

University of Nevada, Reno

**Social and Academic Experiences of
Black Transracial Adoptees at Four-Year Higher Education Institutions**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

by

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ABSTRACT

Transracial adoptees (TRAs) from all racial/ethnic backgrounds remain an invisible population throughout research pertaining to the college students. This qualitative study examined social and academic experiences of Black TRAs who attended four-year institutions of higher education. This study used critical race theory (CRT) as the theoretical framework to examine the history of adoption in the United States and the disproportionality that exists for Black TRAs throughout the foster care system and adoption process. All 10 participants in this study were raised and educated in predominantly White spaces. Data were collected through two semi-structured telephone interviews and the participants' social media platforms. Findings illustrate four major themes, each with three subthemes. First, caring adoptive homes emphasized cultivating a sense of belonging, facilitating academic support, and seeking support for handling racist encounters. Second, navigating White spaces led to experiencing racism and discrimination, embracing sense of self through expressions of hair, and carrying the weight of narrative burden. Third, connecting with others in the higher education setting illustrated valuing campus diversity, relying on systems of support, and seeking social interactions with co-ethnic peers. Fourth, counteracting challenges with intrapersonal assets highlighted drawing strength from past experiences, maintaining a positive mindset, and pursuing opportunities to help others. Implications for K-12 educators and higher educational professionals are discussed.

DEDICATION

To adoptees who feel as though they have not been heard or not been seen...

I see you.

I hear you.

Your voice matters.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Mike for putting up with me and my 21 year college career. You were with me every step of the way and encouraged me to keep going. I could not have done it without your love and support. To Celeste and Latrell, you are only 5 and 6 years old as I write these acknowledgments, so hopefully your memories of me putting in long days at school and at work will be replaced with the memory of me walking across the graduation stage. Your resiliency and strength inspires me every day. Always remember that you can achieve anything that you set your minds to and that we all love you very much. To my parents and siblings, thank you for being my foundation, for always cheering me on, and making sure that I was well-fed. To my in-laws, thank you for always being able to swoop in and support us on our toughest days and for fostering such a strong bond with Celeste and Latrell. Mi familia...no matter what we go through, I will always be there for each of you, support you, and love you unconditionally.

To my DFS family, I did this Ph.D. because I wanted you to know that you are not alone in your struggles. Your test scores don't define you. You do belong. Be proud that you came from a different background. Being the first is scary and lonely, but keep showing up, especially when it gets hard. It's okay if you fail along the way. You are stronger than you think. You got this!

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The United States' story of adoption is complex and the story line is often fragmented. In fact, there is no single source or agency in the country that is charged with compiling the total number of adoptions that take place in each of the fifty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016). However, the 2010 United States Census identified that about 1.5 million people were adopted, making up 2.3% of the total population (Kreider & Lofquist, 2014). While this segment of the population is small compared to households that are comprised of biological children (93 percent) and stepchildren (4.7 percent) (Kreider & Lofquist, 2014), informal and formal adoptions have been part of the fabric of United States history since the colonial period (Esposito & Biafora, 2007). Practices like adoption have contributed to the diversification of families and the educational system throughout America (Trask & Hamon, 2007). Today, it is very likely that educators, professionals, or community members will interact with a member of the adoption triad (adoptee, adoptive parent, or birth parent) as it is estimated that 40 million or more Americans are "directly affected by adoption in very fundamental ways" (Javier, Baden, Biafora, & Camacho-Gingerich, 2007, p. 6).

A *transracial adoptee* (TRA) is a child or adolescent who is legally placed in a family that is racially or ethnically different than him or herself (Hollingsworth, 1999). *Transracial adoption* is a legal process achieved through adoption from the foster care system, private adoption, international adoption, or the adoption of stepchildren in interracial marriages (Lee, 2003). Even though transracial adoption encompasses various parent-and-child racial and ethnic combinations, the practice in the United States

commonly involves the placement of children of color with White adoptive parents (Barn, 2013; Hollingsworth, 1999). For example, there were 437,665 transracially adopted children under the age of 18 in the United States in 2009-2011, and of those households, 93% were children of color and 78% of the adoptive parents were White (Kreider & Lofquist, 2014). Furthermore, 15% of those transracially adopted were Black and 10% were biracial with Black and White ancestry (Kreider & Lofquist, 2014). In other words, one out of four of those who were transracially adopted in the United States during this time frame were either Black or biracial.

While it is important for researchers to draw attention to transracial adoptees from all racial and ethnic backgrounds, examining Black and biracial transracial adoptees, otherwise known as *Black TRAs*, is essential due to the fact that disparities continue to exist in the foster care system and inequities are evident in adoption trends. For example, “The percentage of children in the foster care system who are Black is higher than the overall population who are Black” (Kreider & Lofquist, 2014, p. 13). Not only is there a disproportionate number of Black children in the foster care system (Trask & Hamon, 2007), historically in the United States, Black children were more likely to spend longer periods of time in foster care and less likely to be adopted when compared to White children (Madison & Schapiro, 1973).

While informal adoptions are common in African American communities (Kreider & Lofquist, 2014), many Black children are being adopted by White parents, who live in White communities and are more likely to attend predominantly White schools (Smith et al., 2011). Due to phenotypical differences between adoptees and their adoptive parents, Black-White transracial adoptions are a highly visible form of adoption

in the United States. The adoption of Black or biracial children by one or more White parents has been a highly controversial form of adoption since it began in the late 1940s (Chimezie, 1975; Simon & Altstein, 1977). It generated strong resistance from the Black community because Black adoptees frequently grow up heavily saturated with Eurocentric notions of beauty, beliefs, experiences, and histories (Smith et al., 2011). Essentially, it was deemed problematic that Black TRAs were not afforded the opportunity to learn about their birth culture or come into contact with members from the Black community. The controversy continued throughout the years with the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) issuing a statement in 1972 strongly opposing transracial adoption, particularly in cases where Black and biracial children were adopted by White parents (Roorda, 2015). Nevertheless, adoption professionals and researchers continue to debate the transracial adoption paradox where “adoptees are racial/ethnic minorities in society, but they are perceived and treated by others, and sometimes themselves, as if they are members of the majority culture (i.e., racially White and ethnically European)” (Lee, 2003, p. 711).

Despite the opposing views of researchers, practitioners, and policy makers, transracial adoption continues to be a reality today. While landmark studies looked at the adjustment of adoptees under the age of 18, recent scholarship has attended to what transpires for adoptees throughout early adulthood and their transition out of the adoptive family’s home (Roorda, 2015). While there is limited data about how many TRAs currently attend college, household data from the 2010 United States Census indicated that approximately 325,000 adoptees (all race/ethnicities) were of traditional college age (18 to 24 years old) and about 70% of all adopted children had some college experience

or had earned a college degree (Kreider & Lofquist, 2014). Thus, increasing numbers of transracially adopted individuals are found attending colleges and universities, yet they remain a relatively invisible population on campuses throughout the country (Billie, 2013; Hoffman, 2011; Kryder, 1997; Nissen, 2011; Powell, 2017).

Generally, college is a time when young adults begin to question their identity and explore the question “who am I?” Baxter Magolda (2001) explained that self-authorship is the internal ability for college students to combine the academic knowledge that they acquire, the healthy relationships that they establish, and the sense of identity that they develop. As college students explore what they know, who they prefer to spend time with, and how they see themselves, they often encounter other challenges, such as finances, time management, study habits, and stress. However, many Black students attending predominantly White institutions face additional barriers, such as, “racism, isolation, sociocultural challenges, and academic obstacles” (Harper & Quaye, 2007, p. 127). Furthermore, “for transracially adopted students, self-perceptions of racial identity combine with external perceptions of racial identity in ways that can be confusing or damaging to the individuals involved in developing a clear sense of who they are and how they fit into the world” (Powell, 2017, p. 2). Ultimately, practitioners and administrators in higher education should seek to gain a better understanding of the diverse students they serve and how to best meet their needs because the journey varies for each college student. As such, this study focused on the experiences and perspectives of Black TRAs who attend four-year institutions of higher education. The adoptees’ social and academic experiences were the primary area of focus, but attention was also drawn to their experiences in the adoptive home and their transition to college in efforts

to provide a more nuanced understanding of this college student population's experiences.

Theoretical Framework

Early adoption research had a narrow focus and exhibited methodological limitations, such as the lack of a formal transracial adoption theory (Lee, 2003). More recently, scholars have become more theory-driven in efforts to better understand the adjustment patterns and experiences of adoptees (Brodzinsky, 2007). For example, postmodern approaches to qualitative research have been developed since the 1970s to analyze and critique traditional social science approaches by claiming that there is "no objective, neutral research" (Slavin, 2007, p. 159). Scholars argued that all researchers' beliefs are inextricably influenced by their own race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, and other power-related characteristics (Foucault, 1972). One postmodern approach, critical theory, is informed by elements of social justice and aims to change the social context by uncovering how some members of society are empowered at the expense of other marginalized groups (Lichtman, 2010).

Critical legal studies (CLS) was the body of scholarship that applied critical theory to the United States legal system in efforts to dismantle existing inequalities and injustices by giving voice to marginalized groups (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). However, legal scholars of color were discontent with the notion that CLS failed to include racism and racial power in its critique of the legal system and American society (Ladson-Billings, 1999). As a result, critical race theory (CRT) emerged in the mid-1970s with the early work of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman who were concerned that the momentum of the civil rights movement had stalled and believed it was necessary

to address the more subtle and covert incidents of racism, racial oppression, and racial discrimination in the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013).

With roots in critical theory, CLS, feminism, and philosophy, CRT scholars argued that “legal decisions--both historical ones and those belonging to the present day--reflect the intersection of racism, sexism, and classism, and that legal principles are applied unevenly, with race as the central differentiating quality” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 27). In the context of education, CRT is used to analyze what schools are teaching, to identify the disparities and disproportionality that exist for particular groups within the system, to deconstruct the notion of “educational achievement,” and to shed light on “counterstories” that challenge conventional ways of viewing education (Roithmayr, 1999, p. 5).

This study utilized a critical race theory (CRT) framework in order to examine the perspectives of Black TRAs on their social and academic experiences at four-year institutions. Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) explained that “the basic CRT model consists of five elements focusing on: (1) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, (2) the challenge to dominant ideology, (3) the commitment to social justice, (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (5) the transdisciplinary perspectives” (p. 63). Scholars from various disciplines have contributed to this body of work and its primary tenets can be applied to a variety of settings. For this study, CRT served as an effective tool to examine the experiences of TRAs in the higher education setting because the framework gives voice to marginalized groups and considers the intersection of race with other identities. Chapter II provides a more detailed description of CRT’s five elements.

Statement of Problem

Three main types of adoption studies about TRAs have emerged since the 1970's: (1) adjustment studies, (2) racial and cultural identity development studies, and (3) racial socialization studies (Baden & Steward, 2007; Smith et al., 2011). A variety of methodological approaches were used in these studies to describe elements of the adoptee's development and experiences at home, school, and within the community. However, some areas have received little or no attention by scholars leaving large gaps in the literature.

The majority of the early adoption research did not examine the lived experiences of adoptees as they developed into young adulthood and did not explore different contexts, such as school, extracurricular activities, or social gatherings. Adoption research was largely focused on early childhood or adolescence development, the perspectives of the adoptive parents, and what transpired in the adoptive home. In addition, the research often failed to include the voices and perspectives of the adoptees themselves. As a result, there is a gap in research that pertains to TRAs in higher education, particularly for Black TRAs.

The college experience provides such individuals with the opportunity to grow and shape their identities, yet very little research has been conducted to examine the perspectives of this diverse college student population. A host of theories and models exist in student development to understand and enhance college students' personal growth and learning of the general population (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010), but "much remains to be learned about the identity development of persons raised in homes that do not mirror the biological composition of the family of origin" (Powell,

2017, p. 46). There is a need for research to examine the experiences of Black TRAs as they transition out of their White adoptive homes and to explore their experiences while they attend college.

Purpose of Study

The identity of college students continues to be an area of study that is in its infancy even though theorists like Erikson (1968) and Chickering (1969) have long argued that the college years are a critical period for individual development (Evans et al., 2010). The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of Black TRAs on their social and academic experiences at four-year institutions of higher education. As a way to build context for the adoptees' experiences in college, the study asked questions related to other settings, such as the adoptive home, school, and community. Research attending to Black TRAs during their college years could potentially yield a more nuanced understanding of the post-secondary experiences and perspectives of students.

Research Questions

The research investigated the following questions:

- What are the perspectives of Black TRAs on their social and academic experiences at four-year institutions of higher education?
 - a. What are the challenges they face?
 - b. How do they counteract these challenges?

Significance of Study

With such limited information surrounding Black TRAs as young adults, a qualitative study could provide a better understanding of what some members of this unique college student population perceive and experience. This information may be

valuable for educators, higher education professionals, social workers, mental health professionals, or for programs that specialize in ethnic studies. The findings could provide practitioners in higher education and social services with a foundation for designing services and supports to help Black TRA college students navigate a developmental stage in life that has been deemed by identity theorists as a critical one.

Definition of Terms

Adoption is defined as “the social, emotional, and legal process through which children who will not be raised by their birth parents become full and permanent legal members of another family while maintaining genetic and psychological connections to their birth family” (Child Welfare Information Gateway Glossary, 2017).

The term **Black** is primarily used throughout this paper, but the term **African American** is also used if an author or source being cited used this specific language. The terms are not synonymous as the “people represented by these terms have multifaceted histories” (Smith et al., 2011, p. 139). However, Smith et al. (2011) used the terms Black and African American interchangeably as a shorthand approach to describe the monoracial African Americans who descended from the heritage of chattel slavery in the United States. The term Black is used to describe the adoptees who were born in Africa and adopted internationally. **Biracial** is a term commonly used to refer to children of both Black and White heritage, but can include individuals from other racial/ethnic or mixed backgrounds (Smith et al., 2011).

Ethnicity is a term used for group classification of individuals according to social, cultural, religious, or linguistic features (American Anthropological Association, 1998).

International adoption is when a child is legally adopted by a family residing in a different country than the child's country of origin (Bagley, Young, & Scully, 1993).

Race is a social construct that is used to refer to groupings of people according to a common origin, background, or geographic region and is often associated with perceived biological markers, such as the color of skin, texture of hair, or facial features (American Anthropological Association, 1998).

Racial identity "refers to a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group" (Helms, 1990, p. 3).

Racial socialization involves explicit and implicit messages or actions that parents communicate to their children to provide the necessary psychological tools to develop a healthy sense of self in order to deal appropriately with an oppressively racist society (McAdoo, 2002).

Transracial adoptee (TRA) is a child or adolescent who is legally placed in a family that is racially or ethnically different than him or herself (Hollingsworth, 1999).

Transracial adoption is a legal process achieved through adoption from the foster care system, private adoption, international adoption, or the adoption of stepchildren in interracial marriages (Lee, 2003).

Summary

Since the beginning of adoption research, social scientists have researched families and adoptees in efforts to find generalizable commonalities and differences in relation to their experiences and behaviors in a variety of contexts. However, the challenge that researchers face is that adoption is a complex social process that is unique

to the experiences of the individual. It is difficult to say the “average” adopted child or the “average” adoptive family because of the high degree of variability that exists (Brodzinsky & Brodzinsky, 1998). Yet, the question of how adopted individuals fare in comparison to their non-adopted peers has been the central focus of adoption research for over 50 years.

Diverse families that are comprised of Black children adopted transracially by White parents is a highly visible form of adoption in the United States, but studies that examine adoptees’ experiences or development beyond childhood and adolescence are limited. This study aimed to give voice to Black TRAs who are in the higher education setting. Ultimately, as the practice of transracial adoption continues to take place in the United States, and as more TRAs choose to attend college, it is important for researchers to examine the impact of higher education upon this population. However, when reviewing the literature or findings of this study it is important to remember that there is no monolithic definition of what it means to be Black in America or what it is like to grow up as a Black TRA in a White home.

This chapter provided an overview of the study. Chapter II will outline key historical events and significant trends that shaped adoption practices in the United States; along with the theoretical framework and the literature surrounding adoption research. Chapter III will illustrate the qualitative research methodology used in this study, including the research questions, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter IV will present the findings. Lastly, Chapter IV will discuss the theoretical and practical implications, as well as provide suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to examine the social and academic experiences of Black transracial adoptees who attended four-year institutions of higher education in the United States. The following literature review begins with an overview of the theoretical framework used which is critical race theory (CRT). Next, a historical overview of adoption, international adoption, and transracial adoption in the United States is provided to illustrate how social class, religion, race, economics, and governmental affairs led to modern day adoption practices. Then, attention is drawn to the research pertaining to Black TRAs. The latter scholarship is organized into three main categories: (1) adjustment studies, (2) racial socialization studies, and (3) racial/ethnic identity studies. Subsequently, the research pertaining to transracial adoptees in the context of higher education is summarized in order to better understand the complexities of this social practice.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory

The CRT movement is a collection of scholars and activists who study the relationship among race, racism, and structural oppression in a variety of contexts (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). According to Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw (1993) CRT has no identifiable date of birth as it developed gradually and its scholarship was triggered by key historical occurrences. For example, the rolling back of civil rights gains in the late 1970s and the Harvard Law School student boycott in 1981 were historical events that prompted the gathering, consultation, and exchanging of ideas of CRT scholars. Essentially, the Harvard Law Students created their own course about

race and law because they were dissatisfied with the administrators' efforts. By the mid-1980s the group identity of CRT scholars and their basic tenets started to take shape.

CRT was not commonly used in the field of education until the 1995 publication of Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate's essay, which used CRT as an analytic tool for understanding school inequity and disparities in the United States. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006), proposed that "race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity, society is based on property rights, and the intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently school) inequity" (p. 12). Class and gender also intersect with race and contribute to the educational achievement differences between students of color and White students, however, Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) claimed that class and gender as stand-alone variables do not explain all of the disparities. In regard to students of color, the authors stated, "We argue that the cause of their poverty in conjunction with the condition of their schools and schooling is institutional and structural racism" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006, p. 19). Essentially, CRT posits that race remains a significant factor in United States society and racism has shaped the educational system over time.

In the field of education, Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) identified five tenets of CRT: (1) the intercentricity of race and racism, (2) the challenge to dominant ideology, (3) the commitment to social justice, (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (5) the utilization of interdisciplinary approaches (p. 63). These tenets are reviewed in this section. However, this is not an exhaustive list of CRT tenets as some scholars draw upon other concepts that apply to specific fields of study. For example, Matsuda et al. (1993) approached CRT from a legal perspective and said that the framework,

“challenges ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis of the law” (p. 6). Even though this framework has strong legal roots, many of the key principles apply to transracial adoption research and education.

The intercentricity of race and racism. CRT begins with the idea that race and racism are central, endemic, and a normal part of American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). Wijeyesinghe and Jackson (2012) explained that while race is a social construct, it still carries weight throughout society. They said, “The early twenty-first century is marked by the paradox of a society increasingly believing that race is not a biological reality—yet the social meanings, both positive and negative, ascribed to racial categories and the people who belong to them, are as powerful as ever” (p. 14). Those positive and negative social meanings shape various systems within society. For example, Matsuda et al. (1993) described that racism has contributed to the differences in income, imprisonment, health, housing, education, political representation, and military service. The disparities in the public education system are clear. For example, current school zoning practices often draw lines between low-income neighborhoods and those with middle or upper class residents, which generally separates White students from students of color. As a result, these low-income schools have less property taxes to fund education or upgrades, have high rates of student poverty, and have difficulty hiring and retaining highly effective teachers, ultimately decreasing the academic preparation and graduation rates of students of color. Simply put, “race still matters” (Landson-Billings, 1999, p. 8).

The challenge to dominant ideology. CRT dismisses claims that institutions, such as the educational system, are objective, colorblind, race neutral, and provide equal

opportunity (Yosso, 2006). For example, the education system often promotes textbooks, historical perspectives, and holidays that reflect White Eurocentric narratives. These are not only projected and reinforced throughout the educational system, but are also found in the media, popular culture, and standards of beauty. CRT uses storytelling, counter-storytelling, and the analysis of narrative to challenge dominant discourse, deconstruct stereotypic images, and identify White privilege and racial oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013).

The commitment to social justice. CRT strives to eliminate racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression, such as that based on gender, class, or sexual orientation (Matsuda et al., 1993). Social justice research often identifies instances of “interest convergence.” The concept of “interest convergence,” developed by law professor Derrick Bell, asserts that White elites will tolerate or promote racial advances for people of color only when these also promote White self-interest (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013, p. 3). For example, increasing the diversity and outreach initiatives for Hispanic students at a university may not be a priority for campus administrators until they have an incentive to submit a Hispanic Serving Institution application to the U.S. Department of Education, which gives them access to grant opportunities and national recognition for the designation. Matsuda et al. (1993) argued that established hierarchies, like colleges and universities, should be challenged to identify how people of color experience subordination.

The centrality of experiential knowledge. CRT recognizes that it is critical to draw upon and include the voice, stories, and lived experiences of people of color (Yosso, 2006). Even though there isn’t a single voice for all people, there is a common

experience of racism and structural oppression that people of color are subject to (Dixon & Rousseau, 2006). In terms of education, “without the authentic voices of people of color (as teachers, administrators, students, and community members) it is doubtful that we can say or know anything useful about education in their communities” (Landson-Billings & Tate, 2006, p. 22). In other words, educational leaders and policy makers must draw upon the voices of ethnically diverse people to fully understand what is effective and what needs to be changed about the public school system.

The utilization of interdisciplinary approaches. CRT is not bound by one discipline or field. It draws upon scholarship from the fields of history, law, ethnic studies, women’s studies, sociology, psychology, and other areas of scholarship. Matsuda et al. (1993) stated that CRT’s eclectic nature allows for scholars to maintain a critical posture while examining the aspects of methodology or theory that effectively enable the voice of scholars.

CRT is relevant to this study because it is a framework that draws attention to racism, power, and oppression. One of the ways that this is accomplished is that CRT “analyzes race and racism within both historical and contemporary contexts” (Yosso, 2006, p. 172). For example, CRT provides an opportunity to examine the progression of key historical events that led to the creation of the Child Welfare System, which is a hegemonic system with policies and practices that have re-created systemic oppression for working-class families and people of color. As a result, CRT contributes to the understanding of how Black children came to be disproportionately overrepresented in the foster care system and how that has influenced adoption trends today.

