever feel different, isolated, and lack a healthy racial identity (Lee, 2003). There are concerns that these children will suffer psychologically

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and not understand their cultural or racial identities, including how to deal with racism (Jennings, 2006).

Problem Statement

The number of transracially adopted individuals is increasing, and as a society, we need to help guide and support them as they navigate the path to building their identities (Roorda, 2007). Roughly about 40% of overall adoptive families are transracial (Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2018). Considering the opioid crisis our country is facing, children are entering the foster care system at an alarming rate (Collier, 2018; Radel et al., 2018). Thirty-two percent of foster care placements are because of parental drug use, which is a rise of 10% since 2005 (Collier, 2018). International adoptions have been sought after by American families for reasons including that foreign birth parents typically do not seek to reunify with their children after adoption and the number of babies and toddlers orphaned abroad (Baden, 2007). Although race has been one of the trending issues about adoption and many people have very negative opinions about this occurrence, transracial adoption and children living cross-racially while in foster care is not going away and is actually increasing (Samuels, 2009).

Since transracial adoption has been made a common practice in the adoption world, it has been likened to the "cultural genocide" of the adoptees' race and culture by many adoption and foster care social workers (Lee, 2003). Opponents of transracial adoption have voiced their concern about several factors that could harm these adoptees (Hayes, 1993). The first major issue is taking these children out of their communities and having them assimilate into another culture, thus removing them as an asset to their

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native community. The second major issue has to do with their personal identity considering that the adoptee may not be accepted by their birth or adopted culture, which could lead to major mental health issues, including an identity crisis. Considering these adoptees will be taken out of their birth culture, they may not be taught how to handle racism that would have occurred naturally in their birth home (Lee et al., 2013).

Transracially adopted children are unacknowledged by the education system, and their adoptive families are not equipped with more than the standard required foster family classes (Fishman & Harrington, 2007). The educational system is in the ideal position to support individuals and families that may not fall into the "norm" by having their curriculum reflect the ideals of acceptance of everyone's differences (Miller & Sessions, 2005). Racial socialization, which is the act of transferring racial knowledge and experiences to one's children, leads to positive self-concept and academic success in Children of Color (Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2018). Educators need to discover how children of transracial adoption can acquire the values, cultural customs, and knowledge of how to deal with racism without being raised by parents of their race, or we may have a population that is void of positive racial identity.

Decades ago, theorist Erikson (1968) stressed how important the process of ethnic or racial identity acquisition was for our youth to ensure positive mental health and identity (Roorda, 2015). Helms's (1995) White racial identity model, which is based on the concepts Erikson presented, and Cross's (1971, 1991) nigrescence model are the main racial identity models used for the general population. However, transracially adopted individuals' identities are more complex and may not fall into either of these typically

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used racial identity models (Baden & Steward, 2000). Currently, there are a few racial identity models that could cater to the layered needs of the transracially adopted population; however, the cultural-racial identity model, which includes culture, race, and the adoptive family's impact, appears to be the most complete and comprehensive model at this time.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore transracially adopted individuals' experiences in school that helped shape their racial identities. Youth spend a considerable amount of time in the educational setting and are influenced by their teachers, the administration, students, and the curriculum. Educators are in a position where they could connect transracial adoptees and their families with cultural learning opportunities as well as same-race relationships (Fishman & Harrington, 2007; Gajda, 2004). Adult transracial adoptees were the focus of this research to give the adults supporting younger generations of this population approaches to support their adoptee students with their racial development.

Racial identity development has been studied and researched for decades. The pool of racial identity development models for the transracially adopted population is limited, and only a few are used. This population may not move through these models the same way as those who live in a single-race family and may benefit from the guidance of a model built around their needs and experiences as transracially adopted adults.

The cultural-racial identity model was the first to separate one's cultural identity from one's racial identity, specific to the attainment of racial identity by the transracially

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adopted population (Steward & Baden, 1995). This racial identity model takes the adoptive family's race and culture into account as well as the adoptee's race and culture and measures each component's impact on the adoptee (Baden, 2002; Baden & Steward, 1997, 2000). This research was guided by the components of the cultural-racial identity model.

Most research regarding transracial adoption has focused on White families and Black children; however, this makeup only constitutes 12.7% of these adoptions overall (Smith et al., 2011). This leads to the fact that most transracial adoptions are not White parents with Black children, although this combination dominates research. The most prominent transracial adoptees overall in all categories of adoption are Asian (32%), followed by Hispanic/Latino (27%), then others including Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Alaskan Natives (17). This study sought out participants of varying races and ancestry who have been transracially adopted or have lived in foster care cross racially.

Schools are a second home to most people and places where students are overlooked or supported through our education system (Swartwood & Williams, 2016). Relationships at White schools can be difficult to attain, and transracial adoptees may feel isolated and lonely because they may not know many individuals of their race (Tatum, 2004). School counselors are in an ideal position to support students who have been transracially adopted and provide resources to their families (Branco & Brott, 2017). Research was collected and analyzed regarding the participants' experiences in school,

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which may give us possible approaches to move forward in the educational setting to aid these students with their racial identity development.

The Contemporary American Family

The nuclear family, including two parents and their biological children, does not represent the norm in American society anymore (Gerstel, 2011; Goldberg et al., 2018). The concept of the traditional family is in the process of being remolded due to factors in our culture tied to diversity, socioeconomic status, acceptance, and politics (Goldberg et al., 2018; Stephens, 2013). Only focusing on the traditional nuclear family can leave students whose families vary from the norm feeling shunned, leading to low self-esteem and behavioral issues, ultimately impacting their academic performance negatively (Fishman & Harrington, 2007). Every child that we serve in schools may come from a different type of family, including one-parent households, divorced families, same-gendered parents, resource parents, adopted parents, and so on (Goldberg et al., 2018). As educators, we need to check our own biases about the changing family and be ready to support all of our students and their families (Gajda, 2004).

Philosophical Worldview

This study was completed through a constructivist-interpretivist lens. Each participant that was included in this research has had very different experiences, even if they are considered part of the same population. Constructivists believe that individuals construct their own meaning from their experiences and relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). The goal of this study was to learn from the participants' perspectives of how school has shaped their racial identity development. My

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position was to interpret the participants' complex views and develop a "pattern of meaning" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 8). Learning more about the constructivist view has shaped my understanding that racial identity development can look different for every individual. Every person participates in a different journey to self-discovery and comfort with who they are as a person.

Transracial Adoption and Leadership

An important part of being a successful leader is advocating for the populations that one is serving. Advocacy leadership encompasses creating an equitable environment for all students where each is valued for who they are as a person (Theoharis & Ranieri, 2011). Transracially adopted students are becoming a more prominent population, and leaders need to remember them when considering their school environments. Educational leaders need to recognize their students' cultures and diversity to use them as an asset when planning curriculum, professional development opportunities, and creating an inclusive, compassionate school climate (Minkos et al., 2017).

Significance of Study

This study could help future educators build programs and curriculum to support the transracial adoptee population and the foster-youth population living cross racially. The process of how a transracially adopted person has acquired their racial and cultural identities needs to continue to be explored not only in the home but also in the educational setting. Families and schools have a shared responsibility to educate and care for every child. This study could affect policies and curriculum in schools involving multicultural and school counseling curriculum and training for resource parents.

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Schools and families need to come together for transracially adopted individuals and foster youth living cross racially to provide their children with the support, experiences, and opportunities they need to develop a racial identity. Resource parents, adults who are parenting children while in foster care, could benefit from further training on their foster child's culture, kinship, and race so they could offer them experiences that align with their biological family's heritage (Doyle, 2007). Not having adequate training about their foster child's culture could leave resource parents guessing on how to proceed and remain stifled by the boundaries of their own culture. The resource parents may feel stifled moving forward and not emphasize their children's racial growth, which just increases the obstacles for these children when they are trying to learn about themselves. Schools educated on the transracially adopted population and foster youth living cross-racially are in a position to guide these families with approaches identified through this study (Branco & Brott, 2017).

My research included finding general themes across transracially adopted individuals' interviews about their school experiences regarding their racial identity development. This research could lead the way for future studies. Researchers could investigate the parents' perceptions of how their transracially adopted children attained their racial and cultural identity. The families of these adoptees hold important parts of this racial identity acquisition puzzle. Researchers could also take a closer look at multicultural curriculums. Finding connections between these adoptees concerning their racial identity acquisition and how this process impacted and was impacted by academics could provide further insight.

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The findings from this research could influence policy. Public schools could have policies on how to best support transracially adopted students emotionally and academically. Supporting our diverse student population is more important than ever; our actions set a precedent for our student body and community. This research could help child services improve their resource parents' training. Many resource families will be fostering or adopting outside their race, and all parties deserve to be prepared and educated to lead to successful placements.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How did experiences at school shape the racial identity development of transracial adoptees and foster-youth living cross racially?
    a. What types of school events or curriculum influenced their racial identity development at school?
    b. What role did their teachers play in their perceptions of how their racial identity development was influenced by school?

Definition of Terms

Color-Blind Approach

When an individual's race or culture is not considered in decisions made for that person, each individual is considered to have the same needs as anyone else (Spence, 2013). Esteems White norms as ideal, taking the emphasis off racial differences, ignoring racial color and the experiences that person has lived through (Jennings, 2006).

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Foster Youth

Children under the age of 18 who have been removed from their family because of abuse, neglect, abandonment, or any other reason their parents or primary caretakers were unable to take care of their needs. These children are then placed with a licensed family or specified institution to take care of them until their primary caretakers are approved to parent again, or the child is offered the opportunity for adoption (Doyle, 2017).

Racial Identity

An individual's choice and level of identification of belonging to a certain racial group depending on their experiences, needs, and history. Racial identity can be developed psychologically and internally through societal messages regarding race combined with individual experiences and needs of belonging to a racial group (Baden & Steward, 2007; Tatum, 1997).

Resource Parents or Families

A trained, certified family who parents a minor when placed in foster care due to negative issues in the home or loss of a stable family (New Jersey Department of Children and Families, 2019).

Transracial Adoption

Children who are adopted by families of a different race (Steward & Baden, 1995).

White Norms

Accepted everyday practices and behaviors White people consider standard because of their privilege, stemming from White supremacy ideology (Applebaum, 2016).

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Organization of Dissertation

This study explored participants' perceptions of the role school played in their racial identity development. Chapter 2 will communicate the history of transracial adoption, including policy, previous research, and practice concerning transracially adopted individuals and foster youth who have lived cross racially at school and home. This chapter will also delve into racial identity models and how they may align or not with the transracially adopted person's experience. Chapter 3 will offer the methodology, participants, and research design used for this study. Chapter 4 will share the participants' narratives. Chapter 5 will relay the data and findings of this study. Chapter 6 discusses the research findings and how we could use this information for future practice.

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Chapter 2

Review of Literature

This review of literature includes what place transracial adoption has had in adoptions through foster care, international adoption, and private adoption, policies involving transracial adoption, and racial identity theory. Transracial adoptees' personal experiences, including in the home and school, are discussed. The subject of transracial adoption has gotten a lot of attention from the American public for decades while also reminding us of our tumultuous past regarding racism and segregation (Perry, 2014). Adoption through private agencies and foster care has become more popular by the changing American family including women or men choosing to parent alone, couples who waited to have families and struggled with fertility, and same-sex couples seeking to parent (Briggs, 2012; Jennings, 2006; Perry, 2014; Raleigh, 2012; Woodward, 2016).

Transracial Adoption

Transracial adoption occurs through private agencies, foster care, and international adoption services (Smith et al., 2011). In the past, international adoption was the leading means of transracial adoption, although it is now on the decline because of international restrictions. Historically most transracial adoptions are with White adoptive families because there are more White families seeking White children than there are available to adopt (Samuels, 2009; Woodward, 2016). Roughly 40% of adoptive families are now transracial (Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2018). There are great concerns that transracial adoptees will suffer psychologically and not understand their cultural or racial identities, including dealing with racism (Roorda, 2015; Vonk, 2001).

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Transracial adoption became more common in the 1950s when families started legally adopting children outside their race domestically and internationally (Barn, 2013; Briggs, 2012; Lee, 2003; Steward & Baden, 2000). Through the years, the transracially adopted population has grown rapidly while gaining a lot of attention, including controversy among the Black community in respect to White families adopting Black children (Barn, 2013; Briggs, 2012; Lee, 2003; Perry, 2013; Raleigh & Kao, 2013; Steward & Baden, 2000; Vonk, 2001). In the 2000s, several high-profile celebrities transracially internationally adopted, which spurred mixed responses from the public and raised further questions about the best interest of the child (Briggs, 2012).

The History and Policies Concerning Transracial Adoption in the United States

Transracial adoption has always been a controversial topic in America that has affected many racial populations (Barn, 2013; Lee, 2003; Perry, 2014; Samuels, 2009; Vonk, 2001). Private domestic transracial adoption began in the United States in the 1950s with the Indian Adoption Project (Barn, 2013; Lee, 2003). In a different project in the 1960s, social workers started programs to find placements for orphaned African American children (Barn, 2013; Lee, 2003). In the 1950s, Child Services pushed for more racially diverse adoptive family recruitment (Spence, 2013). However, the National Urban League (NUL), a civil rights organization that fights discrimination against African Americans, shifted its intentions to assimilate People of Color into White society through transracial adoption (Spence, 2013). The NUL deemed the middle-class White family as the ideal for all children, as well as insinuating that Black culture was not valuable, reinforcing White-parent privilege. The NUL influenced the Child Welfare

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League of America in the 1960s to promote what they deemed a color-blind adoption policy regarding transracial adoption, leading to the disintegration of seeking People of Color for adoptive-home recruitment programs nationally (Spence, 2013).

One of the most influential events against transracial adoption was at the behest of the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) in 1972 (Barn, 2013; Briggs, 2012; Jennings, 2006; Perry, 2014). The NABSW called for policies to limit or extinguish transracial adoption because they believed that this practice had harmful consequences for any child of color. One of their main concerns was the lack of skills these children would develop to thrive in a racist world (Lee, 2003). The NABSW wanted race matching policies to protect Black and biracial children in foster care from living with White families that may not be able to support their cultural needs (Anyon, 2011; Jennings, 2006). The NABSW's standing led to many children spending years in care without the opportunity to be adopted because of the lack of same-race parents (Anyon, 2011; Roorda, 2015).

In response to the NABSW's opposition to transracial adoption, policies supporting transracial adoption, including the 1994 Multiethnic Placement Act and the 1996 Interethnic Adoption Provision, pushed transracial adoption forward, sidelining same-race adoption concerns in favor of permanency in any available adoptive family no matter their race (Anyon, 2011; Barn, 2013; Bartholet, 2006; Jennings, 2006; Perry, 2014; Roorda, 2015; Woodward, 2016). Although these waiting children were finding caring families in a timelier manner, the adoptive families were not always prepared to meet their transracially adopted children's emotional needs tied to their race and culture

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(Anyon, 2011; Roorda, 2015). White adoptive families typically do not know how to access Black communities where their transracially adoptive children could build same-race relationships, learn about their culture and heritage, and learn to navigate Black mainstream society (Anyon, 2011; Roorda, 2015). When viewing race as more important than permanency, there can be more emotional damage done by not finding a child a permanent home than the issues they will face when they are transracially adopted (Bartholet, 2006).

In 2008, *The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute Report* reignited the conversation of transracial adoption and the color-blind approach of the 1994 Multiethnic Placement Act (Butler-Sweet, 2011; Perry, 2014). This report went against the past color-blind mindset and endorsed that race should be an important consideration in adoption (Butler-Sweet, 2011). This created fear in the adoption community, including adoptive families, when they reflected on the race-matching practices of the 1970s and 1980s that challenged, held up, or halted transracial adoptions. A leading controversy surrounding transracial adoption is the principle of what is in the child's best interest, which sways from finding a permanent home to race-matching (Bartholet, 2006).

The Indian Adoption Project involved removing Native American children from their families and tribes and placing them in non-Native American foster or adoptive homes (Anyon, 2011; Barn, 2013; Briggs, 2012; Jacobs, 2013). The Bureau of Indian Affairs claimed that with the rise of unwed mothers without resources, Native American children would be better served in adoptive homes outside their culture (Briggs, 2012; Jacobs, 2013). This approach esteemed middle-class White America as the goal while

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removing thousands of these children from their cultures and families in hopes of assimilation into their adoptive homes (Jacobs, 2013). The Native American community was outraged by these adoptions, and after continual efforts, put a stop to this by creating its own child welfare services, finally ending this practice with the Indian Welfare Act of 1978 (Anyon, 2011; Barn, 2013; Jacobs, 2013; Lee, 2003). People of Color strongly disapproved of these initial transracial adoption practices (Anyon, 2011; Barn, 2013; Lee, 2003). They feared that taking these children out of their communities could negatively affect their racial identity development and leave them helpless against racism.

Transracial adoption continues through foster care placements, private adoptions, and international adoptions as upheld by the 1994 Multiethnic Placement Act and the 1996 Interethnic Adoption Provision (Jennings, 2006). The controversy regarding White parents raising Black children is still present, and many Black child advocates fear that these well-intentioned White parents will do more harm than good (Barn, 2013; Butler-Sweet, 2011; Smith et al., 2011). Even though transracial adoption is an increasing practice through foster care and private adoptions, adoptive parents have limited to no training on race and how to support their transracial adoptees (Anyon, 2011; Woodward, 2016).

Foster Care

The main mission of child services and foster care is to reunify families; however, with this increase in substance abuse compounded with drug treatment challenges and availability, many children do not return to their birth parents (Radel et al., 2018). Between 2012 and 2016, the number of children in foster care increased by 10% overall,

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in some states, rising by 50%. Children are entering the foster care system at an extraordinary rate because of the rise in drug use, especially opioids. In 2012, parental drug use and overdoses increased, as did the need for foster care for their children. Looking at the U.S. population as a whole, approximately 2.5% of children in the United States are adopted (Raleigh, 2012; Samuels, 2009).

The foster care system represents every race. The largest population in the foster care system is White (42%), then Black or African American (24%), Hispanic (21%), and small percentages of Asians, American Indians, and children with more than one race (Children's Bureau, 2016). Black and African American families are adopting; however, there are not enough families of color to support all African American children in foster care (Woodward, 2016). African American youth are more likely to be placed in foster care and less likely to be reunited with their birth families due to institutional racism. This is because their birth parents may live in lower socioeconomic circumstances and do not have access to affordable housing, mental health resources, rehabilitation opportunities from substance abuse, or employment (Anyon, 2011; Briggs, 2012). The overrepresentation of Black mothers in prison doubly impacts this marginalized population (Roberts, 2012). Institutional racism, including bias within child services concerning African American families and their children, can also deter reunification and keep these children in the child services system longer than other races (Woodward, 2016).

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International Adoption

The United States leads the world in international adoption (Ferrari et al., 2017). Out of all transracial adoptions, 85% of them are from international adoptions (Lee, 2003). The rate of international adoption between the United States and other countries is the highest in China, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean due to various reasons, including children being orphaned and relinquishment of parental rights due to economic hardship (Baden, 2007). Although international adoption was extremely popular for decades, the practice is now on the decline because of countries around the world putting more restrictions on the practice to stay in compliance with the United Nations and America's laws concerning adoption, including The Hague Convention on the Protection of Children Act, the Multiethnic Act of 1994, and the Child Citizenship Act of 2000 (Smith et al., 2011). The restrictions that have come from these policies are to safeguard the children being adopted, as well as their birth parents, to ensure that there are stronger legal protections in place (Baden, 2007).

Private Adoption

Private adoptions facilitated by adoption mediators involving birth mothers who choose to find an adoptive home for their child have always been a common practice in America (Biafora & Esposito, 2007). Although private adoptions are extremely expensive, many families choose this type of adoption over adopting through child services. This is because adopting through foster care can be seen as legally complicated with the addition of fewer available babies combined with the increased possibility of the adoptee having physical or emotional issues (Clark & Shute, 2001). Historically, it has

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sometimes been difficult to find concise data collected on private adoptions because there are no incentives or punishments for reporting their statistics. Also, many of these adoption agencies have assumed that public agencies have already collected data. In contrast, public agencies assume private adoption agencies keep their own data (Biafora & Esposito, 2007). If Americans are seeking a local healthy infant, they will go through private adoption agencies. Private adoptions are not always same-race, and 21% of private adoptions were logged as transracial in the Survey of Adoptive Parents (ASPE, 2009). Up to the 1990s, private adoption was the most used way that Americans adopted; since then, adoptions from foster care have been the most prominent (Biafora & Esposito, 2007).

White Privilege and Adoption

Upper-class White parents are the typical heads of household of transracial adoptive families (Jennings, 2006; Kreider & Raleigh, 2016). Research has indicated that Hispanic, Black, and Asian adoptive families rarely cross racial lines when adopting (Kreider & Raleigh, 2016). The increase of transracial adoption is connected to White families wanting to adopt, sometimes due to women waiting to start a family to a later age and having fertility issues (Jennings, 2006; Raleigh, 2012). However, more White unwed women are choosing to parent alone, leading to a continuation of a lack of White babies available for adoption (Raleigh, 2012). The decrease of adoptable White babies, combined with the poor recruitment efforts for adoptive families of color, has contributed to more White families crossing racial lines to adopt (Harris, 2014). Transracial adoption also included older children from foster care, which also drives African Americans

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growing up surrounded by White people and White privilege (Brodzinsky, 2007; Harris, 2014). Many White adoptive families do not discuss race in the home or take a color-blind approach (Harris, 2014; Samuels, 2009; Snyder, 2011; Zucker & Patterson, 2018). Growing up, many White people were taught to uphold the belief that race does not matter and then take the same approach when raising their transracially adopted children. This mindset then contributes to many of these adoptees not identifying with their race but feeling more familiar with the White norms that their White families valued (Harris, 2014; Samuels, 2009).

White people view the world from White experience and expectations (Diangelo, 2018). White privilege is an "analytic frame to analyze the taken-for-granted benefits and protections afforded whites based on their skin color, the concept of privilege emphasizes the social condition of Whiteness" (Bonds & Inwood, 2015, p. 716). This White normative mindset causes racial obliviousness, reinforcing bias by not understanding their adoptees' culture and race. White parents minimizing their adoptive child's race can cause their transracially adoptive child a lot of emotional pain and set them up for failure by not preparing them for racism outside the home or future acceptance in their birth culture (Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2018).

Transracially Adopted Individuals' Perceptions and Experiences

Many factors impact a transracially adopted individual's experience and perception of themselves in the world (Baden, 2002; Basow et al., 2008; Butler-Sweet, 2011; Lee, 2003). An adoptee's age at adoption, race, adoptive family's socioeconomic status, race of the adopted family, geographical residence, and education forms their

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opinion of transracial adoption and their own racial identity (Baden, 2002; Lee, 2003; Manzi et al., 2014). There may never be a standard perception of how it is to be a transracial adoptee considering that each person and their experiences are unique (Tatum, 1997). Support groups for transracially adopted individuals could provide a space of community for this unique population to build relationships with other individuals who are navigating all of the feelings and experiences of living across cultures (Harris, 2014).

