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Adult Transracial Adoptees' Childhood Experiences and Decision-Making in Forming Families of Creation

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**ADULT TRANSRACIAL ADOPTEES' CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES AND DECISION-
MAKING IN FORMING FAMILIES OF CREATION**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science, Early Childhood and Family Development

By

Sarah J. Gray

May 2021

ADULT TRANSRACIAL ADOPTEES' CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES AND DECISION- MAKING IN FORMING FAMILIES OF CREATION

Childhood Education and Family Studies

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Sarah J. Gray

ABSTRACT

This study examined adult transracial adoptees' (TRAs) childhood experiences and determined how specific factors influenced their likelihood to choose biological procreation, adoption, fostering, a combination of these options, or the choice to be child-free when forming their own families. These adoptees were Black, Indigenous and people of color adopted by white parents in the United States through domestic or international adoption. Childhood experiences included the TRAs' sense of belonging, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias. The only dependent variable option predicted by a childhood experience was the preference to be child-free. TRAs who experienced higher levels of belonging were less likely to prefer a child-free family. Higher levels of both cultural socialization and preparation for bias approached significance in predicting less likelihood to prefer a child-free family. Data were collected via mixed methods including an online survey and interviews. The aim was to expand representation of adult TRAs in the literature and to inform best social work and parenting practices involving TRAs.

KEYWORDS: adoption, adoptee, transracial adoption, transracial adoptee, cultural socialization, preparation for bias, belongingness, parenting, procreation, decision-making

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In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

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I dedicate this thesis to my little brothers, Zach and Elijah.

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INTRODUCTION

In the field of child and family services, it is well known that the traditional, same-race family model is becoming less common in the United States as nontraditional family types such as multiracial families emerge (Samuels, 2009). Multiracial family forms include different-race couples and their multiracial biological children as well as those who go through transracial adoption, which is when a child is adopted into a family in which at least one adoptive parent is of a different race than the child (Jennings, 2006). An adopted child in this type of family is called a transracial adoptee (TRA) if they are adopted domestically or a transracial international adoptee (TRIA) if they are adopted internationally. As Jennings points out, transracial families challenge the racism that has historically characterized family structures in the U.S. However, marginalized communities and professionals such as the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) have a long history of questioning transracial adoption, as there is an overrepresentation of white adults as foster and adoptive parents to children of color (Jennings, 2006). The initial NABSW (1972) position statement on transracial adoption clearly stated that the coalition of social workers believed Black children belong in Black families, and that position has been extrapolated to apply to other children of color as well. These professionals and other community members have collectively expressed concern that TRAs face challenges such as a lack of sense of belonging, a loss of culture, and an unpreparedness for life in a discriminatory society (Arnold et al., 2016).

Due to the concerns of many parties involved in transracial adoption, some research has been conducted to evaluate the impact of what children of color experience in white families and communities. Outcomes including psychological, emotional, cultural, and relational-romantic

have been examined to various, but generally limited, degrees. However, there is still a great underrepresentation of adult TRAs in current research. For example, little to nothing is known about how childhood experiences in white families affects the way adult TRAs form their own families. No literature exists that investigates whether and why adult transracial adoptees choose to approach forming their families through biological reproduction, adoption, fostering, any combination of these, or the choice to be child-free.

Family Systems Theory, which is widely applied in child and family services, argues that every family operates as an interdependent system – a dynamic unit – in which all behaviors by all members affect all other members in the family (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). In the context of studying adult TRAs as parents, applying Family Systems Theory means that a systematic review of childhood experiences in white families will play a key role in understanding how adult TRAs develop their view of themselves, of family, and of their adoption as a part of those perspectives. Some of the core tenets of Family Systems Theory argue that the whole of a family is greater than the sum of its parts (individuals) and that each family has an equilibrium (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Changes in one member's functioning creates reciprocal change in all other members and can impact the equilibrium, and the differentiation of an individual can change generationally (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Children can inherit relational and emotional issues from their parents through the family projection process (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). These tenets combine to make critical analysis of the effects of white adoptive parents' choices on their TRAs crucial in understanding how adult TRAs go about forming their own families. While the term "family of origin" does not apply evenly to adoptees because they always have a biological family as well as an adoptive family, the principles of Family Systems Theory can still be applied to an adoptive family as a key socializing unit of adult adoptees.

The purpose of this study was to examine adult transracial adoptees' childhood experiences and determine how specific factors influence whether they want to form their own families through biological reproduction, adoption, fostering, or the choice to be child-free. Conducting this study helped increase representation of adult TRAs in the body of literature. The priority in this research was to center the voices of adult TRAs rather than the voices of their white adoptive parents. This study allows researchers to begin closing the gaps in knowledge about how being raised in white families affects TRAs over their lifespan, including how it affects them becoming parents of their own children.

Understanding more about the long-term impacts of being raised in white families on adult TRAs is essential to building a stronger ethical framework for the process of transracial adoption on both professional and familial levels. This study provides the basis for further research that might explore what is uncovered by the survey and interviews conducted. Beyond academic benefit, however, this study informed practical applications in the domains of policy, protocol and parent education.

This study included two sets of research questions that guided the quantitative survey portion and the qualitative interview portion. The quantitative questions answered in the survey are as follows, examining TRAs' desire to form their families through four options (biological reproduction, adoption, fostering, or child-free):

- 1) Does TRAs' sense of belonging in their adoptive families predict desiring to form their families through each of the four options?
- 2) Does TRAs' experience of cultural socialization in their adoptive families predict desiring to form their families through each of the four options?
- 3) Does TRAs' preparation for bias in their adoptive families predict desiring to form their families through each of the four options?

The following research question was explored by the interview portion of this study:

- 1) In what ways do adult TRAs connect their childhood experiences with sense of belonging, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias with their approach to forming their own families?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to examine adult transracial adoptees' childhood experiences and determine how specific factors influenced their preferences for forming their own families, including their sense of belonging, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias. The increase of white families crossing racial lines to adopt children of color has been a controversial trend emerging since the mid-1990s (Jennings, 2006). The term "transracial" was developed to accurately describe adoptive families in which the parents are of a different race than the adopted child(ren) (Samuels, 2010) in contrast to interracial families created by couples of different racial backgrounds. Domestic U.S. transracial adoptees are referred to simply as TRAs (Arnold et al., 2016). As demonstrated by Baden et al. (2012), those adopted both transracially and internationally are referred to in academic literature as TRIAs. In this review, the term TRA can include international adoptees who are also transracially adopted, but TRIA will refer to those international adoptees when they are referred to separately from domestically adopted TRAs.

The focus of this literature review will be on Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) adopted into white families and their experiences with three variables: sense of belonging, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias. Sense of belonging can be defined as an emotional sense of closeness, acceptance and legitimate membership and personal involvement in their adoptive family (Kim et al., 2010; Mohanty et al., 2006). Cultural socialization refers to the process of adoptive parents teaching their TRA about and socializing them amongst members of the adoptee's race, ethnicity and culture (Arnold et al., 2016; Baden et al. 2012; Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2018; Kurtz-Costes et al., 2019). Preparation for bias consists of

adoptive parents providing education and skills training so that their TRA is equipped to navigate discrimination in society (Arnold et al., 2016; Day et al., 2015; Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2018; Kurtz-Costes et al, 2019; Presseau et al., 2019). BIPOC who have been transracially adopted as children express diverse perspectives on their experiences growing up in white families and communities (Brooks & Barth, 1999; Gatzke, 2015; Reinoso et al., 2013; Samuels, 2009), and both TRAs and TRIAs will be represented in this literature review to provide a comprehensive viewpoint. Psycho-emotional, cultural and relational outcomes of TRAs have been studied to some extent. However, there is a gap in the literature as almost no research has been conducted about how adult TRAs are affected by their childhood when they form their own families. The present study aims to build on previous research by exploring how TRAs' experiences in their white adoptive families might impact their inclination to form their own families through biological procreation, adoption, foster care, a combination of those, or the choice to be child-free. The goal of this literature review is to synthesize what is known about TRAs to inform further research on their outcomes as parents. Included in this review of the related literature will be: (a) TRA sense of belonging, (b) TRA cultural socialization, (c) TRA preparation for bias, (d) adoptees as partners and parents, and (e) parental decision-making in family planning.

TRA Sense of Belonging

BIPOC transracial adoptees face a unique set of developmental challenges due to their status both as members of marginalized racial and ethnic groups and members of white families. One aspect of their development is navigating which groups they feel they belong to and in what ways. This section will review how TRAs experience belonging in the context of their adoptive families.

A study of 14 adult Korean TRAs raised by white parents expressed in interviews that their sense of belonging was most related to their experience of being a part of their adoptive family, growing up together, and sharing American culture (Kim et al., 2010). However, these TRAs expressed that they experienced a lack of belonging, or exclusion, stemming from experiencing racism that their white family members did not. While they felt cultural belonging amongst their white community, they felt racially excluded. This may be a more severe issue impacting sense of belonging amongst Black TRAs in their white adoptive families, as Feigelman (2000) found that Black TRAs experienced the most perceived discrimination out of a sample including inracial white adoptees and other races of transracial adoptees. The way the Korean adoptees found the strongest sense of belonging was by connecting with other Korean TRAs, with whom they shared the most in common (Kim et al., 2010). Peer socialization with other TRAs of the same race could possibly help TRAs of multiple racial backgrounds experience a greater sense of belonging in their adoptive families and communities.

Transracial adoptees' sense of belonging, or lack thereof, can also be influenced by where they live and the community they are surrounded by as children. Feigelman (2000) found that living in predominantly white neighborhoods was associated with TRAs having greater feelings of discomfort about their appearance. Samuels (2010) interviewed 25 adult multiracial transracial adoptees, and all 25 of them reported experiencing racism in their white communities when growing up.

Various protective factors may increase a TRA's sense of belonging in their white family and community. Mohanty et al. (2006) studied Asian TRIAs and found that self-esteem was positively correlated with TRIAs' sense of belonging. Conversely, TRIAs' self-esteem was found to be negatively correlated with a feeling of marginalization in their adoptive families and

communities. The study also identified adoptive parental supports for cultural socialization as being a factor that helped TRIAs feel less marginalized in those communities.

TRA Cultural Socialization

One of the most common concerns about white parents adopting BIPOC children is that they will not properly immerse their adoptees in their birth community and culture. White parents considering transracial adoption have even been shown to fear experiencing negative feedback from the Black community due to not being culturally equipped to raise Black children, and often white parents prefer to adopt Latinx or Asian children instead because they consider them easier to assimilate than Black children (Dorow, 2006; Quiroz, 2007). The research reflects mixed outcomes related to the cultural socialization of TRAs raised by white parents, with some outcomes being neutral or positive and others harmful.

The cultural socialization of TRAs has been examined in both child and adult samples. Reinoso et al. (2013) studied the racial identification of child TRAs and found that they correctly identified with their own racial groups rather than the racial groups of their adoptive families, meaning they understood that they were of Asian, African or South American descent, not European descent like their adoptive parents. Reinoso et al. also studied the TRAs' cultural identification and found that they had a very strong sense of connection to their birth country and culture. These children were all socialized by their adoptive parents with other TRAs, often from the same birth countries, which Brocious (2017) found is also identified as an important mechanism for cultural connection among adult TRAs.

Arnold et. al (2016) found that white adoptive parents engaging in the cultural socialization of their adoptees is an important protective factor against the effects of perceived

discrimination for TRAs compared to their non-adopted peers. However, multiple studies indicate that TRAs have not received enough support from their adoptive parents in this way. A study of adult transracial, international Korean adoptees found that their experience of ethnic socialization while growing up in their adoptive families was limited and insufficient (Day et al., 2015). In an interview study of 25 multiracial TRAs, only 4 participants felt their white adoptive parents had been proactive about providing racial socialization when they were children (Samuels, 2009). While some transracial adoptees are culturally socialized in a sufficient manner, it has also been found that some adult TRIAs feel a lack of cultural connection to their birth community due to the inability to speak their birth language after being raised in English-speaking American homes, even more so than due to their lack of engagement in cultural activities (Brocious, 2017). In Arnold et al.'s (2016) study of TRAs, those who were poorly culturally socialized with their birth community and felt frequently discriminated against had the lowest self-esteem.

TRAs often face a complicated journey in their development of racial and cultural identity due to their experiences of cultural socialization, or lack thereof, being raised in white families. Brocious (2017) found in interviews with 10 Asian TRIAs that travelling back to birth countries holds significant emotional value for most and usually includes finding emotional fulfillment in seeking out biological relatives that presumably cannot be found with adoptive family members. The multiracial TRAs in Samuels' (2009) study expressed that socializing themselves racially as adults is like putting a puzzle together – it is a long process of understanding pieces of their racial identity. Racial resemblance to adoptive families was a central issue to many of the TRAs of multiracial backgrounds, but that resemblance could not be provided due to their families' whiteness. Being Black-white multiracial individuals, they also

experienced their status as transracial adoptees with white parents to be a social liability when trying to engage with the Black community. In other words, the Black community used the TRAs' status as members of white families to reduce their seeming 'blackness' and belongingness in Black spaces (Samuels, 2009). Samuels (2010) reported that these TRAs often sought out Black peers in their process of reculturation and learning how to "be Black" (p. 33).

Baden et al. theorized that TRAs develop their cultural and racial identity uniquely and proposed the new term "reculturation" to describe their more involved process (2012, p. 388). This process includes losing and regaining a sense of minority status and identification while being raised in white families and communities, and it has extra phases of complication for TRIAs compared to domestically adopted TRAs (Baden et al., 2012). Society demands that TRAs exhibit the expected behaviors, mannerisms and appearances of their birth culture despite socialization in predominantly white spaces yet deems them illegitimate members of that community regardless of their characteristics. This leaves adult TRAs the difficult task of reculturation, in which they actively or passively work towards becoming passing members of their community so that their adoption status is not a factor affecting their membership (Baden et al., 2012).

White adoptive parents may have an inflated view of the success of their cultural parenting practices with their TRAs. While adult TRAs in the literature have expressed facing myriad struggles related to being raised by white parents who did not sufficiently culturally socialize them, Brooks and Barth (1999) found that according to the white adoptive parents in their study, 65% of their adult Black and Asian adoptees have a secure racial identity and 35% have a strong racial identity. This was based on a scale that also included a "weak" category for racial identity consisting of overall discomfort, shame, lack of pride, and negative beliefs about

their racial group (Brooks & Barth, 1999). Strong racial identity was defined as having no shame about their ethnic appearance or their birth group and also taking pride in their heritage, whereas those with secure racial identity have some more negative feelings towards their appearance and membership in their birth community (Brooks & Barth, 1999). The same study revealed that certain subgroups of TRAs have more positive or negative racial experiences than others. Black female TRAs, for instance, express the greatest racial and ethnic pride, whereas Black male TRAs and both male and female Asian TRAs struggle more with distress over their physical appearance (Brooks & Barth, 1999).

TRA Preparation for Bias

The way parents prepare their BIPOC children to face discrimination in society often falls under the term “racial-ethnic socialization” in the literature, and includes socializing children with same-race people, encouraging racial or ethnic pride, and teaching coping skills for facing oppression (Montgomery & Jordan, 2018, p. 440).

The Montgomery and Jordan (2018) meta-analysis of literature about white adoptive parents of transracial adoptees and their racial-ethnic socialization practices revealed that some adoptive parents do not engage in racial-ethnic socialization because they believe that acknowledging the racial differences in their family would harm their TRA. These white adoptive parents tend to practice a colorblind mentality, leading to problematic and insufficient preparation for bias for their TRAs. Samuels (2009) found that 23 of 25 multiracial adult TRAs reported being instructed by their white adoptive parents to deal with racism passively by classifying racist slurs as regular name-calling and excusing racists who committed discriminatory acts as imperfect individuals. However, Montgomery and Jordan (2018) found

that “parent practices of preparing their children for racial bias and discrimination helped adoptees to better cope, feel more comfortable with the adoption and have better self-esteem” (p. 454). These parents who do not engage in preparing their adoptees for bias often have not been educated on the importance of racial-ethnic socialization and how to practice it in their transracially adoptive families (Montgomery & Jordan, 2018). Another study of white adoptive parents of TRAs found that they prioritize culturally socializing their BIPOC teenage children over preparing them for bias (Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2018). The one variable that was correlated with white adoptive parents engaging in more preparation for bias was their past engagement in multicultural experiences such as living in diverse neighborhoods prior to adopting their BIPOC children. Similarly, Montgomery & Jordan (2018) found that adoptees who were more supported by their parents in racial-ethnic socialization, which includes preparation for bias, were more likely to live in diverse neighborhoods.

