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Mairi McKenna
Wilfrid Laurier University

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Transracial Adoption (TRA) and the Development of Ethnoracial Identity

by

Mairi McKenna

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Abstract

Research on the experience of transracial adoption and the development of identity has indicated that supports for this process are required. Research that has not named transracial adoption as negatively impacting on identity has also recommended these kinds of family supports. There has, however, been a disquieting absence of such support programs. It is for these reasons that I have set out to start the process of identifying the best practices for such supports and begin the process of creating such a program.

The methodology is influenced by a number of different theories: participatory action research (PAR), needs assessment, capacity building, empowerment theory, adult education models and the constructionist movement in psychology. The analysis procedure was primarily informed by the PAR, constructionist, problematizing and grounded theory models. A detailed description of the struggles and supports adoptees and parents reported in interviews and focus groups is provided. The discussion and analysis of the results made use of theories of development, attachment, adoption, identity and narrative creation.

Finally an outline for a parenting program is offered, based on the recommendations identified in this research. The program sessions fall under the following themes: expectations, identity, attachment, racism, culture, seeing difference/being different, social interaction, adoptee sorrow, birth parents/country of origin, family culture, communication, hard times, parents' emotions, resourcing and multicultural education.

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Transracial Adoption (TRA) and the Development of Ethnoracial Identity

Introduction: The Floating Signifier of Race[1]

The critiques of transracial adoptions range widely. A primary theme of these concerns is the development of the ethnoracial identity of children. Only culture and faith are considered as a part of the Child and Family Services Act when placing a child for adoption (Child and Family Services Act, 2000) . Most adoptive and foster families are *white*, and visible-minorities, Metis and Indigenous children are over-represented in high-risk populations and in care (Ornstein, 2000; Simon & Alstein, 2000). Henry et al. (2000) describe Canada as a democratic racist society. Democratic racism is defined as "the justification of the inherent conflict between the egalitarian values of justice and fairness and the racist ideologies reflected in the collective belief system as well as the racist attitudes, perceptions, and assumptions of the individuals" (p. 19). Despite our egalitarian values, the majority of Canadians, as shown by numerous studies decade after decade, hold racist opinions (Henry et al. 2000). Those who oppose transracial adoption give as their main reason the racist climate.

What does it mean to live in a racialized society in which race becomes folk, or *common sense*? Race is a concept linked with science. Science holds with it a claim to objective *truth*. It promises explanation and prediction. *Using it to define race also acts to legitimize the essential nature of race and its authority.* To talk about race assumes that there are different, clearly identifiable races of humanity: distinct types. It assumes that you and I clearly originate from one or another race. It lends authority to the unequal division of human beings. But "[t]he concept of race has defied biological definition" (Omi & Winant, 1986, p. 58). These supposedly clear-cut,

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[1] This is a movie title that features a series of lectures by Stuart Hall. Although I am not drawing from that film, the title seems appropriate as it is inspired by Hall's work, and it is the mythology around race that I want to discuss.

scientifically distinct races remain elusive. How do we identify a race? Black is a colour. Can we clearly identify all black people by the colour of their skin? No. For example, I am very light skinned as are many other black people. So then Black is not a literal description of a race. *Black* is a political term. Black has a history; it has a story to tell about Civil Rights and reclaiming a description of the self and its inherent beauty. Black is a politic. Omi and Winant (1986) argue that "[t]he effort must be made to understand race as *an unstable and 'decentered' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle*" (p. 68, their emphasis).

Yet a race is a "*distinct* human type" (Stevens 1996, p. 961). Distinct differences are an imperative element of race because it is the differences that justify the inequality of the hierarchical structure of race on which our history and our present have been built. Race and its hierarchy have become a part of our *common sense; it has become folk.* Ng (1993) uses "common sense" instead of the term "ideology" to indicate the taken-for-granted character of ideological thinking. The term 'common sense,' used in the everyday vernacular, denotes ordinary good sense" (p. 52). She suggests that looking at things like racism and sexism as common sense illuminates how ordinary they have become in daily life without our conscious recognition; ". . . certain things, to borrow from Himani Bannerji's description, 'disappear from the social surface' (1987, p.11)" (Ng 1993, p. 52). What does it mean for something to be folk? Folk is defined as "1: originating or traditional with the *common people* of a country or region and typically reflecting *their lifestyle. . .*" (Stevens 1996, p. 452, my emphasis). It is also "1:. . .people in *general* or of a *specific class*" (Allen 1990, p. 457, my emphasis). But like race, folk is a kind of division that implies an essentialism. Folk is the essential tradition, essential truth, the common sense. But what or who is essential, and how is something essential? These things depend on political circumstances. So race as a folk belief will be politically positioned: problematic, contestable, and only half of the story. It is in this way that the promise of authenticity of races affects us because like another folk

myth, we can never attain it or live it ourselves; however, because it is a part of our common sense, we go on believing that we can.

Canada is a racialized society. The result of living in a racialized society is that the members of our society create racial identities—but we also live in a diasporic society; thus I will call them ethnoracial identities. *The creation of ethnoracial identities means three things. First, that our general identities will always include a consciousness/unconsciousness of and response to our assigned/perceived race. Secondly, like both identity and race, these ethnoracial identities are unstable, positioned, ongoing processes. Finally, these identities will always include a response to the dominant white culture in the form of some response to their white baseline or* common sense. *This is why the issue of ethnoracial identity is of great concern in the placement of minority, Indigenous and Metis children for adoption.*

Literature Review[2]

Research on the identity of transracially adopted children started almost immediately as soon as it became a formal forum for adoption. The starting point was Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development.

Erikson's Psychosocial Stages	
Basic trust versus mistrust	Birth-1yr.
Autonomy versus shame and doubt	1-3yrs.
Initiative versus guilt	3-6yrs.
Industry versus inferiority	6-11yrs.
Identity versus identity diffusion	**Adolescence**
Intimacy versus isolation	Young adulthood
Generativity versus stagnation	Middle adulthood
Ego integrity versus despair	Old age

Berk, 1996, adapted from table 1.3, p. 18

[2] The language used to describe different ethnoracial groups changes throughout this section depending on the terms that the researcher used. I do not like to use some of the terms used in this section, I have used them because the authors have used them.

According to Erikson, adolescence brings the challenge of identity versus identity diffusion. The development of an identity has actually begun years before adolescence, but it is in this phase that Erikson places the specific focus on identity development. At this point young people start a more concentrated focus of questioning practices and beliefs that they had taken for granted before, developing their own perspective, as well as recognizing their own identity and where it might take them. Erikson outlines four identity statuses:

Identity Achievement	**Moratorium**	**Identity Foreclosure**	**Identity Diffusion**
Already explored alternatives. Committed to a formulated set of goals and values. Having a feeling of well-being, consistency of being over time, and a sense of direction.	Delay or holding pattern. Have not yet made commitments in their lives. Exploring with a desire to find values and goals.	Committed to values and goals, but have done so without exploring the alternatives. Accepting the identity that the authority figures in their lives has assigned them.	Lack a clear direction for their lives. They have not yet committed to values or goals. May not have explored alternatives, or they have to some extent but became discouraged, interpreting alternatives as threatening and overwhelming.

Berk,1996, p. 587

Based in Erikson's stage of identity/identity diffusion, Marcia (1966) studied *Development and Validation of Ego Identity Status.* Marcia explains that "the individual is required to synthesize childhood identification in such a way that he [*sic*] can both establish [a] reciprocal relationship with his society and maintain a feeling of continuity with himself [*sic*]" (p. 551). Marcia had five hypotheses which he tested. In sum, those with identity will be better at handling stress, will set more realistic goals, will change less when given false information about themselves and will maintain a positive relationship between measures of identity and self-esteem. Individuals in foreclosure will support "authoritarian submission and conventionality" items (p. 552). Marcia's methodology involved a number of procedures: interviews scored according to Erikson's theory focusing on identity status; the Ego Identity Incomplete Sentence Blank (EI-ISB) created by Marcia;

the Concept Attainment Task (CAT); the Self-esteem questionnaire (SEQ-F); and finally a number of specific conditions were created like stress during CAT and a confederate set-up after the CAT challenging the participant falsely on the ground of inconsistency on his/her scoring, after which the participant took the SEQ-F again.

Marcia (1966) confirmed his hypothesis that participants with achieved ego-identity dealt with stress better than others. Participants in foreclosure set high goals in comparison to their level of attainment. Marcia found no relationship between SEQ and stage of ego-identity, and ego-identity did not significantly appear to be related to authoritarian submission and conventionality. A relationship was found between EI-ISB and SEQ. Marcia also found that in studying identity, the interview procedure was more successful because the EI-ISB test deals with ego identity as a simple and linear quality. Scores on the second SEQ after the confederate set-up did not show a significant change.

Profiles of Erikson's Ego-Identity/Diffusion			
Achievement	**Moratorium**	**Foreclosure**	**Diffusion**
Highest score on ego-identity. Scored better on stressful concept attainment; endured longer and set realistic goal. Slightly less subscription to authoritarian values. Self-esteem slightly less vulnerable to false negative information.	Vulnerable to CAT scenario and its similarity to other measures of identity achievement.	Endorsement of authoritarian values, i.e., obedience, strong leadership and respect for authority. Self-esteem vulnerable to false negative information. Poor performance in stressful scenario when compared to identity achievement. Set more realistic goals. Lowest position on most tasks.	CAT lower than achieved identity (not lowest). Suggested theory: Spectrum with "playboy" at one end and "schizoid" at the other (p. 558). The playboy functioning relatively well. NOTE: ". . .the extent of disturbance of an extreme identity diffusion would have precluded his inclusion in our sample" (p. 558).

Berk, 1966, pp. 557-558.

In summary, Marcia found that the interview methodology worked better to study identity as interviews do not treat identity as a linear progression. He concludes by stating that the study's main contribution is developing, measuring and partially validating of "the identity statuses as individual styles of coping with the psychosocial task of forming an ego identity" (p. 558)

McRoy et al (1982) studied *self-esteem and racial identity in transracial and inracial adoptees.* McRoy et al. write that the major influences on the development of self-concept include the following: communication directly from other people about the self; comparison of the self with others in the immediate environment, and the role assigned to the individual by the community (p. 522). Their method entailed two groups of families. The first group was composed of thirty white families who had adopted black children. The second group was thirty black families who had adopted black children. Of the adopted children, 63% were male and 38% were female. The dependent variable was the self-esteem exhibited by the black children measured through interviews with the children including the Total Positive Overall Level of Self-Esteem Score, the Twenty Statement Test and a ninety-five item interview schedule dealing with family, peers, school, community environment, and perceptions of racial identity. A separate interview was conducted with parents using the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS) and a ninety-item interview schedule.

McRoy et al (1982) found no significant differences between the groups' scores on self-esteem. They give special consideration to the amount of research that addresses racial identity. The TSCS does not involve participants evaluating themselves on particular traits such as racial identity or associated feelings. Participants describe themselves by rating statements on their applicability to themselves. These statements refer to the self in terms of physicality; behaviour; morals; ethics, family; and finally, a social self. The Twenty-Statement Test, however, revealed significant differences between how the two groups viewed their racial background and adoption

status. The children who were transracially adopted identified themselves as adopted, using racial self-referents in comparison to the inracially adopted children. McRoy et al postulate that it is the former who may be more aware of their racial group and adopted status because of the physical differences between them and their families and peers since these children were raised in predominantly non-minority environments. A specific effort was made to ascertain if self-esteem had to do with other issues besides race.

> . . . there appeared to be a difference between the transracial and inracial adoptees in their sense of racial identity. Racial identity seemed to be more of a problem for black children who were being reared by white families. Such factors as the family's nurturance of the child's black identity, the child's access to black role models and peers in the community and in school, and the parents' attention to the child's black heritage seemed to be influential in the shaping of a positive racial identity (p. 526).
>
> Although most white families applying to adopt black children probably can provide loving homes for the children, not all of them can fulfill black children's need to feel positively about their black identity (p. 526).

They conclude by recommending that agencies use specific criteria for choosing adoptive families, investigating not only the prospective adoptive family, but the racial milieu in which the adopted child will be raised. They also recommend that agencies could offer postadoption consultation to support families in developing positive and unambiguous racial identity.

In 1984, McRoy et al investigated again *The Identity of Transracial Adoptees.* This study took a developmental approach since children as early as three years old have been found to be aware of differences in ethnicity. The implication of this is the recognition by transracially adopted children that they are different from the rest of their family. As the child grows, she/he learns about her/his membership in a minority group and the historically inferior place that group holds in

comparison to the dominant group. By seven, children have shown a recognition of the term "black" in a racial context, and by Grade Two, many children have developed prejudices that can be acted on against those who belong to minority groups. Children who grow up with family members or peers of the same minority group can develop coping mechanisms. Through identifying with others of the same racial background, a child can develop a sense of belonging. The child raised in a white family and community may be lacking this kind of support system. The desire to be liked and to belong may be impeded by one's physical differences. This study examines how variables such as the racial composition of the child's neighbourhood and school, the presence of black siblings, parents' perceptions, attitudes and actions in relation to the child's racial heritage act on the child's racial perceptions.

Thirty white families adopting children who had at least one black parent were involved in this study. The children ranged from ten to twenty-one years of age. Children and parents were interviewed separately. The parents' survey included ninety-one items addressing the following: demographic characteristics of the family, placement history of their child, racial composition of the family's neighbourhood, family interaction with black people, the parents' perceptions of their child's relationship to peers and significant others, parents' attitudes toward the racial background of their child, and their perceptions of their child's racial attitudes. The adoptees' survey was a ninety-five item, six-section interview designed to open conversation about their experiences and feelings. The interview addressed family, relative and peer relations; school; feelings about racial identity; and attitudes towards being transracially adopted.

The results were divided into four sections; first, was the sociocultural milieu of the adoptees. Eighty-seven percent of the adoptees were brought up in neighbourhoods where black people made up between 0-10% of the population. Eighty percent had never had black teachers. Eighty-three percent had at least one black friend, but seventy-five percent said that the majority of

their friends were white. Forty-three percent said they would like more contact with other black people, and the remaining fifty-seven percent said that they didn't care or they were ambivalent. Of the children who said they did not want more contact with other black people, sixty-two percent explained that they liked white people better or had nothing in common with black people. Every one of those individuals lived in neighborhoods that were predominantly white.

Secondly, there were the perceptions of racial identity. Fifty-three percent of adoptees identified themselves as either mixed, part white or black/white. Thirty percent identified themselves as black. Ten percent identified themselves as white. One identified as Mexican. A positive relation was found between the parents' perception of the child's attitudes towards her racial background and the child's perception of her own racial background. When the adoptees were asked how their lives would be different if they were being raised by/had been raised by a black family, typical answers were: that they would be discriminated against; wouldn't be teased because of their family make-up; wouldn't be rich; would be whipped more; and would be lighter than parents. Four said there would be no difference, and one said "We could go out in public without people staring and our friends wouldn't ask why we're black" (pp. 37-38). Eighty percent said that people had told them that they were not like other blacks, and many had been told that they didn't talk black or that they acted white. Most of the adoptees brought up in white areas explained that they felt dissimilar to other blacks in attitudes, language and culture. These children felt that they had little in common with black people and felt no desire to fraternize with them.

Third was the parent's perception. Sixty percent of the families held some version of a "colour blind" attitude when it came to differences between the family and the child. These differences were rarely discussed in their homes. The adoptees were generally seen as different culturally and better than other black people. Those who were old enough were dating predominantly white partners. Twenty percent acknowledged the racial identity of their child and

the need to provide her/him with black role models. These parents took steps to surround their children with a diverse community through integrated schools, neighbourhoods and churches. These children discussed racial issues with their parents and peers, and expressed an interest in associating with other black people. Twenty percent of the families adopted a number of children transracially. Discussion of racial issues was common. These children were taught to connect with their heritage. They had a diverse group of friends, felt equally accepted by both white and black groups, and had a number of black role models.

The significance of the child's sociopsychological context was the fourth result. The children who were raised in racially dissonant contexts tended to compensate either by denying or minimizing the differences between them and their environment, or by selecting associates on the basis of other similarities. They identified themselves according to other variables that denied or de-emphasized their racial heritage, for example, by identifying themselves as mixed, part white or even white.

The authors concluded that the parents of transracial adoptees need to put forth a special effort to perceive realistically the child's racial identity as different from that of the parents, and to be open to making some alterations in their lives in order to support their child's developing a "positive racial group orientation" (p.39). They recommended agencies providing postadoption services to white families raising non-white children. They also suggested that agencies make the following recommendations for transracial adoption families: to live in an environment that is racially mixed or that provides opportunities for their children to befriend others of their racial group; to implement an interracial lifestyle; to provide black role models for their children; to enroll their children in racially mixed schools. "The daily lives of the transracilly adopted family should demonstrate acceptance not just of one black child but of other blacks as well" (p. 39). The agency might need to assist families in finding communities in which a family can live and in supporting the

siblings of the transracial adoptee (TRA) if relocation to a multiracial environment is a departure from their norm. Finally, the agency was urged to help the families develop sensitivity to the potential negative impacts of social practices in their children's lives, i.e., in the family, in the community and at school.

In 1987, Rita J. Simon and Howard Alstein, two of the most published researchers in the field on international adoption, published *Transracial Adoptees and their Families: A Study of Identity and Commitment* and *Adoption, Race, and Identity: From Infancy through Adolesence* in 1992. Both books were based on a three-part longitudinal study in 1972, 1979, and 1984. The study started out involving 96 parents and 218 children of whom 111 were transracially adopted. The study was interested in the long-term impacts of transracial adoption, including racial identity, self-esteem, strength of loyalties and commitment of both the adoptees and their parents.

Parents were interviewed at each of the three phases in 1972, 1979 and 1984. In each phase of the study, parents were asked about things they were doing to educate, support or acknowledge their children's ethno-racial heritage. Each phase of the research showed different levels of support.

1972 (%)	
Child too young to do anything	8
Doing little	26
Doing various things (i.e., books, pictures, music and cultural artifacts. Some joined Open Door Society to engage other TRAs for their children to play with)	66
Not changing anything about their lives as a result of adopting a TRA (no artifacts, etc.)	12

1992, pp. 77-78

1979 (%)	
Not "acknowledging" or teaching their TRA about their heritage	33 (approx.)
Exposure to heritage (i.e., print media, music, television, movies such as *Roots*, black churches, black godparents and school)	66 (approx._
Observe ethno-specific holidays	35
Did nothing (reasons: confused as to how to proceed and not wanting to treat their child any differently. A few said they lacked the time).	Not cited
Almost all families who adopted from Korea had artifacts in their home, experimented with cooking and read books about Korea.	

1992, pp. 78-79

1984 (%)	
Did nothing special to enhance TRA's ethnoracial identity	37
Used to do things to enhance their TRA' identity, but no longer	13
Some activities (holidays, music, books, foods, encouraging friendship with blacks, and other exposures to specifically black community members).	50 (approx.)
Believed that their child had at least some knowledge and appreciation of their heritage (gained mostly from books, school courses and television—again, friends and activities were cited as less important).	85
Discusses racial issues, attitudes and instances of discrimination with their children in informal settings. The context was usually the children's friends; an event on television, from the newspaper; politics, etc.	87

1992, p. 79

In the first phases of the study, seventy-five percent of the families were taking various steps to support their children's ethnic identity, specifically books, toys, and music. In the second phase, only two thirds were engaged in these kinds of activities. At the third phase, only about half of the families engaged in various activities to support their children's ethnic identities, such as books, music, attending black churches, having diverse friends and observing holidays such as Martin Luthor King Jr. Day. But thirty-seven percent of the families said that they did nothing in particular to support their children's ethnic identity, and thirteen percent said that they used to engage in various activities but gave them up many years ago. Eighty-five percent of the parents felt that their children had some knowledge and appreciation of their racial and ethnic background. This

appreciation was gained through books, school and television. "Friends and participation in 'ethnic activities' were thought by the parents to be much less important" (1987, p. 36). The parents felt that they had discussed issues of ethnicity and race with their children in terms of their friends, news media, television and politics (1987).

As for racial and ethnic identity, the researchers asked four questions examining the parents' expectations for their children's identity, expectations for change in identity, how the child identifies and how they identify the child. Their answers are listed below.

Parents' expectations about adopted child's identity			
Response Category	**1st TRA**	**2nd TRA**	**1st White Adoptee**
We wanted our child to share the family's identity[3]	12.2	7.1	28.4
We wanted our child to identify with his/her racial and ethnic background	23.2	26.2	--
We wanted the child to be interracial	3.6	4.8	--
We had no expectation or desires about the child's identity	50.0	47.7	43.0
Other responses (Christian, physically and intellectually able, successful woman)	6.1	7.1	14.3
No answer	4.8	7.1	14.3

1987, adapted from Table 4.7, p. 45

Parents' Perceptions About How Child Identifies			
Category	**1st TRA**	**2nd TRA**	**1st White Adoptee**
Black	48.8	47.6	--
White	26.8	28.3	58
Native American	2.4	4.8	--
Asian	4.9	2.4	--
Mixed	4.9	9.6	7
None	2.4	--	7
Other	2.4	--	--
Irrelevant	--	--	7
Don't know	3.6	2.5	7
No answer	3.8	4.8	14

1987, adapted from Table 4.9, p. 46.

[3] A definition of "family identity" is not offered in the text. I read it as possibly including ethnic identities such as European or Irish, etc. It could include religious identity as well.

Parents' Current Perceptions of Child's Identity			
Categories	1st TRA	2nd TRA	1st White Adoptees
Black	42.7	45.3	--
White	10.7	9.6	64
Native American	1.2	4.8	--
Asian	4.9	7.1	--
Mixed	8.5	14.3	--
None	6.1	7.1	--
Other	2.4	--	--
Irrelevant	20.8	7.1	14
No answer	2.4	4.8	22

1987, adapted from Table 4.9, p. 46.

In response to McRoy and Zurcher's study listed above, Simon and Alstein examined how many of their parents might have taken a colour blind approach to their children, *colour blind* referring to parents choosing not to see the colour of their child because they see it as unimportant. They estimated about thirty-one percent had taken this approach and found only a sliver of parents had completely overlooked race as an issue.

Sixty-five percent of the TRA had reported racial slurs or some kind of comment based on their ethnic or racial background to their parents. Eighty percent of the parents felt that their children had these experiences, but the parents chose not to broach the subject with their children. Most incidents involved name-calling, but seven parents reported such incidents by teachers or a friend of the family. Most families reported no action against reported incidents and discussed them with their children, but "parents did not believe that these incidents, hurt and angered as the children were by them when they occurred, were likely to leave lasting impressions or scars" (1987, p. 48).

The work with the adoptees started with age specific methodologies. The first phase included a three-part technique. The first part was a doll test. The adoptees were presented with a set of three baby dolls all dressed in a diaper. These dolls were light, medium and dark skin-toned.

The children were first given the opportunity to play with the dolls for a bit as the researcher set up. Then they were asked to answer questions by pointing to the doll that fit the following: you like to play with the best; is a nice doll; looks bad; is a nice colour; looks like a coloured child; looks like a black coloured child; looks like a white coloured child; looks like you. The children were then presented with a second set of three dolls (light, medium and dark in skin tone), a set of either three boys for boys or three girls for girls, representing ages from six to eight. This was done to make the test meaningful and effective for older children in the sample. The same eight questions were posed.

This test showed no difference between the scores of any of the children (born into family, white adopted and TRA); none showed a white preference. On previous tests such as these, all children displayed a white-preference through choosing the white doll in relation to positive attributes, e.g., best doll, nice doll, etc. It was expected that the children growing up in TRA families would not show white preference and lower awareness of identity attributed to race. There was only one difference between the children's racial awareness (their ability to identity the "white" doll, etc), and that was that white children were most accurate at identifying the white dolls. The American Indian and Asian children scored lower on racial identity than did the black and white children. The researchers were concerned that there was no doll available for the American Indian and Asian children that the TRAs could identify with. It was felt that this was the variable responsible for the number of children who identified the white doll. Overall, older children were more accurate, and sex was not a determining factor. It should be pointed out that the last such research using the dolls methodology was carried out in 1970 in a different area of the United States (Nebraska); thus comparisons with other data should be placed in time and place.

The second phase was to show the children 24 sets of pictures. Each picture was coloured differently: half the pictures were black or white, and the other half were any other colour.

A two-line story was attached to each; after each set the experimenter would ask which object was "bad," "dirty" or "pretty." No differences were found among the ethnoracial groups. In this phase, the children were, however, more likely to identify white objects with positive adjectives. The older children (six and seven) were more likely to express more positive thoughts about black groups, but they still expressed more positive associations with white groups.

The final task involved fifteen wooden puzzle pieces representing different coloured family members and friends. Three mothers and three fathers were presented; each suggested white, one black and one light skinned Black/American Indian/Korean. Different aged siblings were also provided in the three skin-tones. These figures fit into five different models. The exercises were to arrange a family of five, family of four, and finally a friend from the figures remaining. They were then to choose a figure that looked most like them, and then someone whom they were most likely to play with.

Two-thirds of the children assembled inter-racial families for their first exercise. In the second exercise the following were assembled:

Children selecting white parents (%)		
Children	**Mother**	**Father**
White	77	74
Black	48	56
American Indian and Asian	55	53

1992, p. 137

Next the children were asked to select their siblings. In all cases, white, black, American Indian and Asian children mostly chose dolls according to their appearance (i.e., the latter groups selected medium and darker siblings). Again, approximately forty percent of the American Indian children chose white figures; the researchers speculated this choice was related to the lack of a doll for them to identify with, i.e. Indigenous identity is not necessarily described as related to a

particular colour.[4] The final exercise showed similar findings. It asked the children to select a friend. The children's selection of friends showed no preference for or specific awareness of ethnoracial group membership (Simon & Alstein, 1992).

Overall, black children did not show the same ambivalence towards their "race" that other black children in previous research showed. The children also showed less preference for white categories in comparison to previous research, but the white bias was still present in the second experiment. Finally, there were some lower scores from the American Indian and Asian children, but the researchers felt it was the lack of an appropriate doll for them to identify with (Simon & Alstein, 1992).

The children were not interviewed in the second phase; thus when they were next interviewed in the third phase, the median was 16 years old. The TRAs showed no difference with respect to attending college, the racial make-up of their schools, grades, etc.. Sports was the favourite activity across all categories. Most named special qualities that they have. The TRA youth were asked if their family was different from their friends' families. The responses were around other families not adopting, social freedom levels, relationship quality, etc. (Simon & Alstein, 1992).

The youth were asked to talk about how it felt to be living in a white family. Most children reported no problems. Some said they didn't think about it, but others said it embarrassed them that their parents were white, and that they were adopted and were being acculturated into white culture. Some of the black children talked about not feeling comfortable with and being teased by their black friends because of their white family and acculturation. Many of the children from all the

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[4] My undergraduate anthropology thesis involved working with Indigenous post-secondary students. In our work, students often explained that their Indigenous identity was not an issue of a specific colour, as much as it was what dominant society would understand to be culture. They did not want to be included in terms like visual minorities, for example. They also objected to inclusion in the term *multicultural*. It is my suspicion that their experience is unique and includes variables that dominant society simply does not understand. It may also be that these children do not know that they are Indigenous, do not want to identify as Indigenous, etc.

different ethnoracial groups talked about not feeling comfortable with black people in general. The TRAs were asked if they ever wanted to be of the same ethnoracial background as their parents. Sixty percent reported that they had not felt that way, and those who did described family situations where relatives were talking about family traits, situations where they were the only Black person present and situations with friends or at school when their peers saw their family. The children were asked if they had ever wished that they were another colour. Forty-three percent of the TRAs reported that they had never felt that way (and forty-four percent of children born into their families said they never had). A number of children[5], however, talked about being deeply disturbed by their ethnoracial background because they were a part of groups that were discriminated against (Simon & Alstein 1982).

The youth were asked if people had treated them badly because of their ethnoracial background. Forty-six percent reported name-calling at school, twenty-six percent reported remarks in other public areas, twenty-eight percent reported incidents with friends, and teachers, and racist jokes told in front of them. Thirty-nine percent reported no such incidents. Sixty-three percent had talked to their parents about the incidents, and most reported that their parents responded by playing the incident down and taking no action. More than half reported that they themselves did nothing in response to the perpetrators. Overall, only fifty-four percent of TRAs reported discussions of ethnicity and race with their parents, which is considerably lower than white born (79.3%) and white adopted (75.0%). In addition, all the children studied (TRAs, white born and white adopted) responded similarly to thinking about how the world is organized: twenty-two to twenty-three percent said that they see the world organized by ethnoracial categories (Simon and Alstein, 1982; 1992).

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[5] The authors provide no specific number here, but include substantial quotations from their interviews with these youth.

In terms of self-description and pride in their ethnoracial background, the following tables report the youth's answers.

Mention of race and sex in self descriptions (%)						
Characteristics mentioned	TRA		White born		White adoptee	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Race	46.7	54.0	6.3	2.3	Frequencies too small n=4	8.3
Sex	--	--	--	2.3		8.3
Race and sex	3.3	4.0	6.3	2.3	n=4	--
Neither	46.7	40.0	85.4	88.4		75.0
Other/no answer	3.3	2.0	2.0	4.6		8.3

1987, adapted from Table 5.5, p. 67

Pride in Ethnoracial Background	
Black TRAs (5)	
Black or brown	66
Mixed	6
Don't mind their colour	17
Prefer to be white	11
Korean, Indigenous, Vietnamese, etc. TRAs (%)	
Proud of ethnoracial heritage	82
Don't mind their colour	9
Prefer to be white	9

1987, adapted from p. 68

All the categories of children studied scored similarly on integration and commitment scales with no significant differences. The self-esteem of the TRAS was also of interest. Historically, black children have had higher levels of self-esteem as children grow up, and variables like grades and socio-economic status had less bearing on their self-esteem than they did on the self-esteem of white children. The one factor that they found to be significant in the high self-esteem of these children, despite their disprivilege, was the role played by significant others in the children's lives (Rosenberg & Simmons 1971, cited in Simon and Alstein 1992). In this study, however, there were no significant differences in their group scores on self-esteem; the black children did not score significantly higher than the other children.

