Parenting Across Racial Lines: The Lived Experiences of Transracially Adoptive Parents of Black Children

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This transcendental phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of transracially adoptive parents of Black children. Guided by the Cultural-Racial Identity Model, the study addressed two questions: 1) What are transracially adoptive parents of Black children's perceptions of their child's racial/cultural identity development? and 2) What are their perceptions of the parent–child relationship? Six adoptive parents participated in semi-structured, 60-minute interviews. The data were transcribed and thematically analyzed to uncover shared patterns of meaning. Six key themes emerged: (a) experience of the child–parent relationship; (b) impact of trauma; (c) becoming a transracially adoptive parent; (d) the cultural, racial, and ethnic identity development process; (e) encounters with microaggressions; and (f) cultural socialization practices. The study's findings offer meaningful implications for adoptive families, mental health professionals, counselor educators, and researchers by highlighting culturally responsive approaches to supporting identity development and relational dynamics within the transracial adoption kinship network.

Keywords: **transracial adoption, Black, children, parents, Cultural-Racial Identity Model**

There are over 100,000 adoptions in the United States every year (Administration for Children and Families [ACF], 2023) and approximately 40% of domestic adoptions in the United States are transracial (Vandivere et al., 2009). Transracial adoption has traditionally been defined as "the adoption of a child from one racial or cultural group by a parent or couple from another racial or cultural group" (Malott & Schmidt, 2012, p. 384). The practice of transracial adoption in the United States began in the 1950s with the adoption of Korean and Japanese child survivors of World War II (Barn, 2013). By the 1960s, opposition to transracial adoption emerged from Indigenous communities and the National Association of Black Social Workers, who argued that such placements could compromise a child's racial and cultural identity development (Marr, 2017). This resistance contributed to the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978, which was established to preserve the cultural traditions of Indigenous children and communities.

Despite the ICWA of 1978, the U.S. government later enacted the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act of 1994 and the Inter-Ethnic Placement Act of 1996, which mandated race-neutral placement practices. These acts were backed by advocates of transracial adoption who believed that the benefits of securing housing for children outweighed others' concerns about racial matching (Marr, 2017). To this day, the debate on racial matching continues with minimal regard to the mental health needs of transracially adopted children.

According to Godon et al. (2014), transracially adopted children experience racism and discrimination, identity conflicts, psychological issues, physical dissimilarity from their adoptive families, and the potential minimization of racial incidents. Cultural socialization has been cited as a

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solution for addressing racism and discrimination and has been emphasized as a method for promoting a positive cultural-racial identity for transracial adoptees (Docan-Morgan, 2010; Leslie et al., 2013; Vonk et al., 2010). Studies that have focused on cultural socialization typically seek to address the needs of Asian and Latinx transracial adoptees, as they contribute to a large percentage of inter-country adoptions (i.e., a child adopted from outside of the United States; Chang et al., 2017; Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2019), whereas Black transracially adopted children often represent a small percentage of participants or they are not included in the sample.

According to Samuels (2009) and Goss et al. (2017), Black transracially adopted children are more likely to have a negative racial identity, which could lead to them feeling disconnected from their adoptive family, experiencing loneliness and low self-esteem, having a strong desire to belong, and potentially demonstrating withdrawal symptoms. There is a scarcity of literature on Black transracial adoptees, especially in counseling literature. In the last 30 years there have been approximately 40 articles on adoption written in counseling journals (Liu et al., 2018), and most adoption research provides little empirical information related to counseling people within the adoption kinship network (Grotevant, 1997). This gap reflects a critical need for adoption-competent counselors and increased research on transracially adoptive families in the counseling profession.

Literature Review

Adoption has been generally viewed as a positive social practice because adoptive parents are able to provide a permanent home for a child (Esposito & Biafora, 2007). However, Palacios and Brodzinsky (2010) found that adopted children have more significant challenges with adjustment when compared to their non-adopted peers, as adopted children showed some resilience to their early childhood experiences, and child–parent conflict issues were higher with adopted adolescents versus non-adopted adolescents. Keyes et al. (2008) reported that some adopted children showed minimal issues regarding adjustment; however, it was also noted that adopted children may be at risk for externalizing behavioral disorders, especially if they were adopted domestically. Several studies have further suggested that transracial adoptees, in particular, may experience psychological adjustment difficulties (Brodzinsky et al., 1998; Feigelman, 2000; Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Shireman, 1988; Vroegh, 1997). Weinberg et al. (2004) found that adolescent transracial adoptees were at higher risk for externalizing behaviors, disabilities, academic adjustment challenges, and delinquency compared to both same-race adoptees and non-adopted peers.