The primary way success of white adoptive parents’ racial-ethnic socialization of their TRAs has been assessed is through examining the wellbeing of the adoptees as adults (Presseau et al., 2019). Arnold et al. (2016) found that there was a significant positive correlation between higher perceived discrimination, specifically caused by low levels of preparation for bias from TRAs’ white adoptive families, and adult TRAs having depression (Arnold et al., 2016). Presseau et al., (2019) found that according to a sample of adult TRAs with white adoptive parents, their adoptive parents’ preparation for bias moderated their perceived discrimination and psychological distress. These two findings combine to indicate that white adoptive parents’ decision to prepare their TRAs for bias could be a protective factor against negative psychological outcomes.

All of these findings about the way white adoptive parents prepare their TRAs for bias in society are in somewhat stark contrast to the organic way racial-ethnic socialization occurs in Black American families. According to a study by Kurtz-Costes et al. (2019), Black parents engage their children in preparation for bias by teaching them about racial issues, showing them how to respond to experiences of racism, and helping them engage in coping skills for both interpersonal and systemic racism, largely predicted by the way they were socialized in their family of origin. Generally, it is found that moderate levels of preparation for bias in Black families are associated with positive outcomes in their children. This study of Black high school seniors and their parents found that participants' views of the racial climate in the U.S. developed alongside their preparation for bias, and those with more negative views of the racial climate tended to more strongly emphasize the importance of inter-group interaction. Black parents' preparation for bias by socializing Black children to have mistrust in the white population and to simultaneously rely on the Black community for support contrasts greatly with the colorblind approach many white adoptive parents of Black and other children of color have taken according to the literature.

As mentioned previously, an additional challenge faced by some TRAs is experiencing discrimination from their birth community, which may view them as white-washed or inauthentic people of color. Tony Hynes, a Black adoptee raised by a white lesbian couple in the U.S., expressed that in his experience many Black adoptees do not feel prepared to navigate rejection and prejudice from the Black community when they try to participate in that community as adults (personal communication, September 3, 2020). Korean TRIAs have expressed the same struggle of feeling culturally excluded by Koreans and Korean Americans (Kim et al., 2010). In terms of preparation for bias, this is a developmental area in which white

adoptive parents might need to consider Baden et al.'s (2012) reculturation theory and incorporate into their parenting practices the knowledge of what TRAs could face as seemingly invalid members of their birth communities and the need they may have to engage in reculturation to becoming passing members of those communities.

Adoptees as Parents

Little literature exists exploring partnership and parenting outcomes amongst adult transracial adoptees. However, some research has examined a few aspects of those outcomes for adult adoptees, including some TRAs.

One study examined three female adult adoptees, one of whom was a TRA, to see how their adoption status might affect their experiences surrounding parenthood (Gatzke, 2015). Gatzke found that becoming a mother was a highly emotional process in which the adult adoptees she studied questioned their own origins. Based on the interview with one of her participants, Gatzke suggested that some adoptees may avoid thinking about their own adoption experience while forming their own families because it is too intense. One adoptee expressed desiring a biological child because she did not know anyone genetically related to her, while another, before deciding her genetics were stronger than her environment in shaping her disposition for parenting, found it difficult to become a mother at all because she had been abused by her adoptive parents and feared she would make an incompetent parent. Each adult adoptee spontaneously expressed struggling with their children's school projects about family trees because they evoked feelings of questioning and grief due to their own adoption status (Gatzke, 2015).

One adult adoptee wrote a self-study that described the way she had internalized the idea that her adoptive mother's infertility is a struggle she might also have, which led her to feeling shocked when she and her husband became pregnant (Phillips, 2010). Phillips expressed that it was important that her husband wanted a child equally and that their child was conceived in agreement, which he was. After having her son, she felt extremely connected to him, but she frequently had nightmares that someone was attempting to take him away or that she could not find him. She felt extremely anxious for his wellbeing and protective of how valuable he was, and knowing he was not a mistake helped her realize for the first time that she was not a mistake either. Phillips processed feelings of guilt towards her adoptive mother's inability to conceive and breast feed as well as a sense of motherless-ness that came from her lack of connection with both her biological and adoptive mothers. Phillips' (2010) miscarriage of her next pregnancy three years later also "ignited" (p. 99) her deep fear of people being taken from her. Phillips' (2010) self-study describes the difficult emotions that having biological children can bring to adult adoptees, as well as the immense connection and healing.

A larger study of 18 domestic adult adoptees and 16 adult TRIAs examined the adoptees' families of creation, which involved a married partner and at least one biological child, and found that overall, both partners, but especially the non-adopted partners, emphasized positively the resemblance of their biological children to the adopted partners (Greco et al., 2015). The couples varied in their perception of how the adoption status of the adopted partner influenced their family development, however, with some considering it neutral, positive, or negative and needing to be avoided, and some couples disagreeing about which of those three categories the adoption status fell into. The study revealed that adult adoptees have an internal psycho-

emotional need to revisit their adoption history, and that it is a task taken on by them and their partners together in order to help construct the adoptee's identity as an individual and as a parent.

Day et al. (2015) studied a sample of 52 transracially, internationally adopted Korean Americans who had become parents. 43 participants had biological kids only, 4 had adopted kids only, and 5 had both biological and adopted children. The study found that the adult Korean TRIAs frequently felt they were inauthentic or inadequate as parents in their ability to pass down their Korean heritage to their children. Many participants were poorly ethnically socialized in their adoptive families, so the adoptees often engaged in their own reculturation alongside their children as they raised them to connect with their Korean heritage. Another study of 52 adult TRIA Korean Americans found that they also been poorly culturally and racially socialized by their white adoptive parents, and some of them reported that becoming a parent and socializing their children had an impact on developing their own sense of pride in being Korean (Zhou et al., 2020). Another study of 31 adult Korean American international adoptees who had at least one biological Asian-White multiracial child found that 3 of the 31 adoptees had also adopted children (Wu et al, 2020). For their biological multiracial children, these adult adoptees did prioritize cultural socialization and teaching them about their multiple heritages, and they especially prioritized preparing their children who looked more Asian for facing discrimination in society. For their multiracial children who had white-passing privilege, some of the adult adoptees prioritized teaching them about that privilege and others de-emphasized any cultural socialization practices because their children did not pass as Asian. While most of the adult adoptees shared the same values in culturally and racially socializing their biological children with their white partners, they typically took the more active role in doing the socializing (Wu et al., 2020).

The common theme from the body of existing literature is that adult adoptees' experience in becoming parents frequently involves processing more of their own origin story and the impacts of their adoption experience. It seems another layer of complexity is added for TRAs, who have racial and cultural processes to navigate. There is a gap in this literature, however, as the research has focused on adult adoptees' experiences having biological children. The present study will serve to expand the literature by including adult TRAs who decide to foster, adopt, or refrain from having children.

Parental Decision-Making

To the knowledge of the researcher, no literature exists that directly examines what process adult adoptees go through when forming their own families and what consideration they may have for adopting or fostering children, or for having no children at all. The current literature has examined the approaches of adoptive parents in general but without specification about adoptive parents who are adult adoptees, whether same-race or transracial.

It is difficult to assess the characteristics of BIPOC adoptive parents because most literature centers around white adoptive parents. This is likely due to the way traditional academic research has been conducted by and centered white people (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). It is also partly due to the overrepresentation of white people amongst adoptive parents. Current research indicates that the majority of adoptive parents are white, married, and in their early forties (Hiromi & Kubo, 2014). This is clearly a different demographic than adult TRAs and TRIAs, who are almost entirely BIPOC (Jennings, 2006). It is also most common that parents who adopt are childless at the time, with only some adoptive parents having one or more biological children prior to adopting (Hiromi & Kubo, 2014). The majority of those who choose

to adopt internationally do not have any biological children and are motivated by the younger ages of children available by international adoption and the speed of the process compared to domestic adoption (Hiromi & Kubo, 2014), which might increase their openness to transracial adoption since most international adoptees are of a differing ethnicity than their white American parents.

On the other hand, Jennings (2006) exposed some of the demotivating factors parents face when considering transracial adoption. Prospective white adoptive parents have expressed that the desire for their children to fit in with their family, the fear of a TRA facing racism from their white communities and family members, and the sense of inadequacy to sufficiently prepare a TRA for life as a marginalized person are all reasons they might not adopt transracially. In a national survey of both fertile and infertile women aged 24-45, 1,747 participants who had considered adopting children but decided against it answered a set of questions about what that consideration had entailed (Slauson-Blevins & Park, 2016). The participants completed detailed interviews and seven themes were found amongst factors that the women weighed when considering adoption: prioritization of biology, family building requisites, economic concerns, relationship barriers, barriers to adoption, family barriers, and change of heart. While the prioritization of having already had a biological child or attempting to have a biological child before adopting were the most common themes in the study, only 0.95% of the sample expressed that having a biological tie to their next child took priority.

Adult TRAs who are approaching parenthood could very well have a unique perspective on the priority of biological connection compared to typical adoptive parents. Several of the fears identified by adoptive parents in these studies may also be held by adult TRAs approaching parenthood and considering adoption, but they might also differ from white adoptive parents in

their reasoning as a result of their experiences of being transracially adopted. This has yet to be explored in research.

What the current body of research has shown about the sense of belonging, cultural socialization and preparation for bias experienced by transracial adoptees is somewhat limited and profoundly complex. Navigating the process of family formation as an adult is a personal and complicated experience for all people, but adult TRAs face numerous potential challenges that others do not as they process their adoption experience and their racial experience. The literature does not address how these adoptees decide how they form their own families and what factors are a part of that decision. The present study serves to fill this gap by gaining information and narrative detail from adult TRAs about what the process has been like for them and in what ways their childhood experiences impact their decision-making process.

METHODOLOGY

The present study explored the childhood experiences of adult transracial adoptees and assessed if their childhood experiences relate to the way adoptees form their own families. Data were collected using a cross-sectional, mixed methods design via surveys and interviews comprised of questions about the adoptees' sense of belonging, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias growing up in their white adoptive families. This study examined if their childhood experiences relate to their inclination to form their families through four approaches, including biological procreation, adoption, fostering, or the choice to be child-free. Approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board for this study, IRB-FY2021-274, on November 10, 2020. The letter of approval is located in Appendix A.

The following research questions were explored by binary logistic regression.

- 1) Does TRAs' sense of belonging in their adoptive families predict desiring to form their families through each of the four options?
- 2) Does TRAs' experience of cultural socialization in their adoptive families predict desiring to form their families through each of the four options?
- 3) Does TRAs' preparation for bias in their adoptive families predict desiring to form their families through each of the four options?

The following research question was explored by the interview portion of this study:

- 1) In what ways do adult TRAs connect their childhood experiences with sense of belonging, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias with their approach to forming their own families?

The quantitative analysis of the survey was used to test these two hypotheses:

- 1) TRAs' with high scores of belongingness, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias in childhood will report wanting to foster or adopt some of all of their own children.
- 2) TRAs' with low scores of belongingness, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias in childhood will report wanting to biologically reproduce or choose not to have children.

Participants

The adult transracial adoptees studied in this research were Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) who were legally adopted by white parents from the United States. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDH) (2009) reported that as of 2007, 40% of all adopted children in the U.S. were transracially adopted. It was also found that adopted children were disproportionately children of color compared to the general population of children in the United States, as they comprised 63% of all adoptees but only 44% of all children (USDH, 2009). Simultaneously, 73% of adoptive parents were white (USDH, 2009). To qualify for participation as “adults” in this study, the TRAs had to be at least 18 years of age at the time of the study. The TRAs could have been domestically or internationally adopted, but their adoptive parents had to be white U.S. citizens, as the U.S. served as the cultural setting for this study.

35 participants completed at least 75% of the survey. For the qualitative interview portion, 9 of the survey respondents completed an interview. The researcher is a member of the adoptive family community and recruited adult TRAs from a personal network of connections. Recruitment involved contacting family friends and TRA experts through email and social media who were adult TRAs or might know adult TRAs. The researcher utilized a snowball sampling method as various contacts shared the information with others in their own personal networks. Snowball sampling was used because adoptees are a somewhat inaccessible population since

adoption records are sealed, and because the personal information this study centers around calls for some level of trust between the participants and the researcher. Snowball sampling is ideal for gaining access to hard-to-reach populations and for optimizing the potential for trust via personal or mutual connection (Carr et al., 2019). Snowball sampling has limitations regarding representativeness of the sample as well as potential for bias (Mills & Gay, 2019). A primary concern with snowball sampling is overrepresentation of a particular section of a sample (Carr et al., 2019). However, the qualitative nature of this research prioritizes engaging deeply with the population rather than finding a representative sample, and therefore a purposive sample is appropriate. Additionally, to ameliorate the risk of disproportionate representation of any sub-population, the researcher utilized multiple personal contacts who have different social circles. The researcher shared information about the study and the link to the survey with potential participants via emails, direct messages and posts on Facebook and Instagram with the goal of reaching diverse pockets of the transracial adoptee population. The researcher allowed others to forward the emails and posts to people in their personal networks. Informed consent procedures were implemented with all potential participants prior to the survey and interview components.

This study was conducted online, so there were no limitations on the physical location of any given participant. There were no exclusionary criteria based on socioeconomic background or occupation. To describe participants, regions of the U.S. are reported to identify location, however state names are omitted from the study for privacy.

Participants indicated on their surveys whether they wanted to further participate in the interview portion of the study by answering a binary Yes/No question. Because more than 10 participants were willing to be interviewed, the researcher used purposive sampling to select diverse participants from each category of the dependent variable: those who want to

biologically reproduce, those who want to adopt, those who want to foster, those who want to be child-free, and those who are considering all options. The researcher also chose interview participants based on diversity by race, age, stage of family planning – though all were in various stages of planning and had not finished forming their families – and preferences for forming their family.

The researcher anticipated that the primary risk posed to participants in this study was mild psychological or emotional upset that might be triggered by recalling childhood memories or discussing personal experiences. The researcher is a white woman and factored in the racial barrier that some participants may have experienced when disclosing intimate information about their experiences in white families. The researcher sought out the perspectives of prominent transracial adoptee advocates – Angela Tucker, Tony Hynes, and Dr. JaeRan Kim – and included a Black faculty member with professional foster care and adoption experience as part of the thesis committee in order to reduce risk of discomfort for participants. The researcher and the principal investigator, who both coded the qualitative portion of the study, also bracketed our biases as described in the Analyses section.

Procedure

Before conducting the study, the researcher conducted a pilot test of the survey portion of the study in which 5 people who met the participant qualifications took the survey to test it for readability, potential biases, and construct validity. Pilot participants were asked at three points in the survey whether they had any feedback on the survey. No invalid or otherwise problematic items were identified by pilot participants and thus none were adapted or replaced by the researcher to increase validity prior to distribution of the finalized survey. The researcher sought

to identify any constructive feedback about item 7 in the Preparation for Bias subscale (“my parents expressed caution to me about interacting with white people”), but no concerns were noted by pilot participants.

Following the pilot study, the survey portion was administered using Qualtrics. Qualtrics provided the option of using anonymous links to complete the survey, meaning they could not be traced back to the individuals who completed the survey. This option was utilized to ensure protection of participant confidentiality. Additionally, the Missouri State University theme was used for the survey format to promote participant confidence in the professional nature of the survey. Participants provided consent by electronically marking that they read and understood a consent form (see Appendix B) at the beginning of the survey. They then entered a pseudonym for their survey. Survey data was kept anonymous, even to the researcher, to allow for participant privacy given the possibility that participants are in the researchers’ social network. Those who consented to participate in an interview were not anonymous to the researcher, however their data were kept confidential in all reporting. The survey collected demographic information as well as the questionnaire data for the independent and dependent variables of the study (see Appendix C). The independent variables were measured using several Likert scale questions for each variable that created a summative score, making those variables continuous. The dependent variable was measured with a single-item question wherein participants could select all that applied (biological procreation, adoption, fostering, or child-free) for their approach to family formation. That was followed by an open-ended question which was assessed for themes which were reported as contextual information that provided narrative along with the quantitative data and that reflected some similarities to the findings of the interview portion of the study. At the end of the survey, participants were offered the option to participate in the interview portion of

the study. If participants indicated they wanted to participate in an interview, Qualtrics linked them to a survey separate from the initial survey (as to ensure participant privacy) where they provided their pseudonym again, as well as an email address for the researcher to use to schedule an interview. The pseudonym allowed the researcher to connect survey responses to interview participants. The survey itself remained anonymous, with no identifying information, for participant confidentiality. If participants indicated they did not want to participate in an interview, the survey ended with the standard closing survey screen in Qualtrics.

When the researcher emailed participants who indicated interest in participating in the interview portion of the study, the researcher attached a second consent form (see Appendix D). Participants electronically signed the second consent form and emailed it back to the researcher prior to the scheduled interview or sent an email in reply stating that they consented to do the interview. This indicated that they read and understood the interview protocol, and that they consented for the interview to be recorded. The research also verbally confirmed with each interview participant prior to starting each recorded interview that they consented to the audio recording of the interview. Interview data was personally collected by the researcher using open-ended questions (see Appendix E). Interviews took place online using privately linked Zoom video chat. The method for collecting the interview data was audio recording of the interviews for transcription and coding. The interviews lasted approximately 32 minutes on average.