In terms of friends, black children were found to be almost as likely to choose white friends as any other group, but they were more likely to choose black friends than the other groups. It is pointed out that the vast majority of youth were going to predominantly white schools and, as stated earlier, grew up in predominantly white neighborhoods. As such, there were fewer opportunities to make friends with those of similar ethnoracial groups. School and the neighbourhood were listed as the top places where they found friends. Most reported that they have had no problems with their dating choices in terms of racial discrimination. Twenty-nine percent reported racial discrimination, which was twice as likely to come from the family of their dates, not from the TRA's families.

Finally the children were asked about their future plans. Most of the TRAs (63.8%) perceive their future in a multicultural community, similar to biological chidlren (76.5%) and white adoptees (50%). Twenty-six point six percent of TRAs, however, specified that they would live in communities that were mostly white whereas two point two percent chose mostly black neighbourhoods. Only a fraction of the TRAs chose to marry specifically white partners. There were, however, twenty-three point three percent who specified that it would probably not someone of the same ethnoracial group.

Finally, twenty-two point five percent of the youth had tried to search out their biological parents, and fifteen point three percent wanted to but have not yet tried. Simon and Alstein specify that they did not get the feeling that it was from a lack of belonging to their adoptive families: "The adolescents were expressing a sense of incompleteness about their origins and a need for more information about their personal histories" (1992, p. 169).

The most resent fourth phase of the study was summarized in Simon and Alstein's most recent book *Adoption Across Borders* (2000). In it they summarize the results collected in 1991-1992 . Fifty-three percent listed their closest friends as white, and seventy percent of second and

third friends white as well. Eighty percent had married a white partner and sixty percent lived in predominantly white neighbourhoods.

At this phase the TRAs were asked when they first remembered realizing they were different from their parents. Seventy-five percent said that they did not remember. They were then asked if they felt their ethnoracial background had impacted their relationships with their families. The adoptees were then asked if being of a different ethnoracial group was of varying difficulty throughout their lives.

Being of different origin from family easier or more difficult at different times (%)	
Rarely difficult	40
Early childhood the most difficult	22
Adolescence most difficult	24
Early childhood the easiest	8
Difficult through both childhood and adolescence	8
Treatment by others of same ethnoracial origin	
Very negatively or negatively towards them during	29
Neutral	37
Positive	10
Very positive	15

2000 , p. 73

Only one sibling reported somewhat negative feelings towards their TRA sibling. Thirty percent reported feeling out of place during phases of their lives, for example, when their family participated in cultural activities specific to their TRA sibling. Thirteen percent reported no impacts from having a transracial sibling, and the remaining reported positive impacts.[6]

A final discussion of interest is the TRAs' interest in locating their biological families. Seventy-five percent of the 1991 sample had not attempted to locate their biological families (thirty-eight percent had either started to look or were interested in looking in 1983/4). Only 15 TRAs had

[6] There was a great deal of data from siblings through each section, but due to length restraints I have only included this statement about their whole experience of having a TRA sibling.

tried to find their biological families: seven were successful and thirteen had done so with help from their adoptive families (two TRAs had not asked for their families' help).

In this final phase, of the interview, the TRAs were asked to look back and evaluate their experiences and gather their recommendations for the practice of transracial adoption. They were asked if they agreed with the position taken by the National Association of Black Social Workers, who argued that transracial adoption is a form of genocide (Simon & Alstein, 2000). Eighty percent of the TRAs disagreed, and five percent agreed. They were then asked if they would urge social workers to place nonwhite children in white homes. Seventy percent of the TRAs said they would, and almost all the rest placed stipulations on such placements. Of the stipulations, the first was not to do so as a first choice but only after searching for a family of the same background. The second stipulation was to place nonwhite children with white families who were willing to commit to exposing their child to their child's heritage.

The TRAs were then asked how they thought that being of their ethnoracial group and being raised by white parents had impacted their perception of themselves. One third said that it had not, one third said it had in a positive manner, and one third said that they were unsure of how it had impacted them. They were then asked if they would have preferred to have been raised by a family of their same origin. Seven percent said they would have while sixty-seven percent said they would not have. Four percent were not sure and twenty-two percent had no answer. When asked about their answers, most said that their lives had worked out and that their parents loved them. When asked for their advice to parents about to adopt a child of their background and how to raise the child, ninety-one percent said to be sensitive to racial issues and nine percent advised to reconsider. The last question was how they describe themselves ethnoracially. Thirty-two percent identified as Black, sixty-eight percent as Mixed (black plus white, Asian or Native

American) five percent as mixed. The "others" listed were White, Hispanic, Native-American and Korean, but no specific numbers were provided.

In 1988, Andujo studied *Ethnic Identity of Transracially Adopted Hispanic Adolescents.* Andujo had three research questions. First, is there a difference between the development of Hispanic children adopted by non-Hispanic families, and those who are not? Secondly, do Hispanic adoptees in Hispanic and non-Hispanic families differ in terms of their perception of ethnic identity? Finally, how do environmental and familial variables impact the development of Hispanic adoptees' ethnic identity?

Two groups were selected to participate in the study; the first group comprised 30 white families who had adopted Hispanic children, and the second was made up of 30 Hispanic families who had adopted Hispanic children. The adoptees completed the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, The Twenty Statements Test, the Mexican-American Value Attitude Scale and participated in a 60-item interview schedule.

Andujo (1988) found that adoptees scored similarly on self-esteem. There were two significant differences though: identity and physical self. These scales were further described as "their basic identity and how individuals present their view of their body, physical appearance, skills, sexuality, and health status" (p. 532). Children adopted into Hispanic families, were more likely to describe themselves in terms of ethnicity as compared to those adopted by non-Hispanic families who used terms like *American* to describe themselves. Eighty-three percent of the transethnically adopted children used colour, specifically shade of colour, to describe themselves, compared to only 33% of in-ethnicity adopted children. A significant difference was found between the groups on the M-AVAS. The transracially adoptees were more strongly acculturated into dominant Anglo-American culture (seventy-seven percent of transracially adoptees scored high versus seven percent of in-ethnicity adoptees).

In his discussion, Andujo (1988) addresses the variable of socioeconomic status. He found that those Hispanic families in the upper class resembled the non-Hispanic family in their negation of ethnicity. He also found that the majority of adoptees had not yet developed a positive ethnic identity. This may interfere with developing a sense of wholeness and self-acceptance. Transethnically adopted individuals may experience an uprootedness and lack of continuity. Furthermore, because the adoptees have recognizably ethnic characteristics, society may react to them according to stereotypes. "Once adoptees are beyond the confines of their immediate families, they will experience the same interactive threats all minorities experience in society, and ultimately will experience some role confusion" (p. 534).

Andujo (1988) makes a number of recommendations for both practitioners and families. First he makes the statement that ethnic identity has appeared to be more of an issue for the children who were transethnically adopted, in comparison with those adopted into same-ethnic families. It is recommended that agencies develop policies to expand their resources for Hispanic adoptive families; children should be placed with same-ethnicity or race families where possible so as to help children develop the skills needed to cope with racism. To recruit more Hispanic adoptive families, it is recommended that agencies hire more Hispanic staff and develop an outreach program. Agencies are recommended to develop subsidized adoptions, single-parent adoptions, support groups for parents, and adoption exchanges. Where permanent placements are favored over temporary foster care, and after exhausting the possibility of finding a Hispanic family to adopt a Hispanic child, then non-Hispanic families should be considered. At this point, specific criteria should be utilized in selecting an appropriate family. The focus, in these cases, should be not only on evaluating the family, but also on preparing the family. It should also investigate both the psychological and social environment of the perspective families. Perspective families should show openness to accepting the ethnic and cultural differences of an adopted child.

They should be open and able both to acknowledge and deal with racism. They should make a commitment to develop in their children a sense of ethnic identification.

> In sum, to avoid alienation or cultural strain, transethnic adoptive families must be part of the sociocultural milieu of the transethnically adopted child. They should not be limited in their personal cultural orientations, nor should they rely on formal, intellectual, or observational means to link themselves and their children with the ethnic community (p. 534).

Huh and Reid (2000) studied *Intercountry, transracial and ethnic identity* with Korean participants. They asked a number of questions addressing the following: what kinds of identity do transracially adopted children develop? what variables impact this development, specifically family and cultural activities? is the development of ethnic identity related to other aspects of development? are there stages in the development of ethnic identity? and are there variations in this developmental process?

One hundred and fifteen families were contacted, and 30 families agreed to participate in the study. This sample included 40 children ranging from 9 to 14 years of age. The methodology was both qualitative and quantitative. The quantitative procedures measured family involvement in Korean cultural activities, the child's identification with Korean culture, and the communication between the adoptees and their parents concerning their adoption. Data was collected through interview. The qualitative procedure was Grounded Theory focused on the development of Korean identity pertaining to parents' attitudes toward Korean culture.

The study found that eighty percent of those with a high Korean identity and twenty percent of those with a low Korean identity described themselves as Korean-American. Of those with low Korean identity, fifty-three percent described themselves as Korean and twenty-seven percent responded as "American", "just a person" or "haven't thought about it." In terms of the

development of ethnic identity, Huh and Reid described the following phases: recognizing and rejecting differences (4-6 years); the beginning of ethnic identification (7-8 years old); acceptance of difference vs. ethnic dissonance (9-11 years); and integrating Korean heritage and American culture (12-14 years old (pp.80-85). More detail on these phases will be provided in the *Methodology* section in the discussion of analyzing the results.

Most adoptees recommended that children should be the ones to decide how much or how little they want to learn about their home country. Overall, adoptees who participated in cultural activities scored higher on Korean identity. They may also achieve identities that are more integrated with American culture, thus the tendency to identify as both Korean and American. "While high participators were not necessarily better adjusted, their better 'integrated' identities and their greater ease in discussing their adoptions with their parents may be considered as desirable" (p. 85). The qualitative research suggested a path of development for those participating in Korean culture, and those who have low participation. Those with higher participation started to develop an identifiable ethnic identity around 7-8 years of age. Those with low participation did not develop ethnic identity or became "arrested" before developing an integrated identity (p. 85). A determining factor here is parental involvement. If parents were not encouraging and participating with the children in cultural activities, adoptees were less likely to develop their Korean identities very far. There remains a question here, however, as to whether the parents' lack of action was in response to the child's lack of interest, or whether the child's lack of interest was a response to subtle, perhaps even unconscious, clues from their parents discouraging such an endeavor. Overall, children's interest in their ethnicity seems to vary over time, particularly during their adolescence. The author warns that the implications of this study are limited by the size of the sample and their self-selection to participate.

In conclusion, Huh and Reid (2000) discuss implications for practice. It was recommended to social workers that they support parents in becoming involved in activities that support the development of integrated ethnic identities in their children. Activities could include cultural programs, helping their children develop relationships with others of the same ethnicity, cultural experiences within the family home, and visiting the country of origin. Families should encourage but not push. They should look for learning opportunities at different times throughout a child's life, as their interests may vary in different phases of development. Social workers were also strongly urged to work with schools to develop appropriate sensitivity, cultural education and language instruction.

In 2000, Carstens and Julia studied ethnoracial awareness in intercountry adoption in the United States. The study makes the assumption that parents who make a pre-adoption visit to the country in which their child was born are more likely to secure a cultural consultant for their children. This assumption was confirmed, finding a significant relationship between the two variables. Ninety-one percent of the families reported socializing with people of their child's ethnic group or country of origin. All 51 families' sociocultural milieux were then placed along a scale ranging from low to medium to high. "Milieu" or "indicators" consisted of family members, co-workers, school, ethnic rations, church members, toys, books, ethnic restaurants and events, etc. Sixteen indicators of a multicultural milieu were identified.

The high category consisted of families who identified between sixteen and ten multicultural indicators of multicultural milieu. Twenty percent (n=7) of the sample fell into the high category. The sociocultural milieu of these families was planned in the hopes of addressing both their children's identity and their developmental needs. These families frequently discussed the significance of the visits to the adoptees' countries of origin. Systems of significance for these families were neighborhood and community, education, religion and employment systems.

Thirty-two percent (n=11) of the families ranked in the moderate level, between ten and five indicators. They frequented ethnic restaurants and recreation events. They identified co-workers and adoption networks as systems important for addressing their children's needs in terms of identity. In response to questions about planned parenting strategies, these families linked cultural artifacts to education systems such as culture schools. These families often yielded information about the significance of visiting their children's home-country.

Forty-six percent (n=16) of the families rated low on the integration scale, less than five indicators of multicultural milieu. They most frequently referred to cultural artifacts and media as important. These families typically did not identify cultural consultants in their milieus.

In conclusion, the authors recognize the limitations of their work and call for more research on the impact a cultural consultant would have on a TRA. They also suggest researching the attitudes of international adoptees towards the immigrant communities and other ethnoracial groups in the hopes of better understanding TRAs' psychosocial adjustment. They conclude by acknowledging that Latin American Indian adoptees face more difficulties being raised in white families because of the marginalized status of their communities (Indigenous peoples).

In 1998, Anne Westhues and Joyce Cohen brought the discussion of ethnoracial identity to a Canadian population. The study drew from British Columbia (n=50), Ontario (n=40) and Quebec (n=36) through social service ministries. Applicable families were identified through records, and the families were invited to participate. The mean age of the adoptees at the time of the interviews was 17.3 years. The researchers interviewed TRAs, their siblings and their parents. Methodology included both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The following tables summarize the results.

Ethnic Identification	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
Do not think of self ethnically	3	7.7	11	10.0
Canadian/Quebecois	20	51.3	44	40.0
Ethnically other than Canadian	9	23.1	41	37.6
Hyphenated Canadian	4	10.3	5	4.6
Don't know	2	5.1	4	3.7
Other	1	2.6	4	3.7
Total	39	100.0	109	100.0
Racial Identification				
Do not think of self racially	4	10.5	18	17.3
Black	6	15.8	8	7.7
Brown	11	28.9	28	26.9
Tan	2	5.2	3	2.9
White	4	10.5	10	9.6
Oriental/Asian	7	18.4	20	19.2
Bi/Multicultural	1	2.6	2	1.9
Other	3	7.9	14	13.5
Total	38	100.0	104	100.0

Westhues & Cohen, 1998, p. 40

Comfort with Ethnicity	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
Very comfortable	13	32.0	39	34.8
Comfortable	20	50.0	40	35.7
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	5	15.0	17	15.2
Uncomfortable	0	0	11	9.8
Very uncomfortable	1	2.5	3	2.7
Didn't know	0	0	2	1.8
Total	40	100.0	112	100.0
Comfort with Race				
Very comfortable	13	31.7	37	33.3
Comfortable	18	43.9	45	40.5
Neither comfortable nor comfortable	6	14.6	18	16.2
Uncomfortable	4	9.8	8	7.2
Very uncomfortable	0	0	3	2.7
Total	41	100.0	111	100.0

Westhues & Cohen, 1998, p. 42

The importance of ethnicity and race (%)				
	Ethnicity		Race	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Important or very important	44	46	46	42
Neither important or unimportant	20	27	20	25
Unimportant or very unimportant	32	14	34	33

Westhues & Cohen, 1998, pp. 39-40

Pride in ethnicity or race (%)		
	Male	Female
I am proud to be	45	45
I do not mind being what race and ethnicity I am	45	47
I would prefer to be different race or ethnicity	10	5

Westhues & Cohen, 1998, p. 41

No significant relationships were found between level of comfort and ethnic identification. However, a relationship was found between comfort level and racial identification, specifically in regards to how they presented themselves physically and to how comfortable they were with their racial background. The TRAs with a specific identification were more likely to be very comfortable with their race than those who did not develop a specific identification (1998, p. 41).

Parents were also interviewed. The following chart summarizes the parents' results.

What Parents have done to promote Ethnic/Racial Identity in their children				
Activities	Racial Identity		Ethnic Identity	
	No. (n=126)	%	No. (n=126)	%
Read books on ethnicity/race	78	62.4	98	78.4
Attend cultural events	45	36.0	62	49.6
Child joined cultural groups	18	14.4	24	19.2
Family joined cultural group	18	14.4	19	1.2
Child heritage program	4	3.2	6	4.8
Travel to country of origin	16	12.8	18	14.4
Other	24	19.5	5	4.1

Westhues & Cohen, 1998, Table 3, p. 43

Approximately half of the families had friends who were of the same ethnicity or race (fifty-one percent and fifty-six percent respectively), a quarter of whom saw these friends every week, and a quarter of whom saw them a few times a year. About thirty-one percent and forty-eight percent of the parents had neighbours of the same ethnicity and race respectively. No differences were found between the supports the families provided and level of comfort with ethnicity or race.

The study also examined racial discrimination. The vast majority of the adoptees had experienced discrimination. Many different incidents were named.

Discrimination	Male %	Female%
Experienced discrimination	85	82
Racial or ethnic slurs (from peers in middle school)	69	74
Racial or ethnic slurs (from adults)	9	7
Others (peer refusing to play with TRA, being bullied by peers, adults staring, stereotypical assumptions made about them, e.g., all blacks good at sports or all Asian good at school)	22	19

Westhues & Cohen, 1998, pp. 44-45

There was no relationship found between racism and the adoptees' comfort level with their race or development of their ethnic and racial identities. However, the researchers speculate that this is because of the pervasive nature of discrimination and racism in their lives. Gender was also found to have no significant relationship with comfort level, identification or perceived importance of ethnicity or race. However, fourteen percent more males were comfortable with their ethnicity and three point five percent more in comfort with their race.

In their discussion the researchers point out that Canadian policy demands that due regard be given to the child's ethnic and racial background, because Canada was a signatory to the UN Convention on International Adoption. They write that "it would appear that the intent that the child retain a linkage with his or her roots has not been maintained at all in about 20% of cases, and somewhat superficially in at least 60% more" (1998, p. 47). In discussing why this may be, they

point out that it is too easy just to place blame on the parents. But very few families felt that their child's ethnoracial identity was of any importance. These families have been discussed above as "colour blind" in that they reject difference. This is so deeply integrated into their belief systems that many families described situations in which they forgot their child was adopted or that their child appeared different to the outside eye. To complicate matters further, some children strenuously reject discussion about or education in their heritage. In wholly rejecting their heritage, the family may effectively promote a sense of belonging or attachment that aligns itself with the child's right to be protected and nurtured; however, this right may contradict the child's right to connect with her ethnoracial background! In an attempt to crack this problem, Westhues & Cohen cite Bisoondath's (1994)discussion of multiculturalism in which he presents the difficulty Canadians often run into questioning whether there is a cohesive culture in which they can take part and belong to, in terms of multiculturalism and immigration. He suggests that we remember our *cultural heritage* as our origins, but live in the current *culture* of Canada in the day-to-day life that we live together as Canadians, regardless of our origins. Taking this two-pronged approach could resolve the problem of the two conflicting rights. Another option, however, is the bicultural identity in which the child would have understanding and feel a belonging to two different cultures simultaneously. This would necessitate knowledge of both ethnoracial origins, which is not always possible in international adoption, but as the research above reveals, even if origin is known, it may not lead to identification. In terms of race, this can be a constant reminder of origin and of the dissimilarity between the child and his family. The researchers draw on Saetersdal and Dalen (1991)concluding: "The key to helping [children] develop the skills they need to function safely as visible minority person[s] is to learn to assess when they need to be 'stressing their differences,' and when they need to simply be acknowledging them" (1998, p. 50).

In summary, research over the decades has established the development of identity as a potential area of difficulty for transracial adoptees. This same research has identified the need for the creation of programs specifically for parents who have adopted or will adopt transracially. Even research that has not named transracial adoption as negatively impacting on identity has asserted the need for these kinds of programs to support parents. Nevertheless, there is still a disquieting absence of those resources. This is why I have set out to start the process of creating them. My goal in this research is to start the development of programming to help parents to support their transracially adopted children in their process of developing positive ethnoracial identities. Through this process, I am engaging with a variety of related discourses, specifically those on attachment, identity, development and difference. All of these are by now highly developed and complex in authorship. I draw from them selectively in order to support the main objective of this work; I am therefore not making myself responsible for a comprehensive treatment of those bodies of literature. I will deal with these issues in the discussion section.

Methodology

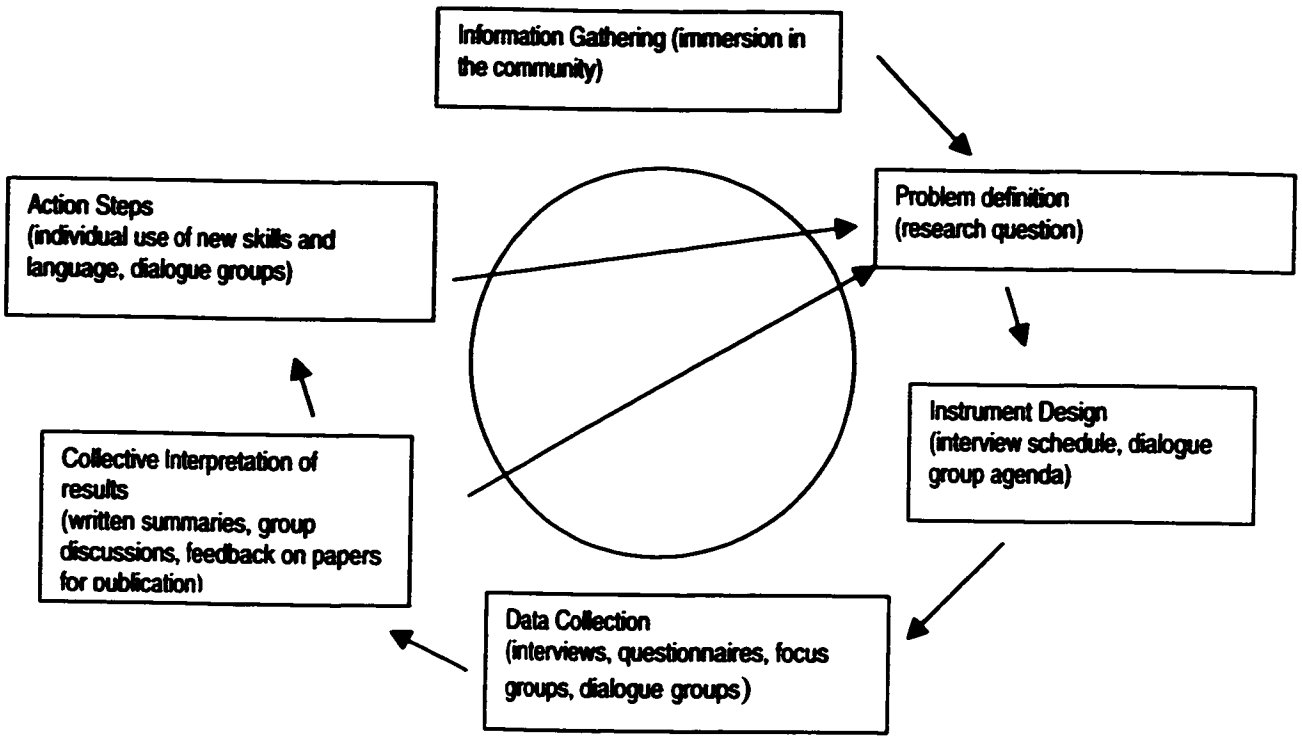
This is a proposal to create a program to support transracial adoptive families. The result of the research involved in this thesis will be to work with transracially adoptive families to develop the program. This will be done in three phases. The first phase is what I am calling capacity building, which I will discuss below in my section on theory. The second phase will be to analyze the findings from phase one. The final phase will be to use that information to create a program for transracially adopting parents to support the development of positive ethnoracial identities in their children. The manner in which this will be done has been influenced by a number of different theories. Below, I discuss operational terminology, ethics and positionality; I also give an overview of the major theories that are a part of the procedure and analysis, as well as detailing the procedure.

Operational Terminology

The focus of this research is the development of a program to support the development of *positive ethnoracial identities* in adopted persons. There has been some discussion in the literature about what this means and whether it, "positive ethnoracial identities", is an appropriate phrase (Richards, 1992; Tizard & Phoenix, 1994). My goal is not to reduce ethnic or racial identity to a dichotomy of white and non-white. Nor is it my intention to reduce identity to the dichotomy of good or bad. Identity is a complex mixing of numerous variables that is always in process involving learning and adapting to the environment. I am using "ethnoracial" to encapsulate both racial and ethnic variables as one alone would not be inclusive enough for my discussion. I use the term "race" uneasily since it is a floating signifier, as Stuart Hall has described, dependent on cultural and social cues. But race is a variable in society and in culture, consequently, I am using it as a socially constructed variable. I am using "ethnicity" to include the differences within one "race" (e.g., Somalian, Jamaican, etc.). I am using the term "positive" to represent a balance between positive and negative thoughts, so that everyday life is not being negatively impacted by a weight of negative feelings related to ethnicity and/or race. I do not use *positive* to negate or exclude any negative feelings, as I *am* arguing that there are numerous variables in society that encourage negative feelings about ethnicity and race that *any* non-white person is susceptible to. Indeed people of colour, regardless of the racial make-up of their family, face ongoing challenges of how to live in a racist environment on a daily basis and how to incorporate coping mechanisms into identity. It is a problematic term, like race, but in terms of this research I have not yet developed a more appropriate one.

Procedural Theory

This methodology has been influenced by a number of different theories: Participatory Action Research (PAR), needs assessment, capacity building, empowerment theory, adult education models/change agency and the constructionist movement in psychology. First of all, the initial model that I wanted to use was PAR. PAR is a "collaborative action-oriented" process of research developed out of concern about the relationship between power and knowledge, specifically, the use of knowledge as a tool by dominant groups for maintaining control (Chataway, 1997, p. 750). Through PAR, groups who have typically been the researched—historically oppressed, under-advantaged and over-studied—act on their environment as instruments of change. The researcher takes a catalytic and supportive role in the work. The population develops both the focus and method of inquiry itself with the researcher. PAR can effect change in its very process and in the training of Participatory Action Researchers within the community. PAR can also provide the catalyst necessary both to motivate and to gain the understanding necessary for community transformation (Chataway, 1997). The procedure utilized in this project is a modification of PAR. I have worked on a variety of participatory action projects and found that it develops the best information and practical applications, and thus wanted to use it for this work. In addition, it is a methodology that was developed for work with marginalized communities. Since the non-white population is still marginalized, as are many associated with non-white communities or individuals, it seemed appropriate to use this methodology. There is no pat way to proceed in PAR. The process is, however, cyclical. A good example of this process is offered by Chataway (1997, p. 753) from her work in Kahnawake.



As my ideas about what I wanted to do developed, I realized that what was needed was a practical program to support ITRA families, and TRA families in general. From here I needed to look at needs assessment. But implicit in the theories associated with needs assessment is the identification of needs that are somehow extraordinary and abnormal. In thinking about people, specifically TRA families and racial issues (for many, issues that are not discussed in much depth in the context of their personal families), I felt I needed something different from the standard model of needs assessment. I arrived at the idea of using a community needs assessment model called *problematization*, the model of capacity building, and the strengths perspective (Martin-Costa & Serrano-Garcia, 1995).

Problematization appealed to me because it refers to a process of consciousness-raising needs assessment, and a part of this project was anti-oppression consciousness-raising. The process brings intervention and research together simultaneously and interdependently. It assumes that every stage of the process should be permeated with explicit ideological inputs that

lead to consciousness-raising" (Martin-Costa & Serrano-Garcia, 1995, p. 264). There are four objectives suggested for this model:

1. the creation of collective efforts to solve community problems as defined by community residents;
2. the achievement of individual and group participation in the analysis of social reality;
3. the creation of grass-roots organization; and
4. the development of political skills among participants, resulting in their increased involvement in public affairs (p. 264).

The ITRA families would participate in identifying issues and creating possible ways of addressing them. This model can help develop an already assembled group of grassroots organizations, as most international adoption agencies are run by ITRA families, but it would also give them the opportunity to expand what the agencies are about since it raises consciousness about oppression and race-related issues. As these are political issues in and of themselves, this problematization process can help participants develop political skills, specifically the skill to identify potentially oppressive variables in their families' lives and some basic tools for dealing with them.

The model proceeds through four phases. In the first phase the researcher familiarizes herself with the community and literature on it. The second phase involves identifying a core group of participants, including both community members and *interveners*. During the third phase, task groups, activities, workshops, education, skill development, needs assessment, etc. are developed. Special focus is placed on cohesion-building and the general internal working of the group. The final stage invites the involvement of new goals and new groups. The cycle then repeats itself (Martin-Costa & Serrano-Garcia, 1995). This is a process similar to PAR and similar to Participatory Action Evaluation, both of which I am practised in to some degree. As such, I hope to find myself influenced by the process. Most notably, I want to pay special attention to the cohesion

of the small groups that participate, as these groups can lend great support not only to the development of the program but, overtime, to each other.

The capacity building model is an alternative to needs assessment. Kretzmann & McKnight (1993) explains why needs-focused inquiry is problematic by pointing out that the images that spring to mind from areas such as South Bronx, South Central L.A. and Public Housing are negative, i.e., crime, violence, unemployment, drugs, gangs, vacant buildings, etc. The images present a neighbourhood and its people that are needy, problematic, and deficient. These images may be based in some reality, but the problem arises when these images are presented as not a truth, but *the truth* about a community. Once accepted, these *needs maps* determine how to address problems, specifically deficiency-oriented policies and programming (p. 2).

