

ABSTRACT

TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION RELATED ISSUES IN LATINX TRANSRACIAL ADOPTEES

This thesis explores the experiences of transracial Latinx adoptees. This exploration begins with an examination of existing literature. The literature review reveals two key takeaways. The first takeaway is: although transracial adoptees are well adjusted overall, they do face issues related to having been adopted transracially. The second takeaway is: very little research literature focuses on Latinx transracial adoptees in particular. In order to address this gap in the literature, new research was conducted. The research was guided by the research question, “To what extent are transracial adoption-related issues that have been documented in other transracial adoptee populations found in Latinx transracial adoptees?” Three Latinx transracial adoptees were interviewed. Research procedures, findings, and implications for social work practice are discussed.

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TRANSRACIAL ADOPTEES

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial, there have been children in need of parents with enough stability and resources to raise them. Due to either family obligation, goodwill, infertility, or some combination of the three, adoptive parents have chosen to raise some of those children as their own. Only recently have these arrangements evolved into formal, modern-day adoption (Mallon & Hess, 2014). It is only even more recently that these adoptions have begun to cross racial and cultural lines (Mallon & Hess, 2014). When there is a racial/cultural mismatch between one or both adoptive parents and their adoptive child, adoptions are referred to as transracial. Transracial adoption began primarily with the adoption of infants from post-war Korea (Shiao & Tuan, 2008). From there, transracial adoption has expanded to encompass adoptees with roots from all around the world (U.S. Department of State, 2017).

Since the advent of transracial adoption, the practice has been controversial. Some view transracial adoption as wholly benevolent practice in which children in need are rescued and families are made whole (Jennings, 2006). Others see transracial adoption as a practice that exploits poor women of color and strips children color of their cultures of origin in order to meet White, mainly upper middle-class adults' need to be parents (Jennings, 2006). However, no one side has a monopoly on truth. Truths from either end of the spectrum can exist simultaneously. Profound parental love and profound parental ignorance of transracial adoptees experiences can coexist. Access to high-quality education can be paired with a dearth of access to members of one's culture of origin.

Problem Statement

Adoptive parents generally have the best of intentions when they choose to adopt transracially. However good intentions are not always enough. Adopting transracially is a complex matter. It is so complex because parents who adopt transracially are generally White (Euro-American or European). This is an arrangement ripe for unintentional, but still problematic racial dynamics as Euro-Americans and Europeans have a long legacy of marginalizing people of color. White people have enslaved, forcibly colonized, and systematically discriminated against people of color for centuries.

Although overt racism has declined, racism still exists in more insidious forms (Crenshaw et al. 1995; Harris, 2002). People have internalized biases of which they might not be fully aware (Baron & Banaji, 2006). Furthermore, discrimination persists in the form of institutionalized racism (Crenshaw et al. 1995; Harris, 2002). Due to these ugly, deep-seated legacies, transracially adoptive parents, who are almost always White (Rainbow Kids Adoption and Child Welfare Advocacy, 2016), ought to do some serious soul searching and pragmatic planning before they adopt children of color.

Potential transracial adoptive parents should take an honest inventory of any internalized biases that they might harbor. They ought to ask themselves whether their social circles include any people of color. Furthermore, they ought to ask themselves if they are willing to actively honor and actively expose their children to their cultures of origin. Additionally, they should ponder how they might help their children navigate challenges related to being people of color in largely White worlds. The aforementioned adoptive parent actions are all important as they are associated with better quality of life for transracial adoptees (Lee, Lee, Hu, & Kim, 2015; Mohanty, 2015; Reinoso, Pereda, Van den Dries, &

Forero, 2013; Tan & Jordan-Arthur, 2012). If White adoptive parents do not actively honor their children's cultures of origin, actively expose their children to their cultures of origin, and make active efforts to understand the experiences of people of color, their children adopted transracially can grow up isolated, cut off from their cultures of origin, and/or surrounded by insidious racism to which their families might be oblivious (Butler-Sweet, 2011a; Docan-Morgan, 2010; Goss, Byrd, & Hughey, 2017; Hamilton, Samek, Keyes, McGue, & Iacono, 2015; Samuels, 2009; Smith, Juarez, & Jacobson, 2011.).

Unfortunately, adoptive parents do not always soul search and pragmatically plan before they adopt transracially (Jennings, 2006). Too often, adoptive parents take a colorblind approach to transracial adoption (Jennings, 2006). This approach is to the detriment of transracial adoptees as it is dismissive of very real differences and minimizes the importance and value of adoptees' cultures of origin (Jennings, 2006). Issues related to a colorblind approach have been well documented in Asian and Black transracial adoptee populations. However, these issues among Latinx transracial adoptees have not been as well studied. More research with Latinx transracial adoptees is necessary in order to determine to what extent Latinx transracial adoptees are affected by the transracial adoptee issues that have been well-documented in the research literature. These issues that transracial adoptees face will be more thoroughly explored in chapter 2.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the present, phenomenological study is to understand the experiences of Latinx transracial adoptees. The study seeks to better illuminate Latinx transracial adoptees experiences of power imbalances, isolation, discrimination, and color-blind rearing practices. Gaining an understanding of the

experiences of Latinx transracial adoptees will, in part, fill the current Latinx transracial adoptee gap in the transracial adoption research literature. Furthermore, gaining a better understanding of the experiences of Latinx transracial adoptees could potentially better inform social workers' practices and policies when working with Latinx transracial adoptees and, potentially, transracial adoptees at large.

Theoretical Framework

The present study utilizes Critical Race Theory as its theoretical framework. Critical Race Theory is primarily concerned with race and racism. It examines the interactions between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This often means calling into question the foundations that underlie our society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In this way, it is far more skeptical, or critical, of institutions than many other theoretical frameworks.

Critical Race Theory began to emerge in the 1970s amongst a group of scholars who were both disgruntled with the marginalization of people of color in the field of law and involved with Critical Legal Studies. Critical Race Theory emerged fully in the late 1980s when those scholars came together to more thoroughly discuss and dissect their grievances at a series of conferences (Crenshaw, 2002). The product of their discussion and dissection was a new school of thought, Critical Race Theory. They chose this name because their thinking was critical in nature, and, therefore, closely related to Critical Theory (Crenshaw, 2002). Furthermore, they had a deep, particular interest in the intersection of Critical Theory and race (Crenshaw, 2002).

Tenets

Critical Race Theory "rejects at least three entrenched, mainstream beliefs about racial injustice: "colorblindness will end racism, racism is carried out by individuals, not systems, and the belief that racism can be eliminated whilst other forms of oppression and injustice persist (Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002, p. 1). Since its advent, Critical Race Theory principles have been used to critically examine race-related issues as they pertain to a variety of fields, from education to law.

Critical Race Theory maintains that White, European American, culture is the dominant culture in the United States (Harris, 2002). Furthermore, Critical Race Theory asserts that, while overt racism has declined in the United States, institutional racism, a more insidious form of racism, is still alive and well. Institutionalized racism is often, unfortunately, considered normal and widely accepted (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). Critical Race Theory challenges social workers and non-social workers alike to both identify and address racism, institutional racism in particular.

Application to the Present Study

I chose Critical Race Theory as the framework for my study because I aim to examine racism as it pertains to the institution of adoption. Adoption always involves a power imbalance. Adoptees are, by and large, thought of as lucky and are expected to be grateful for having been "saved" by their adoptive parents (Smit, 2002). This can lead many adoptees to feel indebted to their adoptive parents and unentitled to feel the full range of more bitter feelings that often go hand in hand with having been adopted (Smit, 2002). Because children adopted transracially are almost always children of color, and because transracially adoptive parents are almost always White (Rainbow Kids Adoption & Child

Welfare Advocacy, 2016), the power scales are unbalanced even further. When well-intentioned, but ill-informed White parents do not go out of their way to thoughtfully embrace their transracially adopted children's cultures of origin, they can subtly perpetuate racism by failing to critically examine their culture's dominant status. When they fail to examine their culture's dominant status, they can end up marginalizing their adoptive children's cultures of origin in their own homes.

Methodology

A better understanding of Latinx transracial adoptee experiences is gained via the study's semi-structured interviews. I obtained permission from Pact, a Bay Area nonprofit that serves transracial adoptees, to recruit participants via their adoptee network. One participant was recruited via Pact's network. Two other participants were recruited via online Latinx adoptee communities. Participation was voluntary, and all participants were all over 18 years of age. Participants received a \$10 coffee shop gift card for their time.

Each participant was interviewed via online video chat. Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews guided by a 15 question interview guide. The interview guide, informed by the current research literature on transracial adoption, was developed by the researcher. To view the interview guide, see Appendix A. Participants' responses were audio recorded and analyzed using a phenomenological approach. Significant statements were identified, coded, and then clustered. Next, themes were identified. Finally, I triangulated my findings with both the literature and my thesis chair. Adjustments to my findings were made as was necessary.

Research Question

The study's overarching research question is: To what extent are transracial adoption-related issues that have been documented in other transracial adoptee populations found in Latinx transracial adoptees? Questions in the interview guide were used to gather the information needed to answer the study's overarching research question. Interview questions were primarily focused on transracial adoption-related issues experienced by Asian and Black transracial adoptees.

Delimitations

I chose to look specifically at Latinx transracial adoptees. I chose to look only at this population as this population has only seldom been the subject of empirical research. Furthermore, this is the only population that is pertinent to my research question. I worked with Latinx transracial adoptees involved either with Pact or involved with online adoptee communities. This choice was made out of convenience.

Limitations

The present study has neither enough participants nor a representative enough sample for broad conclusions about the experiences of Latinx transracial adoptees to be drawn. The sample is composed of Latinx transracial adoptees connected with either Pact, or online communities for Latinx transracial adoptees. It is possible that these unique characteristics make for unique perspectives. For all these reasons, my study's findings are not widely generalizable. More research is needed for broader generalizability. Additionally, a researcher-developed interview guide, informed by a review of pertinent transracial adoptee literature, will guide interviews. Thus, the interview guide used has only face validity.

Significance to Social Work

Micro

Having more knowledge about the experiences of Latinx transracial adoptees could potentially lead to better service for Latinx transracial adoptee social work clients. Because, with more knowledge, social workers will be able to better understand their nuanced experiences. When Latinx transracial adoptee clients are better served, their families benefit as well. Because family units are heavily intertwined, and trouble for one member generally means trouble for the entire unit. Most importantly, my study could potentially lead to social workers to utilizing better informed practices when making decisions about adoptive placements for Latinx transracial adoptees. This is key, as better decisions earlier can prevent more serious issues later.

