Module #12: Race and Ethnicity in Adoption

Teaching Script
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Overview of Module
This Module provides opportunities for students to explore the significance of race and ethnicity in their lives and the lives of clients with whom they are working. Students will identify the barriers that both they and the families with whom they are working may experience in talking about race. The Module addresses the formation of racial identity for all children, with a particular focus on minority children. The training Module further addresses racial socialization and the challenges that transracial adoptive families may face, particularly when white families adopt children of color. The Module provides students with opportunities to explore their own personal beliefs and assumptions about race and transracial adoption. Students also are provided with opportunities to learn techniques and strategies for assisting white parents in providing effective racial socialization and promoting their minority children’s healthy racial identity development.

Learning Objectives
Students will be able to:
1. Define the concepts: “race”, “ethnicity,” “culture” and “transracial adoption”.
2. Identify two barriers that transracial adoptive families may experience in talking about race in daily life and demonstrate (in a case study discussion) how the clinician can start the discussion about race
3. Define the term: “racial identity” and give two examples of issues that individuals who are transracially/transculturally adopted experience with regard to racial identity
4. Identify one or more strategies for helping parents promote a child’s healthy racial/ethnic identity, including one or more strategies for helping adoptive families connect with their children’s racial heritage
5. Demonstrate two ways in which the clinician can (re) start and support the conversation on racial identity
6. Define the term: “racial socialization” and give two examples why white parents of children of color find racial socialization more challenging than parents of color
7. Identify one or more therapeutic techniques or strategies for helping parents engage in effective racial socialization of their children
8. Define the term: “microaggression” and detect examples of microaggressions in scripted role plays
9. Give three examples of how therapists can assist families that have adopted transracially

Materials Needed
- 2 Flip charts and markers
- LCD Projector and Screen
- Agenda
- Copy of PowerPoint Slides
- Two copies of scripts for Participatory Role Play

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• A flag for each participant (to be waved when a microaggression occurs) [small flags are sufficient] (supplied by CASE)
• Slips of paper with the following:

1. Two-year old Hannah was adopted from China six months ago. She is in day care with white and Latino children.

2. Five year old Aaron is in kindergarten. His white parents adopted him from foster care about one year ago. He is a very observant child and notices what is alike and different in everything around him.

3. Chloe is ten years old and was adopted by her white paternal grandmother after her African American mother was unable to get off of drugs and the court terminated her mother’s rights. Her dad passed away a few years ago. She is attending a primarily white school.

4. Jamal is a 16 year old adopted by his white parents from foster care when he was 9. He has grown up in a white environment, being one of the few youth of color in school and on his sports teams.

Make a sufficient number of strips, repeating as necessary, so that each small group can draw a slip of paper.

• Handouts:

  Handout #12.1: Race Literacy Quiz
  Handout #12.2: Immigrant Orphans Adopted by U.S. Citizen by Gender, Age and Region and County of Birth: Fiscal Year 2010
  Handout #12.3: Adopting a Biracial Infant
  Handout #12.4: Raising a Child of a Different Race: Deliberate Parenting Can Make a Difference
  Handout #12.5: Children’s Understanding of Race and Adoption
  Handout #12.6: How a Child Develops A Positive Racial Identity [Source: Dr. Joe Crumbley]
  Handout #12.7: Parenting Tasks that Facilitate Positive Racial Identity
  Handout #12.8: My Story
  Handout #12.9: Role Play Scenarios
  Handout #12.10: The First Sting of Racism
  Handout #12.11: Race and Ethnicity in Adoption: A Resource Guide for Mental Health Professionals
• YouTube Videos to prepare to show:

  Identity for the Transracial Adoptee - Excerpt
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqpeqXJXMrw&feature=related

  "Where Do I Belong?"
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0xmpoC-bsU&feature=related

  Transracial Adoption: A family's experience and advice to those considering adopting transracially
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTZwUks_wFE

  Adoption - An Adoptee Talks About Racism
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qz4e6PQUhxY&feature=related

  Adoption: Being Chinese in America
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oN-m-I45z1I&NR=1

• Two copies of two role plays (found at the end of the Teaching Script)
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Students’ Assignment

Checklist

✓ Take the Race Literacy Test and think about the follow up questions for class discussion.
✓ Read Handout #12.4 and think about the follow up questions for class discussion.
✓ Read the article, *Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implication for Clinical Practice* online and bring examples of microaggressions to class.

Assignments

Pre-Module Assignment #12.1: Take the Race Literacy Quiz (Handout #12.1) and then check your answers against the answer key. When you have completed this work, think about the following questions and be prepared to share your thoughts in class.

1. How accurate were you in answering the questions on the Race Literacy Quiz?
2. Did any of the correct answers surprise you? If so, why?
3. What, if anything, did you learn about your own racial literacy from this very short quiz?

Pre-Module Assignment #12.2: Read Handout #12.4, *Raising a Child of a Different Race: Deliberate Parenting Can Make a Difference*, and jot down your responses to the following questions. Be prepared to discuss these issues in class.

1. How does Jana view her and her husband’s responsibilities in parenting Ari? In supporting his identity development?
2. How does she view her family as a transracial family?
3. What lessons that she draws from her experience might be relevant to your work with transracial adoptive parents?

Pre-Module Assignment #12.3: Read the article, *Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implication for Clinical Practice*, by Derald Wing Sue and colleagues – found at: [http://www.olc.edu/~jolson/socialwork/OnlineLibrary/microaggression%20article.pdf](http://www.olc.edu/~jolson/socialwork/OnlineLibrary/microaggression%20article.pdf)

Bring to class one or two examples of microaggressions in your own personal experience or in movies.
Pre-Module Assignment Checklist for Teachers

Students are to:

Pre-Module Assignment #12.1: Take the Race Literacy Quiz in Handout #12.1 and be prepared to discuss the following in class:
1. How accurate were you in answering the questions on the Race Literacy Quiz?
2. Did any of the correct answers surprise you? If so, why?
3. What, if anything, did you learn about your own racial literacy from this very short quiz?

Pre-Module Assignment #11.2: Read Handout #11.4, Raising a Child of a Different Race: Deliberate Parenting Can Make a Difference, and be prepared to discuss the following in class:
1. How does Jana view her and her husband’s responsibilities in parenting Ari? In supporting his identity development?
2. How does she view her family as a transracial family?
3. What lessons that she draws from her experience might be relevant to your work with transracial adoptive parents?

Pre-Module Assignment #12.4: Read the article, Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implication for Clinical Practice, by Derald Wing Sue and colleagues – found at: http://aanavi.com/articles_files/racial-microaggressions-in-everyday-life---derald-wing-sue002c-et-al.pdf and bring one or two examples of microaggressions from their own experiences to class.

Teacher Assignments:
- Verify the link for the article by Dr. Sue and colleagues (Pre-Module Assignment #12.4). If this link is not longer live, research and provide students with a live link.
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Module #12: Race and Ethnicity in Adoption

9AM - 9:15AM  Welcome and Announcements

Welcome to our Module today on race and ethnicity in adoption. We want to thank several people who assisted in the development of this Module:

- Dr. Leigh Leslee
- Robert O’Connor
- Dr. Ruth McRoy
- Dr. Devon Brooks
- Dr. Amanda Baden

Large Group Discussion: Before we begin our Module today that focuses on race and ethnicity in adoption, what adoption issues have come up in your practice since our last Module together?

9:15AM – 10:15AM  Introduction  [Learning Objective #1]

Lecture

In the last several decades, race has been perhaps one of the most controversial issues in the area of adoption. As you learned in an earlier Module, there have been, and continue to be, strong opinions expressed by many professionals, organizations, adoption workers, adoptive families, and the community at large about race and transracial adoption. You probably have some thoughts or opinions about the desirability of transracial adoption – thoughts and opinions that may affect your clinical work with adoptive families and birth families. We will be talking all of these issues today.

First, let’s look at the learning objectives for our class today. Students will be able to:

1. Define the concepts: “race”, “ethnicity,” “culture” and “transracial” adoption.

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2. Identify two barriers that transracial adoptive families may experience in talking about race in daily life and demonstrate (in a case study discussion) how the clinician can start the discussion about race.

3. Define the term: “racial identity” and give two examples of issues that individuals who are transracially/transculturally adopted experience with regard to racial identity.

4. Identify one or more strategies for helping parents promote a child’s healthy racial/ethnic identity, including one or more strategies for helping adoptive families connect with their children’s racial heritage.

5. Demonstrate two ways in which the clinician can (re) start and support the conversation on racial identity.

6. Define the term: “racial socialization” and give two examples why white parents of children of color find racial socialization more challenging than parents of color.

7. Identify one or more therapeutic techniques or strategies for helping parents engage in effective racial socialization of their children.

8. Define the term: “microaggression” and detect examples of microaggressions in scripted role plays.

9. Give three examples of how therapists can assist families that have adopted transracially.

To begin, before we focus specifically on transracial and transcultural adoption, it is important to step back and look at what the terms “race”, “culture” and “ethnicity” mean. In your pre-work, you took a quiz of selected questions from the Race Literacy Quiz and you checked your answers against the correct answers. We asked you to think about your experience with this quiz.

Handout #12.1. Race Literacy Quiz

Large Group Discussion

As you feel comfortable sharing:

1. How accurate were you in answering the questions on the Race Literacy Quiz?
2. Did any of the correct answers surprise you? If so, why?

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3. What, if anything, did you learn about your own racial literacy from this very short quiz?

As we have recognized, this quiz provides very powerful food for thought. As we learned (or perhaps already knew) from Question #1, we tend to think of a person as being of a certain “race” based on such things as:

- Skin color
- Facial features
- Hair
- The region of the world that the person comes from
- How the person self-identifies in terms of race
- Cultural features such as food or traditions

But:

- Geneticists have now established that race cannot be determined by our DNA. Scientists now unequivocally state that biologically speaking, “race” does not exist.
- It is common to find two people who identify themselves as white and black who have exactly the same skin tone.

It is fair to say that there has been, and still is, much confusion over what race is. Perhaps the most accurate definition of race is:

*A subjective and socially constructed concept used to categorize and stratify people. In most places, race assessment is based on physical markers, such as skin color and hair and is presumed to reflect a common biological ancestry.*

By “socially constructed,” we mean that “race” has no biological basis, but exists only to the extent that people in a certain place and time agree on what it is. Great variations and inconsistencies exist as to what has been thought to constitute different races over time and in different places. For example, in the late 1800s in the U.S, immigrants from southern Europe, primarily Greece and Italy, were thought of as “black.” That said, “race” remains a powerful,
socially constructed concept that impacts us psychologically, socially, and politically. In other words, race may have no biological basis, but in our society, race matters.