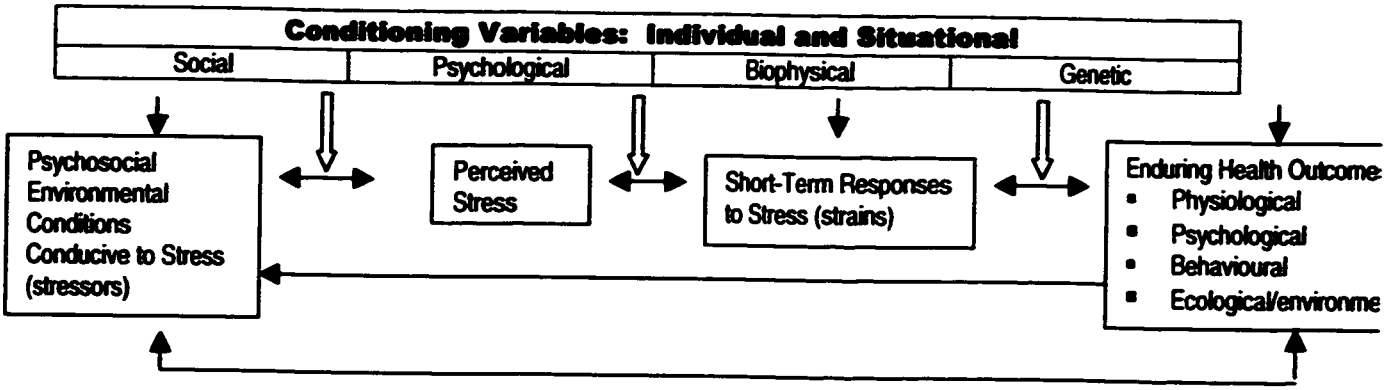
Public, private and non-profit human service systems, often supported by university research and foundation funding, translate the programs into local activities that teach people the nature and extent of their problems, and the value of services as the answer to their problems. As a result, the behaviours of residents in many lower income urban neighbourhoods are affected because they come to believe that their well-being *depends* upon being a *client*. They begin to see themselves as people with special needs that can only be met by outsiders. They become consumers of services, with no incentive to be *producers* (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, p.2).

Capacity building offers an alternative. It is supported by two social observations. First, it has been shown over time that the initiatives that are most advantageous to the community occur when the community is meaningfully involved. Secondly, the hope for new initiatives or financial assistance from outside urban communities is increasingly dismal. Consequently, it behooves one to look inside communities to recognize and build on the capacity already there. It starts with creating a new map, a map of assets in the community. Each community group, association, religious group, household, individual, business, public institution and organization, etc. adds to the

map. Kretzmann & McKnight (1993) argue that it is essential to include the assets of those who have been labeled marginalized and ignored by greater society. An inventory of *gifts* is made of these assets. At this point, the community has acknowledged the strong core of participation and community-rooted traditions, and also taken steps to build on the already existing roots and started new ones.

Although this model is grounded in lower income urban areas, there are many elements of this approach that I find I can use in my work. *First of all, it approaches families as having the capacity to support the developing of TRA ethnoracial identity. Secondly, it makes the point that capacity-building is not based on the assumption that outside communities are not needed.* In fact Kretzmann & McKnight assert that the assets within the community are necessary but not sufficient to meet all needs. I would modify that assumption to fit my work as follows: building resources within the TRA community is necessary, but other communities, namely the ethnoracial cultures and communities of the adoptees, will also be a part of the process.

Capacity-building leads to, and from, empowerment theory. Empowerment, generally speaking, is "the ability of people to gain understanding and control over personal, social, economic, and political forces in order to take action to improve their life situations" (Israel, et al., 1995, p. 152). "Individual or psychological empowerment refers to an individual's ability to make decisions and have control over his or her personal life. It is similar to other constructs such as self-efficacy and self-esteem in its emphasis on the development of a positive self-concept or personal competence" (Israel et al., 1995, p. 152)." In these definitions, empowerment is very much a part of the goals of the program. It is my goal that both TRA and *their families will begin to examine critically the role that racism and discrimination play in their world, how they manifest themselves, and how one develops specific coping mechanisms.* Israel et al. (1995) offers a useful diagram of the stress process, which they relate to empowerment.



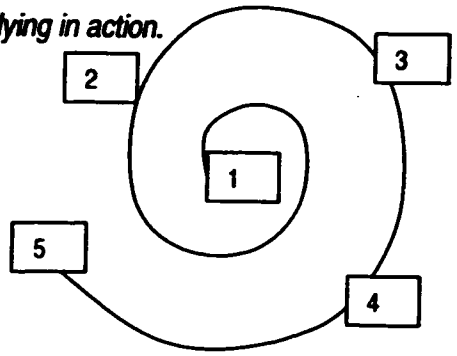
The thin arrows represent presumed direct relationships among the variables. The block arrows represent "hypothesized buffering effects of conditioning variables" ([shortened version of figure from] Israel et al., 1995, p. 156).

The idea is that those who are empowered have their consciousness raised, are better able to cope with the impacts of stress, (read: difference, racism and discrimination) and are aware of their capacity to respond. In looking at the diagram, I tacitly imagined racism and discrimination, as per democratic racism (cf. p.5), being a part of stress; specifically, that there are often stresses working in our lives that we are unable to name or are even unaware of; for TRAs and their families some of them may be race (e.g., the racial difference in the family), racism, or discrimination.

The methodology of this initiative was also influenced by education theory, specifically the approach outlined by Rick Arnold, Bev Burke, Carl James , D'arcy Martin and Barb Thomas (1998) in *Educating for a Change*. The book is a practical tool to working with people (adult education theory but not exclusively). It comes from the perspective of educators and activists who challenge the status quo (p. 1). It is a political tool, and power is central to its practice. Among other things, the book suggests what the authors call the *spiral model*. I find this a helpful tool because I am coming from the perspective of a change agent who works persistently as an activist and an educator against oppression. This work is dealing especially with racism and discrimination; thus this perspective is a part of this initiative.

Educating for a Change introduced the spiral model. Simply put, in the centre of the spiral is number one, starting with *the participants' experiences*. As we spiral out, we move to number

two, *looking for patterns* in those experiences. Next, we can *add some new information* to these patterns, number three. Fourth comes *practice skills, strategizing and planning for action.* The final part at the outer perimeter of the spiral is *applying in action.*



The final theory that has impacted my approach to this initiative is the constructionist movement in psychology. It has not necessarily had a practical influence, but more of a theoretical one. The constructionist focuses on how it is that people describe, explain and account for both the world in general and their lives in it. It finds themes in people's accounts of life through time. Gergen (1985) suggests that methodologically, constructionist theory manifests one or more assumptions. First, each individual's experiences of the world are not sufficient to prescribe the terms of existence. Doubt about the taken-for-granted nature of knowledge and the constraints that language has put nurtured a medium to challenge the "objective basis of conventional knowledge" (p. 267).

The second assumption recognizes the role that humans play in constructing our world, and the role that inquiry plays in that relationship.

> [t]he terms in which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people. From the constructionist position the process of understanding is not automatically driven by the forces of nature, but it is the result of an active, cooperative enterprise of persons in relationship. In this light, inquiry is invited onto the historical and cultural bases of various forms of world construction (p. 267).

Finally, the constructionist view casts doubt on notions such as truth, reality and interpretation as they pertain to the correlation between one steadfast variable like truth or reality and another changing variable like social circumstances. Most relevant to the topic at hand would be how self-identity is informed by the changing nature of the individual's dialogic environment.

The Analysis

The Procedure

The analysis procedure was primarily influenced by the PAR, constructionist, problematizing and grounded theory models. I analyzed the data using constant comparative and theoretical questioning models of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The data were reviewed using open, axial and selective coding of grounded theory, but because participants were made privy to the literature on related subjects it could not be called grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The process was informed by *memoing*, (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) which included reflections based in thick description[7] (Geertz, 1973) and conceptual density[8] (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The analysis process moved through one to three (depending on the participants availability and interest) feed-back loops or members checks from both those who participated in the research and additional service providers, adoptees and adoptive parents (Guba & Lincolin, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Martin-Costa & Serrano-Garcia, 1995; Chataway, 1997) .

Foundational Theory for Procedure

Following both the Spiral Model and the constructionist theory, (as well as suggestions from grounded theory, specifically Strauss & Corbin, 1994) I called upon a series of substantive

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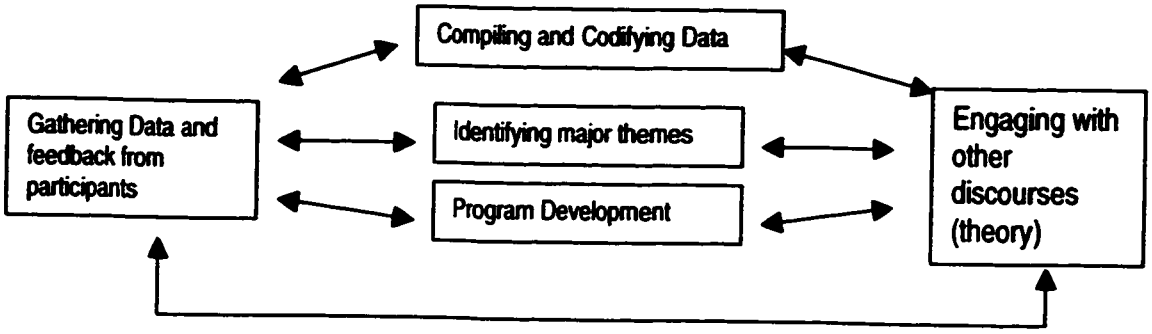
[7] Geertz explains that this is the cultural context that distinguishes a *wink* from a *blink, for example.* ". . . a stratified hierarchy of meaning structures in terms of which twitches, winks, fake-winks, parodies, rehearsals of parodies are produced, perceived, and interpreted . . . (Geertz, 1973, p.7).

[8] ". . .richness of concept development and relationship—which rest on great familiarity with associated data and are checked out systematically with these data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p.274).

theories, especially those of development, identity and adoption. Within developmental theory I will focus predominantly on attachment, adoption and creation of narratives of identity. These theories provided the foundation from which I was able to draw patterns from the results. The following diagram depicts the architectonic of my engagement with the results of this research.



The discourses presented in this section were used to inform the process detailed in the above diagram. They are not, however, the focus of my work and I am therefore not making myself responsible for a comprehensive treatment of them.

Attachment theory has been soundly based on the theories of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. As most foundational theory is associated to Bowlby's name, I will summarize his theory; Ainsworth's research, however, has been instrumental in creating this foundation. Bowlby (1969) introduced a process in humans whereby infants put out signals, such as crying or smiling at adults, to ensure that they will provide for them. Adults, being predisposed to these signals, respond. Critical in this process is *attachment formation*. Bowlby identifies four parts to this process in which infants focus their signals on specific familiar adults, resulting in attachment. First, the infant shows *indiscriminate social responsiveness* from birth to two months of age. The child develops a number of social signals, now called attachment behaviours. Attachment behaviours bring the child closer to adults in an attempt at ensuring comfort and security. The second stage is *discriminating sociability*, from two months through to seven months. The baby starts to show preference for specific caregivers. They start to show an understanding of

reciprocity in social interactions, *effectance* in their ability to impact on others' behaviours, and *trust* in their caregivers who respond to their signals. The third phase is *attachment* which Bowlby locates between seven and twenty-four months of age. Here the infants, instead of waiting for their caregivers to respond, start to take responsibility for staying in proximity to them, as they now understand reciprocity. Children now protest more when their caregivers, or attachment figures, leave or when in proximity of strangers. The fourth phase is *goal-corrective behaviour.* As the child becomes less egocentric, she becomes more aware of their parents and accommodates for them. As such, child and attachment figure are able to come to mutually agreed upon outcomes (Bowlby, 1969; Lam et al., 1992, pp. 467-472). Both Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth (cited in Lam et al, 1992) declare that attachments are formed to those whom the child associates with consistent, predictable, and appropriate responses to their attachment behaviour over time (p.469).

Many theorists such as Grotevant (1992; 1997) and Phinney & Rosenthal(1992) take a developmental approach to identity. Indeed Grotevant (1992; 1997) insists that such an approach is imperative for examining development because it is a process. Identity must be understood as a process with no finished end point and with consideration of historical and contextual situation of the individual (Erikson, 1968; Hall, 1990; Grotevant, 1997). Adoptive identity or ethnoracial identity are no exceptions and should be examined as processes as well (Hall, 1990; Grotevant, 1997).

Most developmental theories of ethnoracial identity describe a three-stage process . The first is a period where ethnic identity is unexamined. It has been observed by many different theorists, often in terms of being a phase of pre-consciousness, pre-exploration, or pre-engagement with identity. Phinney & Rosenthal (1992) explains that attitudes are still dependent on external factors such as friends, family and community. In early adolescence, youth may have a positive image of their ethnic group or they may show out-group preference due to negative ethnic imagery and stereotyping. Thus attitudes may still be in foreclosure for these reasons or

they may be diffused, the topic having never been given any thought. The second phase tips the individual into active engagement with identity; this usually stems from a specific incident that brings them face to face with the issue of identity (e.g., a racially charged conflict, etc.). The final phase finds the individual committing to a way of life, a way of being, finding resolution of the identity crisis and achieving a more solid sense of himself.

Grotevant (1992; 1997) looks at these three stages in the process of developing identity in adopted persons. Grotevant (1997) explains that even through in-race adoptees do not struggle with the same dynamics of negotiating racial hierarchies and their "place" in relation to an oppressive dominant culture, they still struggle with a similar developmental process. He explains that adoptees have the added experience of having to deal with what being adopted means. It is the elements of their identity that are *givens* or assigned, such as being adopted or being ethnoracially different from their families, that are of particular focus for them to deal with.

The first phase is pre-integration. First-person accounts often illustrate a pre-crisis stage during which adoption issues are encapsulated and not integrated into a larger whole. "Different metaphors have been used to describe this state, but they each describe denial" (Grotevant, 1997, p. 17). Lifton (1994) also described a phase of denial: ". . . It became important for my sense of coherence as a self to imagine myself as not adopted" (p.81, cited in Grotevant, 1997 p. 17). However, adoptees are sometimes unwilling or even unable to deal with their adoptive status. This lack of will or ability is sometimes expressed through internalized or externalized behavioural problems (Grotevant, 1997 p.17).

In the following phase, adoptees may experience what he calls "disequilibrating experiences" that bring identity to the forefront (1997, p. 18). These experiences may tip the adoptee into a crisis of identity. The process of questioning can be turned inward, resulting in self-doubt or obsession (Grotevant, 1997). On the other hand, it can simply encourage the adoptee to

engage actively with her identity. This is not a single-cycle process, however. Adoptees may experience a number of cycles, and each cycle may facilitate deeper and more meaningful integration of the adoptee's identity (Grotevant, 1997).

"Ultimately, the identity quest can lead to an integrated sense of identity constructed into a *narrative* that includes one's adoption circumstances as well as all the other aspects of identity important to adult functioning" (Grotevant, 1997, p.18, my emphasis). Adoptees may express interest in their biological heritage and may search for their biological family. This can help the adoptee integrate his adopted status into the narrative of who he is, thus finding a resolution of his identity. This achievement is not, however, the end of the process. Identity keeps evolving and developing over the life-span. Grotevant also points out that resolution is not inevitable, and some do not reach this point.

As described above, Huh & Reid (2000) have proposed a developmental outline for ethnoracial identity development in international adoptees from Korea. Their theory is detailed in the chart below.

Stages of the Development of Identity	
Recognizing and rejecting differences (4-6)	This age includes big changes like starting kindergarten. This means a new group of people. This was the point where adoptees recognized they were different. Many were still unable to recognize ethnicity and were confused about their race. These children knew they were from Korea, but didn't grasp its significance. Another researcher reported that some Korean children identified with *black* when they realized that they were not white. Parents played an important role as they exposed their children to Korean culture. At kindergarten age, children were exposed to other cultures as well. Kindergarten is the beginning of kids wanting to belong; thus it might translate into a child's reluctance to engage with Korean culture.
The beginning of ethnic identification (7-8)	Around the age of 7, children grasp ethnicity and its physical results. They begin to understand Korea as a separate country, that they are Korean and that that is why they appear different from their parents. Questions and/or teasing from other children about being different initiates discussion. Most adoptees reported teasing. Coping mechanisms varied. These experiences played a role in adoptees' attitudes toward being adopted. Parents are especially important in this phase. Their perceptions of how important Korean culture is to their child plays a role in the adoptees' ethnic identity. Parents who exposed their children to and educated their children about Korean culture

	instilled pride in their children about their ethnicity. Adoptees whose parents did not feel it was important to support did not see their ethnicity as especially important to their sense of self.
Acceptance of difference vs ethnic dissonance (9-11)	Adoptees' attitudes towards their Korean identity develop further. Some accept their ethnicity and feel positive about it. They feel positive about the way they look and feel proud of their ethnicity. These adoptees identified themselves as Korean American and immersed themselves in Korean culture (language, cultural camps and Tae Kwon Do).
Integrating Korean heritage and American culture (12-14)	Adoptees who had exposure to Korean culture identified as both Korean and American and discussed their integration into both cultures. Adoptees were able to discuss pride in their Korean background or their need for additional exposure to their culture. Their desire to learn about their culture is no longer in response to the encouragement from their parents, but comes from their own interest. Friends and school play a larger role in fostering pride and interest in adoptees' ethnicity in comparison to parents'. Around Grade Six, adoptees started learning about different countnes and cultures in school. The opportunity to study a particular country led adoptees to study Korea in depth. The opportunity both to learn about and teach their peers about their country of origin was a source of pride for many adoptees. Adoptees also became aware of stereotypes and how these have been applied to them. "Their identification as a Korean and their pride in their own ethnicity were becoming based on more concrete knowledge about Korea rather than just about their differences or uniqueness" (p. 84). They looked in more in-depth ways at Korean culture through studying its history, looking into how Korean children of their age group lived, Korean make-up and hairstyles and looking for Korean role-models. Some children who had not previously been very interested in Korean, started to show some interest as inspired by their school curriculum. Their interest was sporadic without a stimulus to learn about Korea, but the author suggests that these sorts of interests are opportunities for development of ethnic identity.

pp. 80-85

The final developmental theory I want to introduce is what I will call narrative theory. A number of identity theorists write about the process of identity as developing a narrative. *The Family Story Collaborative Team* identified four aspects of narrative coherence: *internal consistency, organization* (management of narrative, how points are made), *congruence between affect and content* (fit between actions or thoughts described and emotion expressed), *flexibility* (ability to explore new ideas and alternatives, view issues (Grotevant, 1997).

Participants

The project will focus on intercountry transracially adopted individuals (ITRA) who identify themselves or who are identified by another as non-white and who are at least in early

adolescence (16 and up), and on the parents of ITRAs. This included the parents of ITRAs who identify/are identified as of African-Canadian, Hispanic, Indigenous and Asian (including all regions) descent. Parents were recruited from *St. Anne's* Adoption Centre international adoption agency, *Guatemalan Gems* support community, Adoption Council of Ontario and word of mouth. There were eight adoptees and twelve parents who participated. Adoptees and parents represented ten different families. The adoptees ranged in age from late teens to thirties.[9] In the analysis process, staff from Open Arms to International Adoption agency and Children's Bridge participated and five additional adoptive parents.

Procedure

This was qualitative research influenced by the practical theories that I described above, specifically Capacity Building, Problematizing, PAR and the Spiral Model (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993; Martin-Costa & Serrano-Garcia 1995; Chataway, 1997; Arnold et al 1998). The procedure reflecting these models took place in three phases.

Phone One	Interviews with Internationally adopted adoptees placed transracially and Internationally adoptive parents who adopted children transracially.
	Focus groups with internationally adoptive parents who adopted transracially
	Focus group Internationally adopted adoptees placed transracially
	Passive observation of Adoption agency and adoption service providers.
Phase Two	Compile preliminary results and send them to participants. Gather feedback.
Phase Three	Present final version of results section to participants and other transracilly placed adoptees, parents and service workers. Gather feedback.

Phase one. The first phase took place in four parts over the summer of 2001. The first part involved interviewing four adoptees and five parents who were unable to schedule group discussions. Interviews were both face to face and by phone. Two interviews were held, with both parents in attendance. The second and third parts involved focus groups. One focus group was

[9] A number of adoptees requested that their ages not be given; thus I have omitted all exact ages.

held with parents (n=7), and one was held with adoptees (n=3). The model I used for the focus groups was Kitchen Table Talks (KTT). The KTT is essentially an informal focus group. The basic model would involve families chosen from the community in which, hopefully, information would be gathered. The families would be well respected in their community, for example, a family where many of the local youth spend time or a family who participated in many community activities. The family is asked to host a dinner/KTT at their home. The family invites their friends to come to their home-cooked meal or pot-luck, and after dinner members of the family lead a focus group with the guests. The family members are trained by researchers and follow a research design prescribed by the researchers, but they do all the practical work themselves (Morrison, 2001).

The KTT model that I used was a variation of the preceding model. Parent support groups were consulted and asked to identify one or two families who could host the KTT. These families were approached about hosting a KTT and one was chosen. Instead of only the family members facilitating the focus group, however, I facilitated. This was done for two reasons. First of all, I am working on the assumption that a focus group such as this will gather more useful information if it is led by someone familiar with the issues that it faces. Next, I made three assumptions: first, that it is very difficult for parents to talk about things that they could have done but didn't do, or things that they feel that they should have done for their children in raising them; secondly, issues around race, in particular, are difficult issues to talk about with people, and as the research above reveals, many TRA families are not in the practice of having in-depth discussions about how race and related issues impact their personal lives; finally, I assumed, based on both the literature above and personal experience with adoptees, that there would be some families who do not like to focus attention on the ways that their adoptive child is different from themselves, as they feel that the child is a part of their family regardless of biology. It is because of these three assumptions that I felt an insider is an important part of what a facilitator can bring because I am more likely to

understand the sensitivities, the experiences, and the nuances of their family situation. But a facilitator also needs to be able to ask the questions that gently move the discussion beyond the level that these families may go if an insider to their community were facilitating. The KTT outline was as follows:

KTT with Parents
Participants arrive, "meet and greet."
Informal conversation getting to know each other
• Consent statement and forms. Asking the group if they agree to the discussion being recorded with an audio-recorder. • Introductions (go around the room): name, tell us your family's adoption story, tell us about your family in general, what would you like to get out of this meeting, do you have any apprehensions about this meeting? • A brief overview of the literature on transracial adoption and identity. • Question: What kinds of things did your family do well to support your child's identity? • Question: What kinds of things did your family struggle with? • What kinds of supports were available in the community? • What kinds of supports do you wish you had had, or wish that you had now? • Debriefing (go around the room): anything that you would like to add or share, and what did you get out of this discussion. Closing comments.

In the case of interviews, the same questions were asked.

I started the formal part of the KTT with a summary of literature to familiarize the participants with what other families had said. This may help families to talk about issues by stimulating thought and by illustrating that many families struggle with the same issues. The questions were composed with the building-capacity model in mind; they inquire into the participants' assets (and experiences are assets) to create a positive and, hopefully, safe environment (see table above). I then began to move into discussing issues families have struggled with and areas where they would have or would like support. In this way, families who wanted to do more to support their children's ethnoracial identity could gather practical suggestions from the group without having to ask or feel "on display." In addition, this approach, I believe, helped relax the group to discuss race, their personal experiences, their fears, etc. more openly.

The same format was used with interviews. I took extensive notes during conversations, and all the group members and interviewees agreed to having the discussion recorded (with an audio-recorder). The group ran for approximately three hours, with members coming and going at the beginning and end. The interviews ran from one to three hours. Participants often asked me about my experiences and my opinions on various issues. I answered some and posed some to the group for discussion, adding my thoughts afterwards.

The third part of the first phase was a focus group with adoptees. This KTT was held in a coffee shop. The outline of focus groups/KTT was as follows:

KTT with Adoptees
Participants arrive, "meet and greet."
Informal discussion and getting to know each other
• Consent statement and form. Asking the group/individual agreed to the discussion being recorded with an audio-recorder. • Introductions (go around the room): name, what your interests/passions are, tell us your adoption story and how you identify ethnoracially. • Overview of adoption and identity literature. • What kinds of things did your family do that helped you develop a positive identity? • What kinds of things did you and your family struggle with? • What kinds of supports did you find in the community to help you develop a positive identity? • What kinds of things would you have liked to have had or like to have to support you developing a positive identity? • Debriefing (go around the room): of the things that we have discussed, what things stand out for you as really important for nurturing a positive ethnoracial identity in TRA? Closing comments.

In the case of interviews, the same questions were asked.

After a few minutes it became clear to me that for this group to work I had to act as a participant facilitator instead of an interviewer or external facilitator. The mood of the conversation was almost immediately cohesive and based on common experiences and understanding. In such a situation, for me to withhold my experiences, in my opinion, would have harmed the group's cohesion.

The third part was observation of St. Anne's Adoption Agency and the Adoption Council of Ontario office. This part enabled me to provide a context for the experience of families adopting internationally and to gather additional perspectives. My goal was to inform my interpretation of the data with thick description (Geertz, 1973) (cf. p. 43). I talked with various staff members both briefly and in depth about their work and their thoughts on adoption in general and the focus of this research.

Phase Two. The second phase started with contacting those participants from Phase One who wanted to be a part of the group developing the actual program. I provided the participants with a summary of the data collected and later, a complete copy of this document. Using the plethora of analyses adoptees and parents provided during data collection, their thoughts on the results of the data, the literature described above and additional data on parenting, I created the first draft of the program and of this thesis. I sent subsequent pieces of this thesis (i.e., the results section) to the participants for their input and in order to make adjustments necessary. This process will continue past this thesis both in further detailing the program and in its implementation. During this phase I also increased a number of participants by providing copies of the results section to adoptees, parents and service providers who were interested in sharing their opinions and in being a part of the analysis and program development process.

Ethics

I informed each agency about the project. I answered question that they had about the initiative, and my motivation for doing it, i.e. my MSW thesis and my adoption status. A verbal consent script was read before each focus group. The form included information about the project, myself, and their right to discontinue their participation at any point. It also gave them the choice to have their name included among the acknowledgements or in the body of the paper. Those who did not want their names included in the report were given the option to choose a pseudonym or

indicate that no name is to be used in reference to them in the final report. There was an opportunity for participants to ask questions and clarify details, after which each participant signed a consent form. I asked the members of each group if they minded the use of a tape recorder. Only one participant in an interview objected and the discussion was not recorded. In the event of emotions being triggered during or after the research, I made myself available for counseling after each KTT or interview and was prepared to provide information about counselling in the area for any longer care. When the results had been compiled, I sent them to each participant. I asked them for their feedback and to notify me if there was any detail disclosed that they were uncomfortable with.

Positionality

I am a transracially adopted child. I was but a few days old when I was placed in the care of my adoptive family. I am a light-skinned Jamaican-Canadian, and I self-identify as a Black woman. I have a very positive ethnoracial identity that has been predominantly nurtured by my own interest. I grew up in a very positive and supportive family, but my ethnoracial identity was not a predominant topic of discussion. Over the past years it has become a topic of discussion, initiated by my interest in exploring it and its meaning to me. My family has supported me through every step of my exploration. In preparation for this work, I have spent and will continue to spend a great deal of time engaging with my own feelings about my ethnoracial identity, as well as transracial adoption and identity in general. At this point I do not have a stance on transracial adoption, but I am of the belief that potential adoptive families need to work conscientiously at developing their awareness of racial and ethnic-related issues, such as oppression in its related forms (racism, discriminations, etc.).

As a facilitator, I have to remain as neutral and true to the theory that I have discussed above as possible and work on not making *my* experience of TRA (both positive and negative) the

norm by which other families are compared. To ensure that this is a real possibility for me to do, I have been actively working on recognizing what my experience of TRA was/is, how I feel about it and how it compares to some other experiences, such as those recorded in the literature above and the results that follow. An important way to guard as much as possible against researcher bias is the PAR model that brings the data back to the community for feedback.

Results[10]

Struggles

What both adoptees and parents said about their struggles can be fruitfully gathered under the following headings:

1. Racism and dealing with race
2. Native Culture, Birth Parents and Country of Origin
3. Sorrow, Anger and Attachment
4. Being Different and Seeing Difference
5. Relationships and Social Interactions
6. Parents' Emotions
7. The False Self

But as one parent put it: ". . . it's all linked together. You can't possibly separate it. Sometimes she goes into the race thing, sometimes she'll go into the Dad thing, sometimes she'll go into the abandonment thing, sometimes guilt."

1. Racism and dealing with race

Experiences of racism were highlighted by almost every adoptee and every parent interviewed. Adoptees described experiences of racism from interaction with family, friends (peers and family friends) and the public in general. It was the reality of having to deal with racism and its legacy's impact on everyday life that adoptees spoke about the most. "Dealing with racism" was

[10] Some descriptions of participants have been slightly altered to protect confidentiality.

listed by most adoptees and parents (and siblings through second-hand report) as a bewildering reality that no one was prepared to face.

Adoptees and parents struggled with coming into an understanding of what racism looks like; racism is not always obvious or easy to identify. It has many residual effects in everyday life for people of colour.

> I know, that following around the store thing. And that's something my family doesn't understand. They don't see it. . .My sister noticed once. When I go up to (name of rural city) people stare. . .and just probably five years ago, my sister and I were in (name of city) walking downtown and she's like 'why is everybody staring at you?' I'm like ' (sister's name) that's like, welcome to my life. That happens all the time.' She was like, starting to glare back at them and said 'I'd never noticed that before.' I know you didn't. Nobody did, you know? I had to take that on when I was eight years old.