Measures

The following measures were used to answer the research questions guiding this study in both its survey portion and its interview portion.

Survey. The survey (see Appendix C) developed for this study was constructed by the researcher, informed by previous literature on transracial adoptees' sense of belonging, cultural socialization and preparation for bias in their adoptive families (Arnold et al., 2016). This quantitative portion of the study provided a basis of measurable data on the topic to lay the groundwork for future researchers to more thoroughly explore this topic by identifying significant relationships between independent variables and the dependent variables. The survey was designed to gather information about each independent variable and dependent variable. The three independent variables included the adoptees' sense of belonging, social culturalization, and preparation for bias in the context of participants' childhood experiences. The dependent variable was the adoptees' inclined approach to forming their own family through biological procreation, adoption, foster care, the choice to be child-free, or any combination of those options. The survey began with demographic questions to collect information including age, gender identity, race, ethnicity, relationship status, partner's gender and race, age at adoption, type of adoption (international, private domestic, or foster domestic), country of origin (if applicable), state of adoption, adoption privacy (open or closed), biological family reunion status, number of adoptive parents, adoptive parents' sexual orientation, if their adoptive parent(s) are alive, what stage of family planning the participant is in, and whether the adoptee was raised in a predominantly white neighborhood. These specific demographic questions are frequently used in studies about adoption, and some were particularly informed based on feedback about this study from Angela Tucker, a transracial adoptee advocate (A. Tucker, personal communication, August 8, 2020). Because race is a central component of this study, the demographic questions about race and ethnicity were based on concepts from the 1999 racial identity model developed by transracial adoptee and social worker Susan Harris O'Connor (Ung et al., 2012). The concepts

from the model as used in survey question verbiage helped to reflect other findings in the literature such as the way some transracial adoptees have expressed identifying as culturally white despite racially identifying as BIPOC (Samuels, 2010). Following demographic questions, the survey consisted of seven statements for each of the three independent variables, an open-ended question about the seventh item (“My parents expressed caution to me about interacting with white people”) within the third independent variable measure, and an open-ended question for participants to expand on anything about those three variables. Following that, there were two questions about the dependent variable, one open-ended question about the dependent variable, and a final open-ended question that allowed participants to add anything else they wanted to share. Additionally, there were two questions – one in the demographic section and one in the second subscale matrix – that protected against bots and ensured participants were still reading each question (e.g., “Please select option 3”). The statements for each independent variable were rated on a Likert scale of one to four, with one representing ‘Never part of my life’ and four representing ‘Consistent part of my life.’ The survey was estimated by Qualtrics to take no longer than 25 minutes to complete. Below are a few sample statements from the instrument:

- 1) “I felt like I could be entirely myself with my family.”
- 2) “My parents made sure I had mentor figures involved in my life who looked like me.
- 3) “The way my parents taught me to respond to discrimination in society was helpful to me.”

Interviews. The interview portion of this survey was comprised of eight open-ended questions (see Appendix E). The purpose of this qualitative portion was to center the lived experiences of transracial adoptees and to provide rich narrative detail that expounded upon the quantitative information gathered by the survey. There were two questions related to each of the

independent variables: sense of belongingness, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias. Additionally, there were two questions related to the dependent variable: adoptees' approach to forming their families. The interviews were semi-structured by these questions. Some probing questions were asked as participants led the conversation.

A transcendental phenomenological approach was used to carefully document and code the narrative detail with particular focus on recording participants' responses without interpretation (Creswell, 2007). To ensure maximum validity, the two interview coders – the researcher and the principal investigator – first brainstormed and wrote down out any biases and preconceived beliefs that could influence objectivity of coding – termed “bracketing” (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). This included the researcher bracketing biases such as being a white adoptive sibling to two transracially adopted siblings and having a negative perception of white adoptive parents. The principal investigator bracketed biases related to her position as a white woman with little personal nor professional experience with TRAs and focused on her experience moving from a color-evasive position to now understanding the harm inflicted by whiteness. The audio recording of each interview served to ensure that a precise transcription was done for the interviews. The researcher also collaborated with the principal investigator to identify the broad themes and significant statements in the interview data. All identified themes as well as the qualitative results were emailed to the interview participants for verification of accuracy. Minor edits in word choice of reporting were made based on one participant who sent feedback, which are reflected in the qualitative results. No other participants recommended any edits. All data were recorded using the participants' pseudonyms for confidentiality.

Analyses

The quantitative data collected in the survey portion of this study was analyzed by 12 binary logistic regressions, one for the relationship between each independent variable and each dependent variable option. The purpose of this approach to analysis was to allow for enough statistical power. Scores on each subscale (belongingness, cultural socialization, and preparation or bias) were used to predict TRAs' approach to forming their families. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess reliability of each subscale. The number selected by the participant on each Likert scale represented one point (i.e., if a participant selected 1 to represent "never a part of my life" as their response to a statement, the score for that item was 1). Low scores indicated that participants experienced low levels of the construct during childhood (belongingness, cultural socialization, and preparation or bias) and high scores indicated higher levels of the construct. Each discrete variable category within the dependent variable was analyzed separately given the small sample size.

As previously stated, the data collected in the interview portion of this study was coded using a transcendental phenomenological approach. Phenomenology was selected as the approach to analysis because it lends itself to examining the perspectives of multiple individuals who have a shared experience (Creswell, 2007). For the first step, the researcher and principal investigator set aside personal experiences related to transracial adoption and whiteness by writing out those biases and saving them to acknowledge in the final research report when discussing the role of the researchers, as suggested by Moustakas (1994). After bracketing, significant statements in the interviews were identified and then put into larger themes (Creswell, 2007). To accomplish this, the researcher, the principal investigator, and professional transcribers paid by Rev.com, a transcription service, first used the audio recordings of the

interviews to transcribe each one verbatim. The researcher verified the accuracy of the Rev.com transcript by listening to each interview recordings while reading through its transcript. A few small mistakes were manually corrected by the researcher, but the transcripts were otherwise accurate. All audio files and transcript documents were stored in an encrypted file folder in which each interview and transcript were named with the corresponding pseudonym of that participant (i.e. “Jane Doe Interview,” “Jane Doe Transcript”). The researcher then wrote out both a textural description and a structural description for each transcript. According to Creswell (2007), a textural description contains information about what a participant has experienced, and a structural description contains information about the context and ways in which the participant experienced it. The textural description was based off horizontalization conducted by the researcher and the principal investigator, who read the transcripts several times, identified and highlighted key statements from the transcripts, and color coded them according to broad themes, per Creswell’s (2007) concept of “clusters of meaning” (p. 61). Finally, the researcher wrote a detailed synthesized summary of the shared fundamental experiences of participants, richly describing their childhood experiences with sense of belonging, cultural socialization and preparation for bias in their white adoptive families and how that impacts the way they approach forming their own families. The goal of this final section was to communicate the “essence” (Creswell, 2007, p. 62) of transracial adoptees’ lived experience with accuracy and depth using both tables and narrative.

RESULTS

Qualtrics logged 70 survey responses for this data set. Some responses were deleted for not completing any part of the survey (n=15), only filling out pseudonym and race (n=3), only filling out the demographic section (n=1), the participants' parents not being U.S. citizens (n=1), and for the participant starting the survey twice but finishing it once (n=1). Of the remaining 49 survey responses, 14 were excluded from the present study because participants indicated that they have already finished forming their families, and this study focuses on participants still in the family planning stage. The remaining 35 responses were submitted by participants who indicated they had not thought about forming their families (n=17), are planning their families (n=12), or have started forming their families (n=6) were used for descriptive statistics. Of those 35 responses, some were excluded from analysis of the dependent variable because participants completed the demographic and independent variable portions of the survey, but not the dependent variable portion (n=3). Thus, 32 responses were used for analysis of the primary quantitative research questions.

Table 1 contains the participants' race, number of racial identities with which they identify, and emotional connection to their race/ethnic identity. As a protective measure, not every participant racial identity combination is reported here due to the small sample size. Participants wrote in ethnic identities including Cambodian, Haitian American, and Native American. However, several participants wrote that people most often perceive their racial/ethnic identity as something other than what it is. For example, three Native American participants reported being most often perceived as Latinx or Hispanic. The most common inaccurate perception of ethnicity was found amongst Asian adoptees. Korean and Taiwanese adoptees

reported being most often perceived as Chinese or as generally Asian. Chinese adoptees also reported being mis-identified as either generally Chinese or as other East Asian ethnicities such as Japanese. The 60% of participants who were adopted internationally were born in countries of origin including China, Taiwan, and Ethiopia. Participants were adopted in states within every major region of the United States, including the West Coast, the Midwest, the South, and the East Coast. 94.3% of participants (n=33) reported being raised in predominantly white neighborhoods.

Participants' ages ranged from 18-39. Twenty-seven identified as women, 6 identified as men, 1 identified as nonbinary, and 1 did not disclose their gender. Of the 35 participants, 19 reported being single, 8 reported being in a committed partnership, and 8 reported being married. Of the 16 participants with partners, 11 had white partners, 4 had Asian partners, and 1 had a Black partner. Fourteen of those partnerships were heterosexual and 1 was same sex. One of the participants' partner's gender was not identified as the participant entered an invalid answer (age rather than gender).

Table 2 describes details of participants' adoption processes. Type of adoption indicates whether participants were adopted through a private agency in the U.S., through foster care in the U.S., or through an international process. Adoption privacy shows how many participants had open adoptions, where their biological parent is able to maintain some form of a relationship with them, versus closed adoptions, where their biological parent loses or agrees to lose all contact. Reunification status expresses if participants have reunified with their biological family, are in the process of doing so, or have not at all. Participants' ages at the time of adoption ranged from 1 day old to 16 years old. 91.4% of participants were adopted by a couple (n=32) and 8.6% were adopted by a single parent (n=3). 97.1% of participants were adopted by heterosexual

parents (n=34) and 2.9% were adopted by lesbian parents (n=1). 88.6% (n=31) of participants reported that their parents are living, while 11.4% (n=4) reported they have one living parent and one deceased parent.

The scale created for this study consisted of three subscales measuring the following childhood experiences of adult transracial adoptees: sense of belonging, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias. The subscale developed to measure TRAs' sense of belonging in childhood was found to be a reliable measure ($\alpha = .826$). The subscale developed to measure TRAs' cultural socialization in childhood was found to be a reliable measure ($\alpha = .891$). The third subscale, developed to measure TRAs' preparation for bias in childhood, was also found reliable ($\alpha = .888$). The researcher examined inter-item correlations and a factor analysis to check for criterion validity. Related items correlated in expected directions and appropriate strength.

Tables 3, 4, and 5 display participant responses to each of the subscales developed to assess their childhood experiences with the independent variables sense of belonging, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias. The means and standard deviations for the summative scores of each subscale (on a scale of 7 to 28) are as follows: sense of belonging (M = 20.09, SD = 4.80), cultural socialization (M = 13.46, SD = 5.56), preparation for bias (M = 14.40, SD = 5.59).

Subscale Results

The following research questions guiding this study were answered by binary logistic regression analysis with each dependent variable category (biological procreation, adoption, fostering, and child-free) determined as either present or absent.

- 1) Does TRAs' sense of belonging in their adoptive families predict desiring to form their families through each of the four options?
- 2) Does TRAs' experience of cultural socialization in their adoptive families predict desiring to form their families through each of the four options?
- 3) Does TRAs' preparation for bias in their adoptive families predict desiring to form their families through each of the four options?

Participant sense of belonging predicted the likelihood of desiring one type of family formation: the desire to be child-free. Transracial adoptees' sense of belonging did not predict the desire for biological procreation ($\beta = .20$, $SE = .082$, $df = 1$, $p = .804$). TRAs' sense of belonging did not predict the desire for adoption ($\beta = -.037$, $SE = .073$, $df = 1$, $p = .610$). TRAs' sense of belonging did not predict the desire for fostering ($\beta = -.047$, $SE = .082$, $df = 1$, $p = .565$). TRAs' sense of belonging did predict the desire to be child-free ($\beta = -.173$, $SE = .086$, $df = 1$, $p = .044$), indicating that participants who reported experiencing higher levels of sense of belonging were less likely to prefer child-forming their families child-free.

Participant sense of cultural socialization nearly predicted the likelihood of desiring one type of family formation: the desire to be child-free. TRAs' cultural socialization did not predict the desire for biological procreation ($\beta = .006$, $SE = .075$, $df = 1$, $p = .940$). TRAs' cultural socialization did not predict the desire for adoption ($\beta = -.072$, $SE = .067$, $df = 1$, $p = .283$). TRAs' cultural socialization did not predict the desire for fostering ($\beta = .022$, $SE = .074$, $df = 1$, $p = .765$). TRAs' cultural socialization approached the significance to predict the desire to be child-free ($\beta = -.118$, $SE = .073$, $df = 1$, $p = .107$), indicating that participants who reported experiencing higher levels of cultural socialization may be less likely to prefer forming their families child-free.

Participant sense of preparation for bias nearly predicted the likelihood of desiring one type of family formation: the desire to be child-free. TRAs' preparation for bias did not predict

the desire for biological procreation ($\beta = -.027$, $SE = .078$, $df = 1$, $p = .734$). TRAs' preparation for bias did not predict the desire for adoption ($\beta = .018$, $SE = .070$, $df = 1$, $p = .799$). TRAs' preparation for bias did not predict the desire for fostering ($\beta = -.054$, $SE = .087$, $df = 1$, $p = .538$). TRAs' preparation for bias approached the significance to predict the desire to be child-free ($\beta = -.140$, $SE = .085$, $df = 1$, $p = .099$), indicating that participants who experienced higher levels of preparation for bias may be less likely to prefer forming their families child-free.

Interview Results

The researcher conducted nine semi-structured interviews that consisted of open-ended questions to collect the information included in the following sections. The verbatim transcripts from each interview were analyzed using phenomenological coding as described by Creswell (2007). Six themes were identified among the interviews: TRAs belonging as children but not as people of color; TRAs not experiencing belonging in the community; adoptive parents not immersing TRAs in their birth/ethnic culture; adoptive parents not preparing TRAs for racism in society; TRAs developing their own identities and anti-bias skills; and TRAs' consciousness in family formation. The researcher selected the interview participants according to diversity of racial and ethnic identity, age, stage of family formation, and inclinations towards different methods for forming their families. Of the nine participants, eight identified as women and one identified as a man. Their ages ranged from 22-36 and all three stages of family formation included in this study were represented: "I have not thought about planning my future family," "I am planning my future family," and "I have started forming my family." Likewise, inclination towards biological procreation, adoption, fostering, and remaining child-free were all options being considered by participants. Table 6 describes interview participant characteristics.

TRAs Belonging as Children but Not as People of Color. Many of the adult TRAs who participated in the interview portion of this study discussed that the way they experienced belonging in their adoptive families was complicated. Some participants felt they did belong in their extended families. Erika said, “We grew up actually next door to cousins and, like, my cousins are, like, my extended siblings also, like, my aunt and uncle are, like, surrogate parents.” Sharing a different experience, Elle Naranja said the following about her extended family:

I have never felt a sense of belonging, and I think growing up, there were some cousins I was close to, but generally I did not feel a kind of affinity that I think a lot of families feel, and especially when I was with biological families, I would notice that there is a different kind of camaraderie and connection that, when I was younger was always a little bit off.

Mikasa attributed how she does not feel like she belongs in her extended family to the way she does not share their background.

You know, I didn't share any of the historical family lineage. You know, we have a big family, I have a lot of like cousins and we have little, like, aunts and uncles but of course the history of, of how they got to where they were, right, like migrating from [state] to [state] and all that stuff doesn't apply to me. So, I already felt a bit alienated and just like I didn't quite fit just in sort of those factual aspects.”

While participants expressed different experiences of belonging in their extended families, every interviewee said they felt they belonged within their immediate family in terms of how they were loved, supported, and cared for. Naomi shared, “I felt like I belonged when it came to just the traditional sense of love that a family has for children. I felt like my parents were very affectionate to me. I felt like they believed in me. They were extremely encouraging. Um, so the ways that a parent or a guardian is expected to invest emotionally in children, I felt that.”

Similarly, Andres Felipe described why he felt he belonged in his adoptive family by saying, “That was the emphasis in the home, was, ‘We support you, we love you, we’re gonna be here for you, no matter what.’”

While every adoptee talked about feeling like they belonged with their adoptive parents in the traditional sense of being cared for as their child, several also talked about experiencing a general sense of something missing within themselves or their relationships within their immediate family, particularly because of physically looking different. Bentley described it as, “I belonged in the sense of, yes, they accepted me, but there’s still significant differences in my experience that they don’t have, and they just don’t understand or even conceptualize.” Mikasa explained how it was difficult to connect with her mother when she was a child, saying, “Things that I would express, she couldn’t understand. And it’s not that she didn’t try, but just fundamentally you can’t because we all have different lived experiences.” Elle Naranja described a similar experiencing, saying, “I’ve found it was hard to connect through racial identity because my parents were white. They are amazing, but there are just some things that will never exist in my family.”

