

The Forgotten Lot

Tyree Reed

Ferris State University

### Abstract

Transracial and transnational adoptions are the combining of parents and children of different races and nationalities to form an adoptive family. Across the world there are millions of children that do not have a family. In this paper I addressed various aspects that transracial and transnational families face. I also presented the foster care system and though it is an international system there are positives and negatives that occur once entering. Family is a universal centralized unit and is where we shape our values and beliefs. Multiracial families encounter many challenges daily, that they must face head on and adapt accordingly. Our families are responsible for educating us about the various situations we face in life. My purpose in writing this paper is to bring light to an issue that many Americans are unaware about because they are not informed. It is to provide insight and perspective from a child who has firsthand knowledge of the foster care system, and being a member of a multiracial family. My goal is to build awareness and educate others about adoptions worldwide.

*Keywords:* Transracial adoptions, transnational adoptions, interracial adoptions, multiracial families, foster care system, adoptions

There are approximately 7.1 billion people on Earth, of the 7.1 billion people there are 153 million, 453 thousand orphans and children without permanent families. This number of children makes for about forty-six percent of the total human population of the world. Let those numbers sink in for a moment. Children in the United States as well as internationally are dreaming of that moment where they can get a chance at being a kid. Most are just dreams, but some are actually dreams turned into a reality. More often than not white children are the ones reaping the benefits of finding a family. But what about children of color? Or the international children? What happens to them? Some find families through adoption, others they get stuck in institutions, but the majority of children are placed into the infamous foster care system, and then are soon forgotten about over time. A child could wait for up to three years or more in the foster care system to be adopted.

Transracial and transnational adoptions are the combining of parents and children of different races and nationalities to form an adoptive family. They defy the social, racial, and cultural norms of the typical family by blending racial and cultural lines within families. When forming a multiracial family it is tacked on with various internal and external influences that contribute to its formation. Multiracial families are influenced by emotional and psychological factors, the overall structured policies of the foster care system, and defining what a family means and the dynamics of each relationship formed.

On a daily basis we interact with several hundreds of people. By interacting with others we evoke emotional and psychological responses. Families formed through transracial and international adoptions face more challenges than a normal family. One challenge that every transracial and transnational adopted family will face is race. The parents of these children would be naïve to think otherwise. According to experts, minority parents must educate their children

about the structural and psychological implications of race as a social division in society (Ravinder, 2014). Multiracial families experience invasive discrimination and racism. Families need to focus not only on personal and social competence, which is our ability to interact with others and form relationships, but also cultural and racial competence. Cultural competence is the passing of cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors to promote racial/ethnic identity development. Whereas racial competence is helping the child develop strategies to confront prejudice, racism, and discrimination. Families are subjected to the notion of interracial surveillance, which described by Suter, Reyes, and Ballard (2010), as a “phenomenon by which interracial families or multiracial individuals draw public interest and are scrutinized, monitored, or harassed because they embody multiple racial positions.” Whenever my family and I would go into public we always felt that no matter where we went, we were constantly being watched. We are constantly approached with questions of curiosity or looks of pure hatred and disgust. It is as if our life was a reality television show and the whole world is watching us 24/7.

Formation of multiracial families involve both the children and parents. Through socialization parents can help their children become more aware of their sense of self. Families identify with multiple races and cultures. Individuals who experience more than one culture have a different subjective perception of the various issues involving the mainstream and the ethnic backgrounds. The Bicultural Identity Integration (BII) is whether two cultural backgrounds are perceived as compatible versus conflicting, and how much the two cultural backgrounds are combined versus compartmentalized within one’s cultural identity. BII involves two independent components: cultural conflict and cultural distance. Cultural conflict is the feeling of being torn between one’s two cultural identities. Whereas cultural distance is the perception that one’s two cultural identities are separate and dissociated. BII accurately predicts positive psychosocial

outcomes like self-esteem, life satisfaction, and lower levels of depressive symptoms and anxiety (Manzi, Ferrari, Rosnati, Benet-Martinez, 2014).