Many adoptees described situations in which they would find themselves in the midst of an incident that was evoking intense emotions, but they didn't know why. They explained that they felt it had to do with race or being different but that they didn't quite understand how. Adoptees felt very strongly that adoptive parents should have taken anti-racism training courses before adopting to expose them to the complexity of what racism can look like and how it can be experienced by the adoptee as well by siblings and their parents through association. Adoptees expressed *intense* anger that their parents had not been prepared to *recognize* and *deal with* racism, not to mention help their children in dealing with it.

Because racism was not a topic that was discussed in family communications, adoptees did not know how to bring questions to their parents. For example, one adoptee remembered the first time he was called n*%%#$. It should be pointed out that this adoptee is not of African descent. This adoptee was able to return home and discuss it with siblings and gain some

understanding of the situation and to prepare himself for future experiences. This adoptee did not tell his parents however. Many other adoptees described this pattern. One adoptee explained that she knew her parents did not experience the same things and as such didn't think of mentioning it to them. But those who did not have siblings felt that they did not have any resources available to them to confirm that it was an issue of race and that it was an example of racism, etc., let alone how to deal with it. No adoptee reported discussing immediate incidents of racism with anyone but other adopted siblings.

Parents' discussion of racism was marked by an intense disillusionment with society's level of acceptance, tolerance, etc.. In one parent's words: "I was really quite surprised at how prejudiced people are. I mean, I thought I had some idea but I really didn't. . . I was really quite surprised at how endemic it is and how subtle it is." Another family told the following story:

> Her teacher had a treasure box and if they got all their work done or whatever it was, they got to choose something out of the box. So she went and looked through it and automatically picked out the Guatemalan change purse—the woven Guatemalan change purse and one of the kids in the class . . . said to her "Oh there goes (Name) and her dumb Indian ways.

Another family who had adopted a number of children internationally gave an example. The parents observed that their child who was of African descent was either socially rejected or shown exoticized interest. This was most frequently expressed through an assumed intimacy as a result of objectifying the child. The parents explained that strangers would often take licence to touch the child's hair without asking for permission. On the other hand, the child they adopted from South East Asia drew a very different response. On the whole, no one wanted to touch this child and any interest in the child was expressed as treating her like a ("China") doll. These observations exemplify a common theme for people of colour which is the racialized assumption of intimacy. In

discussion of the experiences of another adult adoptee of African descent, who described frequent situations where her hair would be touched or pulled, the group summarized the related feeling:

> A1: They wouldn't do that if you were blond though. I mean who goes and pulls some blond's hair when she's walking down the street? . . .
>
> A2: : . . .Yeah they can because I'm just black. I'm just here to be touched. And let's not even get into the whole sexualizations of the black woman. . .

Another adoptee of African descent recalled that although his parents' friends were supportive of their choice to adopt, many also made it clear that the adoptee was not to become romantically involved with their children. Some parents faced opposition within their families resulting in family members cutting off contact. These experiences ranged from simply ending face-to-face visits (e.g., refusal to meet or visit with the new baby, etc.) to outright comments such as "Is a c@%^& the best you can do for my grandchild?" and "As if a c#*&@ isn't bad enough, you went and got a n@#$%&?!"

Race and racism took up a large portion of the discussions, adoptees struggling with their identity as people who are non-white in particular. Adoptees described wrestling with what those in the field of race and racism have termed *internalized racism*. They described feeling uncomfortable, insecure and even severely self-loathing because of their ethnic features. For example, adoptees of colour described staying out of the sun to stay light and, in some cases, to "pass" (for white) and conceal their ethnicity. One adoptee explained "I still stay away from sun . . . I get so dark so quickly and then—my hands as dark as they are . . . white skin is more attractive."

Related to this task was how those in the adoptees' immediate circle of friends and family perceived them. Most adoptees described situations where family and friends "saw them as white" or, because they were *colour blind*, claimed not to see the adoptees' race at all. It must be pointed

out that a generation of parents (baby-boomers) were brought up being taught that colour blindness was the approach of choice for the white population in relation to those who are non-white. Whereas a few adoptees understood this perspective, most adamantly articulated how this approach sent a message to them that it was undesirable for them to embrace their ethnicity since a part of their person was not being seen. An example of this dynamic might go like this: a youth might make a comment about his ethnic characteristics, and parents might respond by saying "oh, but you aren't really Latino" or "oh but you don't look Native.[11]" Similar comments were uttered by peers and family friends. For example, a very common occurrence was as follows: a child's parents introduce the child to their family and friends for the first time. Friend or family members respond by saying: "oh, she doesn't look Asian" (read as a compliment).

Some adoptees described these comments as sending a clear message to them that were they to assert their ethnic identity, they would not be accepted and/or loved. In the words of one adoptee: "There's definitely that feeling that your complete assimilation is necessary to be loved." Adoptees expressed feeling torn. They felt that they had to "kill the memory" of their birth-families to claim their place in their own families. They felt that they had to do this precisely by denying their ethnicity, race and culture in order to prove their allegiance to their own environments and to be worthy of love. I shall return to this strong experience in the third section.

2. Native Culture, Birth Parents and Country of Origin

Both adoptees and parents discussed adoptees' native culture. Adoptees talked about very strong feelings of connection with their native cultures. This, in many cases, took the form of a memory of the culture if they were adopted in childhood, or if not, a sensory or biological residue left within them. This connection, however, did not last as a consistent interest in their culture

[11] I have deliberately used the term *Native* (instead of Indigenous), because parents I spoke with used this term.

throughout their lives. Most remembered periods when they were uninterested in their culture or at times, in keeping with the previous theme, actively rejected their culture.

A1: I didn't want anything to do with black people when I was growing up. . .

Even doing this, talking about black films and black actors. I didn't do that for a long time. I felt good about not having seen *Car Wash* or like a Richard Pryor film. It felt really good

A2: Confirming the whiteness?

A1: Yeah.

Interest was mediated by both phase of development and popular culture, not to mention individual particularity. But phase and pop culture were not the only determining factors. For example, when *Roots* first aired, the African-American experience was brought into popular culture. But adoptees described feelings of extreme discomfort watching it with their families. They felt on display or exposed. The family dynamic and their feelings about their role within their families and as people who are different (i.e., as people of colour, as adoptees, etc.) also mediated their reactions and interest.

Adoptees also described a connection with other non-white groups and their cultures. For example, adoptees of African descent felt connections with the experiences of Indigenous or Latin peoples. These connections were manifested in participation and/or interest shown in other non-white cultures. Often these other cultures were more accessible to adoptees than their native cultures, and provided comfort and connectedness. The adoptees' feelings of connection both with their ancestors and with the experiences of other non-white peoples also expressed itself in strong feelings of anger and sorrow. Many adoptees who were not of African descent referred to their intense feelings of anger and sorrow when they learned about slavery in school, for example. Adoptees also talked about the mistreatment of Indigenous peoples in Canada evoking the same feelings. Family and friends often found this to be hard to understand, which generally not only

contributed to insecurity about embracing their native culture and/or ethnicity but also sent the message that the adoptee should strive to conform to a perceived norm in European Western cultural opinions.

Many parents expressed concerns about their child's ability to participate in his native culture, and adoptees reported these kinds of difficulties. In most cases, the concerned parents made concentrated efforts to immerse adoptees in their native culture, such as language classes, heritage schools, dance or music classes. But adoptees experienced difficulties. One adoptee said she had a whole series of jokes about how little she fits into her cultural group. Adoptees had been raised in mainstream Canadian culture absorbing Western dogma and doctrine. These beliefs and ways of life can be antithetical to the native culture of the adoptees, thus creating a rift. This also works the other way around in that the native culture of the adoptee can run contrary to that of the adoptive family. Life circumstances such as sex before marriage, living together before marriage and single parenting can find adoptees' native culture prescribing one attitude and behaviour whereas the adoptive family may have another norm. This can leave adoptees torn between allegiances, even if the adoptee has never been raised in her native culture.

Adoptees and parents both expressed their difficulties in finding common respect for and understanding of native culture. Adoptees described situations in which their parents negated and/or belittled their native culture. In all examples mentioned, parents' actions were motivated by sparing the child ridicule, but their actions were grounded in the judgement that the cultural practice was "not normal" as compared to the popular culture's baseline (read: European Western culture). Adoptees felt parents' actions sent a message to them that their native cultures were backward or bad. This judgement is also related to how ethnic identity is expressed. Growing dreadlocks, for example, may reflect a celebration of heritage, heroes and spiritual beliefs for an adoptee but be read as a rejection of the family's norms, rebellion in general and drug use.

Both adoptees and parents discussed how adoptees. country of origin and birth-families, specifically birth-mothers, are a part of everyday life. Adoptees expressed feelings of connection with their country of origin and their birth-families, for example. For example, they spoke about the role that grieving for their birth-families had played in their lives. Adoptees explained that there had been a lack of opportunity to grieve for their birth-families. Some felt that their adoptive families would have been open to their grieving, but adoptees explained that their parents didn't know how to help them grieve.

A1: I don't think that I've been (inaudible) allowed to grieve. . .even though they were always open there was never any, I don't know. . .

A2: Like you don't really feel like why should you a child of five or six start a dialogue. Adoptees said they didn't know what questions to ask or how to start the conversation. Others felt that their adoptive families were very closed to the different ways that children grieve. Their questions about their birth-families, for example, made their parents uncomfortable or in some cases were left unanswered or they were silenced, sending a strong message to the adoptee that this was unsafe discussion territory. This connection to birth-families, however, did not always result in a desire to reinstate contact. Some adoptees had searched out their birth-families. These relationships had been very positive, and enduring relationships had been formed; this should not, however, be read as a regular occurrence.

Adoptees and parents both discussed returning to the country of origin. It is listed under *struggles* (with more detail provided in *supports* chart, see Appendix A) because country of origin would be featured in adoptees' fantasies surrounding loss: for example, adoptees' threats of running away, i.e. running away to their native country. Some parents were concerned because adoptees were anxious that they might be returned to the country of origin and separated from their parents. In addition, when offered the opportunity to return to their country of origin, not all

adoptees showed interest. Some feel they have to be ready to make that trip, some are eager, some show little to no interest. But some would show interest in returning but then reject the idea in a manner that led parents to feel that they might be turning it down to comfort the adoptive parents or because of their uncertainty about the duration of time with birth-parents. For example, one child first said, "I really want to go to Guatemala." The parents said that they thought it was a great idea and that they would go one day. The child responded by saying: "You know I'm joking." The parent repeated that it was a great idea and that they would indeed go one day. The child responded, "I never want to go. I want to stay here with you forever. I'm Canadian now."

Parents spoke about their efforts to maintain some kind of link, where possible, with the birth-mother and country of origin, but this was never an easy task. Some parents felt apologetic that their children would not be able to access their ancestry whereas others were relieved. One parent, who is involved with International-adoptive families in many capacities, relayed the following: "People have told me (inaudible) 'that's why I went to China because there's no chance of the birth-mother coming back.' Wait till your child is older and wants to search. 'Well, she won't be able to find her because she was abandoned' . . ." I will return to this in the discussion on parent's emotions.

Country of origin was also discussed by adoptees. Many talked about how their parents came to their country to adopt them. Many had a very informed knowledge about what was going on in their countries and how, for example, political issues related to the practice of putting their children up for international adoption. Some felt that adopting children out to other countries was only a *band-aid* solution for their countries' troubles and that the larger issues should be addressed instead of taking on these temporary initiatives. This expression of opinion was accompanied by intense anger around what motivation countries to adopt their children out and why families adopt.

3. Sorrow, Anger and Attachment

Adoptees and parents both described what I am calling *adoptee sorrow*. Adoptees expressed a lingering feeling of sorrow that had been with them all through their lives in some form. Some felt that it was as if they were grieving either a known figure, presumed to be both their mothers (biological or foster mothers), or some unknown subject.

> A1: It's a whole grieving process I think. Like my mother said when I was five (group comments) like she said I cried the whole way home. I'd just sobbed . . . the child has to kill those people. Like kill them off you know? It's like they don't exist anymore so that whole trauma . . .
>
> A2: The primary family?
>
> A1: Yeah but also the birth mother too. Like in a way you're kind of killing off the birth mother to go to the foster home, and then you have to kill them to go to the adoptive home too.

Adoptees explained that their deep sorrow and hurt was either ignored or unrecognized by their families. For example, their adoptive family would both ignore and fail to recognize it, focusing only on their excitement about having a new child in the family.

> I have this memory while I was growing up. Throughout my childhood of everyone's always just *oohing* and *ahhhhing* over everything I did . . . I couldn't figure out why these people were so excited over me because here I was, I mean, most of the time I think in my heart of hearts feeling so depressed and miserable trying to grieve for what had happened but no one wanted to accept this was a hard thing for me because it was just this big celebration. "And she's assimilated so well" (agreement from group). Exactly, exactly, and even now when I speak in my family, my family will not accept the fact that I'm adopted . .

> . So I feel like I'm wearing—like I have this big horn coming out of my head but no one notices or comments on it.

Adoptees explained that this pattern of ignoring sorrow and pain in adoptees carried on throughout their lives. For example, friends and peers would not see how tender the issue of adoption was, or the absence of information about their heritage. Adoptees also felt that their families and friends did not realize the pain that was associated with being adopted. Adoptees felt that parents ignored their anger and depression. Friends were reported as being mainly unaware of adoptees' sensitivities, but some adoptees found their peers to be *in*sensitive at times as well.

Some adoptees spoke about these feelings of sorrow in conjunction with the choice of their friends and families to see them as "white." These situations contributed to their feeling of being divided. Some explained feeling that they had to create and present an identity that was acceptable to their friends and families. Later in their adulthood, these adoptees found that they had to reevaluate their identities and found that they had been living an identity that was, in their words, based in "denial" of "who they really are," which left them very angry.

> A1: The, kind of, whole issue of race is fascinating to me . . . while I was growing up I never made connections. I mean that I look different from my family. (agreement from group). I was in a tremendous amount of denial . . . now it makes me so incredibly angry that I was so disconnected from my cultural roots (agreement from group). I mean, how could I grow up thinking I was white!
>
> A2: I did too though. I mean there was no denying I was a different colour than my family. Like that was pretty obvious (laughter from group). But I mean, all my friends were white. . . I mean I lived in (name of rural city) for God's sake. There were no black people there anyways . . . .

Some found that they had to enter therapy to work through their anger and confusion about their identities. When asked about those who do not feel that the issue of ethnoracial identity is a contentious issue, these adoptees clearly stated that adoptees who felt that way were in denial. Those who did not feel that ethnoracial identity was an issue of great contention were satisfied with their lives and were content in their identities, usually as "humans," non-racialized Canadians or simply as people who did not give a great deal of thought to the issue of race.

Many parents would talk to their children about how they were feeling when they were immersed in this sorrow. Adoptees explained that they felt they did not belong or that they were disconnected from a proverbial unknown "it." Feelings of abandonment and instability in their attachment also came up in discussion of adoptees' feelings of disconnection and depression.

> A1: . . . so that even if I go out in the world as an adult I can learn new things but there's still a fundamentally . . . at the ground roots that's real, um –
>
> A2: Missing.
>
> A1: Missing, or not working totally. . .so I don't know of, I don't know—feeling—
>
> A2: Feel like you don't have a foundation!
>
> A1: Yeah. (agreement and laughter from the group)
>
> A3: I think that's 100% score on that one.
>
> A2: And that leads into relationships.

Both adoptees and their parents described difficulties adjusting to their new homes.

> When I speak with my mother about my past, um, she says she feels I didn't really connect with them until I was around 5 and I came over when I was around two and the transition was very difficult for me. Like, for the first six months I cried constantly at night time and I'd have, ah, nightmares or I'd sleepwalk and race around the house *screaming* as well. So the whole transition was very traumatic for me . . . so if I can kind of surmise what my

development process was I didn't actually make intimate connections with someone until I was five.

Both adoptees and parents also relayed stories where adoptees appeared to feel that their present living arrangements were temporary. Adoptees were periodically worried that they would be taken away or given away, or that they would have to leave. One adoptee remembered his father taking him on a long car ride without first explaining where they were going. He was filled with sorrow and fear thinking that he was being taken *away*. When his father learned this he was shocked. The lack of any transition phase or preparation for the move into an adoptive family left any sense of attachment fragile.

> We did have a few sessions while we were in the orphanage. We had a few sessions with a psychiatrist so that they can help you kind of . . . 'you're going to meet people who you are going to have to love and respect and that they're gonna be your parents '. . . but I think a lot more of that should happen you know? Not just prior to being adopted. Especially for older kids. But I think like after they should be you know talked to . . . *because it's kind of like they just throw you in there.*

Parents observed the differences among children who were separated from birth-families or foster care at different ages. Families who were adopting more than one child began to specify that they would only adopt a child before the age of 3 months or after the age of one year. Some acted as foster parents for the potential adoptees (which increased the risk of losing the child according to Canadian legislation) rather than having them separated from their attachment figures at the wrong time. After reading an article on attachment and its sensitive phases, parents observed that those who were separated from attachment figures during the sensitive phase (which was identified as between 3.5 months and one year) had a very difficult time with the

separation. These adoptees displayed signs of depression and grieving for extended periods of time, in comparison with those who were not disrupted during this phase.

> She made it very clear she did not, like, we were not the ones she wanted. So she cried. You know when someone else's kid if they bump their head or something . . . they don't bloody want you and they're looking around for their mother or father. She was with a foster mother for eleven months and all of a sudden they moved her and she went stiff . . . if something happened she just didn't want to be comforted.

Adoptee sorrow, however, was related not only to grieving. Parents also described a more consuming depression. Others observed a connection with a form of what they called *survivor guilt*, reflecting their awareness that other children are living (and dying) in their native country and that their birth-families are living in poverty while they enjoy a new life in a new land of promise. One parent described the following: "She's told me I've kidnapped her. . . I have everything, she'll go on that route . . . that's there in her brain: survivor guilt. Can we send them bread or (inaudible) . . . what can we give them? What can we send them?"

Adoptees also lashed out at their families in fits of anger, sometimes mixed with sorrow. Parents described it as a "splitting" of good and bad into dichotomous categories. Some examples parents gave illustrated extreme splitting, for instance, in fantasies ranking the adoptive parent as good and the birth-parent as bad. A more typical scene parents described would see the adoptee saying something like, "I don't want to be a part of this family anymore. Nobody understands. Nobody loves me" or "I am going to run away . . . but I can't because I love you too much." Many parents commented on feeling that there was "something simmering below the surface" that, in some cases even frightened them. Parents noticed that around the age of 7, adoptees began to "act out" more. Adoptees and parents recall the love of parents being tested by their children in a

variety of rebellious outbreaks. Once it became clear that this was their permanent home and that parents did love them, adoptees' rebellion often decreased.

Unconditional love, however, was not guaranteed nor was it bought by all adoptees. Parents' discussions of sorrow with their children also frequently related to comments their children made on the physical differences between them and the rest of their family (I will discuss this at length in the following section). Some adoptees explained that the love of their parents was conditional upon their conforming to their parents' expectations and values. A considerable component of this process was interpreted and articulated by most adoptees as being required to conform to a "White" Western European norm, as previously discussed.

> There's definitely that feeling that your complete assimilation is necessary to be loved. I mean, there was no celebration of difference when I grew up right?. . . In retrospect, I recognize it now. I grew up under the thing that I had to, um, completely deny who I'd been previously been in order to be loved.

Many adoptees expressed feeling stifled in their ability to express themselves, and to embrace and celebrate their cultural, ethnicity, history and heritage. A summary phrase that was often used by adoptees was "not being able to be yourself." This resulted in adoptee sorrow.

Those adoptees who had taken steps to address their feelings of sorrow reported significant differences in their lives. A number of the adoptees, after having gone through very difficult periods in their lives of engaging with their adoption and related issues, found themselves starting "new lives." One adoptee, starting university for the first time a month after the interview, said the following: " . . . it's now when I'm in my thirties when I've found my birth-mother, found my brother, like gone to therapy done all these things—come out—that It's like oh maybe I actually can do this."

4. Being Different and Seeing Difference

Coming into an awareness of the differences between adoptees and their families was an important process. Numerous conversations and situations were described by adoptees and parents where adoptees struggled to grasp and understand the social meaning of the differences. Parents recalled conversations with their children answering questions such as "Why don't I look like the rest of you?" "Why is my skin brown and yours isn't?" and comments such as "I want to be white like you " or "I don't want to be brown." The parents of a South East Asian child recalled their child pulling the sides of their faces to make their eyes resemble hers. When the child was older and could speak, when she removed her hands, she said, "They don't stay."

There were numerous stories recounted by adoptees and parents about how the public perceived them. Parents recalled strangers taking great liberties in touching their children or asking intrusive questions like "They aren't really yours, are they?" "What beautiful hair she has. She must get it from her father. Does she?" or comments upon seeing multiracial families such as "How many husbands have you had?" Siblings reported that their friends didn't believe them when they pointed out who their adopted sibling was. Parents have also run into disbelief and difficult questions by hospital and school staff. Many described numerous and frequent situations where looks of confusion, disapproval and disgust were cast at multiracial families. A female adoptee recalled that when in early adolescence, she went places with her father, people would hurl disgusted looks at them, assuming, as she interpreted it, she was his concubine or wife. Comments from children such as "Mommy, why is she that colour?" or "Why is her skin so dirty?" also added to create an atmosphere where *difference* played a considerable role in the lives of multiracial families.

Some adoptees felt that these experiences of highlighting the differences between them and their families acted to encourage them to try harder to conform, to be more like their families.

> I grew up in a very white neighborhood (agreement from group). A very suburban neighborhood there was this real homogenizing culture and I didn't fit in. Like, after, after I was five or whatever and decided to fit in, I mean, I fit in! I didn't want to talk about my adoption. I totally denied the fact that I was adopted. I was white! (agreement from group) And it was not until three years ago that I really started to say 'Hey, there's been a lot of denial going on here.' I couldn't even face the fact that I was Korean and had Korean birth-parents.

Difference is not limited to physicality, however. Adoptees and parents commented on how there were considerable personality differences between children, their siblings and their parents. Adoptees explained that they felt pressure to de-emphasize *any* differences between them and their families.

Every adoptee was raised in a non-diverse environment. Every adoptee mentioned this fact in discussion. This had various impacts, but the strongest theme described by adoptees was that both friends and family perceived them to be, what they described as, "white." As previously discussed, this continued throughout their lives: "But it's still not anywhere I can go with my friends because they're like, 'you're not Korean, you're white!' (loud agreement from group)." Even if the topic of race or ethnicity came up, most adoptees had been told by their friends and family that they were "not" or "not really" a member of their ethnoracial group. This denial made adoptees' innate feelings of connection to their ethnoracial groups and other non-white groups difficult to express. In addition, the lack of people to identify with or people to gain support and advice from in issues related to *difference* left a void in adoptees lives. This void compounded their already

established feelings of being torn between their family and friends on the one hand, and an unknown family and community on the other.

Non-diverse communities also have few specific resources for people who are non-white. For example, their communities lacked the proper hair stylists and products to cut and style non-white hair appropriately. When adoptive parents' ignored these oversights, many adoptees felt awkward; their different hair was a hassle and only emphasized their difference from the rest of their family and community. Such communities also lacked secondary educational resources and supports to fill in the gaps in history that our education system and popular cultures leave out. Information about other countries and non-white experiences in Canada were rarely, if ever, included in adoptees' curriculum in school, and they did not know where to go to receive information. This homogeneous culture also contributed to the commonly experienced request of non-white peoples to speak as a representative of their *entire* race when, for example, a group is discussing an issue where race is perceived to be a variable. Non-diverse communities often assume that their community is, at least visibly, homogeneous.

> I was working at (store name) and in came, like, the cutest little girl. You know, blond with pig-tails and she looked up and right in front of my face she, she tugged on her Mommy's pants and said: "Mom, how come that lady's that colour?" . . . and I smiled at her because she doesn't know better . . . she doesn't understand. She thinks I'm strange because I'm not the same colour as she is and it's a shame you know? That her parents have not explained to her, there's not just white.

Difference is associated with strangers or people outside of the community; as a result, it is often not trusted. Adoptees listed numerous experiences in which they were "othered" in their own towns. For example, assuming that they are from out of town, retailers would charge adoptees the

"out of towner prices" instead of the price given to the locals. Almost every adoptee reported being followed around stores, if not blatantly accused of planning to rob the establishment.

The experience of being *othered* or objectified was a common theme that adoptees spoke about. Adoptees and parents had myriad examples of how people could not believe or even make sense of their family make-up. Strangers would, in some cases, direct shockingly rude comments or questions to both adoptees and parents, as illustrated above. Adoptees of Latin and Biracial (Black and White) descent were also often mistaken for other ethnicities. While this was not always a negative experience, and in cases quite pleasant, the mistaken identity was frequently unsettling. Adoptees explained that they felt that if their dark skin was just a tan, then they were more acceptable. If however, as was actually the case, their skin is brown because they are of non-white descent, they are not accepted, and consigned to a lower social stratum. The stratification characteristic of racism was also related to these mistaken identities. For example, adoptees explained that if it was uncovered that the adoptee was Latin and not Biracial (Black and White), then they were placed on a higher stratum than if they were of African descent. These experiences contributed to adoptees' racialized perceptions of life and identities, and to discomfort with their ethnoracial identities.

In summary, adoptees expressed that these experiences of becoming aware of difference and being identified as different from a popular norm contributed to low self-esteem and sense of control over their lives, as well as general insecurities. Adoptees also postulated that it impacted on the process of internalizing racism.

5. Relationships and Social Interactions

Relationships with friends and partners

Adoptees and parents both identified challenges that adoptees faced in relationships. In their adult lives, adoptees described difficulties with intimacy, maintaining relationships and commitment. They described using self-sabotaging practices, specifically excessively "picky" standards in choosing mates to keep the possibility of commitment at bay. Adoptees also described acting out sexually. Some theorized that it was an attempt to regain their birth-mothers (in both heterosexual and homosexual encounters). As one adoptee who is currently living a lesbian lifestyle postulated: "I think the gender might have something to do with the abuse. Um. Might have something to do with just sort of like trying to connect—this might sound really weird but—trying to connect with the mother, the woman, the womb."

Parents observed in their adopted children trouble with intimacy, clinging behaviour, discomfort with sexuality, promiscuity, not trying/not giving in relationships, poor choices in friends, bossy behaviour, self-sabotaging romantic relationships, and devouring their friend in general. They also listed lying, being bossy, hyperactivity, stealing and violence (both threats of and actual) as behavioural struggles their children faced. Parents observed that their children had trouble interpreting boundaries, both their own and others'. This difficulty resulted in numerous kinds of social problems, such as clingy relationships or, as one parent put it, "sucking the life out of their friends." Parents also reported a few cases of their struggling with criminal and anti-social behaviour, predominantly stealing. There were also cases of threatened suicide and homicide (of parents) although there were no attempts at either.

Adoptees and parents alike spoke about a common defense mechanism that they called *independence*. ". . . He wouldn't let you do anything. You couldn't help him eat. You couldn't help

dress him. You couldn't touch him . . . completely independent," one parent explained. As stated above, adoptees faced difficulties with intimacy, and adoptees also connected these difficulties with fear of abandonment, problems in their past with attachments being broken, and difficulty re-attaching to their adoptive families. They explained that in their adult lives a common way to deal with this history was to develop an extreme "independence," which serve to keep intimate relationships at bay.

> On a day to day basis really it's just trying to deal with the effects of all the coping methods I've kind of created over the years. I mean, I'm still trying to get through so many layers of coping methods to get down to the real problem. . .it's impossible for me to hold down any sort of long- term relationship . . . the whole idea of being together with someone right now is sort of, uhhh. *Like it'd just be so many different factors I'd have to deal with,* I'm really hesitant.

However, it also left many adoptees feeling extremely lonely, and contributed to feelings of disconnection described above in the discussion of adoptee sorrow.

As previously described, all the adoptees, and the children of the parents with whom I spoke, were raised in non-diverse environments. By all accounts, the presence of non-white people (the adoptees) stood out. But children who lived in both diverse (e.g., boarding school, etc.) and non-diverse environments faced racism within relationships. Adoptees and parents reported incidents in which either other children did not want to play with them because they were "different" or community parents would limit the level of involvement adoptees were able to have with their children. Adoptees were often teased, not solely out of racism, but for numerous reasons, including the age of their parents (most parents were older in comparison to other community parents).

On the other hand, adoptees were not completely rejected by their communities. Adoptees frequently appeared *exotic* to their peers. Parents observed that the attraction of some friends to their children was exoticised. That is, they were attracted to such characteristics as being non-white, different, etc. Both parents and adoptees noticed this quality in a number of romantic scenarios as well. Adoptees reported feeling uncomfortable with this dynamic.

Parents observed that adoptees, in relationships with friends, faced some difficult questions that they were unprepared to answer. For example, friends would ask about their family make-up or about adoption. While the adoptees knew the answers to most of these kinds of questions, as they were issues that had been discussed with them, parents witnessed conversations in which adoptees would not answer: they would change the subject and dodged answering or in some cases lie. When parents asked their children why they had avoided the question, they simply reasoned, for example, that they were "busy." Parents did not indicate why these situations occurred or the impact that it had on the adoptees.

Relationships with Family

Many adoptees' relationships with their siblings were of pivotal importance, but relations with siblings were not all positive. Some adoptees felt that their parents showed preference for certain siblings over others. Some adoptees reported different rules set for different siblings. Some reported that parents labeled one sibling "the pretty one," another "the smart one," etc. Some adoptees felt that this was particularly difficult if the doted-on child was a "home-made" or white child. One adoptee remembered peering in the crib where her new "home made" white sibling slept.