CRT is an appropriate theoretical framework for this study because it has the ability to cast its net wide to examine larger systemic issues throughout history, however, the focus can also be narrowed to frame the social and academic experiences of Black TRAs at the individual level. For example, the stories of Black TRAs are not often heard in the educational setting, but CRT gives voice to marginalized groups. Some of the storytelling or experiential knowledge expressed in this research may describe incidents of racism or discrimination, which aligns with CRT's assertion that racism is an integral part of the educational system. CRT also considers the intersection of race with other identities. For example, gender, sexuality, and socio-economic status all play a role in shaping the unique experiences of Black TRAs. Furthermore, Kim (2012) explained that the identity of being a transracial adoptee often remains hidden in the university setting, but those lived experiences can influence the students identity development process in college. Since CRT aims to promote social justice and identify disparities that exist for underrepresented groups, the findings from this study may be able to draw attention to the different academic or social challenges that Black TRAs face.

History of Adoption in the United States

Since ancient times, humans in all societies have relied on a web of social relationships and informal agreements for the care and protection of their offspring. For example, in many nomadic and tribal societies, motherless children were simply taken care of by other women in the group or in some cases there was little effort to distinguish which woman was the biological mother (Bullough, 2006). Essentially, if abandoned or orphaned children managed to survive the difficult conditions surrounding malnutrition

and illness, they were often taken care of by other members of the community without any formal procedure.

Adoption in the United States also began as an informal practice, but in its early stages it primarily served an economic purpose. For example, during the colonial period (1750-1800), adoption was a means to indentured servitude where orphaned children or those from the poor or working class were viewed as an available source of free labor (Javier et al., 2007). Eventually, “baby farms,” the historical practice where individuals exchanged unwanted or illegitimate children for payment, lost popularity when American society began to support adoption based on the emotional value of the child, otherwise known as “sentimental adoption” (Jacobson, Nielsen, and Haredman, 2012, p. 75).

The enslavement of African Americans and the genocide of American Indians reached its peak in the 19th century, which was a time when children and adults were often viewed as property. It was during this time in American history that a racial caste system argued that “Negroes, like the Indians, were an uncivilized lesser race, perhaps even more lacking in intelligence and laudable human qualities than the red-skinned natives” (Alexander, 2012, p. 25). Since then, White Americans have collectively remained in control of social resources, as well as, re-produced and maintained privilege. Today, racism is often more covert than it was at the height of slavery. Well-intended people may not be aware of the automatic or unconscious microaggressions (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) that they direct toward people of color (Solórzano et al., 2000). An example of a microaggression is when a White professor tells a Black graduate student, “You speak so well” or “You are so articulate.” This is harmful to the student because the underlying message stems from a negative stereotype that African

Americans are unintelligent and inarticulate. In other words, the racial slight that the student hears is, “You speak well for a Black person.” According to Smith and Juarez (2012), “White supremacy is recreated daily by well-intentioned people of goodwill, often White people with positive racial attitudes” (p. 113). Today, microaggressions and implicit bias continue to be strong factors in the racial climate of the United States.

American values in relation to social class helped shape adoption. For example, Javier et al. (2007) explained that orphanages and asylums commonly existed to care for homeless, abandoned, or orphaned children throughout the United States, but from 1800-1840 early asylum directors often ran into barriers placing orphaned children with biological kin. In many cases, children were returned to the orphanage by their relatives due to poverty or indentured servitude, yet placing orphans with wealthy families frequently resulted in servitude as well (Javier et al., 2007). In response, asylum directors often turned to middle-class families for the placement of orphans. The economic changes from farming to factory production during the industrial revolution resulted in large-scale immigration and increased poverty. As a result, the dominant group in the United States emphasized that middle-class living standards should be the standard for all homes. Ultimately, poor and working-class families were largely regarded by American society as being ill-equipped to care for their children.

Religious values also played an important role in determining the placement of children. For example, Catholic and Jewish immigrants advocated that the total needs of the child are best met when they are placed in homes that reflected Catholic or Jewish values (Javier et al., 2007). However, at this time Catholic and Jewish immigrants were often subject to discrimination and mistreatment. The class and religious divides were

seen in the members of the dominant group, which favored middle-class and Protestant values. For example, the “orphan trains” took inner city children from poor and working class families and relocated them to the American West as an effort to promote middle-class and Protestant values. The children (whether they were orphaned or not) were relocated where farmers needed work hands, retailers needed shop help, and homes needed domestic workers (Bullough, 2006). Essentially, the orphan trains resulted in the idea of “child-saving,” a concept where rearing children outside of their own homes was promoted as a practice that would give them a chance to live a “suitable” life and allow them to become “productive” members of society (Askeland, 2006). The notion of “saviorism,” that is the idea that a group of people need to be saved, continues to be evident in modern day adoption as conservative Protestants or “evangelicals” have long been associated with domestic and international adoption (Perry, 2016).

Trends in adoption according to race also emerged during this time. For example, Javier et al. (2007) explained that African Americans historically held to the tradition of kinship care or “informal adoption” for orphaned or needy Black children, which was a practice that originated in Africa and persisted through the years of slavery. In fact, data from the 2010 census indicated that informal adoptions continued to be more common among African Americans and American Indian/Alaska Natives (Kreider & Lofquist, 2014). Conversely, when private adoption agencies were first established in the 1920s, adoption in the United States was primarily a process involving the placement of White infants with White families (McRoy, 1989). For example, the original purpose of these agencies was to assist White couples in adopting healthy White babies often from circumstances where unmarried mothers were unable to care for their children. The trend

of White parents adopting White children continued until shifts in American culture, such as the increased availability of birth control, led to the decrease of healthy White babies that were available for adoption (Bullough, 2006).

The concept of “matching,” the attempt to select adoptive parents similar to the child based on traits including religion, race, social class, intelligence, and physical features, accompanied the passage of the Massachusetts Adoption of Children Act of 1851 (Marr, 2017). This law is widely considered the first modern adoption law in the United States where adoption was viewed as a social and legal process that was based on the welfare of the child, rather than on the interests of the adult (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). This law was significant because it gave the courts and judges the power to decide if the adoptive parents were capable of raising, feeding, and educating the child.

The field of social work emerged to assist the courts in determining whether the prospective adoptive parents would be adequate guardians. Social workers served as advocates for couples who wanted to adopt and for women and institutions who relinquished their rights as legal guardians (Simon & Altstein, 2002). However, the practice of “matching” resulted in children being excluded from any possible adoption if they had physical disabilities, belonged to racial minorities, or had any other difficulties (Bullough, 2006). In 1912, President Taft created the Children’s Bureau, the first federal agency within the United States Government, to focus exclusively on improving the lives of children and families (U.S. Children’s Bureau, 2017). At this time, American orphanages were drawing heavy criticism from the press and politicians for their poor living conditions. By 1920, orphanages throughout the country were being dismantled

and the “placing out” of children into homes became the preferred practice (Hacsi, 2006). However, over time, clear discrepancies in the services available to children became evident as most Black children were served by public agencies (foster care), whereas adoption and institutional placements were made more often for White children (McRoy, 1989).

History of International Adoption in the United States

International adoption is when a child or adolescent is legally adopted by a family residing in a different country than the child’s country of origin (Bagley, Young, & Scully, 1993). Dramatic increases in transracial adoptions in the United States resulted from the aftermath of World War II (1939-1945), the Korean War (1950-1953), and the Vietnam War (1955-1975) (Barn, 2013; Jacobson et al., 2012). Orphaned and abandoned children from Germany, Estonia, and Latvia were brought to the United States shortly after World War II. Similarly, the rise of Korean and Vietnamese adoptions was attributed to those wars ending (McRoy & Zurcher, 1983). The “philandering” of American soldiers abroad during the time of war left thousands of bi-racial orphans who were often abandoned due to cultural stigmas against those who were mixed-race and/or born outside of wedlock (Perry, 2016, p. 1845). Many of these international orphans represented the first wave of TRAs to the United States.

International adoption transformed into a large-scale global relief effort for thousands of children that were orphaned due to political conflicts (Zhang & Lee, 2011). Herman (2017) stated that this heightened the religious impulse and the sense of urgency of those living in the United States to “rescue” these orphans, a similar sentiment that had characterized the era of the orphan trains, and this humanitarian effort also

pointed in the direction of special needs adoptions. As a result, adoption agencies slowly began to change their definitions of those who were adoptable, and children with special needs and African-American children began to be placed for adoption in greater numbers, whereas before they were regarded as more or less un-adoptable (Bullough, 2006).

Overall, the effects of war made adoption a mainstream social practice throughout the country, which resulted in American families becoming more diverse.

History of Transracial Adoption in the United States

African kinship systems have long illustrated the preference to informally adopt the children of relatives or friends, rather than going through a public or private adoption agency. For example, an African American grandparent may decide to take in his or her grandchild without taking any legal action to pursue a formal adoption. However, the disproportionate number of Black children in the care of public and private agencies led to the assumption that the Black community could not provide the needed parents to adopt those awaiting placement (Chimezie, 1975). The myth that “Black families don’t adopt” became the common narrative used by White private adoption agencies “who gave little consideration to the need to change their policies and practices, and perhaps their staffs, so as to better serve the Black children under their charge” (McRoy, 1989, p. 148).

The founding of the Minnesota of Parents to Adopt Minority Youngsters (PAMY) in 1961, came as a response to the unsuccessful attempt to secure Black adoptive homes for Black children (McRoy & Zurcher, 1983). The goal of the organization was to recruit minority parents for minority children, but overwhelmingly it was White families who responded to the recruitment efforts. Jacobson et al. (2012) argued that a decrease in

healthy White babies available for adoption by White parents during this time was attributed to a variety of factors, such as women postponing having children to enter the workforce, increased access to birth control, the availability of legal abortion, the decreased stigmatization for single parenting, and a rise in fertility problems that accompany later-age pregnancies (Bullough, 2006). Essentially, adopting White babies was the preferred option in America, but it became more common to see families adopting children of color.

Even though the original intent of PAMY was to secure Black adoptive homes for Black children, approximately twenty Black children in Minnesota were adopted by White families from 1962 through 1965 (Bullough, 2006). In 1970, one-third of the 6,500 Black children in adoption were placed with White families, but in 1972 the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) issued a statement saying that Black children should only be placed with Black families, whether in foster care or adoption (Howard, Royse, & Skerl, 1977). The NABSW denounced transracial adoption as “a form of racial and cultural genocide” (Barn, 2013; Perry, 2016; Zhang & Lee, 2011). The criticism of the NABSW toward transracial adoption was so strong that the Child Welfare League of America revised its standards in 1973 to emphasize racial matching in placement, which resulted in a sharp decline in transracial adoptions during the 1970’s and early 1980’s (Perry, 2016). Similar opposition from the Native American community led to the introduction of the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, which gave tribes exclusive jurisdiction over American Indian children (Barn, 2013).

While transracial adoptions continued to occur in the United States after the NABSW took its stance, the topic diminished from public debate and received very little

media attention until the early 1990's. Patton (2000) attributed the resurgence of transracial adoption discourse to the increased popularity and promotion of "color-blind" federal policies. For example, the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 and the subsequent 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act prohibited the use of race as a factor that would delay or impede the placement of a child into the foster care system or adoption (Marr, 2017). Essentially, these laws said that emphasizing race and culture in matters surrounding placement was a punishable offense that could result in the withdrawal of federal funds. Barn (2013) explained that the move towards "color-blind" legislation was influenced by four key factors: (1) the growing disproportionality of African American children in foster care, (2) agencies' reluctance to place children of color with White families, (3) efforts to purge society of its racist past through the promotion of racial integration, and (4) a critical mass of research evidence that claimed that such placements did no harm and were preferable to institutional care.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 is credited with better protecting children from neglect or abuse, but it also made it easier for courts to terminate the rights of biological parents (Hollingsworth, 1999). In addition, an adverse side effect of this legislation is that very little was done to attract and recruit prospective African American families into the adoption process, yet African American children continued to be removed from their families and placed in the foster care system at higher rates than other groups (McRoy, 2003). The issue of transracial adoption has been a contentious topic throughout history, however, the overall consensus in the literature is that the placement of Black children with White parents is a viable alternative in the cases where biological

kin are not available for placement or when extended time in the foster care system is likely (Alexander & Curtis, 1996; Howard, Royse, & Skerl, 1977; McRoy, 1989).

Research Pertaining to Black Transracial Adoptees

McRoy and Zurcher (1983) stated that since the time of its origin in the late 1940's, the adoption of Black children by White families has been considered "deviant, revolutionary, and nontraditional" (p. 4). Roorda (2015) put this concept into historical context when she explained that during the Jim Crow era, the idea that White American families might consider adopting a Black child would have been "incomprehensible both socially and legally" (p. 31). Historically, the results from transracial adoption studies were often used by professionals and legislators to either argue for or against the placement of Black children with White families (Alexander & Curtis, 1996). Adjustment studies and racial/ethnic identity studies began as a response to the social and political controversies surrounding domestic transracial adoption. Some scholars emphasized the importance of examining the longitudinal development of Black TRAs (DeBerry, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1996) and considering the context or ecological domains (e.g., home, school, society, and culture) when looking at their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Later the research expanded to include international adoptions and more recently racial socialization outcome research has become an emerging area of study (Lee, 2003).

Adjustment studies. Falk (1970) and Zastrow's (1977) studies were some of the earliest attempts to determine the overall "outcome" of placing Black children with White parents. Both studies compared White parents who adopted White children, with White parents who adopted Black TRAs. Zastrow (1977) had two measures that yielded high

levels of parental satisfaction for both groups and deemed the adoptions “successful,” however, the results indicated that the couples who adopted transracially anticipated future problems for their Black children. Zastrow (1977) described that the White parents, “appeared to be somewhat uncertain of the specific problems that may arise, but commented the TRA person may have difficulty in deciding which race to identify with, difficulty in understanding why he is subjected to discrimination, and difficulty in deciding, ‘Where do I belong,’ and ‘Who am I’” (p. 83). Essentially, the parents reported concerns and anticipated that their Black children would experience problems due to race in school, when seeking employment, in dating, and in forming an identity. Falk’s (1970) parent interviews also indicated that two fifths of the children in the study had experienced some difficulties in school because of race. Overall, the problems encountered in school and the potential problems down the road were largely dismissed in both studies due to “satisfied” experience of the White adoptive parent.

Seminal research about adjustment argued that Black adoptees in White homes were no more at risk of psychological harm than same-race adoptees. Simon and Altstein (2002) conducted a 19-year longitudinal study that had four phases—1972, 1979, 1984, and 1991—and tracked the TRAs from early childhood into young adulthood. At the beginning phase, they interviewed and surveyed a total of 204 families where 120 of the 199 adopted children were Black (60 percent). The findings from the adoptees, parents, and non-adopted siblings conveyed an overall positive message about transracial adoption in regard to racial identities, adjustment, and family cohesiveness (Simon & Altstein, 2002). Likewise, Grow and Shapiro (1974) studied 125 Black and biracial children TRAs over the course of seven years. Results indicated that 77% were judged to

represent “successful adoptions” by a series of 15 measures that included the examination of adjustment, symptoms, academic achievement, and relationships with family members and peers (Grow & Shapiro, 1974). Policy makers and legislators often turned to outcome studies as conclusive evidence supporting color-blind family placement practices even though some of the research participants did not exhibit positive outcomes. These two longitudinal studies were particularly influential in the political arena for those who were strong proponents of transracial adoption despite the limitations of the research.

Adoption research concerning issues of adjustment continued into the 1980s and included comparisons with other groups. For example, McRoy and Zurcher (1983) compared the adjustment of 30 Black children adopted by White parents and 30 Black children who were adopted by Black parents living in three different regions in the United States. Results from this study showed that both groups exhibited “typical adolescent relationships” with their parents, siblings, teachers, and peers, and they reflected positive self-regard (McRoy & Zurcher, 1983). This cross-sectional comparison study did find differences in the extent of racial identity, but the scholars stopped short of recommending against transracial adoption (Alexander & Curtis, 1996). The data from this study indicated that the Black TRAs living with White parents had very little exposure to Black role models or Black culture in their day-to-day lives, as 73% had never had a Black teacher or administrator and 75% indicated that most of their friends were White, and 60% were the only Black child in the home (McRoy & Zurcher, 1983). In other words, even though the children in these studies were deemed to have positive adjustment, findings showed that they were growing up in isolation from their birth

culture and exhibited differences in their racial identity development in comparison to their Black peers.

Longitudinal studies, such as Simon and Altstein (2002) and Grow and Shapiro (1974), were considered more desirable than cross-sectional studies because the researchers could examine changes over time. Some scholars chose to follow up with their original participants to research what transpired in their development and progress. For example, Gill and Jackson (1983) in the United Kingdom followed up with 36 Black and mixed raced TRAs from the British Adoption Project and determined that the adolescents themselves generally had good self-esteem and the majority of the TRAs did not have signs of behavioral maladjustment. One criticism of the study came from Kirton (2000) who stated, “While the intentions of their inductive approach are commendable, the result is a research study, which tells us relatively little about the inner thoughts and feelings of adoptees on race or the contexts within which they had developed” (p. 38). Essentially, scholars began to see the importance of examining what TRAs thought about the topic of race and exploring how race impacted them in a variety of settings.

The overall research about adjustment indicated positive results for Black TRAs at home and at school. Research methods included various psychological tests, interviews, questionnaires, and doll tests carried out with adopted children, parents, siblings, and teachers. However, Alexander and Curtis (1996) questioned the soundness of the researchers’ methodology in many of the early adjustment studies. For example, Grow and Shapiro’s 1974 study was deemed a weak research design because it used descriptive statistics to report percentages, rather than using comparison groups and

testing relationships between variables (Alexander & Curtis, 1996). Similarly, Simon and Altstein's 2002 study should have acknowledged the limitation that the final sample in their longitudinal study was significantly smaller than the first and they should have tempered their conclusions because firm conclusions from correlational studies cannot be made (Alexander & Curtis, 1996). Other limitations in early adjustment research included studies that were over 20 years old, had small sample sizes, did not provide comparison groups to same race adoptive placements, and did not examine development beyond early childhood (Lee, 2003). Research attending to the racial socialization practices of White parents and the racial-identity development of TRAs widened the discussion beyond traditional views of adjustment. For example, Smith et al. (2011) summarized, "Studies suggest that while transracial adoption in itself does not produce psychological problems or social maladjustment challenges for adoptees, there are significant dimensions of the transracial-adoption experience that may combine to cause serious adversities for adoptees and sometimes for adoptive families" (p. 61). Essentially, political and ethical questions remained part of transracial adoption discourse even though several outcome studies indicated that Black adoptees did not suffer serious adjustment issues by being placed in White adoptive homes. Researchers and community members continued to ask, "Can White families effectively prepare children of color to navigate a racialized society and develop a healthy racial/ethnic identity?" and "Is love enough?"

Racial socialization studies. Scholars have long argued that racial socialization practices are important to consider when Black children and youth are placed into adoptive homes. *Racial socialization* involves explicit and implicit messages or actions

that parents communicate to their children in order to provide the necessary psychological tools to develop a healthy sense of self in order to deal appropriately with an oppressively racist society (McAdoo, 2002). For example, Chimezie (1975) said it would be “cruel, through inappropriate or irrelevant upbringing, to strip the Black child of his psychological armor against oppressive racism while he still needs this armor (p. 301). The “upbringing” and “armor” that Chimezie referred to is race-specific training that people of color commonly pass on to their children in efforts to prepare and protect them. For example, young Black children are often taught by their parents to detect what racism looks like and sounds like at an early age. Racist encounters can occur as early as pre-school, so waiting to talk about racism until children are more mature is a privilege that people of color do not have. Scholars agree that it is important that parents who adopt transracially be “culturally competent” to promote racial/ethnic identity development and “racially competent” to help children develop strategies to confront discrimination, prejudice, and racism (Barn, 2013, p. 1276). A key assumption is that parenting practices and the family’s social context will shape the racial/ethnic identity that a child acquires (McAdoo, 2002). In other words, the conversations that the White adoptive parents bring into the adoptive home regarding race and racism will influence how Black TRAs see themselves and how they are able to face challenges related to racism and discrimination.

Smith and Juarez (2015) examined the approaches, strategies, and perspectives of 10 White adoptive parents and found that even though well-intended parents “understood that race mattered in the lives of their Black adoptees, they were unable to translate the racialized experiences they witnessed and heard through their children” and “unable to

interpret beyond the prism of Whiteness” (p. 126). For example, the parents’ messaging often argued that the race-based acts that children experienced were not intentional and placed an emphasis on educating those who are racially ignorant. Results from this study indicated that even though the parents wanted their children to be proud of who they were and where they came from, their racial socialization practices often downplayed racist incidents and inadvertently reproduced White privilege.

Racial socialization research has organized parenting styles into categories or typologies in efforts to classify the variations of the perspectives and approaches to parenting enlisted by those who adopt transracially. For example, in a study of 15 White adoptive mothers, Barn (2013) categorized the parents’ responses into three different approaches: (1) “humanitarianism” de-emphasized race and ethnicity, (2) “ambivalence” demonstrated a sense of uncertainty, and (3) “transculturalism” demonstrated a higher level of cultural competence (p. 1280). The author suggested that living in diverse neighborhoods and developing diverse social networks was not enough. Parents who adopt transracially need to nurture social relationships that contribute to the adoptees’ identity, belongingness, and culture (Barn, 2013). Similarly, Lee (2003) provided a typology of four cultural-socialization strategies. For example, “cultural assimilation” downplayed racial and ethnic experiences, “enculturation” promoted opportunities to gain ethnic awareness and a positive ethnic identity, “racial inculcation” taught coping skills to effectively deal with racism and discrimination, and “child choice” was when socialization efforts were adjusted based on the children’s interests (p. 723). Smith et al. (2011) argued that the latter unfairly placed the burden on the children to determine how they would identify at a period in their development when they do not possess mature

decision-making skills and are likely to be immersed in the dominant culture that does not reflect their ethnic background.

Racial socialization categories and strategies are not exhaustive and the perspectives of TRAs and parents vary over time. DeBerry et al. (1996) assessed 88 Black TRAs and families at two different time periods during the 70s and 80s and found that the adoptees' "Eurocentric" reference group orientation increased over time while their "Africentric" reference group orientation decreased (p. 2394). Essentially, as TRAs approached adulthood, decreases were found in their "racial awareness or curiosity about racial differences, racial friendship preferences, racial self-designation, racial attitudes, knowledge and understanding of racial issues, efforts to integrate, efforts to integrate, and efforts to meet African Americans" (p. 2379). Results for this study indicated that family racial socialization would predict the reference group orientation and adjustment in TRAs. Ultimately, the TRAs in this study internalized their adoptive parents' cultural worldview and identified more strongly with the dominant culture than with their ethnic cultures (McRoy & Zurcher, 1983). DeBerry et al. (1996) found that TRAs whose parents actively promoted their children's races, like learning about African American heritage, had more positive racial/ethnic identity development and positive adjustment.

