Racial Identity Development of White Parents of Transracial Adoptees: A Narrative Approach

Author: Theresa L. Sass

Persistent link: http://hdl.handle.net/2345/3679

This work is posted on eScholarship@BC, Boston College University Libraries.

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2014

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.
RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF WHITE PARENTS OF TRANSRACIAL ADOPTEES: 
A NARRATIVE APPROACH

Dissertation
By
Theresa L. Sass

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
May, 2014

Dissertation Committee: Dr. Pratyusha Tummala-Narra, Chair
Dr. Lisa Patel and Dr. Elizabeth Sparks, Readers
Racial Identity Development of White Parents of Transracial Adoptees:

A Narrative Analysis

Theresa L. Sass

Dr. Pratyusha Tummala-Narra, Dissertation Chair

The purpose of this research is to learn about the racial identity development of White transracially adoptive parents through narratives about their adoption and parenting experiences. White racial identity development has rarely been explored within the context of transracial adoption, and existing research on transracial adoption tends to focus on the experiences of the adoptees. The present research attempts to address the need for more literature in psychology and other social sciences on the experiences of White parents adopting transracially.

This research uses qualitative methodology, specifically narrative inquiry and conventional content analysis, to gather data from participants’ (N=12) personal stories about their racial identity. This approach is inductive, naturalistic, and exploratory, focusing on participants’ meaning making rather than causation, and fitting for an under-researched subject area (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Riessman, 2003). Narratives encourage the participants to talk about uncomfortable issues, which is critical, because literature indicates that White people experience discomfort when talking about their race (Altman, 2006; Foldy, 2005).

As theoretical frameworks, White racial identity theory (Helms, 1990; 1995) and critical race theory help describe how parents cope with racial issues and racism from a psychosocial perspective. Issues examined include how institutional and cultural racism affects parents’ experiences before and after parenting, what historical, social, and
personal factors influence the parents’ cognitive, affective and behavioral responses to racial stimuli, and how transformations take place in the racial identity development of the participants.

Findings demonstrate that for the majority of participants, transracial adoption was a catalyst for increased awareness of White racial privilege and racism, and therefore for participants’ racial identity development. This research contributes to theory, research, and practice. Participants’ stories provide an understanding of the complex nature of racial identity development, and offer insight about how to better support transracially adoptive parents and their families. Implications for research, practice, and policy are discussed.
Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the study participants for their time, honesty, and generosity in contributing to this research, and for trusting me with their personal stories. I thank Sally Haslanger for encouraging my interest and pursuit of this research topic, for her scholarly contributions, and thoughtfulness and kind spirit.

I am thankful to my committee, Drs. Tummala-Narra, Sparks, and Patel for their support, encouragement, and insight. As my dissertation chair, Dr. Tummala-Narra, you invested time and energy at a critical juncture in my studies, and I will always be grateful for that. Dr. Sparks, from the beginning, you encouraged and inspired me through modeling and through your own narratives that you shared. Dr. Patel, your warmth and intellectual rigor were also a model of professional inspiration. I am grateful to other faculty who have mentored me and been supportive: Dr. Helms and the ISPRC team, for my foundation in research, Drs. Blustein, Goodman, Liang, and Morse, for your steady encouragement and positivity, Dr. Daniel Merrigan, for helping pave the way to this degree, pre-Boston College. Thank you, Marleah Noonan, for your research assistance and the time you dedicated to this work. Diane Martinez and Lauren McGrath, I appreciate your support and good humor over the years.

I would also like to thank those professional mentors who helped me connect my research, academics, and clinical work: Drs. Phil Laidlaw, Larry Abrams, Mariko Sakurai, Bill Alexander, Chivi Kapungu, John Smolinsky, Suzanne Donnellan, as well as Carolyn Rodgers, Andrea Johnson, Carol Goodenough, and Martha Wisler.

To friends who have supported me through this journey, much love and appreciation: Precious, Bianca Bob, Tracy, Meghan, and Marcia. Zeinab, thank you for
listening to my process over the past year, and for your humor and insight. Lilo, you were the best writing companion ever. Thank you to the Moms’ group, and thank you Lois.

I am deeply grateful to my parents for their love and for their support of my professional goals over the years. Larry, as my husband your love, your interest and excitement in my work, your patience and support have meant everything to me. Max, June, and Omar, you grew up with me as a graduate student this past decade. You continue to fill my life with love, joy, challenges, and a perspective and appreciation of life and humanity beyond what any degree could impart.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter One - Introduction</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research with White Transracially Adoptive Parents</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology, Theoretical Framework, and Aims of the Present Study</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two - Review of Literature</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transracial Adoption and Systemic Racism</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Racial Ideology and Theoretical Frameworks</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Transracially Adoptive Parents and the Psychology Literature</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three – Method</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigor</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four – Findings</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexivity of the Researcher</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection and Analysis</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the Data</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain I: Pre-Adoption Racial Experiences in Childhood</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain II: Pre-Adoption Racial Experiences in Adulthood</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain III: Transracial Adoptive Parenting – Racial Awareness</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain IV: Responses to Racial Stimuli Post-Adoption</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain V: Reflections about Race – Identity, Race, and Dilemmas</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain VI: Talking About Whiteness</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five – Discussion</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of Findings, Literature, and Theory</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths of Qualitative Research</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of Study</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Practice, Research, and Theory</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Background and Screening Questionnaire</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C: Interview Guide</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D: Informed Consent Form</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1
Introduction

Background

Transracially adoptive families are a significant and growing segment of the adoption population in the United States (Jacobson, Nielsen, & Hardeman, 2012). Transracial adoptions are defined as the adoption of a child who is of a different race than one or both adopting parents (Lee, 2003; Zamonstny, O’Brien, Baden, & Wiley, 2003). Adoptions often involve parents adopting children of a different ethnicity and culture than their own – whether or not the race of the child is the same as that of the parent.

In the social sciences, race is viewed as a social construction, and not a biologically based term; therefore, for the purposes of the present research, APA Multicultural Guidelines (2003) determine the use of the term race as, “...the category to which others assign individuals on the basis of physical characteristics, such as skin color or hair type, and the generalizations and stereotypes made as a result” (p. 380). Ethnicity is defined as the “national, regional, or tribal origins of one’s oldest remembered ancestors and the customs, traditions and rituals (i.e, subjective culture) handed down by these ancestors, which among the ethnic group members, are assumed to be their culture” (Helms & Cook, 1999, p. 19). Culture is defined as the “...values, beliefs, language, rituals, traditions and other behaviors passed from one generation to another with any social group...” (Helms & Cook, p. 21). In the adoption literature, the terms ethnicity and culture are often used ambiguously, at times to imply race. The present research will distinguish these terms when necessary, and will focus on adoptions which involve White parents adopting children either from the United States or from other countries, who are
Transracially Adoptive Parents

perceived as racial minorities in the United States. Thus, this research will include children who are identified by their parents as Asian, Black, Pacific Islander, Latino/a or Hispanic, Native American, biracial, or multiracial.

Transracial adoptions make up 75% of all international adoptions to the United States, 28% of domestic adoptions from foster care, and 21% of domestic adoptions from private agencies (USDHHS, 2011). Most transracial adoptions involve White parents adopting children of Color: Among international adoptions to the United States in 2011, approximately 45% were from Asia, 27% from Africa, 2% from the Caribbean, and 1% from Central America. Among domestic United States adoptions, 28% from foster care were transracial, and 21% from private agencies were transracial. Of the foster care transracial adoptions, 63% were non-Hispanic White children, 27% were non-Hispanic Black children, and 5% were Hispanic children. Of the private agency transracial adoptions, 71% were non-Hispanic White children, 19% were non-Hispanic Black children, and 7% were Hispanic children. The numbers of Asian children adopted domestically were too small to allow for calculation of reliable estimates (USDHHS, National Survey of Adoptive Parents, [NSAP], 2007, retrieved 2012).

Transracial adoption involving children of color may be a challenging type of adoption for parents because of differences in physical features between the parents and children, which highlight the disparities between the cultures of origin of the children and the adoptive parents (Lee, 2003). In addition, as a result of White privilege, White people rarely experience the systemic biases which people of color do. Therefore, in becoming parents of children of color, White transracially adoptive parents may undergo a social and psychological shift in their racial perspective due to their family’s increased
awareness of racism and discrimination; this increased awareness is a result of witnessing discriminatory and racist treatment of their child as well listening to the child’s reported race-based experiences. As a result of these experiences, parents may gain an increased consciousness regarding the meaning of race in their lives.

The parents may become aware of the fact that they benefit from advantaged racial-group status in United States society whereas their children do not (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2011; Lee, 2003) This questioning process takes place intrapsychically, where thoughts and feelings, such as dissonance or guilt, are aroused (Sass, 2008). It may also occur interpersonally both within and outside the family system as they must make decisions about race-related issues with the consciousness of being a multiracial family – decisions such as how racially integrated their neighborhood or the child’s school should be, or how they and their children should respond to racial comments (Jennings, 2006; Lee, 2003; Stoddart, 1999; Vonk, Lee, & Crolley-Simic, 2010).

The process of adopting transracially serves to challenge the invisible norm of Whiteness for the adopting White parents. The invisible norm of Whiteness may be defined as the phenomenon of White privilege, which allows White people to take their race for granted, as morally neutral, and without historical meaning being attributed to their Whiteness. This phenomenon allows White people to see themselves as race-less and others as having race (Altman, 2006; Apple, 1998; Foldy, 2005; Frankenberg, 1997; McIntosh, 1988; Thompson & Neville, 1999). The privilege of inattention to race, and the denial of race and racism may be altered when White parents adopt transracially. White privilege also means that positive traits such as intelligence and attractiveness are associated with Whiteness (Roediger, 2008), whereas people of color are “racialized,”
with less desirable and negative attributes ascribed to their assigned racial groups (Omi & Winant, 1994, p.14) Transracially adoptive parents’ whiteness and their children’s experiences of racial discrimination may become increasingly apparent to the parents, in the context of a multiracial family, yet very little literature addresses the nature of the process by which they become more racially conscious parents.

Psychological literature on White racial identity development and interracial relationships hypothesizes that interracial relationships are potentially catalysts for changes in White racial identity (Hartman, 2004; Hill, & Thomas, 2000; Stoddart, 1999). A developmental perspective on White racial identity may provide an understanding of the process by which racial awareness is increased. White racial identity development, and growth in the awareness of the meaning of one’s own race and others’ race in society, has been linked to ongoing contact with other racial groups, and the resulting changes in insight and social navigation of interracial relationships (Dobbins & Skillings, 2005; Helms & Carter, 1990; Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994). Having a child of a different race constitutes a type of interracial relationship; White parents of transracially adopted children must consider how much to integrate the experiences and history of the child’s ascribed racial group into their family’s conversations, interpretations and experiences regarding race.

According to White racial identity theories, White racial identity development progresses from internalized racism and a lack of awareness of racism (i.e., internalized racial privilege), to a more heightened awareness of race and flexible and anti-racist responses to race-related events, including discrimination (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1990, 1995; Ponterotto, 1988; Rowe et al., 1994; Sue & Sue, 1990;). However, there is little
research on White transracially adoptive parents’ experiences of race and racial identity development. Given this lack of research, the present study seeks to explore this topic in order to begin to fill in this gap in our knowledge. In a racially stratified environment that privileges individuals with White group membership and promotes the invisible norm of Whiteness, examining these parents’ racial identity will provide information on the ways that their psychological reactions are affected by their parenting experiences.

White transracially adopting parents are confronted with racial differences on interpersonal, familial, community and society levels. On a personal level, parents may experience feelings of discomfort, guilt, confusion, and responsibility that arise when difference in racial privilege and discrimination between them and their children are apparent. In their families, communities and society, parents must make decisions about how to respond to racial remarks, encounters, or events, and how to address – or whether or not to address – these racial stimuli with their children. Because of White privilege, these feelings and decisions may have been largely suppressed or avoided in the past.

In-depth interviews with these parents may provide an opportunity to gain insight into both the intrapsychic and environmental or interpersonal factors related to White racial identity development. It is critical to take this interpersonal and societal approach to studying the parents’ racial identity development because racial issues and racism are manifest in individuals, and are also grounded in culture and institutions (Dobbins & Skillings, 2005; Thompson & Neville, 1999).

Collins (2009) proposes a framework for understanding racism as a “system of power with four domains”: structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal (p. 53). Collins offers this framework as an alternative to the view of racial inequity as being the
result of structural or personal factors, and as more integrative than an either/or approach. The structural domain includes institutions and organizational practices; the disciplinary domain addresses rules and regulations that people enforce or challenge; the cultural domain includes ideas and ideologies, such as race neutrality; and the interpersonal domain covers relationships and communities. For this study population, racial identity and race-based events must be understood in the context of the parents as individuals within the full scope of their environments, and inclusive of all four of these domains: As Collins notes, “Individually and collectively, racism is produced and resisted within each domain of power as well as across all four domains” (p. 55).

Examining the intrapsychic, interpersonal, and sociocultural processes of racial identity development for White transracially adopting parents may be significant for the field of psychology. Information about the experiences of the parents’ racial identity will provide insight into the factors associated with White racial identity development for this population. In the counseling psychology literature, little is known about White racial identity development from an in-depth and personal qualitative lens. For this particular population, there is virtually no literature on racial identity apart from studies which examine White transracially adoptive parents views about their children’s – not their own – race; this phenomenon reinforces the invisibility of whiteness as a norm, and race as an area of study focusing on people of color. In addition, the present research may generate information to clarify the needs of transracially adoptive parents who may struggle with the challenge of facing and responding to racism and discrimination in the context of a multiracial family.
In general, adoption literature has primarily focused on outcomes for adoptees, rather than examining the psychological impact of adoption on all members of the adoption triad – which includes adoptees, adoptive parents, and birth parents (Sass & Henderson, 2000; Zamostny et al., 2003). Mental health clinicians and researchers have been called on to help understand and address the complexities of adoption, and in particular post-adoption issues that affect family dynamics (Lee, 2003). These issues, which arise from circumstances relating to children, parents and the environment, may include parent-child attachment, children’s pre-adoption experiences and their impact, and societal stigma surrounding adoption. In the case of transracially adoptive families, post-adoption challenges also include families’ experiences with racial and cultural differences (Carnes-Holt, 2012; USDHHS, Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010).

Psychologists and other social scientists have noted the need for supporting White transracially adoptive parents, not only with the challenges facing many other adoptive parents, but also with the issues concerning race that both they and their children face (Lee, 2003; USDHHS, Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010; Zamostny et al., 2003). Although White transracially adopting parents are a growing population who need culturally relevant resources and support, there is a research gap in the psychology literature with respect to transracial adoption and adoptive families’ well-being. Consequently, psychologists and social workers have called for more research on transracially adoptive families in order to inform practice and policy (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2008; Lee, 2003; Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt, Gunnar & The Minnesota International Adoption Project Team, 2006; O’Brien & Zamostny, 2003; Vonk, Lee, & Crolley-Simic, 2010).
Research with White Transracially Adoptive Parents

Most Transracial adoption research focuses almost exclusively on the psychological outcomes and racial and ethnic identity development of the adoptees rather than their parents, and subsumes racial socialization under the phrase “cultural socialization” (Lee, 2003). Racial socialization is defined as the process of development that takes place through social interactions, associations and role modeling, instilling racial pride, a sense of racial history and skills to cope with racism and discrimination (Hughes, Rodriguez, Smith, Johnson, Stevenson & Spicer 2006; Hughes & Chen, 1999; Thornton, Chatters, Taylor & Allen, 1990). Research on racial socialization and transracial adoption often overlaps with research on cultural socialization, which is defined as, “the manner by which parents address ethnic and racial issues within the family, specifically, the ways parents communicate or transmit cultural values, belief, customs, and behaviors to the child and the extent to which the child internalizes these messages, and acquires the skills to become a competent and functional member of a racially diverse society” (Lee et al., 2006, p. 572).

Adoptees considered to be from a different country of origin from their White parents, but not of a different race – Eastern European or South American and identified by parents as White, for example – are not included in the present research, nor in most of the research on transracial adoption. Because racial categories are socially constructed and therefore often ambiguous, the inclusion criteria for this study will dictate that the participants must perceive their children as being a person of color, and identified by other people in their community as a racial minority. This perception of racial difference
is crucial to the study topic, since the research area of interest is participants’ beliefs and attitudes concerning race.

To the extent that empirical research has focused on White parents’ views and experiences of race, it has emphasized the influence of parents’ roles in their children’s racial socialization. Accordingly, parents act as the earliest interpreters and guides for race-related social and environmental stimuli and situations, and they moderate their children’s exposure to and contact with diverse communities (DeBerry, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1996; Lee et al, 2006; Phinney, 1990; Vonk & Angaran, 2003). For transracial adoptees, appropriate racial socialization may be associated with development of a positive racial identity, which, in turn, may be associated with psychological adjustment, self-esteem, protective factors, and coping skills with respect to racism and discrimination. It also may be associated with the adoptees’ competence in and knowledge of the adoptees’ birth culture, and their having a positive relationship with the adoptive parents (Andujo, 1988; Bozek, 2009; Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2011; Lee et al., 2006; McGinnis, Smith, Ryan, & Howard, 2009; McRoy & Hall, 1996; Samuels, 2009; Vonk, Lee, & Crolley-Simic, 2010).

However, little is known about the racial identity development of White parents as they function in the multiple child-rearing roles, many of which potentially involve teaching the child about racism and discrimination. Most of what is known about White parents is determined from the perspectives of transracially adopted children and inferences from research on the children. Much of this type of research suggests that White transracially adoptive parents vary widely in their approaches to racial socialization – both from the perspectives and accounts of the children and the parents.
For example, some parents report employing a race-neutral perspective, in which they ignore or de-emphasize race, whereas others strive for integrated socioracial practices with their children, and employ strategies to be proactive about racial issues (Bozek, 2009; Huh, 1997; Huh & Reid, 2000; Lee, 2003; Lee et al., 2006; McGinnis et al., 2009; Samuels, 2009; Vonk, Lee, & Crolley-Simic, 2010).

Nevertheless, the literature generally suggests that White transracially adoptive parents, whether endorsing a race-neutral stance or not, avoid direct, proactive approaches that challenge racism and discrimination (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2011; Lee et al., 2006; Smith, Juarez, & Jacobson, 2011). Some parents emphasize enculturation, providing race-related education and cultural opportunities for their children, while simultaneously discounting discrimination and racism, and guiding their children to view racial encounters as individual instances, decontextualized from a historical and political pattern (Lee, 2003; Smith et al., 2011). In addition, research on White parents’ racial socialization practices suggests that over time, as transracial adoptees enter adolescence, their parents are more likely to have ambivalent feelings about racial socialization, and begin to emphasize more Eurocentric values (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2008; DeBerry, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1996; Lee, 2003).

Studies of White transracially adoptive parents – from the parents’, not children’s accounts - have highlighted some of the parents’ perceived barriers to addressing race with their children. These barriers include the parents’ (a) choosing to live in predominantly White neighborhoods and selecting predominantly White schools; (b) finding difficulty balancing their culture with the child’s birth culture; and (c) believing that the child lacks interest in her or his birth culture (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2008;
Vonk, Lee & Crolley-Simic, 2010). Lee et al. (2006) noted that parents need to consciously and purposefully engage in racial socialization practices in a proactive manner, and “think beyond racial awareness toward self-examination of their cultural belief systems…” (p. 579). Yet in actuality very little of the research seems to have focused on the quality of White parents’ racial identity or awareness as influences on their childrearing practices and family decision making. Moreover, despite the critical role that White parents potentially play in transracially adoptive families, their mental health issues regarding race have garnered little attention. Psychology literature has illuminated the fact that racism not only affects people of color, but also has psychosocial costs for White people in cognitive, affective and behavioral domains (Dobbins & Skillings, 2005; Goodman, 2001; Helms, 1992, Spanierman, 2009).

Given that parents influence their children’s racial identity development in such critical ways, that there exists such variation in parents’ racial socialization approaches, and that their own mental health and adjustment issues are important, it follows that more information is necessary about what factors affect the parents’ behavior, motivation and decision making about race and racial socialization (Crolly-Simic & Vonk, 2008).

Overall, the psychology and social work literature about White transracially adoptive parents has focused on the parents’ role in racial socialization of children. Few studies have investigated the role of race in the adoption decision making process – whether or not to adopt a child of a different race. I could not locate any published studies that examined the racial identity development of White parents who had adopted a child of another race. Counseling psychologists have advocated for research to better understand the complex issues, including race, facing adoptive families, and the
psychological impact of adoption on all adoptive triad members (with the triad defined as the birth parents, adoptive parents and adoptees), rather than just the adoptees (Lee, 2003; Zamostny et al., 2003).

The present study attempts to fill the racial gap in psychological knowledge concerning White parents’ racial identity, their racial awareness, beliefs and attitudes, and the potential conflicts and transformations in racial identity development that are experienced in the context of parenting a child of color. Attention to the role of race in transracial adoption in psychological research may help inform clinical practice and adoption policy with regard to improved support for transracially adoptive families. Such support might include educating and raising parents’ awareness about the meaning of their own race in their family practices, encouraging their own self-examination, and helping them to understand the importance of and process of racial socialization (Lee et al, 2006; Vonk, Lee, & Crolley-Simic, 2010).

Lastly, psychologists have been urged to consider racism as well as other forms of oppression in our conceptualizations of mental health issues (APA Resolution on Racism and Racial Discrimination, 2001; Thompson & Neville, 1999). According to the constructivist, systemic, and interactionist conceptualization of racism outlined by Thompson and Neville (1999), racism influences these parents’ experiences, and in turn, the parents’ actions may perpetuate or challenge racism. Understanding White racial identity development provides insight into the process by which White people develop a positive, anti-racist identity. Ultimately, as Schetky (2006) notes, “The onus should not be put on adoptees to learn to deal with discrimination but rather on society to end discrimination” (p. 323).
Methodology, Theoretical Framework, and Aim of the Present Study

Qualitative research offers an opportunity to engage in an in-depth examination of parents’ racial awareness, beliefs, and attitudes in an area in the field of psychology and adoption which has not been studied. In the present study, I used narrative inquiry to explore the subjective experiences of White parents of transracial adoptees with respect to the parents’ racial identity, and interview data was analyzed through qualitative conventional content analysis. Narrative inquiry explores in-depth, first-person accounts of research participants to study how individuals construct experiences and events, and how they make meaning of their lived experiences (Mishler, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1991; Riessman, 2008; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

As a qualitative methodology, narrative inquiry is well suited for the study of these parents’ racial identity because of its focus on gaining a descriptive understanding of an unresearched phenomenon (Creswell, Hanson, Clark & Morales, 2007) and its emphasis on meaning making through stories, particularly related to identity (Chase, 2005; Mishler, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1991; Riessman, 2008; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Given a topic as potentially emotion laden as whiteness, the narrative and exploratory aspects of qualitative research encourage the participants to think and talk about uncomfortable issues (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The reflective and spontaneous nature of open-ended and narrative responses is critical, because literature indicates that White people experience discomfort talking about race, in particular, their race (Altman, 2006; Foldy, 2005). By telling their stories, rather than answering pointed questions, participants are more likely to speak freely about race.
The present research draws on critical race theory and White racial identity development theory as frameworks, both of which understand reality as shaped by racial, social, political, cultural, and economic factors. Critical race theory is a theoretical framework and area of study with roots in law, sociology, philosophy, anthropology and history, which applies critical theory – an examination of society and culture and issues of power - to the study of race. Critical race theory addresses the role of race and racism in society and institutions, uncovers the way racism operates in everyday life (Denzin, 2005), and seeks to expose seemingly race-neutral ways of seeing reality, with a commitment to social justice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Mirza, 1999; Thompson & Neville, 1999; Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002).

The use of critical race theory helps elucidate how external influences such as systemic White privilege affect the parents’ racial identity development. Incorporating this perspective helps ensure that the parents’ racial identity development is not viewed as solely an interpersonal experience, devoid of history and context. Research on race can either reinforce or re-examine race-neutral apolitical perspectives, which have been traditionally employed by researchers (Hylton; Solorzano & Yano, 2002). In this sense, using critical race theory applies a social justice lens to this research topic. As Hylton (2012) notes, and in keeping with social justice values, critical race theory provides a theoretical framework that enables researchers to “make bold statements about and challenge the racialised order of things” (p. 25). Critical race theory informed the data collection and analysis, by incorporating consideration of the participants’ past and present experiences of racial socialization within families, communities, and institutions.
Helms’s (1990; 1995) White racial identity development model offers a theoretical framework for understanding the relevance of racism to psychological well-being and developmental adjustment. According to Helms, racial identity theory for White people proposes that the development of a healthy White identity occurs in two phases, which include the abandonment of racism, and the transformation to a nonracist identity. White racial identity development theory also helps elucidate the ways that White individuals form a self-concept as a member of an ascribed racial group, and perceive and interact with other racial groups (Helms, 1990, 1995).

White racial identity development theory offers a theoretical framework that aids in exploring the intrapersonal and interpersonal effects of racial socialization for the parents, in a society characterized by racial stratification, and distribution of power and resources that privileges the parents while marginalizing their children of color. Racial identity theory provides insight into the parents’ race-related psychological processes, within the context of structural racism. Helms (1992) cites White racism as the origin and perpetuation of the racial socialization that affects racial identity development for all people in the United States, noting that, “White people in this country did invent racism in its various manifestations,” with the Constitution legally sanctioning discrimination against people of color (p. 19).

Whereas White racial identity theory provides a framework for understanding the psychological racial experiences of parents within the context of a racist society, critical race theory allows for a complementary view of parents’ race-related experiences that incorporates the institutional applications and personal effects of structural racism. Integration of these theoretical frameworks provides a perspective for understanding and
conducting research that acknowledges the importance of both the research participants’ individual experiences, as well as their cultural and historical contexts.

By exploring and describing the experiences and racial identity development of White parents of transracially adopted children, this research aims to develop an understanding of the influence of factors involving and informing their racial identity development and psychosocial functioning as individuals, parents, and members of their communities. The general research question posed is, “How does racial identity develop for White parents with adoptive children of a different race?”
Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The present study examines the racial identity development of White transracially adoptive parents. Because of the phenotypic and sometimes cultural differences between the adoptive parents and the families of origin of the adopted children, transracial adoption may pose challenges for the parents, who benefit from advantaged racial-group membership in the United States when they are not with their children, whereas their children do not benefit from their own racial status. However, few studies have examined the effects of transracial adoption on White parents’ racial perspectives, nor is there theory that addresses relevant issues.

Given the lack of theory and research on White transracially adoptive parents, in psychology in particular, in this literature review, I use critical race and White racial identity theories to identify factors possibly related to the parents’ experiences and their racial identity. To provide a context for understanding how adoption policy may shape parents’ racial perspectives, I review the history and policies surrounding transracial adoption in the United States, in order to understand parents’ and adoption professionals’ attitudes towards transracial adoption, and the political context in which transracial adoption takes place and is viewed. The connections between White racial identity development, White privilege, and the practice of transracial adoption are explored. An examination of the psychology and sociology literature on transracial adoption includes research on parents’ parenting practices, attitudes about race and adoption choices.

For this study, White racial identity theory helps provide an understanding of the intrapsychic and interpersonal aspects of the parents’ racial identity development in the
context of their race-related parenting experiences and a society where all individuals are racially socialized. As a complementary framework, critical race theory incorporates the view that transracially adoptive parents are influenced by structural racism, and that power inequities must be considered as shaping the nature of the stories the parents tell about race and their understanding of Whiteness. It should be noted that critical race theory also includes multiple levels of analysis, examining racial justice issues with a “perspective that includes economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 3). In this way, critical race theory is well suited to use in tandem with a psychologically oriented theory. Using both of these theoretical frameworks allows for a focus on psychological constructs such as individual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, yet also provides a broader context for understanding the parents’ experiences as being embedded in a structure of racial inequality which affords them increased power and status.

Transracial Adoption and Systemic Racism

Trends in Transracial Adoption Demographics

Transracial adoptions make up 75% of all international adoptions to the United States, 28% of domestic adoptions from foster care, and 21% of domestic adoptions from private agencies (USDHHS, 2012). White parents are the largest racial group of parents adopting in the United States, the predominant group adopting transracially, and the group with the most resources to exercise racial and country of origin preferences in the adoption process. Most transracial adoptions – approximately 92% (Jacobson, Nielsen & Hardiman, 2012) - involve White parents, as opposed to parents of color, adopting children of color (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2011; McGinnis, Smith, Ryan & Howard,
Among domestic United States adoptions, 28% from foster care were transracial, and 21% from private agencies were transracial (USDHHS, 2011).

When White parents adopt children of Color, racial disparities in resources are evident in the mechanisms of the adoption process. First, the cost of international adoption can be a significant barrier that results in higher resourced families in the United States, predominantly White parents, having more freedom and choice in the adoption process. International adoptions require higher expenses than other types of adoption, typically costing $20,000 to $40,000. Children adopted internationally are more likely than domestically adopted children to live in households with incomes over four times the poverty threshold (Jacobson et al., 2012; Quiroz, 2007; USDHHS, ASPE, 2011). In contrast, 56% percent of parents adopting from foster care reported no adoption expenses, 29% reported expenses less than $5,000, and fewer than 10% reported costs of $10,000 or more (USDHHS, ASPE, 2011).

Secondly, racial disparities in worth, availability, and desirability of infants are starkly represented in the fee scales of private domestic adoption agencies. For example, in 1990, one adoption agency’s fee schedule charged $7,500 for White infants, $3,800 for biracial infants, and $2,209 for Black infants (Jennings, 2006). Moreover, based on 2000 Census data, the highest incomes of adoptive families were for families with adopted Asian children, followed by adopted Hispanic (sic) and then Black children (Jacobson et al., 2102). Regarding this income disparity, Jacobson et al. state, “Several individuals in the adoption business have told us that African American adoptees are simply cheaper. Some agencies charge more for healthy White babies” (p.84). It is within this
environment of racist values placed on a child’s worth, that White parents make adoption decisions.

Thus, as critical race theory posits, racism is inherent in United States culture and institutions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), and the adoption system exemplifies this. White transracially adoptive parents benefit from systemic racism and racial privilege in ways that give them the power to shape demographics, policy, and the experiences and well-being of their children. This phenomenon occurs through the parents’ choice of which children to adopt, from where, and choices about whether or not to address race and racism with their children. White parents’ racial identity influences and determines these decisions regarding adoption choices as well as decisions regarding responses to the discrimination and racism that confront their children.

Overall, White parents adopting transracially have shown a preference for children adopted from overseas – in particular a preference for children from Asia, which seems to both reflect and contribute to a rejection of the overrepresented populations of Black and Latino children waiting in foster care for adoption (USDHHS, 2012). In addition, some parents adopting transracially have shown support for policies that explicitly demand that race not be considered a factor in the adoption matching or parental preparation process (Livingston et al., 2008). These parents have vocalized their concerns, and influenced and shaped adoption policy, as well as trends in transracial adoption demographics (Jennings, 2006; Quiroz, 2007).

**History of Transracial Adoption in the United States**

Adoption in the United States has always brought up issues of phenotype and racial difference; at the outset, differences from the White norm were not viewed as
desirable or positive, thus sowing the seeds for racial views that White parents were best matched with White children, and that racial differences between parents and children would be difficult to address or contend with. Historically, adoption was stigmatized and carried out in secrecy; thus it was seen as critical for parents to be matched with phenotypically similar children (Griffith & Bergeron, 2006).

Prior to the mid-1900s, the most common principle underlying adoption was that children should be matched with adopting parents by religion, ethnicity, race and physical characteristics, which included hair and eye color. The purpose of this rule was to make the families appear as a bionormative or biologically related family, and therefore, maintain the secrecy of the adoption. Until the 1960s, adoption agencies adhered to the philosophy of the Child Welfare League of America’s standards for placements by adoption services. According to this philosophy, children with similar racial characteristics would be better integrated into their adoptive families, and consequently, where White parents were concerned, it was critical to match them with White children (Baden et al., 2009; Griffith & Bergeron, 2006).

Within this racialized context, the first transracial adoptions did not necessarily reflect more progressive views of race. Rather, transracial adoption grew from resourced parents’ demand for more babies to adopt. Several factors led to an increase in domestic and international transracial adoption in the last three decades of the 20th century. With predominantly White families seeking to adopt White children, there were fewer White children available for adoption due to increased use of birth control, higher infertility rates due to later average ages of childbirth, as well as the decrease in stigma surrounding single motherhood for White women (Jacobson et al., 2012).
An examination of demographic patterns associated with transracial adoptions with a critical race theory lens reflects the racial structural inequality existing in United States society, and the ways racism influences parents’ domestic and international adoption practices; namely, that adoptive White parents, through economic advantages, are more likely to adopt domestically and internationally through private agencies in order to adopt children who are either White, or from a racial group they perceive as less different than themselves (Asian) than Black children (Zhang & Lee, 2011).

*Domestic Transracial Adoptions and Systemic Racial disparities*

With respect to domestic adoptions, White parents more frequently adopt White children than Black and Latino children, even though large numbers of these children are available (very few Asian children are available for adoption domestically, therefore, data are not available) (Jennings, 2006; USDHHS, 2011; Zhang & Lee, 2011). White parents more often choose to and are generally better positioned economically to adopt from private agencies rather than from foster care for both domestic and international adoption. The United States is the only Western country where adoption through private agencies is preferred to adoption through public agencies (Quiroz, 2007). Since White parents are the predominant group of adopting parents (USDHHS, 2011), it is their choices or preferences that have determined this trend towards private adoptions.

Literature suggests that White parents often endorse negative attitudes and stereotypes about children in foster care, and perceive children of color in foster care as having problems relating to their communities of origin (Jennings, 2006; Livingston et al., 2008; Quiroz, 2007). Also, according to Jennings (2006), White adoptive parents anticipate problems for children of color, such as the child being born to parents with
addiction. This phenomenon is another example of what critical race theorists would term inherent racism, which reinforces the status quo and perpetuates myths – in this case race-related beliefs regarding perceptions of family dysfunction (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). In addition, parents’ acknowledgment of the racism existing in their families and communities contributes to the parents’ view that it will be more difficult to raise a Black child than a child of another race (Jennings, 2006). Preference for private adoption agencies allows White parents to exercise more choice in racial preferences for adoptees and to distance themselves from racial issues that may cause discomfort.

Therefore, parents may elect to adopt children who they perceive as presenting with more manageable racial differences or social differences, associated with race. For example, a White child adopted from an orphanage in Eastern Europe or a child adopted from an orphanage in China may be perceived by White parents as presenting fewer challenges to raise in the United States than an African American child adopted from foster care in the United States (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2008; Zhang & Lee, 2010).

In contrast to White parents, adoptive parents of color are more likely to adopt children from foster care, (Jennings, 2006). When sources of adoptions are examined, 92% of parents adopting internationally were White, 71% of parents adopting from private domestic agencies were White, and 63% adopting from foster care were White. Black and Latino parents adopt almost entirely from domestic sources, primarily from foster care (Livingston et al., 2008). The number of Black and Latino parents adopting internationally has been negligible (approximately 2 and 4%, respectively). By comparison, 27% of parents adopting from foster care were Black, 5% were Latino. The
numbers of Asian parents adopting has been so small that the percentages have not been reported (USDHHS, 2011).

One of the systemic issues impacting racial disparities in foster care and domestic adoption is the culturally biased screening process and structural barriers that result in parents of color being screened out at higher rates than White parents. These barriers include rigid family assessment standards, agency fees, lack of minority staff, particularly in managerial positions, and lack of trained and culturally competent staff (Crumbley, 1999; Livingston et al., 2008; Padilla, Vargas, & Chavez, 2010; Roberts, 2005).

Another systemic issue impacting racial disparities in foster care and domestic adoption is the higher home removal rate of children from Black and Latino families. Research shows that state agencies intervene more aggressively in cases of child maltreatment in Black and Latino families than in White families, and White families are more likely to receive therapeutic and in-home services, even when family characteristics and problems are similar (Padilla et al., 2010; Roberts 2005; Zamostny et al., 2003). State intervention and adoption screening process reflect workers’ and institutions’ stereotypes about family dysfunction and potential or lack of potential for rehabilitation (Roberts, 2005). These intervention and screening processes reflect racism across all of the domains of racism described by Collins (2009), with individuals having the power to make discretionary decisions, decisions being made based on cultural biases, and institutions perpetuating these practices through racial hierarchical staffing.

Further exacerbating racial disparities in the domestic adoption system is the fact that White children spend less time in foster care and are four times more likely than Black children to be reunited with their families. Of children in foster care who are
legally available for adoption, Black children wait longer than White children to be adopted. (USDHHS, Child Welfare, Disproportionality in the Child Welfare System, 2011). Black and Native American children were three times more likely to be in foster care than White children, and in some regions of the United States, Latino children were overrepresented as well (USDHHS, Child Welfare, Disproportionality in the Child Welfare System, 2011).

White parents’ racial attitudes and beliefs and their resulting adoption choices have contributed to the over representation of Black and Latino children in the child welfare system, (Lee, 2003; Livingston et al, 2008). Thus, White adoptive parents’ choices exacerbate racial disparities in an adoption system already affected by racism. (Lee, 2003; Livingston et al, 2008), as evidenced by culturally biased screening, and disproportionate removal rates.

*International Transracial Adoptions and Parents’ Racial Preferences*

Critical race theory underscores the importance of structural racism, which is evident in how race is approached in international transracial adoptions. White parents are five times more likely to adopt children of other races than they are to adopt Black children (Zhang & Lee, 2011). There was an early precedent set for White parents adopting Asian children. Although the earliest transracial adoption recorded in the United States took place in Minnesota in 1948 (Baden, Thomas, & Smith, 2009), the first significant numbers of transracial adoptions occurred in the latter half of the 20th century, when orphans from the Korean and Vietnam wars were adopted to the United States (Baden et al., 2009; Livingston, 2008). Overall, trends show that while the number of
international adoptions to the United States peaked in 2004, the largest numbers of transracial adoptees still come from Asia (USDHHS, 2012).

In fiscal year 2011 (October 1, 2010 through September 30, 2011), the most recent data available from the United States State Department, there were a total of 9,319 children adopted from other countries; 75% of these international adoptions were transracial. Of these, the greatest number, 44.7%, were adopted from East Asia and Southeast Asia; followed by 27.3% from Africa, 20.9% from Russia and Eastern Europe, 2.6% from South America, 2.2% from the Caribbean, 1.2% from Central America, .2% from the Middle East, .1 from Canada .06% from the South Pacific, .1% from an unknown birthplace, and 0% from Europe (Figure 1).

Figure 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region of Origin</th>
<th>Percentage of Total International Adoptions, by Region of Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central America</td>
<td>.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: United States State Department (2012)
Numbers from other regions were too small to represent on this graph: The Middle East, .2%; Canada, .1%, the South Pacific, .06%, .1% birthplace unknown, and Europe, 0%.
Children adopted from Asia and Africa, assumed to be children of color, comprise 72% of total international adoptions. The numbers of visibly racial and ethnic group children increases even more if we factor in those from the Caribbean, the South American countries Guyana and Suriname, and the South Pacific at 2.2%, .5%, .14%, and .06%, respectively.

In spite of the recent decline in the number of transracial adoptions in the United States, there are still large numbers of international transracially adoptive families from earlier cohorts. A ten year comparison of adoptions to the United States from Asia and Africa, the two regions responsible for the highest number of transracial adoptions, indicates that whereas the overall number of international adoptions decreased from 19,647 in 2001 to 9,319 in 2011, adoptions from Asia held relatively steady (46.2% to 44.7%), and adoptions from Africa increased significantly (1.7% to 27.3%).

Thus, while overall numbers have declined, the proportion of African adoptees has increased by 666% (Figure 2). White transracially adoptive parents may see Asian and even African adoptees as less challenging or problematic than African American children in foster care due to the parents’ views of foster care families and communities of color. Nevertheless, these parents may not anticipate or be prepared for the racism their children will still face while growing up in the United States.

*Figure 2*
Race-related Policy and Transracial Adoption

Understanding the history of policy regarding transracial adoption provides yet another context for understanding the systemic racism in the adoption process, and the significance for the White adoptive parent. As with the case of differential value placed on infants and children based on race, race-related adoption policies reflect society’s values concerning race, namely by the devaluation of Black culture. Revisiting Collins’ (2009) delineation of the four domains of racism, it becomes clear that cultural racism plays a role in how adoption policies serve to devalue or dismiss cultures that are different from the White norm. In addition, within the structural and disciplinary domains, organizations and their regulations uphold practices that perpetuate racial discrimination.

Source: United States State Department (2012)
*Year 2004 included to reflect percentages from time period of peak number of international adoptions to the United States

---

Trends in Adoptions from Asia and Africa: 10 Year Comparison*

![Bar chart showing trends in adoptions from Asia and Africa from 2001 to 2011.](chart.png)
Although issues of race are implicit, and in some cases explicit, in parents’ adoption decision-making and in adoption policies and procedures, these issues are rarely discussed. As Livingston and colleagues (2008) note in a policy paper on the role of race and law in adoption and foster care, “Issues of race and adoption are highly sensitive” (p. 5). Their statement reflects the discomfort that issues of race and racism elicit in White people, as well as the impact of dominant norms which define what it means to be a family in our society. Transracial adoption involves both of these issues, and is thus considered a sensitive subject. Research related to transracial adoption repeatedly refers to the controversy and debate surrounding transracial adoption (Crolley-Simic & Vonk 2008; Jennings, 2006; Lee, 2003; Smith et al., 2011). As Samuels (2009) states, “The most publicly debated and emotionally contentious issues in adoption policy and practice are those related to race” (p. 80).

The debate, or controversy, regarding transracial adoption concerns the sociopolitical significance of White parents’ adopting children of color. Transracial adoption by White parents takes place in a context of cultural values, historical practices, public policy, and legislation – all of which have supported structural and institutional racism that empowers the White adoptive parents in their efforts to acquire children, but discourages them from acknowledging racial issues in adoption. This context includes inconsistently applied policies regarding the consideration of race and culture as a factor in adoptions, racial disparities in adoption placement practices, and the potential exploitative nature of more affluent White parents adopting children from less affluent areas. These factors have all led to the view of transracial adoption as a “culturally suspect phenomenon” (Griffith and Bergeron, 2006, p. 303).
Issues that have been raised in the debates about transracial adoption include the following: (a) whether or not White parents can raise a child of color with positive racial socialization, when these parents are of the dominant racial group in a country with a continuing history of racism and exploitation of people of color (Jennings, 2006; Lee et al., 2003); (b) the adoption of children of color by White middle and upper middle class parents from countries experiencing poverty and political and social instability perpetuates cultural imperialism, and may inadvertently promote exploitative practices such as baby selling, kidnapping and forced labor (Kenney, 2006; Quiroz, 2007); (c) overrepresentation of Black children in foster care waiting for adoption reflects White parents’ preferences for non-Black infants, as well as racist parental screening practices that limit Black parents’ adopting; and (d) disagreement over whether or not race should be a factor in the parent-child matching process (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2008; Lee, 2003; Livingston et al, 2008; Zamostny et al, 2003).

A push for domestic transracial adoption and an anti-race matching sentiment first arose following the Civil Rights movement. Organizations that facilitated transracial adoption emerged during this time, such as Operation Brown Baby, Adopt-a-Child, The Open Door Society, and the National Urban League Foster Child and Adoptions Program. These organizations also sought to reduce the relatively large numbers of Black children who were institutionalized in the United States (Baden & Thomas, 2009). The Indian Adoption Project, a collaboration between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Child Welfare League of America, removed Native American children from their families in an attempt to assimilate them into society’s dominant culture. The Indian Adoption Project took place from 1958 through 1967, and was later met with criticism
Transracially Adoptive Parents

concerning the disruption of Native American families and culture (Baden & Thomas, 2009; Lee, 2003; Livingston et al, 2008).

At the same time, while there was increasing public favor for race-neutral adoption policies, transracial adoption occurred without attention to race and cultural issues that transracially adoptive parents would confront, and among some adoption professionals, especially Black social workers, there was a call for the need to attend to race and culture with White parents adopting Black children (Lee, 2003; Livingston et al., 2008; Zamostny et al., 2003). Questions about the capacity of White parents to support Black children in a positive racial socialization process led to the 1972 National Association of Black Social Workers’ resolution opposing the transracial adoption of Black or mixed-race Black children by White parents (Crumbley, 1999). The National Association of Black Social Workers called transracial adoption of Black children cultural genocide, which led to a decrease in White parents adopting Black children (Lee, 2003). In addition, the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act ended the Indian Adoption Project, restricted the transracial adoption of Native American children, and gave preference to tribal families (Kenney, 2006; Lee, 2003; Livingston et al., 2008).

More recently, legislation was enacted to facilitate transracial adoption, except for in the case of Native American children. Congress passed the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) in 1994 to address the racial disparities in lengths of stay and adoption rates from foster care. MEPA required state agencies to improve efforts at recruiting adoptive and foster parents who represented the race and ethnicity of children in the system, and it also forbade the delay or denial of a placement solely on the basis of race, color, or national origin (Griffith & Bergeron, 2006; Livingston et al, 2008). Two years after its
enactment, MEPA was amended by the Removal of Barriers to Interethic Adoption Provisions (IEP) because it was seen as not taking enough measures to facilitate transracial adoption. MEPA wording was changed from prohibiting denial of placement ‘solely’ on the basis of race, color or national origin, to prohibiting ‘any’ consideration of race as a factor in placements, barring exceptional circumstances (Griffith & Bergeron, 2006; Livingston et al., 2008).

The passing of MEPA involved hearings during which White parents testified that race-matching policies were discriminatory because they restricted their options for transracial adoption. These hearings disregarded the reality of White children being placed almost exclusively with White families, at the White parents’ request, without such placements being labeled discrimination. Also, the passage of MEPA did not alter the Indian Child Welfare Act, which highlighted the importance of finding Native American adoptive families for Native American children (Livingston et al., 2008).

Thus, MEPA purported to support race-neutral adoptions, while (a) overlooking the practice of White parents’ requesting White children and being accommodated when possible; and (b) enacting regulations that valued the importance of race matching for Native American children, but not other children of color. These inconsistencies in policy served to support White parents’ freedom of choice to overlook the potential cultural needs of Black and Latino children, and to allow parents discount the significance of their own racial and cultural backgrounds.

Prospective adoptive parents take part in an assessment, or home study, to determine their readiness and appropriateness for adoption. These assessments commonly involve an interview, home inspections, and background reviews relating to parents’
driving, criminal, health, and abuse records. However, not only do the assessment requirements differ depending on the type of adoption and the jurisdiction (USDHHS, 2011), but they also differ significantly in how or whether the subjects of race and culture are addressed (Livingston et al., 2008). Current MEPA-IEP policies dictate that agency workers can only talk about race and culture in cases with international and Native American adoptees, but not children of other races. Agencies that do not comply with MEPA-IEP are considered in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and face financial penalties. Furthermore, families seeking to adopt transracially who feel their rights have been violated by consideration of race “may seek relief from any U.S. district court” (Livingston et al., 2008, p. 16).

There is little structured follow up in terms of support for adoptive families. The National Survey of Adoptive Parents Project (USDHHS, 2007) indicated that just 35% of adoptive parents met with agency personnel to discuss post-adoption services (no information is available about the parents’ follow through), and 31% of adoptive parents attended a parents’ support group (content not specified). This lack of follow up services also has implications for both the parents’ and children’s experiences as they deal with racism in a multi-racial society. Without support and intervention, White transracially adoptive parents are more likely to be silent and not proactive in taking an anti-racist stance within their families and communities (Butler-Sweet, 2011; Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2011; Lee, 2003). Given that there is no guarantee of follow up in services for adoptive parents, parental assessments are a critical point of contact for adoption personnel to reach White parents and have an impact on their racial identity development, and their understanding of racial and cultural issues.
MEPA-IEP policies perpetuate societal racial hierarchies, affecting White transracially adoptive parents’ preparedness to address race and racism or even to consider how these factors pertain to themselves. These policies stand in contrast to the policies regarding international adoption and the adoption of Native American and Alaskan Native children (Livingston et al., 2008). In fact, the Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000 (IAA) includes the mandate that prospective adoptive parents attend 10 hours of pre-adoptive training and parental counseling regarding children’s racial, cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic background, history, and needs (Livingston et al., 2008). Therefore, whereas cultural competence training is required for parents adopting internationally, and culturally sensitive placements are required for Native American adoptees, addressing race and cultural issues is overlooked in the domestic adoptions of non-Native American children of color, and from the previously cited statistics, it is clear that the majority of these children are Black or Latino.

Adoption policies are intended for the best interests of children. In practice, however, these policies serve to perpetuate ignorance and denial about race among White transracially adoptive parents. If one believes that parents’ cultural preparedness and racial awareness are in the best interest of the child, then the legal mandates of MEPA-IEP create a climate where adoption agencies are limited in their ability to screen and prepare transracially adoptive parents to meet children’s needs regarding racial identity and racial socialization (Livingston et al., 2008). Jennings (2006) points out, “By situating the MEPA-IEP in the simplistic discourse of reverse discrimination, the legal community missed an opportunity to better serve the interest of children by forging racially progressive adoption policies” (p.578). Adoption policy thereby represents the
perpetuation of race-neutral practices, practices that are construed by critical race theorists as failing to address racial injustices.

*White Racial Ideology and Theoretical Frameworks*

Because the present research concerns White racial identity of parents adopting children of color, it is necessary to reflect on how issues of race and racism potentially affect the parents’ identity development. The parents’ racial identity development takes place within an environment of White privilege, where Whiteness is the cultural norm, and White racial group membership confers social, institutional and economic benefits. Systemic White privilege informs and affects multiple aspects of White transracially adoptive parents’ life and familial experiences. For example, the parents choose what race child to adopt and they decide whether, how much or in what manner to address racism with their child, if at all (Jennings, 2006; Lee et al. 2006; Zhang & Lee, 2011). Throughout their lives, the parents have developed race-related beliefs and attitudes, whether or not they are conscious of these beliefs and attitudes. These race-related beliefs and attitudes, which are shared collectively amongst other White individuals, may be characterized as *racial ideology* (Noveske, 2006).