> She's like white and blond and perfect and cute and my Mom is all into her and I'm just like getting more and more relegated to the side. And I'm in the middle child position and all that. I remember watching her sleep when she was a baby and wishing I looked that, like

> that. When I (inaudible) because she had these little bow lips. You know little, like cupid. So, yeah, I remember(laughter and agreement from group)... and I remember watching her hair (inaudible). It had these ringlets and it blew in the air... (group bursts into fits of laughing and loud agreement).

These were symbolic to the adoptee even at a young age and evoked intense negative feelings and stirred insecurities. Some adoptees felt that their parents' expectations of their children were divided along racial lines. Specifically, that those children who were white were expected and encouraged to achieve. Non-white chidlren, however, were not encouraged or expected to excel. Parents were satisfied with less and did not encourage them to achieve anything but average accomplishment.

> Even just now I'm just starting to go to university now, I've never gone before because I didn't think I was smart enough, I didn't think I could do it and I wasn't really encouraged... Then when I graduated I just went to Toronto and started waitressing. And my mother was never really like—and my Dad was never really like (inaudible) you know they were just, "she's done what she can do".

Parents expressed concerns that "home-made" siblings were unattended in comparison to adoptees. They worried that the amount of attention paid to adoptees might leave "home-made" children feeling left out or inferior.

> I sometimes wonder if our biological kids have been left out a little bit. You know, if they've had as much attention because so much has been focused on the adopted kids. I almost wonder if they think subconsciously: "well, you couldn't get the daughter you wanted so you had to adopt." Which isn't true at all.

No family had any specific or confirmed example of this dynamic, however.

A number of families struggled with racism from within their families and from family friends. Some examples were listed above in the first section. Families' responses varied. Some parents felt that if a friend or a family member was unable to treat their children in the manner that they felt was their due, then they could no longer be part of each other's lives. Some parents removed themselves from their families or from those who were the focus of such struggles. Other families did not take such actions. One adoptee, for example, explained that a grandparent had been quite negative about the adoption, announcing that the adoptee was not to be brought to her home. As time passed, however, the adoptee became close to that grandparent. The adoptee described their relationship as closer than that of any of their other biological grandchildren.

Many adoptees reflected on their feelings of connection with their families. Some felt very much a part of their families and very committed to them. Other adoptees explained that while they felt warmly towards their families, they never completely felt that they were their families. This was not to say that they felt more connected to their biological families or any other family, but they simply felt a sense of distance or disconnection from their families. Some adoptees also reflected on their parents' abilities to love them in the same way as they would or do love a biological child. Some adoptees wondered if it was possible while others felt that they could not have been loved more if they were actually the biological children of their parents.

Some adoptees described specific struggles such as abuse. These incidents were, however, few. Adoptees felt that it compounded already existing difficulties, specifically their ability to trust and deal with racialized stereotypes:

> A1: I had problems with my grandfather who touched me inappropriately. And when I confronted him . . . I'm like 'why did you do this to me bla bla bla?' And he was saying because I was adopted, I wasn't really his granddaughter so it was okay. . . it's ideas about black women being sexual. . .

A2: it's okay, that's what you're there for anyway right?!.

A1: Right. The whole foundation thing and me not like connecting with relationships. . .it's this whole scared and not trusting thing.

Some adoptees explained that there were times when they felt uncomfortable with their parents' motivations for adopting and/or with the implications of international adoption. Some were concerned that the motivation of adoptive parents for adopting internationally was to "save" them. Adoptees felt that this was the wrong motivation for adopting. They explained that this made them very uncomfortable. Some parents also described conversations with other parents who reflected this mentality. Parents were also uncomfortable with this motivation. Both adoptees and parents did clarify that they understood the "social welfare" motivation for adopting a child from a developing country. They still, however, specified that adopting a child to "save her" or to "be his saviour" sets the stage for a dynamic in which the adoptees may feel they "owe" their parents for their lives. Some adoptees also described family situations in which adoptees felt that adopting them was motivated by making a point to parents' families. For example, parents might have hoped that if their families got to know someone of colour, they would release some of their racist and prejudicial beliefs. In these cases, adoptees explained, they felt "used." Adoptees also described feeling that their adoption was to function as proof of their parents liberal philosophy.

This discussion of "saving" adoptees or using them to make a point with families also evoked comments in adoptees regarding their feelings about their relationship to their parents in terms of the historical relationship between "colonizing" and "colonized" in the context of international adoption. Some adoptees explained that they sometimes looked at their parents and realized that they were members of the colonizing peoples. They realized that they, as members of the white privileged population, were implicated in the colonization and in some cases genocide (literal and cultural) of adoptees' native peoples. Some adoptees used such strong language to express these

dynamics, whereas others expressed the same sentiment more subtly. Either way, the experiences fall into the same theme of struggling with the histories of adoptees' and parents' cultural groups. Some adoptees felt embarrassed or even extremely angry about their parents being white. All who reported these feelings also reported that they were not permanent but came to the surface periodically. When combined with parents' lack of recognizing adoptees' ethnoracial membership and/or their feelings of connection with non-white communities, these feelings were intensified.

Adoptees' relationship with their ethnoracial and cultural communities

A number of adoptees spoke about their relationship, or lack thereof, with their ethnoracial and cultural communities. Experiences were split. As discussed above in the section on native culture, when the adoptee had taken on the cultural norms of their adoptive communities, they sometimes felt that these norms ran counter to those of their native cultures. For example, not all cultures accept single parenthood. If single mothers are not accepted openly in a native culture, it can create a rift between single parent adoptees and their communities. Language is also another particularly significant variable. Adoptees, especially of South East Asian descent, found it almost impossible to enter into their communities if they not speak the language. In terms of dating in these communities, adoptees described a vast barrier to finding a mate in their native communities; adoptees do not have lineage. In cultures where coupling is connected to ancestry, adoptees described serious difficulties both finding a partner as well making friends. Adoptees also found it difficult to feel at home in their native cultures when they did not have first-hand understanding of cultural nuances and practices.

Some adoptees grew up with very little exposure to non-white peoples. As such, by adulthood, they found themselves so deeply acculturated into "white cultures" that they felt most at home in them and still had little contact with communities of colour. Others had made concerted efforts to immerse themselves in diverse environments and chose diverse surroundings in adult life.

> I'm constantly looking for ways to access and familiarize myself with cultures that are, like, just associated, you know. I mean I—some of my white friends are more immersed in Black cultures than I am and it's—uncomfortable. There's just that feeling of being a stranger, you know? Being—false, but it's not because that's part of what you are.

Some adoptees and parents described difficult situations with members of adoptees' ethnoracial communities. Some of the latter had clearly expressed their disapproval of transracial adoption. Some, while making it clear that they did not support the practice, would provide supports such as showing a mother how to *plait* black hair. The explanation given was that even if they do not support the practice, transracial adoption is being practised and the children need the support of their communities, i.e., their ethnoracial communities.

Those adoptees who had developed relationships with members of their ethnoracial communities, as mentioned above, listed them as of great importance to their identities in terms of being seen for who they "really are" or of having a more complete picture of their identities as a part of relationships. These friends were also knowledgeable resources on their native culture and taught them how to connect with their communities.

Social Interactions

In discussions with both adoptees and parents, a number of additional trends developed in terms of relationships and social interactions. Adoptees and parents observed difficulties with change. Some postulated that it was the unknown that was difficult and that being able to predict and expect what was to come in life appeared to be important to many adoptees. On the other

hand, many adoptees and parents talked about adoptees' trouble with strict rules. Adoptees found strict rules almost impossible to follow. Some felt that the strictness of the rules did not make room for the adoptee to introduce or celebrate her native culture. Some felt that it was simply difficult and encouraged excessive rebellion. Some parents, however, described hyperactive behaviour in their children. Many felt that it was a reaction to trauma or other variables in adoptees' lives; this behaviour was reported by a number of adoptees and parents creating a trend.

Parents reported a tendency for adoptees to "split " good from bad in an extreme way. Some extreme cases described adoptees displaying post-traumatic episodes featuring fantasies (e.g., dreams, etc.) that split the birth-parent and the adoptive-parent as either good as bad players in the fantasies. Some children showed less severe splitting in their tendency to dichotomize situations in general life (two sides of stories only, one being good and the other bad), but examples were also given, in these less serious instances, of splitting the birth and adoptive parents as good or bad.

P1: She'll play it out (inaudible) the good mother and the bad mother. . . well, they fantasize, well sometimes she's mad at me because 'my good mother in (country of origin) wouldn't say no' . . . so then she's got all these fantasies, so basically they make a split. . .literally (family friend) will be the bad mother and I'm the good mother. She has to get to the point where she can put them together.

. . .

P2 He can be sort of, um, be two kinds of personalities. Happy go lucky on one side but if he thinks that somebody maybe is gonna tease him he is very (inaudible).

Q: Can anyone else relate to that kind of two personalities thing?

P1: Oh me. . ."When she's home alone with me I see the anger that everyone else doesn't see. . .

Another example of this splitting might be evidenced in a child's inability to conceptualize loving both sets of parents at the same time. An adoptee might feel that he has to reject their birth-family or country of origin completely to accept his adoptive family. One parent described an episode with her child after attending a cultural celebration. The next day the child engaged the mother in play where the child started off dead: ". . .she came alive when she went to the new country. And then I kind of thought about it and I said, 'well, you don't have to choose between, between (inaudible). It's almost like 'Do I have to give this up when I come here.' "

Touch

Some parents reported that their children were very uncomfortable with being touched, and protested against touch for a long time after being adopted. One parent reported: "(name) was completely detached. He did not want to be touched for any reason. Even when he was blue with cold from swimming in the swimming pool, he still didn't want you to put the towel around him." Other parents, and a few of the same parents who had initially experienced troubles with intimacy, reported that touch played an important role in establishing attachment. For example, one family who adopted an infant found that the child required constant touching throughout the attachment phase after adoption.

Mom: . . .she also got to the point—and this lasted, what, would you say a year (spouse's name)? That she had to be touching. She had to be able to touch you, with your hand. . .she didn't have to touch you, she just needed to *be able to* touch you if she needed to. She didn't want you farther than arm's length away

Dad: . . .even people she knew. . .one of us had to be within eyesight all the time.

A number of families who adopted a young child found touch to be a medium through which they both established and monitored trust and then attachment. Some parents observed that their children were physically very clingy with their friends and partners. Other adoptees and parents

reported adoptees having trouble with touch because of its implied intimacy. This often resulted in touch only being received when it was sexualized, with sex providing the option of removing the emotional intimacy and making touch accessible for adoptees.

Adoptees and parents also talked about a negative touch in relation to racism, as I have discussed above. Such touching occurred mostly to children of African descent. Incidents were predominantly reported in which strangers would take the liberty of touching and/or grabbing the adoptee's hair without warning or permission.

Health of adoptees

Parents reported that many adoptees had health concerns in their early lives, parents were aware of only some of these at adoption. Then, some children displayed disturbed behaviour such as rocking and their eyes rolling back in their heads. Some children were already malnourished, neglected and/or severely traumatized at adoption. A number of parents also reported that their children had trouble eating in their early childhood; i.e., children were too anxious to eat or connected food with elements in their history that made eating a source of anxiety. Some children had histories of mental health concerns in their families, such as depression, suicidal tendencies and schizophrenia, which led to concern about their futures. Many parents reported having spent a great deal of time and effort addressing both health problems and emotional residue left from sometimes severely traumatic events in their child's past. These concerns placed a great deal of stress on parents, predominantly from worry. Attending to and caring for adoptees health, in some families, became a considerable part of a their everyday experience for a period of time. In most cases this resulted in the establishment of attachment, cohesive relationships and healthy adoptees.

Fears

Parents reported patterns of fears that their children had in early life. Adoptees had shown fears of rain or showers, loud noises and being alone and /or being left alone to do various tasks. Adoptees who had experiences of extreme trauma in their early lives also exhibited fears related to that trauma (detail cannot be given so as to protect the confidentiality of the participants). Like health concerns, these fears often became a large part of families' culture. Many families developed routines, such as bedtime rituals, to establish familiar and predictable events to ease adoptees into comfort and security. The establishment and carrying out of these routines was in many cases quite time consuming. Again, like health concerns, they most frequently resulted in attachment and cohesive relationships. Parents spoke about these routines fondly as special bonding times.

Emotional expression and communication

Adoptees experienced great difficulties expressing and addressing a number of specific emotions. They talked about not knowing how to express grief, sorrow, pain, hurt and love. They also had trouble expressing their needs in general. Their need to grieve was especially difficult to reveal as described above (cf. p.63, 65). Adoptees and parents felt ill-equipped to deal with many of the big issues described in this study, especially those around the issues of race, ethnicity and culture. Both adoptees and parents felt that adoptees had trouble finding and articulating the questions that they had about their lives. Adoptees and parents felt that they did not know how to start the conversations that were needed or what those conversations should be about. Adoptees remembered being too young to know *what* questions they had, and then growing up and not knowing *how* to ask the questions that they had formed (cf. p. 61). Parents also worried about age-appropriate topics and ways of broaching them with their children.

A subject of particular difficulty reported by adoptees was how to deal with racism. They were very frustrated, on the whole, with the lack of discussion of racism and ways of dealing with it. They felt that if it had been a topic of conversation in everyday life, they would have been better prepared to understand and deal with incidents. It would have also been easier to tell their parents about incidents. Those families that talked about racism regularly also discussed ways of *dealing* with racism. They had faced a number of different incidents and had talked about them as a family and decided on how to proceed. Often, their responses were based on previous discussions of how to deal with racism and therefore both parents and adoptee had some grounding in how to respond. Some of these families still listed dealing with racism as a struggle, however, because parents expressed insecurity about their ability to prepare their children to face and deal with racism, as well as a parent of colour (adopted or biological).

6. Parents' Emotions

Parents and adoptees spoke about struggles that parents faced with their emotions. The first theme was in response to the issue of ethnoracial identity. Parents expressed insecurity about raising a child of colour. Some worried that a parent of the same or similar ethnoracial community as their child might have been able to provide a better upbringing or be able to provide skills and support in terms of dealing with racism that white parents cannot.

> I think all things being equal for me, it would be a heck of a lot easier for (names) if all things were equal to be adopted in a family where their family was racially similar to them . . . not that our family hasn't worked, we've got a great family, but it sure is a lot less explaining for a child. . . If you've lived through it it's easier to give your kids the skills they'll need to survive in this crazy country, this crazy culture.

Many parents expressed anxiety about preparing their children to deal with racism; even if they did not necessarily feel that a parent of colour would have made a definitively more appropriate parent, they still felt insecure about preparing their children for living in a racist society.

Parents also felt insecure about facing racism in *their* lives. Most parents had experienced racism through association with their child, as detailed above. Parents felt unprepared to deal with the reality of how Canadian society experiences racism. They were in many cases painfully disillusioned about Canadian society, and ill-equipped to deal with racism or to access supports and information about racism. Even parents who were relatively aware of what the social landscape in Canada is and felt at least somewhat prepared to deal with racism, still listed it as a struggle. Parents also wondered if transracial adoption was a form of cultural genocide. Parents were well aware of the literature refuting that claim, but still wondered if there was a better way to raise their children.

Some felt anxious about whether they could love or provide for an adopted child in as comparable a way as for a biological child.

> My biggest struggle as a father is, what can I do as a father to ensure that he is going to have a positive self-concept. I'm not his natural father, but one of the things that always returns to me is that, can I do the job as a father that only his natural father can do. I'm talking about, you know when (name) started showing those temper tantrums? Up until then I had felt just like this (indicates close). And then when that came, then the disconnect and then it was like he's not of mine and maybe that's what shook me . . . So I guess my biggest concern as a father (inaudible) is can, can I provide for him what I did for my own, for my other son?

These fears were often alleviated after adopting, as every parent who had worried about this issue found that they felt completely connected to their adopted child.

Some parents remembered numerous times before and after adopting that they feared losing their children. Throughout the adoption process, they felt constant anxiety that something would fall through. As listed above, some parents reported that they knew of parents who were afraid of their children's birth parents because they worried they would take their children away or that their children would leave them to return to their birth-family. In addition, some parents reported observing adoptive families where parents were very threatened by any question about birth-families. Some reported observing that some adoptive parents felt anxiety about their children getting close to any other adult figures, especially those of non-white descent. These fears were sometimes fused with parents' pre-adoption histories, which had a profound influence on most families' lives. Fertility problems, in particular, were observed to have lasting effects on parents by contributing to anxiety and insecurities in parenting and around the possibility of losing children.

The pre-adoption difficulties that parents experienced were not limited to losing children, however. Some parents felt a sense of guilt that someone else's loss was their gain. Parents also observed that couples who were struggling in their marriages pre-adoption also felt strains post-adoption that, some felt, contributed to difficult relationships with adoptees, i.e., creating an unstable environment relating to insecure attachments, etc.

Parents expressed concern that the attention that they pay to their adoptive children in support of their ethnoracial identities and as adopted children may leave their biological children feeling insecure or neglected (cf. p. 75). Those who had talked with their children about this concern found that they did not articulate feeling this way, but parents wondered whether their resentments were conscious. Some parents felt that they wished they had done things differently for their biological children, whereas others were making plans to find a balance in supporting all their children.

Parenting adopted children can be a very emotionally trying experience for parents. Many parents felt very unappreciated by their adoptive children. They explained that their children do not believe or recognize their dedication and love for them. Both adoptees and parents listed numerous examples of ways that adoptees would test the commitment of parents. Parents experienced many different ways that adoptees would strike out against them, push them away, or "push their buttons" past their limits. Many adoptees displayed very high risk behaviours, which put huge pressure on parents, especially in cases where high-risk criminal behaviours were in question. Overall, parents whose children were displaying high-risk behaviour, talked about their experiences as extremely difficult for them to weather, but this was particularly true for single parents. All parents, however, were dedicated to their children and to supporting their struggle throughout the difficult spells. Many adoptees in later periods of their lives confirmed their parents' commitment and love for them and found it was vitally important to express their thanks to their parents.

Parents did not report much detail about cultural clashes with adoptees. Some parents expressed concern that their efforts to protect them against ridicule at their native cultural practices would be interpreted negatively by their children. Take the case of two parents who named their children typically European names instead of names from the children's native culture. They worried whether the children would rather have had a name that reflected their ethnicity and cultural background. On the other hand, they did not change a name that was already given to them (they had not yet been named) and they gave their children names that were of great importance in their adoptive families (i.e., the names of friends and family members). On the whole, however, parents did not recognize the same situations that adoptees named as cultural clashes. They did not recognize a conflict, did not understand why there was disagreement or thought their children's understanding of a situation was odd or inappropriate.

Finally I would like to note that many parents commented on supports for adoptive parents. Those who were participating in support groups reported such supports were of importance the utmost for parenting and being able to weather difficult and/or confusing situations. But almost every parent, both involved and not involved with support programs, commented on the need for more supports for parents who are internationally and transracially adopting. In particular, parents reported the need to prepare parents for the challenges in raising an adopted child, especially a child whose history is greatly unknown, and in raising a child who, in all probability, face discrimination, prejudice, and/or racism.

7. The False Self[12]

Laced throughout the discussion above are examples of what one adoptee called a *false self.* This is the part of the adoptee that gets split off as undesirable or even threatening to becoming to a part of a family. It is the part of the self that grieves the birth or foster parents. It is the feelings of connection with the country and culture of origin, as well as with the ethnoracial and cultural communities of the adoptee. It is the part of the adoptee that feels connected with other non-white communities and the experiences of the colonized. These are the various selves that are separated from the person whom the family and/or public see. Indeed, some adoptees explained that it was not until well into their adult lives that they were able to recognize that they had split themselves into parts. Some adoptees also reported that their friends who were also adopted never reached this realization. As many examples of this have been given above I will save the rest of my exploration of the false self for the discussion section.

[12] This term was also used by Winnicott, but I am using it because it naturally occurred in the discussion with adoptees.

Conclusion

Struggles		
Adoptees	**Adoptees**	**Parents**
Racism and dealing with race	• Safe space to talk about racism • Parents not recognizing and addressing racism • Internalized racism • Family and friends not seeing them as non-white • Feeling that they had to acculturate to white cultures to belong to their family and be loved	• Support in how to deal with racism
Native Culture, Birth Parents and Country of origin	• Feeling that they had to acculturate to white cultures to belong to their family and be loved • Friends and family not understanding their feelings of connection with their non-white cultures • Trouble interacting within their native cultural communities • Families not appreciating and/or understanding native culture • Not having an opportunity to grieve the loss of their birth-families, foster families, and/or their country of origin • Anger at country of origin for using adoption as a "band-aid" solution	• Concern that adoptees may have trouble interacting with their native communities • Fantasies of running away, featuring the country of origin • Adoptees showing ambivalence about returning to country of origin
Sorrow, Anger and Attachment	• Adoptees sorrow • Adoptees' feelings of sorrow were not recognized by family and friends • Friends and family seeing them as white and adoptees feeling pressure to conform. This later led to intense anger at repressing their ethnoracial identities • Experiencing love as conditional on conforming to adoptive families' expectations, i.e., white culture and identity	• Adoptees sorrow (including anger, etc.) • Being separated from attachment figures at times that harmed their ability to attach to adoptive families • Adoptees splitting good and bad elements
Being different/Seeing difference	• Developing social understanding of difference • Dealing with being different from their families and environment • Feeling that they had to acculturate to white cultures to belong to their family and be loved • Racism and how to deal with it • Living in a non-diverse environment	• Dealing with adoptees' questions about the social meaning of difference • Racism and how to deal with it

Relationships and Social Behaviour	• Difficulty with intimacy and commitment (including self-sabotaging relationships and acting out sexually to reject intimacy) • Using intimacy to reject intimacy • Racism • Cultural clashes with parents • Abuse • Sibling competition (including racialized competition) • Not feeling a part of their families • Families' motives for adopting • Dealing with parents are members of the race that historically has been known as the colonizers • Difficulties interacting with their ethnoracial communities and lack of exposure to non-white peoples • Members of ethnoracial communities objecting to IRA • Difficulty with change • Trouble with strict rules	• Adoptees being consuming in relationships • Criminal behaviour • Using independence to reject intimacy • Being teased (about being different, their parents being older, etc.) • Friends being attracted to adoptees because of exoticism • Adoptees facing questions that they did not know how to answer • Concern biological siblings felt left out • Racism from family and friends • Members of ethnoracial communities objecting to • TRA • Difficulty with change • Splitting good from bad in extremes
Emotional Expression and Communication	• Expressing emotions • Feeling ill-equipped to deal with "big issues"	• Feeling ill-equipped to deal with "big issues"
Touch	• Assumed intimacy expressed through unsolicited touching, • specifically of Black hair	• Adoptees not allowing parents to touch them • Assumed intimacy expressed through unsolicited • touching, specifically of Black hair
Health of Adoptees		• Adoptees exhibited malnutrition, trauma, mental health issues
Fears		• Fears of rain/showers, loud noises and being alone
Parents Emotions	• Parents discomfort addressing adoptees experiences of difference • Parents insecurities (especially in preparing their children to deal with racism)	• Insecurity raising child of colour • Insecure facing racism • Pre-adoption anxieties resulting in insecurities • Guilt about their gain being another's loss • Feeling unappreciated
The False Self	• Splitting the self, removing parts that adoptees feel threaten their place in the family and the love of their family (e.g., the non-white self, the adopted self, etc.)	• Extreme splitting good and bad (e.g., private and public selves)

Supports

Adoptees' and parents' discussion of supports can be gathered into the following themes:

1. Relationships and Social Interactions
2. Family Culture
3. Anti-Racism Training, Multicultural Education and Educational Supports

Appendix A is a complete list of the supports that adoptees and parents listed as helpful to the development of their ethnoracial identity. Neither adoptees or parents gave any indication of any one support being better than an other. Overall, adoptees felt that the supports that were provided were helpful to some degree.

1. Relationships and Social Interactions

In addition to the above-mentioned supports, discussions with both adoptees and parents highlighted the role of relationships as special supports in adoptees' lives. Relationships were a common theme that ran through discussions of many topics: in particular, relationships with other transracial adoptees, siblings, and non-white peoples, which I will detail below, that provided adoptees with support in coming into a sense of themselves. These relationships also encouraged adoptees to recognize role models as supports they would have liked to have had. Adoptees and parents also talked about the value of diverse environments for providing adoptees with space to interact and exposure to the spectrum of cultures and ethnicities that Canada has to offer; as opposed to a homogenous space where adoptees stands out for their diversity.

Adoptees and parents observed that it was very important for adoptees to have relationships with other transracial adoptees. Parents observed a difference in how their children interacted, specifying "a calmness" that came over them when being in an environment where their experiences were shared and where no words were needed to explain. Adoptees also talked about these relationships as a space where they were able to address areas of their identity, especially struggles or particularities of the transracial experience. One adoptee recounted talking with a group of TRAs and realizing that none of them had accepted or embraced their Korean ethnicity. From her perspective, she saw them as deeply in "denial"; she also realized that *she had come into an understanding of herself* as a Korean woman.

Many adoptees listed relationships with siblings as of invaluable support in the development of their identity and sense of self. In families where there was the strength of more than one adopted child, the bond between siblings in all but one family was of great importance. Often, it was within the strength of such a bond that issues of race, difference, adoption and identity were first broached. In families where there were "home-made" siblings, parents and adoptees reported very tight and important relationships as well. In some cases, adoptees' relationships with "home-made" siblings were closer and more supportive than those with other adopted siblings. "My brother and I were really close. Not my adoptive brother . . . my white brother. We're the same age so we grew up like twins . . . we were really close; we're still really close." This adoptee explained that when she went to meet her birth-brother, she brought this special brother with her. No other member of her family has met him, including her transracially adopted brother. Another family remembered that when one of their adopted children first came home, she was predominantly "stone-faced" and "made it clear that she could live without us," as one parent put it; but she would smile for her "home made" brothers.

Adoptees reported that relationships with those of the same ethnoracial group or with other non-white peoples were very important to them. Many adoptees explained that while living in extremely non-diverse environments, it was comforting to find someone who was also non-white with whom they could connect and find support. Adoptees described a special bond of understanding with such companions. Some explained that making close friends with members of their ethnoracial community helped them feel connected to their heritage or to the world in general. One adoptee explained that : "I just feel—when I'm hangin' with other people who are black, I just feel like, I really am, more—me or something. Or that more parts of me can be, well, me! (laughter). . .I just feel like I get something back I lost." Others explained it was very important to have someone in their lives that understood from a first-hand perspective what their experiences

as a non-white person had been, and how immediate those communications were. One adoptee described the importance of "givens" in these relationships: all the things that you don't have to explain because the other "just gets it." The support did not even have to be spoken: it was understood.

Adoptees and parents alike addressed the question of diverse environments. Was it important to raise a TRA in a diverse environment? None of the families I spoke with lived in environments considered diverse and their conversations centered around asking themselves if they should move to Toronto in particular. Adoptees who had reached the age of living on their own had almost all moved into areas they identified as diverse or were planning to. Adoptees who lived on their own and adoptees who had lived for extended periods in diverse environments, specifically in boarding schools, listed diversity as a very important support to their identity. Many explained that they didn't feel so "on display" or so sectioned out from the crowd. Their difference, arising from being of colour or transracially adopted, significantly lost the negative connotation it had in homogeneous communities. They loved the opportunity to meet and get to know people from other life experiences, cultures, places in the world and family situations. To paraphrase an African saying, their lives become a bright addition to a complex and colourful tapestry of different experiences, as opposed to being the dark patch in a light coloured throw.

Role models were a commonly listed support that both adoptees and parents were glad that they had had or wished that TRAs had. Parents whose children had had some form of role model remembered how they were able to support their children in unique ways. For example, a few families had Nannies who were from the same country as their children. One Nanny, in particular, spoke to the children in their native language and was able to teach them about their country and their culture of origin. When this Nanny had to end her time working for the family, her sister came to continue her work. In time, these Nannies became members of the extended family

and continued to play a vital role in the development of these TRAs' sense of their country and culture of origin, not to mention their sense of themselves. Adoptees and parents from families where there were a number of TRAs observed that having older siblings who were also TRAs, especially if they were from the same ethnoracial group, was of great importance to both the younger and the older sibling. As cited above, being around other children helped older TRAs to formulate and ask questions about their lives. Both the younger and older siblings benefitted so much from their relationships that one parent is in the process of initiating a program that matches up younger TRAs with older TRAs as role models. My research *strongly* endorses this as a form of support for TRAs.

It was also observed by both adoptees and parents that being around children was helpful in accessing emotions. One adoptee explained that having her daughter brought her adoption issues to the forefront: "Just watching how my daughter has developed and how she makes connections with herself and the world, right? Her place in the family, um, I mean, that was a stage of my development that was definitely missed." Both having children and having another sibling adopted into the family helped adult and child adoptees alike to access emotions connected with their childhood. Parents observed that the older adoptees were able to ask questions about their childhood and their nurturing. One parent reported: "I found especially with (name) in particular. She said, 'Did I do this when I was a baby?' She had a lot of those questions and I could tell that she was going through—feeling a void and 'I want to know about when I was little' and you know, 'Is this what it was like for me?'" Parents felt that it gave them the questions, or an easily accessible context to ask the questions, that they wondered about. Parents also felt that seeing how the new child is treated helps older adoptees recognize how much their parents love them as well.