Wiley (2017) reported the impact of adoption-related microaggressions on adoptees' psychological adjustment. Same-race adoptees experienced microaggressions specific to adoption status, and transracial adoptees experienced microaggressions related to their adoption status as well as their cultural/racial identity. Weinberg et al. (2004) believed that racial and cultural challenges were reflective of the psychological adjustment issues adoptees face when growing up in a different community. Specifically, it was implied that the cultural and racial identity development as well as the cultural socialization of transracially adoptive families needed to be further explored.

Cultural Socialization

Cultural socialization is the process in which transracially adoptive parents intentionally "instill cultural, ethnic, and racial pride in their children" and may involve revisiting one's country of origin, attending cultural events, and providing a diverse environment for their child (Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2019, p.118). Vonk et al. (2010) and Leslie et al. (2013) believed that cultural socialization practices

such as activities reflecting the child's race/ethnicity, childcare providers with the child's similar race/ethnicity, and the consumption of food reflective of the child's race/ethnicity could facilitate open discussion between transracially adopted children and their parents about race and discrimination. The significance of cultural socialization as a protective factor when transracial adoptees experience racism and discrimination has been emphasized in the literature (Chang et al., 2017; Docan-Morgan, 2010; Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2019; Leslie et al., 2013; Vonk et al., 2010), yet minimal literature has focused on the experiences of Black transracially adopted children and their families.

Smith et al. (2011) examined White parents' process of racial enculturation with their Black transracially adopted children and White parents' ability to teach their children how to cope with racism. Although transracially adoptive parents believed there was a need to respond positively to racial differences and minimize personal experiences of racism and discrimination, they believed Black transracial adoptees were responsible for finding coping skills when faced with negative encounters (Smith et al., 2011). The aforementioned study exposes the limited information available about the experiences of Black transracially adoptive families and reflects a need for more studies that focus on the distinctive experiences of these children and their families.

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of transracially adoptive parents of Black children. This inquiry was framed using the Cultural-Racial Identity Model (CRIM), developed by Baden and Steward (2007), which outlines 16 cultural/racial identity statuses for transracial adoptees. The CRIM provided a conceptual framework for understanding how parental attitudes and support systems such as extended family and peers shape the experiences within the transracial adoption kinship network.

Given the limited literature centering transracially adoptive parents of Black children and the lack of adoption-focused research in counseling, this transcendental phenomenological study aimed to fill a critical gap. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are transracially adoptive parents of Black children's perceptions of their child's racial and cultural identity development?
2. What are transracially adoptive parents of Black children's perceptions of the parent–child relationship?

Method

Transcendental phenomenological research involves seeking to understand and describe participants' lived experiences in order to capture the essence of a particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This approach emphasizes intentionality and consciousness, recognizing that meaning emerges through participants' direct engagement with their experiences rather than through external interpretation (Giorgi, 2009; van Manen, 2016). Epoché is at the center of this methodology and is a process in which researchers set aside personal biases, presuppositions, and prior knowledge to view the phenomenon as objectively as possible (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Researchers use various methods of trustworthiness to facilitate the bracketing process and sustain a focus on participants' perspectives throughout the study (Vagle, 2014).

Transcendental phenomenology was the most appropriate methodology for this study because the primary aim was to explore how participants subjectively experience and make meaning of their child(ren)'s racial and cultural identity as well as the parent–child relationship. As noted by Moustakas

(1994) and Giorgi (2009), transcendental phenomenology researchers are focused on understanding participant experiences through rich, descriptive accounts. In alignment with Creswell and Poth (2018), the researchers maintained a participant-centered stance across all phases of the study, from the design of interview questions to the thematic analysis and interpretation of findings, to ensure that the voices of participants remained the center. Ultimately, transcendental phenomenology provided a rigorous and systematic framework for examining lived experiences while honoring the subjective depth and complexity of the participants' narratives.

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this study, a Black transracially adopted child is defined as a child identified by a parent as Black, Black American, African American, or of African descent who resides in the United States and has been legally adopted by a parent(s) of a different race. This definition aligns with previous research that conceptualizes transracial adoption as the legal adoption of a child whose racial or ethnic background differs from that of their adoptive parent(s; Lee, 2003). The emphasis on parental identification of race reflects the sociocultural reality that parents often mediate their child's racial identity through socialization processes and community context (Hollingsworth, 1999; Vonk, 2001). Within the United States, Black adoptees in transracial families frequently navigate complex intersections of racial identity, belonging, and cultural socialization (Baden et al., 2012; Fogg-Davis, 2002). Therefore, this definition centers both the racialized identity of the child and the legal permanence of the adoptive relationship.