White racial ideology provides a rationale for interpreting and understanding racial issues – in this case, the racial identity development of the parents, and their behaviors and beliefs regarding adopting and raising a child of another race. Examining the parents’ experiences and racial identity development through the lens of White racial ideology means that individuals’ beliefs and attitudes are seen as part of larger social structures, where they serve to either maintain and justify, or question and challenge racial hierarchies (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Lewis, 2004).
Theory and research suggest that the White racial ideology of White transracially adoptive parents may be characterized as race cognizant, racial essentialist, or race-neutral. Adherents to the former acknowledge the role of racism in affecting peoples’ experiences and opportunities, essentialists view racial differences as inherent, and those who manifest race-neutral ideology minimize or ignore the effects of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2011; Jennings, 2006; Lewis, 2004; Zhang & Lee, 2011). Race-neutral ideology has emerged as a dominant theme in the literature on transracial adoption (McGinnis, 2009; Jennings, 2006; Samuels, 2009; Sass, 2008).

Within the general orientation towards examining parents’ racial attitudes and beliefs, two specific theoretical frameworks, critical race theory and White racial identity theory, are potentially useful for examining different aspects of White adoptive parents’ reactions to race and themselves and their children as racial beings. Critical race theory and White racial identity theory both address race neutral ideology in terms of race and power as systemic or group-level issues which affect individuals’ experiences, relationships, and well-being.

**Critical Race Theory and Race-Neutral Ideology**

Critical race theory, which originated in legal scholarship and activism in the late 1980s, questions the idealization of race-neutrality, assimilation, and integration in the law. For critical race theorists, race-neutrality, often referred to in the literature as colorblindness, is equivalent to the beliefs that inattention to race will make racism disappear, and that racism is an individual, not a systemic problem (Bush, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Mirza, 1999; Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002). Thus, from this
perspective, parents’ racial beliefs are not merely individual beliefs, but are embedded in a system of beliefs shared with the adoption power system in this case.

Critical race scholars note that society’s social construction of Whiteness serves to perpetuate White peoples’ experience of race as being race-free, or race-neutral. Yet psychologists and critical race scholars concur, that race-neutral ideology ignores between-group racial disparities and power differentials, and perpetuates racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Thompson & Neville, 1999). In fact, race-neutral ideology plays a role in maintaining White privilege, which has been demonstrated through the often-referenced McIntosh (1988) exercises listed in “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.” In spite of persisting racial disparities in employment, health, wealth, education and discriminatory practices, race-neutral ideology allows its proponents to claim that race does not matter, and that racism does not benefit Whites (Gushue & Constantine, 2007).

With respect to White transracially adopting parents, critical race theory would deem that parents’ race-neutral ideology has moved the debate about social issues into a private, individual-focused realm, diverting attention from larger societal issues of racial disparities in access to resources and positions of power. Race-neutral ideology underlies the arguments used against attending to race in the adoption matching process and in parents’ training and preparation for transracial adoption (Jennings, 2006; Lee et al., 2006; Livingston et al., 2008). Through the lens of critical race theory, inattention to race can be seen as legislated through MEPA-IEP policies (Quiroz, 2007). Legislation thus perpetuates parents’ tendency towards inattention to racism and racial differences between themselves and their children.
By focusing on adoption choices as a matter of individual taste and lifestyle preference and reframing inattention to race as a transcendence of race (Quiroz, 2007), race-neutral ideology overlooks the themes of power and race that are central to critical race theory. Race-related power differentials in the adoption system include White parents’ exercising economic privilege to select infants by race, as well as White parents having the legally sanctioned privilege to avoid attention to racism. Also, inattention to race allows parents to overlook the psychosocial needs of the adoptive children, and the adoption agencies to ignore the training needs of parents with respect to preparing them to cope and socialize their children to cope with the racial dynamics in society (i.e. racial socialization; Lee et al., 2006; Vonk, Lee & Crolley-Simic, 2010). As Jennings (2006) observes, White transracially adoptive parents’ race-neutral stance dismisses the “lived experience of race and racism” for transracial adoptees (p. 573), and adult adoptees have expressed feelings of invalidation when told by their parents that race does not matter (Bozek, 2009; McGinnis et al., 2009; Samuels, 2009).

In the psychology literature, scholars have found that White peoples’ endorsement of race-neutral racial attitudes are associated with their increased minimization of racism, denial and distortion of the impact of race on people of color, less awareness and knowledge of multicultural issues, and more overt forms of racism (Gushue & Constantine, 2007; Neville, Spanierman, & Doan, 2006; Sue, 2003; Plant, Thomas & Goren, 2009). White transracially adoptive parents’ endorsement of a race-neutral perspective maintains the racial status quo and thwarts existing efforts to address racial inequality – issues deemed critical to address for the psychological well-being of people
from all races (APA Multicultural Guidelines, 2003; Carter, 1995; Helms, 1995; Neville, Spanierman & Doan, 2006).

Although people of any race may take on a race-neutral ideology, White people are more likely to do so (Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Brown, 2000). The appeal and pervasiveness of race-neutral ideology may be due to the fact that this perspective removes the discomfort of acknowledging racism and one’s role in a racist society, and makes one appear to be non-racist. As the parent of a child of color, the White transracially adoptive parent may desire to project and retain an image of being non-racist. Critical race theory provides a sociopolitical and contextual lens with which to view the present research, highlighting the way that racism is perpetuated in adoption policy and parenting practices.

*White Racial Identity Development Theory*

The focus of critical race theory originated in racial dynamics in systems and institutions, especially inattentiveness to race and racism in law and social policies as these issues affect people of color. White racial identity theory focuses on understanding the intrapersonal and interpersonal effects of being socialized in a society characterized by White privilege and racism. Thus, White racial identity theory aids in understanding the relevance of racism to adoptive parents’ well-being and developmental adjustment in the context of familial relationships and society. Racial identity theory helps describe how (a) the adoptive parents’ self-concepts, as members of the self-identified White racial group, are formed; (b) how they perceive and interact with those from other racial groups; and (c) the psychosocial processes accompanying these interactions. Racial identity theory examines variability within groups, as well as cross-racial interactions
(Helms, 1990). With respect to White racial ideology, White racial identity development, for the White transracially adoptive parents may involve transforming from ascribing to a White racial ideology that perpetuates racism, to an ideology that is actively anti-racist and acknowledges the role that race and power play in everyday experiences.

According to Helms’s (1990; 1995) model of White racial identity development, there is a two-part process involved in the development of a healthy White identity: the abandonment of racism, and the formation of a nonracist White identity. Helms’s theoretical revision (1995) reconceptualized stages as more complex differentiations, which she calls racial identity schemas. Schemas become more effective in managing racial dynamics if the White person acquires the capacity to replace externalizing strategies with more internal, moral approaches when dealing with racial information and stimuli.

The six schemas Helms (1995) theorized to be part of White racial identity development include: Contact, Disintegration, Reintegration, Pseudoindipendence, Immersion-Emersion, and Autonomy.

**Contact.** Use of the contact schema occurs when White people (a) perceive White culture as the norm; (b) are oblivious or naïve regarding racism; (c) are ignorant of other racial and cultural experiences; (d) are not aware of their role in perpetuating racism; and (e) are not likely to have close relationships with People of color.

**Disintegration.** The second White racial identity schema may be precipitated by experiences that challenge the White person’s denial or ignorance of racial issues. With use of this schema, an individual may: (a) feel conflicted about her or his racial group membership; (b) be conscious of the consequences of disagreeing or diverging from
White people who deny or justify racism; (c) feel pressure to minimize or deny the existence of White privilege and racism; and (d) feel anxiety, confusion, guilt or helplessness in response to racial stimuli.

*Reintegration.* The third schema occurs in response to the discomfort of the Disintegration schema, and is marked by attempts to resolve racial identity confusion, including: (a) misinterpretation of the reality of racism; (b) justification of racial inequities through the assertion of White superiority; and (c) negative stereotyping of People of color.

*Pseudoindependence.* This White racial identity schema may, like Disintegration, require life experiences that serve as a catalyst to shift an individual’s views on race. With use of this schema: (a) racism is understood to be problematic; (b) there is an intellectual commitment to addressing racism; (c) racism within the cultural domain (Collins, 2009) may be unknowingly perpetuated by the imposition of White norms on People of color, as the White person attempts to help People of color assimilate in a racist society; and (d) the role of White people in racism is not recognized.

*Immersion/Emersion.* The fifth schema results when experiences, usually with People of color, lead to a shift in the White person’s understanding of race and racism, where: (a) an individual recognizes that racism is a problem for White people too; (b) White peoples’ understanding of Whiteness and their role in racism must change in order to address racial inequality; and (c) this process requires the White person’s educating her or himself about the current and past meaning of Whiteness in the United States.

*Autonomy.* As the most internal, flexible and sophisticated schema, autonomy involves: (a) the ability to deal with complex racial issues and relationships with
individuals of one’s own and other racial groups without feeling threatened; (b) a commitment to anti-racist identity; (c) willingness to give up the advantages of White privilege; (d) no longer expecting People of color to address and solve racism; and (e) taking responsibility for the task of addressing racism, as a White person.

Helms (1995) theorized that most White people use a variety of these racial identity developmental schemas, in different combinations, and healthy development entails using increasingly sophisticated ways of processing and responding to racial stimuli. The schemas hypothetically shape the person’s psychological, social, cultural, vocational and behavioral reactions when race or racism is a factor. Some schemas serve as more dominant, while other are considered secondary, depending on the person’s life experiences and circumstances. Different combinations of racial identity statuses potentially influence interpersonal interactions for adoptive parents within their families, communities, and society (Gushue & Constantine, 2007, p.322).

According to Helms’s (1990, 1995), as well as other White racial identity models (Hardiman, 1982; Ponterotto, 1988; Rowe, Bennett & Atkinson, 1994), White racial identity development begins or ends with a person’s obliviousness concerning interactions of racism with one’s own identity, and later schemas culminate with a state of self-awareness, awareness of racism and flexibility responding to race based stimuli. A spectrum exists from racist to anti-racist. Variations occur in the middle schemas, and in the view of how the process of identity development unfolds. Questions exist about whether or not there are retreats and regressions, how much attention is paid directly to the role of society’s influence in the process, and what are the precipitants of behaviors such as avoiding or taking on responsibility and action concerning racism. The highest
levels of racial identity development entail the abandonment of racism as well as the integration of a complex and flexible understanding of race relations and the meaning of race. This state of awareness requires one to be color conscious, not race-neutral.

As with other White individuals, it is expected that White transracially adoptive parents may draw on a variety of racial identity schemas, and it is not clear from the little existing research on this population whether or not, or in what way, their racial identity is affected by the adoption experience or by parenting a child of color (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2011). Examining the parents’ experiences through the theoretical perspectives of Helms’s racial identity model, as well as critical race theory, offers a means of gaining insight into the race-related psychological processes of these parents while maintaining a sociopolitical perspective on the subject.

White Transracially Adoptive Parents and the Psychology Literature

The field of psychology has largely neglected adoption as an area of study (Lee, 2003; Henderson, 2002; Zamostny et al., 2003). Adoption literature has primarily focused on outcomes for adoptees, overlooking the concerns and needs of the adoption triad, as well as many of the post-adoption issues facing parents and children (Lee, 2003; Sass & Henderson, 2000; Zamostny et al., 2003). In the case of transracial adoption, it is important to note that the racial identity development of the adoptive parent and child is just part of a complex array of developmental adoption-related factors which can present ongoing challenges for adoptive parents. These challenges include issues related to the parent’s identity as an adoptive parent, the parent-child attachment process, communication with birth families in the case of open adoption, social stigma related to adoption, and limited information about the pre-adoption experiences of the child and the

Adoption serves as a positive means of building families; at the same time, adoption literature in the last decade has increasingly recognized that along with creating opportunities, adoption presents challenges, and that adoptive families need support for adoption-related stressors. While many of the challenges unique to adoptive families arise during the immediate post-adoption period, they can also surface over the course of years, in what has been termed the “lifelong process of adoption” (USDHHS, Child Information Gateway, 2010, p. 4). In particular for transracially adoptive families, information and support regarding race-related issues is cited as a critical need for both parents and children, throughout the childhood and adolescent years of the child’s development (Carnes-Holt, 2012; Lee, 2003; Zamostny et al., 2003).

Mirroring the trend in adoption literature overall, the empirical research on transracially adoptive parents has not focused on parents’ experiences in their own right; rather, the limited psychological research on transracial adoption has examined outcomes for adoptees. In particular, research with transracial adoptees and their families focuses on adoptees’ adjustment, psychological and physical well-being, and ethnic and racial identity development (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2011). The experiences of the other adoptive triad members, which include birth parents and adoptive parents, have been overlooked (Sass & Henderson, 2000; Zamostny et al., 2003). Noting the impact of transracially adoptive White parents’ on their children’s well-being, Lee (2003) states that, “Counseling psychologists must consider the various factors that affect the extent to which transracial adoptive families engage in cultural socialization strategies” (p. 723).
The earliest empirical research on transracial adoption took place in the fields of social work and sociology, and examined transracial adoptees’ overall adjustment, focusing on their self-esteem, educational achievement, and overall psychological adjustment (Lee, 2003; Livingston et al., 2008; Vonk & Angaran, 2003). This early research suggested that no significant adjustment differences were found between same-race family adoptees, and transracial adoptees. However, beginning in the 1990s, psychology as well as social work and sociology studies investigated transracial adoptees’ adjustment experiences more extensively, using more specific constructs relating to racial and ethnic identity, cultural socialization, and reference group orientation (Lee, 2003; Livingston et al., 2008). The more recent research suggests that transracially adopted children do face challenges related to their racial and cultural differences (Lee, 2003; Livingston et al., 2008). Ironically, the research in the 1990s that focused on the importance of racial identity to adoptees’ well-being emerged at the same time as the MEPA legislation was enacted, limiting attention to race in the adoption process.

Nevertheless, in the fields of social work and psychology, there was now some focus on the importance of studying adoptive parents, and White transracially adoptive parents gained the attention of researchers. The White parents’ decisions and behavior concerning exposing and involving their children in their birth culture were seen as having an impact on the adoptees’ well-being (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2008; Lee, 2003; Lee et al., 2006; Livingston et al., 2008; Vonk, Lee, & Crolley-Simic, 2010).

Parents’ Role in Racial Socialization
Racial identity theory suggests that transracially adoptive parents’ racial socialization practices may reflect their beliefs and attitudes about race. Racial socialization is defined as the process of development that takes place through social interactions, associations and role modeling, instilling racial pride, a sense of racial history and skills to cope with racism and discrimination (Hughes, Rodriguez, Smith, Johnson, Stevenson & Spicer 2006; Hughes & Chen, 1999; Thornton, Chatters & Taylor & Allen, 1990). Research on racial socialization and transracial adoption often overlaps with research on cultural socialization, which has been defined as, “the manner by which parents address ethnic and racial issues within the family, specifically, the ways parents communicate or transmit cultural values, beliefs, customs, and behaviors to the child and the extent to which the child internalizes these messages, and acquires the skills to become a competent and functional member of a racially diverse society” (Lee et al., 2006, p. 572).

It is important to note that the terms racial socialization and cultural socialization have been used interchangeably in much of the research on transracial adoption (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2008; Lee, 2003; Vonk et al., 2010), in spite of these terms’ having distinct definitions. Perhaps the interchangeable use of these terms in the literature reflects the tendency of White transracially adoptive parents to deemphasize race and feel more comfortable talking about culture than race when talking about themselves and their children (Berquist, Campbell, & Unrau, 2003; DeBerry, Scarr & Weinberg, 1996; Zhang & Lee, 2011). Adoptees considered to be from a different birth culture from their White parents, but not of a different race (e.g. Eastern Europeans or South Americans classified...
as White by parents) are not included in the present research, nor have they been included in the research on transracial adoption.

Most research on White transracially adopting parents’ roles in racial socialization focuses on the variation in practices and views of the parents regarding their racial socialization practices. Psychology and social work literature demonstrates that White transracially adoptive parents vary widely in their approaches to racial socialization, from employing a race-neutral perspective, ignoring or deemphasizing race, to striving for integrated socioracial practices with their children, and employing strategies to be proactive about racial issues (Huh, 1997; Huh & Reid, 2000; Lee, 2003; Lee et al, 2006; Vonk, Lee, & Crolley-Simic, 2010). Some parents provide race-related education and cultural opportunities for their children, while simultaneously discounting discrimination and racism (Lee, 2003). Other parents may “outsource” racial socialization by seeking connections with organizations and groups of their child’s birth race (Butler-Sweet, 2011).

In one study of White transracially adoptive mothers (N=8) of Asian children, the authors (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2008) interviewed participants about their racial socialization practices, and found four types of racial socialization practices. These practices included “families like ours,” which involves socializing with other transracially adoptive families, “visiting culture,” which involves attending markets and festivals, “invested in culture,” involving conversations about race, and lastly, “diverse life,” incorporating diversity, education about race, and activism into family life (p.314). Crolley-Simic and Vonk suggest that whereas parents engage in a spectrum of racial socialization practices as previous research has indicated, there is a subgroup of parents
who go beyond their “comfort zone” of White culture to engage in anti-racist practices, and that these parents’ experiences may provide motivation for others to do the same (p.315).

Lee et al. (2006) created a model of cultural socialization that distinguished between the enculturation beliefs and practices of transracially adopting parents, and the racialization beliefs and practices of these parents. Enculturation encompasses engagement in and modeling of activities that promote awareness of ethnicity and culture; racialization encompasses modeling and preparing children to cope with and respond to racism and discrimination. In contrast to earlier research on the racial and cultural socialization practices of White transracially adoptive parents, Lee et al. found that parents of internationally adopted children (N=2,291) who completed surveys as part of the International Adoption Project had “relatively high mean scores on enculturation and racialization parenting beliefs” (p. 578). These beliefs mediated the relationship between levels of race-neutral attitudes and parenting enculturation and racialization behaviors. The authors concluded that having racial awareness, or low race-neutral attitude scores, only led to corresponding behaviors and practices when there was “conscious and specific thought” about engaging in these activities (p. 578). While Lee et al. suggest that there may be a trend towards more parental awareness of the importance of and engagement in racial socialization practices, the authors point to the need for more information on what specific factors move parents from belief to action.

Studies of White transracially adoptive parents have highlighted some of the parents’ perceived barriers to addressing race with their children. These barriers include: (a) not wanting to live in racially diverse neighborhoods, and choosing to live in
predominantly White neighborhoods and selecting predominantly White schools; (b) finding difficulty balancing their culture with the child’s birth culture; (c) believing that the child lacks interest in her or his birth culture; and (d) discomfort and unfamiliarity with the skills required to talk about race and racism (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2008; Vonk, Lee, & Crolley-Simic, 2010).

Endorsement of race-neutral attitudes continues to be a barrier to parental engagement in racial socialization (Lee, 2003; Quiroz, 2007). White transracially adoptive parents are “positively inclined towards colorblind [sic ] philosophies and parenting strategies that deemphasize race” (Samuels, 2009, p. 92). In fact, parents endorsing more race-neutral attitudes are less likely to engage in racial socialization than parents with lower race-neutral endorsement (Kim, Suyemoto & Turner, 2010; Lee et al., 2006). Early in the history of transracial adoption, parents were advised and encouraged to take a race-neutral stance (Vonk et al., 2010), but there has been some change in this perspective. For example, in Beyond Good Intentions, Register (1990) states that the belief that race does not matter is one of the “pitfalls” of well-intentioned White transracially adoptive parents. However, race-neutral ideology is still common among White transracially adoptive parents, as demonstrated in the literature on parents (Lee et al., 2006; Vonk, Lee, & Crolley-Simic, 2010), as well as in literature on adoptees’ experiences (Bozek, 2009; Samuels, 2009).

Smith, Juarez, and Jacobson (2011) conducted interviews with White transracially adoptive parents (N=23) and their adult Black adoptee children in order to answer the question, “Can White parents teach Black adoptive children how to understand and cope with racism?” (p.1195). The authors’ findings suggest that even when White
transracially adoptive parents assert that race matters, not endorsing a race-neutral attitude, they still employ what the authors call a “White racial frame,” defined by Feagin (2006) as “an organized set of racialized ideas, stereotypes, emotions, and inclinations to discriminate” (p. 25). As noted previously in this chapter, White racial ideology may serve to maintain, or conversely to challenge racial hierarchies in society. In this case, the White racial frame reflects a racial ideology that maintains the racial status quo, and new information and experiences are filtered into parents’ existing framework or schemas.

Smith et al. (2011) note that the parents in the study were well intentioned and desired to instill their children with positive feelings about racial differences. However, in spite of their “antiracist intentions” (p. 1223), the children were taught through their parents’ responses to racial incidents to, “subvert personal needs and responses to racial discrimination to help Whites learn about race and racism, and develop a thick skin to deflect the consequences of race-based discrimination in a way that avoids conflict and does not disrupt harmony with Whites” (pp. 1221-1222). The race lessons imparted through racial socialization served to maintain the White racial frame, and focus on individuals and their interpersonal misunderstandings.

White transracially adoptive parents’ approaches to racial socialization may vary, but overall parents’ racial socialization practices tend towards incorporating race-related issues into their children’s lives in ways that do not challenge the status quo. Of the racial socialization literature reviewed, Smith et al. (2011) most explicitly name parents’ reticence, or inability, to explore the nature of racism with their children. Drawing on critical race theory, this means that White parents are not likely to educate their children about structural level racism, its origins, and its interpersonal impact.
White Transracially Adoptive Parents’ Views of Race

Research which directly investigates White transracially adoptive parents’ own experiences of race and views of race and racism is rare; research investigating these parents’ views on their own race – on what it means to be White in relation to their children and in general – is nonexistent. Therefore, a literature review of research regarding White transracially adoptive parents’ views and experiences of race reveals that – with one study as an exception – it is necessary to examine studies of related topics, such as parents making decisions about transracial adoption, and their motivations, preferences and considerations of race.

The one study that directly examines White transracial adoptive parents’ reflections on race (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2011) states the importance of, and notes the lack of research on transracial adoptive parents’ views of race. The authors interviewed White international transracial adoptive mothers (N=8) about their racial views. This study applied Helms’s (1990; 1995) and Rowe’s (1994) White racial identity theories to their data, looking at how participants’ themes of racial awareness parallel racial identity schemas. While the authors found that participants reported an increase of previously existing mindfulness and awareness of race after adopting transracially, the authors conclude that the participants did not experience significant shifts in racial consciousness or changes in their overall perspectives on race. “Neither the initial desire to raise a child of color, nor the adoption and ensuing relationship with their child appeared to serve as a catalyst for great shifts in the mothers’ views about race” (p. 176). The authors hypothesize that participants in earlier stages of racial identity development did not
experience the cognitive dissonance necessary to generate change to different status of racial consciousness and racial identity development.

Jennings (2006) examined the race-related views of White women (N=14) undergoing the adoption decision-making process. In the context of MEPA-IEP legislation, Jennings notes that this decision making process is critical, given that, “the passage of the MEPA-IEP was situated in the prevailing assumption that (a) White couples are willing to adopt Black children and (b) the decision to adopt transracially signifies antiracist attitudes on the part of White adoptive parents” (p. 563). Jennings’ research supports the literature suggesting that White people employ a variety of strategies to deal with racism and race relations when confronted with race-based stimuli and situations of a challenging nature, such as transracial adoption. The parents in this study varied from challenging racism with anti-racist views, to denying the importance of race, to allowing racism to inform decisions that uphold the status quo and endorsing racist beliefs about the adoptees communities.

Lastly, Zhang & Lee (2011) examine the intersection between transracially adoptive parents’ motivations and preferences and the parents’ views on race, with findings that echo some of the themes from Jennings’s (2006) work. The authors interviewed both international and domestic transracially adoptive parents (N=17) who were White, with the exception of one Black parent in an interracial marriage. The authors observed the parents’ reluctance to talk about race and racial differences, the tendency to talk about culture rather than race, and the belief that being White, they had no culture. In fact, participants spoke of the cultural differences regarding their Asian children, not mentioning race. The authors note that, “Compared with racial differences,
cultural differences can be ‘fun’ and thus easier to accept by many adoptive parents” (p. 90). Participants endorsed the race-neutral stance that Jennings referenced, where White parents saw themselves as having no culture as well. Transracial adoption was perceived as race and class uplift. Similarly, the parents endorsing race-neutrality in Zhang and Lee’s study saw transracial adoption as an act of “doing good,” and part of what the authors term a “rescue discourse” (p. 94).

Zhang and Lee (2011) also observed a phenomenon similar to what Jennings called a “race ranking system” (p. 571). Parents’ concerns about the domestic adoption system, while not discussed explicitly in terms of racial differences, reflected a tendency to see international transracial adoptees as less problematic: “The distinctive characteristics of children from other countries are often perceived in terms of interesting cultural differences that parents must learn and pass on to their children, whereas characteristics of racial minority children available for adoption in the United States are phrased in terms of social problems such as possible parental drug addiction and adverse neighborhood influences on child development” (pp. 93-94).

Pilot study

Sass (2008) conducted a pilot study to examine the experiences of White parents of Children of color (N=4) with respect to their racial identity. Similar to the literature on White transracially adoptive parents, this pilot study demonstrated variation in parents’ thoughts and perspectives throughout the transracial adoption process. A central theme was use of race-neutral ideology as a strategy to cope with race-related issues. The parents’ responses reflected their wish, or assumption that race would not be a significant force in theirs or their children’s lives. Parents expressed a growing awareness that, as
their children grow older, they might influence their children’s racial identity development by choosing whether or how to help their children face the realities of racism. The extent of racial socialization undertaken by parents was influenced by factors such as the degree of discomfort experienced by the parents when encountering racial issues, the social norms of the parents’ community, and the parents’ history of interracial relationships.

My pilot study results suggested that those parents who had more contact with people of color and had more community support for building awareness of race acted on their awareness and discomfort by educating themselves and initiating dialogues with their children about race and racial identity. Results from the pilot study support the dynamic and fluid aspect of Helms’s (1995) racial identity theory, in that parents seemed to advance and regress between various racial identity schemas depending on personal history and environmental influences.

Within the framework of critical race theory, parents in the pilot study endorsing a race-neutral stance reflects the pervasiveness of race-neutral ideology, and perpetuates inattention to the effects of racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The pilot study results support the notion that many White individuals who view themselves as progressive and non-racist nevertheless espouse a race-neutral perspective, in an attempt to avoid the discomfort, or internal conflict, associated with acknowledging racism, and their own privilege and role in systemic racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Lewis, 2004; Frankenberg, 1993; Thompson & Neville, 1999, p.185). The pilot study and other literature on White transracially adoptive parents’ views of race suggest the need for further study about this
population, namely concerning how intrapsychic, interpersonal and social factors influence the parents’ racial identity development.

The research cited has limitations, including small and homogenous samples, (parents’ gender, child’s race), and lack of methodological detail. Nevertheless, these studies suggest that White transracially adoptive parents, like other White individuals, and in spite of having children of color, endorse racial ideology and racial identity schemas that are entrenched in the dominant culture and discourse and, in doing so, exhibit resistance to acknowledging racial differences and reluctance to challenge racism.

Parents’ Impact on Adoptees Racial and Ethnic Identity Development

The connection between parental racial socialization, adoptee racial identity development, and positive mental health outcomes for the adoptees is strongly supported by the psychology and social work literature. For transracial adoptees, appropriate racial socialization is associated with development of a positive racial identity, which is in turn associated with psychological adjustment, self-esteem, protective factors and coping skills with respect to racism and discrimination, competence in and knowledge of the adoptees’ birth culture, and a positive relationship with the adoptive parents (Andujo, 1988; Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2008; Lee et al., 2006; McRoy & Hall, 1996; Vonk, Lee & Crolley-Simic, 2010). In addition, parents’ engagement in cultural socialization practices has been correlated with transracial adoptees’ feeling less marginalized, and transracial adoptees perceive parents as warmer and more compassionate if the parents have had cultural training (Padilla, Vargas, & Chavez, 2010). Parents’ decisions and practices concerning race affect their children in a myriad of ways: adoptees raised with exposure to diverse races and cultures had a more positive sense of identity than those who were
not (Feigelman, 2000), and adoptees raised in diverse communities reported experiencing less conflict about whether they looked phenotypically different from their adoptive parents (Kim et al., 2010).

Research that represents the voices of adult transracial adoptees supports the critical role parents play in positive or negative outcomes associated with racial and ethnic identity development. Padilla et al. (2010) cite several studies that indicate that transracial adoptees, “…function similarly to children placed through same-race adoption on many developmental indicators with the exception of one: ethnic identity” (p. 51). Lee (2003) also noted that, “There remains a significant amount of variability in the psychological adjustment and racial/ethnic identity development of transracial adoptees (p. 727). It is thus noteworthy that research on transracial adoptees’ identity development has examined issues regarding relationships with peers, and awareness of culture, rather than issues involving the recognition of and responses to discrimination and racism (Padilla et al.). In light of the lack of research about coping with racism as a particular realm of racial socialization, it is research with adoptees that offers insight into the importance of adoptees’ receiving support for how to understand and cope with racism.

Interviews with adult transracial adoptees from Vietnam and Korea suggested that these adoptees experienced race and identity issues as more significant than issues of adoption (Soon-keum Cox, 2003). Transracial adoptees have also noted that having same-race role models and diverse school experiences helped them develop positive racial identity (McGinnis et al., 2009; Yoon, 2004). Adult transracial adoptees reported appreciation for their parents’ racial socialization efforts; however, they expressed the
wish that their parents had aided in their understanding of racial dynamics and race-related sociopolitical issues (McGinnis et al., 2009; Yoon, 2004).

The theme of transracial adoptees desiring more attention to racial issues was echoed in a qualitative study of the ecological influences on the ethnic identity development of Korean born transracial adoptees. Adoptees recalled that their White parents reframed racial comments regarding the adoptees and their families, disregarding the race-related significance of these incidents (Bozek, 2009). Adoptees also reported their questions about racial incidents as being dismissed for the reason that color did not matter (Bozek). These responses reflect White parents’ reluctance to talk about race with their children, compared with parents of color (Brown, Tanner-Smith, Lesane-Brown, & Ezell, 2007).

In addition, the adult Korean adoptees (Bozek, 2009) believed that their parents’ not addressing racism during their childhoods had resulted in their existing in a protective bubble within their families, but suffering cognitive dissonance as they grew older and were increasingly exposed to the racism of the larger society. As previously mentioned, parents’ engagement in racial socialization practices may tend to decrease as adoptees grow older (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2008; Lee, 2003); this is unfortunate since adoptees report that race and ethnicity become increasingly salient aspects of their identity as they move from childhood to adulthood (Bozek; McGinnis et al., 2009).

In a study of transracially adopted multiracial adults, the participants reflected that their parents’ commitment to color blindness, rather than having the effect of erasing racism, resulted in “…the opposite effect, causing them to feel racially alienated with an unavoidable experience of racial stigma that was invalidated by the parents” (Samuels,
2009, p. 92). Adult adoptees note that coping with racism and discrimination is a critical part of their racial and ethnic identity development (McGinnis et al, 2009).

White transracially adoptive parents act as the earliest interpreters and guides for race-related social and environmental stimuli and situations, and they moderate their children’s exposure to and contact with diverse communities (DeBerry et al, 1996; Lee et al, 2006; Phinney, 1990; Vonk & Angaran, 2003). Thus, these adoptive parents thus pay a crucial role in the development of their children’s identity development (Samuels, 2009), and are essentially gatekeepers of information and skills regarding race and coping with and responding to racism (Bozek, 2009).

Summary

While White transracially adoptive parents may state that their identity and perspectives have changed post-adoption, research suggests that there is a distinction between parents’ beliefs and their action regarding race. Lee et al. (2006) make the distinction between changes in cognition and awareness, versus transformation to engagement in action – such as taking on an actively anti-racist stance in their families and communities. Crolley-Simic and Vonk (2011) propose that White transracially adoptive parents may need to undergo more experiential change than having the transracial adoption experience, in order for significant changes in racial identity development and views and responses to racial stimuli to occur, and for them to reach a point where they are actively challenging and questioning racism and racial power differentials in our society.

Overall, the literature on parents’ racial socialization practices and their beliefs and attitudes about race indicates that the parents operate predominantly from the racial
identity schemas of Contact and Pseudoindependence. Parents’ endorsement of race-neutral ideology suggests the use of the Contact schema; such parents are those who view White culture as the norm and, in spite of having a child of color, are nevertheless not likely to have close relationships with other people of color. In addition, those parents who do attempt to acknowledge racism and racial differences may do so adhering to the White racial frame (Feagan, 2006), or dominant White racial ideology. In this case, parents may employ the racial identity schema of Pseudoindependence, where they encourage their children to educate rather than challenge Whites, thus perpetuating the idea that racism is the problem and responsibility of people of color. The literature also suggests that for many White transracially adoptive parents, their racial identity, race-related beliefs, attitudes, and racial socialization practices are what critical race theorists would describe as reflecting the influence and values of the dominant racial discourse in the United States, namely race-neutrality.

There are several implications for practice based on the literature: (a) transracially adoptive parents’ racial awareness may not evolve solely by virtue of their parenting experience; (b) training and support recommended by transracial adoption scholars in psychology and social work are critical; and (c) this training and support should emphasize strategies for both parents and children to challenge the racism and the status quo. Smith et al. (2011) observe that research on transracially adoptive White parents has led to recommendations in the form of dos and don’ts without a discussion of how to challenge cultural and institutional racism: “Without considering how the meanings of race connect individuals and families to systemic racism, Whites of goodwill can
unintentionally perpetuate ongoing patterns of racial discrimination and exclusion of African Americans and other peoples of color” (p. 1201).

**Problem Statement**

In general, psychology literature has contributed little research in the area of transracial adoption. The field of mental health, in both research and practice realms, has been “silent” (Lee, 2003, p.711) on the issues facing adoptive families, particularly post-adoption (Henderson, 2002; Lee, 2003; Zamostny, O’Brien, Baden & Wiley, 2003). DeHaymes & Simon (2003) also note the absence of professional literature on the concerns of transracially adoptive families, regarding how all family members could be best supported.

Psychologists have studied the psychological adjustment and racial identity development of transracial adoptees, and their White parents’ role in their identity development, but little is known about the parents’ own race-related experiences. The present study is one of few that focuses on the transracial adoptive parents’ experiences of their own race. In studying Whiteness, it is known that Whites are most often asked to think about race with respect to other populations, rather than themselves (Lewis, 2004). The present study aims to address this gap in the literature through an in-depth examination of the racial identity of White transracially adoptive parents, and providing insight into the psychological processes and perspectives of this population.

Literature shows racism existing at multiple levels in the United States adoption system. Literature also suggests that White transracially adoptive parents, through their choices about race, adoption, and the racial socialization of their children, may perpetuate this systemic racism. Exploring the racial identity of White transracially adoptive parents
will help elucidate a) how the phenomena of White racial socialization and White privilege impact parents’ adoption experiences, and b) how parents’ racial identity may be affected by the transracial experience.

Racial identity theory and critical race theory will help describe how parents, as opposed to their children, cope with race and racism from a psychosocial perspective. Issues to examine include how institutional and cultural racism affects parents’ experiences before and after parenting; what historical, social, and personal factors influence the parents’ cognitive, affective and behavioral responses to racial stimuli, and how transformations take place in the racial identity development of the participants. The population of this proposed research is in a unique circumstance, as individuals whose racial identity is potentially impacted through the interracial parenting experience, and who experience White racial privilege themselves, yet are raising children of a racial group that does not benefit from racial privilege.

Methodology

Qualitative research offers an opportunity to engage an in depth examination of parents’ racial awareness, beliefs, and attitudes which would not be possible with quantitative research (Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Sandelowski, 2010). Existing research suggests that White people have difficulty talking about race as it pertains to themselves and their Whiteness (Leary, 2000; Lewis, 2004; Noveske, 2006). Research on White transracially adoptive parents mirrors and supports this phenomenon, with parents being asked to reflect on the racial identity development of their children. The result is parents’ sharing thoughts about race, without attention to their own experiences as racial actors, and what being White means to them. It is hoped that through the qualitative interview
process, the focus of attention can be shifted from how race and racism affect the adoptive children, to how it affects the parents.

For research regarding race, which is identified as an important area of psychology research by APA (Multicultural Guidelines, 2003), qualitative methodology offers a useful lens to examine the context and complexities of race and culture, through the voices of the participants (Sullivan-Bolyai, Bova, & Harper, 2005; Yeh & Inman, 2007). Yeh and Inman note the importance, applicability, and appropriateness of using qualitative methodology for the study of White people as well as people of color.

Qualitative research allows for the examination of participants’ experience within a sociocultural context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). For this topic, this means that issues of systemic racism in transracial adoption were considered in the study data collection and analysis, informing the nature of questions asked, as well as the interpretation of results. Because it can incorporate systemic issues, qualitative research is well suited to the topic of White racial identity addressed contextually, and is congruent with counseling psychology’s emphasis on multicultural issues and social justice (Morrow, 2007).

**Selecting a Research Paradigm**

Counseling psychologists (Creswell et al., 2007; Morrow, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005) highlight the need for qualitative researchers’ careful attention to selection and implementation of research methodology, and location of the research within a research paradigm. Defined as a “set of interrelated assumptions about the social world which provides a philosophical and conceptual framework for the organized study of that world,” a research paradigm makes the philosophical underpinnings of the research
explicit (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 127). The research paradigm also informs the study’s design, including data collection and analysis (Morrow (2007).

The present research encompasses both the constructivist and the critical-ideological paradigms. A central theme of the constructivist paradigm is that reality is socially constructed through individuals and their interactions, and that meanings are revealed through these interactions. Constructivism allows for racial identity development to be seen as, “an active social process between an individual and others in sociocultural and historical contexts, as well as within interpersonal relationships” (Kim, Suyemoto & Turner, 2010). In line with a constructivist paradigm, the present research, viewing race as a social construction, focuses on participants’ life experiences, beliefs, attitudes, values, and perceived subjective reality concerning their race.

A critical-ideological research paradigm is congruent with constructivism, but adds a more specific contextual lens to the research. Critical ideology encompasses social and historical contexts, as constructivism does; however, similar to critical race theory, critical ideology also examines differential power structures that affect the research phenomenon (Ponterotto, 2005). Critical-ideological research aims to use the results to challenge the status quo. This paradigm is fitting for work relating to issues of race and inequity, and is thus well suited to the present research.

Narrative methodology is also consistent with both of the identified research paradigms. Congruent with constructivism, narrative methods incorporate interaction, co-construction of knowledge, and researcher-participant dialogue (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Ponterotto, 1995). Narrative methodology is also consistent with critical-ideology, as participants’ narratives represent stories and experiences that
can be seen as dominant or alternative within society’s power structures.

A key part of qualitative research and a constructivist research paradigm is reflexivity, or the researcher’s self-reflection about her or his biases, beliefs, and assumptions and how they might impact the research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Morrow, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005). According to Ponterotto (2005), a constructivist qualitative research paradigm assumes that the researcher’s experiences and values cannot be separated from the research process. In chapter three I address reflexivity explicitly with the inclusion of a personal narrative related to this research topic. I also outline the steps taken during data collection and analysis to minimize the effect of my subjectivity on the data.

**Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is known as methodology appropriate for eliciting insight about participants’ meaning making, based on the idea that people communicate and make sense of their experiences through stories, and through the research process (Chase, 2005; Mishler, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1991; Riessman, 2008; Webster & Mertova, 2007). The goal for the present research is that through telling their stories, participants’ beliefs about race, including their own race, will be uncovered. The social construction of knowledge and personal meaning making are all integral themes for narrative analysis, which intends to honor the individual’s subjective experience (Chase, 2005; Josselson, 1995).

Narrative research, which has flourished in psychology and other disciplines in the past two decades, has roots in sociology, anthropology, literature, history, education and sociolinguistics (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Squire, 2008; Webster & Mertova, 2007). While there are multiple approaches to gathering and analyzing narrative data, an
The overarching theme of narrative research is that detailed stories, written or spoken accounts of events, are helpful in gaining understanding of a social phenomenon and how it is variably understood and used to shape practices (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2007).

For a topic concerning White racial identity development, narrative inquiry is a fitting qualitative methodology. The exploratory nature of qualitative research (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) and the storytelling aspect of narrative inquiry are less inhibiting than pointed questions, and encourage the participants to think and talk about uncomfortable issues. Narratives in particular invite participants to share their stories freely. This is critical, because literature indicates that White people experience discomfort when talking about race, especially their race (Altman, 2006; Foldy, 2005; Leary, 2000). Narratives also extract unconscious racial identity attitudes, beliefs and behaviors and are therefore useful because White racial identity is not generally in the forefront of White peoples’ consciousness (Altman, 2006; Helms, 1990; McDermott & Samson, 2005).

Narrative research is also appropriate when studying race and culture, as the inductive, exploratory process allows openness to a culture-specific, emic and ideographic perspective (Ponterotto, 2005; Webster & Mertova, 2007). With little known about the intricacies of White racial identity development, the narrative principle that participants’ stories can provide insights regarding cultural and social meanings is key (Chase, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2002). It is through the participants’ voices that new knowledge will emerge.

Critical race theory also supports the use of narratives as important for race and culture related issues. Critical race theory posits that narratives and narrative analysis can
lead to a better understanding of individuals’ views of race, and can provide insight into realities that are overlooked or that stand in opposition to dominant narratives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). White transracially adoptive parents are in a unique position to share stories of race that may reveal the “majoritarian” stories of a privileged group, but also the “counter-stories” of alternative, minority perspectives that they have come to understand through their experiences parenting a child of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, pp. 29, 32).

Lastly, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) propose that qualitative research can influence policy and practice to promote social change. Narrative inquiry in particular is seen as connected to social change, when context is addressed:

When researchers’ interpretive strategies reveal the stranglehold of oppressive metanarratives, they help to open up possibilities for social change. In this sense, audiences need to hear not only the narrator’s story, but also the researcher’s explication of how the narrator’s story is constrained by, and strains against the mediating aspects of culture (and of institutions, organization, and sometimes the social sciences themselves) (Chase, 2005, p. 668).

Consequently, attending to the sociopolitical context of Whiteness and racial identity for the study participants is important. The present research explores the racial social milieu of the participants as well as their race-related thoughts and behaviors in order to broaden the understanding of their racial identity development. In keeping with a social justice lens, a contextualized approach is congruent with critical race theory and racial identity theories, by facilitating an examination of complex phenomena, which are both personal-individual, and societal-structural.
Chapter 3

Method

The purpose of this research is to learn about the racial identity development of White transracially adoptive parents through narratives about their adoption and parenting experiences. White racial identity development has rarely been explored within the context of interracial parenting and transracial adoption. The present research attempts to address the need for more literature in counseling psychology, as well as social work, on the experiences of White parents transracially adopting. The goal is to learn from the participants in order to better support transracially adoptive parents and their families.

This research used a qualitative methodology, specifically narrative inquiry to gather data from participants’ personal stories about their racial identity. Qualitative conventional content analysis was used to analyze interview responses from participants. This approach is interpretive and naturalistic, examining a small number of cases in order to gain an understanding of the research topic. Narrative inquiry is exploratory, and focuses on participants’ meaning making rather than causation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), fitting for an under-researched subject area such as the present topic.

Qualitative research attempts to use a critical interpretive approach to make sense of data, and includes such theoretical frameworks such as constructivist theory, critical theory, feminist theory, queer theory, as well as the theoretical frameworks applied to the present study, critical race theory and racial identity theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Thus qualitative research is well suited to the overarching constructivist research paradigm of this study, as well as to this study’s theoretical lenses.
Narrative studies are viewed as fitting for research concerning identity. Narrative inquiry offers an opportunity to engage in an in-depth examination of the study participants’ racial awareness, beliefs, and attitudes through their life stories concerning racial identity, and within a sociocultural context. Polkinghorne (1991) points out that identity formation is often an unconscious process and that, through narration, individuals incorporate events into stories which serve to represent oneself and ultimately to answer the question, ‘Who am I?’ In addition, Bruner (1991) noted that individuals’ perception of themselves often changes through telling their stories, as they undergo a process of understanding and portraying themselves in selective ways.

Qualitative research, and in particular narrative inquiry, is also viewed as congruent with critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Narratives are a means for individuals’ stories to emerge, showing us how they make sense of the world, and revealing their preconceptions and subjective truths; narrative analysis allows the researcher to locate these stories within the context of dominant social norms (Delgado & Stefancic; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). For the participants in the present study, this context is a society and adoption system stratified by race and affected by White privilege.

Participants

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The selection of participants for this study was guided by purposive sampling, in order to find participants who could provide the data needed for this research topic (Padgett, 2008). Participants were selected in order to provide rich data for the topic, exploring the racial identity of White transracially adoptive parents. Participants therefore
met the criteria of being a parent who identified as White, and had adopted at least one child whom the parent identified as a racial minority. In addition, if the parent had a partner, for the purposes of this study the partner also identified as White, in order that familial influences on racial identity include the presence of the child, but not the presence and influence of a partner who is a person of color as well.

An additional eligibility criterion for the present study was that participants had lived with their adopted child for a minimum of four years. Post-adoption challenges, which include responding to racial and cultural issues as well as other concerns, are known to arise over the full course of the adoptive parenting years (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2010; USDHHS, Child Information Gateway, 2010). However, this four-year period was selected because it covers a critical early adjustment period in the developmental course of the adoptive parenting experience. (Carnes-Holt, 2012; Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2010; USDHHS, Child Information Gateway, 2010). Parents’ use of post-adoption services, which has been linked to positive outcomes for families, more than doubles between two years post-adoption and four years post-adoption. While use of these services continues to increase eight years post-adoption, the most dramatic increase in use takes place before the four-year mark, suggesting that the early and potentially most challenging adjustment period of acclimation to the parenting relationship has taken place (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2010).

It was understood that there would be a range of experiences and racial identity development of the parents who are interviewed. Of the various types of purposive sampling, recruiting participants based on heterogeneity within a population is known as maximum variation sampling (Padgett, 2008). Using maximum variation sampling,
selection was not based on any calculation of what stage of racial identity development participants represented, or the sociocultural or ethnic background of the parent. Rather, selection attempted to garner a demographic variety, in terms of age, gender and race of the child or children adopted, as well as age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class, and gender of the parent.

Recruitment strategies

Participants were recruited by using word of mouth, contacting multiracial family and transracial adoption support groups, posting flyers in shops and community centers, and sending email notices to adoptive parents’ listserves – all in the greater Boston area (See Appendix A). Groups that were contacted included trafriends@mit.edu, the Transracial Families Group at community@adoptivefamilies.com, and the Jewish Multiracial Network.

Sample size

The number of participants for this study was determined by having a sample size small enough allow for in-depth analysis and lengthy open-ended interviews, but large enough to allow for the identification of patterns and themes across cases. Narrative research sample sizes are typically small, due to the focus on multiple narratives for each participant, as well as the line-by-line analysis of the data for themes (Labov & Waletzky, 1972; Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 2008). The projected sample size was twelve participants, with the caveat that due to the goal of maximizing depth and saturation of information, it may have been necessary to be flexible with respect to sampling. Saturation was determined by reaching a point in the data analysis where similar categories and domains emerged, data became redundant, depth of themes and subthemes
were achieved, and no new noteworthy findings were expected to be generated by subsequent interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morrow, 2007; Padgett, 2008). The criteria for saturation were discussed with my dissertation chair before concluding the interview process.

Data collection

Interviews

Study participants were interviewed once, with interviews lasting from fifty-three to two hours and thirty minutes. All participants were contacted for follow up questions and information, as outlined in chapter four. This study incorporated a demographic questionnaire completed by participants before the interview in order to gather background information and screen for eligibility (See Appendix B). Questions on the demographic questionnaire gathered the following information: race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, primary language, and religious or faith identification of parent, race of child/children, parent’s relationship status, race of parent’s partner (if partnered), age and adoption status of children in household, adoptees’ age at adoption, adoptees’ birthplace, parent’s education level, parent’s employment status, and parent’s field of work. I used open-ended questions to gather narratives about the participants’ understanding of their racial identity development. Participants were informed of the research topic and purpose, and at the start of each interview, I provided participants with information about informed consent and confidentiality, and reviewed it with them to confirm their understanding of the materials. Written consent to audio tape interviews and use interview transcriptions as data was obtained. Interviews were conducted and
audiotaped at mutually agreed upon locations that afforded privacy. Interview locations included participants’ homes, participants’ offices, and my home.

As previously noted, the use of narratives was intended to provide insight into the parents’ questions about their beliefs about racial identity. Unstructured interviews and broad questions were used to elicit stories and experiences; for example, “Tell me a story about your earliest experiences that had to do with your race” (See Appendix C for complete interview guide). Broad questions also allowed the researcher to meet the challenge of being prepared, yet still remaining open to what the participant brought to the interview (Chase, 2005). With unstructured interviews, the researcher has a list of topics, allowing freer responses and resulting in more stories. With structured or semi-structured interviews, narratives are seen as a deviation or departure from the goal of the research (Mishler, 1986). With narrative inquiry, however, being sidetracked is in itself important data (Chase, 2005).

In keeping with narrative inquiry and a constructivist research paradigm, active interviewing was conducted, where the interview had more of a conversational tone than a fact-finding or investigative approach. Active interviewing, in contrast to positivist and objectivist methods, is non-traditional, with less of a formal boundary between the researcher and the participant (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Holstein & Gubriu, 1995; Mishler, 1996; Riessman, 2008). Lengthy face-to-face interviews promote interaction, and are inherently social (Squire, 2008). Narrative research is seen as inherently relational (Phoenix, 2008), with participants’ stories existing in relationship to the researcher’s own stories or perspectives (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2010).
Choudhuri (2003) points out that qualitative research is fluid, and that research questions shift in response to the data as it is collected. In fact, interview question prompts were amended after the first interview, and the order of questions was changed after consultation with my dissertation chair. Details are provided in chapter four, and changes are indicated in the interview guide (Appendix C). These interview protocol changes were intended to encourage participants to share their experiences more fully, and to facilitate the flow and cohesion of narratives.