By contrast, the terms ethnicity and culture, while also socially constructed, focus less on the physical differences among people. Let’s look at definitions of each:

**Culture:**
- The ideas, customs, values, and arts of a given people in a given period (Webster’s Dictionary)
- Culture is the sum total of ways of living, including values, beliefs, aesthetic standards, linguistic expression, patterns of thinking, behavioral norms, and styles of communication which a group of people have developed to assure its survival in a particular physical and human environment (DeGenova)

**Ethnicity:**
- Those who conceive of themselves as alike by virtue of their common ancestry, real or fictitious (Shibutani & Kwan)
- Segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves and/or others, to have a common origin (Yinger)
- Those who share a unique social and cultural heritage that is passed on from generation to generation (Mindel, Haberstein & Wright)

There is huge diversity in race, culture and ethnicity in the United States. The Federal Government has created five broad racial and ethnic categories for collecting census and other types of demographic information. Within each of the broad categories, including white Americans, there are many distinct ethnic subgroups:

- Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, for example, include 43 ethnic groups speaking over 100 languages and dialects.
- For American Indians and Alaska Natives, the Bureau of Indian Affairs currently recognizes 561 tribes.
- African Americans are also becoming more diverse, especially with the influx of refugees and immigrants from many countries of Africa and the Caribbean.
- White Americans, too, are a profoundly diverse group, covering the span of immigration from the 1400s to the 21st Century, and including innumerable cultural, ethnic, and social subgroups – such as Irish American, Italian Americans, and Greek Americans.
- For the 2000 US Census and beyond, the federal government uses the following racial categories: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; and White. Respondents may now select one or more races when they self-identify. The Census 2000 questionnaires also include a sixth
racial category: Some Other Race. There are also two minimum categories for ethnicity: Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino. Hispanics and Latinos may be of any race.

**Large Group Discussion**: How does this information impact the way that you think about the concepts of race, culture and ethnicity?

*NOTE to Trainer: Allow time for students to discuss their thoughts and reactions.*

**Lecture**

The other questions in the Quiz provided us with some important information on how people of color experience life. We will return to a more in-depth consideration of the impact of race – as well as ethnicity and culture – on people in general and transracial adoptive families, in particular, later today.

At this point, however, let’s turn to the concept of transracial and transcultural adoption. In our first Module together, we considered various definitions of transracial/transcultural adoption. To briefly review:

Some definitions of **transracial adoption** in the literature focus exclusively on race and others incorporate ethnicity. Some definitions are:

1. An adoption in which a family of one race adopts a child of another race.

2. The joining of racially different parents and children together in adoptive families.

3. An adoptive parent(s) adopting and raising a child of a different race and ethnicity from their or their partner’s race or ethnicity.
4. Placing a child who is of one race or ethnic group with adoptive parents of another race or ethnic group.

In the United States these terms usually refer to the placement of children of color or children from another country with Caucasian adoptive parents. Families of color do adopt white children. However, the great majority of transracial adoptions involve white parents adopting a child of color, which is why this training Module principally focuses on these families.

We also discussed how, whether we call an adoption a “transracial” or “transcultural” adoption, adoptive families will experience the impact of race and ethnicity on their lives.

We now have a source of information on transracial and transcultural adoption that is providing information that was previously not available to us: The Chartbook Based on the 2007 National Survey of Adoptive Parents. This was the first ever survey to provide representative information about the characteristics, adoption experiences and well being of adopted children in the United States.

- All information is reported by the children’s adoptive parents.
- The findings represent children under age 18 who were adopted and living with either adoptive parent.
- In total, information was gathered on 2,737 adopted children, representing nearly 1.8 million children throughout the nation.
- You can find a copy of the Chartbook and read more at: http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/09/NSAP/chartbook/chartbook.cfm?id=1

The first key finding on the race and ethnicity of adopted children in the US was that the race and ethnic distribution of adopted children is different from that of children in the general population.

- Adopted children are less likely to be white or of Hispanic origin than children in the general population and they are more likely to be black.

- The race and ethnicity of children varies depending on the type of adoption.
  - Children adopted privately as infants in the United States are more likely to be white.
  - Children adopted internationally are more likely to be Asian.
  - Children adopted from foster care are more likely to be black.

- The race and ethnic distribution of adopted children is different from that of adoptive parents.
Whereas a majority of adopted children are non-white, the majority of these children’s parents are white (73%).

Four out of 10 children have parents who report that they and their spouse/partner (if they have one) are of a different race, ethnicity and culture than their child. The following shows the percentage of families who reported transracial adoptions for the different types of adoption.

Let’s continue to look at transracial/transcultural adoptions through the three lenses of different types of adoption: the adoption of children from foster care, international adoption, and the adoption of infants in this country.

**Foster Care Adoption**

As we discussed in an earlier Module, the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act made clear that for adoptions arranged for children in foster care, race and ethnicity generally may not be used in making decisions about the adoptive families with whom children may be placed. Agencies receiving federal child welfare dollars may not delay or deny a child’s foster or adoptive placement based on race, color or national origin.

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – which defines a transracial adoption as the adoption of a child by a family where one parent is of a different race than the child.
- It has been estimated that between 13% and 14% of all adoptions from foster care are transracial, although one estimate puts the percentage as high as 26%. This translates to between 7,000 and 13,000 children in foster care each year being adopted transracially.

**International Adoption**

In your small groups, review Handout #12.2 together and discuss:

- Are the children’s countries of origin the countries from which you expected to see the largest number of children?
- Are you surprised by the large number of countries of origin for children? What does this say about our work on race and ethnicity issues with adoptive families?
Domestically Adopted Infants

The third group is of children who are privately adopted in this country as infants – that is, the children are not in foster care and the adoptions are arranged by private adoption agencies, lawyers or facilitators. As we saw from the Chartbook data, some private infant adoptions in this country involve white families adopting African American and, in many cases, biracial infants. In some cases, multi-racial couples seek to adopt biracial infants. It is not uncommon to find entries on various blogs on the Internet in which individuals are seeking to adopt biracial children. Let’s look at Handout #11.3 which has two examples that help illustrate the thinking that may be behind taking this path to family formation.

Return to your small groups and read the two posts on Handout #12.3. Discuss the questions on the handout following the two posts.

Facilitate the reporting out and make the following points as needed:

First, what are some of the factors that are leading each of these individuals to seek to adopt a biracial child?
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*Mention the following if not raised:*

For Post #1:
- Perceived greater availability of African American and biracial infants to adopt
- Perceived shorter time to adoption for these infants
- Perceived lower costs involved in adopting these infants

For Post #2:
- Infertility
  - The couple is multi-racial; she may see a biracial child as reflecting both of their identities
  - Possible assessment that she has much to offer a child who might otherwise not have the benefits she can provide

Second, would you expect different issues to arise given the different motivations for wanting to adopt a biracial child?

*Mention the following if not raised:*

- Potential differences in understanding the child’s racial heritage and background
- Potential differences in exposing the child to individuals of the child’s racial heritage
- Potential differences in the child’s identity formation as a biracial person
- Potential differences in the child’s racial socialization
- Potential differences in the parents’ full understanding of how to prepare the child for racism, discrimination and prejudice

We have talked about transracial and transcultural adoption from the perspective of the adoption of children in foster care in this country, international adoption and the adoption of infants in this country. Let’s stop for a moment and look at our own thoughts and beliefs about transracial adoption.

### Partner Sharing

Please find a partner and to the extent you are comfortable, share your own personal and/or professional experiences with transracial adoption and what you see as the benefits and challenges of transracial adoption. Are there issues that you have encountered therapeutically as a result of your personal values or professional experience with transracial adoption?
Ask **individuals** to share their exchanges to the extent that they feel comfortable. Ask the following:

1. What issues did you discuss from the perspective of your own values or professional experiences with transracial adoption?
2. How did it feel to talk with your partner about race?

**10:15AM – 10:45AM Talking About Race: Part 1 [Learning Objective #2]**

**Lecture**

If race has been found to not exist biologically, why should we spend time studying it and considering its implication for our work with transracial adoptive families? The most simple answer is that race is one of the primary factors (along with gender and class) structuring our personal and social lives. 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. This notion of the pervasive influence of race in our lives is chronicled in the PBS documentary *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, which we highly recommend to you.

**Large Group Discussion:** Why is it important that clinicians be able to talk with transracial adoptive families about race?

*Note to Trainer. Allow a few minutes for students to contribute their thoughts, then proceed with the discussion, mentioning the following if not raised:*
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.

You read Handout #12.4 as part of your pre-work and gave some thought to several questions regarding Jana’s range of responses that she as a white parent experienced in connection with her son’s African American and Latino heritage – including putting more emphasis on race than her son did.

We asked you to consider three questions after reading Jana’s article:

1. How does Jana view her and her husband’s responsibilities in parenting Ari? In supporting his identity development?
2. How does she view her family as a transracial family?
3. What lessons that she draws from her experience might be relevant to your work with transracial adoptive parents?

Let’s talk about each one. **Note to Trainer: Facilitate a discussion of each of the three questions.**

As clinicians, we may confront challenges in talking comfortably about race with families.
It is important to first acknowledge that for many people it can be difficult to talk about race. It is important to understand why this might be true. Let’s look at some reasons why families may have difficulty talking about race.

Some general reasons are:

- **Belief in the value of colorblindness.**
  Over the last 50 years in the U.S., a belief has developed that the way to avoid being racist is to be colorblind and not talk about race. The assumption underlying this approach is that if we don’t talk about race we are treating all people as equals. While this may be a noble idea, the truth is that people see color and often react to people based on their presumed race. To ignore this is to deny the lived experience of people of color.

- **Fear of offending someone**
- **Uncertainty about our own racial beliefs**
- **Awareness of having behaved in a discriminatory way and feelings of embarrassment about it**

**Large Group Discussion:** Are there other reasons that you can think of?

Another possible reason that we as clinicians and others may be reticent to talk about race is that we engage in what is called the “dominant model of thinking” about race in the US. Some of the elements of this model of thinking include:

- **The U.S. has made considerable progress around race and, if government now favors anyone, it is African Americans (and people of color more generally)**
- **Individuals are “self-making.” That is, what they accomplish is entirely a matter of their own will and desire.**
- **To the extent that racial inequality exists, then, it is a by-product of the inability and unwillingness of individuals to properly adhere to basic American values like hard work and personal responsibility.**
Large Group Discussion: What are your thoughts about this “dominant model of thinking” about race? Have you experienced others who endorse this model of thinking? How might this model of thinking impact the openness of individuals to talking about race?