Transracially adoptive parents of Black children are defined as adoptive parents who have legally adopted a child identified as Black, Black American, African American, or of African descent and who are of a different racial background than the adopted child. This definition is consistent with the language used in adoption and multicultural family research that highlights racial difference as a factor influencing family dynamics and identity development (McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Samuels, 2009). The inclusion of legal adoption status reflects the long-term, parental relationship emphasized in adoption scholarship (Miller et al., 2000).

Participants

Eligible participants met the following criteria: (a) at least 18 years of age, (b) transracially adoptive parent, and (c) adoptive parent of a Black transracially adopted child under the age of 18 (see Table 1). This study included video conference interviews with each participant. Each participant and their child referenced throughout the study were assigned a code name to protect confidentiality.

A total of six White participants between the ages of 29 and 55 participated in this study; four identified as cisgender women and two identified as cisgender men. Their experience as adoptive parents ranged from 1.5 to 9 years. Participants' socioeconomic statuses ranged from middle class to upper class. Regarding geographical location, two participants resided in the Pacific Northwest region and four participants resided in the Southwestern region of the United States; all participants lived in predominately White neighborhoods. A total of four children were referenced in this study; two couples independently discussed their child. The children's ages were between 3 and 17 and two of the children were female and two were male. Two children were described as having Latino ethnicity, one child was identified as Black, and one child was of Ethiopian ethnicity. One child was adopted at age 4, another child was adopted at age 8, and the other two children were adopted under age 1. Three of the children were adopted through the foster care system, while one was adopted from another country through inter-country adoption.

Table 1

Demographic Table for Participants and Their Children

Name	Parent Age, Race, and Sex		Child Age, Race, and Sex		SES	Degree Level	Region	Year(s) as Parent
Abby	31	White, F	9	Black/Latino, M	Upper Middle	Master's	SW	5/Foster
BJ	31	White, M			Middle	Master's	SW	5/Foster
Daisy	53	White, F	17	Black/Ethiopian, F	Middle	PhD	NW	9/Inter-country
Fred	55	White, M				Bachelor's	NW	9/Inter-country
Callie	34	White, F	3	Black, F	Upper Class	JD	SW	3/Foster
Ellie	29	White, F	3	Black/Latino, M	Middle	Master's	SW	1.5/Foster

Data Collection

Upon approval from the IRB, a flyer was distributed to adoption agencies, posted on social media, and sent via email to potential participants. Six participants responded and signed an IRB-approved informed consent document. Each participant was contacted via email and by phone to schedule a video conference interview. Participants were asked to answer demographic questions that were incorporated into the interview protocol. The participant interviews were recorded electronically via video-conferencing software and were transcribed by a secure transcription service. Transcripts were stored on an encrypted, password-protected hard drive that remained locked behind two closed doors.

Based on a review of previous studies examining the experiences of transracially adoptive parents, Charmaine Conner, serving as the lead doctoral student investigator, and Natalya Lindo, serving as the supervising investigator, developed a semi-structured interview protocol; Conner facilitated each interview. Additionally, the interview questions were reviewed by Susan Branco and by Lindo to mitigate potential researcher bias. There were a total of nine questions presented in the interview protocol (see Appendix). Participants shared their experiences as parents of Black transracially adopted children in interviews that ranged from 38 minutes to 60 minutes.

For this study, the research team was comprised of the following people: Conner, Lindo, and Branco. Lindo identifies as a Black, Jamaican, non-adoptee and was the department chair of and associate professor in a counseling program. Branco identifies as a Colombian transracial adoptee. The coding team consisted of Conner, Audrey Malacara, and Sunnycho Teeling, doctoral students in a counseling program. Teeling identifies as a Black and Korean transracial adoptee and was a third-year doctoral student.

Malacara identifies as White and was a second-year doctoral student who has transracially adopted family members. Conner identifies as a Black woman who has served as the lead student investigator on multiple phenomenological studies, is a non-adoptee, and has adopted family members. Conner has also provided child-centered play therapy services to several Black transracially adopted clients.

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were coded following an adapted phenomenological data analysis model (Lindo et al., 2020) based on the classic data analysis strategy by Miles et al. (2014) and Moustakas's (1994) modification of Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen's approach. The coding team began with phenomenological bracketing, or epoché, in which each coding team member described their experience with transracially adoptive parents of Black children and bracketed their biases and areas of expertise related to the population (Moustakas, 1994).

