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Strengthening Your Family
an empowering and inspiring webinar series

Building Self-Esteem and Racial Identity in Transracially Adopted Youth

featuring Dr. Leigh Leslie and Debbie Riley

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Jockey Being Family

Jockey Being Family generously funds our monthly Strengthening Your Family webinar series.

Who is Jockey Being Family?

Jockey International is a manufacturer, distributor and retailer of underwear and sleepwear for men, women, and children and is active in more than 120 countries. Jockey® created Jockey Being Family, a foundation that helps adoptive families remain strong and stay together-forever because Jockey believes that even one failed adoption is too many. To learn more about Jockey Being Family, please visit [http://www.jockeybeingfamily.com/](http://www.jockeybeingfamily.com/)

Jockey International’s C.E.O., Debra Waller, was adopted herself as an infant.

“Jockey Being Family is about bringing people together and it is exhilarating to have impacted the lives of so many families. We set out to strengthen adoptive families but we here at Jockey have also been equally touched by this program, the families, and their stories.”

-Debra S. Waller
Building Self-Esteem and Racial Identity in Transracially Adopted Youth

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With decades of experience, our mission is to strengthen the well-being of children and families of all adoptive experiences by providing them the adoption competent services and resources they need, including:

- Pre- and post-adoption counseling, assessment and therapeutic services
- Individual and group therapy for kids, teens and adults
- Crisis intervention, support and assistance with school issues
- Training, education & interactive workshops – for families, educators and professionals
- Nationally recognized post-adoption models
- New family game: 52 Ways to Talk about Adoption
- Award-winning print publications, articles, newsletters and online resources
The Department of Family Science
School of Public Health,
The University of Maryland

- An inter-disciplinary academic department dedicated to promoting the well-being of families through research, practice, and policy

- Offers a clinical Master’s degree in Couple and Family Therapy and Ph.D. degrees in Family Science and Maternal and Child Health
Why should we spend time studying it and considering it’s implication for our work with transracial adoptive families?

Many have argued that “racial” stratification is the most pronounced social hierarchy in the U.S. and the placement of one’s racial group on that hierarchy has dramatic implications for how a person is treated and the extent to which a person has access to resources and opportunities.

Discrimination and bias based on one’s physical features and presumed race are still very much a reality of life in the U.S. today.

Excellent resource: The PBS documentary *Race: The Power of an Illusion*
**Talking About Race**

- Race is a reality that powerfully shapes our personal and social lives; it impacts transracial adoptive families – and transracially adopted children and youth – in important ways.

- Transracial adoptive families may sense that race is important but may not have the ability to bring it up themselves (for all the reasons that we talked about earlier).

- Transracial adoptive families may deny that race is important (“love is enough”) or may minimize it as relatively unimportant.

- Transracial adoptive families may place greater emphasis on race than their child is comfortable with.
Current State of Transracial Adoptions in U.S.

• 1992 was the last year adoption totals were amassed: 14% of non-relative adoptions were transracial adoptions (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute)

• According to 2000 U.S. Census report, out of 345,490,049 families with adopted children, 308,127 (18%) have family members of different races. (Child Welfare Information Gateway)

• In 2008 there were 17,229 international adoptions (U.S. Dept of Homeland Security)

• Between 7,000 and 13,000 children in foster care are adopted transracially year ([http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/09/NSAP/charbook/chartboook.cfm?ID=1](http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/09/NSAP/charbook/chartboook.cfm?ID=1))
Previous Research

• In general, transracial adoptees fare well, showing overall adjustment equal to same-race adoptees. (Feigelman, 2000.)

• Issues related to discrimination and discomfort about appearance were significant correlates to adjustment difficulties (Simon & Alstein, 2002.)

• Adolescent racial minority adoptees tend to experience difficulties in self-esteem and identity development (Weinberg, 2004).
Beyond Culture Camp – Evan B. Donaldson
Adoption Institute (McGinnis, Smith Ryan, & Howard, 2009)

- Most comprehensive study to date on adult Korean-American adoptees

- Racial/ethnic identity was more important to Korean than to White adoptees at all ages, particularly in young adulthood, where 81% reported it being important.