There is a lot of anger among many individuals in the transracially adopted community regarding color-blind adoptive parents that did not prepare their children to deal with racism (Harris, 2014; Samuels, 2009). One of the biggest concerns from transracially adopted individuals is that their adoptive families did not racially socialize them to build same-race relationships. Samuels (2009) found in her study of transracial adoptees that many voiced that they would have been happier if they had access to people of the same race. Some adoptees have spent so much time in White communities they identify as White in every aspect other than skin tone (Harris, 2014). Tatum (1997) interviewed transracially adopted individuals who were disappointed when their adoptive parents would turn down opportunities for them to participate in events that focused on their birth culture. These individuals' adoptive parents told them that they wanted their adoptive child to assimilate to the adoptive family culture instead (Tatum, 1997). Separating the adoptee from their heritage and birth culture can create self-hate instead of allowing adoptees to embrace their race and birth culture (Anyon, 2011; Manzi et al., 2014; Tatum, 1997).

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Simon and Roorda (2000) worked together to publish books focusing on interviews with transracially adopted individuals and their families. Their combined and individual efforts have brought many transracial adoptees' voices together, where the adoptive family can either reinforce their otherness by having these adoptees "grow up in a bubble of White privilege, attitudes, and experiences" (Roorda, 2015, p. 299) or support the adoptee in building relationships in a more diverse community, which is what numerous adoptees called for (Simon & Roorda, 2000). A common theme among the interviews was the desire of the transracial adoptees to connect to their birth cultures and build relationships with people of the same race (Roorda, 2015; Simon & Roorda, 2000). Many middle-class White parents remain in White communities and schools instead of finding more diverse areas to live, which could afford their transracially adopted children more opportunities for multiracial socialization (Manzi et al., 2014; Samuels, 2009). When these recommendations were not utilized, many transracial adoptees felt caught between their adoptive family's culture, race, and birth culture, leaving them unsettled in their identity (Roorda, 2015; Simon & Roorda, 2000).

In the Home

Racial identity development is pertinent in building who you are as a person and usually develops in the home (Barn, 2013; Neblett et al., 2012; Tizard & Phoenix, 2002). When parenting a transracially adopted child, the adoptive family needs to participate in building their racial pride (Basow et al., 2008; Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2018; Neblett et al., 2012). Much of the literature emphasizes the importance of the racial socialization of transracial children, as well as practices the families could engage in to impact racial

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identity, like cultural events, diverse literature, and same-race role models (Barn, 2013; Basow et al., 2008; Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2018). A significant common concern raised by previous research centers on how families of transracially adopted children will prepare their children to deal with racism (Butler-Sweet, 2011; Lee et al., 2013). If a child relates positively to their birth culture, they could gain higher self-esteem and confidence when dealing with racism or discrimination (Barn, 2013; Ferrari et al., 2017).

Research suggests that families of transracially adopted children can prepare them to deal with discrimination by creating opportunities to promote awareness and coping strategies to deal with prejudice (Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2018; Vonk, 2001). These opportunities arise through racial socialization and family discussions; however, the level of preparedness transracial adoptees receive correlates directly to their adoptive parents' racial awareness (Barn, 2013; Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2018; Snyder, 2011). Although the suggestion of racially socializing this population can prepare them to deal with bias and instill racial pride, there is no definite recipe for how to prepare the parents (Vonk, 2001). Adoptive parents need to know the value of each potential racial socialization event and which would most benefit their child. This study was an opportunity to discover directly from transracially adopted individuals or individuals who lived cross-culturally while in foster care, which school experiences impacted them and how, so that their adopted parents could continue to advocate for them, not only in the community but also in school.

Adoptive parents focusing on educating themselves on race and privilege and discussing these topics with their adoptive children is key to connecting and supporting

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transracially adopted individuals (Smith et al., 2011; Vonk, 2001). This could create a safe space in the home for the family to discuss injustices and problem-solve together. Parents could reach out to their adoptee's school to create specialized groups to create an environment for parental or family learning (Fishman & Harrington, 2007). Vonk (2001) suggested that adoptive parents focus on their own cultural competence defined in three parts as racial awareness, multicultural planning, and survival skills to in their learning support their transracially adopted children. Children's thoughts on race are molded by how parents speak about this topic. Parents of transracially adopted children need to take a color-conscious approach instead of a color-blind approach to foster racial self-love (Barn, 2013; Snyder, 2011; Zucker & Patterson, 2018).

Transracially adopted children observe how their adoptive parents deal with racism against them (Snyder, 2012). Whether the adoptive parents are proactive or passive shapes how the adoptees views themselves and how they will view and handle racism in the future (Snyder, 2012). Adoptive families need to be highly motivated and even seek out formal education about racism and the racial history of their child (Smith et al., 2011). This could be a great opportunity for schools to team with parents to support the whole family as they learn more about race and culture through evening family presentations or school counseling events.

School Experience

Beyond the home, schools are where our youth spend the most time and a place where students who are transracially adopted or foster-youth living cross racially could find additional support. Fishman and Harrington (2007) examined adoptees' school

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issues through developmental stages. They found that school-aged children meet a variety of challenges due to their emotional and cognitive development, and the weight of being transracially adopted or living cross racially in foster care can add more obstacles than their typical peers need to deal with every day. The authors also found that there is a general stigma surrounding adoption, and schools make mistakes reinforcing bias with the use of their language and chosen activities for students (Fishman & Harrington, 2007; Gajda, 2004). Teachers would benefit from further training about their own bias related to race and the concept of adoption and traditional ideas of family. During elementary school, many daily activities center on family concept (Fishman & Harrington, 2007; Gajda, 2004; Smith-D'Arezzo, 2018). Teachers need to recognize stereotypical language and not reinforce the belief that adoption means unwanted in the classroom (Fishman & Harrington, 2007; Gajda, 2004). This is an opportunity for the teacher to introduce adoption and foster families as an additional type of family and normalize the concept of both (Fishman & Harrington, 2007; Gajda, 2004; Smith-D'Arezzo, 2018). When teachers reinforce stereotypes surrounding adoption or foster care, the adoptees and youth in foster care will struggle further with self-concept and self-esteem (Fishman & Harrington, 2007; Gajda, 2004).

Branco and Brott (2017) identified school counselors as being in an ideal position to support transracially adopted students and provide resources to their families. School counselors could provide students who are transracially adopted or students living cross-racially while in foster care with counseling to help them deal with racism and discrimination, build relationships with students experiencing similar issues, and monitor

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their self-esteem (Branco & Brott, 2017; Fishman & Harrington, 2007). Support groups for teens could be especially helpful by teaching the students about open communication and aiding them in making future life choices while surrounded by racial mirrors (Fishman & Harrington, 2007).

Educators, in general, could be a huge asset to students who are transracially adopted, by exposing them to art, music, and literature that depict their race, encouraging students to join clubs and activities that can assist them in their racial identity development (Fishman & Harrington, 2007; Gajda, 2004; Smith-D'Arezzo, 2018; Tatum, 2004). Including multicultural literature at the school level helps children become in tune with their identity while bringing home and school together (Fishman & Harrington, 2007; Gajda, 2004; Lopez-Roberson & Haney, 2017; Minkos et al., 2017; Smith-D'Arezzo, 2018; Sun, 2016). Differentiating the curriculum to support different aspects of culture and social-emotional needs can create a more equitable learning experience for everyone, especially students who have been transracially adopted (Fishman & Harrington, 2007; Gray et al., 2019). Schools could incorporate assignments and learning opportunities to strengthen racial identity through cultural lessons that have students creating jewelry, art, clothing, music, dancing, writing, and even creating dioramas of their racial and ethnic history.

Transracially adopted individuals and foster youth living cross racially may need more support in school (Fishman & Harrington, 2007). Many individuals who have been transracially adopted or are living cross racially in foster care were affected by prenatal issues, abuse, and malnutrition, which may have impacted their cognitive development

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and require them to have special education support. Many of the international adoptees needed the guidance of an English teacher to learn English as their second language as well as about American culture. Because of these varied needs, educators should learn more about this population regarding their racial development and their adoption-related issues (Fishman & Harrington, 2007; Gajda, 2004).

Transracially adopted individuals who attend a school representing many races have more opportunities for valuable racial socialization (Kreider & Raleigh, 2016; Zucker & Patterson, 2018). If transracially adopted individuals attend schools where they are the only person who is not White, they may feel even more isolated, limiting their opportunities to have experiences with same-race peers, which could have potentially benefitted them (Anyon, 2011; Tatum, 2004). When transracially adopted children attend more diverse schools, they may have opportunities to build friendships with children of their own race, seek out same-race role models, and "observe and participate in cross-race interactions" (Zucker & Patterson, 2018, p. 3908). These interactions could lead to transracially adopted individuals discussing racial topics with their adoptive parents, which could further all of their understanding about race and their relationships with each other.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy creates equity in the classroom through institutional, personal, and instructional methods (Richards et al., 2007). American students are more diverse than ever, with more than one in seven students who are school-age speaking a language other than English at home, one in five students living in

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poverty, and one in every three students being a Person of Color (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Many of our school practices reflect White norms instead of acknowledging the diverse lives of students.

Ladson-Billings (2014), a leading scholar and researcher of cultural pedagogy, reminds us that "scholarship, like culture is fluid" (p. 75). As culture evolves, so does the need for us to keep learning, making sure our cultural pedagogy is "evolving" with society, including politics (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 77). The author conducted a study with eight teachers in her book, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children,* to learn more about cultural pedagogy and how to better connect with and support African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The author, through the participants, learned that teachers need to reflect on their connections to culture to best support students in learning about their own birth culture as they help students connect their personal lives to global issues. The author communicated that educators should remember that students are not "empty vessels" and that each student brings knowledge into the classroom that can be shared to help all students be successful in a multicultural society.

Transracial adoptees and individuals living in foster care cross-racially are a part of the diversity of the American classroom. Creating more culturally responsive schools through the academic curriculum and symbolic curriculum, like school celebrations, awards, and displays, can enhance the school climate for every student (Gay, 2002). Cultivating relationships between home and school can foster a more culturally responsive atmosphere by communicating values, knowledge, resources, and a sense of

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community that can benefit all individuals involved (Richards et al., 2007). Instead of expecting our students with the most diverse backgrounds to further separate themselves from who they are in exchange for White norms, it is time to adapt school curriculum, communication, instruction, and learning activities to reflect the students we are teaching (Gay, 2002).

Racial Identity Development

Racial identity forms through one's experiences with culture, relationships, reflection, and what the world tells a person about who they are through media (Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010; Neblett et al., 2012; Tatum, 1997; Vonk, 2001). When someone feels they belong to a racial or ethnic group, it can help the person be successful across academic, behavioral, and social domains (Neblett et al., 2012). Familism, connection to our family through values and family identification, contributes to positive adjustment and high self-esteem, particularly for People of Color (Anyon, 2011; Barn, 2013; Neblett et al., 2012). When a person positively identifies with their culture, they have more confidence in who they are and higher self-esteem (Anyon, 2011; Barn, 2013; Basow et al., 2008; Ferrari et al., 2017).

There are concerns that children who are transracially adopted will feel like they are "other" forever, be forever isolated, and lack the opportunity to build a healthy racial identity (Baden et al., 2012; Butler-Sweet, 2011; Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2018). The concerns raised by The National Association of Black Social Workers involving transracially adopted children's racial identity development are valid, considering 90% of these adoptions involve White parents (Smith et al., 2011). Simon and Roorda (2000)

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found that many transracially adopted individuals feel caught between races, with one community believing they are not their birth race enough and the other believing they are not White enough. Transracially adopted individuals could struggle with their identity and have difficulties with their mental health when they do not feel accepted by their birth or adopted cultures (Anyon, 2011; Baden et al., 2012; Hayes, 1993).

Racial Identity Theories

Theories on racial identity acquisition and how they may apply to the transracially adopted population are essential to learning how to best support this special population as they mature (Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010). Decades ago, Erikson stressed how important the process of ethnic or racial identity acquisition was for our youth, especially to ensure positive mental health and identity (Baden & Steward, 2000; Roorda, 2015). Prominent models like Cross's nigrescence model and Helms's racial identity model have played major roles in understanding racial identity development. However, neither fully explained the racial identity development of someone transracially adopted.

Cross's (1971, 1991) nigrescence models remain paramount in explaining African American racial identity development (Vandiver et al., 2001). Cross's first model, published in 1971, shared five stages of racial identity development, including pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and commitment stages (Endale, 2018; Vandiver et al., 2001). This model is a "process of Afro-American self-actualization" (Poston, 1990, p. 152). Cross adjusted his theory of African American racial identity development in 1991 in response to a scale created to analyze each stage (Endale, 2018). He acquired evidence from this new measurement that "individuals can

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have pro-White sentiments that do not automatically equate to anti-Black sentiments," which helped him separate "pro-Black and anti-White Immersions identities'' in his theory (Endale, 2018, p. 516). Cross continued to improve his racial identity model by combining the last two stages into one, which further supported this model as a significant contribution to critical race theory (Endale, 2018).

Helms's White racial identity development model examines how the White community deals with privilege while also knowing that they have "benefitted from and perpetuated racism" (Helms, 1995, as cited in Zucker & Patterson, 2018). Helms's model centers on "abandonment of racism and the development of a non-racist White identity (Tatum, 1992, p. 13). Helms's White racial identity model comprises six stages: contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independent, immersion/emersion, and autonomy (Tatum, 1992; Zucker & Patterson, 2018). Helms's White identity development theory centers on a person's experience of White identity in response to their "ability to manage social conflicts generated by oppressive definitions of race in society" (Ung et al., 2012, p. 75).

Several biracial identity models are widely respected (Renn, 2008). Three of the most known were by Poston (1990), Root (1990), and Renn (2008), each exploring a biracial or multiracial person's journey of racial development and opportunities for choices along their development journey. Although these models take more than one race into account when looking at racial identity, cultural competence, personal comfort across cultures are not considerations (Baden & Steward, 2000, 2007). Adoptive and birth cultures need to have a place in the exploration of racial identity development in

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transracially adopted individuals (Baden & Steward, 2000). A transracially adopted individual is not only dealing with physical aspects of the race but straddling their birth and adoptive cultures (Manzi et al., 2014). The struggle between their birth and adoptive cultures plays a large role in their racial identity development and needs to be considered for their overall well-being.

The Cultural-Racial Identity Model

The cultural-racial identity model is the first transracial identity model to introduce racial identity (how an individual identifies with their racial group) and cultural identity (the culture an individual identifies as through their knowledge, comfort, and understanding) as crucial elements (Baden & Steward, 1997, 2000; Steward & Baden, 1995). Tizard (1991) remarked that we need to examine how the transracially adopted individual conceptualizes their adoptive culture and birth culture. This model looks at the transracially adopted individual and takes their adoptive family's race and culture into account as well as their birth race and culture (Baden, 2002). Transracially adopted individuals will grow up in and develop in their adoptive culture and thus identify with this culture; however, they might not feel comfortable in their birth race and culture. This model may give further insight into this unique population's development (Jennings, 2006).

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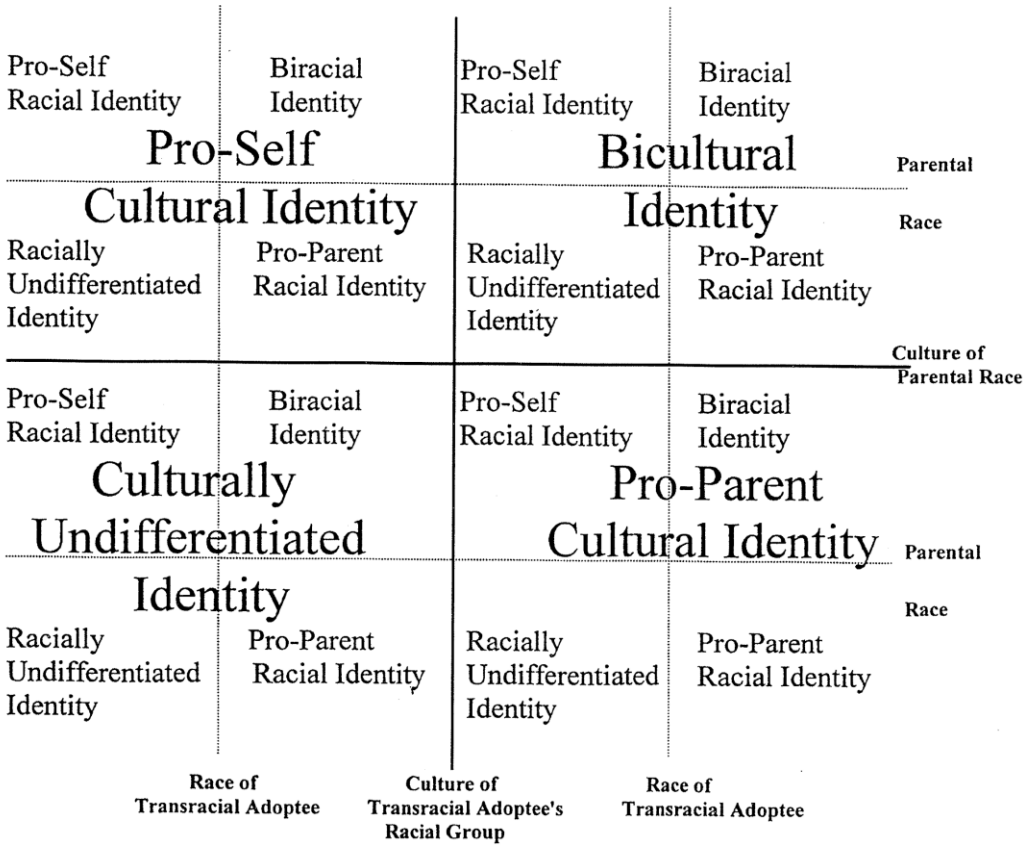
Figure 1

The Cultural-Racial Identity Model



Cultural-Racial Identity Model Definitions for Possible Identities

- *Pro-self-cultural identity* is confidence and awareness in one's own culture pertaining to their race. An individual who has great knowledge of their race and culture and feels comfortable among people of their race and culture (Steward & Baden, 1995).
- *Pro-parent cultural identity* is confidence and awareness of one's parents' culture pertaining to their race. An individual who has great knowledge of

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their parents' race and culture and feels comfortable among people of their parents' race and culture (Steward & Baden, 1995).

- *Bicultural identity* is confidence and awareness of one's own culture pertaining to race and their parents' culture pertaining to their race. An individual who has great knowledge of their own race and culture, as well as their parent's race and culture, and feel comfortable among both groups (Steward & Baden, 1995).
- *Culturally undifferentiated* is an individual who does not affiliate themselves with their race and culture or their parents' race and culture. This is an individual who feels most comfortable among people from many different races or cultures (Steward & Baden, 1995).

Steward and Baden's (1995) cultural-racial identity model emphasizes the adoptive parental impact on their adoptees' adoptive and birth culture. The four dimensions to which a transracial adoptee could be drawn are pro-self cultural identity, bicultural identity, culturally undifferentiated identity, and pro-parent cultural identity. The authors discussed how the adoptive parents' actions and behaviors towards their adoptee's race and culture by "affirming or discounting" their birth culture and race shape the adoptee's feelings towards their own identity.

Steward and Baden (1995) identified four different potential upbringings for transracial adoptees that would impact their racial identity development. Some examples included when adoptees live in a home that is *parent/child affirming* regarding race and culture where the adoptee has had many racial mirrors in their lives, including positive

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interactions with their adoptive and birth culture; including racial socialization and education about their birth culture. *Parent discounting-child affirming* included exposing the adoptee to their own birth culture while neglecting to share their adoptive family culture. This might look like sharing positive role models with the adoptee from their birth culture while failing to place importance on the adoptive culture, including having the adoptee connect with positive role models from the adoptive culture. *Parent-affirming-child discounting* homes focused on sharing the adoptive culture with the adoptee while neglecting the adoptee's birth culture. The last life experience shared by the authors included the *parent-discounting-child discounting* lifestyle, where a color-blind belief endorsed in the home can lead to confusion for the adoptee regarding discrimination and racial groups in the future.

A study using the cultural-racial identity model showed that transracially adopted people could gain more racial pride when exposed to their race and culture or be racially inept or ambivalent if not exposed to their race and culture (Baden, 2016). To further impact these results, there was a high correlation between the adoptee race dimension and the adoptee culture dimension, which shows that when exposed to their birth culture and race, transracial adoptees become more comfortable in their birth race communities (Javier et al., 2007). Transracially adopted individuals depended on their adoptive families to create these experiences and build relationships across races to support their children (Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2018; Snyder, 2011). Steward and Baden's (1995) model delved into the effect of how parents' actions to affirm and discount their adoptee's cultural experiences will shape how adoptees may affirm or discount their own races and

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cultures along with their adoptive family's race and culture. This study utilized this model through the lens of school and how school experiences and educators affirm or discounted transracial adoptees' racial identity.

Steward and Baden's (1995, 2000) global approach to racial identity development, as opposed to the linear approaches of other racial identity development models, informed my research study. Every transracial adoptee's identity is complex and deserves to be viewed through the many facets of the cultural-racial identity model (Baden, 2002). Steward and Baden's cultural-racial identity model can be reframed through a school lens. Using the language of Steward and Baden (1995, 2000), schools, like families, may "affirm or discount" this population's racial and cultural identities by how they communicate, instruct curriculum, use physical space, and by the impact of the overall school climate (Richards et al., 2007). Along with family, school experiences may shape the identity of these individuals as well, while having an impact on performance at school, especially academics (Legette, 2018). Individuals that equate their race with success and feel racial pride may feel more empowered to excel at school overall (Byrd & Chavous, 2009; Legette, 2018).

If a transracially adopted child is exposed only to their adoptive families' race and culture, they may not feel comfortable with people of their own race (Jennings, 2006). It is pertinent that transracially adopted people can navigate both races and cultures (Baden, 2002). In some instances, a transracially adopted individual rejects or cannot navigate their race and culture (Harris, 2014; Roorda, 2015). This is a failure of the family, the schools, and child services. Schools are in an ideal position to support these children by

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providing cultural opportunities to build relationships and expose them to literature about their race and culture, as well as their culture's history and environment. These initiatives need to be consistent through time and take place over the years to help the child embrace their race and culture while also appreciating the adoptive families' culture (Baden, 2002; Steward & Baden, 2000). It is my theory that if schools could be more cognizant of their racial and cultural impact on transracial adoptees, this population could have more opportunities to build their racial and cultural identity.

Research Through a School Lens

School experiences are one of many components that impact transracial adoptees' racial identity development (Baden et al., 2012). The education system has "ignored" transracial adoptees' needs in the curriculum and the school environment (Sun, 2016). Educators influence the school climate through their actions, which affect all populations (Cordeiro & Cunningham, 2013). Although the transracial adoptee population is growing, many educators are not familiar with how their actions and assignments could affect transracial adoptees' racial identity development (Sun, 2016).

The educational system connects transracial adoptees with many experiences through their school-age years that lead to feelings of isolation and rejection (Baden et al., 2012). Educators and students contribute to racism, through their actions and words, in the school environment against transracial adoptees (Snyder, 2012). Considering transracial adoptees are not raised by same-race parents, they might not be prepared to advocate for themselves or stave off racism in school. Although most educators have

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worked with transracial adoptees, they may require more education on race relations, diversity, and racism to sufficiently serve this population (Baden et al.; Snyder, 2012).

Conclusion

Transracial adoption continues to be a critical topic in the adoption world for a myriad of reasons, including but not limited to race relations, discrimination, and what is in the best interest of the child (Anyon, 2011; Barn, 2013; Briggs, 2012; Butler-Sweet, 2011; Ferrari et al., 2017; Lee, 2003; Samuels, 2009; Simon & Roorda, 2000; Ung et al., 2012; Vonk, 2001; Zucker & Patterson, 2018). There are many reasons to oppose transracial adoption, including that taking children out of their racial culture can leave a community of people emotionally displaced, never feeling like they belong to any race or culture (Barn, 2013; Jennings, 2006; Perry, 2014). However, the practice of transracial adoption is increasing. Whether one supports or opposes it, educators have a responsibility to the transracially adopted community to best support them in finding a healthy personal identity or high self-esteem and confidence in who they are in the world.