Some participants shared that they were raised with siblings who are also transracial adoptees. Haley Lyon talked about how growing up with another Black child impacted her, saying, “It wasn’t like I felt alone.” She went on, however, to describe the ways she still felt like she did not entirely belong. “I had a really good childhood but there wasn’t a lot of open communication with my parents about, like, my feelings as an adoptee and just, like, my feelings as, like, a Black person in a very, like, almost, like, white-washed type culture.”

Haley’s experience stands in juxtaposition to Erika, who also grew up with same-race adoptee siblings and said, “I actually always felt a really strong sense of belonging in my

family.” She went on to say, “Because we were Asian, it was obvious we were adopted from the get-go but, like, it was completely normalized and talked about from, like, day one.” Andres Felipe and Mya Lewis talked about how, even though they grew up with transracial adoptee siblings, they had different experiences as the only Black adoptees in their families. Mya shared, “I was the only non-Caucasian or non-Asian of the family, so everybody at least had somebody who was the same color or race, and I was kind of the odd man out.” Bentley, who was the only person of color in her family, shared that she was not treated the same as her white siblings. She said, “I did feel a difference between the parents and them – the adoptive siblings – how they were treated and regarded, and then myself and some of that I do attribute to, um, you know, I do think had I been a white adopted child, you know, some of that, uh, tension wouldn’t have necessarily been there...” She went on to describe, “We know that white folks in this country grow up a certain way and particularly at, you know, their age, they were born in... still segregation, you know? So, a lot of stuff going on and there, there’s a generational education and meaning in regards to race that they might not think as being directly output but it is.”

TRAs Not Experiencing Belonging in the Community. Every interviewee reported some form of feeling that they did not feel belonging in their communities outside the home while growing up. Ivy said, “In terms of where I felt I didn’t belong the most, or didn’t feel that sense of belonging, I mean, I don’t really think I had it just ‘cause I grew up in a very white suburban neighborhood where my entire life there were very few Asians.” Later in the interview, however, Ivy also shared “I was very much in this idea that I don’t look like everybody, but I feel like I was okay with that,” because her parents raised her with a lot of books about diverse, nontraditional families that helped normalize her experience as a transracial adoptee. She said that while her sense of belonging was sometimes there and sometimes not, “I guess I didn’t

really develop a deep emotional tie to ‘Oh, I don’t belong here,’ or, ‘I look different, so I don’t fit in or something.’” Similar to Ivy, Mikasa also talked about being the only Asian in the town she was raised in. She expressed less internal conflict about how that affected her, though, saying she immediately felt like she didn’t belong because she didn’t look the same as anyone else.

...People at grocery store, like, okay, what is this child who looks like that doing with this woman who obviously doesn't look the same. Um, but like I said, I think to just having it always be the forefront of conversation around who I am and my relation to my family. While I know they meant no harm by it, I think subconsciously did cause some internal dialogue that was very much, ‘You are not the same.’

These accounts affirm what most participants shared, which was that they were raised in predominantly white circles. Andres Felipe talked about one of the ways he did not belong was “with those expectations of essentially assimilating into white, uh, suburban culture, right? Uh, not being white, uh, and not even being white passing, in my case... I can’t, and I don't want to.” He went on to describe his experience being one of the only Black people in his area.

I wish I had some friends who look like me, or some- someone to look up to that looked like me. So, I had found that in professional athletes, mostly baseball. Uh, and then there was one meteorologist, a weatherman named Steve Pool, that I remember. Uh, it was a Black guy, and he had a thick mustache, he was bald. And every time he came on, I would- I would run to the TV 'cause there was finally someone who looked like me.

Naomi described a very similar experience, saying, “My mom still says to me to this day I would, just would walk around the neighborhoods looking for Black people, literally just hoping to God that a Black person existed within a 50-mile radius so that you could have somebody that could be not just a reflection but a relationship, right?”

Not every participant grew up in completely white communities, though. Haley Lyon said, “I lived in, like, a pretty diverse area growing up, so I saw a lot of other Black kids, um, in that sense. So, I always felt like, ‘Oh, okay,’” but she also described her family environment as “white-washed.” Along the same lines, Bentley said, “I was lucky enough to live in a city and actually go, ironically enough, to a predominantly Black high school, um, from my freshman until junior year,” but also shared that her adoptive family members “were very white-centered in who they surrounded themselves with.” While Mya Lewis grew up in a diverse area as well, she said that invasive questions from members of the community contributed to her feeling like she did not belong. She said, “When it came to others looking at our family, you know, the main question was always, um, you know, ‘Well what are you? What’s your background? What is your nationality? Because your family is so different from you.’ Um, so it was, it was pretty clear others saw me different, um, besides myself feeling different.”

For five participants, feeling like they did not belong among white people and in the general community was also accompanied by a sense of rejection from their birth/ethnic communities. Haley described having negative experiences with other Black children in her neighborhood, saying, “The Black kids I was around growing up didn’t like me when I was a kid, uh, because, like, we did live on a more affluent part of town. We didn’t live in the ghetto, we weren’t poverty-stricken, like my parents weren’t rich but like, we were well-off.” Erika recounted a painful memory of trying to connect with peers who looked like her. “I have a very vivid memory of being in first grade and trying to befriend these two other Asian girls, and they’re like, ‘Oh, well, like, you don’t speak an Asian language, so, like, you’re not really Asian.’” Similarly, Mikasa said, “I’ve been called a fake Asian before. I mean, banana, twinkie, all the things.” Mikasa married a first-generation Chinese American and described how their

immigrant parents never fully accepted her because she did not speak their language or know their traditions. She expressed the tension that multiple participants talked about by summarizing, “I’ve always had that in my, like in my heart, of like, I don’t feel like I belong anywhere, you know? I don’t belong in Asian culture or Western culture.”

Adoptive Parents Not Immersing TRAs in Birth/Ethnic Culture. Zero of the nine TRAs interviewed in this study reported experiencing thorough immersion in the culture of their birth/ethnic communities while growing up, and several said they were not exposed to their birth/ethnic culture at all. A couple of participants talked about wishing they were white or feeling like they were white in some ways. Haley Lyon described it this way: “I knew I wasn’t the same color, but you get this idea in your head when everyone around you doesn’t treat you Black, which is what I experienced, you kind of forget that you’re Black.” Other participants said they did not relate to this experience, but that they know other transracial adoptees have felt that way.

When asked how their adoptive parents exposed them to the culture of their birth/ethnic communities, multiple participants talked about how limited their parents were in their efforts as well as their access to information and resources. Elle Naranja, who was adopted in the ‘80s, had a unique experience because she and her parents did not know her racial and ethnic identity until she was 27. Her paperwork said she was Italian, so they tried to incorporate some Italian culture for Elle, but none of them felt it was right. When explaining how she was not exposed to her birth/ethnic culture she referenced her parents saying, “They didn’t know enough information either, so it was more like being absorbed into what was present, which was kind of a traditional American family coming from the Midwest... a working class, white neighborhood.” She said that she thinks her parents would have incorporated her true cultural background had they been

aware of it. “It wasn't their parenting of me, you know, that affected... it was the circumstances in which I had total ambiguity around racial and ethnic identity and cultural history.”

Several participants discussed the ways that their parents did make efforts to include their birth/ethnic cultures in their upbringing. Mya Lewis shared how her parents celebrated the adoption days of Mya and her siblings, also transracial adoptees, by gifting them with books and clothes specific to their birth/ethnic cultures. She said her parents did not incorporate her culture to the same extent that they did that of her Korean siblings. Mya clarified that her adoption agency did not provide her parents with the same cultural resources that her siblings' adoption agency provided. However, she also said her parents did not seek out those resources for her, explaining, “It was never really as thorough as what my siblings got, where my siblings, you know, we went to cultural camp, we celebrated holidays, we got – our art teacher was Korean, our, um, a couple of other – yeah, I think the taekwondo we went to had a Korean instructor. So, it was more focused on the majority than the minority.” Erika, who attended Korean Culture Camp too, also said that books were a way her parents exposed her to her birth/ethnic culture. She described some of the effort her mom put forth, saying, “She must've done her due diligence to research books. Like, I had a bunch of books that were, like, about Korean adoptee, like, teenagers and, um, we had, like, picture books of, like, Korean myths. And, it would have... be in, like, English and Korean, and um, I remember, love, I loved reading those.” Erika also said her mom provided Erika and her siblings, also Korean adoptees, with traditional Korean clothing and food, and that Erika's one white sibling very enthusiastically engaged in all of their Korean culture. Mikasa said that her mom also tried to incorporate some of her birth/ethnic culture's traditions by celebrating the Chinese New Year and watching Chinese movies. She said, “My mom worked hard in her own way (laughs) to try to maintain some semblance of connection to

Chinese culture for me. But, you know, I think it's more a lack of, um, a lack of available information for her, so it was a very whitewashed version of it.” Andres Felipe expressed that his parents also had a lack of knowledge due to their age. That said, he expressed that they could have done better.

So, I will say that, with the context, they were limited in what they could have done, right? I have to recognize that. I will also say, I also have friends of, mmm... who were adopted from other countries and also adopted in the 80s and 90s- and their parents had no trouble seeking out information about, um, the country of origin, or if it's a domestic adoptee, uh, just different cultural things, right? Um, there are families out there who- who made it a sustained practice to make sure that their kid, uh, adopted, uh, was- was seen for who they are in their entirety. I think my parents failed on that. If I think of a grade... I'm a teacher, I think in grades... they'd get a D- in that aspect, right?

Two participants expressed being more exposed to their birth/ethnic cultures when they were teenagers. Ivy and Mikasa both took multiple-week trips to their countries of origin – Korea and China, respectively – where they went to their orphanages/adoption agencies and met their former foster parents. This trip was distinct from Ivy’s overall upbringing, though, which she described as growing up “in a very white way.” Mikasa said she was too emotionally immature at the time of her trip to process being completely immersed in Chinese culture. Earlier in her childhood, her mom had taken her to Chinese classes for a brief time, but those dropped off and she was never exposed to books about Chinese people or Chinese languages. Erika and Haley Lyon also expressed that they felt somewhat disengaged from or resistant to exploring their birth/ethnic cultures as children.

Overall, participants discussed somewhat surface-level exposure to their birth/ethnic cultures. However, most shared that while they were growing up, they were not culturally engaged with people from their birth/ethnic communities. Naomi said, “I had the toys, I had the

movies, I had the books. But I did not have a relationship with an adult Black woman until I was a freshman in college.” Erika talked about how mirrors reflect a person’s identity and perspective back to them while windows allow you to see others’ viewpoints. She said, “I think 90% of my life was windows.” She said her parents did not recognize her and her Korean siblings as people with dual culture – “living in a white world as Asians.”

Haley Lyon said that even though her adoptive parents did not “go out of their way” to integrate her and her other Black sibling into Black culture, they did encourage their engagement in Black culture to an extent. Haley said her mom did not allow slang or saggy pants or loud rap music, which she described as, “my mother trying to clean up the little blackness of my brother growing up.” Similarly, Andres Felipe said his adoptive parents never tried to help him learn Spanish or celebrate Columbian holidays, and that the unspoken message he received from them was, “You live in the States now. Just do the States things.”

Two of the four Black women interviewed discussed the significance of their hair and how it played a role in their culture growing up. Bentley, who was raised by her biological white mother prior to being fostered and adopted, shared part of her hair journey, saying,

So, you know Black women’s hair, right? It’s curly, it requires different maintenance, different things. So, I wrap my hair, I put moisturizer in it, I don’t necessarily wash it every day... Um, my adopted mother never really took a deep dive into how to do that. Neither did my biological mother, but there’s a difference in someone who had the means to be knowledgeable and not trying to be versus someone who just clearly, like, didn’t.

Haley Lyon said that her disinterest in integrating into Black culture after her negative experiences with her Black peers was detrimental, but that her parents made sure the one area of her life that was integrated into Black culture was her hair care. “I would give my parents a lot of credit because they did go out of their way to make sure that we were finding Black hairdressers

or other Black women that could help my mom with my hair, um, once they realized, ‘Oh, we don’t really know how to style your hair and we don’t know what to do with your hair.’” Haley said the way she was raised in general was “severely white,” but that her mom is more engaged now in helping her integrate into Black culture. Multiple participants also shared that their parents are more knowledgeable and supportive about the adoptees’ cultural exploration now.

Adoptive Parents Not Preparing TRAs for Racism in Society. All nine TRAs who participated in the interview portion of this study said that their adoptive parents failed to provide them with any substantive preparation for the bias they would face in society as people of color. The majority of interviewees described their adoptive parents as “colorblind.” Mya Lewis explained her parents’ approach to raising children of color as, “they just saw it as a child and not for the different races.” Bentley said, “My adopted mother said, ‘don’t see color. I don’t see race.’ You know, it was the whole colorblind bullshit... and she tried to push that on me, and I was just, I was just kind of like, ‘What?’” Many of the participants said their parents never even talked about race or racism. Ivy described some of the ways she has experienced racism through the Model Minority Myth and the way her parents were seemingly oblivious. “I’m assuming they didn’t know because they’re both white, and I would say pretty privileged – both of them, in, in different aspects. But yeah, my parents did not prepare me at all for that.” Haley Lyon said she thinks her parents were aware of racism, especially after her older Black brother was brought home by the police for “matching a description” that he did not match other than being a Black boy in their neighborhood. She continued, “I don’t think they wanted to really have the discussion with us because they didn’t want to scare us.” Andres Felipe said his parents never discussed police brutality with him, and that he learned how to conduct himself around police officers from movies.

Naomi, who said her parents did acknowledge and affirm her racial identity as a Black girl, shared that her parents' affirmation still did not give her the tools to navigate life as a Black person in society. She explained,

They did not talk about racism. They didn't talk about discrimination. Um, we didn't talk very much about the history of Black people in America. We didn't talk about, um, white privilege and the fact that as an adoptee in a white family I have that, um, you know quote end quote by osmosis which is something Angela Tucker says. Um, you know, I kind of talk about it as 'the shadow of whiteness.' They didn't talk about the fact that that goes, that that's gone at a certain point. So, it didn't feel like I had a lot of practical skills in being a Black person in the world without my white parents there.

Andres Felipé, among other participants, also told a story of how his adoptive parents did not respond in helpful ways when he experienced racism.

I don't know how old I was, but I remember coming home and being frustrated and sitting down at the dinner table... I slammed my glass of milk down and I was just pissed. And my parents saying, "What's wrong with you?" And I was like, "Well, someone called me the n-word at school today." And I remember my dad looking me in the eye and saying, 'Well, don't worry about it. You're not Black so it's- it's okay. They'll- they'll... It's fine.' And I was like, like, 'What? Um, wh- what- what world do you live in?' Right? Like, what the hell?

Mya Lewis also described coming home after something racist happened and the way her dad responded:

His comment usually was, you know, 'People should be judging you by your character and not the color of your skin or not what you look like.' And yeah, that's great, but in the real world that's not the situation. And then goes, 'Well then,' he goes, 'Next time someone comes up to you and has a problem with the way you look, just go ahead and pop them in the face for me.' And I'm like, 'Oh, okay.' I was like, 'I don't think I can do that.'

These types of efforts that participants described their parents making did not include racial literacy and instead consisted of messages about being “presentable” or making sure the TRA knew they mattered and were important. Elle Naranja said that when she experienced racism at school or in the community, her parents also did not know how to respond. She said, “My parents were very supportive of me. It's not like they were like, ‘Oh, well, this is normal.’ They did not normalize it. But I think they also didn't know what to do because it came as such a shock.”

The 2020 murder of George Floyd was mentioned as an example of a turning point in their adoptive parents’ understanding of the racial climate in the U.S. for multiple interview participants, and some expressed frustration that their adoptive parents did not listen to them prior to that. While several of the TRAs said that their adoptive parents are more open to racial conversations now, although that is not the case with all of them, some also expressed that it is a burden to not only have to educate themselves but also their parents about discrimination and systemic racism. Bentley described how tiring it has been to try to educate her adoptive parents, and particularly her adoptive mother, about racism and oppression, saying, “You know, and she just can’t handle it. So, you know, I, I got to a point where I said, ‘I can’t teach you anymore, you can read some books on your own and figure that out.’” Two other participants also alluded to the emotional fragility of their adoptive mothers when it came to racial topics. Mya Lewis described the lack of capacity her parents have had for conversations about racism, saying, “It was a challenge for them. And it was a challenge for them to even talk about those types of things now. Um, I mean, my father’s more receptive than my mother was, but you know... Because my mother was – my mother doesn’t like to, to be... Um, she feels attacked.”