Mezzo

As the present study yielded results consistent with the current body of transracial adoptee research, the results further demonstrated that transracial adoption can lead to lifelong, negative consequences, especially when the adoptions are not carried out in a culturally sensitive manner. Perhaps if private adoption agencies were exposed to more research demonstrating this phenomenon, they would feel more compelled to acknowledge the importance of transracially adopted children being able to grow up in homes where they are regularly exposed to their cultures of origin and their cultures of origin are valued. Perhaps then, they might make more thoughtful adoptive placements and provide better education and coaching to transracial adoptive parents. This potential mezzo-level change could lead to an improved quality of life for transracial adoptees.

Macro

Currently, transracial adoptions from the foster care system are treated the same as non-transracial adoptions from the foster care system. Prospective transracial adoptive parents are not required to receive any extra training or education. This can be harmful as transracial adoptive parents most often belong to the dominant (i.e. White, Euro-American, or European) culture. Transracial adoptees' cultures are already marginalized by society at large in the United States. Being adopted transracially opens them up to having their cultures of origin marginalized in their own homes by their own family members. This is highly problematic. Perhaps a greater body of transracial adoption literature, and a more complete representation of transracial adoptees in the transracial adoption literature, can compel governmental agencies to mandate training for transracial adoptive parents. A widespread change such as this has the power to positively affect many individuals and families.

Definition of Terms

Asian: Asian individuals are native to Asia or of Asian descent. In the United States, the term generally excludes individuals with roots in the Asian subcontinent. The United States operationalization of the definition will be used in this paper as much of the research that informs this paper was conducted in the United States.

Black: Black as a racial/cultural descriptor describes individuals with African heritage.

Culture of Origin: Culture of origin refers to the culture of adoptees' birth families.

Latinx: A Latinx is defined as a person of Latin American descent. An "x" instead of an "o" is now widely used in order to make the term more gender inclusive.

Transracial Adoptees: Transracial adoptees describes anyone adopted by one or more parents who do not share their race and/or culture of origin.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

My literature review provides context for the current study. It communicates what is already known about the experiences of transracial adoptees and sheds light on gaps in the pertinent literature. In this chapter, brief backgrounds of international and domestic transracial adoption will be provided. However, the literature review is primarily focused on research related to transracial adoptee experiences. My review of the transracial adoptee experience literature is separated into two primary categories: theoretical literature and empirical literature.

First, literature that deals with the theoretical challenges associated with transracial adoption will be discussed. This theoretical section is much smaller than the empirical section that follows it because a thorough search of the literature yields far fewer thought pieces than empirical articles on the subject of transracial adoption. After the theoretical literature is discussed, findings from pertinent, peer-reviewed, empirical literature on the topic of transracial adoptee experiences will be reviewed. The empirical research section is divided into three separate sections: Asian Transracial adoptees, Black Transracial adoptees, and Latinx Transracial adoptees as these are the three primary groups represented in the transracial adoption literature. Broad, as opposed to more specific, terms are used to describe transracial adoptees' racial/ethnic backgrounds because transracial adoptees are often divided into these broad groups in the literature. For example, researchers often make reference to their 10 Latinx subjects and as opposed to their 5 Guatemalan subjects, 1 Honduran subject, and 3 Colombian subjects.

After a review of the empirical literature, literature pertaining to the study's Critical Race Theory framework will be discussed. The reviewed literature points to a general consensus: transracial adoptees face issues unique to their status as transracial adoptees and the current practice of transracial adoption warrants critical scrutiny. In order to provide a better, more complete understanding of this consensus, opposing views will be discussed in a rebuttal section. Finally, gaps in the literature will be addressed.

Background

International Transracial Adoption

For parents-to-be with financial means, international adoption presents an opportunity to adopt a child with relatively few strings attached. Adopting from abroad means a significantly minimized potential for often undesired biological family involvement. Furthermore, children adopted from abroad are often given up for adoption due to poverty-related issues alone. Children adopted domestically, in contrast, are often available for adoption due not just to poverty, but to their parents' drug abuse as well (Mallon & Hess, 2014). Drug-exposed infants are at higher risk for a host of issues (Mallon & Hess, 2014). Consequently, non-drug-exposed children are often viewed as more desirable. This could be a motivation to adopt transracially. International adoption also has a particular appeal to religious individuals who seek to do "God's work" by saving the children. Furthermore, transracial adoption can be appealing to prospective adoptive parents as it presents an opportunity to broaden their family's cultural horizons and demonstrate their color-blind goodwill.

International transracial adoption in the United States began in earnest in the wake of World War II, which saw the destabilization of Korea (Shiao & Tuan,

2008). During their chaotic transition period, many Korean children were placed up for adoption. Parents from the United States began to adopt internationally in record numbers. Due in large part to this long legacy, transracial adoptees in the United States, are still primarily Korean (Shiao & Tuan, 2008). However, as time has passed, parents have begun to adopt from an array of other countries. In 2012, parents who adopted internationally adopted primarily from China, Ethiopia, Russia, South Korea, and Ukraine (U.S. Department of State, 2017).

Domestic Transracial Adoption

In a perfect world, all foster youth would eventually be safely reunited with their families of origin. Child Welfare Services strives for this idealistic goal. However, for a variety of reasons, this goal is often unachievable. When a child is unable to be reunited with his or her family of origin, adoption is universally regarded as the next best option (Mallon & Hess, 2014). In the United States, there are more foster youth waiting to be adopted than families looking to adopt from the foster care system (Mallon & Hess, 2014). Children of color (i.e. non-White children) endure the longest wait times (McRoy, Mica, Freundlich, & Kroll, 2007). Taking these facts into consideration, reducing as many barriers to adoption as possible, for foster children of color in particular, seems both compassionate and logical.

Before the 1994 Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) and the 1996 Interethnic Adoption Act (IEP), a mismatch between the racial and/or ethnic characteristics of potential adoptive parents and potential adoptees could be considered one such barrier to adoption (California Department of Social Services, 2018). Since the acts were passed, adoptive parent hopefuls can no longer be denied the chance to welcome a foster youth of a different racial and/or ethnic

background into their families solely on the basis of their racial and/or ethnic backgrounds being different from the racial/ethnic background of the children they seek to adopt. This led to transracial adoption receiving child welfare services' official, unreserved seal of approval. While racial and/or ethnic differences between adoptive parent hopefuls and adoptees should not be cause for denying an adoption, there can be definite drawbacks to transracial adoptive placements. When one takes into consideration MEPA-IEP's failure to eliminate inequity in adoption for children of color (Howe, 2008), the drawbacks are made particularly salient. It is important to note that while the acts apply to adoptions from foster care, they do not apply to the adoption of children not involved in the foster care system.

Adoption Challenges

Adoption poses significant challenges even when parents adopt children from their same racial/ethnic group. Adopted children, more often than not, are released for adoption because their birth parents are facing significant challenges related finances, political unrest, health, addiction etc. that prevent them from being able to care for their children. Such challenges can also preclude them from receiving proper prenatal care. Subpar prenatal care can lead to lifelong issues for infants, learning disabilities and developmental delays for example (Mallon & Hess, 2014).

Furthermore, children are not always adopted at birth. In the time between birth and adoption, any number of misfortunes with potentially life-long effects (e.g. malnourishment, abuse, neglect) can befall future adoptees. This is especially true when children are adopted from the foster care system. What's more, adoptees can struggle with the absence of their biological family in their life. Even when

children never knew their biological family, due to being adopted at birth, biological family provides individuals with their genetic inheritance and is the source of their history, for better or worse. Thus, being cut off from biological family can be akin to being cut off from a part of oneself. Transracial adoption, both international and domestic, adds another layer of complexity to already complex families formed by adoption—a mismatch between race/ethnicity (Mallon & Hess, 2014). Because, when children are adopted transracially, they are also separated from their cultures of origin.

Theoretical Perspectives

Quiroz (2007), the Director for the Center for Mexican American Studies at the University of Houston, argued that transracial adoption is more about providing White, privileged parents with children than it is about improving the lives of underprivileged children of color. Papke (2013), a Marquette University professor of law, shared this view. He posited that current transracial adoption law reinforces white privilege and racial hierarchies insofar as current law allows White people to essentially get what they want at the expense of minority racial groups. If the parents were truly interested in improving the lives of the children they adopt, Quiroz (2007) contended, they would work to improve the quality of life in their communities of origin so that they would not need to be adopted. The subtext is as follows: children are best served when they are raised in their families of origin. Papke (2013) added that White adoptive families are not likely to reflect on this troubling dynamic. On the contrary, she argues they are likely to view themselves as benevolent rescuers.

Quiroz (2007) pointed out that transracial adoption sets up parents to be saviors and transracial adoptees to be the rescued. Per Quiroz (2007), societies co-

sign the largely unregulated practice as it aligns with a widely accepted, feel-good colorblind, individualist narrative. This is problematic insofar as the dynamic sets up transracial adoptees to feel indebted to their parents and to potentially go along with any challenging racial and power dynamics that are likely to play out.

Ali (2014), a professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics, echoed Quiroz's concerns. In her 2014 paper, she criticized the United Kingdom's ill thought-out removal of barriers to transracial adoption. She argued that the government, ignorant of the impactful role of race and ethnicities in children's lives, removed the barriers without considering the consequences for transracial adoptees. Such consequences include the loss of minorities' cultures to integration into White families (Ali, 2014). She even went so far as to liken this phenomenon to the United Kingdom's history of imperialism.

Empirical Research

Asian Transracial Adoptees

Asian individuals are native to Asia or of Asian descent. In the United States, the term generally excludes individuals with roots in the Asian subcontinent. Asian Transracial adoptees are the most widely studied group of transracial adoptees. This is unsurprising considering the vast majority of transracial adoptees are Asian (Marr, 2011; Shiao & Tuan, 2008). Although Marr (2011) found that it is easier for Asian Transracial adoptees to assimilate into the dominant, White culture, than it is for Black Transracial adoptees, being an Asian transracial adoptee is not without its challenges. While Marr (2011) contended that Asian Transracial adoptees can be viewed as "honorary Whites" (p. 40), they are still undeniably different than their adoptive communities.

In the United States, Asian Americans make up only 5.7% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). What's more, Asian Transracial adoptees are often one of the only Asian people in their generally White communities (Goss et al. 2017; Hellerstadt et al., 2008). As a natural consequence of this reality, they can experience feelings of isolation (Goss et al. 2017).