Ultimately, the underlying message of the research attending to racial socialization for Black TRAs was that in order for parents to effectively teach their children about matters of race and racism, they themselves needed to be knowledgeable and be willing to facilitate regular conversations about race and racism into their parenting practices throughout childhood and adolescence. In response, "race talk" in online adoption forums recently has been on the rise to bring awareness to the concept of

White privilege, the negative effects of color-blindness, and the use of appropriate adoption terminology (Quiroz, 2007). While forums about racism and discrimination are readily available online, a gap in research exists for studies that examine whether or not racial incidents and experiences influence psychological adjustment or racial identity development for TRAs over time. Roorda (2015) interviewed more than a hundred young adult TRAs from various racial and ethnic groups throughout the country over the course of 15 years and said that many adoptees expressed that “brushes with racism plunged them into an identity crisis,” yet studies do not provide data on the psychological outcomes for TRAs who experience racial incidents (p. 13). Overall, little is known about the effects of racism on TRAs or their coping strategies (Lee, 2003; Smith et al., 2011).

Racial/ethnic identity studies. *Race* is a social construct that is used to refer to groupings of people according to a common origin, background, or geographic region and is often associated with perceived biological markers, such as the color of skin, texture of hair, or facial features (American Anthropological Association, 1998). *Ethnicity* is used for group classification of individuals according to social, cultural, religious, or linguistic features (American Anthropological Association, 1998). *Racial identity* “refers to a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial/ethnic group” (Helms, 1990, p. 3). There are technical differences between the terms *racial identity* and *ethnic identity*, but the terms are often used interchangeably in the literature (Evans et al., 2010). For example, both terms describe the gradual process through which an individual gains a sense of self, but racial identity development may focus more on the biological

features or group classification, while ethnic identity development may focus more on shared cultural aspects. Andujo (1998) explained that racial/ethnic identity is a product of the socialization process that adoptees received throughout their lives. While racial socialization studies focused specifically on parenting practices, racial/ethnic identity studies addressed how adoptees viewed themselves and how they identified. Some of the earliest adoption studies, such as Falk (1970) and Zastrow (1977), did not take into account the perspective of the Black TRA and did not look at what transpired beyond early childhood, but they did highlight some of the issues that young adult TRAs may encounter as they get older and how they may feel about themselves. An important contribution from these specific studies is that both researchers identified the need for a more detailed understanding of identity for TRAs. Some researchers suggested that the way TRAs identify racially or ethnically may not align with the perceptions or expectations of the outside world. For example, Falk (1970) poignantly stated:

...at some point the TRA child will cast off the protectiveness of the family of orientation and establish his more-or-less independent identity in the community of his choosing. If in this new circumstance he finds himself forced into situations where he is identified stereotypically and he is without prior experience in coping with them, he may face an identity crisis...His identity will be with the White world while others assume that his identity is with the Black world. His rearing establishes the White world as his referent, and his new peers demand that this referent be the minority world. (p. 64)

Adoption research suggested that being a person of color in an overwhelmingly White world shapes one's sense of belonging, identity, self-esteem, and overall well-

being in various ways. While there is no uniform “Black experience,” a common assumption is that a “healthy” Black identity is more likely to develop when a child grows up with two Black parents (Butler-Sweet, 2011a). As a result, the race/ethnicity of the adoptive parent has been largely debated in relation to adoption of Black TRAs in the United States. Perhaps the most common argument against the practice of transracial adoption centered on the idea that White families, no matter how well-intended, are not equipped to prepare Black children to develop a healthy sense of self and racial identity to survive in a racist society (Grow & Shapiro, 1974; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983). Bumpus (2014) compared the racial identity, resilience, and self-esteem of Black TRAs adopted by White parents and Black adoptees who were adopted by Black parents. The researcher used the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity, the Resilience Scale, and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale as instruments in the study. The results from the study indicated that there were no significant differences regarding the self-esteem between the two groups, but adoptees had higher levels of racial identity and resiliency when they had been adopted by two Black parents.

Research also has shown that TRAs of all ethnic groups exhibited a great deal of variability in their racial identities. Andujo (1998) conducted interviews and quantitative assessments, including the Tennessee Self Concept Scale, the Twenty Statements Test (Who Am I?), and the Mexican-American Value Attitude Scale, with 30 White families and 30 Mexican American families who adopted Hispanic adoptees. The findings showed differences in the TRAs’ self-identifying references. For example, those adopted by White parents were more likely to identify themselves as “American,” while the other adoptees overwhelmingly indicated a general acceptance of their ethnicity by self-

identifying as “Mexican American” (p. 532). Brooks and Barth (1999) determined that all 244 Asian and African American TRAs in their study could be classified as having “secure” or “strong” ethnic identities, yet the results conflicted with the fact that approximately half of these subjects displayed discomfort over their physical appearances. Similarly, the majority (83%) of the Hispanic TRA participants in Andujo’s (1998) study used skin color as self-descriptors, such as “I am dark,” “I am kind of dark,” and “I am tan” indicating that physical appearances shaped their racial/ethnic identity. Likewise, Benson, Sharma, and Roehlkepartain (1994) found that 41% of the TRAs in their study reported frequent feelings of racial pride, but 20% wished they were a different race. In other words, some studies illustrated that adoptees had positive racial identity, but faced challenges maintaining positive attitudes about their physical appearance.

Scholars identified significant challenges in racial identity development for Black TRAs raised in predominantly White communities. For example, Hollingsworth (1997) conducted a meta-analysis of six cross-sectional and longitudinal studies and found that TRAs had significantly lower racial/ethnic identities than same-race adoptees. Patton (2000) administered ethnographic interviews with 22 TRAs and found that their experiences varied based on familial and community factors, but one thing was “undeniably clear, the development of meaningful sense of racial identity is profoundly complex and problematic for African American and multiracial adoptees raised in White families” (p. 170). Butler-Sweet (2011a) concluded that middle-class Black adoptees raised by White parents identified struggling with issues surrounding skin care and hair

and many expressed that they did not have positive Black Role models in their life and their perception of “Blackness” was often based off stereotypes of urban poverty (p. 208).

Overall, racial/ethnic identity research outlines the complex nature of identity development for TRAs. The results varied based on family and community factors. Issues surrounding their physical appearance were referenced by many of the participants. The predominantly White neighborhoods and lack of Black role models were issues that also emerged from the research. Ultimately, socialization practices and the adoptees environment influenced their racial/ethnic identity development.

Transracial Adoptees in Higher Education

As college campuses and communities become increasingly diverse, it is important to explore the experiences of Black TRAs in a variety of contexts. Today, it is common to find blogs and books that include anecdotal stories of Black TRAs who go off to college and begin the work of unpacking their “Blackness,” but this phenomenon has not been fully articulated in the literature. For example, “reculturation” is the process where adoptees develop their relationship to their birth and adoptive cultures and can be triggered by life events like going to college (Baden, Treweeke, & Ahluwalia, 2012). Yet, studies about Black TRAs in higher education remain particularly scarce or fail to emphasize college student perspectives or experiences.

Some studies have included Black TRA college students as participants or those who had attended college. For example, Bumpus (2014) identified a sample of 45 Black TRAs ages 25 to 72 where 70% of the participants had attended some college or graduated from college, but the study’s design did focus on what transpired during their college years. Rather, it compared the racial identity, resilience, and self-esteem of Black

adoptees who were adopted by White parents and those who were adopted by Black parents. Likewise, Smith (2013) interviewed eight Black TRA participants who were currently attending or had attended college at the time of the study, but the study aimed to explore their experiences being raised in rural, predominantly White communities. In that study, specific college experiences were only referenced a few times when the participants discussed that they liked the diversity of their college campuses and stated that they wanted to move to a more diverse area after college. Even though the sample included Black TRAs who had college experience or degrees, the findings centered primarily on family, K-12, and community experiences.

Powell's 2017 study was significant because it blended issues surrounding racial identity development and the long-term effects of parents' racial socialization practices for a population that is seemingly absent from the literature. This study examined the racial identity development of Black TRAs during college and interviewed 5 college students about their childhood experiences, college experiences, and the meaning participants made of both. Some of the sub-themes that emerged from this qualitative study were issues about fitting in, navigating Black societal norms, racist encounters, colorblindness/parental education, and their preparation against racism. The study highlighted how a sense of connectedness, faith, and counseling were ways that the participants dealt with the challenges in their lives. In addition, study abroad experiences, mentors, and diversity/ethnic studies courses were perceived to be instrumental in the participant's racial identity developed during college.

Of the limited research that attends to the college experiences of TRAs, most of it focused on the racial identity development of Korean TRAs. Hoffman (2011) examined

the experiences of Korean TRAs who had recently graduated from college and used grounded theory to create a model that demonstrated the complexity of Korean TRA identity development. On the other hand, some studies focused on Korean TRAs who were in college. Nissen (2011) interviewed 11 participants and many of them described that going to college was one of the first times they had been around other Asian people and experienced life as an Asian person. For example, in college the participants experienced stereotypes, were mistaken for being Chinese or another ethnicity, and dealt with discrimination. Some of the participants in this study described that they were interested in learning about their ethnicity, while some of the others identified more closely with being White. Kim (2012) examined how the participants navigated their racial and ethnic identity development in college and how it impacted their overall college experience. The participants in this study described having a difficult transition to college because they struggled to form relationships and find a sense of belonging. This was largely due to the fact that the participants did not feel like they fit in with the Asian students or the White students. Another finding was that the participants had thought about their racial and ethnic identity growing up, but college proved to be a setting where they could explore it more in depth through having conversations with friends, discussions in class, or during meetings for student organizations. The participants in this study also described racist encounters that occurred growing up in school as well as during college. Overall, the majority of the research about transracial adoptees who are in college largely focused on their racial/ethnic identity development.

Summary

In order to provide context for this study, an overview of CRT and key historical events in the United States were highlighted in this chapter. Throughout history, perceptions in the United States surrounding social class, religion, and race have shaped the practice of adoption and they are inextricably linked to governmental policies and adoption trends that occur today. The CRT framework has the unique ability to examine both macro and micro level systems and phenomena. For example, CRT can be used to examine the overall United States Child Welfare System through the lens of power, systemic oppression, and institutional racism. On the other hand, CRT can drill down to the individual level by giving voice to a person of color or a member of an underrepresented group, such as those adopted transracially, in order to challenge dominant ideologies through counter-storytelling. Overall, researchers and policy makers continue to grapple with the social implications of transracial adoption and further attention must be drawn to the disparities and disproportionality that exist for specific groups, particularly Black TRAs, within the system.

The TRA voice and perspective has generally been overlooked or excluded throughout research designs, policy making efforts, and in popular culture. For example, one can pick up a magazine or watch a movie about transracial adoption and generally find that the storyline is based on the White adoptive parents' narrative or perspective. This study hopes to add to the body of knowledge that is generated by researchers who center adoptees as the privileged voice in the conversation and provides opportunities from members of this group to describe their lived experiences as they see it.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

There is limited literature that attends to TRAs who are in college. The few studies that have been published focused primarily on TRA adoptees from South Korea (Hoffman, 2011; Nissen, 2011). Relatively few studies have focused on Black/African American TRA individuals (Bumpus, 2014; Powell, 2017; Smith, 2013) and those studies often focused solely on the participants' racial/ethnic identity development while in college. In order to address the gap in research, this study focused on the social and academic experiences and perspectives of Black TRAs who attended four-year institutions of higher education.

In conducting research, it is critical for the researcher to pick the appropriate design that best addresses the research question and be able to effectively describe the methodology and results, as well as provide a discussion on how it relates to the literature (Creswell, 2007). Chapter III begins with a justification for the use of a qualitative research method based on the research questions that guided the study. The background of the researcher is discussed. Subsequently, an overview of the research setting, recruitment process, and participants is provided. A detailed, step-by-step description of data collection and data analysis methods are outlined. The chapter concludes with the limitations of the study and the strategies used for maintaining confidentiality throughout the research process.

Ethnographic Approaches

This study aimed to examine the life experiences and perspectives of Black TRAs who were attending college. A qualitative research design was employed in efforts to

better understand the adoptees unique experience and allow him or her to tell the story in their own voice. “Qualitative research allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables” (Corbin & Strauss, 2012, p. 13). The interview approach aimed to explore adoptees’ experiences and perspectives in the higher education setting, while also attending to their experiences in their adoptive home and during their transition to college. Interview data derived from a qualitative design provides researchers with “a source of well-grounded, rich description and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 1).

In this study, ethnographic approaches were employed by the researcher to explore the population of Black TRAs, the context of higher education, and the social and academic processes that occur during their college years. In other words, the researcher aimed to set the individuals’ stories about being transracially adopted within the context of higher education. A total of three phases of data collection occurred. The first and third phases of the data collection process gathered data from telephone interviews between the researcher and the participants. The middle phase of the data collection process gathered data via social media platforms during a designated time frame. Chen, Vorvoreanu, and Madhavan (2014) developed a methodology that integrated both qualitative analysis and large-scale data mining techniques that showed how informal social media data can provide insights into students’ experiences in college. For example, the researchers collected 25,000 tweets from Twitter related to engineering students’ college life and identified that heavy school work loads, lack of social engagement, and sleep deprivation were themes that emerged from the data (Chen et al,

2014). Thus, collecting social media data between the first and second telephone interview helped to describe perceptions and experiences that Black TRAs experienced beyond the time being interviewed. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) described that triangulating the data may provide richness and depth to the research inquiry.

Research Questions

This study examined the perspectives of Black TRAs on their social and academic experiences at four-year institutions of higher education. Specifically, the research aimed to answer the following sub-questions: (1) what are the challenges they face, and (2) how do they counteract these challenges. Due to the exploratory and open-ended nature of the research questions, a qualitative research design was utilized for this study.

Researcher Background

As a first-generation college student, the researcher is drawn to work that promotes educational access and equity for historically underrepresented students. At the time of the study, the researcher worked as a higher education administrator for a college access program for low-income, first-generation students. In addition, the researcher previously worked as a guidance counselor at low-income schools in the public school system, which provided a background of experience for understanding how children and adolescents grow and learn throughout various developmental stages. Her interest in adoption research came during her second year as a doctoral student when her and her husband fostered and then adopted two biological siblings through the local county social services department. Forming a family through transracial adoption, where the mother is Hispanic, the father is White, and the children are Black, provided the researcher with a profound respect for the adoptee voice and experience.

Throughout the study, it was the researcher's ethical responsibility to acknowledge, assess, and ensure that personal bias did not influence the data collection or data analysis process. Corbin and Strauss (2012) explained that it is imperative for the researcher to engage in the practice of *reflexivity* to be aware of personal biases or assumptions at every step of the research process and *sensitivity* to pick up on subtle nuances and cues in the data that create meaning (p. 14). For this study, the researcher employed note taking as a technique to practice reflexivity. After each interview the researcher wrote down her personal thoughts, emotions, and perspectives in a notebook. This method helped with acknowledging the stories that triggered emotional responses where some of the adoptees described specific incidents where they encountered racism or discrimination in the school setting, community, or with law enforcement.

In other areas that did not involve issues surrounding personal safety and wellbeing, the researcher made efforts to examine both the negative and positive aspects of the data that was collected to ensure that her positionality did not influence the findings of the study. For example, a few of the adoptees described being raised by White parents who emphasized a colorblind perspective to parenting. In other words, adoptees were taught that "we are all human" and "we should not see color." Practicing reflexivity allowed the researcher to remember that the adoptive parents in this study came from a place of love and were doing the best that they could, even though the research strongly suggests the importance of TRA parents exposing their children to members of the Black community, celebrating racial and ethnic differences, and highlighting the rich contributions of African Americans throughout history. The act of

writing down personal thoughts or reactions helped the researcher stay cognizant of her personal biases and stay focused on seeking to understand the perspective of others, rather than simply judging situations from her own vantage point.

Setting

Recruitment for this study was made available to eligible research participants located throughout the United States. As a result, the setting of this study varied based on the geographic location of those who volunteered to participate in the research study. The researcher maintained a flexible schedule in order to schedule telephone interviews on days and times that worked best for the research participants (regardless of time zone). For example, five participants were attending college on the east coast, four participants were on the west coast, and one was located in the south.

Participants

The researcher recruited a total of ten Black TRAs throughout the country using criterion sampling (Creswell, 2007). Criterion sampling involves selecting participants who meet a set of predetermined criteria. Nine participants for this study met the following five requirements:

- (1) Traditional college age student (generally described as between 18-24 years old)
- (2) Currently attending a four-year college or university in the United States.
- (3) Self-identified as Black or African American or biracial (having at least one biological parent of Black decent).
- (4) Adopted by two White parents (if parents were married) or one White parent (if parent was single).

(5) Began living in their adoptive home before the age of 15 (even if their adoption was finalized after their 15th birthday).

An exception was granted for the tenth research participant to be included in the study because this Black TRA met all of the requirements except for criteria number four, as his adoptive father was both White and Native American. The choice to include this person was based on the fact that the father and mother were separated when he was 8 years old. He spent time going between both households until he was 11 years old, which is the time that his father passed away due to bone cancer. He explained that he didn't know he was adopted until he was 12 years old and didn't know he was half Black until he was 18 years old. It was determined that since this adoptee was primarily raised by his White adoptive mother from 11 years of age and on, that his lived experience would most likely mirror that of the other Black or bi-racial adoptees who were raised by White parents or the international adoptees who were adopted during a similar stage in development. Overall, a total of ten Black TRAs participated in the research study and communicated their experiences and perspectives.

Recruitment

In order to recruit Black TRAs who met the criteria from various colleges and universities throughout the United States, the researcher utilized electronic methods for recruitment and communication. First, a password protected Gmail account was created for the sole purpose of this research study. Once the secure account was generated, the researcher utilized Google Docs to create two documents, the research flyer (Appendix A) and the follow-up research flyer (Appendix B), where each had a link to a shortened URL that could be shared via email, social media, and text messaging. The research flyer

served as the initial call for participants and the follow-up research flyer provided a secondary mechanism to provide information about the study, ask for consent, and screen prospective participants.

At the time of the study, the URL was posted on various online transracial adoption groups that the researcher had membership with for several years, such as *Transracial Adoption* (6,100 closed group members), *Transracial Adoption Perspectives* (5,700 closed group members), and *Transracial Adoption-Community of Learning and Support* (2,400 closed group members). The site administrators for each online group were contacted directly via Facebook Messenger to request permission to post the link to the research flyer on the groups' page. Many of the site administrators asked follow-up questions about the intent behind the adoption research and if the researcher was a member of the adoption triad, which is a common practice found in closed transracial adoption groups that privilege the voices of adult TRAs, birth/first parents, and non-adopted people of color. In addition to the transracial adoption group outreach, the researcher created a visual flyer (Appendix C) and posted it on various higher education support groups, such as *PhiniseD/FinishEdD (Drs/Future Drs) #WhoGotNext* (15,400 closed group members), *Latinas Completing Doctoral Degrees* (6,900 closed group members), *Minority Doctoral Network, Inc.* (4,400 closed group members), *#DoctoralMomLife* (4,300 closed group members), and *Doctoral Mom Group* (652 closed group members). It was through these efforts that the researcher was able to reach the desired sample size of ten participants.

The researcher used Google Docs as a password protected method to gather personal information about prospective research participants. The fillable sections of the

research flyer and the follow-up research flyer automatically populated two different spreadsheets where the responses were organized into separate columns according to each participant. The researcher was the only person with access to these spreadsheets and their contents were stored safely through password protection. As an additional safety measure, the researcher's laptop computer was also password protected. The URLs to the research flyer and follow-up research flyer were deactivated once the researcher achieved the desired number of participants.

In order to be mindful to the recruitment of this unique population and sensitive to any issues surrounding denial or exclusion, any respondent who did not meet the five requirements was notified via a personal email from the Gmail account associated with this study that said:

Thank you for your interest in volunteering for the research study about transracial adoptees in college, unfortunately the information that you provided does not meet the minimum requirements for participation in the study. Your privacy has been protected as I have deleted the information that you entered into the Google Doc, so there is no record of your responses. Thank you for your time and willingness to share your story. Perhaps there will be other research opportunities to work together in the future. Take care!

Due to the small size of the population and the participants being of traditional college age (18 to 24 years old), the researcher received Institutional Review Board approval to provide an incentive to each research participant in the form of electronic gift cards, offering \$25 at the beginning of each telephone interview. Discussing the incentive at the onset of the interview using a telephone interview script (Appendix D)

limited the likelihood that the respondents felt pressured to answer in specific ways that may have appealed to the researcher. Prior to beginning the interview questions, the researcher sent the electronic gift cards to the participants via email and then proceeded with the telephone interview. This was considered as a secure method of sending a gift card without having to collect a mailing address from each participant.

Participant Profiles

The participants in the study reflected diverse identities associated with their country of origin, class, sexuality, and geographic location. In order to maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used throughout the study. The following section provides brief descriptions of the ten Black TRA college students who agreed to participate in the study.

Ace was a Black male undergraduate college student majoring in environmental science with a minor in electronic music production. Ace was a college athlete and led a student organization on campus that focused on clean water initiatives. He was born in Ethiopia and was adopted from an orphanage when he was 13 years old by a White mother and a White father who lived in a predominantly White community on the east coast. Ace and his younger biological sister, Mimi (who also participated in the study), were both adopted from the orphanage to live with the same family. The adoptive home consisted of White biological children and Black adopted children, including one biological sister.

Alex was a Black female undergraduate college student majoring in clinical physiology. She was born in the United States and was adopted when she was 6 days old by a White mother and a White father who moved around a lot due to employment

opportunities and they lived in predominantly White communities on the west coast. The adoptive home consisted of Black adopted children, one of was her biological twin sister.

Barry was a Black male undergraduate college student majoring in physical therapy. He was born in the United States and was adopted when he was 3 years old by a White mother and a White father who were foster parents to 127 foster children. The family lived in a predominantly White community on the east coast. The adoptive home consisted of White biological children and Hispanic and Black adoptive children. Barry was the younger adoptive brother to Paula who also participated in the study.

Cali was a bi-racial (Black and White) female graduate college student majoring in special education with a concentration in infancy. Her undergraduate degree was earned from a different institution and her major was community health sciences. She was born in the United States and was adopted when she was 4 days old by a White mother and a White father. The family lived in a predominantly White community on the west coast. The adoptive home consisted of White biological children who were much older and Cali was the only adopted child. At the time of the study, Cali lived with her significant other and were talking about plans to get married.