TRAs Developing their Own Identities and Anti-Bias Skills. Because interview participants described a lack of experiences with their birth/ethnic cultures and a dearth of preparation for the bias they may experience, each of them discussed how they were forced to develop their identities and their approach to facing discrimination on their own in what was often an interwoven process, as participants described developing both simultaneously. Some participants started exploring their identities in childhood. Ivy talked about how Korean Culture Camp stopped teaching her about her heritage about the time the internet came around. She was in elementary or middle school and she started using the internet to discover her culture. She said, “From there, it was more, like, me doing the research, me watching the Korean dramas, the K-pop music videos and kind of expanding from there myself, um, without, without my parents helping.” Mya Lewis shared how she learned how to respond to biased comments from her peers in high school, saying, “I think that was far too late for me to start becoming comfortable or having friends to teach me what to say or what I should be doing.” Most participants expressed that they developed more of a connection to their culture and racial identity as well as their skills to combat racism as young adults, especially through college and work. Erika said she credits working at a progressive, independent school that had her go through rigorous racial training for the development of her identity. Andres Felipe described the way learning Spanish has played a crucial role in developing his culture and identity, saying, “I’ve been able to reclaim that. And I say reclaim because it was quote, unquote, supposed to be my or- original language, um, had I not been adopted, right? So, being able to reclaim it, and I teach it, and that feels great.” Naomi talked about the long-lasting effects that come from not being exposed to her culture growing up and how it has made it very difficult to form a secure racial and cultural identity:

Never socializing with other Black people means you have a hell of a hard time making any sort of connection with them when you actually meet them... you just have no cultural sense or context. So, the jokes, the TV shows, the food, I mean it's just – you can hear it whizzing past my head. Right? It's just like, whoosh, right over my head. And as an adoptee you're already feeling, um, you know, like you don't belong or your - your identity is invalidated biologically because you're not a real child, quote end quote 'real.' So, there's that sense of inadequacy. And then there's the inadequacy of not looking like your parents. And then you have the inadequacy of, when I do find people that I look like, I am often considered a sell-out, a counterfeit, right? ...I firmly believe that I will carry that trauma of lack of cultural socialization for as long as I live.

Mikasa said that she clung to her Chinese American husband during college and did not start her true self-discovery until her mid-twenties, but that diving into Chinese communities has been difficult, explaining,

Not to say that I'm turned off about learning more about the deep history of China and its culture, but I find it easier to learn about other cultures, uh, from Asia. I think because you don't have the... that I don't have the Chinese people around me saying, 'You're not allowed to learn this. Like, you're not a part of it if this is not for you,' even though, like, I was born there, right? Like, it does belong to me, but it doesn't feel like I'm allowed to have it.

While multiple participants expressed having difficulty integrating with their birth/ethnic cultures and communities, Naomi also shared that interacting with same-race colleagues has been an important part of her learning to navigate racism and discrimination:

'Okay, get an excel sheet. What was the day? What was the time? What was the comment? What kind of superior did you email? What was their response? How many days did it take them to get back?' Right? Like, I would have never thought of that of like, oh, so I'm supposed to document what happens to me so that I have a paper trail when somebody comes and says, 'This never happened' and I can say, 'Yes it did. And there was nothing that was done about it.' My parents never talked to me about that. I only learned that because other Black women were doing it. And I would talk to them, and they're like 'You're not doing this?' 'You're not doing this?' Right?

Ivy discussed being taught about the Model Minority Myth by a peer who informed her about how the seeming-compliments she was receiving were actually racist. She said, “I didn’t actually know that until another Korean adoptee told me that and they’re like, ‘No, that’s, that’s not good and this is why.’”

Every participant discussed how important culture is to them, as well as how essential it is to have the skills to navigate discrimination in society. Each of them shared various ways they prioritize those values in their personal lives, and five of them shared that it is also important for them to incorporate in their workplaces.

TRAs’ Consciousness in Family Formation. When asked about how they want to go about forming their families, participants had very diverse answers. Most of them said they are considering multiple ways of forming their families, as is shown in Table 6. Participants expanded on their range of options in their interviews. Every interviewee expressed a tremendous amount of thought and intentionality behind how they form their families. Their statements reflected a deep understanding of the complexity of parenthood as well as partnership and the formation of each as a process that involves values. Andres Felipe said he wants to be able to have the types of conversations about racism and society that he has never been able to have with his parents. Mikasa had something similar to say, noting,

I need a partner who is also passionate about things like equity and inclusion and understanding biases, understanding politics in the ways in which we think it doesn't influence our lives, but it does every day. You know, like I need my romantic partner and my friends. You know, those people that I surround myself with to be just as engaged and having these conversations whether or not we agree.

Ivy shared how she and her husband, who is of Japanese descent, discuss the importance of their cultural heritages and what they wish they had learned about their backgrounds at an earlier age.

Similarly, Naomi said that her partner, who is Asian, also values things like living in a diverse area and forming their family in a way that is healthy for both of them. Erika has a white husband who she said is very supportive and also knows his limitations in understanding what she goes through when they consider forming a family, explaining, “He's even said, like, ‘I don't... I wanna be able to support you but I, like, literally have no context for, like, any of what you're talking about.’” Bentley said, “I don’t want to be with anyone who’s white unless they have a very educated, forward, progressive, uh, I, you know, uh, in who they are,” because it is important to her that her partner can interact with people different than themselves. While Haley Lyon prioritizes talking about race and racial bias with potential partners to make sure they are on the same page, she expressed concerns about having a same-race partner, saying, “I’m personally really, really scared to either have a Black partner or have Black kids because, like, I almost have, like, this fear that like, like my imposter syndrome is going to be, like, cast onto them.”

Participants shared multiple considerations they take into account as they begin or continue to form their own families. Some participants said they do not plan to have children. Erika discussed her perspective of raising children as a tremendous commitment that she is not interested in making due to her career. She said, “I would love to have a little one who looks like me... like, that's both scary to me, but also, like, ‘Oh, like, yeah, I guess I really... I will literally never get in my lifetime get to see someone who resembles me.’ Like, that kind of sucks.”

Elle Naranja said that her career also takes center focus in her life, and that if she has children that will happen later in life through adoption or possibly fostering. She thinks that her commitment to her career may come from adoption trauma, as she said, “I have read some

research on adoptees being more likely to be independent, and it's often a trait that comes from being adopted,” which is a self-analysis Erika also expressed.

Participants who expressed a desire or an openness to having children also shared differing perspectives on how their experience as transracial adoptees affects the way they want to have children. Some, such as Mikasa, described having a desire to connect with a biological child while others, like Mya Lewis, talked about her desire to form a diverse family through adoption because that is what feels comforting to her. Those considering adoption talked about how they would like to relate to and help an adoptee through the difficulties they would face. Elle Naranja and Naomi discussed ethical considerations as a part of their decision-making process in forming their families. Naomi said, “I am not fundamentally against adoption, but I am deep in the study of all of the various ways in which adoption is embedded in oppressive systems, and I just don’t wanna contribute to that.” Naomi also spoke to the tension of considering foster care as an option for family formation without committing to children long-term. She and her partner have some reservations:

We both talk about, like, well what happens if they say the parental rights are terminated, would you adopt? Do we say no? ...That’s hard ‘cause, like, what if this is a child of color, right? And they have their chance of having two parents of color, or we say no, and they get put back in the foster care system and possibly adopted by white parents who don’t understand, who haven’t done the work. Right? So, it’s complicated. We are not – we have not found an answer.

Of the participants who reported having a desire or an openness to having children, many were unsure about how they would like to go about having children. However, several of them mentioned having an awareness that their status as adoptees and as transracial adoptees might have a significant impact on their emotions through the process of becoming parents. Naomi

said, “I have a really good friend who has said it beautifully in the past, she says ‘I don’t think I can carry another adoption story.’” Other participants expressed feeling fear about having biological children without having access to their family medical history. Ivy said that while she does not seek a biological connection in an emotional way, she does wish she had access to medical records that are pertinent to carrying a child because “when you’re pregnant and you’re going through all the doctor’s appointments they ask you those questions and all I can say is, ‘I have no idea, I’m adopted.’”

While many of the TRAs who completed interviews were not completely decided about if and how they will choose to have children, they were all very sure of how they would like to raise children and the type of environment and culture they want their family to be a part of regardless of whether they have children. Naomi summarized this overarching theme in one statement:

I think being a parent, in my view, means you’re ready to adapt to your children’s needs. And I did not find my parents doing that. So, for my partner and I, we’re very determined that we get to a place as individuals, mentally, spiritually, emotionally, that we are capable of adjusting to our children’s needs whether they’re physical needs, racial and ethnic well-being needs – whatever it is. But I think because I experienced such a lack of preparation from my parents, it has made me wanna wait.

Three primary subthemes emphasizing various aspects of family life emerged: diverse community, individual development, and racial preparation.

Diverse Community. First, participants emphasized the value they place on having a family immersed in a community full of people who are diverse and who are racial mirrors. They talked about how important it is to them that their children be surrounded by role models they can look up to and see themselves in. Elle Naranja spoke about the significance she places

on being a racial mirror to any child she might adopt, saying that her experience of having white parents leads her to the following mentality: “I think I would be less likely to do a transracial adoption because I would want to provide something with more continuity, and that, maybe is influenced from being transracially adopted, which would carry into how I approach my own family-forming.” Andres Felipe said that the way he felt like he did not belong in the predominantly white city he grew up in has caused him to want a much more diverse community for his future children.

There's no way I would ever live here again. Like, there's no way." And I- okay, people say, ‘Oh yeah, everyone has a price.’ Yeah... at this stage it would take something like some kind of seven figure salary for me to live back there, right? Like, with no exaggeration, I- I would not fathom, cannot fathom raising my child or children – biological or adopted – um, there in that environment.

Mikasa shared that her ideal setting to raise a family is within a larger community than a traditional United States model of a family unit.

I really like, uh, communal like big communities... when I think about raising kids, if that's something I choose to do, I want it to be surrounded by like both biological family but also friends and family that will help raise the child, not just a singular, ‘Okay, there's the parents that do the raising.’ Like, I really like that, uh, community unit who are all like a village raising a child.

Individual Development. Second, participants emphasized prioritizing the emotional, identity, and cultural development of their families, including any children they do have. Bentley shared how she wants any children she may have to be fully supported in whatever identities they develop, saying,

Everything is education and just being comfortable with yourself, um, and, you know, I, I want to support my family, my nuclear family, in who they are... I'm a very nontraditional person, so I, I want to reinforce that with any type of child or partner or whomever, whoever you are, whatever role, or whatever you feel, that's who you are. And I support that, and I want to engage with you as another person on that level and I want to be knowledgeable of you who are, you know, and not pigeon-hole you into a category that people think because that's the only thing that I think I know, that, that feels familiar and comfortable with me.

Bentley also said, "I don't want to raise my kids, if I have kids, to be educators. I want them to be comfortable in their own lives, um, and be able to exist and be thriving and do that instead of, you know, trying to balance, um, their parents' lack of education or just lack of experience."

While Erika does not plan to have children, her priorities mirror those Bentley expressed. She said it is important to her, as she explained, "Providing opportunities for people to feel like their identity, whether that's racial, or gender, or sexuality, like, I just think how powerful that is, and even when people might resist, like I did as a kid, it matters, it definitely matters." Haley shared that it is important to her to make sure that she is pursuing her own cultural and racial identity alongside her future partner and children, saying,

Very open communication is, like, something really important to integrate in my family. Uh, as well as just, like, making sure there are aspects of, like, all different types of culture, uh, as I grow my own family, find my own partner, and, like, eventually, um, either have or adopt kids. Um, and like, that's always, like, been a really big aspect of my life because now when I look back, I feel like those were two really big things that weren't a part of my life and my childhood that I want to make sure that if I ever do have kids or end up with someone that that's a part of my life more.

Racial Preparation. Third, participants spoke about their plans to openly discuss race and racism as well as the ways to go about combatting it. This applied not only to friendships and partnerships but also to raising children in that manner from a very early age.

Ivy discussed how she is interested in adopting a child because she is uniquely equipped as an adoptee to raise an adoptee. She talked about the anti-bias skills her mom lacked are skills that she can teach her child, explaining how "...race class can't teach you those things. I mean, you kind of have to experience it. I mean, you can try, but it's that whole textbook versus practice thing." Naomi shared a similar sentiment, reflecting upon the lack of preparation for racism that she received from her parents by saying that even if it is not a direct effect of that lack of preparation, "it affects the way I want to form my family because I want, from the get-go, for there to be serious preparations." Elle Naranja specified the types of information she wants any children she may adopt to learn about race and racism, including

I think preparing a child for racism and knowing this is part of it, you know, if you don't look like you're white, these are some of the experiences you can anticipate having. And, how to protect yourself, and how to also know what it means—how does colorism function? In society, what does it mean for someone to be more rigid in bigotry versus veiled racism? And the different forms. Institutional racism. Structural racism. Individual racism. How do those systems operate? So that a child is equipped at an early age to identify that. And also, to help them find meaning in their identity. To be able to see themselves in their parent or in the people in their community—in books, in literature, in education. Things surrounding. So that they don't wake up one day in their 20's, like, 'What was that?'

Mya Lewis discussed the way she has developed a skillset to response to racist questions as well as inquiries about why she looks different from her family and said the following about raising her own children, including transracial adoptees:

Now that I know how I should have responded to those questions, um, and now that I have educated myself on how to be a little bit more confident in those situations, I want to give them those tools at a young age so that they're spreading knowledge, they're kind of spitting back powerful words to people asking those microaggression questions. Or, um, or giving them the tools that they need to feel comfortable in their own skin. Which

was, you know, challenging for me growing up because my parents didn't think color would be an issue.

Open-Ended Survey Question Results

Additional information was collected in the survey portion of this study that provided some context for quantitative participant responses. This information was found to mirror some of the themes identified in the interview portion of the study.

The first open-ended question in the survey asked, "In what ways, if any, did your parents caution you about interacting with white people?" 28 of the 35 respondents either stated that their parents did not caution them or left the response box blank. Only 7 respondents reported their parents providing any kind of caution. These participants expressed receiving more caution than any of the interview participants reported. One said their parents said, "Just to be cautious, to understand how I'm different from them and that some people would not be fond of me based on racial discrimination." Another reported, "They explained to me that not all white people were as understanding and culturally sensitive as they were. They explained what racism was and what it looked like on a large scale (outright racism) and on a small one (inherit bias, micro aggressions etc.)." Two respondents mentioned their parents cautioning them about interacting with law enforcement, with one saying, "Told me to worry about white cops," and the other saying they were cautioned about, "being careful with police if I was ever pulled over."

The second open-ended question asked participants, "What about the way you felt you belonged, the way you were exposed to your birth/ethnic community, or the way you were prepared for discrimination is important in the way you are most inclined to form your family?" 26 of the 32 participants who completed the entire survey answered this question. 4 respondents stated that they did not completely understand the question. 1 respondent said that they do not

believe any of what the question asks about affects their future family decisions. The vast majority of respondents shared perspectives similar to those expressed by interview participants. 14 said they want to foster their children's cultural identities and prepare them for discrimination in the world. One participant shared, "I think that because my family did not expose me a lot to my ethnic community and prepare me for discrimination, I will be more conscientious to have these conversations if I have children. I will start conversations early and make sure that my children have role models and are exposed to books and media that represent them." A couple of participants talked about wanting to pass on some of how their parents raised them. One respondent said, "The way I was taught to identify, and handle racism and systematic oppression will be passed on to my children, who will be children of color." Others, however, said their experience of not being exposed to their birth/ethnic culture and not being prepared for bias have made forming a family more difficult. "I think about it now, but still struggle to decide how to approach it as a begin to form my own family," one participant shared. Another said, "My uninformed experience results in me feeling less confident in starting a family whether that means having a kid or not. Even in my partnership, which is my family, I have identity issues about the race I am and how underprepared I was to navigate discrimination, and that's a lot to teach a child."

The third open-ended question in the survey, which asked, "What other factors were a part of the way you have chosen to form your family?" was answered by 24 participants. A wide variety of responses were provided, but there were three that were most common. First, financial concerns were cited as a factor by multiple participants. Second, some participants noted that their experience as an adoptee affects their family formation because they would like to adopt so that their child can have a parent who relates to that unique experience. Other participants

discussed the way their experience of adoption has caused them to struggle with trauma, their sense of self, and bonding or connection in ways that makes them more hesitant to have children.