A subset (n = 3) of the participant interviews was selected, and each member of the coding team participated in note taking, which involved writing notes in the margins of the transcripts (Lindo et al., 2020). At the completion of the note-taking process, the coding team began to synthesize the data and develop themes for the preliminary codebook (Lindo et al., 2020; Moustakas, 1994). Similar themes and overlapping categories were defined to synthesize the data, and the preliminary codebook was developed. During the initial coding phase, the coding team established intercoder agreement (Marques & McCall, 2005) by applying the preliminary coding manual to the subset of interviews. Conner manually calculated the initial coding calculations and computed the mean interrater agreement (M = .87), which was consistent with the recommended interrater agreement average approaching 90% (Miles et al., 2014).

In the final stage of the coding process, the coding team applied the final coding manual to each of the six interviews. All coders independently analyzed the same portion of the data for intercoder agreement. Similar to the initial coding phase, during the final coding process, the coding team discussed discrepancies and the mean interrater agreement was manually calculated (M = .91) above the recommended interrater agreement exceeding 90% (Miles et al., 2014).

Trustworthiness was established by using a reflexive journal, triangulation of data, and member checking. Conner documented their experiences, assumptions, biases, beliefs, and knowledge prior to the study and throughout the research process. To facilitate triangulation, each coding team member independently coded their responses and worked toward consensus. Furthermore, member checking was utilized during the interview process by clarifying statements and asking follow-up questions. At the completion of interview transcription, participants were asked to review the transcripts for accuracy. Although each participant was emailed their interview transcript as a part of the member-checking process, none of the participants replied. The absence of responses from participants may have been because of a global pandemic occurring simultaneously with this study. Transferability contributed to the overall trustworthiness of this study by providing a thick description of the methodology.

Results

This study aimed to explore the perspectives of transracially adoptive parents of Black children regarding their children's racial and cultural identity development, as well as their perceptions of the parent–child relationship. Participants contributed their insights through in-depth interviews, and the coding team conducted a thematic analysis of the data to identify patterns across participants. A total of six themes and subthemes emerged from the data: (a) Experience of the Child–Parent Relationship;

(b) Impact of Trauma; (c) Becoming a Transracially Adoptive Parent; (d) the Cultural, Racial, Ethnic, Identity Development (CREID) Process; (e) Encounters With Microaggressions; and (f) Cultural Socialization Practices.

Theme 1: Experience of the Child–Parent Relationship

In the Experience of the Child–Parent Relationship theme, participants described quality time, their perception of their child, and their child's strengths. Four participants reported their child's negative behaviors and that they were often confused about how to resolve behavioral issues. Each participant spoke positively about the child–parent relationship, describing their children as nurturing, intelligent, and strong. However, three participants described their children's challenges with adjusting within the family. Two subthemes emerged from the discussion on the child–parent relationship: Parent Identity and Perception of the Child, and Child Identity. Each of the six participants made comments on at least one of the subthemes.

In the Parent Identity and Perception of the Child subtheme, three participants shared concerns about their child's externalizing behaviors, two participants described having feelings of inadequacy, and one participant shared a desire to meet their child's needs. All six participants provided insight into their child's strengths. Abby, BJ, and Daisy expressed their concerns about their children's behaviors. BJ shared about his son Saint's aggressive behavior, stating:

> I am very laid back, very type B personality. I am not aggressive at all. I hate confrontation. I am very much passive-aggressive, I guess, in the sense that I would prefer to just ignore any direct confrontation or whatever and just hope it goes away rather than confront it. And Saint is super type A, super aggressive, super confrontational.

Regarding feelings of inadequacy, Daisy described being unsure of her ability to care for her daughter Sydney:

> I had done a lot of reading, and I had read the statement from the Black Social Workers of America or something, that they did not feel that a White home was the best place for a Black child. We had a lot of concerns about that.

Abby also explained her feelings of inadequacy as she reported feelings of anger when challenged by a Child Protective Services agent who questioned her ability to care for her son Saint.

When asked about their child's strengths, all six participants shared positive qualities about their child. Ellie focused on Steven's intellectual abilities and creativity:

> He is, well, like I said, intelligent. He has a lot of emotional intelligence, and kind of the traditional intelligence. . . . He is very creative, like with his play . . . and he is very joyful. It is probably the same thing as exciting, like excitable.

Additional participants held predominantly positive perspectives of their child, describing them as caring, intelligent, and joyful.