2. Family Culture

Family culture is what I am calling the dynamics, routines, relationships, beliefs, expectations, communication and parenting styles, etc., of a family. Adoptees explained that what they both found helpful and what they wished they had had was a family culture in which issues of difference, adoption, racism, etc., could be addressed safely and openly. Many adoptees reported that their families were not safe spaces in which to broach these topics, and that the absence of any conversation about these and other topics contributed to their feelings of isolation and to the pressure to create a false self. I have also incidentally talked about parenting styles such as how strict a family is and how sensitive they are to the TRAs' needs and experiences. Parenting style is a defining variable in family culture. For example, constant open and honest communication was made a conscious part of one family's culture. Their children were encouraged to talk about all kinds of things from their immediate interests to emotions, fears, experiences, concerns, opinions, etc. This family made it a priority to constantly be in communication with each other *and* with family friends. This latter connection was particularly important because the family had to remove itself from their family of origin due to racist rhetoric there. The parents believed that in this way they could create a safe space for any topic to be discussed, either with a parent, sibling or role model outside the immediate family. This culture also taught children to think and debate and to weigh options, enabling them to make educated choices for themselves. The adoptees in this family expressed little concern about issues of identity--which I speculated was related to the opportunities they had to engage with so many different parts of life and kinds of life, and with so many forms of support.

Another family made education and prevention of racism a part of their family culture. They went to their children's school and educated each of their children's teachers about important celebrations, world events and cultural customs. As one family pointed out, teachers also need

support in challenging discriminatory behaviour in their classrooms. Classroom teachers and school counselors are not always aware of the impacts that adoption, transracial adoption and/or discrimination can have on children. They are not always aware of how powerfully the silence about non-white peoples speaks to children, especially as the school system is among the most powerful acculturating and socializing influences throughout children's lives. Parents reported providing school staff with information on adoption, cultural celebrations, and ways to support peer mediation and conflict resolution, specifically around the issue of racial discrimination. They set a standard of immediate intervention and follow-up in cases of racism, after "getting the okay" from their child, and provided ongoing support to their school staff in these cases.

Another family included in their family culture the expression of parents' experiences and emotions. Parents would talk to their children in an age specific manner about their day, about situations with friends or memories about incidents in their own past similar to those their children were facing. In this way, emotions were always a part of how the family expressed themselves and part of their awareness. These are all examples of family cultures that parents and adoptees found created a safe and supportive environment in which to develop selfhood.

3. Anti-Racism Training, Multicultural Education and Educational Supports

Adoptees clearly and in no uncertain terms called for mandatory anti-racism training and multicultural education for parents who are intending to adopt transracially. Adoptees wanted parents to be able to identify situations in which racism was a factor and to support adoptees in dealing with these kinds of incidents. Adoptees wanted parents to be able to celebrate different cultures and in developing an appreciation of multiculturalism be able to appreciate the culture of the adoptees and difference in general. With a better understanding of racism and multiculturalism, parents are likely to be less ethnocentric and better prepared not only to support their children directly, but to support the community as well in its role in their children's life. For

example, as described above, some families took an active role in their children's school by providing information about their child's culture of origin. With education about cultures in general, parents could be a part of creating a community that celebrates difference in general, thus decreasing the stigma surrounding difference of any kind.

There were numerous areas about which parents wished they had been educated, or to which they were glad they had been exposed. Many adoptees wished that their parents had a better idea of what they were going through, not only as people of colour, but also as adoptees. Role models and friends who were going through a similar experience were important not only for adoptees but for parents as well. Support groups such as those established for parents of TRAs were described as being invaluable. Parents had a safe space to talk with people "who just got it." These groups provided a place to gain support, vent frustrations, brainstorm ideas, problem-solve, be educated, feel normal and partake of other enrichments. Regularly scheduled meetings also helped to keep parents conscious of what they were and were not doing as parents; helping them to keep thinking about their parenting while also being provided with tools, resources and ideas in a supportive environment. Every parent involved in such a group described it as a great support. Parents who were not remarked that it would have helped them, and stated their desire to participate in such groups. Some families were involved in the TRA community in a minimal way, notably in attending yearly gatherings. These were talked about in the same way as support groups, except that these parents wished that they could get together more frequently; however they often found that without a formal structure their attempts fell apart.

Adoptees and parents also talked about how therapeutic settings have been helpful. Some parents participated in therapy groups and both some adoptees and parents were in therapy. Support groups such as those described above provide an informal therapeutic support. Adoptees and parents also encouraged support groups for adoptees, as a way of sharing

experiences, getting support, problem-solving, as well as providing a medium through which adoptees can meet other adoptees. No participants had been involved in such a group.

The final theme in identifying supports that were educational was that of exposing adoptees to difference. In discussions about diversity, some adoptees and parents recounted that parents had made efforts to expose adoptees to diverse environments and multiculturalism. In particular, parents had gone along with adoptees to cultural events and, in some cases, had deliberately immersed themselves in environments where the parent was a part of the *minority* and the adoptee was a part of the *majority*. Parents made a concerted effort to celebrate events and holidays important in their child's native culture. Adoptees and parents also made special mention of how important it was for adoptees to be fully immersed in the culture of their adoptive families. Some families, however, were not sure how to define the term *culture*, as they felt that they had not grown up within a rich culture. As such, they struggled with identifying ways to celebrate their culture. Other families were rich in cultural traditions, such as history, stories, religion, the arts, food, clothes, etc. They celebrated these in their homes and in their everyday lives. Adoptees, in turn, explained that they felt that they had an appreciation of not only their parents' cultures, but of who their parents are as well. Sharing culture both ways also decreases the emphasis on the adoptee being *different*, and creates a *mutually celebratory and inclusive environment*.

Supports Contested

Some supports that were identified by parents, however, were not recognized as such by adoptees. In some cases, reports directly conflicted. For example, parents felt that doing school projects on adoptees' country of origin was an opportunity to celebrate their cultures. A few

adoptees remembered these moments as drawing attention to themselves as different and not as celebrating their culture. Similarly, some adoptees felt that getting involved in the culture of the adoptee or participating in support groups and events that bring adoptees together emphasized their difference. Simultaneously, numerous adoptees remembered picnics with TRA groups and their friendships with other TRAs as providing much needed support. There were other disagreements in interpretations and opinions. Some parents listed supports that they felt that they had provided or named supports that they felt were effective. Adoptees, however, did not report that these supports had been provided or did not interpret those efforts as being in fact supportive. To protect confidentiality, no specifics can be provided, but these cases were not charged with negative feelings from adoptees. It is important to point out that adoptees felt that the success of supports in creating a conducive environment is particular to the adoptee, their parents, and their family in general. For example, although one adoptee may find it uncomfortable to do a project on their country of origin, another may find it an *exciting opportunity* to research the country *with their parents* and present a piece of *their heritage* to their *friends and classmates*. Some adoptees may find this to be an expression of pride in their country and an opportunity to educate their community.

Conclusions

In summary, the following supports were common to discussions with both parents and adoptees:

Supports that helped or supports that were wished for/wanted
1. Anti-racism training, including how to deal with racism
2. Establishing a family culture in which it is safe to talk about adoption, racism, difference, etc.
3. Support groups and/or education addressing the kinds of challenges that multiracial adoptive families could face.
4. Having a Nanny who speaks the same language as adoptees
5. Connections with diverse communities
6. Living in diverse environments
7. Parents experiencing environments where they are the minority and the adoptee is a part of the majority

8. Celebrating cultural holidays and events
9. Celebrating and appreciating various art forms from adoptees' native culture (e.g., in homes, etc.)
10. Contact with other adopted and internationally adopted families and friends
11. Access to role models who have experienced similar life circumstances, such as adoption, racism, etc.
12. Raising adoptees to appreciate the culture of adoptive parents
13. Therapy and support groups for parents and adoptees
14. Parents actively setting standard that racism is wrong and immediately responding in incidents motivated by racism

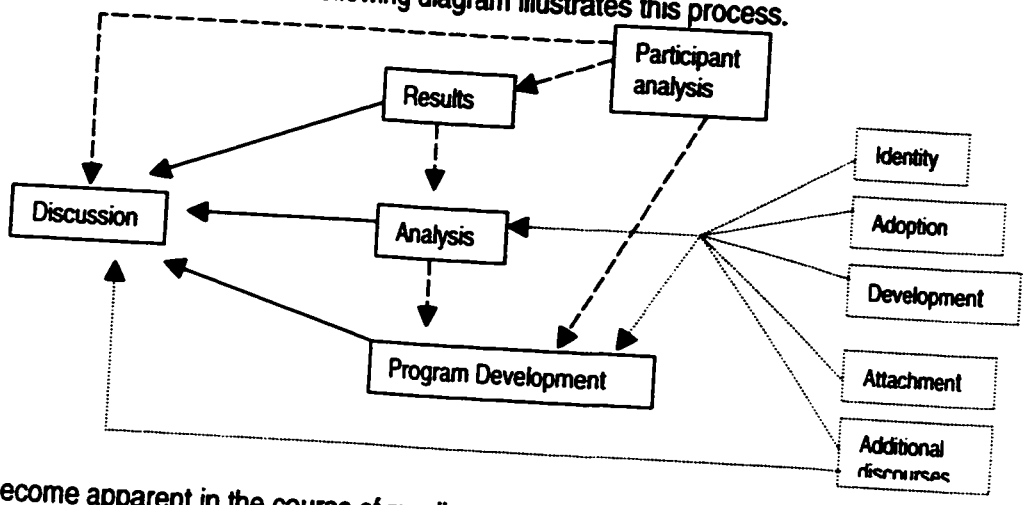
Education provided not only to parents but also to communities, specifically schools

I think it is important to point out that the relationship with parents was central to all discussions of supports. Adoptees presented supports that would help parents to parent, enrich the parents' role in their children's lives, and/or supplement areas where the parents were not able to support their children in the way adoptees wanted.

Discussion

Introduction

The goal of this research is to identify what should be included in a program to help multiracial families, specifically an educational program for parents adopting transracially. A parenting program is introduced after this discussion, but it offers a different distillation or configuring of the results. The discussion upon which I now embark is an academic exercise of analyzing the results; the program can be seen as its practical analogue or application. Although not mutually exclusive, theory and practice do represent contrasting modalities. Consequently the structuring of discussion topics and of program headings are not perfectly parallel. Every theme identified in the results section is not explicitly addressed in this discussion; neither is every theme identified in the program included in this discussion. And I include topics in the discussion that are not explicitly addressed in either of the other two sections. I have chosen these topics/themes for discussion because they have been the most salient in the *process* of developing such a program and are implicit within it. Both the main issues addressed and the analytical lenses I use throughout the discussion were inspired by the analysis participants offered when the data was collected and during the analysis. The various theoretical writings that I have drawn upon in my discussion came into my thinking throughout the whole process of framing, interviewing, analyzing, and of organizing material into a thesis. The following diagram illustrates this process.



I hope it will become apparent in the course of my discussion why I resort to each of these sources.

Because my subject is limited to parents and children who become such by adoption, it is difficult to discern how or how much of their experience has to do with adoption. Researching studies of these same features occurring generally between parents and children has helped me to contextualize my more specific investigation. In this way the research of others has functioned as a kind of control to mine. Reading these particular authors has thrown light on my own research, and it has also alerted me to questions and hidden complexities. It has helped me to *think* differently. And if there's anything I have learned in my meetings with families, it is what a difference how one thinks about experience makes to that experience.

My subjects are parents and children who say again and again that talking to others like themselves has been transformative--because it has given them new ways of thinking about their lives and/or confirmed their own intuitions. The researcher, in this case me, has to bring to her subjects a similar keen appreciation for sharing observations. This is what the theories I bring into my discussion have contributed to my thinking, for this thesis and for the program I hope will be useful eventually.

The results of this research can be developed around the main themes of *attachment and difference.* These are perspectives rather than categories, and they regularly overlap. I am using them in the contexts of both parenting and identity to frame my thoughts. That is to say that parenting and identity are at the heart of every topic discussed below.

To present my analysis, I will follow the streams of thought presented by adoptees and parents, and identify them as a developmental process of coming into awareness. Let me first say, however, that any theory of development is not absolute or predictive. These theories represent themes that may or may not hold true for *parts* of *some* adoptees' lives. Nor do these theories produce a complete explanation for the complexities of adoptees' lives, as adoptees are anything but a homogeneous group.

Attachment

Bowlby is generally known as the father of attachment theory, though its origins were collaborative. It was Bowlby (1969) who introduced us to the *attachment-figure*. An attachment-figure is someone whom a child seeks out when she is tired, hungry, ill, alarmed, or faced with a strange person or situation, or if the attachment-figure's location is unclear. After locating her attachment figure, the child will look to him for reassurance through various forms, such as being held and cuddled. The person whom the child chooses for her attachment-figure is based on who cares for her. Those who make up children's immediate environment will be those who end up as attachment-figures. In his discussion of attachment and attachment-figures, Bowlby supports adoption in no uncertain terms, writing that: *"The role of a child's principal attachment-figure can be filled by others than the natural mother "* (Bowlby, 1969, p. 304, my emphasis). "Such evidence we have is that, provided an attachment-figure behaves in a mothering way towards a child, he will treat her as another child would treat his natural mother" (Bowlby, 1969, p,306). Attachment is *foundational* to the dynamics that will be described throughout this discussion.

The initial experience of being separated from the birth mother has been referred to as the *primal wound* since Nancy Verrier's work (Beauchesne, 1997; Nydam, 1999), but I want to expand the site and scope of this first wound. First, the site of initial injury (Beauchesne, 1997) or the primal wound (Verriers cited in Beauchesne 1997 & Nydam, 1999) is traditionally understood as the separation from the birth mother. Many adoptees spoke about what I have called *adoptee sorrow*, in some way grieving this loss.

"It's a whole grieving process. I think, like, my mother said I cried the whole way home. I just sobbed."

Nydam (1999) explains that there are many ways that this initial wound is experienced. There is the separation itself, as well as the numerous other injuries: whether for instance, the child is

separated after infancy or the child is bounced around among temporary care arrangements. Furthermore, the complexity of adoptee sorrow is manifest in other moments when the child, whether she has been told she was adopted or not, comes into a knowing or understanding of what that means. The child comes to understand that she has another set of parents. Those *parents* may be held dear internally, but the child will probably never know them as *parents*. Furthermore, adoptees come to understand that those parents gave her up, and that it was through such events that she came to her adoptive parents. The knowledge that she is not of her adoptive parents can also act as a blow. These realizations occur within a complexus of painful understanding.

> *The grieving of this loss is critical for healthy adoptive development, as is any grieving that must be done in the face of personal tragedy.* And it is here, especially, where the adoptee is at greatest risk depending on whether adoptive parents communicate the freedom and permission to cry in their arms about lost birth parents (Nydam, 1999, p.31).

Nydan (1999) makes room for other moments throughout the adoptee's life when new understanding and awareness of what their loss means to them becomes clear. He mentions, for example, the divorce of adopting parents as another site of adoptee wounding; the adoptee may re-experience being *given up*.[1] He also talks about the unknown medical histories whose absence can reopen adoptees' wounds: planning to have a child or facing risks of hereditary diseases can remind adoptees of how little they know about their own being, and touch on the primary wound once again.

> I don't remember exactly how it came up but I was talking about heritable disease like if I was at risk for cancer or heart disease and stuff or if I wanted to have a baby having to do genetic testing to see if I was carrying something like a recessive gene for Sickle Cell. It just hit me, you know? Like I have no idea. It's scary.

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[1] I use the term being *given up* to reflect the *interpretation of the adoptee*, as distinct from the complex set of circumstances surrounding an adoptee being *placed for adoption*.

The second way that I want to expand the understanding of the primal wound develops observations both from adoptees and parents on the impact of being separated not only from biological mothers but from temporary caregivers as well. One adoptee spoke very clearly about grieving the loss of both her birth-mother and her foster mother. Parents who had adopted a number of children started to set personal standards for themselves. They would not adopt a child until the child had completely attached to their temporary caregivers and moved through what they felt to be a *sensitive period*. Bowlby (1969) points out that children who were found to have developed a strong attachment to one attachment-figure, were more likely to exhibit social behaviour to other specific figures as well. Children who show only a weak attachment to their primary attachment-figure, however, were more likely to concentrate their social behaviour on that one figure. Thus, according to Bowlby, the more insecurely attached a child is, the more inhibited he will be in developing other relationships. This discussion clearly supports sensitivity and attention being lent to encouraging a secure attachment between an adoptee and a foster-parent, or temporary caregiver if he is not able to be placed before attachment starts. This will not prevent the experience of grieving by the adoptee, but it may allow the child to develop another primary attachment more easily than a child whose primary attachment has been ruptured before attachment has been established. Many children, however, are placed in institutions before being adopted. Bowlby (1969) also cites the work of Spiro (1954) who studies children in Kibbutzim. Spiro found that children developed strong attachments to their parents, who saw their children an average of one or two hours a day and spent the whole day with them on the Sabbath. They did not, however, develop strong attachments to the metapeleth who cared for them in the communal nursery. As Bowlby (1968) suggests, and as I will expand on below, social interaction is at the heart of attachment.

Another part to the process of coming into awareness, of what it means to the adoptee to be adopted, is the issue of permanence. Nydam (1999) cites research done by Brodzinsky (1984) in

which it was found that as the child 's understanding of adoption matures, questions about the permanence of the adoption arise. Whereas in the initial stages of awareness at around 7 and 8 years of age, the child trusts that the adoption is permanent, as she gets a little older, doubts about this may arise. Brodzinsky seems to present this as only a phase in developing awareness, but considers it quite important (1984 cited in Nydam 1999). One of the adoptees with whom I spoke still remembers vividly going on a drive with his father and being convinced that he was being taken away to another home. This raises questions: Are children who have experienced initial relinquishment from a temporary caregiver such as a foster mother perhaps more likely to fear a repetition? Does the adoptee reexperience the primal wound, when he doubts the permanence of the present adoption? Is this phase when permanence of placement is questioned one of particular vulnerability for adoptees?

Thirdly, I want to focus on how the parent may be experiencing this primal wound. Bowlby (1969) speculates about the importance of postnatal hormone levels and the influence of a mother's hormonal levels on the interaction with the child and the motherly response to the child's needs. The adopting parent may find that her natural response is not as strong or fluent as it would be if she had given birth to the child. Whether this latter hypothesis is true or not, it has influenced popular culture, and because adoptive parents have usually received higher levels of education, it is much more likely that they have been exposed to these assumptions. I suspect these thoughts, in turn, may put additional pressures on adoptive parents to be not only the "good enough mother" (Winnicott, 1984; 1990) but the *perfect parent.* Nydam (1999) speculates that adoptive parents may feel guilty about not having created and given birth to their own baby. Parents may feel doubts about their entitlement. A number of parents with whom I spoke, for example, expressed guilt about their gain being another parent's loss. Nydam (1990) writes that these feelings of lack-of-entitlement may be expressed as pressure to prove their parenting abilities. They may overindulge their children or become overly protective out of fear that the birth-

family might return and take *their* child back. As previously detailed, a number of parents reported having conversations with other adoptive parents who had chosen to adopt internationally to prevent the threat of the birth-families reclaiming their children or indeed their adopted children being able to search out their biological families.

> Parents . . . have their own adoption story. Their stories often begin with infertility. Children by birth cannot be replaced by children by adoption. The wished-for birth child was never to be born to them. This is loss, deeply heartfelt loss. And some such couples adopt, not simply as an alternative way to build a family, but as a way to replace, without grieving for, the lost longed-for child by birth . . . And, in this collusion of making believe that things are different from reality, both adoptive parents and adoptees may be caught in the emotional and spiritual trap of never-released grief, *the number-one threat to adoptees and their families* (Nydam, 1999, p. 31, my emphasis).

This dynamic can be exacerbated if parents are feeling pressure to create a seemingly happy and seamless transition into perfect family living. This may be, for example, why adoptees report that parents did not want to see how difficult it was for them to integrate into their new home (cf., p. 63). Furthermore, if parents are insecure about their role as parents, addressing large issues that are emotionally charged may not be possible. In addition, parents' pre-adoption histories of infertility may be emotionally charged with intense fears of loss. I will elaborate on this further in the context of seeing difference in the section on racism, but for now it is important to make the point that parents may not want to delve into their children's experiences of loss because it threatens to remind them of losses that they experienced or could experience. In the case of couples adopting, it might remind them that their child is not biologically a product of their union.[2] For single parents, it may remind them of the lack of a union. Parents might be overwhelmed or ill-equipped to deal with

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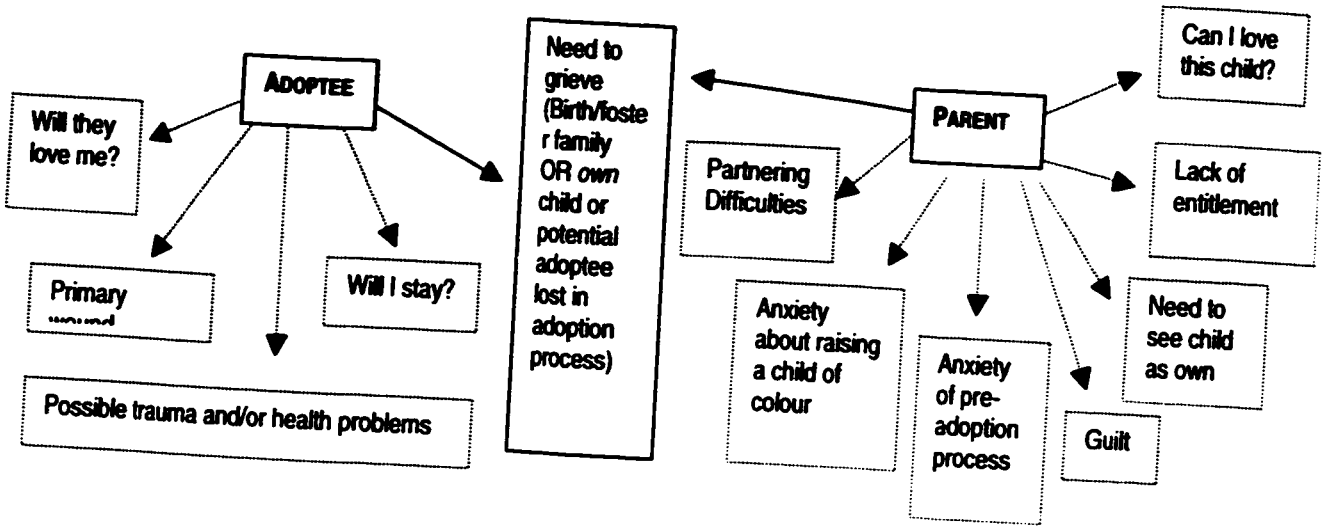
[2] The point was made to me as applying only to heterosexual couples. but I believe that homosexual couples may also lament the ability to reproduce with their partner.

such large issues. The point is that parents as well have experiences of loss that are filled with pain as. The pre-adoption stories of both the parents and the child meet in the adoption of a child and are at work in the process of attachment:



Bowlby (1969) recognizes that a caregiver taking over from the birth mother may be at a disadvantage in terms of attachment because he does not necessarily come into the child's life at birth. On the other hand, Bowlby (1969) provides support to parents who stated that 3.5 months to one year is a more sensitive phase than others. He explains that the infant becomes more ready to attach in the second and third months than in the immediate weeks after birth. He summarizes a number of different studies showing that before 4 months, differential responses are few and only visible when using extremely sensitive methods. Between 4 and 6.5 months, however, differential responses are numerous and apparent, and evident in most children by 6 months. "The fact that by the end of a half-year the elements of attachment behavior are clearly established in many infants suggests that during the preceding months—fourth, fifth, sixth—most infants are in high state of sensitivity for developing attachment behaviour" (Bowlby, 1969, p. 322). Recall from the results section that adoptive parents described their initial interactions with their new child as the feeling of trying to console someone else's child when she is hurt since their attempts to console were often in vain. The parents who adopted a number of children observed that those who were

adopted at either the age of 3.5 months or after approximately a year in foster care with a nurturing family were more easily consoled, and attached to their parents more swiftly. In her work in Ghanda, Ainsworth found the following:

> Some of the infants . . . who seemed most solidly attached to their mothers displayed little protest behaviour or separation anxiety, but rather showed the strength of their attachment to the mother through their readiness to use her as a secure base from which they could both explore the world and expand their horizons to include other attachments (cited in Bowlby, 1969, p.334).

This suggests that the development of a secure attachment to a foster parent allows the adoptee to make the transition to another set of attachment-figures more easily by using the foster parent as a kind of secure base which they may remember. I wonder if a secure base from a positive and nurturing foster family creates a baseline that the world is not a bad place and that the child not only deserves love and can be loved, but that the world (and especially the adopting parents) will provide them with love.

It must be kept in mind that attachment is not limited to the parent-child relationship alone. Bowlby (1969) goes on to point out that if a child has not attached to multiple specific figures by 18 months it is unusual. What relevance does this have for our discussion, which is after all focused on the parent-child relationship? First, it bears repeating that adoptees and parents alike remarked on the important role of siblings in adoptees, lives. And of course, parent-child relating occurs, and is modified by, an ever broadening network of relating. I will return to this in the final section of the discussion in my discussion of role models.

Adoptees' Relationships and Social Interactions

What comes to mind while juxtaposing the experiences of adoptees and parents in my research into the work of Bowlby and Ainsworth is that touch and intimacy have a bearing on attachment, as does anger: "If sadness seems to be the heartfelt response of adopted children . . .

anger may be the characteristic response of adopted adolescents" (Nydam, 1999, p. 41).

Attachment disorders[3] (AD) are described as disorders arising from traumatic disturbances in the child's first, second or third year of life. They are believed to lead to difficulties in developing trust, self-awareness and self-worth. They are also thought to be implicated in the development of cognition and conscience (Archer, 1996). In writing about AD in the context of adoption, Archer (1996) explains the following:

> Characteristic behaviour associated with attachment disorders include an avoidance of intimacy or inappropriate demands for intimacy, extreme oppositional-defiant or passive-aggressive behaviors, aggressive and violent behaviors—including self-destructive activities. There is an apparent lack of conscience or remorse, with stealing and "over the top" lying, abnormal eating and elimination patterns, an abnormal eye contact often including the "look that could kill" and a superficial veneer of charm with non-significant others, associated with an inability to form healthy, meaningful relationships with significant others" (pp. 56-57).

Before going any further, let me clearly state that my introducing AD into the discussion is not to claim it as predictive or fully explanatory. In my view, Archer demonstrates the usefulness of AD as a syndrome that has been observed, and formulated. Archer's exposition correlates with many of the observations reported in my results. Adoptees and parents alike talked about adoptees' difficulties with intimacy and relationships in general. For instance, adoptees made extreme demands for intimate interaction, from constant physical contact with friends and family to seemingly intimate interactions such as sex. On the other hand, they had trouble with personal understanding and respect for boundaries, and experienced sexual interactions without an emotionally intimate component. Both parents and adoptees reported lying. Parents reported a number of different eating patterns that could be recognized as obsessive-compulsive. Parents

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[3] See also DSM-IV (R) Reactive Attachment Disorders

reported a look that indicated to them that "there was something simmering under the surface," making parents uneasy. Parents also described a split in their child's behaviour, which oscillated between being charming outside of the home and acting out angrily with parents.

I repeat that the connection between what is known as AD and the observations of adoptees and parents is not predictive, nor does it provide a pat and complete explanation. For example, reluctance to allow touch is an interesting indicator, but of what? A child who has started the process of attaching to her caregiver may cry when someone who is not a caregiver wants to pick her up, but reach for his parents and bury their face in their arms. An adult may shy away from long hugs from their partner or from any kind of lasting relationship that is based on more than sexual gratification. As a framework for understanding these complexities more generally, I want to turn to the work of Mary Ainsworth.

The *Strange Situation*, created by Ainsworth (cited by Bowlby, 1969) is a series of three 20-minute episodes in which a one-year-old child is observed in a welcoming but strange playroom equipped with an ample number of toys. The child is first observed with her mother. The child is then left in the playroom with a stranger as the mother leaves, then is observed reuniting with the mother. Three patterns of behaviour emerged from this experiment.

Group B: Securely Attached	Group A: Anxiously attached to mother and **avoidant**	Group C: Anxiously Attached tc mother and **resistant**
▪ Active in play and, after separation, actively seeks mother out after absence and is easily consoled and return to absorbed play ▪ Unlikely to be upset in mother's absence ▪ Cried less, developed more subtle means of communicating with mother and was more cooperative in meeting her wishes and commands ▪ When exploring more likely to use mother as a secure base from which to explore constantly tracking her location and returning to her from time to time	▪ Approximately 20% ▪ Avoid mother at reunion, particularly after a second separation ▪ Many treat the stranger in a more friendly manner than their mother ▪ Principal feature observed at home was approach-avoidant conflict in terms of close bodily contact ▪ More prone to angry behaviour than the other groups. Anger rarely directed at mother.	▪ Approximately 10% ▪ Oscillate between seeking proximity and contact with mother, and resisting contact or interacting with mother ▪ Some are comparatively mor angry ▪ Some are passive ▪ Especially angry and resistar when observed at home, specifically when mother triec to engage them in play. ▪ Appears to desire conflict. ▪ Passive in situations where another child would be active

Bowlby, 1969, pp. 337-339 Note: Ainsworth and Bowlby also clarify that this work is largely culturally specific.

The behaviour of children in both the A and the C groups provides useful hints in relation to difficulties with attachment, but examining the descriptions of the three groups raises a few questions. I should point out first that all of those with whom I spoke are adopted, which must make us cautious about too simplistically assuming that their attachment difficulties arise from adoption. If these patterns of behaviour are taken to be indicators of different patterns of attachment and different ways in which children respond to separation, can these examples be used to elucidate adult life as well? And is adoption a factor? What impact do these behavioural characteristics have on relationships?