Furthermore, when Asian Transracial adoptees face discrimination, it is not always easy for them to talk with their parents about their experiences. Docan-Morgan (2010) elucidated a couple of barriers to Asian transracial adoptees speaking openly with their parents about experiences of discrimination. According to Docan-Morgan (2010), some Asian transracial adoptees avoided talking with their parents about experiences of discrimination because they just wanted to fit in; they felt that drawing attention to the discrimination they have experienced by rehashing it with their parents would only serve to reinforce their outsider status further (Docan-Morgan, 2010). Others chose not to discuss the issues with their parents because they felt that their parents could not be helpful based on their lack of experience with race-based discrimination (Docan-Morgan, 2010). Still others felt that their parents would not be helpful based on past experiences in which they were not sufficiently responsive to issues related to difference (Docan-Morgan, 2010). This inability to turn to parents for support around navigating discrimination is significant as Reinoso et al. (2013), in a study of Asian and well as other transracial adoptees, found that parents of transracial adoptees' were the adoptees' most important resources for discussing adoption-related matters such as experiences of discrimination and difference.

In a study conducted by Hamilton et al. (2015), the majority of the 427 Asian transracial adoptees surveyed reported that their parents discussed race and ethnicity with them in the home. This is good news as Tan and Jordan-Arthur

(2012) found that adoptive parents making active efforts to instill a sense of ethnic pride in their children is associated with higher self-esteem in Chinese transracial adoptees. Additionally, ethnic socialization and preparation for bias were found to be associated with fewer feelings of marginalization and fewer externalizing problems for Asian transracial adoptees (Johnston, Swim, Saltsman, Deater-Deckard, & Petrill, 2007; Mohanty & Newhill 2010). Furthermore, Leslie, Smith, Hrapcynski, and Riley (2013), in a study comprised of 53% Asian transracial adoptees, found that racial socialization was a protective factor in the face of high levels of discrimination.

However, it is troubling that Hamilton et al. (2015) found that no discussions of race and ethnicity were taking place in the homes of the other, roughly half of respondents. Unfortunately, this lack of discussion among roughly half of the transracial adoptees surveyed and their parents is consistent with Reinoso, Juffer, and Tieman's (2013) finding that, among a sample of primarily Asian transracial adoptees, parents tended to underestimate their transracially-adopted children's feelings of connection to their cultures of origin.

It is also troubling that, even when parents of Asian transracial adoptees do make efforts to expose their children to their cultures of origin, they do not always do so in the most authentic manner. Chen (2015) observed that many White, Canadian parents to Chinese transracial adoptees exposed their children to only the most pleasant aspects of the Chinese-Canadian experience. The researchers found that the parents taught their children Chinese songs and brought them to Chinese cultural celebrations, but failed to teach them about more substantive, difficult issues such as Canada's long history of exclusionary immigration practices and lingering racism toward Asian-Canadians (Chen, 2015). Researchers

in the United States had similar findings with regard to Asian Transracial adoptees in the U.S. (Goss et al. 2017).

While a well-developed sense of ethnic identity has been found to be beneficial to Asian Transracial adoptees, Lee et al. (2015) found that a strong ethnic identity can have a potential downside. They found that Asian Transracial adoptees who reported higher levels of ethnic pride and engagement were more negatively impacted, in terms of externalizing problems, than were Asian Transracial adoptees who reported lower levels of ethnic pride and engagement (Lee et al. 2015). Perhaps because they felt more attached to their cultures of origin, they felt the sting of having it insulted more acutely. Perhaps there was an issue with their methodology. More research needs to be conducted in order to know with certainty.

Mohanty's (2015) findings corroborated and move beyond Lee et al.'s (2015) findings, suggesting that the relationship between ethnic identity and wellbeing, for Asian Transracial adoptees, is curvilinear. Ethnic identities that were too weak, as well as those that were too strong, were associated with lower levels of wellbeing (Mohanty, 2015). It is important to note that Mohanty's methodology is potentially not as sound as other researchers' methodology. He conducted a secondary analysis to reach his conclusion and did not disclose how old the data he used were. It is possible that his data were much older than the other, potentially more recently collected, data used in other studies. Again, more research must be done in order to know with certainty.

Though challenges associated with being an Asian TRA are well-documented, Asian Transracial adoptees have been found to be well-adjusted overall (Hamilton et al. 2015; Mohanty & Newhill, 2010; Reinoso et al. 2013). This ability to find success in spite of challenges speaks to their resiliency.

Furthermore, Shiao and Tuan (2008) found that transracial adoptees' attitudes toward transracial adoption have shifted since the advent of widespread transracial adoption in the 1970s. The researchers noted that it was not uncommon for Korean transracial adoptees growing up in United States in the 1970s to want nothing to do with Korean culture and be averse to interaction with other Asian people (Shiao & Tuan, 2008). This is in stark contrast to the experiences of Asian transracial adoptees today. Shiao & Tuan (2008) noted that adoptive parents are becoming more progressive in their rearing practices. Consequently, Asian transracial adoptees today feel freer to develop their racial/ethnic identities (Shiao & Tuan, 2008).

Black transracial adoptees and Asian transracial adoptees have many similar experiences related to their status as transracial adoptees. However, Black transracial adoptees, face some challenges unique to their racial identity. Both similarities and differences are explored in the following section—Black Transracial Adoptees.

Black Transracial Adoptees

Black Transracial adoptees report struggling as a result of not completely fitting in with the White social circles they were adopted into or their Black communities of origin (Butler-Sweet, 2011a; Goss et al. 2017; Patel, 2007; Samuels, 2009). Black Transracial adoptees can feel isolated as a result of not fully fitting in with both their communities of origin and adoptive communities (Samuels, 2009). For some Black Transracial adoptees, this sense of isolation is exacerbated by their parents' color-blind approach to child rearing. Such an approach essentially leaves Black transracial adoptees to navigate issues of race and ethnicity on their own (Samuels, 2009). This can have serious consequences.

For example, Smith et al. (2011) found that the adoptive parents of African American transracial adoptees are often ill-prepared to teach their children how to effectively cope with issues of race and racism.

Some parents take color-blind parenting to an insensitive extreme. For instance, some Black transracial adoptees have reported that their parents expect them to choose White spouses (Goss et al. 2017). This indicates that the parents in question, assuming they want only the best partners for their children, view White partners as superior to Black partners. This presumed superiority of White partners over Black partners begs the question: Do those parents who want their transracially adopted Black children to marry White partners believe that White individuals are superior to Black individuals? Having a preference for members of one's own race is understandable. However, such a preference can send a confusing, potentially hurtful message--Whites are superior to Blacks--to a Black transracial adoptee.

Color-blind parenting practices are consistent with research conducted by Hamilton et al. (2015) that suggested that adoptive parents underestimate the extent of their communication about race with their Black transracial adoptees. However, it is important to note that not all parents to Black Transracial adoptees take a color-blind approach to raising their children. Butler-Sweet found that, among the Blacks Transracial adoptees that she interviewed for her (2011a) study, adoptees' parents often make efforts to expose their children to African American culture in distorted manners. She found that these adoptive parents essentially equate urban street culture with African American culture. Furthermore, Butler-Sweet (2011a) found that this distorted exposure leads some of adoptees to misunderstand what it means to be Black because Black culture, though it includes urban street culture, is so much richer than urban street culture alone.

Given their often lackluster exposure to their culture of origin, it is no surprise that Black transracial adoptees can face major challenges navigating identity. Some Black transracial adoptees manage identity issues by defining themselves first and foremost by the non-race-related facets of their identity (Butler-Sweet, 2011b). For example, they might identify themselves first and foremost as smart. Other Black transracial adoptees disclose their transracial adoptive status early and often in order to avoid appearing that they are trying to be something that they are not (Samuels, 2009). Still others navigate identity challenges by leaning into their Black identity (Butler-Sweet, 2011b). This can entail dressing and behaving in manners associated with Black urban culture (Goss et al. 2017).

Fortunately, there is evidence that Black transracial adoptees too are resilient. For example, although Black Transracial adoptees comprised a very small portion of a study conducted by Hamilton et al. (2015), the authors did note that the Black transracial adoptees were found to be essentially identical, in terms of adjustment, compared to the study's same race adoptees.

Leslie et al. (2013), Reinoso, Juffer, and Tieman (2012) and Reinoso et al. (2013), all included Black transracial adoptees in their studies. They did not, however, break down their results by race. This lack of a racial breakdown, paired with Black transracial adoptees' comprising only a small percentages of their studies' participants, means that, unfortunately, the studies' results, as they pertain to Black transracial adoptees, cannot be known. Consequently, it is nearly impossible to draw definitive conclusions about the Black transracial adoptees from those researchers' studies.

Latinx Transracial Adoptees

Research on Latinx transracial adoptees is significantly more limited. A thorough search of the literature yielded only two studies that focused primarily on the experiences of Latinx transracial adoptees. In both instances, Italian families adopting children from Mexico, Central America, and South America were studied. Manzi, Ferrari, Rosnati, and Benet-Martinez (2014) found that overall, the 127 Latinx transracial adoptees recruited for the study had low rates of behavioral issues. However, they did find that having an integrated bicultural identity (Italian and Latinx) is associated with even lower rates of behavioral issues. Their finding suggests that an integrated bicultural identity, which is often developed as a result of parents' efforts to socialize their Latinx transracial adoptees in their cultures of origin, is a protective factor. Thus, parents' efforts, or lack thereof, to socialize their children in their cultures of origin makes a positive difference in their children's lives.

Ferrari, Ranieri, Barni, and Rosnati (2015)'s findings corroborated the aforementioned finding. They found that mothers' exploration and celebration of their children's cultures of origin promoted their children's own ethnic identity exploration. Ethnic identity affirmation and exploration were, in turn, associated with higher levels of self-esteem. Contrary to findings regarding other groups of transracial adoptees, Ferrari et al. (2015) found that parents' preparation of their children for bias was not particularly helpful. Perhaps their methodology was not sound. Perhaps, there is not a significant enough Latin American population living in Italy for widespread discrimination to exist. Perhaps respondents were able to pass for Italian. More research needs to be conducted to be certain.

Goss et al. (2017) too examined the experiences of Latinx transracial adoptees. However, they did not study Latinx transracial adoptees exclusively.

Latinx transracial adoptees comprised only a fraction of the participants in their study of Black, Asian, and Latinx transracial adoptees' experiences navigating belonging. Yet, their study was still valuable insofar as it revealed some identity-related challenges that Latinx transracial adoptees can face. The authors found that the Latinx transracial adoptees in their study were often accused of not being Latinx enough by Latinxs raised in Latinx families. They reported that Latinxs raised in Latinx families were suspicious of them, or even hostile. Much of this suspicion and hostility, they reported, was associated with the Latinx transracial adoptees' inability to speak Spanish.

While the study sheds light of the difficulties that Latinx transracial adoptees can face as a result of not being fully socialized in their cultures of origin, evidence suggests that Latinx transracial adoptees are still better off than their Black counterparts. In study consisting a variety of transracial adoptees, Marr (2011), found that Latinx transracial adoptees, along with their Asian transracial adoptees, are able to better blend in with their White communities than their Black transracial adoptee counterparts. Parents of some Latinx transracial adoptees even admitted that, though they adopted Latinx children, they would not have been willing to adopt Black children.

