PARENTAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF TRANSRACIAL ADOPTIONS: THE IMPACT OF RACE WITHIN FAMILIES

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PARENTAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION: THE IMPACT OF RACE WITHIN FAMILIES

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OBJECTIVES

• (1) participants will increase their understanding of the nature of domestic transracial adoption.

• (2) participants will increase their understanding of the challenges both transracially adopting parents and their children face within the community and church.

• (3) participants will learn specific strategies that can assist transracially adopting parents and their children to grow in their cultural competence.
Much has been written about the effects of transracial adoption on the adoptees. We found a gap in the literature regarding how PARENTS think about race and culture when considering transracial adoption, nor whether their understandings of race changed after adoption. When a new life is introduced into a family – it changes: all members are affected. Parental understandings matter to the entire family.
METHODOLOGY

- Selecting Qualitative interviews
  - Lack of literature on the topic

- Dr. Vonk’s study: a quantitative study with mixed methods results

- Story as a way to understand emerging themes

- Story as a way of placing experience in context
WHO WE ARE: WHY THAT MATTERS:
(TELLING OUR STORIES TO EACH OTHER TO BEGIN)

• Hope: Mother and Educator
  Massachusetts adoption: children 3-4 when adopted, urban life, her faith community

• Jayne: Mother, Grandmother, Author and Trainer
  • Ohio adoption: child 14 when adopted, suburban life, her faith community

• Jane: Mother and Educator
  • Interstate infant adoption, lives in Ohio, living primarily in rural and suburban areas: her faith community
BEGINNING THE RESEARCH

• Developing the questions
• Pilot study: early understandings
• The full study
• Participants: 13 couples
  • 11 couples heterosexual
  • 2 same sex couples
RESULTS: DEMOGRAPHICS

- Number of Adopted Children
  - 28 children total
- Age range of children at adoption
  - At birth- 20 years old (1 child) median age 6 months old
- Income level of families
  - $45K – over $100K p/year, median $75-89K p/year
- Educational Level of Parents
  - 75% had graduated from college
RESULTS:
THE INFLUENCE OF UNCONSCIOUS PRIVILEGE

- “I never thought about race growing up”
- Parents who have not had to consider race in their own lives often discount potential racial concerns
- Belief that privilege accorded to parents can protect their child from racism
- Differences between straight and lesbian couples
RESULTS: PROTECTION AND NURTURE

- Parental comfort vs. child need
- White church or multiracial church?
- School and other institutions
- Parents interpreting society for children provides either segues for discussion and/or the reinterpretation of the child’s experiences of racism
RESULTS:
LIFE CHANCES AND EXPECTATIONS

• Parents hopes and dreams
  • For the parents: how are my children like me? How can I best care for them?
  • For the children: what do parents decide NOT to discuss?
    • “I was waiting for my child to bring it up”

• The re-counting and the possible DIS-counting of trauma
  • In the parents lives?
  • For the children?
RESULTS: HAIR AS A METAPHOR

• The Meaning/dilemma of Hair for the parents of trans racially adopting parents

• Managing/choosing whether to navigate the community from which one's child is identified

• When the child is isolated from his or her identified community: parental perceptions
CONCLUSIONS: HOW MIGHT SOCIAL WORKERS ASSIST PARENTS

- Awareness of the joys and the concerns of transracial parenting
- Discussion of race and culture prior to adoption: not always easy, and not even always LEGAL (e.g. Ohio)
- Awareness of, and naming the reality of institutional racism (we are not living in a post-racial society)
- Asking parents to examine their beliefs and not just their hopes
- “how have you been changed by becoming a transracially adopting parent?”
CONCLUSIONS: HOW MIGHT SOCIAL WORKERS ASSIST PARENTS

• Utilizing skill building for parents
  • “Children will only ask questions about what they have been given permission to discuss”
  • Realizing that parents may not have the stories or the skills to strengthen children as they grow: especially at risk, African American teenaged boys who continue to be perceived as a threat in many predominantly white communities. (Ex: Trevon Martin)
  • Encourage parents to seek out friendships with parents of color who may be willing to share their resilience with adopted children.
Parenting for the Future

what would that look like?