Che was a bi-racial (Black and Native American) male graduate college student majoring in higher education and student affairs. His undergraduate degree was earned from a different institution and his major was in Spanish with a minor in Latin American studies. He was born in the United States and was adopted when he was 9 months old by a White mother and a White and Native American father who passed away when he was very young. Che was primarily raised by his White adoptive mother who lived in a predominantly White and Native American community in the south. However, he did not

know he was adopted until he was 12 years old and didn't know that he was of Black descent until he was 18 years old. The adoptive home consisted of White biological children who were much older and Che was the only adopted child.

Circe was a Black female undergraduate college student majoring in English and secondary education. She was born in the United States and was adopted when she was one day old by a White mother who immigrated from Europe and a White father. The family lived in a predominantly White community on the west coast. The adoptive home consisted of White biological children who were much older and a Black adopted non-biological sister.

Haley was a Black female undergraduate college student who had not yet declared a major. She was born in Ethiopia and was adopted from an orphanage when she was 11 years old by a White mother and a White father who lived in a predominantly White community on the east coast. Haley and her two younger biological brothers were adopted from the orphanage to live with the same family. The adoptive home consisted of White biological children and Black adopted children, including two biological brothers.

John was a bi-racial (Black and White) male undergraduate college student majoring in psychology with a minor in political science. He was born in the United States and was adopted when he was three months old by a White mother and a White father who often lived in different cities due to his employment. The family lived in a predominantly White community on the west coast. John was a college athlete. John was an only child in the adoptive home.

Mimi was a Black female undergraduate college student majoring in physical education. She was born in Ethiopia and was adopted from an orphanage when she was nine years old by a White mother and a White father who lived in a predominantly White community on the east coast. Mimi and her older biological brother Ace (who also participated in the study) were adopted from the orphanage to live with the same family. The adoptive home consisted of White biological children and Black adopted children, including one biological brother.

Paula was a Black female undergraduate college student majoring in physical therapy. She was born in the United States and was adopted when he was two months old by a White mother and a White father who were foster parents to 127 foster children. The family lived in a predominantly White community on the east coast. The adoptive home consisted of White biological children and Hispanic and Black adoptive children. Paula was the older non-biological adoptive sister to Barry who also participated in the study. At the time of the study, Paula was the only participant in the study who was a mother to a young child.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality was of utmost importance when the researcher was corresponding with participants electronically, conducting interviews, and when writing the findings. The researcher utilized pseudonyms in the place of the participants' names, family members, places, institutions, and so forth. In addition, the individualized questions in Appendix E were edited so that the direct quotes from the participants' social media posts could not be searched for on the Internet. Upon the completion of the second telephone interview, the Google Doc spreadsheets were deleted and with it all of the

contents from the screening process. The researcher created generic social media profiles using a pseudonym so that the participant could not be linked with the name of the researcher on their social media platform (Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook). In addition, the researcher deleted the anonymous social media accounts immediately following the second interview.

Data Collection

The role of the qualitative researcher is to attempt to capture data on the perspectives of “local actors from the inside” through an empathic and attentive process (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 6). Data collection for this qualitative study involved three phases of data collection: (1) the first telephone interview, (2) review of social media posts, and (3) the second telephone interview. The entire process of data collection for this study took place from spring to fall of 2019.

The first telephone interviews were conducted in April and May of the students’ spring semester. They took place in a quiet setting that allowed for the interview to be recorded using an electronic audio recorder. All participants were asked the same 11 questions. Each interview lasted between 35 to 45 minutes. The questions asked during the first interview explored TRAs experiences prior to college and during their time in college were:

1. How would you describe the home or homes that you grew up in? What was it like?
2. Tell me about what your adoptive parents were like? How would you describe your relationship with them?

3. In my research I have found that the race/ethnicity of the adoptive parent influences the experiences of adoptees. What are your thoughts about this?
4. What was school like for you? How would you describe yourself as a student in elementary, middle, and high school?
5. Who were your friends and what were they like?
6. What was your transition to college like?
7. How are you doing so far in college? Do you think that your past experiences prepared you for this stage in your life?
8. People say that feeling connected is very important for college students. As a transracial adoptee, do you feel connected to your college campus or with some of the people there? If so, where do you feel most connected and with whom?
9. How would you say your experiences as a transracial adoptee in college compare to those of your non-adopted peers?
10. What recommendations do you have for college campus to make the college experience better for transracial adoptees?
11. What are your plans for the future?

Social media sites such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat are platforms that many traditional college age students utilize on a regular basis to communicate with others and to share their thoughts and experiences. Chen et al. (2014) said, “Students’ digital footprints provide vast amount of implicit knowledge and a whole new perspective for educational researchers and practitioners to understand students’ experiences outside the controlled classroom environment” (p. 246). For this study, the

text from social media posts was collected as a way to triangulate the data and to explore any experiences or perspectives communicated online surrounding their academic or social experiences while attending college. In order to do so, the researcher created temporary profiles for various social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The researcher requested access to the participants' social media for a limited amount of time (from June 1 to September 1). All of the social media posts that occurred during that time frame were collected verbatim and organized into different columns including the pseudonym, date, student quote, description of the post if a photo or link were provided, and the social media platform from where the data was collected. For example, at the end of August, one of the participants posted that he was both nervous and excited to start the first day of the semester. Direct quotes and dates are not provided in the findings as a way to maintain confidentiality. Given that the study focused on the college student population, the researcher believed that utilizing data from social media would be a unique approach to data collection that could enrich the information collected from the interviews.

The second telephone interviews were conducted in September and October of the students' fall semester. As with the first interview, the researcher conducted the second telephone interview in a quiet setting that allowed for the interview to be recorded using an electronic audio recorder. The questions for the second telephone interview were generated after data analysis had been completed on phase one (first telephone interview) and phase two (social media posts) of the data collection process (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In other words, the data from the first two phases informed the questions that were generated for the last phase. The researcher identified themes that emerged for each

participant and areas the needed clarification or elaboration, which provided justification to conduct a total of two interviews. For the second telephone interview, the first two questions were individualized and the remaining six questions were posed to all of the research participants (Appendix E). Each interview lasted between 15 to 30 minutes. The questions asked during the second interview provided TRAs with the opportunity to go more in depth about their individualized experiences in college:

1. (Individualized Question) I followed everyone's social media posts from June 1 to September 1. One post that stood out to me on your social media platform was posted on ____ and it said _____. Tell me a little bit more about that post or the day that you posted it.
2. (Individualized Question) During your first telephone interview, a topic that kept coming up was _____. Is that still an issue that you think about or deal with now that you are in college?
3. What would you say are your personal strengths that have helped you stay in college?
4. During tough times in the K-12 system the adoptees that I interviewed usually leaned on a particular parent or an educator who was generally described as more open, approachable, and easy to talk to. Now that you are in college, who is your go-to person during tough times and why?
5. Racist and discriminatory comments and experiences surfaced for most of the adoptees during their K-12 years or college. As a person of color who grew up

in predominantly White spaces, has your racial/ethnic identity or sense of self changed since you have been in college?

6. All of the adoptees that I interviewed said that they came from a loving and caring adoptive home. What lessons or experiences from your childhood have shaped or influenced who you are as a college student?
7. How would you respond if a White adoptive parent of a Black child asked you, “What will college be like for my child?” What insights or advice would you share about the child’s social life or academic life in college?
8. Is there anything else you think I should know about in regards to your perspective or experiences in college?

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a dynamic and interpretive act where the researcher derives concepts and significance from the data. This research study had three phases of data analysis: (1) first telephone interview, (2) social media posts, and (3) second telephone interview. Corbin and Strauss (2012) recommended, “Analysis should begin after the first data have been collected” (p. 14). Thus, the researcher began data analysis immediately after conducting and transcribing the first interview to identify relevant concepts. The sequential approach to data analysis allowed the researcher to listen in more sensitive ways while analyzing data derived from the participants’ social media posts and to identify subsequent questions for the third interview. For example, if a Black TRA talks about experiences related to her hair several times throughout the first interview, then the researcher can look for other issues or comments that may arise

throughout the research process related to her perceptions of hair, physical appearance, or self-confidence.

After all of the data had been collected and transcribed, the researcher employed Miles and Huberman's (1994) approach to qualitative coding, organized the categories of codes, and interpreted the meaning from that data. "Coding is analysis...analysis involves how you differentiate and combine the data you have retrieved and the reflections that you make about this information" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). First, the researcher went line by line through a transcript and assigned codes that described the meaning or essence of the sentence or a group of related sentences. For example, when a participant talked about joining a club during college, the researcher assigned the code "joining a club." The researcher continued working through the transcript line by line and assigned a series of initial codes to construct meaning of the data. Next, the researcher compiled and collapsed codes into larger themes and subthemes. For example, the researcher collapsed multiple statements about joining clubs, attending student events, and visiting the campus multicultural center into a larger sub-theme called "seeking opportunities for student engagement." Through the data analysis process the researcher found that the underlying theme of these accounts about student engagement were that the Black TRAs were seeking out opportunities to meet and become friends with other Black students. The researcher then identified the larger overarching theme for this data is, "Seeking opportunities to be with co-ethnic peers on the college campus." Essentially, this theme describes the students' efforts to get involved and their internal motivation for campus engagement. Finally, quotes or passages from the individual's responses were identified

as supporting evidence for each theme and subtheme. The themes and subthemes made up the findings of the study.

Limitations

The TRA community in the United States is small in comparison to the general population, especially for those who belong to the community of Black TRAs with White parents. As a result, a limitation of the study is that there was variation in the sample in regard to gender, class, sexuality, and geographic location. The institutions of higher education represented in this study were also vastly different. For example, the experiences for TRAs attending private, public, or Historically Black Colleges or University may influence their college experiences. In addition, the country of origin for those who were adopted internationally may influence their perceptions about the United States educational system. Diverse characteristics were found among the participants, but the researcher aimed to find common experiences and themes that emerged from the data as the results from qualitative studies are not intended to be generalizable to the entire population.

While there was an emphasis to center the research on the voice of the adoptee, a limitation of this study is that other members of the adoption triad (adoptive parents or biological parents) were not included. Similarly, the perspectives of higher education faculty or staff were not included in this study. In terms of the research time frame, the researcher conducted telephone interviews at the end of the spring semester, collected social media data during the summer months, and completed the last telephone interview at the beginning of the fall semester. Having a longer time frame could yield more rich data collection. Another limitation is that the interviews were conducted over the phone

as some argue that body language adds a strong dimension to the qualitative data. Lastly, while the researcher is an adoptive mother to Black TRAs, an additional limitation may be that she is still viewed as an outsider by some of the research participants who may have modified their responses to the interview questions. For example, an adoptee may temper his or her responses related to their adoptive parents knowing that the researcher was also an adoptive parent.

Summary

This qualitative study utilized ethnographic approaches to examine the perspectives of Black TRAs on their social and academic experiences at four-year institutions of higher education. Electronic flyers were distributed and shared electronically in order to recruit ten research participants. The URL to an electronic follow-up flyer was emailed to individuals who expressed interest and that flyer provided information about the study, asked for consent, and screened prospective participants. All electronic forms of communication were password protected and the information was stored securely. In addition, pseudonyms were utilized to protect the identities of the individuals.

The first phase of data were collected through individual, semi-structured telephone interviews, which lasted between 35 to 45 minutes per participant. Second, social media posts were collected as a way to triangulate the data. The third phase of data collection were collected through a final semi-structured telephone interview, which lasted between 15 to 30 minutes per participant. All interview data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed immediately following each data collection phase. The qualitative

data were coded, collapsed into larger themes and subthemes, and interpreted. The findings from the study will be described and discussed in Chapter IV.

Chapter IV: FINDINGS

Overview

This study took a broad approach in efforts to explore the social and academic experiences of Black TRAs at four-year institutions of higher education through the lens of critical race theory (CRT). Specifically, higher education was the primary context for this study and the researcher utilized semi-structured questions during two telephone interviews as a method to have adoptees discuss their experiences in the adoptive home, in the K-12 setting, and during their transition to college. Information was collected from interview questions that focused specifically on their time enrolled in college, and information was also collected from their social media accounts as a way to triangulate the data between the first and second telephone interview. After a thorough analysis of data, the findings from this study revealed that the adoptees' experiences from the past shaped their academic and social experiences throughout college in significant ways. Overall, the higher education setting was perceived to be a positive space for Black TRAs to grow and learn. This chapter presents the findings of this study. The first section outlines the identified themes and subthemes derived from the qualitative data. The sections that follow describe the four major themes and the three subthemes for each category. The last section of chapter IV provides a summary of the results.

Identified Themes and Subthemes

The participants in this study had White adoptive parents, were raised in predominantly White neighborhoods, and were educated in predominantly White K-12 classrooms. Some had other Black adopted siblings in the home, but most arrived to their college campuses with limited interactions with other members of the Black community.

Even though each adoptee had their own unique experiences and perceptions, there were four major themes that emerged from the qualitative data. Additionally, each theme had three subthemes.

The first theme illustrated that the adoptees were raised in caring adoptive homes. Regardless of the age that they entered the adoptive home, it was clear that the adoptees felt that their parents strived to create a loving and inclusive environment. There were three subthemes that emerged within the context of the adoptive home. First, the parents were described as being able to cultivate a sense of belonging where the adoptees felt loved, supported, and included. Even though the family members did not look alike, the adoptees felt accepted for who they were. Second, the adoptive parents were perceived to facilitate academic support and emphasize the importance of education. They ensured that their children were successful in their educational endeavors by providing encouragement and resources. Third, the adoptee were seeking support from their parents to handle racist encounters. Most of the White adoptive parents were described as having a limited understanding of the issues related to race or racism and were not able to adequately prepare their children to handle racist encounters. Many times, the adoptees were left to learn about it on their own through personal experiences at school with their peers. These three subthemes were the most prominent areas that the adoptees discussed when explaining their experiences within the adoptive home.

The second theme focused on the experiences of the Black TRAs as they navigated predominantly White spaces at school and within the community. Due to the lack of diversity of where they lived, the adoptees were often the only person of color in

their classrooms and had high visibility within the community because of their physical appearance. Three subthemes surfaced in relation to their experiences in predominantly White spaces. First, the adoptees experienced racism and discrimination. Racist comments and actions caused psychological pain where adoptees were left feeling anxious or unsafe. Second, the adoptees explained that their White adoptive parents did not know how to take care of their hair, but over time they were able to embrace their sense of self through expressions of their hair. They described their hair as a positive extension of who they were. Third, the participants described feeling the pressure of sharing their adoption story while out in public or at school, a concept known as narrative burden. The adoptees felt that the legitimacy of their family was constantly called into question, which left them feeling stressed or uncomfortable. These three subthemes illustrated the primary experiences the participants had while navigating through predominantly White spaces.

The third theme in the study centered on the social connections that the Black TRAs made in the higher education setting. First, the adoptees valued the diversity that was reflected on their college campus. They appreciated the different people and perspectives that they were exposed to in college. Second, the adoptees relied on their systems of support. They were strategic about who they went to when they needed help. Third, the majority of the adoptees in this study sought out social interactions with co-ethnic peers. Once they got to college many of the participants gravitated to Black peers in efforts to connect with their birth culture. Overall, these three subthemes were prominent as the adoptees described their social interactions and connections in the higher education setting.

The fourth theme highlighted how the Black TRAs in this study counteracted challenges with their interpersonal assets. First, the participants drew strength from their past experiences. Reflecting back on their journey proved to be a motivating force. Second, maintaining a positive mindset was another subtheme that emerged. This helped them stay focused on the goals that they wanted to achieve. Third, the majority of the participants described a strong internal drive to pursue opportunities to help others. They looked at the bigger picture and thought about ways that they could use their personal assets to help improve the lives of others. Overall, the participants in this study found the higher education setting to be a positive space to better understand these complex issues and to experience personal growth both academically and socially.

Caring Adoptive Homes

Based on the data, the adoptive home was an important setting that set the stage for how the adoptees grew up and felt as a member of the family, as well as how they thought about education, and learned how to navigate racist and discriminatory encounters. It was during the formative years that adoptees received and internalized messaging from their parents about sense of belonging, academic support, race, and racism. Even though the participants in this study had adoptive parents who were White, there were racially and ethnically diverse configurations reflected amongst the siblings who lived in the adoptive home. For example, some of the participants had biological siblings who were adopted together as a sibling group. Other participants had adopted siblings who were also Black, but not biologically related. Many of them had White siblings who were biologically related to the adoptive parents and were generally much older than the research participants.

Cultivating a sense of belonging. All of the participants in this study said that they came from a loving and caring adoptive home. Whether they were days old when they entered the adoptive home or came into the home later through international adoption, the participants expressed that they were welcomed by their adoptive parents with open arms. For example, the words “caring,” “supportive,” “warm,” “kind,” “loving,” “empathetic,” “protective,” and “nice” were used by the participants to describe their adoptive parents. However, international adoptees like Mimi, Ace, and Haley, expressed a period of adjustment that was challenging due to the differences in language, exposure to the American culture, and struggles with bonding with their adoptive parents. Mimi, who was adopted from Ethiopia when she was nine years old, said,

It was really hard to adjust to the new life that I joined with my adopted family, but they were loving, and they were really supportive. It was also hard for them because they couldn't really communicate with me because of the language. I didn't speak English when I came to the United States and my parents didn't understand my language obviously because they are American. But they're really supportive for the way they took me in. It's just like adjusting was a lot...to adjust to the language and life here.

Mimi and her older biological brother Ace came from an Ethiopian orphanage together to live with the same adoptive family. In their separate telephone interviews with the researcher, both participants described how challenging it was to adjust, while also experiencing a sense of acceptance from the family members. Explaining the latter, Ace shared,

They are a very nice family. They are a very Christian family. They helped me out with transitioning and adjusting to the new lifestyle. They were a really caring family. My mom was really protective and my dad was always caring for us.

They just treated us like their kids when we first arrived, which is really good.

“Shock” was a word that all three international adoptees in this study used to describe what it felt like for them to leave Africa and move to a predominantly White community in the United States. Haley, who was adopted from an Ethiopian orphanage when she was 9 years old, as well, explained how building a relationship with her adoptive mother was challenging in the early stages. Even though Haley also had the comfort of having her two younger biological brothers with her in the same adoptive home, she identified a specific reason that made her adjustment difficult. She said,

At first, I never really got along with my mom because when I was in the orphanage, I was just like an individual. I took care of myself. So like coming here and having somebody telling you what to do...in the orphanage, you had people, but they would just make sure that you were alive. They weren't really like a mom figure or a dad figure. So coming here, you had to get used to having somebody, an adult, looking out for you. I had to accept it and try not to get into fights with my mom.

Regardless of age, Haley viewed herself as being perfectly capable to take care of herself and she pushed back on her adoptive parents in the struggle to try and regain a sense of control.

While the international adoptees expressed some challenges related to language barriers, cultural changes, and the development of new relationships, the other TRAs who

were adopted in the United States through private adoption or through social services did not articulate a defined adjustment period. For example, Paula, whose parents had fostered over 100 children and adopted her when she was two months old, said, “They gave me a good life and I knew that I was loved. That was never questioned.” Similarly, Paula’s younger non-biological adopted brother Barry, who was adopted when he was three years old, had a similar take on his family’s level of acceptance, “This is what a family looks like. This is what a family feels like. This is what a family is. Like no questioning at all. It just felt safe and normal.” A similar level of certainty and ease was expressed by Alex, who was adopted when she was six days old along with her twin sister. Alex explained,

[The family] It's just been supportive and warm and kind. It's been a really great experience for me and sometimes I just completely forget altogether that adoption was even a thing. You really have like a sense of family that you create. It's really weird that people put such value on blood related bonds when you can get the same type of relationship just by spending time with each other.

Obviously, Alex had no other frame of reference for what a family should be like since she was adopted at such a young age. Her parents were White, she had several Black adopted siblings, and one twin sister, so the diverse make-up of her family was all that she knew. Her adoptive parents were the only parents that she remembered and she grew to love them as any child would grow to love a biological parent. For example, Alex went on to describe,

Oh I love them so much. They're kind and they support me wholeheartedly in everything I do. I don't know what biological parents are supposed to be like, but I

think that they're really good parents. They just...they do everything. I think I was raised in a way where I'm proud of. They did a really good job of not excluding any of us just because we didn't have that blood relationship.

The “blood relationship” that Alex referred to identifies the complex family compositions that these adoptees grew up with. In this study, 9 of the 10 Black TRAs lived in a home where differences in race/ethnicity, gender, and age were represented among the children in the home. For example, in Alex’s home there were a total of 5 Black TRA children (3 adopted non-biological Black brothers and her twin sister). Similarly, Paula and Barry’s parents, who ran a foster home for many years, had 3 biological children and then adopted 9 children who were of White, Black, and Hispanic descent. Circe, who wanted to be a high school English teacher, had an adoptive mother who immigrated from a European country, had White siblings who were 20 to 30 years older than her, and a Black adopted sister who only three months younger than her. Circe embraced the uniqueness of her family when she said, “It was a really good experience just to have all the diversity in our family.” John, who went to college on a football scholarship, was the only adoptee who did not have any other siblings in the home, but he reported that he had an extremely close relationship and bond with his adoptive mother.

In addition to the unique sibling compositions that the majority of the participants had in their adoptive homes, the loss of an adoptive parent was another experience that many had in common. For example, Che’s mother and father separated when he was eight or nine years and then his father passed away due to bone cancer when he was 11 years old. Paula and Barry’s father also had health issues and passed away toward the end of their high school career. Similarly, Circe’s father passed away during her late

adolescence. One adoptee shared a Facebook memory with a picture of her father and said, “Missing you always dad, wish you were here to enjoy some of life’s greatest adventures with us.” She added that he would be watching the family. However, the loss of a parent did not always involve the death of a loved one. For example, John’s father was gone a lot when he was growing up; even when John was first adopted, his father was out of the country. This was because he had a job that moved him around a lot. Sometimes he would be away for a year or two before John and his mother would move to the new location with him. John’s parents eventually got divorced and his relationship with his father ended. This change to the family structure was significant, and when John talked about severing ties with his father he would often pause and clear his throat as he said, “I just kind of blocked it out of my life completely.” This illustrated how John’s family dynamic changed after trauma and loss. Half of the participants in this study experienced grief or loss in relation to an adoptive parent, which impacted their overall sense of belonging in the family. For example, Che explained that he has always been closer to his father and gravitated to him more as a young boy, but after his father died he spent more time with his mother and built a stronger relationship with her. In other words, the loss of one parent, brought them closer to the other.

While diversity was exhibited in the overall make-up of the people who lived in adoptive homes, the participants in the study grew up in predominantly White spaces. They expressed that they had grown up in loving and supportive adoptive homes and highlighted positive attributes about their adoptive parents. Overall, they described feeling a sense of belonging, but in some instances there were challenging issues with adoptive parents that counteracted the adoptees’ sense of belonging.