Lecture
Families also may find it difficult to talk about race with one another or with their therapist as it impacts their families. Some reasons for this may include:

- Desire to continue believing that love is enough
- Discomfort in talking about why they adopted transracially
- Avoiding conversations that make family members seem different
- Discomfort in hearing about their children’s negative experiences and children wanting to spare the parents’ feelings
- Speaking about race when the therapist is of different race than the parents or child—fear that they may offend and or be perceived as racist.

Large Group Discussion: Have you encountered any of these issues in your work with adoptive families?

We will continue our discussion of talking about race after our break.
Lecture

Though families may have difficulties talking about race, race nonetheless structures life in important ways for transracial adoptive families and will at some point directly impact transracially adopted youth.

We can expect that white families who adopt children of color may not be prepared for the impact of race/ethnicity on their lives. This is particularly so for families who do not already live in and interact daily (not just at work) with others who share their child’s racial background.

Individuals’ awareness of race tends to vary as a function of their own race. In other words, those people whose racial group is at the top of the social hierarchy tend to be much less aware of the impact of race on their daily lives than those whose groups are further down the social hierarchy.

In sociological terms, this is referred to as “white privilege” (see the article by McIntosh on your reading list). This means that whites, as the dominant group in this country, are frequently not aware of all the benefits they receive simply because they are white. Further, whites are more likely to have the privilege of not having to pay attention to race and racism if they choose. Of course, we know there are variations in white privilege. White privilege interacts with other privileges so that, for example, a wealthy white person probably has to attend to race less than a poor white person, and white privilege is going to be different in Montana than in Philadelphia. And yet regardless of one’s other characteristics, there are benefits, and benefits of the doubt, that white people receive in our society that they often are unaware of.

Small Group Work: Let’s stop for a moment and talk in our small groups about white privilege. How have you seen “white privilege” play out in your own personal or professional life?

Report Out

Facilitate a reporting of examples of “white privilege” in participants’ lives.
Lecture

The reality that the recognition of the impact of race in our lives often varies by race is particularly relevant when we begin to think about transracial adoptive families. These are families formed of people of different races who are going to have very different experiences based on race and who may not all be equally sensitive to the significance of race in structuring their daily lives.

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 talking about issues that are directly related to the reality that differences exist. One way to think about this is to look at the family being different than the child rather than the child being different than the family.

Before we focus on how we as clinicians can help transracial adoptive families think and talk about race, let’s briefly review how children think about and understand race based on their age and stage of development.

Small Group Work

Return to your small groups and review the materials in Handout #12.5. Select one slip from a basket with a short description of a child. Use the chart in Handout #12.5 as a basis for discussing the child’s understanding of race and how you might work with the child’s adoptive family to support the child as he/she understands race at this stage of his/her life.

Slips:
1. Two-year old Hannah was adopted from China six months ago. She is in day care with white and Latino children.

2. Five year old Aaron is in kindergarten. His white parents adopted him from foster care about one year ago. He is a very observant child and notices what is alike and different in everything around him.

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3. Chloe is ten years old and was adopted by her white paternal grandmother after her African American mother was unable to get off of drugs and the court terminated her mother’s rights. Her dad passed away a few years ago. She is attending a primarily white school.

4. Jamal is a 16 year old adopted by his white parents from foster care when he was 9. He has grown up in a white environment, being one of the few youth of color in school and on his sports teams.

**Report Out**

*Facilitate the reporting out working through the age groups of children and youth. Ask each group to describe how their child would likely understand race and how they might work with the child’s adoptive family to support the child as he/she understands race.*

**Large Group Discussion**

Let’s look at two scenarios and consider:

- The impact of race/ethnicity issues on the adopted child and the adoptive family as a whole.
- At least one way that as clinicians, we might begin the conversation with the adoptive parents about race/ethnicity.

**Scenario #1.**

Donovan and Leslie, who are white, adopted a dark-skinned African American infant, Darryl, one year ago. On three different occasions, people whom they do not know have come up to them to ask if he is theirs. They are angry that people don’t just mind their own business.

- What is the impact of race/ethnicity on this family?
- How would you begin a conversation with Donovan and Leslie about race/ethnicity?
Note to Trainer: After the discussion, present the following:

- **Family Identity.** It is important for Donovan and Leslie to think about how they see their family. Do they see their family as a family of color or as a white family that has adopted an African American child? Or perhaps something else?

- The therapist can help Donovan and Leslie see themselves as a family of color. Depending on where they live, they may be a “conspicuous” family. Other people may see them as such and take liberties, albeit intrusive, that they otherwise wouldn’t if they were a same race family.

  As an example: In an article about transracial adoption in Vermont (which is 96.7% white), a parent, Sue Schmidt, who is white, described how when she is shopping for groceries with her sons, strangers sometimes come up to them and ask if they can touch the boys’ hair. Schmidt’s sons are both adopted — one is African American, the other biracial — and the soft dreadlocks on the younger 6-year-old attract a lot of attention. Schmidt’s answer is always the same — no — but she tries to use the interaction as an opportunity to bring up a topic.

- The therapist can help Donovan and Leslie think about how they can prepare their son over time about these types of behaviors on the part of strangers.

**Large Group Discussion**

*Scenario #2.* Alexa, age 15, is African American and was adopted at age 4. She asks her white parents if she can go over to hang out at her new boyfriend’s house. Her boyfriend and his family are African American. Her parents, Howard and Jean, respond by saying that they are not comfortable with her going over his house and tell her that she should invite him to her house. She accuses them of being racist. Howard and Jean are stunned that she would say this.
• What is the impact of race/ethnicity on this family?
• How would you begin a conversation with Howard, Jean and Alexa about race/ethnicity?

Lecture

Note to Trainer: Raise the following if not mentioned:
• The therapist can help Howard and Jean think through their objections to Alexa going to the boyfriend’s home. Is this something they routinely object to? If not, what has made them suggest that Alexa have him come to their house as opposed to her going to his home? Had they discussed and or considered their daughter dating a person of color? Is race a possible consideration? If so, what role is race playing in their decisions for Alexa? How do they see race factoring into other decisions that they may try to make for her?
• The therapist can work with Alexa on her feelings about her parents’ response. What role does she think race is playing in their suggestion that the boyfriend come to their home? What role is race currently playing in her life – with this boyfriend, at school, in the community and at home? Maybe we should also ask to explore whether there have been other circumstances where she felt that her parents struggled with race issues.

Lecture

To sum up, there are many ways that race/ethnicity may impact the lives of transracial adoptive families. Here are some of the ways that we have mentioned today.

• The reactions of the public to the interracial nature of their families
• Parents’ reactions to public comments and attitudes
• Children’s experiences with racism at school and in community
• Children’s struggles with racial and ethnic identity
• Parents’ own color-blindedness – possibly as a result of a strong desire that their “fit in”
It is very important that we, as clinicians, are comfortable talking with these families about race/ethnicity.

**Large Group Discussion:** As you thought about how you would begin a conversation about race with the adoptive parent(s) and/or adopted child in these case scenarios, what were your feelings? Did this conversation seem easy or hard?

These case scenarios raise important issues that we will be focusing on during the remainder of our Module today. We will be talking about children’s racial and ethnic identity when they are growing up in transracial or transcultural adoptive families. We will also talk about parenting and racial socialization, including issues related to equipping children with skills to cope with racism, discrimination and prejudice.

**11:45AM -- 12:30PM  Racial and Ethnic Identity: Part 1 [Learning Objectives #3, #4, #5]**

As we all know, an important component of mental health is the development of a positive identity. Identity consists of both a sense of who one is and a sense of belonging or membership to a group or multiple groups. While identity development begins in childhood, it is a major task of adolescence.

Research has shown that for racial minority youth, particularly pre-teens and teens, a very significant part of a healthy identity is the development of a positive racial identity. For minority youth, positive racial identity has been found to be associated with high self-esteem and serves as a buffer to the negative effects of bias and racism.

Here is a definition of “racial identity”:

*One’s sense of membership in a race. Racial identity is generally thought to consist of two components:*
  
  a) *The significance of race to one’s definition of self*
  
  b) *The evaluative judgments one makes of his/her race (Sellers, 1998).*

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Let’s look at some of the frameworks that have been proposed for understanding the development of racial and ethnic identity:

*Phinney* (1989) describes stages that individuals progress through in exploring the meaning of their own race/ethnicity – moving from denial of differences to an integrated awareness of race/ethnicity that incorporates pride in one own racial/ethnic identity and the ability to function in the larger society.

*Root* (1999) uses an ecological model to describe the development of racial and ethnic identity. This theory holds that racial and ethnic identity is fluid and constantly changes over time in response to experiences and different influences.

*Cross, Straus, and Fhagen-Smith* (1999) integrate the models developed by Phinney and Root. This theory holds that race may have a high or low salience in an individual’s identity. 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.

Articles by each of these writers are included on your reading list.

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).

Let’s look at some short videos in which transracially/transculturally adopted youth talk about identity issues. We will discuss each one after we see it.

Identity for the Transracial Adoptee - Excerpt
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqpeqXJXMrw&feature=related
In this video, "Identity for the Transracial Adoptee," adult adoptees of color explain how they felt they were “white” when they were at home and with their families, but soon realized that the outside world did not view them the same way.
Module #12: Race and Ethnicity in Adoption

Large Group Discussion:
1. How are these young adopted adults answering the question, “Who am I?”?
2. How does “being different” play out in their lives?
3. How does their identity depend on the context in which they find themselves?

"Where Do I Belong?"
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0xmpoC-bsU&feature=related
A young Korean adopted person talks about conflicting feelings of belonging and being an outsider when she first moves to San Francisco.

Large Group Discussion
• What issues arose for this young woman with respect to identity when she moved to San Francisco?
• In what way was her identity a protective factor? A risk factor?

Lecture
A recent study by the Evan B. Donaldson Institute (which is on your reading list) interviewed adults who were adopted from Korea by white parents and white adults adopted domestically about race/ethnicity and adoption issues. Here are some of their key findings:

Racial/ethnic identity was more important to Korean than to White adoptees at all ages, particularly in young adulthood. 60% of the Korean respondents indicated that their racial/ethnic identity was important to them by middle school, and it continued to
increase in importance during high school (67%), college (76%), and young adulthood (81%).

Korean adoptees were likely to have a stronger sense of ethnic identity than were White respondents. While being equal to Whites in agreeing they were happy about being a member 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, despite identifying strongly with it. They were also less likely than Whites to feel welcomed by others of their own race – only 13% reported that 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. Two factors were significant predictors of their comfort with their racial/ethnic identity:
- Self esteem
- Stronger ethnic identification

Korean-Americans grew up in overwhelmingly White communities. Almost 9 out of 10 reported their communities in childhood were less than 10% Asian and 67% reported that there was little to no racial identify in their communities. However, many of them moved to more racially diverse communities as adults -- almost half (47%) reported that there were large numbers of Asians in their current communities.

