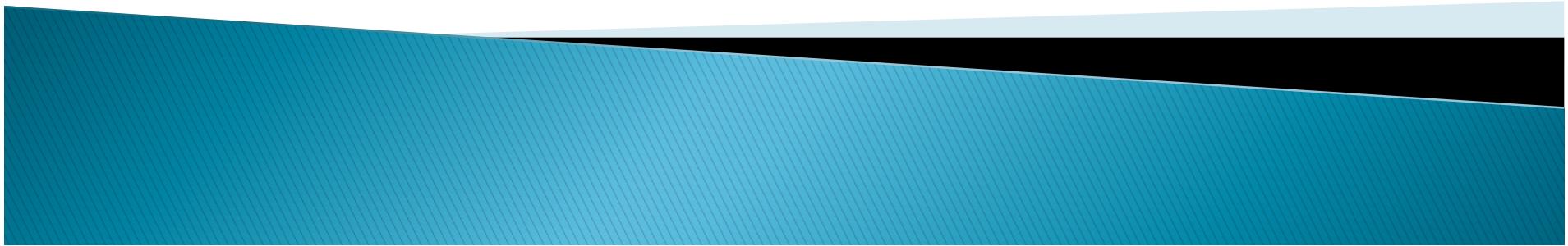


# **My Mind's Blueprint Inclusive of an Oppressed Identity Construct: Reflections and Introspection of a Transracial Adoptee**

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# Overview of Presentation

- ▶ My Mind's Blue Print
- ▶ Complexities of Transracial Adoption
- ▶ Addressing Complexities Within the Family





An Introspective Study of a Transracial Adoptee  
**The Harris Narratives**

Susan Harris O'Connor

# Complexities of Transracial Adoption

# Same Race (Inracial) Placement

- ▶ The adoption of a child of one racial background by a family of the same racial background.



# Same Race Adoption



# Transracial Adoption

- ▶ The adoption of a child of one racial background by a family of a different racial background.



# Transracial Adoptions: Complexities



# Why Me?

- ▶ Is there something wrong with me?
- ▶ Am I wrong?
- ▶ Would I struggle with this if I could pass as one race?
- ▶ Where might being Jewish or female or being an adoptee fit in?
- ▶ What triggers it? Do I? Do You?
- ▶ Is there a relationship between the two? All I know is that when this thing is on, it feels as if there's a game going on within my mind.



# Mind Constructs

- ▶ Human being
- ▶ Female
- ▶ Heterosexual
- ▶ Social Worker
- ▶ Wife
- ▶ Friend
- ▶ Relative
- ▶ Social Status
- ▶ Age Group
- ▶ Health
- ▶ Jewish
- ▶ Black
- ▶ White
- ▶ Native American
- ▶ Transracial Adoptee

# The 2010 U.S. Census

- ▶ reported 2.1 million adopted children under the age of 18 living in households. A 2007 survey of adoptive parents sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services indicated that 40 percent of all adoptions, regardless of type (private domestic, foster to adoption or international), were transracial. Specifically, most transracial adoptive families are composed of white adoptive parents with children of color who eventually grow up to become adults.





# Racial Identity Evolution: Acknowledging Differences

- ▶ Acknowledging differences /recognizing that transracial adoption adds another layer of complexity to identity development
  - Coping with prejudice, incorporating racial/ethnic and other differences between one's self and one's family and one's self and one's society



# Racial identity Development

- ▶ Lifelong, continuously changing process
- ▶ Influenced by those in a particular individual's ethnic group as well as those outside it
- ▶ Acknowledges ethnocentric and multicultural frames

(Helms, 1993; Parham, 1989; Cross, 1971, 1995)



# Adoptive Kinship Network

- ▶ Birth or First Parents
- ▶ Adoptees
- ▶ Adoptive Parents
- ▶ Foster Parents
- ▶ Siblings
- ▶ Grandparents
- ▶ Other Kin