Facilitating academic support. The three international adoptees in the study, Ace, Mimi, and Haley, expressed their unique challenges entering a completely different school system in the United States since they had to learn a new language and needed additional academic support. Ace described his elementary school in his small rural town in Ethiopia as having a hundred students tightly packed into a single classroom where many children did not have a chair to sit on and “it was hard to breathe.” He described how different it was when he transitioned to the homeschool setting in the United States, but more than anything it was the language that he struggled with the most. Ace said,

It was hard picking up a new language. Coming from a tribal language in Ethiopia and suddenly coming to a new language is very hard. I was homeschooled for about three years before going into a public high school. So my mom taught me some of the basic English, how to read and write. Then after a year or so I kind of worked independently. She provided me with all the necessities and school supplies.

Also from Ethiopia, Haley had an option to test into the public school or the private school, which were both connected to her orphanage. She tested into the private school and was advanced compared to her peers in Ethiopia, but due to the language barrier in the United States, she started in third grade instead of fourth grade. Haley took reading and English classes her first summer in the United States so that she could skip fourth grade and get back with her age group. Mimi also described her concern about being behind her peers due to her limited English skills. Mimi explained,

I was still playing sports with my age group, but I just felt like I wanted to be caught up with them in education as well. So I went to school for literally eight straight years. The whole school year, summer, all year round for eight years. With the help from a tutor who had a weekend house nearby, Mimi received the home school curriculum from her mother and was tutored on the weekends in writing and reading. Similar to Mimi's experience, Haley also put in extra work outside of the school day and said,

My parents they were helpful. They wanted us to have the best. So they made us take extra reading classes. Then every possibility that came, they were like, "Yes. Look at the computer and teach yourself stuff." Like knowledge is power, I guess. Eventually, with the academic support from home and the extra hours focusing on reading and writing, the three participants were able to learn English well enough to graduate from high school and attend college.

The academic journey was not easy for some of the other participants as well, specifically, those who required additional support or interventions that were un-related to learning a new language. Paula, a physical therapy major, explained that she struggled with dyslexia as a child because she used to flip her B's and D's. In addition to being tested, Paula said, "My mom got really involved and she got me the help I needed and into the classes that I needed for me to succeed." Likewise, Paula's younger adopted brother, Barry, was diagnosed with a learning disability, and he was provided with the support and testing accommodations that he needed. John, the psychology major and college athlete, experienced a great deal of difficulties throughout elementary school, but

his mother was able to provide him with an alternative school setting that helped change his educational trajectory. John said,

I was diagnosed with ADHD when I was little. I was just bouncing through different medications. None of it was really working. It was just a lot of dumb things that happened that got me kicked out of schools. I was really rambunctious and loud. In fifth grade I went to a public school and I got like four D's there. I barely passed. Then my mom said, "We need to get you into a private school." So I went to a private school. For whatever reason they let me in the school and I ended up turning all my grades around. Sixth grade was really where I started playing football, baseball, basketball, track, volleyball...like all of the sports there, but football, baseball, and track were the ones I was best at. The head coach that was there, he was in the MLB [Major League Baseball], so he trained me and stuff. We had like a little bond.

With the support and understanding of his mother and the access to alternative school placements, she was able to provide John with a setting that essentially turned his active nature into positive assets. Without that change, John may have continued down a difficult path educationally. Instead he received the early intervention that he needed to be a successful student athlete, and he eventually earned Division I scholarship offers to play three different sports.

Other times, the academic support reflected the direct influence of the adoptive parents in a specific area. For example, Cali, the special education graduate student, explained that her mother was always reading to her when she was young, and as a result, she developed a very high reading level. John said, "Both of my parents are writers, so

that is one thing they instilled in me was writing. That definitely helped me.” In another instance, it was the daily routines and expectations of the adoptive home that led to improved academic results. For example, Paula said,

I would come home and my parents would sit me at the kitchen table and they would do my homework with me and make sure it got done. When I had tests, my mom or dad would give me like spelling tests, so they were on top of my academics.

The emphasis on academics in the adoptive home stemmed from the fact that the parents were directly involved in the educational system, had attended college themselves, or had occupations that emphasized education. For example, Alex’s parents were both educators. She said, “I think since both of my parents are part of the education system, it’s always been like, ‘Do your best. Your best is always going to be enough.’” Che’s mother attended college for about two years and became an assistant teacher. When Che described his adoptive home he said, “There was a lot of education around and strict religious and military upbringing and morals.” In a similar light, Cali’s mother was a social worker for Child Protective Services and was always very involved in the well-being of her daughter. Cali explained that her mother closely monitored her grades online and her parents would ground her if they didn’t think she was meeting her potential. Cali said, “One of the things that I got in trouble for was when I got less than a B. They knew I could do better.” However, high expectations sometimes came from within the adoptees themselves. For example, Circe, the aspiring high school English teacher said, “I always focused on making my family proud of me. Being able to focus on my studies and make sure I get good grades to make my family proud. School just

always kind of came naturally to me.” Circe sought the approval of her parents and found that academic success was one way to gain that approval and recognition.

Overall, the adoptees in this study explained that their adoptive parents valued education. The parents demonstrated academic support by providing resources outside of the school day, advocating for testing or special education resources, and making sure that the educational setting met the needs of the student. In addition, the parents were described to enforce routines or activities that emphasized study skills, reading, and writing.

Seeking support for handling racist encounters. Many of the Black TRAs in this study did not have the opportunity to talk about race/ethnicity in their adoptive home because their parents were described as adhering to the color-blind approach or did not know how to facilitate conversations about race or racism. In general, the adoptees were first exposed to these concepts at school or out in the community. For example, Cali, the graduate student studying special education, said:

In elementary school, I don't think I even realized that I wasn't White for a while. There was no one else like me at my school. There was no diversity at all. I think there were a few Hispanic people and I can't even remember anybody. So I had no idea. I knew I was darker, but I didn't know what it meant. I think my parents didn't even know how to try and explain that to me. I didn't really bring it up and they didn't really bring it up.

Similarly, racial or ethnic differences were not talked about in Barry's home. Even though the adoptive home consisted of White biological children and Hispanic and Black adoptive children, there was more of an emphasis on blending in with the dominant

culture. In fact, he used the word “normal” 16 times in his first interview in reference to his experiences as a Black child at home and at school. His statements reflected that he felt a sense of comfort when he felt part of the group or larger community. He said,

You are not different. I don't think people should look at just because you're adopted that means...just because you have a White father and a Black mother doesn't mean that you should feel different. You should feel like everyone else. We are the same. Nothing should have to be changed. You don't need to be viewed as different. I mean you're a different personality, you're different all around, you have a different look to you than other people, but I feel like it should be geared towards everybody. Instead of a Black or a White school, it should just be a school.

While Barry strived for a sense of “normalcy,” he was not always considered part of the group as he had hoped. For example, he mentioned that he had been called a “race traitor” by a Black co-worker when he was in high school because his comments were interpreted as slights toward Black people. It is likely that the messaging that Barry received from his parents was that treating people equally would inherently create a world where people were equal in status and privilege. This color-blind approach would avoid identifying differences or celebrating differences in efforts to categorize all groups as equal based on the fact that they are all part of the “human race.” As a result, Barry was not prepared for racist encounters or negative experiences that came up from interracial dating.

Many of the adoptees described that they were not prepared for dealing with racism or issues surrounding race/ethnicity because of the lack of diversity in their environments. Ace, who had come from Ethiopia when he was 13 years old, said:

Where I lived, the majority of people were White. It was kind of hard to see other Black kids. It's hard to see. It's a different culture shock to be honest. I didn't expect that. I thought it would be kind of a diverse area, but it wasn't.

Haley, who was also adopted from Ethiopia, made a similar statement about the lack of diversity at her school. Haley stated, "To be one of two Black people in the school to me was like shocking from me having gone to school with all Black people." Due to the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in their geographic locations, the concept of race or racism may have not crossed the minds of the White adoptive parents. As White individuals living in predominantly White spaces, some of these parents may not automatically see the world through a racialized lens. However, being aware of race and racism would prompt conversations that centered on diversity related topics.

Outside of their neighborhoods and schools, some adoptees reported that even when their families went on vacation, their parents picked locations or activities where very few people of color frequented. The stark differences were often apparent and Cali commented, "We were on a cruise to Alaska and I was like, 'There are no Black people on this boat!' (laughs)." Cali elaborated on a situation when being the only person of color created some discomfort for her. She said,

When I was a growing up, my parents had this vacation spot. There were no Black people there. I remember being followed around the store and my mom

didn't believe me. She said that it was just because I was a kid. I don't know if she was trying to shelter me or if that's what she really thought?

Cali's mother did not believe that she was being followed by the store attendant because as a White woman, it can be assumed that she did not have a frame of reference for understanding racism or recognizing when her daughter was subjected to a microaggression. In other words, there was no way the mother could validate her discomfort or pass along ways to cope because she wasn't even aware that it was happening. Cali explained that she hadn't been exposed to different cultures growing up. In fact, she said, "I didn't even know that there were different cultures until I got older and I started to watch TV and listen to different music." Based on her description, Cali's parents did help her learn about racial or ethnic differences and they did not prepare her to handle racist or discriminatory incidents.

Based on their accounts, the Black TRAs living, playing, and traveling within predominantly White spaces led to many experiences being confronted with comments or actions directly related to their physical appearance. Che, the higher education graduate student, explained that he was aware of racial and ethnic differences from an early age, was eager to learn about it, but did not receive the level of support he needed to process specific experiences. He described that he frequently wanted to talk to his mom about what it was like to be the only person of color in the room. He wanted to share with her that he felt like people were always looking at him, which made him feel uncomfortable. Che said:

There are things that I wish I could have talked to her about it and she could understand those things, but being a White woman she couldn't really

comprehend that. It was always difficult talking to her about things that were involved with race or ethnic identity. I would try to have these conversations and she would nod, and agree, and tell me those things that what a stereotypical parent would do.

Even though he did not elaborate on what he meant when he referred to her as a “stereotypical parent,” it was clear that Che wanted to express the feeling that he didn’t belong. He felt like his mother did not facilitate the conversation in a way for him to gain a better understanding about racial and ethnic differences.

Other Black TRAs in the study had more open lines of communication about racism and discrimination in their adoptive home. In these cases, their parents were described as discussing and modeling strategies to deal with specific incidents. For example, Alex mentioned that there were times when her parents intervened. She did not specify exactly what occurred, but she said, “Whenever my parents would see something that they thought crossed the line they would stick up for me. I didn't really know what was going on, but they would know, so they intervened.” In this case, even though the TRA was unable to detect that a racist encounter happened, the parents handled the situation. In another case, Cali’s boyfriend, who was Black, explained to her that his parents had prepared him on what to do if a cop came up to him or if he got pulled over. Cali explained, “No one ever had that discussion with me. I feel like there's probably a lot of racial discrimination things that I just missed due to lack of knowledge or you know being aware of what was happening at the time.” Cali felt that her parents did not adequately prepare her to be a person of color living in a racist society. On the

other hand, Haley's parents were described as taking a different route and made specific efforts to educate their children on how to prepare for specific incidents. Haley said:

My parents did a good job in teaching us because they knowingly know that they are White and we are Black and we're going to be out here experiencing way more different things than they are. So like when we get stopped by the police...they taught us how to talk to a police as a Black person, you feel me? They tried to do as much as they can. Learn how to be a White parent to a Black kid I guess.

The adoptees reported that their parents made an effort to begin talking about race and racism with them starting at a young age. For example, Circe's mom used age appropriate language to openly discuss the differences about race and how some people are treated differently based on the way they look. Circe explained:

It's really hard to address the problem of racism at a really young age. So after we talked about how people have different skin colors and some people judge people about it...she had to be kind of careful because I was super young....but I remember her telling me that the color of my skin didn't matter. She knew that I was a good person. I was her daughter and I'd always be her daughter. She would always love me. The confirmation of always being able to have her love and have her be there for me just made our skin color not a problem for me when I was younger.

Growing up, Circe experienced open communication about the issue of racism. In addition, her mother followed up with a message of support, which made Circe feel loved

and accepted. Haley also recognized the positive impact that White adoptive parents could make in preparing their young Black children. Haley said,

Even though they are White, they did a lot more effort trying to raise us kind of Black or teach us what to expect out in the world as best as they can. But at the same time it's just like some things they really can't understand unless they're Black. You can try to explain it to them, but they are like, "Yes, we don't understand, but you are going to go through it, so you got to prepare." They can only tell you and teach you so much and the rest is in your hands.

Haley's perception was that even though her parents would never know what it felt like to be in their shoes, they did their best to prepare her and her brothers for racist encounters.

Based on the qualitative data, the participants shared that some of the parents did not introduce conversations about race and racism into the adoptive home. The adoptees were left to construct meanings of race and racism on their own through personal experiences. Students' experiences pointed to aspects indicating that parents recognized that it was an issue, but did not know how to facilitate conversations about racism. These adoptees were left grappling with questions and feelings of uncertainty. Finally, some of the parents were described as maintaining an open level of communication and facilitated conversations in efforts to better prepare their children. These adoptees were taught what to expect and were reassured that they would always be loved and supported through difficult times. Even though the parents were White and had a limited understanding of race and racism, their effort was appreciated by the adoptees who knew that they were doing the best that they could.

Navigating White Spaces

Another major theme that surfaced from the data analysis pertained to the experiences of TRAs in predominantly White spaces. Specific experiences with racism, issues surrounding their natural hair, and the narrative burden for the adoptees were all subthemes that emerged from the data. Narrative burden is described as a process that many adoptees face when their own personal narrative or story is placed under scrutiny by the questions of others (Ballard, 2013).

The following section illustrates real-life incidents that may be triggering or difficult for individuals to read. Before beginning to examine the following section on Black TRAs' racist and discriminatory encounters, the researcher clarifies her opinion that the use of the N-word should under no circumstance ever be used by non-Black people in any context. The researcher tried to honor the adoptees' authentic voices throughout this study, but decided it was best to use an abbreviated version of the word when transcribing the interviews.

Experiencing racism and discrimination. Examples of racist or discriminatory encounters were evident throughout the interviews when they adoptees were at school, at work, or out in the community. Alex, a clinical physiology major, described several instances in elementary school where her peers made comments about her physical appearance. She recalled a specific situation involving a White female at an after school program who made a negative comment about her skin. Alex said,

She wouldn't share her nachos with me. She was like, "No, you're dirty." I don't think she knew any better because we were all kids and that was probably what she was taught, but she wouldn't share because I was "dirty" and she was just

talking about the color of my skin. I don't think it resonated with me how racist that was because we were all young little kids, but there were a couple of instances.

Alex was excluded from sharing food with this student because of her physical appearance. Years later during this telephone interview, Alex still struggled to process the event. On one hand she recognized it a racist act, but was quick to provide justification about them being young or the parents who may have modeled poor behaviors.

Middle school was also a time frame where some of the adoptees struggled with fitting in or experienced racism for the first time. Barry explained that while he was interested in dating White girls in middle school, he had insecurities associated with that. He stated, "It was just that I felt like I wasn't good enough because of my skin color. A girl wouldn't like me because my skin color." Barry described the fear of being rejected by a White female due to his physical appearance, which speaks to the fact that he wanted to fit in with the "normal" crowd and be accepted by the majority group. Similarly, John recalled a time when he recognized that he was treated differently because of the color of his skin. This particular situation occurred in middle school and involved an incident with the police. John said,

I was with my White friend. We both got stopped. They had talked to my White friend outside of the car, just talking very casually. They patted me down. They handcuffed me. They put me in the car. They asked for I.D. They asked me where I went to school and what I was doing in that neighborhood and what we were doing. They threatened to take me to the police station. This was me in the seventh or eighth grade. And so my White friend's dad ended up coming out

because we were just down the street and he had to talk to them and nothing happened. That day was when I realized like, “Okay, maybe it is because of my skin color.”

Essentially, his friends’ light colored skin was less of a threat to the police officers and the fathers’ White privilege made it possible to de-escalate the situation. Meanwhile, John was not afforded such privilege as he was harshly interrogated and restrained in the back of the police vehicle.

In high school, some of the participants tried to navigate how they fit in amongst their peers. Circe explained that there were experiences where she felt very uncomfortable around her peers at her predominantly White school. For example, she and her sister were asked random, stereotypical questions: if they were in a gang or if they had killed anyone because they were Black. Circe said, “I don't want to say we always felt nervous when we were around a lot of White people, but we kind of were.” The microaggressions from her peers made her feel uncomfortable. Circe explained, “Around a lot of our White peers we were just really concerned about being judged because of our skin color or being asked questions that were based off of our race.” While Circe experienced issues with her classmates, Barry continued to experience concerns associated with interracial dating in high school. He explained that his first girlfriend was a White female from a working class family. Prior to dating Barry, something negative had occurred in the girl’s past that involved a different Black boy. Barry recalled one day sitting on their couch and getting dirty looks from her parents. He explained,

They didn't know me. They just saw me as my skin color. In a way, I could understand, but in the year that we were together I tried to show them that we are not all the same. Yes, we're all Black, we're all the same color, but we have different personalities. We're not lumped into the same Black guy.

In these instances, Circe and Barry both had experiences in high school where they felt the pressure to represent the entire race or were stereotypically perceived by others based on their race.

Racist encounters during the TRAs' college years also surfaced as they described their experiences in the community and on the college campuses. One adoptee talked about a racist event on social media and expressed concern about how his "Black and Brown brothers and sisters" had been treated in the community. The post did not elaborate on what had happened in that specific event, but the adoptee showed solidarity to those affected by saying that he saw them, was there to support them, and that they were not alone. Cali explained that she had a boyfriend in college, who was half Black and half White. They were both off-campus walking, saw a puppy, and walked over to where it was. She said, "We went to go pet a dog and the guy was like, "get those [N-word]" and I was like "okay!" She described being alarmed by the abrupt verbal attack and she walked away. Barry also described an incident when he was a college student working as a cashier and he had an altercation with a man because Barry asked to see his I.D. before selling him cigarettes. Barry recalled, "He just went off on a rant and I was like you have to have your I.D. otherwise I can't sell it to you. So then he starts to walk out, calls me [the N-word], and leaves." Similarly, John was also called [the N-word],

but this particular incident occurred on the college campus and escalated to the point where campus police got involved. He explained,

This was the craziest thing. I was in my Spanish class and I was the only person of color in the class. I am not going to say all of the details of what happened, but in the end it a White student had called me the N-word five times to my face. The police had to come because I was chasing after him on the college campus.

John recalled that as soon as the police had let him go, he went to call his mom for support and she was able to help calm him down to the point where he left the scene and returned back to his dorm.

The Black TRAs in this study described various incidents at school and within the community where they experienced racism or discrimination. Not only did the situations take place in different settings, they occurred at different developmental stages in the adoptees' lives. These racist encounters created issues within their social networks, impacted their emotional well-being, and brought forth feelings of uncertainty and fear. The color of their skin, wasn't the only challenge that they faced navigating White spaces, many adoptees experienced difficulties related to their hair.

Embracing sense of self through expressions of hair. The majority of the Black TRAs in this study expressed challenges that they faced due to their natural, textured hair. These participants lived in predominantly White neighborhoods, attended predominantly White schools, and their White parents were described as struggling to manage or maintain their hair. One of the first things that helped Alex understand she was a different race than her parents and peers was her initial observations about hair. Alex said that she would notice the hairstyles at school and began to take note that some

of the other Black children had “better hairstyles” than she did. Circe described a similar experience where her mother couldn’t really offer her guidance about things related to hair and make-up. Circe said:

It was mostly stuff that we would have to reach out to other people for to get help with. I wouldn't blame my mom, it's just that she didn't really know what she was getting herself into when she adopted two African-American girls.

Similarly, Haley’s mother also struggled to take care of her and her brothers’ hair when they were young. She explained that it was especially difficult because there was a lack of resources in her predominantly White community, so the learning process for her mother was difficult. Haley stated, “In my town, they didn't have very many Black salons. She [mother] would try to watch videos and stuff. Something that would take two hours, she would take like seven hours.” Haley acknowledged the effort her mother made, but felt frustrated that she didn’t have other people that she could go to for help.

Outside of the adoptive home, the Black TRAs had incidents where their White peers would make comments about the texture and style of their natural hair, which made them feel different. When describing what it was like living in a predominantly White neighborhood, Alex recalled, “I think that is where a lot of the insecurity stems from. Everyone had bone straight hair. It was just different.” Being different often made the adoptees subject to negative comments from their peers. Alex went on to explain that she and her twin sister often wore their hair up in two “puffs” and the White students at school would call them “Mickey Mouse ears.” Similarly, Cali was called “broccoli head” one day by one of her classmates because she had cut her hair short and she explained that no one at her school had curly hair like she did. Based on these accounts it was clear

that Alex and Cali stood out in the crowd and were impacted by the comments and name calling. The name calling did not stop even after Alex tried to venture out and try new hairstyles. She said:

There was this one girl. Her name was Alicia and she had box braids. When I was in elementary school her mom did my box braids and I thought it was so cool. But some of the other kids would be like, "Oh, they are like snakes!" Like Medusa or something. I was like, "I think they are pretty cool. I don't know why you guys don't think so."

Essentially, when Alex tried to experiment with different hairstyles and embrace that part of her identity she was still ridiculed by her White peers.

Some of the participants continued to struggle with issues surrounding their hair during middle school and high school. In one case, the parents' lack of knowledge about hair care for Black women had damaging results. Circe commented:

Growing up through middle and high school, someone had referred my mom to someone who did hair in a big city nearby, so we would frequently go there to get our hair done, but that kind of got expensive. After a while she took us to a place to get our hair permed so that it would be straight. It lasted okay and it lasted for a while, but my hair, it's not as straight as my sister's, and it started to fall out because of the perm. So because she really didn't know how to take care of it, I ended up wearing a wig for most of my high school career.

Immediately following that statement, Circe sarcastically said, "Well that was a fun experience," but later explained how much confidence she had gained in college from embracing her natural hair. Essentially, Circe used sarcasm as a way to cover up the

embarrassment and uncertainty that she likely experienced over the course of many years. The process of losing her hair and then being forced to hide what remained under a wig is a traumatic experience, especially because she did not have anyone from the Black community who could offer support or encouragement. Alex also felt the urge to fit in with her surroundings. She explained that it wasn't that her parents pushed it on her, but at one point she really wanted to add relaxer to her hair. Alex described the social pressure that she felt and said, "I think it was just seeing other kids as the norm that had different standards, so I just wanted to follow that."