Protection of human subjects

Boston College Internal Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained before conducting interviews. Confidentiality and informed consent documents were reviewed with each participant (See Appendix D). Participants were informed that their interview transcripts would be used as a source of data, but that no names or identifying information were to be included on the interview transcripts. Participants were given the option to choose a pseudonym for use in data analysis, or I would assign a pseudonym. All participants chose a pseudonym themselves, which was used for transcription, analysis and written results in order to protect participants’ identities. Participants were particularly concerned about the privacy of their children’s identities, and I explained that names and identifying details would not be used in publications or documents related to this research, and that consent forms and audiotapes would be stored apart from any identifying information in a locked cabinet accessible by me and my dissertation chair only.

The informed consent form described the limits of confidentiality, as well as the potential emotional risks and benefits of participation in this study. The narrative
interview process and exploration of personal experiences regarding race and racial identity could have resulted in emotional responses, feelings of distress or other negative psychological responses. Thus, I offered participants a resource list with information on obtaining mental health services available if they wished to speak with a clinician regarding issues that came up during the research interview. No participants requested this information.

Data collection procedures

After reviewing informed consent and confidentiality procedures, I asked participants if they had any questions for me about the interview and follow up process. I let participants know that I would contact them later for either a follow up interview, or for verification or clarification of the interview data if necessary. Participants were offered a copy of the transcript. I also let participants know that I would share a summary of the research findings with them after the data analysis was complete.

The intent of the interview questions chosen was to allow participants to address the research topic while still providing an opportunity for them to let personal meanings emerge and develop as they responded (Mishler, 1986). The main research question for the present study explored the development of racial identity for the participants in the context of parenting a child of a different race. Interview questions were informed by this study’s theoretical frameworks of White racial identity development theory and critical race theory, and also by themes that emerged from the literature review.

Interview questions, therefore, were intended to elicit information on the following: (a) parents’ perceptions of their own race and the impact of their race on their experiences; (b) parents’ experiences with people and with institutions that have affected
their thoughts and feelings and their own race; (c) changes over time in parents’ understanding of the meaning of Whiteness and their own racial socialization.

Participants were asked to share stories about behaviors and behavioral strategies relating to racial stimuli, reflections about race and personal relationships, as well as about social institutions, structures, and one’s experiences in those contexts. Participants were also asked to share their experiences over the lifespan, to elucidate trends and transformations over time, including before and during the course of parenting the transracially adopted child. At the end of the interview, participants were asked to reflect on the interview process itself.

Data analysis

Transcription

Interviews were transcribed verbatim including notes and punctuation representing pauses, silences, false starts, and overlaps between the interviewer and participant. My observations and reactions to each interview were recorded in the research memo book, and initial thoughts were also added to the end of each transcript following the first listening to the audiotape.

Analysis

This study employed a conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Qualitative content analysis is one of several methods used to analyze data in narrative research. There is no single standardized method associated with narrative inquiry, and narrative data analysis methods vary depending on the theoretical framework and focus of the research (Mishler, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 2008; Sandelowski, 1991). For the present research, categorical content analysis was chosen because in
addition to allowing for exploration of an under-researched phenomenon, it attends to sociopolitical contextual issues and the researcher-participant relationship.

*Categorical-Content Analysis Versus Holistic Content Analysis*

Lieblich et al. (1998) outline a model for the classification and organization of types of narrative research, providing an overview and demonstration of four types of narrative analysis. Out of the four typologies for reading and analyzing a narrative, two are form analyses (*holistic-form* and *categorical-form*), and two are content analyses (*holistic-content* and *categorical-content*). For the reasons discussed above, the present research will employ a content analysis. Within content analysis, Lieblich et al. distinguish between a *holistic-content* analysis and *categorical-content* analysis in several key ways, which provide a rationale for the use of *categorical-content* analysis for the present research.

*Categorical-content analysis* involves the examination of a phenomenon that is shared by a group of people, such as the experience of being a transracially adoptive parent. With *categorical-content* analysis, irrespective of the context of the entire narrative, the researcher looks for sections of the narrative that are related to the research topic. The authors note that categorical-content analysis is also known within qualitative research as *content analysis*. In contrast, *holistic-content* analysis tends to examine a narrative in its entirety, such as an individual’s life story, looking a plot development, turning points, and a person’s development over time (Lieblich et al., 1998).

For the present study, participants were asked to share stories related to their racial identity and experiences regarding race, both before and after adopting their child or children. While some participants took a more chronological approach to sharing their
stories, the research questions focused on the topic, defined as racial identity, and therefore a topic and phenomenon based analysis is more appropriate for the present study. A *categorical-content* analysis allows the researcher to withdraw sections of narratives for analysis, rather than working on an interpretation that encompasses a single narrative in its entirety.

*Content analysis*

Use of a *categorical-content* analysis, which will now be referred to as content analysis, is a systematic way of drawing inferences from data, with the goal of gaining understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Content analysis is considered to be both reflexive and interactive, with continuous modifications within the process as information and insights emerge (Sandelowski, 2000). The overall approach is to begin with small units of the text, and *in vivo* coding of the data, moving on to the development of broader categories and clusters, eventually leading to themes that synthesize and summarize the data across interviews (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

There are three approaches to qualitative content analysis: directed, summative, and conventional (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Directed content analysis is most often used when the researcher takes a deductive stance, examining the data through the lens of established theory and previous research. In this case, preconceived coding categories are used in the data analysis. Summative content analysis involves identifying and quantifying specific words and language patterns to explore the use of language and its context. For summative content analysis, interpretation involves exploring the underlying meanings of the language being examined. Conventional content analysis is used when
there is not a substantial body of theory or research on the topic being studied.

Conventional content analysis, in contrast to directed content analysis, involves an inductive approach, where codes are derived from the data during the process of analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

For the purposes of the present research, conventional content analysis is most fitting because of the lack of research on the racial identity development of White transracially adoptive parents. White racial identity theory and critical race theory, as well as the literature on transracial adoption informed the interview questions; however, data analysis did not employ predetermined coding categories. Rather, data analysis began with reading the transcripts, immersion in the data with word for word review (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Lieblich et al., 1998), and identification of narratives (Lieblich et al.). Once narratives were identified and highlighted, each narrative was analyzed using open coding, with the generation of data-derived codes.

The first step of the data analysis following the aforementioned re-reading of the transcripts was the identification of initial codes through open, or in vivo coding. In vivo coding is defined as the use of codes that emerge directly from the participants’ words (Padgett, 2008). These codes were accompanied by quotes selected from the text for each code. This process included a careful and close reading of each interview, and the use of quotes helped limit the influence of researcher bias, while representing participants’ perspectives as much as possible (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). I used tracking tools in the right hand margins of the transcript to highlight and represent the data and coding. I also used memo writing to note impressions and thoughts throughout this step and throughout subsequent steps.
The second step in the analysis involved the generation of what Hsieh and Shannon (2005) term “emergent categories,” whose purpose is to group and sort the codes into larger groupings that represent key concepts from the data (p. 1279). For this step codes were examined for commonalities, and the individual codes that appeared connected or representative of common points, were placed into broader clusters or categories. At this level of analysis, patterns within interviews as well as across interviews were noted. Infrequently occurring codes were noted as well. The broader categories or clusters remained close to the text, in order to accurately represent participants’ experiences while also highlighting emerging trends (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Downe-Wamboldt, 1992). Codes were refined, discarded, or added to (Padgett, 2008).

Lastly, these categories were collapsed into a smaller number, and organized to represent another broader level of categories. The analysis at this stage explored patterns that would inform the organization of the data into these broader themes or domains. Subcategories were subsumed by these overarching themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Throughout the data analysis I consulted with my dissertation chair, as well as a graduate student experienced in qualitative data analysis, who assisted in peer review by co-coding the transcripts. Moving from one step of the analysis to the next necessitated this peer review, faculty consultation, and a consensus on the interpretation and analysis.

*Defining a Narrative for the Present Research*

Before data analysis, it was necessary to define what would be considered a narrative. Riessman (1993) considers a narrative broadly as having a thematic sequence and some aspects of chronological structure. For the purpose of the present study,
narratives included first-person stories describing an event, stories about behavior, incomplete stories, and other accounts of phenomena related to the topic (Bailey & Tilley, 2002; Labov & Waletzky, 1997; McCance, McKenna & Boore, 2001; Polkinghorne, 2010; Riessman, 2008). Thus, any part of the interview that told a story was defined as a narrative.

According to Lieblich et al. (1998), narrative categorical content analysis involves marking and selecting sections of the interview text that are related to the research topic. This may include all of the text, depending on how directly participants respond to the interview questions. These sections did not necessarily include a story in its entirety, if the story diverged from the research topic. Participants’ stories were not categorized as separate units; rather, they were coded as all other topic-related parts of the text. Narratives were a means of generating rich data, analyzed in the context of the entire individual transcript, and across transcripts. Information shared in the interview outside of the sections marked as topic-relevant were also included in the data analysis if this information supported or facilitated the analysis (Lieblich et al., 1998). Codes and categories occurred across narratives within each interview, and across interviews.

Using a conventional categorical content narrative analysis, with consideration of the entire transcript, allowed for a detailed and thorough analysis of the content, along with attention to the researcher-participant relationship, and inclusion and consideration of less easily identifiable elements and aspects of the data. This approach helped explore how personal narratives concerning identity fit within broader narratives and issues.

Rigor

Evaluation criteria
In contrast to a study using positivistic methodology, the standards for trustworthiness and rigor for a naturalistic, narrative inquiry are different in several aspects. Specifically, attention is paid to the context of the participant, the subjective nature of experiences, and the awareness of the role and impact of the researcher on data collection and interpretation (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Trustworthiness is examined instead of validity in order to achieve integrity in qualitative research.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) summarize the criteria and techniques for establishing trustworthiness as the following: credibility (using prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing and member checks both in process and at the conclusion of the research); transferability (through thick description, or inclusion of context); and dependability and confirmability (through use of an audit trail).

To maximize the rigor of this research, the following strategies were used to address trustworthiness: triangulation, peer debriefing, reflexivity, member checking, memos and journaling. For triangulation, I engaged other observers, including my dissertation chair as well as a graduate student in counseling psychology, to review the interview transcripts and contribute input to the data analysis. Peer debriefing also took place with fellow counseling psychology students.

Reflections and observations related to reflexivity were recorded in a personal journal. I used this journal as a means of reflecting on my relationship to the participants, and reflecting on the potential impact of my own biases and values on the research process. I also used the journal to record field notes, or observations, after each interview, and to record thoughts and feelings related to the research during data analysis as well.
For member checking, I contacted each participant following the interview, offered to share a transcript of the interview, and gave them an opportunity to add thoughts about or additional information to the interview. I offered each participant a summary of the research findings upon conclusion of the study.

I recorded memos throughout this study. These memos represented the audit trail referred to by Lincoln and Guba (1985) above, and this audit trail was achieved by detailed and accurate record keeping of methodological decisions throughout the research process. Memos included notes on the times and dates of contact with participants (de-identified), a record of meetings with peer co-analysts and my dissertation chair, and notes on decisions regarding the research process throughout the data collection and analysis.

The strategies for trustworthiness described above that I used in this study are consistently recommended for qualitative researchers, across methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Krefting, 1991; Morrow, 2005; Padgett, 2008; Sandelowski, 1993). Reflexivity is further detailed in the next section of this chapter.

*Reflexivity*

Examining what led me to this research, personally and professionally, is a critical process in qualitative research. Reflexivity, which is the researcher’s self-reflection about her or his biases and assumptions, is one of the strategies used to address researcher bias, which can affect the way the research is conducted and the way the data is analyzed and understood (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Johnson, 1997). Being explicit about my assumptions and biases, and engaging in this self-reflection process serves to increase my awareness of my biases, and help the reader to know what my position is relative to the
The assumption in qualitative research is that the researcher’s values and biases are inherent to the work (Choudhuri, 2003). Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Mattis, & Quizon (2005) emphasize the importance of researchers’ examining the possible effects of their own group history, personal history, skin color, race, class and attitudes both before beginning the research, as well as throughout the process.

In the following section I share a personal narrative in order to engage in researcher reflexivity, taking ownership of my perspective or (Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007). This process, also known as bracketing (Munhall, 2007), was carried out in other ways throughout the timeline of conducting the research. Strategies used to promote qualitative research validity included journaling, feedback from peers and colleagues, member checking, and participant feedback (Johnson, 1997; Munhall, 2007; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Memo writing addresses reflexivity by allowing the researcher to be transparent about the research process, providing a forum to express feelings, assumptions, questions and ideas (Fassinger, 2005). While memoing, journaling and member checking will be employed throughout the research process, I will address reflexivity through a personal narrative.

**Personal narrative**

I have been especially drawn to the narrative aspects and quality of qualitative research, for both the researcher, who comes with a story, and the participants, who are sharing their stories. I believe that all research, qualitative and quantitative, is embedded in personal perspectives; these perspectives are made more explicit in qualitative studies.

From a young age I have been curious about the idea of race and its meaning in society. This curiosity was brought to the fore by my multiracial family, other peoples’
comments about us, and my own observations of peoples’ reactions. My parents were an interracial couple, dating in the late 1950s, and marrying in 1961, when miscegenation was still illegal in some states. My father was Jewish; my mother is African American. They were married for 48 years until his death.

The race rules to which people ascribed made no sense to me. In my family and among peers, we reacted to and understood racial stimuli according to unspoken, implicit codes. We ‘lived’ race, but there was no explanation of these phenomena – why ‘good’ and ‘bad’ neighborhoods and schools had predictable proportions of White, Asian, Black and Latino students, or why people had rules and beliefs about who should date whom, for example.

My parents adhered to the codes, in spite of the visually and culturally defiant nature of their relationship. My father did not talk about race. My mother’s race talk included stories involving color issues (the paper bag test used at her college in social circles), stories of mistreatment (my cousin exploited in a military experiment, my grandfather called the n-word by a train conductor), colloquialisms, (“She must have a touch of the brush,”) and observations, (“He had a thing for dark skinned women”). While I was disturbed and perplexed by what I saw around me on the street, on television, and in magazines, I explored race through books. Some were not so helpful (one suggested that men and women in interracial relationships were repressed homosexuals). Others were completely engaging. I loved fiction, history, critical essays, and autobiographies. Personal essays and autobiographies drew me in most of all. They gave me insight into historical injustices, and reflected the beauty and strength of Black culture.
I still lacked a critical perspective on race and the phenomenon of racial identity development, even after taking African American studies courses outside my college major, and studying for a master’s in public health in the early 1990s. I was bothered by the public health research that presented racial differences in health outcomes - from teen pregnancy to heart disease - as tragic facts, needing intervention, but not seen in the context of the complex factors that affect race-based experiences. Only in the Counseling Psychology PhD program did I find coursework and research projects addressing the complexity of race as a social construction, and dealing with the psychological meanings and impacts on all of us of living in a racialized society. This psychological perspective came with a critical historical understanding of the origins of and political power motivations behind the racial hierarchies we see today.

While many of the racial phenomena I noted as a child still exist today – internalized racism, disparities in wealth, housing, and education – I now have the tools to examine them more meaningfully, and from a psychological and social justice perspective. Self-examination continues to be an ongoing process for me. At the same time, in professional and personal spheres, I have observed in others the lack of voice and lack of understanding of race that I have experienced.

My work with families has taken me within and outside of myself. While this research topic does not represent my personal experiences, it is close to me, because it involved mixed race families, and the negotiation of race within these families. At the same time, in my work and family communities, I have often been approached by White transracially adoptive parents who request guidance and advice about racial issues. In this way, the research topic has come to me. With exposure to other multiracial families, I
have come full circle to a different and deeper understanding of my family of origin. For obvious reasons, I have been able to identify with my mother; but because of his silence, I always wondered what my father was thinking and feeling. Perhaps I was drawn to this research topic hoping to get a glimpse of my father’s experience. Lastly, I believe that my research methods have also brought me full circle to my love of personal narratives as a reader today, an English major in college, and as a child eager to learn.

Assumptions and biases

In exploring my assumptions about racial identity development in the participants, I draw on both from my personal experiences in a multiracial family and living in a community with multiracial families, my intellectual development in the scholarship of race, and my experiences as a clinician. As a woman of color interviewing the participants, I anticipated that in my presence the parents might feel self-conscious about making statements perceived as racist or ignorant of their children’s experiences. However, as a light skinned Black woman, I have noticed that at times White people have expressed more comfort talking to me about race than if they don’t know that I am biracial, or if I were darker skinned.

Some of my assumptions regarding this research include the following: that due to White privilege, most parents will not have thought much about race prior to adoption, that the parents are likely to react to the challenges of racism with discomfort and avoidance, and that parents’ perspectives will vary depending on the extent of their pre-adoption relationships with people of color. Potential biases I have regarding this research are related to my views about race-neutral ideology. These views are namely that an anti-racist stance is preferable to a non-racist one, and that it is preferable for
parents to be proactive talking and teaching about race, as with other difficult or taboo topics and forms of oppression. Based on clinical and personal experience, I have come to view race-neutral ideology as dismissive of individuals’ experience and reality, and as resulting in parents and children being ill equipped to recognize and respond to discrimination.

In addition to reflecting on my personal views of the present research, I have thought about the implications of my studying a group of which I am not a member. For historical and sociopolitical reasons, literature on researching populations different from oneself has focused almost exclusively on the power dynamics, ethics, and implications of White researchers studying people of color (Helms, Henze, Mascher, & Satiani, 2006). In fact, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) observe that the history of qualitative research is linked to colonialism, with the purpose of gaining knowledge about “strange and foreign worlds” (p. 1). The study of the “the exotic other” (p. 2) was fraught with implications of racism as qualitative methodology was used within the power dynamics of colonialism. More recently, scholars of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (Bell, 1995; Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Frankenberg, 1997) have written about White racial ideology.

The present research reverses the familiar gaze of White researchers on people of color, and also diverges from the also more typical position of same-race research. Fawcett and Hearn (2004) address the complexity of conducting research on ‘others’: that we have multiple forms of otherness, and that we can be in a dominant group in some situations but not others. I addressed these complex issues of identity and positionality in my research journal and through peer consultation, with the intention of understanding their impact on the data collection and analysis.
Chapter 4: Findings

Results of the current study, which examined narratives of participants’ experiences of racial identity as White transracially adoptive parents, are described in detail in this chapter. Participants shared their thoughts and feelings about their racial identity before adoption, during the adoption process, and throughout parenting. The present chapter will (1) describe the participants, (2) outline how the data was coded and categorized using a content analysis methodology, and (3) describe the results of the data analysis with the use of themes, categories, and illustrative quotations from the interviews.

Given participants’ concern for their own and their children’s privacy, participants are referred to by a participant identification number. In circumstances where quotations included identifying information, I removed the information and replaced it with bracketed general terms to convey the meaning of the participant without compromising his or her confidentiality. In order to be clear about the commonality or differentiation of participants’ experiences, I use the terms “most” or “many” to denote eight or more of the twelve participants, “some” or “about half” to denote between four and seven of the participants, and “several” or “a couple” when referring to two or three participants. At times I refer to a precise number.

Participants

Twelve parents completed interviews for the present research. Before beginning the interview, all participants signed the IRB approved consent form, received a copy of that form for themselves, and completed a demographic questionnaire. All initial interviews were conducted in person, at the participant’s office, home, or the researcher’s
home. The location of the interview was determined by the participant, who was given a choice of the aforementioned locations. Participants were contacted for follow up questions and information. Each participant was asked for her or his age, as this question had been omitted on the demographic questionnaire. Participants’ age was considered important as it became clear during data analysis that participants were influenced by race related events in society during their childhoods, in particular, the Civil Rights movement. Interview lasted from fifty-three minutes to two hours and thirty minutes, with an average length of one hour, twenty-four minutes.

The first participant interviewed was contacted for a second interview, recorded by phone, to answer questions based on prompts generated with my dissertation chair and me after our review of the first transcript. Those questions and prompts were included in all subsequent interviews, and are denoted in the appendix (Appendix C: Interview Guide) with an asterisk. Lastly, one participant was contacted for follow up of questions that had been answered by the other participants, but lacked clarity in her transcript. Three participants sent emails with thoughts they requested to be added to the data. These emails were de-identified and added to the original transcripts as data.

Of the twelve participants, eight identified as female, and four identified as male. Two participants were a married couple, male and female. Ten identified as heterosexual, and two as lesbian. Eleven were married and living together, while one was divorced and single. Two participants adopted their children as single parents.

Participants’ ages ranged from 38 to 59 years old, with an average age of 53 and a median age of 56 years of age. While criteria for participation in the study included identifying as White, participants identified their ethnic backgrounds as “none” (n=4),
“WASP” (n=2), and the remaining including Irish, French Canadian, Russian, Scottish, German, English and Finnish. One participant was born and raised in a European country, one was born in the United States but lived in a European country until college, and two others traveled and lived overseas extensively due to a parent’s employment. English was the first language for all but the one participant who was born and raised in Europe. Participants identified their religion as Jewish (n=1), Lutheran (n=1), Jain (n=1), UCC/liberal Protestant Christian (n=1), “fallen Episcopalian” (n=1), “raised Catholic; currently religion plays no role in my life” (n=1), “somewhat” (n=1), “none” or “N/A” (n=4), “anti” (n=1).

The majority of participants (n=9) held a graduate degree, while the remaining (n=3) had an undergraduate degree. All but one participant worked full-time; the other identified herself as a “stay at home parent.” Participants’ fields of work included education (including administration and teaching), law, business ownership, marketing research, health/medicine, and software.

In order to protect the privacy of the participants and their families, information about the adoptive children’s ages and places of birth are presented in aggregate, rather than by describing each participant’s family. In total, five participants (including the married couple) adopted domestically, and seven participants adopted internationally. The study inclusion criteria included having parented the adopted child for at least four years; the average and median years of parenting among all the participants was 14.5, ranging from six years to twenty four years of parenting. Children’s present ages ranged from four to twenty-four.

All children adopted domestically in this study were African American (n=5) or
Haitian American (n=2), and born in the United States. The children adopted internationally were born in the following countries: Guatemala (two participants) (n=3); Ethiopia (n=2); South Korea (n=2); Columbia (n=2); China (n=2); and Vietnam (n=1). Age at adoption ranged from three days to eleven years old, with one participant unsure of her children’s exact ages at adoption. In total, 14 children were adopted under the age of two (ranging from 3 days to 23 months of age), and five children were adopted over the age of two (ranging from 3 years to eleven years of age). For three participants, the domestic adoption was open.

Saturation. Saturation was determined during the data analysis when similar categories and domains emerged, data became redundant, and depth of themes and subthemes was achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morrow, 2007; Padgett, 2008). Morrow (2007) notes that gathering additional data may always provide more elaboration and complexity; however, saturation is considered achieved when the present themes and categories cover all aspects of the existing data, and represent the complexity of the research topic. For the present research, emerging themes and subthemes were noted during memo writing and coding. In addition, these themes and subthemes were discussed in consultation with the dissertation chair and graduate student co-researcher who co-coded the data. It was determined that although subsequent interviews might continue to provide additional codes for each individual participant, new themes or categories were not likely to be generated.

Reflexivity of the Researcher

Acknowledging the role of my own biases and feelings about this study topic is a critical component of qualitative research. While the present study is qualitative, the data
analysis process did involve a quantitative aspect, counting the numbers of participants who endorsed different feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. I was appreciative of the methodical and iterative aspect of the coding process that forced me to count the frequencies of participants’ points of view and experiences. At times I felt so emotionally impacted by the pain and shame that participants expressed, and so grateful for their honesty about these feelings, that I realized that I risked neglecting some of the more positive feelings that participants conveyed, such as their compassion, pride and persistence. The interviews were often emotionally draining.

At different points during the research process, I found myself identifying with all members of the adoption triad. I identified as a parent of children of color who also struggles to navigate a racist society, as a child who grew up in a multiracial family, and as a person of color having witnessed and survived family losses. Recognizing my own biases values forced me to identify moments in which I was silently agreeing, applauding participants’ statements or practices, or feeling critical, or empathic. At times I wished we were having a conversation rather than an interview – especially when some participants expressed this wish themselves.

During the data analysis and writing of results, consulting and discussions with colleagues and my chair helped me retain what I hope is a clear and accurate representation of the data, while still acknowledging the existence and effects of racism, a stance which some readers may perceive as subjective. Throughout the recruitment, data collection, and data analysis phases of this study, I kept a personal journal to record my feelings and thoughts in response to this experience.
The co-researcher, a White woman raised in a predominantly White neighborhood, spoke with me about her own potential reactions and biases too, as they emerged during the research process. Having grown up in a family she described as conscious and explicit about diversity and White privilege, and having had an early interest in potentially becoming an adoptive parent, she shared her reactions of “surprise” to some of the participants’ discomfort talking about race, or hesitance initiating more conversations about race and racism with their children.

Lastly, I considered my role as a person of color and its effect on the interview process. My co-researcher shared her thoughts that some participants may have edited some of their responses based on self-consciousness of the racial difference and dynamic in the room, and that if I were White, participants may have provided a different account of their experiences regarding race. The majority of the participants appeared visibly affected when answering questions that involved thoughts and feelings about White privilege and racism, reflecting the shame and discomfort that is associated with the White racial identity development process (Helms, 1992). Participants’ reactions included long pauses, sighs, tears, rubbing one’s face in one’s hands, and verbal expressions of how difficult the process was. For me, at times, the tension was palpable and uncomfortable. In the role of a researcher, I attempted to encourage participants with prompts, validate their experiences, and welcome follow up conversation and contact after the interview. Given the emotional nature of the interviews, I agree with my co-researcher that the tenor and content of the interviews were affected by the cross-racial interview dyad. This experience is corroborated by Helms’s (1995) racial identity interaction model, whereby individuals’ racial identity statuses influence their reactions
to each other in dyads or groups, whether in the psychotherapeutic setting or in other environments.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews for the present research were all recorded with a digital audio recorder, and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription company. The digital audio files were deleted after transcription, and the transcripts were password protected. Participants’ pseudonyms were used in the transcripts, and any identifying information such as names of people, institutions and locations was changed or removed. The participants’ consent forms were the only documents with their names, and these forms were locked in a file cabinet in an office at Boston College. The graduate student co-researcher and I completed a human subjects ethics certification course approved by the Boston College Institutional Review Board before the data collection and analysis. As part of an audit trail, dates of all correspondence with participants, interviews, and meetings with the co-researcher and dissertation chair were recorded in the memo book. References to participants in the memo book and journal were de-identified.

Using conventional content analysis methodology, the goal of the data analysis was to systematically draw inferences from the data, beginning with small units of the text, and then move on to the development of broader categories and themes (Downe-Wamboldt; Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The overall purpose was to gain an understanding of the study phenomenon: the racial identity development of the participants as they experienced parenting a child of color. Ultimately, the themes derived from data analysis should reflect the summary and synthesis of data across interviews (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).
After reviewing the first transcript with my dissertation chair, the decision was made to add prompts, and make minor changes to the wording and order of questions of the interview protocol. These changes to the interview protocol were intended to provide a more linear and organic narrative structure for participants’ stories and responses, and to elicit more information about the research topic. For example, some participants had difficulty articulating the ways their views of Whiteness had changed. Thus, following the question, “Can you describe, overall, how that awareness or those feelings and thoughts about being White/what it means to be White have changed since becoming an adoptive parent?” we added prompts asking participants to describe their thoughts as well as feelings, and added the follow-up question: “Do you see yourself differently as a White person now? Do you see other White people differently?”

My dissertation chair and I discussed the data collection process repeatedly during the two months that the interviews took place. The extent of follow up interviews deemed necessary was also discussed. It was determined that after the extensive follow up conducted with the first participant, additional follow up interviews would be conducted on an as needed basis rather than being required for each participant; this decision was based on our observation that the additional questions and prompts elicited more responses about the research topic than originally anticipated. The interviews were judged to have provided extensive and rich responses relating to the participants’ racial identity development.

As an initial step in the data analysis, I read each transcript, making brief notes in the memo book with impressions and reflections about each participant. I had already begun writing in the research journal during the participant recruitment phase, had
continued journal writing throughout the interview process, and kept this personal writing up throughout the data analysis phase. In periodic meetings with my dissertation chair and co-researcher, I shared my feelings and thoughts about the research process. These discussions covered issues related to reflexivity, such as emotional reactions to some of the interviews and participants, dreams about the data, and ways that the data brought up feelings about my own race-related and parenting experiences.

Following the initial reading of each transcript, I listened to the audio recordings while re-reading the transcripts, this time reviewing each transcript line by line in order to correct minor errors made by the transcription company, and de-identify personal details as described above. During this second reading of the transcripts, I also inserted notations about the length of pauses in speech, notes indicating when a participant became tearful, and indications of when there was an outside interruption – issues that would not have been captured by the transcription company. With each reading of the transcripts, I became more familiar with the data, and began to add tentative ideas about categories to the memo book. At the end of each transcript, I also wrote notes on my initial impressions of the data.

The first part of data analysis involved restating, but not extrapolating, the content of the transcripts, using participants’ language as much as possible (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This process of encapsulating the data into summary statements was done using the track changes comment feature, in the margins of the documents. Repeated reading of the transcripts allowed for immersion in the data, and for identification of narratives (Lieblich et al., 1998). Narratives were highlighted and initially noted as a story, with a brief descriptive phrase for each. During this phase of analysis, I began to meet with the
researcher who worked with me to code data. The co-researcher had previous experience with qualitative research and qualitative data analysis. She and I first met several times to discuss the background literature and methodology of the present research. We also discussed potential issues related to reflexivity for both of us; these included my identification with both the participants and their children at times, and her feelings as a person who was raised by parents who were social scientists, and who has wanted to be an adoptive parent herself from a young age.

After summarizing the text of all of the interviews, the co-coding researcher joined me for the next phase of data analysis: coding the data. The co-researcher and I coded the first transcript together, reviewing the methodology and purpose of deriving these initial codes based on selected quotations. The codes, phrases that succinctly summarized a participant’s words, also stayed close to participants’ language as this methodology indicates (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Padgett, 2008). Following the coding of the first transcript, we independently coded each subsequent transcript, meeting after each transcript to review our separate codes and come to a consensus on any differences of perspective. This process involved close review of the text, discussion of impressions and emerging themes, and the offering of additional insights that one or the other of us may have considered. Narratives, which had been previously identified during the initial readings, were coded within the body of the transcripts. Our independently coded transcripts, as well as the transcripts coded by consensus were all shared with the dissertation chair for her review and feedback. An example of codes and participant quotations is below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Quotation (Participant ID#, page #)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>


| Participant identifies awareness of racial differences, while recognizing lack of awareness of privilege | I still didn’t feel privileged. I just realized there was a difference. That's when I guess I just started being aware of the whole racial issue in this country (P1, 2) |
| Participant notes that his parents’ race talk was simple, with them expressing strong anti-segregation and anti-racism beliefs | Yeah. We talked about it, but it was really pretty simple because they you know, were very strong believers that you know—that like they were anti-segregation, you know, anti-racism, and you know (P4, 8) |
| Participant is met with disbelief when sharing stories of racial microaggressions in daughter’s school, due to city’s reputation as liberal | You know, and I think when I talk about my experiences in the school, um, as the parent of a black child, being put into like you know, with the worst teacher, with all the other black kids, and the parents that were white got their kids in with the good teachers, and oh, no, that wouldn’t happen in HOME CITY. Oh yes, it did (P6, 35) |
| International upbringing cited as attributing to participant’s sense of own identity as fluid and constructed | I think because of my childhood growing up in another country, um, with a different language and a different culture, all of which were adopted in the sense—in the more broad sense of adopted, um, I tend to |
think of identity as much more fluid than most people and much more constructed (P7, 6)

Participant express discomfort with idea of transcending race

I’m a little uncomfortable with this idea of transcending race. (P9, 36)

In public, participant is asked a range of personal questions including cost of adoption and sibling status of children

Um, and I’ve even gotten questions, right in front of the kids, people will ask well how much did you pay? Um, and other things, you know, questions like, you know, oh another question I got um, was um, “Are they sisters?” I said yeah, of course they’re sisters. “Do you mean biologic?” Um, just people—and that’s right in front of the kids too (P11, 18)

Once the first three transcripts were coded and reviewed for consensus, I paused the coding in order to begin compiling categories and identifying chunks of data and quotations from transcripts that represented the emerging categories. These categories consisted of clusters of codes (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The document with categories and references to transcripts’ relevant data was discussed with the co-researcher. We then continued coding the next several transcripts. These steps were followed repeatedly until all the transcripts were coded, and a draft of categories and clusters of categories was completed, covering all the transcripts.
Throughout the data analysis process, the co-researcher and I met a total of seventeen times. I also met with or had phone consultations throughout the process with my dissertation chair. The process of developing categories and sorting them into broader clusters and themes involved multiple reworking of categorical labels and resorting and review of the content. As Sandelowski (2000) and Padgett (2008) noted, content analysis is reflexive, iterative, and interactive, with continuous modifications a necessary part of the process as information and insights emerge. While refining and reorganizing categories, I began to designate larger themes, or domains, which incorporated and consolidated the categories. In order to address subjectivity and represent participants’ ideas as accurately as possible, I stayed close to participants’ quotes throughout this part of the data analysis as well; this attention to participants’ language is integral to conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). See below for an example of the completed codebook. The following outline and table represents an example of a domain (pre-adoption racial experiences: childhood), a category within that domain (meaning of whiteness in family of origin), and the sub-codes.

I. Pre-adoption racial experiences: childhood (domain)

IA. Meaning of Whiteness in family of origin (category)

IA1. Unaware of own race

IA1a. Not thinking about or talking about being White

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page in codebook</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Quote (Participant ID, page)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Family of origin did not think about being White; participant</td>
<td>Interviewer: Going back to your childhood a little, in your family of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Participant doesn’t know if anyone in family of origin thought about being White; observes that being White was something you accepted, along with the accompanying privileges</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Notes that the way she grew up, everyone was White, the same, and for that reason race did not come up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Has difficulty stating what it meant to be white growing up, as family of origin did not think about it; participant thought of self</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes not having to think about race as a privilege</td>
<td>Interviewee: I don’t know. We never thought about it. The White privilege was just that we didn’t have to think about race. (P1, 3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I don’t know if anyone really thought about being White. You just were. I mean you either would just accept it, and have those privileges that go along with being White. (P6, 7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>You know I mean being White, you just really—and being White and growing up the way I grew up, it was just like, you know, race really wasn't—didn't even come up. (P3, 33)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>It's honestly hard to say (what it meant to be White in family of origin) because it was almost like we didn't think about it, or at least I should say</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As with the determination of categories, designation of overarching domains resulted from an iterative process of returning to review the data, reconsidering the groupings, and discussing the significance and applicability of the domains with my dissertation chair and graduate student co-researcher. An outline of the codebook follows.

Overview of the Data

A total of six domains arose from the analysis of the data, which will be described in this section. Chapter 5, the Discussion, will include an analysis of the findings integrated with White racial identity theory, critical race theory, and the literature. However, due to the inclusion of some narratives and the subsequent length of the domains, the findings for each domain are also briefly summarized in this chapter, along with an analysis of one of the narratives as it relates to some of the major themes that emerged from that domain.

The six domains cover distinct yet related experiences and reflections that are connected to the participants’ racial identity development. These domains progress chronologically from childhood to adulthood, including experiences of race before adoption, followed by the parenting experience, and culminating with participants’
overall current reflections about their identity and race. The last domain addresses the process of talking about Whiteness. For each domain, categories are outlined, within which codes further describe aspects of each category.

The first domain examines the pre-adoption racial experiences of the participants in childhood, up to college age. Participants share the influences of childhood environments and relationships on their racial identity development, including neighborhoods, schools, peers, parents, extended families and religious institutions. In this domain, participants describe the ways race was spoken about or not, and the ways they learned about their race, including from families, schools, community leaders, and social and political movements of the time. Exposure to racism as well as anti-racism activism is discussed. Lastly, this domain covers participants’ responses to racial stimuli during childhood: their thoughts, feelings, and actions.

The second domain focuses on participants’ racial experiences in adulthood prior to adoption. Given that all the study participants attended college, the role of the college experience in and out of the classroom is referenced as a venue where race learning took place. Relationships in the workplace and in other settings are also cited at influential in the development of racial identity. In this domain, some participants describe a lack of awareness of race, while others describe a process of growing awareness of race. Catalysts or triggers for racial awareness are described, such as the unusual experience of being a racial minority in a setting. Furthermore, behavioral, cognitive and affective responses to racial stimuli are covered. Racial stimuli referred to by participants include the rare minority experience, and the witnessing of racial microaggressions.
Domain three reflects the role of race and racial awareness in the adoption process and during subsequent parenting experiences. Participants explain if and how race played a role in their adoption decisions and in the adoption system, and their initial views of transracial adoption. Some information is shared about the role of agency trainings or education about transracial adoption, when applicable, and participants’ views of the usefulness of these offerings. Participants view their adoptions decisions regarding race in hindsight. Parenting experiences are highlighted in terms of how participants’ views of their children’s race related experiences affected their thoughts about race.

The fourth domain explores participants’ responses to racial stimuli in their environments. This includes experiences where they find themselves a racial minority, situations where they respond to racial situations related to their children, including racial microaggressions, and relational connections and disconnections with people of color. This domain also includes looking at the feelings expressed by participants in response to racial stimuli.

Domain five is an examination of participants’ views and reflections on their own racial identity that were expressed throughout the interview, not necessarily chronologically. Participants note the ways they feel their racial identity has changed or shifted post adoption. Participants also share responses that suggest the importance of other, intersecting aspects of their identities, including gender, sexual minority status, and perceptions of themselves as social justice agents. Race as construct was addressed, with participants reflecting on general ideas of the meaning of race in society, and struggling to reconcile the desire for race neutrality with the reality of racism in society. Lastly, in this domain participants speak to some of the race-related dilemmas and concerns that
have arisen from their parenting experiences that they have had difficulty reconciling. Overall, this domain gives voice to some of the participants’ more philosophical and existential musings about the meaning of race and whiteness in their lives.

The sixth and final domain examines the process of participants’ responding to the interview questions. This domain focuses on the phenomenon of talking about whiteness, the feelings that were elicited, the challenges posed by answering certain questions, and the hesitancy and diversion in answering certain questions that was evident for many participants. Some participants were transparent about their difficulties with the process, and for others the challenges were apparent in styles of speech or changing of the subject. It should be noted that not all participants found the process difficult, and that the majority of participants cited motivations for participating in the research as well as perceived benefits of going through the interview process.

The delineation and explication of each domain will offer more information about the data, including participants’ quotes. For content analysis, quotations are critical in serving the purpose of best representing the voices, thoughts and experiences of the participants (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Lieblich et al. 1998; Riessman, 2008; Squire, 2008). Due to the nature of narrative inquiry, quotations are often of a substantial length in order to include participants’ stories as representative of themes in the data.

Interviewer-interviewee dialogue is included in the quotes in the following cases: (1) a lengthier narrative is featured; (2) the main idea of the participant necessitates a longer quote, or (3) it was necessary to include the questions in order to illustrate a participants’ style of response, for example, change of topic.

Domain I: Pre-adoption racial experiences in childhood
In the first domain, parents share experiences of race during childhood, and their reflections on the meaning of whiteness growing up. Information in this domain emerged from questions such as asking participants to recall their earliest memory of race, times when they were aware of being White, if and how race was talked about in their families of origin, and how they learned about race. In response to these questions, participants also brought up issues related to cultural, religious and class differences. The influence of socio-political movements was also referenced.

Meaning of Whiteness in family of origin. Most participants had difficulty answering the question about the meaning of Whiteness in their family of origin, and required some prompting about whether or not race was spoken about, or if the family ever talked about being White. Five participants shared that they did not recall thinking about being White during childhood. In one case, Whiteness was articulated as the norm: “It's honestly hard to say (what it meant to be White in family of origin) because it was almost like we didn't think about it, or at least I should say I didn't think about it. Um, you know, I think it's kind of the typical—I don't know if this is typical—of thinking of myself as the unmarked, the not different, the normal, the typical” (P7, 7). Similarly, a few participants named the privilege that accompanied this state of not thinking about race: “I don’t know. We never thought about it. The White privilege was just that we didn’t have to think about race” (P1, 3). In the same vein: “I don’t know if anyone really thought about being White. You just were. I mean you either would just accept it, and have those privileges that go along with being White” (P6, 7). And additionally, “Mmm. Wow. (long pause) First thing that comes to mind is that it (growing up White) meant…privilege. I—I—I would—that was absolutely in my consciousness” (P9, 12).
Growing up in a predominantly White environment. The majority of participants (n=8) identified their childhood neighborhoods and schools as predominantly White, using expressions such as “lily white” (P3, 1) and “very white” (P1, 1; P10, 1; P12, 1). Several could quantify the minority presence in the community, for example, having one person of color in their school, or two African American families in their town. In the case where one participant grew up in a somewhat racially mixed or changing neighborhood, the minority population was geographically separated: “Definitely, the Puerto Ricans were seen as out, you know, outsiders, and you know, and-and for the most part, they, they weren’t living in the nicer areas of town” (P5, 3). Three participants recalled having African American friends in elementary or middle school.

In some cases, the lack of racial diversity in participants’ communities meant that participants’ responses to questions about race led them to reflect on the types of differences that they were aware of as children, which included class, culture and religion. In one example of religion being salient as an aspect of identity difference, one participant stated, “I wasn’t living with, uh – with people with different races or even different religions. My best friend was Catholic, and I went to his church, like once, and it was the strangest experience. So I remember these kind of different cultures. That was about the most different culture” (P9, 6). Another participant noted, “And so I think what it meant to be a White person was just to, you know, to—to just be—not to be—to be in a very exclusive um, um, neighborhood where you didn’t have contact with people who were different. So the differences ended up being class and religion” (P12, 8). For another participant, ethnicity, rather than race, was a factor in identifying differences
among peers, with peoples’ ethnicity identified by their last names: “I can remember a big question in my town being like, ‘What kind of name is that?’” (P5, 2).

For participants in this study, class, ethnicity and religious differences were associated with status, reinforced a level of existing privilege, and they identified their families as middle or upper middle class. One exception was the participant who grew up overseas and was aware of being different, and at times “alien” from the majority of his peers due to having a different first language and culture (P7, 1).

_Influence of parents and sociopolitical movements._ Parents were cited as a major influence on participants’ thoughts about race as children. Parents influenced participants by their reactions to race related events in the news, their responses to racist statements of extended family members, and their modeling behaviors with respect to relationships with people of color or responses to incidents involving racism.

For participants growing up during the civil rights movement (n=9), their parents’ responses to the news about desegregation was cited as having an impact on their racial identity development. Participants were influenced by the images on the news, as well as their parents’ views of segregation and articulation of fairness and justice as important values: “I—you know, I think growing up in the ‘60s with all the turmoil and the segregation—segregation and the terrible things that we saw on the news all the time, um, you know, I remember my mom specifically saying, you know, ‘This is not right what’s happening out there in the world.’ Um, and she said, ‘I just hope that it changes for the future because it’s—it’s not appropriate, you know, that if you’re of one particular race that, you know, you’re treated any differently than—than anyone else.’ Um, and the—yeah, I just—I remember that vividly” (P10, 4). According to another participant, “We
talked about it, but it was really pretty simple because they (*parents*) you know, were very strong believers that you know—that like they were anti-segregation, you know, anti-racism” (P4, 8). Further, “Um, certainly uh, seeing those—those images and seeing Martin Luther King. My dad went to, uh, hear Martin Luther King in, uh, at the—in the nine, 1960, at the uh, *I Have A Dream* speech. He was there. Um, and um, I—so I think that my father and my mother brought it to the forefront of our psyche as children that uh, something was wrong with America in terms of uh, uh, that general policy” (P8, 2). Another participant described his parents as “very passionate about the civil rights movement” (P9, 7). Participants’ parents used the civil rights movement as a teaching tool: “They didn’t want us to grow up to be bigoted and so they tried to teach us about at least the civil rights movement. They used that as, I guess a paradigm” (P1, 3).

For several participants, their parents’ outreach to connect them or their families to people of color was memorable. One participant was sent to a summer camp in a predominantly Black neighborhood one summer. Another participant’s mother brought men from an African country as guests to her children’s youth group, which the participant took to mean, “It was sort of like that’s what we did. We you know, we reach out. We get to know different people. We, my mother, was very embracing of everyone” (P3, 6). In one case, the relationships promoted by the participant’s parent informed his sense of a multiracial family, were cited as a precursor to his decision to adopt transracially. These relationships included hosting a man from an African country for a year, “who became like an older brother” to the participant, as well as hosting a Black child for a summer, whose poor health struck the participant as “horrifying” (P9, 77).
Another participant, recalled his mother’s desire to be more ethnic, and then connected this memory for the first time to his own desire to form a different type of family later through transracial adoption, a type of family he identified as “cool and life enhancing” (P4, 12):

“You might find an interesting anecdote is my mother always said that she really wished that we were something. Um, you know, she was very jealous of people who were of any strong ethnic identity ‘cause we're pretty much you know, totally assimilated into everything that you could imagine being assimilated into. she was very jealous of people who had uh, a clear identification, who could say you know, we are Italian or Jewish or you know, Puerto Rican or whatever it might be that you know, and we have our special celebrations, our feasts, our music, our dances, our—our things that we do, you know, our, um—because we didn't really have—you know, we sort of lived in this kind of you know, sterile or not—sterile is not exactly the right word, but um, there—there're no rituals or uh, feast days or songs for uh, that—that people like my family had. So—so I guess, I mean, she used to say that quite literally that she wished that she was of some more interesting ethnic background that she could identify with… Well, I—I think it explains why—not that I was ever quite that—I never said it out loud to myself. I—I don't think I ever really thought it out loud to myself, but I think you know, I was looking for um, an injection of—yeah, I wanted to um, not live and die in—in such a um, distilled environment. So uh, I think like my mother—although I um, don't think I ever said it 'til now—um, I think I wanted to have a—to forge a more
interesting uh, or more flavorful uh, ethnic identity or—or hybrid identity” (P4, 11-12).

Several participants’ parents also exerted influence through their disagreement with or disapproval of extended family members who made racist statements. In the case of grandparents, parents attributed racism to generational differences in racial attitudes. These parental responses were often the beginnings of participants’ awareness of differences in attitudes and treatment of people with respect to race:

“I remember actually when I was in grade school, I was at my aunt and uncle’s house, and there was a discussion about um, about what if I, as an adult, brought home a Black man as a boyfriend, and my aunt and uncle were just outraged that my parents were okay with that. [Laughter]. I was really shocked at that point, ’cause I didn’t—it didn’t hit me that there was issues at that point, ’cause I was in grade school, and my surroundings were pretty non-homogenous. [Laughter]. So I—I guess that was probably my—one of my earlier realizations about—that there were issues in the world” (P2, 2).

At times, participants received mixed messages from parents. Some noted that one parent was more progressive in her or his racial views than the other, or that there was respect for difference from a distance, or responses to news but no proactive stance about race. For example, on participant stated, “Within my parents’ generation, I think there was—my perception of it was that there was a certain level of suspicion. Like it’s fine. People, they, people—you respect other people. You leave ’em alone. They’re hardworking, don’t—but like, but we’re not going to socialize with them. We’re not going looking for that. We’re not like celebrating people’s differences. We just want
them to you know, do what they are supposed to do, and we’re doing what we’re supposed to do, and you know, whatever. Um, so I think that was more of that kind of feeling, like they weren’t seeking out opportunities to interact with people from different races or cultures, for that matter” (P5, 6).

In one case, a parent who supported civil rights had an issue with the participant’s sibling’s interracial relationship. Another participant recalled her family’s expectation for her to marry within her race:

“I think the, um, kind of the expectation from my family growing up is that when, you know, I was going to get married that I would marry of the same race. Um, my mom was always saying, “Don’t—don’t you like those guys with the blond hair?” And I’m like, “No. No, I don’t. No, I don’t. Indeed I don’t.” [Chuckles.] And, uh, and I remember that was kind of strange. I mean you should really, you know, meet and fall in love with somebody that you really love and not just because of their race” (P10, 3).

Parents who were proactively anti-racist (n=6) were seen by participants as critical in the development of their own early sense of social justice. For one woman, her mother’s taking her out of school to participate in civil rights protests in Washington, D.C. paved the way for her own future political activism:

“You know, it was part of that sort of growing unrest, that sort of – then you sort of evolve and you have your beliefs around things. I kind of felt really grateful for my mother for doing that. ’Cause in my town it was like we were the only ones who would do that (laughing). And it was overwhelming like the amount of people there. But it was, I - you know, I did get involved very politically in
college and I think that was something that sort of sparked my interest in that. But um, I think I was just trying to put it all together at the time” (P12, 7-8).

Two participants’ parents were active in protesting racial housing discrimination, in one case the parent signing a petition against the enacting of racial covenants, and in another case, the parent taking the participant to accompany him at a public protest against racist real estate practices.

Lastly, an indirect effect of parents’ values regarding race being an influence on participants took place in the realm of the parents’ religious institutions. Several participants spoke of their families’ churches’ involvement in the civil rights movement.

“I mean, he (childhood minister) was raised up on all the sort of social justice gospels and all that kind of thing, and he went to, uh, um—went with a bus with a group of Whites to Alabama, and he was, uh, on one of the—one of the famous incidents where a bunch of White people were taken off the bus and were feeling, uh—I can't remember exactly who was hurt, but I remember him talking about that—you know, being, um—there was a lot of violence going on, and the Whites who were coming to join in the—in the Civil Rights Movement were often doing it at risk of their own lives, so that—I mean, there's no question that was just huge in my experience of—of race” (P9, 1-2).

This same participant stated that his family considered racism “the defining sin of our time” (P9, 7). Another participant’s church integrated support of Martin Luther King’s efforts into its ministry, and was active in reaching out to African American churches.

