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DOMESTIC TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION:

IN THE WORDS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOPTEES

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements of the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(in Education)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

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DISSERTATION ACCEPTANCE STATEMENT

On behalf of the Graduate Committee for Ellen M. Smith I affirm that this manuscript is the final and accepted dissertation. Signatures of all committee members are on file with the Graduate School at the University of Maine, 42 Strodder Hall, Orono, ME.

Dr. Sandra Caron, Professor of Family Relations	April 17, 2013 Date

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The practice of domestic transracial adoption of children of African American heritage has sparked more controversy than any other form of adoption. In 1972, the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) passed a resolution calling for an end to the practice of transracial adoption of African American children (Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998; Griffith & Bergeron, 2006; Hollingsworth, 1999). Chestang (1972) coined the words "cultural genocide" in reference to the social and political issues of transracial adoption. Chestang acknowledged that the adoptive parents may be well intended, but the child would have a fragmented "identity" (p 103) for life. Following the controversy of transracial adoption, the Child Welfare League of America reversed its position in 1973 and argued that children would be better adjusted and integrated into communities if placed in same-race families (Brodzinsky, Smith et al., 1998; Newman, 2007).

Over the next few years the number of African American children in foster care grew at alarming rates (Penn and Coverdale, 1996). As the number of children increased, there were several changes in the child welfare laws between 1994 and 1997 to address this issue, and race is now prohibited as a determining factor in placing a child for adoption (Brodzinsky, Smith, & Brodzinsky, 1998; Jennings, 2006; Lee 2003).

Concerns about the placement of African American children with different-race parents continue to be debated. Additionally, the research has focused on proving or disproving that European American parents have the ability to raise healthy African American children (Baden, 2002; Samuels, 2009). Furthermore, much of the research

has been conducted from the adoptive parents' viewpoint without the adult adoptee's perspective (Abdullah, 1996; Alexander & Curtis, 1996; Baden, 2002; Brodzinsky, Smith et al., 1998; O'Brien & Zamostny, 2003). Moreover, many of the studies are "over 20 years old" (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2008, p 21), and have combined domestic and international adoptees. This phenomenological study seeks to understand the experiences of African American adult adoptees who were raised by European American parents in rural areas of New England.

The Problem

Domestic transracial adoption continues to be a controversial permanency option for African American children without families. Although there is research regarding various aspects of adoption, there appears to be limited research with adult adoptees who were transracially adopted. Studies have revealed that transracially adopted children that were raised in diverse communities with parents who provided African American role models and promoted their child's race and culture tend to report a positive racial identity and positive feelings toward others of African American heritage (DeBerry, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1996; Feigelman, 2000).

Furthermore, the literature reflects that adoptees raised by same- or different-race parents are at greater risk of externalizing behaviors or experiencing school problems when there may be unresolved grief and loss, although early trauma and age of adoptive placement are also factors to consider (Brodzinky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998; Verrier, 1993). Children who have been placed with their adoptive families by the age of three appear to have the same adjustment as non-adopted children with the exception of the

need to grieve the loss of their birth families or culture (Brodzinksy, Schetcher, Henig, 1992). Due to the young age, it is implied that the child has experienced less trauma.

There is a gap in the literature in understanding the experiences of African American transracially adopted individuals from the perspective of the adult adoptee. In order to understand their experiences, the focus needs to be on all aspects of the adoptees' growing-up years. To understand what socialization experiences promote or hinder racial/ethnic identity, the interactions between immediate and extended family, school peers, educators, and community members must be examined. In addition, the circumstances of their adoption need to be explored to determine the age of adoptive placement as well as the type of adoption (open or closed). By examining the experiences of the adoptee through structural and contextual descriptions, the essence of their experiences will emerge. Given the lack of research from the perspective of the adult adoptees, it is imperative that they are given a voice.

Purpose Statement & Research Questions

Research indicates there are limited studies describing the experiences of African American individuals raised by European American parents from the adoptees' perceptive. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine the experiences of African American adult adoptees that were placed with European American parents in rural areas of New England during their growing-up years. The overarching question for this study is: *How do self-identifying African American individuals who were adopted by European American parents describe their experiences being raised in rural, predominately European American communities?*

The three sub-questions are:

- *How do African American adoptees describe their experiences growing up within their adoptive families?*
- *How do African American adoptees describe their experiences with peers and educators at elementary, middle, and high school levels?*
- *How do African American adoptees growing up in rural areas of New England describe their experiences as young children, adolescents, and young adults within the community?*

Research Approach

I conducted a phenomenological study with the goal of five male and five female adult African American adoptees raised by European American parents in rural areas of New England. However, due to lack of female volunteers there were three females and five males that participated. Participant criteria included: self identifying as African American or Black, born after 1980, placed with their adoptive family by the age of three, and raised in a perceived rural areas of New England. Through in-depth interviewing I explored the experiences of these adoptees with extended and immediate family members, peers and educators at school, and the community at large. Through contextual and structural descriptions I describe the essence of the experiences. The first interview with the adoptee was in-person for approximately one to two hours. A follow-up interview with each participant after reviewing the first interview occurred by phone, Skype, or in-person as determined by the participant.

Researcher Assumptions

Over the past several years, through various jobs I have held, I have developed some assumptions about adoption in general and specifically domestic transracial adoption. As a social worker for several years, I worked with children and their parents in the foster-care system. In another role as a social worker for the foster-care system I worked directly with children in preparation for adoption. If old enough, the child and I would work together to write their adoption life story. As Grotevant (2003) states, children that are able to develop a narrative in which adoption is part of their life story have better adjustment. In addition, I worked with the child to develop a life book that, whenever possible, included pictures of his or her birth family. Children wonder who they resemble when they do not look like anyone else in the family.

Through my work with children in the foster-care system, I was keenly aware of the extreme loss they experienced. Loss can manifest itself in behavioral problems, and children need to grieve this loss, but it is not pathological. When adoptive parents acknowledge and understand the loss, it helps the child and, I believe, can decrease behavioral issues.

I suspect that adoptees will view educators differently if the administration handles racial slurs in the same manner as bullying in general. I also suspect that this will be tied to the view of their school experience in terms of behavior and academic achievement. In my fifteen years as a school counselor, I have found that when administration takes a strong stand and students feel supported, they develop a sense of belonging to the school community and experience less behavioral problems and learning

difficulties. That is not to discount that learning disabilities exist; it just may mean they are less likely to be misdiagnosed.

As stated, this is a phenomenological study under the umbrella of qualitative research. With qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument and requires a relationship with the participants. Although I will make every attempt to minimize the influence of my assumptions and biases, it is impossible to have total assurance that some weight will not be given in the analysis.

Rationale and Significance

There appear to be few studies with the adult adoptees of African American heritage raised by European American parents from the adult's perspective. The studies that do exist are old or with the purpose of proving or disproving the ability of European American parents' ability to raise African American children with a healthy racial identity. In addition, there are federal laws that prohibit the use of race as a factor when placing a child for adoption. Due to this gap in the literature I hope to add to the body of knowledge regarding transracial adoption from the descriptions provided by the adult African American adoptees that lived the experiences. The descriptions gained from this study with adoptees will inform therapists who are working directly with adoptees and/or their families in developing potential strategies for challenges adoptees and/or their families may face. Furthermore, this may inform training programs for prospective adoptive parents to be proactive in meeting the challenges of parenting a child that does not mirror their race or ethnicity.

Definitions of Terminology

African American or Black – For the purpose of this study, African American will be used to describe an individual whose ancestry is from the continent of Africa.

European American, White or Caucasian – For the purpose of this study, European American will be used to describe individuals considered white, Caucasian, and non-Hispanic.

Rural – The USDA Rural Housing Program sets its rural guidelines at 20,000 or less individuals (Waves, 2008). The Office of Management and Budget defines urban area with 50,000 individuals and outlying counties tied to the core counties economically. The Office of Management and Budget and USDA Rural Development's definition seems most appropriate where rural is defined as less than 50,000 individuals. When looking at the New England states there are very few major cities. The few major cities that are in New England typically are not surrounded by other densely populated areas although there are exceptions such as the Boston area in Massachusetts. In addition, the report from the US Census 2000 describes New England ethnicity population as 82 percent to 97 percent white, European American or Caucasian. When looking more closely at this report, individuals of African American descent range from 0.5 percent to 9 percent of the population. Upon further investigation Maine and Vermont have 0.5 percent and New Hampshire has 0.7 percent report individuals of African American heritage living in their states. Massachusetts has 5.4 percent, Rhode Island has 4.5 percent, and Connecticut reports 9.1 percent.

Transracial adoption - Transracial adoption involves the adoption of a child of a difference race or ethnicity from his adoptive parents (Fenster, 2005). For the purpose of this study, transracial adoption is defined as African American children adopted by European American parents.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Domestic transracial adoption is a controversial permanency option for African American children without families. Due to the disproportionate number of African American children waiting for adoption, federal legislation was enacted that prohibits the use of race as a determining factor when placing a child for adoption. Included in this literature review is the history of adoption in the United States as well as domestic transracial adoption to orient the reader to where we are currently in the controversial practice of domestic transracial adoption. This literature review will begin with the national statistics detailing the significant number of children who are in the foster care system waiting for a family.

Statistics

The statistics reported in 1997 by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) signified the urgency to make changes within the foster-care and adoption systems. In 1997 there were 110,000 children in public foster care waiting for an adoption. This number included 61,549 (56 percent) African American children and 30,776 (28 percent) European American children. It should be noted that according to the US Census 2000 individuals of African American heritage made up only 12 percent of the entire population in the United States, showing the disproportionate number of this population of children waiting for a family. By 2004 there were 118,000 children waiting for a family. The number of African American children waiting for a family dropped to 45,025 (38 percent); however, European American or Caucasian children increased to

44,991 (38 percent) (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). Seven years later in 2011 there were 104,236 children waiting for families in the child-welfare system with 29,164 (28 percent) African American children and 41,665 (40 percent) European American children. From 2004 to 2011 the number of waiting children has decreased by more than 13,000. The number of European American children has stayed fairly consistent, but African American children waiting for adoption have decreased by over 15,000, with a statistical decrease of 10 percent. This decrease would suggest that the Adoption and Safe Family Act (ASFA) has helped reduce the amount of children of African American heritage in foster care waiting for a family. In 1997, 56 percent of the waiting children were of African American heritage; that has decreased to 30 percent in the 14 years since the passage of the ASFA. Although the numbers are still high when thinking about 104,236 children waiting for a family, there is progress in the overall number of children, and specifically African American children (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2011).

History of Adoption

For centuries families have been joined together through adoption. In earlier years adoption was used to meet the needs of the adults and their societies without regard to the best interest of the child. Orphaned children were often forced to provide additional labor or care for older family members. The first laws governing adoption practices in the United States were passed in 1851, but it was not until 1929 that all states had some minimal laws governing adoption practices (Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998).

It is estimated that as many as 6 in 10 Americans have some personal association with adoption either as a birth parent, adoptee, adoptive parent, and/or know an adoptee, birth parent, or adoptive parent (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 1997). In addition, it is estimated that approximately two to four percent of American children are adopted each year with half being kinship adoptions (Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998; Grotevant, 2003). The exact number is unknown as there is no known comprehensive clearinghouse that keeps accurate statistics of adoptions in the United States. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) keeps statistics regarding children in the state welfare system, but this does not include children joining families through private adoption agencies, private adoptions, or international means. From 1944 to 1975 the Children's Bureau and the National Center for Social Statistics collected statistics on finalized adoptions in each state; however, states were not required to report these statistics. In addition, Hansen and Simon (2004) studied the reporting practices of public agencies throughout the United States and found inconsistencies in their statistical practices. Within public agencies there appears to be an increase in transracial adoptions, but given the wide variation in these statistics Hansen and Simon (2004) recommend further research to determine how many adoptions have been finalized. Most transracial adoptions involve European American families adopting children of a different race; however, in New Mexico, non-Hispanic children are routinely adopted by Hispanic parents. This was also found in Hawaii where parents who identify as an Asian or Pacific Islanders adopt "white" children (Hansen & Simon, 2004, p 54).

In the early 1900s adoptable children were European American without neurological or psychiatric problems in their genetic history. In the 1920s and 1930s adoptions increased with the availability of infant formula eliminating the need for a wet nurse. As the demand for healthy European American infants increased, baby brokers started to take advantage of the situation. These individuals would place children in homes without safeguards for the infant's well being, and adoptive parents were not given the medical history of the child. Once these abuses became known laws were strengthened to protect all involved (Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998).

By the mid-1950s the demand for adoptable infants surpassed the number of children available to adopt, which led to questionable tactics by some agencies to screen out prospective adoptive families. In 1955 the first National Conference on Adoption was held at the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) to address the need for improved casework practices. During the 1960s children were routinely placed in study homes for 6 to 12 months, and foster parents would monitor the child for perceived physical and/or psychological problems. If an impairment developed, the child was deemed unadoptable (Brodzinsky, Smith, & Brodzinsky, 1998). It would appear that in earlier adoption history the practices consisted of finding children for families, but today most, if not all, view adoption as finding families for children with the best interest of the children being paramount. Currently, families can adopt through such places as the state child welfare system, private adoption agencies, or attorneys.

Following World War II, international adoptions increased, starting with Korea and later Vietnam. In 1958 the Indian Adoption Project began and continued until 1967 (Lee, 2003). This collaborative project between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the

CWLA was designed to assimilate Native children into the dominant culture (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2008; Lee, 2003). It is believed that as many as one third of Native children were removed for reasons other than abuse (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2008; Park & Green, 2000). This practice expanded to children of African American heritage by the early 1960s (Lee, 2003).

In 1972 the *Social Work* journal published an article opposing the practice of transracial adoption. Chestang (1972) coined the words "cultural genocide" in reference to the social and political issues of transracial adoption. Chestang asserted that children of African American heritage transracially adopted would not be prepared to deal with the experiences all African American individuals face from birth to death, including social inconsistency, social injustice, and personal impotence. Without proper preparation the child would develop a fragmented "identity" (Chestang, 1972, p 103). Although Chestang (1972) acknowledged that the adoptive parents were well intended, and there were too many children languishing in foster care, he described this solution for African American children as shortsighted. In addition, in 1972 the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) passed a resolution calling for an end to the practice of transracial adoption of African American children, labeling it cultural genocide (Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998; Griffith & Bergeron, 2006; Hollingsworth, 1999).

In the early 1970s members of the Association on American Indian Affairs testified before Senate subcommittees describing how many Native children were removed from their families and placed in non-Native families (George, 1997). In 1978 the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), Public Law 95-608, was enacted to ensure

legislatively that Native American children's heritage was preserved following the testimony in the Senate. This legislation allowed for tribal courts to supersede the state's court system to prevent Native children from being placed in non-Native homes. This law covers all aspects of child welfare including public foster care, termination of parental rights, as well as foster and adoptive placements (United States Accountability Office, 2005).

In 1973 the Child Welfare League of America reversed its position and argued that children would be better adjusted and integrated into communities if placed in same-race families (Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998; Newman, 2007). Over the next few years the number of African American children in foster care continued to grow at alarming rates. Penn and Coverdale (1996) assert that children of African American heritage wait sometimes years longer than children of "Asian, White, Hispanic, or Mixed Background" (p 243).

In 1991 the NABSW suggested that the ICWA be revised to include the National African American Heritage Child Welfare Act so that similar policies could be applied to African American children, but it was not acted upon (Griffith & Silverman, 1995). The NABSW 2003 National Steering Committee stressed that transracial adoption should be considered only after documented evidence to find same-race families has failed. In addition, the NABSW has maintained that increased emphasis on the recruitment of same-race families should be a priority. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) voted in 1992 that African American children should not be placed with different-race families unless all other options have been explored. The NAACP also called for professional and lay "monitors" (Griffith & Silverman, 1995, p

109) to oversee the process; however, this was not implemented. From 1980 to 1997 there were four federal legislative acts that changed the permanency options for children without families which include the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act, Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994, The Multiethnic Placement Act amended by the Interethnic Adoption Provisions of 1996, and the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

Federal Legislative Actions Impacting Adoption Practices

The first federal landmark legislative act that changed the permanency for children waiting for families was in 1980 with the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act, Public Law 96-272 (Brodzinsky, Smith, & Brodzinsky, 1998). In part, this legislation created an Adoption Specialist position in every state in the country to provide national consistency for children without families. Funding was allocated for families to adopt special needs children, creating permanence in the lives of many children who were previously deemed unadoptable. Children considered special needs are typically older, have physical psychiatric or emotional needs, and/or have been abused. Although this legislative Act helped many children within the foster-care system, it took another 14 years before the issue of race and culture of children waiting for families would be addressed.

In 1994 Ohio Senator Howard Metzenbaum introduced a bill entitled the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) to end what he labeled as discrimination in the placement of children in foster care and adoption. He cited the disproportionate number of children of African American heritage waiting to be adopted. This act restricted the use of race as the sole determining factor for placement. In 1996 the MEPA was amended by the Interethnic Adoption Provisions (IEP) restricting the use of race as a

determining factor for placement except in very special individualized circumstances (Griffith & Bergeron, 2006; Jennings, 2006; Lee 2003).

The most current federal legislation was signed in 1997 by President Clinton. The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), Public Law 104-542, brought sweeping changes to the child-welfare system including the continuation the IEP. Although some are concerned that legislators lack sensitivity to recognize the unique strengths of minority cultures, others believe that transracial adoption promotes racial integration (Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998).

Impact of Being an Adopted Person

Many believe adoption is a win-win-win for all involved. The child has a family, the adoptive parents have a child, and the birth mother is able to move on with her life after an unplanned pregnancy. However, in reality it is a loss for all involved (Brodzinsky, Smith et al., 1998; McGinn, 2008; Verrier, 1993). Kirk (1984) developed the idea that adoption is based on the foundation of loss. This loss includes the child's loss of his/her birth family, the adoptive parents' loss of the genetic child, and the birth parents' loss of their child (Brodzinsky, Smith, & Brodzinsky,1998). Verrier (1993) describes the loss from adoption as a "primal wound" (p 1) that is imprinted in the unconscious minds of infants creating a sense of incompleteness. Grief associated with "adoption loss is more pervasive, less socially recognized, and more profound" ((Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998, p 9) when compared to divorce or death of a parent. It is further complicated by the expectation that the adoptee is expected to feel grateful for the loss. Even when placed for adoption during infancy, adoptees need to grieve the loss of being cut off from their birth families, genetic history, or in the case of

transracial adoption, ethnic and racial origins (Brodzinsky, Smith, & Brodzinsky, 1998; McGinn, 2008; Verrier, 1993).

The incompleteness resulting from early rejection and loss from adoption may create issues of trust, intimacy, loyalty, guilt and shame, power and control, and identity for the adoptee in many areas of life. For example, some adoptees when entering young adulthood face difficulty when looking for employment as they fear rejection from a potential employer. Parents may view this as unmotivated to work and fail to recognize the aspect of rejection that is resurfacing for the adoptee (Verrier, 1993). This can also be seen in intimate relationships in which the adoptee avoids relationships in fear that it will end as the first relationship did at birth. Adoption loss and rejection are extremely complicated; however, it is not pathological (Brodzinsky, Smith, & Brodzinsky, 1998; Verrier, 1993).

Leon (2002) suggests that adoption loss may be more intensified due the stigma and secrecy that American society places on it by looking at "adoption as abandonment" (p 657). Kinship and parenthood tend to be defined as bloodline, creating a defiant status for the adoptive family. Levy (1970) describes the parenthood definition of one Polynesian culture as "children are kept by their parents, not because of the natural, given order of things, but because the parents happen to wish to, and are allowed to, by others in the community" (p 82). This would suggest adoption is not viewed as deviant. Wegar (2000) also found that American society views adoption as a cultural deviance with problem behavior expected from the adoptee. Many view adoption as a second-best way to build a family (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 1997). Leon (2002) suggests that the particular sources of strengths may be missing in current research with adoption.

Brodzinsky, Schechter, and Henig (1992) examined adoption over the life span directly with adoptees who were the same race as their parents and placed during infancy. The sample for this study was found by advertising in the mainstream location instead of mental health agencies to get a broader perspective. This work was based on Erik Erikson's psychosocial model. Erikson's model of development suggests that as we grow we need to resolve conflict to move to the next stage of development (Broderick & Blewitt, 2003; Brodzinsky, Schechter & Henig, 1992). In addition to these stages Brodzinsky, Schechter & Henig suggest that adoptees will also need to resolve additional related conflicts. For example, in Erikson's model of industry versus inferiority (6 to 12 years) the child needs to learn the importance of academics and comparing favorably to peers. The positive outcome is competence and the negative outcome is lack of competence (Broderick & Blewitt, 2003; Brodzinsky, Schechter & Henig, 1992). For this stage Brodzinsky, Schechter & Henig (1992) proposes the child develops as Erikson's model suggests with additional tasks related to adoption. These tasks may include understanding the implication of being an adopted person, probing for answers to why she/he was placed for adoption and one's origin, coping with physical differences from family members, adoption sigma, and possible peer rejections to adoption. This suggests adoption is a lifelong process with additional developmental challenges to achieve regarding adoption (Brodzinsky, Schechter & Henig, 1992; Verrier, 1993). These challenges are to be met by the child, but they are not pathological. This is important to remember because in 1980 there were a few researchers who tried to diagnose adoptees with “adopted child syndrome” (Brodzinsky, Schechter, Henig, 1992, p 10). A group of researchers attempted to pathologize adopted persons for displaying

low self-esteem, academic problems, or rebellious behaviors such as aggression, stealing, lying, or oppositional behaviors. These behaviors are the result of unresolved grief and loss (Brodzinsky, Schechtler, & Henig, 1992; Verrier, 1993).

O'Brien and Zamostny (2003) examined 38 studies with adoptive families that could not be replicated based on inattention to theory and variables that were not controlled for. These variables included child's age when placed with their adoptive parents, gender, special needs, and support availability. They suggest the development of protocols and assessment inventories to identify the family's strengths, assets, and coping strategies in context of societal and cultural influences when presenting for treatment. This would help identify the level of intervention warranted for a family.

In summary, adoption-related milestones are faced throughout the life span and with healthy coping strategies adoptees will achieve these milestones as they do other developmental tasks. Adoptees need to be provided age-appropriate information about their adoption as they grow throughout childhood. For example, a toddler enjoys listening to his/her adoption story even without fully understanding it. When a child joins the adoptive family during infancy or toddlerhood, adjustment has been found to be the same as non-adopted children with the exception for grieving the loss of the birth family (Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998). During middle childhood an adoptee understands the sense of loss and that he/she has two sets of parents. The infant-placed adoptee will grieve for a fantasy birth parent and begin to recognize that their birth parents did have other options. During adolescence a child will question identity and may start a search for his/her birth family; however, this may be in the form of letter writing both to and from the birth parents. As the adoptee moves into adulthood he/she

may start to wonder why he/she has certain abilities such as being artistic. In Erikson's psychosocial model, young adults struggle for identity; an adoptee's quest is to incorporate identity as an adoptee into a broader sense of self. When entering into more intimate relationships an adoptee may start to express feelings about adoption that were previously suppressed. If an adoptee has a child, the awareness of missing genetic information may resurface as this may be the first time someone resembles him/her. By mid-life (50s-60s) an adoptee may develop an awareness that time is running out to search for his/her birth parents. Grief may resurface when an adoptee becomes a grandparent and again worries about unknown genetic information. During late adulthood (after 60) an individual may search for birth relatives; an individual may think about how adoption has shaped his/her personality (Brodzinsky, Schechter & Brodzinsky, 1992).

Impact of Being a Transracially Adopted Person

Although there is research regarding various aspects of adoption, there appears to be limited research with adult adoptees of African American heritage who were adopted transracially. The studies that do exist are contradictory and fail to control for the various variables that affect the outcome (Abdullah, 1996; Alexander & Curtis, 1996; Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998; O'Brien & Zamostny, 2003). Moreover, the research examining African American transracial adoptees is very limited and consists primarily of studies conducted "over 20 years ago" (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2008, p 21).

Abudullah (1996) analyzed the concerns regarding African American transracial adoption and asserted that the Multi Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) is the equivalent to

genocide. Abdullah further argues that the methodology used to assess the success of transracial adoption has been flawed and states that the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) position lacks research. Abudullah recommends that research be completed with adult adoptees regarding their experiences as a child adopted into a multiracial family through "African-centered frame of reference" (p 260).

Fenster (2005) examined casework attitudes by administering a Likert-type scale to 300 European American and 300 African American social workers. This scale was developed to examine attitudes toward transracial adoption and "white parents" (p 49) ability to help their child develop an African American identity and cope with societal racism. In addition, Fenster (2005) also examined optimism regarding the future of race relations and the commitment to understand Black awareness. Fenster (2005) defined "Black Awareness as (1) belief that African American values should be more prominent in American institutional life, (2) concern that African American children learn Black history, language, and other aspects of culture, and (3) belief that African American children need to develop pride in their African American heritage and a sense of belonging to the African American community" (p 49). Fenster (2005) concluded that race relations will need to be addressed on a micro and macro level before transracial adoption can be effectively implemented and accepted by all stakeholders. In addition, both African American and European American social workers' positive attitudes toward transracial adoptions may be based in their optimism about the future of race relations. Moreover, attitudes toward transracial adoption may not be fixed, but a malleable trait based on findings of this study.

Carter-Black (2002) also examined the opinions of mid-western African American child welfare workers about transracial adoption, foster-care placement, and the Multi Ethnic Act. Through an ethnographic method of inquiry with nine women and one man three themes emerged: children in need of an out-of-home placement must be prioritized, the current child-welfare system does not respond to the needs of African American children and their families, and the Multi Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) is potentially harmful to African American families. Although the MEPA states that agencies who receive federal funds must attempt to recruit foster and adoptive families that reflect the children that are in their care, some of the participants expressed fear that this will not occur with less conscientious workers or agencies. In addition, concern was expressed for families of color who lack resources to utilize such private legal counsel. It is important to keep in mind the attitudes of those in charge of placing children in adoptive homes and how they interpret the laws governing these practices so that professional development can be tailored to their needs (Carter-Black, 2002).

McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale and Anderson (1982) conducted one of the early exploratory inquiries with 30 European American families who adopted children of African American heritage, and 30 African American families who adopted children of the same heritage. Both groups had similar demographics and lived in urban areas, although 87 percent of the European American parents lived in primarily white communities while 70 percent of the African American parents lived in more diverse areas. These families resided either in the Southwest, Midwest, or Upper Midwest portion of the United States and were identified through adoption agencies or parent groups. Both groups of children and their parents completed the Tennessee Self Concept

Scale and participated in interviews. The adoptees' interview focused on relationships within their family, school, and community as well as their perception of racial identity; the parents' interview focused on family, demographics, and their adopted child's experience in school, community, and family relationships. In addition, the parents also completed a family adaptability and cohesiveness evaluation scale assessing family functioning. Through this comprehensive study McRoy, et al. concluded there was no difference in self-esteem between the two groups; however, the research did reveal differences in racial identity. Transracially adopted persons who were raised in more diverse neighborhoods with African American role models tended to report a positive racial identity and positive feelings toward others of African American heritage. If the family of the transracially adopted person deemphasized the importance of racial identity and did not seek positive African American role models, the adoptees tended to devalue or not acknowledge their African American identity. Moreover, adopted persons tended to see African American individuals as poor, using bad English, and militant. This early study of McRoy, et al. suggests that racial self-perception and self-esteem may operate independently, which was also noted in other studies (DeBerry, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1996; Feigelman, 2000; Vonk, Lee, Crolley-Simic, 2010).

Vroegh (1997) explored transracial and same race adoptions in a longitudinal study that started in 1970. African American children of this study were placed with their adoptive families between 1970 -1972 with "42 white families and 45 black families" (Vroegh, 1997, p 569). In the fifth phase of this project there were 52 adolescents (34 transracial and 18 same race) willing to be interviewed. In this phase the children were now in their late adolescence when identity concerns may exists due to the age. The

areas looked at included general adjustment, self esteem, and racial self identity as well as peer, parents and sibling relationships. Vroegh (1997) found no evidence that everyday relationships with individuals of the same race are "key" (p 574) to developing a black racial identity. Most of the transracially adopted adolescents lived in predominately "white" neighborhoods. Both transracially and same race adoptees preferred African American friends and expressed a preference to date African American individuals although this was affected by opportunity. Vroegh (1997) suggests that "placement of young Black children in white homes can meet the best interests of children who would otherwise remain without permanent homes for far too long" (p 574).

The Minnesota Transracial Adoption Study (Weinberg, Waldman, van Dulmen & Scarr, 2004) examined the psychosocial adjustment among transracial adoptees, European American adoptees, and non-adopted siblings. Specifically this study addressed the question, "Are transracially adopted adolescents at greater risk for development of behavior problems than other adopted adolescents and non-adopted adolescents?" (p 28). This analysis consisted of 91 parental interviews involving 240 children (average age of 19 years) during their adolescence/early adulthood years. The original study recruited families from the Open Door Society and letters sent from the State Department of Public Welfare Adoption Unit to European American families with African American adopted children under the age of four. Originally there were 321 children with 145 Caucasian birth children and 176 adoptees (130 African American and 46 others identified as Caucasian, Asian or American Indian).

Weinberg, Waldman, van Dulmen and Scarr (2004), compared the problematic behaviors of transracially adopted adolescents, Caucasian adolescents, and non-adopted

adolescents. Although participants were drawn from the community at large rather than just those in mental health counseling, this study was still only based on the parents' responses. Based on information obtained from the parents, Weinberg, et al. developed four scales to assess school problems, behavior problems, general health, and delinquency. This study revealed children who were adopted had more adjustment problems than non-adoptees; however, there was little significant difference between groups of adoptees. Weinberg, et al. concluded that their study is consistent with other studies that suggest adoptees are at greater risk than non-adoptees for externalizing behaviors problems, learning disabilities, school-adjustment problems, and delinquent behavior. In addition, individual differences such as age of placement need to be factored into adolescent adjustment, as this may account for differences between non-adopted and adopted adolescents. The history of trauma prior to placement needs to be accounted for. Moreover, this study revealed the need for research focusing on interventions that can be developed for adoptee populations.

DeBerry, Scarr, and Weinberg (1996) utilized data gathered in the Minnesota Transracial Adoption Project collected in 1976 and 1986 to examine questions about racial socialization. Through this data analysis, the researchers concluded that parents who promoted their child's race had more positive racial and ethnic identity development as well as positive outcomes. This was also revealed in a similar study completed by McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale, and Anderson (1982). Nearly half of the adoptive parents emphasized biculturalism when their children were young, but by adolescence they were more likely to deny or deemphasize race. The decrease in culture-specific parenting corresponded with a decrease in adoptee's identification with their cultural or origin.

Adolescents with more positive adjustment tended to have active parents that promoted racial and ethnic identity development. In addition, when parents actively promoted their children's races they had more positive racial/ethnic identity development and more positive adjustment (DeBerry, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1996). Cultural competence for multiracial or multicultural adoptive parents is described as racial awareness, multicultural planning, and development to ensure that the child has opportunities to learn about culture, and the survival skills for to cope with racism (Vonk, 2001).

Feigelman (2000) conducted a longitudinal study of 240 children adopted by European American parents. The racial breakdown of the children in the study was: African American (33), Asian (151), Latinos (19) and European American (37). In 1975 Feigelman gathered the 3,000 names of potential participants from parent organization and adoption agencies. From this list a random sample was selected or entire lists were used if there were limited numbers of names available for a racial group. In the first wave, 1,121 surveys were sent out and 66 percent responded. From those that responded in the first wave, another survey was sent in1980-81 and 68 percent responded; the children were now entering school at that time. The final survey was administered in 1993, when the adoptees were approximately 23 years old. Feigelman found that if African American and Asian American children were raised in predominately European American neighborhoods they reported a greater discomfort with their appearance. Those who reported greater discomfort with their appearance tended to have adjustment difficulties. This was not found for those identified as Latinos in this study; however, it is important to keep in mind there were only 19 who identified as Latino out of 240 in this group. In addition, Feigelman noted that there was a negative impact on the child's

adjustment if exposed to societal racism. Feigelman's study is similar to the McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale, and Anderson (1982) study in which children raised in diverse neighborhoods had a more positive racial identity. Again, this study was completed by only the parents and would have been much richer if the adoptees had been included.

Burrows and Finley (2004) examined adoption outcomes of various parent child racial combinations on multiple indexes. The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health conducted a school-based study with adolescents in grades 7 to 12 resulting in more than 20,000 interviews in the family's homes. From this study, Burrows and Finley analyzed the responses of interviews where adoption was indicated. This sample consisted of 350 same-race adoptions identified as European American, 74 same-race adoptions identified as African American, eight identified as transracial (European American parents with African American children), and 24 identified as European American parents with Asian children. This study revealed that Asian children showed the highest academic strength and academic expectations as well as reported the greatest number of psychosomatic complaints. These could suggest cultural expectations/stereotypes of Asian children as academically inclined may be reinforced by the parents. Other findings included African American children adopted by European American and African American parents having the highest level of self-worth when compared to the other two groups. This study also supported the earlier study by Mc Roy et al. (1982), findings that self-worth or self-esteem appear to work independently of racial identity; however, this study did not control for self-worth and the number of African American transracially adopted children is very small.

Lee (2003) reviewed studies on transracial adoptions since 1990 and classified them as “descriptive field studies on either the psychological outcomes or the racial/ethnic identity development of transracial adoptees” (p 715). In addition, Lee noted that outcome studies focus on psychological problems and adjustment and lack direct consideration of the racial and ethnic experiences of the adoptee as has been cited above. According to Lee, the cultural socialization of the adoptee needs to be examined to understand their racial and ethnic experiences that promote or hinder ethnic identity directly. An underlying assumption of cultural socialization research is that healthy psychological development is contingent on positive racial and ethnic experiences. "Cultural socialization outcome research represents a bridge between outcome studies and racial/ethnic identity studies and is a more appropriate methodology to examine how adoptees and families approach and overcome the psychological and cultural challenges related to transracial adoption” (p 719). Lee further reports that there is a limited but growing body of theory and research that focuses exclusively on the cultural socialization process between the adoptee and their families. Critical insight into how parents attempt to address various aspects of their transracial adoption paradox is warranted.

Lee (2003) suggests that more research is needed with the focus on theory to determine the specific factors that affect cultural socialization, racial/ethnic identity development, and psychological adjustment. Baden and Steward (2000) have developed a Cultural-Racial Identity Model for understanding identity experiences when raised by different-race families, citing that the existing racial/ethnic identity theories are not applicable to this situation. This theory will be discussed in the next section on identity. According to Baden and Steward, most of the studies have focused on the ability of

European American adoptive parents to provide African American children with the tools to develop a positive racial identity. The research needs to examine transracially adopted children as a group in itself and determine the factors that impact their experience including both positive and negative experiences.

Park and Green (2000) argue racial identity should not be evaluated on a forced choice attitudinal self-report, but use both quantitative and qualitative methods. In addition, studies should not only assess the impact of transracial adoption as a group but also compare the experiences within group differences. When reviewing the research, Park and Green found problems in sampling methods as well as Eurocentric standards of measurement used to assess transracial adoption. Park and Green (2000) further suggest that a multidimensional design with both Eurocentric values and African-centered world views are included when assessing transracial adoption.

Grotevant (1997) recommends that adoption be examined on multiple disciplinary perspectives and all stakeholders should be "familiar with the key concepts and theories that lend understanding to the historical and cultural contexts of adoption, the systemic functions of adoptive kinship networks, and the biological and health issues that arise in adoptive families" (p 760). Park and Green (2000) suggest adoptees may view transracial adoption in a multi-dimensional manner where the adoptee identity has more than one identity.

Wright (1998), an African American clinical psychologist, argues that most African American individuals believe that transracial adoption is a viable option when other alternatives are not available. Children should not experience unnecessary moves to achieve "ethnic matching" (Wright, 1998, p 71); these moves put children at high risk

for psychological problems later. Wright also suggests that when African American individuals "can see close up how much these families love and care for their foster and adoptive children almost always support these placements whether or not alterative racially matched homes are available" (p 71).

In summary, additional research is warranted in the area of domestic transracial adoption and specifically with the adult adoptee of African American heritage raised by European American families. Many studies have been completed from the viewpoint of the adoptive parents without direct perspective with the adult adoptee. In addition, many of the studies have included international adoptees along with African American adoptees (DeBerry, Scarr & Weinberg, 1996; Feigelman, 2000; McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale & Anderson, 1982; Weinberg, Waldman, vanDulmen, & Scarr, 2004). Moreover, many of these studies are old, with children placed before the first federal Adoption Act passed in 1980. The studies that have been completed are contradictory with the goal of providing or disproving the success of transracial adoption (Baden & Steward, 2000). Studies have failed to examine the strengths, assets, and coping strategies of members of the adoptive family (Lee, 2003; Leon, 2000; O'Brien & Zamostry, 2003).

In addition, many of the studies cited in the literature review appear to have been completed in the midwestern part of the United States with few, if any, being completed in New England. African American children are adopted in the rural states of New England where many are populated by predominately European American individuals. Given the findings of several studies indicating the need to live in diverse areas it is important to understand the experiences of these adults growing up in rural New England.

In order to understand the experiences of transracially adopted persons in rural New England, a review of the current literature on identity development is warranted.

Socialization and Racial/Ethnic Identity Development

Grotevant (1997) describes the "unique challenges facing adopted persons are about givens in their lives rather than about choices they are to make. However, although adopted persons did not choose their adoption situations, they do have choices about how they come to terms with them and about how these identity components become woven into their personal narrative" (p 9). When looking at identity development, the adopted person may have additional challenges to integrate their history as an "adopted person into their emerging sense of identity" (p 9) due to not knowing their birth families. Grotevant asserts that the adopted person needs to construct a narrative that includes their adoption that "explains, accounts for, or justifies" their adoption status (p 9). This can create a sense of coherence and meaning to this experience. Grotevant (1997) hypothesizes that there is a stronger predictor of adjustment outcomes if the adoptees "come to terms" (p 21) with their adoption. Erikson's psychosocial model emphasizes identity is on a continuum in which your past, present, and future shape your overall identity process and adoption needs to be woven into this process like other experiences that shape identity. Identity challenges for adopted persons will be revisited when faced with life transitions such as marriage or birth of a child (Brodzinsky, Schechter & Henig, 1992; Grotevant, 1997; Verrier, 2003).

Grotevant (1997) further explains that the process of identity development integrates pre-adoption history with questions such as "Who is my birth family? How am I similar to and different from my birth parents? Where do I fit in their world? How

does their world fit into mine? Can I fit in? Where do I want to fit in? To which group do I have responsibilities or allegiance? Must I choose, or can I live in both worlds? Will society let this be my free choice"(p 8 & 9). Both Grotevant (1997) and Brodzinsky, Schechter, and Henig (1992) based their studies on Erikson's psychosocial theory. Of particular interest is that Erikson was adopted by his stepfather, which may impact why this theory lends itself so well to adoption challenges. One is left wondering how much Erikson's adoption impacted the model he developed.

Dunbar and Grotevant (2003) conducted a study through the Minnesota/Texas Adoption Research Project through the lens of adoptive identity during adolescence. For this inquiry, the participants were between the ages of 12 and 20. They found four types of identity including unexamined, limited, unsettled, and integrated. Further descriptions of each include:

- Unexamined identity–individuals have not thought much about adoption and typically answer adoption questions with "I don't really know" (p 143).
- Limited identity – individuals are willing to discuss adoption but feel it is not a huge issue in their lives—they view it as something in the past when they were younger. Adolescents tend to have a "positive acceptance of their adoption and denial of differences due to adoption combined with low levels of curiosity and little emotional involvement, seem to have led to limited exploration about adoption" (p 150).
- Unsettled identity – individuals in confidential adoptions note being bothered by the lack of information about their background and expressed a desire to search although they are ambivalent about making contact. Those in open adoptions

expressed dissatisfaction with the contact with their birth families and expressed anger and sadness about the rejection from their birth parents.

- Integrated identity – individuals are able to incorporate negative and positive aspects of their adoption into a "serviceable identity for the present and an adaptive sense of self for the future" (p 156).

Later in this longitudinal study Dunbar and Grotevant (2003) plan to interview these same individuals to examine "continuities and discontinuities in adoptive identity development" over time (p 160).

Samuels (2009) conducted an Extended Case Method study with 25 adult "Black-White" (p 83) multiracial individuals recruited through various means such as web-based advertisements, adoption organizations, conference brochures, and word of mouth. The criteria for participant inclusion included "white adoptive parents, and a minimum age of 18" (Samuels, p 84). This study looked specifically at multiracial individuals and the distinct complexities of identity development. Samuels (2010) suggests that when adoptees are older they will go through a delayed process of "enculturation" (Samuels, 2010, p 38) in which the person relearns culture. Although this study is focused on multiracial challenges, what can be gained from this study is that parents need to prepare their children for racism by anticipating ways in which their child may be stigmatized. For the bi-racial individual this may include being stigmatized from the African American as well as the European American communities. Samuels (2010) notes that adoptive parents should develop a "biculturalism" (p 38) identity that is grounded before adopting. By shifting the parental identity away from "white parents with transracially adopted children toward being a multiracial and multicultural family in both identity and

cultural practice" (Samuels, 2010, p 39) expand the parental skills to cope with racism and teach their children about culture. Adoptee's parents that endorse "colorblindness" (Samuels, 2009, p 87) were less prepared for racism, and only discussed it after their child had encountered an incident. Colorblindness refers to inactivity on the parents' part to include their child's culture and ethnicity into their lives and teach about discrimination and racism before it occurs. Samuels (2010) also suggests that identity is "multidimentional" (p 38), occurring across the life span involving various domains such as structure, behavioral, and personal domains.

Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt, Gunner, and Minnesota International Adoption Team Project (2006) studied international adoptions through the lens of the adoptive parents. The findings of this study suggest that parents look beyond racial awareness by examining their own cultural belief systems and what it means to engage in "culturally competent parenting and to nurture culturally competence in their children" (Lee, et al., p 579). This study was looking at the degree of color-blindness and its' effects. Parents with low color blindness were more likely to engage in activities that encouraged their children to participate in cultural activities. In addition, these parents were more likely to discuss discrimination and racism with their children.

Clearly the idea of parental participation in low color blindness has an impact on the socialization of the adoptee's growing-up years. This is enhanced by living in a rural area such as New England where these opportunities for participation are limited and which will be an important aspect of the adoptee's description of growing up in rural areas.

Butler-Sweet (2011a and 2011b) completed a study with 18- to 30-year-old African American adoptees who were adopted by middle-class families and were attending elite colleges in Massachusetts. These participants were divided by individuals raised in monoracial families (two African American parents), biracial families (one African American parent and one European American parent), and transracial families (both parents were European American).

The findings of Butler-Sweet's (2011a) study suggest that both transracially adopted individuals and those raised by biracial parents showed identity confusion. In comparison of the three groups, the monoracial parents tended to keep in closer contact with other middle-class African American families allowing for their children to associate with other middle-class African American children. The children raised in the monoracial families also reported being less prepared for feeling different when at their schools where students came from different economic backgrounds. The participants in this study found the meaning of being "Black" (Butler-Sweet, 2011b) and their middle class status at odds with each other as they had no connection to urban culture.

Butler-Sweet (2011b), also asked participants to identify words that would describe them and words that the public would use. The transracially adopted persons tended to put race at the third or fourth word of description where participants raised in biracial or same-race families tended to put race as a second descriptor. Interestingly, the transracial adoptees tended to put family-related status first. Butler-Sweet theorize this may be the result of the early stares from strangers they experienced when with their families; race could be very evident to them but in relation to their "white parents" instead of denying that race is important in this society (p 762). Butler-Sweet (2011b)

suggests that they "weren't simply black children, but black children who had white parents - a detail that rarely went unnoticed" (p 763). When analyzed through the lens of family structure, the participants were aware of race but in the context of family status due to the outsiders' attention and not just race. If this was not considered it would appear that the transracially adoptees would not identify race as important.

Butler-Sweet (2011b) also asserts that in order to understand the identity development of transracial adoptees socioeconomic status needs to be considered. This is particularly important sense most adoptive families are middle class (Brodzinsky, Smith, & Brozinsky, 1998). Studies show that both African American and European American middle-class families both emphasize owning your own home, education, and self-reliance where children are able to develop their talents (Butler-Sweet, 2011b; Lacy, 2007). Butler-Sweet (2011b) suggests that transracial adoption literature on black identity is behind by failing to include the impact of socioeconomic class as black identity is tends to be linked to urban poverty with little attention to the African American middle class. This would indicate that identity is more fluid with multiple sources that influence identity.

Baden and Steward (2000) have developed a Cultural-Racial Identity Model to understand the role of parents, extended families, as well as social and environmental contexts. In addition, Baden and Steward explain that other identity theories such as Cross' Nigrescence Identity Theory and Helm's White Racial identity Development Theory do not take into account the experiences of individuals raised by parents who do not mirror their racial/ethnic identity. This model separates race and cultural into 16 different proposed identities. These identities are based on the degrees to which

individuals “(1) have knowledge of, awareness of, competence within, and comfort with their own racial group’s culture, their parents’ racial group, and multiple cultures, and (2) are comfortable with their racial group membership and with those belonging to their own racial group, their parents’ racial group, and multiple racial groups” (Baden, 2002, p 167).

Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia (2012) developed a new Reculturation Model. Reculturation is defined as a process where the adoptee must "learn or reclaim their birth culture after their adoption into predominantly white families" (Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia, 2012, p 389). Samuels (2010) describes adoptees going through an enculturation process described as a delayed process of relearning; however, Baden, Treweeke and Ahluwalia (2012) assert that it cannot be returned as it would not have been retained due to the young age and adoptees need to learn birth cultural practices. Enculturation begins at birth, but stops when placed in either a foster or adoptive home that does not represent the child's culture; this occurs at a very young age.

Adoptees may experience dissonance in late adolescence and early adulthood regarding how they feel and society's expectation of them (Baden, 2008). Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia (2012) suggest that over time the transracially adopted person may "struggle with their cultural affiliations and the need to resolve the dissonance they experience between their physical appearance and their lived cultural practice and affiliation" (p 388). In order to resolve the dissonance the adoptee may engage in a process of reculturation. This process is initiated by the adoptee—not the adoptive parents; during this time their relationship may be strained to some degree although

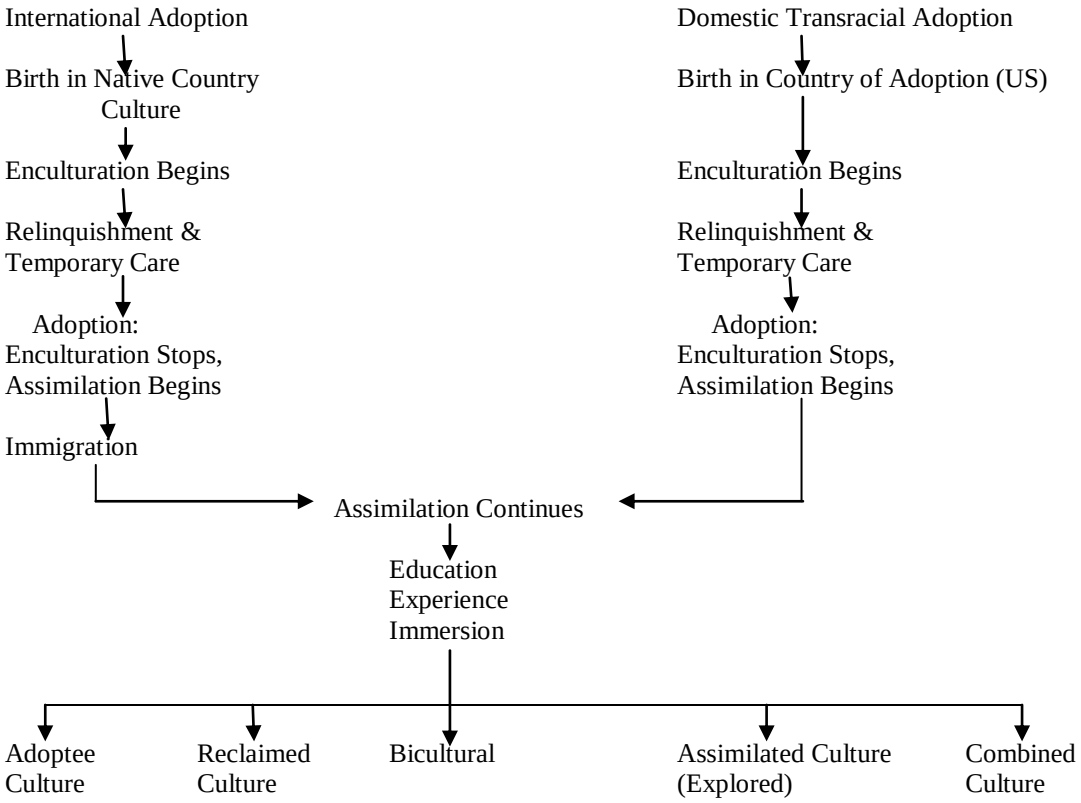
parental patience and understanding can help. In addition, the process may be triggered by events such as the adoptee leaving for college (See Figure 2.1).

"Reculturation is a process of identity development and navigation through which adoptees develop their relations to their birth and adoptive cultures via reculturation activities and experiences leading to one of five possible reculturation outcomes" (Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia, 2012, p 390). Reculturative activities may include such things as attending cultural events, cooking or eating food from the birth culture, taking classes on history or culture, joining support groups, or attending adoption conferences. This process allows adoptees to develop "a new relationship with their birth culture" (Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia, 2012, p 391).

This process may start with one of three approaches of education, experience, and immersion. The first is education to gain knowledge about their birth culture. Through this educational process the adoptee learns about such things a cultural traditions, language, music, or relationships. Once gaining sufficient knowledge the adoptee may seek ways to experience his/her newfound knowledge. The adoptee may find ways to interact with individuals who mirror his/her culturally but on a time-limited basis such as church, social events, or time-limited visits. In another approach the adoptee may immerse him/herself into the birth culture. They may move to diverse communities or change their name to their birth name while associating primarily with those that mirror them. These phases are not necessary linear nor does the adoptee needs to go through all three. (Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia, 2012, p 390).

According the Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia (2012) there are five possible outcomes for the adoptee once moving through the stages of reculturation process (Figure

Figure 2.1 The Model of Reculturation for International and Domestic Transracial Adoption. Note: There are two potential starting points for adoptees depending on whether individuals were adopted domestically or internationally (Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia , 2012, p 392).



2.2). These outcomes are adoptee culture, reclaimed culture, bicultural, assimilated culture (explored), and combined culture. This would also indicate that identity is fluid depending on context. When adapting this to domestic transracial adoption, there is a difference in that the adoptee does not have immigration status and may have few placements but the process is the same once started (See Figure 2.1). This model appears to describe the process of cultural losses and gains once the adoptee enters adulthood.

Lee (2003) discusses the notion of cultural socialization as a way to understand racial and ethnic experiences of adoptees and their families that "promote or hinder racial/ethnic identity development" (p 719). Lee further asserts that cultural socialization may bridge studies with outcomes and racial/ethnic identity studies. By examining the specific experiences described by adoptees, a greater understanding of identity development and socialization can be obtained. Socialization leading to identity development may also be influenced by the type of adoption the adoptee experiences. For example, was it an open adoption or confidential (closed) adoption? This will be discussed in the next section.

