

Racial Identity at the Intersection of Artist, Academic and Advocate

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Overview of Presentation

- ▶ Overview of Presentation and Collaboration
- ▶ The Harris Racial Identity Theory Narrative
- ▶ Racial Identity Formation Process
- ▶ Best Practices: Assisting Adoptive, Foster and First Families
- ▶ Implications for Advocacy and Supports

- ▶ Discussion/Questions



The Harris Racial Identity Theory Narrative

Susan Harris O'Connor – Artist





An Introspective Study of a Transracial Adoptee

The Harris Narratives

Susan Harris O'Connor

Racial Identity Formation Process Best Practices: Assisting Adoptive, Foster and First

Ruth McRoy – Academic



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.





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 in TRA

- ▶ Color Blind Approach
- ▶ Survival skills
- ▶ Acknowledging differences / recognizing that transracial adoption adds another layer of complexity to identity development
 - Coping with prejudice, incorporating racial/ethnic 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)



Influences on Racial Identity Development

- Age of child
- Cognitive Development
- Racial environment
- Racial socialization experiences



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



Issues for parents and children

- ▶ Absence of an adult of color in the family
- ▶ Need for race conscious parents
- ▶ Awareness of adoption issues of rejection and abandonment
- ▶ Impact of visibility
- ▶ Hair and Skin care
- ▶ Child learns racially based survival skills
- ▶ Acknowledge differences and similarities within your family



http://www.huffingtonpost.com/la-sha/what-white-parents-adopting-blackchildren_b_8951402.html

What White Parents Should Know About Adopting Black Children



What White Parents Should Know About Adopting Black Children

- ▶ The desire to love a black child must be matched by the willingness to learn and accept the unique needs of blackness and black childhood.
 - "Going in with the mindset that this black child is no different from any other child is a naiveté the adoptive parent cannot afford..."
- ▶ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/la-sha/what-white-parents-adopting-black-children_b_8951402.html



Implications for the child

- ▶ How will child learn racially based survival skills?
- ▶ Are you willing to acknowledge differences and similarities within your family?
- ▶ Will child feel comfortable in an African American world?
- ▶ How does it affect your child to be physically different from the rest of your family?
- ▶ How will your child learn about his/her background?



- ▶ “I want him to be comfortable in his skin. I want my child to be comfortable eventually as a black man, as an adoptee, as being part of a multiracial family, and as an American. I want him to be able to navigate multiple communities to the success of whatever he should want to be professionally” (R. Roorda, 2015, p. 182).



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).



- ▶ Selected Research Findings on Outcomes of Transracial Adoptions



- ▶ Many transracial adoptees report a struggle to fit in with peers, the community in general, and, sometimes their own families (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000, John, 2005; Simon & Alstein, 2002; Trenka, Oparah, & Shin, 2006, Riley & Singer, 2016).



Identity Development in a Transracial Environment: Racial/Ethnic Minority Adoptees in Minnesota (Hamilton, Samek, Keyes, 2015)

- ▶ Reported that in their sample of 26 AA and mixed race adolescent adoptees, experienced some discomfort in discussing race/ethnicity with parents.
- ▶ The authors called for further research on communication patterns and perceptions of parents and child within the transracial home environment (p. 230)



Research Findings—McRoy, 2007

AdoptUSKids Success Factors Study

- ▶ 28 White families who transracially adopted African American children from foster care



Comments from Transracial Adoptive Parents about Challenges faced due to racial differences

- ▶ Teased and asked questions by peers—upsets child
- ▶ She would like me to be brown also
- ▶ Kids make fun of her
- ▶ Hair and skin care
- ▶ People asking if AP is the real mom
- ▶ KKK pamphlet dropped on friend's door
- ▶ Remarks at school—"can't play here—only for White kids"



Implications for the child

- ▶ How will your child learn racially based survival skills?
- ▶ Are you willing to acknowledge differences and similarities within your family?
- ▶ Will your child feel comfortable in an African American world?
- ▶ How will your child feel different from the rest of your family?
- ▶ How will your child learn about his/her background?



Implications for Advocacy and Supports

Kim Stevens – Advocate



Racial Identity Constructs



Genetic Racial Identity
Imposed Racial Identity
Cognitive Racial Identity
Feeling Racial Identity
Visual Racial Identity

Elementary School

- ▶ School age children want to be like everyone else—they may start to pull away from heritage activities—Child won't say "I wish I were White, but might say, let's skip culture day—I'd rather play soccer."
- ▶ Emerging Awareness: Children who attend racially diverse schools or reside in racially diverse communities are much more likely to become aware of race at an early age than those in more homogeneous settings.



Preteens

- ▶ Preteens hate to feel different
- ▶ Role models are key to forming identity
- ▶ Mentor of their own race can be very influential
- Explore the question of identity, “Who Am I?”
- Experience varying reactions of others as they mature

Identity Development

Issues for parents and children

Issue	Intervention
Absence of an adult of color in the family	Shared parenting with adults of color
Need for race conscious parents	Education, attention, be an ally
Awareness of adoption issues of rejection and abandonment	Validation not denial, anticipate and hold feelings for child
Impact of visibility	Awareness, preparation, practice
Hair and Skin care	Ask, partner, learn
Systemic racism/assumptions	Speak out, advocate, “arm” child

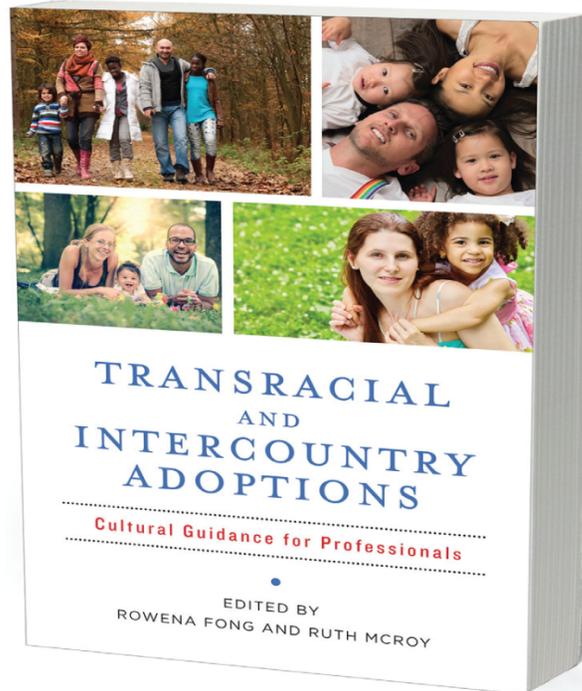


Practice Implications

- Impact on children in transracial families
 - Motivation for parent/professional
 - Before placement and throughout life of the family
- Identify your role and responsibility
 - *For professional*
 - *For parent*
 - *For extended network*
 - *In connecting with and responding to the community*



Transracial and Intercountry Adoptions: Cultural Guidance for Professionals



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