Learning about race as intellectual, emotional, but rarely interpersonal. Aside from parental influences, participants noted other experiences as children that influenced
their thoughts about race – namely sociopolitical movements, and readings. Several participants spoke about the impact of images from the civil rights movement, apart from their parents’ input. One participant spoke of race being “dominant” in his mind during the social upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s, including, “I'm mostly thinking of Black Americans in the United States at an early age. I'm not thinking about Hispanics. I know—I know I wasn't. Uh, I was thinking then about the Vietnamese and was wondering about what kind of racism was the core of this—I mean, that seemed hideous to me, as you're watching people of another race being—being killed (P9, 14-15). As another participant stated, “seeing the child (sic), the people being hosed, and uh, Martin Luth- I mean, Martin Luther King’s assassination, uh when everything sort of boiled over. Um, the injustice of all that um made me realize, I think by the time I was 13, 14, 15, that there needs to be an upheaval uh, or a change. That my being in this safe zone (his White neighborhood, referred to in previous para) needs to be sort of radicalized” (P8, 13). An outgrowth of being raised in this time period was the establishment for some participants of people of color in heroic roles. Martin Luther King and Gandhi were cited by several participants: “So uh, uh, certainly, as a child, my heroes were, you know, were-were either African American people, like Martin Luther King, or Gandhi—“ (P8, 19).

Literature and school were noted as a source of learning about race by five participants: “I have to say, and it seems pretty basic and not, um, not too extraordinary, but in social studies classes we learned about all, you know, kinds of races and people around the world, so I’d say from like junior high and beyond, um, and I love the—and I absolutely loved those classes, you know? ’Cause I realize what a tremendous place and
world, you know, this is with this so—just so much to learn from everybody” (P10, 3). Another participant stated: “You know, of course, probably in high school is when I began to study Martin Luther King and Gandhi and all of this. I mean, we had a really good school—and, um, I was reading all kinds of—you know, Dostoevsky. I mean, the language of all—the literature of alienation and otherness and, you know, I'm reading Kafka and—and Samuel Beckett, and Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment, so I'm deep into the issues of self and otherness and have been for a long, long time, uh, in college as well” (P9, 10).

In some cases, readings helped supplement lived experience and frame an understanding of race and race privilege: “How did I learn about race? I think mostly through experience. Um, but um…that coupled with, you know, because I’m very academic and you know, um, I read a lot so—I think that from an early age I read—I love literature and I was reading African American and Latino authors and if I unpack my bookshelves here that’s what you can see. So that became a passion of mine that I learned a lot through literature. I think when I said learned through experiences learning about White skin privilege, which I was able to put in like a construct because I read about that (P12, 2-3).

Early relationships with people of color were unusual. One participant spoke to the more abstract nature of learning about race: “you know, learning about it was more—I think more peripheral than upfront because I'm White, so I felt like I could walk in the world, and it wasn’t—I just, I wasn’t aware of it really” (P6, 3). Several participants observed that even while they may have been aware of race and immersed in media coverage and literature, there was a disconnect between their intellectual engagement and
their personal relationships: “So this (reading literature of alienation and otherness) became something of a—of an obsession with me, but am I actually living with and having the experience of being with diverse races at that point? I'm telling you, the town was mostly White with the exception of the METCO (bused from city) kids. That's just the truth of the matter” (P9, 10). Similarly, he continued, “I was never directly involved in the Civil Rights Movement myself. I was in the—in the life of the mind, absorbing and reading. I was intensely involved, but I wasn't fighting on the—on the front lines of that” (P9, 18). As mentioned, only three participants noted having friends of color growing up; one person had an adult role model of color, a school administrator who was admired and well liked. These relationships were unusual.

_Racial stimuli: Awareness and associations._ For many participants, awareness of race required the presence of or contact with people of color, and led to negative associations with race. Four participants noted that their awareness of their own race occurred when they were in the presence of people of color, an unusual occurrence. For these participants, this contact occurred during travels to urban areas, or on use of public transportation. For one participant, the different racial makeup of the city environment was a reminder of his race and class status: “I mean, uh, that every time you uh, you-you go into a situation where it’s a very odd uh, scene uh or a-a sense of—you know, you go downtown as a, as a child and you see a lot more African American, Asian American um, people. And then you come back into your family, there’s this uh reconnecting that—and-and you know, sense of, oh, I’m safe now. I'm—or, I'm—and uh, the-I-I guess I felt like it helped to reinforce this idea of like, I’m upper class, White kid in a, in a safe uh, safe neighborhood” (P8, 13).
Several participants shared stories about observations or interactions with people of color in childhood, which resulted in early associations of race and negative social factors such as poverty or discrimination. In the first story, the participant recalls living overseas and becoming aware of class differences, and then through follow up questions, recalls an association between darker skin and poverty:

“Interviewee: Yeah, I think, for me, that uh, like when I was younger, when we lived in (Latin American country), the big difference was class more than—I don’t recall skin color, but um, I remember I had a really good friend who—from the neighborhood. I mean she would just come and play. I don’t know, you know, exactly how I knew her. Maybe she was from school, but she was really, really poor, and she wouldn’t come to my birthday party because she didn’t have a dress, and I remember going to her house and being shocked.

It was a shack, and it had one room, and I lived in a really—because my dad worked for organization, and we had a really nice house, and I just remember being—like her mother—I said, “I want her to come to my party.” I left my party to go get her, which I got in trouble for, but I went and got her, and I remember the disparity. That’s—I was just so shocked. Her mother opened a trunk, and clothes for the whole family was in one little trunk, and she pulled out a dress, and I just—that to me, was my first realization, wow, that there are—people live different ways, and she lived a in a—in a shack with a tin roof in—in like one room with a curtain dividing the sleeping quarters from like whatever, the cooking.
Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Did you associate that with race at all, racial differences, or…

Interviewee: Um, well she was (from that country), so I—I maybe did.

In another city at that time, in the 70s there were a lot of street children called pabenas, and um, their parents would put them on a bus and ship them to Latin American country over here to make money, and so the black—would end up on the street. And there were people that would intentionally cripple their children, so they could be beggars, so that’s sort of—that’s more of a disparity, but I guess yes, associated with race. Um, and I think I did notice in country that the poor people had darker skin – and the wealthier people had whiter skin. I think I remember noticing that” (P6, 4-5).

In the second story, a participant recalls driving in the Southern United States and being struck by seeing the level of poverty in which Black people lived:

“I remember seeing—very distinctly remember seeing very poor housing and seeing Black people sitting on their porches. Uh, I remember seeing that, and it was—you know, just having conversations with my parents. What's—how you—how—that's a rough way to live. You know, how do you—how do you live like that? Um, and this is when I'm really young. I mean, I'm thinking—I'm pretty sure by six, seven, eight years old. I hadn't started studying history. There comes a point when I'm studying history, and—and, um—but—but I remember feeling—so—so I think race was, at an early, kind of primal level, was associated with poverty” (P9, 4).
This same participant described the cumulative effect of observing racism in his environment: “I mean, I was aware of that (his own race) certainly from when I drive through the South, or when I start reading, and I start hearing my—the minister, and I start watching TV, and I’m watching the Civil Rights Movement unfold. I mean, I am intensely aware of being White at that point” (P1, 7).

In another narrative, a participant recounted as a student having a brief affair with a Black man, being subject to abusive language while in his company, and formulating the thought that, “I mean it sort of gave me a sense of, you know, wow. It's like, just because this person is—looks different” (P3, 2).

Several of participants felt, as youth, that racism was a phenomenon that happened elsewhere: “I remember like Martin Luther King being shot and stuff. So you know, it was in the context of a whole lot of drama in the rest of the world, but you know, I was—this is in Massachusetts, so it’s not the, you know, the Deep South or anything. Um, and it you know. It was basically it felt like you know, that's—that’s not here. You know, we’re—we're living in a place where everything's solved, where the problem is solved, and you know, there’s a—we’re—we're watching or hearing about something happening elsewhere” (P4, 7). Similarly, another participant reflected, “I was naively surprised and confused when Northerners would say or do something racist such as Boston council woman and anti-busing proponent Louse Day Hicks and seeing ghetto riots in Northern cities” (P8, 29).

*Racial stimuli: Feelings.* In response to racial stimuli, participants reported predominantly negative feelings, encompassing anger, fear, shock, shame, vulnerability, upset and confusion. Some participants (n=4) described confusion, or wondering about
the meaning of race related behaviors they observed. One recalled not understanding the racism she witnessed in coverage of civil rights: “I remember thinking that—that, um, I guess it was—there was a lot of confusion to me at that time. You know, why would—why would people treat each other that way, you know, when in reality, I mean, they shouldn’t have been treated—nobody should be treated differently at all. And, um, I—I just didn’t understand it, the mindset of how folks could be different—treated differently due to race” (P10, 4). Another participant was perplexed by his parents’ formality addressing the family housekeeper, who was Black. In another instance, the participant found her parents’ reaction to nearby race riots confusing: “I probably felt a little confused, like I didn’t understand what was—like why were people rioting? What you know? I mean I think I had a basic you know. Um, and just kind of wondering what was going on. I never really knew. I mean no one explained anything to me from what I remember” (P6, 2). One of the participants living overseas recalled a friend’s parents referring to an acquaintance from a North African country using a derogatory term, and thinking, “I had no idea why they would be saying that, but that stuck with me to this day that his parents were saying that... because he was a (foreign language term for another race).

Beyond confusion, participants expressed a mix of emotions regarding race. Several stated that they felt anger when witnessing civil rights violations covered in the media. In one case this was articulated as, “I don’t know if shame, I don’t think I felt so much shame as anger towards the status quo of things that should change politically. So it was more directed towards the administrative of how Lyndon Baines Johnson, uh, Richard Nixon. You know, it was like what’s they’re, they're the white guys that are making this all bad for the rest of the nation. Or the man” (P8, 14).
Another felt shock at the cliques and separations by race at his high school. Several stories that participants shared illustrate the mixture of feelings elicited by racial stimuli. The previously cited story of the participant witnessing extreme poverty in the South brought up feelings that the participant struggled to remember: “Feeling uh—uncomfortable. Um. I'm trying to put myself as a kid, back in the car, driving down there. What was that feeling? But I think feeling, uh, maybe concerned; um, maybe sad; um, maybe anxious; a little bit, you know, worried,” further reflecting that, “I think it has to have been a shattering kind of thing, shattering my view. I mean, what- how does this world co-exist?” (P9, 4;17).

Two stories stood out for their accounts of shame, triggered by witnessing or learning about racial discrimination. In one account, the participant took part in a classroom debate about the treatment of indigenous people in South Africa:

“And I just remember feeling very ashamed of um—of that White people could treat other people that way, and they could see themselves as being superior. Um, and I mean I think living in home country too, the Second World War was still—I mean it wasn’t close to me personally, but still I knew a lot of people. So, they had experienced how Jewish people had been persecuted too. So there’s—there, there was that sense of, you know, that superiority is a very dangerous thing to feel, and I remember thinking that that’s something that I never wanted to feel like. I never wanted to treat somebody that way that they were inferior to me. Um, so I just remember we had a debate about it, and I remember I spoke up and said to my teacher that I felt ashamed of being White.
And I have sense remembered some of the people were like—didn’t quite understand my feelings at the time” (P11, 1).

Another participant brought up shame as a reaction to witnessing children in the South being hosed during civil rights protests; in a more hesitant manner, he talks about shame relating to a more personal incident closer to home. In this incident, he and an African American friend were caught shoplifting paint for a model building project, but only his friend was arrested. This incident sparked insight about racial disparities. With some probing, this participant expressed his feelings:

“Interviewee: I think that that sort of s-suddenly made me realize uh, that there was a, [clears throat] that you have to be very careful if you’re African American in a White community. Um, and uh, and it played out really, I think uh, made me think about the police a lot more and, and how—their effect on race. And you know, why uh, in this town that I grew up in are there no African American police?

Interviewer: Mmhm. Do you remember your feelings at the time? You said you were 12.

Interviewee: I was 12 or thir—uh, possibly 13. Um, um, there was so much going on. I mean, it was 1967. And between the murder—but—uh—you know—Martin Luther King assassination and Bobby Kennedy, and—I mean, I think also, I mean. One of the —so—[clears throat] all of those, and you know, the Beatles, and this revolution is going to come and we’re going to change the world, um, uh, there was really a sense of—uh, and the war, the Vietnam war—um, really a sense that things were going through a fundamental shift in, and—I, of course,
being you know, as a t-t- 12-year old, 13-year-old, thinking that it’s all going to get b-better, and we’re going to get rid of racism. We’re going to get rid of sexism. We’re going to get rid of war and um, and democracy; we’re going to turn it into a Communist state. [Laughs] Um, I mean, that was a little bit later.

Interviewer: So that's what you—so that’s what you were thinking, so around this event with your friend in this—and, and what happened to him. Um, do you remember what you were feeling?

Interviewee: [Sighs] Mostly shame. Um, and uh, n-not so—I mean, the shame of around what my parents were going to think that I had s- tried to steal something. Not around so much the issue of his being African American (P8, 2-3).

Yet another participant remembered having the unusual experience of being a racial minority during a visit with his family to a Black church. This experience led him to consider what people of color might feel on a regular basis:

“I mean, I guess uh, my—I g- I g- uh, like a time where I felt vulnerable as a White person in, uh, suddenly realizing “I’m White” was in a church in predominantly Black neighborhood, um being with my family, being the only White people in the church. And um, feeling like, are they going to, are they going to react to us um, differently? And um, you know, it made me, it put me on the defensive, that suddenly, um, probably exactly what African Americans feel all the time being in a White society, on a you know, on a bus or in a church. Um, uh, and that was, so that was probably in 19, early 60s. That uh, that was an acute uh, moment of White awareness” (P8, 12-13).
For one participant, her earliest memory of race was the public harassment of a family member for his darker skin tone ("Mediterranean coloring") (P12, 1), an experience that heightened her early sense of justice, and elicited feelings of fear and anger. The same participant also shared a story about an incident at her religious institution, which infuriated her and impacted her to the extent that she did not return to temple:

“And the rabbi—this is something that really—I never went back to temple after this and I was so furious that he chose—his sermon—it’s not a sermon, but his talk was against marrying outside of the Jewish religion. Where the—the kids—I think it was the mother who was—yeah, the mother was Jewish. Because I remember his last name and I don’t remember anything—it was Latino surname. It must’ve been the mother was Jewish and the father was Latino. And here’s this poor kid at 13 and the talk the rabbi gives is about how you shouldn’t marry outside of your religion. And I was so furious, I told my mother, this is so hypocritical and so cruel I’m never going back to temple and I didn’t” (P12, 7).

There were, however, several exceptions to the accounts of difficult feelings surrounding race. One participant shared his earliest memory of race as thinking of himself as not racist: “Basically, you know, my first—my first memory of race was a very self-congratulatory one I guess in the sense that I would say, you know, "Am I a racist? No, I have you know, friends. I'm friends with (name)," and um, and that's very simple and easy and uncomplicated, and um, then I was one of the good guys for the next, [laugh], 20 to 30 years” (P4, 1-2).
In one story, a participant shared her feelings of pride in response to her parents’ act of advocacy for a Black family that had moved next door and was shunned by neighbors. Other participants described an attraction to difference and diversity. For the United States born participant who grew up in Europe, his bicultural experience influenced his approach to difference: “By no—no—no, uh, you know, virtue of mine, but just by virtue—because of my experience of growing up in multiple cultures, I tend to be, uh, not only open to, but biased towards the different. Like I like it if it's different. I'm interested in it” (P, 46). Another participant reported feeling “positive” and “curious” about racial difference in elementary school (P5, 1). Yet another participant shared a story of a class field trip to an urban area, her feelings of “joy” of being around people of different races, and how that experience fueled her future resolve to seek diversity in her life:

“*Interviewee:* I’ll never forget it. It’s, uh, I just—I think at that moment I realized that, you know, I—I—there are many other people in the world besides, um, you know, just—just White, so that—that trip I think stuck with me quite—quite a bit. *Interviewer:* Mm-hmm. Do you remember what you were thinking at the time? *Interviewee:* I remember thinking that, um, there’s just so much out there in—in the world that I don’t see, and I wish I could see. And I knew that when I got older, I didn’t—I didn’t want to stay in a small town that was of, uh, you know, primarily, you know [chuckles], one race, ethnicity, but to work in a place that was very diverse. Um, I made that decision a long time ago. I really loved it. Uh, I just, you know, I—it—I think it kind of always bothered me that I grew up within such a White neighborhood [chuckles] without any
diversity at all, and, um, I just—I really loved coming into the city and seeing all the, you know, diversity goin’ on in the city. So it was like a treasure. It was—I guess it was a treasure for me to, uh, be able to come in and, you know, you know, not just at the clubs, but just to come into the, you know, downtown area or something like that just to walk around, and, yeah, that was just a really good thing.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. And—and your feelings around that?

Interviewee: Um, I would say…joy to see other people, you know, in the world. It was—yeah, it was a very good, happy experience” (P10, 7-8).

Summary of Domain I and reflection on a narrative

During participants’ childhoods, with few exceptions, learning about race involved predominantly negative feelings and associations. Race was a subject not to be talked about, other than family members and religious leaders’ responding to overt racism, such as civil rights violations. Participants reported growing up in environments where White people existed in separate social and educational circles. The painful feelings expressed upon witnessing or learning of racism, whether first in the South, or then locally, reflected a response to the clash between the reality of racism and those values of justice and fairness taught at home and by community leaders such as clergy. This tension between the local reality and the ideals of equality that had been taught may have also contributed to participants’ adulation of figures like Martin Luther King and Gandhi. These men were repeatedly referred to by participants as heroic, and they seemed to represent ideals, in contrast to complicated and challenging issues closer to home.
The narrative about shoplifting is emblematic of an incident where a participant noticed racial difference, but focused more on the person of color’s difference, or different experience, than on how history and context were connected to the present situation. In this case, the present issues included the lack of African American residents in the town, or on the police force, or the race-based decisions made by adults that fell within the disciplinary domain of racist systems. For the participant, there was some awareness and wondering, in an ahistorical context. As with other participants who experienced shame and confusion, it appears that the educators and adults in their lives did not fill in the blanks with context and discussion.

*Domain II: Pre-adoptive racial experiences in adulthood*

In contrast to the first domain, in this domain the participants have more agency in their environments as adults, beginning with their college experiences. Influences on participants’ racial identity in this domain include their college experiences, their post-graduate relationships, and work environments. The ways participants learned about race, the different types of racial awareness they describe, and triggers for this awareness are covered in this domain — all pre-adoption.

*Learning about race in college.* For some participants (n=5), college was the first time they interacted with and had relationships with people of other races. College was identified as an environment unique in its capacity to bring groups of people together across class and race. In the words of one woman, “You know, in college, uh, there wasn't really as much of a sense of privilege because I was interacting with people more as you know, as peers, as teammates, as classmates, as you know, group members, whatever” (P3, 2-3). Another participant cited college as the place she began learning
about race, due to the way college had “preselected” or “prequalified” students from typically disparate groups (P5, 3).

Several participants recalled college conversations around race, gender and other political issues as learning experiences outside of the classroom. This included having a person of color educate the participant about an aspect of race: “I can’t think of an actual example, but like even having you know, um, Black friends. And, and, being like, someone will point out, ‘Well, that’s you know, that's not how it is,’ or, ‘You have to think about this other thing.’ And then you’re like, ‘Oh, yeah, I do’” (P5, 11-12).

Academic education was seen by participants as having an impact on their racial awareness, but in an abstract or intellectual way: “You know, I had become somewhat radicalized in college but it was very academic” (P12, 11). Another participant attended a progressive institution, still did not have close relationships with people of color, but shared that his college education contributed to a state where, “my consciousness about racism was sophisticated with a large political, economic and theological mental and emotional structure of theory and critical perspective” (P9, 78). This participant was able to name college as a place where, “I still lived in a fairly, you know, middle-class, upper middle-class, highly educated, uh, kind of privileged environment. I mean, I certainly was aware of the way the rest of the world was living, but I continued to live in it” (P9, 13).

A minority of participants (n=2), shared their views of racial affinity groups, which presented an opportunity for thought and discussion about the meaning of race and the existence of these groups. This was named as being around people who were different, acknowledging their concerns, and sorting out their mixed feelings about this
phenomenon: “That whole tension, I can remember thinking about it between like, “Oh, why do all the Black students sit together?” You know. That whole thing, is that a good thing? Is that a bad thing? All, you know, all of that. Um, those were very live conversations in the years that I went to college” (P5, 4). Another participant gave voice to his feelings about college affinity groups in terms of his views of identity:

“I think that, uh, my—my instinct was to—at the time was to—was kind of negative towards it (affinity groups) because it felt, um—it felt like it was emphasizing differences that we were trying to get away from. And it felt a little bit ghettoizing. Um, you know, since then, I've, I think, read and heard and understood things that make me understand why it made sense and why there are good reasons for those things. But at the time, I didn't like it because it felt like, um—I think I need—I need to explain. I think because of my childhood growing up in another country, um, with a different language and a different culture, all of which were adopted in the sense—in the more broad sense of adopted, um, I tend to think of identity as much more fluid than most people and much more constructed… So, um, uh, as a result—because of that, I think, I always felt like what—like, we don't want to emphasize. Why—why would we want to emphasize, like, the way we look or our biological makeup as being so important part of our identity? Of course it is to some extent, but I think at some level, I felt like, um, part of being human is aspiring to transcend those things. Part of being civilized is being—is transcending those things. In the same way that we all have the instinct to—to, you know, vi- violence and theft and taking what I want when
I want it, um, but we don't do those things because that's part of being human and civilized” (P7, 39).

*Learning about race through relationships post-college: work and elsewhere.*

Interracial relationships were instrumental in participants’ racial identity development. For some participants, interracial relationships in their families of origins (n=4), specifically siblings dating or marrying interracially, were cited as learning experiences by way of exposure to and time spent with people of other races. For one participant, her multiracial extended family was noted as influential in her later decision to adopt transracially: “So that's *(multiracial extended family)* family for me. That's part of the reason that we—when we were looking to adopt, we wanted to find a sibling group and we wanted to find—and we were interested in kids of color ’cause that's sort of like, that was the context for me for what a family was” (P3, 1).

One participant’s hearing about and observing friends of color being subject to racial microaggressions was a “frustrating” experience (P11, 10). Through work, this participant befriended people of other races. She described the process of coming from another country to the United States and at first having difficulty understanding the reported discrimination – incidents such as racial profiling, difficulty getting into clubs, being seen as an intruder in one’s own apartment building. “It was just something that was just eye opening for me to realize that, that people were treated this way, that they were not able to have equal access as I was…I think it made me understand that um..that my experience was very different from my friends, and the way I’m approached by other people. And it’s simple things, like just crossing the road that cars will stop for me where
they may not stop for my friend. That um, I just – I can’t understand how people can just use that (race) as their, as their first, um filter” (P11, 2;10).

For several participants, pre adoption work provided an environment where they learned about racism and White privilege. One participant observed that, “My experiences with race and understanding of white skin privilege came from really working in this sort of grassroots organization (progressive organizations, working with people of color)” (P12, 11). The same participant recalled being given positions for reasons that she attributed to racial preference:

“I do remember there were times where um, in job situations where I was really aware that I got a particular job that I should not have gotten because of my privilege. That happened when I was in college and I actually had exclusive conversations about it. I was hired to be a Latin American student advisor and I, you know, someone talked to me about you shouldn’t have hired for this. This should’ve been a Latino person. And then I was hired by non-profit organization to do this work with Native American preschools - because I have a lot of cross-cultural experience. Um, and I was at this um, cultural competence conference. And um, very um, very impressed with a Native woman who was our facilitator. And had a lot of conversations with—like that as a—you know, what is my responsibility? I’m offered this job. This should be a job that a Native person has. And there was all sorts of—I felt all sorts of racism in non-profit organization. All sorts of racist assumptions going on with this particular program and how I advocate for what I felt. And, you know, at what point do I
say I shouldn’t have this job. So is that something to do. So I—you know, those are things that remember—” (P12, 3-4).

Similarly, for this same participant, a workplace experience of taking a summer job, not telling the employer or fellow workers, people of color, that she would be leaving for college at the end of the summer, created a rupture in a friendship and heightened the participant’s awareness of class and race privilege: “I just began to cross a lot of lines with racial lines and class lines and I was always aware that I had this privilege because now I’m going back to this college” (P12, 10). When probed about feelings, the participant shared, “I felt dishonest but I, you know, with the employer but I didn’t so much care about that. it was this one friend of mine who was Puerto Rican who I couldn’t tell but I felt—yeah, I felt like I wasn’t being—you know, I hadn’t been real about who I was” (P12, 12).

Another participant shared a story about working in a predominantly Black neighborhood while in her 20s, at a business owned by a collective of White women, and her learning about race privilege through the conversations that took place when the collective sought to integrate:

“We would have these talks with the women at (workplace), and you know, you know, racism and you know, ‘We’re not going talk about racism to you. You guys, you know, you don’t really—you can’t understand it. We’re not here to teach you about racism. You guys…’ You know there was a lot of tension, [laugh], a lot of talking about you’re White, you can walk around, and I guess that’s the first time I really ever thought about it was working at (workplace), and trying to integrate (workplace), and trying to have these discussions with African-
American women about racism versus White privilege, and you know, what that meant, and you know, thinking about it, and kind of seeing it, oh, okay, I really do have White privilege when I walk in places, versus you don’t know what it’s like to be Black, and walk into a place, and be followed, and you know, be—you know, people are suspicious about you, or you know, people don’t trust you. You’re White. You walk in, and—and people trust you. It brought new level of awareness to me. I mean probably I had sensed it on some level, but it’s not something I had in my frontal lobe, thinking about it, processing it, so I think that did bring a new level of awareness, and kind of noticing when I went places” (P6, 14).

For one participant, seeing racial disparities in health and labor through his work resulted in his developing a commitment towards social justice through work related advocacy:

“I was involved in a fight that was more having to do with—with economic issues and poverty. I had been doing chaplaincy work in, um—at (urban) Hospital and had become intensely aware of how many of the people in (urban) Hospital were Black. It was where more of the poor people, and many of the people—I was working in a cancer ward with people who were dying, and about half of the people that I was visiting were Black or Hispanic, and many of them were cleaning people. They did cleaning in the city, and it was stunning to me, and it's why I didn't become a minister, because I felt that work itself was treated so differently. There were some kinds of work people thought was all sacred and, you know, we should get ordained and get blessings and hands laid on and all this
kind of thing, and yet even in our church, the person who was the sexton— basically, the janitor—and the person who was the church administrator were treated fundamentally differently—different pay rates, different, uh, kinds of, uh, constructs around them. You know, there's no ordination for the—for the sexton. In my view, there should be. I see—I see no difference between the importance of cleaning the toilets or giving the sermon on Sunday. That was my fight” (P9, 19).

States of racial awareness. Participants reported a variety of levels of racial awareness pre-adoption as adults. A minority (n=2) stated that it was inaccurate to suggest a dichotomy of awareness pre- and post-adoption, but rather that they experienced racial awareness more on a continuum over their lifetime. It should be noted that these same two participants later in the interview process did acknowledge a shift in the ways that they thought about race post-adoption.

Several participants stated that they had a “naïve” or “embarrassing” lack of awareness before adopting (P1, 1; P7, 33). One participant who grew up overseas described herself as having a “historical” view of race that led her to be “colorblind” (P11, 3; 13). She shared a story of having her racial awareness raised once in the United States by way of her employer’s warning about a predominantly Black neighborhood:

“I always heard that the U.S. is a melting pot. And then coming here, you know, you see how um, the sections of (city) at different areas were split up into different neighborhoods. And um I was living in ah, (suburb) at the time on the red line, at the end of the red line, the last stop before (predominantly Black neighborhood). And sometimes I would take the train home late at night and my
host mother I was, I was living with would be um, would get upset with me because we were so close to (predominantly Black neighborhood), and it was still, it was a – a hard area and ah, she was worried for my safety. And I just couldn’t understand why, why she was so worried, you know, um, and how one stop on the train could be completely different neighborhood. Um, so, so that, the melting pot didn’t really exist and the, the one, the melting pot that I had in my head just didn’t exist in (city)” (P11, 3).

For two others, pre-adoption racial awareness was described as not being at the forefront of their thoughts, and that it was easy to forget about one’s own race as a White person: “I mean, it’s one of those things. You just slip in and out of it. I mean, especially in being the dominant race, I think it’s easy to forget” (P5, 10). Several other participants shared that they lived in diverse neighborhoods before adopting, worked with people of color, and felt comfortable, or that race was “no big deal” (P3, 14).

Awareness: Triggers for awareness. As the case in the first domain, the most common trigger for awareness of a participant’s own race in adulthood was the presence of a person of color, or the experience of being in a racially or ethnically diverse environment. All of the participants reported situations where their awareness of Whiteness was heightened in such situations. For one participant whose partner’s family is from a Eurasian country, whose population is considered White but at times racially ambiguous, she felt her Whiteness most acutely: “When I was at my husband’s church, um, which is an (Eurasian country) church and almost 99 percent of everybody there is (husband’s ethnicity). Um, I was not, and I really felt kind of alone in this sea of, um, this whole different world where it was different—I felt very left out” (P10, 5). Others
also reported specific scenarios of heightened awareness, for example being in the company of multiracial extended family members in public, and getting “funny looks” (P3, 3), or moving between predominantly White neighborhoods and mixed race or predominantly non-White neighborhoods.

For some participants, it was difficult to think of stories about their Whiteness without talking about the people of color they knew: “I’m not coming up with much, I guess” (P3, 14). As one woman stated, “I’d say it’s (awareness of own race) probably most often in the—or primarily in the context of other—you know, so not as White among White people, but just when race would come up because some person of color was in the story or the environment” (P2, 8). This theme was echoed by other participants, one of whom reflected, “I mean, I think, you know, the experiences (of awareness of own race) really get more intense later, when—when I'm living in (urban neighborhood), for example. Then I had a lot of experiences and a lot of feelings. Yeah, especially when I started living in the city” (P9, 13).

Just as the workplace was a catalyst for learning about privilege for some participants, work also served as a place that triggered awareness of race in a more general sense. For one participant in a social service field, the diversity of the work environment made her reflect on her role there as a White person: “When you’re interacting with such diverse groups, you’re very aware of how you’re —and I, how you're being perceived. I mean think that that is like, “Oh, I’m doing you know, social work, and I’m telling this person whatever. Well, how are they hearing that coming from me, you know?” (P5, 12). Other participants noticed the homogeneity of their work places: “We would have CEOs and ah, ah senior executives um, um, leaders of high tech
companies in the New England area come, and the majority of them are, are White. And I remember we were doing one program where um, the senior VP was an African American man, and it was just so refreshing to see that it’s not just this old boys’ network; they are, you know, they’re all taking care of themselves” (P11, 4). Several participants noticed that diversity in their workplaces included Asian Americans, but not Black or Latino people, and that this lack of diversity was not congruent with their or their company’s values:

“In terms of culture and politics, it's, like, this very kind of ultraliberal company, um, but in terms of who actually works there, uh, especially among the analysts, uh, very White. You know, there was—I remember there was one guy of Indian descent, um, and he was, um—he sort of stood out for being so—because it was so unusual. And there was one woman of, uh, Chinese descent, of Asian descent, but otherwise very homogeneous. And I remember just feeling like that was a little bit of a—it was a little odd, like, um, it felt sort of unfortunate, like it didn't feel like it jibed with our culture of who we hoped to be” (P7, 13).

*Responses to racial stimuli: general.* Participants expressed a variety of reactions to racial stimuli in their adult pre-adoptive environments. For about half of the participants, these responses were positive: for some participants, there was a feeling of comfort with extended family members who were of a different race through dating or intermarriage; for others, there was a sense of ease and enjoyment of being in diverse work environments. The majority of stories shared about race-related experiences during adulthood pre-adoption, however, involved some degree of discomfort or challenge.
For the participant at the workplace that was undergoing integration, an incident of theft sparked a disagreement between the participant and another White woman:

“I think everyone had different expectations about what the collective should be, and how we should function, and how we can bring the two worlds together, so I worked there for a couple of years, and I remember starting that process of bringing people in from the neighborhood, and, you know, we would have kids come help, and I became very friendly with one kid, and, you know, she ended up stealing from the bakery, and one of the collective members got really, really upset, and you know, it was just—it was really hard. I tried to explain to someone who is like so rigid that you know, I mean, if it’s there, and she’s so underprivileged, and you know, of course it’s going to be very tempting to take money when you see, you know, when you watch TV, so just try—trying to have those discussions and meeting dead ends, and um, that’s just one little example” (P6, 10).

In other cases, a participant might have witnessed a racial microaggression, and not known how to respond:

“In college, we had a—um, I was living in a dormitory, and um, there weren’t all that many people of color in this dormitory, but there were a few, but one in particular had been called ‘oreo,’ you know. And um, and that was outrageous to me. And um, I don’t remember that I actually did anything about it. I may have said something to people around me, but never to the guy, um unfortunately, um but that’s one instance I can remember. I found it outrageous. I—I—I had, I
remember having a sen—an overwhelming sense of needing to do something about it. But having difficulty with doing that” (P2, 8-9).

Later in the interview this participant, after adopting, found herself in situations where she pushed through racial discomfort to advocate or question racial microaggressions.

One participant who described two people of color in her pre-adoption life as “scary” and “intimidating,” but purposefully took on a role mentoring a child of color from a low income family in order to “get out of my comfort zone cause I definitely needed to you know, shake things up a little it” (P3, 4; 33; 4). Another participant took on an advocacy role with an African American community leader/clergy in a self-described complicated situation that resulted in tension and the relationship ending “in a really ugly way.” The participant’s described his views of race and poverty as becoming more “nuanced” through this experience (P9, 19).

For another participant, there was a similar theme of recalling race-related incidents that triggered one’s own awareness as being tension-rife. In this case, the participant told two stories of interactions with African American people that brought up feelings of discomfort, but could not be articulated as related to race other than the fact that they involved a person of color. In the first story, the participant remembered a difficult email exchange with a coworker following 9/11 which reflected a clash of values and resulted in her feeling angry, and limited interaction with this person:

*Interviewee:* “I think that was just one of those times where I became very aware of how my background and my views were very different than hers. Um, and it was at the point where we couldn’t really find some kind of common ground in all this.”
Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Do you remember how it was related to race or—for her or for you?

Interviewee: It ah, it was, it was—I’m trying to think—it was something [sigh]. I can’t really remember” (P11, 7).

Similarly, the same participant recalled haggling at a yard sale with a group of African American buyers:

“They were very aggressive in their haggling, and um, well kind of attacking me, and I, I was very stunned by this because I, I was trying to negotiate but they were just very aggressive in the way that they were trying to barter with me.

And had, you know, things had prices on them but it was with reason, and these women were just going like low-ball, and it was just one of those like, you know, let’s try to find some kind of common ground, you know? I’m not trying to be rude or anything here, so but it was just very like wow! Okay, um.

Interviewer: And do you remember your thoughts at the time?

Interviewee: I, I felt um, almost like they were trying to shame me or something.

It was um; it was um, um, it was a humbling experience. I think it was really like, okay, all right, you know? Um, I’m trying to think.

Interviewer: Like shaming because of difference, or how do you mean?

Interviewee: It seemed that I was an easy target or something that, you know, that they could, they could get me.

Interviewer: Because of race?

Interviewee: Yeah, right. Yeah.
Interviewer: Mm-hmm. And how did you—so how did you deal with it, in that situation?

Interviewee: I, I let them—I think I let them get their price because it was one of those like, okay, you know?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: We get to sell something at least, you know, and you get what you want obviously. So, but it was ah, yeah it was very, very uh, very tough situation yeah” (P11, 8-9).

In both of these stories, the participant attempts to find “common ground” and feels frustrated. Finding common ground could be a metaphor for the connections and disconnections related to race and racial awareness throughout participants’ stories.

Responses to racial stimuli: minority experiences. In situations where participants experienced being a racial minority, a common theme was feeling conscious of their own race in a way that was not familiar or usual for them. Responses to these situations range from philosophical musing about being an outsider, to removing oneself from the situation, to experiencing an empathy that they later relate to their child’s experiences.

For the participant who felt alone in and shunned by her husband’s community, her response feeling anger, and resolving not to return to that religious institution. One participant recalled being a minority in a college course setting, and related this experience later, as an adoptive parent, to how her children might feel:

“A time that I felt so visible was I took a class in college on Native American studies and I was the only White kid in the class too. I walked into the class and I sat in the back row. The teacher’s first sentence was, ‘Have you ever noticed any
other Native American students in your classes?’ Everyone in the class who was Native American or of color kind of shook their head no and he goes, ‘Look in the back row. That’s where all the minorities sit.’ And everyone turned around and there I was sitting in the back row, the minority in the class. That’s like my daughters must always feel like. I always tell them, I say, ‘You have to make yourself sit in the front. You have to show the teachers that you’re engaged’” (P1, 6).

Other participants recalled travelling outside of the United States, being a racial and linguistic minority, and having that experience foster empathy for others with minority status. As one participant stated:

“I would say one of the most visceral experiences I had was the first time I took a business trip to Tokyo and it was the—and upon arrival, I realized that it was the first time in my life that I had been in a place where I was the racial minority, and I had never thought of myself as the majority before. At least intellectually, I would have known it if you had asked me, but I had never felt it. But it was the first time I had been in a place where I looked all around me and everybody looked of a different race. And I was a little uncomfortable with that because it's—I think of it as a continuum, but in that case, it is a visceral experience that has to do with the way you're brought up and the way—the way you experience it. So that was a strong experience for me. Um— I thought of it as—I guess I thought—my thought—it was not so much a thought or a feeling of, wow, this is what it's like, or this is a bit of what it's like. I've never been able to feel this before. We can read all the books, take the seminars and be parts of the
discussions. You can't actually feel it until you're in that situation. Um, so—and sometimes to this day, I think about that with our kids, that it's—I'm glad that I had that experience, um, because it helps me just to have an inkling of what it must be like for them almost every day” (P7, 11-12).

For one participant, stories of his own racial awareness drew on experiences where he put himself in racially diverse environments. In the first story, he was in a “pretty tough part of town,” at a bus stop, and encountered a Black couple having a physical altercation:

“I had this sort of internal dialogue, and like you know, what do you do in a situation like this? I mean, you know, one ought to intervene, but um, you know, I—I uh, you know. I—I guess I kind of knew that it was—I—I had a feeling that it was not fated to go well, but at the same time, I felt you can't—you can't not doing anything, so after a few seconds of internal dialogue, I jumped in and tried to stop it.

And they both turned on me. I mean, they both turned and looked at me and said basically like, you know, "What the fuck you doing? You know, you—you have no business here. This is not your world." Um, and um, you know, the—the look of mm, I mean, contempt is not the right word, but basically like almost disbelief like you’re—you’re—you don't belong here. You're on the other side of—of the wall, and you should be—should have stayed on that side of the wall. Um, I still remember, uh, and—and of course the fact that it came from both of them was kind of the—the most memorable aspect. So that's uh, I—I—that’s not exactly a racial thing. I mean, it wasn't—I mean, it—it's just very clear that I was uh, you
know, intended to be a—a uh, you know, that I was living in a—in a—I was intended to stay on my side of—of the—of the compartment” (P4, 2-3).

Though the participant says that this incident was “not exactly a racial thing,” he expresses feeling that a boundary was crossed that related to race. The same participant found himself, on another occasion, walking in a Black neighborhood, and being told by a resident that he should leave before sundown. He found that response “laughable” (P4, 4). In what was this participant’s most detailed story, he describes another experience as a racial minority, again, initiated by his actions, and willingness to be in a situation where he was a racial minority. This story describes his attempt to participate in pickup basketball games on a public court in a city:

“Interviewee: So I used to play in a lot of you know—in—in city you may not know um, or may, but at least in those days the—there's a—a set of courts down by (public park), which is where like the big game was. You know, you sort of if you were—if you wanted to play against the—the good guys, you went down to (public park). So I went down and played at (public park) a few times, and what I learned was that I could play with those guys, but they would not give me the ball, and I'm talking about most of them were Black. Um, and—and it was—it was very clear. I mean, again, it's not like overtly racist behavior. Nobody ever said, "Don't give the White guy the ball." It was just sort of the um, un—unstated assumption that you know, that I could play.

I mean, I could clearly play defense, and but it was my job was to pay defense, get a few rebounds and get the ball to somebody who was going to score. Um, and if, you know, typically, very commonly, there would be like one White
guy in each team, and obviously I’d be—they'd put the White guys to guarding each other. Um, but basically as soon as I got the ball everybody else would be like, "Hey give me the ball." You know, like, "What are you doin'?" let you know, if I was to do something else, you know. I'm not saying people would get uh, really angry about it, but there'd be sort of a sense of what—what are you doing? You’re not—that—that's not your role. You're not supposed to be taking it to the basket. You're supposed to be getting the rebound and giving it to me… Mostly I—I tried to—to show that I could play, but I—I guess the—the true answer is that after a while uh, you know, I—I—I didn't think that I was going to be—um, that I could get proper respect for what I could do, and I didn't feel like I could—I was great enough that I could you know, knock everybody else outta my path and show them that I was in fact you know, the dominant force, and they should be giving me the ball. So like that wasn't going to happen. So at—at some point it just became—like it was more comfortable to play somewhere else because um, like I—I was treated like a—like a regular, and they would let me shoot and you know, stuff like that. So I mean, there's no sense of tremendous you know, anger but just a certain—

Interviewer: Do you remember what you were feeling?

Interviewee: Well, it's a—it’s—it’s very much what I said about the other things you know, when I brought up the anecdote about the (religious) Community Center. You just sort of feel like you know, they don't need me.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.
Interviewee: They wouldn't mind or notice if I went somewhere else. Um, you know, it's more like a little bit of not even discomfort as much as lack of comfort. You know, you're not—you're not getting all—all the things you, you know. I mean, if you're going to put on your shorts, and go down and get sweaty and take the risk of breaking your leg or something, you know, you want to get something in return.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And what you want in return is camaraderie and fun and respect, and to make some good plays and you know, feel like this was—this was fun. Um, you know, it just—you know, as a plant seeks the sun, you know, I sought the places where I felt more—uh, you know, where it worked better” (P4, 13-15).

In this last story, the participant is limited in his ability to participate in the games, based on race; however, he is able to change locations to play somewhere else, where the racial makeup of the players is different, the unspoken rules of the game may be fairer towards him, and he would “get something in return.”

Minority experiences for the participants pre-adoption were temporary; while they felt discomfort, they were able to move on or remove themselves from the situation. In the next domain, which includes adoptive parenting experiences, participants’ race mobility is affected to some degree by virtue of having children of color. The next domain examines racial experiences in that context – the realm of parenting.

Summary of Domain II and reflection on a narrative

As adults, and before parenting a child of color, participants began to have more interracial contact within the college environment. For most participants, these racial
experiences were more intellectual than personal, and college served as a relatively emotionally safe venue for dialogues and structured interaction in classrooms or on teams, for example. Participants found themselves more challenged in terms of race with relationships in the work environment and, in some cases, in other community interactions, where racial disparities became more evident. Racism was acknowledged, but with few exceptions, not actively challenged or confronted.

Before the narrative about playing pickup basketball with Black men, the participant had shared previous stories about being in areas with racial diversity and later contemplated that transracial adoption was part of seeking difference in his life. In this narrative, however, he found himself excluded from full membership in the group, and unable to participate or use his skills the way he would have liked. His minority experience was an analogy for what racial minorities experience in the United States. The narrative is told as a memory of race, and of awareness of Whiteness, with him concluding that he was not uncomfortable, yet sought a different place to play that allowed him to be more fully who he was, and how he saw himself as a skilled basketball player. While this story represents the participant’s awareness of his own race, and his interpretation of how the Black men playing ball saw him and his role as a White man, the story ends with his departure to other basketball courts. His sharing of this experience as a racial minority facing discrimination does involve reflection about racial minority populations’ experiences on a broader scale – the experiences of those who do not have the option to change locales when seeking more equitable experiences. Perhaps transracial adoption served as a way of seeking difference that felt more manageable, at
least initially – with a parent seemingly having more agency or control with a child in contrast to adult peers.

Domain III: Parenting: racial awareness and perspectives on privilege

The third domain covers the role of race in the adoption process, participants’ racial awareness as parents, and their increased recognition of White racial privilege. Most participants spent significant portions of the interview sharing stories about their children’s race related experiences, even when the interview questions were intended to elicit their views about their own experiences with race. Thus, in this domain, quotes and stories are selected from those sections that represent how parents’ observations of their children reflects on their own identity development, rather than representing topics like the children’s racial identity development and relationship with their birth culture.

Race and adoption decisions. Half of the participants cited the desire to fill a need as influential in their decision to adopt. This included perceiving a need in another country due to the conditions of poverty and orphaned children, or seeing a need in the domestic foster care system, with children waiting for homes. In one case, a parent attended an event titled the “Black Child Festival,” where potential adoptees were present to meet with potential adoptive parents; this scene and the anticipating children were described by the participant as one which “just breaks your heart” (P3, 10). Several parents contrasted their decision to adopt a child of color with White adoptive parents who sought a child who resembled them racially:

“I'm sure you know all this stuff, but you know, that most people that adopt are looking for infants. They want infants that look like them. They'll go to Romania or somewhere to find that um, and—and pay money, and meanwhile, there's a lot
of kids who are in the state system, and um, who are older kids, and in many cases, they're older kids because they've actually been taken from their um, parent or parents for whatever reason, or the parents have died or some such thing. Um, so you know — so she (wife) had learned—had learned something about that, and her heart kind of went out to um, all these kids trapped in an environment like that, and so she felt strongly that we should um, adopt uh, somebody outta the state system” (P4, 9-10).

Similarly, another participant stated, “I am aware of many families—we've met some through the agency—who wanted to go internationally, but they specifically wanted to go to a country like Russia because they wanted White kids” (P7, 9). All participants adopting domestically were informed that if they did not request a White child, they would most likely get a child of color – African American, Latino, or mixed race. “So we put our name into (adoption agency). Um, and they came to us and said, ‘You know, you didn’t check ‘White’ as your preference. We just want you to be clear that if you don’t check White, you’re mm-probably not going to get a White child.’ And we’d said, ‘That’s fine.’ Um, didn’t, doesn’t—you know, we were much more sort of concerned about—I mean, we were thinking about the the n-need, filling a need, not, not trying to fulfill an agenda” (P8, 7-8). For one participant, transracial adoption from the chosen country was a means of making amends for a professional injustice this participant had witnessed perpetrated on this population in the past, and her perception of this population as vulnerable.

The most common reasons other than need that were cited for adopting a child of color included the following: not being concerned about race, but with ease of adoption
and a shorter timeline (n=5). Other participants recalled wanting a cultural and linguistic connection to a region the parent had lived or traveled in, or a language a partner spoke, wanting a connection to existing multiracial extended family members, knowing community members who had adopted from that region, wanting “to forge a more interesting uh, or more flavorful uh, ethnic identity or—or hybrid identity” (P4, 12), and lastly, viewing the visibility of transracial adoption was seen as a way to avoid unwanted questions, complications, and secrecy about the adoption.

*Adoption concerns regarding race.* Over half the participants expressed awareness of and concern about racial dynamics in the adoption system. One participant recognized that the domestic adoption system was racially “fraught,” noting the “political and social realities in the adoption system. There’re a lot of Black kids in the United States that need to be adopted. Now would the Black community feel about us adopting White kids?” (P9, 25). Another participant stated that her eyes were “abruptly opened” by the differential costs of infant adoptees by race in the United States: “So just like the price scales and—ugh, it just was crazy, and that—you know, the talking about biracial children versus full Black children and Asian children. Or it was horrifying to us the way this was all discussed. And we, we just remained—we said we’re just going to be open. We’re not placing any restrictions on this. But we were really pretty unpleasantly surprised by the nature of it” (P2, 5).

For two of the seven parents adopting internationally, concerns were cited regarding possible exploitative practices, such as the forced removal of children from families for profit, and the potential of exploitation of less resourced areas. As one participant shared, “It (feelings about race during the adoption process) was also mixed
up with a lot of feelings about, again, the North/South. Like the power— you know, that privilege of adopting from this country. You know, that—it was wrapped up in class; it was wrapped up in a lot of things” (P12, 21). For this participant, concerns about exploitation were assuaged by a friend who also adopted internationally and told her to “have faith,” and by her getting to know and trust the local facilitator who worked with her in her child’s birth country (P12, 51).

**Guidance and hindsight regarding race.** Most participants (n=9) received guidance of some kind on transracial adoption from their adoption agency. Some (n=4) cited social workers’ input on transracial adoption as memorable and helpful. This included the agency workers putting them in touch with other families who adopted from the same country. For others the readings provided were helpful, with one participant citing Peggy McIntosh (1988) as “super eye-opening” (P2, 6), combined with classes that had an impact: “we started realizing how naïve we were uh, in getting into it, ‘cause they gave us a whole lot of things to read and to you know just get—start learning, um, ‘cause I would say we’re probably in the—the, the world of—you know um, how is it—like not seeing color, you know, like being in that—everyone’s the same, not seeing color realm—and uh we’ve learned that pretty quick that that was not going to fly [laughter] raising a child of color” (P2, 6).

Three other participants who adopted domestically recalled attending classes where they listened to speakers, watched videos, and participated in discussions. In one case, parents heard testimonials of adoptees: “Some of those were um, stories that you, uh, they present about what it’s like to be not uh, not feel like you’re part of a family. Um, some of those were stories about uh, African American kids, or people who don’t
see their skin color as the same as their parents” (P8, 10). During a “giving and receiving ceremony” in the birth country, one participant recalled advice that impacted her to the extent that she started a program for transracial adoptees upon returning home: “They said to us, um, ‘Don’t ever—ever let your son forget where he’s from and where he was born.’ I will never forget that. And—and I said, ‘No, I won’t,’ um, and so I connected with the, um, (birth country) community here, um, and actually started the Big Sibling program at (workplace) because of that” (P10, 10).