In summary, many of the studies suggest that identity development may be fluid and developed over the life span (Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia, 2012; Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992; Grotevant, 1997; Lee, 2003; Samuels, 2010). Lee (2003) suggests that if the adoptee's cultural socialization is understood than there may be a clearer understanding of what promotes or hinders identity development. In addition, the amount of colorblindness that is present during the adoptees growing up years is an important aspect of identity development (Samuels, 2010). Moreover, Butler-Sweet (2011a) suggests that socioeconomic status needs to be considered when studying

Figure 2.2 The Outcomes of Reculturation

Adoptee Culture

> Adoptee may feel that neither their birth nor adoptive culture fits them and instead identify primarily as an adoptee and associate primarily with adoptees.

Reclaimed Culture

> Adoptee may fully immerse themselves within their birth culture. They have the ability to "pass" and authentically, competently, and proficiently perform within their birth culture.

Bicultural

> Adoptees identify with their adoptive White culture to which they assimilated and with their hyphenated-American ethical group.

Assimilated Cultured (explored)

> Adoptees may continue to assimilate to their lived, adoptive (i.e., What American) culture and may attempt to hold onto their honorary White status.

Combined Culture

> Adoptees may have some combination of the previous outcomes.

Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia (2012, p, 395)

transracial adoption, and this has been left out putting transracial adoption literature behind in identity development. Clearly, the Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia (2012) Reculturation model offers a promising way to evaluate identity development where the young adult adoptee goes through a process of reculturation to develop relations between their birth and adoptive cultures. Samuels (2010) also suggests that adoptees will go through a delayed process of enculturation and need to relearn culture. Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia (2012) state that it has to be learned as the adoptee would not have retained it as they were too young. Much of this literature is based in the early work of Erik Erikson's psychosocial model of development where identity is on a continuum shaped by one's past, present, and future experiences.

Open to Closed Adoptions Continuum

Many times in early adoptions, the birth parents and adoptive parents knew each other and children had access to their personal information. It was not until the 20th century that adoption became confidential. This secrecy was an effort to shield children from the "presumed stigma of illegitimacy or bad blood associated with being born out of wedlock, being infertile, or having a child outside of marriage" (Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, & Esau, 2000, p 379). Social norms have changed starting with the civil rights movement and slowly there was a move to have adoptions more open in the 1970s.

Adoption openness is on a continuum from birth and adoptive parents freely communicating directly to one that is completely confidential. In early adoption history, adoptive parents and birth parents knew each other, creating options for the child to have access to their history. Open adoptions are common when an older adoptee joins the adoptive family. Open adoptions allows for the child to have complete genetic and

medical history. In addition, some adoptive parents report a sense of permanence with their child without the fear of the birth parents returning to reclaim their child (Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998). Moreover, with an open adoption adoptees have access to pictures as well as relationships with their birth families (Samuels, 2009). Verrier (1993) finds that the current practices of open adoption where children are handed over to adoptive parents by the birth parents has created more difficulty for the adoptee as they watch the recorded video while growing up.

Closed adoptions create a sense of secrecy and incompleteness (McGinn, 2008; Verrier, 1993), and there is concern that children growing up in a more open adoption will lack security, although the research has not shown that to be true (Brodzinsky, Smith, & Brodzinsky, 1998). Brodzinsky, Smith, and Brodzinsky (1998) recommend that agencies should have a continuum—ranging from open to closed adoptions—to meet the needs of all involved in the triad. There are very few states that are now allowing adoptees to obtain their original birth certificates when they reach 18, such as Maine did in January 2009. Although many adoptees worked hard for the change in the law so they could have access to their own personal information, there are birth parents that wish to remain anonymous and were promised this anonymity when making a plan for adoption. As time goes on we will learn how this is going to affect all involved.

School Experiences and African American Adoptees

Children spend many hours in school, and this experience can affect identity (Miller & Garran, 2008). Studies have indicated that adoptees are at greater risk for school problems and learning disabilities (Brodzinsky, Schetcher, & Henig, 1992; Weinberg, Waldman, vanDulman & Scarr, 2004); however, without asking the adoptees

directly about school their input is lacking. Although the research discussed below was not completed with adoptees, it does give insight into the experiences of African American individuals within the school setting, where the national graduation rate for African American adolescents is only 56 percent (Wigfield, Byrnes, & Eccles, 2006).

Many African American students describe a lack of voice in the school setting and are encouraged to remain invisible (Beard & Brown, 2008; Isom, 2007; Rodriguez, 2008; Wiggan, 2008). Exploration of their "blackness" was not only discouraged but silenced, with limited diversified curricula (Graham & Anderson, 2008; Mark & Tonso, 2006). Many students report a lack of teacher engagement and state that educators do not create an environment in which children developed a sense of belonging (Bemark, 2006; Mark & Tonso, 2006). John (2005) describes his anger as an African American child when school officials treated racial slurs the same as other name calling.

As stated, many studies involving transracial adoption cite behavioral and academic problems in school for the adoptee, but these issues are from the parents' perspective (Brodzinksy, Schetcher, Henig, 1992; Weinberg, Waldman, vanDulman, & Scarr, 2004). It appears in the literature that without assessing directly from the adoptee there is no way of knowing what other factors may be creating the school issues. Given the literature on the low graduation rate of African American adolescents, more should be asked about this area in the life of the adoptee.

Summary

In 1972 Chestang described domestic transracial adoption as "cultural genocide," and the NABSW passed a resolution to end this practice. In the following years children of African American heritage in the foster-care system grew rapidly (Penn and

Coverdale, 1996). Between 1994 and1997 there were three federal legislations enacted and now race cannot be a determining factor when placing a child for adoption; the number of African American children waiting for families has decreased significantly indicating that the law is doing what it intended to do. Today, domestic transracial adoption continues to be a controversial permanency option for African American children without families.

When looking further at the literature Brodzinsky, Schechter, and Henig (1992) and Grotevant (1997) based their research on Erik Erikson's psychosocial model where the past, present, and future shapes identity. In addition to the tasks that Erikson outline, adoptees will have additional adoption-related tasks to achieve at various developments. Moreover, many other studies have been a based on the notion that identity may fluid or multidimensional (Baden & Steward, 2000; Baden, Treweeke, & Ahluwalia, 2012; Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992; Grotevant, 1997; Lee, 2003; Samuels, 2010). Other studies have revealed that children raised in integrated communities with parents who provide role models and promote their child's race and culture tend to report a positive racial identity plus positive feelings toward others of African American heritage (DeBerry, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1996; Feigelman, 2000). Furthermore, the literature reflects that adoptees raised by same- or different-race parents are at greater risk of externalizing behaviors or experiencing school problems; however, the adoptee's perspective has not been considered to determine other factors that may be impacting school performance (Brodzinky, Smith, & Brodzinsky, 1998; Verrier, 1993). This would indicate that socialization practices may influence identity development. Lee (2003) asserts that the cultural socialization needs to be explored in order to understand what

experiences promote or hinder identity development. This should also include the degree of colorblindness experienced while growing up (Samuels, 2010). In addition, socioeconomic status may influence identity development as Butler-Sweet (2011a) has suggested. Grotevant (1997) suggests that adoptees need to integrate pre and post adoption history in their identity. Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia's (2012) Reculturation Model may help with understanding transracial adoption over the life span and that identity develop is fluid with many influences; this model may add the needed structure to explain the process.

The literature on domestic transracial adoption that does exist is contradictory and variables affecting the outcomes have not been controlled effectively. In addition, much of the research has been conducted from the adoptive parent's perspective (Abdullah, 1996; Alexander & Curtis, 1996; Baden, 2002; Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998; O'Brien & Zamostny, 2003). Much of the research has focused on proving or disproving that European American parents have the ability to raise healthy African American children (Baden, 2002). Moreover, many of the studies are "over 20 years old" (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2008, p 21), and have combined domestic and international adoptees.

There is a gap in the literature in understanding the experiences of African American individuals transracially adopted as described by the adult adoptees who lived the experiences. In order to understand these experiences the focus needs to be on all aspects of the adoptees' growing-up years. To understand what socialization experiences promote or hinder racial/ethnic identity, the interactions between immediate and extended family, peers, educators, and community members must be examined. In addition, the

circumstances of their adoption need to be explored to determine the age of adoptive placement as well as the type of adoption in terms of open or confidential. By examining the experiences of the adoptee through structural and contextual descriptions, the essence of their experiences will emerge.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of self-identifying African American or Black adult adoptees raised by European American or White parents in rural areas of New England during their growing-up years. This practice has sparked more controversy than another option for children without permanent families. The goal of many studies has been to prove or disprove the success of transracial adoption (Baden & Steward, 2000). This debate has been described between "those who advocate for their cultural needs and rights and those who advocate for the needs and rights to timely adoption" (Samuels, 2009, p 80). Moreover, much of the research has been conducted from the adoptive parents' perspective without the adult adoptee's perspective (Abdullah, 1996; Alexander & Curtis, 1996; Baden, 2002; Brodzinsky, Smith et al., 1998; O'Brien & Zamostny, 2003).

In order to understand the experiences directly from the adult adoptees, I developed an overarching research question: *How do self-identifying African American individuals who were adopted by European American parents describe their experiences being raised in rural, predominately European American communities?*

The three sub-questions that were answered in this study are:

- *How do African American adoptees describe their experiences growing up within their adoptive families?*
- *How do African American adoptees describe their experiences with peers and educators at elementary, middle, and high school levels?*

- *How do African American adoptees growing up in rural areas of New England describe their experiences as young children, adolescents, and young adults within the community?*

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

I choose a qualitative research methodology because it investigates a social phenomenon of an individual or group of individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon (Cresswell, 2007; Glesne, 2006). The naturalistic approach promotes a "deep understanding" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2011, p 8) through "exploration, discovery, and description" (p 9) of a lived experience from the participant's perspective. Patton (2002) describes qualitative data as telling a story by taking the reader to a time and place captured through the words of the individual who has experienced the phenomenon. This holistic inquiry requires fieldwork and consisting of three possible types of data collections including in-depth open-ended interviews, direct observation, and written documents (Patton, 2002). I choose open-ended questions because it focuses on "the wholeness of experience rather than solely on its objects or parts," (Moustakas, 1994, p 21) with probes to produce in-depth responses from the participants and reported in rich descriptions with quotations.

When looking at the literature Brodzinsky, Schechter, and Henig (1992) and Grotevant (1997) based their research on Erik Erikson's psychosocial developmental model. Erikson's model emphasizes identity is on a continuum in which your past, present, and future shape your overall identity process (Broderick, & Blewitt, 2003; Brodzinsky, Schechter & Henig, 1992; Grotevant, 1997; Verrier, 2003). Like other experiences, adoption needs to be woven into this process that shape identity (Baden,

Treweeke, & Ahluwalia, 2012; Brodzinsky, Schechter & Henig, 1992; Grotevant, 1997; Verrier, 2003). Brodzinsky, Smith and Brodzinsky (1998) assert that adoptees will have additional adoption-related tasks, and with healthy coping strategies adoptees will achieve these adoption related tasks as well as the other developmental milestones in Erikson's model. Lee (2003) suggests that by examining specific experiences described by adoptees a greater understanding of identity development and the socialization process can be obtained. Many studies suggest that identity development is a life-long process (Baden, Treweeke, &Ahluwalia's, 2012; Brodzinsky, Schechter & Henig, 1992; Grotevant, 1997; Samuels, 2010). Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia's (2012) developed a Model of Reculturation where the adoptee may go through a process of reclaiming their culture as young adults. "This construct also aides in understanding how individuals must assimilate when they are adopted and how they may make the choices, conscious or unconscious, to reclaim their birth culture at some point in their lives" (p 397).

When taking into account the prior research and the gap in the literature in understanding the lived experiences of the adult transracially adopted individual in-depth interviewing was the most appropriate. In addition, transracial adoption needs to be explored with the adoptee without the bias of proving or disproving the parent's ability to help their children develop a positive racial identity as many of the studies have been in the past.

This study looked at the experiences of transracially adopted persons raised by European American parents in rural areas of New England to gain an understanding of the experience. Additionally, this study explored the socialization practices described by

the participants to understand what was beneficial and what challenges they encountered that could be avoided for other multiracial families.

In addition, qualitative inquiry is completed with a small number of participants, which does not lend itself to a generalization of its findings. This method is used to empower "individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationship that can exist between the researcher and the participants" (Creswell, 2007, p 40). In a very simplistic manner this speaks to the power I gave to adoptees through the telling of their own story, with their own words and voice about their experiences. As described by Grotevant (1997), adoptees face unique challenges with all the givens in their lives in terms of being an adopted person. Grotevant further asserts that adoptees do have a choice in how they come to terms with being an adopted person in the way they weave their adoption-identity component into their personal narrative. Adoptees were empowered by the opportunity to express how their experiences have impacted them both in terms of the challenges they faced as well as the joys of being a member of a multiracial family.

Qualitative inquiry is "characterized as inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and analyzing data" (Creswell, 2007, p 19) with "the logic that the qualitative researcher follows as inductive, from the ground up, rather than handed down entirely from a theory or from the perspectives of the inquirer" (Creswell, 2007, p 19). Given the significant controversy surrounding the practice of transracial adoption, I believe this was the best method. As stated, much of the research has been to prove or disprove European American adoptive parents' ability to raise African American children with a healthy identity which justified a ground up approach. Although I

brought my own biases to this study—as all qualitative researchers do—I did my best to set them aside and listen through a clear fresh lens to the stories of these individuals. By asking open-ended in-depth questions directly to the adult adoptee, this design started from the ground up without an agenda for a particular outcome as some studies have done. When looking at the various methodologies under the umbrella of qualitative inquiries, I believed a phenomenological inquiry best matched the questions asked in this study, which are described in the next section.

Rationale for Phenomenological Methodology

Phenomenology inquiries examine a group of individuals who have a shared experience. Phenomenology asks what is the "meaning, structure, and essence of a lived experience" (Patton, 2002, p 104) for this group of individuals. Creswell (2007) further states that this methodology is "important to understand these common experiences in order to develop practice or policies or to develop a deeper understanding about the feature of the phenomenon" (p 60). When applying this quote to my study, I found justification by my desire to develop a deeper understanding that was missing from the literature of the practice of domestic transracial adoption from the perspective of the adult adoptee. Through analysis of the interviews with participants, recommendations for therapists, school counselors, adoption agencies, and parents were developed.

As described by Moustakas (1994), phenomenology is concerned with wholeness examining experiences from many sides, angles, and perspectives until the essence of the experience is achieved. The broad open-ended questions in this study allowed adoptees to describe all aspects of their lives, from interaction with their immediate and extended family to peers and educators at school to interaction with community members at large.

In addition, the participant was asked to describe if there was a difference in the interaction as a child, as an adolescent, and as a young adult. These questions looked for the wholeness of their experience describing the challenges and joys of these experiences without prejudgment.

Phenomenology methodology attempts to eliminate everything that represents prejudgment of the phenomenon and look through a fresh lens (Moustakas, 1994). Through in-depth interviewing, rich descriptions of the experience are collected typically with 5 to 25 persons. I had hoped to interview 10 participants (five males and females) for this study, but was only able to gain access to only five male and three female participants. Open-ended in-depth interviewing takes place in the participant's naturalistic setting, typically with more than one interview (Moustakas, 1994). I interviewed the participants in person for approximately one to two hours in a naturalistic setting in their community; seven were conducted in a library and one was conducted in a community facility at the request of the participant. The interviews were transcribed by a transcriptionist and reviewed by me before a follow-up interview was conducted. Follow-up interviews were done by phone for seven participants, and one was in person at the participant's request.

The analysis of the data began with the use of bracketing (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994) where I set aside my personal perspective of transracial adoption to examine the participants' phenomena from a fresh viewpoint. Creswell (2007) describes this process as reading the interview text for significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of the experience. From the statements a search is done to find clusters of meanings in themes. At this point an elimination of duplicate statements

will be done. With this description from the participants' words, a textual description is developed. Following this a structural description is written to describe the context or setting that influenced how the "participants experienced the phenomenon" (p 61). From the structural and textual descriptions a composite description regarding the essence of experience is derived, focusing on the common experiences of all participants.

I believe this was the best process for this study, particularly with the all the controversy surrounding the practice of transracial adoption. It is imperative that the words and voice of the adult adoptee who was transracially adopted are heard describing the experience from all angles.

Self as Researcher

As stated in chapter one (Researcher Assumptions Section), I hold assumptions and biases about adoption based on my work with children in the foster-care system and as a school counselor. In addition, I am a European American adoptive parent of two adult African American children who joined our family as infants. Both my children are currently in college and have approved of my research project. Through the years of raising my children and with open communication, they have given me insight into the challenges and joys from the adoptees perspective when raised by different-race parents in rural areas. Although I believe it is very important to understand the experiences of adults who were transracially adopted, my first responsibility is to my two wonderful children and their approval was paramount to this project.

Although being an adoptive parent does create bias, it also creates sensitivity and understanding to the transracially adopted person. As a parent I am sensitive to the issues of living in a rural community with different-race children. Adoption agencies will tell

parents they may need to move to a more diverse area; however, in rural states this may not be possible. Economic declines can prevent a family from moving even if intended. Having said that, it is important as a first step to see what adult adoptees say about their experiences in school, in the community, and with their families. Qualitative research is about the relationship with the participant, and although I made every attempt to not allow my biases and previously-stated assumptions to interfere with the analysis of the participant words, it is inherently impossible to say it did not become part of my analysis.

The Research Sample

A criterion sample procedure was used for this study, as all the individuals I studied have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). I located participants through word of mouth, letters, and phone calls to state and private adoption agencies and participant referral. Criteria for participant selection included: self-identifying as African American or Black, adopted by European American parents, at least 18 years old and no longer participating in K-12 education, placed with their adoptive parents by the age of three, born after 1980, and raised in perceived rural areas of New England. I conduct in-depth interviews with five male and three female participants. My goal was to interview five males and five females; however, after significant recruitment only three females volunteered to participate.

Information Needed to Conduct Study

This phenomenological study describes the experiences of eight self-identifying African American adults adopted by European American parents and raised in rural areas of New England during their growing-up years. In seeking to understand these experiences, one over-arching research question with three sub-questions were developed

that were explored with the participants. The categories for the information are demographic, perceptual, and theoretical. This information included:

- Perceptual information included the participants' experiences growing up in rural New England with different-race parents. This included their experiences with immediate and extended family members, peers and educators at school, and community members.
- Theoretical information was an ongoing process of reviewing the literature.

Design of Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of African American adult adoptees raised by European American parents in rural areas of New England during their growing-up years. I continued to research new peer-reviewed literature throughout this study. Following approval from the committee and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Maine, I followed the process described below.

- I conducted a pilot interview with one female to test the broad questions that were not changed after analyzing the interview (See Appendix A).
- I sent out letters or called state and local adoption agencies to request access to adoptees (See Appendix B). I also prepared letters for agencies to send potential participants (See Appendix C). I utilized word of mouth and participant referrals to obtain the criterion sample discussed above in the Research sample section.
- I contacted potential participants to discuss the study after obtaining their name from various contact persons.

- When setting up an interview time, I went over the criteria for inclusion with the participant before the interview (See Appendix D).
- Participant names and addresses were kept in a locked file cabinet. The names were coded for confidentiality and kept in a separate locked location. Interviews on a computer were password protected and backed up on a portable external drive kept in a separate, locked file cabinet.
- I met with the participants in their community at an agreed-upon location, primarily at local libraries and went over the informed consent (See Appendix E).
- The first in-depth interview lasted between one to two hours following the general interview questions above. As with all phenomenological research designs, this was only a guide for the interview to gather the needed descriptions to get to the essence of the experience. The interview was recorded on an audio device and transcribed by a transcriptionist. I immediately wrote a memo following each interview with my thoughts about the interview.
- Data from the audio device was immediately backed up to both my password-protected laptop and an external portable device and locked in a file cabinet.
- Each initial interview was transcribed by a transcriptionist and reviewed to determine the missing data for a second interview.
- I contacted the participant to schedule a second interview. The second interview was by phone for seven participants and one was in person at the participant's request.
- Following the initial and follow-up interviews I analyzed the data using Nvivo software after they were transcribed by a transcriptionist.

Analysis and Synthesis of Data

Analysis for this phenomenological study began with a review of who I am as a researcher, remembering that I am the instrument. As discussed earlier in this chapter, a phenomenological design requires that the researcher bracket his or her experiences. I reviewed my experiences and personal interest in domestic transracial adoption so that I looked at the data through a fresh lens, eliminating as much of my bias as humanly possible.

Once the interviews were transcribed, they were transferred into the NVivo system. I read all the interviews for overall content. Creswell (2007) describes this process as reading the interview text for significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of the experience. A second reading allowed for recording significant statements. Following the second reading, I looked for meaningful clusters within the statements with all statements being given equal weight (Patton, 2002). From this, I eliminated all irrelevant, repetitive, or overlapping data. This process identified themes to use to describe the textual description considered in the abstract, which provides content and illustration, but not the essence (Patton, 2002).

The next step involved the structural analysis, which describes an understanding of how the participants as a group experienced what they experienced (Patton, 2002). This description tells what context or setting influenced how the participant experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). In this synthesis I looked for a deeper meaning for the adoptees as a group. The final step was, as Patton states, "an integration of the composite textual and composite structural descriptions, providing a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the experience" (Creswell, 2007, p 486). The essence of the experience was

derived by focusing on the common experiences of all participants (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). In this case it was the essence of eight African American adopted persons raised in rural New England with European American parents.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are of the upmost importance in any research project that involves human interaction. Participants were given an informed consent detailing the goals of the study (See Appendix E). This stressed that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time. All information was kept in the strictest confidence, and all materials such as written and audio interviews were locked either in a file cabinet or, if located on a computer, were password-protected for security. Participant names and identifying characteristics were changed to protect their identity.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Because trustworthiness in qualitative research cannot be generalized, the validation process is viewed from the standpoint of researcher, the participant, or readers. I provided rich, thick descriptions from the participants to convey the findings of this study. As stated by Patton (2002), qualitative data tells a story by taking the reader to a time and place captured through the words of the individual who has experienced the phenomenon. In addition, I stated my bias to this topic from the beginning to create a tone of honesty (Creswell, 2007). I also utilized member-check by having participants read the report to determine if they felt it is accurate as another method to increase the trustworthiness of this study. I offered the analysis of the interviews to all participants; five responded and received a copy of the analysis. Three participants responded that the

analysis was accurate; two others did not respond. As stated, phenomenological methodology cannot be generalized, but it can be trustworthy by following the steps I have outlined in this section.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First, I completed in-depth interviews only with the adult adoptees who volunteered—and without their adoptive parents. This study was confined to adoptees that grew up in rural areas New England. I interviewed adoptees who joined their adoptive families by age three and were born after 1980. As with all qualitative studies, generalizing cannot be done due to the limited number of participants. Although I have addressed the limitations as I see them at this point, I saw it as a starting point for further research in the area of transracial adoption. Additional limitations are discussed in chapter 5.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study under the umbrella of qualitative research was to describe the experiences of eight African American adults who were adopted transracially by European American parents and raised in rural areas of New England. As stated, the literature reflected a gap in understanding the lived experiences described by the adult adoptees. Phenomenological inquiry was the best methodology for this study in order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Given the significant controversy of the practice of domestic transracial adoption, a study was warranted to start from the ground up looking from all angles. This study can be used to inform therapists or school counselors working with adoptees and/or their families. In addition, it can be used to inform training programs for prospective adoptive parents to be

proactive in meeting the challenges of parenting children that mirror their race or ethnicity. Moreover, there are recommendations to inform parents who are members of multiracial families joined through adoption.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The following chapter will provide a comprehensive picture to answer the overarching research question: *How do self-identifying African American individuals who were adopted by European American parents describe their experiences being raised in rural, predominately European American, communities?* The three sub-questions that will be answered are:

How do African American adoptees describe their experiences growing up within their adoptive families?

How do African American adoptees describe their experiences with peers and educators at elementary, middle, and high school levels?

How do African American adoptees growing up in rural areas of New England describe their experiences as young children, adolescents, and young adults within the community?

There are three sections that will address family, school, and community which identify themes that emerged from the interviews. All references to adoptive mother or adoptive father will be referred to as mother or father. The birth parent will be referred to as birth mother or birth father. To protect the identities of the participants of this study, pseudonyms have been used and their residences have been generalized. All participants made it clear they were happy with their families, but there were challenges that make it more difficult. They do not want their stories to be viewed as a criticism of their parents, but rather as a learning tool for other multiracial families who were joined through adoption.

Although I had hoped to have an equal number of male and female participants, it was more difficult to find females willing to participate. The final sample included three females and five males. Each participant was screened and met the criteria for inclusion listed below.

- Self-identify as African American or Black
- Grew up in rural areas of New England
- At least 18 years old
- No longer participating in K-12 education
- Joined their adoptive family identified as European American, White, or Caucasian on or before the age of three years
- Born after 1980

There were two interviews with each participant: one face-to-face and a follow-up by phone, with the exception of one who wanted to meet face-to-face for the second interview. With the exception of one, the first interview lasted approximately two hours and the second was between 30 minutes and 90 minutes.

I will start with a brief summary of the participants' profile, including demographics and descriptions of each participant's circumstance of adoption and pre-adoption experience. I will then discuss the findings of this study.