Although they face a host of adoption-related challenges, similar to other transracial adoptee groups, Latinxs transracial adoptees, seem to be resilient. Hamilton et al. (2015) noted that their study's Latinx transracial adoptees were essentially identical to their study's same-race adoptee control group in terms of adjustment and well-being.

Other researchers, Leslie et al. (2013), Reinoso et al. (2012) and Reinoso et al. (2013), included Latinx transracial adoptees in their studies. They did not, however, break down their results by race. This is problematic insofar as the

Latinx transracial adoptees comprised small percentages of their studies' participants. Consequently, it is nearly impossible to draw definitive conclusions about the Latinx transracial adoptees from the researchers' studies.

A Critical Race Theory Framework

Many regard transracial adoptees as lucky for having been rescued by financially secure, caring, White families (Quiroz, 2007). However, for transracial adoptees, the experience is far more complex (Quiroz, 2007). This is largely due to complicated, often-unexamined racial and cultural dynamics at play in families formed via transracial adoption. In many cases, these dynamics are even willfully ignored in favor of a "color-blind" approach to parenting (Quiroz, 2007). As evidenced in the reviewed transracial adoption literature, this color-blind approach can have negative consequences for transracial adoptees.

Critical Race Theory "elucidates the relationship between social structure and White privilege by looking at how race and power intersect," (Reid, 2006). Applied to transracial adoption, a Critical Race Theory perspective can be used to illuminate the negative effects of the oft-ignored racial dynamics and power imbalances that exist in families formed when White parents adopt children of color. The present study seeks to examine potential impacts of these largely unexamined transracial adoption dynamics as they relate, specifically, to Latinx transracial adoptees. As the goal of the present study aligns with the goals of Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Theory was chosen as the study's framework.

Rebuttal

Although evidence suggests that transracial adoptees face a number of unique challenges as a result of having been transracially adopted, Simon & Alstein (1996) argued that transracial adoptees don't experience any problems,

traumas, or heartbreak that are specific to transracial adoption experiences. Some scholars have even gone so far as to argue that transracial adoption is superior to in-race adoption. Swize (2002) posited that children of color raised in White families are better equipped to navigate mainstream, White-dominant society. Therefore, Swize (2002), asserted that transracial adoption actually gives transracially adopted children of color an edge over their non-transracially adopted counterparts. Morrison (2004) built on Swize's thinking, adding that transracial adoptees are better equipped than their in-race adopted counterparts not only because they are able to get along well with the dominant group, but also because they are, simultaneously, able to get along with their minority group of origin. Furthermore, Morrison (2004) argued that because White parents tend to be better educated than parents of color, children of color are better served by transracial, as opposed to in-race, adoption.

Perhaps these scholars came to the conclusions that transracial adoption is not associated with any unique issues, and is superior to in-race adoption, because they didn't have any evidence to the contrary. Park and Green (2000) asserted that research literature conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, which is around the time the aforementioned literature was published, was conducted from a Eurocentric perspective. Consequently, researchers, in examining transracial adoptee well-being outcomes, excluded well-being outcomes related to race and ethnicity. Therefore, they failed to elucidate transracial adoptees' challenges related to growing up outside of their racial and ethnic groups (Park & Green, 2000). Thus, because they lacked crucial insight, scholars who believed that transracial adoption is at least without unique challenges, and at best advantageous, came to erroneous conclusions.

Gaps in Literature

There are two significant gaps in the literature. Both Transracial adoptees adopted from foster care and Latinx transracial adoptees are underrepresented in the literature. More research needs to be conducted in both areas in order for a more complete picture of the experiences of transracial adoptees can emerge. The present study will address the lack of Latinx transracial adoptee literature. Furthermore, the present study will build upon what is known about problem areas for transracial adoptees, in general, and Latinx transracial adoptees in particular.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter will explain the methodology that was used to answer my study's research question: To what extent are transracial adoption-related issues that have been documented in other transracial adoptee populations found in Latinx transracial adoptees? This explanation includes descriptions of the study's participants, instrument, procedure, and data analysis. The study's limitations and delimitations will also be described. Lastly, the study's protection of human subjects will be reviewed.

Method

Participants

A total of three people, all women over 18 years of age, participated in my study. All three participants were both transracially and internationally adopted. One woman was adopted from Colombia. The remaining two women were adopted from Peru. Each of the three participants was adopted in infancy. One participant grew up in the United Kingdom. The remaining two women were raised in the United States. All three participants experienced middle-class, or higher, upbringings.

Instrument

I developed an interview guide informed by a review of pertinent transracial adoptee literature. Thus, the interview guide has only face validity. The 15 questions in the interview guide focus on participants' experiences as transracial adoptees. To view the interview guide, refer to Appendix A. I designed the interview guide with the intention of interviews taking roughly forty minutes

to complete. One interview lasted 34 minutes, another lasted 41 minutes, and the longest interview lasted for 1 hour and 10 minutes.

Procedure

I obtained permission from Pact, a San Francisco Bay Area nonprofit that serves transracial adoptees, to recruit participants via their adoptee network. To view the email that Pact sent out to their network on my behalf, refer to Appendix B. One eligible participant, and three ineligible participants, responded to a recruiting email that Pact forwarded to their transracial adoptee network on my behalf. Consequently, only one participant was recruited via Pact's network. My study's two other participants were recruited via recruitment messages posted in Latinx adoptee online communities. I verified participants' eligibility (on the basis of age, Latinx descent, and transracial adoptee status) via pre-screening surveys and email correspondence.

I used HelloSign, an eSignature platform, to share my study's informed consent form with my participants. To view the informed consent form, refer to Appendix C. After they received and reviewed their informed consent forms, I ensured that the participants understood their rights via email correspondence. Furthermore, I asked them if they had any questions about the informed consent form, or the study in general, via email. None of the three participants had any questions. They all signed their informed consent forms prior to their interviews. At the beginning of each interview, I reviewed their rights anew. I also asked, again, if they had any questions. Again, they did not.

Each participant lived out of state or further. Consequently, each participant was interviewed via online video chat. Interviews were all audio-recorded. After I finished interviewing participants, I thanked them, offered to debrief with them,

and offered to facilitate a mental health referral should they feel that they needed one. All three participants respectfully declined offers to debrief as well as offers to receive a mental health referral. As a token of appreciation for their participation, electronic gift cards to coffee shops of the participants' choosing were sent to participants via email.

Data Security

Before pre-interviewing and interviewing participants, I assigned them each a participant number. All interview materials were labeled according to their participant number. Their names were not included in any interview materials. The participant number key was stored in a password-protected document on my personal laptop. I deleted the participant number key and destroy all interview materials.

Data Analysis

I analyzed data using a phenomenological approach. To begin my analysis, I used the interview audio recordings to transcribe what exactly what each participant said during their semi-structured interviews. I then read through each transcript several times in order to gain an overall sense of each interview. While reading through the transcripts, I wrote notes in the margins to note anything that stood out to me. Next, I coded my participants' responses. After that, I examined the codes in order to identify emergent themes. Then, in order to ensure the integrity of my findings, I triangulated them with both the pertinent literature and the coding, clustering, and theme identification of my thesis chair. When there were discrepancies, I carefully considering the discrepancies and made adjustments as was needed.

Delimitations

I chose to look specifically at Latinx transracial adoptees. I chose to look only at this population as this population has only seldom been the subject of empirical research. Furthermore, this is the only population that is pertinent to my research question. I worked with Latinx transracial adoptees involved either with Pact or involved with online adoptee communities. This choice was made out of convenience.

Limitations

The present study has neither enough participants nor a representative enough sample for broad conclusions about the experiences of Latinx transracial adoptees to be drawn. The sample is composed of Latinx transracial adoptees connected with either Pact, or online communities for Latinx transracial adoptees. It is possible that these unique characteristics make for unique perspectives. For all these reasons, my study's findings are not widely generalizable. More research is needed for broader generalizability. Additionally, a researcher-developed interview guide, informed by a review of pertinent transracial adoptee literature, will guide interviews. Thus, the interview guide used has only face validity.

Protection of Human Subjects

In order to obtain an educated understanding of the risks associated with working with human subjects, I completed the National Institute of Health's online course "Protecting Human Research Participants." To view my certificate of completion, see Appendix D. Although my study involves only minimal risk, risk still exists. As a result of taking part in my study, participants ran the risk of becoming emotionally upset due to discussion related to their experiences as transracially adopted individuals. In order to prevent any chance of participants

becoming uncomfortably upset, I made sure that participants understood that the interview can be stopped at any time. Additionally, I was sure to verbally emphasize their right to cease taking part in my study at any point. In case any participants became emotionally upset, I had information about mental health resources in their area handy. Furthermore, I offered to facilitate counseling referrals to the participants.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In this chapter, broad demographic and recruitment information about participants will be provided. Then, an overview of the theme identification process will be presented. Next, I will discuss the three major themes and seven collective subthemes that emerged as a result of the theme identification process. The order in which the themes are presented reflects the order in which participants' adoption journeys progressed. Following the discussion of each theme and subtheme, the experiences of the three participants will be reviewed as they relate to respective themes and subtheme.

Participants

All three of the study's participants expressed excitement around participating in the study, because they feel that adoptee voices, in general, and Latin American adoptee voices, in particular, are often underrepresented in the adoption discourse. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. To view the interview guide used, refer to Appendix A. Each of the study's three participants was interviewed once. Due to distance, all interviews were conducted via video chat. Participants will, hereinafter, be referred to by pseudonyms in order to preserve their anonymity. Participant 1 will be referred to as Maria. Participant 2 will be referred to as Esperanza. Participant 3 will be referred to as Hannah.

Maria was born in Colombia and adopted by White parents in Connecticut. She did not specifically state her age, but disclosed that she was born in the 1980s. She was recruited via Pact's network of transracial adoptees. Esperanza was born in Peru and adopted by White parents, both with international backgrounds. The 36-year-old was raised primarily in London, England. Hannah, who is 28-years-

old, was born in Peru. She was adopted and raised by a single, White mother and raised in the Boston metropolitan area. Both Esperanza and Hannah were recruited via a recruitment post in a Facebook group for Peruvian adoptees. Maria, Esperanza, and Hannah were all adopted before their first birthdays. All three women described experiencing middle-class, or higher, upbringings.

Theme Identification

After transcribing each interview, I read and reread the transcripts many times. I highlighted significant statements and wrote notes in the margins as I read. Based on the salient statements and notes, I compiled a long list of themes. From there I clustered similar themes, until eventually, I was left with three broad themes: isolation and confusion, exploration and reconnection, and adoption insight.