Four participants engaged in readings on transracial adoption on their own. One parent anticipated that challenges would arise about transracial adoption. More parents (n=4), in hindsight reflected that they were naïve about race at the time of adoption, and had not anticipated how the challenges that would arise. One parent said she wished there had been training to prepare her to talk about race with her child, remembering her child’s remarking at an early age that she wished she had skin the color of her mother’s, and being unsure how to respond. Several noted that reading about race and adoption was not enough to prepare them for the experience: “I mean we read some books but it’s not quite the same, reading the books until you are in the thick of things” (P11, 14). Two participants used the word ‘naïve’ to describe themselves at the time of adoption, regarding race. In one case, a parent noted:

“White people see positive role models at every turn of the magazine page, every click of the remote, in every classroom, and on every radio show. Amazing White people are everywhere talking about how amazing we are. I would tell my younger self that I could not give my Black daughter a positive racial identity because I am not Black, will never experience being Black and can now only
peripherally understand what it is like to be Black in this color obsessed country” (P6, 42).

Several parents were critical of their own lack of follow up to guidance concerning race, in particular having people of color in their family’s lives: “No (guidance) other than trying to stay connected to people of color. You know. I think—uh, which I don’t think we’ve done the best job of” (P3, 13).

Triggers for racial awareness. For all participants, the visibility of racial difference in their families resulted in increased moments of racial awareness. In public, as one parent stated, “I mean I felt—uh, I was very conscious of the fact that I was White and you know, and conscious of the fact that my child is not” (P3, 22). Half the participants reported being questioned about their maternity or paternity. Several talked about fielding questions from other children questioning their relationship to their child. These questions were attributed to childhood curiosity, and it was noted that adults likely had similar questions that went unvoiced. Several participants described receiving double takes and stares from adults.

Reactions to the public attention were varied. Several participants expressed concern about being seen in public as someone who might be abducting their child, or being seen as a perpetrator in relationship to their child. Several others recounted intrusive questions. One parent described recognizing that her family was different from the typical family, yet wanting to be treated the same as others. Another described his wish to respond to people’s stares that he perceived as hostile, but not doing so out of the desire to protect his child. Protecting one’s children was a concern for several participants. After receiving a negative comment traveling out of state, one parent stated,
“We learned on that trip that there were definite threats out there, and how people perceived us” (P2, 11).

A minority of participants (n=2) had more positive feelings about the increased attention. One father described transracial adoption as “the new norm” in his community, and enjoyed taking his child to work to “show off a little” as he did with his grandchildren (P8, 16). Another “got a kick out of” people noticing the racial difference in his family, and acknowledged that he would have a similar reaction upon seeing a multiracial family: “I didn’t feel any animosity toward us at all. It wasn’t that at all because it sort of went like – I began to notice that I might do the same thing” (P9, 34).

Another factor influencing racial awareness for participants was the experience of observing their children’s experiences with race and racial identity development. These observations included participants noticing the following: children’s racial affinity seeking; children’s awareness of racial difference between themselves and their parents; children’s racially diverse friendship groups; children’s relationship with their birth race or country changing over time, most commonly from rejection or ambivalence to increased interest and identification; and children’s being influenced by racial stereotypes and racism.

In terms of how these observations affected the participants’ understanding of their own racial identity, it was rare for a parent to make an explicit connection. The most common connection made was parents’ recognition of the child’s minority experience in contrast to the parent’s experience of being majority by default. Picking up her child from an affinity group event, one participant notes, “It’s moments like those that—most of the time I forget that we're different. At home and everything, they're my daughters and
that's that, but it's times like that that it comes home that we really are different and she is going to have very different experiences than I had growing up” (P1, 6). The contrast of the child’s experience affected the parent’s perspective, with several parents noticing diversity as a critical part of their own environment only post-adoption. As one parent stated, her child’s pointing out people who look like him reflected a phenomenon previously not as prominent in her own environment: “They might bring it (race) up, usually like, ‘Oh, that is like me. That’s not like me. That is like.” Usually more, “It is like me,” because that’s more remarkable in our environment” (P5, 26). One participant directly contrasted his child’s experience of nodding to other Black people in public, to his own experience, which was absent of that sort of explicit acknowledgement of racial solidarity:

“I mean, you grow up Black, you’re like, you know you're Black every day of your life. You grow up and you're White in a White area. You know, I didn't like other people because they were White. It didn't ever cross my mind. I mean, the notion that there's like—I mean, my son is Black. If he's in a White area, and he sees another Black guy, they're going to sort of you know, exchange glances and sort of feel instantly like you know, we have a little—you know, we’re going to have to watch each other's backs or something like that, but—but when you live in a place where everybody else is White, you know, I—I mean, I liked some people. I hated other people. The idea that—that that’s my likes and dislikes had any—I don’t know. It's just they were completely orthogonal concepts from race, so I—it just—as a—as an aspect of my daily life, it just was a nonstarter in my early experiences” (P4, 7-8).
Lastly, one participant observed that she and her partner’s being White served as a buffer protecting their children from potential discrimination: “If we’re traveling together as a family, it’s a different thing, because we would be the White parents with those kids, so they must be fine. I don’t know, whatever. But like if they were by themselves, or they were, I don’t know. I can expect it. I can imagine that it’s, could potentially be a different thing” (P5, 23).

Participants’ extended families’ reactions to participants’ adoptions were mixed, with negative reactions bringing awareness closer to home for participants. Some (n=4) participants reported extended families as being positive and supportive, in one case funding the expense of the adoption, and in another accompanying the participant to the birth country. Half of the participants reported some member or members of their extended family as engaging in exclusionary behavior or hurtful statements based on their child’s race. Two participants reported mixed reactions, and two reported a gradual transition to acceptance. As discussed later in this chapter in the next domain, families’ responses in some cases altered family relationships. Participants found themselves educating family members about their racial microaggressions, disagreeing with family members about racial issues, and trying to make sense of the complexity of having a loved one exhibit behavior that was seemingly contradictory or at odds with values and expectations.

There were several other types of experiences that participants attributed to increased racial awareness post-adoption. One was noticing the racial dynamics and discrimination in schools, particularly for parents of Black children. One participant whose child was adopted from Asia became aware of the lack of attention to Asian
Americans when the school focused on racial issues, and the lack of diversity among school faculty in general. For several parents of Black children, racial disparities in treatment, disproportionate numbers of Black students in non-honors classes, and the perceived lack of involvement of Black parents stood out.

For many participants, awareness of racial stereotypes and representation of race in media were cited as increasing post-adoption (n=8), including underrepresentation of Asian Americans, and negative stereotyping of all people of color. Again, as with participants observing their children’s navigating racial identity, parents did not often make an explicit connection to their own racial identity. The idea that their children’s experience of race was different from their own as White people was implicit, and unspoken, with one exception, where a participant shared that his own critical observation of racism in the media and exposure to other races and religions beyond stereotypes helped him gain self-awareness related to race:

“Certainly media played into all of this and uh, stigmatized—um, and again, made me—but also, in Judaism, made me realize that, that I’m—I'm not Jewish, I’m not Black, I’m not Chinese. I am something else. And thinking that I’m, I'm what the rest of the nation is, not feeling like that I’m—so, at some point [clearing throat], I guess I realized that there’s large percentage of people who are uh, disenfranchised by television, church, all of this stuff” (P8, 13).

Similar to pre-adoption, some participants reported being aware of their own race when they experienced a degree of minority status; however, this time instead of themselves being a minority in an unusual situation, they experienced being a minority as a multiracial family, and by virtue of assessing a situation or environment from their
children’s perspective. As one parent stated, “You know, early on, we realized you know, our-our immediate environment wasn’t especially diverse” (P2, 12). Another participant described a shift in awareness:

“What you perceived—again, sort of what you perceived as a diverse environment before, now you look at it, and you’re like, “That’s not diverse at all,” you know? Like, ’cause now your kids are in it, and they’re sticking out. You know. And you’re like, “Wow, I don’t know what I was thinking. You know, I don’t know why I thought that school was diverse. It’s not” (P5, 17). This participant went on to add:

“I-I actually have like two reverse illustrations. You know when you're looking for your kids in like, on a playground or in a pool? They, they were always very easy to find, you’d be like, “Oh, yeah, just look for the dark kids.” You know. And, and the reverse was that when we went—I forget where we went. I don’t know where it was. Where did we go? Some—I don’t even remember. I think it might have been once. I don’t even remember where it was, but we were, “Wait, we can’t find them.” You know, and we were like, “Oh, yeah, right, ’cause this place has got many more kids of color” (P5, 17).

Another participant told a story about her children being the only people of color at a White friend’s annual gathering, and her choice to limit visits with these friends:

“I know they have a good time, they like it. They don’t see it themselves, but it bothers me because that’s not the world I want them to grow up in.

I, I, you know, I want them to be in a much more diverse world where they realize that there are people of many different backgrounds, with many different
experiences, uh, whether racially, culturally, nationally um, and they all have something to offer in their own special ways.” (P11, 16).

All participants noticed the diversity or lack thereof in their environments in a more heightened way, or at least through the eyes of their child: “I mean, so you see, you’re looking at them, and looking out for them. And then, and then from then, I often think, “Well, how are they you know, how are they perceiving this? How are they seeing this?” (P5, 19). As one parent said, with respect to noticing race post-adoption, “I guess I realize how White I am and how White my life has been” (P1, 6). Participants reported assessing schools and neighborhoods with respect to racial diversity, and in several (n=3) cases, along other dimensions of difference as well, including ethnicity and sexual orientation. Some parents lamented the lack of diversity, while others (n=6) described actively and consciously seeking schools or neighborhoods with racial diversity:

“When we decided to move from where we lived in (town), we looked at demographic information and we picked, basically, communities that had good public schools and that had a large Asian or Asian-American population. And we just didn't even look at places that did not have that diversity. We just didn't want—didn't want to do it, you know, unless we were forced, and had no choice. But, um, so I guess that's an example where—although at the time, if you had said, is it better—if you had asked me before adopting, do you think it—would you rather live in a place with racial diversity or a place that's homogeneously White? Unfortunately, some people would probably say homogeneously White. I would have felt the opposite. I would have said I'd rather live in a place with diversity. Um, but—um, but it wouldn't have been like a necessary. If I had—if
we had a house we loved or a place we loved, um, you know, we might have moved there and only vague—had this vague notion of it being homogeneous. Whereas now, I'm acutely aware of when I'm in a homogeneous place versus not, and I'm acutely aware of diversity or not, and it's become a big priority for us” (P7, 21-22).

All participants recalled the physical differences between them and their children which were associated with race as being brought to their attention, and increasing their awareness of their own race – whether their child pointed out skin color differences, or difference came up in the social context of conversations with other parents about family resemblance. Most participants also said that they were more aware of their Whiteness when they and their child were with White extended family members.

Regarding physical differences, one participant noticed a connection between quality of hair care services and attention to his child’s racial difference; the result is that he and his wife now seek culturally competent barber shops, noticing that this is not the norm for most families. In this quote, the implicit meaning of the word ‘most’ is ‘White’:

“My son, uh—we've noticed that, um, he usually gets a better haircut if we take him to a place that is Asian or (child’s birth country), a haircutting place that's—or I guess a barber or stylist or whatever you want to call it. Um, and that's, you know—it's never like he said, oh, that's different or something, but, um, I guess that's a little bit of a—that's something most families don't experience, probably” (P7, 25).

*Overall changes in racial awareness post-adoption.*
The majority of participants (n=10) expressed a major shift in racial awareness post-adoption. For the two participants who didn’t, both reported a strong awareness of race and White privilege prior to adoption. When asked further probes about changes in awareness, one of these participants stated that, “I don’t think it has (awareness) changed, but you know I – you know, I’m aware there’s always things you’re not aware of” (P12, 33). The other participant stated that, “I think – I think it probably has, and I don’t think I can feel or see it” (P9, 61).

For the remaining ten participants, statements about overall changes in racial awareness were strong. One parent stated that the change for her was, “Visceral. I really feel it now whereas before it was more intellectual. It’s very emotional now;” also noting, “I do now look at everything with a racial overtone like, how does race play into this, whatever we’re doing” (P1, 7, 8). Another participant described herself post-adoption as “definitely more conscious of race,” adding that, “I found I became much more – um, like my radar was on all the time for people talking in ways that were uh, insensitive or thoughtless or not inclusive” (P3, 22, 15). One parent cited a “big difference” in awareness (P6, 16). Another said, “So yeah, I mean, definitely more aware of it now;” and, “You’re just more aware of race generally, everything” (P5, 16, 19). One participant who said he had always been aware of race, upon reflection added that, “Yeah, I mean, obviously, I’ve paid more attention to race since – (adopting)” (P 4, 16). One parent stated, “I’d say it (race) came into my consciousness in a different way” (P10, 15). In one case, the change was described as, “Since adopting, it’s probably—especially when the children were young—probably thinking about it (race) every day in one form or another” (P2, 10).
Some participants were more specific about the sorts of changes in awareness they had experienced: “I think it’s really changed how I see myself in the world, and how I see my children in the world, and also how I approach other people um, whether of same race or a different race. Um, I think it’s just made me become a lot more aware of um, that the world is not colorblind, and um, and that I need to find ways to navigate that world, instead of, of assuming that everybody are (sic) just the same” (P11, 27). These changes included increased awareness of racial microaggressions. Several participants (n=3) shared that they were more aware of other White peoples’ negative comments about race. Stereotypes were always apparent to one participant, but post-adoption, “It's just more personal when you're sitting with your kids. I mean, that's sort of obvious.” (P9, 50). In one case, a parent observed:

“And I notice it, you know, just like going shopping, or you know. I just am more—I—I feel more tuned in, so—so watching like kids who are shopping at the mall, and—and you know, who’s watching who, and you know” (P6, 20-21).

For one participant, a story illustrated her heightened consciousness of her Whiteness and other White peoples’ behavior that she experienced even when not in the presence of her children:

“I was on the subway once. I was sitting down and you know how they have the shorter end and then the long end and then another shorter end seat. I was at the shorter end of the seats and there was—it was primarily Blacks sitting around me. At the other end was primarily White, which I didn't notice at first, but I was sitting there. Then the train stopped and only one person got on and it was a White woman. She comes on and she turns like she's going sit where I was sitting
and it's like she looked and turned really quickly and went the other way. One of the guys made some comment like, ‘She doesn't want to sit here with all of us.’ Then they all started laughing and I started laughing ’cause it was funny. That was clearly what she did even though she was probably not conscious of it. Then I looked at him and I said, ‘I heard what you said and I really hope it's not true. And he goes like that (makes face, skeptical). Stuff like that really strikes me now when I see that” (P1, 9-10).

This participant continued with a second story about finding herself engaging in stereotyping at work in a statement to a Black colleague regarding an insinuation of illegal substance use. Recognizing her offense and hearing the woman and her colleagues’ reaction, this participant expressed feeling pain about her statement and awareness in general of her and other White peoples’ racially offensive behaviors:

“It's stuff like that that makes me cringe. It's still inside of me. I notice things now more and it hurts me now more. I could say something like that in front of my daughters. What are they going to think? What does that really mean? I'm just aware of every little, little stupid thing that I do and that other White people do” (P1, 10).

Several participants shared that the transracial adoption experience opened them up in broader, general ways: “when you open your mind about race, you kind of tend to open your mind about a lot of things, I think. [Laughter]. That’s how it’s worked for us, anyway” (P2, 28). Another participant observed that she was more empathetic to other people in general:
“So there's, there was that feeling, and it just opens you up, I think, generally to feeling more like, usually more open, I think, generally to other experiences um, with people of different kinds and different races. Um. And I, you, I think you identify more with other people’s experiences. You can be touched by things in you know, in like sort of a, a way that you might feel like you wouldn’t—I don’t know. You just don’t know how you would have felt otherwise” (P5, 23).

This same participant, who had struggled to identify feelings in response to questions, went on to reflect that transracial adoption facilitated transcending any doubts about cross-racial or cross-biological love for a child:

“I mean, I—I guess you can’t help but meet more you know, empathetic and, and more—I don't, I don’t know. But yeah, feelings, feelings. (long pause) Uh, I mean I guess you think if you ever had a thought like, ‘Oh, you couldn’t like really love someone who was a different race,’ that's, that's cl- like, you have that feeling, that’s totally gone. You know, um. Or at least—I don’t know if it’s totally gone, but like, like, um, very—if there was—I mean, this goes along with the whole adoption, too, like, like, ‘Oh, you couldn’t love them any more if you had gave birth to them or whatever.’ Like you just don’t think you could” (P5, 23).

This openness was translated for some (n=4) parents into increased empathy for people of color. In one case, a participant came to understand, through adoption, the existence and need for racial affinity groups: “This is maybe a little strong, but I'm just going to say it. That it's almost like those affinity groups are a necessary evil, I think. It's like, um, we wish we didn't need them, I guess. Um, but because people are treated
differently, there's a shared experience, I guess. I don't know” (P7, 42). Another participant described a sense of understanding her Black coworkers:

“Well I definitely don’t feel like I used to feel before I adopted (child). Um, I definitely feel different. Um, I think I have uh, a—a different level of understanding about what it’s like to be a person of color, um, not that I can—I don’t know if I’ve internalized it so much as it’s more kind of um, more up in my head, the thinking that I have internalized a little bit, but I just have more of an awareness like with people at work, my coworkers who are Black. Um, I just, I feel like I have a different understanding” (P6, 31).

This participant further elaborated, “I think it (transracial adoption) did affect my work, and how I looked at people and kind of my understanding of their experience, like not just assuming that everyone is really happy and everything goes well for everyone” (P6, 16).

Recognition of privilege post-adoption. Most participants (n=10) articulated that they were more aware of White privilege post adoption. Some stated this in a direct way: “I don't think I had a strong opinion or a strong feeling of what it meant to be White at that point (in high school). I don't think that has happened really until my kids, the understanding of White privilege. Those are my first experiences of realizing that there are differences in people's attitudes” (P1, 2). Another explicit statement about White privilege followed a participant’s reflection that she now sees other White people differently:

“I think I, I have become more aware of White privilege, and how it shapes a lot of things around us, and um, and how a lot of White people are not aware of that.
And that’s, that I find frustrating um, that they are just completely clueless to that, you know, that, that, that special passport, if you wish, you know, they’ve gotten. And they don’t understand that that’s what they have, that, that other people have to fight a lot harder to get some of the same privileges that you have as a White person” (P11, 28).

One participant pointed out her awareness of White privilege as building on other areas of privilege of which she had previously been aware: “I worked with men all the time. So I knew what it was like to be different than the people I worked with, just—but just from a gender perspective. Um, and this—adopting our daughter added a layer of race on top of it about how I was still quite privileged even though I was a woman in a uh, a male-dominated field” (P2, 14).

In another example of recognition of different levels of privilege, one participant whose partner is a self-identified White Latina, described how she learned about the conflation of race and ethnicity by observing peoples’ reaction to her partner; this was based on her partner’s surname, and peoples’ assumptions about her race before meeting her:

“Her culture and ethnic background are stuff that you, in my previous experience would be you know, Spanish-speaking and, and just different you know, foods, different stuff like that, be associated with someone with a different race…It’s just not something I was fam-familiar with. And I think, I think most people in the United States, maybe more now, but weren’t, like again, ’cause just ’cause of the reactions that she would get between the—disjoint—people perceived a disjunction between let’s say her name and her appearance” (P5, 14-15).
This participant noted that this experience made her aware of a type of race privilege she had based on not having a “disjuncture” between her own ethnicity and race: “Like, yeah, there’s different kinds of Whiteness. Even, even within Whiteness, there’s very different kinds of Whiteness” (P5, 15).

For some participants (n=4), part of their consciousness of race privilege was prompted by other peoples’ pointing out advantages based on race. One parent stated that there were times her son pointed out ways that she was privileged: “We've had conversations where, you know, you can do that because you're White. I mean, given that it's mostly (son) and me talking, there's the gender issue, the age issue, and the race issue” (P3, 24). For another parent, a coworker of color pointed out how her Whiteness earned clients’ trust, in contrast to her own experiences: “I work with an interpreter from (country in South Asia), and it’s just really, really painful for me when, you know, I go into someone’s home, and she’s like, ‘Oh, as long as you have white skin, they’re going to trust you.’ I'm like oh my God” (P6, 35). When one participant lived in a diverse neighborhood where she was a minority, neighbors brought up race and privilege as a reason for her and her partner to pay more towards a joint repair job.

In other instances, participants became aware of the lack of privilege of their children, in contrast to their own experiences: “At some point we read or somebody told us, uh, you as an adoptive parent, may not treat your kids any differently on the basis of race. Maybe you'll succeed at that. But the world will not. So whatever you may think, you need to recognize that your kids will go out in the world and will be treated differently because of their race in a way that you never have or will be in the—in the same way” (P7, 41).
One participant who had difficulty recalling examples of events of incidences relating directly to her own racial awareness told two stories about her child which culminated in her reflecting on how her child’s experience was different than what hers would have been, due to race. In her first story, the participant compares her child’s experience to hers:

“One time our son when he was younger would get terrible rashes and things and we were always at the emergency room it seemed. And, um, in one incidence he was maybe five or six, and he was covered head to toe in welts and things. And when we went into the emergency room, uh, the person—the intake person there was asking me questions, you know, to me, and then said directly to me as if our son was invisible, “Does he speak English?” And [sighs] I was just really taken aback by that, you know, ’cause we—he was home with us at 15 months, so of course he spoke English. And I—I felt very sad for our son at that time. So I was very aware at that—at that moment that, you know, because of race and this person looking at me one way and our son the other way, that that question would even come about” (P10, 13-14).

In this participant’s second story, she overheard her child’s playmates asking questions about his racial background: “You know, and this whole conversation, this back and forth about race and identity, um, going on and they’re both trying to figure it out at a really, you know, young age. I mean that was—I—I do remember that very well, very well. Because I mean those kinds of questions were for me or for, you know, um, for my husband weren’t really—it didn’t—those kind of things, those questions weren’t asked of us, you know?” (P10, 14). When asked what this incident made her think about
her own race, she responded, “That it was, uh—it sounds very like simple, but it just seemed like it was easier. It was easier, for me” (P10, 15). The participant then reflects, “I think it’s, uh, painful that there’s a struggle going on, you know for him on a level that I’m not familiar with” (P10, 17).

For another participant, experiencing a racial microaggression at an indoor play facility heightened her awareness of how differently her children may be treated due to racism, and how her own Whiteness gives her some ability to “buffer” her children, for the time being, from some of these experiences:

*Interviewee:* “I remember one time I was going to a, an indoor playground with two other adoptive moms, all with um, with Asian children. And one mom um, is Asian herself um, and me and another mom were ah, White, and so we all show up with our—with our, ah, four, five, ah, Chinese kids. And it was further out west ah, from here um, and the woman at the reception treated us like we were not welcome. It was very—there was—she didn’t say anything specific, but it was ah; she was very brief with us, she wouldn’t give us information. And then some other people ah, White families came in with their white kids, and she was more than welcoming, and she was telling them about events that was (*sic*) happening later in the day. Information that she hadn’t given us, and she was very brief with us. Um, that was very shocking to me to see that even though there were two white moms, but because of our children and, and my other friend, we were just not welcome at this place.

*Interviewer:* Mm-hm. So, you’re saying that was shocking, um do you—do you remember what you were thinking or feeling at that point?
Interviewee: I felt outraged. I felt like leaving the place and I haven’t gone back. I don’t want to go back to a place that treats people that way.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Because it shouldn’t matter where you come from. It shouldn’t matter—I mean I know now in some sense I’m—I might be buffering my children from the experiences they’re going to have later on. Um, and I’m very much aware that, you know, the world’s going to see them as Asian once they grow up and become young women. Um, and they’re going to have a very different experience than I will um, because of who they are and that’s not—it shouldn’t be that way” (P11, 4-5).

Post-adoption, participants (n=5) also reported being more aware of racial disparities and White privilege in employment settings. One simply noted that she had gotten jobs over qualified people of color due to being White. Another participant noted the lack of diversity at his workplace, and when prompted, attributed this lack of diversity to the company’s quest for characteristics in employees that are implicitly associated with Whiteness, ultimately acknowledging that he benefited from this phenomenon: “I thought of it as having to do with, um, the kind of people that the company was recruiting. And one of the qualifications for the job was being able to, um, project a lot of confidence even in situations where you were not very confident. And in—in, like, sort of, you know, professional business situations. And I think I—I think I remember thinking that would be—you would be more likely to be able to do that if you were White in a country that is mostly White than if you were not, just from experience” (P7, 13). In the
following quotation, this same participant describes the advantages he has at work due to race, of which he is more aware of post-adoption:

*Interviewee:* “I think, uh, maybe it—it (*transracial adoptive parenting*) certainly, I think, increased my realization of a certain level of privilege that I have that's just a result of assumptions people make that are positive - in some circumstances. So for example, in the workplace or wherever when, um, where being White and male, so—is considered kind of the default and the, you know, um, the desirable way to be in a—in a given profession, for example.

*Interviewer:* Is that related to what you were saying about the job where confidence would be required to perform a certain part?

*Interviewee:* Yeah. Mm-hmm. Yup. Um, in the sense that just as, I think, a lot of women talk about they feel like they have to, you know, work twice as hard to get half the recognition. Whatever the ratio is. You get the idea.

*Interviewer:* Mm-hmm.

*Interviewee:* Um, I think that, um, I'm—I've sort of become more aware of the fact that I'm—I am given a—given a little extra, uh, uh, leeway and trust just from the fact of being White that I wouldn't if I were not. Again, it depends on the profession, you know” (P7, 33-34).

This participant concluded:

“I do think it (*race*) matters and it—it increases—especially because I'm in a profession which is sort of similar to consulting where you're advising people. Often when people look for advice, it's sometimes because they need advice, but it often is just ’cause they want somebody to tell them what to do because they're
having a hard time making a decision. And when you want that, you want somebody who acts confident about what they’re saying. And therefore, in both my company and every consulting company, that’s just part of the culture. You train people to act confident even when they’re not, and that’s ’cause they’re actually doing a client a service because that’s what they want. They don’t want somebody to come in and be wishy-washy and say, well, you could do this, but I’m not sure. You know, that’s just not helpful. They’re actually paying you to act confident. And so does that mean they’re paying you to be White and male also? Because—you know? I mean it’s kind of weird, isn't it? Um, at least they’re more likely to” (P7, 37-38).

In perhaps the most explicit and personal expression of White privilege in the workplace, one participant stated:

“And I, I, I uh, recently, I-I’ve certainly been over the years been paying attention to um, who gets what kind of jobs. I do think um, that uh, having—so this is the, I think—I uh, so having, having grown up in a White, middle-class society uh, has provided me with an opportunity that um, is pretty unusual. Um, there, there’d be no way I would have gotten a job at (workplace) teaching where I am um, uh, if you know, if I hadn’t sort of followed the path and connections that I had. Every, I would have to say, every job I’ve had, I, it was, that I happened to know somebody who was doing the hiring, or in a position, um, and they were all White. And um, so, because I you know, had these sort of residual relationships with White people in uh, the (city) area, I was able to track down jobs you know, through the grapevine, whatever. Um, and you know, I mean, I think, I think
that’s where, that’s great for um, you know, for somebody to grow up in a society where you can you know, be able to manipulate [chuckles] your-your life around who you know. Um, I don’t think it’s uh realistic, and I don’t think it’s sustainable. Um, and it certainly um, I think to some degree, disenfranchises a bunch of people who are much more qualified to take those positions that um- * (does not finish sentence)” (P8, 22).

Others participants described race-related scenarios at work that highlighted White privilege. One participant, when reflecting that she is now more aware of race-related issues at work, described a tragic outcome related to treatment disparity based on race:

“Well I—I—I saw differences in how people were treated. I worked at a hospital in *city*, and the clinic where I worked was um, diverse, um, and I was on my shift at the hospital, and one of my patients came in complaining of preterm labor. She was African-American, and I sent her to the um—to see the—the—the specialist up on the floor, um, and then my coworker who worked at the hospital clinic, which was mostly white, and so you know, the—the specialist, the neonatologist you know, said just go home and drink or whatever, and she had some cervical changes and all this stuff, and she was carrying twins, and this white woman came in, my other coworkers friend, and ‘Oh my God, get her in the hospital. Let’s admit her. Let’s do all this, do all this,’ same exact symptoms, same presentation. My client ended up miscarrying, so I mean you know, I don’t know if that could have been prevented, but I just saw the—the difference in the treatment, and I was furious, furious.
Ah, it just makes me really upset to think about it because I was there for the delivery, but there was two you know, beautiful babies, and it was really hard because the—both mom and dad were there, and you know, when babies are born that early they still breathe, but you know, their lungs are still solid, so eventually the stop, and it was just like we can’t do anything, and it was really, really, really hard, so I just felt like you know, seeing the—the—at the hospital, and the difference between how the nurses treat the patients of different backgrounds, that was very hard for me” (P6, 19-20).

At times parents directly linked their reflections about race at work to consideration of their children’s projected future experiences, or an understanding or empathy towards their children’s racial difference. The participant quoted above recalled being part of an interview process where he questions cultural bias on the part of the interview committee, and also identifies his own bias towards hiring a person of the same race as his children:

“A couple of years ago, I remember when I was interviewing somebody to hire to replace somebody on my team who, who I was managing…um, and, uh, we interviewed a candidate who was Asian and, um, I thought she might be a good fit for the job. And—but when other people interviewed her, they didn't think so, and we ended up hiring somebody else, um, a Caucasian woman. And in retrospect, I think—I think they were all right. Um, uh, but I think at the time, I both experienced a positive bias towards her because I remember thinking it would be nice to have a more diverse team and—and I have a special affect, because of my family, for this woman because she's Asian-American, or actually, I think she was actually Chinese-born, but anyway.
Um, so I guess I was having my own bias and, um, and I sort of wondered whether other people were having a bias against her, um, not intentional at all, but I wondered that. But I didn't feel like I really could or should, you know, surface or say that. There was no evidence that they were, and they gave a number of reasons why she wouldn't, you know, um—but there were some confidence things. I remember people saying, well, you know, during the whole interview, she just had a hard time making eye contact. Um, and, you know, she has a degree from (business school) and she seemed very—but she just had—and I kind of remembered thinking, well, but maybe the reason she's having a hard time making eye contact is because she's not confident and—but people say, well, she just didn't seem like she was interested in the job, like she was just there, but, like, going through the motions. And, you know, it's very possible all of that was completely true. But I—but all those things came up in a way they wouldn't have if she had been Caucasian” (P7, 34-35).

Another participant had several observations about race in the workplace, and considered how his children will be discriminated against in the workforce: “Certainly they’re going to ha-have to deal with that as-as they, you know, certainly that when they go out to the job market, people are, in the rest of the world, are going to see them as African American, and I know that. And um, we-we do talk a lot about, um, openly, about uh, the rest of the world being not (home city)” (P8, 16). This participant spoke of being in public with his son, and noticing White privilege in employment hierarchies. In this quote he speaks to the difference in his perspective after having children of color, and seeing their experience relative to his:
“I don’t think I would have given it a second thought, except that as I see them growing up, um, you know. How are they going to, uh, how, well how is, how are they [clears throat]—if they don’t know somebody, uh and they go into a new city and they have nobody—you know, they’re just taking somebody off the street, just looking at a resume, how are they going to know, uh unless they’ve—you know, the [clears throat] unless there’s a sort of a—because my resume looks horrible, and I, and I [chuckles] and as I say, it—it wouldn’t have flown if-if if somebody was just looking at—so I think, I think I’m acutely aware of uh that. I think also I’m much more aware of, as I, as I look at uh who has what kinds of jobs in state, and you still see that people doing the bagging at a store are of one uh ethnicity or race, and the people managing the store are of another ethnicity or race. That’s not to say that it’s not changing, but it’s, it's how does, you know those—that’s something that, as-as I’m more- as I'm with my African-American son, in a store, and he sees an encounter where [clears throat] there’s a manager who’s White and ah, it's an employee who’s uh either Hispanic or uh African American or Chinese. Um, why, you know. Those kinds of interactions. Just you—as—and everybody can be civil, but there’s a clear understanding there that there’s still a-a White race on top” (P8, 23).

Summary of Domain III and reflection on a narrative

In this domain, transracial adoption appears to be a means for many participants of addressing a societal need while forming their families. For almost all participants, being a multiracial family and seeing racial discrimination towards their children were significant triggers for increasing their racial awareness, and many reflected on their pre-
adoptive selves as naïve regarding the extent of racism in our society. While seeing racial microaggressions perpetuated on their children heightened participants’ awareness of White privilege and the extent of racial disparities even when not in the presence of their children, many participants articulated these events with language that reinforced seeing racial incidents as patterns among individuals, and less as events of a systemic nature. It may have been more difficult for participants to talk about systemic level racism because of feelings of hopelessness or helplessness that were evoked. These reactions are explored in the next domain. Overall, participants’ propensity to talk more about their children than themselves, even when asked to speak about their own race, reflects the phenomenon of racialization in the United States as involving the othering of people of color.

A brief narrative in Domain III illustrates the challenge for participants of making connections from the individual scale racial event to the larger meaning of race in society. This narrative was a subject of discussion between me and the co-researcher, who questioned whether this story was related to the research topic. I felt that the narrative represented a salient point about racial privilege and the experiences of White people in contrast to racial minorities. In this story, the participant described how his child received a better haircut when he went to a barber of his own race. The participant recounted his observation, and in his conclusion, used hesitant language: “I guess that’s a little bit of a – that’s something most families don’t experience, probably” (P7, 25). Similar to stories told by other participants followed by statements like, ‘that’s not exactly a racial thing’ or qualifiers as to whether or how race may have played a role, the conclusion here minimizes the story’s significance as demonstrating an essential part of
being the racial majority: services and products are generally geared towards your group, while in contrast racial minorities must often make an effort to seek culturally appropriate services, thus highlighting consciousness of racial difference and affecting daily experiences. The reference to ‘most families,’ implying White families, characterizes participants’ general experience of understanding racial events from their own racial perspective, even when they are speaking of the context of their children.

Domain IV: Responses to racial stimuli post-adoption

While the third domain described parents’ increased awareness, triggers for awareness and changes in thought regarding race, this domain examines participants’ responses to this heightened racial awareness, both behavioral and affective. Contexts include their families, workplaces, neighborhoods and school communities. Parents’ conversations with their children about race, and the ways they help their children navigate racial issues are covered. In addition, parents’ responses to racial microaggressions, and how parents respond in situations where they are a racial minority are explored. Participants’ connections and disconnections with people of color and views of other White people are discussed.

Responding to children: navigating race. In this category, there are three subcategories: protecting, guiding, and talking about race.

Protecting. About half (n=5) of the participants reported feeling protective of their children, wanting to guard their privacy and shield them from negative experiences related to race. As one participant stated, “I think I was just incredibly naïve and I didn’t realize how people react to you just based on your race until my kids. I'm incredibly protective of them for that because I'm raising them in a White environment. They're
never invisible whereas I can be invisible. I always think of them as being incredibly brave. I don't want them to always feel like they're being stared at, which they are” (P1, 2). Another parent noted, “I, I think um…like sometimes when, when um, especially when I’m with the girls and people approach me? I feel very guarded um, because, because like I said some of the stupid comments that we get about adoption and, and people’s prejudices and, and not understanding um, what we’ve gone through. Um, I’m also, I’m, I’m very much aware of how my reaction reflects on them, you know?” (P11, 20).

Yet another parent said that in response to peoples’ comments, “you know, we've always felt that the most important thing we can do is—there's a temptation to want to educate the person, but we've tried to always make it our priority to care for the kids first and not make them, uh—even if we do respond, to not make them feel like we're, you know, in some way getting angry or suffering because of the way we formed our family” (P7, 16-17). Other participants spoke of being watchful for discrimination against their children, “second guessing peoples’ motives,” and wanting to “insulate them from harm” (P5, 17; P3, 14).

Guiding. Most participants made efforts towards racially socializing their children, with attention to the child’s birth race as well as environmental factors. One participant spoke of giving her children strategies to respond to peoples’ comments: “Hopefully, I mean, hopefully we try to be… anti-racist in, in, you know, helping the girls find tools to protect themselves and, and, you know, have responses when people make comments” (P11, 22). Another parent stated that she felt that part of her role as a transracial adoptive parent was, “Guiding them to be um, Hispanic men in the world, or boys for that matter” (P5,
21). Some parents engaged in specific activities that related to racial socialization, such as visiting historic civil rights sites, or providing the child books about race and adoption. One parent talked about finding a balance between intervening and letting her child handle verbal racial microaggressions. Most often, guidance was given in the form of conversation, which is addressed in the next section.

*Talking about race.* Participants’ conversations with their children about race fell under multiple overarching topic areas: (1) talking about stereotypes and discrimination in view of preparing the child for what to expect (n=3); (2) affirming the child’s cultural and racial heritage and beauty (n=12); (3) using the media as a platform for analyzing stereotypes and discussing racism and race history (n=8); (4) responding to child’s reported microaggressions with validation of feelings, or sharing one’s own experiences of marginalization (n=4); and (5) talking about physical differences in skin color and hair texture associated with race (n=6).

With respect to the process of talking about racial issues with their children, participants reported a variety of comfort levels and depth of these conversations. Most participants (n=9) expressed confidence talking about race with their children, from an early age. In these cases, both children and parents initiated race talk, though most parents (n=8) reported that conversations occurred most often in response to an outside stimuli, such as an event in the news or a media stereotype. Several parents (n=3) had some level of disagreement with their child over their child’s embracing racial stereotypes. Four participants reported that talking about race with their children was challenging because of their child’s lack of interest, in spite of parents’ repeated attempts to broach the topic. In one case, a participant stated that she found conversations about
race to be “awkward and scary” (P1, 19). Four parents reported that their children became more open over time, and most recalled times when their children were more or less open to these conversations.

Half of the participants recalled talking with their children about skin color and hair care differences within the family. Several parents cited adoption literature as guiding them to focus on commonalities as a way of bonding, and therefore conversations about differences took place in tandem with discussion of similarities. Conversations about hair and skin were so common, one parent called these topics “classic” (P5, 25).

For several parents, discussions about phenotypic difference were also tied to conversations of a deeper nature as children grew older; in two cases discussing the child’s wish to look like the parent, and in several cases the child’s positive identification with his or her color and racial identity.

Humor was cited by four parents as a frequent component of race conversations, and a way of making the difficult topic of race easier to talk about. In one story, the participant shared her experience of being stopped by Black women and reprimanded about her children’s hair care, frequently enough to note, “This is a joke with the girls. I used to get the bad White mother talk from Black women” (P1, 12). The same participant offered another example of humor in race talk, or as she states, “a not so heavy way”:

“We joke around a lot about—like, I bought her a (shoe brand) for her first pair of high heels and I said, ‘They only came in Caucasian.’ So we would laugh, and then I got them some black ones and I said—the next day I said, ‘Oh, I found some in Sri Lankan.’ We do try to bring it up in a not so heavy way” (P1, 14)
For another participant, a science fiction film served as a vehicle for catharsis as well as an opportunity for the parent and child to express their feelings about being a family that is different from the norm:

“I mean, one of the funniest—funniest things we've done—was this movie called—there's some stupid movie that's called, um—it's called The Martians or something, and then it was something with—that (son) and I were watching. He was—I think he was, like, 13 or 14, and this is a—Attack of the Martians. It's actually a pretty famous movie. There are famous actors in it. It—it was actually this—I cannot remember the name. They come down, and one goes, "We come in peace." I think it's Michael Douglas or somebody's the President—I can't remember—and he goes, ‘Oh, that's great.’ He's trying to welcome the aliens in peace. ‘We come in peace.’ And I think the President of the United States goes to him, and he takes out of whatever—his fang or something and sticks it through him and gores the President. Right? And—and the—and the Martian goes, ‘Ha ha ha ha,’ [mimics laughter]—like this, you know, kind of laughs.

[Laughter] And—and son and I are sitting there. We've been—we'd gone through a—a year or two of him talking about being the only Hispanic kid in the class, and there was a lot of stuff going on, and all the struggles and all this, and at one point we sit there, and he and I both sort of turned to each other and laugh, and we go—this is going to sound so weird to you, but I just remember us sitting there, going, "That's kind of like us. We're kind of like the Martian family. We're—we're like that. We're like those aliens," and it was just something about that weird scene where they—this guy who was trying to be liberal and say, "I
embrace you as the, you know, other”—this alien, and then the thing goes and stabs the guy—[laughter]—and (son) and I rolled on the floor, uncontrollable, where our bellies were aching. We laughed so hard, and it felt like the tension of years of him dealing with some of the racial issues was, like, spilling out—and—and we just—and there—there was—and (son) and I kind of got closer to each other, um, because I think we just—sometimes we felt like we were trying to be normal or something, you know—whatever that means, you know, with all the stuff in families, you know, which are about so many things, and now we were also accepting that we were an adoptive family, and we were different, and people—that's all I know is this—is this adoptive—I haven't been a father—any other kind of father. I'm an adoptive father. That's all I've ever been, so what do I know?” (P9, 38-39).

Lastly, concerning race talk, participants were asked about the role their partners played, if they had a partner. One participant reflected that she and her partner talked about race more since adopting:

“Before we were much more, ‘Oh, it didn’t really matter.’ It wasn’t something that we were really focused on. So for us, you know, now we talk a lot about it at home. You know, those experiences and try to figure out, make sense of what happens and how do we discuss it with our kids too. So, so we’ve definitely become much more racially aware um, and talk about it much more than before it was much more, ‘Oh, doesn’t really matter,’ it’s, you know, ‘Oh, we’re, we’re open, we’re tolerant.’ But it’s different than being actively engaged in a conversation about race” (P11, 23).
Another participant described talking with her partner about race as “high anxiety”:

“Like, we worried—’cause I’m in medicine and I know about racial disparity in healthcare and we talk about, well, will our kids not get the healthcare because they’re Black? Then education, are our kids going to be stereotyped as not being smart because they’re Black? We worry about that, and we can talk about it when it’s specific to our kids pretty freely. But I don’t think we talk about in general very much. Specifically when it’s related to the kids” (P1, 16).

Overall, half of the participants described their partners as supportive, and active in educating themselves and the participant about race and adoption issues. Half of the participants also noted that their partner had a somewhat different approach to talking about race with their child: being more direct about stereotypes and racism, or having a more diverse background and therefore being able to share more knowledge and experience.

Relational connections and disconnections. Participants’ stories about race included features of both relational connections and disconnections with people of color. In the most obvious tie to the transracial adoption experience, half of participants reported being involved with groups of transracially adoptive families, sibling or mentor groups for their child, or other multiracial family groups. Almost all parents reported these groups to be helpful for sharing feelings and information. One participant did not stay in an adoptive family group, stating: “I knew more culturally than a lot of them, so like the clothes and the—some of it felt like really superficial. I think it was all well-intentioned but there were—there were more artifices than I think, you know, like, you know indigenous clothes” (P12, 45, 49).
These groups were multiracial, but consisting predominantly of White adults. In fact, one participant who described her town as having many transracially adoptive families, noted that almost all the people of color in that town were the adoptees, and that adult role models of her child’s race were difficult to find. Many participants (n=5) spoke of honoring their children’s birth race and culture through cultural festivals, holidays, foods, frequenting restaurants in neighborhoods connected to the child’s culture (in this case, Asian), and media such as books and films.

Celebrations, food and media were a more common type of cultural connection for participants than interpersonal relationships with people of color. Several participants noted that they worked closely with people of color, but a minority (n=2) of participants stated that they had friends of color. These were the same two participants who reported having people of color in their life before adopting. Overall, half of the participants spoke of a lack of interpersonal closeness with people of color, alluding to challenges and lack of proximity or opportunity. One parent reflected that keeping her child connected to his birth race was a “bigger responsibility” than she had anticipated, “that would take work and time” (P10, 12). In one case, a participant referred to a “filter” that was a barrier to interracial relationships: “It makes me frustrated that, that this filter is already there, you know, there’s a filter between us, and, and sometimes I don’t know how to break through that. Um, and just, and, and find out how I can connect with other people” (P11, 20).

Continuing on the theme of interpersonal distance, one participant observed, “I mean I had work friends who were Black, but I, work friends are work friends. So I, we'd go out after work, but I didn't go to their houses, they didn't come to mine, sort of” (P3, 15). Some (n=4) participants were critical of themselves for not establishing or
maintaining more relationships with people of color: “I don’t think I’ve done a fabulous job of crossing color boundaries or ethnic boundaries” (P3, 33). Similarly, a participant wondered why he did not do more to stay in touch with children and families from the transracial adoption group, and several parents lamented the loss of friends who were people of color in their life over time.

Several stories reflected the awkwardness of attempting connections across race, at times. In one, the participant hesitated to mingle or interact with parents of color at a school event for children of color:

“There was a diversity picnic that they (child’s affinity group) organized. She didn't want me to come. When she told me she didn't want me to come and she saw that my feelings were hurt she goes, ‘Oh no, no, you can come. Really, you can come.’ I decided I wouldn’t come because she wanted to have that experience on her own. When I went to pick her up and there was other family members there, there was one other White guy and there was me and everyone else was of color. I didn't feel comfortable enough even to sit with them, with the other parents, while I was waiting for my daughter to come out. I felt so awkward because I wasn't there the whole party and I was just coming to pick up my daughter” (P1, 6).

The other story involved a participant’s wanting to connect with a woman who lived in his neighborhood who was the same race as his soon to be adopted child. This story has two parts. The first part describes the interaction; the second part is the participant reflecting, later in the interview, on learning moments in his life that were related to race:
“And so when we, uh, as-as we were about to adopt, um, we weren’t, we had no idea about who the child was. I did, I met a woman, um, who is a-a-a (home city) person, African American woman. I happened to be walking the dog. And I had said, ‘Oh, we, we’re going to be adopting.’ And for whatever reason, I said that, ‘He’s probably going to be African American’ because that’s what they—he/she would probably be African American. And, looking back on it, it was like, uh, because she was African American I felt like I should say this to her. Uh, you know, that—and, and as a way of saying, ‘Oh, well, you know, I’m going to be Black, too!’ [chuckling] Or ‘I’m going to be uh, part of uh, the African American culture, too.’ Which is insane. Uh, it was sort of a stupid uh thought…Me ta-talking to this woman along the water who I was walking a dog with, and-and-and realizing before I’ve even met this child, I’ve said to somebody um oh, I’m going to be adopting a, probably adopting an African American child, [clears throat] made me realize acutely, that, I mean as I thought about it, as I think about it now, it’s like, you, you, you haven’t gotten over race and probably never will. And um, and you are you know, a White person in a-a-um s-society and you, you know, you do the best you can to level the, balance-balance-balance the issues” (P8, 8, 25).

With respect to these interpersonal racial divides, a couple of participants talked about purposefully either living in a predominantly minority neighborhood, or visiting one. One of these parents stated her purpose this way:

Interviewee: “We love to go to, to ah (neighborhood) all the time, and show my children that I’m not afraid to go to a place where I’m the minority and she’s the
majority. Um, so, so in that sense we’re trying to put ourselves in situations where I’m outside of my comfort zone sometimes, but I want to show them that—show my kids that that’s okay. That I, you know, that I am just not—not that I—I’ll never understand what their experience is going to be, but that I’m not afraid of, of turning um, the situation around.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. And, um, how does that feel to be outside of your comfort zone um, in those relationships or in those situations?

Interviewee: Um, right, right. Well it can really feel awkward until you try, until you find that common bond or shared experience, whatever it is um, that you need. So um, it’s, it’s, it’s getting easier I would say um, to do that. Um, and, and it’s something that I see it as my um, my responsibility um, to put myself in situations where I get to learn from other people’s experiences and understand (clears throat) how other people see the world um, so it’s not just about me” (P11, 25).

Another participant described her experience living in a neighborhood where she was a racial minority as “fascinating”; the participant’s family had since moved in order to send their children to higher performing schools:

“Different things happened that were really quite stunning, but the good outweighed the bad in many cases, so… It was, it was really valuable to be the minority and to really cement—and be exposed to—the socioeconomic status in that neighborhood is quite broad, you know. From the poorest poor to pretty wealthy, so it’s diverse economically and racially, um and I would say that I grew
to have a better appreciation related to the economic diversity in minority cultures. I hadn’t been exposed to that very much- and that helped a lot” (P2, 25).

Participants were asked if and how their relationships had changed post-adoption. Five responded that there were no relationship changes. Upon further reflection one parent stated that due to school choices, she spent less time around people of color than she had prior to her child’s school age. Another parent had a mixed response: in some ways, she reported, her social circles had widened as she was involved with other transracially adoptive families; in other ways, due to extended family’s treatment of her child, those family relationships had become limited. Overall, four parents stated that their relationships had become more racially diverse, and diverse in other ways too such as including more gay and lesbian families and adoptive families, as their worlds expanded as parents. Several stated that post-adoption they felt more comfortable with people from backgrounds different from theirs, one stating she makes more effort to understand other people, and another noting that her “tolerance” has increased (P10, 26). Another participant remarked that she had learned not to stereotype people.

One way that participants felt a connection to people of color that was emblematic of feeling or desiring a connection, but not necessarily having personal closeness, was the phenomenon of pride by association. Four participants described this type of connection as a post-adoption change. With pride by association, participants either identified in an emotional way with their child’s birth race, or felt that they had internalized aspects of their child’s racial identity. One participant described this as a feeling of pride in the accomplishments of a person of her child’s race: “I get proud now when I see a very successful non movie star or athlete Black person. I feel it’s a pride that – it’s a shared
Transracially Adoptive Parents 190

pride I guess. It’s the first time I can feel that way, I guess” (P1, 11). This same participant reported noticing and being more interested in people of her children’s race, including noticing aesthetics such as hairstyles.

Another participant noted, “There are times when I see Hispanic kids who look like son, um, and I feel that's my family, too. I'm—I'm—is that sentimental?” (P9, 67).