Participant Profiles

Participant Demographics

All participants self-identified as either Black or African American, although three have one birth parent who is not African American or Black (See Table: 1). All participants were adopted by married heterosexual parents before they were one year of

Table: 4.1 Participant Characteristics

Characteristics	Camille	Shaniqua	Paisley	Brian	Jaden	Jay	Quincy	Michael
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male
Age when adopted	5 months	6 weeks	4 month	5 weeks	1 year	4 days	2 months	1 year
Adoption type	Closed	Closed	Open	Closed	Closed	Closed	Open	Closed
Birth order in adoptive family	Youngest	Middle	Youngest	Oldest	Oldest	Oldest	Oldest	Youngest
Number of children in adoptive family	2 - Both African American adoptees	3 - All African American adoptees	2 - one European American adoptee	3 - All African American adoptees	3 - One birth cousin - all African American	3 - Two European American siblings born to father and stepmother - only child to mother	3 - All African American adoptees	2 - Both American adoptees
Contact with birth mother			From beginning			18 years old	From beginning	
Probable race of birth mother	African American	African American	European American	African American	African American	European American	European American	African American
Probable race of birth father	African American	African American	African American	African American	Haitian	African American	African American	African American

age. Two sets of adoptive parents divorced when the participants were four and seven years old. One participant's adoptive father died when she was eight, and her adoptive mother died when she was 18 years old. Six of the eight participants have at least one African American sibling in their adoptive home, one has a European American adopted sibling, and one participant has two siblings from his father's second marriage. Two participants considered their adoptions open and six were closed. Three participants have had contact with their birth mothers consisting of either face- to-face meetings, phone calls, or through social media.

All participants grew up in the same New England state that they considered rural and in towns that met the criteria of having a population of less than 50,000. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the participants' community population ranged from 800 to 16,000 during their growing- up years. The 2000 U.S. Census was used because it best represents the participants' growing-up years; all participants were born between 1985 and 1993. One participant moved from New England during his middle school years although he considered it rural with a more diverse population. This same participant moved again, when he was a junior in high school, to a large metropolitan community outside of New England.

The U.S. Census data in 2000 reported 12.3 percent of the entire population in the United States reported their race as African American or Black. However, these participants grew up in areas where the racial breakdown of community members of African American heritages was between 0.5 percent to 1.5 percent in the same New England state; four participants in 0 to 0.percent, two participants in 0.5 percent to 1.0 percent and two participants in 1.0 percent to 1.5 percent (U.S. Census, 2000).

All eight of the participants graduated from high school between 2005 and 2011. Their graduating class ranged from 56 to 140 students, except one participant who moved to a metropolitan area with a graduating class of more than 500. They all described being one of very few African American students in elementary, middle, and high schools, and many times being the only person of color in their individual classrooms. One participant moved in middle school to a more diverse area for the remainder of middle school and high school career. Two participants went to a parochial school early in their school career, and both transferred to public school between third and sixth grade.

All participants are attending or have attended college. Two of the five males have completed their Bachelor's degree and are applying to graduate school, two males are participating in a community college for an Associate's degree, and one male has completed one year in a community college but is "taking a break" before returning to college. Of the three female participants, one has completed an Associate's degree and two are in the last year of their Bachelor's programs. Seven participants are employed either part- or full-time while one has medical issues that prevent her from currently working.

Circumstances of Adoption and Pre-adoption Experiences

All eight of the participants were told their birth parents were unable to care for them. The participants varied in the amount of information provided about the circumstances of their adoption. All participants were born in the United States with six from the southeastern coast, one on the west coast, and one in New England. Below is a brief description of each participant in this study.

Camille was born to a young mother, and her "birth father wasn't in the picture." Camille believes both her birth parents are Black. Her birth mother had other children but was unable to care for her, resulting in a plan for adoption. Camille lived in a "nursery" until she was five months old. Her mother picked her because she was the "only one not crying and had dimples." Camille has little information about her birth family and would like more but does not believe this is possible. Both of Camille's adoptive parents are deceased. Camille has one African American sibling who is one year older and was also adopted as an infant. They are not biologically related.

Shaniqua was in foster care for only a few weeks before moving to her adoptive family. She believes her birth mother was young. Shaniqua's adoption was closed and she has not searched for her birth family. She would like to search for them at some point when she is older. Shaniqua has two adoptive siblings: one two years older and another eight years younger. Each adoption was separate, and they are not biologically related.

Paisley described her birth mother as "promiscuous" and involved with drugs. Paisley feels fortunate to be alive, as she believes her birth mother would have terminated the pregnancy if time had allowed for it. Paisley's birth mother does not know who her birth father is. Paisley's birth mother is European American and her family was not tolerant of other races. When her birth family realized that Paisley was half Black, "that wasn't acceptable; yes she got rid of me because of it." Paisley was cared for by her birth mother and birth grandfather for a very short period of time before going into foster care while her birth mother made an "adoption plan." She was placed in her adoptive home at

approximately four months of age and feels fortunate to have been raised in a loving family she describes as "White parents that are stable and good and positive."

Paisley had contact with her birth mother while she was growing up. She remembers her mother driving her birth mother to a treatment center in another New England state when she was young. She recalls being confused when she visited her birth mother because she would play with dolls. Her mother explained to her "that when she [birth mother] was a kid she didn't get to play with dolls so now she needs to play with them." Paisley expressed a desire to know more about her birth father in order to learn more about her African American heritage but recognizes it is not possible. Paisley has one European American adoptive sibling who is five years older.

Brian does not know much about his birth family, as it was a closed adoption. His African American birth mother was 43 when she gave birth to him, and he knows the name she gave him at birth. He expressed a desire to know which adoption agency he was placed with. He was in foster care only a short time before moving to his adoptive parents' home at five weeks of age. Brian has two younger African American siblings who were adopted separately and are not biologically related.

Jaden was placed with his adoptive parents at approximately one year. His African American birth mother had many children and she was not able to care for him. According to Jaden, she kept some of the children, but not him. Jaden does question why him, and feels "disappointed" that he was the one placed for adoption. When he was younger, Jaden wondered "What could I have done differently? What could I have done to change it?' Mom must be mad at me. What did I do? She wanted me to be cared for,

but why'd she put herself in that position in the first place?" In reality, Jaden understands as an adult that he did not do anything wrong.

Jaden described his adoption as a "package deal." The adoption agency wanted Jaden and his maternal birth cousin placed in the same home. The cousin is two months younger and Jaden describes this sibling as "drug addicted at birth with attachment issues." He described that the agency was reluctant to allow "White" parents to adopt them because they believed a Black family would be better, but they finally approved it. Jaden does not know much about his birth father except he was deported back to his homeland of Haiti. Jaden feels he will not be able to obtain information about him now that he is back in Haiti, and he wonders if he "lived through the earthquake." Jaden also has another African American adoptive sibling who is three years younger and is not biologically related. This sibling has contact with his birth family including his birth mother and birth grandmother.

Jay was placed with his adoptive parents at four days old from the "foster care home." Jay's birth parents were both still in high school when he was born and he realizes they could not care for a child. Although Jay refers to himself as African American, his birth mother is Italian and Filipino and his birth father is African American. Jay has two younger siblings from his adoptive father and his second wife who are both European American.

Quincy was placed with his adoptive parents when he was two months old. Quincy quickly stated his adoptive parents traveled to bring him home, and he feels fortunate because his adoptive parents did not travel to get his siblings; they came by escort. (Escorts are individuals who are hired to bring the infants to the adoptive family's

state and meet the family at the airport). His birth mother was 16 years old when he was born and unable to care for him. He does not know anything about his birth father except he is African American. Quincy's adoption was open, and he recalled receiving birthday and Christmas presents from his birth mother each year. He did not truly understand she was his birth mother when he was younger, although it was always communicated to him by his parents. Quincy received videos from his birth mother and his adoptive parents would make videos for her each year. Quincy feels very fortunate to have had pictures and videos of her while growing up especially since his two younger African American adoptive siblings did not have contact with their birth families. Quincy has two siblings who were adopted separately and are not biologically related.

Michael was placed with his adoptive family when he was about one year old. According to Michael, his birth parents "were not together" when he was born, and his birth mother "didn't really want to have a kid." His birth father wanted to raise him, but did not appear in court on the day of the hearing. Michael continues to wonder why his birth father did not attend the court hearing, and he hopes to ask him someday. Michael has an African American adoptive sister who is two years older. They were adopted separately and are not biological siblings.

Family Experiences

In this section I describe the experiences of the participants with their families. I will answer the sub-research question: *How do African American adoptees describe their experiences growing up within their adoptive families?* There were eight themes that emerged about the family (See Table 4.2). The participants understood that their parents wanted a baby without regard to race. In addition, there was a strong sense of family

Table 4.2 Themes for Family, School, and Community Experiences

Family Experiences

- My parents really wanted a baby
- We're a family no matter what we look like
- Brother and sister - closer than most
- My extended family embraced me
- I always had my church family
- My parents did their best to educate me
- Someone that kind of looks the same
- What my parents didn't teach me

School Experiences

- Supportive teachers, counselors, and coaches
- School activities and belonging
- I realized I wasn't the only one
- For the first time, I realized I was different
- Black history was limited
- Experiencing name-calling and discrimination
- Being stereotyped

Community Experiences

- Strong circle of support
- Role models
- Accepting of differences
- Dating dilemmas
- I was stared at a lot
- African American men are suspect
- Am I really African American
- Seeking a more diverse community

within the immediate family, between the siblings, as well as with the extended family. The participants also found comfort in their church family that provided acceptance and guidance. Most participants believed their parents tried their best to educate them about African American culture. The participants stated there were challenges that they were unprepared for, and they would have preferred more preparation from their parents. Most of the participants expressed a desire to search for their birth parents or siblings at some point.

My Parents Really Wanted a Baby

Each participant knew of their parents' story of infertility and their journey to adopt a child without regard to race. The participants described how much their parents loved them, creating a secure home for them to grow up in. For most participants, at least one parent was comfortable to discuss adoption and it appeared to be discussed openly. The parents provided the participants with information about their birth families in a positive manner. Examples of how these themes emerged from the interviews are provided below.

Quincy described how his parents wanted to have a baby and "there were no specifications, they just wanted to bring somebody into their home." Quincy developed a deeper understanding of the adoption process when his parents adopted his sibling when he was 10 years old. This process helped him realize how much his parents really wanted a family, and he describes this below.

> I kind of realized, it takes a process; you really have to be committed and want to do it. So for me I struggled a lot with, 'Where did I come from?' and 'Really why am I here?' type of questions when I was younger, but watching [sibling] get

> adopted I realized the decision my parents made wasn't on a whim. It was really thought out and really planned, and so they really wanted a son or someone in their life, so it kind of helped strengthen the idea that this adoption was just more than a one time. I also noticed when I was asked, 'Do you want a sister?' that I hadn't thought about the responsibility of what that was [to be a brother].

Quincy remembered asking many questions about adoption around this time as he tried to figure out how he ended up in the northern part of the country.

Brian described how he "was very blessed and lucky to have been adopted." His parents "kept pristine records" including his original "redacted" birth certificate. This was a similar message that other participants received—they were wanted, loved, and with a secure membership within the family.

For many of the participants who were the second child adopted, they understood their parents wanted to have another child of the opposite sex. Shaniqua recalled that her parents adopted her brother and "after they got him, they wanted to have a girl."

Michael described that his parents "love me as much as any parent," but he struggled to understand the adoption process as the youngest child in his family while growing up. He described that he equated it to puppies being brought to the shelter. Below is his description when young.

> I always thought of it as a puppy. A puppy's born then they give it to [the pound] ...then you go to the pound to pick it up and that's your new family. That's how I thought it was like. Alright, I was born to this family, but I'm now with this family.

We're a Family No Matter What We Look Like

Throughout all the interviews there was a strong sense of family and connectedness, even when there was conflict. All the participants expressed acceptance that their parents wanted them, and they tried to provide the best they could for them. Many of the participants believed it was normal for children and parents to not look like each other when they were young. There were many strengths within the family that have allowed the adoptees to become productive citizens within society.

The strong message of family that participants received from their parents is illustrated best by Jay's statement below.

> My parents let me know be proud to be who you are, you're beautiful the way you are, don't worry about what anyone else thinks....We're a family no matter what we look like and we need to be proud of that, being proud of who you are. Take pride in the fact that you're multiracial, take pride in the fact that you have multiple backgrounds, take pride in the fact that ya know on one side of my family I'm French Canadian but by blood I'm African American and Italian, I accept both those heritages, I've learned about both of them, ya know I think it's a lot about pride like I was saying, you have to feel like you own something, you have to own your ethnicity and your identity.

Jay feels this helped him immensely when he would encounter difficult situations at school, especially when he had to move. Jay's parents divorced when he was 4 years old, and he described the contrast between his parents as "my father's been more of a

traditional parent and my mom would sometimes think outside the box." He described a very close and loving relationship with both his parents, although he feels he can talk about feelings easiest with his mother.

Jay's father remarried when he was in elementary school, and he has a good relationship with his stepmother. They have two more children who are many years younger than Jay. He takes great pride in being a big brother and wants to maintain that strong relationship now that he is grown. Jay wants them to know he will always be there for them.

Jay's mother also remarried, and he has a very strong relationship with his stepfather. The stepfather was adopted by European American parents and he is bi-racial, which has created a strong bond for Jay that he can identify with. Jay describes his stepfather as "like an older brother" that he can talk with about anything. They both have a love for music, and he has taught Jay how to play an instrument. They spend hours talking about music and the similarities and differences between their adoptions. Jay described having four parents who love him very much.

Brian's parents also divorced when he was seven years old, and he would visit between the two houses. His father bought a house on the next street so "both parents were less than 50 feet from each other, so that's been nice." Below is Brain's description of his parents.

> I'm as happy as I can be with the family that loves me.
>
> He's a good dad...I think that's one thing that's good, he's not afraid, he always says I love you before I leave the house, he's not one of those ya know strong guys that doesn't show emotion ever....My mother made me feel special.

Jaden described his home growing up as active with "kids and dogs running around, just a normal house." He described a loving family with a lot of stress due to his younger sibling having problems that left him "doing my own thing" by the time he started high school. He shared that his parents knew he was making good choices so they had to focus more on his brother, who was having significant problems. Below Jaden describes how he coped with this.

> Yeah like I know it wasn't their fault at all I have no ill will towards them for it, but they had to deal with some things and I wasn't the issue, I wasn't the problem. So they couldn't give me the attention that they wanted to. Ya know, just some things just got stepped over, I was one of those things.

Jaden stated his parents did the best they could and he knows they would have liked to give him more attention, but couldn't. His parents attended most of his sporting events and tried to support him with their presence. Jaden described a strong sense of family, and that family members take care of each other when there are challenges. He continues to be very connected to his parents, and as an adult now he tries to make things easier for them.

When Shaniqua was young she didn't think about her parents being a different race; it was "normal that parents and children didn't look alike." In addition to her brother matching her racially, her first "best friend" was adopted from Cambodia so he didn't look like his parents, creating this normalcy for differences. As with many of the participants, Shaniqua recalled reading many children's books about adoption and families that do not look like each other when she was growing up; sometimes the books were about animals and sometimes the books were about people. As Shaniqua described

the relationship with her parents, there was a strong sense of family. Shaniqua also participated in an adoption commercial for television. She was very proud when talking about making this commercial that showed off all her family. Shaniqua described being very close to her mother and stated, "I'm very blessed that my mom decided to adopt me, I'm a very lucky girl." The other two female participants also described how they enjoyed spending time with their mothers and doing special activities, such as giving each other a manicure or going shopping together.

Camille's family was the only multiracial family in the area. When she was young, Camille recalled thinking, "My parents are White and I'm Black; my brother is Black. That just the way it is." As she got older she "liked having a family that looked different," although this does seem somewhat contradictory, as later she described being uncomfortable around other African American individuals. She described her family as very close although very traditional. She would spend most of her time with her mother while her father spent most of his time with her brother.

Camille experienced significant loss while she was growing up. Her father died when Camille was six years old, and her mother died very suddenly when Camille was 18 years old, during her first semester of college. Her mother's male friend that Camille became close to during her adolescent years also died when Camille was 21. Although Camille stated that she is "mad at God" for all her losses, she expressed how fortunate she is to have been chosen by her parents where she was raised in a loving and caring home.

Brother and Sister - Closer Than Most

All of the participants except Camille described a strong bond with at least one of their siblings. Six of the eight participants have siblings who are African American, which is an important source of comfort; two have siblings that are European American. Now that the participants are grown, most spoke of wanting to maintain that closeness with their siblings and taking steps to ensure they stay connected.

Michael has a sibling who is two years older. He described his sibling as a "real sweetheart," and he appeared very protective of her. He expressed his frustration when his sister experienced racial incidents at her school because she is so "sweet," and he doesn't see how anyone could do that to her. He described their relationship as "We're pretty close. I mean we have the typical brother and sister spat but other than that we're pretty close for a brother and sister. I think we're closer than most."

Brian has a strong bond with both his younger siblings and is protective of them. His youngest sister recently disclosed she is a lesbian. Brian described how difficult this has been for her and his supportive response to her recently.

> Sometimes it has been kind of confusing for her and I had always told her, 'You choose who you are as a person, I will always love you.' That was the way I was raised; wasn't really a big discussion. My parents were always like 'You're different; everyone is different in their own special way and you should respect them as long as they respect you.'

Brian also described a strong relationship with his other sibling, with whom he shares a love of sports. He clearly described a strong bond between the three of them.

Jaden also has a strong bond with his sibling who is his birth cousin and is two months younger. He was born drug addicted and developed significant problems in early adolescence. When Jaden was young he had a strong relationship with this sibling and they spent a lot of time talking about many topics, including their birth family and sports. As this sibling got older he developed mental health issues. It was clear that Jaden is very concerned for his sibling's well being and ability to make better choices. Jaden also described how his father has spent a great deal of time talking with him about his sibling's issues to make sure he does not feel responsible for his sibling's choices or situation.

With the exception of Camille, the participants told stories of connectedness with their siblings and a desire to continue their strong bond now that they are grown. Camille's sibling was placed in "juvenile detention center" when he was approximately 13 years old, and later a "group home" in a neighboring town. He returned to her mother's home when he was approximately 15 years of age, which was very challenging for Camille. Camille described how her brother would "just like control everything.... I'd just get really mad and upset and start crying." It has been six years since Camille spoke with her brother.

My Extended Family Embraced Me

Many participants described a strong relationship with their extended family members even though they were adopted and a different race. They provided the continued sense of family, which they know they are a part of. For many of the participants, their parents came from large close families with many family gatherings throughout the year. Most talked of gifts shared at birthdays and holidays, while others

spoke of their relatives sharing their talents such as helping them improve their ability to play an instrument.

Jaden's parents both have many siblings, creating a large extended family. Jaden described how his parents picked up both him and his sibling from their foster home, and before going back home they stayed with relatives in another state. It appeared to be a way of welcoming and celebrating their membership to the family. As a child, Jaden remembered going to visit relatives in other states and spending time with cousins who are close in age. Recently he was going to take a semester off to save money and one aunt paid for the semester to help him. He described various professions that family members are employed in and how he fits into the picture of following some of them. Although Jaden is very connected to his extended family, he is also conflicted when they are all together because he looks different as described below.

> I call it the 'Where's Waldo' effect. Like everything around me blends together but I'm Waldo and I stick out, you can see me....I may see it that way but my entire family sees it as I'm not the Waldo, I'm just blended into the background.

Brian also recalled having to drive for many hours visit to his extended family. As a child he did not always want to go because he would rather be with his friends or playing sports but his parents insisted. Now that he is grown he willingly goes on these long trips to visit family members so that he maintains this connection. Brain stated, "This is my family. This is all I've ever known, and I want to continue to have a family as I get older. I want to go on the trips." He described many of his extended family members as "conservative," which created lively conversations with an acceptance of differing opinions. Brian remembered discussing race only one time with an uncle and

that involved political parties in terms of equality for African Americans. Brian proudly stated how he surprised himself in his extensive knowledge about history and provided a strong argument to his uncle.

Jay described a strong relationship with many family members—from grandparents to aunts and uncles from both his mother and father's family. Many times his grandparents and other relatives would transport him to various activities if both of his parents were unavailable. Jay's maternal aunt lives in an urban area and would take him to places to learn about African American culture, such as museums or multicultural fairs. She would also send him gifts that represented his culture. Jay described how adoption was normalized in his family as he has several cousins who joined their family through adoption.

Michael and his sibling are the only members joined through adoption in his extended family, but he has cousins who are multiracial. Although his cousins are not African American, he described how "nice" it was to be where there were other multiracial families. Michael recalled spending holidays and birthdays with many extended family members.

Camille's relationship with her extended family was different due to the death of both her parents. After her mother died, her maternal aunt and uncle provided her with a home for school vacations and summers. She knows they care about her as she does them, but they don't "understand" her. She described them as "an older couple" whose children had left home many years earlier so they were not used to a teenager being around. She expressed feelings of connectedness to her aunt and uncle, but she clearly stated she would not call them if she had a problem. Camille commented many times

that she is very grateful for all they have done for her; she does not have contact with any other family members. Throughout all the losses she has experienced, she described how her past with her immediate and extended family has influenced her future below.

> I was fortunate to have a really good upbringing so I want to make it so other children can have a equally good upbringing that I had. Every child should have an opportunity to be with a family that loves and cares for them like my parents did for me.

Camille wants to be a social worker helping abused and neglected children or connecting families through adoption. She feels that her experience was so good she wants to be part of helping others have an opportunity to have a family.

I Always Had My Church Family

Most of the participants said their churches became a place of unconditional acceptance. Their church was an extension of their family. For many, the church offered guidance when they were faced with difficulties. Many attended various church services and participated in church youth groups and described a very liberal church that allowed for acceptance of differences, including lifestyles. Some of the participants attended regularly, whereas others were a little more sporadic due to their other activities.

Shaniqua recalled that her "church family" provided a place where she "never had to worry about being judged." Shaniqua was involved in many church activities, including the choir and youth group. She also went on youth group retreats each summer, and many times she would leave New England. She fondly recalled a couple of times the church youth group went to the South to participate in full gospel Black churches that she describes below.

> They had so much more that gospel uplifting kind of music, full of Black people, and I loved it! Even now when I'm watching like movies and stuff like that like I feel more connected to when it has like a lot of Black people and soulful music. I feel so much more connected to that.

Shaniqua feels her continued faith gives her direction and without it she would feel "lost." When she went away to college she was worried about finding another church and her minister helped her.

Camille was also very involved in church with her parents when she was young. Camille remembers participating in summer church camps and going to services a few times each week. After her father died she slowly stopped attending regularly and by eighth grade she stopped completely.

Quincy was the most influenced by the church. Throughout the time we talked he discussed the "Christian values" he was brought up in. He described that as a child it didn't "really click" but it was expected that you put on a tie and go to church each week. The church Quincy grew up in was very musical and he could play his instrument there. He feels that this strong Christian faith helped when he left for college, as it was a place he could turn to when he experienced difficulties. In college, he searched for a local church that he liked and was an active participant throughout his college years. Now that he has been out of college for a couple of years, he is applying to graduate school to become a minister where he can continue to serve God using music as a means for the message.

My Parents Did Their Best to Educate Me

Overall, most participants felt their parents did the best they could to educate them about African American culture. Many of the participants described how their parents tried to educate them about culture through books and movies. Most of the male participants gave examples of their parents trying to warn them of racism within society. However, many of the examples involved issues of racism that would have been in the news since their parents would not have personal experience of the day-to-day challenges in society as a person of color. Hair care was particularly important—especially for the females—and parents took care of this, although it was very challenging. Some of their stories to illustrate this theme are described below.

A few of the participants said their parents celebrated Kwanzaa when there were young but stopped before they were adolescents. Brian described how his parents "tried Kwanzaa" but abandoned this celebration by the time they were adolescents. He described how his parents tried to provide African American culture with the limited resources they had available to them, and they "did a good job with books." They had many children's books in the home to provide role models through literature. When he got older they subscribed to *Ebony* magazine so he "could read about Black entertainers." His mother also read a lot of "folklore" to them when they were little. He also stated they "didn't go overboard to make it embarrassing."

Jaden described one conversation as a teenager when his parents told him some people "don't necessarily like African Americans as much as other cultures." They warned him to stay in groups as it is safer than being alone. Jaden wanted to go to a college in a rural Northern area of his state, but his parents described it as unsafe for

someone of African American heritage to be there. He respected their warning but felt "it kind of sucks to be limited to a certain part of the state just because of that."

Michael described how his parents would talk about race and culture in "spurts." If there was a racial incident at school they would discuss it. When incidents did happen, his mother would always ask him if she should "call the NAACP" but Michael felt the incidents did not warrant their involvement. He believes she was trying to be supportive and would bring in other resources if necessary to help. Michael's mother talked with him about dating. She told him to be very careful in public with a girl because some people do not like interracial couples. He feels if something happens it is because of him and he must protect her. He had one girlfriend in high school and felt her parents were not happy about it, but did not forbid her from dating him.

Jay recalled conversations with his parents about race and culture. Jay and his father share a love for history, and he learned African American history while watching movies and reading books with his father. Jay's mother and his maternal aunt taught him about culture. Many times they would take him to various major cities in New England to attend cultural events, such as multicultural fairs, art festivals, or museums; they would also go to various ethnic restaurants. He has fond memories of these times. Often, his mother and aunt would buy him birthday and Christmas gifts that represented African American culture.

Jay recalled one time when he was in his late teens that he and his mother were at a garage/convenience store in a very small town. They were talking about stereotypes before going in, and how society reacts to African American individuals. As they were

getting out of the car his mother said, "Let's go scare some White people." Jay said they both laughed and he described how he likes her sense of humor to help him understand difficult topics.

Jay emphasized that his parents did the best they could to prepare him for society, and the only thing they couldn't provide were stories of personal experiences that he describes below.

> There's been challenges that I probably wouldn't have ran into if I had a Black mother and father; however, I like who I am today as a person. I like how I have a diverse group of friends. I like how I can go out and hang out with all of them. So I like that and it's because my parents are White.