Isolation and confusion led to exploration and reconnection. Exploration and reconnection sometimes led to further isolation and confusion in addition to renewed efforts for exploration and reconnection. Isolation and confusion, paired with exploration and reconnection, led to adoption insight. To view a visual representation of the themes' relationship to one another, refer to Figure 1.

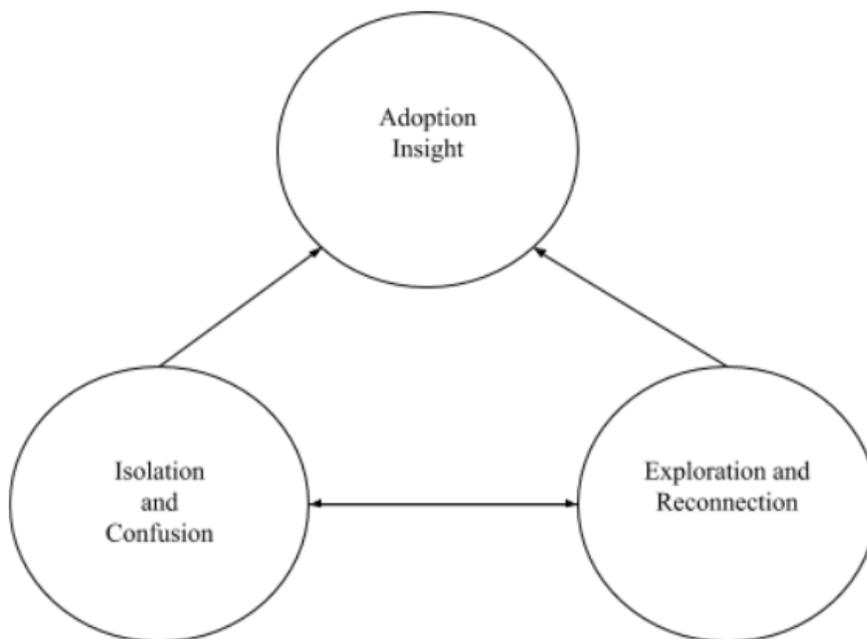


Figure 1. Themes' relationships to each other.

In addition to these three themes, seven subthemes, total, were identified. Collectively, the themes and subthemes captured the experiences of all three women. This whole process of theme and subtheme identification was carried out with the assistance and input of my thesis chair, Dr. Betty Garcia. In the following sections and subsections, themes and subthemes will be expanded upon.

Theme 1: Isolation and Confusion

All participants shared experiences of isolation as a result of being adopted into families in which nobody looked like them. Furthermore, all participants shared experiences of isolation related to growing up in communities in which nearly nobody shared their cultures of origin. For all three women, this led to varying degrees of confusion. Within this broader theme of isolation and confusion, three subthemes were also identified. The three subthemes are as follows: lack of ability to express transracial adoption-related needs as children, lack of support in forming meaningful connections with cultures of origin as youth, and complicated identities.

Lack of Ability to Express Transracial
Adoption-Related Needs as
Children

Maria struggled to find the language necessary to describe her adoption-related pain. All she knew was that no one around her looked like her and it did not feel good. She said that, as a child, she blocked out a lot of her pain around what she describes as her adoption trauma. Her parents wrongly assumed that because Maria was assimilated and wasn't outwardly defiant, she was doing well. In reality, she was burying her feelings of loneliness and pain beneath a facade of perfectionism. She did this because fully facing her feelings would have been too much for her to bear. She explained:

I was the perfectionist kid, and I was in a severe amount of pain. It's hard at times because there are pictures where was smiling, but I look at them and it breaks my heart to pieces because I know that it wasn't an authentic smile. I know that I was playing a part. That's really hard to explain to them still, and really hard for them to hear still.

Even though she suppressed her feelings for the most part, she couldn't escape them entirely. Maria had nightmares, not explicitly about her removal as she wasn't old enough to consciously remember her removal, but about her removal in tone and feeling. Maria, who has thought a lot about her adoption trauma, hypothesizes that her adoption trauma manifested itself in more abstract nightmares because her trauma is preverbal. Only in recent years has Maria realized that her dreams were not normal and were actually symptomatic of trauma.

Esperanza, too, described not being able to fully convey her adoption-related needs. Her parents didn't talk with her about adoption. She didn't hear about it anywhere else either. Consequently, she didn't know much at all about

adoption. As a teenager, she knew that she wanted to go back to Peru. However, she couldn't understand what was motivating her desire to return to Peru.

Esperanza now knows that she needed to go back to Peru in order to embark on an adoption journey in order to fully process and understand what it means to be adopted transracially/transnationally.

As a young child, Hannah reported being unaware of her subconscious adoption-related needs. Hannah explained that, by the time that she consciously realized that she had adoption-related needs at ten-years-old, it was too late. She felt that she had already been separated from her birth family and her culture of origin for too long to fit in. She feels angry that her mother did not take the initiative to help her become aware of and meet her adoption-related needs. She resents the fact that *she* had to initiate any sort of meaningful adoption conversation.

Lack of Support in Forming Meaningful Connections with Their Cultures of Origin as Youth

All three women grew up in White families in predominantly White, middle-class communities. Hannah and Maria's parents made efforts to connect their children with groups for Latin American adoptees. However, these groups did not enable either child to form any sort of meaningful connection to their cultures of origin. For Hannah, the group was not helpful as she didn't connect with the group's other adoptees at the time. Maria's family was not involved in the group for long enough for Maria to feel like it was beneficial. Although Maria and Hannah's parents made efforts to expose them to other Latin American adoptees, they did not make any efforts to connect them to the broader Colombian, Peruvian, or Latinx communities in their areas in any other way, with one exception.

Hannah's mother employed a Bolivian nanny to look after her as a child. However, Hannah did not mention having a Bolivian nanny being a beneficial way to connect to her culture of origin.

Both Maria and Hannah expressed ire around their parents' failure to initiate any real efforts beyond the adoptee groups. This failure resulted in feelings of loneliness and longing in Maria. Maria wishes that her parents would have taught her Spanish, cooked Colombian food, and taught her about the culture in general. Furthermore, she wishes there would have been other people around who looked like her. Hannah too wishes that her mother had done more. Being the only other person who looked like her in school and her neighborhood felt strange. There were other Latinxs in the region, but their paths never really crossed. Hannah mainly attributes this to different socioeconomic statuses.

It is important to note that Hannah's mother did bring her back to Peru when she was ten for a visit. However, it was not of her own accord. The trip only happened because Hannah urged her mother. Hannah feels that so much of the responsibility for maintaining her cultural ties should not have fallen on her shoulders alone. Hannah wishes her mother had taken more initiative in exposing her to her culture of origin.

Both Maria and Hannah expressed frustration around their parents not having any friends who looked like them. They were also frustrated that they didn't even have any role models that looked like them. Hannah talked about the importance of role models, saying:

It's really important for kids to have role models in their lives and see that you are friends with people who look like them...for so many reasons. I think it's important for the adults as an exercise to understand where the kids came from, and also for the kids to have someone that they're looking

up to. This tip was from a blog post I read somewhere. It was mostly for a black kid. It said if you're going to raise a black kid, maybe you should be friends with black people. But I think that it goes for anybody. If you're going to raise a Latino, you should be friends with Latino people.

Hannah describes her family as being very liberal politically. However, she said that they almost exclusively associated with members of their own racial group, not out of malice, but out of habit. Maria's parents didn't have any real opinion of Latinxs as there were nearly none around them. Maria felt largely disconnected from the few Latinxs in her community. She was fearful of them as she worried that they wouldn't accept her. This was due, in part, to interactions with Latinxs in which she was shamed for not speaking Spanish.

Hannah's and Maria's difference and isolation from others like them made them stick out. Hannah reported feeling "micro-aggressed." People were never overtly hostile. However, she was often asked about where she's from, when she felt she shouldn't have been asked. Furthermore, people often asked to know "more of her life story than [she] wanted to share." Maria too received uncomfortable questions about her background. She described the questions as, "com[ing] with a lot of judgment, not curiosity." Maria was also stared at often, especially during family trips to Maine to visit relatives. Additionally, Maria expressed feeling discounted and disrespected as a minority. When she shared these experiences with her parents, they told her she was probably misinterpreting things. Her parent's dismissal of her experiences only made the sting of the experiences worse.

Esperanza, too, faced some discrimination. For example one or two children at school refused to hold her hand during school activities. She describes the incidents as minor insofar as they never escalated and were isolated incidents.

Additionally, school mates would often ask Esperanza how she got to be in an English boarding school as there were no other Peruvians at school or in English boarding schools in general. This led her to feel that many of her classmates were confused by her presence at boarding school. However, she emphasizes that her school experience was great overall. She felt accepted by her group of friends even though she stood out.

Even though Esperanza grew up in London where there was not a very large Peruvian community, she was more exposed to her culture of origin than either Maria or Hannah. Esperanza grew up with parents who had genuine interest and experience with Peru prior to her adoption. Her mother had actually written her dissertation on Peru. Furthermore, her mother, the daughter of an American father and Dominican mother, is fluent in Spanish and lived in Argentina until she left for college in the United States. Her father had visited Peru as well. Her parents made efforts to celebrate her culture of origin by exposing her to books, television programs, and museum exhibitions about her country of origin when the opportunities arose. Even though Esperanza craved more exposure, she said that she acknowledges that her parents did not have many opportunities to expose her to her culture of origin in London. Although Esperanza's parents were quite knowledgeable about Peru, Esperanza pointed out that they were not knowledgeable about the unique aspects of transracial adoption.

Complicated Identities

In high school, Maria "tried to be Puerto Rican" for a time. She knew she didn't fit in with the dominant community. She had no real ties or access to a Colombian community. Therefore, trying to fit in with the Puerto Rican girls at her high school seemed like the next best thing to her. However, trying on a Puerto

Rican identity could only be a temporary fix for Maria. Maria knew she was Colombian, not Puerto Rican. It was not until Maria began to branch out on her own in college and beyond that Maria formed a more solid, Colombian identity. This identity formation will be described in depth in the Exploration and Reconnection section of this chapter.

Esperanza didn't struggle as much with her identity formation. Esperanza's whole family was so unusual that she never had any aspirations of normalcy. Even though no one around her was adopted or Latin American, she was "okay" with being different. This was due, at least in part, to Esperanza not being alone in her difference as her whole family was and is "unusual" in terms of its size, ancestry, and international background. Her family had eight children in London. This is most uncommon in London, like most major metropolitan areas. Furthermore, her parents were not Brits. Her father, a White American, was born in Zimbabwe. Her mother was born in Argentina to White American and White Dominican parents. They had lived all over the world. Her parents immigrated to London for their American banking jobs. They did not have any family or real roots in the United Kingdom. Esperanza described her family's background as being in stark contrast to the backgrounds of most other Londoners. She explained, "of course, no we didn't fit in, but that's okay." Esperanza's whole family, not just Esperanza, always had to unpack their stories for others. Consequently, Esperanza is able to confidently describe herself as a British Peruvian adoptee. Furthermore, she doesn't mind explaining her unique situation to others either. She sees explaining her background as a welcome opportunity to educate others.