First, I wonder about the impact of rejections of touch and chronic anger on relationships with parents. Many parents spoke about how difficult it was for them to care for a child who pushed them away physically and emotionally. Rejection by your baby can be difficult for any parent. In the case of a parent filled with excitement at finally having a baby, perhaps after having fertility traumas in her pre-adoptive history, being promised an adoptee but then losing him to some

technicality is a very difficult experience. For some parents the blow to their expectations comes as a kind of rejection of their parental capacity. The very influential infant research of Daniel Stern and Beatrice Beebe contextualizes the phenomenon of parental vulnerability to their child's behavioural initiatives. In their close observation, including timed filming, of mother-infant interactions, Stern and Beebe (Stern, 1985) discovered the surprising degree of reciprocity of impact between the two participants:

> . . . investigators have described in detail how caregivers and infants mutually create the chains and sequences of reciprocal behaviours that make up social dialogues during the infant's first nine months (p. 139).
>
> . . . infants exert major control over the initiation, maintenance, termination, and avoidance of social contact with mother; in other words, they help to regulate engagement. (p. 21).
>
> . . . when the mother overstimulated him, Stevie would avert his head to the side. Mother would respond to this dodge by chasing him with her face and escalating the stimulus level of her behavior to capture his attention. He would then execute another dodge, swinging his face away to the opposite side. Mother would follow his head with hers, still trying to maintain the vis-à-vis engagement at the level *she wanted. Finally, if he was unable to avoid her gaze, Stevie would become more upset and end up crying. . .*This kind of intrusive overstimulating behavior on the part of the mother can arise from many causes: hostility, need for control, insensitivity, or an unusual *sensitivity to rejection such that the mother interprets each infant head aversion as a "microrejection"* and attempts to repair and undo it (p. 194-195, my emphasis).

The complex and dynamic tension between adoptees' and parents' interpretations and needs are filled with the possibility of misattunement. Bowlby reports on a study by Schaffer and Emerson (1964, cited in Bowlby 1969) that found the difference between children who did and did

not want to be cuddled bore directly on the strength of their attachment. Children who were found to have a lesser attachment pulled away and actively rejected physical contact. But non-cuddling children were found to enjoy other kinds of physical contact, like being swung around or simply sitting on their parents' knee. What differentiated them from other children was their dislike of being *restrained* (Bowlby, 1969). This brings to mind observations in my research: that adoptees had trouble with rules and strict parenting. A number of adoptees reported leaving home at what would be considered an early age. Many felt a need to leave home because of limitations put on their ability to explore their identities. For example, many adoptees felt a drive to engage in sexual activity. There were a number of complex reasons and ways that this unfolded, but it also reminded me of not wanting to be restrained. Parents felt that they were being taken for granted or being disrespected, but adoptees insisted that they just needed room to do what they wanted, to *act out* who they were. Nydam (1999) for example, writes

> . . .part of the struggle of adolescence is to build a personal identity that is satisfying, with which one can be happy. This is the difficult but lifelong important work of self-definition. So when a teen decides to put a ring in his ear or her navel, it is not simply a matter of looking for someone's attention, especially that of an anxious parent. It is first a matter of presenting oneself to the world as a unique individual who has a need to be seen and understood in a certain fashion (p. 65).

Nydam goes on to ask what role a teenage pregnancy could have in this context and in the context of adoption. There is a way that sexual behaviour may get entwined with relinquishment. As one adoptee explained in her discussion of living a lesbian lifestyle over the past five years: "I think the gender might have something to do with the abuse. Um. Might have something to do with just sort of like trying to connect—this might sound really weird but—trying to connect with the mother, the woman, the womb." Any attempt to restrict it might be *feverishly* fought off, as was reported by adoptees and parents. Some interpreted their parents' sternness as rejections that furthered their

feelings of isolation. Grotevant (1992) talks about the importance of a good fit between parents and their child. Grotevant, McRoy and Jenkins (1988 cited in Grotevant, 1992) found that incompatibility in the behavioural styles of adoptees and parents was a variable in family problems in 16% of the case studies (compared with 2% in non-adoptive families). It may be that understanding an adoptee's personality traits and her history in relation to attachment should inform parents, both in their relationship with their child and in their parenting styles. A good fit in an adoptive family may provide a safe space for adoptees to find a way of being in relationships that support them in developing identity, and following Bowlby's (1969) observation of social interaction, may strengthen the ability to securely attach.

Secondly, I wonder about the relevance of these conclusions for relationships later in life. A tendency towards an angry reaction could also impact upon interactions with peers. And as adoptees clearly stated, their difficulty with intimacy and their tendency to opt for purely sexually gratifying relationships as opposed to more intimate relationships are all evident connections. In the event that close relationships, both platonic and romantic, are established, does the adoptee go through characteristic responses to incidents that they interpret as separation? Hendrix (1992) argues that the lower brain does not in fact distinguish between a trauma that happened in early life from an incident that triggers that trauma in adult life. For example, suppose my romantic partner or a friend says that she/he will call me from work to discuss our plans for an upcoming vacation, but then does not call. I may read this situation as danger and start to worry. I may start phoning her/his place of work. If I do not get any answer or if I leave messages but get no call in return, I could find myself in quite an emotional state. As Hendrix explains, my brain does not distinguish this moment from the experience of my primal wound. Thus I launch into a reaction that might mirror those seen in the *Stranger Situation*. When I do get a call back, I may avoid her/him and say that I don't really want to talk, but then not let them off the phone. I may be very cold, passive or angry. While observing both myself and my adopted friends (without a control, of

course), I have seen this situation play out numerous times. But again I am reluctant to view these connections as explanatory and/or predictive, and I am considering adoption to be a factor, where Ainsworth does not.

Difference

What struck me initially in listening to the streams of thought of parents and adoptees was that, regardless of how many supports either parents or adoptees acknowledged, the struggles that they had faced dominated their discussions. Adoptees and parents alike reported a long list of supports that were provided to adoptees, but even adoptees who had experienced these supports talked about great difficulties in the process of developing their identities. I want to point out that a great many of the supports listed by parents were being provided for adoptees who are still young; these supports, therefore, were not included in the adoptee interviews. In thinking about what was at work in the imbalance between supports and struggle, it occurred to me that if the difference in adoptees' lives was not recognized, their capacity to respond to supports was undermined.

> The identity process becomes increasingly complex as *layers of 'differentness'* are added; thus, this process is typically more complex for adopted than for non-adopted persons. Because most of the additional dimensions of differentness do not concern things that the person has *chosen*, the task of identity involves 'coming to terms' with oneself in the context of the family and culture into which one has been adopted. Although the identity task may be more complex for adopted than non-adopted persons, this does not imply that there is anything pathological about it (Grotevant, 1997, p.4, my emphasis).

In this quotation Grotevant introduces us to the significance of context: what is at issue is not simply the givens, but also the meanings that they hold and within which they are perceived. He contextualizes my discussion as well, for this research does not state that transracial adoption is itself a unified variable or dynamic that produces certain results and/or struggles. The dynamic or variable as evolving from the layers of difference is what I want to address in this work.

Adoptees' Relationships and Social Interactions

In moving from a discussion of attachment to one of difference, I reiterate that this is a shift of perspective rather than category. Thus, the same *arenas of behaviour* may be in view. And what follows concerning difference is seen to throw light onto the nature of attachment.

Bowlby writes that ". . . evidence is now weighty that amongst the most effective reinforcers of attachment behaviour is the way a baby's companions respond to his social advances" (Bowlby, 1969, p. 314). Two variables are of greatest significance to the intensity of the parent-child bond. The first is the parent's attunement to their child's needs or the readiness with which a parent responds to the child's crying. Second is the quality and perseverance of the parent's readiness to initiate social interaction. Bowlby (1969) also clarifies that if a child is given *sufficient social interaction,* especially in the middle to latter half of the first year, the child will "quickly develop a discriminated attachment once he is given the opportunity to do so." However, without social stimulation, the child will develop much more slowly (Bowlby, 1969, p. 323). With proper social interaction, the evidence suggests that a child's sensitive period for attaching can persist to up one year. Some children experience a delay in attachment even until two years of age, which Bowlby describes worrisome since they do not attach to any figure. Children who are raised in institutions are primarily at risk of attachment delays. Even some children raised in families, not in institutions, experience delays in developing attachment, but do develop attachment later in their lives. This suggests that a child's sensitivity to attach persists as a structural need. The implications for children who cannot be adopted immediately or within a short time after birth are obvious.

The significance of social interaction takes me back to the dynamic between struggles and supports I describe above. I wish to expand upon the ways that the quality of social interaction relates directly to attachment. If attachment is a life-long dynamic (Bowlby, 1969), and if our primal brains do not distinguish the present from the initial wounding (Hendrix, 1992), then adoptees'

experiences of deep emotional struggles, despite the presence of supports, can be *understood if the supports are not sufficiently social* (i.e., do not involve interaction between the child and the parent) *or if the quality of social interaction omits specifically needed elements*. For instance, how a child's social advances are met in relation to *grieving* and also *difference* could modify the quality of the parent-child attachment. One family told the story of a pre-verbal child of South East Asian descent putting her hands up on her parents' faces and pulling the sides of their face. When she had words, she gave this action the phrase "they won't stay." This action can be thought of as a social advance. It can also be seen as the creation of meaning. As early as the pre-verbal stage the child is noticing difference and trying to make social sense of it, through a social advance to her parents to engage with her experience of difference. The little girl was not alarmed; she was looking for meaning. If the parents are not attuned to the child's need to engage with difference, or if they are ill-equipped to deal with this interchange, could a barrier to attachment be formed? Put another way, does this initial moment encourage the process of splitting one self from another that adoptees and parents described?

This pre-verbal/early verbal phase is also characterized by social referencing and exploration. In *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, Daniel Stern (1985) describes his attempt to study prohibitive behaviour. He and his team quickly realized, however, that there are myriad factors going into this communication. For example, the parent may say "Don't touch that," which at the linguistic level appears clearly to be a prohibition. However, the parent may say that with a smile on their face and a playful tone indicating that the intent is not prohibitive—the scene might be followed by "I'm gonna get you" and the two fall into a tickle fight. In the same way, the parent might say "are you sure that is a good idea?", which may not equate to a prohibition linguistically but clearly is, given the body language and tone of voice. Stern's team studied how a parent-child dyad related around a topic that the team *knew* was prohibited. What Stern and his colleagues found was that the child was able to interpret this complex series of messages.

> Our overall impression was that the mother sent out the "authentic" prohibition in one or more channels and then used the other channels to modify, contradict, or support the prohibitive messages or to send out a competing "authentic" message . . . We had expected adults to be able to deal with this level of complexity, but we did not forsee that *infants too, almost from the beginning, have to learn to decipher mixed messages* (Stern, 1985, p.216, my emphasis).

If this dynamic of competing messages in reference to exploring difference is set at this phase, how does it relate to the exploration of identity in later life? For example, how far does it impact on the adoptee's identity if a parent is verbally communicating an *inauthentic* message that it is okay to explore the differentness of the adoptee's identity while physically communicating that it is actually not acceptable. Adoptees described parents who said that they supported exploration of difference (i.e., searching for birth families, celebrating culture, etc.) but gave another message in their physical language. Adoptees described "just knowing" that this kind of exploration was unacceptable. Do these moments in early childhood elucidate adoptees' reports of receiving parental messages that difference is not to be explored because their parents have (tacitly or unconsciously) sent the message that this is unacceptable? Taken a step further, if such complexity is experienced, is this translated as not only can the *parent* not handle difference, but that *others* cannot handle the child's differentness? Stern is identifying sophisticated capacities in amazingly young children, evidence of their attunement to a rich parental repertoire. It definitely functions very positively in their lives, but it also lays them open to conflicting and confusing elements as well. How does this become woven into the child's identity? *Communication* means understanding that is not self-alienated, it is one's vehicle of learning how one gets into the world. If the way I function *out there* doesn't work, then I jump outside myself to function: I create a *false self*. This becomes the way I travel, the vehicle in which I drive through life. These pathways and patterns, in fact, are also laid down neurologically. The child is in the process of forming her

synaptic connections through this time period. To my chagrin these are questions beyond the scope of this research.[4]

The Narrative of Identity and the False Self

> For adopted persons, identity development . . . involves *constructing a narrative that somehow includes, explains, accounts for, or justifies their adoptive status.* If things are going well, narratives lend a sense of coherence and meaning to the experience of individuals constructing them. Such outcomes are presumably associated with psychological well-being and resilience. Conversely, the inability to construct a coherent narrative that confers meaning to the individual's life circumstances can be related to various forms of psychological distress . . . In terms of adoption, we must ask *what are the consequences of constructing a personal narrative that ignores the fact of one's adoption.* (Grotevant, 1997, pp. 10-11, my emphasis).

As we have seen, the process of identity starts from the beginning of life (Stern, 1985; Erikson, 1968; Winnicott, 1990). I want to take some space to explore what is being created through this process. As I said in the introduction, this research tells a story of becoming, of coming into awareness. I want to propose that what this involves, is the creation of a narrative. Grotevant (1987) proposes three aspects of identity which I am using to form my thoughts. First is *self-identification*, which he explains as a combination of both our personal characteristics and our social style, through which others and ourselves define us. Second is our *subjective sense of coherence of personality* which, he explains, involves the construction of meaning, both individually and socially. Third is our sense of *continuity.* By this he means the linkages across our past, present and future. ". . . identity stands at the interface of individual personality, social relationships, subjective awareness, and external context" (Grotevant, 1997, p. 5).

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[4] For more on neurological development and its relationship to this topic, see Allan Schore.

Like any individual, the adoptee has numerous nuances of his person and his life to incorporate into his narrative, into his identity. But Grotevant (1997) argues that most challenges unique to adoptees focus on the incorporation of what he calls *givens*, or the assigned parts of our person (i.e., gender, race, adopted status, etc.) into their lives, rather than the *choices* they may make. Honneth (cited in Beauchesne, 1997) puts forth the observation that *intersubjective recognition* is critical in the individual's process of forming and safeguarding her identity integrity. Without that recognition, she is *vulnerable to repeated injury* to herself by *harm to her understanding of herself.* What is especially damaged, according to Honneth, is both her potentials (that is, the given or assigned) and his *choices* (cited in Beauchesne, 1997). The question begs to be asked: what is the impact of not addressing difference in general, especially adoptive status and the ethnoracial and cultural difference of the parents and their child? The way adoptees deal with the elements of their lives over which they have no control has ramifications for the kinds of choices that they can make later (Grotevant, p.82, 1992). A number of adoptees exemplified Honneth's argument that the lack of recognition harmed potential:

> Even just now I'm just starting to go to university now, I've never gone before because I didn't think I was smart enough, I didn't think I could do it and I wasn't really encouraged. . . you know they were just, she's done what she can do. . .it's now when I'm in my thirties when I've found my birth-mother, found my brother, like gone to therapy, done all these things—come out—that It's like-- oh maybe I actually can do this.

Grotevant (1992) argues that assigned components of identity provide context for choices. In the case of this adoptee, her white siblings were encouraged to excel whereas she was not. She interpreted this as putting boundaries on what she, as a black woman, could do. She is not, however, bound by this context and manages to break free from it through an integration of her identities.

As stated earlier, the silence surrounding adoptees' experiences of difference was the topic adoptees most often voiced. Conversely, when listing supports adoptees made particular mention of their parents celebrating difference. Adoptees listed being exposed to a diverse environment (e.g., boarding schools, etc.), visiting places with different ethnoracial make-ups, going to places where the parent is the ethnoracial minority, parents having friends from diverse communities, etc. It was, however, the lack of recognition of difference that they described as still leaving them *vulnerable to injury*. Adoptees described difficulty not only making choices in relation to or in celebration of their ethnoracial identity, but also in recognizing actually having choice—as did the adoptee quoted above. Even adoptees whose parents provided supports that celebrated difference, expressed anxiety around embracing *their own difference from their families*. They indeed felt that their place in their families was tentative, resting on their assuming an *as if persona:* as if the adoptee was born to their adoptive parents (Lifton, cited in Nydam, 1997; Beauchesne, 1997). Returning to Grotevant's (1997) aspects of identity, this lack of recognition could impact upon how an adoptee self-identifies, and on the *coherence* of his personality. Adoptees described the lack of recognition as leading to the creation of a "false self."

Adoptees described feeling the need to create an identity that could conform to the required norm of their immediate environment. "There's definitely that feeling that your complete assimilation is necessary in order to be loved . . . In retrospect I recognize it now I grew up under the thing that I had to, um, completely deny who I'd previously been in order to be loved." In this split, the adoptee's *continuity* of self is also ruptured, and continues to be ruptured throughout her life unless she is able to integrate the various parts of her narratives. Lifton (cited in Nydam, 1997) writes that many adoptees adapt to their role in what she calls the *adoption game*, through either adopting the role of the *good adoptee* or the *bad adoptee*.

> In the first case, as a "good adoptee," the child or adolescent adapts carefully to the expectations of adoptive parents as a defense against the horrible possibility of further

> relinquishment. It is important to note that this adaptation of good behavior is different from the task of being good because of solid and clear attachment. Instead, it is meant to be protective and so it is experienced differently, as an *"as if" persona that protects the true self from injury* . . . (Nydam, 1997, p. 66, my emphasis).

Some adoptees find the courage to make the shift over to being a *bad adoptee*. As the *bad adoptee*, they let their parents in on the struggle that they are facing within. "Becoming a 'bad adoptee' in adolescence means taking on the fears of future abandonment that may have haunted the adoptee all along" (Nydam, 1997, p.66). If the adoptee cannot face this risk, then he may never face this side of himself, leaving that part *lost*, and the remaining person feeling like a partial person. Others, according to Lifton, start in the role of the *bad adoptee*. These adoptees push closeness away, act out and prefer to fight. These possibilities are reminiscent of Ainsworth's groups in the *Stranger Situation* (cited in Bowlby, 1968; cf., p. 113). Further research has led to correlations between group A (anxiously attached and *avoidant*) and conduct disorders, aggressive behaviours and depression; and to correlations between group C (Anxiously attached and *resistant*) and phobias, anxiety disorders, psychosomatic symptoms and depression (Mash & Wolfe, 1999, p. 53).

How can we take these observations and theories and put them in the context of helping parents parent? Winnicott (1990), who most paradigmatically talks about the *true self* and the *false self* (not to be confused with multiple personalities), refers them back to the relationship with the mother (or more generally the primary caregivers). He explains that the caregiver who is *good enough*, both meets to some extent the omnipotence of the child and makes sense of it. But if the caregiver repeatedly implements the child's omnipotent expressions, then he provides for the child's weak ego. On the other hand, the caregiver that is not *good enough* does not *dialogue* with the child's omnipotence. He is not able to meet the child's gesture, but initiates and substitutes his own instead. The parent's gesture is given precedence by the child's compliance. "This

compliance on the part of the infant is the earliest stage of the False Self, and belongs to the mother's inability to sense her infant's needs" (Winnicott, 1990, p.145). The child's gesture is reminiscent of Bowlby's discussion of the social advances to the parent—and more specifically, of the little South East Asian girl described on page 106. In this context, it suggests to me that both attunement and communication are of crucial importance in the parent-child relationship. It demonstrates again that attachment is at the foundation of discussions of adoption. Adoption provides the possibility for healing and the living of a productive life. It also must be entered into, however, with an awareness of the potential struggles it may mean for adopting families.

When the misattunement is severe, or the gestures of the child are consistently overridden by the parents, we find fertile ground for the child to repress the non-acceptable parts of herself. In creating this *self*, some adoptees may *split* off the parts of themselves that are non-white, that are from before, so that she has virtually no birth-family, no country of origin, no ancestral connection, no native culture, etc.. It is this split identity that adoptees described as causing great turmoil later in life and that needed to be healed. Some felt that in order to heal they needed to search out their biological families. Others found they needed to surround themselves with people from the same racial and ethnic communities. Some spoke about a desire to return to their country of origin. To close the split in their identities, they needed to reclaim their *lost* or *denied selves* (Hendrix, 1992). Lifton (1994 cited in Grotevant, 1997) introduces what she calls *cosmic loneliness*.

> . . . the adopted child's narrative is broken when she is lifted out of her own genetic and historic family line to fix the break in the adoptive home by the fragmentary adoption narrative . . . (Lifton, 1994, p. 37 cited in Grotevant, 1997, p.10).
>
> Connected to his adoptive home by the fragmentary adoption narrative and disconnected from his real biological narrative, he has lost his place on the intergenerational chain of being (Lifton, 1994, pp.46-47 cited in Grotevant, 1997, p.10).

In reading this passage I was reminded of the phrase *If you don't know where you come from, you don't know where you are going.* As this phrase refers to the stolen histories of the African diaspora, and to face silence about the histories of people of colour, it's all too familiar. In her doctoral thesis *As if Born to*, Lise Beauchesne (1997) argues that coming to terms with being adopted means addressing a hierarchy that privileges biology over all else, relegating adopted status to a lower stratum. Thus "adopted" is a problematic identity, that leads to falsifying the adoptee's identity, *as if they were born to* their adoptive families.

> I remember looking at photos after our family had gone on some--one of those family trips. There were all these photos of my Dad and his brothers and sisters and all their kids and their kids. Then in the middle of all those photos was this dark face and this huge afro! I mean the thing that really stood out for me was that they all looked alike and they had this kind of bond you know? I mean they'd talk about great-great-grandmother 'so and so' and look at pictures and go on about who looks so much like 'so and so' and all that. Then there I was . . . just smiling like it meant something to me outside of how fucking lonely it made me feel!

While study after study measuring adoptees' identities show little to no difference between adoptees and those who are not adopted, they do not ask about the subjective factor of *adopted identity*. Benson, Sharma & Roehlkepartain (1994 cited in Grotevant, 1997) found that twenty-seven percent of adoptees approved of the statement that "adoption is a big part of how I think about myself" while forty-one percent claimed to think about adoption at least 2-3 times a month, or as even often as every day. Those who support open adoption argue that knowledge of one's past is a basic human need (Grotevant, 1997). Family is a big part of many peoples' lives, and if adoption is frequently on the minds of adoptees it is not surprising that adoptees are often hyper-aware of their "as-if-born-to" status. Providing adoptees with information about their adoption stories may be an important medium for adoptees to find their place. One adoptee said: "I don't

know, I just. . . ultimately I just feel like I have to create my own identity. . .I . . .learned to look for my own answers. " If there is no space to voice feelings of cosmic loneliness and no access to information about adoptees' histories, where do those feelings go? Even if the adoptee is able to achieve some integration, there is no way to know who he would be if he had not split a part of himself off. Part of the self may mature and engage with the environment, but even when brought into the everyday, the false self lags at a different developmental stage. These split selves may be shared with family at some point, or they may remain a separate part of the adoptee's life. They may be lived out with others who are understanding, but they may also be accessed in fantasy.

Fantasy, Myth and the Family Romance

> I mean the whole fantasy of the mother—I mean for me especially, I mean since the chances of me being reunited with my birth-parents are very very slim—I build up fantasies about it . . .

Without knowledge, adoptees are left to wonder, to imagine, and to create their own stories. Children's tendency to fantasize about the potential of belonging to another family has been written about, most notably by Freud in his considerations of "the family romance" (Freud, 1909; 1939). Many of us have had conversations with people who have grow up thinking they were adopted or perhaps wished that they were adopted! But for the adoptee, there actually is another family, another set of parents. There is an important difference however. For children who create a romance of another family, that family can only be better than what it is they are living in. For the adoptee, this family could be bad as well. The other family has, after all, rejected the adoptee through relinquishment (Nydam, 1999). The fantasy is a part of the adoptee's narrative. In these fantasies the adoptee may find another site of splitting the self.

Brinich (cited in Nydam, 1999) explains that the "double representational world" of the adoptee (fantasy and reality) can predispose the adoptee to living a split life which he must, at some point, deal with and address (p. 95). As Cohen (1994) points out, however, "[g]iven the

absolute centrality of lack and loss to children who have been abandoned or rejected by their birth parent, it would hardly be surprising if many of them developed a strong emotional attachment to personal myths of origin which function as defense mechanisms in this way" (p. 46). Nydam (1999) makes an interesting argument for fantasies of birth-families operating as unusual kinds of transitional objects. A transitional object's meaning stems from what it represents, namely, the confidence the child has that the caregiver will attend to needs and attune to the child. The child essentially concretizes that relationship with the caregiver in the form of the transitional-object: such as a favourite toy, blanket, etc., which it has endowed with key importance. Thus the child is able to tolerate separation from the caregiver. The ability of the child to handle being alone rests on the confidence the child has in her relationship with the caregiver. As the child internalizes this relationship, she no longer needs the transitional object (Winnicott, 1986; cited in Nydam, 1999). In the case of the fantasies of the birth-parents as transitional object, however, this process cannot unfold, as the birth-parents are not "available for continuing nurture . . . This object absence means that the relinquished adoptee is left *without* assistance towards psychological development out of this intermediate space toward new psychic land where fantasy and reality are more clearly distinguishable" (Nydam, 1999, p. 100). Nydam points out that these fantasies can become a fixation for the adoptee. The transitional object is alive, but it is "running in place" (1999, p.100). The adoptee may hold onto the relationship into adult life so as not to *lose* the birth-parent. Compare this with the image of an adult bringing a "blanky" to work. In this context it is not surprising that adoptees reported feelings of being split into parts. It also leaves me wondering about the possibility of adoptees becoming fixated on difference such as adoption or race, which some adoptees did describe, as a form of attachment to transitional objects.

Secondly, Nydam (1999) also points out that as transitional objects, fantasies of parents can manifest themselves in negative stories or representations. Internalizing this object amounts to exposure to the pain associated with being placed for adoption. Yet, this could be a way of

working out the anger an adoptee has for his birth-parents for letting him go. Like the bad adoptee, if this is too much for the adoptee to absorb, he may repress these feelings and/or include them within the *lost self*. This leads to the third way these fantasies can act as transitional objects: through representing the struggles surrounding ambivalence. It may be through these fantasies that adoptees close the gap between the good and the bad elements of their birth-stories and their birth-parents. As adoptees mature and deal with the various feelings and questions that surround being placed for adoption, they may use the fantasies to integrate these elements (Nydam, 1999).

The fantasies of the birth-parents are, on some level, a part of the adoptees' story beyond just the biological. These fantasies become a part of the narrative as well. Those adoptees who had some amount of information about their adoption stories and their birth-parents appeared to be more equipped to merge the fantasy and the reality. If adoptees feel that they are unable to search for information to fill in the blanks in their adoption stories, which they have had to fill with fantasy, are they less likely to integrate these parts of their lives? Would this kind of support (i.e., information about their birth-stories) provide adoptees with needed tools to integrate the split parts of themselves?

Racism

The equilibrium that the adoptive family and the adoptee may be living in meets a *disequilibration* crisis, as Grotevant (1997) calls it, when faced with the immediacy of difference. Among the most startling of such experiences is that of racism. Encountering the greater public's reactions to themselves and to their families sometimes acted as an abrupt reminder of the difference between the adoptees and the rest of their families. Experiences of racism emphasized difference but add a new dynamic, a new layer of difference (cf., p. 117). The theory focusing on the development of ethnoracial identity states that such an experience highlights the meaning socially given to racial difference. It acts as a catalyst for moving out of *diffusion* or *foreclosure* and into *moratorium*, an explorative phase (cf., p. 4). As an understanding of racism becomes a part of

an adoptee's consciousness, all situations that follow are seen in that light and dealt with on some level, or ignored and repressed. Racism differentiates the adoptee from the greater society (us and them) and, in some way, from the experiences of those within their family. But as I have been suggesting, understandings of difference precede the abrupt *disequalibrating crisis*.

As explained earlier, racism in the Canadian context is not necessarily overt. Part of the challenge of *democratic racism*, especially in Canada, is being able to identify the contradictions within the rhetoric (cf., p. 1). Many adoptees described episodes in which they felt that they were victims of racism, and their parents either did not recognize the situation at all or stated flat out that the adoptees were misinterpreting the incident. Regardless of where "the truth" lay in those situations, the adoptees remembered their parents' unwillingness or inability to recognize the impact on their children or act in defense of their children. These situations, I am proposing, only underscored the adoptees' feelings of isolation, separateness, lack of empathy and belonging. Adoptees made *social advances* (Bowlby, 1969) to their parents for understanding and support, but were not met with *intersubjective recognition* (Honneth, cited in Beauchesne, 1997). They were left alone, adding yet another layer to their experience of otherness.

Adoptees listed the need for anti-racism training for parents as a "mandatory" support before they adopt; they felt it would be of *particular* importance. In my view, this is an ingenious and creative suggestion, expressing adoptees' strong desire to open their experience of differentness to their parents and their hope of alleviating (if even a little) and preventing the pains of isolation, splitting and falseness.

Racism impacts on parents as well. Many parents spoke about their disillusionment with Canadian society after adopting transracially. Many parents had to face a difficult reality: their friends and family were racist. Parents, grandparents and friends clearly spoke out about their disapproval of adopting a child of colour (cf., p. 57). Some family members refused to be involved with them or to even meet the child. Some adamantly rejected the notion of introducing a

child of colour into *their* family. Some friends, while supporting the *idea*, refused to let their children fraternize with adoptees. The parents had to face some hard realities about the world in which they lived. They had to reevaluate their own identities as well as the impact of racism on the whole family.