He also expressed a positive feeling for the culture as a whole:

“And I feel really happy—there's a change: I feel really happy that Hispanic culture's on the rise. I want to see—I celebrate that. I love it. It can't come soon enough for me. Um, I take great delight in that. That's a change. I wasn't even thinking about that before. I am definitely thinking about that now, and I sort of have a lot of—like every—you know, I have two kids, and everybody I meet from 

birth country I sort of love, and maybe it's because I want to, ’cause, you know, we save what we love, and we love what we want to save, and—whatever. It's that whole thing. Right?” (P9, 75).

In one case, a participant said that while he was interested in his child’s culture before adoption, he is now “much more interested,” adding that his sense of identity has shifted to be inclusive of part of his children’s culture: “I think it's affirmed and—and—and made more vivid, kind of, my sense of the multifaceted and fluid nature of identity. Um, you know, are my kids (birth nationality)? Well, that's definitely a huge part of them. Am I (birth nationality)? Well, I am a little bit now. I'm a little bit more than I used to be” (P7, 19, 43).

Responding to racial microagressions. As noted in domain three, the theme emerged of participants’ witnessing racial microaggressions perpetrated towards their
children serving as a trigger for participants’ increased racial awareness. Participants reported strong feelings in response to microaggressions, and often a behavioral response as well. At the minimum, action included for almost all participants talking to a partner or friend. For one participant who relied on the support of her partner and for a while, therapy, an incident during a playdate where she perceived a racial double standard regarding behavior left her feeling “bad”:

“So and dealing with parents of White kids too when you have a Black kid, yeah, and—and you know, (daughter), as little, was always a very intense child, and you know, she didn’t like to take—you know, she didn’t like adults to tell her what to do, and I remember this one family because (daughter) was Black, and their— their daughter finally had a Black friend, and they felt comfortable because I was White, and you know, (daughter) did not live up to their expectations. So you know, I mean I felt bad, you know, just like I mean, if she had been White, you know, they would have stuck it out” (P6, 36).

One participant reported feeling “disgusted” by racist news coverage of immigration (P5, 24). For participants whose family members exhibited rejecting behavior or made hurtful comments, several participants’ responses included spending less time with those family members, feeling increased tension around those family members, or in some cases confronting or attempting to educate family members. For one participant who stood up to a family member regarding a racist remark about his newly adopted child, his response was framed in terms of the power versus weakness of values regarding racism and love for his child:
“I mean, I gave him (the offending family member) absolutely no power in the decision or any respect for that. I cared about him, but I cared about him enough to refuse to, uh—to give any power to that and, in fact, to see that as a sign of his weakness and in any—anyone else who, um—who would view son in any but the most, you know, sacramental way. As the—as the, you know, special and unique person that he is and—and—and if he can't love (son), then he can't love me” (P9, 37).

On a wider scale, participants took action in response to microaggressions that reached beyond family circles. As described later in this domain, several participants took on an advocacy role at their children’s school in response to racial disparities in the treatment of Black children at these schools. The feelings associated with incidents included participants being “furious” and “angry” (n=2) (P6, 20; P3, 17; P2, 16). Two participants moved their children to a different school due to concerns about race and treatment of their children.

One story recounted a participant’s response to blatant differential treatment of her child in a preschool classroom, as observed by the participant and her partner through a one-way viewing window. The participant and her partner were aware of several race related issues: the potential impact of informing another White person of racist behavior, the role of the participant and her partner’s Whiteness in the reception of school staff to their complaint, and lastly, the recognition that as for racial minorities, there is a “cumulative” effect of these microaggressions. After describing the observation experience, the participant recalls:
“So I guess we were, we were struck by that as a growing awareness of the cumulative effects of, of being a minority race in our society. And um, we had to talk it over a little while about how we dealt with this, ’cause we were, like, ‘Okay. The main—the head teacher’s White, and we’re White, and how can we talk about this in a way that is productive and not angry?’ [Laughter]. So we figured out—we eventually approached the teacher, and we were, like, ‘We believe we just saw you know, some subtle racism there,’ and um and we explained it to her, and she agreed with us. We were very fortunate in the fact that she agreed. She said, ‘That is absolutely true what you observed,’ and she said, ‘This is a great teaching moment, and I will use this in the classroom,’ which was probably the best possible outcome I can imagine. Um, so we were fortunate that it worked out, but it—that was a case where we really considered our whiteness in this role of parents and how we interacted with the other people in this environment and um, how to get things done” (P2, 15-16).

Outside of the realm of school, one participant found herself drawing on professional expertise to advocate for friends of color who were wrongly accused of shoplifting in a well-known department store, arrested and detained. While the participant was satisfied with the end legal result, she expressed awareness of the lasting impact on her friends, which she likened to “wounds”:

“There were lots of incidents that happened where I was very aware because the people I was close to around me were being treated so differently than I was. That no one would’ve ever, ever arrested me in a situation like that where I was having a dispute with a cashier. Well, I did feel the privilege. I felt I was glad that I
could be helpful and that they didn’t have to call some White lawyer that they
didn’t know who are any—you know, that they—they knew me and felt
comfortable and knew that—that I felt—I felt good—I, you know, as my lawyer
self felt good about being an advocate. And that we ended up with some—some
restorative justice to the whole thing. Um but it doesn’t take the wounds away
and, you know, it doesn’t take it away (P12, 15).

One participant described herself as “quicker to respond” (P10, 24) to the slights
she sees and hears, about which she stated, “You just - you just hear things that you
wouldn’t hear, um, if—if our family was all White [chuckles]. And sometimes it’s—it’s
not overt; it’s very passive” (P10, 27). One parent noted her own transition from disbelief
that there could be racial profiling in her city, which is known to be progressive, to
acknowledging, “That happens. You know, those sorts of things (racial profiling of Black
men) are so elementary now” (P3, 4). Overall, most participants (n=8) described a more
magnified response to racial microaggressions, whether through emotions or active
response.

A final observation about participants’ responses to racial microaggressions is
related to the ambiguous nature of these incidents. Because racial microaggressions are
known to be more difficult to identify and acknowledge than overt racism, participants at
times (n=6) recounted an incident, related the mistreatment to race, but then second-
guessed their initial reaction. Several parents wondered how much their child’s adoption
status figured into differential treatment by family members, independent of race.

One participant who observed differential treatment at school also questioned race
as a factor. She first recounted what appeared to be White flight upon a restructuring of
the school that resulted in integration of classroom, described her anger about the situation, and then wondered whether the causes were in fact due to race:

“And when we, when we integrated, which I said, that's when we started, we found that the school very quickly, like the White families just kept leaving and leaving and leaving and leaving. And it was uh, I mean, it was dramatic. It was all the same teachers. All you know, a lot of the—there were fantastic teachers in the school, many of whom are still there. Um. And people just started to flee…So, I was very conscious of the fact that the school was becoming more and more—you know, we were becoming Blacker and Blacker in the student body. And you know, nothing had changed in the administration… I was angry. I was upset that people were so reactive. Uh, and uh, and I felt you know, I mean it was sort of like the anger could be directed anywhere. It could be you know, the family resource center, which is the place that advises people where to put their kids was actively advising people not to send their kids to (name of) school. Now, you know, was that because the school was in transition or because the school was becoming more Black? Or you know, who knows? But um, so you know, and you try to get to the root of that” (P3, 16-17).

Also in the public domain, a participant described questioning the role of race:

“I can remember one time. I can't remember exactly where we were, but some sort of store or business or something. We were in a line, and I remember the kids being a little bit rambunctious, you know, running around. They were young, and a woman being kind of uh, cranky with them, you know, a little gruff toward them, and you know, and at—those are situations where you think to
yourself—which you can—you know, if you—as you know, I suppose—I mean, when—once you're in that world, you—you can't ever stop wondering about things like that. You—you know, you think to yourself would she be that way if they weren't you know—would she be you know, treating them as bad kids or annoying, obnoxious kids, or you know, would she be as cranky with them if they were you know, sweet little White kids, um, but you don't know that. I mean, she didn't say anything racially inappropriate. She was just kind of cranky with my kids. And you know, so you get—went to a little bit of a defensive place. But um, but and afterwards, you wonder if—if race was involved, but you never really know those things” (P4, 18).

Another parent expressed general uncertainty about her reactions to situations where she thought race played a role:

“Like um, and you know, maybe uh, some of it could—I mean sometimes I feel like I'm a little too sensitive. Um, I feel like uh, maybe some of it doesn’t have to do with race, and maybe I think it does. I mean maybe—maybe it doesn’t have to do with race, and I perceive it as. Then I think back, and I say, well maybe it just has more to do with personality, but you know, sometimes I do” (P6, 21).

Becoming an ally or advocate. Half of the participants recalled instances where they took on a role of being an ally or advocate for a person or people of color, including their child and other people. These stories emerged in response to questioning about awareness of their own race in the public domain. Two parents spoke about taking on an advocacy role in their children’s schools after discovering racial disparity in treatment and hearing of racial microaggressions. These parents went to school administrators, got
involved in meetings, and grant writing to institute change. As one participant summarized, “I got really involved with the kids' school, partly because you know, I felt like there were things happening that weren't good, that weren't fair, basically” (P3, 15).

Other participants (n=5) took action about racial issues in the workplace. One stated that she was more likely, post-adoption, to participate in events related to diversity, including advising. Another told several stories about times she confronted supervisors about what she felt were racially unjust hiring practices. One parent stated, about her workplace, “And I'm you know, I'm constantly the person that points out, it's like—and—and we do have—I think workplace is definitely committed to diversity, but it's just hard. So, you know, I'm more likely to be the person that says, wow, that picture looks awfully White” (P3, 19). Another participant, whose work involved representing voices and images of people at institutions, recounted how he consciously chooses to counter racial stereotypes with his selection of content for his work. One parent was turned to by a coworker of color for support in an instance where the coworker’s assertion of racism was challenged by her colleagues:

“And you know, I just remember the summer that I worked with name, someone was telling her that something wasn’t racist. I don’t remember. I didn’t hear the conversation, but she turned to me, and she’s like, “She has an African American daughter. She knows what it’s like. She knows that people are racist.” I could only agree with her, [laugh], could back her up. [Laugh]. “Yes. They are. Yes. They are. I know they are racist. Yes” (P6, 39).
Lastly, the participant who spoke about being conscious of racial hierarchies and the ways his children will be discriminated in the workforce as African Americans, shared a story of using his hiring power to address diversity issues:

“When I did my hiring very recently at university, or where I work, [laughs] let's, get that in. I purposefully—I, well it was an entry-level position and I-I knew somebody who was completely disenfranchised in terms of his life. Had you know, had been um, been in jail, Haitian American, uh and I just thought, “Oh, I know who I’ll give this job to. The person who needs it the most.” And if he’d been you know middle-class White kid, I would have said no. No, no, I don’t have any job available. But I had this job available, and I, and I-I- you know, I uh, I fought to have him in the position” (P8, 25).

Feelings. Participants expressed a plethora of feelings during the interviews about the events they recalled and their reactions to racial stimuli. These feelings are expressed in many quotes in these first four domains; however, it is useful to examine the scenarios that elicited the most strongly expressed feelings to gain information about environmental precipitants. Overall, it appears that there were three types of situations that brought up strong, and mostly negative emotional reactions: a) a shift in the participant’s racial status resulting in loss of race related power; b) a trigger of awareness of the participant’s own privilege or racism; and c) a trigger of awareness of other White people’s privilege or racism. A fourth, and less common type of situation was d) a scenario where participants felt an alliance or connection with people of color, or a sense of effectiveness in addressing racism. A summary of each of the four scenarios follows.
**a. Shift in racial power structure.** In these situations, participants were racial minorities within a social context. Several participants described this taking place outside the United States. For one participant, traveling to his child’s birth country brought up mixed feelings; in this quote the participant mentions race among the forms of power that he is aware of usually having:

“I**nterviewee: This was a profound experience of racial difference, um, because I didn't speak Spanish. (Wife) could speak a little bit, and, uh—I mean, that's the most profound experience I've had with being, you know, immersed, and then we got on the airplane in (city), and I was on a plane with all Spanish-speaking people, and we're going to (country). That was really a profound change.

Interviewer: Can you remember what you were thinking at the time?

Interviewee: I—it was the first time I had ever been completely immersed in a culture that was not speaking my language. Um. What was I thinking?

Interviewer: Or—

Interviewee: Feeling?

Interviewer: And feeling. And feeling. Yeah.

Interviewee: I was feeling, um, excited, really exhilarated, and really unstable. Really off balance. Feeling like I—all—a lot of my power is language, and, um, you know, whatever power, uh—you know, I—I—you know, I have—you know, physically, I'm aware that I'm tall. I'm aware that I'm white. Okay, so we talked about those issues and how those can—and unquestionably, in growing up in the '60s—I'm—you know, this was a—aware this was a form of power. I was—I was—you know. My wife did a pretty decent job, but I couldn't, so I felt—I felt
quite happy to be powerless. But I say that, and that's—that's sort of intellect. My nervous system felt destabilized, and unsure, and unconfident, and very dependent on everybody around me to be nice to me, and to be courteous to me, and people were, and I think that's the dominant thing that I was going to say that was stunning to me about (country)” (P9, 31-32).

Another participant spoke of feeling like an “outsider” when at birth family gatherings (P4, 5). Other feelings previously mentioned by participants finding themselves in racial minority situations include discomfort and awkwardness (n=5).

b. Awareness of own race privilege or racism. Participants’ awareness of their own privilege or acts of racism or stereotyping elicited even stronger feelings than discomfort or awkwardness. In these cases, the predominant feelings were guilt, shame, anger, and disappointment in oneself. Examples of scenarios include participants finding themselves engaging in racial profiling or stereotyping. One participant recounted taking part in a professional endeavor which by her own admission exploited people of color: “It's really shameful. There's really no publications that came out of the (project). I was part of that project, so I had incredible guilt for that” (P1, 4).

Tension, confusion, and anger were also recounted. At times participants hesitated to express a feeling, or expressed a feeling and then retracted the statement. One participant stated, “Well, I-I hate shame, the word shame” when trying to identify feelings associated with his racial awareness (P8, 25). Another participant shared that he had felt “grateful” and “lucky” to be White, sentiments he said that he had never expressed before this interview; he later clarified via email:
“I said to you at one point, as I recall, that I felt lucky to be White. I felt deeply disturbed that I said that after you left, because I think it is not true, and also because I think it was slightly perverse of me to say it, because it is such a partial and disturbing truth. There is a kind of obviously self-serving truth in that feeling of being lucky not to be the direct victim of racism, but it was an immature feeling that was utterly unsustainable, and never really true to begin with. I don’t think I sustained that feeling for a milli-second before it crumbled in my mind like a mirage, and I felt and knew the deeper feeling of shame, humiliation and degradation” P9, 78).

c. Awareness of other White peoples’ privilege or racism and its effect. Even more common than participants’ acknowledging their own privilege was the phenomenon of participants’ observing and reacting to White privilege and racism as a whole, and its effects on their children and in society. One participant stated, in reference to other White peoples’ lack of “tolerance”: “This is kind of strange, but sometimes I feel kind of, you know, mad [laughs] that I’m White sometimes [laughs] because it’s like, I don’t know. I think because I feel like sometimes people just don’t get it, but um, uh, it’s very frustrating” P10, 24.

Other feelings cited about racism included the following: frustration, sadness, discomfort, pain, humiliation, embarrassment, heartbreak, guilt, awkwardness, pain, anger, fury, horror, concern, anxiety, worry, and dread. There were no participants who did not express at least one of these feelings. For two participants, embarrassment and pain were expressed at the history of racism in the United States. For others, these feelings were reactions to their children’s experiences, disparities in education, income,
or health care, inequality or differential treatment in the workplace, other White peoples’ lack of awareness about racism, and the observation of internalized racism at play – including colorism among people of color, and valuing of European physical features.

d. Sense of positive purpose or connection related to race. The least common scenarios that elicited feelings for participants were those that had positive associations with racial stimuli. Several participants expressed pride in their decision to adopt, and their parenting decisions. As noted previously, one third of participants expressed pride in achievements of the racial group of their child. Another area within which participants expressed pride was their work, when their work involved a social justice mission, directly or indirectly related to racial equality. Two parents stated that they enjoyed their increased awareness and understanding of people of other races post-adoption, and several participants expressed that they had positive experiences with a friend of color, or in diverse environments – including their workplaces (n=3) or neighborhoods, past or present (n=5). One participant spoke of her friendship with a woman of another race:

“We have some other friends um, of, of Indian descent um, and, and it’s, it’s very interesting—I, I, I met the mom at a playground, and our kids hit it off and we hit it off. And it was very interesting; she grew up in India ah, on a farm, where I grew up in (country) on a farm. And even though we come from two completely different worlds um, we had so many things in common and so many values in common, and um, the way we want to raise our children and so on. So it’s, it’s been really wonderful to have a friend like her, who is just, so—from such a different world, but yet we have, have this common bond that we can um, we can get
together and um. And I, I , I really enjoy spending time with her, going out with her” (P11, 16).

Another participant stated: “I um, feel like (workplace) is kind of cool because where I work—and I worked in very diverse places which is nice, that I worked in legal services and immigration work - there’s a lot of diversity and people I work with. Mostly the administration is Latino which is interesting, and the kids are mostly African American and then Latino” (P12, 25).

Lastly, several participants expressed pride in their children’s development of a positive racial identity over time, noting the progression from rejecting or not being interested in their race and culture, to embracing their race through friendships and interest in learning more about their racial and cultural history. In addition, several participants expressed hope for their children’s generation, for less racism and more diversity.

**Summary of Domain IV and reflection on a narrative**

Participants’ responses and reactions to race-related events were varied and unpredictable, with a few participants taking action to address racism and discrimination, usually at work or at their children’s schools. As with participants’ race discourse with their children, participants’ had a tendency to react rather than initiate. Affective reactions to racial incidents were intense, and described with strong language. Participants also described connections with people of color, and more frequently disconnections or tense interactions. For most participants, the racial makeup of their circles of friends did not change after adopting, and participants expressed a sense of disappointment about the lack of diversity in their social circles.
A narrative that is emblematic of the dialectic between desire for connection to other races and the interpersonal separations apparent in daily life, is one participant’s story of his encounter with a Black woman whom he knows from his neighborhood. His attempt to relate to her in his role as a transracially adoptive parent - “I’m going to be part of the African American culture too” (P8, 25) - can be seen as an attempt to bridge a racial divide. He concluded this story by stating that as a White person, one does the best one can to level, or balance the issues, and then reflected that this experience meant for him that, “You haven’t gotten over race and probably never will” (P8, 25). This is a poignant illustration of the tension between awareness and helplessness. Even if one does the best one can to address racial issues, the question remains whether race can be ‘gotten over.’ The same participant explicitly acknowledged how he had benefitted from White privilege in every work position for which he has been hired, told a story about hiring a person of color in a manner to consciously address disparities at his workplace, and shared that transracial adoption was a means of “giving back” (P8, 29). He showed awareness of privilege, and evidence of taking some steps to address racism. As with the basketball story, transracial adoption may have been a means of bridging a racial divide, in a situation that evoked fewer feelings of vulnerability or shame, and more of a sense of effectiveness and gratification.

Domain V: Reflections about race: Identity, race, and dilemmas

This domain covers participants’ reflections on their racial identity, including how they perceive their racial identity has changed, if at all, since parenting. Participants’ thoughts about other aspects of their identity are shared. In addition, participants’ ideas
about the meaning of race in our society are explored. Lastly, this domain includes an examination of the participants’ dilemmas and concerns that are race-related.

*White identity: views of and changes in.* In spite of participants’ tendency to talk more about their children’s racial identity than their own, when prompted they shared insights about their own race and how their racial identity had changed since parenting. Many participants (n=11) expressed that they believed that this research topic was important, with some saying that they thought about their race a lot, and others saying that they believed they should think about it more. One participant stated: “I've actually never been asked this—these questions about race before. I've *thought* about it my whole life, but I've never sat with someone and had you listening and really interested in that question” (P9, 70-71). Other participants shared their belief in the importance of the topic, but noted that they did not have a chance to think about it often, one stating “Certainly, um it’s something that I think we *need* to be thinking about, all about—um, or I need to be thinking about. Sort of be reminded that uh, as I have children who are African American in a white family, *[clears throat]* what, what is going to be—uh anyway, that’s something that I have to be sort of constantly thinking about” (P8, 28). As another parent added, “Sometimes it (*talking about her racial identity*) makes you think like, ‘Oh, I should really be more thoughtful about this.’ You know. And then you feel bad that you’re not. I do feel like I’m passively thinking about it all the time or a lot more than, but, but trying to be explicit about it is a good thing, I think” (P5, 32). Lastly, one participant stated, “I think it’s something that I—I mean I—I want to keep learning about it, and hopefully growing from it, and you know, just thinking about it more. I don’t know, just trying to understand it on a deeper level because a lot of times it’s more you
know, you go through your day. You don’t really think about these things. It’s good to stop and—and process it and have more of an awareness about it, like you know” (P6, 40).

Overall, these responses suggest that participants think about race, including their own race, but do not speak about the topic explicitly, and upon reflection, wish they did have or create the opportunities to push themselves in this area. Therefore it follows that for many participants, the thoughts about their racial identity and race that are outlined below, are thoughts in progress, or thoughts that have been germinating over years but not necessarily expressed in conversation often or at all.

As several participants noted when responding to the question about the meaning of Whiteness growing up, for them White identity was the default, the unmarked, the normal and the typical. However, when asked to reflect about their racial identity over time, and post-adoption, half of the participants described their identity as complicated, fluid, and changing in response to their experiences, mostly experiences related to parenting. One participant called his racial identity “multifaceted and fluid,” (P7, 43). Another parent, who stated that he did not think his racial identity had changed post-adoption, reflected that through observing his child, “I guess I’m seeing how fluid identity may be,” and also noted that being a transracially adoptive parent was “Just another – another piece of – another skin – another piece of skin on me. It’s just another thing. I don’t know how big it is” (P9, 66). For this participant, his identity was more connected to social norms he rejected, “By refusing to be defined by – by the history, but to define myself in terms of the world that I want to be” (P9, 20). He further describes
this aspect of his identity as connected to his work, not race, but this quote illustrates how he perceives his identity as complicated and intertwined with race:

“You know, there're all these shadows that kind of attach to us as people. Um, you know, people see color. People see race. Sometimes they do. Sometimes they don't, maybe. I don't know, but I sort of think I can tell when people are and when they're not. I don't know that I can, but I sort of think I can. Um, and, um—and I sort of think there are times when people see me as White, and so they're seeing me racially and when they’re not, so I think it’s – we’re in this mirror with - with each other, is kind of the way I think of it, and some of it isn’t, and it’s not – it’s not – you know it’s not just race” (P9, 21).

Another participant had difficult pinpointing how her racial identity had changed, but when asked, said that she “absolutely” felt different about her race post-adoption, but could not think of a way to illustrate this change, other than talking about how much she was aware of race when with her children (P5, 19). One parent stated that post-adoption, “Whiteness became a more obvious part of my identity” (P2, 14). In another general statement about identity change, one parent noted that her experiences of discomfort witnessing racism towards her son, and discrimination against herself by her partner’s family had an impact on her identity, or “persona”: “It’s helpful to be able to relate to uncomfortable stories that affect you racially and, um, and if you don’t experience that or if it’s rare, you’re kind of like missing something. You’re missing something. And I think it really helps to form your whole persona if—if you do—if you are in a situation that’s very uncomfortable” (P10, 26).
Other participants were more specific about the ways they felt their racial identity had changed. Relating to her advocacy for her children in schools, a participant shared, “So, and you know, I was presenting as a Black parent, really, 'cause my kids are Black. And it was I mean, it was really, uh, yeah. So I, I think my identity kind of shifted” (P3, 18). In a follow-up email, one participant shared that he reflected after the interview about his racial identity over his lifetime. Previously in the interview, he had described his awareness of racism in the workplace, schools, and the media. In this follow up, however, he described a transition from naiveté about racism as a child, to recognition of racism in the North as well as the South:

“At 10 and 12, I felt proud to be in a "Perfect Family", proud to be a WASP. I did not know or did not think of WASP as a derogative term. I'd brag about my father, my family. As a child, I wanted everything to be the way it was, what I thought to be the perfect, happy, secure family. When I saw it was not a perfect world with the fire hosing of young people in the south, the treatment of Jews in concentration camps, my secure world began to fall apart. My ethnicity I began to see as part of the problem. My (Southern state) relatives using the word Nigroes, emphasizing the ‘Nig’, made me realize that they did not view African American's as equal. At probably 12-13, I wondered if somehow my ethnicity was responsible for the plight of the Jews in Germany and African Americans in the south. I distanced myself from my Southern (two different states) relatives, seeing them as racist and anti-Semitic, identifying myself as (non-racist) Northerner. I was naively surprised and confused when Northerners would say or do something racist” (P8, 29-30).
A few participants spoke of their racial identity, or views of race, going through different phases or stages. For one, his view of race became more complicated, as outlined in three phases:

“So you know, basically I—I think that I was able to preserve a relatively idealistic view of—of multiculturalism through you know, through my—through middle age. I used to play—you know, I—I lived in um, what you would call diverse neighborhoods for most of my young adulthood, and you know, I used to go and play basketball down at the courts and you know, that kind of thing, and uh, um, so anyway, and it was—it was an easy—So basically three—three phases of my life. There's the, you know, easy childhood where I just sort of thought it's easy to you know. There’s a very simplistic view of race. There was the middle years when I was living in a um, diverse neighborhood and feeling like you know, I got this down, and then there was the years after we adopted these kids, which are you know, far more complicated” (P4, 3-4).

The other participant named three stages of racial awareness post-adoption, as part of a “journey”:

“Well for a while, I went—I’m sure I went through, I went through a period feeling pretty good, that, like, “Wow. Our eyes are opened, and good for us.” [Laughter]. You know? I would characterize it as kind of self-righteous kind of um thinking, um but you know, that only lasted for so long. [Laughter]. Um. Then, then I went through a period of feeling like we had all this knowledge, and it was clear that hardly anybody in the world has this knowledge and awareness, and what can you do to help? [Laughter]. You know? So that was
definitely a stage. I would say now, I’m more at the point of it—it’s just—you—you intervene when you have an opportunity, and you don’t otherwise, and it’s just part of the fabric of life. You know, it’s- it's, I guess it’s just more integrated into who I am now, that I feel more comfortable speaking up when I need to or to know when to step back and let things play out or you know, things like that. I feel um, much further along in that journey—[laughter] now that’s been 18 years” (P2, 16).

This participant added that her racial identity is now more nuanced:

“I guess I feel like I have—uh, where I used to be fairly—there wasn’t much gray in my world view. I mean, I feel like I grew up with good values in terms of appreciating people for who they are and you know, not judging too quickly about people, um, but I don’t think I had a lot of gray in there. I, and I think now, my racial identity is much more nuanced in terms of how I think about it, when it’s important, when it’s not important, when I choose to act on it or not, um and it feels like less of a—the word struggle comes to mind” (P2, 17).

Half of the participants brought up other aspects of their identity that influenced them, including gender, sexuality, religion, bilingualism, and binationality. These intersecting identities, as participants described them, made their assessment of situations more complicated and nuanced, and they expressed awareness of multiple layers of privilege, lack of privilege, and ways of seeing themselves and others. One participant observed that her child’s developmental challenges raised her awareness of intelligence privilege that she had previously taken for granted.
Another noted that her gender and sexual minority status gave her an increased empathy to other people who were considered different: “I guess for me, I have always felt different from a gender perspective, um, so I always had a lot of, I think, sympathy or like um, some-some feeling of connection with other groups that felt either different or oppressed. Um, so I think that helped me to be more thoughtful about this kind of stuff, or not thoughtful, but like except, like just more open. Even though I hadn’t had a lot of experience, but like, I was just open to it in a way that some other people weren’t” (P5, 5). This participant added that she viewed multiple dimensions of identity in herself and others, with race being one of them, and was “always thinking about how I’m being perceived, and race is definitely part of that” (P5, 12).

Identity as social justice agent. Participants’ identity as White people was often linked not just to the recognition of privilege that was discussed in previous domains; participants also saw themselves as different from other White people, and having greater racial awareness. Many participants described actions at work that they undertook to promote racial diversity or bring awareness to racism (n=7), such as the previously mentioned hiring decisions, participation in mentoring or diversity programs, purposeful reversal of stereotyped images, or confronting supervisors about discriminatory practices.

For several participants, the progressive nature of their work organizations was cited as integral to their identity and sense of purpose as a social justice agent. For one, diversity at her workplace was a positive factor; for the other, racial hierarchies in employment positions are part of what he hopes to address through his leadership; this participant described his work’s mission as the following:
“My passion was always to try to bring, uh, more and more—you know, I always thought I aspired to the middle class, and I aspire for a strong middle class in America, and I feel that that kind of middle class—I don't aspire for—I mean, we're—we're reasonably wealthy, but I work very hard to build a company which, um—the whole company is being given to the employees, for example. That's sort of an expression of this fight that I continue to fight where it's going to be an employee-owned company—employee stock, and the whole company's been given to the employees, and, um, I'm extremely proud of us, and I feel it's in many ways like, uh, a crowning accomplishment of what I've always been working on—is this issue of, uh—it's a defining idea: the issue of a fundamental equality, even though we all are different, and I certainly don't think any one group should define the way all groups should be. I mean, I find that to be one of the most abhorrent ideas: the idea that any one perspective thinks that they should have the power over other people” (P9, 17-18).

Several participants spoke about being judged for their behaviors, as they discussed overall awareness of their racial identity and changes in racial awareness. One stated, in the context of framing racism as a sin, and his refusal to be defined by society’s parameters:

“You know, in the—in the religious texts, they talk about sin being like something that becomes collective. Well, I do understand that. I do feel race and racism that way. That there's a way in which you're caught in a kind of soup of feelings, projections, feelings, history, and all of that, and you can't—so I say "refusal," and I do believe that. I think you have to refuse to be in that—that, you
know, soup or web, and then you have to not only consciously and mentally—or, I don't mean really mental. I mean in your will, or in your imagination, or in your—whatever. You know, the will, really. Your desire. Who you're going to be. That question of—ah, my back—of the who... Who am I? I think you have to not only define it in imagination, but you have to do it. Then you have to be that person. Because—you know, because we're judged who we—how we behave.
Um, so that's how I think how I've lived with it” (P9, 21-22).

Another participant considered judgment by society and his children, and then linked his own spirituality to his identity as a person who wants to make positive changes in society:

“But [clears throat] you know how does, how does, is society going to judge me in the future? And I think I do you know, think about how my children are going judge me in the long run and with the, is this something that they’d be proud of? One thing is, that I guess that you haven’t talked about, is religion, um, which is a whole huge part of this, is, uh I think that in my early psyche, uh and I think in all—you know, I-I think the-the framing of a child is all, mm-so much of it takes place between zero and five years old. Um, so that I think that between zero and five, the notion was that there’s this White God up above, looking down, uh that is judging you. Um, so uh, and then becoming an atheist, or agnostic, and then becoming an atheist, um—Something that certainly had something to do with forming of my uh my need to live Jesus’ life, uh but now, as an adult, not s-seeing Jesus as son of God. I see that Jesus is just another word for uh, Mother Teresa,
Gandhi, Martin Luther King, uh trying to figure out what’s the best way to change the world towards a positive um aspect” (P9, 26-27).

In keeping with this aspect of participants’ identity as a person doing good in the world, and going against the racial norm or status quo, several participants explicitly linked their decision to adopt transracially to their desire to do something positive and act against the norm. One participant linked the adoption to his previously stated concept of refusal to accept racial inequity. Another stated, “We thought that we were—you know, we wanted to—to break stereotypes. We—we were—you know, we were looking forward to having a family that everybody kind of you know, relished. You know, we were going to have each other's backs, and we were going to be um, breaking stereotypes together, and then we were going to feel proud about that” (P4, 40). Lastly, another participant framed transracial adoption as, “Having come from privilege, why shouldn't I give back. My wife and I saw so much selfishness coming from the Me generation of the 70's-80's. I felt a sense of moral righteousness not to be part of that trend” (P8, 29).

*Perspectives on other White people.* One theme that emerged was participants seeing themselves as different from other White transracially adoptive parents, different from extended family members who were White, not embodying negative stereotypes associated with White people, or taking action to address issues of injustice, racial or otherwise.

One participant struggled with the idea that he was labeled a WASP, and in spite of having written WASP on the demographic questionnaire for this study as his ethnicity, did not identify with the wealth or dominating characteristics he associated with the term:
“That’s (WASP)—which is a word I never even heard 'til I was—it's a fairly funny thing ’cause when I was grown up I had you know, like—one of my earlier girlfriends was making fun of me for being such a WASP and ’cause we weren't like wealthy or anything like that. We were—but um, but yeah, it’s I had a couple of girlfriends who sort of thought I was like completely emblematic of you know, this—this dominant class, and I kind of felt like, boy, I'm—you know, I have these huge college loans, and you know. I don't feel like you know, uh, running anything, but um, anyway, so I—I sort of didn't even know the word WASP until I was probably in my 20s or maybe late teens anyway” (P4, 11).

Another participant termed herself “anti-racist” (P11, 21). In another case, a participant disagreed with a family member about a town regulation that she felt was racist and exclusionary, noting that this family member “does not perceive her privilege at all,” and stating, “So I do feel – I feel different from my family because I have very different beliefs and I have a very different lifestyle” (P12, 32).

In addition to several participants who were critical of other White peoples’ lack of awareness of privilege, as noted earlier, there were other instances of participants’ being critical of other White peoples’ attitudes or behaviors concerning race. One parent reflected, “I mean they just—I feel like they’re—sometimes I feel like their level of awareness about race in this country is just on a different level from my understanding, and what—and I think that I used to do this too, like minimize what people experience in this country. Um, oh, it’s not that bad, or that couldn’t have happened, or you know, people aren’t really like that, or I see—I feel that kind of attitude” (P6, 35). This same participant felt that her Black colleagues or those in multiracial families understand her
better than her White coworkers, noting, “I think that I feel like some of my White colleagues don’t really understand me and my family and you know, where I’m coming from” (P6, 34).

One participant said that she sees a continuum of White racial identity, and feels she is now more accepting of dealing with other White people who are at different places on this continuum than she used to be: “I feel like there’s just this vast continuum of where people are with regard to their own racial identity, and you know, I-I just feel more equipped to just take them where they are—you know, and not feel angry or um, defensive or you know, any number of things in reaction to whatever they happen to bring out about that” (P2, 17). In the same vein, another participant described the effects of maturing on how he views other people and judges his own effectiveness regarding racial justice:

“I see racism, and I do. I—I see the way people treat differences and turn on or turn off and, uh, light up or don't, or get interested or don't get interested, and— you know, for all kinds of reasons, and, um, I—I guess, you know, whether— whether, as I said, whether for age or because of the experience of the kids or, um, I think I'm—the word that keeps coming back is generous. I mean—I— if I'm not going to do something about it—there's a lot of crap going on in the world all the time, and so I guess it's just that I pick my fights, so I see all these things but—but I feel—I—I have really big confidence that we can—you know, I guess this is what moved me before: make the world the way we—that would be most worthy of us. But to do it—you know, when you’re a kid and you imagine the
world is one thing. Now I know that to make even this much of a dent is a really big, heroic thing” (P9, 45).

Other participants showed less understanding, citing frustration with “holier than thou” White people who considered themselves progressive:

“But, you know, there is that education that you think maybe when I was younger and naïve that you can change people’s minds by appealing like [laughing] giving them information, whatever. And you know, I actually feel that people who maybe aren’t so—so—I mean I think that was my—just—just disaffection with that kind of community who thinks they’re like holier than thou but really don’t examine their own—their own privilege. Um, never would examine it. It was always like taken for granted and very hard to chip away at” (P12, 54).

Similarly, another participant pointed out the contradiction he saw between White people, including a family member, who made racist statements, and yet in their behaviors are open and friendly towards people of color, in contrast to self-proclaimed liberal White people at times exhibit exclusionary or discriminatory behavior:

“There are people who, in their mind, think they're not racist, and then when they’re—you know, they talk to somebody (a person of color), they can't talk to them…I saw that with all the liberal people in the church where I was, but when it came to—[laughter]—you know, some of the issues I was fighting over on the sexton, they were just comfortable with the sort of social order the way it was. You know, with being kind of slightly demeaning toward somebody who was
doing, um, you know, bathroom cleaning. So—so I just see—I just see this—this gap between the mind and the body, or whatever you want to call it” (P9, 23, 24).

Lastly, a parent who spoke of his own identity as having “complexity and richness,” and his enjoyment of difference, reflects on the contrast of some other White peoples’ perspectives:

“It's a huge contrast to many people's lives I am exposed to who I feel like are much more monochromatic. Um, and there, I feel distance compared to those people who are—who live in completely homogeneous situations, um, and who are blind to that aspect of themselves and other people. Especially to themselves, frankly. That is the most unfortunate thing. Not just other people, but blind to their own, um, fluidity and therefore, possibility, you know? It's sort of being enclosing, feeling locked into being only who they believe they are, what they've come from” (P7, 43-44).

Of other parents in a transracially adoptive group, this participant observed, “I often feel like with some of the parents there who come from maybe a slightly more homogeneous and insular backgrounds or just where they live, you know— um, or whatever, um, that they are really not—they're very—they're not very adventurous. So when something is different, they tend to recoil from it instead of having interest and openness” (P5, 46).

*Race as a construct.* A theme that emerged from the data was participants’ grappling with the idea of what race means in society today. Some participants (n=4) expressed conflicted thoughts and feelings about ascribing importance to race. Participants’ replies to questions about their racial identity and racial awareness often flowed from stories, to philosophical musings, to strongly stated opinions - as expected
with a narrative study and semi-structured interview protocol. This was especially evident as all participants pondered the meaning of race as it intersects with other social phenomena. Two participants literally asked the question, “What is race?” (P7, 1), one at the beginning of the interview, and the other stating near the end, “I mean, I kicked all around that thing—of what is race” (P9, 74).

Acknowledging race as a social construction, yet still meaningful, one of the above participants stated, “Race does exist even though race is in people's minds, for the most part. Just because it's in people's minds doesn't mean it doesn't exist. What's in our mind is probably the most important thing that exists 'cause it influences how we treat people and how we act” (P7, 41). The other participant mentioned above likened his view of race to that of cultural immersion: “The experience of race, as with most experience is partly the way we swim unconsciously in the culture with the voices and feelings of our culture influencing our feelings for good and for bad, even when we reject the culture. That’s part of the pain and horror of racism and how it becomes trans-social, seeming larger than any one or two or even a hundred thousand people” (P9, 78).

This acknowledgment of the power of race in our culture brought up mixed and strong feelings for participants. One of the participants cited above spoke of the potential good and bad associations with race: “I started talking about, is that (race) a thin thing, is that a primal thing, is that a tribal thing, is that a superficial thing, is that a c-c-crude thing? I mean, I talk about that a lot of different ways. Is that a sacred, beautiful thing? I don't know. It can be any one of those things. It can be really beautiful. It can be really crude, is my sense. Like, tribal identity can be a really good thing. It can be a really, really bad thing” (P9, 74).
Half of the participants expressed thoughts about a desire to transcend race, a wish for race not to matter, to be a problem that has been fixed. Mentioned earlier were the two participants who saw the need for affinity groups, yet wished their existence were not necessary. One of these participants stated: “I sort of feel like part of being human is transcending those things (*racial differences*), which at some level, I know is naive, but at another level, actually, I believe is important. I guess naive and important maybe mixed together, turns into idealistic” (P7, 15). In one case, the dialectic of the wish versus the reality was expressed in this quote:

“I wonder if there's a fantasy life that—that I have—I know you don't want to get into what my psychology is of the fantasy life, but I'm just trying to come to this—where...I feel that—you know, that (*children*) and I are so bonded, um, that—you know, I—I don't—I don't—I don't like the language of, you know, it's transracial or post-racial—or something like that, because I wonder by whose definition and what did we post-racial into? You know? Whose race? Are we post-ra—post-racial, no—no race, race? You know, I'm—I love distinctions between people and—you know, but did—was I in part imagining a kind of exodus from a world into another world? Of transcending race in some way. I'm a little uncomfortable with this idea of transcending race. Race is part of our identity. My eye color is part of my identity. My—my, um, shape of my finger is. I mean—I—I don't know. I mean, okay, so—but that—those things haven't caused problems offhand” (P9, 36).

For another participant, the feeling that race should not matter was balanced with the reality of racism: “Even though it’s, you know, 2013, and there shouldn’t be this whole
Transracially Adoptive Parents 221

race thing going on, it still goes on a lot” (P10, 25). One participant also expressed a wish for a “level playing field” for race, noted the progress in gay rights, and pondered whether a similar shift would take place for race. In this quote he expresses hope, but not confidence:

“I mean the whole thing of g-gay marriage in the United States has taken this monumental shift, uh where ten years ago you never imagine and here today we’re talking about it uh being the norm. Um, and I think the same is-is true for, I mean, I would like to say the same is true for racism. And it’s, it-uh-it-it-someday, I guess I would hope. And it-and-and you know, as I say, television and the media and movies all portray uh you know, today we’re, we're, we're, there’s this push to make it a level playing field. Um, and you know, whether it’s going be successful or not, I don’t know” (P8, 24).

Lastly, one participant described racism as a concept that had “expired” and questioned racism as the cause of social stratification as it exists now:

“Um, I think I—you know, the—the big conclusion that I have drawn um, is that uh, racism is a concept that expired in the last millennium, and I think it's a—it’s a useless word um, in the modern era, and I think or—this culture is held back by its inability to stop thinking about racism. Um, and racism belonged to the era of Martin Luther King um, you know, the—you know, ’cause I—I think race isn't the issue. I think culture is the issue. You know, I know it's very easy to say. I mean, a lot of people say that. And it's very easy to say you know, the old—some of these things. Some of my best friends, blah, blah, blah… But when I look back in my life I have—I mean, there are many, many you know, perfectly good
examples of this. I have no stress whatsoever in dealing with people of other races who share interests with me. Um, so you know, I'm—I'm utterly confirmed in the—in the long view of my life looking back, that race is not even an interesting factor, let alone a dominant factor. That um, you know, belief systems um, are what matters, and you know, it's a—it's a crime that certain belief systems have gotten associated with certain—uh, you know, again, I'm not the first person to say this, but the—the um, you know, the grand social experiment from the—like the '60s or so was to say, now, if we just integrate schools and water fountains and blah, blah, then you know, um, people will—um, you know, that's what was holding back uh, you know, keeping the stra—social stratification in place, but I don't think there's very much less social stratification now” (P4, 42-43).

Intersections of race with culture and class. In addition to expressing mixed feelings about the significance of race, all participants found the intersections of race, class, and culture to be complicated and confusing.

In terms of socioeconomic status, two thirds of participants raised class and poverty as factors that made it difficult to figure out what role race played in a situation—situations involving friendships, their children’s experiences, and the contexts of children’s birth families. For one participant, the end of a friendship with a woman of color was described as related to class as well as race: “You know it was, was uh, you know it was definitely race—somewhat racially charged but it was also just the—it was more—it was—I mean it’s always class intersects and I felt it was more class, to me, than race. Um, so it’s hard to—to extricate, you know to— It’s so intertwined” (P12, 14).
For another participant, what she observed as the lack of involvement of Black parents at school, the environment in her children’s birth family home, as well as the home of a mentee, were all questioned as connected to issues beyond race: “And, and again, I come back to—which I know is not your focus, but the issue of poverty and, and access and—uh, I mean you know, immigration is, and there's just I mean, there's so—everything gets just all—everything's all kind of wrapped together, I think” (P3, 28). In the context of stating that the interview questions were challenging, one participant reflected that, “It’s hard to separate out race from socioeconomic status” (P6, 40). One participant observed that class and context will affect how her children are perceived, depending on where they are: “There’s a class element as well. So if you live in certain communities, people assume you’re illegal, right? If you live in other communities, people probably assume you aren’t, or whatever” (P5, 23). Finally, another participant spoke to these relationships as having been part of his thinking since college: “When I started going—you know, studying history in college and studying theology and thinking more about race, I remember thinking about how much of it is—is about poverty and education. You know, how we—why do we have feelings that we have about race? Why do we think something—you know, why would skin color make you feel "other"? Obviously, there are cultural things, there's poverty, um, and there's skin color” (P9, 4).

Over half the participants (n=7) talked about culture as being related to race as well, including but not limited to the participants who had lived overseas. One parent focused on the idea of nurture taking precedent over nature, and the impact of his and his partner’s culture on their children’s identity: “I used to talk about instead of a genetic propagation, mimetic propagation. I don't pass on my genes, but I pass on my memes.
Um, and that sort of became something I thought about a lot as an important part of parenting and families, is culture of family, um, the memes that it propagates” (P7, 18-19).

Another participant questioned the influence of culture when asked about his thoughts on racial awareness post-adoption:

“So what is genetic? What is cultural? Um, okay, she (daughter) comes from a gene pool. Right? We know this. I don't—I—I don't claim any expertise. I—I don't know how anybody does. Are there—are there things that we call Germanic? Are there things that we call Hispanic?” (P9, 62-63).

Asked to elaborate on her use of the term White culture, one participant had difficulty identifying what White or African American culture was. This participant had used the expression in the context of talking about her child’s identity: “I mean she’s very clear. She’s not White because every time I tell her she’s White culturally she’s like, ‘No. I’m not. I’m African American,’ so she’s very clear she’s African American or Black or whatever, and – and we’re White” (P6, 26).

“Interviewer: You were saying that your daughter is Black, but she’s being raised with White culture. How would you—how would you define that?

Interviewee: I mean I think um, maybe more of a European—Um, I mean I don’t—I mean what’s African-American culture? What’s White culture? I mean all I know is my culture. I mean I don’t know. I mean, yeah. I mean (daughter) has some friends that, you know, she’s gone to church with them. Church is very important. I mean I'm not religious at all. (Daughter) has never been religious. She’s like, “God, I don’t want to go to that church because it takes all day,”
because they had a christening of a baby, and she’s like, “I don’t want to go and sit there,” [laugh].

*Interviewer:* Mm-hmm.

*Interviewee:* So I mean maybe it’s not like the—a—I mean maybe it’s just our family culture. Like we’re not religious. I’m not religious at all, and you know, she’s, from the time she was very little, she was like, “There really isn’t a God,” because you know, kids talk about God a lot, and—and we didn’t in our family, and—and so and I—I guess that’s one of the big differences I see between African—like the African-Americans that’s she’s friends with. Like they’re very religious, and they go to church.

*Interviewer:* Mm-hmm.

*Interviewee:* Church plays a big role, um, and I don’t know. Um, so I don’t you know. I guess I don’t really understand the differences between if she had been raised in a Black family, but she would have had maybe more of an extended family. I don’t, you know. I just don’t know” (P6, 38).

For another participant, whose parenting influence was challenged by the open adoption of older children, navigating the distinction between associating stereotyped behaviors with race, and seeing these behaviors as separate from race, arose as a theme throughout the interview. At the beginning of the interview, this participant noted that race became complicated for him post-adoption, when “it’s not simply skin color, but you know, culture and all the other uh things that make it not quite as simple” (P4, 2). This participant rejected the idea of traits being coded racially, but felt that the conflicts with his children around stereotyped behaviors were inseparable from race because his
children have resisted full integration into the family. It should be noted that in this situation, the birth family has had the opportunity to exert unusual influence throughout the participant’s parenting years. Nevertheless, this participant’s thoughts about race and stereotypes provide insight into how inextricably race can be linked to social factors. The participant describes his view of the challenges below:

“So she was already sort of uh, a troubled or—or complicated or whatever kid to start with but—or not to start with, but by the time we got her. Um, but she—it is very much as if she looked in the manual, and found every negative stereotype about Black people that has ever been expressed or swept under the rug, and turned around and treated it as a—she—she read that as the manual for how to be black. She—she was clawing her way towards every ugly stereotype imaginable throughout her life, and that made us—so my experience of whiteness really only began when we I—we adopted these kids.

Because all of a sudden everything that I—you know, reading books, uh, respecting schedules, being curious about the world, um, enjoying the outdoors, um, you know, eating foods that are not fried. I mean—I mean I—I—I can't tell you the degree of cliché and—and ugly stereotype to which my daughter dragged us. So you know, basically the more we tried to—to drag her onto what I thought—or to steer her back to what I thought was you know, healthy, functioning, uh, workable life habits, the more you know, White, stereotypically white I became in her mind. Because it became a— you know every—every value became a battle over race, and she chose the wrong uh, side in every one of those
battles, and I won't be on time. I won't eat well. I won't go outside. I won't you know, open a book, uh, etcetera” (P4, 24).

The participant also questioned whether his values are part of his culture, and Whiteness, or if they have “intrinsic” worth apart from race:

“I've had to develop more respect for, or at least have a closer view of you know, I—I was never proud of being White. I mean that would have struck me as being sort of a racist sentiment, but it turns out that a lot of the things that I believe in are the things that are stereotypically associated with white people. Um, and—and very unfortunately, stereotypically anti-associated with black people. And you know, I don’t—I don't want those traits to be coded as White, but in the end, I believe in those traits, and those traits are coded as White, and um, you know, it's much harder to be—to pick the good guys, and going back to what I said before“ (P4, 21-22)

For this participant, parenting experience has led him to associate negative and positive traits with race and culture, in spite of acknowledging and repeatedly returning to the idea of not doing so – not “trafficking in stereotypes” (P4, 44). He provides examples such as trains not running on time in the country of origin of his children’s birth parents, and how being on time is critical to functioning in United States society, for example even in my scheduling of his research interview and his being on time. In what he says he originally thought of as a “cute story, but when I look back on it I’m not sure it is,” his child’s refusal to make a pie crust from scratch with an extended family member represented a negative cultural marker; his child defended her insistence on store bought crust by saying, “That’s my tradition” (P4, 43). The participant circles back to his earlier story
about trying to intervene in an interpersonal violence incident at a bus stop, as similar to his wanting to help his children who are drawn to stereotyped behavior by loyalty to their birth family:

“Um, our kids, because they ran to such stereotypes and—and shut down anything—any behavior pattern that they perceived as White or middle class—I mean, it's not just race. It's class too because they feel a loyalty to—again, this circles back to what I was saying before. We thought we were trying to help these kids escape an underclass uh, existence” (P4, 36).