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Chapter 3

Methodology

Qualitative researchers delve into participants' experiences to gain insight into an identified problem (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Gill et al., 2008; Rapley, 2007; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). This study focused on the personal accounts of transracial adoptees, who were adopted internationally and from foster care, involving how and if school experiences shaped their racial identity development. Utilizing the case study design provided the initial opportunity to focus and learn about each individual while collectively looking at these individuals' experiences to answer my research questions (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Houghton et al., 2013; Stake, 2006). My research questions focused on how school experiences, including teachers, influenced the racial identity development of transracial adoptees. The transracial adoptees' stories of their experiences in relation to their racial identity development were explored. The information gathered from these interviews could give parents, caseworkers, and educators better insight into what shapes racial identity development for these populations at school.

Research Questions

1. How did experiences at school shape the racial identity development of transracial adoptees and foster-youth living cross racially?
    a. What types of school events or curriculum influenced their racial identity development at school?

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b. What role did their teachers play in their perceptions of how their racial identity was influenced by school?

Rationale of Methodology

My case study research focused on transracial adoptees and centered on the data collected through interviewing the participants. Using a case study design allowed the participants to share their personal accounts (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Houghton et al., 2013; Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Stake, 2006). My research techniques were guided by Stake's (2006) research philosophy involving the researcher "experiencing the activity of the case as it occurs in the contexts and in its particular situation" (p. 2) by interpreting the constructed realities of the participants while encouraging the researcher to interpret possible multiple perspectives.

The participants took part in two interviews, followed by a formal e-mail, to allow them to inform me of any other experiences that may have come to mind after reflecting on the interviews. The first and second interviews were guided by an interview instrument. The first interview centered on learning the participant's personal story, overview of their educational experience, personal identity, and experiences with teachers. The second interview delved further into discussing the role of school in their racial development concerning curriculum, assignments, and projects. The time between the first and second interviews and the third interaction gave the participants a chance to reflect on the interview questions and their former school experiences. The third interaction, which was a formal e-mail, allowed the participant to share any experiences that they may have remembered after the interviews, share school artifacts, and give

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feedback after reviewing my interpretations from the first two interviews. In addition, I communicated with the participants through e-mail or Facebook Messenger before the interview to ensure their participation. After the interview, I discussed the data derived from the interviews through phone calls or any electronic device the participant chose to obtain their approval. Given the complex and highly personal nature of this study, continued communication with the participants allowed us to establish trust, especially considering that I am an outsider in this community (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The participants belonging to the transracially adopted population were over the age of 18. They relayed their life experiences regarding their racial identity development in connection to their home and school life, highlighting incidents and happenings that positively or negatively impacted them. While investigating my data, I searched for common themes or similar results among the participants, seeking approaches to support this population and school with their racial identity development (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003).

Initial Challenges

As this study proceeded, adjustments to the original research design were necessary. At the onset of this process, I had planned a comparative case study between international transracial adoptees and transracial adoptees adopted through foster care to investigate how and if their school experiences differed or aligned. It became evident through the interviews that the small sample of individuals had very similar experiences in school and that it would serve the study better to be organized in a qualitative descriptive case study. Although two communities of transracial adoptees were

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interviewed for this study, their interviews and artifacts were analyzed as transracial adoptees as an overall population.

My research included a pilot study. Initially, I did not gather enough in-depth data from the first group of participants' interviews. This is a reflection on my own weaknesses and not any fault of the participants. At my chair's direction, I took time to revisit the interviewing process, increase my knowledge and skills, and reset my mindset to refocus on my responsibility to the participants and the transracially adopted community. After careful consideration, two of the participants' interviews, which were data-rich, were included in the main study, while four of the participants' interviews became the pilot study. The recommendations for educators from the four participants in the pilot study were included in this dissertation. Six new participants were sought out and participated in the main study, while combined with two from the initial interviewing experience, bringing the study to eight participants. The experience of facing my own failures pushed me to be present and thoughtful in each step of this process, not just in the end result.

Sampling Approach

Purposeful selection was utilized to build an information-rich sample of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002; Russell & Gregory, 2003). Criterion sampling was used, considering my focus was specifically on people who need to meet the criteria of having been transracially adopted either internationally or through foster care (Kuper et al., 2008; Patton, 2002; Russell &

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Gregory, 2003). The interviews occurred on the telephone, as requested by all of the participants due to distance.

Gatekeepers

A gatekeeper is a part of a community and could support one's research by encouraging people from their community to become participants (Yin, 2015). I am an outsider in the transracially adopted community and depended on identified gatekeepers to contact participants. The transracial adoption population is unique, and I reached out to multiple communities. The first method I used is the snowball or chain sampling techniques by asking friends, family, colleagues, and professionals at Court Appointed Special Advocates, CASA, and child services I have worked with as a foster parent for recommendations of possible participants (Kuper et al., 2008; Patton, 2002). The next approach I used was making an announcement on Facebook asking my community if anyone knew any individuals that fit the criteria that I was seeking. Lastly, I reached out to transracial adoptee-centered support groups on Facebook, through the help of a gatekeeper, to seek additional participants. The gatekeepers approached possible participants, and then anyone who wanted to be a part of my study reached out to me. Most of the gatekeepers who connected me with interested participants were colleagues from my place of work and friends.

As a researcher, I needed to approach the transracial adoptees who participated in this study with genuine humility and respect. I am an outsider in their community. Many transracial adoptees have experienced extreme hardships and trauma and may be too angry about their adoptions or experiences in school to share their experiences with me,

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an adoptive mother and a White woman. This could have complicated finding willing participants. Complete transparency about this project was communicated to each participant through phone conversations, so they could decide if this study aligned with their needs and if they wanted to participate or not (Chan et al., 2017).

Participants

My study was limited to individuals transracially adopted internationally or through foster care. My focus was on eight transracially adopted individuals, four internationally adopted and four adopted through foster care. Focusing on more than one type of adoptee was chosen to gain a broader understanding of the diverse quintain of transracial adoptees' experiences regarding how school could have shaped their racial identity (Stake, 2006). All of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 25 years old. This age range was chosen for two reasons. Their school experience was the most recent and will hopefully be easy to recall, as well as that this age range may have access to school digital artifacts. All participants lived in the United States with their adoptive families for at least five years of their life. All chose their pseudonyms for the study.

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Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Adoptee status	Self-identification	Length of interviews	artifacts
Melody	International adoptee	Chinese American	41 & 35 minutes	Article, drawing
April	International adoptee	Chinese woman	35 & 36 minutes	Photos, poems
Olivia	International adoptee	Chinese American adoptee	52 & 81 minutes	Drawings, pictures
Evelyn	International adoptee	Chinese woman	35 & 55 minutes	Photos
Rosie	Adopted from foster care	Mixed identity	36 & 59 minutes	Photos
Lilah	Adopted from foster care	Melting pot	38 & 67 minutes	Photos, projects
Deker	Adopted from foster care	African American man	30 & 31 minutes	Photo, hand imprints
Gabriel	Adopted from foster care	Privileged African American man	31 & 27 minutes	Photos, texts

Positionality

As a non-transracial adoptee and an educator, there is an important need for me to share my positionality on this topic, including the reasons behind my motivation for doing this research. For over 20 years, I have had the privilege of educating students first as a special educator, then a school counselor, and at present as an assistant principal. In my work, I have supported many children in foster care. Along with already having three children, my husband and I fostered and later adopted one of my students. From this experience, we realized that we could support other children by providing a stable home

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and care before returning to their birth families, and have continued to be a resource home for the past many years.

During our time of being a foster or resource family, we parented children with many different abilities and children of different races from ours. While parenting a child with a disability, Child Services provided us with direct support and resources to care for the child. While parenting a child that was not our race or culture, child services would ask us every month what we were doing to expose the child to their race and culture without providing any direction. This left us, as the resource family, feeling lost and ill-equipped.

As a resource parent to African American children, I am aware that I do not know enough to help them attain their racial identity or navigate a world of bias and racism. My love can help them feel wanted and secure but does not provide them with the racial and cultural mirrors and experiences they need. These children did not choose to be placed in foster care, nor did they choose to be placed in a White family. Our story is not unique. Many families are struggling with raising children they love of a different race and culture authentically.

As a resource parent put in the position of transracially adopting, I knew I needed to learn more about racial identity, culture, and White privilege. My family needed to be more informed of our children's race and culture and connect them to the resources they deserve. My family needed to come to terms with our White privilege and centering race and culture as a common conversation in our home. Before my dissertation work began, I was researching on my own and conversing with anyone that may help me be a better

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parent to my children. As I have been writing this dissertation, I have been peeling back the layers of my own beliefs and trying to learn about the cultures around me by doing personal research and reflecting on my values and family.

I believe transracial adoption can be risky. The risks involve children who have potentially been through trauma and need love and permanency. These children depend on the adults around them to support them physically, mentally, and emotionally. We have a growing population of transracial adoptees who have grown up lacking support with their racial and cultural needs. Many of these individuals are angry and have every right to be. The adoption system we have relied on has been color-blind, leaving White families to raise transracial adoptees as if they were White, and has done a lot of damage to many people it was supposed to help. Resource families do not receive adequate guidance on cultural and race relations when fostering or adopting children that are not their race.

I also believe transracial adoption should be the last resort for permanency. Child Services needs to exhaust searches for same-race families before placing a child in a family that is not their race. Race matters. Culture matters. If a child can be placed in a family that is their race and culture, that should be the priority. If this preferred placement is not available, a family who is open to truly educating themselves about the child's race and culture should then be considered.

As a White woman conducting this research, I knew I was "other" in many ways. I have benefited from White privilege in my life. I am not an adoptee. I approach this work as a caring adoptive and foster parent, educator, child advocate, researcher, and

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student. I am simply an available platform for willing transracially adopted individuals to share their stories to help other future transracial adoptees. I will continue to push myself to learn about race, culture, and racism for the rest of my life. My learning will never end. I am just a humble student myself. The participants in this study could help shape how adoptive parents and educators could improve how we support transracially adoptees in gaining their racial and cultural identity in the future.

The words we use verbally and in our writing "reflect power, status, and privilege" (Liddell, 2018, p. 1). While writing this dissertation, I have studied and researched current and progressive language use to write about the transracially adopted community respectfully. With the support of my chair, I was able to see that my language did not always reflect my intent. Through this process, I have continued to learn more about the power of language, and I strive to be better and have my language reflect that. The American Psychological Association (2010) was very clear that authors need to use "specificity and sensitivity" when using terms for different races while using accepted modern terms (p. 75). The way I wrote about a certain culture or race, reflected how the author, where I have learned about the individuals or group, had described them in my current readings. When written, races and cultures have been capitalized to show my respect for them, as well as the "power and solidarity" of these groups (Liddell, 2018, p. 1). As I continue to learn, I have made concerted efforts to remain thoughtful about my use of words and how I, as an outsider in this study, being a White woman, can continue to humbly learn from my mistakes and strive to be better.

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Although I challenge myself daily, I also know that I have bias. I need to face my bias as I do this work so that my interactions, which contain my beliefs and personal experiences, are not imposed on the participants. I need to stay aware of my interactions with the participants, so I do not influence their answers. Some of my bias will be connected to hearing the participants' negative and positive experiences with their teachers and adoptive or foster parents. Being an educator for over 20 years, I have worked with thousands of students, and their parents, and hearing of other educators' failures could negatively impact me. Also, hearing the participants' stories about how their adoptive or foster parents disappointed them or impacted them in negative ways could hurt me emotionally. The negative impact or emotionality has helped me face when my actions should have been better as an educator or parent. This reflection has pushed me to continue to challenge myself. During the interviews, data analysis, and writing this dissertation, I have dealt with my defensive feelings through personal research and deep reflection on my own past and present actions, considering I employ these roles.

Philosophy of Research

A naturalist approach through an interpretive constructivist lens was taken through the research of this study. A naturalist paradigm approach focuses on the complexity of analyzing someone's experiences and knowing no one answer or interpretation will fit every participant (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). An interpretive constructivist values that every person will interpret the world around them in different ways, which is impacted by collecting their relationships, experiences, and place in life (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The participants who joined this study, although an international

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transracial adoptee or someone who has lived cross racially in foster care and was adopted, were different genders and races, were adopted at different points in their lives, were adopted under different conditions, have varying opinions of adoption, have varying opinions on racial identity, and used those experiences when answering the questions in the interviews.

Instrumentation

The semistructured interview questions were open-ended and varied slightly between the transracially adopted individuals adopted internationally or through foster care. Semistructured interviews allowed me to ask direct questions to answer my research questions while giving the participant and me space to explore areas that the participant may need to explain in greater detail during the interview (Gill et al., 2008; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interview questions were shaped by the cultural-racial identity model (Steward & Baden, 1995). The interview questions were guided by the cultural-racial axis of the cultural-racial identity model with a focus on the child/parent affirming or discounting behaviors as applied to the participant's experiences. Gaining as much knowledge from the participants was of vital importance. If that meant that I needed to ask additional questions to learn more about an experience, I did (Yin, 2014).

After the interviews, I sent a formal e-mail to every participant to allow them to share additional information they may not have shared during the interview. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2010) discussed that using familiar technology-based data collection methods, like texts or e-mails, helps participants feel more comfortable. Asking

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participants for texts or e-mails gives the researcher physical data similar to artifacts, which can add valuable data to a study (Onweuegbuzie et al., 2010).

Data Collection

Data collection occurred in multiple ways. Each participant took part in two interviews at times and days of their choosing. All of the participants shared a variety of artifacts from their time in school. The participants also had an opportunity to respond to a formal e-mail to share any experiences they may not have included at the interviews.

Interviews

The interviews were conducted through my laptop, audio-recorded, and saved for later review. No one else had access to these audio files. During the interviews, handwritten notes were taken as a precaution and directly after to help me remember crucial points of the interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rapley, 2007; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The length of the second interviews ranged from 27 minutes to 81 minutes depending on how many artifacts the individual provided, which were each individually discussed, as well as the experiences they shared. Each interview was transcribed verbatim and uploaded to Dedoose to be analyzed. Analytic memos were created from the interview transcripts, the e-mails, and the artifacts. The length of the first interviews ranged from 30 to 41 minutes, depending on the participants' experiences. These memos were developed from gathering what the participants' identified as significant experiences with teachers, curriculum, and assignments.

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Artifacts

All of the participants in this study submitted artifacts. Collecting artifacts from the participants gave me physical evidence of the participants' experiences connected to their interviews (Wildemuth, 2016; Yin, 2014). The artifacts consisted of photographs showing school projects, their families, class pictures, team pictures, hand-drawn pictures, crafts, and photographs of them with classmates and friends. The artifacts that the participants provided showed me physical ways how they interpreted situations or experiences in their lives, like hand-drawn pictures of their family or projects they made for school (Wildemuth, 2016). Having multiple forms of data, including the interviews, artifacts, and formal e-mails, helped me triangulate the data to strengthen the findings' accuracy (Wildemuth, 2016; Yin, 2014).

E-mails

After the interviews were completed, I followed up with each participant with an e-mail. In the e-mail, I thanked them for their participation and told them that if they had forgotten to include anything during the interview, that they could use the e-mail as a space to give me more information. Only one participant e-mailed me further information. The other participants thanked me for having them in the study in their e-mails or did not respond at all. Instead of using the e-mail, one participant texted me further information they wanted me to include in the study.

Trustworthiness and Reliability

Trustworthiness and reliability are crucial when collecting data; therefore, it is essential in case study research to view the research through many lenses (Creswell &

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Creswell, 2018). Although validity and reliability are different in qualitative versus quantitative studies, the researcher can use qualitative validity procedures by utilizing multiple methods during data collection and analysis. Considering this study was motivated by personal interest, many methods were employed to combat bias (Maxwell, 2013; Roulston & Shelton, 2015). One of the methods used was respondent validation and member checking, where the interviewees were able to read their case study narratives and had the opportunity to comment on them to increase validity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Maxwell, 2004; Russell & Gregory, 2003; Stake, 2006). This allowed the interviewee to agree, disagree, or add to findings (Maxwell, 2004; Russell & Gregory, 2003). If any participants disagreed with how the interview was represented, the interview was altered. Peer debriefing, having another professional read through my data analysis, was also utilized (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The motivation behind conducting this study was personal to me as the researcher. I kept separate my positionality in regard to the data collected. As I analyzed the data, I tried my best to remain a neutral and objective party to convey the participants' authentic stories using their verbatim answers. I shared my findings with the participants for their approval (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Reflexivity and understanding both my perspective and the participants' perspectives were also kept in mind during this process and how my position as an adoptive parent could influence how I interpreted or understood results (Kuper et al., 2008).

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Data Analysis

Coding

All data underwent three cycles of coding. In vivo coding was utilized for the first round of coding and was completed on Dedoose. In vivo coding was crucial to this process to secure the integrity of the participants' voices (Saldaña, 2016). The interviews were typed verbatim. From those interviews, I was able to identify codes from the participants' own words that gave information to answer the interview questions directly and were "significant" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 107). Elaborative coding, a top-down method utilizing a current theory, was used for the second round of data analysis. The codes identified from the in vivo coding were then placed in a new codebook framed by the cultural-racial identity development model. I then used the concepts of "affirm" and "discount" from the cultural and racial identity model, utilizing pro-self cultural identity, bicultural identity, culturally undifferentiated identity, and pro-parent cultural identity to frame which school experiences supported or neglected the participants' racial identity.

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Table 2

Example of Code Book

In vivo	Elaborative cultural racial identity model	Category
Big moment blond hair	Affirm pro-parent/discount pro-self	Blending in/camouflage
Insisted sign up for multicultural club	Affirm pro-self/discount pro-parent	Educator support
"Only Asian person besides the foreign exchange student"	Affirm pro-parent/discount pro-self	Artifacts/dance pictures Attended predominantly White schools: "No one looks like me"

Matrix coding was used for the third round of coding to help develop themes. By putting data into a matrix, the participants' views became easier to identify, which lent to confirming findings and checking the study's rigor (Houghton et al., 2013). Google Sheets was used as a frame for the matrix. Each participant was placed in a column vertically, where I placed all of the data relayed from the interviews. The major codes that emerged from the elaborative cycle of coding were placed in the matrix horizontally. I then went across the document to fill in the data aligned with the participant and the codes. When analyzing the data across the matrix, specific themes emerged that were more prevalent among the participants (Saldaña, 2016). These themes directly correlated to the research questions about the participants' school experiences and racial identity development.

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Table 3

Example of Matrix

Participant matrix	April – international	Olivia – international
Blending in	• Dressed like White friends; tried to do hair like White friends • Called the Asian store the Stinky store to blend in • Wouldn't report microaggressions; didn't want to stick out • Dressing like pop stars friends liked • Making fun of other Asian people to fall in line with White friends	• Felt like she needed to blend in in school • Was scared to ask questions that may bring attention to her
Bullied by peers	• Yes—about being adopted • Her parents not being her real parents • Did not report bullying; just wanted to blend in • Microaggressions daily	• Yes—Comments from peers: "You don't seem Chinese"; "I don't see color" • Kids made fun of her eyes and asked if she could see • "Do you eat dogs?" "Are you going to have an arranged marriage?" "Is your vagina slanted?" • Telling her makeup wouldn't look good on her because of her skin tone

Analyzing Artifacts

The artifacts collected from the participants were also analyzed. Stake (2006) believed the researcher's first impressions of the data were essential when analyzing

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information. When analyzing artifacts, I used impressions and intuition to guide my content analysis interpretations (Saldaña, 2016). These interpretations were recorded in analytic memos and then coded to align with the rest of the study. During the interviews, the participants discussed each artifact they shared, with this information included in the data analysis. The participants and I communicated through the interview and data analysis period to ensure that their authentic voices would be heard in this study (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

Figure 2

Example of Collected Artifacts

Note. Picture drawn by Melody as a child of her birth mom giving her to her adoptive mom.

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The Cultural Racial Identity Model and the Data

The findings from this study were framed in the cultural racial identity model's language of "affirm" or "discount" in reference to racial identity. Steward and Baden (1995) measured the impact of the adoptive family and environment on the transracial adoptee's racial identity. The cultural-racial identity model contains two dimensions: The adoptee culture model and the parental culture model, as well as four types of cultural identities "bicultural identity, pro-self identity, and culturally undifferentiated identity and pro-parent cultural identity" (Steward & Baden, 1995, p. 324). All of these components come together to measure how the transracial adoptee identifies themselves racially. An adoptee could identify more with their adoptive family or more with their birth race. The terms "affirm" and "discount" are used to sort which experiences have secured the transracial adoptee more in their birth racial identity or their adoptive family's racial identity and the variations. This study used the terms "affirm" and "discount" to identify which transracial adoptees' experiences at school have affirmed or discounted their birth racial identity or pro-self identity as well as "affirm" or "discount" their bicultural identity, culturally undifferentiated identity, or pro-parent cultural identity. As the researcher, I sought to see how and if these school experiences offered them "knowledge, awareness, competence, and comfort" with their birth culture (Steward & Baden, 1995, p. 324).

Ethical Considerations

The highest ethical standards and integrity should always be kept when one is involved in research with participants and impacting the world at large (Creswell &

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Creswell, 2018; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). In addition to IRB acceptance, I obtained informed consent through writing and documentation from each participant. Building and maintaining trust with the participants was crucial not only to my dissertation but to me as the leader of this research. Each of the participants was fully informed throughout the study through phone calls or e-mail and also had access to the final product to ensure they knew how I presented their point of view (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

The Ethic of Care was at the heart of this study (Wood & Hilton, 2012). The Ethic of Care puts the person and their needs first, as I showed the participants their value through my compassion and respect when interviewing them, analyzing the data, and the final product. Ways I did this included remaining transparent with the participants through each step of the study and using respondent validation to ensure I conveyed the participants' views and experiences. To combat reactivity, verbatim interview scripts were typed up from the interviews and used as data (Maxwell, 2013). Respondent validation was utilized by continuing conversations with the participants about their interviews through e-mail and texts (Maxwell, 2004; Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Stake, 2006). If the participant felt that we needed to meet up more after the interviews to ensure their experiences were shared so they felt comfortable, another meeting would have been scheduled. Understanding the participants' experiences from their perspectives was valued (Stake, 2006).

Although I entered this research with theories in mind, because this research is personal to me, I tried my best to remain aware of researcher bias and reactivity (Maxwell, 2013). I adopted reflective practice throughout the study to help me deal with

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my bias. In qualitative research, this is called reflexivity, meaning that the researcher takes time through the research process to reflect on their past and present experiences as well as their feelings concerning the topic while they are conducting their study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I wrote personal memos that kept track of where I was in the study emotionally.

The participants' mental and emotional well-being were protected in this study (Chan et al., 2017). The potential participants were briefed before the interview, and if the interview were too emotionally painful, it would have been stopped and discarded. Confidentiality was pertinent to this study, and all of the participants' names were changed to protect their identities (Kuper et al., 2008). Topics brought up during the interviews could have been emotional for some participants, while other participants benefited emotionally from participating in this study and sharing their stories (Decker et al., 2011). A minimalist approach during interviews was used, which entailed giving the participants mental health resources if asked for, which they were not asked for (Chan et al., 2017).