# Racial Identity Development in Transracial Adoptions

- **Conceptual Level:** Children make distinctions
  - Skin color and hair texture
- **Evaluative Level:**
  - Observe racial differences and become aware of the labels and emotional responses associated with racial groups



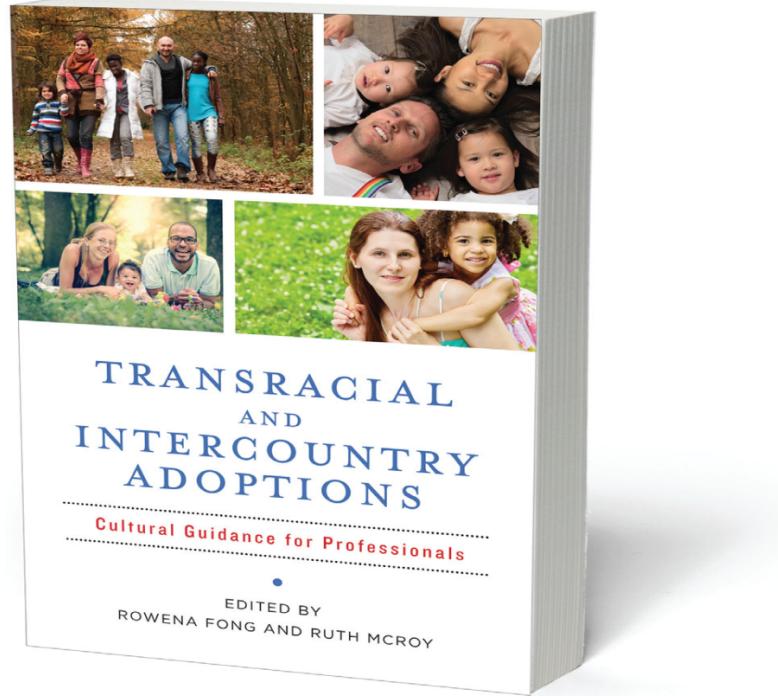
# Development of racial and cultural identity

- ▶ 3 years—Aware of race and skin color differences
- ▶ 4–6—can identify own group and may put positive or negative value; information from environment and parents
- ▶ 7–11—have idea of own and other racial and ethnic groups; explore meaning of being member of different groups—calculates social mathematics of belonging to particular group
- ▶ 12–18—assess importance of race and ethnicity

# Family Preparation

- ▶ Agencies must develop strategies to adequately prepare transracial adoptive families and provide adoption-specific supports to help families address the significance of racial and cultural identity for their adopted children and to find ways to help them feel more connected to their heritage and identity (Vonk & Angaran 2003).

# Transracial and Intercountry Adoptions: Cultural Guidance for Professionals



# Addressing Complexities Within the Family

# Parental Tasks

- ▶ Maintain an environment that embraces diversity – overt and subtle efforts
- ▶ Awareness of adoption issues of rejection, abandonment, loss, and self-worth
- ▶ The hard work is on the parents, not the children
- ▶ Above all, unconditional commitment



Be “Woke”



# Welcome and Celebrate

- ▶ Wide diversity within family, friends, community
- ▶ Maintain a slur-free environment
- ▶ Acknowledge differences and similarities within your family
- ▶ Anticipate, name, celebrate your child/youth in all their layers and identities



# Educate Yourself

- ▶ Impact of visibility/invisibility
- ▶ Sexual and gender identity and expression
- ▶ Development of an integrated identity
- ▶ Development of effective (not self-harming) survival skills
- ▶ Understand that identity changes over time and be aware/available/accessible

# Ask and Answer...

- ▶ How does it affect your child to be different – on a variety of levels – from the rest of your family?
- ▶ How will your child learn about his/her background?
- ▶ How will your child develop a strong and positive sense of self?



# Be a Proactive Advocate

- ▶ Call out "isms" as you see them
- ▶ Be a team player without compromising
- ▶ Appreciative inquiry
- ▶ Hold and name issues for your child
- ▶ Identify adult partners early and throughout
- ▶ Be involved



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