Brian's parents made sure he understood racial profiling and to always be polite and respectful to police officers, even if they were not polite to him. Because it was a rural area, they wanted him to know what to do especially after the "Rodney King beating." They warned him about certain areas to be careful of as he got older and not to be off by himself. For example, he learned not to walk alone on a rural road and to be with others to stay safe. Brian understood his parents were trying to prepare him, but it "kind of scared" him. His parents talked with him about racial name calling to help prepare him if it happened, but it was a shock when it occurred at a sporting event. Brian feels his parents would not have thought to prepare him for this because as a "White" person you don't have to think about this.

Shaniqua described that her "parents did a good job with videos and movies," but it would have been better to talk about African American culture and race as well. She recalls a series of books about a "slave girl" and there were movies such as *The Color*

Purple that they watched. Looking back on it now, Shaniqua thinks her parents were trying to teach her about culture and race through literature and movies and did the best they could with limited resources. She also recalled her parents trying to put culture into their everyday lives. For example, Shaniqua described that her parents like to be on time for events, and she frequently was not ready on time. Her mother would joke that "it must be in that Black culture of being slower." Now that she is older and has more African American friends she has noticed that they are frequently late and she wonders if it is cultural. Shaniqua likes spicy food and her parents would joke with her that it must be a cultural thing. She feels this was her mother's way of trying to embrace her culture.

Camille was the exception and has tried to understand why her parents didn't talk with her about race and culture, as she describes below.

> I just kind of wish my parents maybe would have talked a little bit more about [race], but at the same time it's not something I think they wanted to dwell on. I don't think they wanted to make it so I was different than them or other people.... so I think that's probably why they never talked about race too much.

Shaniqua described her mother as trying to learn everything she could, including "how to incorporate our lifestyle of hair into hers....She went the extra mile to learn." She recalled going to a sports camp when she was young and being very excited to see a trainer that not only matched her racially but also had the same hair style. When her mother came to pick her up she asked the trainer how she fixed her hair so she could do Shaniqua's better. At the time, Shaniqua was very embarrassed but now recognizes that her mother really wanted to do the best she could and didn't have a lot of resources in the area.

Both Camille and Shaniqua shared that their mothers' braided their hair when they were young. Shaniqua's mother also put beads in her hair to match her outfit every day, and she remembered her peers commenting on how "cool" she looked. She fondly recalls her gym teacher calling her "Serena Williams," which made her feel proud. Shaniqua recalled in great detail her enthusiasm to be a model for stylists at a mall to learn about relaxers for Black hair. Many stylists gathered around her to learn techniques, but in the end, Shaniqua stated, "They still didn't learn how to do it right."

Paisley also expressed her frustration with stylists who say they know how to care for Black hair, but really don't. Paisley's mother did not braid her hair and she described going to a local hair stylist who "cut my hair very very short, it was like two inches maybe, I had this Afro it was awful and everyone made fun of me and thought I was boy." Hair care was the biggest concern for Paisley, and she brought it up several times in both interviews. She stressed, "You have to put hair care in the report.... It is a must that parents understand it is expensive to get Black hair care in a salon, and if they are going to adopt a Black child they must take care of this." When Paisley was in middle school she would travel to another part of the state with her mother to have her hair straightened by a Black hair stylist. She has fond memories of getting her hair done.

Someone That Kind of Looks the Same

Most of the participants expressed a desire to search for their birth parents or birth siblings. They want to see someone who not only matches them racially but also resembles them in some way. Two of the participants reported that their adoptions were open, and the other six were closed at the time of the adoption. Three participants have met their birth mothers. The following stories highlight this theme.

Jay's adoption was closed but his mother found his birth mother on a social media site when Jay was 18 years old. Jay shared that his parents were very open about adoption, although his mother was more open than his father. Jay and his birth mother first communicated through social media, then by phone. He learned she is now married with three other children. Jay would "like to meet her [birth mother] and my sisters just to see someone that kind of looks the same and see if there's any similarities and stuff like that." Jay recalled a conversation in which his birth mother said he looks like a nice young man and "she's very proud of me and she's glad that I was put in the right family." Clearly this statement from his birth mother was very important to him. Jay has seen a picture of his birth father and hopes to find him someday.

Quincy had video contact with his birth mother growing up and described how the videos and pictures helped him figure out who he is. He proudly stated he has his "birth mother's smile" and when he has shown friends her picture they can see the "resemblance," which he likes. Quincy continues to have contact with his birth mother but he has never talked with her on the phone. Now that he is grown, they communicate through email. He knows his birth mother has another son who is 5 years old. He invited his birth mother to his college graduation and wedding, but she was unable to attend. Quincy hopes to meet her one day.

Although Paisley knows her birth mother and has met her birth siblings, she knows little about her birth father. Her birth mother has given her mixed messages about her birth father. At one point she told Paisley she looked like him; later she told her she really doesn't know who her birth father is. Paisley understands that she will probably never know about her birth father, but she still thinks about it from time to time.

Shaniqua's adoption was closed but she was told that she has a "half brother and a half sister." When thinking about her birth siblings Shaniqua stated, "It's not really difficult, it just makes me curious, but I'd like to see them sometime just to see somebody who kind of looks like me." Shaniqua commented that she wants to be "in her 30s" when she searches for her birth siblings, Brian would also like to search for his birth family but not until he is in his 30s, just as Shaniqua stated.

What My Parents Didn't Teach Me

All the participants described challenges they encountered about being African American and for which they were unprepared. Most of the participants stated that their parents would not have thought to warn them about subtle racisms because they would not have experienced this and thus did not know. All the participants described not knowing how to answer "awkward" questions when people would ask why their parents are a different race. For many of the participants, music, movies, and television became a means to learn about Black culture and identity beyond what their parents provided for them. The stories below illustrate their understanding of learning how to be an African American person in this country.

Shaniqua described how, when she got older, peers would ask why her parents were "White" and she was "Black." There were times when she felt "such pride in being different" when peers were "intrigued" when she spoke of her adoption; however, there were other times when the questions were intrusive and difficult. Shaniqua wishes her parents had helped her to develop a story to tell when individuals asked questions. By discussing this ahead of time, the child "is not stuck in that awkward phase of 'I don't

know the answers to these questions'" and it kind of makes you second guess yourself as well.

Camille illustrates some of the awkward questions she was asked.

> 'Why is your hair like that?' I remember one of my friends asked, 'Is your whole body black or is it just like your arms and legs?' I'm like 'no, my whole body's like this.'

She recalled peers being indifferent after she answered their questions; she doesn't feel it was out of "hate"—just children asking questions. As with most of the participants, she would have liked more preparation for these types of awkward questions.

Jay recalls some of challenges of constant questions about why his parents do not look like him every time he had to change schools. He found this to be "annoying after a while because it would happen at every school I went to, multiple, multiple people asking it."

The role of music had been very important to all members of Quincy's family, but when he entered middle school it became a source of much conflict when he found a love for "rap, hip hop, and R & B" music. He found the music telling him a story of Black culture that he didn't see or hear about in his family; he described this as "a whole culture that I could relate to....I wanted to learn and be cultured."

The music "created turmoil with my family because not only did I want to learn it, I wanted to do what they did. I wanted to express it." They did not like the music and viewed much of language as "vulgar." There were times his parents would refuse to let him buy certain CDs or find CDs in his room and throw them away. He described his parents as not understanding that he was trying to learn about culture through the music,

and this was "culturally representative" of him. Many times Quincy would research the words and find something that was "rooted in history" that the artists were speaking of and try to convey this to his parents. He found this as a way to not only learn how to act as an African American person in today's world, but also a way to learn about the history of African American culture. He described this as "so I'm trying to bridge all these different gaps together and try to make one person who was me."

Quincy also turned to television to listen to comedians and sitcoms such as the *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* with Will Smith. He would watch it many times so he could take on Will Smith's "charisma and attitude." Quincy believes now it might be a little easier to find out about culture through social media but that was not available at that time. Quincy described having a "big Afro" and wearing chains with clothing that he saw rap artists wearing. He was constantly reminded that he "lives in [town] and there's no way you can act the way you are acting." He felt this was another message that he was "different."

Quincy shared his belief that this was more enhanced because cultural teachings were not available to him. He described the area that he grew up as very isolating and where you can go 30 minutes in any directions and find nothing. "I really think that if I hadn't sought it and it was provided to me, it would've been a different story." Although this was a source of conflict for Quincy and his parents, he also stated he never doubted their commitment to him, and the strong sense of family.

Quincy described how he started to change at the end of his junior year because he was concerned it might impact college in some way, and he never lost sight of this

goal. He got rid of the "chains and big Afro" and described himself as more "upstanding," but this was his way to find himself.

Jay described how listening to music "helped me kind of take the slang and some of the terms that I would hear in a song, and it was about making connections through the music." Jay has now taken his love for music and is writing rap. He described writing about his own experiences and also writing about experiences of others. He has written lyrics about "loss in their family, a breakup, traumatic experience, things like that." He likes telling a story that "makes them want to listen to it, makes them want to find out who I am and we can share stories and stuff like that."

Music was also important to Brian and he found it to be a way to learn about past struggles. Brian stated his parents "didn't really push me in one direction or another," and it doesn't appear there were any conflicts over music with his parents. He describes what it represented for him below.

> I gravitated towards more Black-conscious music, jazz, hip hop, R & B....It's part of the culture....There are a lot of artists right now who are singing about Black identity, ya know Marvin Gaye did a lot obviously and a lot of those artists talk a lot about identity but a lot of that was about finding acceptance.

Shaniqua learned about African American historical events through movies. She watches about one movie per month now because she doesn't want to get "bombarded" with the history because she gets "uncomfortable" when she is learning it; she describes uncomfortable below.

> This awkward gut feeling, like kind of like when you're about to go on a roller coaster and you're at the high point and about to go down over the top and your

stomach goes into your mouth, that's like that kind of feeling that I get ummm. Like I'm not, it's like, you're not prepared for what you're about to see.

Shaniqua wants to "learn more just not all at once, but little by little," and by herself. She described herself as having "knowledge but not extensive knowledge." She knows about "classic stuff" such as Martin Luther King and Malcolm X "but never like the stories of what people and families went through."

Shaniqua described the biggest challenge of having parents of a different race was that "they don't understand what you are going through." She explained that her parents tried to learn, but it was hard in the area they lived in. Shaniqua described that the conflicts between her sibling and her parents were over his choice of rap music and their parents found the language offensive. Shaniqua shared that her mother saw it as rebelling rather than seeing it as a way to discover how a "Black person is suppose to be."

Family Experiences Summary

Throughout the interviews, it was clear that not only the immediate but also the extended family members provided a sense of belonging and connectedness for the participants. Most of the families provided a structure in which the participants felt a strong commitment to their parents and siblings, including helping each other when in need. As adults, most want to maintain a strong relationship with their parents and siblings. The participants were given opportunities to develop and maintain relationships with extended family members and they have. Most of the participants stated that their parents tried to prepare them to be an African American person living in the United States. They appeared to prepare them for things they would have heard about in the news, such as racial profiling, but did not appear them for the more subtle things that

occurred, probably because the parents would not have these experiences as a member of the dominate culture and would not know to prepare them.

It appeared that the participants received positive messages from their parents about their birth parents. Many expressed a desire to either search for the birth parent or a sibling as it is important for them to meet someone that resembles them. Three participants have had contact with their birth parents and for two it has been a positive experience; however, for one the limits and structure needed to be in place to maintain balance.

Overall, the families were able to provide hair care, which was especially challenging for the females. It is difficult to find products and very few stylists in rural areas know how to care for Black hair. Parents will need to understand that this hair care knowledge is expensive but crucial.

Most of the participants appear to have a strong sense of belonging to their families and expressed a desire to maintain that closeness now that they are grown. It appears these families found a way to ensure their children felt loved, protected, and cared for, so they could become secure in who they are.

School Experiences

In this section I describe the participants experiences with school personnel and peers, and their experiences in school activities. I will answer the sub-research question: *How do African American adoptees describe their experiences with peers and educators at elementary, middle, and high school levels?* There were seven themes that emerged in this section when the participants described their experiences within the school environment (See Table: 4.2). Most of the participants described having supportive

educators and coaches. There was a sense of belonging to the school community and this was enhanced by their participation in school activities that primarily involved team and individual sports, music programs, and Boys State. Most of the participants realized they were different for the first time when attending school with peers, and later in high school they spoke of the comfort of not being the only one. Most of the participants experienced name calling, discrimination and stereotyping in school. Another theme that emerged is the limited Black history being taught in the schools.

Supportive Teachers, Counselors, and Coaches

Most of the participants described educators and coaches as very supportive and protective of them. There was an underlying theme that their teachers wanted them to succeed academically. When there were incidents of name calling, most felt supported and that the adults they were entrusted to would ensure that incidents were dealt with quickly. Following are stories that support this theme.

Although both Paisley and Brian went to different schools, they each shared a story of being assigned a family tree project in middle school. Brian described how the teacher did not realize how difficult this type of project would be for a student who was adopted. In both situations. once the teacher was aware, the assignment was immediately altered. Brian sought the assistance of his guidance counselor. Paisley talked with her mother, who helped the teacher design an alternative assignment.

When Paisley was in high school her coach wanted her to pull back her hair like the other players who were "Caucasian" but she couldn't. When the athletic director became aware of this situation he was very quick to support her. He discussed cultural differences with the coach, and it was never an issue again in high school.

Although Jaden found all of his coaches supportive, he spoke at great length about one particular high school coach who had a big impact on him. He described his coach as the "first Caucasian person" that he could talk to about anything, including racial issues.

When Brian was a freshman, his team was at an away game when the students for the opposing team started chanting "monkey." The athletic director for the opposing team "brushed it off." Brian's coach became very angry and insisted that athletic director do something, which he finally did. Brian felt very supported by his teammates and coaching staff. He also had another incident that same year where an opposing player called him "nigger" during the game. This school took it very seriously and reported it to the Attorney General's office. The Assistant Attorney General who handles civil right violations called Brian and discussed the incident with him. Brian did not file civil charges, and education was provided to the offending student. Brian received an apology letter from the student, and he once again felt very supported.

Brian was very fond of his high school guidance counselor who is Native American and grew up on a reservation. Brian recalls this counselor understood what it was like to be a minority in a school where most of the students are European American. When Brian would struggle with this, he found support in talking with him. The counselor also helped him learn about African American history by recommending books about such individuals as Malcolm X.

After high school Brian went to an in-state rural college. Brian also discussed at great length that he liked the academics and professors at this "liberal school" that was very accepting of differences. Although he did not have a good experience with his coach, Brian is quick to say that if he had not gone to school there he would not have met

some great people, so he does not regret it. At one point he was asked to participate in a roundtable discussion with the Dean along with 12 other "Black" students to discuss their experiences and why they choose that school. The school was making an attempt to get a more diverse student body, and the following year Brian saw an increase in diversity of the student body.

Quincy described how he always felt "my teachers loved me." Although he wanted a better curriculum, he felt the teachers did the best they could and wanted to support him. Camille and Shaniqua both felt their teachers wanted the best for them as well and would always be there for them. Shaniqua said the one time she was called a name, the principal acted quickly and took care of it immediately.

School Activities and Belonging

Most of the participants were involved in some type of school activity such as sports or music. This gave the participants a sense of belonging and security to the school as well as self-esteem. They developed deep friendships with their fellow students, some of which have lasted into adulthood.

Jaden was a strong, three-sport athlete in high school in both team and individual sports. He described building relationships with other athletes from around the state when at competitions. This allowed him more exposure and interaction to diverse groups, although the conversation typically focused on the particular sport and technique used to improve.

Jay described how "sports taught me a lot about leadership, individuality, and that a team means more than just one person." Jay described how sports helped him when he had to move to new schools. He recalled being quickly embraced by his teammates and

coaches, giving him a sense of acceptance and belonging. He describes his sports "team as a support system, a family."

Michael was also an athlete. He described many times that he felt he was not chosen for who he is as an athlete but for his race. Teammates felt Michael could " intimidate" the opposing team. Although Michael felt very included by his teammates, but wondered if it was because they wanted to say they had either a "Black" friend or player on their team. Michael stopped playing a team sport his senior year of high school so he could save more money for college.

In addition to being a gifted athlete where he felt a strong sense of belonging to his team, Brian said one of the most important events that happened in high school was being chosen for Boys State. Growing up, he believed he would register as a Republican because his father is, but once he filled out a questionnaire at Boys State he realized his views were more in line with the Democratic party. While there, the members teleconferenced with the then-Senator Obama. This had such an impact on Brian that he campaigned for him when he ran for President in 2008 and again in 2012. Brian realized he is liberal in many areas, and sometimes in class discussions he would get frustrated when students were very conservative. While at Boys State he had a leadership role and had to demonstrate negotiation skills which helped him with class discussions.

Shaniqua described herself as a talented three-sport athlete. In high school she was a starter on team sports and broke some of the state records for a particular sport. She described playing sports from an early age and went to various sports/musical camps in the summer, which gave her an advantage. Most of her friends played on the same sports teams and they were very close throughout elementary, middle, and high school.

Shaniqua stated that she was usually picked for games quickly because she was athletic but used to wonder how she would handle it if she was not chosen because of her race. These activities clearly gave her a sense of belonging.

I Realized I Wasn't The Only One

For most of the participants it was not until high school that there were other students of color within their schools. Many described how comforting it was to not have all the eyes on them when they were discussing Black history. A few participants shared that it was especially reassuring to see others in the corridors even if they weren't African American but instead were of another ethnicity besides the dominate culture. Below are a few of the stories that illustrate this theme.

Shaniqua recalled when she got into high school sometimes another person of color was in the class. She shared how nice it was to not have all the attention on her when they would do a project for Black History Month. She stated, "I didn't have all that attention just on me; someone else was there now to share it with me."

Paisley was one of only a few African American students in her school. There were two other girls in her grade, but one left in high school to go to a private school and the other had different interests. Although they didn't spend much time together growing up, they did have another person in the school. They are good friends now and periodically get together when they go back to their growing-up town.

Camille and her brother were the only African American individuals throughout her K-12 career. When she entered college in a diverse area there were many more individuals of various cultures. She enjoys not being the only one in her classes now, but is afraid to interact with anyone.

Jaden described that it was easier to have other students in school who were not of the dominant race. He shared that his two best friends are a mixture of races: one is half Asian and the other is Brazilian. In this part of the interview he identified himself as half Haitian and half African American, and states, "Of course I picked the only other kids that are a little different." Jaden still talks with his two best friends every day, even though they attend different colleges. Growing up, they not only went to school together, they also played sports together and developed a strong bond. Jaden feels some of this friendship started because they were different from the others but the friendships grew because of their similar interests. Jaden also described how just seeing other students in the hall was comforting.

> It wasn't in case I needed something, it was more or less like walking up to one of them was a lot easier than walking up to a group of Caucasian people....Yeah there's always that certain level of comfort because you don't know just looking at somebody if they're accepting of you or not. Even if they didn't talk it was comforting to know that perhaps others felt the same way.

Jaden shared there were a few students in his school who were also transracially adopted and remembered thinking that they probably had similar feelings.

Quincy recalls that there was one other student who was adopted in his grade although not his class. They were friends until middle school, but this student became involved with drugs and stopped attending school regularly. Quincy looks at this person as if it could have been him if he had made different choices. He described his friend as

living in a "moral family with good values" as he did. He feels fortunate that he was able to make better choices, and even as he searched for who he was he didn't lose sight of the importance of good grades and making good choices.

For the First Time I Realized I Was Different

The participants did not realize they were different from others until they entered school. For many of the participants, this realization didn't occur until they were in late elementary school although a couple of the participants clearly remember this happening much younger in nursery school.

Jaden described his belief that students do not see racial differences until late in elementary school. He believes he was viewed as just one of the kids playing at recess. He was chosen to speak at the Martin Luther King breakfast with another African American girl, and he believes they were chosen because of their race. This was a "little awkward" at first, because one of the students asked why they weren't chosen and the teacher responded that they won it. Jaden stated, "We knew we were chosen because we were African American."

Shaniqua described that in middle school students started to see her as "Black" and below is how her peers responded to this.

> It was really cool that they had a Black friend, but I think in middle school you have so many different groups of friends that I think that's why they saw me as the Black person because I never got too involved with a specific group.

Although for most of the participants it was not until late elementary school or middle school that they describe feeling awkward or different from others, for two it was much younger.

Jay noticed he was different when he was in a classroom of children at his nursery school. He was the only person of African American heritage and there was one Chinese student. He doesn't recall much about it except this was the first time he noticed he was different.

Brian remembered in great detail the activity they were doing in nursery school when he realized he was different. He described working very hard to trace his hand print and below is what he described when he looked up from his work.

> There were all these White little hand cut outs and then mine which were the Black ones, and they'd [teacher] always put mine in the middle. I think the nursery school teachers were really aware. They were really understanding.

Brian feels fortunate that his nursery school teachers were so aware of making sure he felt secure.

When Jay started school in kindergarten he remembers a friendly bus driver who would even take the time to talk with him when he would see him on the weekend. One particular day he took a different bus to a friend's home to play. He recalls his friend telling him a few days later his bus driver did not like people of African American heritage. His friend told him next time you come over "you can just wear like a long sleeve shirt or you can paint your face White or something like that." At the time Jay thought "that would be cool" because he was using paints, but as he got older he saw it differently.

Black History Was Limited

Through the voices of the participants it appears that most of the schools taught about slavery and Martin Luther King, Jr. and little else. Some of the participants

expressed frustration with the history curriculum and felt it was not comprehensive with an accurate portrayal of history. Many felt uncomfortable being the only person of color in the classroom when the brutality of slavery was discussed, especially when not balanced with other historical events except Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. These are a few of the stories that illustrate this theme.

Brian stated that some of his "anger comes from the curriculum not providing accurate and detailed education to all students about African American history." Brian relates his frustration with the educational system below.

> They don't really do a lot about Black History Month....They do like the little blurb or whatever, watch a movie or a project but it's not really in-depth or whatever.
>
> I had never heard of Malcolm X...my counselor at school...said I should read it for my reading project or something. And it was a totally different view like oh my gosh this guy is amazing. I've researched [state] curriculums and history curriculums and I was very angry that Malcolm X was left out a lot.... I think our country has come a long way, but there's always more than one side of the story and I think civil rights has become almost hum drum now, oh ok we've really come a lot way, we're a lot better than we used to be, but ok let's celebrate it for a couple weeks, or one day Martin Luther King's birthday, but that'll be it—we'll move forward.

Quincy asked many questions about African American history throughout his school career. The teachers were very good about answering his questions. He would sometimes ask questions he already knew the answer to, but wanted to start a

conversation in class about it so his friends would also know about a particular piece of history that he describes below.

> I'm already tensed up, I want to learn more, I want to ask questions. I want to really push the buttons of the teacher, like how about this slavery, where's Martin Luther King fit in this, when you're younger we take what we know and try to fit it in the bigger picture.

Quincy was very involved in the music program at school but did not feel the program was inclusive of all music from different cultures, including African American music. At school he just wanted someone to be "as cultured as the kids that come through the system." He remembered wanting someone to be cultured about music such as the "Tupac album" even if they were "White," as this would have had a positive impact on him. He felt that he was not understood and that his culture was not part of the school program anywhere from the academic world to the music program.

Jay was interested in history from a young age and spent many hours watching the History Channel. Jay and his father share this love for history and would talk about historical events. He felt "Black history" was woven into all history, not separately, when his father talked with him about events. He also expressed that the history curriculum lacks an accurate portrayal of history in United States, but his reaction was not as strong as Brian's and Quincy's. He said his prior knowledge of historical events helped when they discussed slavery during history class.

Jaden also found history class to be challenging and describes one particular class. "We're talking about slaves and the N word and everyone's just staring at you the whole class waiting for you to say something. Yeah, I pretty much just kept my head down."

Jaden used his athletic training to cope with this which he describes as "I'm an athlete so I use that training, one bad day, one bad game, out of your head, go to practice the next day." After the class he tried to just put it out of his mind and move on to what he needed to do next.

Shaniqua recalled feeling very uncomfortable when talking about slavery, as she felt everyone was starring at her. She states that she gets "uncomfortable even now" when it is discussed at college.

Two participants described learning about African American history only from school. Michael described not knowing "people hated Black people until I was old enough to learn about slavery and things like that I didn't really know about" until he learned about it in school. Camille also recalled discussing slavery in middle school but viewed it just as another lesson, and they would move on to the next topic soon. Camille does not remember "having like any feelings toward it or anything" when race or slavery was discussed in school. She appeared almost detached from the topic.

Experiencing Name Calling and Discrimination

Most of the participants experienced name calling and discrimination in school. It ranged from racial slurs to comments about hair and skin color. For most it was an act of overt name calling and the officials within the school acted appropriately and quickly. Unfortunately for one participant, it was repeated throughout his school career and it was not adequately addressed. These are a few of their stories to illustrate this theme.

Shaniqua remembered one incident when she was in fifth grade that she describes as "traumatizing" when it happened. A new girl came to her school and said she didn't like her because of her "skin color." Shaniqua stated that at first she didn't say anything

because it "caught [her] off guard" as no one had ever said anything about her skin color. This girl taunted her with "your mother didn't want you so she gave you away." She also pushed her down on the playground and she got hurt. The girl denied it when confronted by the teachers, but Shaniqua's friends told the teachers the truth which helped her feel supported. She feels the school dealt with it quickly and appropriately. The girl's mother came to the school and apologized and made her daughter do the same. Shaniqua described how even a year later it still upset her, and she wrote about it in an autobiography for a class.

Shaniqua recalled one incident with a teacher at vacation Bible school when the teacher used a little chant to get students to slow down. Below she describes what the teacher said and how she felt about it.

> Slow down brown cow, and that just made me feel very uneasy, and I was just like why would you say brown cow? I didn't understand that, and I remember I told my mom about it, and she brought it to the director's attention who talked to her. After the director talked to the teacher she was then super nice and that still it didn't make me feel better about it because for some reason I felt that she still wasn't being genuine about it.