Hannah, on the other hand, describes her identity as "a work in progress." She feels she can't claim any one identity. Hannah knows she's not White, yet she feels most comfortable in the world of her White, middle-class mother. She knows

she can claim Latino heritage, yet she doesn't feel that she fully belongs to it because, in spite of having an open adoption and making multiple trips back to Peru, "I didn't have any of the cultural connections growing up or anything like that, because I grew up in a middle-class White family, which is just a different life. It's a different set of rules that you're learning to live by." Hannah feels that she belongs when she is in the company of her close friends. Outside of this, she can't help but feel that she doesn't quite belong.

Discussion

I was struck that Esperanza, who was arguably the most isolated from her culture of origin due to growing up in the UK where there was almost no Latinxs let alone Peruvian community in the 1980s, felt the least isolated. This is, in part, a result of Esperanza not being the only outsider in her family in addition to her parents' efforts to expose her to her culture of origin. Although the exposure was only via books, museum exhibitions etc., I think Esperanza appears to have known that they were doing all that they could do given their location. Furthermore, Esperanza knew that her parents had a deep appreciation for her country and culture of origin.

Though Maria and Hannah were largely isolated from Latinx communities, and more specifically Colombian and Peruvian communities, in their immediate families and social circles, they were not geographically very far from Latinx communities. Therefore, their parents, with time and effort, could have helped them connect to others that share their culture of origin. However, they didn't. I think that this made their isolation hurt more. Furthermore, even though Maria and Hannah were adopted as infants, their cultures of origins will always be a significant piece of who they are. It seems that Maria and Hannah's parents did

not know enough about their countries and cultures of origin for Maria and Hannah to feel that their parents understood and placed value in their cultures of origin, and thereby, value in important pieces of who Maria and Hannah are.

I believe that Maria and Hannah's parents' lack of understanding and appreciation of their cultures of origin led them to have more trouble navigating their identities. Although Esperanza's identity is undeniably complex, she was able to confidently make sense of it. The process was markedly more challenging for Maria and Hannah. While there is great value in understanding and appreciating transracial adoptees' cultures of origin, I do not believe that that understanding and appreciation are enough. Adoptive parents must also be knowledgeable about transracial/transnational adoptee specific issues. None of the girls' parents taught them about transracial/transnational adoption related challenges. Therefore, none of them had the language they needed to adequately describe their adoption related needs and, in some cases, pain. Furthermore, because the participants' parents were not educated about transracial/transnational adoption specific issues, they could not offer sufficient support around those issues.

Findings and the Reviewed Literature

Isolation was a common theme in the reviewed research literature. Much of the reviewed empirical literature suggested that promoting connection to transracial adoptees' cultures of origin via ethnic socialization was beneficial in reducing isolation and promoting adoptee well-being (Johnston, K.E., Swim, J.K., Saltsman, B.M., Deater-Deckard, & Petrill, 2007; Ferrari et al. 2015; Mohanty & Newhill 2011; Leslie et al. 2013; Rosnati, & Benet-Martinez, 2014; Tan & Jordan-Arthur, 2012). For all three participants, ethnic socialization was highly

important. They did not receive much ethnic socialization at children, however, as adults, they sought it out for themselves.

The participants' lack of ethnic socialization as children is consistent with findings from Reinoso et al.'s (2012) study. The researchers found that adoptive parents tended to underestimate their transracially adopted children's feelings of connection to their culture of origin. In, their study, however, parents exposed their children to their cultures of origin with far more frequency than the participants' parents exposed their children to their cultures of origin. Perhaps this is attributable, at least in part, to their study having been conducted relatively recently with adoptees between the ages of 8 and 12. All three women in my study grew up in the '80s or '90s. Perhaps parents, in general, were less likely to expose their children to their cultures of origin. Shiao and Tuan (2008) found that this was the case in their study of Korean adoptees.

Theme 2: Exploration and Reconnection

In addition to shared experiences of isolation and confusion, all three participants shared experiences of exploration and reconnection with their birth families, birth countries, and birth cultures. For all three women, the exploration and reconnection process was self-prompted. What's more, the trio's exploration and reconnection has been, and continues to be, integral to the women's understanding of themselves as transracial adoptees and people. Two exploration and reconnection subthemes--reconnection with birth family and countries and engagement with other transracial/transnational adoptees--characterized each woman's experience.

Reconnection with Birth Family and Countries

All three women reconnected with their birth families in their respective countries of origin. Maria found her birth mother, her “Mama,” in spring of 2017. Within thirty minutes, she was communicating with her birth mother using the mobile phone application WhatsApp. For a few weeks, Maria chatted with her compulsively. A few months later, Maria returned to Colombia and reunited with her birth family for the first time since her adoption. The trip helped her find a lot of pride in being adopted from Colombia. Maria even regained her Colombian citizenship during that trip. Soon, Maria, her partner, and their dog are going to live in Colombia for a year. She is hoping to write her adoptee memoir while there. She is also hoping to improve her Spanish language skills so much so that she returns to the States fully fluent. Even though Maria feels most fortunate to have been reunited with her birth family, she still struggles with grief. Maria describes her past year of reconnection as, “the most enriching year of my life and the hardest year of my life, by far.” “Waves of grief” for all that she has lost still rise up in her. In spite of her solid support system, she can still be “sucked under” by these waves for weeks at a time.

Esperanza has reconnected with her birth mother too. For Esperanza, reconnecting with her birth country has been perhaps even more significant though. Esperanza explained:

I don't think we really ever begin to interact with our adoption until we go back, until we actually go back and see the land where we were born, and even the place, do we actually understand what the word adopted means. We can read as many books as we want, we can watch as many YouTube videos as we want, we can whatever we want to do, but until we actually step foot across the boundary, do we actually know what it means to have

been adopted abroad, internationally, and transracially. So that's what I believe. Because of that, when I do go back, it's amazing.

She made her first trip to Peru as a nineteen-year-old. Her school facilitated a special study abroad program for her. She felt warmly embraced by the locals. Esperanza so enjoyed her time in Peru that she has been back sixteen times since her initial trip. Each trip has been different and valuable to her. Although Esperanza's parents were not very knowledgeable about adoption, she is very thankful that they taught her how to embrace travel. Thanks to their life lesson, Esperanza has never felt any hesitation travelling to Peru. Esperanza even plans to move to Peru in the near future. Eventually, she wants to adopt and raise two children in Peru. She also wants to help provide much needed education around Peruvian adoptions in Peru, particularly transracial/transnational Peruvian adoptions. She has already begun this by maintaining communication with Peruvian adoption officials in order to provide them with her valuable perspective.

Hannah's experience of reconnection was and continues to be complicated. Hannah's adoption was open, meaning her adoptive mother agreed to leave channels of communication between Hannah and her birth family open to a certain extent. One day, a ten-year-old Hannah received a letter from her biological brother in Peru. In his letter, he talked about how much he loved her. This letter sparked Hannah's interest in her birth family. She wanted to go to Peru to meet him and the rest of her family. Her mother agreed to take her. Her reunification was not everything she had hoped for though.

She described feeling overwhelmed. Up until then, she had been the only person she knew that looked like her, the only person she knew biologically related to her. Then, suddenly, she was surrounded by people who looked like her and were related to her. They all spoke Spanish and she couldn't. Their realities

were so different from her largely White, middle-class reality. Hannah felt that, at ten years old, she was already too different from them. She felt that the ten years her mother had waited to bring her back to Colombia had irrevocably made her an outsider. It was “too late.”

She wishes that her mother would have, budget allowing, brought her back every year after her adoption. She wishes that her mother, as the adult, would have anticipated her need to return. However, Hannah did not let this stop her from returning. Hannah has travelled back to Peru five or six times now. Over time, the trips became less and less confusing and overwhelming. However, the confusion and feeling of being overwhelmed have not disappeared entirely.

Outside of trips, Hannah keeps in regular contact with her biological family via telecommunications. However, there remains is an undeniable gap in cultural understanding between Hannah and her birth family. For example, Hannah’s biological sister is expecting a daughter and planning to name her after Hannah. Hannah knows she should feel honored, but, in reality, feels very uncomfortable about her sister’s choice of baby name. Hannah views her disagreement with her sister’s choice as a cultural difference. She feels she can’t explain this to her sister without offending her.

Engagement with Other Transracial/Transnational Adoptees

For Maria, interaction with other transracial/transnational adoptees has been a huge part of processing adoption-related challenges. Growing up, she didn’t really know any other transracial/transnational adoptees. When she was in graduate school, she met an adoptee from Cape Verde who was raised by a White mother. That adoptee was her first adult adoptee friend. Unlike Maria’s parents,

her friend's mother went to great lengths to engage with and celebrate her friend's Cape Verdean culture of origin. The friend's mother even moved just to be closer to a Cape Verdean community. Furthermore, the friend's mother befriended Cape Verdeans and learned how to cook Cape Verdean food in order to provide her daughter with even more cultural connections. Her friend's experience provided a stark contrast to her own. From her friend's experience, she learned about what transracial/transnational adoption could be like. This brought to the surface anger around how her parents handled her adoption.

A couple of years ago, Maria joined her first adult adoptee support group. At first, the experience was disappointing. She was still alone, even in the support group. No other members were brown with White parents like Maria. Sensing her disappointment, her group leader connected Maria with a Colombian transracial/transnational adoptee. Through him, Maria was able to be connected to a wider Colombian transracial/transnational adoptee community. Finally, she felt that she had found her people. She described her first meeting with the community as, "...incredible. We were all sobbing. We stayed until the [movie] credits were done. We went to a restaurant, and we stayed, until they kicked us out, for hours talking." Even when apart, community members are a huge source of support to one another. For example: in their Facebook group, members celebrate their Colombian heritage by asking members to post pictures of their beautiful Colombian faces. Recalling this practice brought a big smile to Maria's face. The community even wrote a book about their adoptee experiences.

Esperanza too has engaged with many other transracial/transnational adoptees. She describes herself as a "very proactive adoptee." She enjoys being able to chat with other adoptees about their adoption experiences, both in person and in online communities. Hannah is involved with the adoptee community as

well. She enjoys sharing her story with other adoptees. What's more, she loves the automatic understanding that comes with sharing adoption experiences with other transracial/transnational adoptees. For her, such interactions are healing. They help her feel less alone. She is developing a podcast about her adoption journey. She will use her podcast as a way to connect with other Latin American adoptees and provide a platform to share their unique experiences.