The fourth open-ended question in the survey asked, “Is there anything else you'd like to share?” 8 participants provided answers to this question. One respondent said that their desire for biological children is tied to not knowing any biological relatives. They said, “While it seems a bit silly perhaps and isn't my only reason for wanting biological children, I would like to know what it is like to have someone else who resembles me.” Another participant expressed interest in being able to talk with other queer adult adoptees, saying, “I want to know if they struggle with deciding on having biological children while also being gay/lesbian, in partnership with someone of the same sex.” Two respondents shared that their trauma and emotions from adoption affect the way they connect to partners and possible future children, making it more difficult and more of a concern in forming their families. Another participant said, “As an adult, I realize my parents did their best in the time they were in, but I miss not having a black culture at all. And as an adult it's really hard to integrate and interact with people that look like me.” Another respondent shared struggling with their identity and culture, but said, “My faith, my tribe of friends and my drive to constantly improve myself helped me through stages of my life. However, I still struggle with being adopted as it is such a complex topic that affected so much of my growth. I never really knew the real me until I met my husband.” Two participants thanked the researcher for conducting this study.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined how three childhood experiences of adult transracial adoptees – sense of belonging, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias – predicted the ways in which they want to form their own families. Participants reported their perspectives on each of the three childhood experiences and indicated how they are most likely to form their family: through biological procreation, adoption, fostering, child-free, or any combination of those. In this section, the overall findings of the study, as related to the following quantitative research questions will be discussed.

- 1) Does TRAs' sense of belonging in their adoptive families predict desiring to form their families through each of the four options?
- 2) Does TRAs' experience of cultural socialization in their adoptive families predict desiring to form their families through each of the four options?
- 3) Does TRAs' preparation for bias in their adoptive families predict desiring to form their families through each of the four options?

Additionally, the overall findings related to the following qualitative research question will be discussed.

- 1) In what ways do adult TRAs connect their childhood experiences with sense of belonging, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias with their approach to forming their own families?

The quantitative results of this study showed that participants reported experiencing moderate levels of belonging, low levels of cultural socialization, and very low levels of preparation for bias as children in their white adoptive families. This aligned with the qualitative results, in which participants provided a more nuanced understanding of their experiences, which

included varying levels and forms of belonging, cultural socialization, and preparation in different relationships and contexts.

Childhood Experiences According to the Subscales

The results of each subscale in this study revealed information about participants' childhood experiences that substantiated findings reported in the literature.

Sense of Belonging. The literature has established that transracial adoptees tend to experience a sense of belonging in their white adoptive families in the sense that they have a shared experience of growing up together and participating in the same type of culture (Kim et al., 2010). The results of the survey subscale for sense of belonging of adult TRAs showed that the participants in this study did experience moderate to high levels of belonging in their adoptive families. The literature has also shown that living in predominantly white neighborhoods can impact TRAs' sense of belonging outside the home, however, and 94.3% of the participants in this study were raised in predominantly white areas. Because the subscale about belonging was specifically about TRAs' sense of belonging within their family as children, it did not measure their sense of belonging in their communities growing up. Since it has also been shown that transracial adoptees have experienced racism in their predominantly white communities (Samuels, 2010) and that one reason TRAs do not feel like they completely belong in their families is because they experience racism that their white parents and/or siblings do not (Kim et al., 2010), it is possible that part of the reason the TRAs in this study did not report higher levels of belonging in their families is because of their racialized experiences in their communities growing up.

Cultural Socialization. The results of the survey subscale for cultural socialization of adult TRAs confirmed findings from previous studies that many TRAs experience a lack of cultural socialization facilitated by their white adoptive parents (Brocious, 2017; Day et al., 2015; Samuels, 2009). For example, in the Samuels (2009) study, only 4 of 25 TRA participants believed their white adoptive parents had proactively provided racial socialization, including cultural socialization. In this study, the vast majority of participants reported that each subscale item related to cultural socialization was rarely or never part of their life. Brocious (2017) identified socializing amongst other TRIAs to be important means for adult TRIAs in developing cultural connection. In the present study, only 17.1% of participants who responded to the cultural socialization subscale item “My parents socialized me amongst other transracial adoptees” reported that as a consistent part of their life, and 68.6% reported it was rarely or never part of their life. This indicates that the adoptive parents of this sample did not adequately provide one of the important mechanisms for the TRAs to develop their connection to their birth/ethnic culture.

Preparation for Bias. The results of the survey subscale for preparation for bias of adult TRAs also confirmed findings from previous studies, which indicated that many TRAs experience a lack of preparation for bias by their white adoptive parents (Montgomery & Jordan, 2018; Samuels, 2009). The findings of this study differed slightly from those of Hrapczynski and Leslie (2018), who found that white adoptive parents prioritized the cultural socialization of their TRAs over their preparation for bias. In this study, participants’ mean score for cultural socialization was slightly lower than their mean score for preparation for bias. Participants reported experiencing lower levels of preparation for bias than cultural socialization.

The statistics were extreme, but unfortunately not surprising. It is important to read them in sentence form, not only in Table 6, to grasp the seriousness of what the numbers describe. 69.6% of participants' white parents rarely or never acknowledged discrimination as an issue in society. 77.1% of participants' parents rarely or never discussed social issues and current events related to the TRAs' race and ethnicity. 51.4% of participants' parents rarely or never stood up for them in moments of discrimination. 80% of participants' parents rarely or never helped them learn coping skills for experiencing discrimination. 71.5% of participants' parents rarely or never taught them to respond to discrimination in a helpful way. 71.4% of participants sometimes or consistently heard their parents speak negatively about their birth/ethnic community. 85.8% of participants' parents rarely or never cautioned them about interacting with white people.

These results mirror those of the Samuels (2009) study, in which 23 of 25 the adult TRA participants reported being told by their white adoptive parents to respond to racism with passivity. Because Arnold et al. (2016) and Presseau et al. (2019)'s findings indicated that white adoptive parents preparing their TRAs for bias could be a protective factor against negative psychological outcomes, it is possible the participants of the present study face greater psychological issues as adults due to experiencing an utter lack of preparation for bias. Again, the way these white adoptive parents have failed to prepare their TRAs for discrimination contrasts greatly with the way Black parents and other parents of color prepare their children for discrimination, especially in terms of skill development. While the majority of participants in this study reported not being taught how to cope with or respond to racism, Kurtz-Costes et al. (2019) described how Black families transmit those lessons intergenerationally. They found that many Black parents' approach to preparing their children for bias includes socializing them to have a mistrust of white people. This study used the item "My parents expressed caution to me

about interacting with white people” – an item that increased reliability of the subscale – and only 5 participants answered it with either “sometimes” or “consistently.” This data, particularly in the context of the results for the entire preparation for bias subscale, confirms that this is an area of development that can often be neglected by white adoptive parents.

Family Formation as Predicted by Childhood Experiences

While participants reported moderate to high levels of sense of belonging, according to the survey portion of this study, it was not found to significantly predict adult TRA family formation via biological procreation, adoption, or fostering. The interview data from this study, however, suggests that at least some adult TRAs who prefer each of those three methods deeply consider and are motivated by their sense of belonging in their adoptive families when forming their own families. Participants’ discussion of childhood experiences and family formation is further described later in this section, but several examples are included here to tie these findings together. For example, Mya Lewis shared that the way she experienced belonging in her multiracial adoptive family has made her feel most comfortable in multiracial settings and has motivated her to adopt, including transracially. Other interview participants such as Mikasa said that not belonging biologically to their adoptive families has caused them to desire having biological children who will physically resemble them.

Cultural socialization was not found to significantly predict adult TRA family formation through biological procreation, adoption, or fostering in this study. That said, interview participant Haley Lyon said that the lack of cultural immersion she had in the Black community she experienced as a TRA has caused her not to want to have biological children because she fears being unable to adequately pass on their heritage and culture to them. This indicates that at

least some adult TRAs do factor in their childhood experience with cultural socialization when they decide how to form their own families.

Like sense of belonging and cultural socialization, preparation for bias was not found by the survey portion of this study to significantly predict adult TRA family formation through biological procreation, adoption, or fostering. While no interview participants specifically noted a connection between their childhood experience with preparation for bias and the way they would like to go about having children or choosing to remain child-free, multiple participants did express that they factor in their preparation for bias when it comes to mate selection. Andres Felipe, Bentley, Mikasa, and Haley Lyon all described the importance they now place on having a partner who understands and discusses issues of discrimination and how they connect that to growing up with white adoptive parents who did not possess those skills.

Although sense of belonging, cultural socialization and preparation for bias did not significantly predict participants' desire to form their families through biological procreation, adoption, or fostering in this study, the sample size was not large enough to rule out those three independent variables as a potentially significant in predicting adult TRA family formation via those three dependent variable options.

Each of the independent variables in this study were found to significantly or nearly significantly predict one form of family formation amongst adult TRA participants: the choice to remain child-free. Namely, participants who experienced higher levels of belonging, cultural socialization and preparation for bias were less likely to prefer remaining child-free in their family formation. This supports one prediction of Hypothesis 2 of this study: "TRAs' with low scores of belongingness, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias in childhood will report wanting to biologically reproduce or choose not to have children." The first prediction of

Hypothesis 2 and both of the predictions of Hypothesis 1 – “TRAs’ with high scores of belongingness, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias in childhood will report wanting to foster or adopt some of all of their own children” – were not substantiated by this study but could be further explored in future studies.

Participants’ Descriptions of Childhood Experiences

While the quantitative results of this study did not draw many direct connections between the selected childhood experiences and adult TRAs’ family formation, a lot more thorough information was uncovered in the interview results. The qualitative research question – “In what ways do adult TRAs connect their childhood experiences with sense of belonging, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias with their approach to forming their own families?” – was answered richly and with great nuance by interview participants in a way that both confirms previous research findings and adds to them.

Descriptions of Sense of Belonging and Family Formation. Interview participants expounded greatly upon what the quantitative survey data revealed about their experiences of belonging – and not belonging – in their white adoptive families, in their families’ communities, and in their birth/ethnic communities. Interview participant answers, like the survey subscale responses, mirrored the Kim et al. (2010) findings about TRAs experiencing a sense of belonging in their adoptive families in a traditional familial way but a lack of belonging due to experiences of racism not shared by their adoptive families. Kim et al.’s (2010) other finding that the Korean TRIA participants found the most belonging amongst other adoptees was a sentiment echoed by both Ivy and Mikasa – both Asian TRIAs – in their interviews. Some of what the interview participants shared also supported Feigelman’s (2000) finding of Black adoptees experiencing

the most discrimination of all adoptees. For example, Andres Felipe talked about being called the n-word as a child, whereas most of the non-Black participants shared stories about microaggressions they faced. While it is important not to compare trauma, it is also important to acknowledge that anti-blackness is at the core of white supremacy, which could possibly lead to Black adoptees facing the brunt of societal discrimination and struggling more with a sense of belonging in their white families as a result. Both Feigelman (2000) and Samuels (2010) also found that living in predominantly white neighborhoods can be associated with TRAs experiencing discrimination and feeling uncomfortable with their own appearance. What was shared by interview participants in the present study expanded on both of those findings. Participants shared multiple experiences of discrimination in their predominantly white communities, from a Korean adoptee being asked if they speak Chinese to a Black adoptee describing how her Black brother was profiled by the police in their neighborhood. When asked about their sense of belonging, almost every interview participant mentioned how looking different from their white adoptive family members contributed to the ways they felt they did not belong growing up. Some participants connected this experience to having a desire for biological children who look like them. Gatzke (2015) previously found in an interview that another adult TRA expressed the same desire. In the present study, Mya Lewis shared a different perspective as someone who feels most comfortable in multiracial settings because of growing up with siblings and parents of different races, which has led her to desire transracially adopting children as well as having biological children. According to Family Systems Theory, these differences in desires can be explained by a difference in the TRAs' childhood experiences of belonging in their adoptive families (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Adult TRAs are not a monolith, and some

experienced a more or less profound lack of belonging based on their experience as people of color raised by white parents in a white supremacist society.

One unique finding in the present study overlapped with a finding in Phillips' (2010) self-study. Phillips wrote about feeling shocked when she became pregnant because she had internalized her adoptive mother's infertility as something she too would struggle with. One interview participant in the present study – Ivy – shared a similar message. She talked about how growing up around so many infertile mothers, including her own and those of her friends at Korean Culture Camp, caused her to subconsciously believe that she would not be able to get pregnant and to experience shock when she became pregnant with her son.

In addition to feeling a mix of belonging and not belonging in their adoptive families, many interview participants described struggling to feel like they truly belong in their birth/ethnic communities as well. Samuels (2009) found that a sample of adult TRAs faced challenges to belong in their birth/ethnic communities because their members often invalidate TRAs as legitimate people of color and instead see them as a whitewashed outsider. The stories participants in this study told of being judged, rejected, and even name-called by members of their birth/ethnic community reinforce that TRAs can often have difficulty as adults when trying to integrate into the communities that should naturally be theirs.

Descriptions of Cultural Socialization and Family Formation. Interview participants also provided rich descriptions of a variety of experiences in terms of the cultural socialization they were provided by their adoptive parents. As Mohanty et al. (2006) found, adoptive parental supports for cultural socialization can be a factor that helps Asian TRIAs feel less marginalized in their predominantly white communities. Ivy and Erika both reported different ways that their parents normalized interracial families and provided cultural socialization to them through

books, traditions, and Korean Culture Camp helped them feel more at ease in their communities compared to what other interviewees described. These participants also felt more connected to their birth/ethnic cultures as children, which supports the Reinoso et al. (2013) study, which found that child TRIAs who were socialized around other TRIAs had a stronger sense of connection to their birth country and culture. Reinoso also showed that the child TRIAs were able to accurately identify their race as BIPOC rather than white like their parents. Some of the participants in the present study talked about feeling like they were white or wishing they were white as children, which could possibly be connected to the lack of cultural socialization they received, which overall contrasted with what the participants in Reinoso et al.'s (2013) study received.

Most participants' responses to the question, "In what ways do you feel like your adoptive parents did or did not expose you to the culture of your birth community?" described inadequate cultural socialization and the negative impacts they associate with that. As previous literature has established, adult TRAs often face the unique developmental task of navigating their racial and cultural identity after being raised by white parents (Baden et al., 2012; Brocious, 2017; Samuels, 2009; Samuels, 2010). This was expressed in great detail by every interview participant in this study. Brocious (2017) found that some adult Asian TRIAs feel less connected to their birth/ethnic communities due to their inability to speak their native language, which is something every Asian interviewee talked about in this study. Black TRAs in the Samuels (2010) study said that as adults they seek out Black peers to learn how to "be Black" (p. 33), which was also discussed by Naomi and Haley Lyon in this study. These types of deficits in cultural socialization leave adult TRAs with the challenge of developing their cultural identities through reculturation (Baden et al., 2012). For the TRIAs in this study, reculturation has included visiting

their home countries and trying to learn their native language. For the domestic TRAs in this study, reculturation has involved more learning about norms in their birth/ethnic cultures and building relationships with same-race peers. These aspects of reculturation mirror what Samuels' (2009) participants likened to putting together a puzzle piece by piece.

Greco et al. (2015) found that adult adoptees have a psychological and emotional need to revisit their adoption history when they develop their identity both as an individual and as a parent. This finding aligns with a core tenet of Family Systems Theory, which posits that every individual's patterns of behavior must be understood in the context of their family because all members are affected by one another (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). An adult TRAs' process to forming their own family, therefore, forces them to either subconsciously or consciously confront the ways in which their experience in their adoptive family has shaped them. Greco et al.'s (2015) study found that adoptees' partners – members of their new family systems – play a role in going through that process with the adoptee, which was substantiated by multiple participants in the present study expressing the significance of their partners' support in their own journey of reculturation and family formation. Some participants in this study described feeling apprehensive about having biological children or same-race children because they fear not being able to properly culturally socialize them due to their own lack of cultural immersion growing up. This affirmed what Day et al. (2015) found in a sample of adult Korean TRIAs who, after being inadequately ethnically socialized by their white adoptive families, often felt inauthentic or inadequate in their role as parents trying to pass down Korean heritage to their children. However, Zhou et al. (2020) found that some adult TRAs develop their own sense of cultural pride by culturally socializing alongside their children, which is an experience Ivy and multiple other participants mentioned looking forward to. Like the participants in Wu et al.'s (2020)

study, the participants of this study all affirmed the importance they place on culturally socializing their children.

Descriptions of Preparation for Bias and Family Formation. When interview participants were asked about how their parents prepared them for racism and discrimination in society, each one said they were not prepared in any significant way. Their responses, like the survey portion of this study, substantiated what Montgomery and Jordan (2018) found about adult TRAs experiencing problematic and insufficient preparation for bias from their white adoptive parents, particularly because the adoptive parents believed acknowledging racial differences would harm their TRA. Many of the interview participants shared that their parents did not discuss race and racism at all, let alone teach them any skills to navigate discrimination. Montgomery and Jordan (2018) found that many white adoptive parents who avoid the issues of racism have not been educated on it, which is something many of the interviewees in this study mentioned, particularly due to their parents' ages and the time period their adoption took place in. While Montgomery and Jordan (2018) as well most of the literature and the participants of this study used the term "colorblind" to describe the mentality of white adoptive parents, the term "color evasive" is suggested by Annamma et al. (2016) as a replacement term as phrases that use disability for this mentality are fundamentally problematic because they do not correctly illustrate the issue of refusing to acknowledge race while also perpetuating disability as a deficit (Watts & Erevelles, 2004). Andres Felipe's description of his father minimizing Andres being called the n-word at school was a color-evasive response similar to that described by participants in the Samuels (2009) study, in which they shared that their white adoptive parents taught them to respond to racism such as slurs with passivity.