Shaniqua expressed how it made her frustrated, but she was respectful as her parents had taught her.

Camille recalled in third grade a student called her a "nigger" but that was the only time. A couple of students asked her if her "whole body was Black or just her arms and legs." She describes answering their questions and it stopped. Paisley also

experienced being called "Afro puff" on the school bus. Her mother reported it to the school, and it did not happen again.

Jaden experienced racial name calling at a couple of team games. The first time the officials took care of it, but the second time Jaden said his teammates "took down" the other player who called him a racial name at the first opportunity. Jaden acknowledged that it could have been handled differently, but it also felt good to know his teammates were there for him. When he was at the end of his high school career he and his "Brazilian friend" who was also adopted decided they wanted the younger players to feel part of the team and be comfortable with them. They developed a game where they had the students tell them a stereotype about their race. Jaden described that when the coach found out he stopped them. Jaden believes the coach was right, but they wanted the other players to not be intimated by them, but race should not have been brought into it.

Michael remembered many incidents at his K-8 school where he was frequently called names such as "brownie, brown guy, Black guy, dark kid." Michael reported that this happened primarily on the playground and no one intervened to help him. He shared when he was young how confused he was about why students would say this and then knowing why. He also described how he not only stood out on the playground because of race but also because he matured quicker and was bigger than many of the students.

Michael remembered an incident when he was in middle school where he was called a "nigger" at lunch. He recalled how he got up and pushed the boy's face in the table. The boy had braces on and it cut his lip. Michael is clear that he should not have hurt the boy, but he reacted out of anger. The principal wanted to suspend Michael for

several days out of school, but his mother intervened, and it was reduced to in-school suspension. The boy who called him a "nigger" did not receive any discipline from the school for the racial slur. Michael describes this below.

> I feel like they [school officials] never had to deal with the N word being thrown around because we never really had a Black kid, The principal said we can't have violence in the school so we need to take care of this before we take care of that, but they never did anything about the racial name calling.

Michael's mother would frequently ask when incidents happened at school if he wanted her to get the NAACP involved, but he declined as he felt they had bigger issues to deal with.

Brian relayed an incident when a new girl moved to the school from an urban area. When she met Brian she said, "What's up my nigger?" Brian described how the whole class become silent and he just quietly left the room to go to the school counselor's office. Brian later learned this new European American girl had "four adopted Black brothers" and that was how they talked to each other. Brian shared his confusion about how some "urban" African Americans use the word "nigga" to each other and it is viewed as acceptable and that is a word that was never acceptable in his home or his school.

When Brian entered college he continued to play sports although he had difficulty with the coach. Brian described the coach as being nice but insensitive. They would play many teams in urban areas that were "predominantly Black," and Brian recalled the coach telling the team that "the Black athlete can jump higher, so he'd be like they have urban quickness, and everyone would just laugh so hard." Brian was the first Black player on the team in many years, and he believes the coach thought African American players

were more athletic, but could not run complicated plays. Brian tried to talk to the coach about his playing time, but he would say he forgot about him. Brian also noticed that when another African American player joined the team he would play him, but if he made a mistake he was taken out quicker than the "White" players for making the same mistake.

Brian described a group of young men from his high school known as the "Carhartt Crew" who dressed a particular way and hung "confederate flags" in their trucks. Brian stated these young men were not being "overtly racist" but their body language made it clear they didn't like him. When he walked by they would talk among themselves but Brian couldn't hear what they were saying, which he describes below.

> Sometimes that would be more terrifying because I never knew if they would say something when I walked by or throw something at me, so I guess it was more scary versus someone just yelling at me and stuff.

Michael, who grew up in a different part of the state, also described similar experiences with some other high school students also known as the "Carhartt Crew."

One participant said his high school guidance counselor could not remember his name. Jaden stated the counselor repeatedly called him by the name of another African American student who was a year ahead of him. He describes having to tell the counselor his name and remind her that "you must have seen [other student] yesterday." Jaden shared that he did not look like the other student other than that they were both African American.

Being Stereotyped

Most of the participants described being stereotyped in some manner, from music choices to how they should act as an African American person. Most of the stereotypes came from places such as television or music videos.

Shaniqua described an incident with a peer who came to visit while she was watching the Country Music Awards. Her friend said, "Black people do not watch Country Music Awards." At first Shaniqua responded with, "That's dumb; it doesn't even make sense." The friend then called another African American friend to see if that person listened to country music. When that person didn't, the neighbor said, "See; I told you so." As she got annoyed with neighbor, she used an analogy of how not all "White" people listen to the same music and race does not dictate what music you like "If it did, you wouldn't like rap music." Shaniqua decided to teach her neighbor about stereotypes using this analogy, and it seemed to work for her. Paisley also described a similar experience of being expected to listen to only rap music, which she likes, but she is also fond of country artists such as Carrie Underwood.

Shaniqua explained that the difference between her and her sibling was that "he wanted that to be one single thing." She was not comfortable with all the attention on her and would be embarrassed at the rap music blaring when they would ride to school together, but at other times she wanted to be like him, which she discusses below.

> I wanted to be like [sibling] and be like ‘oh I am a Black person and all my friends want me to be that person so maybe I should be doing all this stuff’ but then once I really thought about it didn’t matter to me. I am who I am, I’m gonna do what I wanna do, it doesn’t matter if I’m Black or White or Asian or whatever.

Michael explained how peers expected him to like only certain music because it is "Black" music, but he also likes country, as he describes below.

> They always expect me to listen to only rap music and I didn't really like all those kind of things. If music sounds good I'll listen to it, but I'll listen to anything from Willie Nelson to Lil Wayne if it sounds good, and if I'm in the mood to listen to it, I'll listen to it.

Michael felt that the expectations for a "Black" person came from watching MTV and shows on television. He describes how he feels about this perceived expectation below.

> They [students] were expecting me to talk a certain way, act a certain way, wear certain clothes, and do certain things, but that's not me. I'm not a very loud person... I don't like to be the center of attention I mean like if we're having a conversation I'll talk or whatever.

When Michael was a high school junior another African American student transferred to his school; this was the first time there was another student at his school besides his sister. He described feeling pressured by the stereotype in that he must hang out with this person because "all the Black kids stick together."

Michael described how girls would often say, "I've never been with a Black guy before" and what he really wanted was for the girls to see him as an individual and not just a "Black person." Michael described how "challenging it is to decipher your true friends from friends that wanted to say they have a Black guy as a friend." Michael spent a long time talking about not knowing who his real friends were at school.

After high school Michael went to a community college that is located in an urban area with a large immigrant population. Michael has enjoyed the diversity, but he feels

that he is expected to act like the immigrants that reside there. This population is from a country in Africa. "I just feel like [state] is such a hard place for African Americans." Michael likes his college and the students, but feels when he is in the community he is again expected to act a certain way and not the way he wants to. He sees society placing expectations on him about race again as it did in K-12 school, but for different reasons; now he is expected to act like the immigrant population from the continent of Africa.

Brian explained that when he started high school he didn't know how to fit it. He described how he dressed differently than the other students. He wore khaki pants and collared shirts which was expected of athletes on game day and just became his usual dress, and others would ask him, "Who are you trying to be." He asked his mother to buy him new clothes and then he was teased for trying to dress like those living in "Boston." This was a very difficult time for Brian and he recalled talking with the school counselor, which helped.

Jaden described a family of African American boys being raised by their birth father in the community and how it helped him learn about how to be "Black." He described in great detail how much he enjoyed just being at their house, and how the father would "razz him about his walk and talk....He would try to acclimate me more to the Black community.... It's nice because that's how African American families show their love by making fun of one another." Jaden stated that he knew this from watching sitcoms, so he felt he was accepted by the family. He belied that the sitcom was an accurate portrayal of all African American families. Jaden clearly enjoyed visiting this family and described how you can tell if a person is raised by a "White family versus a

Black family. Different walk, different talk, umm it's just their nonverbal is 100 percent different."

Jaden is currently going to a small community college near his growing-up town. His first year of college he went to a more diverse school, but then transferred to a local community college that was less expensive. Jaden loved the diversity of the school and the community, but felt it was too expensive when he was not sure what he wanted to do. At his current rural community college there are very few students of color, and he finds himself sitting very quietly "in the corner" to not draw attention to himself. He also noticed that the other African American student in one of his classes does the same thing in hopes of trying to avoid being stereotyped. He describes this below.

> I guess we already stick out so much just because of our skin color. Why draw more attention to ourselves? Some White people think that African Americans are known for being loud, boisterous, very animated people and that makes some White people uncomfortable so we just are like all right well let's not draw attention to ourselves so we don't cause any problems.

School Experience Summary

The participants reported a mixture of both positive and negative experiences within their educational systems. Most of the participants felt their teachers wanted them to be successful and cared about them. The participants described many incidents in which they felt supported and protected by their educators and coaches. They also described how their teams were cohesive in terms of taking care of each other. Most participants felt their teachers, coaches, and the administration took care of any racial incidents. In one case the school officials did not appear to intervene appropriately;

however, his mother did intervene. Most participants shared incidents of being stereotyped, discriminated against, and called racist names. Although this was very difficult for them, it helped when adults took action and gave the message that this type of behavior would not be tolerated.

Participants realized they were different when they entered school. For most it was later in elementary school; however, for a couple it happened in nursery school. Many participants were in high school before another student of color was in the classroom. They were especially thankful when they didn't have to be the only student in class when slavery or Martin Luther King, Jr. was discussed, as they felt all the other students were watching them for a reaction. Students described limited opportunities to learn about African American history. Lessons revolved around Martin Luther King, Jr. and slavery. One participant didn't even feel that the school provided diversity in its music program where African American musicians could have been explored.

Community Experiences

In this section I describe the experiences of the participants' interaction with members of the community, dating preferences, and desires to move to more diverse areas. I will answer the sub-research question: *How do adoptees growing up in rural areas of New England describe their experiences as young children, adolescents, and young adults within the community?* In this section there were eight themes that emerged (See Table 4.2). For the most part, participants felt supported and accepted by their community, with a few participants having role models. Some of the participants view themselves as very accepting of differences. The participants described a variety of issues when they started dating.

Most described being uncomfortable with being stared at when they were in public with their families. The male participants described being seen as suspicious just because they are African American. Lastly, many of participants discussed wanting to move to a more diverse area after college.

Strong Circle of Support

Most of the participants felt they were accepted by their hometowns and some even experienced protectiveness. Involvement in community activities as young children helped create a sense of acceptance. Many described going into stores where the clerks knew their families and would engage in conversation about events in their perspective families. They always felt welcomed by their friends' parents when they visited. This theme is illustrated in some of the participant's stories.

Four male participants shared that early children's community sports gave them a "strong circle of support." Jaden describes how there are "20 parents looking out for ya there; ya know 20 kids and that definitely helps." In addition to feeling like part of the community, Jaden also met other African American players from around the state due to his participation in statewide elite teams. Many times they would also go out of state to play in various tournaments, which would again provide exposure to other persons of color and to develop friendships. Jaden feels very fortunate to have had such an accepting and encouraging community, and now that he is in his 20s he is giving back by coaching the young players. He feels he can be a role model as well as provide skill building to the young players.

Brian also described a similar experience of participating on community teams which helped him feel like part of the community as well as meet other African American

individuals. He played on elite teams where he would go to different states. Brian was one of very few children of color in the community, but there was one other multiracial family with three younger children of color that lived close by. Brian thought it was "cool" to have a family that looked like his so close and perhaps those children looked up to his family.

Michael was chosen to participant in an elite clinic on the west coast due to his participation in community sports teams. He described this as the first time he found himself a member of the majority race in attendance. He remembered that there were approximately 150 players and all but 10 were African American.

Jay also described playing on elite teams. This provided an opportunity to be with other African American individuals who were playing on opposing teams in other parts of the state. He recalls how being a good athlete helped him acclimate to his new schools when he had to move due to his father's employment.

Although all talked about their community involvement through sports, Jaden was quick to say that it doesn't have to be sports—it can be any community activity that a person enjoys. It just creates that sense of belonging.

All the female participants described being accepted in their community. Many times when they were in town they would enjoy talking with the clerks who always recognized them and asked about their families. They felt safe in their hometowns and expressed a sense of protectiveness about the area they grew up. This was especially evident for Camille and Shaniqua. Shaniqua recalled that "you didn't even need to lock your car doors.... It was very safe." Camille described how "everyone knows each other and looks out for one another."

Shaniqua was active in community activities from an early age. She loved sports and music and her parents provided these opportunities for her. She enjoyed going to friend's homes and felt very welcomed by all. Shaniqua had close friends who participated in many of the same activities and developed deep friendships.

All the participants described being welcomed into their friends' homes. The parents were always very warm and inviting when they would visit. There were treated with respect; however, this was not the case when they started dating, which is discussed later in this section.

Role Models

A few of the participants described having role models within the community which had a positive impact on them. Some of the male participants spoke of the role President Obama will have on future generations of African American males and bi-racial individuals. Some of the participants had role models who were not of African American heritage, but they were not of the dominant culture and it was comforting to talk about some of the forms of racism. Examples of this theme are illustrated below.

Jaden's community coach was from the West Indies who was a "very nice guy, and that made things a lot easier for me just knowing that he was always there." He described him as a positive person who was always there for the players. He also had a son that played on the team which was nice to have someone who was also a person of color. Jay also described many multiracial families that had children who were part of the community's elite teams.

Both Brian and Quincy discussed at length the impact President Obama will have on African American or multiracial children growing up. Brian was a strong supporter

and helped campaign for him. Both describe how President Obama as a role model for many who may not have one, including bi-racial as well as African American individuals.

The only role model Shaniqua remembered growing up was her doctor, who was African American. She recalled how nice he was to her when she was ill. When she started college in the nursing program it was because of his influence. Although she is now majoring in child development, she still wants to work with children in the hospital.

Brian described how he looked up to sports figures such as "Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant," and he had many books about them which he found helpful. Brian did not have role models of African American heritage in his community, but he did a Native American guidance counselor. He recalled many conversations with him about how he overcame adversity when he was growing up. He also helped him learn about other historic African American figures to create a sense of pride in his heritage.

When Jay returned to his home state a few months ago, he found a barbershop that specializes in ethic hair where his friend works. This shop offers much more than just hair care for its customers, especially for those who do not live in a diverse area of the state. Below, Jay describes the barbershop/salon which is also the same shop that Paisley went to when she was in middle school.

> It's also another good chance to see how different races interact. He's Puerto Rican [friend], I'm African American, my friend [name] is Irish, my other friend is Native American, my other friend is Italian and Black just like I am, so it's cool to see how we converse in the barbershop. You know the barbershop is kind of where you can talk about pretty much anything. It's a comfortable feeling, it's supposed to be a comfortable feeling.

Accepting of Differences

Some of the participants discussed their families being open and accepting of differences. A few of the participants view themselves as strong advocates for others who can potentially be discriminated against. A few described how they use another person's views of same-sex relationships as a gauge for measuring how the person is going to accept them as person of color.

Brian recalled a strong emphasis on "tolerance and acceptance of everyone, and respect was a must" while growing up. When he was in high school he had friends who confided in him that they were gay. Brian was viewed as liberal and accepting in high school so others came to him for support. Now, as an adult, Brian describes himself as a strong advocate for others who may be vulnerable to discrimination. He also listens to what other people say about same-sex relationships to determine if they are going to accept him as an African American man.

Brian described this as "I kind of looked at it like if they're going to be tolerant of people who are attracted to same sex, then I just feel it would be a natural extension to someone of a different race."

Jaden and Michael also expressed similar views about sexual orientation as a means to understand how another is accepting of them. Michael states that the "heart wants what the heart wants and sexual orientation should not be a factor." Michael describes himself as very accepting of all differences. The participants that raised sexual orientation felt their families were very accepting of differences, and now it appears they are using a person's views on same-sex relationships as an indicator of how individuals are going to be accepting of them as a person of a different race.

Dating Dilemmas

In discussions about dating, most of the participants revealed that they did not date much in high school. All the participants described their sexual orientation as heterosexual. All males and one female stated they are attracted primarily to European American individuals. Some of the male participants worry that females may want to date them because it is a novelty "to date someone Black." In addition, some of the participants felt they were not welcomed by the parents of the persons they dated. Dating seems to bring up issues of trust from perceived rejection of a partner to safety when going to the parents of potential partners. Following are stories that illustrate this theme.

All the female participants stated they did not date much in high school. Shaniqua sees herself "as marrying somebody who is African American rather than White," but also stated "there are very slim pickings" in New England. She recalled a recent conversation she had with a male African American friend who lives in an urban area. "Black girls are very curvy and voluptuous [in the South].... I think that's another reason why I want to go down south. People look more like me color wise and physically." Shaniqua would like to live in an area that not only has more persons of color, but also where young women have similar stature.

Paisley also shared that she "finds men with darker skin really attractive but there aren't many here." Paisley described that what she looks for in a man is someone who is family oriented, and race is secondary. She also views herself as independent and does not "need" to have a man in her life as some of her friends do. Neither Paisley or Shaniqua is involved with anyone at this point.

Camille is attracted to European American men. Camille rarely dated in high school, although she had many male friends. Camille had her first boyfriend when she was 20 years old. She shared that they had a good relationship and enjoyed many of the same activities. When his mother found out he was dating an African American woman, she kicked him out of the house. She described how his mother told him he would "no longer be her son" if he continued to date her. The relationship ended due to the pressure. Camille is now in a committed relationship with a European American man. Early in the relationship Camille questioned her partner about his family's acceptance of individuals of African American heritage because she didn't want to put herself through such a traumatic event again. She happily reported race is not an issue with anyone in his family, and they are very warm and accepting of her. He has a large family with several sisters that Camille enjoys spending time with.

Brian described a traumatic incident with one of his first girlfriends. She called crying one night and said her mother was involved in a chapter of the Klux Klux Klan; her parents were divorced. Shortly after that Brian started getting "hate email" saying such things as "die nigger, go back to Africa." This was coming from his girlfriend's email account although he knew it was not from her. After the girl contacted Brian he had to send it to the police. Since this incident, Brian is a little wary of going to any girlfriend's home as he is concerned he will be met with overt racism.

Brian dated a lot throughout high school and college. Another time he met the father of a girl at a sporting event, and they talked for a few minutes about sports. After they finished talking he overheard the father say, "He’s not like the rest of them, he’s not

trying to act all thug, he's just regular people." Brian described how awkward it was for him and how embarrassing for the girl.

Brian explained that now he asks girls early on if they have ever dated a "Black man." He describes his reasoning for this below.

> Being an African American it makes me more visible especially in a state like [state]. Some people might look of it as a positive stereotype like 'you must get all the girls.' Being kind of an oddity in terms of dating can be a benefit, but other times it becomes a detriment because as a Caucasian man you don't have to worry that you are a novelty. I tend to ask it pretty straight forward, so I ask, 'Am I the first African American you've dated? Have you ever had an experience meeting other Black men? Do you know any Black people in general?' Ya know the answer will vary. I've got, I've dated people who have had adopted siblings who were Black, I've dated someone who was the first Black person who ever came into their home.

Brian feels that intimacy has been challenging for him at times not only in terms of acceptance, but also in trust. He feels the trust issues are from being adopted. He is trying to work through this with a girlfriend he has dated on and off for about three years. Below he describes his issues with intimate trust.

> Rejection of me as a person I would take to heart, and I would easily seek out comfort with someone else. I recently started dating a woman who I've been on-again-and-off-again with for three years. I said to her, 'Look, you're gonna have to work with me a lot because I still have a hard time accepting who I am through other people's eyes.'

He shared that whenever he feels a perceived rejection he will look for another relationship. He hopes by talking about trust with this woman he can work on this relationship.

Michael questions if the girls want to go out with him because he is an African American or because of the person he is. Like Brian, he worries that girls want to go with him just to say they have dated a "Black man." He also shared how he worries about being in an interracial relationship. He says, "I treat my girlfriends right and I am nice to them, but you feel like everywhere you go their eyes are on you."

Michael is also worried that his girlfriend will be targeted for name calling because she is dating a "Black man." He feels responsible in that "it will be my fault that you're getting your feelings hurt because of me." He feels responsible if others target his girlfriend because of race as that would make it his fault. He does not see this as a societal issue nor that it is his girlfriend's choice to date him. Michael also described being a little apprehensive when going to a girl's home, but does not feel that way with guy friends. He was clear that he is only attracted to "White girls." Below he reveals his feelings.

> I can't see myself dating a Black girl because it would remind me so much of my sister.... So I couldn't really date a Black girl it would be like dating my sister. Everyone is like, 'So, why don't you date a Black girl?' but I couldn't do that.

Jay dated a lot in high school and college with both African and European American woman, but finds he is most attracted to European American women. He has not had negative experiences with the families of girlfriends.

Quincy did not date much in high school. He described how he was the friend girls would turn to when they would break up with their boyfriends. He recalled being shy around the girls in high school although he did have one girlfriend the last few months of high school. This relationship ended shortly after they went to different colleges. Quincy was crushed after they broke up during his first semester of college and found comfort in "God," which has been a strong part of him ever since.

Quincy described being attracted to "White girls" and feels that culturally many "Black men always are more attracted to White girls." Quincy dated a few other women in college before he committed to a relationship with his partner who is European American. Quincy described a "good relationship" with his partner's parents and feels he can "joke" about cultural things with them. He describes them as more "sophisticated" about race and culture because they live in an urban area of the rural state he grew up in. As an example he said, "When they ask if I want fried chicken, I say, 'Of course I am supposed to.'"

I Was Stared At a Lot

Most of the participants described being unprepared for how much people stared at them when they were in public. Some described overhearing people talking and other times they would whisper, which was also difficult not knowing what was being said about them. Some of the participants described trying to be sure they are dressed properly to avoid drawing attention to themselves. All described how the staring made them very uncomfortable.

Although Jaden loved the community he grew up in, he recalled people staring when they were in public if they did not know his family. He remembered people talking

and asking if they were "stolen children," and at other times people would whisper. As he became older, he labeled it "White noise" because it is always there in the background, reminding him to make sure he dresses properly when he leaves the house so as not to draw attention to himself for any reason. Jaden contrasts home and community below.

> In your house you got mom, dad, my brothers, and the dogs running around, all doing their own thing ,a normal household. But in the community, it's people staring, people pointing, people looking. Ya know what I mean, it's like, 'Am I doing something wrong?'

Michael also described that it is just "normal at home," but when in public with his family people would stare. He would always try to avoid bringing attention to himself.

Jay described how his mother warned him that sometimes people will stare at them as a family when they were in public. He recalled how store clerks would ask if they were together or if he was bothering her. He remembered how proud he was to say she was his mother, and then they would apologize; however, it made him frustrated that he had to explain.

Shaniqua also discussed the need to talk to children about people staring when you are in public. She always felt protected in her community, but people would stare because her family looked different when they were in unfamiliar places. She discusses this below.

> They need to prepare a child for that, letting them know that ok you are going to be different than some of the other kids just because the color of your skin, that doesn't make you weird, doesn't make you have something wrong or a disease, that's just a way you were made.

Shaniqua works in a day care now and found that the children stared at her in the beginning because they "are used to White teachers." Below she describes how the day care incorporates diversity.

> Books that talk about how you're beautifully and wonderfully made. It's about children who are different colored skin, different types of hair, different cultures, bringing that in at a younger age so hopefully once they get older they'll remember that ...yes they are different but there's nothing wrong with you.

Two of the participants discussed crossing the Canadian border a few times each year, and remember being held at the border when they were young. Brian recalls being taken to a room away from his parents for several hours to be sure his parents were really his parents. He was interviewed by the border patrol and told he didn't do anything wrong.

Camille crossed the border with her parents several times a week when she was young and the border patrol knew them. When she got older the border patrol would ask her about her family if they recognized her; if not, she was pulled aside to show additional identification. Her car was never searched. There was a clear difference if they recognized her or not.

African American Men are Suspect

Men in this study described many incidents of being followed in stores for no other reason than being African American. Some were not prepared for being treated suspiciously, while others were frightened by the warnings and incidents.

When Quincy went away to college in an urban area he was not prepared for how the world reacts to African American young men. He recalled the first time he heard

about studies showing that women would pull their purses closer when walking by an African American man and he thought "that was absurd; like who would do that?" Shortly after this he "walked into some stores at different times and, I don't know if I've ever been followed, but I'm sure I've been watched very carefully." Quincy stated, "It's not that they [parents] were naïve about it, they just wanted me to be so secure in myself that I wouldn't worry about what other people thought of me." Quincy struggled with worrying about "what people think" about him when he was growing up, and occasionally still does. He stated now when he goes into stores he gets what he wants and leaves; he makes sure he is "not wandering." He is also very careful of how he dresses such as not wearing a "hoodie."

Brian recalled one incident when was in the city with his mother and sibling to get a suit for his eighth grade semi-formal. Unbeknownst to Brian, the clerk was following him and his sibling, but his mother was very aware of the clerk's behavior. Below he recalls hearing his mother's forceful words to the clerk.

> I've watched you tail my sons this whole time, and I've seen two White kids over there eyeing sunglasses and talking about stealing things, and you're following my sons this whole entire time. The clerk was sweating and he's like 'I'm so so sorry, we've had problems in the past, I'm so sorry' and he's backtracking, and my mom's like 'Let's go, we're leaving.'

Brian remembered his mother was "shaking" and was very angry. They left the store at that point and found another store in which to buy his suit. Brian was very "proud" of his mother for doing this as he did not realize he was being followed. In the rural community he lived in he felt very accepted, and never felt store owners would follow him. After

this incident he was more aware of store clerks and noticed it would happen in areas where he did not reside.