Conclusion

This case study consisted of gaining insight from transracially adopted individuals regarding their experiences at home and school and how this impacted their racial identity development. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and put through three rounds of coding: in vivo, elaborative, and matrix, as well as the artifacts and written correspondence with participants. Through these processes, I was able to identify themes from the data that aided me in finding if there were approaches to support transracially

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adopted individuals through their racial identity development at school. Themes emerged when participants described having similar experiences, expressed feelings about themselves, others, curriculum, or interactions with teachers.

This research was guided by my passion as a child advocate and an educational leader. The transracially adopted population deserves to have the opportunity to attain a positive racial identity and not be a victim of their adoptions. Through my research, with the assistance of the valued participants, my goal was to learn how school has shaped the racial identity development of transracial adoptees. As educators, we need to hear about this population's experiences to approach curriculum and programming from a more informed view.

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Chapter 4

Collection of Case Studies

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate if and how school experiences shape the racial identity of transracial adoptees who were adopted internationally or through foster care. This study framed the participants' responses about their school experiences, school assignments, and relationships with teachers using the affirming and discounting elements of the Cultural and Racial Identity Model created by Steward and Baden (1995). This study consisted of two interviews per participant, a formal e-mail, and an investigation of various school artifacts provided by the participants. The two groups of transracial adoptees' responses about their experiences in school were analyzed to discover if and how assignments, school experiences, or teachers shaped their racial identity. The participants offered several recommendations to educators to help support the racial identity of these populations in the future.

Description of Case Studies

Each case study narrative communicates the participants' personal experiences and perceptions of their time as a student in relation to their racial and cultural identity development. Participants shared their backgrounds, information about their adoptive families, their thoughts on their racial and cultural identity, relationships with educators, stories about the artifacts given for the study, and experiences with assignments, curriculum, and peers.

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Transracial International Adoptees

Melody

Melody is a 22-year-old woman who was adopted from Le Cheng City, Guangdong Province, China, and was brought to New Jersey when she was about 1 year old. She has lived her whole life with her single mom, who is French-Canadian and was born in Ontario. Melody considers herself Chinese-American; her adoptive mother's French culture is a smaller part of her life. In the past few years, she has been learning more about Chinese culture and seeking out experiences to learn about her birth culture. She is also invested in the adoptee community, including creating an adoptee club at her university, and is proud of her background.

School Experiences. Melody attended primarily predominantly White schools growing up. She shared that while attending school, she did not know anyone that looked like her or was part of an adoptive family. She explained that she "didn't have anyone to identify with or relate to," which made school events awkward. Her close friends knew that she was adopted; however, when she went to school events with her White mother, her peers would question whether she was an adoptee. This made her very uncomfortable that she was "pressured to say yes." She explained that she would have rather said no and lied to them than share that private part of herself when she was younger. Melody would become anxious at school events because she did not know how to handle these conversations about her family. Another issue tied to her anxiety about sharing her adoptee experience was that people frequently reacted in negative ways and told her how

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sorry they were for her to be adopted. She explained that this response confused her because she viewed her adoption as positive.

Curriculum and Assignments. In elementary school, Melody had an assignment that allowed her to share her birth culture with her peers and teacher. Melody was extremely excited to complete this assignment and communicated that she "went the whole nine yards" when creating it. She put together a trifold about Chinese New Year, explaining the holiday to her peers. She also brought in fortune cookies to share with her class. Melody communicated that her peers were "very responsive in a positive way." As the only Chinese American in the class, this experience helped her feel accepted into the class community. Melody shared that her peers were able to find many similarities between American New Year's celebrations and Chinese New Year's celebrations, creating an experience for all of the students to see that Melody was not so different from them and that they shared experiences across cultures.

In high school and college, two cultural events influenced Melody in negative ways. While in high school, her school had a culture day. The school highlighted "Hispanic, African American, and European cultures and history." Melody explained that she was happy to learn about these cultures; however, "Asian cultures" were not included in the event. Melody was also saddened that there was not anything including family diversity at the event and believes that adoptive families should be part of the discussion. While in college, Melody attended a diversity weekend excursion through an organization. She was excited about the event and then was let down when she realized the event did not feature Chinese culture or any Asian culture. She was the only Chinese

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individual in attendance. Being a multicultural event, she wanted to voice her concern to the program leaders but was not confident enough at that point in her life to say something to them about it.

The lack of Chinese or any Asian culture included in the school curriculum made Melody feel that her race and culture were not as important as other races and cultures. She shared that aspects of African American culture were shared throughout school. She appreciated the opportunity to learn about another culture; however, the lack of any information on Chinese or any Asian culture made her feel like it did not matter as much as other cultures. She also offered that adoptive families were never discussed or explained in the curriculum, which made her feel like her experiences as an individual were "not important."

There were times in Melody's life that school was very lonely. During middle school, she experienced bullying from her peers regarding her race. During this period, Melody did not feel supported by the school and often felt "isolated" and that no one understood where she was coming from. Her high school experience was more positive. Melody reached out to her high school counselor for support and was able to open up to them and discuss bullying concerns. Being able to talk to someone confidentially at the school provided Melody with a safe space. Looking back at her school experiences, she is disappointed in the overall support of her position as a transracial adoptee in a school that "promoted diversity," even though she struggled to feel accepted.

Experiences With Teachers. Melody's relationships with her teachers through the years have been mostly positive and professional. As she grew older, she felt more

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comfortable building relationships with her teachers. As she becomes an adult, she has sought out more experiences to learn about her Chinese culture as well as connect with other adoptees. Melody connected in particular with a professor in college and felt comfortable opening up about her adoption with her, which was encouraged by the professor's anti-racist teachings in class as well as the fact that this professor had transracially adopted. Melody and this professor continue their friendship and supportive relationship to this day. Melody had a negative experience with a different professor that ignored her in class, as the only Person of Color, to the point that Melody left her class in tears. This professor made her feel as if she did not belong.

Artifacts. Melody shared two artifacts from her time in school that were significant to her. The first artifact was a drawing Melody made with her school counselor. While in elementary school, Melody was attending an event with her mother when she became very upset. The school counselor was present and invited Melody to her office to talk. The school counselor encouraged Melody to draw her feelings. Melody drew a picture of a house with her adoptive mom in front of it along with her birth mother, who was crying as she handed Melody to her adoptive mom. Melody said this activity helped her see how she felt about her situation and how she was processing her adoption. The other artifact was an article about the first law created to support transracial adoptees in becoming citizens immediately with no waiting period. This law was enacted in 2001. Although the article did not directly connect to her school experience, Melody wanted to share it with me because it was a significant point for her and other transracial adoptees.

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Figure 3

Newspaper Article About Adoption Law and Citizenship in the United States

6 NATION/WORLD TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2001 • THE TAMPA TRIBUNE

AP photo

Andrew Maness and his wife, Donna, adopted Emily, 4, and Jack, 3, from South Korea. The children are among 75,000 adopted nationwide who will become citizens today under a new law.

Adoption law grants citizenship

WASHINGTON — The law was spearheaded by Rep. William Delahunt, D-Mass., who has an adopted daughter who left Vietnam as a baby.

By KEN MAGUIRE
of The Associated Press

Four-year-old Emily Maness has spent nearly all her life with her adoptive family in Massachusetts. But in the eyes of the U.S. government, she's still a South Korean.

Her parents, Donna and Andrew Maness, brought her home from the town of Kyungsangbuk-Do in 1997, then waited a year for the Immigration and Naturalization Service to schedule an interview for citizenship. The couple from Falmouth canceled the interview because of a family funeral, then completed paperwork to reschedule.

But another year has passed, and they've had no response.

Today they won't need an answer. That's because Emily and her younger brother, Jack, are among an estimated 75,000 adopted children across the country who will become citizens simply by waking up.

The Child Citizenship Act, passed by Congress last year, grants automatic citizenship to most adopted children born abroad, provided they are younger than 18 and at least one parent or legal guardian is a U.S. citizen. There are about 20,000 such adoptions every year, and the average wait for INS citizenship processing has been two years.

The new law removes a bureaucratic and psychological hurdle for parents who may well have waited years and paid up to $25,000 for international adoptions.

"It's the best thing that could have happened to people in our position," Donna Maness said. "The whole adoption process is filled with obstacles. We justify ourselves over and over again. We get FBI checks, state and local checks. We reveal everything about our selves to government agencies."

And that's before the INS application, which seems similar paperwork on parents and children, including birth and marriage certificates, photo identifications, alien registration cards and certified English translations of documents written in other languages.

Rep. William Delahunt, D-Mass., wrote the new law from experience. He has an adopted daughter, Kara, 26, who became a citizen several years after leaving Vietnam as a baby.

"Most people are totally unaware that a child adopted from overseas does not become a citizen automatically," Delahunt said. "Many of my colleagues were surprised to learn that this wasn't the case already."

Delahunt said the citizenship bill generated more e-mails and letters from citizens than any other he's been involved with during his 20 years in office. "This is as much about promoting adoption as it is reducing barriers," he said. "There are children everywhere, home and abroad, in need of a family."

The law

Details of the Child Citizenship Act, which takes effect today and grants automatic citizenship to foreign-born adoptees under these conditions:

- The child is under 18.
- The child has at least one parent or legal guardian who is a U.S. citizen by birth or naturalization.
- The child resides permanently in the United States in the legal and physical custody of the parent or guardian.
- The child is a lawful permanent resident.
- The law also grants automatic citizenship to the children of most U.S. citizens living abroad.

Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service

Note. Melody had kept this article, sharing it for the study.

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Olivia

Olivia is 25 years old and was adopted at 11 months old from Yiwu in Zhejiang Province in China. Olivia grew up in Iowa with her White adoptive family. Her adoptive family are fifth-generation farmers and had two biological sons 7 years older than her. She has no connection with her birth family and does not have any access to records. Olivia does desire to find out what she can about her birth family, but information is difficult to attain. Olivia's adoptive parents adopted another girl from China a few years later after Olivia's adoption. They wanted Olivia to grow up with someone who looks like her and shares her culture. Olivia sees herself as a Chinese American Adoptee. She said that she is a "banana, yellow on the outside and White on the inside." She knows little about Chinese culture but is continuing to learn more.

Olivia's family did try to help her learn about Chinese culture. They went to a heritage camp in Denver annually from fourth grade and through high school to meet others and learn about culture and food, create friendships, and share resources. Her parents threw a big party for Chinese New Year annually and invited friends and their church community. Olivia would also bring in treats and red envelopes to school to celebrate. Her adoptive mother also brought her to many cultural festivals at the local university that Olivia really enjoyed.

School Experiences. In elementary school, Olivia attended a private Catholic school. There were only eight people in her class. She and her sister were the only two people from China in the county. She needed to attend speech services for articulation, which made her feel singled out and embarrassed. She adopted her White peers' opinions

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that the speech students were dumb, trying to blend in. Olivia did, however, enjoy some positive experiences in school, which did allow her to share her birth culture. Her elementary school put on an "Ethnicity Fair" annually. The students set up booths, and their peers could go from booth to booth and learn about different cultures. Olivia made dumplings for her peers, shared red envelopes, and was able to share things she knew about China with her peers. This opportunity made her feel very "special."

The diversity of Olivia's schools increased when she attended middle and high school but so did the bullying. Olivia experienced many microaggressions and bullying from her peers, including: "You don't seem Chinese"; "Can you see with your eyes?"; "Do you eat dog?"; "Is your vagina slanted like your eyes?"; "Are you going to have an arranged marriage?"; "Are you going to be a mail-order bride?"; and "You're not the kind of girl guys want." Also, girls made comments about shades of makeup not looking good on her. The young men around her made her feel like she was not pretty. She continued to struggle even outside of school, when she went to the mall for prom and the woman selling cosmetics did not know how to help her with her makeup.

Olivia felt comfortable telling her adoptive parents about the bullying and microaggressions. While in elementary school, she let her parents go to the school and complain and have her peers disciplined. As she got older, she did not want them to report anything. Although she would still tell her parents about the bullying, she told them that she did not want them to interfere, and they "trusted her discretion" and "understood how it would make it worse" for her in their small town. Olivia explained

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that she needed to “pick her battles” and just “brush it off.” Her high school class was only 99 students, and she did not want to draw more attention to herself.

Experiences With Teachers. Along with bias from her peers, she experienced bias from teachers. The stereotype about people of Asian descent being smart in math hurt her. Teachers would say that they thought she would have done better in certain subjects because of her race. Some of this affected how teachers graded her. While in 10th grade, a young teacher did not like her views on identity and graded her lower. This teacher was not familiar with racial identity. She thought that the younger teachers would have been more accepting, but that was not the case. Olivia articulated how her teachers’ lack of understanding of identity and adoption “definitely negatively impacted” her. Olivia wanted to talk to her teachers about identity, but they lacked understanding. This lack of support made her feel “ashamed, embarrassed” and made her want to blend in even more with her peers. These negative experiences “definitely hindered” her “personal and emotional growth.”

Olivia shared how teachers allowed bullying and did not step in to help her. They never pulled her aside, shared understanding, or offered mentorship. It was very “hush-hush.” Teachers would stand by the door at the beginning of class and hear her peers say mean things and do nothing about it. Oliva said that it was confusing having teachers do nothing when they were in a “position of authority.” Teachers would hear Olivia’s peers say mean things to her during class, and they would ignore it. These were teachers that Olivia saw daily that “chose” not to say anything to her peers about their behavior.

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Two teachers had a positive impact on Olivia. There was a third-grade teacher, Mrs. C, who had a friend who was an adoptive parent. Olivia believes that since this teacher had more knowledge and experience with adoption, she was more in tune with her. She was very interested in Olivia and would ask her questions and show her compassion. The teacher talked to her about her Chinese culture and let her talk about the Chinese zodiac and Chinese New Year in the class. Mr. C, Olivia's 12th grade history teacher who was newly from New York, was very open-minded and liberal. She only had him for a semester, but he made a big impression on her because of his openness and "he really talked" to her. They would have in-depth conversations. He showed an interest in Olivia and empathized with her.

Curriculum and Assignments. Oliva experienced a biased curriculum which had a significant impact on her. Olivia shared a story about a time she created a family tree in elementary school. She inquired to the teacher on how to proceed, considering she did not have any information about her birth family. The teacher instructed her to make up her own imaginary family. Olivia then chose famous Asians of different nationalities to adorn her family tree as her imaginary family members, including celebrities like Bruce Lee. She gave the imaginary family members names like "Chong" and "Chow." She said that when she presented her family tree to the students, they showed their approval with "Karate chops" in the air. When she brought the project home, her adoptive mother became extremely angry and discussed with Olivia how the project was racist. She explained how each of the individuals came from different countries and how the teacher should have reached out to Olivia's adoptive family on how to proceed with the

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assignment instead of supporting a fictional piece that reinforced racism that was then shared with the class. Olivia's adoptive mother did communicate all of this with the school.

When Olivia was in high school, she had to complete an activity and project on genetics for biology class about DNA. When she approached the teacher about her trouble with the project and the fact that she was adopted, the teacher was very "insensitive" and "narrow-minded" with her answers. The teacher discussed Olivia's issues with the project in front of the class, which was embarrassing. Olivia conceded and completed the project where the result was a blended picture of her and her lab partner, which hung on the wall for the rest of the year. She was reminded daily of this project, which brought up negative emotions for her.

While in middle and high school, Olivia was encouraged to put on presentations about the "One Child Policy" in China. She had written an essay on the subject, and the teacher asked if she would like to share it with the class. This experience led to her giving the presentation several times through middle and high school, including at the 4H. Olivia said that the presentation was well-received, and her peers asked a lot of questions. She felt like it gave her a "chance to inform" her peers and teachers as well as a "time to explain" more about herself and the Chinese culture. Olivia recounted how following these presentations, the bullying from her peers would subside for a while and that her peers and staff were "more educated" after these presentations.

Olivia lived near a university growing up that offered Ethnic Fairs. Her adoptive mom would bring Olivia and her friends to experience the music, foods, arts, and overall

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Chinese culture. This gave Olivia's adoptive mom and her friends a time to experience being the only White people and Olivia an opportunity to be surrounded by racial mirrors. Olivia expressed how it was really nice to physically blend into the crowd and observe how other Chinese women wore their makeup and how they dressed. It felt good not to be "pegged as the only Asian girl." The friends that Olivia would bring to these festivals would buy items from the fair, like chopsticks, bringing them to school and using them proudly. Her friends openly discussed their positive experiences at these festivals with Olivia, which made her feel really proud.

Olivia really wanted to leave Iowa and went to university in Wisconsin. She said it was sadly "two-pronged": she wanted to leave where everyone knew everything about her, but then when she went to college, she had to explain herself to everyone. People would tell her that her English was really good or ask her to explain why her last name was not Chinese. The university was a bit more diverse than Iowa, with more people of Hispanic descent and African Americans, but still not many people of Asian descent. She said that "she blended in, but she didn't blend in." Olivia wanted to learn more about Chinese culture and tried to join the Asian Student Union, but it did not work out. All of the students knew the Chinese and Korean languages as well as culture and customs. Olivia said they all dressed differently than her and didn't have much in common with them. She felt like she was "rushing a sorority that she didn't fit into." This experience just made her want to blend in more with her White friends.

Artifacts. Olivia shared a large number of artifacts. The artifacts consisted of photographs, hand-drawn pictures, and handwritten stories. She discussed that even at

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this young elementary school age, she knew to draw her and her sister, who is also Chinese, in darker colors from everyone else. Her class at the time of the presentation of this project was very accepting. Olivia included many pictures from high school. She is the only person of color among many White students at prom, homecoming, and her own friend group. Olivia confided that she was the only Chinese student in her grade other than one exchange student. Olivia shared many pictures of herself with her predominantly White sorority. While she was in college, she was very proud that she was put in a position to help the sorority recruit sorority members from more diverse backgrounds.

April

April was adopted at 6 months old from Chenzou, in the Hunan Province in China. Her White adoptive parents had chosen a name for her, which happened to be her adopted mom's maiden name. When they arrived in China, they discovered that her name was April, which means "naturally beautiful," and decided to keep the name. Her adoptive parents also had one biological child who is a few years younger than her. April has never had any contact with her biological family and has never been too curious about finding them. She anticipates that a search for information about her family could be difficult because she was born during the One Child Only Policy in China. There are not many accessible records during that period. April describes herself as a "Chinese woman."

April's adoptive family does have some Polish roots. She grew up eating Polish foods like Dutch Noodles and pierogies. April was in a unique situation growing up

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because several family friends had also adopted. One family had also adopted from China, and the other family had adopted from China and Vietnam. April shared that having other families in their lives who had adopted "normalized" the concept of adoption for her. They spend holidays with these families, including Thanksgiving. The families all spent time together at China Camp, which was a weekend sleepaway camp. Together they learned Chinese games and saw Chinese entertainment like juggling, which April described as a "fun time."

School Experiences. April experienced a lot of discrimination in school by her peers. Her elementary school was mainly White. She would get bullied about being adopted, having White parents, and not living with her "real parents." She said the students would make a lot of microaggressions towards her. For example, math was a struggle for her, and her peers would make her feel like something was wrong with her because she was Chinese and "Asians are supposed to be good at math." April felt like she was not "living up to what other people stereotyped" her to be. She never told her parents about the microaggressions from her peers about having White parents and being an adoptee other than when they happened in middle school. Other microaggressions that were towards her were during unsupervised times like the bus. She never reported any of these incidents to anyone.

While growing up, April struggled with her identity. She wanted to "be like the teens she saw in magazines" and would mirror her peers' bias to be accepted and fit in. April shared that this would mean "disowning the Asian parts" of herself to fit in. Being surrounded by White people, being like White people was her "standard" of how to

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“look” and “act.” She shared that she “internalized sort of hatred” for herself and “resentment for being different.” She tried to blend in as much as she could. She would try to do everything her White friends did, including dressing like them. She felt bad about her straight black hair so she would try to style it like her White friends. She even dyed her hair to fit in. If her White friends became interested in something, she would push herself to become interested in it, as well.

April would join in her White friends’ microaggressions to be more accepted by them. There was an Asian market near her home. Her White friends would make fun of it and call it the “Stinky Store” because of the fish and produce smells. She would also refer to it as the “Stinky Store” to fit in. She shared that she would make fun of other Chinese people and “internalize the idea that Asians were supposed to be nerdy and weak and quiet,” which she viewed as a “turn off to people.” She did not think her peers would want to be friends with someone with those traits, so she “would have to work hard to not be as quiet” and also let her peers know that she “wasn’t good at math.” She “didn’t want to be reduced to a stereotype.” April explained that microaggressions towards anyone that was different were typical in her friend group and her peers also made fun of students that smelled of curry.

Each school became more diverse as April progressed through her school district. She said that the higher level the class, like AP, the Whiter the class was. She was surrounded by mainly White peers and friends. In high school, she was “very excited” to make friends with a girl who was second-generation Chinese. April described this friend as “way more Chinese” than her because her friend practiced many Chinese traditions in

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the home, including food and language. They became good friends and are still in touch. Although they spent a lot of time together, she did not learn much culture from her. She learned a lot about her culture and race as a teen through Facebook groups, which she described as a "safe place." She became very close with individuals in these groups, and they learned a lot together and from each other. She learned a lot about culture "on my own the most."

Experiences With Teachers. Relationships with teachers were "pretty okay." She did not get in trouble and didn't try to be close to teachers. April's eighth-grade language arts teacher made the biggest positive impression on her when they studied the works of "Asian" writers. This was one of the only times she had the opportunity to learn about her Chinese culture and other Asian cultures in school. She enjoyed her relationships with teachers more in college and felt they treated her more like an adult and showed her more compassion. She is a women's studies major and built a positive relationship with her LGBT professor. This professor really wanted her to "succeed."

Artifacts. April shared several artifacts with me. In middle school, her language arts teacher, who was her good friend's father, taught a unit on Asian poetry. April shared many of the actual written works they studied, including: "Cincinnati" by Mitsuye Yamada, a poem "Doreen" by Janice Murkitoni, and poems "When I Was Growing Up" and "Where Is My Country" by Nellie Wong. She also included a comparative piece on "Cincinnati" and "When I was growing up" that she wrote for a class assignment. Completing the assignments for this unit was the first time assignments made her "think

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about my racial identity and start to unpack it." The class discussions were very thought-provoking, and "throughout my life," the "poems have always sat with me."

One of April's favorite parts of the curriculum was when she read *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatshuki Houston and James D. Houston in eighth grade. She voiced that she "hated doing homework" but looked forward to the assignments connected to this book. Every week she had to write a journal entry from the perspective of the mother in the book. April offered that the assignments forced her to put herself "in the point of views of the characters." April valued this activity and believed it increased the students' empathy and understanding about people living in different cultures, including herself.

Evelyn

Evelyn is 18 years old and was adopted from Jiu Jiang City in China, at about 11 months old, by her White adoptive parents. The orphanage told them that Evelyn was found outside a factory by a family who wanted to keep her but could not afford to. She was about 6 weeks old when she arrived at the orphanage. Evelyn chose to do an ancestry DNA test and found out that she is 96% Chinese and a bit of Mongolian and Korean. Her adoptive mother is Lebanese and Italian. Her adoptive father is German and Russian. Her adoptive mother is Christian, and her adoptive father is Jewish. They celebrate all of the holidays from both religions. Evelyn sees herself as a Chinese woman and continues to learn more about her culture.