The theme of a group of people adhering to self-sabotaging behaviors continued in this participant’s later reflection about parenting and race:

“It’s (transracial adoptive parenting) caused me to think a whole lot about the cultural experience of you know, Black and White in this country. Um, you know, I guess I used to think there were people that—it was a simple as there were people who are trapped in a bad place who were trying to get out of that bad place, and just you know, but everybody had their eye on the same goal. It's just some people had trouble getting to that goal, but it turns out there's a very—in—in my experience at least, there's a very large proportion of people who don't share the goal. Who you know, who are—you know, it's not as simple as, "Stop holding me back and I'll soar." It's, you know, "My—my dream is the opposite of your dream." Um, so it’s uh, well, it's been much more complicated” (P4, 30).

He concludes, “I've moved from thinking that—that race was a fun thing that we could uh—you know, that would be kind of cool to um, challenge some stereotypes together, to seeing it as a—well seeing that there's an intractable thing that is not primarily about
race, but it is unfortunately. People trap themselves in it by their uh, self-identification, I guess” (P4, 44).

While this participant provides insight on how powerful the psychological meaning making connections between race and behavior patterns can be, it is significant to note that for this participant and his partner - who also pondered the connections between race, class, and culture, but less extensively – their overall parenting experience and the complexities related to this particular open adoption were reported as more challenging than for the other participants. While his partner expressed sadness and concern for their children as well as hope, the depths of this family’s struggles were evident in this participant’s description of their parenting: “I guess the three phases of our child—of our childrearing years, which are you know, very sad. Sad, sadder and saddest” (P4, 29).

**Intersection of race with adoptive or developmental issues.** Most participants noted that in addition to culture and socioeconomic status, there were other complicating factors related to general parenting and adoption challenges that made racial issues difficult to sort out. Some parents noted that issues of race and racism exacerbated already challenging situations. One third of participants cited dealing with children’s learning disabilities, other special needs, and medical health issues as challenges that superseded issues related to race. One parent remarked that upon bringing home her infant, the child’s race was just one of many new characteristics and changes she needed to adapt to as a parent. As children grew older, several (n=3) parents saw race as intersecting with children’s developmental challenges, especially during adolescence. As one parent stated, “You know, I don't know that that's (child's challenging behavior
changes) about race. I think it's about being a teenage boy. And it probably doesn't help being a Black boy in a White family in a largely white world” (P3, 21).

In addition, family issues were at times conflated with race for parents when asked about how race came up for them through their parenting experiences. As one parent noted, “As I look back on it, I—I can't tell what's the difference with—I don't when we're dealing with racial issues or we're dealing with the family, I don't” (P9, 29), later stating again, “There's a whole thing about being a family which is just about being a family. I'm really convinced of that. There's another thing that is about race” (P9, 73).

Even with sibling discord, in the case where this participant described color differences between both adopted siblings as influencing the children’s experiences of race, the participant reported that it was unclear at times if sibling issues were typical to siblings, or related to color and race.

Another participant found it difficult to sort out whether a family member’s negative comment about her child was due to race, or adoption, or some combination: “I think that was more an adoption issue than a racial issue. But my mother, I can’t even remember what she said because I got so mad at it and it upset me so much. But I do—it’s very hard to tease out because I think there were feelings about having an adopted grandchild. And then an adopted grandchild who was of color. So it was hard to figure out what—what was real. But she said—she just made some very stupid remarks about color that made me really mad” (P12, 30).

One participant who adopted domestically, including one child adopted at an older age, reflected on his child’s use of her parents’ Whiteness as a way of marking
difference and incompatibility. This participant saw the child’s issues as related to social factors associated with his child’s experience in foster care, rather than race:

“So one—so the, the, the second child we adopted, who was uh, adopted when she was 11, she would throw it into our face that uh—‘I can’t live here, because I’m African American and you guys are White. And you have your White ways, and I’m not’— and uh, the reality was that that wasn’t, that wasn’t why she was, she couldn’t live with us, or she couldn’t tolerate us. Uh, it had nothing to do—it had to do with a class issue, I think. I mean, she had been in foster programs that were just horrible and um, she w- you know, she was dealing with uh, lots of other issues” (P8, 18).

This participant reflected on adoption related issues for his other child that may have been due to genetic loading (the participant requested that details be omitted for privacy):

“Our son is going through major problems. So, the question is, um, is it in part because of his adoption? Is it in part because of his (sic) African American? Is it self-esteem? And self-esteem is going to pl-play a huge part of um, his—I think, we-we both think that self-esteem—so that can be, certainly is, uh, an issue as an African American child in a White family. And certainly could be because of adoption. Um, I would say we also over-compensated with, ju- because we saw him as this, um, you know maybe w-w-we saw him as coming from an underprivileged uh, heritage, or, or, you know I mean, uh out of a family that was uh, under-served” (P8, 18-19).
Another participant used hand gestures to show the difference between the expected racial issues versus the present adoptive issues: “The sort of surprising fact is that race very quickly took a backseat to other issues, which were adoption related, but just not transracial-adoption related. Um, we—we anticipated race being this big (wide gesture). You know, it turned out to be this big (narrow gesture) compared to the real problems, which were this big (wide gesture)” (P4, 20). This participant’s partner stated, “What, what's what? And it, at some level, doesn't matter. You know what I mean, we used to, when we first adopted the kids, we spent a lot of time thinking, like was that adoptive behavior or is that because they're Black?” (P3, 35).

One participant made a connection between the multiple themes relating to race, adoption, and difference in his family, and his family’s attraction to films that include relatable narratives: “All the stories of you know, like Disney, are all people who are disenfranchised, adopted, have lost their parents. [Laughs] Um. I mean, it play, it plays out well so, for you, a-as a story. So um, that sort of um, s-s- uh, it-it seems to have migrated into our family’s um, norm of stories” (P8, 20).

Lastly, several participants reflected on their aging process as possibly playing a role in their understanding of race. With respect to her increased openness towards people of other races, one participant wondered how much of that change was related to her transracial parenting experience, and how much was due to maturity over time: “I feel more comfortable. I feel like able to—to really—um, like I want to get to know them. I want to get to understand them. I want to know about their culture. Maybe it’s just my maturity too” (P6, 31-32).
Concerns and dilemmas related to race. Participants’ concerns, and dilemmas regarding race fall into four general categories, and were expressed throughout the interviews, at least some by all participants. The categories include (1) participants’ worries about their children that are race-related; (2) participants’ wondering about their children’s race-related experiences; (3) participants’ worries about their own choices and responses to situations involving race; and (4) participants’ experiences of disconnection between intention or desire versus reality concerning diversity. Each subcategory is described below.

(1). participants’ worries about their children that are race-related. Over half the participants (N=7) shared concerns about their children facing discrimination in society. Areas of concern that parents mentioned included discrimination in hiring practices, the workplace, applications to college, and racial profiling by police and storekeepers. Two parents worried about their sons’ vulnerability and physical safety as Black males, and another parent worried about his child’s internalization of dominant norms of beauty. Several parents (n=3) expressed concern about their children’s being able to navigate racial and cultural differences. In one case, a participant expressed hope that her child would be able to maintain relationships with friends of color in spite of school and neighborhood changes. Another participant worried about her child experiencing differences on multiple levels – adoption, race, a sexual minority family - in the world as an adult.

(2). participants’ wondering about their children’s race-related experiences. A recurring theme when participants talked about race and their children was the phenomenon of wondering what their children’s internal experience was. In a word search of participants’
transcripts, the words “wonder or wondering” occurred 51 times. One parent wondered about his children’s perception of race and physical differences, their thoughts about children of their race with same race parents, whether some of their questions or statements would be the same if their parents were their own race. Another parent said she could only guess about her child’s thoughts about some race related issues, for example, why he waited years before telling her about the racial stereotyping and microaggressions he’d been experiencing for years. Another parent wondered repeatedly why her teenage daughter refused to talk about race in spite of her parents initiating conversations and providing readings.

Other sorts of parental wondering included how children were perceiving racial differences in and outside of the family, and whether or not there was something going on internally for the child that the parent was missing: as one participant stated, she did not know if there were situations related to race that affected her children and, “I’m just not seeing it” (P1, 15). One participant shared that she wondered about her latency age son’s thoughts about the racial balance at school, but noted, “We haven’t actually had an explicit discussion with him about that, what he was thinking along that. It seems a little premature for that, perhaps” (P5, 20). Perhaps one parent summed up other parents’ unanswered questions with a question of her own at the end of the interview: “I guess I’m curious. Are you talking to any of the kids? It would be fascinating to ask some of the same questions” (P3, 30).

(3). participants’ worries about their own choices and responses to situations involving race. Not only did parents worry and wonder about their children, they worried about their decisions regarding their children’s racial socialization (n=8). Even parents who
reported connecting children to their birth culture through relationships and information, expressed concerns. Several parents wondered if they had done enough to keep their children connected to their birth culture, through groups or through facilitating bilingualism. The area of most concern (n=6) was whether or not they were providing their children with the skills to handle racial discrimination. One participant wavered between wanting to provide protective skills and wondering if she were overreacting: “When I tell them about policemen, that they have to behave in a different way with a policeman. Or when they go into a store, that they can't be like how I am when I go into a store. Then I think, maybe I'm overreacting and I shouldn't give them that kind of self-consciousness. I worry that I'm not teaching them protective skills” (P1, 7). Another parent recalled:

“He said, Mom, you don't need to worry about me. It's like, I'm not worried about you. I'm worried about other people and how they are going to perceive you and how they are going to — uh you know, how they will judge you before — without knowing you in any way. And um, I don't feel like I've done — we've done a great job of giving him that — you know, that — I mean he's obviously had some experiences that have been racially motivated, but I don't know that he's strong enough or conscious enough to really protect himself in some situations” (P3, 22).

This same participant also expressed a desire to equip her children “to get ahead in the world” and wondered if school’s emphasis on Black history, which she also reviewed with him, was sufficient: “But um, and just the, you know, the drudgery of it (studying slavery and racism). I mean it's, it's uh, you know, it's awful. It's — but uh, at the same time, you know, I want him to be the best person he can be, and so having some historical
context is absolutely good, but um, having a better sense of how do I get ahead in the world is more important, I think” (P3, 28).

Another concern participants had that was related to preparing children for racism, was the idea that they might be raising their child in a “bubble” (P5, 22) or “buffering” (P11, 4) their children. One participant identified her child’s unawareness of racism as a potential issue: “And part of me, part of you is like—well, you know, you're kind of, a little bit of it is how much do you take that away from them, do you know what I mean? Like you know, if they haven’t noticed certain things yet, you don’t necessarily want to be throwing it in their face, right? So it’s like letting them exist in-in-in a-in a certain kind of privilege. We have that luxury. On the other hand, but then it can—if you don’t call them on certain stuff, it can flip over into real intolerance or something on their part “ (P5, 29-30).

Lastly, five participants had ongoing and unresolved concerns about balancing quality in their children’s schools with neighborhood and school diversity, finding it difficult to have both. With the most resource rich schools located in predominantly White neighborhoods, parents faced the decision about whether or not to move to a more diverse neighborhood at the cost of better quality education. As one parent, who moved from a predominantly Black and Latino neighborhood stated, “I wish we could move back and have the schools that we have here, you know?” (P2, 24). These parents lamented the lack of diversity in their neighborhoods and schools.

(4). participants’ experiences of disconnection between intention or desire versus reality concerning diversity. While all participants valued diversity, four identified their neighborhoods as racially diverse, four resided in neighborhoods with limited diversity –
the predominant racial minority group being Asian, with the Black and Latino population under 5% - and four lived in neighborhoods that were described as predominantly White. Most participants reported not having close friends who were people of color (n=7), three referred to people of color in their life but it was unclear how close these relationships were, and a minority (n=2) reported having close friends of color.

Half the participants wished for more diversity in their social circles: “I wish my relationships maybe should have changed a little more (post-adoption), incorporating more people of color, and they haven’t. You know. They haven’t, really” (P5, 31). One parent spoke of her neighborhood as homogenous relative to her work area: “It’s, um, primarily, you know, racially Caucasian. Unfortunately, really. I didn’t think about that component, you know, with our son going to school. Um, you know, it would have been much better in this area here which is much more diverse” (P10, 23).

Several parents (n=3) observed that it would be disingenuous to seek friends of color for the sake of their children. As one participant stated:

“So we did ask ourselves the question for the first time ever, I think, how diverse is our set of friends? Do we have any Asian friends, you know? And of course—and there were some, but we kind of starting thinking in these weird terms we had never thought about. Is that—is it enough? Should we have more Asian friends? Then it becomes—that’s kind of weird because—and then that, I think, had a weird ripple effect of after that, we found—I should speak for myself—I found myself sometimes, when meeting someone, like an Asian-American who might be a friend, felt like another parent or somebody who might become a friend when you meet the person for the first time, um, having an involuntary thought of, it
would be nice if this person became my friend because then he would be somebody Asian in my life and who my kids might be around and that would be a positive. But at the same time, you know, hating that reaction and feeling like, oh, God, that's terrible. I want to be his friend because I want to be his friend. Why would I want, you know—um, on the other hand, I guess probably, we all have ulterior motives, whether we think about it or not, for becoming people's friends that are based on all kinds of things. Wanting to be associated with them because of their jobs or where they live or what they look like or what car they drive or whatever, depending on whatever your priorities are” (P7, 31-32).

One participant considered the mission to befriend an African American colleague for his children’s sake to be “weird”:

“We were not friends outside of work. Um, my—my uh, wife was encouraging me to try to cultivate uh, a friend you know, and outside of work friendship with him because he would have been such a great uh, you know, role model for our kids. Um, and he actually had a couple of sons I think about the same age as our kids. You know, sort of a weird assignment, you know, buddy up to this guy and bring him home for dinner” (P4, 17).

In one other instance, a participant spoke of the challenge and dilemma of purposefully making relational connections across race upon becoming a parent:

“You know, early on, we realized you know, our-our immediate environment wasn’t especially diverse, so there was this, this feeling like we needed to you know, broaden our circle um, in order to provide an environment that we wanted our daughter to grow up in. And, and that exerts a kind of pressure, but it’s
artificial in a way. You don’t want to go make a friend with someone [laughter] of color just because they’re a person of color. That’s just wrong. So um, you know, we’d have these dilemmas set up um, which were challenging, so um, so there was that” (P2, 12).

Feeling the need to seek diverse friendships in a way not previously felt provoked discomfort for participants quoted above; perhaps this is because this situation implies that without having children of another race, having friends of color would not have been considered as critical.

Participants viewed the interpersonal distance between races in varying ways. For one parent, this divide was seen as seemingly inevitable: “I was aware of this—the scourge of racism. It was a constant topic of conversation. Uh, it was perceived, in our family, as evil, and yet, um, we continue to exist, bonding around people who are like us. Uh. I mean, this seems to me to be an unmistakable aspect of the human condition, as far as I can tell” (P9, 16). This participant later spoke about the challenge of bridging racial divides, noting that such connections required a “gift” (P9, 25). He recalled a friend who was able to do this in high school, and reflected that he has become more able to do this himself over time due to his work: “I came to gain some of those skills, probably in business and sales, but, um, I—I just—I just—when somebody has a gift at bridging difference—differences and different cultures. There're people who can do that better than others” (P9, 25).

Another participant also spoke about the challenges involved in making interracial connections. This participant shared two stories about building connections across race, and both stories were told at the end of the interview when she was asked if there was
anything she wanted to add. The first story involved her church sharing space with another group:

“Yeah it’s interesting, we have um, my church um, is a (denomination) church, majority are White people in it. And it used to be shared with a Haitian congregation afterwards, so they would rent the space after. And um, um, and the Pastor in our church was very much like, you know, he wanted to be anti-racist, and we had to do all these things. And he wanted to do all of these ah, church services together um, with the Haitian church, and it kind of worked and, you know, ah they would have church service together and then we’d have lunch afterwards. And, and the majority of the people would sit at separate tables.

And then there would be some people who would, you know, try to cross tables, you know? And we would be some of them, just trying to, you know, talk to people. And it was just somebody made a comment, and I can’t remember who it was, but somebody made a comment where they said ah, “We,” meaning the White people, “need them much more than they need us. So it was much more like, “Well, if we have these ah, church services together, and we eat lunch together, then we’re not racist.” You know it was, it was kind of an interesting perspective, where they were like, “Well, why do we need you?” You know, “We have our own community and, you know, we help each other out and, you know, you just want to come and share something so you can feel good about yourself and, you know, polish your halo. Um, um, so that was kind of an interesting um, experience. So now the church is shared with a Korean church, and, and again they do the same things” (P11, 28-29).
The participant who shared this quote had earlier in the interview recalled challenging herself on other occasions to go outside of her “comfort zone” to find a “common bond or shared experience” (P11, 25). Her second story involved her partner’s employer consulting in an African country and implementing a project without including local people, to the detriment of the project’s success. Concluding the second story, the participant reflected on how engagement and communication are integral to relationships across race:

“I think there’s a tendency between White people to ah, think that if we can come in and help whatever x, y, z community then, you know, we’ve done a good job. And not understanding the history or the background of a certain ah, whether it’s a racial group or um, an ethnic group um; that you can’t fix a problem from the outside in, that you have to engage in communication and find out, you know, uh, what it is people need. Engaging in a conversation and talking about um, each other’s needs and wants, and, and um, and work on integrating instead of fixing things from the outside in. It’s um, and I, I think that’s, that’s one of the challenges that we have, both on a family level but also in, in a local and a national level too” (P11, 31).

The idea in this quote that interracial relationships work best from interpersonal closeness and engagement, rather from the outside in, conveys a theme expressed by many participants: closeness is difficult when differences are perceived, including differences associated with race, but not inherent in race. It could be said that many participants remain on the outside looking in, questioning, but accepting this distance.
In the face of complex and intersecting factors, and concerns about parenting decisions, few participants expressed confidence about addressing racism. Many attempted through their work and through membership in groups and religious communities to contribute to efforts to address racial inequity. Overall, as most parents indicated, they wanted to continue to think deeply about the topic of racial identity, and identified learning about race as “a lifelong education” (P11, 14), “a continuous learning process” (P2, 31), and an area about which they wanted “to know more” (P10, 28).

*Summary of Domain V and reflection on a narrative*

This domain reflected contradictions: participants’ expressing that they thought about race all the time, yet did not talk about it; that they thought about their racial identity, yet had not thought about it deeply, or at least in the way the interview questions prompted them to. There was ambivalence about race-neutrality, and intersections of race, class, and culture were a source of confusion. Most participants described a major shift in their identity as White individuals post-adoption, encompassing increased empathy for people of color, having increased awareness of different aspects of identity and privilege, particularly White privilege, and having a more critical eye towards other White people, either as being oblivious, or understanding that they were at a different point of racial identity development. How this awareness played out in day-to-day actions was varied. It was not clear that behaviors matched aspirations with respect to race relations.

One of the participants described her racial identity development as going through stages. She narrated this process as an eighteen year journey, from gaining knowledge and awareness and having “a kind of self-righteous kind of thinking,” to pondering how
to take action, to choosing when to intervene when there is an opportunity, or when “it’s just part of the fabric of life.” She described her current identity as more nuanced and less of a struggle now, and later alluded to seeing other White people on a “continuum” of racial identity development (P2, 16). For this participant, who had been involved in multiracial family groups and anti-racist groups with her partner, her comfort with where she stands now and the decisions she makes on a daily basis about race-based issues stands in contrast to most of the other participants, for whom thoughts and feelings about race were less resolved. This level of comfort may be due to a number of factors, including her having lived in a neighborhood where she was a minority and her involvement in consciousness raising groups. Notably, there were other participants who had similar experiences, yet expressed responses associated with different racial identity schemas.

Domain VI: Talking about whiteness

The final domain addresses participants’ responses to the interview process. The last two questions on the interview protocol encouraged participants to share thoughts and feelings about what it was like for them to answer questions about race and their racial identity, and asked participants why they had agreed to participate in the interview. Many participants commented on the interview process even before these interview questions were asked. The interview elicited multiple and intense feelings for participants. This domain explored these thoughts and feelings about talking about whiteness, as well as the ways participants reacted to questions that were challenging. Participants’ motivations for participating in interviews, and the benefits they cited from participating are also shared in this domain.
Feelings elicited by interview process. Half of participants reported the interview process to be ‘interesting’ with one participant stating, “This is exhausting to keep pushing into this. I mean, I’m glad we’re doing it” (P9, 69). Only one participant stated that the interview was “fun” (P2, 33). Most participants reported more difficult feelings coming up during the interview, including discomfort, embarrassment, self-deprecation, stress, vulnerability, puzzlement, dread, and worry. There were also participants who criticized their responses as rambling, inarticulate, or not reflective. Several participants remarked early in the interview that they had not anticipated how difficult it would be to answer the questions: “These are going to be harder questions than I thought,” was a response to the first question (P5, 1); “It was hard” said one participant (P3, 33), who earlier, after the second question stated, “I’m beginning to dread the rest of this interview” (P3, 5). One participant noted that he had never been asked these questions before, and expressed a multiplicity of feelings related to talking about Whiteness:

“That was, um—that was more challenging than I thought it would be. It was. Um. (long pause) I guess because it's, uh—my first thought is because it was so—it's so unusual. I mean, I think that to know what you think, you have to kind of practice thinking. To know what—what you're feeling, you have to talk about what you're feeling. I mean, it's—it's—it's kind of—that's kind of bedrock for me… So I think that talking about race this explicitly—it's the truth. It's just not a conversation that, um, we have in quite the way where you were asking what were you feeling about that. What were you—so that was a fair amount of work. It was uncomfortable because I felt kind of inarticulate about it. I was trying to see myself and wasn't—didn't feel like I was—it was hard for me to feel like I was
getting at all the truths ’cause it felt like a con—like there were a lot of layers, and lots of different things that I might say, sometimes contradictory things—— that I might say, and I worried” (P9, 71).

Lastly, concerning feelings, one participant stated directly that in general, talking about race brought up difficult feelings: “I think it (race) is hard to talk about. I mean yeah, in general, because it’s—it—it brings up intense emotional feelings, and people are either—you know, they get—feel really bad or angry or assuming you have to deal with all those underlying tensions and emotions that come up with it (P6, 39). Another participant noted, “It’s hard to identify feelings. It’s very hard… The feelings part was hard. Yeah, definitely” (P5, 24, 32). For one participant, the theme of honesty recurred around his identifying and sharing feelings, as he shared twice during the interview that he was “trying to be honest” about his feelings (P9, 16, 44).

**Challenges posed by interview questions.** Many participants were specific about the ways that interview questions challenged them. The most difficult questions to answer included those that probed for thoughts and feeling about the participant’s own race and racial identity, apart from their children or other people of color in their context.

Four participants found it difficult to answers about race pre-adoption, or even post-adoption outside of the context of their children. One commented, “It was kind of stressful talking about my early life because it’s really there’s nothing to say (about race), but there’s more to say here (post adoption)” (P4, 8). Another participant reflected that not seeing himself as having a racial identity made certain questions difficult to answer:
“So when you ask about to what extent my racial identity is constructed, it's hard for me to answer the question because I feel like I don't have a racial identity. And I don't mean—that sounds like when Colbert says, you know, I don't see race, you know, I don't know whether I'm white or black. Do you watch Colbert, the Colbert Report? (interviewer shakes head ‘no’) Okay. Well, he basically is pretending to be this conservative commentator, which he really is not, so he's mocking all the conservative commentators by—by acting like them. And he, um—so he does this, uh—he'll often say to a guest interviewee, you know, are you black or Asian or white? I don't know. I'm blind—race-blind. I don't see race, you know, kind of thing.

So I'm afraid by saying this that I'm not aware, you know, of my racial identity that I sound like that, and that's not what I mean. What I mean is actually that I don’t—probably just that I haven't thought about it enough, and also because I generally perceive myself as being in the majority, I haven't had to think about it because I have a different—whereas I have forcibly become acutely aware of cultural identity and linguistic identity in a way that most people have not” (P7, 30-31).

Four participants had difficulty identifying stories, or specific incidences in response to questions about awareness of their own race. Several participants who spoke of benefitting from White privilege, were not able to come up with examples or related stories. Lastly, as alluded to in domain five, some participants found questions difficult to answer because of the challenge of talking about race without being able to clarify the
connection between race and other social factors, or because of concerns related to parenting and adoption that overshadowed or overlapped with racial concerns.

_Diversions, hesitations and follow-ups._ While some participants were transparent about their difficulty with the interview process, for others the challenges were apparent via style of speech or digression in responses. Unsolicited follow-ups also were a testimony to the impact of the subject matter on participants.

The most common type of diversion that occurred during the interviews was participants’ not answering questions about themselves and their feelings, and instead talking about their children’s experiences or their thoughts about race in general (n=6). A minority of participants identified this phenomenon in the moment, with remarks such as, “And but again, that’s more about them (children) than me” (P5, 17, 21), or “I’m not coming up with much, I guess” (P3, 14).

Two examples of diversions follow. In the first, the participant was asked about possible changes in his own racial identity, and answered with reflections about his child. The following interview excerpt includes more prompts for the original questions:

*Interviewee:* I guess I'm seeing how fluid identity might be.

*Interviewer:* So that may be a different way I could ask it is: if you think about your own racial identity—

*Interviewee:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* - as a White person—

*Interviewee:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* - do you think your racial identity as a White person has changed at all?
Interviewee: Well, I—I—I mean I—I guess there's been—I mean, I—I feel there's been change in the culture, um, over the last 40, 50 years. I mean, we've—it—it was a part of the public conversation about how much change has happened. I mean, uh—

Interviewer: But for you personally?

Interviewee: So for me personally, I think that there's more—tha—I have many more—I have many more relationships with many more people of many different cultures. I mean, we were—some of our best friends were Cape Verdean.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Um, our next-door neighbor baby-sitted our kids were from Puerto Rico” (P9, 63-64).

In this vignette, the participant has difficulty talking about his Whiteness in a personal way. Later in this domain, the same participant was able to talk more directly about his race in a follow up correspondence.

The second excerpt that demonstrates a speech diversion begins when the participant has been asked about how he feels about White privilege that he has identified in the workplace, but answered instead by sharing his increased awareness of peoples’ offensive comments:

“Interviewer: Mm-hmm, and I-I know it seems, probably seems like I keep coming back to ask you about your feelings, but this is psychology research, so.

Interviewee: Sure. Yep. [Laughs]
Interviewer: So that was, you gave some great examples there of um, when you see inequities like in a store or you see, how you said, ‘It’s not what you know it’s who you know.’

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Can you describe your feelings around um, those perceptions, or those reflections?

Interviewee: Um well I guess I s-s-s-see it, uh, I-I do take it back to the idea that we are a society that is—I-I so I don’t, I guess I don’t see it as a personal fault on my, my part. [Clears throat] That I-I see it much more as, we’re in this uh white fathers of our nation society, migrating to a colorblind society someday. Um, and we’re, you know, some—there’s going to be step forwards and step backwards. Um and hopefully we can learn from those step backwards” (P8, 24)

This dialogue continued after the participant reflected on his learning experiences at work and in parenting:

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. So ear-earlier on I was asking about um the feelings associated with the awareness. You were talking about kind of how you see it structurally, racism as—historically, almost.

Interviewee: Yes. Uh huh.

Interviewer: Um, so that wasn’t really feeling, though. That was insight. So I guess I’m still trying to get at, if you can think of, or name the feelings that come up with those sort of insights.

Interviewee: Hmm… (sigh) Well, I-I hate shame, the word shame. Um.

Interviewer: Maybe there are other words.
Interviewee: Yeah. Um, I-I-I guess I do see it as a-a-a something that uh, I’m trying to fix. That’s something that you know, is broken and I’m going to do my best to try to fix it. And as I say, I’ve made mistakes and I-I feel, do I feel, when I made those mistakes, and um you know, like I was like—uh, [clears throat] um, and I don’t, it’s not anger, and it’s not—it’s uh, it's like ooh, I shouldn’t have done that! Um, so I wonder I would, how would I describe that? As like, um, you know I-I had a—a disappointed in myself in not sort of thinking ahead to, you know, that I-I could have done it, should have done it differently” (P8, 24-25).

This quote demonstrates the challenge involved in identifying feelings about race, specifically Whiteness, to the extent that repeated prompting was required, and the participant first identified what the feeling was not, rather than what it was.

Another phenomenon that suggested participants’ difficulty accessing feelings or memories about race was the delay for some (n=3) participants in recalling early memories of race. One participant shared two childhood relationships with Black people that had not been mentioned in the interview, in a follow up correspondence; both people had lived with his family at different time periods during his childhood. The two participants who grew up overseas did not recall memories of race when first asked, but spoke about racial issues at a later point in the interview; this may have been due to what both participants pointed out as more of an emphasis on culture and nationality due to their not being in the United States.

There were also several instances where participants told stories about race, but were not able to articulate how the incident was related to race. These were stories told in response to questions about the awareness of the participant’s own race. In these stories,
the meaning of the interaction was not clear, other than the fact that it was an interracial interaction that, for that reason alone, triggered awareness of the participant’s Whiteness. Upon prompting, these were stories that elicited feelings of vulnerability or difference.

Aside from digressions and delays when answering questions, another example of linguistic diversion was the habit of several participants to switch to use of the third person when talking about difficult topics. In one example, the participant reflects on a realization he experienced about race, speaking of himself in the third person:

“I mean as I thought about it, as I think about it now, it’s like, you, you, you haven’t gotten over race and probably never will. And um, and you are you know, a White person in a-a-um s-society and you, you know, you do the best you can to level the, balance-balance-balance the issues” (P8, 25).

Another participant talked about racial awareness in a similar manner:

“I mean it’s one of those things. You just slip in and out of it. I mean, especially in dominant race, I think it’s easy to forget. You’re just slipping in and out of being aware and not being aware, of being aware and not being aware. Um, uh, let me think, public domain. I mean, here, where I work, it’s a very diverse place, a racially diverse place. Um, and so again, you’re—every once in a while, you’re like, aware of it. You’re more aware of like how diverse it is, and how you’re just one of many different races here” (P5, 10).

When asked about feelings, this participant stated, as quoted previously (but repeated because this quote relates so strongly to feelings about race): “I mean, I—I guess you can’t help but meet more you know, empathetic and, and more—I don’t, I don’t know. But yeah, feelings, feelings. (long pause) Uh, I mean I guess you think if you ever had a
thought like, ‘Oh, you couldn’t like really love someone who was a different race,’ that's, that's cl- like, you have that feeling, that’s totally gone” (P5, 23).

Perhaps the emotionally charged nature of the interview topic also led some participants \((n=4)\) to add thoughts at the end of the interview that were philosophical, existential and reflective of an accounting of their lives, relationships or sense of purpose. One participant ended the interview with an unprompted recall of all the Black people in her life, from college to present, noting losses as well as relationships that had been sustained. Another participant, when asked if he wanted to add anything, talked about the connection between religion, his spirituality, and his social justice mission. In the case of one of the participants with a complicated open adoption, the interview ended with his musing about the usefulness of race as a concept, followed by an analogy contrasting troubled marriages to difficult adoption paths, with adoption having no “cultural template” for peer understanding or social support as in the case of marriage and divorce (P4, 46).

Finally, one participant ended the interview quoting Shakespeare, pondering the question “Who is there?” and relating the present research question to such questions that are central to humanity: “I'm saying that if we're going to save our civilization, that—and maybe the human race on this planet—we better be starting to ask questions about that mystery, which is our human heart, and metaphor, metaphor, our desire. What do we want? Who are we? Who is there? So, I see you doing that. Yeah, it's around race” (P9, 74).

Three participants initiated follow up to the interview, adding more thoughts about the research topic. In one case this occurred in the interview room. The participant
had an afterthought she asked to add, which was then recorded. This afterthought concerned her assessment that the nature of racism in the United States made the experience of parenting a Latino or Asian child less challenging than parenting a Black child:

“I-I think there’s a sense to which they’re (Latino children) perceived as—well, they’re not White, but they’re you know, they're closer to White. Somehow there’s this like, hierarchy. And, and so, I think that that affects how they are perceived, how you perceive them, you know, all of that stuff. So um, I think, I think I would have been more challenged um by um, if we had adopted a Black child than, than a Hispanic child. That’s all” (P5, 33).

In two other cases, participants emailed to share some overarching thoughts about their racial identity as it had developed over time, and to clarify statements made during the interview. These afterthoughts had a similar tone to the previously mentioned philosophical wrap-ups of participants; they touched on larger themes of the meaning of race in society as these themes connected to participants’ personal experiences.

*Benefits derived from and reasons for participating the interview.* As difficult as some of the interview questions were for many participants, nine participants reported deriving benefits from engaging in the interview process. Beyond those (n=6) who found the interview questions ‘interesting,’ benefits cited included the following: the interview provided a rare opportunity to express oneself about this topic (n=4), and the interview led to reflections and insights about the participants’ racial identity development (n=7). Three participants expressed the wish for more opportunities to talk about the research topic. Several participants noted that the interview was a chance to speak openly and
honestly about race; perhaps this was due to the anonymity and confidentiality inherent in this interview process.

Overall, there were a variety of reasons given by participants for engaging in the research. Several participants said that they participated due to a connection with the researcher, a relationship with someone else at the research institution, or familiarity with one of the recruitment listerv moderator. One participant said he agreed because he wanted the opportunity to talk about his experience honestly noting that, “this is a serious conversation. You're there to hear what I have to say. And so I don't have to feel like I'm being a downer with one of my friends um, if I tell the truth, which is what I've tried to do” (P4, 47).

Several participants agreed to interview out of a desire to help other transracially adoptive families. As one said, “Because it (parenting) was so hard. And still is. Any help that people in my situation can get would be great….Maybe in your research you’ll find help for us. There needs to be a book or something” (P1, 8, 12). A minority of participants (n=2) said that they were proud of their decision to adopt, felt positive about their experience, and were happy to talk about it. Lastly, the most common reason given (n=7) was a desire to contribute to a research topic the participant thought was poorly understood and important to study further.

The researcher-participant relationship. Half of the participants commented or wondered at the end of the interview about what the interview process was like for me as a researcher. They expressed curiosity about my experience of such a one-sided conversation about a charged topic such as race. These comments were made after the audio recording had been stopped. Several participants asked about my own racial
background, as well as wondering if I had a personal connection to transracial adoption as a parent or adoptee. I answered their questions, and also used transparency in sharing that I did indeed find it difficult limit my role to asking questions. Many participants expressed the wish to talk further about the topic, in a conversational format. In some cases, a brief conversation did follow the interview. I attempted to validate the challenges they expressed during the interviews, particularly as a fellow parent of children of color. There were issues that participants brought up that I could identify with, regardless of our racial difference – for example, the dilemma imposed by structural racism of choosing between a diverse community and a resourced school system. As a follow up to some of these conversations, I shared resources with participants, such as literature on racial microaggressions.

_Summary of Domain VI and reflection on a narrative_

Almost all participants dealt with difficult feelings during the interview process, often expressing these feelings and thoughts about the interview unprompted, before the penultimate question about what the interview was like for them. In spite of the challenges of the interview, participants said that talking about the research topic was beneficial to them, and helped them reflect in ways that they usually did not. Many participants expressed hope that the research would be useful for other transracially adoptive parents. In addition to the difficulty answering questions about feelings, a striking aspect of the process was participants’ philosophical and existential reflections at the end of the interview, or in follow up communication. These final communications tended to express thoughts about racial justice, justice in general, and being judged for one’s actions. There was an air of self-deprecation in these reflections, and often thoughts
going back to childhood as well as into the future, hoping for a more positive future. For many participants, racial identity was connected to a process of feeling judged, at least in the context of the interview.

In a narrative that directly followed the interview process question, one participant began by stating, “It was hard,” followed by recalling her childhood when she did not think about race or whiteness, followed by memories of Black people in her life, and then criticism of herself as falling short in “crossing color or ethnic boundaries” (P3, 33). The participant accounted for each relationship with a Black person briefly, highlighting some of the emotional ups and downs, and what had become of the relationship. This accounting of one’s experience of whiteness, especially in relationship to blackness rather than other races, would seem to be a natural outcome of the interview, with its questions prompting participants to reflect over the lifespan. The air of judgment expressed along with the memories appeared to be a common theme. This final emphasis on judgment and assessment of deeds and relationships may be tied to the moral aspect and uncomfortable dilemmas associated with White racial identity development as explicated by the theory, and addressed in Chapter 5.

Summary of Chapter

In this chapter, I identified the overarching thematic domains that emerged from the data analysis. These domains covered factors related to participants’ racial identity development, progressing from childhood to adulthood before adopting, and then to the course of the participants’ adoptive parenting experiences. Participants’ reflections on race and racial identity were explored. Their experiences of and responses to talking about Whiteness within the interview process were also discussed. In Chapter 5, I will
discuss how these findings correspond to the research literature, as well as how they may
be understood within the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory and White racial
identity theory. The limitations of the present research, implications for practice, policy,
theory, and future research will also be discussed.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The goal of the present study was to explore the development of racial identity for White parents of transracially adoptive children. This research used a narrative approach to elicit participants’ stories of their experiences related to race and their perspectives on being White. Critical race theory and white racial identity theory are useful frameworks with which to examine racial identity development from a counseling psychology philosophy, as both theories address the interpersonal-psychological aspects and sociopolitical contexts of race and racism.

Participants shared their thoughts and feelings about race as they responded to questions about themselves as racial beings beginning in childhood, and progressing through adulthood, parenthood and into the present. While participants in the present study were heterogeneous in the extent of their racial socialization and use of different racial identity schemas, it was clear that for the majority of participants, parenting a child of color had impacted their experiences of race, had prompted various responses in thoughts, feelings, and behavior, and resulted in shifting of racial identity statuses.

In this chapter, I will review the study results through the lens of racial identity theory and critical race theory. I will relate the research findings to the existing literature on White racial identity development and White transracially adoptive parents. This chapter will outline the external factors and internal psychological processes that participants described as most significant in their experiences of race across the six thematic domains derived in chapter four. Lastly, I will examine the limitations of the
present research as well reflect on the implications of the findings for practice, policy, and research.

Integration of Findings and Research Literature

As outlined in chapter two, White racial identity theory and critical race theory provide a comprehensive framework for understanding both the interpersonal and structural mechanisms of race and racism in the United States. Using these theories in tandem offers a useful perspective for understanding the range of factors that affect an individual’s racial identity development. Due to the small sample size and exploratory aspect of this study, this section will review the range of themes represented, including and noting the frequency when applicable.

*White Racial Identity Theory: Overview and Connection to Critical Race Theory*

According to Helms’s (1990; 1995) White racial identity theory, the development of a healthy White racial identity develops in a two-phase process: the abandonment of racism, and the evolution of a nonracist White identity and strategies to contend with racism, occurring over six statuses, as outlined in chapter two of this study. Helms’s model assumes that in this society, all White people live in a context where the norm is racism, and being White is seen as superior to other races (Helms, 1992). Critical race theory focuses on and explicates the institutionalization of this norm of racism, and how it affects groups and individuals.

The maturation of White racial identity statuses is precipitated by situations that trigger personal responses or needs. Situational or environmental contexts affect the consistency of the use of a particular racial identity status. In this way, racial identity theory complements critical race theory: individuals’ personal responses and needs are
driven by environmental triggers; these environmental triggers exist as a result and reflection of structural racism. The personal and political are inseparably linked.

Indeed, Helms’s model of White racial identity development (1990; 1995) acknowledges the impact of such environmental factors as sociocultural messages about racial groups, and the connection between White race and access to economic and political power. As one example, Helms illustrates the way the idea of the superiority of Whiteness over color is “hammered into the White child’s consciousness” through negative language and images associated with Black people or people of color (1992, p. 6). In another example, Helms (1992) cites the role of political leaders, public officials, educators and others in promoting the idea of a race neutral society following the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, and promotion of the idea of reverse discrimination as a movement in the 1980s. These movements demonstrate society’s recognition that skin color influences access to political and economic power, which in turn influences daily experiences and quality of life for individuals.

Critical race theory and Helms’s White racial identity theory both address the sociopolitical ways that institutions, policies and individuals have reinforced racism. However, each of these theoretical frameworks is derived from a different discipline, has a unique lens, and serves to complement the other. As a theory originating in legal studies, and most often applied in the fields of law and education, critical race theory offers insight into how inherent racism plays out in systems and organizations, and affects access to resources. For this research, critical race theory helps to explicate inherent racism in the adoption system, as well as in other institutions and arenas within which the study participants live, work and interact. Critical race theory helps
demonstrate, for this study population, how influential race-related systems, regulations, and economic factors are in their racial experiences and therefore in the development of their racial identity. Through critical race theory, one can see the effects of systemic racism on the participants’ lived experiences, and how these mechanisms continue to operate in ways that perpetuate racism, and myths of race neutrality that cause confusion and dissonance for participants.

As a psychological theory, White racial identity offers a psychological and developmental perspective in order to better understand behavior, and to guide research and practice with respect to the study participants. White racial identity theory takes into account environmental factors, the extent of racism in society, and the resulting racial socialization of White people; however, its focus on psychological variables complements critical race theory by adding in depth exploration of an individual’s development as a racial being over the lifespan, including cognitive, behavioral, and affective changes related to race. Racial identity theory allows for exploration of interracial and intraracial relationships, how people navigate these relationships, their positive changes in attitudes, beliefs and behaviors, as well as their use of emotional and behavioral defense strategies. In essence, racial identity theory looks at the personal processes by which White people individually develop a healthy racial identity, and can become change agents and allies, thus contributing to the goals of the critical race theory movement.

For the present research question, these theories together allow a richer understanding of the individual participants and the social and political forces at work in their lives. Social forces have a significant impact on participants’ development,
relationships, and their racial identity development through every stage in their lives, both before and during their transracial parenting experiences. In the following section, an examination of the schema of White racial identity theory applied to this study’s participants’ narratives, will offer a closer look at the nature of the environmental effects of racism on participants’ psychological experiences.

White Racial Identity Theory and Participants’ Narratives

According to White racial identity theory, a White person’s racial identity can progress or regress based on the demands or circumstances in the environment. People may have different levels of each status, and the levels present in any individual depend on racial stimuli in the environment, lifespan development and maturity, and experiences and events in one’s life. An individual may operate from a schema that is dominant for him at her at that moment, depending on circumstances and the nature of the stimuli (Helms, 1992).

In accordance with Helms’s (1990; 1995) theory, the participants in this study, across the six thematic domains, operated from a variety of racial identity statuses. These findings support the limited existing research on White transracially adoptive parents’ racial awareness (Jennings, 2006; Sass, 2008). In this section, I will look at the dominant and variant statuses used by parents pre- and post-adoption, and the precipitating factors that suggested shifts between statuses either as progressions or regressions.

Domain I. In the first domain, during childhood, most participants endorsed the Contact schema of naiveté and obliviousness about race. Participants reported not thinking about race, and named their Whiteness as the norm, the default, and the typical. The predominantly White environments that all participants reported growing up in
contributed to their origins in the Contact schema, as they did not have relationships with people of color, with few exceptions. The internalization of racism and unconscious learning of what it means to be White took place for participants during these early years. Participants were most aware of their own race when in the presence of people of color. This phenomenon of Whiteness being defined in contrast to other races is supported by Helms’s (1992) theory, which states that White children are taught to define Whiteness by the identification of what they themselves are not.

According to Helms (1992), White children receive ambiguous messages about their Whiteness, which teach them to not acknowledge their race in a conscious or explicit way, yet to behave according to certain expectations, for example marrying within their race. White racial socialization includes the message that consciously acknowledging or speaking about one’s Whiteness is negative, and associated with racism, White supremacy or bigotry (Bartoli, Michael, Bentley-Edwards, Stevenson, Shor, & McClain 2013; Helms, 1992). Helms states, “So, in this society, one learns to act White, but not to be White. White people teach each other to lie about being White” (p. 9).

These ambiguous messages about race were imparted to participants by their parents, other family members, clergy, and the media. One participant was encouraged explicitly to date within her race. Other participants’ parents had disagreements with extended family members who opposed interracial relationships. All participants who grew up during the civil rights movement described this political movement as a venue for their parents to teach values of fairness and justice, albeit from a distance, and within a segregated environment.
Some participants’ parents made an effort to bridge the differences created by residential segregation, but bringing people of color into their homes as visitors, or by purposefully putting their children in environments with people of color, for limited time periods. For these participants, these encounters seemed to pique an interest in people of color, awaken an early awareness of disparities in living conditions, and at times create a feeling of estrangement. Because participants were not exposed to a wide variety or number of people of color, stereotypical assumptions about racial groups were imprinted, for example, the early association of Blackness and poverty. For a few participants, early but distant exposure to people of color created an interest in and resolve to see diversity later in life; some participants linked these feelings with their decision later to adopt transracially.

Participants reported exposure to the Civil Rights movement as instrumental in their formation of beliefs about racism and justice. However, these observations about race occurred at a psychological and interpersonal distance, particularly during the childhood years. In this sense, some participants could be seen as endorsing Pseudo-Independent schema, espousing liberal ideals on an intellectual level, but assuming people of color wanted to and should become more like White people, thinking rather than feeling about racial issues, and not thinking about the meaning of being White in this country. This may be an oversimplification, however, as several participants reported learning about the history or race in the United States and being deeply affected emotionally, even during their high school years. At this point in their lives, only a couple of participants had a close relationship with a friend of color. Participants whose parents involved them in activism and protests regarding racial justice, both in the South and in
their home communities, observed that these incidences set the stage for their activism and social justice efforts in college and adulthood – actions which would represent a transition to using the Autonomy schema later in life.

Although Contact was a dominant schema in early childhood for participants, and Pseudo-Independence was used as they grew older, Disintegration was also a schema employed by many participants in response to environmental triggers. The feelings participants described as children related to racial information included anger, fear, shock, shame, vulnerability, upset and confusion. These feelings fit under responses typical of the Disintegration schema, when a person is confronted with experiences that challenge their ignorance of racial issues.

Helms (1992) describes White peoples’ response to Disintegration as either a retreat to Contact, or socialization into racism and belief in the superiority of White people and inferiority of people of color. For participants in this study, it was not clear that either progression occurred. Two participants engaged in anti-racist activism in their high schools. Others did not take an active anti-racist stance, but neither did they endorse White superiority or justification of racism. As noted previously, many endorsed a Pseudo-Independent intellectual interest in racial issues during high school, through reading authors of color and literature about race, racism, and activism in the United States and other countries. For several, uncomfortable feelings about racism were also accompanied by positive feelings about other races, including wanting more contact, and enjoyment – even if from a distance. The findings from the present research suggest that as young adults and later as parents, responses to Disintegration were less predictable than the theory implies.
Domain II. In the second domain, during adulthood but pre-adoption, many participants reported experiences of growing racial awareness due to interracial relationships at college and in the workplace. In college, participants’ dominant racial identity schema was Pseudo-Independence where race is approached in an intellectual and not personal way. College was, as one participant noted, a “preselected” environment where one could for the time being put aside differences of privilege, class, and race and begin to have cross-racial interactions (P5, 4). Pseudo-Independent status involves a level of denial, however, and that was evident in participants also reporting the following: these relationships were not reported to be close or intimate; the participants’ closest relationships were still with other White people; and, some of these relationships involved people of color educating the participant about race. Participants’ mixed feelings about racial affinity groups in college represented Disintegration, in terms of conflicting feelings and confusion, as well as elements of Reintegration, with the denial of responsibility of White people’s role in racism and distortion of reality in questioning the purpose of racial affinity groups.

For most participants the workplace, rather than college, was the setting where they reported first becoming aware of their White privilege, often through witnessing or hearing about racial microaggressions or racial disparities and discrimination. This initial recognition of the social implications of being White is a hallmark of Disintegration. Participants also had a propensity to use the Disintegration schema when on rare occasion they were in a situation where they were the racial minority. Following Disintegration, however, participants did not appear to move towards Reintegration. Rather, some participants recognized having held racial stereotypes themselves, and upon recognition
of White privilege and racism they expressed a sense of righteousness and higher state of awareness relative to other White people. As before, rather than Reintegration, some participants began to draw on the Immersion-Emersion schema, where they recognized White peoples’ role in racism and experienced anger at themselves and other White people. Participants also reported increased empathy for people of color. For these participants, even pre-adoption, working in multi-racial environments may built the foundation for the use of later schema (Helms, 1992).

Domain III. In the third domain, post-adoption, the pattern seen previously of participants transitioning from Disintegration to Immersion-Emersion also emerged from the findings. The adoption process and parenting a child of color were environmental catalysts for increased awareness of race and racism for the majority of participants, as suggested by the literature on interracial relationships and White racial identity development (Hartman, 2004; Hill, & Thomas, 2000; Stoddart, 1999). Some parents noted their own naiveté about race when looking back at the adoption process. These participants recognized that prior to adoption, their understanding of race was less personal or visceral, and thus Pseudo-Independent. Many participants expressed strong feelings consistent with Disintegration in reaction to racial disparities and racism evident in the adoption system, such as differential costs by race, or overrepresentation of Black children in the foster care system waiting for adoption. Several participants reported that trainings that educated them about racial issues helped them think in new ways about race and their role as White parents, precipitating use of the Immersion-Emersion schema.

As Helms’s (1990; 1995) theory posits, and as research on White racial identity development suggests (Dobbins & Skillings, 2005; Helms & Carter, 1990; Rowe,
Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994), when a situation necessitates White people to be in a multiracial environment, and they are forced to confront their internalized racism and racial stereotypes, the stage is set for transition to use of more progressive racial identity schema. For most of the participants, their visibility as a transracially adoptive family and other White peoples’ reactions to their children served as this sort of environmental catalyst for change. This phenomenon is supported by the literature on White transracially adoptive parents’ awareness of differences in race privilege between themselves and their children (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2011; Lee, 2003).

Domain IV. In the fourth domain, which reflected participants’ responses to racial information and stimuli, the following environmental circumstances triggered parents’ increased awareness of their own race privilege and the lack of diversity in their environments: witnessing racial microaggressions towards their children, recognizing their children’s affinity seeking, and reflecting about the meaning of their children’s racial identity development. These environmental triggers, being personal in nature and eliciting strong emotions, helped participants move from a Pseudo-Independent intellectual view of race to a more advanced understanding of Whiteness, as evidenced in Immersion-Emersion.