Korean adoptees faced discrimination as a result of their race and such discrimination was much more common for them than discrimination based on adoption status. 80% reported race-based discrimination from strangers and 75% from class mates. Nearly half (48%) reported negative experiences due to their race in interactions with childhood friends. 39% of Korean respondents reported race-based discrimination from teachers.

Large Group Discussion: What are your thoughts about these new research findings?
Transracial Adoption: A family’s experience and advice to those considering adopting transracially

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTZwUks_wFE
A mom and son discuss realities of growing up as a multi-racial adoptive family. Judy and Aaron Stigger share their insights, experiences and advice for Caucasian families considering adopting an African American child.

Large Group Discussion
1. How did “sticking out” affect Aaron?
2. What factors promoted Aaron’s positive racial identity?
3. What did Judy learn about herself as a transracial adoptive parent?

So how does a child develop a positive racial identity? Handout #12.6 provides information drawn from the excellent work done by Dr. Joe Crumbley, a psychotherapist in Philadelphia who extensively writes and trains on this issue.

The information covers theories of social learning, object relations, and identification – all of which are useful in explaining how a child’s identities (racial, religious, ethnic, class, and gender) develop. These theories are also useful in understanding the similarities and differences in how identities develop in children from dominant groups and children from minority groups that experience discrimination. Please review this handout on your own.

Dr. Joe Crumbley advises that parents can facilitate their children’s positive racial identity through seven tasks. Handout #12.7 provides more information on each of these tasks.
Handout #12.7 Parenting Tasks that Facilitate Positive Racial Identity

The seven parenting tasks are:

**TASK 1:** Acknowledge the existence of prejudice, racism, and discrimination.

**TASK 2:** Explain why the child's minority group is mistreated.

**TASK 3:** Provide the child with a repertoire of responses to racial discrimination.

**TASK 4:** Provide the child with role models and positive contact with his or her minority community.

**TASK 5:** Prepare the child for discrimination.

**TASK 6:** Teach the child the difference between responsibility to and for his or her minority group.

**TASK 7:** Advocate on behalf of your child's positive identity.

As clinicians, we are well acquainted with adolescent development and identity development issues that are inherent in that period of life. Does the transracially adopted adolescent experience different challenges than adolescents who are raised by their birth parents or who are adopted in race?

**Small Group Work**

In your small groups, look at Handout #12.8 My Story ([Source](http://library.adoption.com/articles/the-significance-of-racial-identity-in-transracially-adopted-young-adults.html)) and how one young adult who was adopted biracially describes his journey toward identity in adolescence. Then discuss:

1. What are your thoughts about this young man's journey?
2. How does race impact his search for identity?
3. If you were his therapist when he was 18, what might you expect your work with him to focus on?
Report Out

Facilitate the small groups in reporting out their discussions about each of the three questions.

12:30PM – 1:30PM   Lunch

1:30PM – 2:00PM   Racial and Ethnic Identity: Part 2 [Learning Objectives #3, #4, #5]

Before lunch we looked at a number of issues related to racial and identity development. Now, let’s look at a case example and apply what we have been learning about racial/ethnic development when children and youth are transracially/transculturally adopted.

Small Group Work   Handout #12.9 Role Play Scenario

Return to your small groups and select group members to play three roles: one person will be Tamika, the clinician, another will be Sandra, the adoptive mom, and the third person will be Joy, Sandra’s adopted daughter. The purpose of this role play is to practice how we, as clinicians, can (re)start and support a discussion on racial identity. This role play is drawn from a real life story. The remaining group members will be observers. As observers, notice how the therapist re-started the conversation and think about how you might have done so. Allow about 10 minutes for this activity.

Report Out
Facilitate the reporting out of the small groups’ work. Start by asking the participants who played the three roles:

1. Therapists: What was it like to re-start the conversation about Joy’s sense of racial identity? Did you find it hard or easy?
2. Mother and Daughter: As the adoptive mother and as the adopted teen, did you want to have this conversation? How did you feel as Tamika re-introduced the topic?
3. All Role Players: Given your experience in this brief Module, how might you together continue the work?

Then ask the observers:

1. What are your thoughts on how you might have re-started the conversation either the same or differently?
2. Having watched this role play, how might you continue this work?

Lecture

You might be interested in how Joy summed up her story:

Today, I’m often asked by friends and acquaintances who’ve adopted nonwhite children whether I think it’s important to address their child’s racial identity. I tell them yes, that no matter how strongly they wish to ignore their racial differences, their child must also be ready to meet the world beyond the family — and for that a child needs a strong positive feeling about being Asian, Latino, Indian. It has taken me years of hard work to understand what it means to be Korean. There have been moments of great joy, but it has also been, at times, a lonely journey — a journey I wish my family had been willing to take with me when I was still a little girl.

2:00PM – 2:45PM A Movie and Discussion
We will now watch *Struggle for Identity: Issues in Transracial Adoption*. This documentary, produced in collaboration with the New York State Citizens’ Coalition for Children, is a starkly realistic account of the transracial adoption experience. Narrated by young adults who were adopted as children, this documentary examines the effects of trans-racial adoption on individuals, families, and society.

*Note to Trainer: The documentary is 40 minutes. After the documentary, ask participants for their responses to it.*

**2:45PM – 3:00PM Short Stretch Break**

**3:00PM to 4:10PM Racial Socialization and Transracial Adoptive Parenting [Learning Objectives #6, #7, #8]**

The process by which minority adolescents develop a positive racial identity is the source of a great deal of study. One factor that is important in the process of identity development and that is particularly relevant for transracial adoptive families is racial socialization.

Here is a definition of **racial socialization:**

> “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).

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
- Talking openly about racism

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• Providing children with strategies for coping with racism

While research on racial minority families has shown a link between parent’s active racial socialization and positive racial identity in children, less research has been done with transracial families. Three issues, however, have been identified that I would like to focus on today.

**First**, many practitioners have expressed concerns that white parents frequently do not have the life experiences needed to help them prepare their children to deal with racism, discrimination and prejudice.

Let’s briefly look at these three terms:

The American Heritage Dictionary defines **racism** as:

Discrimination or prejudice based on race; the belief that race accounts for differences in human character or ability and that a particular race is superior to others.

The key distinction in the definition of **prejudice** is in its reference to pre-judgment—that is, deciding on a person’s qualities, characteristics and value on the basis of an arbitrary descriptor such as race, before knowing the facts. In general, prejudice refers to “any unreasonable attitude that is unusually resistant to rational influence.”

**Discrimination** refers to the recognition of differences among people and making choices based upon those qualities, be they perceived or real.


Handout #12.10 The First Sting of Racism

*Note to Trainer: Ask for a volunteer to read the story.*
Large Group Discussion:

1. Why do you think that her mother replied the way she did?
2. What was most unsettling to this child in her mother’s reply?
3. Would you consider the mother to be racist? If so, how would you work with the mother about the impact of her racism on her child? How would you help the child with her mother’s racism?
4. If you were working with this family as their therapist, how would you help them help their child deal with the racism she is encountering?

Let’s listen to a young adopted person talk about issues of parental racism.

Adoption - An Adoptee Talks About Racism
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qz4e6PQUhxY&feature=related
Lynne Conner, a Korean adoptee, discusses her mother’s inability to acknowledge racism.

Large Group Discussion: If you were working with Lynne as an adult adopted person and she shared with you what she shares on this video, how would you work with her around these issues?

Lecture

Second, there is concern that while white parents may be acting in overt, deliberate ways to instill racial pride and teach coping strategies to their children, they may be unaware of the unintended ways in which they undercut their own efforts or send contradictory messages to
their children about the value of their race. For example, parents may provide the children with books about individuals of their race who have accomplished great things or they may take part in cultural events; but if all the professionals in a child’s life and all the people he or she sees in the neighborhood, church, and school are white, it minimizes the message that people of color are successful.

Let’s listen to what Dr. Amanda Baden shares about being a Chinese adopted person in the United States.

Adoption: Being Chinese in America
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oN-m-l45z1l&NR=1

Large Group Discussion

1. Dr. Baden highlights the importance of being Chinese American and observes that “it is more than tea ceremonies.” How might you as a therapist help a family support the value of their Chinese American adopted child’s race?

Note to Trainer: Raise the following if not mentioned:
- Dealing with racial stereotypes
  - Help parents acknowledge the stereotypes that often are associated with Asian people: they are very smart and hard-working, are automatically good at math, and are great with details
  - Help parents see that positive stereotypes give children the burden of social expectations
  - The efforts of children’s hard won accomplishments may be diminished by others who see them as “natural” or genetically determined
- Helping parents see that the child’s comfortable acceptance of their dual identity (Chinese and American) comes from being valued and valuing in the context of celebrating differences
- Helping parents find ways for their child to feel part of and participate in the culture of his/her heritage and allowing the child to have connections with and...
2. We just discussed some issues that may arise for a Chinese American adopted child. What might be some specific issues that come up regarding valuing the child’s race when you are working with white families who have adopted:

   o An African American child from foster care

   
   *Raise the following if not mentioned:*
   - Dealing with negative racial stereotyping of African Americans and the impact of these stereotypes on the child’s sense of self-worth and identity. TV newscasts, it has been found, disproportionately show African-Americans under arrest, living in slums, on welfare, and in need of help from the community.
   - Going beyond role models in the sports world (having an African American President certainly helps!)
   - Exploring parents’ own comfort with African Americans in professional, social and personal relationships
   - Developing meaningful relationships with African Americans in the family’s daily life -- through community involvement, social relationships, and worship

   o A Native American infant

   
   *Raise the following if not mentioned:*
   - Dealing with negative racial stereotypes of Native Americans: devoid of self control, unable to handle responsibility
   - Dealing with positive racial stereotypes of Native Americans: noble, living in harmony with nature (remember *Dances with Wolves*?)
   - Acknowledging the absence of Native American role models: few Native American leaders in most communities; few if any role models in the media
   - Creatively findings ways for their child to connect with and feel pride in his/her Native American heritage

3. How might the issues that we have discussed differ depending on the age of the child who is transracially adopted?

4. What other factors might affect the child’s valuing of his or her race?
We have talked about two issues in fostering children’s positive racial identity. First, we discussed concerns that white parents frequently do not have the life experiences that equip them to prepare their children for racism. Second, we talked about how parents may be unaware of the unintended ways they undercut their efforts to instill in children the values of their race.