Evelyn's adoptive parents have supported her in embracing her heritage and culture. When she was 9, they returned to China for a trip. Evelyn said it was quite a

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culture shock for her and took her time to process the culture differences. She was able to meet the people who took care of her at the orphanage. Her "nanny" gave her the name Cao Ke Ning, which she uses in her Mandarin class in high school. Evelyn expressed that everything in China was "so different" from America, including how they live and things they eat which is not what she expected. Her parents wanted to bring her before she had preconceived notions about China to make her own opinions. She would like to return and try further to find her birth family.

Evelyn's family embraced Chinese heritage in their home. They celebrate Chinese New Year every year and put up lots of decorations and lanterns. They also shared and gave the red envelopes affiliated with Chinese New Year to friends and family. Her adoptive family also celebrates additional Chinese holidays as Evelyn learns about them from her Mandarin class. When possible, her family brought her to local Chinese festivals and gatherings for adoptees to learn more about their culture. Her adoptive parents always wanted her to learn about her culture and heritage and hired a private Mandarin tutor who worked with her from ages five to ten. Although Evelyn had a positive relationship with the Mandarin tutor, she did not want to continue taking lessons as she got older because she "didn't want to accept that she was Chinese" and when she was younger would "turn a blind eye" to the fact that she was not White.

School Experiences. Evelyn attended a predominantly White school. There were a few People of Color, but not many. When she was younger, she really did not notice the lack of diversity. Looking back now, though, she wishes she had access to more diverse friends. Most of her friends were White; however, she did have a really good friend who

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was Indian and Middle Eastern and is still friends with them. Evelyn never experienced bullying from her classmates; however, some would make "Asian jokes" that bothered her. When Evelyn was younger, she never really thought about not being White and would "forget I'm Asian" because she was so immersed in American culture.

Evelyn spoke directly about the history curriculum. She articulated how she spent a lot of time learning about American and European history. Evelyn did not see herself reflected in the school curriculum, specifically history class. She would have valued learning global world history and believes that this would be very beneficial for all students. She explained how exposing students to many more cultures could normalize diversity. Evelyn also mentioned that sparking "curiosity" in students could motivate them to continue learning about cultures.

Experiences With Teachers. Evelyn would qualify most of her teachers as "distant"; however, she was fortunate to have some who made a positive impact on her. Her sixth-grade teacher went above and beyond for everyone in the class. The teacher would set up activities for herself and her students outside of school. Evelyn explained that this teacher pushed her and impacted her "personality" and "racial identity as well" by encouraging her to "stay true" to herself. This teacher made Evelyn feel like "being curious about my culture is a good thing." She also had some high school teachers she really liked, including her Science and English teacher. She mainly admired these teachers because they took the time to build relationships with her. She never experienced any teacher bias in her school career.

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Curriculum and Assignments. Evelyn did have some positive cultural experiences in school. When she was in elementary school, she did attend a "world celebration day." They made rice field triangle hats that you would wear in China and learned about Chinese culture. Sophomore year, Evelyn started taking a Mandarin class in high school. Evelyn revealed that she really started wanting to embrace and learn more about her culture during this time. During her time in Mandarin class, she completed several cultural projects. She learned about Chinese celebrations, cultural norms, language, and Chinese folk tales as well as researched landmarks and their cultural aspects. Evelyn disclosed that the class had a "positive impact on my curiosity" and her cultural identity. She also went on field trips with her Mandarin class, including visiting Chinatown in Philadelphia and the Franklin Institute to see the Terracotta warriors on display. She expressed that these trips were "super cool" and that she and her peers really enjoyed them.

Artifacts. Evelyn offered many photographs as her artifacts for the study. She shared many from her trip to China with her adoptive parents showing them visiting the orphanage, visiting with the owner and her nanny, and pictures of banners welcoming her. Evelyn was surprised and happy that they remembered her and felt very cared about when they visited. While Evelyn was in China, she built a relationship with her translator and was invited along with her family to her home. She felt very welcomed overall on her visit and hopes to return.

Evelyn shared several pictures of her with friends, including a field trip with her high school Mandarin class to Chinatown in Philadelphia. Pictures show her with friends

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ordering in Chinese at a restaurant, shopping in the "Asian market," and seeing the sights. There is also a picture of Evelyn and her friend eating a scallion pancake for the first time, which is now her favorite Chinese food. Evelyn expressed that she really "just nice to be in that area" and experiencing the culture with her friends.

Evelyn shared several pictures from local Chinese festivals that her adoptive parents brought her to. The pictures show her learning about art and beautiful dancers in dragon suits. She learned about the Chinese zodiac and had the opportunity to make pandas out of clay. Evelyn said that as she grew older, she did not want to attend these festivals anymore. She started to "pull away" because she wanted to "fit in more." Evelyn confided that she "didn't want to bring more attention to the fact that I was adopted and that I wasn't from here."

The majority of the rest of her photographs included her friends from school. She included pictures from Halloween and class pictures mostly to show the lack of diversity. There was one picture that was very different from the others, a homecoming dance picture. In this picture, the People of Color were the majority. Evelyn explained to me that one of her peers called for everyone who was not White to be in the picture, so they could take a "diversity photo." Evelyn said that taking this photograph was "funny and just really nice." She said that it was funny because none of the students talk about there not being many People of Color at their school. The picture was shared on social media with a good response.

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Transracial Adoptees Adopted Through Foster Care

Gabriel

Gabriel is a 20-year-old African American man who is a part of a large sibling set split up and placed in the foster care system. He was placed in foster care about a year and a half old with one of his birth sisters. They were adopted together in the same home in New Jersey. He has two White adoptive sisters in his family. He keeps in touch with his birth family as well. He identifies as a "privileged African American man." He expressed that he has the accent of a "White suburban person." He aspires to go into public education and be a racial mirror for People of Color as well as to educate others on diversity.

Gabriel grew up in a "wealthy White area with a low percentage of African Americans." All of the schools he attended were predominantly White. Being surrounded by mostly White people, Gabriel did not see himself as African American when he was a child. He described his school population as "stark" and did not have many opportunities to have friends outside of his White community. As a child, he was "not really in tune with my African American culture." As he got older, he became more interested in his racial and cultural identity, making learning African American history and heritage a priority in his life.

School Experiences. Gabriel was fortunate to have positive relationships with his administrators. In elementary school, he had a conflict with one of the only other African American children in his school. Gabriel's school principal was able to help them solve their conflict. The principal was able to mediate between them both and encourage a

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friendship, which was then shared by their families. While in high school, Gabriel was very angered by a conversation he had with a teacher regarding her lack of knowledge regarding White privilege. He sought out the principal, who then calmed him down, held a discussion with him regarding the incident, and confided in him that as a White man, he had attended a primarily African American school district in his youth. Both the principal and Gabriel were able to share their personal stories and Gabriel felt very supported.

Experiences With Teachers. Gabriel had positive relationships with teachers throughout school. He had a strong love for learning that teachers respected and saw his teachers as his "liberal outlet" in what he viewed as a "conservative town." In high school, one teacher relationship became extremely important to him. Mr. M was a history teacher at his school, which happened to be Gabriel's favorite subject. One day some of the students in class threw racial slurs at Gabriel. Mr. M defended Gabriel, and they ended up having a conversation where Mr. M confided in Gabriel that he had been one of the only White students during his youth when he lived in Japan for a long period. Gabriel found he and Mr. M had a personal connection tied to their experiences. This conversation turned to racial disparities, and Gabriel and Mr. M built a positive, trusting relationship that Gabriel depended on.

Gabriel had negative experiences with some teachers through middle school and high school. He communicated that some teachers were not versed in diversity and did not represent historical events accurately. For example, one teacher likened slavery to indentured servitude, which angered Gabriel. Gabriel called himself a "confrontational" person and would speak up in class when he felt teachers misspoke, which was not

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always well received. Another experience that disappointed Gabriel was that most teachers would let him speak up in class and have a platform to discuss racial issues but would not publicly support him. Gabriel wishes that teachers had "hopped" in and added to the conversation. Gabriel explained how teachers have the most respected voice in the classroom as the "figurehead," and as "the Black Lives Matter kid, your opinion gets dismissed a lot."

Curriculum and Assignments. Gabriel was somewhat disappointed with the school curriculum, especially regarding history, where he believes diversity curriculum should shine. He voiced several times during the interview that the history that was taught was "too soft." He felt the teachers brushed over critical events or did not discuss the depth of brutality he felt should be shared in class. Gabriel felt his teachers should have discussed how "skewed" White society's "moral compass" was during that time and why slavery lasted such a long time. In middle school, as part of the curriculum, the class watched Roots. Gabriel was excited to watch Roots and discuss it with the class. Sadly, he found Roots un-relatable and that it did not hit the mark to stand alone and tell the whole story of slavery. He communicated that although talking about past events is important, it should lead to conversations about how those events inspired current events and practice.

Soccer was a significant part of Gabriel's life in high school. There was a time when he played on a team that was quite diverse and did not represent the racial makeup of his school. Gabriel was voted the captain of the team by his teammates, which was a great honor. The team was honored at an event where Gabriel was awarded a Good

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Sportsmanship award. Gabriel disclosed that while the school was taking pictures of the team, it occurred to him that "I'm just a number." As a school that lacked diversity, he felt the school was exploiting him and his team to make it seem like the school was more diverse than it was, basically "creating diversity" for a photo opportunity.

Artifacts. Gabriel shared pictures and texted me a suggestion for schools. The pictures that he shared showed him on a childhood sports team, among high school peers and neighborhood children. In all three pictures, Gabriel was the only African American person. Gabriel also sent me a text to communicate how difficult it may be for transracial adoptees living with White families in relation to how to handle police involvement. He wants the transracial adoptee population to know their civil rights. He believes that offering a class to equip students with navigating the law and police interactions, especially when these individuals may be targeted for their race, could be beneficial.

Deker

Deker is 19 years old and was adopted when he was 3 years old from foster care. He has two African American adoptive brothers who were also adopted from foster care. Deker was in contact with his birth family when he was younger but has now "lost contact" and is not seeking a relationship with them. His adoptive mother is White and of Irish descent. His adoptive father is of Indian descent and was born in England. His adoptive father is Hindu, but they are not religious. They eat Indian food and watch Indian movies, which he enjoys and makes him feel close to that culture. His family is also very interested in international soccer. Deker confided that his adoptive father's culture had a tremendous impact on him. His adoptive grandmother on his adoptive

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father's side visited from India recently, and they took her to an Indian restaurant. His adoptive grandmother and their family are close and call often as well as recognize holidays and birthdays.

Deker views himself as an African American man, which he attributes mainly to his skin color. He is proud of who he is and has not had time yet to explore African American culture but hopes to in the future. Deker's adoptive parents did bring him and his adoptive brothers to Black History museums while growing up. Deker communicated that having two African American adoptive brothers did have a positive impact on him.

School Experiences. Deker attended three schools growing up. His elementary school was very diverse and had he had the opportunity to have friends of many races. When he started school in middle school, it was predominantly White. He was one of the only Black students there. He felt awkward at first but then felt much more comfortable when he joined the soccer team. His high school was more diverse than middle school. He did have a little bit of a more diverse friend group but mainly hung out with his soccer team friends.

Deker never experienced any microaggressions or bullying from his peers throughout school. His soccer team was very close, and he referred to them as family. His soccer team had sleepovers and dinners and hung out to watch soccer matches. His peers would ask him about his adoptive family, but it was never mean and mainly out of curiosity.

Curriculum and Assignments. Deker did have opportunities to learn about African American culture in school. He learned about Civil Rights and Martin Luther

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King Jr. One of his favorite elementary school experiences was during Black History Month. The students were asked to dress up as famous African Americans. Deker chose to be Martin Luther King Jr. The majority of the students in this school were African American, and Deker disclosed that this activity was very natural and comfortable, especially because People of Color were the majority.

While in elementary school, Deker was asked to complete a family tree. He felt completely comfortable including his adoptive family in this assignment. Deker explained that it was very natural for him to use his adoptive family and not his birth family. He felt "nothing bad" about doing the project. Deker was disappointed that he did not have access to African American literature or books depicting African Americans. He also disclosed that there were not many posters on the walls of classrooms or schools in general highlighting African Americans.

Experiences With Teachers. Deker was fortunate to have many positive relationships with teachers. Deker's elementary school teachers were mainly good. He preferred his teachers in high school. He said they were "upbeat and helpful." He had three favorite teachers during high school. He had a great relationship with his sophomore English teacher. He really connected with what she taught, which was *The Odyssey* and Greek stories. Deker and his English teacher continued to check in with each other even after he was finished with the class. Deker was also very close with his high school soccer coach. His soccer coach spent a lot of time with him and always took an interest in his life. He said his race did not seem to be a factor in school to his teachers, and he never experienced any bias from them. Deker also had a positive relationship with

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his gym teacher who, like his soccer coach, took time to build a relationship with him and engage him in conversation.

Although Deker had positive experiences in his lower grades, he never really talked about his family makeup until high school. He felt more comfortable with his high school teachers and felt like they took time to build a relationship with him. It was common knowledge in high school that he was adopted. His high school teachers gave him positive responses about his mixed-race family and made him feel comfortable sharing that with them.

Deker enjoyed it when his school curriculum included culture. In high school, his Spanish class during senior year had a cultural day. The students were encouraged to bring in cultural food from their families. Deker shared samosas at the event, which are an Indian appetizer. His dish was well received by peers, especially his Indian peers. During the interview, when asked if he would have brought in food from Africa, Deker disclosed that he was not familiar with any native African foods.

Artifacts. Deker shared three artifacts for the study. All three artifacts were photographs, one of a team, one of a clay heart with a hand imprint, and one with a clay heart imprint accompanied by a photograph. The first photograph was from Deker's senior year soccer banquet featuring all of the team's seniors. Deker confided that he was really "sad" that the season had ended after he had spent five to six years with his teammates. The photograph shows several young men, mostly White. The photograph showing the heart with the hand imprint was made by Deker and his adoptive mother and was very "special" to him because they made it together one year post his adoption.

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Deker brought it into school, and although he was a bit nervous about how his peers would react, he received positive feedback from them. The last photograph is of a handprint in clay on one side and a picture of him at four years old in front of his former home where he had a lot of wonderful memories. Deker brought this piece to high school for an assignment where students needed to share something sentimental with them. He expressed that his teachers and peers supported what he shared about his adoption by asking questions and engaging him in conversation.

Figure 4

A Clay Heart and Handprint Made by Deker

Note. Deker made the heart to celebrate the 1-year anniversary of his adoption.

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Rosie

Rosie is 22 years old and was adopted through foster care at 7 years by a White family. She was placed in foster care as an infant and stayed with two families during that time. The second family she stayed with adopted her. Rosie is one of six children who were split up into pairs and placed in three different homes. She grew up with her birth sister, who is 1 year older than her. The White family who adopted her were long-time foster parents and had adopted before. She and her birth sister, along with another foster sister, were all adopted on the same day. Rosie grew up with foster children living with them periodically while growing up. Rosie sees herself as a mixed American woman between White and Black races. When she was little, she saw herself more as African American but now feels like she does not belong. She is still learning about her German heritage and does not see it as part of her identity.

Rosie is still in contact with her birth parents. Her birth father's family is from Germany and relocated to Minnesota. Rosie was close to her birth father's parents and has a book about Germany her grandmother put together and shared with her. Rosie's birth mother resided in Arizona for a long time but is now living in Philadelphia. She does not see her birth parents as parents but more as friends. Rosie is trying to learn more about her races and cultures to figure out "what kind of life that she can make for herself." She feels like she does not have a culture to belong to right now.

School Experiences. Rosie attended school in a small rural school district. It was not diverse and was a farming community. She and her sister were the only African Americans out of three in her elementary school. In high school, the student population

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became a bit more diverse. She felt like it was “whiplash” when she was in a space with more People of Color and trying to find her place. Rosie had “never really saw anyone else that looked like me,” so this was a new experience for her. Rosie had mostly White friends until high school where she became very good friends with a girl of Korean descent and had a couple of African American friends. She had more access to People of Color; however, she was nervous if they would have the same interests. Rosie felt like she “didn’t really fit in with a lot of people.” She pushed herself to have more friends of color.

Rosie’s godfather, who is African American, prioritized spending time with her and teaching her about African American culture. He sent her to an all-African American camp for two weeks when she was thirteen years old in Washington DC. Rosie really enjoyed her trip and felt comfortable and at ease among so many people of the same race. Rosie explained that she “felt as though I was in a club where I belonged, and I didn’t have to worry about making a mistake.” Her godfather would bring her on trips and teach her about African American art. Rosie expressed that he was a wonderful role model and would bring her to the African American hair salon once a year to get her hair done.

Experiences With Teachers. Rosie was fortunate to have had some supportive teachers. Her favorite teacher was her Kindergarten teacher. She really took time with Rosie and was very patient. She also had a track coach, who she still is close with; that had a big impact on her. Her track coach took time to build a relationship with Rosie and recognized when Rosie was not acting like herself and her mental health was deteriorating. Her coach connected Rosie with the school counselor. Her track coach also

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“insisted” that she sign up for the multicultural club where she met her friend from Korea and other good friends.

The multicultural club that Rosie was a member of in high school was very beneficial for her. This club allowed her to learn about several other cultures. She also was able to socialize with other People of Color. The leader of this club was Rosie’s first Black teacher. Rosie really “appreciated” this relationship and felt at ease with this teacher. They were able to discuss politics, feelings, and mutual experiences. This relationship was different because Rosie did not have to “convince her teacher that her feelings were real or valid.” Having a same-race teacher was very positive for Rosie.

Rosie experienced bullying throughout school. In elementary school, some of the other students would call her “ugly and weird.” She would assert herself and often got into physical altercations with them. While in high school, Rosie experienced additional bullying by two boys that were Trump supporters. When the media brought up how African American males are targeted by police, they cornered her in a stairwell and threatened to throw her down the stairs. Rosie never informed the school. She did tell her adoptive mother about the incident. Her adoptive mother wanted to contact the school administration; however, Rosie just wanted it “dropped.” Rosie did not like confrontation and was dealing with a lot of issues emotionally at the time, and did not want this incident “piled” onto everything else she was dealing with at the time.

Curriculum and Assignments. Rosie shared her experiences with me about the same assignment given to her at two different times in her life. She needed to research her family and write a report about them. When Rosie was in the lower grades, she did

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not have access to information about herself and reluctantly wrote about her adoptive family. This activity created feelings of “sadness” and reinforced the feeling that she did not belong. As a teenager, she received the same assignment after she had the opportunity to learn more about her birth family. This experience was powerful for her. She loved learning about herself and told anyone that would listen about this project. This was an “eye-opening” experience for her and made her feel very “proud.”

Rosie did participate in a multicultural day in high school. Students brought in different types of food to share. Rosie chose to bring in chicken on a stick to represent “Asian” cultures and her love of anime. She really enjoyed the experience and the exposure to different cultures. She shared that she did not know enough about her own race and culture to share food from Africa or Germany.

Artifacts. Rosie shared many artifacts with the study. The first photograph shows Rosie and her high school coach, whom she is still in contact with. Her coach built a strong relationship with Rosie, including supporting her mental health in times of need. A picture of her cross country team was also shared to show that there was not a lot of diversity on the team, which was unlike track. Although she enjoyed her time in cross country, track season felt more comfortable because she was surrounded by more diversity.

Rosie shared many photographs from elementary school. Two of the pictures showed Rosie dressed as a princess for Halloween. She wore a ball gown and a long blond wig. Rosie explained that while wearing the wig, she “felt so pretty” and that she “felt like a Disney princess.” All of her peers showered her with compliments,

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specifically about the wig. Looking back now, it makes her sad because it does not really look like her. She enjoyed wearing the costume so much that she wore it the following year with the same fanfare. The last picture was a formal class picture from kindergarten with a teacher whom Rosie identified as treating her with a lot of compassion and kindness. Rosie is the only child that is not White in the picture. Rosie has two White adoptive sisters who had many friends in their school, and Rosie confided that she felt like the "forgotten sister" many times. Rosie disclosed that she struggled with confidence. She had to push herself to be more outgoing. She would dress in bows and knee-high socks to stand out. At the same time, she would wet her curly hair to make it appear longer to blend in with her White peers. Rosie strove to make her hair seem less "puffy" and "longer" like her peers.

While growing up, Rosie participated on a cheer team. A picture of her cheer team was given with the other artifacts. She explained that this was positive and negative. She appreciated her friendship with the only other African American on the team, yet Rosie had to straighten her hair to uniform herself with her White peers for competitions. Everyone would compliment her on her straightened hair, but Rosie hated it. The more people would praise her on her hair, the more straightening her hair hurt her. She was happy to receive the kindness of others but sad because it was not her natural hair.

Rosie shared photographs of herself along with her birth father's extended family in Seattle. Rosie's birth sisters were able to accompany her on this trip. She shared that during this period, her birth dad's family, who are of German descent, helped her fall in love with her curls. Many people from this side of the family had hair that was also very

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curly. They showed her and her sisters ways to style their hair and shared different products with them. Rosie came back from this trip with new confidence.

Rosie sent me a picture of her birth siblings and herself. Rosie is part of a six-child sibling set. The children were adopted in pairs to three different families. The adoptive families planned visits for the children while growing up. The siblings were able to build relationships with each other; however, Rosie's adoptive mother did not let her contact her German family members out west until she was older.

Rosie enclosed a picture of her giving a presentation for Black History Day. This took place in elementary school. Each student chose a name out of a bowl of significant Black Americans or supporters of civil rights. Rosie was very upset because the teacher gave her a slip instead of letting her choose from the bowl. Rosie was given Harriet Tubman. She asked the teacher if she could choose from the bowl instead, and the teacher told her no. Rosie had to dress like Harriet Tubman, write a report on her, and present in front of the class. This experience had a negative impact on her because she felt singled out and was not allowed to choose for herself.

Lilah

Lilah is 25 years old and was adopted from foster care at 2 years by her White adoptive father and Native American adoptive mother. Lilah grew up in Alabama, where she still resides. All of her siblings in her adoptive home are adopted, and her adoptive parents still foster children. She is one of four adopted siblings, all of different races. She is African American, her one brother is White, her sister is Pacific Islander, and her

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youngest brother is Native American. Her family has been fostering for 25 years. Lilah has on-and-off contact with her one biological brother.

Lilah's adoptive parents, especially her adoptive mother, always prioritized exposing her children to many cultures. They celebrate Black history month in multiple ways as well as celebrate famous women's birthdays throughout the year. Lilah's family attended a predominantly African American church periodically, where Lilah participated in many activities and programs, including dance. Lilah lives in Alabama, which has a rich history, and her family would visit the Civil Rights museum and landmarks. Lilah's family learned about and celebrated Native American culture by participating in Thanksgiving powwows, sewing powwow dresses, creating pottery, learning the native language, and listening to stories.

Lilah identifies as a "melting pot." Lilah explained that she identifies "with everybody." She feels like she has a foot in many cultures. She identifies with both her "African American side and her White side." Lilah expressed that sometimes she even identifies more with her "White side" because she went to an all-White school, and most of her friends growing up were White. Lilah described her racial and cultural identity as a "bunch put together."

School Experiences. Lilah attended a private school until fourth grade. This was a smaller school that did have some diversity. Lilah enjoyed not being the only African American and had a lot of friends. This school did create a positive cultural experience for Lilah. Annually they would host a cultural fair. The students would make tri-fold projects sharing information regarding their race and culture. Food from different cultures

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was shared as well as native dress and videos. Lilah shared parts from her multicultural family, including powwow dresses made by her aunt, Native American languages and artwork, Native American fry bread, African American artwork, and African American history.