This movement away from Pseudo-Independence can result from such an experience where the White person recognizes that previous views of race and ways of dealing with racial information are no longer effective or consistent with how they see themselves (Helms, 1992). It was apparent that participants engaged in a variety of behaviors in an attempt to deal with racism, including the following: choosing not to respond to racism at times (Pseudo-Independence), second guessing racial
microaggressions (Reintegration), refusal to conform to societal racial norms (Immersion-Emersion), and acting as allies (Autonomy).

Parents who described having their ‘radar on,’ being aware of race all the time post-adoption, and being open and touched to other kinds of difference as well as race, were also concerned about the future discrimination their children would face and were aware of the privileges they had that their children did not. These parents drew on Immersion-Emersion schema. These were parents who tended to actively seek diversity, and at times purposely themselves situations where they would be the racial minority. By attempting to interact with others from a positive and non-racist White perspective, these participants showed a propensity to use the Autonomy schema. Approximately half of participants’ social circles remained predominantly White, and thus appeared to be draw mainly from Pseudo-Independent and Immersion-Emersion status.

When talking to their children about race, participants also used a range of racial identity schema; as in the literature, these approaches varied from deemphasizing race to introducing the subject of race and racism (Bozek, 2009; Huh, 1997; Huh & Reid, 2000; Lee, 2003; Lee et al., 2006; McGinnis et al., 2009; Samuels, 2009; Vonk, Lee, & Crolley-Simic, 2010). Many parents reacted to racial events rather than initiate the topic of race, with some reporting awkwardness during these conversations (Disintegration). Some parents noted that talking about physical differences of skin color and hair, or using humor in race conversations was a way of making a difficult topic easier to broach, thus reflecting uncomfortable feelings typical of Disintegration. Most parents reported initiating conversations about race, and feeling comfortable with these discussions (Immersion-Emersion and Autonomy).
Several participants struggled with seeing their children embrace negative racial stereotypes. Participants made sense of this phenomenon with a variety of approaches: as developmental adolescent rebellion, part of the child’s racial identity development, and part of the child’s identity development relating to adoption and connections to their birth race. Participants acknowledged the challenges their children faced in sorting out these various influences within the context of predominantly White families and communities. Participants’ consciousness of these complex issues was evidence of their responding to racial evidence in a less naïve and more informed and nuanced manner, and being further progressed in identity development than the Contact origins of their own childhoods. In one case, a participant struggled with identifying positive traits with Whiteness, yet recognizing this view as endorsing stereotypes even as doing so. This situation represents an example of an individual in Disintegration status, perceiving one’s race to be superior, yet also recognizing that their racial group had oppressed people of color, arousing discomfort and conflicted feelings (Helms, 1992).

The feelings participants expressed in response to racial information in their environments spanned a range of racial identity statuses. Anger at oneself and White racism represented use the Immersion-Emersion status, while guilt and shame represented Disintegration. At times it appeared that participants were operating from a combination of both of these schema. Several participants’ strong feelings of pride in or identification with the race of their children was part of their recognition of other races’ struggles and contributions to society. Lastly, as an indication of more progressive identity schemas, several participants talked about their connections with people of color, and their actions as allies, expressing feelings of effectiveness and pride in their role as
White individuals being non-racist. In keeping with the literature on White transracially adoptive parents, the number of participants who took a proactive approach to challenging racism and discrimination was a minority of those interviewed (Crolley-Simic & Vonk, 2011; Lee et al., 2006; Smith, Juarez, & Jacobson, 2011).

Domain V. In the fifth domain, where participants’ reflections on their identity and race are covered, participants had a propensity to use the Disintegration schema as they struggled to understand social phenomena as due to class or culture, versus race. This confusion reflected ambivalence or denial about the role of racism and race history in the United States in creating the association of social factors with race. Such conflicted thoughts and denial are representative of the Disintegration schema.

Ethnicity did not come up as a factor for participants, except in the one case where the participant’s partner’s last name being Latino triggered reactions that increased the participants’ awareness of the discrimination that White Latinos face. While society’s definition of White identity has shifted over time to include or exclude various ethnic groups, those ethnicities who are included in the White identified group have benefitted from White privilege, or the “unearned wages of Whiteness (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998, p, 4). Thus, ethnicity was rarely mentioned beyond the context of noticing ethnic differences during childhood.

Another issue challenging participants and their racial identity development was the desire to transcend race, or see racism as an issue in the past. This desire reflects the Pseudo-Independent characteristic of wishing racism not to exist, while unknowingly perpetuating White norms (Helms, 1992). While grappling with this issue, one participant regressed to Reintegration, attributing traits he deemed negative to certain racial groups;
however, even while making these statements, this participant expressed ambivalence, and the challenges of his family’s situation suggested that feelings of helplessness and ineffectiveness in parenting may have contributed to these statements; this was an example of personal needs and environmental factors causing a shift to the use of a schema, in this case Reintegration.

The scenarios described above represent the earlier, or internalized, schema in Helms’s theory (1990; 1995). However, approximately half of the participants drew from the latter three, or externalized, schema of White racial identity theory. Many participants reported thinking about race more, experiencing shifts in their racial identity with increasing awareness of and responses to racism, and gaining a more critical perspective on themselves and other White people. These phenomena all represent use of the Immersion-Emersion schema.

In an indication of racial identity development, several participants clearly articulated the development of their racial identity as a life long journey. These tended to be those participants who also felt positive talking about their racial identity and experiences around race, even though those included painful moments. This phenomenon supports Helms’s (1992) assertion that being able to identify a positive aspect of Whiteness and White identity is challenging, but part of the most mature status, Autonomy. Autonomy requires extensive self-education and reflection. The journey metaphor, as used by one participant, spoke to the aspect of Autonomy described as a continual process of discovery and learning from experiences where one consciously and actively pushes oneself past discomfort (Helms, 1992).
Participants who operated from Autonomy schema were also those who reported the most participation in multicultural groups and anti-racism education. These participants spoke of how opening themselves to facing racism and embracing racial difference also opened them to other aspects of identity and oppression - including gender, sexuality, and labor justice issues. This type of openness is also described as part of Autonomy by Helms (1992) as an increased awareness of multiple forms of oppression, with the White person working towards addressing oppression in a broad manner, regardless of whether she or he is the targeted group.

However, for some participants, their work towards social justice may have been a means to do good work and live true to their values, while simultaneously not integrating their lives racially, or confronting racism more directly and arousing discomfort. Transracial adoption served as one means to fulfill a moral aspiration, as seen in the literature for some parents as race and class uplift, or part of a rescue discourse (Zhang & Lee, 2011). At the same time, continued interpersonal racial distance and hierarchies in social and work settings was troubling for many participants. With the majority of participants reporting not having close relationships with people of color, feeling discomfort about this, and also feeling disingenuous about seeking these relationships for the sake of their children, it appeared that participants were likely to avoid racial stimuli that would evoke discomfort.

These findings support the research on White racial socialization as emphasizing the importance being a good person, working hard, and meritocracy, at the expense of the White individual being prepared deal with race and racism on an interpersonal level (Bartoli et al., 2013; Hamm, 2001). Even some of those participants operating from more
externalized and advanced statuses still struggled with guilt and doubts about responses to their children, their effectiveness as agents of change in society, and conflicted decisions about where to live and send their children to school.

White racial identity theory helps illuminate the source of some of the conflicts and contradictions inherent in participants’ feelings, thoughts, and behaviors regarding race. The crux of White racial identity development, abandoning racism, presents a tension between the “moral self” and the “socialized White self” (Helms, 1992, p. 20). The moral self strives to be just, while the socialized White self is challenged to identify racism, recognize that color does matter, acknowledge one’s own role in a racial hierarchy, and find new, positive ways to identify as White. This must all occur in the face of norms that are so pervasive, that the White person in Immersion-Emersion or Autonomy and may face criticism or ostracism from other White people when acting as an ally or anti-racist.

Domain VI. In the last domain, Talking about Whiteness, the discomfort expressed by many participants in response to the interview questions supports Helms’s theory as well as White racial socialization research: White racial socialization in the United States teaches White people that Whiteness should not be spoken of (Bartoli et al. 2013; Hamm, 2001; Helms, 1992). The findings of the sixth domain are addressed in the following section, which integrates the literature on Whiteness.

Literature on Whiteness: White Racial Socialization and the phenomenon of being tongue-tied

There is not much known about the social or psychological processes involved in the racial socialization of White people, in part due to the lack of research on White racial
socialization (Thomann, 2012), and also due to White individuals’ reluctance to speak freely about their own experiences as racial actors (Lewis, 2004; Noveske, 2006). Research suggests that White persons do not report their race as salient to their identity (Livingston, 2008). Even in psychotherapy, White clients deemphasize race when engaging with clinicians of any race, and may be reluctant to speak of race without inhibition, for fear of being perceived as racist (Leary, 2000; Miller & Josephs, 2009).

Much has been written about the invisible norm of Whiteness (Altman, 2006; Apple, 1998; Foldy, 2005; Frankenberg, 1997). Lewis (2004) relates this norm to the difficulty White people have speaking about their own race: “As the norm, Whiteness is rendered invisible; this is why most Whites immediately picture Black people when considering race, become tongue-tied in articulating the content of whiteness, and place little, if any meaning on their own racial status” (Lewis, p.1).

Findings of the present study supported this literature on Whiteness, with participants’ use of the words unmarked, normal, and typical to describe Whiteness, and, for most participants, stating that they did not think about their Whiteness. However, transracial adoption, for all but two participants, changed this unawareness significantly. The fact that the majority of participants experienced difficult feelings when talking about their Whiteness, and had difficulty answering questions about awareness of their own race in the absence of others, as well as feelings about their own race, supports the “tongue-tied” state as described above (Lewis, 2004, p.1) when asked to speak about their own race, not about other races. In addition, previous research with White transracially adoptive parents suggests that this population is more comfortable talking about culture than race, and has a tendency to deemphasize race when talking about
themselves and their children (Berquist, Campbell, & Unrau, 2003; DeBerry, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1996; Zhang & Lee, 2011).

The interview process of the present study represented both a challenge and an opportunity for participants to give voice to thoughts and feeling about Whiteness. In a dialectical process, structural racism perpetuates silence about racism, and not talking about Whiteness and racism perpetuates structural racism. An outcome of this, as described in the fifth domain, was parents’ wondering about their children’s thoughts about race and racial differences, particularly when children were reluctant to talk, or conversation about race was limited.

The extent of parents’ wondering about their children’s thoughts brings up the question of why some parents had not asked children more often what they were thinking, which in turn is related to the silence around race. Again, research on White racial socialization supports the phenomenon of “colormuteness” (Bartoli et al., 2013, p. 26) as contributing to not talking about race, except reactively.

In addition, the difficulty so many participants exhibited when answering questions about their race and related feelings, including topic shifts and hesitancy, was an indication of the painful feelings often associated with the participants’ own race. Feelings such as shame and anger reflected Immersion-Emersion status. The tendency to turn to topics other than oneself and avoid feelings about race was indicative of intellectualization, or Pseudo-Independence.

Finally, participants’ tendency at the end of interviews to muse on existential topics related to their life’s purpose, spirituality, and an accounting of their deeds, coupled with the follow up communication that acknowledged the deep pain of racism
and their personal transformations, supports Helms’s theory’s attention to how deeply
White racial identity development speaks to one’s moral self. As noted previously,
participants’ difficulty speaking freely about the research topic was likely influenced by
the researcher being a person of color. Feelings of shame, embarrassment, or possibly
being judged were potentially exacerbated because of the cross-racial nature of the
interview dyad.

As noted in the sixth domain, the majority of participants remarked that the
opportunity to give voice to this research topic was rare, that the topic was on their minds
but they did not get to talk about it, and that they wished they had more opportunity, or
thought they should talk and think about it more. Several participants recognized the
challenges inherent in White racial identity development as identified by Helms (1992) in
their statements that they were willing to share because they knew this was a difficult
issue and wanted to help other parents.

*Critical Race Theory and Structural Racism: Contextual and Interpersonal Effects*

The lens of critical race theory suggests that participants were influenced at every
stage in the lifespan by an environment that perpetuates White racial privilege, racially
segregated schools and communities, and as a byproduct, interpersonal distance between
races. The social construction of White race in the United States is connected to
dominance, privilege, and normativity of a racist culture due to the racial history of this
country (Frankenberg, 1993). In the face of this social structure, as the above section on
racial identity theory illustrates, the study participants may be avoidant, passive,
conflicted, perpetuating of racism, actively anti-racist, or combinations of all these
stances depending on the circumstances and their level of racial identity development.
Regardless of the participants varying use of racial identity schemas, it is clear that their sociopolitical environment across the lifespan played a major role in shaping their racial experiences.

_Institutional and cultural influences._ All participants reported residential segregation in their childhood environments. This was true to the extent that class and religion were often the first sociocultural differences noticed by participants as children, rather than race. For the one participant who grew up in a town with some racial diversity, it was noted that the people of color lived in a less desirable section of town.

As a byproduct of residential racial segregation, participants’ schools were also predominantly White. Two participants went to school in towns where a small number of Black and Latino children were bused in as part of program meant to benefit both urban and suburban students; both participants questioned the social success of this busing program, noting the continued racial separation within the school milieu. These contexts sowed the seeds for the interpersonal distance and separation that fostered participants’ use of the Contact schema during their childhoods. These environments also led to the cultivation of stereotypes that participants internalized, and became aware of later, often post-adoption – for example, the association between their own neighborhoods and safety and exclusivity. At the same time, for some participants, even limited encounters with people of color created a curiosity and a desire for more diversity. Some participants related these experiences to their later decision to adopt transracially.

Sociopolitical movements that impacted cultural narratives about race and racism in the Northeast also influenced participants. For those participants growing up during the Civil Rights movement and seeing media coverage of protests, the perception of a
North/South divide in the existence of racism perpetuated the idea that racism was a problem elsewhere, and would be addressed by changes in laws regarding voting rights and segregation. Several participants stated that as youths, they experienced civil rights issues as belonging to another region of the United States, and did not think racism existed in their local communities. It could be said that the idea of the Northeast as non-racist, when viewed using critical race theory, was eventually exposed for the study participants as a myth, given that racism continues to be a cultural norm throughout the United States. In fact, desegregation laws and other legal outcomes of the civil rights movement may be seen as advancing race-neutrality, while disguising the existence and impact of subjective, or inherent, everyday racism (Vasquez Heilig, Brown, & Brown, 2012).

In addition, the majority of participants’ reported childhood experiences of their parents emphasizing the values of fairness and meritocracy, especially in response to Civil Rights protests; literature supports this type of parenting lesson as an integral part of the way White parents racially socialize their children, thus contributing to the overall sense of the United States being a fair and just society, where much racial progress has been made beyond overt racism (Bartoli et al., 2013).

Several participants reflected that beginning in childhood, or later in adulthood, the realization that there was racism within their extended families and in their Northeastern United States communities was a source of cognitive dissonance and pain. These realizations occurred both pre- and post-adoption, but occurred for many participants, post-adoption. Thus, the political events of the time set the stage, for some participants, for the Disintegration racial identity schema, based on the feelings
participants described of discomfort, confusion guilt, helplessness. Elements of Immersion-Emersion emerged as well, with participants’ having their worldview altered, and feeling angry at being White. For other participants, these feelings were less intense and emerged later, in adulthood.

In terms of institutional and structural influences beyond childhood, participants reported that college and their workplaces also played a major role in the influence on their racial identity. As noted in the demographic overview of participants, all twelve participants attended and completed college. A majority of participants recalled college as the first place where they discussed racial issues, and had a more diverse group of friends. Nevertheless, universities maintained structural racism in the form of cultural influences whereby White people were still the majority and privilege was not seen an issue, as several participants reflected. While college provided an opportunity for some interaction and discussions, the majority of participants still reported not having close friends of color in college. Participants recalled instances of minority students educating them about racial issues, and learning about race in an intellectual, but not visceral or personal way.

The workplace highlighted injustice and privilege issues for many participants, even before adoption. Work settings provided exposure to racial stratification, and disparities in hiring and treatment by race. For a few participants who worked in fields where they were social justice advocates, work was the primary setting where they learned about racial oppression. Work also was an opportunity to form relationships with people of color, and for some participants this meant hearing these acquaintances’ stories of racial microaggressions.
Interracial relationships within participants’ extended families also provided a venue for learning familiarity and comfort in the presence of other races, but these experiences were unusual and involved just a few participants. Overall, workplace relationships and experiences were a significant venue for participants’ growing awareness of race. The present research suggests that in a racially stratified society, work is a milieu that potentially forces interaction and observations across race in a way that college and residential venues do not.

Once parents began the adoption process, the systemic issues surrounding race and adoption in the United States brought racism to the forefront for many participants. In particular, for participants who adopted domestically, the racial disparities in the foster care system led participants to describe the process with words such as “fraught” and “horrifying” (P9, 26; P2, 5). The adoption process brought home the reality of racism within the adoption system, as supported by the literature on adoption and race (Jennings, 2006; Livingston et al., 2008; Quiroz, 2007). This was true for most participants, including some adopting internationally who expressed concerns about exploitation and forced removal of children from homes. The majority of participants expressed awareness of being in a position of power in their decision-making, and recognized the vulnerability of both the children and the birth families.

Parents who adopted internationally cited various reasons for their choices, including perception of an expedited process, ease of adoption for a single parent, and most often, a desire to avoid potential complications of open adoption or possible relinquishment of adoptees. These reasons support the literature regarding parents’ views of international adoptees as less problematic than domestic adoptees (Crolley-Simic &
Vonk, 2008; Jennings, 2006); however, no participants were explicit about viewing domestic adoptees as having social problems inherent to their birth community, versus international adoptees presenting more interesting cultural challenges (Zhang & Lee, 2011). In fact, half the participants in this study population adopted Black children, five domestically, whereas research shows that White parents are five times more likely to adopt children of other races than they are to adopt Black children (Zhang & Lee, 2011). With a small sample size, it is difficult to tell whether these trends are due to self-selection or other factors related to the study population versus White transracially adoptive parents nationwide.

For some participants, transracial adoption heightened a previously existing awareness of the cultural, social and institutional racial hierarchies and issues surrounding them; for others it brought on new awareness. The visibility parents experienced, being stared at and questioned, reflected the rarity of multiracial families in our society as a whole. Being a multiracial family made parents even more aware of residential and school racial segregation, and the homogeneity of their environments as they now stood out as a family, whereas prior to adoption they were the majority. As parents observed stereotypes or racial microaggressions against their children, they became more aware of their own privilege in contrast to their children’s experience, and had concerns about their children’s present and future treatment – including discrimination in hiring, racial profiling, self-esteem and safety issues. However, for the most part, in spite of this heightened awareness, distance between the participants and other racial groups only lessened for a minority of parents, and most participants kept the same friendship and community circles.
The power and influence of structural racial divides exists to the extent that even with children of color in their families, most parents did not develop close relationships with adults of color. Memberships in transracially adoptive family groups involved relationships with other adults who were mostly White. These social divisions resulted in the awkwardness and tension many participants cited when engaging with people of other races. These divisions also made it more likely for parents to connect with their children’s birth race and culture through holidays and festivals rather than through lasting and personal connections with the communities of color.

The extent and impact of racial social separations may help explain the dilemmas some parents faced when conflating race and culture in negative and stereotypical ways. Without having close relationships with a significant number of adult people of color, it was difficult for participants to recognize the diversity within and across races; for example, recognizing that there are many ways to be African American, or another race, outside of stereotypes, just as there are many ways to be White. Thus, due to structural racism and cultural divides, some participants identified Black culture, for example, with negative traits, or behaviors that were stereotyped. Other participants had difficulty identifying the terms White culture or Black culture in spite of using these terms in their narratives as one participant did, telling her daughter that she looked Black but was culturally White. Most participants did not explicitly attribute social characteristics to race, but may have endorsed such views and not expressed them.

Critical race theory exposes and critiques the cultural myth of race neutrality as neither true nor desirable (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Vasquez et al., 2012). Several participants expressed ambivalence about race neutrality as an ideal. Once they became
adoptive parents and witnessed racial discrimination and microaggressions towards their children first hand, no parents endorsed the myth of a race neutral society or level playing field; they could only express the wish for this as a goal. However, the extent of the wish for race neutrality, and the ambiguity of racial microaggressions may have contributed to some of the participants’ questioning the validity of racial microaggressions that occurred in their stories.

Besides the workplace, nowhere was racial disparity more apparent than in the participants’ children’s schools. The structural racism inherent in housing and schools that was evident in the participants’ own childhoods, is still evident in the present. While segregation is no longer legal, it exists in a different guise, with limited diversity in most schools, racial tracking within schools, and limited diversity in many towns as well. The majority of participants reported their schools and neighborhood as predominantly White. Because of racial social segregation, parents were confronted with dilemmas in their parenting decisions with respect to race and diversity. Transracial adoption forced parents to face, to an extent, what people of color face: for example, whether or not to sacrifice school diversity for school resources. Parenting a child of color made the issue of diversity salient in a new and personal way, with parents concerned about their children’s racial identity and well-being.

As evidence of White privilege, the importance of diversity in the participants’ own lives was seen by many parents as a benefit or option that was potentially life enhancing but not critical. When parents did experience moments of being a racial minority, these were reported to be empathy-building experiences, but were nevertheless temporary or short-lived. Being in the dominant racial group meant that participants
could more easily build their lives around situations where they experienced less discomfort. For most participants this meant that their life choices resulted in their children having the experience of being a minority rather than themselves as parents being minorities in a neighborhood or school community. Many parenting dilemmas for participants centered around conflicting feelings about intention versus acting, or wondering whether they did enough to connect their children with their birth race, while the parents were not necessarily connected themselves.

All participants expressed awareness of institutional racism. While many participants wondered whether to prepare their children to respond to racism or to shield them as much as they could during childhood, they all acknowledged the institutional racism that their children would continue to face in schools and the workplace. Participants worried about the emotional ramifications of racial stereotyping on their children’s self-esteem. They worried about the practices of racial profiling and police brutality on their child’s safety.

Lastly, critical race theory and research has recognized other identity category memberships than race that affect people’s experiences and are related to privilege and oppression (hooks, 1992; Valdes et al., 2002). Some participants expressed awareness of their own multiple identities where they experienced privilege or oppression, due to their gender, sexual orientation or religion. These parents tended to also be aware of and concerned about their children’s multiple and intersecting identities, as being adopted and a person of color, but also related to gender, or in some cases, coming from a sexual minority family.
As a final note about the impact of systemic racism, participants’ language and imagery stood out as particularly expressive. Participants used imagery and language that reflected the magnitude and scope of these racial barriers and divides. The participant who described racism as a soup in which we all are immersed and swim, provided a powerful image that represented the currents which people of all races in this society must navigate. Other physical imagery included the use of phrases such as “eye opening” (P2, 7, 11, 16, 32); ‘being on the other side of a glass,” “in another compartment,” and “on the other side of a wall” (P4, 6, 3,3), racial associations being “seared in the brain” (P9, 17), and “finding common bonds” beyond “filters” and outside of “comfort zones” (P11, 16, 25, 10, 20, 25, 27). This imagery is a powerful expression of the divisions reinforced by social structures and racial hierarchies, and the gulf participants either retreat from or try to bridge.

Narratives: majoritarian and alternative. Critical race theory considers majoritarian, or dominant narratives to be those stories where the cultural attitudes of the dominant race are represented. According to Solorzano and Yosso (2002), “A majoritarian story distorts and silences the experiences of people of color” (p. 29). As scripts used to make sense of the world, one could say that peoples’ narratives about race represent their racial identity schemas. Counter-storytelling, or alternative accounts, express the perspectives of oppressed groups, and discuss and expose racism and other forms of oppression (Solorzano & Yasso, 2002). In contrast to majoritarian narratives, counter narratives represent more fair, and just scripts.

Participants were asked to share memories about race, and tell stories about times that they were aware of their own race. Regardless of story outcomes, most of the stories
that participants shared involved interpersonal challenges related to race, and their developing awareness of race and racism. Given that this study’s participants were from the majority and dominant racial group in the United States, stories where participants were able to articulate White privilege and racism could be considered alternative accounts. These were often stories where participants were able to name their painful feelings and be what Helms terms “brutally honest” with themselves about racism and their own role in it – an integral part of racial identity progression past the early internalized statuses (1992, p. 74). Parents’ counter narratives also included stories of being allies and advocates, another type of narrative that differs from the racial norm for White people, and represents racial identity development.

From the perspective of critical race theory, the findings of this study suggest that transracial adoption forces parents to face racism in a way they might not otherwise, and respond with a wide range of feelings and behaviors. While much of what has been described in the data analysis involves difficult feelings and conflict over choices, for many parents, in the face of the powerful forces of societal racism, transracial adoption was a source of pride, a way to enact restorative justice, embrace moral righteousness, and make amends for one’s own unearned privilege and unconscious racial enactments that might have caused suffering.

Strengths of Qualitative Research

Because of the lack of qualitative research on White racial identity in general, and for this population in particular, qualitative methodology was critical in allowing participants to express themselves more fully than they could have in a quantitative format, such as a with a questionnaire or scale. Interviews were fluid, enabling me to
prompt participants based on their cues, and in response to my own thought processes in the moment; for example, I was able to follow up on or clarify points that participants had moved on from or left unfinished later in the interview if necessary, in order to gain a fuller understanding of the participant’s meaning.

The researcher-participant relationship in qualitative inquiry entails a certain amount of trust in the researcher, which some participants in this study alluded to explicitly. This trust is part of an interpersonal space, where verbal and non-verbal messages are conveyed bi-directionally, shaping the nature of the narratives and data. This is why qualitative research has been deemed inherently relational (Clandinin et al., 2010; Phoenix, 2008), and narratives are considered to be co-constructed in the interview context (Reissman, 2008; Squire, 2008). The semi-structured nature of the interviews in this study facilitated participants’ expression of their thoughts and feelings. They could add more at the end of the interview if they desired in response to an open-ended question, and they had the opportunity to contact me to add thoughts at a later date upon further reflection.

Due to the relational nature of the qualitative interview, a critical component of this methodology, reflexivity, involved my attending to my personal reactions, biases, and assumptions. As described in the previous chapter, this process required continually consulting and checking in with my dissertation chair and peers, and keeping a journal recording my feelings. In fact, emotional sensitivity and comfort with ambiguity are included as principles of good practice in qualitative research (Rossman and Rallis, 2003). In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research recognizes that bias cannot be eliminated; however, transparency and accounting of reflexivity means that
while the research is subjective, it is nevertheless systematic and rigorous, and can provide a richer understanding of participants’ experiences.

Limitations of Study

The findings of this study represent data from participants living in the Northeastern United States, in and around a major metropolitan area. All but two of the participants spent their childhoods in the Northeast or New England area. Participants agreed to participate after responding to email listserv, word of mouth and poster outreach in this geographic area. It is possible that the findings of a similar study conducted in another region of the United States would generate different outcomes, due to geographic differences in racial history and political affiliation that could have potentially influenced participants’ racial identity. In qualitative research, results are not generalizable, but are applicable to this particular study population.

The self-selected population represents a subset of transracially adoptive parents who were open to talking about race, and their own race and racial identity, and more likely to have participated in transracially adoptive family groups and multiracial family groups. They were therefore more likely to be operating from more progressive racial identity schemas than parents who may have hesitated or declined to participate in such research.

Due to the limited nature of the sample size of a qualitative and narrative study, it is also possible that more diversity among participants in terms of demographics other than race would have generated different findings. For example, the present research included two lesbian parents, no gay male or transgender parents, and only one single parent. The average age of participants was over 53, and thus the perspectives of a
younger generation of transracially adoptive parents may also have been overlooked.

Interviews with a different researcher would elicit different findings. It is difficult to determine the effect of my identity as a researcher of color and biracial African American woman on the participants’ responses and openness to expressing their thoughts and feelings freely. During the data analysis process, my co-researcher, a White woman, shared her own reflections that participants may have withheld information, thoughts, and feelings that they would find embarrassing or shameful to express in the presence of a person of color. The co-researcher, based on her own experience with White colleagues and graduate students peers, observed that White people were more likely to express their most candid thoughts about race in the presence of other White people, when they felt less likely to be judged.

Implications for Practice, Research, and Theory

In spite of the limitations of this study, the findings of the present research offer insight into the concerns and needs of transracially adoptive White parents. These findings may have implications for clinicians who work with transracially adoptive families, as well as for those professionals who have input into policy decisions regarding adoptive parent trainings and support services.

Clinical and Policy Implications

While MEPA and IEP were enacted to remove barriers to transracial adoption, these federal mandates contain no provisional guidelines regarding the importance of supporting families around racial and cultural socialization (deHaymes & Simon, 2003). The present study supports existing research suggesting that White people employ a variety of strategies to deal with racism and race relations when confronted with race-
based stimuli and situations of a challenging nature, such as transracial adoption. Strategies vary from avoidance to activism. Given the aforementioned impact on children, support for parents is vital to the well-being of the family. Parental support in facilitating positive racial identity is critical, and furthermore, parents need education and preparation to undertake this process (Livingston et al, 2008). “Failing to provide families with this preparation is contrary to sound and ethical social work practice and is not in the best interest of the child” (Livingston et al, p.41).

However, training provided by adoption agencies is inconsistent. The present research, where 75% of participants reported receiving some guidance on transracial parenting, reflects some improvement in the amount of training offered, though the extent of the training this study’s participants received varied from conversations with a social worker, to multiple week long classes. In a survey of 195 public and private adoption agencies that facilitated transracial adoption, it was found that approximately half of the agencies provided cultural competence training for parents adopting transracially – training which typically occurred in only one session; parents voiced the need for more support (Vonk & Angaran, 2003).

Again, in the present study, several participants expressed the wish for more support concerning issues of race. This supports previous research where White transracially adoptive parents expressed disappointment and frustration due to not feeling adequately supported, having a lack of resources to draw on, and perceiving resistance or minimal efforts from child welfare or adoption workers (DeHaymes & Simon, 2003)

Over half the participants in the present study felt that White transracially adoptive parents’ racial identity was an important issue to address, several parents stated
their reason for participating in the study as wanting to help other parents in their circumstance because of the challenges they experienced, and still others expressed concerns about the lack of openness of other transracially adoptive parents concerning the subject of race and racism.

The results of the present study support recent research on recommendations for transracially adoptive parents: parents need education about and venues to discuss the effects of racial socialization in United States society on themselves and their children, and support in how to respond to racial information and incidents for their own psychological growth as racial beings, and for their children. Current recommendations for best practice have emerged as an outgrowth of the research on psychological well-being outcomes for transracial adoptees; nevertheless, in the context of families, this information is inherently linked to parental growth and experiences around race.

Existing recommendations cover the following three general areas: planning in order to provide children experiences that support positive racial identity development; preparation for parents to impart skills for children to cope with discrimination and racism; and the development of both parents’ and children’s racial awareness (Crumbley, 1999; Jennings, 2006; Livingston et al, 2008; Vonk, 2001; McGinnis et al, 2009). It has been proposed that White parents considering transracial adoption meet with other White parents who have already adopted transracially, have mentors, forum to facilitate recognition of one’s own racism, psychoeducation about race and culture, and racism, and consider the impact of their neighborhood, school and social relationship choices on their children (DeHaymes & Simon, 2003; Zuniga, 1991). Training programs race and culture, including White privilege, “appears to have a positive effect on their
Overall, there is agreement among researchers and adoption professionals that pre- and post-adoption training and support is needed for White parents to help adoptees develop positive racial identity, cultural knowledge, and skills to address racism and discrimination (Vonk & Angaran, 2001). However, as the present study suggests, parents would benefit from guidance specific to their own racial identity development; how can parents “sensitize their transracial adoptees about the politicalization of everyday life” (Smith, Juarez, & Jacobson, 2011, p. 1224) if their own racial identity development does not allow for awareness of such phenomena?

Psychologists can play a critical role in working with parents and families to address issues of racial identity development for all members of the adoptive family. Psychologists may also play a role in training agency workers in developing programs for parents considering adoption, developing trainings for parents in the process of adopting, and, developing supportive and therapeutic services for adoptive families as they transition through developmental stages as parents and children. Psychologists can help advocate for the need for such services to be mandated, by citing the psychological costs to parents and children when these needs are not addressed. In addition, psychologists can take part in the evaluation of such training and support programs.

Implications for Theory

Critical Race Theory. Critical race theorists have been challenged to confront issues in organizations and communities, but also increasingly take into account peoples’ lived experiences, and engage in personal reflection as integral steps towards the
eradication of racism (Hylton, 2012). The present research, in the context of transracial adoption, looks at racism at a structural and community level, and also within White individuals’ lives. These data were analyzed using a multilevel approach that included participants’ intimate feelings and reactions, individuals’ behaviors, and their responses within organizations and systems as individuals with race privilege.

As qualitative research, the data generated from the present study provide insight into White peoples’ psychological defenses and vulnerabilities about race and race privilege. The present research explores, for White transracially adoptive parents, what occurs psychologically when race neutrality and race privilege are exposed. For this population, the data shows the unfolding of the recognition of race privilege and racism, and participants’ reactions in response to this recognition. At times it was evident how painful this process is, to the point where answering certain questions was avoided. The difficult nature of this process could help critical race theorists understand the challenges faced at an individual level to changing the racial status quo. This research exposes the ongoing challenges and conflicts inherent for those with race privilege to cross boundaries, challenge their ways of thinking, and work towards anti-racism. In particular participants faced emotional barriers, and perceived or took limited opportunities to challenge the status quo.

This study points to the importance of recognizing catalysts for shifts in White racial awareness, providing more opportunities for White people to talk and process racial identity issues, and harnessing these identity shifts in order to build alliances and coalitions to fight racism. These data suggest that increased interracial relationships are an opportunity for “interest convergence,” where White peoples’ interest and the interest
of people of color overlap (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 8). Having a child of color appears to motivate White parents to become more vocal about racism, and engage in acts of anti-racism advocacy. While these actions may be relatively small in scope, it is possible that White people such as the study participants who have increased intimate interracial contact, and who undergo progressive racial identity shifts, are more likely to be anti-racist allies, and support and contribute to the success of the reforms endorsed by critical race theory.

**White Racial Identity Theory.** Helms (1990; 1995) posits that for White people, being confronted with multiculturalism in their environments sets the foundation for movement to more advanced racial identity schemas. Similarly, Thomann (2011) cites the need for both an abstract and personalized understanding of structural racism to become a White ally, which is considered part of the development of a positive and healthy white identity. The data from this study help illuminate how White people understand and react to racism in abstract ways as well as more personal ways in their daily lives. Participants’ reactions differ even within multiracial environments. The richness and lived experiences represented by qualitative data build on Helms’s (1990; 1995) theory by adding to the understanding of what it looks like, cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally, when White people are confronted with racism and stereotypes within diverse environments. Whether at school, work or through parenting, the data suggest that racism in the abstract becomes personal through close and meaningful relationships.

This research also builds on the theoretical description of feelings experienced by White people during their use of different racial identity schemas. Study findings reflect
an intensity, fluidity, and complexity of emotional expression for participants across schemas. For example, participants reflected Pseudo-Independent intellectualism at times, yet did not necessarily exhibit emotional distancing regarding race, as characterized in the theory for this status. Similarly, participants endorsed behaviors of Immersion-Emersion or Autonomy schemas, but reported feelings from earlier schema, while not necessarily endorsing behaviors or thoughts from the earlier statuses.

In addition, findings from the present study emphasize and elaborate on what Helms (1992) terms the struggle in White racial identity development between the moral self and the racially socialized self. Qualitative data helps illustrate how difficult it is for participants to resolve these moral dilemmas. Participants’ dissonance and confusion about their roles in challenging situations, and their struggles to deconstruct sociopolitical conceptions of race continues in different contexts, and across the use of multiple schemas. The intensity of emotions regarding race expressed by participants, including feelings about themselves, other White people, and people of color, highlights the affective aspect of racial identity development. Shame emerged as one of the dominant feelings; for those in positions of power and privilege, awareness is necessary to bring about change, while shame and guilt are seen as self-defeating (hooks, 1999). These data suggest that for many transracially adoptive parents, shame, guilt, and awareness are all present, and it may be that shame and guilt have a limiting effect on possibilities for change, particularly change on a broad scale.

Lastly, this study’s findings suggest that the precipitants to White peoples’ changes in racial identity are multifaceted and complex. In spite of the similarity in participants’ backgrounds - predominantly White childhood environments, parents’
instilling values of fairness and justice, and their common experience as transracially adoptive parents - there was still considerable variation in participants’ comfort with race, talking about race, and acting in response to racism. Existing in a multiracial environment, and having stereotypes challenged (Helms, 1992) may only tell part of the story. Questions emerge as to how potential factors such as individual temperament, experiences related to non-racial aspects of identity that are marginalized, or the influence of anti-racist White role models might play a role in racial identity development. These questions point to areas of future research on White racial identity development.

Future Research and Counseling Psychology

Areas for future research include examining the racial identity development in other samples of White transracially adoptive parents, including parents with open adoption agreements, parents in other geographical areas, and from other demographics in terms of age and family structure. More information is needed about the multiple environmental factors that influence White peoples’ racial psychological orientations. The significance of participants’ affect as part of their racial identity development, as noted above, merits more attention, as these feelings are connected to cognition and drive behavioral choices. This study indicates that information can be gained by exploring situations similar to transracially adoptive parenting, where White people find themselves in racial minority situations, or find themselves having heightened sensitivity to racism by virtue of having a close or intimate relationship with a person of color. Finally, examination of the impact of intersecting identities, issues of power and powerlessness in
the context of race activism, and the ways White parents feel a sense of agency or lack of efficacy are all areas that are fruitful for further exploration.

Counseling psychologists have called for research to address the role of race in adoptive families, and the influences of sociocultural factors on adoptive families’ experiences (O’Brien & Zamostny, 2003; Zamostny et al, 2003b). Attention to the role of race in adoption may contribute to psychology research by informing clinical practice and adoption policy to support transracially adoptive families, including determining ways to support parents in the process of racial socialization, and in their own racial awareness and self-examination (Lee et al, 2006; Vonk, Lee & Crolley-Simic, 2010). In the field of psychology, counseling psychology’s emphasis on prevention, healthy development and coping skills, adjustment to transitions over the lifespan, multiculturalism and the elimination of oppression provides the foundation for research that supports transracially adoptive families and their challenges (Gelso & Fretz, 2001; Lee, 2003; O’Brien & Zamostny, 2003; Vera & Speight, 2003; Zamostny et al, 2003). All triad members in transracially adoptive families face issues that potentially complicate their relationships, developmental tasks and psychological adjustment (Zamostny et al, 2003). Furthermore, research that attends to issues of race and racism as they affect mental health and well-being is consistent with counseling psychology’s attention to social justice issues and oppression (Bieschke, 2009; Goodman, Liang, Helms, Latta, Sparks, & Weintraub, 2004).

Conclusion

This research study contributes to the literature on White racial identity development and to the literature on how racial issues are addressed in transracially
adoptive families, from the understudied perspective of the White parent. Findings demonstrated that for almost all participants, transracial adoption was a catalyst for increased awareness of White racial privilege and racism, and therefore for participants’ racial identity development. This development was primarily due to parents’ seeing race differently and having increased race consciousness, as a result of witnessing their child’s experiences, and seeing racial information with the perspective of their child in mind. For the minority of participants who did not cite transracial adoption as a factor in their racial identity development, parenting a child of color was still recognized as increasing their awareness of race and racism to some extent.

Overall, participants used more progressive racial identity schemas over time, but to differing degrees depending on their pre-adoptive experiences and personal circumstances. Institutional and cultural racism created segregation and interpersonal distance between races that existed in childhood and, for most participants, continued into adulthood and post-adoption. Navigating racial stimuli elicited strong feelings in participants, which were often painful and challenging. Some participants also experienced pride and joy, but for all participants, a continuing journey of racial identity development was evident.

This study suggests that White racial identity development for transracially adoptive parents is changeable, complex, and influenced by multiple environmental variables across the lifespan. Participants’ own racial identity development takes place in a parallel process to their children’s racial identity development, which is further complicated by the child’s developmental stages and, at times, issues related to adoption.
Many participants indicated the need for support in sorting out this complex web of factors. Questions about the connections between White racial identity development, transracial adoption, and other environmental factors highlight the need for continuing research on this study topic. Psychologists and other clinicians working with this study population would benefit from increased knowledge about White transracially adoptive parents’ racial identity development. Such knowledge would support the parents in navigating racial issues for both themselves and their children, impacting the well-being of all family members.
References


Colorblindness: White racial and ethnic socialization. Submitted for Publication.

Also

presented at Boston College, Diversity Challenge Conference, October 20, 2012.


Butler-Sweet, C. A healthy Black identity: Transracial adoption, middle-class families, and racial socialization. Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 42(2), 193-212.


Collins, P.H. (2009). *Another kind of public education: Race, schools, the media, and...


Transracially Adoptive Parents 308


hooks, b. (1999). *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, MA:
South End Press


*Education, 118*(2), 282-292.


McIntosh, P. (1988). Unpacking the invisible knapsack, from the paper, White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondence through work in women’s studies, Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, Wellesley, MA.


Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Are you an adoptive parent?
Are you White, and your child is of a different race than you?

You may be eligible to participate in a study exploring the racial identity development of White parents who have adopted children of color.

General Requirements for Participation:

• White adoptive parent of child or children of color
• Single, or partnered with partner/spouse who is also White
• Adoptive child (at least one) you have parented for at least four years

If you meet these requirements, we would like to discuss the possibility of setting up a time for an interview.

Interviews will take 60-90 minutes. Interviews will be private and confidentiality will be maintained.

If you have any questions, or are interested in participating, please contact Terry Sass at (617) XXX-XXXX. Feel free to leave a private message at that number and she will get back to you.

**Thank you for your consideration. Please pass this invitation to other parents who may be interested in participating.**

The Institutional Review Board at Boston College has approved this study.
Appendix B: Background and Screening Questionnaire

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. I want to ask you a few questions to make sure that you are eligible for participation. I really appreciate your taking the time to answer these. Please note that all information will remain confidential and no individual or identifying information will be reported.

1. With what racial group do you identify? What ethnic group?
2. Do you have a faith or religious identification?
3. What is your gender identification? Sexual orientation?
4. What is your country of birth?
5. What is your primary language?
6. What is your relationship status?
   a. Single
   b. Married and living together
   c. Separated
   d. Living together (not married)
   e. Divorced
   f. Other
7. If you have a partner or spouse, with what racial group does she or he identify? What ethnic group?
8. For each of your children, please answer the following questions:
   a. Current age: ____, ____, ____, __
   b. Age at adoption (if not adopted please indicate): ___, ___, ___, ___
   c. Race: _______, _______, _______, ______
   d. Birth country: ______, ______, ______, ______
9. What is your education level?
   a. Less than high school diploma
   b. High school diploma
   c. Some college
   d. College graduate
   e. Graduate degree
10. What is your employment status?
11. What is your field of work?
   a. Not employed outside of household
   b. Employed part-time
   c. Employed full-time
Appendix C: Interview Guide

Thank you so much for your participation in this study. Before we begin, please let me know what name, other than your own, you would like for me to use to refer to you during the interview process. This name will be used to protect your privacy, and will be used in all transcribed and written materials that are generated from this interview. If you do not select a different name, I will select one for you.

Participant Pseudonym: _____________________________

After the interview has been completed, I would like to follow up with you by sending you a copy of the interview transcript and then maybe discussing it with you – in person or by phone. If you are comfortable with me sending the transcript to you, please let me know where I should send it and how I should follow-up.

Interview Questions:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Tell me a story about your earliest experiences that had to do with your race?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>How did you learn about race?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>What did it mean to be White in your family of origin/growing up? Can you tell me a story about that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>(This question applies to the time before you adopted): Talk about some times you were aware of being White/aware of your race *(PROMPT/PROBE #1: in the public domain - at work, on the street, at school, in an institution) *PROBE ABOUT THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS i.e. What were you feeling when this happened? What were you thinking? How did you deal with it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>(This question also applies to the time before you adopted): Talk about some times you were aware of being White/aware of your race *(PROMPT/PROBE #2: in the private domain - at home, or in your relationships) PROBE ABOUT THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Describe your decision to adopt, and if and how race was a factor. (was there counseling/guidance on TRA?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>(The next two questions concern your experiences after having adopted your child/children): Talk about some times you've been aware of being White/aware of your race *(PROMPT/PROBE #1: in the public domain - at work, on the street, at school, in an institution) *PROBE ABOUT THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Talk about some times you've been aware of being White/aware of your race *(PROMPT/PROBE #2: in the private domain - at home, or in your relationships) PROBE ABOUT THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**9.** How do you think your children perceive you or understand your race, your being White? Racial differences in the family? What about your partner? Can you talk about her/his ideas about or understanding of being White?

*10.** What is it like when you talk about race in your family? (now/not family of origin) (Has how you talk about race changed? Now does it come up? Who initiates these conversations? Do you talk about the historical aspects of race?)

11. Can you talk about ways your relationships may have changed in ways that involve race, before and after adoption?

12. Can you describe, overall, how that awareness or those feelings and thoughts about being White/what it means to be White have changed since becoming an adoptive parent? *Thoughts?* What about feelings? *(Do you see yourself differently as a White person now? Do you see other White people differently?)*

*13.** Is there anything you want to share or add that you feel is important, that I didn't get to ask about?

13. What was this interview process like for you?

14. Why do you think were you willing to participate in this interview?

**Verbal probes:**

Tell me more about that.

Can you give me an example of a time...

What else can you say about...

How did you understand that?

How did that make you feel/What were you feeling at that time (about your own race)?

What did that make you think/believe (about being White/about your own race)?

If I understand you, you believe/think... (summarize)...

So this made you feel...
Appendix D: Interview Consent Form

Boston College Consent Form
Lynch School of Education
Department of Counseling, Developmental, and Educational Psychology
Informed Consent for Participation as a Subject in "Racial Identity of White Transracially Adoptive Parents: A Narrative Approach"

Investigators: Theresa L. Sass, M.A., M.P.H. and Pratyusha Tummala-Narra, Ph.D.

Introduction

• You are being asked to participate in a research study. This study explores the racial identity of White parents who have adopted children of color.

• You were selected as a possible participant because you are the White adoptive parent of a child of color.

• We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Study:

• The purpose of this study is to learn about White parents’ experiences, thoughts, and feelings regarding race. There is little research on White transracially adoptive parents’ experiences of race and racism. More information in this area could help mental health and other professionals psychology to better support transracially adoptive families.

• The total number of participants is expected to be 12.

Description of the Study Procedures:

• If you agree to be in this study, I would like to interview you to ask you about your experiences regarding race and racism as a White parent of a child of color. First, you will be asked to complete a survey, which should take about 5 minutes. The interview should take about 60 to 90 minutes and will be audiotaped. A follow up interview will take place which will be shorter. The purpose of the second interview is to clarify information from the first interview. I may take notes during the interviews. Assistants may help me with the typing and translating of the audiotapes. In addition, my Dissertation Director, Dr. Pratyusha Tummala-Narra and other graduate student researchers may help with the data analysis. Interviews will take place at a location we both agree on that allows privacy. I will ask if you would like to receive a transcript of this interview and a chance to talk to me about changes or additions you would like to make. We could have that conversation by phone or in-person if you choose.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in the Study:
Potential risks may include experiencing strong emotional reactions in response to discussing issues of race and racism. However, there may be unknown risks also associated with participating in this study. If you became emotionally distraught during your involvement in the interview, with your permission, I will help you contact supports or resources to aid you in your distress.

Benefits of Being in the Study:

• Potential benefits to participation may include positive and hopeful feelings from participating in research that may help improve mental health services for transracially adoptive families.

Payments:

• No payment is received for participating in the interview.

Costs:

• There is no cost to you to participate in this research study.

Confidentiality:

• Your interview audiotapes will be kept strictly confidential. Although names might be used during the interview, when the interview tape is transcribed no names or identifying information will be recorded. I will ask you to choose a pseudonym to be used instead. This pseudonym will replace your name in the interview transcripts. This form and the audiotapes will be stored in a locked cabinet that will only be accessible to the researchers of this project (i.e., Dr. Pratyusha Tummala-Narra and Terry Sass). The audiotapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed. No names or identifying details will be used in any publications or other documents resulting from this research. All data collected from this study will be presented as a group, so that no one can identify any one individual within the study. I may also quote you or other participants without identifying where the quotation came from. The information collected will be kept for five years after the results of the study are published. This consent form will be stored separately from the information you provide, and will also be destroyed by shredding five years after the results of the study are published.

Mainly just the researchers will have access to information; however, please note that a few other key people may also have access. These might include government agencies. Also, the Institutional Review Board at Boston College and internal Boston College auditors may review the research records.

• As is the case in any research project, there are certain limits to confidentiality. For example, if you tell me about a child, elder, or disabled individual who is being abused, or about your intent to hurt yourself or others, we may be required to inform the Department of Child and Family Services or other appropriate authorities.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:

• Your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your current or future relations with the University or with your current and/or past therapists.

• You are free to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason.
Contacts and Questions:

- The researchers conducting this study are Terry Sass, M.P.H., M.A. and Pratyusha Tummala-Narra, Ph.D. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact Theresa Sass at 617-347-9137.
- If you believe you may have suffered a research related injury, contact Dr. Pratyusha Tummala-Narra at 617-552-4491 who will give you further instructions. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact: Dr. Stephen Erickson, Director, Office for Research Protections, Boston College at (617) 552-4778, or irb@bc.edu.

Copy of Consent Form:

- You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

Statement of Consent: *(please check boxes below)*

I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participate in this study.

I have received a copy of this form.

Signatures/Dates

Study Participant (Print Name) : ____________

Participant or Legal Representative Signature : ____________ Date ______

Witness/Auditor (Signature): __________________________ Date ______