Within the Child Identity subtheme, participants reflected on their child's role within the family system. Four out of six participants contributed to this theme, with three specifically discussing their child's interactions with their adoptive and biological siblings. One parent noted that their child took on

the emotional labor for maintaining the child–parent relationship. Several participants also described increased sibling conflict and how these dynamics influenced the overall child–parent relationship. Despite these tensions, the participants were intentional in highlighting their child's positive attributes. Interestingly, while all parents acknowledged their children's strengths, no one spoke explicitly about their own strengths as parents.

Theme 2: Impact of Trauma

The Impact of Trauma theme centered on adverse experiences the child may have encountered either before or after adoption. Four participants referenced trauma in their child's history. Two were able to provide detailed accounts of pre-adoption trauma, drawing on information shared by the child's biological family. The other two had limited knowledge of their child's early experiences because of minimal background information. Only one participant spoke about a post-adoption traumatic event within this subtheme. Reported traumatic experiences included the death of a loved one, multiple foster home transitions, and parental substance use. Overall, participants recognized that trauma shaped their child's resilience while also contributing to externalizing behaviors such as hyperactivity and impulsivity, as well as challenges related to attachment.

Theme 3: Becoming a Transracially Adoptive Parent

In Becoming a Transracially Adoptive Parent, participants reflected on navigating the process of legally adopting their child. There were three subthemes that arose from their responses: Assumptions and Feelings, Resources and Support, and Search and Reunion. Each participant described the challenges associated with becoming a transracially adoptive parent. Participants described a range of Assumptions and Feelings, including feelings of anger, irritation, and surprise toward the adoption process. In recounting her initial perceptions of transracial adoption, Callie noted:

> At that time, when we were going through our training, it did not occur to me that there could be any reason other than racism why a parent would not want a child of any race. When I heard other people saying, "Oh, White child only," I thought in my mind, racist. Why else would you say that? Now being a parent to a child of a different race, I completely understand that there are actually a lot of very valid reasons why you might not be open to having a multiracial family.

In contrast, Daisy emphasized the significance of race in her decision to pursue transracial adoption again. She intentionally sought to ensure her current transracially adopted child would feel a sense of connection with her older transracially adopted child. Fred expressed a similar commitment to the adoption process, though he noted that race did not influence his initial decision-making process and reported feeling confident in his choice. Overall, race emerged as a meaningful consideration for a few of the participants. This suggests varied levels of importance placed on racial identity during the adoption process.

The Resources and Support subtheme captured participants' engagement with post-adoption services, as well as the role of community and familial support. This subtheme resonated with all participants, and they offered specific examples of the support they received through both formal services and informal networks. Abby described using post-adoption services for her son Saint and reported being frustrated about her overall experience. She expressed the challenges of securing mental health services for her son:

> We had post-adoptive services coming in and doing skills therapy for a while. But that seemed to do more harm than good, because that also kept changing what people were there. And I need consistent people, and I was just out. And they would try to give me counselors and things to help them for a while when they were really struggling. I think there were five of them that I reached out to, and two of them responded with, "We're full," and the other three just did not respond at all.

In a similar fashion, participants communicated frustrations about the lack of pre-adoption training for transracially adoptive parent; many sought support from family members, friends, and community.

Search and Reunion reflected participants' perspectives on their child's connection to their biological family. Four out of six participants shared that their child maintained some level of contact with biological relatives. Although one participant expressed initial concerns about this connection, all four ultimately emphasized the value of maintaining those ties. For example, Daisy recalled her early fears that her daughter Sydney's biological family might try to disrupt the child–parent relationship. Over time, Daisy was able to process and resolve these fears by seeking guidance and reassurance from her own family and other adoptive parents.

Theme 4: The CREID Process

In the CREID Process, participants shared how their beliefs about culture, race, and ethnicity have evolved over time. Each of the participants reflected on how their multifaceted identities have affected themselves and their children. Two subthemes were identified from the participants' responses: the CREID Process of the Transracially Adopted Child, as described by the participant, and the CREID Process of the Transracially Adoptive Parent.

The CREID Process for the Transracially Adopted Child revealed the participants' understanding of how they have seen their child navigate the CREID process. Four participants contributed to this subtheme. BJ mentioned his son Saint's perception of physical differences:

> He is the only one with curly hair in our house naturally. He would speak up . . . sometimes randomly, we would be sitting there not even talking about hair or anything and he would be like, "Mom, I want straight hair," or whatever.