Experiences With Teachers. Lilah had a negative experience with a science teacher in elementary school. She was given an assignment, and when she submitted it to the teacher, he did not believe it was Lilah's work and said that he was not grading it. Lilah was the one African American female in the class and felt like the teacher wanted her to fail. Other diverse families had gotten "push back" from this teacher. Lilah feels that this experience was "racially motivated" as well as gender-biased. She explained that this teacher made her feel "inferior." Her adoptive mother did address this matter with the school. Shortly after this experience, Lilah was homeschooled.

Lilah was homeschooled by her adoptive mother from fourth to seventh grade. She loved being homeschooled by her adoptive mother and communicated that she was her favorite teacher ever. Her adoptive mother dedicated time during their academic time towards culture and assigning reports and projects on African Americans in history. Lilah shared that these projects gave her "confidence that if I put my mind to it, I can do whatever I want to," as well as giving her "security" in her racial identity by learning what other African Americans had accomplished during "the toughest times." Her mother also took her on several field trips to landmarks and museums, creating "a real learning experience."

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Lilah had learning disabilities and was dyslexic while growing up, and received support while in school. She returned to public school in seventh grade to receive the extra support she needed. She did go to the school counselor a lot when she started public school. She was looking for support and guidance because of what her peers would say to her. Her school counselors taught her coping skills and tried to help her navigate her new school. The school counselors were not used to supporting students through the race-based bullying Lilah was greeted with because she was the only African American in the school.

Lilah endured a lot of mistreatment and bullying from peers in middle school. Some of her peers told her that her parents adopted her because they felt sorry for her. Peers also told her to "go back to the cotton field," "go pick cotton," and shoved her into lockers. Then they started stealing her homework so they could cheat off of her. Teachers would intervene if they knew about it. The counselors did end up getting the administration involved and did discipline the students. The parents and students met with her after school to apologize for the bullying and harassment.

In high school, Lilah kept herself very busy with extracurricular activities, including band. Schoolwork was a priority for her, and she considered herself the teacher's pet. Lilah's ninth-grade history teacher was one of her favorites for his kindness, patience, and understanding. He took time to build relationships with his students and made them feel valued. Lilah's other favorite teacher was her high school chemistry teacher. They had a relationship outside of school; her siblings and teacher's kids were friends. This allowed them to form a relationship. This teacher never ridiculed

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her. She was very understanding. Lilah did build some positive relationships with educators; however, overall, she felt like her teachers took time to build relationships with students who looked like them. She felt like anyone who would have been considered an outsider would not be given "the time of day."

Curriculum and Assignments. Lilah was fortunate to have positive experiences in high school. She was the only African American out of a graduating class of 646 students in high school. She did not want to be the center of attention and tried her best to blend in; however, when her teachers would give her the opportunity to explore her culture, she embraced it. Lilah was able to choose her topics when writing research papers for her Language Arts class. In eleventh grade, she wrote a research paper on Rosa Parks, the Freedom Writers, and Civil Rights that she was very proud of. In twelfth grade, Lilah chose to research cultural stereotypes, including "culture, race, gender, and sexual orientation." Writing on these topics allowed Lilah to educate her peers. Her peers would ask her additional questions about the topics, which made Lilah the authority on these topics to her peers and made her a little uncomfortable because she was just learning about these topics.

Lilah contributed to her school culture in high school. She and a friend created a club known as the Heritage Panel, where they would discuss each other's heritages. The Heritage Panel connected with a local predominantly African American high school to bring the students together. This gave both high schools an opportunity to be exposed to many different heritages and cultures and learn from each other. Lilah also helped bring a

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Gay-Straight Alliance to her high school because she saw the need and wanted to help support her friends and promote acceptance.

Artifacts. Lilah shared many artifacts in the form of photographs for the study. Many photographs showed her family, their close relationships, and diversity, including family trips. One photograph was of Lilah and a friend who was also a transracial adoptee. Their parents had met through classes at human resources and became friends. Lilah and this particular friend shared a strong bond and utilized each other as emotional outlets when needed. Some photographs showed Lilah with her high school band friends, where she was the only person of color; their friendships were not as strong because in the beginning of their relationships, they thought stereotypically that Lilah was a "sponsored" student and was not at the school on her own merit.

Lilah shared some photographs, including her adoptive and biological siblings. Lilah communicated a special memory of her and her sister when they were younger. Her family was tailgating a football game, and she and her sister were dressed as the team's cheerleaders. She and her sister were chosen to be photographed for the team's program. Lilah also included a photograph of her biological brother when they were between four and five years old and had visits, as well as a picture of them at her biological brother's Eagle Scout Ceremony. Both of their adoptive families would get the children together periodically so they could have a relationship. These were positive memories for Lilah.

Lilah shared photographs of important projects in her life. The first one was a project from seventh grade where she had the opportunity to create a binder of her autobiography. Soccer was a main theme at the time, but she also included personal

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information and pictures of her family. Her peers responded positively to the photographs of her multicultural family, which made Lilah feel “big.” She loved having the opportunity to express herself to her teachers and peers. Lilah went into “enormous” detail. Her teachers passed the binder around to other teachers because they were so impressed with her work. Lilah explained how wonderful it felt that people “were actually seeing me for me and not what they think they’re seeing me for.” The other binder that was photographed and shared was the project that her science teacher in third grade rejected because he did not think it was her work. The photographs showed a well-organized, highly detailed project. Lilah disclosed that this teacher was White and would invest most of his time in the White privileged students in the class.

Conclusion

The participants’ narratives shared school and life experiences regarding their racial identity development throughout their time as students. The participants discussed positive and negative teacher-student relationships, impactful curriculum or lack thereof, and overall school experiences in connection with racial identity development. Many of these experiences have shaped how they identify themselves. All of the participants would like to learn more about their birth culture.

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Chapter 5

Findings

This study has investigated how school experiences and teacher relationships have impacted the racial and cultural identity development of transracial adoptees who were adopted internationally and through foster care. Both transracial adoptee populations shared many of the same experiences that impacted their racial and cultural identities. Individuals from both populations had teachers, counselors, or administrators that supported their racial identity development through informal or formal counseling and protected them from teacher bias. Both populations experienced teacher bias from educators. The participants shared stories about how opportunities to research their heritage, culture, race, and adoption affected them. All of the individuals in this study reported the lack of awareness about transracial families, adoptive families, and diversity in the classroom. All of the participants communicated that their adoptee identity was very important to them.

The study's findings were separated into two sections: shared experiences and conceptual themes. These findings were identified through analyzing the data using Steward and Baden's (1995) cultural-racial identity model, specifically identifying if the experiences affirmed or discounted the participants' racial and cultural identity. The participants' level of "knowledge, awareness, competence, and comfort" (Baden & Steward, 2007, p. 100) with their adoptive families' race and culture, as well as with their own race and culture, were analyzed. The data collected were then put through three rounds of coding to determine what experiences affirmed or discounted each component

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of the cultural-racial identity model, as per the participants. After the data were analyzed, it was determined that there were many shared experiences among the participants and conceptual themes.

Shared Experiences

There were three main shared experiences identified through this research for all of the transracial adoptees. The first shared experience included "attended predominantly White schools," which communicated how the participants lived in primarily White communities at home and in school and had limited access to anyone from their birth culture. The second shared experience included "transracial adoptees experience their birth culture," which focused on when the participants had opportunities to attend events that centered on their birth culture, attend heritage camps, and travel to their birth country. The third shared experience, "curriculum and school experiences help transracial adoptees connect to their racial and cultural identities," communicated how curriculum, assignments, and classroom experiences could affect transracial adoptees' racial and cultural identity development in positive ways.

Attended Predominantly White Schools

The participants in this study attended predominantly White school districts. Many of the transracial adoptees were the only person of their race or one of few People of Color who attended their school. They did not have racial mirrors and wanted to see someone who physically looked like them. Many times, White friends were their only option, and when they were met with the opportunity to be friends with someone who was their race, they were excited to build that relationship. The participants spent a lot of

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time in White communities while in school. Being continually surrounded by people who were White at home and school had an impact on the participants.

No One Looks Like Me. Olivia, an international adoptee living in the Midwest, grew up without any racial mirrors except for her adopted sister, who was also a transracial adoptee from China. Olivia explained, "I was the only Chinese person in the entire county besides my sister until basically 10th grade, when we started to get foreign exchange students." Olivia did not have access to same-race friends. She shared that her friend group was all White, and she only dated White peers because there were not many or any People of Color to date. Olivia discussed how she "was the only Person of Color" in her friend group at school. Olivia shared how not only were the majority of her peers White, but her school staff was also all White, "None of my teachers were not White." Being immersed in a White community, Olivia "tried to conform to White culture."

Gabriel, who was adopted through foster care, explained how attending a predominantly White school did not give him a chance to learn about his heritage or race. The reality of living in a predominantly White community is all Gabriel knew through his early life. It was not until he was older that he started to see differences. He even stated that he did not see himself as African American and was not self-aware at that time in his life. He did not have many racial mirrors around him and had mostly White friends.

As an adult, Evelyn, an international adoptee, identified herself racially and culturally as a Chinese woman; however, growing up in a predominantly White community and school shaped her thinking when she was younger. She described herself as "submerged" in White norms. Evelyn's height of comfort living in White communities

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was evident in how she viewed herself as she went through school. She navigated through her White community and school with ease. As Evelyn aged, she hoped not only to learn more about herself racially and culturally but about diversity in general. She said, "I wished we had more diversity, but it's not really something that I have control of. But I feel like it would have been more beneficial for others to have that as well."

The participants did not have access to anyone who looked like them many times at school or at home. Olivia did not see individuals that looked like her until high school when they accepted exchange students. All three of these participants shared that they did not look like the other students at their schools. This affected their choice of friends and people they dated by limiting their choices to only White students. Gabriel communicated how that affected his awareness of his own race growing up. It was not until his later teen years that he was able to learn more about African American culture and have a diverse friend group. Evelyn felt the lack of diversity in her school and community and believed that all students would have benefited from having more diversity in their school. Attending predominantly White schools isolated participants by being the only person of their race in their school. Participants had limited or no opportunities for same-race friendships or romantic relationships, which could have given them a chance to learn about their birth race and culture.

Participants' Recommendation. *Opportunities to interact in diverse communities.* The participants did not get to engage with many same-race individuals, if any. Many of the participants shared that they would have valued the opportunity to do so. Gabriel, who was adopted through foster care, spoke about the importance of

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transracial adoptees interacting in communities of their birth race. This could be facilitated by the schools for community outreach and community service for interested students. Many transracial adoptees lack racial mirrors and could benefit from more racial socialization. He described many benefits of creating this experience, like including opportunities to build relationships and familiarizing themselves with different parts of the community.

Transracial Adoptees Experience Their Birth-Culture

Participants shared how interacting with their birth culture through events, visiting museums, heritage camps, language lessons, and travel benefitted them. The participants in this study appreciated when their adoptive families made efforts to support them with their birth race and culture in different ways. Participants shared positive experiences involving having racial mirrors in their lives through relationships with same-race godparents or joining churches that were predominantly their birth race. Participants learned about themselves when provided opportunities to interact with same-race individuals. These experiences pushed the adoptees to be curious about themselves, more confident, and embrace their whole self. Participants attended heritage camps, traveled to their birth country, and learned about their birth cultures at cultural fairs.

Heritage Camps. Several of the participants attended heritage camps growing up, which were supported by their adoptive families. A heritage camp is a camp that focuses on a specific culture or race, where transracial adoptees may attend to learn more about their birth culture, as well as have the opportunity to spend time and build relationships with same-race friends (Myers, 2019). April and Olivia, both adopted internationally,

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attended camps focused on their Chinese heritage; Rosie, adopted through foster care, attended an African American camp to learn more about her race and culture. All three of the participants found their experiences while attending the heritage camps very valuable. This was the first time for the participants where they were surrounded by people that were the same race as them. Rosie described how "comfortable" she felt being one of many African American children at the camp. April and Olivia embraced learning the cultural aspects of their camps, including participating in activities and being exposed to Chinese art, music, and dance. Olivia enjoyed building relationships at the camp and discussed how she "created a lot of friendships and then have more connections and resources." All three participants shared how these immersion camp experiences helped heighten their awareness and comfort with their racial and cultural identity.

Cultural Heritage Fairs. Cultural heritage fairs and events were a norm in Lilah's life, who was adopted through foster care, as well as for international adoptees Olivia and Evelyn. Lilah, who grew up in a multi-cultural family, attended Native American and African American events and fairs with her family, where she would participate in cultural rituals like dancing, singing, and creating cultural crafts. Evelyn's adoptive parents would bring her to Chinese heritage events, some specifically for transracial adoptees, highlighting holidays, crafts, music, dress, food, and art. Olivia's adoptive mother would bring her to Chinese heritage fairs at their local university. Olivia loved attending these events and would often bring friends to share in the experience. Olivia enjoyed learning about her culture through all of the booths and performances. Olivia and her friends bought chopsticks and paintings of their names in Mandarin at the festivals

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and brought them to school to proudly show their peers. These actions gave them a chance to educate their peers and create acceptance of Chinese culture, which Olivia was very happy about.

Participants' Recommendations: Mentors. A few participants suggested creating opportunities for transracial adoptees to be mentored by someone who shares their birth culture and race. Rosie, who was adopted through foster care, had an African American godfather. Rosie benefited from having a same-race mentor to be a role model, help her navigate racism, and teach her about her heritage. Olivia, an international adoptee, communicated how she would have benefited from a mentor who shared her birth culture. Olivia would have loved to have had an adult who was Chinese or an adoptee from the school or outside community mentor her. Olivia also suggested creating a partnership with a local university and seeking students as volunteers to mentor students in public schools. Rosie also suggested having schools build partnerships to connect students of different backgrounds, create relationships, and expose students to more diversity to normalize differences.

Curriculum and School Experiences Help Students Connect to Their Racial and Cultural Identities

As students, we have the opportunity to learn many subjects and topics while in school. The participants had varied experiences with curriculum that impacted their racial and cultural identities in positive ways. The participants shared experiences from Kindergarten through college. Some of the school projects and experiences gave them

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great joy in learning more about their heritage and themselves and opportunities to research their cultures.

Sharing Birth Culture Through Experiences and Curriculum. Time and again, the participants happily took any opportunity to share their culture with peers or research anything directly related to their heritage. When educators assigned work related to learning about their backgrounds and encouraged them to share their findings with the class, the participants were excited to complete their assignments. Many shared how proud they were to share what they had learned with their classmates. These opportunities seemed to create a space where the participants were proud to learn about their own heritage and could educate their peers and even their teachers, leading many times to more acceptance of them as parts of their school communities.

Several of the participants shared assignments and curriculum that increased their knowledge of their birth culture. While in middle school, April, an international adoptee, had a language arts teacher who taught a unit on Asian poems and literature. April was very passionate about this unit and explained, "it was honestly one of the first school assignments that really made me think about the racial identity and kind of start to unpack it." April described herself as a typical eighth-grader who disliked homework but "got really into it" and that the readings were very "meaningful" to her. She also saw a lot of value in the exercises the teacher had the students complete, including writing from different characters' perspectives. April shared that these readings "stuck with me," and she still reflects on them as an adult.

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After seeing Olivia's report on the One-Child Policy in China in middle school, teachers asked her to present on the subject many times through middle and high school. Olivia explained how important the One-Child Policy has been to her and how it "shaped my identity in a sense." Olivia shared how when she would present on the topic in school, "everyone paid attention." She really enjoyed presenting on the topic and reported how the presentation "opened the dialogue" about China. Olivia also noticed that after presenting "less racist comments happened" to her at school. She hoped that the students were "more educated" about the topic, and that is why they stopped bullying her. The experience allowed Olivia to learn more about China, becoming more comfortable with Chinese heritage while educating her peers.

Participants gained knowledge about their heritage and respect from their peers when they made presentations about their birth culture. These opportunities inspired the participants to learn more about themselves in the future. These experiences reinforced them as the authorities on these subjects, which increased their personal pride in themselves.

Sharing Birth Culture at Cultural Fairs. Cultural fairs hosted by schools gave the participants and their peers opportunities to learn about different cultures. The cultural fairs consisted of booths, tri-folds, food, dress, and even media created by the students and shared with their peers and staff. Many of the participants delighted in learning more about their heritage and sharing what they learned with their peers. Some participants shared their racial and cultural heritage, and some shared their adoptive families' heritage. They all enjoyed learning about other cultures and the chance to see

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diversity in their schools. These experiences oftentimes helped the participants create stronger relationships with their peers, while giving all parties a space to be curious, ask questions, and bond.

Cultural fairs offered at the schools provided the participants opportunities to share their heritage and learn about other cultures. Olivia, an international adoptee, and Lilah, adopted through foster care, took the opportunity to share their heritages with their school community. Both participants' events included booths set up to show artwork, food, dress, or even videos focused on the students' cultures. Olivia described her experience by sharing,

> We did have ethnicity fairs where we set up booths and bring things from our culture whether it be food or artifacts [or] clothing. So I would do China, and I would bring a red envelope, then make like potstickers and rice.

She remembers the experience as a highlight to share her heritage and educate her peers and teachers about herself. Lilah also found a lot of value in the practice of schools hosting cultural fairs and added that the students gained so much hands-on knowledge "instead of reading it out of a textbook."

Participants who had the chance to participate in cultural fairs could interact with their peers while sharing their knowledge of their birth culture. Sharing information about their heritage, including food and history, created awareness about their birth culture at school. These interactions between the participants and their peers helped them educate their peers and cultivate friendships.

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Culture-Focused School Trips. Being able to travel with peers and educators to experience cultures firsthand was very positive and memorable for the participants. Only a few of the participants had the opportunity to go on field trips; however, they were inspired by these experiences and shared how valuable they were to their own learning and development. The participants enjoyed eating food native to the cultures they were learning about and the language they were learning, which helped them connect with different heritages and cultures.

Evelyn, an international adoptee, took Mandarin classes while in high school. Attending this class allowed her to learn the Mandarin language along with Chinese culture. This class, in particular, took their students on annual school trips. She visited a local museum that had exhibits on Terra Cotta warriors. She and her peers were able to see the displays in person, which Evelyn described as "super cool." Evelyn also traveled to Chinatown in Philadelphia with her classmates. The Mandarin teacher wanted them to order their food in Mandarin off the menu and try authentic Chinese food. They visited shops, restaurants, and an Asian market. She was able to build her cultural competence and awareness of her Chinese heritage and share the experience with her peers.

Singular Experience

Visiting Their Birth Country. One of the participants, Evelyn, an international adoptee, traveled to China, where she was born, with her adoptive parents to visit her orphanage and experience China first hand. She was the only participant able to travel to their birth country and experience her birth culture as a child. Evelyn was overwhelmed for much of the visit, saying that the trip was "eye-opening" while trying to process the

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cultural differences. Evelyn and her adoptive parents visited her orphanage and met the director and her nanny, who took care of her while she lived there. Evelyn visited historical sites and was able to travel around with a guide who she became close to. One of the most valuable aspects of this trip was her visit with the people from the orphanage, realizing that they all truly cared about her. Evelyn explained that "it was just so reassuring to know that they still cared and they still remembered me." Evelyn's personal experience visiting her birth country extended her understanding of China and Chinese culture, which has inspired her to plan a visit again for the future.

Participants found value in leaving the classroom to learn more about their heritage. The direct exposure to culture and history gave everyone involved time to ask questions they may not have thought about in the classroom, time to practice the language in real-life settings, and try cuisine made authentically creating memorable experiences for all involved. Not only did the transracial adoptees benefit from the chance to go into the community to learn about other cultures, but every student gained knowledge and learned through experience on these occasions.

Themes

There were four conceptual themes identified in this research. The first conceptual theme was "blending in," which brought to the surface ways that transracial adoptees felt they needed to meld into predominantly White schools and with White friends by changing their physical appearance, not reporting bullying in fear of bringing more attention upon themselves, and trying to belong by joining into microaggressions about their own culture and race. The second theme, "not included in the curriculum,"

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examined the need for a more diverse curriculum representing more cultures, races, and types of families in the classroom. The third theme, "educators' actions impact racial and cultural identity," showed how important supportive educators were in the participants' lives and how negative interactions affected participants. The last identified theme was "seeking and creating diversity," showing how transracial adoptees sought out and built diversity around them to further their own racial and cultural identity development.

Blending In

Many of the participants in this study communicated that they felt like they stood out among their peers at school. Their physical differences set them apart immediately from their peers. These participants wanted to "blend in" to their peer groups and school community. They did so in many ways, including changing or altering their physical appearance, doing whatever they could not to bring attention to themselves, including not reporting bullying, as well as joining into their friends' microaggressions concerning their own race in attempts to feel like they belonged. Several of the participants attended cultural events focusing on their culture and race and had the opportunity to be a part of the majority, where they did blend into the crowd. These experiences gave them solace and a true sense of belonging physically to the community. Feeling like you belong to a community is a fundamental human desire that many transracial adoptees may struggle with in their lives (Butler-Sweet, 2011). For many transracial adoptees finding ways to "blend in" becomes part of their daily routine and takes up much of their time and energy.

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Camouflage: Changes to Physical Appearance. Many participants shared that to blend into their community or school, they felt the need to alter their appearance to look like their peers. Some participants took cues from magazines or peers on what clothing to wear or how to style their hair. Dying their hair, cutting it a certain way, straightening it, or wetting it between classes, so it would appear longer and more like their peers was what these participants did to look like the students around them. Sometimes these participants were even told by adults to change their appearance so they could participate on cheerleading teams. These participants hoped that by altering their appearance to look more like their peers that they would be more accepted by them. As they got older, though, many were sad that they felt like they had to change their outward appearance to make it closer to their White friends to feel attractive and be part of the group.

April, an international adoptee, put a lot of pressure on herself to "blend in" with her peer group. April commented,

> I wanted to blend in as much as possible and be like my friends as much as possible and be like the teens that we saw in the magazines as much as possible. And you know that in other words, that's sort of meant like, kind of like disowning the Asian parts of myself.

Even as a teen, April realized that altering her appearance discounted her racial and cultural identity; however, she saw these physical transformations, which included dying and cutting her hair a certain way as well as wearing clothes similar to her friends, as a necessary action to look like her peers.

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Rosie, an individual adopted through foster care, struggled with feeling the need to alter her appearance to "blend into" her White community most of her life. When Rosie was a child, she dressed up as a princess for Halloween, wearing a beautiful dress complete with a blond wig. When Rosie reflected on that experience, she shared,

> At that age, I wasn't really confident about my complexion, or my eyes, or my hair. So it was a really big moment for me to have blond hair and to feel like one of those Disney princesses in that way.

Rosie remembered the day fondly filled with compliments she usually did not receive from peers regarding her appearance, especially her hair, even though "it wasn't real hair." Rosie communicated that she felt "really beautiful, and I felt like everybody saw me as really beautiful that day." Rosie, now an adult, shared,

> Looking back at it now, I feel sad because I have a lot more confidence in my natural complexion. I'm looking back at things like how I wasn't really comfortable in my own skin until I put on things that didn't really look like me. That's sad.

Rosie's experience receiving high praise from her peers made her feel so happy and beautiful that she wore the same costume the next year.

Depending on others' opinions and acceptance of her hair worsened when Rosie joined a cheer team. Rosie enjoyed cheer and spending time with her friends. The one big obstacle for Rosie was her hair. Her coaches demanded that her hair be straightened for the cheer meets and went as far as straightening her hair themselves or sending her to the only other African American girl's home on the team to get her hair done for the meet.