The third issue is that the nature of instilling pride and developing coping strategies will vary as the child grows and matures. Thus, not only do white parents need to be engaged in these activities, but they need to adapt them in developmentally appropriate ways or change them altogether as the child moves into adolescence.

Let’s look at some suggestions that have been developed for transracially adopted parents. These are techniques that therapists can use in helping parents support healthy racial socialization for their children:

**Refuse to Tolerate Racially and Ethically Biased Remarks**

Therapists can help transracial adoptive parents learn how to refuse to tolerate any kind of racially or ethnically biased remark made in their presence. These remarks may be made about their child’s race or ethnic group, other races and ethnic groups, or any other characteristic such as gender, religion, age and physical or other disability. Therapists can help parents teach their children how to handle these remarks by modeling behavior. 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.”
- “Surely you don’t mean to be critical, you just don’t have experience with . . .”

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Therapists can help parents learn the technique of giving the person a chance to back off or change what has been said. Helping parents learn to do this will enable them to teach their child how to stand up to bias without starting a fight, which could put their child at risk.

Therapists can help children learn how to walk away. The Center for Support and Education’s W.I.S.E. Up program provides guidance on helping children learn these skills.

**Talk About Race and Culture**

Therapists can support transracial adoptive parents in talking with their children about racial issues, even if their child does not bring up the subject. Parents can use natural opportunities, such as a television program or newspaper article that talks about race in some way. Therapists can help parents develop ways to let their child know that they feel comfortable discussing race - the positive aspects as well as the difficult ones.

Therapists can help parents learn ways to stand behind their children if they are the victim of a racial incident or have problems in your community because of the unkind actions of others. The therapist can help parents develop tools that they can give their children in dealing with these situations. Above all, the therapist can help parents respond to their child’s hurt feelings by allowing the child to talk about the experience with the parent and acknowledging that the parent understands.

Lois Melina, a White adoptive parent of Korean children and a noted adoption writer, lists five questions for parents to ask their child to help the child deal with problem situations:

- What happened?
- How did that make you feel?
- What did you say or do when that happened?
- If something like that happens again, do you think you will deal with it the same way?
- Would you like me to do something?

**Taking the Child to Places Where Most of the People Present are from The Child’s Race or Ethnic Group**

A therapist can support transracially adopted parents in connecting their child to people who reflect the child’s racial and ethnic heritage. Therapists can encourage families to participate in adoptive family support group events which often provide places where children will meet and interact with other children and adults of their own racial and ethnic heritage. Therapists can help parents appreciate the benefits of having experiences when they feel what it is like to be in
the minority. These experiences can help parents increase their awareness and ability to understand the child’s experience as a minority individual.

Let’s turn now to one aspect of racial socialization that we have not yet discussed – **microaggressions**.

Parents of racial minority children often are prepared to act on their child’s behalf to address overt acts of racism or to teach children how to respond. However, one of the mechanisms through which bias and prejudice operate and one of the areas that may be less obvious to white parents of children of color is **microaggression**. As you read in the article by Dr. Sue and colleagues, one definition is:

“Microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicates hostile, derogatory, negative (or dismissive) racial slights and insults towards people of color (Sue, et al., 2007, p. 271).

Before considering the types of microaggressions, several general points need to be made.

- Microaggressions are often invisible to the perpetrator or discounted because other explanations are available.
- Because of the vagueness or subtleness of microaggressions, recipients often question or doubt themselves.
- It takes a great deal of psychological energy to distinguish microaggressions from other, differently motivated acts.
- Recipients must also spend psychological energy determining whether it is effective/useful to identify or undercut the microaggression.
- The psychological impact of microaggressions is cumulative, but their harm is often minimized by others, particularly those of the dominant group.

As you know from your reading, there are three types of microaggressions:
**Microassaults:** Conscious and intentional actions or slurs, such as using racial epithets, displaying swastikas or deliberately serving a white person before a person of color in a restaurant.

**Microinsults:** These convey rudeness, meanness, or insensitivity about one’s race, heritage, or identity. They send a message that one is of less worth or importance than others or is somehow inadequate. Examples include: white children not including a child of color in their playgroup, a black or Latino student in an advanced placement class being asked by the teacher if he/she is in the right class, or an employer more thoroughly checking references for an applicant of color than a white applicant.

**Microinvalidations:** These exclude, nullify, or deny the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of persons of color. They lead persons of color to feel awkward, frustrated and to doubt their own sense of reality. What would make microinsults into microinvalidations would be having someone tell the person in each instance that they are making too big a deal of the incident or there is really a different explanation for it (for example, “I’m sure the server just didn’t see you, they wouldn’t intentionally wait on a white person first”).

Dr. Sue and colleagues focus on microinsults and microinvalidations because of their less obvious nature, which puts people of color in a psychological bind. They say that while the person may feel insulted, she is not sure exactly why. The perpetrator doesn’t acknowledge that anything has happened because he is not aware he has been offensive. In turn, that leaves the person of color to question what actually happened. The result is confusion, anger and an overall sapping of energy.

The young adult whose story we just read said the following about microaggressions:

“I often felt crazy, doubting my perceptions of racist situations, because I was told I was being ‘too sensitive’ and ‘too serious.’ At some point, I gave up trying to talk to my family about what I was going through, and resigned myself to expecting less in the way of support and understanding from them. I felt alienated from my family and friends, and totally alone as the only person of color I knew who was coping with a racist reality.”

**Large Group Discussion:** What examples of microaggressions in your own experience did you identify?

As you read in the article by Dr. Sue and colleagues, racial microaggressions become meaningful in the context of clinical practice. The often unintentional and unconscious nature of
microaggressions pose the biggest challenges to the majority of white mental health professionals who believe that they are just, unbiased, and nonracist. As the authors point out, mental health professionals are in a position of power and this makes it less likely that it will be possible to accurately assess whether racist acts occurred in their sessions.

As therapists, we must make a concerted effort to identify and monitor microaggressions in the therapeutic context.

Let’s consider the following scripted role play. May I have a volunteer to read from the script as Terry, the client, an African American adopted young woman, age 17, who is struggling with issues of identity? I will play Karen, the therapist, who is white, and middle-aged. Thank you for playing Terry, the adopted person.

Distribute flags to each student.
When you detect a microaggression, raise a flag. We will stop the role play and discuss.

Note to Trainer: Every time a flag is raised, ask people about why they believe the statement is a microaggression.

Note to Trainer: Two copies of the Role Play are at the end of the Teaching Script.

Introductory Participatory Role Play

Karen: Terry, it is nice to see you. How have you been?

Terry: It has been a really hard week. I am just not sure how I feel.

Karen: Tell me more about what your week has been like.

Terry: I . . . well, I just don’t feel that I can take it much more. Everyday, someone has something mean to say to me because I am black.

Karen: Something mean? Can you give me an example?

Terry: Well, yesterday, I was with my sister, who, you know, is white, and a white man asked her what she was doing hanging out with me.
Karen: You took that to be “mean”?

[Terry: He was mean.

Karen: Do you think that you may be overreacting to his comment?

[Terry: I don’t think so.

Karen: Well, where were you?

Terry: We were in line for tickets to a Jay-Z concert.

Karen: Is Jay-Z black?

[Terry: Well, yes. I don’t think you understand what I am talking about.

Karen: What do you mean?

Terry: Maybe I shouldn’t be talking about race stuff with you . . .

Karen: What are saying? When I see you, I don’t see race or color. We are all human beings under the skin.

[Terry: But, I don’t think you can really understand what it means to be black in this city.

Karen: Believe me, I understand. As a woman, I face discrimination all the time.

[Terry: Well . . . are you saying that I shouldn’t be reacting to comments like what the man said?

Karen: I think it would be good not to look at your problems as stemming from racism.

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Large Group Discussion: What are some key points that we can learn from this role play?

Note to Trainer: Raise the following points if not mentioned:

- White people may state that “race” presents “no problem” for them to discuss but in the process, they make statements that reflect an insistence on color blindness.

- White people may deny individual racism by saying that they can understand and relate to racism. When therapists say, for example, that gender oppression is the same as the client’s experience with racial/ethnic oppression, it can convey that to the client that the therapist is attempting to minimize the client’s racial identity. Notice how Terry reacts to this comment – with self doubt.

- Notice how Terry backed away from her feelings. She clearly was not willing to challenge the therapist who is in a position of power. This may lead to feelings of resentment and a decision not to continue therapy.

Demonstrated Role Play

Now, let’s look at another role play – this one involving a Mom, Dad and their son, Riley. May I have three volunteers to play the three roles?

NOTE to trainer: 3 copies of the script for the volunteers to use are provided at the end of the Teaching Script.
You are seeing a family in therapy in which the parents are white, the 14 year old son – Riley -- is African-American, and the 12 year old daughter is Latina. The family is seeing you because the parents are concerned that Riley is not performing up to his potential in school. His standardized test scores are quite high, but his grades have hovered around a C average all through middle school. Riley is now a freshman in high school and is expressing some difficulty adjusting to the new, larger school. The following interchange takes place between the parents and son in the third session.

Mom: I don’t understand why you won’t go talk to your teachers if you are having trouble with the material in a class.

Dad: I know if maybe hard to ask for help but the teacher won’t know you need help until you do poorly on a test, and then it is too late.

Riley: You guys don’t understand. It’s embarrassing to go see the teachers. Some of them treat me like an idiot and some blow me off – they don’t think I’m serious.

Mom: Riley, that’s ridiculous, the teachers are there to help. Have you done things in class that would lead them to believe you are not serious?

Riley: NO – Mom why do you always blame me?

Mom: Honey, I’m not blaming you, I just don’t want you blaming others. I want to make sure you are looking at your own behavior.

Riley: I do look at my own behavior. Heck, my friends make fun of me because I’m the one kid that does go in after school sometimes for help.

Dad: Well, your friends may be part of the problem.

Riley: I knew I shouldn’t have mentioned my friends. Look, yesterday I did go in for help in geometry after school. There were two other kids there. He addressed all their questions and basically ignored me after asking what I didn’t understand.

Mom: Did you say anything or just sit there quietly? If you don’t say anything he may have thought what he was showing them was helping you also. You have to be willing to let a teacher know what you need.

Riley: Mom, I’m one of only a few black kids in most of my classes- the only one in geometry- so I stick out anyway. I don’t want to stick out more. Last week, Mr. Johnson (geometry teacher) said that the county was trying to get more kids through Algebra II, by 10th
grade, but he refused to water down the curriculum to make sure more people got through. He’ll deny it, but I know he was thinking about me when he said it.

Mom: You seem to be taking this awfully personally. Just because you are Black does not mean he was talking to you. You can’t wear your race on your sleeve, Riley or you’ll never make it through life.

Large Group Discussion: Do you think there were microaggressions in this interchange? Where did you see them?