The issues about hair continued to be a present theme during the time that the Black TRAs went to college. After leaving the adoptive home, many of the adoptees experimented with new hair styles. Growing up, Che explained that his mother did not allow him to experiment with his hair, so when he got to college he tried highlights and dyed his hair various colors. He said that he asked one of his assistant directors on campus about her crochet braids and after talking to her, he decided to get them. Che described the effects of this positive experience and said:

I got it and I felt, "This is natural. This feels good." I think it was one of the first times that I will say I actually feel like I belong to a part of my race now because like a lot of identity is found in hair for the Black community. I was like, "What if I try it?" And I tried it. I felt like I finally had that piece of identity that I was missing.

On social media Che posted a picture of his crochet braids and commented that he had been on a "journey of identity and expression" through his hair. In his photo he appeared happy and confident, which indicates that he was pleased with where the journey had

taken him. Cali also took on a new change when she went to college and had her natural hair styled in locks. She said, “It’s crazy because my hair has never grown or looked good as it has ever since I got it locked. My natural hair and the natural products that I use have made me very happy.” Her excitement about her hair also surfaced on social media when she included a pre and post picture showing off her new locks with a comment that said “look at my hair.”

Experimenting with different hairstyles in college proved to be extremely positive for many of the Black TRAs. Circe drew a connection from her hair to her overall wellbeing when she stated:

Now that I have my hair in locks and its growing and I can see it flourishing and being healthy. I feel like it reflects me and what I’m doing throughout my college experience. I feel like college is helping me grow and find what I know that I can flourish in.

Cali also explained the long process in which she came to terms with her hair and how it had become a source of pride for her. She said:

I get compliments on my hair a lot. People like the curls. I feel like as I’ve gotten older I’ve definitely embraced it more. When I was younger, I tried to straighten it out a lot. I really didn’t know what I was doing, so I think I damaged it. I used to dye it a lot too. I really feel like my big curly hair is like part of me.

Essentially, Cali’s perception of her hair and physical appearance improved from over time. Likewise, Alex found confidence and pride in wearing braids, although she admitted that wearing her hair natural continued to be a struggle in college. She explained,

I'm still not very sure on how to do it or how to control my hair, but I think wearing protective styles, people have complimented it. It has turned into like this positive thing. I really like my hair.

In all, the majority of the Black TRAs faced challenges surrounding their natural hair. A commonality amongst the participants was that it wasn't until young adulthood or college where they started to have more positive perceptions of their hair and physical appearance. Once they got to college, their hair became an important part of their daily lives and was linked to their self-confidence and identity. Essentially, the college setting provided a safe place for the adoptees to experiment with different hairstyles and openly express themselves.

Carrying the weight of narrative burden. Repeatedly sharing their personal story with others is a burden that TRAs constantly have to face because they look different from their families or peers. This highly visible form of adoption wasn't something that the adoptees gave much thought when going about their business at home, however their differences were amplified once they stepped outside of the adoptive home. Alex said, "I think it was being outside society's standards that made me realize it [being raised by White parents], but it wasn't like I would think about the race difference very much." Alex recognized the differences in race between her and her parents and felt the pressure of not fitting. Che found himself having to explain the physical differences between him and his caregiver. He stated, "When it came to going out in public, people would be wondering, "Why do you have a child who is not White?" "They don't look like you." I would be like, "Yes I'm aware, I don't look like my mother." Similarly, Mimi explained the challenges associated with having to explain her family make-up to others,

“It was hard for me to explain how I had White parents and then I had some White siblings. It was hard to open up to people because we lived literally in....there was no diversity in the place I lived. And it was hard.” These adoptees were tasked with having to explain why their family looked different than other families. This kind of repeated demand not only threatened their privacy, it forced the adoptees to speak from the position of being an outsider or “othered.”

Despite the physical differences, the degree of openness regarding the adoption stories also varied from participant to participant. On one end of the spectrum, Cali grew up having an open dialogue about her adoption story. She said, “My parents were always very open about the fact that I was adopted and I'm assuming I would've found out anyways when I was older (laughs).” On the other end of the spectrum was Che who was not given access to his complete story, which created challenges for him. Che stated that he had no idea that he was adopted until he was 12 years old. He explained that his father was half Native American, so prior to finding out the truth, he just assumed that he took after his father. After his father died, Che learned the truth about his adoption; however, his mother did not mention anything about his race/ethnicity at the time of the disclosure. It wasn't until he began gathering various documents for his college applications that he eventually discovered from his original birth certificate that he was Native American and Black. Che explained:

My mother said, “I always wanted to tell you about it.” Her explanation to that was because he [father] didn't want me to grow up with the word “adopted” and he viewed that as being negative I guess. I understand that, but at the same time there was a lot that I could have known about myself before I started college.

He explained that when he started college he was confused about how to learn about and explore an identity that he didn't even know he had.

All of the Black TRAs in this study described situations having to share their personal stories with others. In some cases, their stories triggered memories of trauma that they experienced due to loss, living in the orphanage, and being removed from their home, language, and culture. Ace said, "I have always been comfortable sharing my story. Except when it comes to family [in Ethiopia], then I get emotional. I don't get into that part. I try to keep it brief and that's it." Ace had a limit on what he was willing to share because opening up too much about his loss, grief, and trauma caused him psychological distress. As a way to cope with that difficult part of his adoption story, he explained that he would generally focus on the aspects showing how far he had come in life. Ace's younger sister, Mimi explained that talking about her past actually had some serious damaging effects on her relationship with her adoptive mother. For example, her mother arranged for Mimi to talk to a therapist because she thought it would help her daughter. Mimi was resistant to the idea and felt like she was forced to go. She said,

I didn't really want to talk to a therapist about my childhood story or anything that had changed me. Therapy is all about rehashing my childhood stories and all the pain and it made the whole situation worse. Our relationship is kind of messed up right now. I'm trying to rebuild it as much as I can, but it's hard.

Although the mother may have had good intentions, forcing her daughter to confront her childhood trauma before she was ready, basically caused Mimi to experience more trauma.

The adoptees in this study shared examples of how their narrative burden started at a young age. Circe stated that she remembered being teased by an older boy when she was in kindergarten, but she did not elaborate on what he said to her. Paula also recollected instances when she had peers make comments that were hurtful. She said, “Once in a while they'd be like ‘that’s not your mom,’ which obviously I took to heart because that was the only mom or dad I ever knew.” Paula’s younger brother Barry also commented on this common scenario, “Some people would say they weren't my actual parents and meanwhile we're thinking, well they are. They're not just here to raise us and then give us back or anything like that.” Essentially, comments like this were hurtful because the underlying message was that their families were not legitimate or real. Sometimes others would make blanket statements that were hurtful to the adoptee. Cali said, “So many people are like, ‘Oh my gosh you were adopted...that must be horrible.’ I never looked at it that way.” That assumption did not resonate with Cali because she explained that she didn’t feel like being adopted was a “big deal” for her because she was adopted at such a young age. However, the comment still caused a level of discomfort because she didn’t feel understood.

For some adoptees, the pressure was two-fold. First, they felt pressured to disclose personal details about their life. Second, they sensed underlying tones of judgment or disapproval once they disclosed information about their past. Mimi described what it was like for her to navigate these situations. She explained,

After the first year I just said, “I am adopted.” Like, you can know now. Like I got annoyed, so I just told them. It was easier, but at the same time you can see that mentality where...people don't say it out loud, but I can see some people

they're really just thinking of some negative stuff in their mind. You can see it.

But at the same time it was easier than just keeping it in...letting people know who you really are.

Mimi had a heightened awareness of how people perceived her and the feelings of being judged by others weighed on her heavily.

Overall, the Black TRAs in this study experienced the burden of having to share personal details about their adoption story or past. Their identity was often called into question by a variety of people in different settings. The questions and comments made the adoptees feel like the legitimacy of their family was scrutinized by those around them. Feeling pressured to answer personal questions caused the adoptees to feel stress and discomfort.

Connecting With Others in the Higher Education Setting

In college, the Black TRAs put their academic knowledge and interpersonal skills in action. The participants in this study talked about what the college campus felt like to them. Each of them found it to be a setting where they had opportunities to connect with others. The participants described positive experiences with campus diversity, their systems of support, and their relationship with co-ethnic peers.

Valuing campus diversity. The majority of the Black TRAs in this study described their college campuses as diverse, which highlighted positive elements, such as a sense of pride, safety, and excitement. For example, Cali was proud to report that her graduate school was known to be in the top five most diverse college campuses in the country, which she said was something that was celebrated by professors and students alike. Barry explained that his satellite campus was much more diverse than the main

university campus and said, “I feel safe with this campus because there’s just so much diversity.” Circe explained that moving away from a predominantly White town to attend college in a bigger city was a positive change for her. She stated,

Seeing the diversity of the student population just kind of blew my mind. Being able to see people that were African-American, Indian, Asian, and Pacific Islander...just seeing the different people on campus interacting with each other just made me excited to be in that environment and to be a part of that school community.

Ace also saw the college campus as a positive space that brought together people from different backgrounds, locations, and tribes. Ace said, “I think college is a very important environment to be in, especially if you're coming from a different culture.” Regardless if these college students were adopted nationally or internationally, the general consensus was that they found a sense of comfort and belonging on diverse college campuses.

Of all of the participants in the study, John was the only one who stated his university wasn’t doing enough to increase the numbers of diverse students, particularly Black students. He said:

The campus is beautiful and it's nice, but there’s no diversity at all. There's only White people. That's all I see. And then all the athletes are Black. There's maybe like 8 other Black people at the school that’s probably all I can...I don’t know, that's what it seems like to me. I don’t feel...I don’t want to say not welcome, but it’s just that there's a lot of White people at that school that have issues with Black people.

John explained that he and his teammates had personal encounters with racism on the college campus, so he believed that many members of the White student body were prejudiced. He felt the most comfortable around his closest friends and teammates that he had met through the athletic program.

The diversity within specific educational programs was highlighted by some of the other participants in this study. Circe, who aspired to be a high school English teacher, commented that the College of Education at her institution was working on putting together a diversity club for its education students. She said:

I am surprised that there is so much diversity in the people that are in the educational program only because when I was growing up, I only had a bunch of White teachers. Here I am and my peers are Latinx and Pacific Islander and I just I can't wait to see these people teach.

The representation of ethnically diverse teachers in the workforce was a topic that was important to Circe because of her lived experiences attending predominantly White schools. In fact, she explained that one of her side projects was to create a podcast for teachers to help them talk about complicated topics in the classroom like, race, ethnicity, LGBTQ+ issues, and school shootings. On social media, Che provided a link to a tweet about representation and explained in the comment section that he didn't have his first Black teacher until he was in 9th grade and his first Black male instructor wasn't until he got to graduate school. The representation amongst the faculty and staff in his program was something that he was taking note of. Another education major, Cali, commented on how her education courses had a diverse group of students. Cali said,

I really like taking these classes. Everyone has a really nice viewpoint and it's nice to hear different stories, from different people, about so many different things. Two people can be going through the same exact thing and you hear totally different perspectives.

The adoptees expressed that seeing diversity reflected in the student body as well as the discussions that took place during class were positive aspects of their college experience. The diverse perspectives illustrated in the classroom helped the adoptees feel like they were part of an inclusive environment.

Some of the adoptees drew direct comparisons between their college campuses and the public schools they attended. Haley explained that going from a high school in a predominantly White community to later attending a larger university normalized the differences amongst people. She said, "When you come to college everyone is different. You will see the different ages and I don't think race really matters that much." Alex also drew comparisons to the public school system and said "I think throughout middle school and high school there are people trying to keep you in boxes, but in college you kind of get people who embrace all sorts of diversity and all sorts of different personalities really." Cali referenced the idea of being able to blend in better in the college setting than in high school because of the increased diversity. In high school, she was called an "Oreo" for what she described "as acting or talking White." Cali said,

In college, I lived on campus and I felt like it was one of the first times that I wasn't getting judged a lot because no one knew me. There were a lot of other kids that were Black that sounded White or were different or whatever.

For many of the adoptees, there was comfort in numbers on their college campuses, and they felt less pressured to fit in as they did attending school in their smaller, White communities.

Several of the adoptees believed their institutions had room for improvement, but they acknowledged their efforts to increase and support diverse students. Ace explained that being Ethiopian was something that made him very unique and that he didn't want to forget his tribe and cultural roots. While Ace would have liked to have more opportunities to celebrate his culture and language on the college campus, he explained that he saw some improvements in regard to diversity. Ace said, "The college is doing better at recruiting Blacks and minorities. Trying to increase the diversity and recruiting from international students, which is definitely good for me to be around." Ace felt a level of comfort being around members of the Black community because those social interactions brought back the familiarity of growing up as a child in Ethiopia. Haley also sought out links to her life in Ethiopia. She attended an orientation when she first arrived at the university where she learned about different organizations, clubs, and events that are available to support students of color. She described an African association where students from different cultures had meetings and put on events. Haley shared,

It kind of brought me back home [to Ethiopia] in a way. In a sense where I could teach other people. It was just good to see there are other people coming here from the same place. Like I met a couple of Ethiopians here that just came for school. So it just like opened the door for me.

For Ace and Haley, the presence of other Ethiopians and international students was a positive aspect of their campus' diversity. The familiarity was comforting, but it also

gave them an opportunity to celebrate and express pride in their culture with others from similar backgrounds.

Overall, the topic of campus diversity in relation to their academic and social experiences in college came up frequently in the data. The diversity and inclusion efforts of the college campuses were areas that the participants were aware of and believed to be beneficial. Interacting with others from diverse backgrounds allowed the adoptees to feel connected to the community as a whole. The general feeling of the college campus in relation to its diversity added to their sense of inclusion and acceptance. All of the participants perceived the topic of campus diversity to be something that brought immense value to their college experience.

Relying on systems of support. The Black TRAs in this study each paved their own path as they entered the higher education setting. For these young adults, college proved to be a time where they were expected to make decisions about their academics, finances, and social lives. Haley referred to this change as “adulting” and said, “Becoming an adult, I would say is a pretty big life change. Making your own appointments. Doing stuff that you never had to do before.” With this new found independence, many of the participants encountered challenges along the way that required support from others. The Black TRA college students in this study gravitated towards a wide range of individuals during difficult times.

For some of the participants, their support system during college was very small and they still relied heavily on their adoptive parents. When John was asked what his personal strengths were that had helped him stay in college, he responded with a simple, one word answer and said, “My mom.” While the other adoptees answered this same

question describing personal attributes, John's relationship with his mom was so strong that he actually referred to her as his personal strength. Even though John and his mother lived in different places, he still considered her a strong part of his support system. Likewise, Cali moved away from her hometown to attend graduate school in another city. The geographic distance between family members did not affect Cali's relationship with her parents as she maintained consistent communication. She said, "I'm really close to both of them. We talk constantly. Always texting or talking on the phone." The week prior to the telephone interview, Cali explained that someone broke into her car, stole her purse, and maxed out all of her credit cards, but her parents were still willing to help and sent her some money. Even though they lived in different cities, her support system was just a phone call away.

The participants had an easier time navigating stressful situations that happened outside of the school day because they could call upon others to help. For example, Paula was a full-time student and a new mother. At the time of the study, her son was only five months old. Paula explained how her mother was readily available to help her with childcare. When asked to elaborate on a specific social media post about being a mother and balancing school, Paula said, "It was the second day of classes and the transition was easy because my mom was watching him, but also like wow this is weird too because I am used to spending my whole day with him. I missed him." Having access to a childcare alternative made her feel more comfortable about leaving her son behind so that she could focus on her studies. In sum, her mother provided one important source of support while in college.

The adoptees also had peers who proved to be sources of support during difficult times. Alex had a friendship that blossomed in one of her college classes, and she felt comfortable going to her friend for help with school work. Alex said, “I’ve made a friend and her name is Olivia. She’s really open. I think we’re both struggling through our classes a little bit so it’s just easy to lean on one another when we have problems.” Likewise, Circe’s best friend proved to be a supportive presence in her life that kept her grounded and focused on the bigger picture. She said, “We are always able to balance each other out and take a step back and look at where we are and how we align ourselves so that we can remind ourselves what we’re doing and why we’re doing it.” Barry’s best friend and girlfriend proved to be good sounding boards for him. Barry said, “When they listen they try to come up with positives. Positive ways of thinking differently. They may not have the same opinion as me, but I just look at their opinion and how it meshes with mine.”

Some adoptees mentioned campus faculty and staff as critical members of their support system. Paula described a professor of hers that pushed her to keep going and who she could relate to because she was also young and attending college when she got pregnant. Paula said,

I was having complications during my pregnancy and she reached out to me before I even reached out to her to let her know that I wasn’t going to be in class to see if I was okay. She not only cares about me academically, but on a personal level.

Paula explained that her individualized attention and inclusive environment created a sense of connection which motivated her to keep moving forward. Barry described how

the availability of his professors was extremely helpful especially because he struggled with a learning disability. Barry stated, “I could go to my medical assistant teachers and sit down with them a little bit after class and ask them to help me with a certain problem or question if needed.” In addition to his teacher, Barry received support from for an individual who specialized in helping students with disabilities. Through her support Barry was able to get help with his testing anxiety and receive accommodations.

Some of the adoptees described multiple people on the college campus who added to their support system. For example, Che described two individuals who were both supportive and influential. First, the assistant director of the Student Affairs Department who encouraged him to talk when things were not going well. Che said, “We have these very deep conversations like, ‘This is what I am seeing’ or ‘This is what I’m struggling with’ and he offers that support.” At the beginning of those conversations, the assistant director would ask Che if he just wanted to be heard or if Che wanted advice. The second person that Che referenced was his first Black professor who happened to be married to a TRA. Che said,

He has challenged me to think about the identity that I have and the identity I aspire to have and how I don’t need to do this and that to be considered Black. He’s like, “You are because you are.”

This particular ethnic studies professor encouraged Che to move beyond the racial identity theories that he was learning about in his college class and make an effort to simply embrace his individuality.

The campus library, tutoring centers, and multicultural centers also had individuals that the adoptees leaned on for support. Alex described some of the

challenges she faced with her academics, but found support on her college campus. She said,

I have the chemistry tutoring center and I know everyone in there. And in the library, they also have one in there. I like the people there. It's like a bunch of helpful people. I feel like they don't shame me for getting the answer wrong. They are like, "No, but you're cool."

Even though the coursework was difficult, Alex had plenty of academic resources that she felt comfortable accessing. Haley said that she wasn't very connected to her college campus, except she did find social support through the Black student organization and academic support through the Multicultural Center. She described the Multicultural Center as a house where Black students could get help, print their papers, and feel supported. Likewise, Mimi rarely utilized social or academic support services that her university offered. However, off campus, Mimi relied heavily on her academic tutor who had helped her when she first arrived to the United States. Even after high school, her tutor continued to check on her every week and Mimi said, "Even though she was just my tutor I sometimes feel as though she's like my mom." That long-term relationship proved to be a critical source of support and encouragement when Mimi didn't feel comfortable talking about things with her adoptive mother, college friends, teammates, or coaches.

Two of the adoptees in this study mentioned that they also found support through counseling for situations that family and friends were not able to help with. Haley did not disclose how long she had been going to counseling, but she explained that she had access to her counselor every two weeks. She said, "That's who I go to to let my steam out or I talk to if I have a problem if I can't talk to my closest friends." Cali was new to

counseling at the time of the interview, but decided to seek out some additional support because she had recently connected with members of her biological family after being matched with them on an online DNA database. She explained:

It's been a lot. I'm thinking about it. I think that I am still in shock about it because I haven't made that step to talk to him [biological father] again...I've talked to him once. He told me he would call me back, but he didn't. Then my half-sister, we text sometimes, she said that he's waiting for me to call. I still feel kind of weird about it. It's a huge kind of thing.

Cali decided to reach out to a therapist during the reunification process with her birth father because she found that it was difficult to talk about this particular issue with her adoptive parents and boyfriend.

During their college years, the adoptees in this study faced challenges with a variety of issues including academics, finances, child care, time management, identity, and stress. In trying to overcome these obstacles they generally leaned on individuals who made them feel comfortable, served as a sounding board, and helped provide the academic and emotional support that they needed.

Seeking social interactions with co-ethnic peers. Many of the Black TRAs in this study gravitated toward Black peers in college. This was evident in some of the pictures that were posted on social media that showed the adoptee with Black friends. One of the comments said, "Chilling with some of my peeps at the park." Haley had originally wanted to attend a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), but due to finances she was not able to. As mentioned earlier, she found comfort with the Black student body on her college campus and met many new Black friends while living

in the dorms. She said, "That's where I got into to the Black culture." When the researcher asked if her sense of self or identity had changed while attending college, Haley simply said, "No because I only surround myself with Black people." Haley lived in Africa until she was 11 years old and explained that she felt the most comfortable being around people of color.

Several of the adoptees intentionally gravitated to their Black peers even though they hadn't had Black friends when they were younger. John said:

I didn't really associate myself with a lot of Black people when I was younger like I do now because now a majority of my friends are Black, but when I was younger I just didn't really have a view on the world. Now that I do and I see how the world is today I guess I picked, I don't want to say my side, but I don't look White and I know that. I tend to pick my Black side. I looked up my roots and all my heritage because now I'm in contact with my grandma on my dad's side. So I know my Black side now.

Not only had John decided to surround himself with Black friends, but he also used college as a period to reach out to his Black family members to connect with that part of his identity. Likewise, Che was also determined to enhance connections to his birth culture during college. He reached out to a Black residential manager on campus who encouraged him to get involved with the Black student organization and the intercultural affairs department. Che stated,

I really did a cultural overload. I had years of my life that I kind of had to make up for. I missed out on 18 years of being Black. "I got to catch up real quick." At least that is what I thought, but has not been the reality of it at all. I realized

that I am not going to catch up on those 18 years and there is no way to effectively do that, but at that moment that is what I wanted to do and I was going to do everything I could to do that.

Once arriving to campus Che felt a sense of urgency to immerse himself in the Black culture because he had gone so many years without access to it. Che described that he kept adding things to his plate because he was seeking connections with his Black peers, but there were times where he didn't feel like he fit in because he hadn't experienced racism to the degree that they had when they were younger. Che explained, "I had never experienced that [racism]. Because of the lack of....this is going to sound weird, but the lack of oppression, I felt like an imposter." Essentially, he felt that he had to experience certain things in order to be authentically Black. He did not have ownership of his Black identity and said, "I fall somewhere in that liminal state of being that identity, but not really being that identity because I was raised under a different race." He was caught between worlds and struggled to find alignment between what he had experienced growing up and how he wanted to identify in college. Overall, Che felt a lot of discomfort in college and sought out co-ethnic peers as a way to ease that conflict within himself.