This brings us to another dominant theme—parents' feelings of inadequacy. Feelings of inadequacy, I think I can safely say, are a part of parenting. Parents feel inadequate whether they have adopted transracially, or whether they are raising their biological children, adoptive children or step-children. I have already discussed some of parents' insecurities, but I want to focus specifically on those related to addressing racism. The parents who participated in this research spoke about a number of areas where they felt inadequate. Along with general parenting concerns, parents listed dealing with racism. They wondered if a parent of colour (not necessarily the child's biological parents) would have been better suited to raising their child. Parents wondered whether transracial adoption was, in effect, cultural genocide. These feelings were also mixed with feelings of guilt that the loss of their child's birth-parents was their gain. As I have said, the process of becoming must be examined from the parents' perspective as well and parents have adoption and pre-adoption stories too. Many families' histories are filled with unique experiences that contribute to either the desire or the inability to see their children as different. From my data, I shall describe some composite possibilities.

A couple may have been trying to conceive for some time to no avail. They may have used extraordinary measures or not. They may never have been able to conceive or they may have lost a number of children at various stages. They are emotionally drained and cannot face the disappointment any longer, so they make the decision to adopt. Both through the process of adopting and through parenting their child, they feel fear about losing this child as well. They are afraid that the birth-parents will change their minds or that there will be a mix up and they will have to wait even longer to be granted a child. They are anxious about their child's safety and health

throughout her childhood. Any talk about searching out information about their child's birth families, country of origin or even their native culture fills them with fear: that their birth parents could come for their children and take them away; that their child could leave them for his birth-family; that children embracing their native culture are rejecting their parents' culture and indeed their parents. To see the racial difference is to see that this child is not "theirs."

Another scenario might find parents concerned that they are not be able to love an adopted child with the same affect as a biological child, and despite their complete love for their child, signs of difference might remind them of that fear or simply that this child is not "of them." Another scenario might find parents holding deep philosophical, political and/or religious beliefs. The opportunity to adopt presents a medium to exercise or, in some cases, prove their beliefs through action. Still another scenario might find parents growing up in a racist environment. The opportunity to adopt transracially offers them a way to show their families that those of colour are not so different. A different version of this scenario might feature parents who were raised in a very homogeneous environment feeling ill-equipped to deal with issues of race and racism. These parents might find themselves wracked with anxiety and guilt when even the slightest mention of race comes up. They may not know where the line between being racist and celebrating diversity is, and may have no immediately available resources to gain a better understanding. Any of these scenarios and countless other compositions of particularities can lead parents either consciously or unconsciously not to acknowledge the ethnicity, adopted status, race or culture of their adopted child. It is for this reason that I join adoptees in recommending the inclusion of anti-racist programming and multicultural education for prospective adoptive parents. There are a myriad of corresponding issues that could be addressed in this section, but they will be left for future research.

I want to make one closing point. Families of colour do not necessarily devote time specifically to addressing the impacts of racism and discrimination in their lives, let alone strategies

to deal with them. In the course of other conversations, including those linked to research, I have talked with people of colour who have struggled deeply with the silence in their families surrounding racism and discrimination. I appreciate that children in racially homogeneous families are not necessarily growing up with a model of how to deal with racist and discriminatory realities. A Latin child, brought up in a Latin family, who experiences a discriminatory incident might not necessarily talk about it at home, or there may not be any overt action taken, as these experiences are such common occurrences. On the other hand, that child may find comfort in knowing that her family understands what this experience is, and that, as one friend said to me, it "is not a battle that I want to pick." Knowing which to pick, having the support when you decide to fight and having the resources to fight when the time come are often silently passed on through the example provided by a family. I am aware of these conversations when I examine the many layers of difference that TRAs experience, aware that it is this communication through family example that is absent in TRA and why special attention is needed.

Identification with Role Models and Dominant Culture

Adoptees and parents both mentioned the importance role models can play for children in general and for adoptees in particular. Some families cited the importance of older siblings, while others talked about specific role models with whom adoptees connected (e.g., teachers, nannies, family friends, etc.). In addressing what exactly identity is, Richards (1994) pointed out that part of identity involves being different; it is being unique and distinct. But there is also the component of *sameness*. Adoptees and parents spoke about the important relationship developed with siblings or other adopted peers (cf., p. 92). They also mentioned the support that comes from a role model outside of the family. Adoptees, however, made one adamant proviso. They felt that providing a child with a diverse environment was important for adoptees so that the environment could provide them with people with whom they could discuss their experiences of racism or other issues related to the celebration of their cultures or ethnicities. Adoptees felt, however, that if role models were

brought into their lives in an inauthentic manner, then it was not helpful and instead of creating an environment of inclusion, it would emphasize the adoptees' differentness. As one adoptee put it: "Like not saying, 'well this is Bob and he's gonna talk with you about Korea. . .' " Or as another pointed out, not inviting someone to dinner "just so there's a black person around table" as opposed to inviting a friend to dinner who just happens to be black. Adoptees and parents alike expressed concern about the role models that are chosen. One family had chosen a close friend who had been adopted to be their children's god-parent. The friend was, however, unable to provide a positive discourse about adoption. In fact, this friend discouraged the family from providing their children with information about their birth-families and from visiting their country of origin.

It is also important to be cognizant of the images that the parents' or dominant culture present to children, for culture is full of signals that children pick up as models. One parent I spoke with remembered riding with her seven year old daughter in a taxi cab. Her daughter turned to her mother and asked: "Why do all the taxi drivers have same skin as me?" Many researchers have shown, those of us living in the West recognize from an early age that there are differences among people (cf. p. 7, 46). Through cultural cues we find patterns in the differences and learn to label some good and others bad. Those in the other or bad category then act as "containers" (Winnicott 1971; cited in Mattei, 1996), as "psychological pillows " or "suitable targets of externalization" (Volkan, 1988, p.31; cited in Mattei, 1996) for unconscious feelings that conflict with the individual's or community's self-perception. All members of a society, in its spectrum from oppressor to oppressed, are impacted by these cues. For example, some argue that Western culture has assigned badness and unconscious aggressive and sexual urges to the black body so that the black individual becomes the very embodiment of danger for the oppressor or the privileged (Fanon, 1967). Among the oppressed, first, there can be a negative identification with that *other* or *bad* role, which is then confirmed by more cultural cues and by experiences. This phenomenon of

identification is extensively explored in psychoanalysis and by cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall and Franz Fanon. Identification regularly involves indiscriminate and even anomalous appropriation, as when a little girl identifies with her Dad or brother.

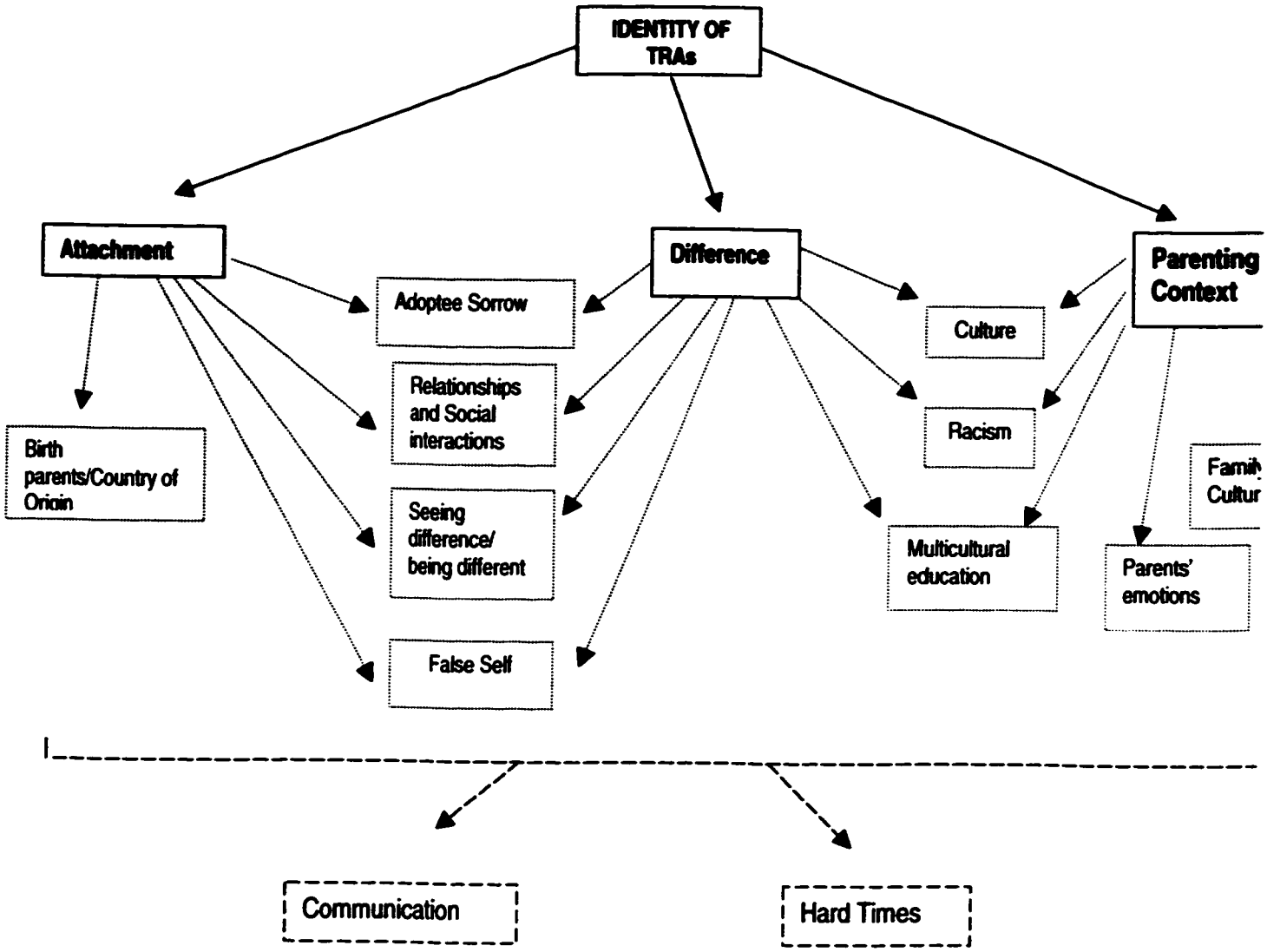
Fanon (1967) provides a striking exemplification of a second identification. He points to a young black boy in colonized Africa (or North America) who grows up reading stories with a white male hero that demonize the Other—think of cowboys and Indians, or even space invaders. The little black boy grows up identifying with the hero, and this hero, in some way, becomes part of his identity. But the boy is black. In those moments when he encounters this discontinuity, such as coming face to face with social interpretations of race (e.g., racism), he will experience distress. Now, one might counter that we have many heroes-of-colour in Western culture. But black heroes, for example, are still concentrated in very specific areas, such as sports. Fanon points out how swiftly observers and sports commentators remark on how like a *colt* or a *stallion* or other animals these athletes are. The sexualization of that animal seems never far behind—what bearing does this have for adoptees acting out sexually? One analogy frequently made, and championed by one such hero Dennis Rodman, is that *basketball is just a bunch of black ho's being handled by white pimps.* Such images of black heroes possibly confront the black child with a beast-like, native identity, recycling, in effect, the imagery of the savage Other. There is too often an unsettling silence about the perspective of little girls, black and/or white, in these conversations as I see gender as integral to the challenges in forming a racial/cultural identity. This will be kept for another discussion.

An appreciation of the cultural cues and representations of racial and cultural categories and how they are experienced seems to me crucially important both for representation and for intervention. This is where multicultural education can make a large and important contribution to a parenting program. Hall points out that there is a way of thinking about a cultural identity " in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many others, more

sophisticated or artificially imposed 'selves'." (1990, p.223). If I am part of the diaspora, then I must go back and excavate and discover this *true* identity. But time layers and reworks experience for both the émigré and the original community. What implications does this have for an internationally adopted child who is trying to reintegrate his selves? This might be an identity-search that drives an adoptee to return to the country of their origin. There is, however, a second way of thinking about identity. Hall writes: ". . . we should think . . .of identity as a 'production' within, not outside, representation" (1990, p. 222). "Every regime of representation is a regime of power formed, as Foucault reminds us, by the fatal couplet, 'power/knowledge' " (1990, pp. 225-226). By reconsidering the relationships that have a history of oppression and prejudice, we can better understand the subjective experience of the shadow of power. The child who asked her parent: "Why do all the taxi drivers have the same skin as me?" is facing this relationship. This identity could find an adoptee exploring the history of colonialism, identity theory, and politics, or even writing a Masters thesis on transracial adoption. It is work towards identity that encourages us to find ourselves where we are, and to take steps to understanding how we arrived there.

Proposed Program Outline

Based on this research I recommend a parenting program specifically developed to help parents support their children develop positive ethnoracial identities. I have created an outline for such a program. It distails into dominant themes the main issues identified in the results. They are schematized as follows:



Each theme comprises a session in the parenting program, for parents either about to adopt, or who have adopted, transracially. I have constructed a logic model outlining the elements brought to my attention from this research, as well as from the subsequent feedback of adoptees, parents and service providers. For each theme I have outlined implementation objectives as well as short term and long term objectives. I have then examined the evolution of group process and arranged the sessions in an order I felt was sensitive to this process. For instance, issues of parents' emotions are not broached in the initial sessions, as a level of trust is required for this discussion to be honest and effective. The logic model provides the outline for a four-month weekly program. Each group will ideally be comprised of no more than sixteen participants. The group must be lead by a

facilitator who is trained not only in group process and counselling, but well versed in adoption, identity, developmental and anti-oppression theory and practice as well. Multicultural education training is an additional asset.

Goal: To help parents support the development of a positive ethnoracial identity				
Main Components	**Expectations**	**Identity**	**Attachment**	**Family Culture**
Implementation Objectives	• Identify parents expectation • Provide info on common experiences in international adoption (e.g., health problems) • Bonding for group	• Define identity • Significance of identity • How is identity formed • Reflect on process of identity development • Reflect on supports and struggles to developing identity	• Define attachment • Significance of attachment • Provide info on sensitive period and disruption during s.p. • Discuss relinquishment • Provide and discuss developmental map of "Attachment disorders"	• Identify family culture that parents grew up in • Identify family culture of family • Discuss the role of family culture • Follow-up on the role of parents • Opportunity for family bonding
Short Term Objectives	• Bring parents to awareness of their emotions re: adoption • Start parents thinking about what adoption will be like • Bonding for group	• Encourage parents to reflect on who they are and how their identities developed • Provide understanding of what identity is and its significance throughout life	• Provide parents with understanding of attachment and "attachment disorders" • Provide realistic consideration on adoption's challenges • Lay foundation for the rest of the program	• Identify family culture of parents and how it impacts on present family culture • Bonding • Start parents thinking about the environment adoptee will be entering/has entered
Long Term Objectives	• Prepare parents to adopt • Bonding for group	• Understand identity as lifelong process and parents' impact • Prepare parents to recognize identity building opportunity	• Prepare parents' need for understanding emotional withdraw, patience, etc.	• Provide tools to celebrate parents' and adoptees' culture
Main related themes	•	•	• Attachment	• Parents
Group Process Phase	Pre-Affiliation			

Main Components	Racism	Culture	Seeing Different / Being Different
Implementation Objectives	• Define racism and its significance • Identify emotional responses and their histories • Provide info and discuss democratic racism • Provide parents with examples of what racism looks like in Canada • Prepare for seeing difference/being different • Follow up on identity and attachment	• Define culture and its significance • Help parents identify and expand on their cultural richness • Identify and discuss what knowledge and thoughts about adoptee's culture • Brainstorm on how to bring the cultures of adoptees' and parents' together • Prepare for family culture and seeing difference/being different	• Introduce the role of difference in the context of "layers of differentness" • Address role of family in layers of differentness • Follow up racism, attachment and identity • Prepare for Adoptee Sorrow
Short Term Objectives	• Provide safe space to talk about and explore racism • Encourage parents to think about racism and how it may impact their lives • Prepare parents to recognize racism • Encourage parents to think about dealing with racism • Follow up identity and attachment	• Develop a working understanding of culture, especially parents' • Increase parents' awareness of adoptees' culture • Prepare for family culture • Follow up on identity, attachment and racism	• Help parents to gain understanding of how difference can be experienced in the context of TRA • Explore the role of family in thinking and dealing with difference • Prepare for Adoptee Sorrow • Follow up on racism, culture and the role of parents in developing identity
Long Term Objectives	• Prepare parents to recognize and deal with racism • Prepare parents to talk with their children, friends and family about racism	• Provide tools for families to celebrate parents' and adoptees' cultures	• Prepare parents to recognize and deal with incidents related to difference
Main Related Themes	• Difference	• Difference	• Difference • Attachment
Group Phase	Power Struggle		

Main Components	Social Interactions	Birth Parents and Country of Origin	Adoptee Sorrow	Communication
Implementation Objectives	• intro to developmental theory • identify different parenting and environmental factors significant to different ages • discuss role of attachment, racism and culture • prepare for Adoptee Sorrow and Communication	• how parents feel about BP and CoO how BP and CoO part of child's life • prepare for AD • ways to make part of adoptees' lives • introduce fantasy	• follow up on Attachment, racism, culture and identity • introduce and define and understand AS • how to recognize when it may be a factor so as to support and not to compound • prepare for hard times • introduce false self	• Intro and discuss overt and covert fo communication • Discuss ambiguity and how it can im adoptees • Discuss silence, specifically in relatic racism and adoption • Discuss communication and its role i parenting • "I" and "You" questions, open-ended questions, feedback, listening, talkin about emotions and opinions
Short Term Objectives	• introduce and understand developmental theories and sources • follow up Attachment, racism and culture • prepare for communication and AS and communication	• bring parents emotions out • introduce adoptees emotions • start thinking how to make BP and CoO part of everyday life • start thinking of significance of being open to pre-adoption life of adoptee	• follow up attachment, racism culture and identity • prepare for hard times • understand the grief • start thinking about layers of difference, grieving, role of parents and family in grieiving process	• follow up on previous sessions • provide opportunities to talk through important topics • provide tools for communication and dealing with important topics
Long Term Objectives	• prepare for different phases of development • prepare parents to recognize attachment, racism and cultural factors at work • prepare parents to see the process of identity development and support it and recognize supportive factors and those that may negate	• provide ideas for how parents can keep BP and CoO a part of adoptees lives • to prepare parents for feelings of insecurity re: BP and CoO	• prepare parents to recognize, not compound and support their child's grieving	• provide parents with communication specifically in relation to adoption, attachment, identity, racism, culture, difference, etc.
Main related Themes	• Attachment • Difference	• Attachment • Difference	• Attachment • Difference	• Parents • Attachment • Difference
Group Process Phase	Intimacy		Differentiation	

Main Components	Hard Times	Parents' Emotions	Resourcing	Multicultural Education
Implementation Objectives	• Introduce possible challenges families could face Provide a format for addressing difficult situations and discuss • Provide format for evaluating incidents and prepare for prevention	• Bring parents' emotions into the conscious mind and into the family discourse • To provide parents with a safe environment in which to explore and share their emotions • Support group bonding and family cohesion	• Provide resources for parents • Provide first hand accounts of adoptees' and parents' experiences	• Provide multicultural education
Short Term Objectives	• Introduce parents to some experiences parents have had, discuss • Encourage parents to think about what leads to hard times, how to prevention and how to address them • Follow up on the role of parents	• To open discussion and increase parents' awareness of how they feel about adoption and difference in particular • To start linking the role that parents' emotions have in parenting • Follow up on family culture	• Provide first hand information • Provide parents with tools and resources	• Provide parents with the opportunity to research and gain more understanding of their child's culture
Long Term Objectives	• Prepare parents for challenges that may lay ahead • Provide parents with tools to deal with hard times • Prepare parents to think about their needs and the needs of their children through hard times	• To encourage parents to regularly engage with their emotions and have an ongoing discourse about them • To help families create a space where emotions are a part of the family culture • To help families include emotions in their communication	• Provide parents with resources to access if needed • To provide parents with "real life" examples of TRA	• Provide parents with understanding of their child's culture and tools to celebrate it and make it a part of everyday lives • Increase general awareness and acceptance of difference
Main related Themes	• Difference • Attachment • Parents	• Parents	• Parents • Difference	• Difference • Attachment • Parents
Group Process Phase	Differentiation		Termination	

Assignment: Divide the participants into groups according to family or by country (or ethnicity) of adoptees. The groups will research the culture and history of the country (or ethnicity). At the final session groups will present their research as well as practical suggestions as to how families can support their children's link to their country and culture.

Homework: Various sessions may include homework assignments. For example, families may be asked to immerse themselves in an environment where they are a part of the ethnoracial minority. Homework is at the discretion of the facilitator and the group.

The program is developed both to educate parents and to create a potential base for support groups that can be independently run after the program is completed. The program is based on the research presented here, as well as on a group conducted in 2001 with multiracial families (transracially adoptive and biracial families) at Lakeshore Area Multi-Service Project (LAMP), a community health centre in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Implications for Future Research and Interventions

My first recommendation is that the program presented above should be put through a pilot run. It should be evaluated for the usefullness of its material, the order of sessions, the balance between theory and skill-development, etc. Evaluation should also consider if there are particularities of experience that can and should be grouped or taken into consideration. For example, are there specific experiences differentiating gender, country of origin, as well as experiences of violence, sexual interference/abuse, level of trauma, poverty or neglect experienced by adoptees. Issues relating to parents' experiences (e.g., class, education, adoption histories, etc.) should also be looked out for in terms of needing specific attention. The work started in this thesis should and will be continued in the form of not only running the program, but further developing interventions and programming for transracial adoptees and their families. Age, phase of development and popular culture will also need to be taken into consideration to create effective, sensitive and engaging initiatives. As transracial adoption becomes more known in popular culture, the more discourse and awareness will be accessible to adoptive families about the issues that their children may face. This has increased special considerations transracially adoptive parents have given to ethnicity, race and culture. Feedback from adoptees and parents must continue to be the guiding force behind this work.

Secondly, I am aware of topics of enormous significance to which I could give only limited attention in the discussion: topics such as adoptee sorrow and the development of the false self. Adoptee sorrow obviously trenches upon the experiences of grieving and loss. I further suggest that this information should be collected through qualitative means, since this kind of dynamic and experiential data is, to my mind, beyond the scope of what quantitative research can provide. Third, I would like to see some investigation of similar programming for both adoptees and their siblings. This work would need to take into consideration the same long list of variables that I mentioned above: development, popular culture, pre-adoption history, age of adoption, etc. Finally, I recommend that adoption agencies give consideration to the complexity of the issues others and I have shown light on surrounding this issue when considering prospective adoptive parents. If, for example, agencies initiate mandatory anti-racism training for prospective parents, and they show resistance, this should be seriously taken into consideration before being granted a child.

Appendix A: Supports

Supports	
Adoptees	**Parents**
• Nanny of same ethnoracial community • Live in a diverse environment (e.g., or be exposed to through international boarding school) • Opportunity to speak native language • Connecting with other "non-white" people • Close relationships with siblings (both biological and adopted) • Opportunity for independent living (e.g., parents supported adoptee living on own) • Parents showing that it is okay to be different • Visiting different places of different ethnoracial make-ups • Environment where parents are apart of the minority and the adoptee is a part of the majority • Celebrating cultural holidays and events • Parents getting adoptee involved in various activities in general, not necessarily related to ethnicity or race • Parent participating in cufture with adoptee • Celebrate arts from adoptee's culture (i.e., music, dance, art, etc.) • Treated as any other child Parents respect and enjoy adoptee's culture • Internationally adopted friends Other adults in life besides parents No supports provided Raised to appreciate culture of adoptive parents	• Support groups for multiracial families, specifically international adoptive families • Going to country of origin (to get the child, planning to go, go to village of child's origin, friendships developed/established with community members of the country of origin) • Reading related sources • Volunteering in adoption agencies • Support groups (with other international adoptive parents, men's group named) • Friendships with other international adoptive parents • Friends and family members from the same ethnic group as adoptive children • Language classes (for both adoptees and for parents) • Heritage classes • Artifacts around the home representing and native to adoptee's culture • Arts (music, art, dance, etc. from the culture of the adoptee)clothes from adoptee's culture • Nanny from country of origin who speaks native languageFoods from adoptee's culture a regular part of family menu • Activities for international adoptees (e.g., picnics) • Parents attend talks on related topics • Therapy (i.e., adoptee seeing adoption therapist, parents seeing therapist, etc) • Access adoption resources (e.g., councils and support groups) • Role models (e.g., other adopted siblings, teachers, family friends, etc.) • Adopting more than one child internationally • Siblings ("home-made") (triggers questions and reminders/examples of how loved they are) • Regular conversation (about emotions and experiences specifically addressing ethnoracial, cultural and adoption issues) • Spirituality • Unconditional love • Connect with adoptee's ethnic community • Respond positively to questions about and related to adoptee's culture, ethnicity, race, country of origin, and birth parents. • Experience environments where the parent is a racial minority (e.g., church, ethnoracially and/or culturally similar countries) • Diverse group of family friends • Professionals of same and/or diverse ethnoracial desent(e.g., doctor, dentist, etc.) • Being adoptee's active advocate (e.g., with racist incident) • Learn how to deal with racism (active learning and utilizing skill) • Dealing with racism immediately • Talking about dealing with racism

• Therapy (e.g., with an adoption therapist, Freudian analysis, etc.) • No parental preference among siblings • Honest with adoptee about adoption • Supported finding birth parents Very focused and full-time parenting (in formative years) • Include adoptee in genealogy • Non-judgmental parenting • Parents actively set precedent that racism is wrong and intolerable • Parents' friends of diverse ethnoracial and cultural communities • Popular culture is now more diverse and inclusive than it was before • Constant interaction with "white" cultures helped TRAs to feel comfortable interacting in white communities and dealing with racism when it occurred	• Arming adoptee with skills in dealing with racism • Provide support to educators (e.g., teach school staff about racism, cultural holidays and/or tradition, etc.) • Talk about adoption in a positive light • Celebrate the day adoptee was adopted (e.g., "Adoption Day" or "Family Day") • Clear and active support provided to adoptee in situations of racism committed by family or friends • Live in a diverse environment (in the case where families did not live in diverse areas, adoptees were sent to boarding schools to provide a diverse experience) • Private schools (to provide a diverse environment and/or expose adoptee to international community, etc.) • Regular one-on-one time with adoptee and parent • Bring attention to "successful" people of similar descent • Literature celebrating country of origin (or culture, ethnoracial background, etc.) • Keep adoptee in a safe environment to support development • Keep a sense of humour • Parent support and skill development groups • Family culture including friendship, caring, etc. • Be aware of prasticing and celebrating the culture of parents (the adoptee's culture as well, e.g., religion) • Community (of international adoptees, of ethnoracial communities of the adoptee, religion, etc.) • Meet birth parents • Collect stories to tell adoptee about her/his birth parents • Making birth parents or early foster parents a part of her/his life • Pictures and videos of adoptee's country of origin • Exposing adoptee to communities of her/his ethnicity, race and culture • Proactive support of adoptees' experiences within their ethnicity and culture and identify development • Talk about identity in general • Provide adoptees with descriptive terms that apply to them for accurate self-identification such as Black, Brown, etc. • Make celebrating culture a norm (culture of adoptees, of parents, etc.) • Look for opportunities to celebrate culture (e.g., school assignments) • Names: keep same as what birth parents chose, name after special friends or family, easy names to pronounce[5])

Supports Wanted/Wished for	
Adoptees	Parents
• Anti-racist training including education addressing how to deal with racism (e.g., education to help parents identify ignorance, etc.) mandatory for potential adopting parents • Multicultural training • Adopted friends	• Address racialization of poverty i.e., expose adoptees to members of their ethnoracial group in different social economic strata • Contact with other international adoptive families
• Internationally adopted friends • Living in a more diverse environment • Role models/mentors (adoptees expressed a desire for them either to have lived a similar experience in terms of adoption or to be of the same ethnoracial and cultural group) • Taught how to deal with racism • Prepared for cruelty of peers • Establish racism, prejudice and discrimination as a topic that can be talked about at home • Establish pride in adoptees' culture and ethnicity • Parents not adopt transracially unless they have an organic connection with the country of origin and/or the ethnoracial cultural community of the adoptee (e.g., friends, family, speak languages, spent time living in country of origin or countries of same culture, etc.) • Parents not approach adoption as "shopping for a child" • Parents not approach adoption with the belief that they are "saving" the child ("no good Samaritans") • Parents not approach adoption as a means of feeding ego and/or status • Education provided to general community re: adoption, racism, etc. especially in schools (e.g., potential challenges and/or disorders that can be related to adoption) as support is not just about a family but about a community • The beliefs regarding race, ethnicity and culture of prospective adopting parents be investigated before certification to adopt internationally and using more effective and appropriate standards • Popular culture of today more inclusive than it was (would have liked to have had that as a norm) • Variety of supports from different perspectives • Schools reflect multiculturalism (e.g., celebrating different holidays and events, teaching history from more than just the colonizer's perspective, etc.) • Exposure to those of the same ethnic racial and cultural communities • Availability of professionals who specialize in international and transracial adoption (for adoptee and parents) • Pre-adoption counseling (e.g., how to handle situations, how to set foundation, potential struggles, etc.)	• Contact with adoptees who had positive transracial adoption experiences • Support groups for adopted teens • Consultant from same ethnoracial community (for parents) • Support group addressing "big issues" in adoption Literature on children who feel white (experiential) • Living in a diverse environment • Role model/mentor for adoptee • An "in" to adoptees' ethnoracial communities (an introduction or connection) • Some preparation addressing what issues might come up in international adoption • What questions to ask adoptee to start conversations on topics related to international adoption in general and support for addressing these questions • Support group addressing transracial international adoption • Contact with like-minded people and those in similar situations (community, friendship, support, etc.) • Therapeutic environment and supports

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