

North American Association of Christians in Social Work
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**PARENTAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF TRANSRACIAL ADOPTIONS: THE
IMPACT OF RACE WITHIN FAMILIES**

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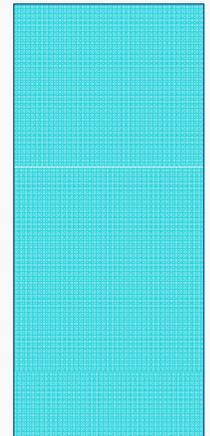
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PARENTAL
UNDERSTANDINGS OF
TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION:
THE IMPACT OF RACE
WITHIN FAMILIES

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OBJECTIVES

- (1) participants will increase their understanding of the nature of domestic trans racial adoption
- (2) participants will increase their understanding of the challenges both trans racially adopting parents and their children face within the community and church
- (3) participants will learn specific strategies that can assist trans racially adopting parents and their children to grow in their cultural competence

WHY STUDY THIS ISSUE?

- Much has been written about the effects of trans racial 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 effected. 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 ones 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?