Discussion

For all three women, exploration and reconnection was very important. Furthermore, for all three women, it was a self-initiated process. I think that the women would have all felt more supported by their parents had their parents more proactively supported them in exploring and reconnecting to their cultural roots. I was particularly struck that Hannah felt that traveling back to Peru at ten-years-old was too late. I think this speaks to the importance of adoptive parents being open to integrating exploration and reconnection into their children's adoption experience from the moment they are adopted.

Findings and the Reviewed Literature

In their study on Latino transracial adoptees in Italy, Ferrari et al. (2015) found that when mothers explored and celebrated children's cultures of origin at higher rates, their children, in turn, celebrated and explored their ethnic identity at higher rates. This finding is particularly pertinent to Hannah's perspective on exploration. Hannah wished she had gone back to Peru sooner. She wished her mom would have brought her back every year. Hannah believes that, adoptees should not have to bear so much of the responsibility for exploring and celebrating their cultures of origin. This speaks to the importance of parents taking the lead in terms of celebrating and exploring their children's cultures of origin.

Ferrari et al.'s (2015) study is also pertinent to the other two participants. Perhaps Esperanza's parents' exploration and celebration of her culture of origin led her to feel the least conflicted about embarking upon her adoption journey. Perhaps Maria's parents' lack of exploration and celebration of her culture of origin has contributed to her reunion with her biological family and country of origin being more difficult.

Theme 3: Adoption Insight

In their own way, each woman was able, with time, reflection, and effort, to make sense of their adoption experiences. Two adoption insight subthemes were identified. All three women came to the conclusion that adoptive parents need more education about transracial/transnational adoption. Additionally, all three women were able to find meaning in their adoption-related struggles.

Belief that Adoptive Parents Need More Education about Transracial/Transnational Adoption

Maria, Esperanza, and Hannah all recognize that their parents did what they could to help them navigate the complexities of transracial/transnational adoption with the very limited transracial/transnational adoption resources that were available to them. They were quick to remind both the researcher and themselves of this fact if and when they found themselves becoming angry or upset recounting the mistakes their parents made. For example, in reference to her parents' lack of knowledge around transracial/transnational adoption, Maria shared, "They didn't have any support. I do try to honor that when I get fired up." Ultimately, they all felt that their parents, however well-intentioned, did not know enough about transracial/transnational adoption to truly understand their children's adoption

related challenges. All three women felt that more education for transracial/transnational adoptive parents is needed.

Maria has the most critical view of the practice of transracial/transnational adoption. In her opinion, children are best served when they are raised by families in their own cultures and countries of origin. Consequently, she feels that children should not be adopted outside their cultures of origin or outside of their birth countries' borders. However, Maria is aware that parents continue to adopt transracially/transnationally. In these cases, Maria wants to see adoptive parents receive thorough education around cultural awareness and adoption trauma.

She feels that adoptive parents are too often ignorant about racial issues. For example, she is flabbergasted that her parents chose to adopt her, a dark-skinned Colombian child, as opposed to adopting an Asian or African child, because they felt that a Colombian child was closer to a White child than an Asian or African child. Furthermore, Maria feels that adoptive parents are too often ignorant about adoption-related issues as well. For example, she feels that adoptive parents too often think that love is enough to raise a transracially/transnationally adopted child, when, in reality, children adopted transracially/transnationally have special needs that need to be treated as such.

If parents do choose to adopt transracially/transnationally, she hopes that they will seriously think about why they are choosing to do so. She also hopes that parents will allow their children to be their own people, not just the people who their parents want them to be. For example, Maria's parents changed her birth name from a Spanish name to Maggie (name approximated, not exact, in order to maintain anonymity). She hated the new name that her parents gave her. Six years ago she reclaimed her birth name and, now, feels so much better about her name. Lastly, Maria wants parents to be aware that the bond between birth mother and

child will always be significant, even when children are adopted at an early age. Therefore, being separated can be traumatic.

Esperanza firmly believes that parents should only adopt transracially/transnationally if they do so thoughtfully. Although her parents thoughtfully chose Peru, the country in which her mother completed her doctorate, she noted that too many adoptive parents choose to adopt transracially/transnationally without much thought. She pointed out that many parents place more thought into the house they choose than the child they choose. For example, parents might choose to adopt from a certain country because it's the country that their adoption agency recommends or adoptions from that country as easier logistically, not because they gave a genuine interest or connection to a country or culture.

Esperanza recommends that parents do their research, visit the country that they want to adopt from for three months or longer, and then really think about their decision to adopt transracially/transnationally. Like Maria, Esperanza too felt that raising a child adopted transracially/transnationally is not the same as raising a biological child. She shared that her mother used to believe that raising a transracially/transnationally adopted child is the same as raising biological children, but has since realized her mistake. Esperanza believes that it is important for parents to understand how adopted children are different. She wishes that her own mother would have realized this sooner.

Hannah believes that parents hoping to adopt transracially/transnationally should be required to take a class, especially when those parents do not look like their children and are raising their children in areas where those around them don't look like their children either. Hannah observed that although she feels like ethnicity shouldn't matter much, it, in reality, does. Thus, a racial/ethnic mismatch

between parents and children is significant. Hannah becomes frustrated when she hears adoptive parents try to normalize transracial/transnational adoption by making statements such as, “it doesn’t matter that you were adopted.” Hannah points out that these statements are well-intentioned, but leave very little room for children to feel that they can talk about the ways in which they are different or are not belonging in the family.

She wants parents to understand that when they adopt transracially/transnationally, extra work is required. Hannah firmly believes that parents need to be actively open to talking with their children about their birth family, birth country, and culture of origin. Parents can’t expect that their children will feel comfortable talking about these matters if their parents aren’t comfortable talking about them. What’s more, parents should guide exploration. Children shouldn’t feel like that is their responsibility. Children aren’t likely to be open about desires for reconnection, even if they want to be, if their parents are open about their approval of any desires for reconnection. She explained, “I don’t think that you can expect your kids to be open with you if they don’t think that you are willing to explore with them.”

Additionally, Hannah believes that it is important that children see role models who look like them. She suggests that parents make friends who look like their adopted children. Furthermore, Hannah thinks that adoptive parents ought to understand that the children they adopt never fully belong to them. Their children will always also belong somewhere else. Parents need to accept this. She also wants adoptive parents to understand that just because their children were adopted as infants does not mean that extra understanding and effort is not required. Hannah is aware that these best practices entail a lot of work for adoptive parents. She wants adoptive parents to know that properly supporting their

transracially/transnationally adoptive children requires that they be “more selfless than they have ever been.”

Meaning Making

In spite of the challenges that Maria, Esperanza, and Hannah have faced as transracial and transnational adoptees, they all are resilient. All three women graduated from college. What’s more all three women have found a way to make their struggles meaningful. Though they don’t completely agree with the ways their adoptions were handled, they all conveyed understanding that they were not able to safely remain with their families of origin. The three women cannot go back and change their parents’ under-education and under-preparation for adopting them. However, they can be of service to others.

Maria has done this by becoming a therapist. She specializes in working with individuals coping with eating disorders as well as individuals coping with adoption trauma. She has even presented on adoption trauma at a conference. She takes pride in educating fellow therapists about adoption specific issues. Furthermore, she takes pride in helping the parents she works with more effectively support their children. Furthermore, Maria is shining a light on the necessity of proper adoption education for transracial adoptive parents by writing a memoir about her own adoption journey.

Esperanza is also working on a book, a history of adoption from Peru. She hopes to use her experiences as well as her research to educate others. Her educational aspirations do not stop there. Esperanza also plans to move to Peru in order to be a more active part of the Peruvian adoption discourse. International/transracial adoption from Peru has been on the rise. Esperanza wants to ensure that these increasing numbers of adoptive parents are well-educated

about adoption-related challenges. Additionally, Esperanza wants to prepare Peruvian adoptees for their new lives abroad. That way, future Peruvian adoptees may not have to deal with some of the avoidable struggles that she had to deal with. Last, but not least, Esperanza plans to one day adopt and raise two Peruvian children in Peru.

Hannah feels that the challenges she faced as a transracial adoptee have been meaningful insofar as her experience has led her to be a more compassionate person. Because she has struggled, she feels more empathy for people's struggles in general. Furthermore, being a perpetual outsider has inspired in Hannah a great interest in exploring and understanding different cultures. She is also more readily able to connect to others because her adoptive background paired with her dark features make her culturally ambiguous enough that people belonging to different cultures often assume she is a part of their cultural group. Hannah is also making meaning by developing a podcast about her adoptee experience. Eventually, she wants to have other Latin American adoptees share their adoption stories on her podcast as well. Hannah noted that the understanding that Latin American transracial adoptees can offer one another when they share their experiences can be very healing.

Discussion

The three women had perhaps the most in common in when it came to insight gained as a result of being adopted. They knew what it was like to be different and to not be truly understood. All three women seemed to have a heightened sense of empathy for others as a result of their own struggles. In their own ways, each woman has become the change that they wish to see in the world. Furthermore, although each woman wished that their parents had better supported

them in navigating the challenges associated with being adopted transracially/transnationally, they were able to accept the complicated truth that their parents were not malicious, just ignorant.

They all seemed to have dedicated much time and energy to processing their feelings about their adoptions. I think this enabled them to achieve the levels of clarity that they have achieved. More research needs to be done to know for certain, but I suspect that the participants are perhaps more reflective and proactive than most transracial/transnational adoptees. If Maria, Esperanza, and Hannah, who are perhaps among the most reflective and proactive of adoptees, have faced challenges as a result of not enough parental education and support from their parents in navigating adoption-related challenges, I imagine that adoptees who are not as reflective and proactive might be struggling even more to process their adoptions.

As a result of their extensive reflection, the three women all came to the conclusion that parents who adopt transracially need more education in order to best support their children. Though the tone of their advice differed, the advice itself was strikingly similar. They all felt that parents should understand that adopted children, especially children adopted transracially/transnationally require additional support and parents ought to be prepared to offer this additional support. The three women also all agreed that their own parents were under-equipped to support them in navigating adoption-related challenges. Therefore, they were unaware that there was important knowledge that they lacked. Suggestions for better parent preparation will be discussed in the implications section of chapter 5.