Children placed in multiracial environments struggle to establish an identity. This is due to all of the factors that could play into it. From age, environment, community, etc. I know as I grew up, I personally struggled to find myself. I had trouble sorting out the whole identity of was I white? Or I am I black? Even though my complexion is dark, mentally I struggled. I was always called an 'Oreo' or the 'whitest black boy ever'. I tell people I live in a black and white world, which many will not understand. Transracial adoptees can be considered a specific subtype of immigrants. Like all immigrants, they experience a dissonance between their physical appearance and their cultural practices and affiliations, but, unlike immigrants, transracial adoptees cannot build their own ethnic identity through recognition of their parents' somatic traits and they become part of a new culture through a peculiar "migratory" process taking place in solitude rather than within a group (Manzi, Ferrari, Rosnati, Benet-Martinez, 2014).

Children in the child welfare system experience a wide range of negative life events. Even in the face of adversity or risk, fostered youth can exhibit positive development which is characterized as resilience. I can attest that I have experienced some negative events, but I have always bounced back no matter what was thrown at me. Several factors associated with positive development among foster youth are positive self-perception, personal sense of competence and ability to set goals for the future, involvement in community, feelings of power and safety for males, positive connections with peers, authoritative parenting, and social support (Howe, Diehl, Trivette, 2010). Though foster youth are at a high risk for a variety of combination of negative outcomes, their personal characteristics, relationships with their parents, support networks, and experiences within the community can all influence their life outcomes.

Before a child is officially adopted they are first placed into the foster care system. Just like everything in this world there are politics behind every system and policy. Because nothing is ever perfect there are many pros but also many cons to the foster care system. In the past the foster care system has been used as a resource for impoverished parents who could not care for their children and has since evolved to a resource for children who are at risk of harm or neglect by their parents.

Once a child enters the foster care system there are four resulting outcomes. First, a child is released to another level such as specialized care or residential care for children who may be hard to place due to behavior problems or the unavailability of an adoptive family. As a child get older they are less likely to be adopted. They are often placed in residential care facilities, boarding homes, or apartments until they can legally leave. Children are bounced from one level to another within the system. In a way, it is a legal form of human trafficking. Second, a child is released to an adoptive home. Some adoptions are successful and others are unsuccessful. Third, a child is returned to their biological family and this is only after the family meets specific mandated criteria. Reunification with children are successful and others are not. Lastly the child ages out of the foster care system by reaching the legal age of 18 years old. Majority of children who age out do not have a high school education, or any form of training in a trade and are unprepared to support themselves. According to Palmer (2014), young men aging out of the foster care system are twice as likely as non-foster youth to end up in the criminal justice system, and girls are far more likely to have unintended pregnancies. Foster youth also have a two times higher risk than combat servicemen to develop post-traumatic stress syndrome. Since children are bounced from home to home or placed in residential care, there is not emphasis on the physical and mental health of children. Foster care providers under-report chronic physical and

mental health conditions. There are “significant barriers to providing comprehensive health care to foster children” (Palmer, 2014).

Along with flaws in providing health care for children, there is also a substantial amount of minorities in the foster care system. There is an overrepresentation of children of color due to higher rates of removal and extended stays in out-of-home care. This could be due to the racial bias within the system when adopting and providing resources. The attitudes of works, agency policies, poor recruitment efforts, and the communities’ misperceptions about adopting children of color provide a shortage of minority foster families and adoptive homes. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2001), the number of children of color awaiting adoption continues to climb. National figures indicate that approximately 59% of children awaiting adoption are of color: 42% African American, 15% Latino, 1%, 1% American Indian (Haymes de Vidal & Simon 2003). Though the foster care system works for some, it does not work out for every child. Not every child gets that experience of what a family is like, or what it is like to be a child.