Like the preparation for bias subscale results, the interview results of the present study aligned with the previous finding by Hrapczynski and Leslie (2018) that TRAs are culturally socialized by their parents more than they are prepared for bias. However, cultural socialization can still play a role in counteracting the effects of racism. White adoptive parents engaging in the cultural socialization of their adoptees in an important protective factor against the negative impacts that come from perceived discrimination, according to Arnold et. al (2016). They found that it is actually more important for TRAs than for their non-adopted peers. This was something Haley Lyon mentioned in her interview, in which she said that the way her parents accepted her as Black person might have helped her experience less discrimination. Mya Lewis said that her father's general advice to stick up for herself, although inadequate, was somewhat confidence-boosting and that confidence was a big component in her process of learning anti-bias skills from peers and herself. This is an interesting finding, because Mya Lewis' father kept their family in a diverse part of the country and, in her words, refused jobs in the south because he wanted his TRAs to have more resources available to them. While both Haley Lyon and Mya Lewis' efforts towards preparation for bias were insufficient and somewhat color-evasive, both of them grew up in diverse areas, which is the context in which previous studies found that white adoptive parents tend to be more supportive of their TRAs' racial-ethnic socialization, which includes preparation or bias (Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2018; Montgomery & Jordan, 2018).

All nine interview participants in this study spoke about how highly they prioritize or will prioritize preparing their children for racism and bias in society. This prioritization was found amongst another sample of adult TRIAs in Wu et al.'s (2020) study. The interviewees in this study emphasized how they want to approach the process of preparation for bias completely differently than their white adoptive parents did. They said it will include discussing race and

racism with their children from a very young age. This reflects what Family Systems Theory calls a change in equilibrium, which occurs when a family member makes a choice outside of family norms and thereby alters the norms of the family system (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). There was some diversity in how they plan to prepare their children for bias. Mya Lewis described how she wants her children to be educators and leaders who feel empowered in moments of discrimination to respond confidently, which is something she struggled to do as a child because she was not prepared for bias. On the other hand, Bentley explained that she does not want her children to have to educate anyone about racism because she has felt burdened by having to educate her adoptive family about it. Naomi expressed some fear that her child may not present as Black because she is biracial Black, and her partner is Asian. The adult TRIA participants in Wu et al.'s (2020) study reported teaching their white-passing children about their privilege. Naomi's interview results expand on that finding and indicate that the task of raising biological children may be even more complex for adult TRAs who have children that do not look exactly like them and may be afforded more privilege in society for passing as white or benefiting from colorism.

Limitations

Some limitations of this study should be considered. The following section contains limitations of this study related to the researcher, sample, and methods. The foremost limitation of me as the researcher in this study is that I am a white woman. As such, I did not have the experience of being a person of color, let alone a person of color adopted and raised by white people when I designed, conducted, and analyzed this study. My racial identity in the context of a white supremacist society might have also served as a barrier to participants fully disclosing

their experiences, as there may be greater emotional risk involved in sharing racial trauma with a white person.

Four primary limitations exist in the sample of this study. First, the sample was created via snowball sampling, which led to some over-sampling. For example, a transracial adoptee from Korea shared the link to the study on their social media platform and then there was an influx of Asian TRA participants that created the majority of the sample. Additionally, because the study was shared by multiple prominent TRA leaders, it is likely that the sample was skewed towards adoptees who are more consciously involved in processing the impacts of their experience with adoption, as manifested by the fact that they are engaged in adoptee communities online. This process of an adoptee critically engaging with their adoption story and traumas rather than accepting mainstream, romanticized narratives about their adoption experience is often referred to in the adult adoptee community as “coming out of the fog,” and adult adoptees who engage on adoptee platforms tend to be immersed in the process or have already come through to the other side. The second sample limitation of this study is that is a small sample, therefore the survey data is not generalizable and more complex statistical analyses could not be performed. The third sample limitation of this study is that it is not a statistically representative sample of the transracial adoptee community. For example, 15 percent of adoptees in the U.S. are Asian (USDHHS, 2009), whereas the percentage of Asian adoptees in this study is 57.1. The fourth sample limitation is that the interview participants were purposively selected by the researcher, which could have permitted some bias in that sampling.

Certain limitations existed within this study due to the methodology. First, the study depended on participant memory and opinion, neither of which can fully measure the facts of an experience but instead measure the perception of an experience. That said, the study was

intended to explore the lived experiences of adoptees, which includes their memories and perceptions. A second limitation of the study is that the measures were developed for this study and therefore have not yet been rigorously evaluated for reliability and validity by multiple studies.

Implications

This study informs changes in both policy and practice within the field of child and family services as well as in parenting practices amongst white adoptive parents. Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva (2008) discuss the importance of recognizing racism as a structural phenomenon rather than individualizing the issue and viewing it as a problem to be solved by individual education.

Professional Policy. With the Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva framework for understanding racism in mind, the field of child and family services must evaluate the structural issues at the policy level that contribute to the mishandling of children of color in the system as well as within the white adoptive families they are entrusted to by government and nonprofit agencies. Child and family services relies heavily on policy to guide decision-making at every step of the foster care and adoption process. Policies exist about the age gap between adoptees and their adoptive parents. Policies exist about the criminal background of adoptive parents. The findings of this study indicate that significant issues exist in white adoptive parents' ability to appropriately raise children of color, which confirms the concerns the NABSW expressed decades ago in their position statement about transracial adoption. New policies and best practices should be developed to address these issues and concerns with the opinions and experiences of adult TRAs' as the primary focus in shaping them. While color-evasive practices were recommended for the

field of child and family services for a few decades, new policies must more explicitly address anticipated areas of concern when placing children of color with white parents. For example, policies about vetting prospective adoptive parents should include a thorough assessment of the parents' background when it comes to racial issues and racial engagement. The standards a white parent adopting a child of color must meet should include anti-racist standards that exceed the basic skills every parent needs to have, like the ability to provide basic shelter, nutrition and education for their child. White adoptive parents must be able to meet the cultural and racial developmental needs of a transracial adoptee through both their own skillset and partnership with members of their child's birth/ethnic community. As transracial adoptee Chad Goller-Sojourner said, "Your child should not be your first Black friend" (NPR, 2014). Children of color should not be placed with white adoptive parents who do not meet a set of anti-racist criteria outlined by decisive policy. Vetting policies must address the following questions. Are the parents involved in the birth/ethnic community of the child they might be placed with? Do they engage in supporting the social and political interests of the birth/community of that child? Are all of the parents' best friends and mentors white? Requiring a social media search of prospective adoptive parents similar to one an employer might conduct when hiring a staff member for a diversity, equity and inclusion position could be beneficial to this end.

Professional Practice. Because institutions of higher education such as technical colleges and universities play a significant role in preparing child and family professionals to enter the field, they are responsible for providing adequate education that addresses the diverse needs of children and families being served by schools, government agencies, and nonprofits. This includes transracial adoptive families. The researcher of this study suggests that Baden et al.'s 2012 Reculturation Theory be incorporated in standard child and family development and

social work coursework, including introductory courses, at institutions of higher education that teach human development. This will provide child and family professionals in all sectors of the field, from preschool teachers to social workers, a framework by which they can assess the wellbeing and development of transracial adoptees in their programs. This could add a level of accountability and support for white adoptive parents, as child and family professionals are often the ones to observe areas of concern and to provide additional educational materials to parents whose children are not developing in a healthy way. Possibly even more importantly, it would prepare child and family professionals to support TRAs in developing healthy racial and cultural identities even if their adoptive parents are not engaged in fostering that development. The ultimate goal is to promote and protect the wellbeing of children of color in white adoptive families, so equipping professionals with both knowledge and skills is a crucial part of that.

Although informal, supplemental education through professionals such as schoolteachers can aid in developing white adoptive parents' cultural competence and anti-racist skillsets, formal education should play a more significant role in that development to ensure that TRAs are adequately supported in their adoptive families. All social workers should be trained in the practical application of guiding white adoptive parents through Reculturation Theory, with particular focus on minimizing the assimilation stage in which TRAs and TRIAs are swept into white culture rather than their birth/ethnic culture, and on maximizing early education, experience and immersion in the TRA's birth/ethnic community. This type of training should exceed established trainings that teach white adoptive parents basics such as to engage in proper hair care for their TRA and to celebrate the traditional holidays of their TRAs' birth/ethnic community. Rather than focus on surface-level cultural socialization – although that is also very important – this training should take an in-depth approach that challenges white adoptive parents

to completely rethink their paradigm of existing as white people in all-white families in a white supremacist society. This training should require of white parents both serious introspection and detailed plans of action that outline which areas of their personal and family life will need to change to meet the cultural and racial needs of a TRA.

Parenting Practices. The findings of this study have implications for three primary domains of child development that white adoptive parents need to attend to when raising TRAs: emotional development, cultural development, and anti-bias development. While not every participant in this study reported experiencing being adopted as traumatic, some did. 47.5% of participants reported rarely or never feeling like they could be completely themselves with their adoptive family. Interview participants highlighted over and over that it is incredibly important to them that any children they may have feel completely supported to be whoever they are and to explore themselves without judgment or confinement to any societal standards or categories. While that could reflect an overall generational shift across young adults in the U.S. compared to previous generations, interview participants also connected these values to the ways they did not feel emotionally safe to discuss their experiences as adoptees and as people of color with their adoptive parents. This indicates that white adoptive parents need to reevaluate how they approach multiple domains of parenting such as listening, comforting, and openly communicating with their TRAs about all areas of their lives. They need to understand that, as Family Systems Theory argues, their choices significantly impact the development of their TRAs and their collective development as an interracial family (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). White adoptive parents must acknowledge the full range of emotions attached to their child's position in a white supremacist society that need to be recognized and attended to. The researcher would argue that part of fostering a sense of emotional safety for TRAs should include white adoptive parents

ensuring their TRAs have adults of their child's race and ethnicity to go to when they need support from someone who better understands their experience. It is important for white adoptive parents to be self-aware of their own limitations in this domain and that they develop enough security in their own identity to seek out a more collectivistic approach to raising their TRA than is typical in all-white families in the U.S.

Not unlike with emotional development, white adoptive parents need to develop a skillset for fostering the cultural development of their TRAs that includes real relationships with members of their birth/ethnic community. The result of every subscale item of the cultural socialization scale indicated that the white parents of the participants were extremely insufficient in their cultural socialization practices. What stands out in the data, however, is that the more "surface-level" items had higher scores than those that reflected deeper immersion of TRAs in their birth/ethnic community. The results showed that white adoptive parents more often socialized their TRAs amongst other TRAs, provided them with positive reflections of themselves, and taught them about their birth/ethnic community. Those scores were still very low, but the results of the items about whether the participants' adoptive parents made sure they had friends, role models, and mentor figures who looked like their TRAs, and that their TRAs' birth/ethnic culture was integrated in their family life were significantly lower. This data matches what interview participant Naomi said about white adoptive parents having a skewed understanding of what racial mirrors are. White adoptive parents need to move far past the bare minimum of having diverse books for their children to read and actually engage in immersing their TRAs in their birth/ethnic communities. This could be especially important for language acquisition of TRIAs, who in this study expressed their inability to speak their native language as a loss or as something they had to reclaim as adults. True immersion in TRAs' birth/ethnic

communities could minimize the cultural and racial trauma of assimilation, which may in turn reduce the difficulty TRAs face in reculturation.

In addition to developing their own self-awareness and skillsets for the sake of optimal emotional and cultural development in their TRAs, white adoptive parents must recognize their urgent need to develop anti-bias skills and knowledge that can aid their children navigating oppression in a white supremacist society. The overwhelming majority of participants in this study reported being unprepared by their parents to face racism. The items measuring this lack of preparation provide an outline for basic action steps that white adoptive parents need to take. First, they must be able to acknowledge racism as a societal issue that not only others will use to inflict pain on their child, but that they will also participate in as a result of being socialized according to whiteness. Second, white adoptive parents must be able to openly discuss issues of racism and discrimination, including current events such as acts of violence that target people of color. This preparation will need to be tailored to the particular race and ethnicity of the TRA. For example, Andres Felipe mentioned that his parents did not teach him how to interact with police, which is something he needed to be taught as a Black boy because he was at the greatest risk of suffering police brutality of anyone in society even as a child. Third, white adoptive parents need to model anti-racism as practiced by white people when their TRA experiences interpersonal, systemic or institutional racism. While a white adoptive parent cannot provide the same type of support that a same-race parent could to a TRA, they can demonstrate how white people should respond as accomplices when people of color – their own children – are harmed by white supremacy. Fourth, white adoptive parents must teach their child coping skills and response skills that the TRA finds helpful in combating the discrimination they encounter. Multiple interview participants in this study shared how important it is to them to prepare their

own children in this way starting at a very early age. White adoptive parents would be wise to follow the lead of parents of color in this domain in particular because white parents have no framework from which to teach these skills since they have never had to use them in their own lives. The researcher strongly recommends that white adoptive parents seek out same-race mentors for their TRAs who can provide a more organic form of guidance for surviving racism. Fifth, white adoptive parents need to speak respectfully, accurately, and with context and nuance about the birth/ethnic communities of their TRAs. This is a practice that should come naturally if the parents are involved in their child's birth/ethnic community and are well-educated not only on the culture and history of that community but also on their own positionality as white people in a white supremacist society that has abused and exploited that community for centuries. Sixth, white parents of TRAs must be cognizant enough of the harm continually perpetuated by white people, whether consciously or not, to warn their TRA to practice discernment and caution when interacting with white folks and white institutions. This is not a recommendation for instilling fear, but rather an appropriate level of skepticism and a sense of freedom to expect that white people should earn trust through action. White parents have a responsibility to challenge the presumption of white innocence by permitting and encouraging this skepticism if they are going to participate in the dismantling of white supremacy and the prioritization of their child's safety.

Future Directions

The following section contains information about how to improve future research based on the weaknesses of this study design as well as comments on the direction of continued research with adult transracial adoptees.

Method Improvement. The researcher has identified certain aspects of the study methodology that could be improved in similar research in the future. First, the interview question “What was your experience with your adoptive parents in terms of them preparing you for what you would face in society because of your race or ethnicity?” should be reworded to say, “What was your experience with your adoptive parents in terms of them preparing you for what you would face in society because of racism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination?” The wording could be altered depending on what subsample is being studied, as some adoptees such as those from Central America will face both racism and xenophobia, whereas Black American adoptees may not experience xenophobia. The authors of *White Logic*, *White Methods* explain how race itself is not a causal variable and that the systems of academia and research typically fail to measure racism instead as the root of disparities (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). While the researcher of this study agrees with that perspective, the wording of the interview question above was an oversight that can be attributed to the researcher’s internalized white supremacy, as white supremacy promotes the belief that race rather than racism is the cause of disparity. It should be noted that the researcher, the principal investigator, and one of the thesis committee members are all white women, so 75% of the research team was comprised of white women. While the researcher intentionally sought out an African American thesis committee member, the overall lack of diversity in the research team points to the systemic issue of the lack of diversity within the Childhood Education and Family Development department at Missouri State University, which limited the research team to predominantly white members. The researcher recommends involving more diverse scholars in future studies to strengthen methodology and reduce harm to BIPOC participants via the increased accountability for the failures of white researchers that perpetuate facets of white supremacy such as the belief that

race is the problem, not racism. Second, the researcher received feedback from TRAs in one Facebook group where participants were recruited that TRAs should be compensated for the emotional labor of participating in studies about adoption. Acquiring funding to compensate TRAs in future studies should be a top priority for researchers. Third, further scale development is needed to thoroughly examine the reliability and validity of the three subscales developed in this study. The measures should be tested using large sample sizes and rigorous factor analysis.

Further Research. A few specific studies should build upon this one for the sake of expanding what has been reported thus far. First, a larger-scale study should be conducted using the same subscales developed for this research in order to confirm or challenge whether each independent variable predicts each dependent variable option. As previously stated, the sample size of the present study was too small to conclude any generalizable information, and a larger study would help transracial adoption researchers progress in exploring any significance childhood sense of belonging, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias in predicting family formation patterns in adult TRAs.

Second, a study that examines the parenting practices of adult TRAs would greatly expand on what participants in this study shared in their responses to the open-ended survey and interview questions. While the questions were intended by the researcher to explore what methods of family formation adult TRAs are more inclined towards, most participants shared more about how they would like to go about raising their children than about how they want to add those children to their families. This indicates that a significant relationship could possibly exist between adult TRAs' childhood experiences of belonging, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias and the way they practice parenting.