Brian was very accepted and comfortable in his town but when going to a neighboring town it was different. He described an incident of being pulled over by the police, and he believes it was racial profiling. The officer pulled him over and said, "I saw you sit inside your car and make a phone call. Were you doing something you shouldn't have been doing, why do you need to be on your phone stopped outside someone's house?" He tried to explain that he was lost but the officer did not offer any help. The officer followed for three miles after he let him go. His parents had warned him of such possibilities, but he was frightened by the experience. He shared that there is no way of knowing for sure if he would have pulled over as a "White" man, but he felt he would not have.

Jay reported that his parents tried to prepare him as much as they could and theorizes that perhaps parents of African American heritage might have done a little more because there may be family members that could provide personal stories. Jay recalls many conversations about stereotypes with his mother, and that it was their issue and loss by not being accepting. He feels that his parents "prepped" him before it happened so that helped. Jay recalled going into stores and felt they kept an eye on him, although he is not sure if they followed him.

Michael described an incident that happened a couple of years ago at a rural state fair. He was with his two African American childhood friends and their three "White" girlfriends at a fair in the same county as they grew up. Michael described everyone staring at them and moving to the side; he believes that many of them had never seen

"three Black men together before." Michael recalled feeling they were waiting for them to rob them with guns. Below Michael describes his behavior in public.

> When you go out in public you always make sure you're doing everything right. You don't wanna give anyone any ammunition and any reason to say anything. When you go out in public you don't want to wear your pants down around your ankles... you don't say things that would make people worry.

Am I Really African American

Many of the participants revealed that they question if they truly understand how to be an African American person in this country. They were unsure how to act, especially when in urban areas. Some felt their mannerisms are that of European American individuals because that is who raised them and their community was not diverse. Some of the participants seemed to have taken on society's stereotypes of people of African American heritage. Below are some of stories that illustrate how they are working through identity issues.

Shaniqua explained her perception of being an African American person without many who mirrored her racially in the community.

> Yes I am Black, but I felt Black and me were two different people. Like yes I was Black but I wasn't, I'm not gonna act like I am Black. Like I'm just going to act like me, if that happens in small bits and pieces of me being Black then ok, but I'm not going to try to fit this Black stereotype. Because, I felt like fitting this Black stereotype, it's going to set me apart even more from all of my White community and be seen as different and have all the attention set back on me, which is something like I didn't want. So I think I kind of separated those two

> like an on-and-off switch, like if I wanted to act like Black then ok, if not then that's fine.

Camille does not know about "African American culture or race." She shared that she is intimidated when she is around persons of color. She recalled one incident while shopping with her mother when an African American man with "dreadlocks" complimented her hair, and she just walked away. She was reprimanded by her mother for being rude, but Camille was intimidated.

Camille's college is in a diverse area with a large immigrant population from Africa, and she enjoys not being the only person of color in the class, but she rarely interacts with anyone. She shared that she is "scared." She commented that "if a Black person were to walk towards me, I'd walk the other way." Camille doesn't feel she is a "true African American" because she doesn't know "how to act." She described feeling "nervous and my heart beating fast" when she sees a person of color. She is worried that they will think "she's not cool enough to be Black, she's not wearing the clothes or talking like we do." Looking back, Camille wishes her parents had talked about race more so perhaps she would not be so afraid now to be with other individuals of African American heritage.

In high school Shaniqua had a close group of friends that continued until she went to college. Shaniqua explains the confusion she sometimes felt below.

> I have no connection with any type of Black culture in [state] I kind of started acting just like everybody else and so they see me just like them, just somebody who has different skin....I think my friends were like I don't even see you as Black I just see you as White. As I got older I think it bothered me, but like no I

> am that Black, a Black person and I want to be seen as one not as a White person because I'm not, but then again I think it would be awkward now to switch back over to being part of that Black culture just because umm I haven't been in it for like my whole life and I would I'd feel like people think I'm trying to be something that I'm not.

Jaden has many cousins he is very close to, and recently a cousin invited him on a trip that she won in a raffle. Although race was not discussed openly, his cousin noticed he was uncomfortable in the airport and told him to "just stay close you will be fine." Below he describes the scene at the airport in a major city.

> All the African American women thought I was really attractive and a lot of the White women did too. I was just like oh hi, I wasn't attracted to any of the African American woman. Umm the men saw me as more of a threat.

This was the first time he had been in a place where the majority of people were of African American heritage; this happened the week before our second interview. He wishes now that his parents had taken him to places growing up where there were more African American individuals to get used to being one of many.

Michael is intimidated when he's with other African American individuals. He also feels that he does not know how to act when in their presence and is sometimes confused. He illustrates this below.

> It's kind of a weird thing. I found hanging out with more Black people more intimidating than hanging out with White people. I feel like I'm supposed to act a certain way, say certain things, and do certain things around Black people because apparently that's how they're supposed to do it. My whole life I've been raised

> by upstanding citizens who you know to pronounce words and say words a certain way.

Quincy expressed how conflicted he was at times trying to figure out "who and what" he was. He describes how he tried to sort it out below.

> I'm trying to sort it out. I'm one thing, and how do I do what I know is what I feel [African American] but my parents always reminded me I was half Black and half White always, always, always.... It made me mad. I would walk the African American road, I would identify with that, but I was always reminded that I was mixed. But I always knew in my head I was African American, it was no question to me.... but I didn't say anything about how I thought. I'm trying to bridge all the different gaps to make one person.

Seeking a More Diverse Community

Several of the participants described wanting to move to a more diverse area once they have completed their education. They described wanting to be in a diverse area with multiple ethnicities, not necessarily an African American-only community. Below are their stories and dreams for the future.

Camille will graduate in few months and plans to leave her growing-up state. She and her partner plan to visit a Southern state in a few months as a possible place to live where there would be more diversity. She has not traveled much and wants to experience other places, and she hopes the employment might be better outside of New England. She wants to get a job in social services where she can work with children.

Shaniqua is in her last year of college and wants to go to graduate school. She may have an opportunity to have graduate school paid for at her current college but is

considering other options. She wants to "move to the South and go to a Black college, but will need to look at the financial situation before making a decision." Shaniqua hopes to move to the South where there are more persons of color with a body type like hers. She also wants more options when looking for an African American person to someone to share her life with.

Quincy finished his Bachelor's degree and has been employed full time for two years. His partner finishes her Bachelor's degree this year, and he plans to go to graduate school in an urban area in another New England state. Quincy wants to live in an urban area after they finished their education and raise a family in a diverse area.

Jaden is finishing his degree and will have his Associate's degree soon. He is living with his parents and working full time while he is going to school. He coaches young athletes in his hometown to give back to the community that gave so much to him. He hopes to move to a more diverse area at some point.

Michael is employed full time and hopes to be done with school in a few months. He and his girlfriend are planning to move to another state. His education is in automotives and he believes employment opportunities will be better on the West coast. He also wants to live in a diverse area with many ethnicities. Michael wants to have children at some point and wants to live in an area where it doesn't matter what "color" you are, and his children can have a "rainbow of friends."

Community Experience Summary

Within their communities, the participants experienced a strong sense of belonging and a protectiveness of them by community members. Most participated in community activities and felt that this helped them develop a sense of belonging. There

were a few who described having role models within the community although others have role models only from books and videos.

A few of the participants described themselves as more accepting of differences, and would watch how people respond to same-sex relationships as a way to judge if they are going to accept them as an African American person. Most of the participants did not date in high school. The males described being attracted to European American women while two of the females are attracted to African American men.

Most of the participants were unprepared for the staring that happened when they were in the community with their parents. Many described how people would whisper about them and wonder if they were stolen children. The male participants also realized they were treated as suspects when they were out of their communities. They experienced being followed in stores or carefully watched. Many of the participants would make sure they were dressed properly and some described trying to not draw attention to themselves. In addition, many struggled with wondering if they know how to be an African American person. Some talked of being intimidated when around African American individuals. It appeared many would compare themselves to urban youth.

Many of the participants described wanting to leave the growing-up state to live in a more diverse community. They want to be in areas where they are not the only minority but it doesn't necessarily have to be just African American individuals.

Summary

This chapter addressed the overarching research question: *How do self-identifying African American individuals who were adopted by European American parents describe their experiences being raised in rural predominately European American communities?*

There were three sub-questions that were answered in this study, which included the adoptees' experience with family, school, and community. Eight themes emerged from family experiences, seven themes from school experiences, and eight themes from community experiences.

Without exception, the participants described a loving and caring family with a strong sense of belonging with not only their parents but also their extended families. Most participants have a strong connection with their siblings and have a sense of responsibility to maintain these relationships. Throughout their growing up years there were many family gatherings during holidays and birthdays. Those with African American siblings said it was normal to have children that didn't look like their parents when they were young. Most of the participants were involved with their church which was viewed as a natural extension of their family. They described how the clergy and congregation were very accepting without judging and provided directions when faced with life stressors.

Most of the participants expressed a desire to search for either a birth parent or birth sibling so that they will have someone who resembles them. Three of the participants have had contact with their birth mothers; two were open adoptions and had contact from the beginning and one started contact at 18 years of age. Two of the three described a positive experience with their birth mother, but one needs to set limits.

Most of the participants felt their parents did the best they could with limited resources to educate them about African American culture. All female participants and a few male participants stated hair care is extremely important and described how difficult

it was to find a stylist and products for Black hair. Most of the participants felt their parents did the best they could to take care of their hair.

A few of the participants described how their parents tried to provide cultural experiences by celebrating Kwanzaa, but abandoned it by the time there were adolescents. According to some of the participants, their parents attempted to teach them about culture through books and videos. One participant describes how his parents did everything they could to prepare him for society's response to an African American man. Most male participants were given some form of preparedness for racism; however, this appears to be primarily what would be in the media such as racial profiling or interracial dating. There were challenges that the participants faced that their parents had not prepared them for, such as awkward questions from peers about why they do not look like their parents, stares when they were in public, racial comments, discrimination, and stereotyping.

Videos and television shows became a source of education about African American culture for some of the participants. A few appeared to take on some of society's stereotypes about how a person of African American heritage should act from theses sources. Music was especially important to many of the participants not only for its' rhythm, but also as a means to learn about culture by researching the meaning of the musicians words. Music could provide an avenue for parents to talk with their children about race. Overall the participants were clear that their parents provided a stable, loving home where they felt a sense of belonging and connectedness. Although there were challenges growing up in rural areas as an African American person, they hope these

challenges will be reduced for other multiracial families joined through adoption by their participation in this study.

There were seven themes that emerged in the participants' school experiences that are both negative and positive. Most of the participants had positive interactions with their teachers, counselors, and coaches. In addition, they felt school activities helped create a sense of belonging to their school. It was not until they started school that they realized they were different. Most stated this started in late elementary school, but a couple noticed in nursery school. Many of the participants were the only persons of color in their elementary school; however, by high school most spoke of other ethnic students in their classes. In addition, some of the participants discussed seeing other students of minority status in the halls and how helpful this was to them to not be the only one—even if they didn't speak.

Through their voices it appears the teachers are covering only slavery and Martin Luther King, Jr., for a short time in history. Many of the participants describe feeling very uncomfortable when slavery was discussed as they felt their peers were staring at them. A few of the participants expressed frustration with the lack of a diversified curriculum in not only the history, but also in music that is not exploring African American artists.

Participants spoke of being called racist names, discriminated against, and stereotyped at school. Participants revealed that school officials acted quickly and they felt supported when this occurred with the exception of one participant. This participant described repeated name calling at school and the school officials did not address it

although when he reacted to a racist name he was disciplined. The participants relayed many stories of being stereotyped. Overall the experience in school was mixed.

There were eight themes that emerged in the community experiences. All the participants felt they were accepted in their hometowns and the females spoke of a protectiveness within their communities. Participants revealed that if they showed an interest in an activity their parents provided opportunities. Most participated in community sports as youngsters, and they felt this early participation gave them a sense of belonging to their communities. Not only did the participants' parents provide security for them during the games, but so did the other player's parents. Many described the players and their parents as extended family members - all looking out for them. In addition to providing a sense of belonging, these elite teams also allowed them to play other teams in state and out of state so they came in contact with a more diverse group of players.

A few of the participants described having role models within the community, such as a doctor or family of minority status. For most, role models consisted of public figures. Some of the participants brought up President Obama and how he is a role model for many African American and bi-racial young men. A few of the participants see themselves as more accepting of differences. Some of the participants appear to watch people to see how they respond to same-sex couples, using this to judge if they are going to be accepting of them as an African American person.

All the participants discussed dating and described their sexual orientation as heterosexual. All male participants are attracted to European American women; however, two of the female participants are attracted to African American men.

Although all were welcomed into their friends' homes, many were not welcomed as a potential boyfriend or girlfriend. Some of the male participants also worry that women want to date them because they are a novelty, or so they can say they have dated an African American person. Many of the participants did not date much in high school. However, two are in committed relationships with European American individuals.

In addition, many of the participants struggled with who they are as an African American person. It appeared sometimes they would compare themselves to urban youth and wonder where they fit in. Some struggled in how to act and how to react when they are with other African American individuals, as this is sometimes intimidating. Many of the men described being followed in stores when they were not in their own communities and described incidents of bias. Several of the participants expressed a desire to move from of their growing-up state to more diverse communities.

Many of the participants were unprepared for the stares they encountered when they were in public with their parents. They would hear people talking or whispering which made them very uncomfortable. As a result, participants would take extra care to be sure their clothes were perfect.

Overall the participants appear to be doing well and are productive members of society. They have a strong support system with a secure membership in their families. The participants have identified areas that were challenging and made recommendations of things that they think would make it less challenging for a child of African American heritage to be raised in a rural European American community.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The practice of domestic transracial adoption of children of African American or Black heritage has sparked more controversy than any other permanency option for children. Samuels (2009) describes the debate of transracial adoption between "those who advocate for their cultural needs and rights and those who advocate for the needs and rights to timely adoption" (p 80). There are federal laws prohibiting the use of race as a determining factor when placing children for adoption, yet we know little from the perceptions of adult African American individuals who were adopted by European American or White parents.

Many of the studies on transracial adoption that exist are contradictory and fail to control for variables that affect the outcome such as age of placement (Abdullah, 1996, Alexander & Curtis, 1996; Brodzinsky, Smith & Brodzinsky, 1998; O'Brein & Zamostny, 2003). The goal of many studies was to prove or disprove the success of transracial adoption practices (Baden & Steward, 2000) given the significant controversy surrounding the practice of domestic transracial adoption. In addition, much of the research has been completed with the adoptive parents or with adoptees in childhood and adolescence.

This phenomenological study sought to understand the experiences of African American adult adoptees who were raised by European American parents in rural areas of New England. These adoptees were placed for adoption by the age of one and were interviewed for this study in their early 20s. There were eight participants in this study who were asked to describe their experiences in the three areas of family, school, and

community (See Table 4.1). From these interviews several themes emerged within each area (See Table 4.2).

In the eight themes that emerged from their family experiences, all participants described a strong connection to their parents and extended family with an expressed desire to maintain that closeness as adults. Most of the participants described a strong relationship with their siblings. In addition, many participants viewed their church's clergy and congregation as an extension of their family where they could find judgment-free comfort when facing life stressors. Additionally, most believe their parents did their best in trying to educate them about life as an African American individual living in the United States, but there were challenges that the participants were not prepared for. Most expressed a desire to search for a birth family member. Overall there was a strong connectedness to family from the participants.

There were seven themes that emerged, creating both positive and negative school experiences for the participants. There were many supportive school staff members including teachers, counselors and coaches for school activities noted by the participants. They described a strong sense of belonging to their school community. It was not until the participants entered school that they realized they were different, as many of them were the only person of color in their schools (other than their sibling) until they entered high school. At that point, many reported other students of color in their school and sometimes in their individual classrooms. It was in school where most participants experienced incidents of name calling, discrimination, and stereotyping. With the exception of one, participants described feeling supported by school personnel who acted quickly and appropriately to address these issues of name calling, discrimination, and

stereotyping. The participants also revealed that their particular schools primarily teach only about slavery and Martin Luther King, Jr. For a few, they expressed their frustration with the lack of diversity in the history curriculum to promote other historical figures of African American heritage. The findings for school experiences were mixed, with both positive and negative interactions.

Eight themes emerged in the participants' community experiences. Most spoke of a strong support system that existed in their growing-up community. Many were involved in community activities from a young age and felt this helped them develop a strong sense of belonging. Some of the participants described a few role models within the community; however, many relied on role models who are in the public realm of society. Acceptance of differences was very important to some of the participants, with a few making a strong commitment to help reduce bias of any kind.

Although accepted by the community, all described being stared at when in unfamiliar areas with their families. Many described how uncomfortable this made them, and they would carefully dress before leaving their homes. All participants described being welcomed and accepted by their friends' parents; however, there were times when they were not accepted by a potential boy/girlfriend's parents. All of the males and one female revealed being attracted to European American individuals for intimate relationships, with two participants being involved in committed relationships.

The male participants described being viewed as suspect when in public as they got older. Many times they were followed or watched carefully by store personnel. Participants described not knowing how to be a person of African American heritage and shared they were intimidated when they encountered other African Americans. Several

of the participants expressed a desire to move to a more diverse area after they complete college.

When looking at the essence of this study, the participants described a strong sense of belonging to their families, schools, and communities where they may have been protected from the realities of racism when they were very young. They experienced acts of name calling, discrimination, and stereotyping while at school, but were supported for the most part by the school officials and their parents. There were challenges of socialization to develop a sense of identity as a person of color; however, it may be important to look at individuals when they are in their 30s to see how this has developed after they become more established. Overall, the participants are doing well academically and hold a strong regard for higher education. They appear to have a healthy self-esteem based on their ability to function in the world. There were challenges for these participants of being unprepared for issues of racism, and society's response to families who do not resemble the mainstream. In addition, many participants revealed they are uncomfortable or intimidated when with other individuals of African American heritage. There appears to be a protective factor in rural areas for these participants from all they encountered; however, this also prevented them from developing a connection culturally due to the lack of diversity. When taking a broader perspective of this study, the areas that are significant are the participants' sense of belonging and connectedness, socialization, and identity development as a person of African American heritage raised by parents who are European American.

Comparison of Findings to Previous Research

Sense of Belonging and Connectedness

When interpreting the findings of this study the participants described a sense of belonging and connectedness that crossed in their experiences in family, school, and community. Connectedness in family experiences was apparent in these themes: “My parents wanted a baby,”“We're a family no matter what we look like,” “Brother and sister - closer than most,” “My extended family embraced me,” and “I always had my church family.” This sense of belonging and connectedness was also evident in the school themes of supportive teachers, counselors, and coaches; school activities and belonging; and a strong circle of support was found in community experiences. Clearly, this secure sense of belonging is a protective factor for these participants.

This is connected to a meta-analysis completed by Juffer and van IJzendoorn (2007) regarding self esteem of transracial, international, and domestic adoptees, and described a protective factor as "having a secure relationship with a supportive parent." When transracially adopted individuals feel "valued...with higher levels of support from the social environment may thus translate into fewer behavior problems and positive self-esteem in adoptees" (Jufffer and van IJzendoorn, p 1078). Through this meta-analysis they also noted that this was the same in both same race and transracially adopted children. This clearly supports the findings of this study where most of the participants described being valued with many individuals who supported them and most did not describe behavioral problems.

The participants of this study have graduated from high school and either entered or finished college. In addition, they are all employed with the exception of one who has

health issues that currently prevent her from working. This would lead one to believe they have a healthy self-esteem. Research findings have suggested that self-esteem and racial identity operate differently with positive self-esteem being reported by adoptees whether raised by same or different race parents (Burrows & Finley, 2004; DeBerry, Scarr & Weinberg, 1996; Feigelman, 2000; McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale and Anderson,1982).

Although some communities did not offer role models of African American heritage, they did offer acceptance throughout their early years of life. The participants did not discuss any early incidents of non-acceptance from community members, and appear to have been protected from early knowledge of racism. Wright (1998) suggests that "young children are not equipped to cope with the knowledge of pervasive racial discrimination" (p 7). Wright further argues that "children who are loved, cared for, and shielded as much as possible from early experiences with racism grow up with a high sense of self worth regardless of their race" (p 8).

Most of the participants described being very supported and connected to their church and viewed it as an extension of their family. This is connected to Wright (1998) who describes that to raise healthy teens parents can "encourage spiritual growth....having faith in a higher power gives meaning and purpose to teens' lives and provides an emotional shield few other alternatives offer" (p 243-244).

There was a strong sibling relationship noted with most of the participants with a sense of responsibility to maintain this strong connection as young adults. This was a similar finding in a study completed by Vroegh (1997), who found sibling relationship to be harmonious between the siblings.

The participants provided many examples of being connected to family, school, and community. They felt protected with others watching out for them. Clearly this provided a strong caring environment for them to grow up that would help develop a healthy self-esteem.

School

Most of the participants described a sense of belonging to their K-12 schools, and they believed school personnel wanted them to succeed. This conflicts with some of other research where children of color, not just those who were transracially adopted, report a lack of teacher engagement and students did not develop a sense of belonging. (Benmark, 2006; Mark & Tonso, 2006).

Other studies from the adoptive parents' perspective have suggested that transracially adopted children are at greater risk of behavioral and academic problems; however, these studies did not ask the adoptee directly about their school experiences to gain understanding of other contributing factors (Brodzinsky, Schetcher, et al., 1992; Weinberg, Waldeman, Vadulman & Scarr, 2004). The participants of this study did not reveal problems with behavior or significant academic problems. This may connect to being placed with their families early in life without early trauma. Children who join their adoptive families by the age of 3 years appear to have similar adjustment as birth children due to an assumption that a young child has experienced less trauma (Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992). There was one exception to behavioral problems at school. Michael in this study received an in-school suspension for violence; however, he was reacting to being called a racist name, indicating there were other

circumstances to consider. If taken just as a statistic it would not reveal the whole story of this particular participant being targeted at school.

Most of the participants described a lack of diversified curriculum where the instruction for African American history briefly focused only on slavery and Martin Luther King, Jr. Although Fenster (2005) studied social worker attitudes toward transracial adoption he described a need for a commitment to understand Black awareness which he defined as "(1) belief that African American values should be more prominent in American institutional life, (2) concern that African American children learn Black history, language, and other aspects of culture and (3) belief that African American children need to develop pride in their African American heritage and a sense of belonging to the African American community" (p 49). When applying this to the participants' education, the schools have an obligation to all their students—not just those of color—to improve the curriculum that is comprehensive from all perspectives. A full analysis of school curriculum is beyond the scope of this study; however, this does warrant further investigation.

Socialization

Studies have revealed that children raised in integrated communities with parents who provide role models and promote their child's race and culture tend to report a positive racial identity plus positive feelings toward others of African American heritage (DeBerry, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1996; Feigelman, 2000;Vonk, Lee, Crolley-Simic, 2010). In contrast, Vroegh's (1997) study concluded that "no evidence was found ...that everyday relationships with Black people are key to the development of Black identity" (p 574).

The participants of this study had limited opportunity to interact with persons of color. At a young age many of the participants played on elite sports teams where they traveled to more diverse parts of the state or to other states. Many of the participants talked about the diverse players that they played against, creating some contact with others who mirrored them racially. A few of the participants revealed that they would have time to talk with opponents about training for particular sports, although this seemed to focus more about sports rather than race and culture.

The communities where the participants grew up had very little diversity with the 2000 U.S. Census reporting 0.5 percent to 1.5 percent of the population being of African American heritage. There were a few role models in the community, but many of the participants talked about public-figure role models, in particular President Obama. Many of the participants stated they are not comfortable with other African American individuals, which may be due to the lack of a diverse community, but they also appeared to compare themselves to young urban African American individuals. This would suggest that participants may be more comfortable with other African American individuals if more opportunities to interact had been available.

It was clear from the interviews that the parents did not minimize any incidents of name calling, discrimination, or stereotyping. Most of the participants described school officials sending a clear message that racism would not be tolerated and fully supported the participant. However, for one participant the school officials did not intervene, but his mother sent a clear message to him that it was unacceptable to be called racist names. Other researchers have recommended that racism should not be minimized when reported

(deHaymes and Simon, 2003; Vonk, 2001). Samuels (2009b) suggests adoptees are less prepared for racism if incidents are minimized.

The participants believe their parents attempted to prepare them for racism in society. Most described these conversations before incidents occurred, although many wished conversations about race were more often and in greater detail. It would appear the parents did not take a colorblind approach to racism. Samuels (2009) describes a colorblind approach as one where parents fail to include their child's culture and ethnicity into their lives and teach about discrimination and racism before it occurs. Many participants described some preparation for racism, although there were things they were not prepared for. The participants were uncomfortable in public with their families due to the stares of others when not in their own community. They were not prepared for this and wished their parents had discussed this in greater detail. Similar findings have been cited in other studies where visibility in public was noted by the children who were not in diverse neighborhoods (de Haymes and Simon, 2003; Feigelman 2000).

The male participants of this study revealed that they were followed in stores and one described that he may have been profiled by the police. Although parents had talked with their children about potential racism this was still very difficult for the participants. This is related to a study completed by Feigelman (2000) who was unable to judge if being adopted by same-race parents would protect children against racism any better.

Many of the participants revealed they are more accepting of differences in general, and some of the participants described their parents as more accepting of differences. A study conducted by deHaymes and Simon (2003) found that children who

cited their parents as more accepting of differences appear to have more awareness, appreciation, and understanding of various cultures and race.

Most of the participants revealed being attracted to European American individuals. Vroegh (1997) found that "friendship and dating choices appeared to be dictated by opportunity." Clearly, the participants of this study had few opportunities to date other African American individuals. This is an area that could be studied again when the participants are older as many of them are still continuing with their education and opportunity to date a diverse population is still quite limited for most.

Identity

Identity development of transracially adopted individuals has been at the center of opposition to this practice. Findings of studies have noted that identity is fluid and affected by many factors (Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia, 2012, Brodzinsky, Smith, & Brodzinsky, 1998; Butler-Sweet, 2011; Grotevant, 2003; Samuels, 2010). This section is divided into the impact of socioeconomic status and culture as it shapes the process of identity.