Findings and the Reviewed Literature

Quiroz (2007) argued that children are best served when they are reared in their families of origin. Maria shared this exact opinion. Maria felt that, if child is unable to remain with his or her family of origin, the child should at least remain in their home country. Maria, Esperanza, and Hannah all agreed that maintaining cultural connections are important. Furthermore, all three women agreed that transracially/transnationally adoptive parents need more education and support around maintaining and facilitating cultural connections for their children due to their own experiences. The participants' experiences of lacking sufficient cultural connection are in line with Ali (2014)'s theoretical fear that when transracial adoption is not carried out thoughtfully, children's cultures of origin can be lost.

In spite of their challenges, all three of my study's participants proved to be resilient. This finding too is consistent with the existing research. Hamilton et al. (2015), Mohanty and Newhill (2010), Reinoso et al.'s (2013), and Rosnati, and Benet-Martinez (2014) all found that transracial/transnational adoptions are, overall, well-adjusted.

In Essence

The central research question was answered. Based on the information gathered from my participants, Latinx transracial adoptees, like their transracial adoptee counterparts belonging to other racial/ethnic groups, do experience issues unique to being adopted transracially. Overall, I think that the participants' experiences and insight all demonstrate that taking a color blind approach to transracial adoption, one in which parents with good intentions treat their transracially adopted children as they would treat biological children, is harmful.

Children adopted transracially and/or transnationally are undeniably different from their adoptive families. Furthermore, they are often undeniably

different from those around them. Ignoring transracially/transnationally adopted children's differences discounts their very real, very normal feelings of isolation, confusion and desires for reconnection their cultures and/or countries of origin. Furthermore, ignoring difference suggests that difference is something to be hidden, not celebrated.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In this chapter, my study's implications for social work practice will be discussed. Next, I will share some thoughts and observations about my study. Then, unanticipated outcomes of my study will be discussed. Additionally, recommendations for future research will be made. Finally, concluding thoughts will be shared.

Implications for Social Work Practice

Findings from my study can be used to inform social work practice. Taking what the participants wished that their parents had known about adopting transracially, as well as what their parents did that served them well, and applying it to social work practice could improve adoption experiences for transracial adoptees. Recommended practices, informed by my study, will be proposed at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

Micro

When working with parents considering transracial adoption, social workers ought to make sure that those prospective adoptive parents understand that love will not be enough to responsibly raise a transracially adopted child. Responsibly adopting a child transracially will require most prospective adoptive parents to make major changes in their lives. For example, parents who seek to adopt transracially ought to make friends of that same race/ethnicity of the children whom they hope to adopt. Along the same lines, parents ought to foster connections with individuals and/or communities that transracially adopted children can turn to in order to learn about their cultures of origin in an authentic manner.

Parents also need to educate themselves about their children's culture of origin. Without an understanding of the culture, they cannot truly appreciate it. This is significant as prospective transracial adoptive parents ought to show their children that they value all of them by valuing their culture of origin. Children might not feel comfortable fostering connections with their culture of origin if they feel that their culture of origin is not valued by their parents. Furthermore, parents ought to engage in self-reflection before adoption transracially. The decision to adopt should be made intentionally. Choosing to adopt transracially due to ease is not necessarily a good reason to adopt transracially.

Prospective transracial adoptive parents also need to understand that they should only adopt transracially if they are comfortable with their children reuniting with their birth families. Furthermore, parents should not wait for their children to broach the topic. Rather, they should talk openly with their children about their birth families so that children do not feel like the topic is taboo or off limits. Furthermore, transracial adoptive parents should only adopt transracially if they are comfortable with difference as ignoring transracial adoptees' undeniable differences doesn't make their difference disappear. Parents should be prepared to help their children navigate experiences of otherness. Parents can only do this if they first acknowledge that those experiences exist.

Mezzo

Agencies and organizations that work with transracial adoptees and their families ought to familiarize themselves with best practices around working with transracial adoptees and their families. Based on this knowledge, agencies and organizations ought to carry out practices that are in line with these best practices. For example, private adoption agencies ought to require that their social workers

thoroughly educate prospective transracial parents about the extra efforts required of parents who adopt transracially. Furthermore, to ward off isolation, agencies and organizations ought to train their social workers to connect transracial adoptees to authentic sources of social support.

Macro

Domestic adoption practices are dictated primarily by federal and state laws. Currently, no state or federal laws require transracial adoptive parents to complete transracial adoption specific training. Laws should be amended or developed in order to ensure that transracial adoptive parents are at least offered transracial adoption training. Ideally, this type of training would be required of transracial adoptive parents.

Reflections

I am a Latina transracial adoptee. I had assumed that my status as a transracial adoptee would help me recruit participants as I figured that Pact and online communities would be more receptive to a transracial adoptee. I did not anticipate my status as a transracial adoptee would help me as much as it did in my interviews. My participants seemed to feel comfortable talking to me as I understood their experiences in a way that most people cannot.

I identified with nearly all of what the participants shared. I identified with their conflicted view of their parents in particular. They all appreciated the good, safe lives and care that their adoptive parents provided for them. However, they were all frustrated with their parents' ignorance about transracial adoption. It is supremely frustrating that so much suffering could have been so easily avoided with proper parent education.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are likely experiences unique to transnational, transracial adoptees as opposed to domestically adopted transracial adoptees. I would recommend that future researchers include not only international adoptees, but also domestic adoptees in studies of transracial adoptees. I think the absence of domestic transracial adoptees in my study is largely attributable to the difficulty I had recruiting enough participants in general. After consulting with members of my Masters of Social Work cohort, I believe I might have had struggled to recruit more participants because I did not recruit participants in person. Cohort members who recruited participants in person seemed to have more success than those who recruited via email etc. If I could go back in time, I would recruit participants in person, or at least establish more of a relationship with the agency and groups from which I recruited. In order to recruit higher numbers of transracial adoptee participants, I recommend that future researchers dedicate at least some of their recruitment efforts to in-person recruitment. Furthermore, I recommend that future transracial adoptee researchers try to build relationships with the organizations and groups from which they recruit participants.

Additionally, I would recommend that future researchers recruit participants from public social service agencies. It is important to note that adoptees involved with these agencies often belong protected populations. Therefore, proper precautions must be taken when working with adoptees recruited from these agencies.

Finally, I would recommend that future researchers inquire further into transracial adoptees' recommendations around improving transracial adoptee experiences. Maria, Esperanza, and Hannah all offered sage advice to parents seeking to adopt transracially. I'm sure other transracial adoptees are willing to

share their own equally useful pieces of advice. Because this type of information can be used to improve transracial adoption practices, it is vital and deserves to be investigated further.

Conclusion

Tactfully acknowledging difference in transracial adoptive families is no easy feat. Doing so requires adoptive parents to go out of their way to educate themselves. However, thoughtfully acknowledging difference can enable adoptees to feel comfortable expressing feelings of isolation, confusion, and desires for reconnection. When adoptees feel comfortable expressing these feelings and parents have education around how to support their children as they navigate these feelings, parents can meaningfully support their children, and thereby, improve their children's lives. I believe that, if more adoptive parents were made aware of transracial adoptees experiences and were provided more adoption-related education, adoptive parents would choose to put in the extra work needed to best support their children.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

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1. How old were you when you were adopted?
2. Were you adopted domestically or internationally?
3. What race/ethnicity are your adoptive family members?
4. How do you identify racially/culturally/ethnically?
5. Did your parents ever make efforts to expose you to your culture of origin?
If so, how?
6. How would you describe your family's opinion of Latinxs?
7. What was your opinion of Latinxs growing up? Did that opinion change at all as you got older?
8. Did you feel like you fit in with the Latinx community growing up? What about now?
9. Do you feel like you fit in with the [parents' culture of origin] community growing up? What about now?
10. Growing up, were you comfortable talking with your parents about discrimination against Latinxs? What about now?
11. As a Latinx transracial adoptee, have you faced any other challenges we haven't discussed?
12. Do you feel being a Latinx transracial adoptee has enriched your life? If so, how?
13. Is there anything that you wish your parents had known about what being a transracial Latinx adoptee was like for you growing up?
14. What advice would you give people interested in transracial adoption?
15. Would you consider adopting transracially? Why or why not?

Debriefing: Some of what we discussed today might have brought unpleasant feelings or memories. In light of that, I'm wondering how are you feeling after the interview?

If they're feeling emotional distress: I can facilitate a mental health referral to help you process these emotions if you would like.

APPENDIX B: RECRUITING EMAIL

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Hi Everyone,

My name is Helen Bowles Shih I am a second year Masters of Social Work Student at CSU Fresno. I am writing my master's thesis on transracial adoption. I've found that there is lots of research that examines the adoption-related experiences of Asian American and African American transracial adoptees. However, there has been very little research on the adoption-related experiences of Latinx transracial adoptees, a group of particular interest to me as I myself am a Latina transracial adoptee.

I'm hoping to interview other Latinx transracial adoptees in order to add our voices to the transracial adoption research literature.

If you are interested in participating in my study or are interested in learning more about my study, please contact me at: helenmbowles@mail.fresnostate.edu. Please include Latinx TRA Study in the subject line.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration,

Helen Bowles Shih

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

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You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Dr. Betty Garcia and graduate social work student Helen Shih. We hope to learn more about the experiences of Latinx transracial adoptees. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a Latinx transracial adoptee and over 18 years of age.

If you decide to participate, Helen Shih will travel to your area and interview you in person or interview you via video chat on Skype should you reside prohibitively far away. Interviews will be audio recorded and require roughly forty minutes of your time. It is possible that answering questions about your experience as a Latinx transracial adoptee will bring up negative memories and emotions, leading you to feel upset. If you this happens, Helen will have counseling resources on hand and can facilitate a referral for you with your permission.

Potential benefits include: (1) feeling satisfied knowing that their participation in my study could lead social work professionals to have better-informed practice when working with other Latinx transracial adoptees and potentially transracial adoptees in general and (2) feeling satisfied knowing that the study's contribution to the growing body of research on transracial adoption could, as a small piece of the collective whole, potentially influence policy that improves the experiences of transracial adoptees. We cannot, however, guarantee that you will receive any benefits from this study.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. If you give us your permission by signing this document, we plan to share a write up of our study's findings (that do not identify

participants by name) with Pact, Bay Area non-profit serving transracial adoptees and their families. Data collected will not be shared. Subjects will be compensated with a \$10 Starbucks gift card.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not, in any way, prejudice your future relations with California State University, Fresno or Pact. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. The Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects at California State University, Fresno has reviewed and approved the present research.

If you have any questions, please ask us. If you have any additional questions later, Dr. Betty Garcia will be happy to answer them. Her phone number is: (559) 278 – 2550. Questions regarding the rights of research subjects may be directed to Kris Clarke, Chair, CSU Fresno Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects, (559) 278-4468.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

**YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE.
YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO
PARTICIPATE, HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE.**

Date _____

Signature _____

Signature of Investigator _____

APPENDIX D: CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

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