Lecture

Clearly the parents want to help Riley. Was this anything other than parents attempting to be helpful, while not wanting to give too much credence to Riley’s racial explanation?

Two points are important to emphasize here:

First, microaggressions are from the recipient’s perspective. It is not a matter of determining the “truth.” The problem for the recipient of the microaggression is he or she has to spend psychological energy figuring out whether race was relevant. If Riley determined it as relevant, he is likely to experience the teacher’s comment as a microinsult and his parents’ responses as microinvalidations.

Second, the clinical challenge is that because of the subtleness of microaggressions, therapists can choose to focus on other aspects of the interaction without making race a focal point of the discussion. For example, the therapist could focus on Riley’s comfort level speaking up in class. If the client raises race but the therapist does not address it, the therapist risks committing another microinvalidation. In this case scenario, Riley brings up race. But let’s say for a moment that the interchange stopped before Riley and his Mom’s last statement. If Riley didn’t bring up race, it doesn’t mean he wasn’t experiencing the racial component of what was going on. In that
case, it might be even harder for the therapist to realize and bring up the relevance of race in the situation.

4:10PM to 4:25PM Some Additional Thoughts on Clinical Work with Transracial Adoptive Families [Learning Objective #9]

Many parents who adopt transracially maintain that love, acceptance, and security are all they need to provide a child, regardless of race. While all children need these things, as we have learned today, this colorblind approach to parenting minority children leaves them vulnerable and ill-equipped to handle the racism they are likely to experience. However, even parents who recognize that adopting transracially will require additional skills and strategies on their part are often not sure how to proceed.

Lecture: How Therapists Can Assist Transracial Adoptive Families

Let’s look at some specific ways that we as therapists can support transracial adoptive families:

1) Help potential parents assess whether transracial adoption is right for them

Therapists can focus on the following with prospective parents who are considering transracial adoption.

- Examine attitudes and beliefs about race and ethnicity: A therapist might say, “While you may think you know yourself and your family members very well, it is important to examine your beliefs and attitudes about race and ethnicity before adopting a child of another race or culture. Try to think if you have made any assumptions about people because of their race or ethnic group. There are two reasons for this exercise: (1) to
check yourself — to be sure this type of adoption will be right for you; and (2) to prepare to be considered “different.”

Examine lifestyle: A therapist might ask: Do you already live in an integrated neighborhood, so that your child will be able to attend an integrated school? If not, would you consider moving to a new neighborhood? Do you already have friends of different races and ethnic groups? Do you visit one another’s homes regularly? Do you attend multicultural festivals? Do you enjoy different kinds of ethnic foods? How much of a leap would it be to start doing some of these things? Can your self-esteem take the slights, insults, and discrimination that will come with being part of an interracial family and having minority children? How comfortable are you with attracting attention, appreciating multiple perspectives, being flexible in the face of complexity, and seeking help?

2) Help parents see the relevance of race in their children’s experiences.

- Children need open dialogue about race to successfully develop their identities. Open communication about race will help children construct their social realities. They will test these perceptions against a larger society. Their very identities are formed through testing the boundaries of their worlds, which grow larger and larger each year of life.
- Healthy discussions about race help children adjust to their experiences inside the family and with society as a whole.
- Families shape their children’s lives, and many believe that white parents of black children have a heightened sense of responsibility for this task. It is only through ongoing and candid conversation that families can hope to have a lasting positive effect on their children, giving them the necessary tools they’ll need to navigate in a world where race matters very much.

3) Help parents learn to talk about race with their children.
Parents will enter your therapy room with different approaches to addressing race. Some parents rarely talk about it and emphasize the commonalities of all people (“we are all of the human race”), while others are very astute about the implications of race for their own and their children’s lives. Obviously the way you approach the topic will depend on how the family presents. Some ways of assessing the parents’ or family’s comfort in talking about race include questions such as:

- What role do you think race plays in your family, in your life, in your child’s life?
- How is race usually talked about in your family?
- When do you feel most awkward or find it most difficult to talk about race with your child? Why do you think that is?
Module #12: Race and Ethnicity in Adoption

- Have you ever felt your being white and your child being a minority has affected the way you parent? Can you tell me about those times?

4) **Listen to parents’ concerns, fears, and anxieties about race relative to their children and their own parenting.**

Of course, listening is at the core of clinical work. In working with transracial adoptive families, the key is tuning your ears to hear the relevance of race even when that may not be the language that parents use. The challenge for the clinician is to integrate race into the reflections or questions you ask without making everything about race. For example, when the parent is talking about their concern about the child’s poor school performance or lack of interest in school, in addition to all the clinical questions you would ask for any child, a therapist might ask:

- I wonder if race could play any part in the struggles your child has with school?
  Are his experiences different in any way from other kids because of his color?
- I wonder what it is like for your child being one of only a few people of color in his/her school (if you know that to be the case)?

Similarly, these kinds of questions can be asked of the children and adolescents in family or individual sessions.

5) **Listen to parents’ thoughts about racial identity and racial socialization, and where it may be necessary to expand their knowledge or understanding of the issues.**

Again, parents will fall along a continuum, with many parents actively aware of these concepts and trying their best to provide needed racial socialization while others will not have given these ideas much thought. One of the things that may be most helpful for parents just coming to grips with some of these ideas will be articles, books, websites, and documentaries that educate them. Handout #12.11 provides a list of resources that you can share with parents.

**Handout #12.11 Race and Ethnicity in Adoption: A Resource Guide for Mental Health Professionals**

**4:25PM to 4:30PM Summary and Closing**

We have come to the close of our Module. Please think about your answers to the following questions:

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• Can I define the following concepts: “race,” “ethnicity,” “culture,” “transracial” adoption,” “racial identity,” “racial socialization,” and “microaggressions”?
• Can I identify two barriers that transracial adoptive families may experience in talking about race in daily life?
• Can I identify at least two issues that individuals who are tranracial/ transculturally adopted experience with regard to racial identity?
• Can I identify one or more strategies for helping parents promote a child’s healthy racial/ethnic identity?
• Can I give two examples of why white parents of children of color find racial socialization more challenging than parents of color?
• Can I identify one or more therapeutic techniques or strategies for helping parents engage in effective racial socialization of their children?
• Can I describe at least two ways that microaggressions can occur in the therapeutic relationship?

As a result of this Module, you should be able to answer “yes” to each of these questions. If not, please feel free to talk with me after the Module and please review the Module materials.

In your email inbox, you will find a message with a link to a brief online survey for you to provided feedback on today’s workshop. It will ask you to rate the quality and relevance of the workshop content and the effectiveness of the learning activities, to identify the strengths of the training Module, and to recommend ways that the training can be improved. Please follow the link in the email and provide the feedback right ways while the Module experience is fresh in your memory.

You will also receive an email directing to you to the “test” on this Module. This “test” is designed to help you and me assess what you have learned from the Module today.

In our next and final Module, we will be hearing from you as you make your final project presentations.

Thank you for your attention. See you next [week/month]!
Reading List

Web Based Resources

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_trans.cfm

http://www.nacac.org/postadopt/transracial_identity.html

Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute. (2009). Beyond Culture Camp: Promoting Health Identity Formation. Available at:  

Feagin, J.R. & Ausdale, D. The First R: How children learn race and racism. Available from Amazon:  

Long, J.K. (2002). Information Packet: Domestic Transracial Adoption. National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning. Available at:  
http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/14/1d/6d.pdf


New York State Citizens‘ Coalition for Children. (2009). Ask the Experts (Michelle Johnson and John Raible, African-American adult transracial adoptees, answer questions relating to raising children of a different race and/or ethnicity). Available at:  
http://nysccc.org/family-supports/transracial-transcultural/ask-the-experts/

Race: Are We So Different? Established by the American Anthropological Association. Available at:  
http://www.understandingrace.org/home.html

http://www.amazon.com/Beyond-Good-Intentions-Reflects-Internationally/dp/1597430005

www.nacac.org/adoptalk/TransAdoption.html

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Other Resources


Scripts for Introductory Participatory Role Play

Karen: Terry, it is nice to see you. How have you been?

Terry: It has been a really hard week. I am just not sure how I feel.

Karen: Tell me more about your week has been like.

Terry: I . . . well, I just don’t feel that I can take it much more. Everyday, someone has something mean to say to me because I am black.

Karen: Something mean? Can you give me an example?

Terry: Well, yesterday, I was with my sister, who, you know, is white, and a white man asked her what she was doing hanging out with me.

Karen: You took that to be “mean”?

Terry: He was mean.

Karen: Do you think that you may be overreacting to his comment?

[Should be a flag. Stop and discuss.]

Terry: I don’t think so.

Karen: Well, where were you?

Terry: We were in line for tickets to a Jay-Z concert.

Karen: Is Jay-Z black?

[Should be a flag. Stop and discuss]

Terry: Well, yes. I don’t think you understand what I am talking about.

Karen: What do you mean?

Terry: Maybe I shouldn’t be talking about race stuff with you . . .
Karen: What are you saying? When I see you, I don’t see race or color. We are all human beings under the skin.

Terry: But, I don’t think you can really understand what it means to be black in this city.

Karen: Believe me, I understand. As a woman, I face discrimination all the time.

Terry: Well . . . are you saying that I shouldn’t be reacting to comments like what the man said?

Karen: I think it would be good not to look at your problems as stemming from racism.
Demonstrated Role Play Script (3 copies)

Copy #1 of Script

Mom: I don’t understand why you won’t go talk to your teachers if you are having trouble with the material in a class.

Dad: I know if maybe hard to ask for help but the teacher won’t know you need help until you do poorly on a test, and then it is too late.

Riley: You guys don’t understand. It’s embarrassing to go see the teachers. Some of them treat me like an idiot and some blow me off – they don’t think I’m serious.

Mom: Riley, that’s ridiculous, the teachers are there to help. Have you done things in class that would lead them to believe you are not serious?

Riley: NO – Mom why do you always blame me?

Mom: Honey, I’m not blaming you, I just don’t want you blaming others. I want to make sure you are looking at your own behavior.

Riley: I do look at my own behavior. Heck, my friends make fun of me because I’m the one kid that does go in after school sometimes for help.

Dad: Well, your friends may be part of the problem.

Riley: I knew I shouldn’t have mentioned my friends. Look, yesterday I did go in for help in geometry after school. There were two other kids there. He addressed all their questions and basically ignored me after asking what I didn’t understand.

Mom: Did you say anything or just sit there quietly? If you don’t say anything he may have thought what he was showing them was helping you also. You have to be willing to let a teacher know what you need.