Socioeconomic status. Although not directly asked, the participants of this study revealed they lived in single-family homes where there was sufficient income to allow them to play on elite sports teams that required significant travel as well as engaged music lessons. Most of the parents were well-educated and held professional jobs such as teachers, college professors, doctors, and nurses. This would indicate the families of this study were middle class. The participants tended to compare themselves to urban African American youth living in poverty. Some participants spoke of dressing properly and speaking clearly, unlike the stereotype of urban youth. Participants may view being an

authentic African American person as an urban youth living in poverty without recognition that there are African American youth who are living in middle class. The findings of Butler-Sweet (2011a and 2011b) study with 18- to 30-year-old African American individuals who were adopted by middle class families are relevant to this current study. The group was divided by individuals raised in monoracial families (two African American parents), biracial families (one African American parent and one European American parent), and transracial families (both parents were European American). In addition, the sample for Butler-Sweet (2011a and 2011b) consisted of college students primarily in elite colleges in Massachusetts although they may have grown up in European American neighborhoods in other parts of the country.

Butler-Sweet (2011a) found that transracially adopted individuals showed identity confusion, but so did the participants who were raised by biracial parents. One of the areas that was different between the groups was that monoracial parents tended to keep in closer contact with the Black community, allowing for children to have more contact with other middle-class children of color. This study also found that those raised in monoracial families were less prepared for feeling different from peers at their schools where there was a mixture of students from different economic backgrounds. Middle class in African American families is similar to European American middle class in that there is an emphasis on owning your own home, education, and self-reliance where children are able to develop their talents (Butler-Sweet, 2011b; Lacy, 2007). This was clearly noted in the interviews of this study. The participants grew up in single-family homes with a strong emphasis on education with all going to college. If they showed an interest in an activity, opportunities were provided for them.

In Butler-Sweet (2011b) when transracial participants were asked for self descriptors and public descriptors they tended to put race at the third or fourth descriptors; participants raised in biracial or same families put race as a second descriptor. Transracial adoptees tended to put family-related status first. This could be explained because of the early stares from strangers they experienced as children when with their families; race could be very evident to them but in relation to their "white parents" instead of denying that race is important in this society (Butler-Sweet, 2011, p 762). This would indicate that identity is more fluid with multiple sources that influence identity.

The participants of this study self-identified as African American or Black and clearly spoke of the stares they encountered when in public with their families while growing up. They did not appear to deny their racial heritage although many did talk about having incorporated the mannerisms of their European American families which has resulted in a questioning of their authenticity as a person of color. It would appear family income has not been factored in with many studies.

Culture and identity. Many of the participants described not knowing how to be a person of African American heritage. They revealed not knowing how to act when in the company of others that mirrored them racially. Participants described some attempts by their parents to provide a cultural experience for them by celebrating Kwanzaa, and one participant described many cultural events provided by his family. The female participants in particular discussed the challenges of hair care and the need to find knowledgeable stylists and products. Most felt their parents worked hard to provide this self-care.

Vonk (2001) describes cultural competence for multiracial or multicultural adoptive families as racial awareness, multicultural planning, and development so the child has opportunities to learn about culture, and survival skills for the child to cope with racism.

When analyzing the interviews of this study, participants described their parents as trying to raise racial awareness and develop survival skills. Overall the participants seemed to lack opportunities to learn about culture other than from books and videos. Samuels (2010) would suggest that this is a superficial connection to Black heritage and more interaction is needed. When older, adoptees will go through a delayed process of "enculturation" (Samuels, 2010, p 38) in which the person relearns culture. Samuels (2009b) suggests that identity is multidimensional and is driven by context occurring across the life span, involving various domains such as structure, behavioral, and personal domains.

As stated earlier, if adoptive parents take a colorblind approach to race, adoptees are less prepared for racism. Colorblindness refers to inactivity on the parents' part to include their child's culture and ethnicity into their lives and teach about discrimination and racism before it occurs (Samuels, 2010). Although there were areas where the participants were not prepared for racism, the parents did make some attempts at this. The parents did teach about overt racism, but were unable to teach about the subtle covert acts of racism as it had not been within their experiences to do so. As stated by Brian, his parents would not have known to teach about acts of racism such as those at a sporting event because it was not part of their experience.

The participants of this study stated they are uncomfortable with other African Americans and intimidated at times. Many revealed plans to move to a more diverse community once they complete their education. This may connect to a new Reculturation Model developed by Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia (2012).

Reculturation is a process where the adoptee must "learn or reclaim their birth culture after their adoption into predominantly white families" (Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia, 2012, p 389). This is different than Samuels' (2010) description of an enculturation process that is a delayed or a process relearned as Baden, Treweeke and Ahluwalia (2012) state it needs to be learned— they would not retain birth cultural practices.

Baden (2008) explains adoptees may experience dissonance in late adolescence and early adulthood regarding how they feel and society's expectation of them. This is clearly described in the interviews of this study. Many described how they are expected to act due to society's stereotypes.

"Reculturation is a process of identity development and navigation through which adoptees develop their relations to their birth and adoptive cultures via reculturation activities and experiences leading to one of five possible reculturation outcomes" (Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia, 2012, p 390). See Figure 2.1 for reculturation outcomes descriptors. This process may start with one of three approaches of education, experience, and immersion.

The first is education where the adoptee may learn the history of his or her birth country or culture. This was clearly seen in the participant interviews where they talked

of reading about historical persons from the civil rights movement to musical artists of African American culture.

The next may be experience where, after obtaining knowledge of their birth country or birth culture, adoptees may seek opportunities to put their knowledge into action by interacting with representatives of their birth culture and ethnic group such as church or tours, but is time limited. This was noted by some of the participants where they plan to visit more diverse areas where they may want to live (which is clearly time limited).

The last approach—immersion into birth culture—may provide adoptees with the lived experience leading to various reculturation outcomes such as moving to birth countries to work or into neighborhoods dominated by a racial or ethnic group. Many of the participants have plans to move to a more diverse area once they have completed their education.

After going through these approaches adoptees may develop one of the five possible outcomes of identity (Figure 2.1). This would also indicate that identity is fluid depending on context. When adapting this to domestic transracial adoption, there is a difference in that the adoptee does not have immigration status and may have few placements but the process is the same once started (See Figure 2.2).

This reculturation model seems to connect best with the participants of this study. Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia (2012) describe dissonance occurring in late adolescence and early adulthood; the participants of this study are between the ages of 19 and 25 which would be at the same ages they have suggested. It would appear that the participants of this current study would be experiencing dissonance about culture and

identity when analyzing their interviews. Many of the participants of this study have plans to move to the more diverse areas where there will be a more cultural immersion.

Many of the studies suggest that identity is fluid. (Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia, 2012, Brodzinsky, Smith, & Brodzinsky, 1998; Butler-Sweet, 2011; Grotevant, 2003; Samuels, 2010). Baden, Treweeke, and Ahuwalia (2012) Reculturation Model would best explain where the participants are in their development at this point, and they may be developing their identity.

Grotevant (2007) describes identity on a continuum with the past, present, and future shaping an individual's overall identity, and based his research on Erik Erikson's psychosocial developmental model. The experience of adoption needs to be woven into this process of identity like other experiences that shape identity. When looking at identity development, the adopted person may have additional challenges to integrate their history as an "adopted person into their emerging sense of identity" due to not knowing their birth families. By constructing a narrative that includes their adoption, it "explains, accounts for, or justifies" their adoption status (Grotevant, 1997, p 9). Grotevant hypothesizes that there is a stronger predictor of adjustment outcomes if the adoptee "comes to terms" (p 21) with his or her adoption.

Additionally, loss for the adoptee must not be forgotten, which has been well-documented in the literature beginning with Kirk (1984). For the transracial adoptee it is not only their loss of biological family but also their culture. The incompleteness resulting from early rejection and loss from adoption can create issues of trust, intimacy, loyalty, guilt and shame, power and control, and identity for the adoptee in many areas of life (Brodzinsky, Smith & Brodzinsky, 1998; Verrier, 1993). Brodzinsky, Schechter, and

Henig (1992) also based their work on Erikson's stage theory of psychosocial development when studying adoption over the life span. This study consisted of European American children placed with same-race parents during infancy. They assert that adoption is a life-long process where adoptees will have additional developmental milestones to achieve in addition to the milestones that Erikson's theory describes. When looking at domestic transracial adoption there are additional milestones to achieve when raised by different-race parents. With healthy coping strategies adoptees will achieve adoption-related milestones as they do other developmental milestones (Brodzinsky, Smith, & Brodzinsky, 1998). Studying transracial adoption over the life span would provide a better picture of the impact of being raised by parents who do not mirror them racially.

Limitations

As with all qualitative studies, the findings of this study cannot be generalized. There were several limitations to this study beginning with a small sample size, and limited to participants who were placed with their families before the age of three. Originally this study was restricted to African American adoptees who were adopted by European American parents living in rural areas of New England; however, all participants grew up in the same New England state. In addition, the goal was to have five female and five male participants, but recruitment became difficult and there were only eight participants, five males and three females. With the limited number of female participants, it was not possible to examine possible unique themes to males and females. In addition, the sample was restricted to those who volunteered. There were others who declined participation in this study, and there is no way of knowing why this occurred.

The interviews relied on the participant's ability to recall as well as on their perceptions of events and this could not be verified. Interviews with parents, teachers, coaches, and others who had contact with the participants would have been beneficial. In addition, all participants self-identified as African American or Black, but three revealed during the interviews that they had a European American birth mother, and being bi-racial may have impacted the study.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, there are several recommendations for school counselors, mental health counselors, adoption agencies and parents. In addition, participants also made specific recommendations that have been incorporated into the recommendations below. To improve these recommendations below, it would be beneficial for counseling training programs to offer coursework specifically in adoption to increase the knowledge of school and mental health counselors.

School Counselors

Children could benefit from school counselors understanding the developmental process of adoption and the loss associated with it. For the transracially adopted children this would include loss of culture. Continued effort by the school counselor in focusing on acceptance of differences within the school environment would be beneficial to all students to understand the impact of racism and discrimination as well as the support to the child of color.

In addition, school counselors could become a champion of change if the curriculum is not comprehensive by addressing historical perspectives to develop pride in oppressed populations. A comprehensive and diverse curriculum delivered to students in

K-12 would benefit all children. The participants of this study went to different schools and had the same message of limited African American history even in the music program as reported by one.

Mental Heath Counselors

Mental health counselors need to understand the developmental structure of identity and that it may be fluid. When working with the transracially adopted person there needs to be open dialogue about race, as many participants felt this was missing with their parents, and this must not be repeated with the counselor. The counselors need to be comfortable with this topic and have an understanding of white privilege.

As stated by Grotevant (2003), counselors need to "understand that adoption requires multiple disciplinary perspective... including key concepts and theories that lend understanding of historical and cultural contexts of adoption, the systemic functioning of adoptive kinship network and biological and health issues that arise in adoptive families" (p 760). In addition, counselors should be familiar with state laws regarding adoption records for searching. Baden, Treweeke, and Ahuwalia (2012)) suggest that "there needs to be understanding that adoption across the life span rather than any one segment (i.e., pre-adoption, time of adoption, adult adoptees) of the process would be most beneficial" (p 397).

Adoption Agencies

It would be beneficial if adoption agencies facilitate multifamily groups so children are with other multiracial families during their growing-up years. This would put an emphasis on the need for children to be around other multiracial families. Facilitating partnership with the office of intercultural affairs at local colleges to develop

activities where college students could become mentors to young children would also be beneficial. This could benefit the college student if a connection is made with a family, as the college student would have a place to visit. This could be a win-win situation for both parties as the college student is away from his or her family for the first time and the child is mentored by a person of color.

More ongoing training after the adoption is finalized would also be helpful to families. Bradley and Hawkins-Leon (2002) suggest psycho-educational groups that include having parents look at white privilege and learn African American history so they can teach their children. This could be done by providing a book list to parents to give them some direction on where to start. Many of these tasks could be accomplished by partnering with colleges to have interns with an interest in adoption help with the coordination of this as well as facilitating the psycho-educational groups.

If agencies could stay more available to parents during the child's growing-up years by staying current on new research, it could help adoptees and their families when challenges arise. This could be accomplished through such means as social media or newsletters.

Parents

Participants clearly stated they would have liked parents to talk with them more about race and culture, and parents should not wait for the children to bring it up. In addition, participants shared that they would have preferred their parents pre-teach about historical events before learning it in school when other students would stare at them. Parents need to become comfortable and educate themselves about history to talk with their children about these topics. This requires the parents to have an understanding of

their community so that they prepare their children for racism, but not before they are developmentally ready for the realities of racism as stated by Wright (1998).

Staring was a common theme that participants revealed and would have liked to have been more prepared for, especially when in the community with their families. Parents need to develop a network with other multiracial families to spend time with so children see that they are not the only family that does not look like each other.

Finally, hair care is especially important for the females and stylists need to be sought; they do exist even in rural area, but parents may need to travel to find salons as Jay and Paisley did. In addition, this is another topic where participants are able to interact with others of African American culture that was identified as lacking for many of the participants.

Future Research

As noted by many researchers, adoption is a lifelong process along with identity development. It would be beneficial to study transracially adopted individuals at various developmental stages over the life span as Brodzinsky Schechter, and Henig (1992) did with same-race adoptions. In addition, comparing the experiences of African American adoptees raised in rural, suburban, and urban areas could be beneficial. To gain the most understanding of this experience, it would be advantageous to interview adoptees, their parents, teachers, coaches, etc., as this would give a more comprehensive picture of the experience. It would also be valuable to interview African American parents and their children who are living in rural areas of New England with limited diversity.

The Model of Reculturation developed by Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia (2012) appears to be a promising way to look at this process over the life span in future

research. In addition, further studies where socioeconomic status is included could also beneficial.

The participants revealed their schools did not provide a comprehensive curriculum that includes perspectives from oppressed populations. An assessment of school curriculum and its delivery could be beneficial to determine if this is a pattern in all schools including urban, suburban and rural areas.

Conclusion

The National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) along with Chestang (1972) cited the practice of transracial adoption as "cultural genocide." Following this controversy of transracial adoption, the Child Welfare League of America reversed its position in 1973, and argued that children would be better adjusted and integrated into communities if placed with same-race families (Brodzinsky, Smith, Brodzinsky, 1998; Newman, 2007). Over the next few years, the number of African American children waiting for adoption in foster care continued to grow at alarming rates and waited longer for families than any other population (Penn and Coverdale, 1996).

From 1994 to 1997 there were several federal laws enacted restricting race as a determining factor in adoption placement due to the high number of children of color in the foster care system (Jennings, 2006; Lee 2003). Since the law change, the number of African American children in foster care has decreased significantly, indicating that it may be having an impact on the number of children in foster care.

Many of the transracial adoption studies that have been completed are contradictory and fail to control for variables that affect the outcome such as age of placement (Abdullah, 1996, Alexander & Curtis, 1996; Brodzinsky, Smith & Brodzinsky,

1998; O'Brein & Zamostny, 2003). The goal of many studies was to prove or disprove the success of transracial adoption practices (Baden & Steward, 2000), given the significant controversy surrounding the practice of domestic transracial adoption.

The goal of this study was to examine the experiences of transracially adopted individuals without bias toward proving or disproving the practice. All the participants indicated their parents did the best they could to prepare them for society's racism. They were unprepared for some of the more subtle forms of racism. Many participants revealed being uncomfortable when with other individuals of African American heritage which may be the result of the isolation from others who mirror them racially. They also appear to compare themselves to urban youth living in poverty instead of middle class African American youth. However, the findings of this study suggest that overall the participants are doing well. All the participants have graduated from high school, and continued with college. They are all employed, with the exception of one with health issues, and exhibit a healthy self esteem .

The findings also suggest that the participants have a strong sense of belonging and connectedness to their parents, communities, and schools, and clearly stated they are happy with their families. It appears the participants were protected from the realities of racism early in life in their rural areas. The parents clearly supported their children when incidents of racism occurred in school and for the most part school officials sent a clear message that racism would not be tolerated.

Findings of previous studies have suggested that identity development is a lifelong process, and it would appear the participants are in this process. If using Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia (2012) Model of Reculturation, the participants may be where

they should be in identity development when factoring in their age group. They are in their early 20s and have plans to complete college before moving to more diverse areas. Perhaps the protectiveness of their family, schools, and communities early in life allows them to explore their cultural and racial heritage now as young adults.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Please describe the circumstances of your adoption.

Please share your stories about being adopted by a family who is not of African American heritage.

What tell me what school was like for you?

Please describe the community that you grew up in.

APPENDIX B

Letter to Adoption Agencies

Ellen M. Smith
191 Tremont Street
Malden, MA 02148
Ellen.smith@umit.maine.edu
207-314-0260

Dear _____,

My name is Ellen Smith and I am a doctoral student in Counselor Education at the University of Maine. I am writing to ask for your help in finding participants for the study I am conducting. I will call you in a few days to discuss this request. I understand that your records are confidential; however, if you are willing I will provide letters and postage to send letters to potential participants. All that would be required of you is to address the envelopes. Below is a description of my study.

I am interested in knowing about the experiences of African American or Black adults who were adopted by European American parents. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of self identifying African American or Black adult adoptees raised by European American parents in rural areas of New England during your growing up years.

I am looking for participants who:

- self identify as African American or Black
- grew up in rural areas of New England
- are at least 18 years old
- no longer participating in K-12 education
- joined their adoptive family identified as European American, White or Caucasian on or before the age of three years
- were born after 1980

I am interested in knowing more about their experiences with their immediate and extended family, peers and educators at school and the community at large. In addition, I wonder if these experiences were different at different ages. For example, how was school at the elementary level middle level, and high school levels?

The first interview will be face to face for one to two hours at a place that is convenient for the participant. A second interview will take place either by phone or in person determined by the participant. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and participants can withdraw at any time. Participants do not have to answer any questions that they are not comfortable with. In addition, there are no known risks or benefits to

participation in this study other than the time and inconvenience to meet. This may bring back childhood memories.

Participants and any identifying information will be held in the strictest confidence. In addition, all documents on the computer will be password protected and written documents such as consent forms will be locked in a file cabinet in my home office where I am the only one with access.

If you have questions I can be reached at 207-314-0260 or my email is Ellen.smith@umit.maine.edu . You can also contact my advisor, Dr. Dorothy Breen at the University of Maine in the Counselor Education program. The phone number is 581-2479 and Dr. Breen's email is Dorothy.Breen@umit.maine.edu.

Thank you for considering this request!

Sincerely,

Ellen M. Smith

APPENDIX C

Letter to Participants Sent by Adoption Agencies

Ellen M. Smith
191 Tremont Street
Malden, MA 02148
Ellen.smith@umit.maine.edu
207-314-0260

Dear _____,

My name is Ellen Smith and I am a doctoral student in Counselor Education at the University of Maine. I am writing to ask for your help in a study I am conducting. I am interested in understanding the experiences of self identifying African American or Black adult adoptees raised by European American parents in rural areas of New England during your growing up years. The agency that sent this letter believes you fit the criteria for this study. I have not been given your name.

I am looking for participants who:

- self identify as African American or Black
- grew up in rural areas of New England
- are at least 18 years old
- no longer participating in K-12 education
- joined their adoptive family identified as European American, White or Caucasian on or before the age of three years
- were born after 1980

I am interested in knowing more about your experiences with your family, peers and educators at school and the community. In addition, I wonder if these experiences were different at different ages. For example, how was school at the elementary, middle, and high school levels?

The first interview will be face to face for one to two hours at a place that is convenient for you. A second interview will take place either by phone or in person determined by you. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. You do not have to answer any questions that you are not comfortable with. In addition, there are no known risks or benefits to participation in this study other than your time and inconvenience to meet. This may bring back memories from your childhood.

Participants and any identifying information will be held in the strictest confidence. In addition, all documents on the computer will be password protected and written documents such as consent forms will be locked in a file cabinet in my home office where I am the only one with access. If you are interested in participating in this study or have questions please call me at 207-314-0260 or you can email me at Ellen.smith@umit.maine.edu . You can also contact my advisor, Dr. Dorothy Breen at

the University of Maine in the Counselor Education program. The phone number is 207-581-2479 and Dr. Breen's email is Dorothy.Breen@umit.maine.edu.

Thank you for consideration this request and I hope to hear from you!

Sincerely,

Ellen M. Smith

APPENDIX D

Participant Contact Sheet
(To be filled out when a possible participant makes contact)

Domestic Transracial Adoption: In the Words of African American Adoptees

Ellen Smith, Doctoral Candidate in Counselor Education
University of Maine, Orono, ME 04469
Ellen.smith@umit.maine.edu
207-314-0260

PARTICIPANT CONTACT SCRIPT:

- My name is Ellen Smith
- I am a doctoral student in Counselor Education at the University of Maine
- I am doing research on domestic transracial adoption.
- I want to understand the experiences of African American or Black adoptees who were adopted by European American or white parents.
- I will be interviewing African American adoptees to find out more about these experiences.
- Do you have any questions? *(Answer general questions at this time).*
- If you think you might like to participate I need to ask you a few questions.
- Is this OK? ____YES_____NO *(If no, say thank you and end the call).*

Do identify as African American or Black? _____YES_____NO

Were you adopted by European American or White parents? _____YES_____NO

How old were you when you were placed with your parents? _____

What is your DOB: _____

Are you participating K-12 Education? (Will be asked if under 21 years). __YES__NO

Where did you grow up? _____

Do you consider it rural? _____

Are the basic criteria for inclusion met? ___YES____NO *(If no, inform; thank caller for interest).*

The following information will be gathered for those who choose to participate in the study.

NAME: _____ PHONE: _____

E-MAIL:_____APPT TIME: _____

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT

Domestic Transracial Adoption: In the Words of African American Adoptees

Ellen Smith, Doctoral Candidate in Counselor Education
University of Maine, Orono, ME 04469
Ellen.smith@umit.maine.edu
207-314-0260

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Ellen Smith, a doctoral student in Counselor Education at the University of Maine. My advisor is Dr. Dorothy Breen. The purpose of this research is to describe the experiences of African American adults who were adopted by European American parents. You must have been placed with your parents before the age of 3. You must have lived in rural areas of New England during your growing up years. You must be at least 18 years old and no longer attending K-12 school. You must be born after 1980.

What Will You Be Asked To Do?

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in two interviews. The first interview will take approximately one to two hours at a location convenient for you. A follow up interview less than one hour will either be by phone or in person as determined by you.

I am interested in knowing your point of view about being raised by parents of a different race, and the following general statements will guide our interview.

- Please describe the circumstances of your adoption.
- Please share your stories about being adopted by a family who is not of African American heritage.
- What tell me what school was like for you?
- Please describe the community that you grew up in.

You will have an opportunity to read the write up of this research to see that it is a true reflection of the words, ideas, feelings, and experiences. You will be able to make corrections and to share your feelings about being part of the research process.

Risks

Except for your time and inconvenience, there are no known risks to you from participating in this study. This may bring back memories from your childhood.

Benefits

While this study will have little direct benefit to you, this research will help us learn more about the experiences of African American children adopted by European American families. This research may be used to inform counselors and adoption agencies working with multiracial families.

Confidentiality

Your name will not be on any of the documents. A code name chosen by you will be used to protect your identity. All data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home office and I am the only person with access. Data on my computer will be password protected. My dissertation committee will have access to coded data to ensure the analysis is true to your original words. The key linking your name to the data and audio recordings will be destroyed after data analysis is completed. I expected this to be completed in May, 2012. Your name or other identifying information will not be reported in any publications. Coded data will be kept my home office in a locked file cabinet indefinitely for future research.

Voluntary

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to take part in this study, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

Contact Information

If you have further questions about this study, please contact me at:

Ellen Smith
191 Tremont Street
Malden, MA 02148
207-314-0260
Ellen.smith@umit.maine.edu

You may also reach my faculty advisor on this study at:

Dr. Dorothy Breen
Associate Professor in Counselor Education
College of Education and Human Development
University of Maine, 5766 Shibles Hall
Orono, ME 04469
207-581-2479
dorothy.breen@umit.maine.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact:

Gayle Jones, Assistant to the Protection of Human Subjects Review Board
University of Maine
207-581-1498
gayle.jones@umit.maine.edu

Your signature indicates that you have read this form, and that you understand the above information. You will receive a copy of this form.

Thank you for your help and participation in the study!

BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHOR

Ellen M. Smith grew up in Skowhegan, Maine where she graduated from Skowhegan Area High School. Ellen earned an undergraduate degree in Psychology from the University of Maine at Farmington. She also earned a Master's in degree in Counselor Education from the University of Maine. In 1988 and 1989 Ellen and her husband, Steve, adopted two wonderful children, Christopher and Kayla, who are now grown and brought so much to her understanding of transracial adoption.

Ellen has worked for the Department of Human Services as case worker with children in the foster care system. In addition, she has worked as a social worker for private and public agencies writing adoption home studies for perspective adoptive parents. Ellen served as the Executive Director for Mid-Maine Homeless Shelter, and later as the chair of the Board of Directors. Ellen is a Nationally Certified Counselor and a Certified School Counselor in both Maine and Massachusetts. She worked as a school counselor for 15 years and also coordinated the K-12 counseling program. While a school counselor, Ellen was actively involved in the Civil Rights Team Project through the State of Maine Attorney General's office, and advised one of the first Elementary Civil Right Teams in the country at her school. Ellen has worked as an Adjunct instructor in counselor education at the University of Maine and Husson University.

Ellen and her family moved to the Boston area and she is currently an adjunct instructor at Fisher College in the Human Services and Psychology programs.
Ellen began her doctoral studies at the University of Maine in Counselor Education in 2005. Ellen is a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Education with a concentration in Counselor Education from The University of Maine in May 2013.