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Rosie's godfather would bring her to an African American salon annually. She explained it as a "complicated" experience. She wanted to participate in African American culture at the salon but had mixed feelings about getting her hair straightened. After her hair would be straightened, she would be showered with compliments from her peers, but after a few days, when her hair was curly again, her peers would tell her they preferred her hair straight.

Many participants felt uncomfortable being themselves with their White peers. April and Rosie both altered their hair to make it look more like their friends' hair by dying, cutting, and straightening it. Rosie even had adults instructing her on what to do with her hair to participate in sports. Rosie chose to wear a blond wig on Halloween for two years in a row because her peers' praise had made her "feel beautiful." The participants were told by peers and adults that altering their appearance was required or positive. Their community's responses about their appearance being different affected them in ways that pushed them to continue trying to change themselves.

Don't Want to Bring Attention to Myself. Many of the participants did not want to bring additional attention to themselves, which would create a larger divide between themselves and their White peers. Wanting to not stand out even more brought them to decisions of not reporting bullying or teacher bias to administration and sometimes not even to their adoptive parents. Evelyn cut herself off from anything having to do with her heritage when she was a child by quitting Mandarin classes and refusing to go to cultural events about her heritage with her adoptive parents. Trying to hide and not stand out was common for most participants but ended up making them feel a sense of loss of pride

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about themselves as they got older when they began valuing themselves and opportunities to learn about their cultures more.

Being one of the only people who were not White in school was challenging for the participants. They knew that they stood out among their peers due to physical differences and went to great lengths not to bring additional attention to themselves. Olivia shared during the interview that she was not the "typical White blonde-haired, blue-eyed type of person" that attended her school, and she got bullied for her racial differences. Most of the time, she did not report the bullying to her teachers or the administration. She explained how she needed to "pick and choose your battles" because reporting the bullying could "just make it worse" by bringing more attention to herself. Fortunately, Olivia did have her adoptive family as an outlet and was able to confide in them, but mostly kept the bullying to herself, not wanting any additional attention from her peers.

Rosie, who was adopted through foster care, shared a scary incident of bullying while in high school that she did not report to her school or her adoptive parents at the time. Rosie had been very vocal about police brutality against African Americans on Facebook and at school. Two of her peers who did not share her beliefs cornered her in a stairwell at school and threatened to throw her down the stairs. Fortunately, a classmate walked in and stopped the incident. When she finally did inform her adoptive parents of the incident, they were very upset and wanted to contact the school. Rosie refused, saying, "I just wanted it to be dropped." Not only were participants afraid of backlash by

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their peers, but they also conceded not to report bullying behaviors because they did not want any additional attention.

Many participants already felt different from their peers and made choices not to bring additional attention to themselves. Some of the participants chose not to participate in activities that may have accentuated their uniqueness among their peers. Some participants chose not to report bullying in fear of retaliation from peers. These participants chose self-preservation by trying not to attain additional attention while in school or in their community.

Belonging. The sense of belonging is important to most individuals, especially while in school. The participants connected to the sense of belonging in several different ways. Many of the participants adopted their peers' interests in hopes of connecting with them in that way and being accepted into their peer group.

Some of the participants aligned their interests with their peers, hoping to belong to a peer group. Lilah explained, "I would figure out what kind of clothes they like to wear. I played a lot of sports and danced. So that's what I did to blend in." April shared that she had similar experiences when trying to make friends. April explained that "it seemed like I had a lot of White friends and I would just sort of like, you know, become interested in whatever they become interested in." Sometimes the sense of belonging would be more important than participating in activities that actually interested the transracial adoptees. Feeling the need to adopt their peers' interests further discounted their identities by leaving their own interests behind, or not even considering how they would like to spend their time, and placing more value on their peers' interests.

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The participants sought out opportunities to have a sense of belonging with their peers. The participants pushed themselves to connect with peers, even if they did not have common interests. Some participants did not feel a natural connection to their peers and, in turn, felt compelled to adopt their friends' interests to obtain and sustain a sense of belonging.

Not Represented in the Curriculum

Participants struggled to find their race, culture, and multicultural families included in the curriculum, as well as diversity in general. Many participants desired to see their birth race included in the curriculum or offered as classes. If their birth race or culture was included, it was a day on the war their native country was involved in with the United States of America or the slave history of African Americans. Many participants did not have the opportunity to learn about their heritage outside its interactions with the United States, which were typically negatively framed. Having the participants not seeing any families similar to theirs could discount their adoptee identity and miss a chance to teach all students how families can come in all shapes and sizes. Lilah shared her frustration by exclaiming, "I mean, you have those little textbooks that show like that happy family in the 1950s, but it's an old one-race family sitting on the table during dinner."

My Heritage Was Not Mentioned. While in college, Melody, an international adoptee, attended a diversity and culture retreat-excursion. She was extremely excited to participate and build relationships while learning about other cultures, including her own. Upon her arrival, Melody was devastated to discover that she was the only person who

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was Chinese. During the weekend, she was saddened that "they didn't include me in one of the bigger cultures or backgrounds that I think makes up a big chunk of America's diversity." There were discussions and presentations on many diverse groups, excluding Chinese or any Asian culture. Combined with the fact that Melody felt like public schools were lacking in teaching Asian cultures, this experience reinforced that her college experience may be the same. She left the weekend feeling defeated and alone.

The participants longed to see the strengths of their heritage portrayed in the classroom, which may have lifted their self-confidence as well as educated their peers and supported their cultural learning and acceptance of the transracial adoptees. Many of the participants have a deep curiosity about cultures in general. Outside of not seeing their cultures depicted in the curriculum, many discussed the overall lack of curricular diversity.

Participants' Recommendation: Need For Diversity Rich Curriculum. Gabriel and Rosie, both adopted through foster care, and Olivia, an international adoptee, call on history teachers to delve deeper and show all perspectives in their teaching. Many times in the interview, Gabriel said that history teachers would "go soft" on teaching controversial topics that were extremely important in history and relevant in today's time. Olivia echoed this perspective, saying that teachers "skimmed overall cultural history" and how she would have liked learning more about world history. Gabriel shared, "We shouldn't just talk about what happened. We should talk about the effects and ramifications it had on the communities. And how, and whether things have or have not changed." He continued by calling on history teachers to deepen their understanding of

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history and how best to teach it by saying, “that’s how, that’s where, you know, racial discrimination and misunderstandings and lack of understanding really comes from, it’s ingrained in our history. So it, unfortunately, falls on the history teachers more.” Rosie is bothered that when learning about African American history that slavery is the only focus. She asks that teachers combine those stories with positive stories and history of Africa and African history.

Melody, an international adoptee who felt the lack of opportunities to learn about her Chinese culture, suggested having schools host a week of cultural diversity monthly. She suggested dedicating lessons and activities to as many cultures as possible, hoping that these actions would show the students that the school viewed all cultures as “important.” The lack of discussion about Melody’s birth culture affected her. She felt her Chinese heritage was unacknowledged by her teachers and school. Educators are teaching a more diverse population than ever before (Iwai, 2013). Every student wants to see themselves reflected in the educational setting, and the curriculum should reflect the students it is teaching as well as the greater population as a whole (Iwai, 2013).

The participants rarely or never saw themselves in books or literature. Almost every single participant mentioned wanting to see more culturally diverse books and literature inside the classroom. As young students, they longed to read a story about someone who looked like them or someone who was transracially adopted. Rosie, who was adopted through foster care, described herself as an “avid reader.” She would have loved to have read books on famous African American inventors instead of stories involving African Americans always being about slavery. The participants all voiced the

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desire to have more opportunities for transracial adoptees and all students to have books and literature promote their racial reflections, and strengthen self-esteem.

My Family Is Different. Many participants mentioned not seeing adoptive families or non-traditional families depicted in curriculums or books. Melody discussed how she felt "other" in two ways. She attended a predominantly White school and was one of the only adoptees in attendance that she was aware of at the time. When she would go to school events and her peers met her White adoptive mother, she was forced to identify herself as an adoptee. This forced her to have to consider others' perceptions of her and her family. She was already struggling as one of the only people who were not White in the school, and then it was doubly reinforced that the type of family that she belonged to was also different from her peers. Melody communicated how schools are missing this connection with their students by not discussing how "some families are different, and that creates diversity, too."

My Family Does Not Fit Into This Assignment. Rosie, who was adopted through foster care, had extremely negative experiences completing family tree assignments while in school. While other participants, like Deker, were comfortable completing his family tree assignment using his adoptive family, Rosie was upset by this experience. Rosie shared that while seeing her peers happily finish the assignment, she struggled with the fact that at that part of her life, she did not have much information on her birth family and that she had to rely on her adoptive family to complete the assignment. This experience reinforced that Rosie's family was different from her peers and downplayed her identity as an adoptee. Participants searched for families that looked

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like theirs at school and in the curriculum. Not seeing themselves reflected in school culture, including not seeing other families like theirs, weakened their emotional connection to school.

Participants' Recommendation: Creating Awareness of the Changing Family. Along with awareness of the transracial family, many participants wanted to break the stigma that people should feel bad for them since they were adopted. This statement does not discount the tremendous sense of loss for adoptees but rather shine a light on the fact that adoptees have to contend with the stigma that coincides with the concept of adoption, sometimes creating a shadow of discernment by parents and assumptions about the adoptee's behavior.

Melody, an international adoptee, communicated that teachers need to start the conversation about adoption and different families in the classroom. She believes that creating an understanding of the adoptee community would create acceptance. Melody feels like the academic world has "brushed over this population" and needs to teach about adoption when family is visited in the curriculum. Joseph, an international adoptee from the pilot study, who is proud to be adopted, stressed the importance of creating awareness about adoptive families and viewing these families through a more positive lens.

Morgan, a pilot study participant who was adopted through foster care, shared that she had teachers educating her peers on adoption and having an impact on the adoption stigma. When it was brought up in class that she was adopted and students had a negative response, the "teachers would set the record straight because people have such a bad idea of it sometimes." There are countless types of families. It is natural for children to want

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to be proud of their family; however, the nuclear family has been the stereotype for a healthy family. Representing as many types of families as possible could help all students feel accepted. Bringing the concept of adoption into discussions in the classroom can normalize this image and bring about more understanding that there are many examples of family (Fishman & Harrington, 2007).

Many participants desire to see more taught about the ever-changing family. Lilah, who was adopted through foster care, discussed how examples of different types of families should be represented in curriculum and books. As an individual, she has seen a lack of multiracial, transracial, same-sex, and families with people who have disabilities discussed in the classroom. April, an international adoptee, also yearns to see more diverse families in schools. She disclosed that "some kind of variance would be really helpful." She remembers only seeing nuclear heterosexual families depicted in schools, which is very limiting. There is a need for our school culture to reflect the student population.

Educators' Actions Impact Racial and Cultural Identity

Educators are in a role of leadership in the classroom (Stronge et al., 2004). Students pay close attention to their actions and behaviors while learning from them as well as seeking guidance and approval. Students spend a considerable amount of time with their teachers and educators overall daily and during their school years. Throughout this study, participants gave many examples of how educators impacted their racial and cultural identity through educator support, advocacy, and bias. Relationships with educators shaped how they viewed educators overall and what level they could trust

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school leadership, as well as how they viewed themselves as part of the school community.

Educators Support Transracial Adoptees. When educators stepped up and connected transracial adoptees with school services and culturally rich activities, the participants' lives improved. The participants had teachers who advocated for them in situations, including bullying. These teachers also encouraged the participants to join multicultural clubs and seek school counseling. Having educators taking the time to connect them with positive experiences and support them made them strong allies, as well as showing the participants that they were valuable.

Many participants had educators that encouraged them to learn more about themselves and find value in who they are as an individual. April, an international adoptee, recalled a teacher in elementary school who meant a lot to her. She remembered the teacher always telling the students "to be proud of ourselves" and that they "didn't need to fit in with others." April took comfort in this positive relationship because she "had a difficult time fitting in with other people," and this teacher spent time with her and showed her that she valued her. Evelyn, an international adoptee, had a similar experience with a teacher who helped her be "curious about my culture" and that she "should embrace it." Her teacher was always "encouraging" her students to "do what they want." She "pushed them" and "didn't hold them back." Evelyn, now an adult, explained how she "always tried to stay true to that."

Rosie, who was adopted through foster care, had a positive experience with the leader of her multicultural club. Rosie disclosed that it was the first time she had an

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African American teacher. Rosie remembers being part of the club was very "beneficial" to her. She looked forward to her discussions with this teacher in particular. Rosie felt comfortable talking to this teacher about politics and her feelings. Rosie felt like she "didn't have to convince her that my feelings were real. I ended up knowing she already knew they were." This teacher would share her own experiences with Rosie, as well as tell Rosie that she understood what she was going through. She would give Rosie advice and built a very trusting relationship with her.

Positive relationships between educators and the participants made positive impacts on their lives. Many participants communicated stories about how educators took time and effort to reach out, build relationships, or mentor transracial adoptees. Letting transracial adoptees share their experiences and culture with the class, as well as encouraging them to be curious about themselves, aided them to learn to embrace themselves. Some educators professionally shared some of their personal life with transracial adoptees, which made them more relatable and helped build trust between them. Many participants had strong relationships with educators, which created a safe space for them.

Educator Bias. April and Olivia, both international adoptees, experienced microaggressions and stereotypical responses from their teachers. Both participants had teachers question their academic abilities by making comments like, "Oh, I thought you would get a better grade than this," focusing on stereotypes that Asian students excel at certain subjects. As a student, Olivia asked herself, "How do I respond to that?" April shared that she would "internalize this feeling of not living up to what other people

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stereotype you to be." Participants faced the fact that not only did their peers view them differently and treat them differently, but so did their teachers. Their teachers' personal biases affected their interactions with them, including how they were graded. Olivia experienced this when she was more knowledgeable than her teachers on identity issues and race relations, and instead of the teacher discussing her thoughts with her, they would give her a lower grade because they thought her perspective was "convoluted."

Lilah and Rosie, both adopted through foster care, experienced negative interactions with educators. While in third grade, Lilah had worked diligently on a project that was to be made at home. The teacher questioned whether Lilah had completed the project independently, which she had. This experience upset Lilah and her adoptive family, which they believed to be not just "racially motivated, but also gender-motivated because I was the only African American girl in my class." This was not the only time this teacher had acted in this way with his students. Lilah disclosed, "the next thing I know, I'm being home-schooled." During Black History Month in fourth grade, Rosie was given an assignment to present herself as Harriet Tubman to the class. Rosie was extremely upset because all of the other students had the chance to choose who they wanted to present on, except for her. She explained that the assignment was "stressful" for her and made her "very uncomfortable." Her teacher "insisted that I vocalize my opinion on African matters." Rosie disclosed that this particular teacher was "pushy" and kept making her the "voice of the minorities" throughout the school year, which she found "annoying." Both of these participants were put into situations where they could not trust their teachers.

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Participants' Recommendation: A Need for School Counseling. Several of the participants leaned on school counselors during their time in school. Many of them voiced the need for more school counselors. The participants reached out for support from school counselors in elementary, middle, and high school. Low self-esteem among the participants, especially concerning self-perception, resonated among many of the transracial adoptees, and they felt they could have benefitted from more counseling support. April, an international adoptee, thinks that school counselors could be a great support for transracial adoptees to navigate their "personal experience" and connect transracial families.

Morgan, adopted from foster care and from the pilot study, suggested small group counseling for transracial adoptees and People of Color living in White communities could boost self-esteem. She "hopes they [transracial adoptees] are comfortable and they actually like themselves and they're not—they don't feel that little bit of difference. And if they do, it's a good difference." Morgan discussed her struggles with loving who she is and shared that she "didn't like being Black" or "having curly hair, dark skin, dark eyes." She hopes for Black women to find beauty in their skin and hair. School counselors are in an optimal position to care for any student at risk or needing support, including transracial adoptees (Branco & Brott, 2017). School counselors could provide extra support to transracial adoptees and work directly with them to help them navigate school.

Participants' Recommendation: Diversity Training for Educators. All participants recommended professional development for educators on race and culture discussions and understanding, transracial adoption, cultural pedagogy, and the adoptive

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family. The participants offered suggestions for curriculum, school events, and classroom enrichment. School districts could seek ways to provide professional development for staff on race relations and White privilege. Further educating teachers could help them relate better to students and their families while creating an environment of acceptance.

Providing more professional development to educators on learning about their own biases to better support students was brought up by the participants. Julia, an international adoptee from the pilot study, explained when referring to teachers, “I think they have to work on their own biases first.” Stereotypes towards groups of people can impact our actions and decisions in the classroom (Dee & Gershenson, 2017). We can unintentionally hurt our students by not discussing bias and diversity in the classroom. Providing a classroom environment where students feel safe enough to discuss diversity can provide them with not only an outlet but an opportunity to learn about their peers and increase empathy. Julia recognized the bias around her and felt helpless to change her teachers’ perspectives. Olivia, an international adoptee, also discussed the importance of providing more professional development for teachers and suggested that the teachers have opportunities to work on scenarios.

Seeking and Creating Diversity

Numerous times the participants sought out diverse experiences for themselves, including creating them to share with others. Lilah and Melody took the initiative to create various valuable clubs to further their own learning and connection with diversity, culture, and even other adoptees. Melody created an adoptee club at her university. She identified the need for adoptees to build their own community within the university and

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was met with excitement by her peers and faculty. Lilah created a multicultural club in high school where students could come together and discuss their heritages. She was able to unite her club with a fellow high school that had a more diverse population than her school in hopes students could build relationships across schools. Olivia sought out a leadership position in an organization that gave transracial adoptees the power to recruit more People of Color to their clubs to create more diversity. The participants worked hard to create equity and expose their peers to more diverse environments to benefit everyone. April benefited from social media, which served as a positive platform for some seeking diversity and desiring more diverse relationships, especially with other adoptees. This safe place offered the chance to speak with other People of Color to further her learning. Time and time again, participants took the initiative to create a more diverse environment for themselves and their peers, which benefited them all and reinforced confidence in their racial identity.

Participants' Recommendation: Adoptee Clubs at School. Although this study investigated the development of transracial adoptees' racial development, the adoptee identity resonated with the adoptees as a significant part of their overall identity. All of the participants shared how they did not know many other adoptees, and the ones they did know were considered close friends. Many of the participants discussed the need for an adoptee club at school, where adoptees could have the opportunity to create friendships with other adoptees. In the pilot study, Luke, adopted through foster care, discussed how he had access to his Mexican heritage but longed for more relationships with adoptees or individuals who went through foster care. He explained how these friendships are

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important and that the potential “bonds” you can have with someone who has lived a life like yours can turn into “a friend for life.”

Most of the participants communicated feeling accepted when surrounded by individuals who were similar to them. Overall, the transracial adoptee community continues to look for connections with others who have had similar experiences. Joseph, an international adoptee from the pilot study, would like to see adoptee clubs in schools. He discussed that there were no opportunities to connect with the other adoptees in his school and that he would have liked to “learn things from each other.” Julia, an international adoptee from the pilot study, advocated for the creation of adoptee clubs, explaining how beneficial “getting the kids together to talk about their experiences” as transracial adoptees could be for them. This could be others of the same culture or race or other adoptees. Most schools have an adoptee population. Many of the participants voiced that they desired connections with other adoptees regardless of whether they were transracially adopted or not. Some of the participants also suggested bringing transracial families together to build relationships and community.

Conclusion

The transracially adopted participants, international and adopted through foster care, communicated that their racial identity was shaped by school experiences, lack of school experiences, and teacher relationships. Both populations shared extremely similar views and had similar experiences regarding their race and culture while in school. All of the participants communicated how assignments and activities that focused on their racial identity and cultural heritage had strong impacts on them and gave them an opportunity

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to share their culture with their peers and teachers. Authentic relationships with educators where the teachers offered support and guidance helped the participants feel valued. Many participants looked forward to opportunities where they could share about their adoption. Several participants shared how they appreciated when teachers took the time to create an accepting classroom climate where diversity of culture, race, and family was shared openly.

Several participants shared experiences that negatively impacted their personal views of their race and heritage. One of the most discussed was the lack of discussion in the classroom about different cultures and families. The lack of discussion and lack of curriculum that did not reflect their culture, race, and family makeup led the participants to feel "other" and that their backgrounds were not as valued as their peers. Teacher bias in the classroom was confusing and disheartening to some of the participants who experienced it. Many participants shared stories where their own teachers created a climate or environment that embodied stereotypes and bias.

The participants in this study and the pilot study were very passionate about implementing change for transracial adoptees attending school. Melody, an international adoptee, hopes that in the future, as a result of studies like this one, to see a "huge, huge change" in how schools cultivate their school climate to include transracial adoptees better. Creating awareness of this population, along with adoptive families in general, could create a more accepting environment as the participants suggested. Participants shared how society is growing more diverse, and our students want their identities,

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whether racial, cultural, or family, to be acknowledged, approved of, and accepted at school by their educators and peers.

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Chapter 6

Discussion and Implications

Educators need to do more to support the transracially adopted student population. A person's racial identity is formed through relationships, media, and experiences at home, in their community, and at school (Tatum, 1997). If transracial adoptees do not have opportunities to learn about their birth race and culture, they may not feel secure in their racial identity and suffer psychologically (Jennings, 2006). The common practice of transracial adoption has been questioned for years, considering transracial adoptees may not have access to anyone like themselves racially or culturally (Lee, 2003). The main issues against this practice include that they need to assimilate into a new community when they could be an asset to the community of their birth and that there is a risk that they could be rejected by their adoptive community and their birth community, leading to an identity crisis (Hayes, 1993).

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How did experiences at school shape the racial identity development of transracial adoptees and foster-youth living cross racially?
    a. What types of school events or curriculum influenced their racial identity development at school?
    b. What role did their teachers play in their perceptions of how their racial identity development was influenced by school?

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Description of Methodology

This study investigated how and if schools shaped the racial identity of international transracial adoptees and individuals who were adopted transracially through foster care. A descriptive case study approach was used to give the participants the opportunity to tell their personal stories in depth to describe the "phenomenon" of experiencing school as a transracial adoptee (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Eight participants were interviewed over the telephone twice, along with sharing school artifacts and writing a formal e-mail if desired. The first interviews ranged from thirty minutes long to fifty-two minutes long depending on the participants' experiences. The second interviews ranged from 27 to 81 minutes depending on the participants' experiences, as well as the artifacts they provided, which were all discussed. Every participant shared a variety of artifacts for the study, including photographs, newspaper articles, and hand-drawn pictures.

The data went through three rounds of coding. The first round of coding included In Vivo or verbatim coding, which was selected to protect the integrity of the participants' actual words (Saldaña, 2016). Elaborative coding was used for the second round of coding. The cultural racial identity model created by Steward and Baden (1995), which is usually used to measure the racial identity of adoptees as they were impacted by their family, was used to investigate if experiences in school "affirmed" or "discounted" the participants' racial identity in any way. The third round of coding included building a matrix to identify the themes of the study, which were "blending in," "not included in the

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curriculum," "educators' actions impact racial and cultural identity," and "seeking and creating diversity."

Summary of Findings

This study consisted of one main research question and two sub-questions seeking to explore if and how school shapes the racial identity of international transracial adoptees and transracial adoptees adopted through foster care. Overall, all of the transracial adoptees shared many of the same positive experiences, along with struggles and concerns, during their time in school. School experiences did play a role in their racial identity development. Participants communicated numerous times that school experiences, interactions with teachers, and curriculum impacted the transracial adoptees' racial and cultural identity development.