Riley: Mom, I’m one of only a few black kids in most of my classes- the only one in geometry- so I stick out anyway. I don’t want to stick out more. Last week, Mr. Johnson (geometry teacher) said that the county was trying to get more kids through Algebra II, by 10th grade, but he refused to water down the curriculum to make sure more people got through. He’ll deny it, but I know he was thinking about me when he said it.
Mom: You seem to be taking this awfully personally. Just because you are Black does not mean he was talking to you. You can’t wear your race on your sleeve, Riley or you’ll never make it through life.
Mom: I don’t understand why you won’t go talk to your teachers if you are having trouble with the material in a class.

Dad: I know if maybe hard to ask for help but the teacher won’t know you need help until you do poorly on a test, and then it is too late.

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Mom: Did you say anything or just sit there quietly? If you don’t say anything he may have thought what he was showing them was helping you also. You have to be willing to let a teacher know what you need.

Riley: Mom, I’m one of only a few black kids in most of my classes- the only one in geometry- so I stick out anyway. I don’t want to stick out more. Last week, Mr. Johnson (geometry teacher) said that the county was trying to get more kids through Algebra II, by 10th grade, but he refused to water down the curriculum to make sure more people got through. He’ll deny it, but I know he was thinking about me when he said it.

Mom: You seem to be taking this awfully personally. Just because you are Black does
not mean he was talking to you. You can’t wear your race on your sleeve, Riley or you’ll never make it through life.
Copy #3 of Script

Mom: I don’t understand why you won’t go talk to your teachers if you are having trouble with the material in a class.

Dad: I know if maybe hard to ask for help but the teacher won’t know you need help until you do poorly on a test, and then it is too late.

Riley: You guys don’t understand. It’s embarrassing to go see the teachers. Some of them treat me like an idiot and some blow me off – they don’t think I’m serious.

Mom: Riley, that’s ridiculous, the teachers are there to help. Have you done things in class that would lead them to believe you are not serious?

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Riley: I knew I shouldn’t have mentioned my friends. Look, yesterday I did go in for help in geometry after school. There were two other kids there. He addressed all their questions and basically ignored me after asking what I didn’t understand.

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Riley: Mom, I’m one of only a few black kids in most of my classes- the only one in geometry- so I stick out anyway. I don’t want to stick out more. Last week, Mr. Johnson (geometry teacher) said that the county was trying to get more kids through Algebra II, by 10th grade, but he refused to water down the curriculum to make sure more people got through. He’ll deny it, but I know he was thinking about me when he said it.

Mom: You seem to be taking this awfully personally. Just because you are Black does
not mean he was talking to you. You can’t wear your race on your sleeve, Riley or you’ll never make it through life.
Handout #12.1

RACE LITERACY QUIZ
What differences make a difference?

The Race Literacy Quiz was developed by California Newsreel, in association with the Association of American Colleges and Universities. The myths and misconceptions it raises are explored in the documentary series RACE - The Power of an Illusion, available on video from California Newsreel at www.newsreel.org or 1-877-811-7495. For more information and background, visit the companion Web site at www.PBS.org/Race. The following are questions selected from the Race Literacy Quiz which was developed in 2003.

1. Members of a race can be identified by their:
   A. Blood group  
   B. Skin color  
   C. Ancestry  
   D. Genes  
   E. None of the above  
   F. All of the above

2. Which group has the most genetic variation?
   A. Humans  
   B. Chimpanzees  
   C. Penguins  
   D. Fruit flies  
   E. Elephants

3. Which two populations are most likely, on average, to be genetically similar?
   A. Italians and Ethiopians  
   B. Senegalese and Kenyans  
   C. Italians and Swedes  
   D. Chinese and Lakota (Sioux)  
   E. Saudi Arabians and Ethiopians

4. Which continent has the greatest human genetic diversity?
   A. Europe  
   B. Asia  
   C. Africa  
   D. North America  
   E. South America

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5. Which was NOT introduced to Indians by whites?

A. An Indian identity  
B. Democracy  
C. Identity by "blood quantum"  
D. Horses  
E. Measles

6. Which of the following is not a result of federal government policies?

A. Redlining  
B. Urban renewal  
C. Deterioration of inner cities  
D. Affirmative action quotas  
E. The wealth gap between black and white families

7. The net worth of the average white family is how much compared to the average black family?

A. Three times as much  
B. Eight times as much  
C. Half as much  
D. Twice as much  
E. The same

8. According to a 1993 study, 86% of suburban whites lived in a community where the black population was:

A. Less than 5%  
B. Less than 10%  
C. Less than 1%  
D. More than 10%  
E. More than 15%
Answers:

1. **A. None.** There are no characteristics, no traits, not even one gene that distinguish all members of one so-called race from all members of another race.

2. **D. Fruit flies.** Fruit flies have been around for a very long time but they also have a short life span, so lots of genetic mutations have accumulated over many generations. In contrast, modern humans are one of the most genetically similar of all species. On average, only one of every 1,000 nucleotides (the "letters" that make up our DNA) differ one individual from another. This is because we are a relatively young species (approximately 150,000 - 200,000 years old). We simply haven't been around long enough to accumulate much genetic variation. Also, humans have always moved, mixed and mated, further homogenizing our gene pool. Beneath the skin, we're all very similar.

3. **E. Saudi Arabians and Ethiopians.** Populations that live near each other geographically tend to be genetically more alike than populations that live far apart. That's because they are more likely to have intermixed in the recent past and therefore share more genes. So even though Senegalese and Kenyans or Italians and Swedes are traditionally placed in the same "races," they live farther apart from each other and have had less contact and intermixing than Saudis and Ethiopians.

4. **C. Africa.** We are all Africans. Modern humans (Homo sapien sapiens) originated in Africa, and we spent most of our evolution as a species together there. Some modern humans first left Africa 50,000 - 70,000 years ago and spread out around the world. All the other populations of the world can be seen as a subset of Africans. Every human genetic trait found elsewhere can also be found in Africa, with the exception of relatively few recent variations favored by the environment, genetic drift, or sexual selection - such as light skin.

5. **B. Democracy.** United States’ representative democracy drew upon the traditions of the Iroquois Confederacy. Indians didn't think of themselves as Indians when European settlers arrived, but rather as members of separate tribes or nations, divided by language, custom and religion. The idea of "blood quantum," i.e., the determination of Indian identity by ancestry, was imposed by the federal government. In contrast, tribal membership traditionally was open to anyone, even Europeans, as long as they accepted tribal customs and authority. There were no horses in the New World until they were brought over by Europeans. Measles, small-pox and other communicable diseases were also unknown in the Americas prior to European exploration. Some historians estimate that up to 90% of all Atlantic coast Indians died from diseases contracted from European traders and explorers by the time of the first Plymouth settlement.

6. **D. Affirmative action quotas.** Federal affirmative action guidelines specifically prohibit quotas. Beginning in the 1930, the Federal Housing Administration and related programs made it possible for millions of average white Americans to own a home for the first time and set off the post-WWII suburban building boom. The government established a national neighborhood appraisal system, explicitly tying mortgage eligibility to race, a policy known today as "redlining."

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The FHA and other government policies made possible the post-World War II all-white suburbs, while people of color and in central cities were denied loans. Government policies and practices helped create two legacies that are still with us today: segregated communities and a substantial wealth gap between whites and nonwhites, much of which can be traced to the differential value of their homes.

7. B: Eight times as much. Probably no one statistic better captures the cumulative disadvantage of past discrimination than wealth. Even at the same income levels, whites still have, on average, twice as much wealth as nonwhites. Much of this difference is due to the different rates of home ownership and the different values of homes in white and Black neighborhoods. But wealth is not only the end point, it’s the starting line for the next generation - helping finance your children’s education, helping them through hard times, or helping with the down payment of their own home. Economists estimate 50-80% of one’s lifetime wealth accumulation can be traced to this head start. As wealth gets passed down from generation to generation, the legacy of past discrimination accumulates, giving whites and nonwhites vastly different life chances.

8. C. Less than 1%. According to the 2000 Census, whites are more likely to be segregated than any other group. This is largely a result of past housing discrimination, but it is perpetuated today by unfair practices such as predatory lending, racial steering and a substantial wealth gap between black and white families. Today, 71% of whites own their own home, compared to 44% of African Americans. Black and Latino mortgage applicants are 60% more likely than whites to be turned down for loans, even after controlling for employment, financial, and neighborhood characteristics. On average, nonwhites who are approved for mortgages still pay higher rates.
### Handout #12.2. IMMIGRANT ORPHANS ADOPTED BY U.S. CITIZENS BY GENDER, AGE, AND REGION AND COUNTRY OF BIRTH: FISCAL YEAR 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region and country of birth</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Under 1 year</th>
<th>1 to 4 years</th>
<th>5 years and over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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D Data withheld to limit disclosure.
- represents zero.

Handout #12.3  Adopting A Biracial Infant

Post #1

Hi. DH and I are looking at adoption agencies for an African American or biracial infant. We've come across a couple in UT that promise extremely short wait times. 2-8 weeks once we're paper ready. Any experience with agencies promising that short a wait time? We are looking for agencies that are out west since they seem to have more African American and biracial infants available. Then speaking with a local agency here in MA that we were considering to do our home study, she just about laughed out loud with the idea that I would even need an agency. She said if they did our home study, they would just pass our info on to one of the many e-mails she gets daily from lawyers, facilitators and agencies that e-mail and ask if they have families for an African American or biracial infant. She said that as long as our expected costs were reasonable (didn't get into numbers with her) we would have an infant within a month of our home study completion. I know this does happen for some families that are open to an infant besides a white child, but I also know families whose budget is larger than ours and they are waiting. Any advice is so greatly appreciated. Post here with specific agency advice. We would really like to balance cost with speed (don't we all..LOL) but I think our budget, not including travel, post-adoption services and finalization would be around 15K. Thanks so much!

Post #2

Where can I look to adopt a biracial infant or young child?

I am 42, I have a great career, a beautiful home, a nice car, and everything a woman my age could ask for, except a child. I am Caucasian and my fiancée is African American. I am unable to have children of my own but I am very interested in adoption. Does anyone have any ideas of where I can start? I live in Atlanta, Georgia

For Discussion:

1. What are some of the factors that are leading each of these individuals to seek to adopt a biracial child?

2. Would you expect different issues to arise given the different motivations for wanting to adopt a biracial child?
Handout #12.4  Raising a Child of a Different Race: Deliberate Parenting Can Make a Difference
Jana Wolff

No guidelines or checklists exist for learning how to instill racial pride in a child who has been adopted transracially.

When my husband and I were first looking into adoption, we were much more focused on how to get a baby than on how to parent one. We read everything we could find about successfully adopting, and spoke to anyone we could on the subject.