- While equal to Whites in being happy as members of their ethnic group and feeling good about their ethnic background, they were less likely to have a strong sense of belonging to their ethnic group. They were also less likely than Whites to feel welcomed by others of their own race – only 13% reported they felt welcome “very often” by other Koreans.
While most Korean adopted respondents reported achieving some level of comfort with their race/ethnicity as adults, one-third remained uncomfortable or only somewhat comfortable.

Korean-Americans grew up in overwhelmingly White communities. Almost 9 out of 10 reported their communities in childhood were less than 10% Asian.

Korean adoptees faced race based discrimination much more common than adoption based discrimination. 80% reported race-based discrimination from strangers and 75% from classmates.
Limitations of Previous Research

- Typically from the perspective of parents

- Reflective data from adult adoptees

- Does not reflect the recent research findings on racial minority youth – particularly racial identity and racial socialization
Challenges in Transracial Adoptive Families

Parenting transracially adopted youth presents unique challenges surrounding race and culture.

- Much of what transracial adoptive families want to do is help their adopted child fit and feel that they belong – that they are NOT different.

- When a child is transracially adopted, they are visibly different. It can be challenging for families to find the balance between integrating the child into their family and dealing with reality that differences exist.
The socially constructed meaning of race in the U.S. creates the need to consider how transracially adoptive families address racial differences within their families.

Transracial adoptees are primarily exposed to white cultural orientations and are not socialized to their minority status (Samuels, 2009), making them increasingly vulnerable to the stress associated with experiences of discrimination.

White adoptive parents may lack knowledge, skills, and resources to foster ethnic identity development in minority youth and to prepare their minority children to handle experiences of racial discrimination.
Race and Racial Socialization in the Context of Transracial Adoption

• The transmission of a parent’s world views about race and ethnicity to children by way of subtle, overt, deliberate and unintended mechanisms.” (Hughes, 2003, p.15).

• Deliberate Racial Socialization includes:
  ✓ Cultural socialization, emphasizing messages of ethnic pride, heritage, and tradition
  ✓ Preparation for bias, preparing children for discrimination

Racial socialization contributes to minority children’s self-esteem, ethnic-identity, ability to cope with discrimination, academic achievement, and psychosocial outcomes (Hughes, Rodriguez, Smith, Johnson, Stevenson, & Spicer, 2006).
UMD/C.A.S.E. Study

- **Primary Goal** – Identify family factors that contribute to psychological well-being of transracially adopted youth, with a particular focus on racial socialization

- National on-line survey of parents AND youth (age 13-18)

- 85 parent-adolescent respondent pairs –

- Criteria:
  - All parents white
  - Child in home before age of 4
The research that was presented by Dr. Leigh Leslie within this presentation has recently been published. Therefore, unfortunately, we are not permitted to send you those specific slides that talked about the variables, details and results. Dr. Leigh Leslie has provided below the reference of where you may access the study.


In addition, the Conclusions of the study have remained as part of this PowerPoint slide presentation.
Conclusions

- As expected, lower parental color-blind attitudes and more parental multiethnic experiences predicted more racial socialization practices in transracially adoptive families.
- In terms of differences in racial socialization based on race, perhaps parents who adopt Latino children engage in the lowest levels of racial socialization, perhaps because these children most closely resemble white children and can “pass” as white.
- Parents who adopt black children either 1) do not see the importance of race and therefore engage in less racial socialization or 2) recognize the meaning and difficulty of being black in America and therefore engage in very high levels of racial socialization.
Discussion

- **Racial Socialization**
  - Racial socialization appeared to protect transracially adopted youth from the stress resulting from experiences of discrimination.
  
  - Adolescents with high racial socialization experienced lower levels of discrimination-related stress.
  - Racial socialization had the greatest protective impact for transracially adopted youth who experienced greater racial discrimination.
Implications

The data has implications for parents adopting transracially and professionals working in the transracial adoption area.
Questions to Consider

- Do you believe “we are all of the human race” or do you focus on the implications of race for yourselves and their children.
- Examine your lifestyle; i.e., where you live, racial composition of social network, professionals you utilize
- What role do you think race will play in your family, in your life and that of your child?
- How do you think that your being white and your child being a minority will effect the way you parent?
- When do you think it might be awkward to talk about race with your child?

Think about your child, not as a 6 year old, but as a 16 year old. What special challenges do you think there may be to parenting a minority teenager?