Those children who are fortunate enough to find an adoptive family start their journey into the unknown. The question arises, what defines a family? In America, we never strictly define who or whom could form a family. This virtually leaves the doors wide open with limitless combinations and possibilities. Multiracial families go against the grain even though they are adopting a child just like a same race adoption couple. Bottom line is, same race adoptions are more socially acceptable. Multiracial families have society against them due to racial biases, prejudices, and stereotypes. Though families face these challenges, it is their responsibility to educate themselves on racial issues and diversity.

Adopted parents should encourage their children to embrace the races within their family. It allows children to create their own identities, and encourages them to be different. They help to promote diversity as well as racial equality. Our world is marked by racial boundaries, multiracial families show that races can coexist not only in the same neighborhood but in the same home. The family unit is important to help structure and form not only a personal identity but a family identity that can identify with the multiple races and cultures that exist. Not only do parents have to educate their children but they also must protect them from the cruelties of society. Parents will need to find a healthy balance between being a protector and an educator. Multiracial families are new agents of change.

Across the world there is an epidemic of children without families, and over time it is continuing to increase. It is an issue that needs to be addressed but because it is a system it tends to get overlooked. These children are like pawns in a chess game with loop holes which allow patrons to manipulate it. I have pity for those who never get that chance to escape and have a sense of freedom. Those who are liberated from the system gain a unique opportunity for a second chance at a better life.

Transracial and transnational adoptions are controversial in nature because people fear what they do not understand. Multiracial families gain a different perspective through the many trials and tribulations they face daily. Same race families have a more privileged perspective. I always say that adopted children are their own breed of person, if you have never lived as an adopted child you could not fathom what each child goes through. We stick out like sore thumbs. Our families go through societal scrutiny because we are different, we do not look like everyone else. As a child you are continually made fun of because your parents are not the same color, as middle age you get made fun of because you are “too white” or “too black”, as an adult you are



accepted. It is a confusing life we live, but we sure as hell do make the best of it. Through all the peaks, through all the valleys I bet you could walk up and ask any adopted child their story that could at times make a grown man cry, but there is not one child who I have met who is not one of the most grateful people to step foot on this Earth.

Each night I close my eyes and think, what would my life be like if I had not been adopted? Where would I be? What would I be doing? Millions of questions flood my mind. But then I remember that I was one to be handpicked by my parents and given the second chance to build the best life for myself. Honestly in my twenty-three years, I have been blessed beyond words. I would be lying though, if I said that there is not a day that goes by where the questions appear and I daydream my parallel universe. When I finally come to I take a moment of silence for those children who never get this chance, for those children suffering from abuse and neglect, mental and health disorders. Those children crying themselves to sleep dreaming of what it is like to be a kid, to embrace a warm hug or a tender kiss. Those ones who never receive a gift for their birthdays or Christmas. While in my moments of silence I say a little prayer that God bless them in ways like he has blessed me, I hold them close to my heart, my mind, and never forget the forgotten lot.

## References

- Haymes de Vidal, M. & Simon, S. (2003). Transracial Adoption: Families Identify Issues and Needed Support Services. *Child Welfare League of America*, 82(2), 251-272
- Howse, R. B., Diehl, D. C., & Trivette, C. M. (2010). An Asset-Based Approach to Facilitating Positive Youth Development and Adoption. *Child Welfare*, 89(4), 101-116
- Manzi, C., Ferrari, L., Rosnati, R., & Martinez-Benet, V. (2014). Bicultural Identity Integration of Transracial Adolescent Adoptees Antecedents and Outcomes. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 45(6), 888-904.
- Palmer, D. M. (2014). To the End of June: The intimate Life of American Foster Care by Cris Beam (review). *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 25(3), 1472-1474.
- Ravinder, B. (2014). Doing the right thing: transracial adoption in the USA. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 37(5), 857-859.
- Suter, E. A., Reyes, K. L., & Ballard, R. L. (2010). Parental management of adoptive identities during challenging encounters: Adoptive parents as 'protectors' and 'educators'. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 28(2), 242-261.