In addition to the perception of physical differences, three participants described cultural implications of the child's biological family. Abby shared how language was a barrier when she translates for her son Saint's biological mother, who is non–English speaking. Fred discussed his daughter Sydney's struggle with learning English after becoming legally adopted. Daisy was surprised when she realized Sydney had no prior schooling before being adopted; at the time of adoption, girls were not allowed to attend school in her daughter's home country. Although physical differences were heavily referenced, there was little attention to other factors that contribute to the CREID process of the participants' children.

In the CREID Process of the Transracially Adoptive Parent subtheme, participants reflected on how transracial adoption shaped their understanding of race and culture. All participants described experiencing a deepened CREID process since becoming adoptive parents, noting increased awareness, reflection, and personal growth. This subtheme also captured participants' evolving assumptions and emotional responses related to race and culture. Their insights ranged from heightened fears about navigating racial dynamics to a strong desire to cultivate a racially diverse and inclusive family environment. Callie addressed how her White racial identity has impacted her CREID process:

> I guess it has made me more aware of race and race relation issues, where before it was something that I had the luxury of not having to think about. I was raised in a home where you did not talk about race. There was not really a reason to talk about race. Even your own race—like White being in your mind the default race—why even talk about it? There is nothing to discuss. Just having discussions about race is new. I am reading books about race. Just now, it is a day-to-day conversation in our house. That is something that is completely different.

A central theme among all six participants was the recognition of personal growth and self-awareness. Despite identifying as White, each participant acknowledged engaging in a CREID process and emphasized the importance of understanding race and culture within the context of being a transracially adoptive parent.

Theme 5: Encounters With Microaggressions

Encounters With Microaggressions encompassed participants' perceptions of racism or discrimination directed toward their transracially adopted child, as well as their own responses to these incidents. For the purposes of this study, microaggressions were defined by the coding team as any derogatory remark, insult, or subtle slight made toward the child based on their race or ethnicity. Five participants contributed to this theme, sharing experiences that often occurred within extended family interactions, educational environments, and social settings. One parent, for example, recounted an incident in which their child was compared to an orangutan. The outcome of this situation resulted in the individual responsible apologizing, and the parent reported that they remained in contact at the time of the interview. Other participants expressed uncertainty in responding to such incidents, with their reactions ranging from intense anger to avoidance of the person involved. Overall, these accounts highlighted the emotional complexity and ongoing challenges of navigating racial microaggressions as transracially adoptive parents.

Theme 6: Cultural Socialization Practices

Cultural Socialization Practices referred to the participants' attention to their child's racial/cultural identity. This theme covered the intentional efforts of the parents to integrate their child's culture of origin into their daily lives. Participants' responses included an emphasis on attending cultural activities, searching for diverse schools, and allowing the child to travel to a local community representative of the child's ethnicity. Callie noted the courage involved in seeking out ways to integrate culture into her daughter Sarah's life:

> I had to learn how to do my daughter's hair. I went to a stylist in Dallas who holds classes. The first time I went there, nobody in the class made eye contact with me. I think they all thought I was in the wrong place and then they handed me the White mannequin. Then I had to show a picture of my daughter and then I got the Black mannequin. It means putting yourself out there a little bit more, being willing to be in places where people might ask, do you really belong here? It can be uncomfortable. I can understand that not everybody might want to do that.

All six participants discussed their cultural socialization practices and appeared to recognize the significance of intentionally fostering their child's cultural identity. Each person expressed a desire for additional resources and guidance on how to incorporate cultural socialization more effectively into their parenting.

Discussion

There is a significant gap in the literature addressing the experiences of Black transracially adoptive families, particularly within counseling journals (Liu et al., 2018). Although some scholarship exists, further research is necessary to deepen understanding and inform clinical practice. This study aimed to address that gap by contributing insights specific to counseling literature. The findings may be applicable to transracially adoptive parents of Black children, mental health professionals, and counselor educators.

Participants in this study reflected on the parent–child relationship, frequently expressing feelings of inadequacy and a strong desire to meet their child's emotional and developmental needs. These feelings of inadequacy align with Silverstein and Kaplan's (1982) reflections on the impact of identity issues within the adoption kinship network. The desire for participants to meet their child's needs is also consistent with Brodzinsky (2011), who spoke to the importance of attachment within the child–parent relationship for adoptees. Participants also shared concerns about their child's tantrums and expressions of anger and frustration, which are consistent with Palacios and Brodzinsky's (2010) study that delineated adopted children's potential struggles with adjusting to the adoption process. In addition to behavioral concerns, participants shared how physical dissimilarities regarding hair and skin tone impacted the child–parent relationship. These observations supported Goss et al.'s (2017) perspective that transracially adopted children struggle with their sense of belonging within their adoptive family because of physical dissimilarities.