Think about how comfortable you are with attracting attention, appreciating multiple perspectives, being flexible in the face of complexity, and seeking help.
Post-Placement Considerations: Families
Racial socialization is a key variable by which minority adolescents develop positive racial identity.
**Parental Issues**

- Discomfort in hearing about your children’s negative experiences about race
- Talking about race will make kids feel different
- Hold onto the desire that love will cure all
Think about...

People of different races are going to have different experiences based on race and may not be equally sensitive to the significance of race in structuring their daily life.
White parents frequently don’t have the life experiences that equip themselves to prepare children for racism.

• Instill value of your child’s race
• Instill pride and coping strategies – evolves developmentally
Faulty thinking: We are all the human race

Racism is old fashioned thinking

Racism is just ignorance

It doesn’t matter what color you were raised, just as long as someone love you

Everyone is equal
Ways Race and Ethnicity Can Impact Transracial Adoptive Families

- The reactions of the public to the interracial nature of your families
- Parents’ reactions to public comments and attitudes
- Children’s experiences with racism at school and in the community
- Children’s struggles with racial and ethnic identity
- Parents’ own color-blindness – possibly as a result of a strong desire that their children “fit in”
The best outcome of racial identity is not seen as a racially focused identity with strong ethnic identification, but the integration of race into one’s identity in a way that supports a sense of self worth.
Research indicates that when racial minority youth have personally explored the meaning of their racial membership for themselves, have a positive view of their race, and a secure identification as a member of that race, they have higher self-esteem and more positive mental health outcomes than youth who do not take these steps (e.g., Seaton, Scottham & Sellars, 2006).
Most definitions of racial socialization also emphasize the protective features of this socialization in preparing minority children to cope with racism, including:

- Learning about and developing pride in one’s race and heritage
- Teach about their racial identity BEFORE learning about racism – prevent internalization of the victim/oppressor role.
- Talking openly about racism – “Racism is out there, but it should not let it stop you!”
- Providing children with techniques for coping with racism.
Techniques that support healthy racial socialization for children

1) Self Exploration

- Examine your own negative and positive internalized attitudes about race.
- Consider how race is discussed in your family.
- Where do you have your own connections to people of color?
- Can you see the relevance of race in your children’s experience?
- When do you think the subject of race will surface for your child? Are you prepared?
Techniques that support healthy racial socialization for children: (continued)

2) Talk about Race and Culture
   - Educate your child about the historic roots of ideological and institutionalized racism
   - Talk with your children about racial issues, even if they do not bring up the subject. Use natural opportunities, such as a television program, newspaper article, school assignment that talks about race to open communication.
   - Open communication about race and handling discrimination will help children cope. Kids’ need more than “Don’t let it bother you.” or “Those people are just ignorant.”
   - Respond to your child’s hurt feelings by allowing the child to talk about the experience with the parent
   - When children are older, discuss with them why you decided to adopt a child of color. Explore their thoughts.
Lois Melina, a Caucasian adoptive parent of Korean children and a noted adoption writer, lists four questions for parents to ask their child to help the child deal with challenging situations:

1. What happened?
2. How did that make you feel?
3. What did you say or do when that happened?
4. If something like that happens again, do you think you will deal with it the same way?
3) Refuse to Tolerate Racially and Ethnically Biased Remarks

- Empower your children how to handle remarks by providing them with a repertoire of responses and model for them. Parents, for example, can say: “I find your remark offensive. You can’t talk to me that way. Please don’t say that type of thing again.”
- Ask your children if they would like you to intervene when encountering these remarks.
Techniques that support healthy racial socialization for children: (continued)

4) Educate Relatives
   • They can be part of the problem and or the solution - what are their biases and beliefs?

5) Promote Opportunities for Connection with Others of Color
   • Expose child to significant role models and relationships of racial origin.
   • Affirm their minority group can make positive achievements.
   • Provide child with diverse experiences so that they are not dependent on stereotypes of what it means to be a member of their race.
   • Ask yourself – “Who is having dinner at my table?”
Providing healthy racial socialization is a developmental process: continue the dialogue!
Certificates of Attendance

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Registration is FREE for first 150 registrants! The coupon codes will be available later this week.

For a schedule of our pre-recorded webinars on our most requested topics, please visit adoptionsupport.org/indemand
References