Some of the adoptees explained why they saw the benefit of surrounding themselves with people of the same race/ethnicity. Circe explained that being around people who looked like her really helped her develop socially since she was able to ask questions. She said, "Through college and being able to talk with other people who are African-American and have natural hair, I've found a lot more support in like buying the proper beauty items that I need for my hair." Cali also gravitated towards Black peers in

college and explained that she dated mostly Black men; however she felt her level of openness was different. Cali said, “I am a bit more open to other races than other people. Like my boyfriend...he's Black and he only has Black friends.” She elaborated since she was raised by a White family, she could also relate to White people. Cali also mentioned that she related well to people of other ethnicities. She dated someone from El Salvador and her best friend was Filipino and she stated that she was proud of the fact that she could relate well to others.

Overall, there were a variety of reasons as to whom the Black TRAs in this study chose to surround themselves with in college. Some of them exclusively socialized with Black peers, while others enjoyed interacting with people from different backgrounds. In some cases, they opted to connect with Black peers because it brought a sense of familiarity or comfort. At other times, it was because they were searching for answers to help explain who they were.

Counteracting Challenges with Intrapersonal Assets

The fourth and final major theme of this qualitative research centered on how the Black TRAs in this study counteracted the challenges that they faced throughout their lives with their intrapersonal strengths. Regardless of the type of obstacle that they faced, the participants drew strength from previous experiences, maintained a positive mindset, and had the drive to help others. The participants exhibited self-awareness about how they were feeling and where they wanted to go.

Drawing strength from past experiences. As mentioned previously, past experiences could sometimes trigger difficult memories for the adoptees in this study, but at other times it was a motivating process. Mimi said,

There are days that I want to quit and want to give up on everything. Then I look back. I was an orphan girl who just came to this country to get an education. “I have gotten this far. Why quit now?,” that’s what I tell myself. It definitely helped me a lot...my past stories. I had a lot of challenges in early life.

Mimi often drew from her past experiences to help her stay focused and work hard in her college athletics and academics. Even though Ace expressed difficulty talking about certain aspects of his adoption story, he often drew from past experiences to keep moving forward. Ace claimed,

All of the struggles I’ve gone through have motivated me to work hard. Be able to look back and see how far I have come and be able to be grateful every day. It’s definitely been an experience and it does affect my life today. It motivates me to move forward with the confidence that I can do better and that I have succeeded in life.

In addition to being motivated, Ace explained that facing challenges early in life had made him driven to take advantage of the opportunities that come his way. On the flipside, Cali didn’t think that being adopted played into her performance in school. She elaborated,

I feel like being adopted doesn’t do anything for me education wise. I was really young when I was adopted, so maybe it’s different for someone who was older. I used to work with older foster kids and they might have had a lot of different experiences. Like bouncing around from home to home.

Cali didn't draw upon her adoption story for motivation like some of the other participants in the study did. However, she acknowledged that age and exposure to trauma may influence their experiences in school.

The concept of gratitude came up several times as adoptees reflected on previous experiences. Haley explained that her past experiences had provided a new perspective for her. She stated, "A lot of it is just like being humble and grateful. Even being here is an opportunity for me." In conversations with his biological family, John learned about the hardships that his birth mother and birth father had faced. He explained that graduating high school and going to college on an athletic scholarship would have been highly unlikely given the circumstances that he was born into. He said, "I know me getting adopted gave me more opportunity than what I would have had if I didn't get adopted. I got blessed really because I shouldn't be here." John expressed how important his mother was to him and he strongly believed that his path would have been much different if he hadn't been adopted.

Proving to others that they could succeed is also something that came from reflecting on their past experiences. Circe explained that her drive to make her parents proud was probably higher than her non-adopted peers because of their differences in race and she wanted to prove that she was "worthy" of her parent's love. Circe said, "For me it's like my mom, out of all those babies, she chose me. I want to make her proud of the child that she chose." The trauma of being separated from their biological parents at birth can leave many adoptees with a fear of abandonment. In this case, Circe had an overwhelming need to pay a debt back to her adoptive parents by striving to be the best

version of herself. Alex also found that people's negative assumptions surrounding those who were adopted had pushed her forward to do her best. She said,

I feel like sometimes people think that people in foster care or people who've been adopted don't have the skills to do everything that other people do. One of my big motivators, not only just because I'm adopted, but because I am that type of person, is that I like proving that I can do a lot more than people think that I can do.

Alex took the fact that she was adopted and combined that with her drive to prove other people wrong. Mimi wasn't concerned with proving people wrong; rather, she strived to be the first female from her family in Ethiopia to graduate high school and earn a college degree. She said, "Staying in college is challenging every day, but that's what keeps me in line and not giving up." In this case, it was reflecting upon her family back home and having an overarching goal that proved to be highly motivating for Mimi to persist.

John faced adversity during his adolescence that had a major impact on his life. He was angry and disheartened that he had been subjected to racism and discrimination when he was pulled over and detained by law enforcement twice during his youth. To make matters worse, a serious altercation broke out between him and his father during this time, which put tension on their relationship. However, even at a young age, John was able to take those traumatic experiences and tension to make positive changes in his life. He said, "I don't know, that changed me and I just got my shit together and got right." After those incidents, John explained that he made a conscious decision to focus more on his schoolwork and sports. John's ability to learn

from his hardship essentially put him on the positive path to earn multiple offers to play sports in college.

Reflecting back on past experiences served many functions for the Black TRAs in this study. Some used it as a motivating force and felt a sense of gratitude that helped keep things in perspective. Others looked back at their adoptive story or family history as a way to rise above the expectations of those around them. In some cases, the adoptees were able to help ease their underlying feelings of abandonment or loss by making their adoptive parents and biological families proud. Simply put, they were striving to add a happy ending to their adoptive story by staying motivated and focused on their long-term goals.

Maintaining a positive mindset. The ability to maintain a positive outlook during stressful or difficult situations often led to success for the participants. The Black TRAs in this study faced many obstacles growing up, but they were able to overcome them in different ways. For example, funny memes and links to silly videos on social media showed how humor was often used by the adoptees to decompress and stay positive. When Circe described the stress that her and her sister faced amongst their White peers at school, she drew strength and perspective from her support network. Circe said, “I knew that we would face adversity growing up and that was just a part of life, but we were always going to make it because we had each other.”

The transition to the collegiate setting came with its share of challenges for the participants, but focusing on their personal growth allowed them to persevere. For example, Haley struggled with time management during her first semester and her grades dropped. Reflecting back on this, she was not proud of the fact that she let her social life

impact her grades, but she said, “You think you know who you are and then you come to college and then you can really find yourself. Even if it’s good or bad...you learn from it.” The following semester she had gotten back on track with her academics. Haley reframed this difficult time during her collegiate career as an opportunity to learn and grow. Barry also explained that he had problems in college because he struggled with test taking and failed two classes. He had to re-take those two classes, which created additional work to his normal course workload. He explained that his attendance was good, that he was studying very hard, but his test scores were still not high enough. Despite everything, Barry said, “I have a mindset that this is what I want, I’m going to go for that no matter what.” He set aside the fact that it would take extra work and extra money to keep going, but he said, “I am going to keep going and eventually beat this class.” He managed to stay positive and resilient during this difficult time in his collegiate career.

Being able to look at the bigger picture also served as a positive guiding force in the adoptees’ lives. Alex expressed her desire to enter the medical field and said, “I realized pretty early on that you can't really stop going at any point when you're going for something in the medical field just because there are so many hoops to jump through.” She knew that it would take a lot of time and hard work in order to reach her goal. Paula also had extra responsibilities and expectations as a mother to a five month old child. She talked about how looking into the future helped keep her focused. Paula stated,

I feel pretty motivated. I just want to have a good job for my family and for my son. I like what I'm doing so that's a plus. I think motivation is pretty much the

key thing. Staying on top of things. Looking at the future and it's going to be better for us.

Paula explained that college was hard, but she knew that she would have to do whatever it took to get to where she wanted to be in life. Having the tenacity to not quit when things got difficult was something that the adoptees had in common. John said, “I don't really like starting things and then not finishing. I quit something in the past that I wish I didn't and ever since then I don't really like to stop.” John explained that once he started something he did his best to finish it.

Some of the adoptees in this study were just starting their college careers, while others were approaching the finish line. Despite their age or year in college, they demonstrated the drive to get a higher education and were able to maintain a positive mindset throughout challenges and obstacles.

Pursuing opportunities to help others. Intrapersonal intelligence is embodied when an individual has the ability to look at the bigger picture to see how their personal strengths can be utilized for positive change in the lives of others. This requires empathy, motivation, and social awareness. The Black TRAs in this study described the importance of giving back. Many gravitated towards careers in various helping professions. For example, at the time of this study Cali, Che, Circe, and Mimi were working toward degrees within the field of education, while Alex, Barry, and Paula were in the medical field. Even Ace, who was an environmental science major, was highly involved on his college campus to raise awareness about improving access to clean water. Ace explained,

I used to fundraise money and bring water filters to Ethiopia to my village. I distributed 70 water filters in my village. One per household. The reason I did this is because I lost my parents due to waterborne disease. I think it's one good thing to do to the community to give back.

Ace's past experiences motivated him and he explained that, in the future, he hoped to create a non-profit organization to improve the lives of Ethiopians. Similarly, Paula described that the experience of her father being sick when she was young was her first introduction to the field of physical therapy. She commented on how those in home services had helped him, which inspired her to pursue the same line of work. She elaborated, "So that has always been my thing...helping people. Even helping my mom or my siblings. It was always just something I felt good about doing." Alex, a clinical physiology major, explained that learning about the human body, anatomy, and physiology was not only interesting, but that knowledge could be used to help others. She explained, "I like the way that you can help people through gaining knowledge and experience yourself."

For those in the field of education, it was important to help students through support and representation. Circe explained that growing up there were conversations that she would have liked to have with her teachers, but she felt like they wouldn't understand because they weren't Black. Circe stated, "I hope to teach in a bigger city where there's a heavier population of African-American students so that I can properly represent and properly support them as they go to their education." She communicated the importance of having students be able to have racial mirrors in the people who educated them. Che explained that he was interested in working with the Latinx

population and doing research about their access to higher education and how their linguistic abilities play a role in their education. Che stated,

I am really interested in the higher education that we have for our students, predominantly our students of color. And that's because these institutions of higher education were not originally designed to accommodate or to allow our students of color into these spaces.

Che described the importance of representation and how he wanted to contribute to the persistence of students of color. He said, "I want to be that person that someone could look at me and say, 'Well he made it. We have similar identities, so therefore I can make it.'"

Some of the participants in the study used their own adoption story as a way to help others. For example, Cali explained that she often saw diverse families coming through the early childhood intervention program that she worked for. She said that sharing about her past experiences as a TRA helped the parents at her job "feel a little bit more at ease with me." Mimi also explained how she would use her international adoption story as a way to help motivate the students that she worked with as a physical education teacher and coach. In addition, Mimi wanted to continue to help her older brother, Ace, with his water filter project. She also wanted to go back and volunteer at the orphanage that she lived at. Haley, who was an undeclared major, also expressed an interest in helping her birth country in the future. She said, "I definitely plan on going back to Ethiopia at least to visit or do some work. I plan to finish college, my education, and somehow give back to the orphanage or just back to the people at home."

The interest and drive to help others was strong amongst all of the adoptees interviewed in this study. They wanted to use their knowledge and resources to help young people, families, and some strived to make impacts on a larger global scale. Even though these participants were busy working to fulfill their college requirements, they demonstrated the drive to help others.

Summary

All 10 participants in this study were raised in predominantly White neighborhoods and attended schools where the students and teachers were primarily White. The adoptive home was described as a loving and caring place. Even though the race/ethnicity, age, and gender of the siblings in each household varied, the adoptees explained that they had a sense of belonging. The adoptees reported that their parents valued education and provided a variety of resources in order to help them be successful. There were varying degrees to which the parents were described as preparing the adoptees for racist encounters. The participants shared that some of the adoptees explained that their parents did not initiate or facilitate conversations surrounding race and racism, while other parents were described as discussing it openly throughout their development.

It was within predominantly White spaces that the adoptees in this study faced a variety of challenges. All of the adoptees described their personal experiences encountering racism at school or within the community. For most of the adoptees, the topic of hair came up many times throughout their interviews and social media posts. In some cases, talking about their natural hair was in reference to a degrading comment from a White peer and other times it was mentioned as a source of pride, identity, and

self-confidence. The adoptees in this study dealt with the ongoing pressure of having to explain why their families looked different than other families, which often led to invasive questions, comments, or judgments.

For the majority of the participants the higher education setting promoted positive learning experiences and social encounters. Campus diversity was a topic frequently mentioned by the adoptees and they believed it was important to their sense of belonging. All of the Black TRAs in this study were able to identify more than one individual who served as their support system, especially during difficult times. In college, many of the adoptees gravitated towards Black peers or experiences where they could learn more about their Black identity.

The participants in the study faced a wide range of academic and social challenges throughout their childhood, adolescence, and during college. However, the results from the study indicate that the adoptees had various ways to cope and persevere. Looking back at their past experiences often was a source of motivation. The adoptees were able to maintain a positive outlook despite barriers. Finally, a common theme that emerged with the majority of the adoptees was the interest in giving back and helping others.

In conclusion, the interview data and social media data reflected the social and academic experiences of Black TRAs in college. The qualitative data was rich and provided a nuanced window into the perceptions and lived experiences of the college students in this study. The participants shared the various challenges that they faced, but also provided insight as to how they have managed to overcome those obstacles.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the social and academic experiences of Black TRAs who are in college, with a particular focus on their challenges and the ways they counteracted those challenges. Over the years, the practice of adoption has diversified families throughout the United States, but transracial adoption has been a particularly visible and controversial form of adoption. Historically, there have been disparities for Black TRAs who go through the foster care system and adoption process, but much remains to be examined about their lived experiences. For example, these young adults are graduating from high schools, moving away from their adoptive homes, and attending colleges throughout the country, yet very little research has centered on elevating their voices within the context of higher education or beyond college.

Chapter V begins with providing a brief summary of the study and its participants. Then the chapter highlights the major findings from this qualitative research and draws connections to the literature. It provides theoretical implications related to critical race theory (CRT) and practical implications for educators and those involved with adoption. Finally, this chapter provides suggestions for future research and a conclusion.

Overview of the Study

The ethnographic approach of using an open-ended interviewing process was used to examine at Black TRAs in the setting of higher education to better understand their academic and social experiences. Data were collected through two semi-structured telephone interviews and the participants' social media platforms. Combining the various data sources allowed for triangulation.

A total of 10 participants were recruited for this qualitative study. Six of the participants were female and four were male. All three of the international adoptees in this study were from Ethiopia and their average age at the time of their adoption was 11 years old. The remaining seven adoptees were adopted domestically, through private agencies or social services, and they all came into the adoptive home under the age of three. Seven of the adoptees self-identified as Black and three reported they were bi-racial (two were of White and Black ancestry and one was of Black and Native American ancestry). All of the participants had some knowledge of their adoption story with the exception of Che who did not know that he was adopted until he was 12 years old and did not know he was from Black ancestry until he was 18 years old. The participants in this study attended colleges and universities on the east coast, west coast, and in the southern part of the United States; all but two were undergraduate students. The majority of the Black TRAs in this study were pursuing degrees in education and in the medical field.

Overview of Major Findings and Connection to the Literature

While the research pertaining to Black TRAs who are in college is very limited, this study strived to contribute to this area of scholarship. Consequently, the findings of this study mirrored some of the results of other adoption studies. The themes and subthemes illustrated in Chapter IV attended to the experiences that the research participants had navigating a variety of contexts, including their home, schools, and communities. Together the interviews and social media data helped tell parts of the story of the 10 individuals in this study and describe some of their experiences throughout their childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood.

Even though there is no monolithic definition of what it means to be a Black TRA or to be a person of color living in the United States, this research provided a window into some of the complex and multifaceted experiences of Black TRAs. Examining the individual quotes and stories allowed the researcher to identify four key points. First, adoptees should be the privileged voice in conversations related to transracial adoption. The findings from this study suggested that the adoptees were able to clearly identify positive and negative experiences that took place within the adoptive home, at school, and in college. Their insights and perceptions are valuable assets and sources of information as educators and adoptive parents strive to better understand this population. Second, research and discussions need to move beyond simple dichotomies. The findings illustrated how complex their social and academic experiences were, so researchers must peel back the layers of the story in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of their lived experiences. Third, the concept of race/ethnicity shapes the adoptees lives and experiences. The findings clearly demonstrated that racism and discrimination manifested in their lives, but the diversity of college campuses helped the participants flourish and grow. Fourth, the self-agency of the adoptees needs to be acknowledged and highlighted. The Black TRAs in this study proved that they were not passive recipients in life. They were active and intentional in their educational endeavors and social engagements.

Adoptees as the Privileged Voice

The findings from this study suggested that these young adults have the knowledge, insight, and understanding to effectively articulate the implications of transracial adoption and how it shapes the college experience. Adoption research has

taken place for over 50 years; however, the adoptees themselves have often been left out of the conversation or overshadowed by the perspectives of others. For example, individuals in the United States commonly hear messages about the need to recruit foster parents and the high number of children who are in the system awaiting adoption. In fact, National Adoption Awareness Month is a mainstream way to draw attention to the issue of adoption, but the narrative during the month of November is generally one-sided. For example, it is not communicated that trauma is inextricably linked to the separation of children from their birth parents (Verrier, 1993) and the messaging rarely emphasizes what the Child Welfare system is doing to keep families together (Trask & Hamon, 2007). As a result, the general public is not challenged to move beyond the popular culture image of “forever families.” This is significant to note because the Black TRAs in this study were often compared to the mainstream narratives and images. Their families did not match the dominant group’s perception of what a family should look like, so they often felt pressured to defend who they were to the outside world.

In adoption research, the voice of Black TRAs has generally taken a back seat to the voice of the White adoptive parents. Kirton (2000) critiqued some of the early adoption research because the Black TRAs were not generally given the opportunity to express their personal thoughts and feelings about how they experienced race and what it was like to navigate different spaces. In fact, many of the early assessments, surveys, and measures failed to include TRAs in the research process (Falk, 1970; Zastrow, 1977). Essentially, many studies were talking about TRAs without actually talking to them. More recently there has been a growing trend where the adoption community is hearing directly from Black TRAs. In fact, researchers who were transracially adopted have

taken ownership and conducted the research themselves (Baden et al., 2007; Baden et al., 2012; Ballard, 2013; Hoffman, 2011; Roorda, 2015).

Oftentimes, the adoptee population seemingly disappears behind the stereotypical image of a young child in need. Very little research has looked beyond childhood or examined contexts outside of the adoptive home. The adoptees in this study reflected a population of college students who are commonly invisible in the world of higher education. The participants articulated what it felt like to be a Black child adopted by White parents within the context of school, the community, and in college. They described the discomfort that they felt when they had to field personal questions about their birth parents and adoption story. They highlighted many instances where their physical appearance and hair was a source of negative comments and feelings of otherness amongst their White peers (Butler-Sweet, 2011a; Powell, 2017). The participants spoke openly about their encounters with racism and discrimination in various settings (Kim, 2012; Powell, 2017). In some cases, the White adoptive parents were described as being completely unaware of these situations or minimized the experience (Smith & Juarez, 2015). These are some of the troublesome and raw accounts that came up when Black TRA college students were given the opportunity to reflect on their personal and academic experiences. The qualitative data highlights the weight and complexities experienced by adoptees in respect to their adoptive story, their natural hair, and their racist encounters. Ultimately, researchers cannot fully understand transracial adoption without listening to adoptees' first-hand experiences.

Moving Beyond the Dichotomy

The findings from this research determined that the academic and social experiences of Black TRAs in college were complex and multifaceted. However, the United States is a dichotomous society and situations are often viewed as good or bad and questions are generally answered with a yes or no. Likewise, the topic of transracial adoption remains polarized. There are adoptive parents, policy makers, and researchers who argue that transracial adoption does not have negative consequences (Grow & Shapiro, 1974; Simon & Altstein, 2002), while others say that it does (DeBerry et al., 1996; Smith et al, 2011). Indeed, the findings and conversations from these groups of individuals have contributed to the overall scholarship surrounding transracial adoption, however, the adoptees lived experiences consist of many different and connected parts.

Much of the seminal work surrounding transracial adoptions found that adoptees had adjusted positively to their adoptive family and they often demonstrated “typical” child and adolescent behaviors (Grow & Shapiro, 1974; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Simon & Altstein, 2002). Essentially, the reports from White adoptive parents, school records, and psychological assessments generally deemed the placement of children of color with White parents as having positive results. Smith et al. (2011) explained that just because the early research does not show specific abnormalities related to their psychology or adjustment, it does not mean that Black TRAs are free from experiencing serious adversities.

The Black TRAs in this study, described academic and social experiences at school and within the community that were positive, but at other times challenges emerged. In respect to their sense of belonging, the participants in this study described

feeling welcomed into a caring and loving adoptive home. However, some of the adoptees who were adopted later in their childhood described a period of adjustment where it was difficult to connect with an adoptive parent (Bagley & Young, 1993). In terms of academic support, the Black TRAs in this study explained that education was something that was valued in the home and that their adoptive parents were eager to provide additional support or assistance. However, previous research indicated that White adoptive parents who lived in predominantly White spaces, generally did not have a frame of reference to know what it is like to be a person of color in the United States (Smith & Juarez, 2015). While it may come easy or natural for adoptive parents to provide academic support to their Black TRAs, they often did not seem to have the experience or knowledge to support, advise, and prepare their children for racist encounters in school and with their classmates.

Race Matters

The findings from this study illustrated that lives of the adoptees were shaped by the social constructs of race and ethnicity. These concepts had an ongoing presence throughout their K-12, college, and community experiences. The participants in this study were often subjected to racist or discriminatory comments even though the parents were described as being unaware that it was happening or did not know how to talk about it. In fact, color-blind perspectives and policies have emerged as a way for individuals from the White community to replace the difficult memories of the past with images of oneness and unity of the future. However, the research demonstrates that “seeing no color” can have damaging consequences on those who are adopted transracially and are living in predominantly White communities (Barn, 2013; Butler-Sweet, 2011a; DeBarry

et al., 1996). The underlying conflict for many transracial adoptees is that they often grow up as active participants in the White majority culture due to living in predominantly White neighborhoods and attending predominantly White schools, but they are treated differently as racial/ethnic minorities by members of the majority culture (Lee, 2003).

The participants in this study experienced varying degrees to which the topic of race/ethnicity was discussed in their adoptive home. For some, they perceived that a color-blind approach was modeled by their parents, while others adoptees believed they had parents who openly talked about their racial/ethnic differences. Regardless of what was communicated in the adoptive home, the results from this study show that the majority of the participants emphasized the importance of their campus diversity and many gravitated to co-ethnic peers while attending college. Essentially, race did matter to the Black TRAs in this study as they moved through their college experience.