The impact of trauma was a recurring theme in participants' narratives. Parents described traumatic experiences such as drug exposure, the loss of biological or adoptive family members, and repeated foster care transitions. Participants' experience of their child's trauma highlighted the typical challenges faced in the adoption process (Brodzinsky, 2011; Silverstein & Kaplan, 1982), leaving parents unsure about the reason for their child's behavior. Palacios and Brodzinsky (2010) emphasized that trauma exposure can manifest in adoptees through aggression, attachment issues, and academic difficulties, all of which were reflected in participant accounts. These traumatic experiences appeared to impact the emotional and logistical challenges associated with the transracial adoption process.

During the interviews, participants described their overall process of becoming a transracially adoptive parent. Responses included frustrations about the adoption process, confusion about expectations, and concerns about continuity in the foster-to-adoption process. The participants' feelings were reflective of Brodzinsky's (2011) thoughts regarding the complex process of adoption and its impact on members of the adoption kinship network. Most participants shared that they relied more on informal networks such as family and community support rather than formal counseling services, supporting Lancaster et al.'s (2017) findings on the preference for peer-based over professional support. Most participants welcomed the search and reunion process, allowing their children to be in contact with their biological family. This form of contact was recommended by Grotevant (1997), who believed members within the adoption kinship network should work together to determine the process and extent of maintaining relationships. Becoming a transracially adoptive parent provided participants with insight into the influence of race and culture in transracially adoptive families.

Participants recounted the CREID processes of themselves and their children. They described having an increased awareness of how race and culture impacted their parenting and their child's overall sense of self. Some participants noted their child's external representation of their culture and the child's focus on physical differences within the family, which could be connected to the lack of geographic diversity. Each of the participants lived in a predominantly White neighborhood; living

in a geographically diverse area could positively impact the cultural and racial identity development process for transracial adoptees (Kreider & Raleigh, 2016). The child's emphasis on physical differences is consistent with findings by Godon et al. (2014) that transracially adopted children are acutely aware of physical differences. To support their own CREID process, participants often turned to self-directed learning, including reading books and conducting online research. These efforts reflect a commitment to growth and also underscore the need for more structured, professional support. This could be especially helpful in preparing transracially adoptive parents for responding to experiences of racial microaggressions.

Each participant recalled encounters with microaggressions and their responses to incidents of racism and discrimination taking place in both social and educational settings. They believed their child's age protected them from experiencing microaggressions, which is consistent with findings from Morgan and Langrehr (2019), who reported that transracially adoptive parents with younger children ignore or are unaware of their children's experiences with racism and discrimination. Across participants, there was a shared struggle in knowing how to respond effectively to these incidents. In previous studies, transracially adoptive parents addressed microaggressions by attempting to prepare their child for bias (Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2019), encouraging their child to educate their offenders (Smith et al., 2011), and engaging in cultural socialization practices (Vonk et al., 2010).

All participants shared about their cultural socialization practices with their child. Participants in this study engaged in several cultural socialization practices suggested by adoption agencies and professionals, which included attending diverse schools, churches, and culturally focused restaurants. However, they felt unsure whether these efforts adequately prepared their children for racism. The child's age at adoption may have influenced the nature of these practices. Chang et al. (2017) suggested that parents tend to engage in fewer cultural socialization activities with younger adoptees. Overall, participants shared both feeling unsure about how cultural socialization prepared their child to handle racism and discrimination and a desire for support.

Implications and Ethical Considerations

Transracially adoptive parents would benefit from continued access to culturally responsive training and mental health resources (Lancaster et al., 2017). Adoption agencies and mental health professionals can enhance support through structured, evidence-based interventions, such as ongoing workshops on racial socialization, antiracism, and trauma-informed parenting facilitated by adoption-competent clinicians with expertise in racial identity development. Counselors in practice might incorporate reflective supervision, case consultation, and peer discussion groups that focus on the intersection of race, identity, and family systems within adoptive contexts.

At the systemic level, counselor education programs and accrediting bodies such as the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs could strengthen professional standards by requiring adoption-specific competencies within curricula addressing child and adolescent development, family counseling, and multicultural competence. Counselor educators can integrate experiential learning through case-based simulations, visual media that reflects adoptive kinship structures (e.g., *Grey's Anatomy*, *This Is Us*), and cultural immersion projects emphasizing racial identity development and transracial family dynamics.