Third, research should be conducted to evaluate how childhood experiences predict how adult TRAs select partners. This recommendation comes from interview participant disclosures, which indicated that some adult TRAs connect experiences with belonging, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias in childhood to the way they select their partners who are socio-politically conscious, supportive and empathetic. Quantitative research could be beneficial to establish trends and predictive relationships between childhood experiences and partner selection. There is open discussion in the adult TRA community about how a seeming majority of adult TRAs choose white partners, so further research could examine the racial makeup of adult TRAs' partners as well as their emotional and social characteristics.

Some future directions for research came up more sparsely in the present study but would also be beneficial in increasing the representation of adult TRAs in the literature as well as the diversity of adult TRAs' experiences. Areas of research that need further exploration include intersectional TRA identities such as disability and LGBTQ+ status to more fully understand family formation amongst adult TRAs. While this research did include some LGBTQ+ demographic questions, the study was not large enough to use the data collected for statistical analysis. However, the open-ended questions from this study, both within the survey and the interviews, yielded some information about an LGBTQ+ participant's considerations about family formation as well as some participants' medical concerns about biologically reproducing. No other disability information was collected, though, and again, due to the sample size, what was disclosed was not enough to be statistically analyzed for significance.

Conclusion

This study found that adult transracial adoptees' childhood experiences with sense of belonging, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias have diverse impacts of varying significance on their approach to forming families of their own. The data from this study showed that adult TRAs who experienced higher levels of belonging, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias are less inclined to choose to be child-free. While the interview participants in this study expressed nuanced and ranging childhood experiences, the subscale results indicate that the participant sample in totality experienced moderate levels of belonging, low levels of cultural socialization, and low levels of preparation for bias. These findings indicate that there is a need for improvement in the way child and family service professionals vet and train white adoptive parents. Additionally, these findings indicate that white adoptive parents of children of color need to improve their parenting practices to better meet the developmental needs – emotional, cultural and racial – of their adoptees. Further work that centers the perspectives of adult TRAs is necessary to shape the future of these endeavors in a way that benefits children of color who are placed with white parents. The primary recommendation of the researcher of this study is for the field of child and family services to reevaluate all policy and practice standards related to transracial adoption according to feedback from adult TRAs.

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TABLES

Table 1. Participants' Race, Number of Racial Identities, and Emotional Connection to Race/Ethnicity

	<i>n</i>	%
Race (n=35)		
Asian/Pacific Islander	20	57.1
Black	13	37.1
Latinx or Hispanic	3	8.6
Native American/Native Alaskan or Indigenous	5	14.3
White	5	14.3
Other*	1	2.9
Number of Racial Identities (n=35)		
One	27	77.1
Two	5	14.3
Three	2	5.7
Four	1	2.9
Felt Emotional Connection to Racial/Ethnic Identity (n=35)		
Yes	9	25.7
Somewhat	18	51.4
No	8	22.9

*Other: "Racially Native without tribal affiliation; Ethnically Mexican; Mixed race (half Spanish/Portuguese, half Mexican with minimal Asian descent)"

Table 2. Adoption Descriptives

	Type of Adoption (n=35)			Adoption Privacy (n=34)		Reunification Status (n=35)		
	Private Domestic	Foster Domestic	International	Open	Closed	Yes	In Process	No
<i>n</i>	9	5	21	11	23	11	7	17
<i>%</i>	25.7	14.3	60.0	31.4	65.7	31.4	20.0	48.6

Table 3. Sense of Belonging Item Responses

Item	Never		Rare		Sometime		Consistent	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Felt like a true member of immediate family (n=35)	1	2.9	5	14.3	15	42.9	14	40.0
Felt close to siblings (n=34)	8	23.5	7	20.6	11	32.4	8	23.5
Felt close to parents (n=35)	4	11.4	4	11.4	18	51.4	9	25.7
Felt accepted by immediate family (n=35)	2	5.7	0	0.0	18	51.4	15	42.9
Could be entirely themselves with family (n=35)	7	20.0	9	25.7	11	31.4	8	22.9
Felt like a true member of extended family (n=35)	9	25.7	5	14.3	11	31.4	10	28.6
Felt accepted by extended family (n=35)	3	8.6	10	28.6	10	28.6	12	34.3

Table 4. Cultural Socialization Item Responses

Item	Never		Rare		Sometimes		Consistent	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
My parents exposed me to role models who looked like me (n=35)	17	48.6	12	34.3	3	8.6	3	8.6
My parents made sure I had mentor figures who looked like me (n=35)	19	54.3	13	37.1	2	5.7	1	2.9
My parents helped me develop friendships with peers who looked like me (n=35)	16	45.7	10	28.6	4	11.4	5	14.3
My parents socialized me amongst transracial adoptees (n=34)	12	35.3	12	35.3	4	11.8	6	17.6
My parents provided me with positive reflections of myself (n=35)	13	37.1	7	20.0	9	25.7	6	17.1
My parents taught me about the culture of my birth/ethnic community (n=35)	13	37.1	10	28.6	6	17.1	6	17.1
My family integrated the culture of my birth/ethnic culture into our lives (n=35)	20	57.1	9	25.7	5	14.3	1	2.9

Table 5. Preparation for Bias Item Responses

Item	Never		Rare		Sometimes		Consistent	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
My parents acknowledged discrimination in society (n=35)	19	54.3	5	14.3	7	20.0	4	11.4
My parents discussed social issues and current events related to my race/ethnicity (n=35)	21	60.0	6	17.1	5	14.3	3	8.6
My parents stood up for me in moments of discrimination (n=35)	11	31.4	7	20.0	9	25.7	8	22.9
My parents helped me learn coping skills for experiencing discrimination (n=35)	17	48.6	11	31.4	3	8.6	4	11.4
My parents taught me to respond to discrimination in a helpful way (n=35)	15	42.9	10	28.6	5	14.3	5	14.3
My parents spoke negatively about my birth/ethnic community (n=35)*	1	2.9	9	25.7	7	20.0	18	51.4
My parents expressed caution about interacting with white people(n=35)	29	82.9	1	2.9	3	8.6	2	5.7

*Reverse coded

Table 6. Interview Participant Characteristics

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race	Ethnicity	Partnership Status	Stage of Family Formation	Family Formation Options
Andres Felipe	36	Male	Black; Latinx or Hispanic	Afro-Latino	Single	Not thought	Bio, adopt, child-free
Bentley	36	Female	Black; White	Black	Committed partnership	Planning	All options
Elle Naranja	33	Female	Asian/Pacific Islander; Latinx or Hispanic; White*	Multiracial Chicana	Committed partnership	Not thought	Adopt, foster, child-free
Erika	36	Female	Asian/Pacific Islander	Korean American	Married	Planning	Child-free
Haley Lyon	22	Female	Black	American	Single	Planning	Adopt, child-free
Ivy	26	Female	Asian/Pacific Islander	Korean	Married	Started forming	Bio
Mikasa	28	Female	Asian/Pacific Islander	Chinese American	Committed Partnership	Not thought	Bio, adopt, child-free
Mya Lewis	35	Female	Black; Latino or Hispanic; Native American/Native Alaskan or Indigenous	Mixed American; Afro-Latina	Married	Planning	Bio, adopt, foster
Naomi	27	Female	Black; White	No answer provided**	Committed Partnership	Planning	Child-free

Table 6. Continued

*“Racially Native without tribal affiliation; Ethnically Mexican; Mixed race (half Spanish/Portuguese, half Mexican with minimal Asian descent”

**Self-described as biracial Black and Black in interview

APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval Form

IRB-FY2021-274 - Initial: Initial Approval

do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>

Wed 11/11/2020 1035 AM

To: King, Elizabeth K <EKing@MissouriState.edu>; Gray, Sarah J <Sarah197@live.missouristate.edu>



Missouri State
U N I V E R S I T Y

To:

Elizabeth King
Childhood Ed & Fam Studies

RE: Notice of IRB Approval

Submission Type: Initial

Study #: IRB-FY2021-274

Study Title: Adult Transracial Adoptees' Childhood Experiences and Decision-Making in Forming Families of Creation

Decision: Approved

Approval Date: November 10, 2020

This submission has been approved by the Missouri State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented. Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB.

This study was reviewed in accordance with federal regulations governing human subjects research, including those found at 45 CFR 46 (Common Rule), 45 CFR 164 (HIPAA), 21 CFR 50 & 56 (FDA), and 40 CFR 26 (EPA), where applicable.

Researchers Associated with this Project:

PI: Elizabeth King

Co-PI:

Primary Contact: Sarah Gray

Other Investigators:

Appendix B: Participant Survey Consent Form

MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: Adult Transracial Adoptees' Childhood Experiences and Decision-Making in Forming Families of Creation

Principal Investigator: Dr. Elizabeth K. King

Primary Study Contact: Sarah Gray

What is this study about?

This study will explore how adult transracial adoptees' childhood experiences with their sense of belonging, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias affect their decision making in forming their own families. This study will inform how birth parents, adoptive parents and family professionals approach transracial adoption as a practice.

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or Missouri State University. Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study. You may print a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

Why are you asking me?

You have been chosen to participate in this study because you are an adult transracial adoptee with white adoptive parents, and you are at least 18 years of age.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in your study?

You will be asked to complete a survey about your demographics and childhood experiences in your white adoptive family. The completion of the survey should take approximately 25 minutes. As a follow up, you have the opportunity to volunteer to participate in an interview. A separate consent process will be completed for that portion of the study.

Is there any audio/video recording?

There is no audio or video recording.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

Results from this study will inform the field of social work and child and family services about the long-term impacts of placement and parenting decisions made for transracial adoptees by birth parents, adoptive parents, and child and family professionals. This will center on benefitting children of color adopted by white parents.

Are there any benefits to *me* for taking part in this research study?

There is no direct benefit to participating in this study. However, this study will provide participants the opportunity to express their experiences and increase representation of adult transracial adoptees in academic literature and professional processes, which are currently dominated by the perspectives of white adoptive parents.

Potential Risks to Participants:

The Institutional Review Board at Missouri State University has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. If any of the questions make you feel uncomfortable, you may choose to skip that question or withdraw from the study. If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Sarah Gray at sarah197@live.missouristate.edu or 501-909-2415, or Dr. Elizabeth K. King who may be reached at eking@missouristate.edu or 417-836-6961. If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Administration at Missouri State at 417-836-5972.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There is no direct payment for participating in this study. There are no costs to you for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential?

Data will be collected via Qualtrics and all participants will enter a pseudonym, thus responses will be anonymous. De-identified data will be stored on a password protected computer or a password protected USB in a locked office. Data will only be available to study personnel outlined in this consent form.

What if I want to leave the study?

If any of the questions make you feel uncomfortable, you may choose to skip that question or withdraw from the study. In addition, you have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time without penalty.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By clicking “yes” you are agreeing that you read and you fully understand the contents of this document and you are openly willing to consent to take part in this study. All of your questions

concerning this study have been answered. By clicking “yes”, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate.

Appendix C: Survey Items

The following statements are written in reference to your childhood experience growing up in your adoptive family from the time of your placement to the time you left home as an adult. In this survey, “family” refers to your adoptive family, “parents” refers to your adoptive parents, “siblings” refers to your adoptive siblings, and “birth/ethnic community” refers to the race, ethnicity, culture and/or country you were born into. Rate each of the following statements using this scale: 1 = Never part of my life, 2 = Rare part of my life, 3 = Sometimes part of my life, 4 = Consistent part of my life.

I. Sense of belonging

- a. Growing up, I felt like a true member of my immediate family.
- b. I felt close to my siblings.
- c. I felt close to my parents.
- d. I felt accepted by my immediate family.
- e. I felt like I could be entirely myself with my family.
- f. I felt like a true member of my extended family.
- g. I felt accepted by my extended family.

II. Cultural socialization

- a. Growing up, my parents exposed me to adult role models (teachers, community leaders, celebrities, etc.) who looked like me.
- b. My parents made sure I had mentor figures involved in my life who looked like me.
- c. My parents helped me develop friendships with peers who looked like me.
- d. My parents socialized me amongst other transracial adoptees.
- e. My parents provided me with positive reflections of myself (books, toys, movies, tv shows, etc.).
- f. My parents taught me about the culture of my birth/ethnic community in a positive way.
- g. My family integrated the culture of my birth/ethnic community into our lives (art, customs, traditions, social gatherings, holidays, etc.).

III. Preparation for bias

- a. Growing up, my parents acknowledged discrimination against my race/ethnicity as a problem in society.
- b. My parents discussed social issues and current events related to my race/ethnicity with me.
- c. My parents stood up for me in moments of discrimination.
- d. My parents helped me learn coping skills for experiencing discrimination.
- e. The way my parents taught me to respond to discrimination in society was helpful to me.
- f. I heard my parents talk negatively about my birth/ethnic community.
- g. My parents expressed caution to me about interacting with white people.
 - i. Open-ended question: In what ways did your parents caution you?

Open-ended question: “What about the way you felt you belonged, the way you were exposed to your birth/ethnic community, or the way you were prepared for discrimination is important in the way you have chosen to or plan to form your family?”

IV. Decision making in family formation

- a. Select all that apply to the way you have formed your family or the way you are most inclined to form your family in the future.
 - i. Biological procreation.
 - ii. Adoption.
 - iii. Fostering.
 - iv. Child-free.
- b. Select all that apply for the reasoning behind the way you have formed your family or are most inclined to form your family.
 - i. Importance of biological connection with child(ren).
 - ii. Financial concerns.
 - iii. Family circumstances.
 - iv. Partner’s desires.

Open-ended question: “What other factors are a part of the way you have chosen to or plan to form your family?”

Appendix D: Participant Interview Consent Form

MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: Adult Transracial Adoptees' Childhood Experiences and Decision-Making in Forming Families of Creation

Principal Investigators: Dr. Elizabeth K. King

Primary Study Contact: Sarah Gray

What is this study about?

This study will explore how adult transracial adoptees' childhood experiences with sense of belonging, cultural socialization, and preparation for bias affect their decision making in forming their own families. This study will inform how birth parents, adoptive parents and family professionals approach transracial adoption as a practice.

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or Missouri State University. Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study. You may print a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

Why are you asking me?

You have been chosen to participate in this study because you are an adult transracial adoptee with white adoptive parents, and you are at least 18 years of age.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in your study?

You will be asked to complete an interview consisting of open-ended questions that should last no longer than 45 minutes.

Is there any audio/video recording?

There is audio recording. All audio recordings will be kept on a password protected USB or computer in a locked office, with no identifying information.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

Results from this study will inform the field of social work and child and family services about the long-term impacts of placement and parenting decisions made for transracial adoptees by birth parents, adoptive parents, and child and family professionals. This will center on benefitting children of color adopted by white parents.

Are there any benefits to *me* for taking part in this research study?

There is no direct benefit to participating in this study. However, this study will provide participants the opportunity to express their experiences and increase representation of adult transracial adoptees in academic literature and professional processes, which are currently dominated by the perspectives of white adoptive parents.

Potential Risks to Participants:

The Institutional Review Board at Missouri State University has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. If any of the questions make you feel uncomfortable, you may choose to skip that question or withdraw from the study. If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Sarah Gray at sarah197@live.missouristate.edu or 501-909-2415, or Dr. Elizabeth K. King who may be reached at eking@missouristate.edu or 417-836-6961. If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Administration at Missouri State at 417-836-5972.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There is no direct payment for participating in this study. There are no costs to you for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential?

Data will be collected via an in-person or online interview. De-identified data in the form of audio recordings will be stored on a password protected computer in a locked office. Data will only be available to study personnel outlined in this consent form.

What if I want to leave the study?

If any of the questions make you feel uncomfortable, you may choose to skip that question or withdraw from the study. In addition, you have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time without penalty.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing this form, you are agreeing that you read and you fully understand the contents of this document and you are openly willing to consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate.

Signature: _____.

Date: _____.

Appendix E: Interview Questions

Belongingness:

1. In what ways did you feel like you did or did not belong in your adoptive family?
 - a. What does 'belonging' mean to you?
 - b. What are examples from your childhood?
2. How does the way you experienced belonging in your adoptive family affect the way you want to form your own family?

Cultural socialization:

3. In what ways do you feel like your adoptive parents did or did not expose you to the culture of your birth community?
 - a. What was your experience with your birth community while growing up in your adoptive family?
 - b. How sufficient was the cultural experience your adoptive parents gave you?
4. How does the way you experienced your birth culture affect the way you want to form your own family?

Preparation for Bias:

5. What was your experience with your adoptive parents in terms of them preparing you for what you would face in society because of your race or ethnicity?
 - a. In your opinion, what is the best way a parent can prepare their child for bias?
 - b. How sufficient was the preparation for bias that you received?
6. How does the way you received preparation for bias affect the way you want to form your own family?

Approach to Forming Families:

7. How do you want to form your own family?

Overall Question:

8. What, if any, other parts of your experience with transracial adoption influence the way you want to form your own family?