Highlighting Self-Agency

The findings from the study illustrated that adoptees have self-agency, a concept where an individual deliberately chooses what actions they will take in efforts to achieve particular results. The participants in this study were active and intentional in their educational endeavors and social engagements. Unfortunately, being adopted can sometimes be perceived as a weakness or they can be viewed as individuals who are passive. Lee (2003) explained that there is a need to understand TRAs as active “agents of change” and the findings from this study support the notion that they are not passive recipients to environmental and social influences (p. 725). In other words, adoptees are

not the stereotypical image of children in need that is often portrayed throughout the mainstream narrative about adoption.

Despite their individual circumstances and challenges, each adoptee in this study possessed strengths and positive attributes that propelled them forward in the college setting. The literature on college student success often highlights the importance of support systems (Kim, 2012; Nissen, 2011). The Black TRAs in this study exhibited a wide array of individuals from whom they drew support. For example, the majority of the participants leaned on peers and their adoptive parents for support in college. They were intentional about who they included in their lives. They confided in college professors who shared common interests or came from similar backgrounds. Likewise, maintaining a positive mindset or outlook on life was an attribute that the participants in this study stated was important especially when having to endure racist encounters or during situations where they did not fit in (Powell, 2017).

For the Black TRAs in this study, their past experiences proved to be intertwined with their future goals. For example, the majority of the participants described instances during their college years where they would draw from previous experiences and aspects of their adoption story to identify areas that provided motivation and strength. Essentially, their underlying drive to keep moving forward was largely fueled by their interest to help others in the future. For example, the adoptees pursuing degrees in education and healthcare embodied the motivation to improve the lives of others. Overall, their interpersonal strengths and self-agency were contributing factors to their retention and success in higher education.

Theoretical Implications

The first tenet of CRT asserts that race and racism are endemic to American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). The Black TRAs in this study described specific accounts of racism or discrimination that occurred at school or within the community. They identified situations where people made hurtful comments about their hair or skin tone. Oftentimes as the only Black person in the room, these adoptees described situations where they were tokenized or stereotyped. CRT is essential in drawing attention to the fact that racism does exist in the lives of those who are transracially adopted, and how microaggressions, implicit bias, and color-blind perspectives continue to impact them in the college setting. For example, the safety and emotional well-being of the participants was jeopardized after verbal attacks where they were called the N-word. Overall, the Black TRAs in this student were subjected to racism at different ages in school and within the community.

The second tenet of CRT, the challenge to dominant ideology, also applied to the topic of transracial adoptees in higher education. Delgado and Stefancic (2013) explained that an object or situation can be described in a variety of ways depending on who is telling the story, but a counternarrative or counterstory can be a way to challenge the status quo. Indeed, the practice of adoption is generally portrayed in the way that those in power define it, but this study drew attention to the counternarrative for the Black TRAs who were in college. For example, the participants in the study explained that their White adoptive parents cared about them deeply, provided them with educational resources and support, and created a sense of belonging within the adoptive home, which all fell in line with what the dominant culture typically projects. However

in most cases, the Black TRAs in this study said that they were not adequately prepared to deal with racist encounters and were not educated by their parents on issues surrounding safety, such as traffic stops. The majority of the adoptees said that their parents did not talk to them about approaches to stay safe or how to advocate for themselves when interacting with law enforcement. With the recurring stories in the news showing unarmed Black people who are shot or beaten by police, these realities challenge dominant culture's claim that "love is enough" (Smith & Juarez, 2013, p. 109). Drawing attention to the adoptees' encounters with racism could help encourage White adoptive parents to become more culturally competent and incorporate ways to better prepare their children to live in a racist society.

As previously discussed, when examining a societal issue, it is imperative to hear directly from those who have the experiential knowledge surrounding the issue at hand, which is the fourth tenet of CRT. The voices, stories, and experiences of people of color, or in this case those who were adopted transracially, is essential to draw upon (Yosso, 2006). These voices can help policy makers, practitioners, and educators examine the systems that are in place. For example, asking adoptees to communicate their viewpoints regarding open versus closed adoptions could provide guidance on shaping policies in this country. Having college TRAs talk about their process of racial/ethnic identity development during their college years, could help inform higher education professionals about campus diversity efforts. For example, the perspective and experiences of transracial adoptees can be embedded into professional trainings that aim to teach faculty and staff on how to lead effective discussions about racial issues in the classroom or during advising. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) were credited with being the first to

publicly apply the CRT framework to the field of education, but there is a wealth of opportunity for scholars to apply it to other areas of education including the racial/ethnic identity development of those who are adopted transracially (Hoffman, 2011). Overall, the contribution of this study was that CRT was an effective framework to shed light on the participants' unique academic and social experiences as Black TRAs in college.

Implications for Practice

There are members of the adoption triad (adoptee, adoptive parent, or birth parent) living in towns and attending schools throughout the nation. Regardless of the racial or ethnic background of these individuals, there are many ways that adoptees can be better supported in the educational system. First, it is imperative for K-12 educators and higher education practitioners to be aware that the adoptee population exists in their classrooms. It is important for educators to be aware of their biases and acknowledge that all families look different and come together in different ways. For example, due to a lack of awareness or sensitivity many TRAs are asked invasive questions from their classmates and teachers like, "Where are your real parents?" which was a comment that Barry and Paula heard from students at school. Questions like these can trigger feelings of discomfort or make an individual feel like they do not belong. Second, it is important for educators to be sensitive to their students' unique stories and histories. For example, when giving an assignment that involves a family tree or requires interviews with family members, a college professor can reflect inclusiveness and sensitivity by saying, "Every family is different, so you get to decide who you consider to be your family and how they are represented in this assignment." Third, it is important for educators to understand that adoption is complex and uniquely experienced by each adoptee. For example, sweeping

generalizations or statements like, “Happy adoption month!” or “You are so lucky that you were adopted!” can be hurtful or insulting to some adoptees. Rather, the safest approach is for an individual to err on the side of privacy and respect. If an adoptee initiates a conversation about adoption, then the best approach is for the individual to be an active listener and reply with empathetic and validating responses such as, “I hear what you are saying.” Fourth, it is important for educators to understand that trauma is associated with each removal that the child experiences in his or her life, even if the removal from biological parents occurs at birth (Verrier, 1993). Educators must be aware that trauma manifests itself in different ways and can affect cognitive, emotional, and social development. In fact, while the effects of trauma or abandonment can remain relatively silent or invisible, challenges can carry on through adulthood for many adoptees. Those who provide advising or counseling services in the system of higher education must be sensitive to the needs of young adults who were transracially adopted. Overall, educators and practitioners at any level have the opportunity to be more aware of the populations that they serve, use inclusive language in their classrooms, be mindful that each adoptee has unique experiences and needs, and seek professional development on trauma informed practices. For example, Thomas, Crosby, and Vanderhaar (2019) reviewed the most frequently cited and available trauma-related resources and identified that the content generally related to strategies that informed educators about the nature and impact of trauma, provided ideas to build emotionally healthy school cultures, and outlined ways for educators to engage in self-care.

College campuses and communities in the United States are becoming more diverse with each passing year. While often overlooked, individuals who are adopted

transracially are entering the college setting at higher rates. For the Black TRAs in this study, their campus diversity was central to their success and sense of belonging. As a result, institutions of higher education must continue to work towards increasing diversity initiatives on their campuses in order to meet the unique needs of their college student population. For example, the adoptees in this study found a sense of belonging within student clubs and at multicultural centers. In addition, recruiting and retaining ethnically diverse faculty and staff improves representation throughout campus, but also can increase the opportunities for mentorship and support for students of color. The findings of this study illustrated how the Black TRAs gravitated to university faculty and staff who shared common interests or came from similar backgrounds. Colleges and universities can strive to offer ethnic studies courses, majors, or minors where cultural diversity is celebrated and imbedded into the curriculum. Student engagement initiatives and clubs should be inclusive of different populations and identities and provide an array of opportunities for students to come together and connect throughout the year. Finally, student support services, such as counseling centers, should be trained on the effects of trauma related to the adoptee population, as well as the racial/ethnic identity issues that many transracial adoptees face during college.

Suggestions for Future Research

Throughout the years, a variety of methodological approaches have been used to examine the population of students in the United States who were transracially adopted. For example, the majority of the studies were cross-sectional or longitudinal studies and often used surveys or representative samples to draw comparisons between Black TRAs and same race adoptees (Lee, 2003). Adoption research has outlined results

from adjustment studies, racial socialization studies, and racial/ethnic identity studies for children under the age of 18, but similar efforts should be continued for TRA populations who are in college or beyond college. The majority of the existing research about TRAs who are in college has drawn attention to the experiences of Korean TRAs and emphasized the international adoptee perspective (Hoffman & Peña, 2013; Nissen, 2011; Shiao & Tuan, 2008). While these studies are imperative to understanding the unique experiences of the largest segment of the TRA population in the United States, there are opportunities for researchers to examine the lived experiences of TRAs from all racial/ethnic backgrounds. For example, focusing on Hispanic TRAs could contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding a growing segment of the college student population. On the flipside, further research could be focused on smaller, yet equally important, adoptee populations including White children who were adopted transracially by Black parents. In addition, longitudinal studies can be conducted to examine how TRAs develop or change in college over time. The increased use of technology and social media amongst this population of college students can also be used as a way to support a researchers' findings about their academic and social experiences.

While this study only focused on the experiences and perspectives of the adoptees, future research could include participation from members of the adoptive family or biological family. For example, several of the participants in this study mentioned their birth parents, biological siblings, and extended family members during their interviews. Researchers could examine the experiences associated with reunifying with members of their first family and explore if these interactions may have shaped their college experiences or identity. Along those lines, the differences between closed

adoptions and open adoptions could be an area of research that draws more attention, specifically how the level of openness of one's adoption influences his or her college experiences.

The transition to college is often a pivotal period in one's life. For many adoptees, going to college can trigger interest in their birth or adoptive cultures (Baden et al., 2012). In fact, one of the Black TRAs in this study mentioned that she had originally wanted to attend a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), but didn't attend because she could not afford to do so. Future research could incorporate various college settings to compare the academic and social experiences of Black TRAs who attended predominantly White institutions with those who attended HBCUs. Regardless of the setting, there is a need for future research to examine the psychological impacts that racism and discrimination have on those who are adopted transracially in college and beyond. Qualitative research can continue to be utilized to explore the descriptions of the racist encounters and examine how those events influenced the Black TRAs experiences in college. This area of focus is essential given the political climate of the country at the time of this study, the incidents of police brutality against Black men and women, and the increased presence of White supremacy groups within various communities and university campuses.

Conclusion

The practice of informal and formal adoptions have occurred throughout history and are part of the fabric of communities across the globe. As long as issues related to political uprisings, war, natural disasters, and poverty continue to occur, it is likely that the practice of transracial adoption will continue to persist. Same-race adoptions and

transracial adoptions have deep historical roots in the United States and were shaped by social class, religion, and race. As a result, the dominant culture has established deep seeded ideologies and narratives surrounding adoption and transracial adoption in the United States. Over time, these dominant ideologies have been embedded into the foundation of larger systems including the field of education and social services.

The CRT framework provides the opportunity for scholars to look at the historical progression of adoption through the lens of power, privilege, and oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). Examining the historical events and policies that have led to modern day adoption practices through the CRT lens allows scholars to acknowledge that racism has created differences in housing, income, incarceration, and education. The CRT model highlights the experiences of minoritized populations and allows their voices to be heard. CRT challenges the status quo through counternarratives and provides opportunities for participants in research studies to share their experiential knowledge. Ultimately, it allows scholars to flip the script on what is widely disseminated and accepted by the general public.

Transracial adoptees have been a silenced population in the field of education for far too long. As a community, adoptees have a wealth of knowledge and first-hand experience on what it is like to move through the system of education. Scholars, educators, and practitioners have a responsibility to call upon the members of the adoption community to learn how we can improve our adoptive homes, schools, and universities. We must be prepared to hear what Black TRAs say is working and what is not. We must be strong enough to sit with those truths, own them, and find ways to address them. Above all, educators and practitioners must work hard every day to affirm

people from underrepresented groups (no matter how small the group is) by making sure their histories and voices are reflected in the curriculum and literature. We should not have to wait for a nationally declared month in order to celebrate their beauty, strength, and contributions. Ultimately, we have a duty to provide our diverse students with affirmations of achievement and hope, which are the strongest ways to fight racism and oppression.

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APPENDIX A

Research Flyer

Hello. My name is Mariluz and I am a doctoral student in the Equity and Diversity in Education program at the University of Nevada, Reno. I am seeking participants for a research study about the social and academic experiences of transracial adoptees who are attending a four-year college or university. In full-disclosure, I am a Hispanic adoptive mother of two biological siblings who are Black (5 and 6 years old), so my primary goal with this research is to honor the adoptee voice and perspective, as well as, address a gap in research by exploring the experiences of transracial adoptees during their college years.

To participate, you must meet 5 requirements:

- (1) Traditional college age student (18 to 24 years old).
- (2) Currently attending a four-year college or university in the United States.
- (3) Self-identify as Black or African American or biracial (having at least one biological parent of African American descent).
- (4) Adopted by two White parents (if adoptive parents were married or living together) or one White parent (if adoptive parent was single).
- (5) You began living in your adoptive home before the age of 15 (even if your adoption was finalized after your 15th birthday).

As busy college students I understand that your time is valuable, so I will be providing an incentive for those who participate in this study. I will email you two \$25 amazon.com eGift cards for a total value of \$50.00. The first \$25 eGift card will be emailed at the beginning of the first telephone interview (lasting approximately 60 minutes). The second \$25 eGift card will be emailed to you at the beginning of the second telephone interview (lasting approximately 30 minutes). In addition to the two telephone interviews, I will ask to follow a social media platform of your choice (Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook) for a short period of time. I will set up a generic profile and I will not interact with you on social media at all. It is just another way for me to gather information about your college experience.

If you are interested in participating in this study please provide your email below so that I can contact you with more details about this research study.

This Gmail account is password protected and your personal information will not be shared. If you volunteer for this study, your identity will remain anonymous and you will pick a pseudonym (a fictitious name) for me to use throughout the study.

I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your time!

Sincerely, Mariluz
mariluzcristinagarcia@gmail.com

775-247-5501

Fillable section of the Google Doc

- Email Address

APPENDIX B

Follow-up Research Flyer

Hello. Thank you for your interest in my research study. Please look over the following details and fill in the information at the bottom of the google sheet:

Purpose: I am conducting a study about Black transracial adoptees who are in college. I want to explore their academic and social experiences in the higher education setting, as well as examine their childhood experiences in relation to their overall college experience.

Telephone Interviews: You will be asked to participate in two telephone interviews. The first telephone interview has 11 questions and will take approximately 60 minutes. The second telephone interview has 8 questions and will take approximately 30 minutes. Each telephone interview will be audio recorded.

Social Media Posts and Profile: In between the first and second telephone interviews, I will ask to follow your social media posts on a social media platform of your choice (Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook). I will only follow your posts for one to three months and then I will delete my anonymous social media accounts. I will not make any comments or interact with you via social media during that time. My profile will be created using a pseudonym and the account will be deleted after the second round of telephone interviews are conducted. I will not contact you via email or social media after the second telephone interview has been completed and there will be no required follow-up.

Risk: This study is considered to be minimal risk of harm. This means the risks of your participation in the research are similar in type or intensity to what you encounter during your daily activities. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop at any time.

Benefits: Benefits of doing research are not definite; but I hope this research will inform educators and professionals who work with adoptees. There are no direct benefits to you in this study activity.

Confidentiality: As the researcher, I will treat your identity and the information collected about you with professional standards of confidentiality and protect it to the extent allowed by law. You will not be personally identified in any reports or publications that may result from this study.

Incentive: As an incentive for your participation, I will be sending you two \$25.00 electronic gift cards to Amazon.com to the email address that you provided. The first gift card will be emailed to you at the beginning of the first telephone interview and the

second gift card will be emailed to you at the beginning of the second telephone interview. The total incentive for participating in this research is \$50.00.

Participation: If you would like to volunteer for this study please fill in your information below to make sure that you meet the study's criteria and so that we can schedule our first telephone interview. If you prefer to schedule the telephone interview via text messaging, then please include your cellphone number with area code (not required). This Gmail account is password protected and your information will not be shared.

Sincerely, Mariluz
mariluzcrisitinagarcia@gmail.com
775-247-5501

Fillable section of the Google Doc

- I give my formal consent to participate in the study (Yes or No)
- Email address where you would like your Amazon gift cards sent
- Pseudonym (fictitious name) for me to refer to you in this study instead of your first name
- Cell phone number w/ area code (if you prefer texting over email)
- How old are you?
- Name of college/university?
- What is your race/ethnicity?
- What is the race/ethnicity of your adoptive mother? (type N/A if not applicable)
- What is the race/ethnicity of your adoptive father (type N/A if not applicable)
- How old were you when you began living in your adoptive home?
- Do you have a social media account? (Yes or No)
- If so, which social platform do you give me access to temporarily follow from an anonymous account between our first and second telephone interview? (Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter)
- Any questions or comments? If not, then I will be in communication shortly. Thank you!

APPENDIX C


Visual Flyer

Seeking participants to interview over the phone:

- (1) Traditional college age student (18 to 24 years old)
- (2) Currently attending a four-year college or university
- (3) Self-identify as Black or African American or biracial
- (4) Adopted by White parent/s
- (5) Began living in the adoptive home before the age of 15

\$50
electronic
amazon.com
gift card
provided

If you are interested please contact
Mariluz Garcia
E-mail: mariluzcristinagarcia@gmail.com
Text Message: 775-247-5501
Or fill out the google form:
<https://forms.gle/5NLGwDq6Y8B6BtzF6>

An aerial photograph of a modern university campus. The buildings are primarily brick with large glass windows. There are green spaces, walkways, and a central circular area. In the background, there are mountains under a clear sky. A small square icon with a cross is visible in the upper right area of the image.

APPENDIX D

Telephone Interview Script

Hello. I wanted to remind you that this telephone interview will be audio recorded. As you already saw in the email that you gave consent to, I am conducting a study about the perspectives of Black transracial adoptees who are in college. I want to explore their academic and social experiences in the higher education setting, as well as examine their childhood experiences in relation to their overall college experience.

This telephone interview will have _____ number of questions and will take approximately _____ minutes (11 questions for the first interview or 8 questions for the second interview and 60 minutes for the first interview or 30 minutes for the second interview). In the event that this telephone call is disconnected I will call you right back and we can continue the interview.

As an incentive for your participation, I will be sending you a \$25.00 electronic gift card to Amazon.com to the email address that you provided on the Google Sheet right now. Please take a moment to look and confirm that you received the electronic gift card (Yes or No?).

Do you have any comments or questions before we begin?

APPENDIX E

Individualized Questions for the Second Telephone Interview

Due to confidentiality reasons, the social media posts have been edited to protect the identities of the research participants online.

Ace's Individualized Questions:

1. I followed everyone's social media posts from June 1 to September 1. One post that stood out to me on your social media was on August 24th that said _____. Was that experience meaningful to you and if so, how?
2. During your first telephone interview, it was clear that you are very proud of your Ethiopian roots and African identity. What has been your experience trying to balance or blend the part of you that is Ethiopian with the part that is American?

Alex's Individualized Questions:

1. I followed everyone's social media posts from June 1 to September 1. One post that stood out to me on your social media was on June 7th and someone posted on your timeline _____. Was that post meaningful to you and if so, how?
2. During your first telephone interview, the topic of hair came up several times. Now that you are in college, how has your hair played a role in your identity or sense of self?

Barry's Individualized Questions:

1. I followed everyone's social media posts from June 1 to September 1. One post that stood out to me on your social media was on June 23rd _____. When you read that post, was it meaningful to you and if so how?
2. During your first telephone interview, a topic that kept coming up was interracial dating. Is that still an issue that you think about or deal with now that you are in college?

Cali's Individualized Questions:

1. I followed everyone's social media posts from June 1 to September 1. One post that stood out to me on your social media was a memory that popped up on June 20th and the caption said _____. How has the move to another city for graduate school shaped your college experience?
2. During your first telephone interview, the topic of hair came up several times. Now that you are in college, how has your hair played a role in your identity or sense of self?

Che's Individualized Questions:

1. I followed everyone's social media posts from June 1 to September 1. One post that stood out to me on your social media was on August 17th and it said _____. Can you elaborate on the "journey" that you are referring to?

2. During your first telephone interview, a topic that kept coming up was your identity and sense of self. Now that you are in college are there certain cultural aspects, gestures, or knowledge that you feel you missed out on because your father passed away when you were so young and your mother a different race?

Circe's Individualized Questions:

1. I followed everyone's social media posts from June 1 to September 1. One post that stood out to me on your social media was on August 10th and it said _____. Can you elaborate more on this?
2. During your first telephone interview, the topic of hair came up several times. Now that you are in college, how has your hair played a role in your identity or sense of self?

Haley's Individualized Questions:

1. I followed everyone's social media posts from June 1 to September 1. One post that stood out to me on your social media was on a picture of you on August 26th and the caption said _____. Tell me a little bit more about that post or the day that you posted it.
2. During your first telephone interview, the idea that came up often was that your move from Ethiopia to the US was the biggest change or experience of your life and everything else feels small in comparison. Is that idea still true for you now that you are in college?

John's Individualized Questions:

1. I followed everyone's social media posts from June 1 to September 1. During that time you only posted once on Instagram and it was a picture of you standing outside, in front of a car, with your phone, and the caption said _____. Tell me a little bit more about that post or the day that you posted it.
2. During your first telephone interview, a topic that kept coming up was how sports were a big part of your identity growing up and shaped your educational experiences. In college, when you become medically retired from football due to concussions, did you feel a shift or change in your identity or sense of self?

Mimi's Individualized Questions

1. I followed everyone's social media posts from June 1 to September 1. One post that stood out to me on your social media was on June 24th that said _____. Tell me more about that post or how you were feeling when you posted it.
2. During your first telephone interview, it was clear that you are very proud of your Ethiopian roots and African identity. What has been your experience trying to balance or blend the part of you that is Ethiopian with the part that is living in America?

Paula's Individualized Questions:

1. I followed everyone's social media posts from June 1 to September 1. One post that stood out to me on your social media was a selfie of you with your son on

August 27th and the caption said _____. Tell me a little bit more about that post or the day that you posted it.

2. During your first telephone interview, you explained how you lost your father right before you started college and then later you became a mom while attending college. How has your experience been in comparison to your college peers who may have not had to go through two major family events like these while in college?