Several established resources provide frameworks to guide these efforts, including the National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative (NTI), Adoption Competency Curriculum, and the Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.) training programs. These resources

align closely with the American Counseling Association's *Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies* (Ratts et al., 2016), *Competencies for Counseling the Multiracial Population* (Kenney et al., 2015), and adoption-related frameworks outlined by Branco (2019).

Finally, counselor educators may apply a program evaluation logic model to systematically assess and revise course content. For example, a child and adolescent counseling course might incorporate scholarly readings on adoption and racial identity, media depictions of diverse adoptive families, and guest speakers with lived or professional expertise in adoption-related issues. These intentional curricular and policy-level changes support future clinicians becoming adequately prepared to provide culturally responsive, adoption-competent services to transracially adoptive families.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was its purposive sampling method, which may have excluded adoptive parents of adult children or children of other racial backgrounds. Additionally, this study focuses on adoptive parent perspectives, which may inadvertently marginalize the voices of Black transracial adoptees, as the children were not interviewed. Although the children's insights were not included for this study, future research is being designed to center their perspectives.

Another limitation stems from Conner's "outsider" status, having not been adopted, despite their aligned racial and cultural identity to the participants' children. To address this, the research team included an expert with lived experience in transracial adoption who reviewed the interview protocol and findings for cultural responsiveness and objectivity. An additional team member with "insider" status contributed to analyzing the data and ensured bias was monitored throughout the coding process.

Finally, the study attempted to address the complex nature of adoption, particularly within Black transracial adoptive families. Given the nuance of the topic, it was not possible to fully capture all of the multifaceted layers within a single study. Conner intends to continue exploring these issues in future research.

Future Research

The experiences of Black transracially adoptive families have been overlooked in the existing literature. This absence may stem from policy shifts discouraging race-conscious adoption practices or from a lack of research interest. Regardless of the cause, the need for attention remains. Black children make up approximately 23% of youth in foster care (ACF, 2023), and 40% of adoptions in the United States are transracial (Vandivere et al., 2009). Yet counseling literature continues to lack well-informed insights on how to serve this population.

This study sought to understand the experiences of transracially adoptive parents of Black children. Themes connected to trauma, microaggressions, identity development, and cultural socialization arose from their discussion. The findings offer critical insight for transracially adoptive parents, counselors, and counselor educators alike. By prioritizing culturally responsive practices and integrating adoption-competent training into counselor education, the counseling profession can attend to the needs of Black transracially adopted children and their families. This study provides a foundation for future scholarship and advocacy with this population.

There is an urgent need for more research on transracial adoption within the counseling profession, as the majority of existing studies can be found in social work literature (Liu et al., 2018). This study is among the few that center transracially adoptive parents of Black children in counseling research. Future directions should include studies that center the voices of Black transracial adoptees themselves. Another potential area for possible exploration could be the use of play therapy with transracially adopted children, which has not been widely studied. Additional research could also investigate the experiences of counselors working with transracially adoptive families, offering valuable insights into best practices and professional development needs.

Studies examining the CREID process for both adoptees and their parents across developmental stages would also contribute meaningfully to the literature. Considering the evolving perspectives gained from understanding the lived experiences of this population, researchers may find that the identity development process for transracial adoptees has shifted in recent years. Furthermore, their investigative efforts may be paused by the current sociopolitical landscape in the United States. Future researchers could utilize qualitative studies to inform the creation of a racial identity development assessment tailored to the transracial adoption experience, potentially grounded in the CRIM model.

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Appendix

Parent/Guardian Interview Questions

These first questions are about your process of adoption and your experience raising a Black child.

- Describe your process of adopting your child.
- Discuss which decisions led to you adopting a child of a different race.
- Since you have adopted, has your child experienced any major life events or changes at home and/or school? If so, how do you believe those changes have affected him or her?
- What, if any, support from your community, family, or mental health services did you seek for you and/or your child?
- Describe your child's relationships with sibling(s), peers, and friends.
- What experiences, if any, has your child had with racism and/or discrimination since adopting your child?
- How did you handle experiences with racism and/or discrimination?
- How has your experience of raising a Black child influenced/affected your view of race and race relations?

These next questions are focused on the relationship between you and your child.

- How would you describe your parent–child relationship?
- Tell me about your experience of their cognitive, emotional, social, and physical developmental processes.
- Being a parent can be time consuming, do you spend one-on-one time with your child? If so, what kinds of things do you do together?
- What, if any, challenges have you faced in the parent–child relationship? Tell me about any positive experiences you have had.
- What do you enjoy about being a parent?
- Tell me about your child's strengths? (School, home, athletic, social, etc.)
- Is there anything else you think I should know about you and/or your child at this time?