Living in a White World

1.a. What types of school events or curriculum influenced their racial identity development at school?

The first research sub-question centered on investigating if school events or curriculum influenced the participants' racial identity development. Most of the participants attended predominantly White schools that rarely included their race or culture in the curriculum. The participants were very involved in their White communities, which discounted their own racial and cultural development by not exposing them to their own heritage through lack of racial mirrors, lack of positive stories about individuals from their background, and constantly feeling they needed to align with White norms.

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While growing up continually being surrounded by White people discounted the racial identity or pro-self category in the Cultural-Racial model of many of the participants (Steward & Baden, 1995). In turn, participating in a predominantly White community and school affirmed the Pro-parent category for them in the cultural-racial identity model. Spending extensive time in White communities reinforced the participants' comfort and familiarity with White norms, sometimes leading the transracial adoptees to identify a part of their racial identity as White. The transracial adoptees learned to navigate predominantly White communities with respect to language, customs, and relationships.

Throughout the participants' lives, they experienced acculturation (Baden et al., 2012). As People of Color, the transracial adoptees spent the majority of their time in White families and predominantly White schools. Acculturation is the complex process of a person adopting or becoming fluent in another culture that may be outside their own by learning the culture's norms, expectations, behaviors, which can even affect their personal identity (Baden et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2019). This experience of spending so much time cross-racially made it confusing when participants did have opportunities to build same-race relationships.

Transracial Adoptees Address Curriculum and School Experiences

1.a. What types of school events or curriculum influenced their racial identity development at school?

In continuation of answering the first research subquestion, all of the participants offered valuable examples of how school curriculum and school events affected their

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racial identity development. Assignments and research connected to their birth culture or adoption affirmed their racial identity. These experiences allowed the participants to learn more about their birth culture or adoption and share it with their peers, resulting in creating awareness in their classrooms. Having the chance to create a project about their birth culture or researching a topic about their birth culture reflected that their race and culture were important to the school and the teacher. Not only was learning about and sharing their birth culture with the class a positive experience for the transracial adoptee, but it exposed the rest of the students to diversity, normalizing differences, which in some instances reduced bullying against the participants.

Experiences and curriculum in school could affirm or discount a person's racial identity development in relation to their pro-self racial and cultural identity. Learning about White history, famous White individuals, being surrounded by books filled with stories of White families, and seeing posters of White people daily could discount transracial adoptees' pro-self racial and cultural identities while affirming the pro-parent component. Participants rarely or never recall seeing their reflection or learning about their personal racial or cultural history in their environment, making transracial adoptees feel less valued than their peers (Ung et al., 2012). In turn, providing opportunities for transracial adoptees to learn about their cultural history or country of origin affirmed a positive racial identity by expanding their knowledge and comfort with the information to be shared (Baden, 2002). Not only could learning about many cultures and diversity be beneficial to transracial adoptees, exposing all students to many cultures and ways of life could promote acceptance of differences and curiosity overall.

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The lack of awareness of transracial adoption and the participants' birth culture in the classroom affected all of the participants. The participants discussed how their classrooms were lacking information about their birth culture. Many of the participants did not have racial mirrors or role models in their schools. This lack of awareness discounted their pro-self racial identity while affirming their pro-parent component and made them feel less significant among their peers. Many of the participants voiced wanting to see significant curriculum changes by providing all students with more culturally diverse learning experiences, including literature, cultural and heritage fairs, and revamping history to include more world history.

The participants offered many types of school activities and events that affirmed their Pro-Self racial and cultural identity development. Cultural fairs gave the participants opportunities to research their own heritage and learn about their peers' cultural backgrounds. The participants' only complaint about cultural fairs was that they were not frequent enough, and they would have been open to having them more frequently. Black History Month was a highlight of the year for the African American transracial adoptees. They enjoyed the opportunity to learn about strong Black individuals and participate in the special events during the month's celebration. Participating in research reports and giving presentations about their cultural heritage allowed them to learn about themselves and share it with their school community.

These findings align with previous research on the diversity of the American classroom and cultural pedagogy. Gay (2002) encouraged schools to become more culturally responsive through school curriculum and experiences to increase a more

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inclusive, positive, and diverse school climate. The American classroom is more diverse than ever before, and the school curriculums should reflect the students it is teaching (Gay, 2002). Culturally responsive pedagogy leads to equity in our schools through curriculum and teachers' instructional methods (Richards et al., 2007). Schools could provide culturally infused experiences through lessons on diversity and world cultures through writing, the arts, and history to benefit all students (Fishman & Harrington, 2007; Gray et al., 2019).

The Changing Family

The depiction of the nuclear family still dominates our society and school curriculums. In continuation to answer the first research sub-question centering on school events and curriculum, many of the participants expressed how disheartening it was to only see one race families as examples of what a family was growing up. Family tree projects were extremely difficult for most of the participants to complete. The curriculum needs to be more sensitive and reflect the ever-changing family by not putting adoptees in a difficult position by making them choose between their birth and adoptive families (Fishman & Harrington, 2007). Assignments that reinforced the nuclear one-race family confirmed repeatedly that the participants did not quite belong. Fishman and Harrington (2007) urged schools to "restructure" assignments surrounding family to be more inclusive of different types of families, especially families formed through adoption.

Not only did participants feel different from their peers because of their race, but their family was different from their peers. When the transracial adoptees attended school events outside of school hours with their adoptive family, they were put in a position to

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explain their multiracial family. Being put in this position to explain their family to peers was sometimes embarrassing because the transracial adoptee was forced into divulging personal information about their family in public. These exchanges separated the transracial adoptees further from their peers and made many feel like they did not belong anywhere.

Educators' Actions Can Affirm or Discount Different Parts of Identity

1.b. What types of school events or curriculum influenced their racial identity development at school?

The second research subquestion sought out to see if relationships with teachers influenced their racial identity development. The participants had powerful examples of how relationships with educators impacted their racial identity development. Fishman and Harrington (2007) shared how vital educators' impact on students' racial and cultural identity development could be. These authors discussed how teachers' own bias and their actions with students could positively or negatively affect them. In this study, supportive relationships between transracial adoptees and educators were Pro-Self racial identity affirming among the participants. Some educators confided their own experiences as "other" with the participants who built a strong connection between them. Some teachers defended the participants when they had to deal with racist comments in the classroom from peers, which strengthened trust between them. These experiences for the participants reinforced their trust in adults opening up opportunities for the educators to build relationships and advocate for students and put educators in a unique position to

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connect transracial adoptees to resources like counseling and multicultural clubs to better support their identities.

Positive Impact. Many of the participants were fortunate enough to have educators in their lives who encouraged them to learn more about their heritage. These educators included teachers, school counselors, coaches, and school administrators. Gajda (2004) urged educators to support adoptees' emotional and academic needs, help them learn about themselves, and build relationships with them to help them feel like they belong. In some instances, teachers took a personal interest in the transracial adoptee's heritage and supported them in researching their birth culture and giving cultural presentations to their peers. These actions helped grow the self-confidence and self-esteem of the transracial adoptees as well as motivated them to keep learning and sharing about themselves. A few of the transracial adoptees had same-race educators, which gave them a direct racial mirror and affirmed their pro-self racial and cultural racial identity and strengthened their self-awareness and competence within their race by giving them a same-race mentor and opportunity for conversations about race.

As leaders in the classroom and school, educators could similarly impact transracial adoptees' racial and cultural identity development. Fishman and Harrington (2007) encouraged educators to "challenge their pre-existing opinions and attitudes regarding matters of race, culture, ethnicity, and adoption" (p. 274). Educators learning about their own racial bias and teaching more diversity in the classroom could be more effective. When educators encourage transracial adoptees to learn more about themselves and feel proud of their race and culture of origin, this interaction can affirm the

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transracial adoptee's Pro-Self racial and cultural racial identity. The transracial adoptee may feel a rise in self-esteem regarding their race and culture and be more apt to share about themselves with those educators, as well as build positive relationships with them. Some educators show bias through stereotyping transracial adoptees or through negative actions like excluding or targeting transracial adoptees in discussions. Educators may also disregard transracial adoptees' emotions when working on assignments that are insensitive to them, which can negatively impact cultural and racial identity and self-esteem. These negative interactions could lead transracial adoptees to lose trust in educators and may make the transracial adoptees reluctant to reach out to educators when they need to.

Negative Impact. There were many negative racial development experiences for transracial adoptees during their time at school. Fishman and Harrington (2007) urged educators to challenge their own bias concerning "race, culture, ethnicity, and adoption" (p. 274). The authors encouraged educators to never tolerate other students' or staff members' racism and protect their students, especially transracial adoptees. Many of the participants spoke out about teachers using microaggressions, bias, and stereotypes in the classroom. These experiences were belittling and confusing for the participants coming from the head of the classroom. These negative actions by educators impacted participants' racial and cultural identity development by blocking trust between student and teacher, heightening the insecurities of the transracial adoptees, and reinforcing their differences.

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Bullying and Teacher Bias. Educators are leaders in school and are there to not only protect students but esteem their best interests (Stronge et al., 2004). Many transracial adoptees had experiences with educators that left them feeling isolated and alone. There were instances of teachers seeing bullying happen and ignoring it, as well as teachers lowering the grades of transracial adoptees' assignments and projects because they did not believe they were capable of completing the work or they did not agree with the transracial adoptees' politics or belief system. These instances put the participants in very precarious positions where they felt helpless and unsupported. When the transracial adoptees' peers observed the teachers ignoring the bullying, it reinforced that the bullying was acceptable. Many of the participants never told anyone of these happening because their past experiences had shown them that justice would not be done.

Harsh bullying was a daily occurrence in the lives of many of the participants. Many of the transracial adoptees endured physical and verbal bullying from early elementary school through their college years. Peers would use racial slurs and bullying about their physical features against them, as well as belittle them. Bullying and harassment from the very peers they were trying to befriend and be accepted by could affect how they felt about themselves (Butler-Sweet, 2011). These peer actions illustrated their peers' desires to keep the transracial adoptees separate from them and force the transracial adoptees' to not fully accept themselves, sometimes leading to lower self-esteem and depleted pride in their race.

Many participants' desire to blend in with their peers influenced how they dealt with bullying and teacher bias. Some teachers compared the participants to stereotypes

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and disregarded participants' feelings by the words they used or their actions in the classroom. Participants rarely reported these experiences to school administration. Reporting bullying or teacher bias to school administration could bring more attention to them by the school community, leading to retribution from their peers or further separating them from their peers.

Importance of Educators' Actions. The actions of educators directly impacted transracial adoptees' racial and cultural identity development. Educators are in the position to assist in students' racial and cultural identity development by building positive relationships with them, advocating for resources, connecting students to culturally rich experiences and curriculum, encouraging further learning about their heritage, personal learning about diversity and bias, and protecting students from bullying. Educators learning about cultural pedagogy, race relations, and diversity could have a positive impact on personal bias and stereotypes, which would benefit not just transracial adoptees but all students by creating a more balanced and safe space for learning. Educators, like parents, are in the unique authority position to directly change school culture by their actions in relationships and with the curriculum. The participants communicated that having trusting relationships with educators gave them more pride in themselves and created a much more accepting atmosphere in their classrooms.

Creating Diversity. Many of the participants in this study sought out diversity themselves. Some saw a need for more culturally diverse clubs in their schools or ways to make clubs more inclusive to People of Color. The participants were not afraid to advocate for themselves and their peers. Learning more about their culture and race of

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origin could affirm transracial adoptees' racial and cultural identity development. When accumulating knowledge about personal history, language, customs, and culture, your level of understanding and comfort within that culture and race could increase (Baden, 2007). Heightening their own awareness of themselves could help them navigate their own race and culture more fluidly, assisting them in building same-race relationships. All of these elements could further affirm their pro-self racial and cultural identity development leading to more self-awareness and understanding.

Limitations

There were limitations to this study. All of the international transracial adoptees were Chinese women. The only perspective for the international participants was from a Chinese woman's perspective. If they had been from other countries in the world, their answers might have reflected something different. If they had not identified as women, their answers might have varied. All of the transracially adopted individuals adopted through foster care were African American, leading only to an African American perspective. If other races were included in this sample, the perspective would have been different and more diverse. This sample did include six individuals who identified as women and two who identified as men, leading to points of view from those two genders. The pool of participants was four individuals from each transracially adopted population. Although the interviews were rich with information, if more individuals had been interviewed, there may have been even broader responses. Most of the participants were from the East Coast of the United States but in different states. Answers might have

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contained even more varied answers if the participants were mainly from other regions of this country.

Due to the scope of this topic, there were subjects that were related to my research that were not included, because I tried keeping the topic as close as possible to the research questions. I did include some information and research on culturally relevant pedagogy; however, I did not deeply explore it. In addition, the general topic of Minoritized students in American who attend predominantly White schools was not considered for this study. This study centered on the transracial adoptees' experiences in their schools and with educators.

Implications for Practice

Policy

Public schools build policies to protect their students and provide the best educational experience possible. There are policies for students who identify as transgender, students with disabilities, and policies on supporting students through suicide ideations and child abuse. These policies protect these special populations, support their academic career, improve mental health, and create a more positive school climate (Demissie et al., 2018). Transracial adoptees may have experienced trauma and have issues with their mental health and with learning, which can all impact their academic performance (McGinn, 2007). In addition, transracial adoptees' emotions and learning are impacted by their school experiences and interactions with teachers (Fishman & Harrington, 2007). At present, students who are transracially adopted are just swept into the general population; however, they have needs that public schools could be

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fulfilling. The addition of school policies that include professional development and the use of school counseling could improve the school experiences of transracial adoptees.

Some policies impact school counseling programs, and school counselors could be vital in supporting this population. Branco and Brott (2017) advocated for school counselors to play a major role in supporting the transracially adopted youth. School policy on the specific role school counselors could take with transracial adoptees, and their families may benefit all parties. These policies could include how school counselors could provide small group counseling to give these students a safe place to discuss concerns, bullying from classmates, and open discussion on race. Branco and Brott (2017) also urged school counselors to provide resources for families of transracial adoption and assist them in finding rich cultural experiences for their families, which could also be included as part of the school policy.

National and district policies regarding curriculum should be updated to better represent the current ethnically diverse American population for every student (Apple, 2018). Curriculum in U.S. schools should reflect the country's racial, social, and cultural makeup of its communities (Sleeter & Stillman, 2013). The integration and adoption of multicultural education in American schools has been in motion since the mid-1900s; however, educators need to keep moving forward by creating and offering more culturally relevant curriculum (Sleeter & Stillman, 2013). Apple (2018) communicated that America's curricular "historical amnesia" in relation to "whose knowledge is official" (p. 685) continues to stifle and even oppress the American student instead of inspiring them and pushing them forward. Students deserve to learn history and read

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stories from different perspectives. Curriculum policies surrounding these subjects need to continue to seek out diversity, embrace different perspectives, and be open to exposing students to role models of all racial and cultural backgrounds.

Future Research

The practice of transracial adoption will continue to grow. A researcher could explore different variations of races of adoptees and races of adoptive families. There may be differences in how different combinations of races and cultures on the side of the adoptive family or the adoptee affect how the adoptee experiences their education. Specific grade levels and their impact on transracial adoptees could be explored. Researchers could hone in on certain age groups or times in school, for example, elementary, middle, or high school or higher education. Focusing on certain grade levels could aid researchers in discovering if there is a difference in curricular needs at different age levels. At each level of education, students have access to different resources that may help or hinder them. Identifying specific programs or resources that best support transracial adoptees at certain ages would be valuable. Adoptees of different ages may benefit from different interventions, experiences, or curriculum.

Leaders in Our Classrooms

School leaders drive academic and emotional aspects of their students' curriculum and school experiences (Ubben et al., 2015). It is the school leaders' responsibility to foster a climate of acceptance and growth for their students and staff. This study identified how school administrators, educators, and curriculum impact the racial identity development of the transracially adopted community. The transracially adopted

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community could benefit greatly from school leaders supporting their racial and cultural identity development by utilizing and securing a more culturally diverse and relevant curriculum and having a more diverse staff, which could benefit every student. School leaders considering their students' cultures an asset could develop richer professional development for their educators and a more compassionate school climate (Minkos et al., 2017). School leaders are in a position to drive the changes needed to support our transracially adopted youth.

Recommendations

This study appears to support the argument for change in school curriculum and practice. As educators, we need to take a deep look at our curriculum and see if it reflects our students and their families. Creating diversity-rich experiences in the classroom that include discussions on race and family could benefit not only the transracial adoptee population but our whole student population overall. If we do not have many racial mirrors in our faculty or student body for each student, our curriculum and school libraries should include as many examples of race, culture, and families as possible.

Family in Curriculum

The concept of family is reinforced in school through books, curriculum, posters, and projects. Typically, the nuclear family is depicted as the concept of family in school. However, that depiction does not reflect our current student populations' families anymore. Previous research urges educators to normalize the concept of adoption and foster families (Fishman & Harrington, 2007; Gajda, 2004; Smith-D'Arezzo, 2018). Educators need to be cognizant of how they describe the concepts of adoption and foster

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families and not reinforce negative stereotypes and beliefs (Fishman & Harrington, 2007; Gajda, 2004). Finding resources that reflect students' lives could have a positive impact on them seeing themselves and their families reflected in the curriculum, as well as have the general school population be exposed to different types of families like transracial families, same-sex parents, multiracial and cultural families, divorced families, multi-generational families, families with different abilities, and polyamorous families.

Normalize Learning About Cultures

If schools make efforts to include more diversity and normalize different cultures and families in the classroom, transracial adoptees may have a better understanding of themselves. These actions could lead to transracial adoptees having more self-confidence in who they are as part of the school community. Not only would this support transracial adoptees' racial and cultural identity development, but it could support the school community's shift in mindset to embracing and normalizing diversity among students and staff.

This study found that providing culturally relevant experiences and curriculum in school matters. When transracial adoptees had the opportunity to research their own race and culture, they felt pride in who they were, especially when they could share the information with their peers. Cultural fairs offered a rich experience for all of the students, including exposure to diversity. When the participants shared their culture with others, their self-confidence was evident. School trips, including culturally rich experiences, gave transracial adoptees firsthand experience to explore diversity and expand their cultural thinking. It is time for schools to take a proactive approach to

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include more culturally diverse school experiences and activities for the school community.

Educators' Impact

Educators' actions and support affect transracial adoptees' racial and cultural identity. Building relationships with students is at the center of education. Educators need to show an active interest in their students and build relationships with them. Taking time to learn about their students' backgrounds can make the classroom more inclusive and accepting of every student. Strengthening communication and understanding between students and educators and their families could lead to educators knowing when to modify assignments that may be uncomfortable for transracial adoptees, creating opportunities for transracial adoptees and every student to share about their backgrounds and opportunities for family inclusion in the classroom.

School leaders need to examine their school climate and adjust their teachers' professional development to expand their learning on race relations, the changing family, and diversity. Interactions between transracial adoptees and educators influence how the youths saw themselves as part of the school community and how they trusted adults in supporting them or not. Educators motivated to learn more about their own bias and diversity can make a lasting positive impact in transracial adoptees'. Continued professional development on race relations, diversity, and anti-racism could improve educator-student relationships and school climate as a whole.

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Child Services

The information gathered from this study could assist child services in supporting youth living transracially while in foster care and youth who are transracially adopted. Foster parents are required to attend classes when earning their license. The findings from this study could shape the foster care licensure curriculum to better support foster children who are living transracially while in foster care. The participants' school experiences could be shared with foster parents to help deepen their understanding of their foster child's potential experiences in school and with educators. The experiences and recommendations of the participants could assist caseworkers in not only supporting transracial foster families to help them navigate their children's racial and cultural identity development but be better advocates for transracial adoptees at school.

Conclusion

This case study sought to investigate if and how schools impact the racial identity development of transracial adoptees. Steward and Baden's (1995) cultural-racial identity model, a racial development model used for transracial adoptees, was utilized to frame the information from the participants' interviews. Eight transracial adoptees shared how school, including experiences with educators and curriculum, impacted them through interviews and school artifacts. This study found that school, including relationships with educators and curriculum, impact transracial adoptees' racial and cultural development. American education needs to reflect the students in the classroom. A culturally relevant curriculum needs to be adopted by schools to enrich the learning of our students by exposing them to multicultural experiences. As educators, we need to take responsibility

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for our interactions with our students, especially including race relations, our own bias, and acceptance. Educators need to nurture their students' learning and promote diversity in the classroom.

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Appendix A

Letter to Participate in the Interview

International Transracial Adoptees and Transracial Adoptees

That Were Adopted Through Foster Care:

How did school shape your racial identity development?

Greetings!

I am a doctoral candidate from Rowan University in New Jersey, as well as a foster and adoptive mom. I am currently looking for volunteers between the ages of 18 and 25 to be participants in my study about individuals who have been transracially adopted internationally or through foster care. I am studying how school experience shaped transracial adoptees' racial identity development.

If you are interested in participating in this study, we would meet either in person or virtually, depending on distance. There will be two interviews which will take about an hour or less. The interview will be recorded for research purposes but kept confidential. There will also be an opportunity to formally e-mail me additional information when interviews are complete.

After the interview, I will share your interview with you for your approval to have it included in the study. If you do not feel I have represented your position to your liking, the interview will be altered to your specifications or destroyed. Your interviews will be kept confidential and only used for this research.

I truly hope you will find value in this study and agree to participate. The partnership between school and home can always be improved.

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Thank you so much for your consideration!

Lindsey Zabelski

This study has been approved by Rowan University's IRB (Study #_____)

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Appendix B

Interview 1 Questions

1. Can you share your adoption story with me? Probes if needed: age at adoption, country you were adopted from, your race, your family's race
2. Keeping racial and cultural identity in mind, how would you identify yourself?
3. If you ever needed any special supports in school, like ESL, school counseling, or other school-based programs, can you describe your experience with receiving these supports?
4. How would you describe the racial makeup of each school you attended and how it made you feel?
5. How would you describe your relationship with your teachers throughout school?
6. Do you feel like your teachers had any impact, positive or negative, on your race or culture identity? How so?
7. Do you think teachers could do more support transracial families? If so, what could they do?
8. What suggestions would you make to teachers to help them create experiences and assignments that would promote racial identity in the classroom?

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Appendix C

Interview 2 Questions

1. Did you bring any of your schoolwork, projects, or pictures from school to share with me during the interview? If so, what made these important to you, or why did you save these specifically?
    a. If the participant does not have any artifacts:
        i. Are there any specific reasons why you did not keep school work? or
        ii. Did you not have any school experiences that you felt impacted your racial identity?
2. Can you tell me about any assignments or projects you remember that you may not have kept that supported or impacted your racial and cultural identity? How so?
3. Do any of your schools offer special events that supported or impacted your racial and cultural identity?
4. Do you think schools could do more to support transracial families?
5. What suggestions would you make to schools, such as types of events or programs that you think could help transracial families?
6. Having gone through this interview experience with me, what would you hope could change for transracial adoptees in relation to school?

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Appendix D

Formal Follow-Up E-mail

Dear _____,

Thank you so much for your participation. I value your time and everything you have shared with me. I wanted to make sure that you had a chance to tell me anything else you may have remembered from your school experiences or was brought to the surface after your own reflection on this process. Please e-mail me back with any additional experiences that are school related that may have not been included in our first two interviews.

I am truly grateful for your input and time.

Sincerely,

Lindsey Zabelski

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