When we finally became the proud adoptive parents of our son, Ari, we plunged into study once again to learn all that we could from our new gurus: Dr. Spock, T. Berry Brazelton, Penelope Leach, and many others.

Now that Ari is eight, our focus has shifted yet again, this time to a subject that’s harder to master through books. As white parents of a biracial son who is African American and Latino, we find ourselves rushing to stay ahead of our son’s blossoming sense of identity, his sense of himself as a unique individual with a particular heritage. We look for answers to questions he might ask, while trying to give him a solid sense of who he is even before he asks.

When we first adopted, the wonderful resources available today did not exist. Sometimes I wonder if so much knowledge at the very beginning of the process would have terrified us too much to proceed with a transracial adoption. Still, I am very grateful for the education now; at least we have a pretty clear idea of what we have to do.

Transracially adopted children do not have the advantage of learning about their birth culture through everyday cues and bits of knowledge, assimilated almost unconsciously over years, as in single-race families. So the responsibility that parents have to their different-race children can seem overwhelming.

To fulfill that responsibility experts recommend:

- interacting with people of your child's race
- living in multicultural neighborhoods
- finding same race mentors and role models for your child
- advocating for unbiased learning materials
- confronting racism openly
- cooking and eating ethnic dishes
- providing special maintenance to hair and skin
- celebrating all cultures
- taking part in homeland tours and culture camps
- creating a positive cultural environment at home

No blueprint or formula, however, can assure that a child will grow up feeling proud of his or her ethnic heritage, unfortunately for us. We are the kind of people who like making lists and checking things off. We have sent our child to culture camp, joined diversity groups, read books...
and gone to workshops, attended cultural festivals as a family. In fact, most parents involved in trans-racial adoptions make similar efforts. We are deliberate parents; we want to do right by our kids.

Facing the challenge

Ultimately, we have had to come to terms with an inescapable reality: we cannot master transracial parenting. No matter how many things on the list we do, no matter how exemplary we ourselves might be as role models, no matter how much we love our sons and daughters, we cannot be our child's color and part of his or her cultural heritage.

Once we accepted that we could never parent our child perfectly, this apparently discouraging news actually liberated us. Once we acknowledged the challenges facing us, we could reduce the tasks into manageable pieces. Then we did what all parents do: try hard, stay in the game, and hope for the best.

Acknowledging that transracial parenting is an inexact science, we’ve learned some important lessons along the way. Diversity is not enough. Diversity is good, just not enough, if it does not include someone a child can identify with directly. We live in a very diverse community, with neighbors from China, Samoa, Japan, Vietnam, Hawaii, the Philippines and Korea, but our biracial son does not find himself reflected in any one of them. Being with non-whites is not enough; transracially adopted kids need people like themselves in their lives. Choosing a certain barber, babysitter, or Cub Scout troop can influence a child’s sense of himself.

Surprises Along the Way

In blind zeal to meet people of Ari’s race, we acted as though economic circumstances did not matter, inadvertently accentuating differences more than similarities. Our family traded houses for part of a summer with a family from another state. The African American and Latino neighborhood we chose was culturally rich, but economically disadvantaged, a far cry from our middle class neighborhood at home. We had a wonderful experience, but learned something that sounds terribly snobbish to admit in our egalitarian society: economic circumstances, perhaps as much as race, create different experiences and therefore different perspectives, even values. We have learned to seek out more than just race as a common ground with strangers whom we hope to have as friends.

At times, we’ve found ourselves forcing our experiences and relationships. I remember sitting through a Sunday morning service in an all-black Baptist church. Sure, Ari got to see lots of lovely and friendly black families, but since we are Jewish we could never truly belong to a different religious community. We have since learned to customize our family traditions so they fit our particular combination of cultures. One December, when Kwanzaa and Hanukkah overlapped, we hosted a Kwanzukah party, which has since become a tradition bringing together our African American and Jewish friends. We did not have to give up our heritage to connect with our child’s.

Trans-racial parenting has been both harder than we imagined, and not so hard at all. While these additional efforts might seem to make parenting harder, none is really a hardship. It’s a
pleasure to celebrate Kwanzaa and Cinco de Mayo with friends, march in the Rainbow Coalition parade, and cook wonderful ethnic foods. Trans-racial parenting requires more deliberate efforts than same race parenting, but I cannot think of one that has not been altogether worthwhile. Interestingly enough, what’s hard about trans-racial parenting is building a feeling of ordinariness into extraordinary days, making experiences into more than just a series of field trips, creating for our son a securely unified life.

The range of trans-racial parenting experiences has forced us out of our comfort zone, and developed an extra measure of courage in us all. Being part of a mixed race family has not only challenged and enlightened us, but also altered our individual personalities. We've had to become more boldly public as a trans-racial family. We look to proud and successful men of color for clues on how to raise our son. Asking strangers to help in this way can be scary, but we've been amazed at their generosity, and at the value of these discussions. The more we have reached out to people unlike ourselves, the easier building a rapid rapport with strangers has become. Soon we realized that people aren't so different after all. Beyond all its other benefits, transracial parenting inevitably boosts a family's social life.

We also realized that our son might not care as much as we do about all this. Parents are sometimes more gung-ho to learn about their children’s culture than their children are. After we went to great lengths to find and attend a culture camp with Ari one summer, all he seems to remember is the indoor pool at the motel where we stayed and the candy that was sold in the canteen after lunch. Those were his favorite parts, though, of course, we hope that some of the experiences he doesn't remember also made a lasting impression. Trans-racial kids aren't necessarily motivated to learn all they can about their birth cultures, any more than same race children are, but that doesn't negate the importance of the family becoming educated.

This continuous effort at making ourselves more racially sensitive and aware, however, edged us toward extremes at times. Once the radar screen goes on, racism seems to be everywhere. In our gusto to do right by Ari, we moved imperceptibly into the zealot zone, overdoing our quest for racial enlightenment. We paid no heed to the effect our new-found passion was having upon our friends, not to mention Ari, neither of which was always good. In our enthusiasm to educate ourselves about Ari’s ethnicities, we lost sight of the main goal of enhancing his pride, not ours, in his heritage.

Sometimes when I think about the challenges ahead of us, navigating Ari from a little boy to a teenager and then to a man, I get tired enough to nap. Happily, parenting brings rewards aplenty to make the journey most worthwhile, and parenting Ari does seem an extra measure special.

Our hope is that Ari one day will make this quest to know his heritage. Parents can nourish young kids with healthy foods, but young adults pick their own menus. We hope that when that time of searching for himself comes, Ari’s early experiences will resonate with a deep meaning. We also want Ari to know how much we care about who he is, as a unique individual. The bad news is that we will no longer be choosing which elements of his culture get emphasized.

We have fun; serious issues don’t have to be somber. We even get a kick out of the surprise reactions our mixed family elicits in some people. We cannot help but laugh at some of the
ignorance we encounter; and we are a closer family for being on this journey together. Interracial families feel that they see the world more clearly than others, because we’ve experienced it from a different angle. We start to believe that we are better than our plain old vanilla counterparts, but then again we’re quick to recognize bias, even when it’s our own.

When all is said and done, I suspect that it’s harder to be a trans-racial family; harder on the parents and harder on the children. Like most things in life, though, the greater the challenge, the greater the reward. For us, the challenge of raising a child with a strong and uplifting sense of himself has already been frustrating and demanding, as well as illuminating and enriching. And the journey has barely begun.

*Jana Wolff is the author of* [Secret Thoughts of an Adoptive Mother, (now available in paperback)](https://www.amazon.com/Secret-Thoughts-Adoptive-Mother-Paperback/dp/1934354133). *She lives with her family in Honolulu, Hawaii.*
Handout #12.5  Children’s Understanding of Race and Adoption  
By Joan D. Ramos, MSW  
Adoptive Families Magazine, February/March 2004  
Reprinted with the permission of Adoptive Families Magazine  

Summary Developed by TAC

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<td>They do not comprehend the real meanings of these labels, and may be puzzled by the use of colors to describe both people and objects.</td>
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<td>Preschoolers can usually identify their own racial or ethnic group and may place a positive or negative value on their own and other groups.</td>
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<td>Feelings about groups are acquired by absorbing societal messages from the media, literature, toys, and their surroundings, even in the absence of contact or parental instruction.</td>
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<td>Children notice their own racial and ethnic differences from their parents and may express a desire to be the same race and ethnicity as the parents the children love. Some children act on this desire by avoiding sunshine, or trying to change their skin or hair color with chalk, flour or soap.</td>
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<td>By the age of six, children notice that most of their peers are of the same race as at least one parent and that most of their playmates are not adopted.</td>
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<td>Peers question children about their ethnicity and family composition.</td>
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<td>This can be a prime age for participating in group activities with a cultural or educational focus, as well as a time when role models are especially important.</td>
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<td>Most children are comfortable with their interracial family status, especially if parents strive for open communication regarding adoption, race and related issues. These children are usually accepted by their dominant culture peers with whom they want to fit in. A child may assume a sort of celebrity status, especially if he or she is the one-and-only child of color.</td>
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<td><strong>Twelve Through Eighteen</strong></td>
<td>This is a time of exploration, including determining the significance of race,</td>
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ethnicity, culture, and adoption, and examining how these apply to the individual.

A teen’s past experiences with his or her ethnic group identity are important as they determine whether the adolescent’s identity now is positive, negative, or in transition. Teens who have had little or no contact with members of their own group may model themselves after media images, which may be exaggerated and negative.

Teens interracial family status can add another layer of embarrassment about their parents.

Some teens form interracial friendships, while others may experience rejection from dominant culture peers who were previously friends. This may particularly occur with respect to dating.

Some adopted teens may meet others of the same racial or ethnic heritage for the first time in school, and may not be accepted by these individuals (who are also dealing with identity issues) as they do not “act their color.” This can be a very tumultuous time.

### Article

The history and development of intercultural adoptions—adoptions between members of distinct racial, ethnic, national origin, and religious groups—that have taken place in the United States since the end of World War II play a role in how such adoptions impact children and families today. Most such adoptions, whether of children born in the United States or in other countries, follow the pattern of adults from the dominant culture group adopting children who are members of heritage groups deemed to be of minority status in the United States. Within our country, children of color continue to enter the foster care system in numbers quite disproportionate to their population percentages, related to socioeconomic factors reflected in different racial/ethnic groups.

Children from throughout the world suffer most from the dire circumstances that affect large sectors of the populations in so-called "developing" nations. Accordingly, these children may become candidates for intercountry adoptions. The institution of formal adoption was originally developed to serve European-American children and adults, and only fairly recently has this focus changed.

Caucasian parents who adopt children of color have a unique opportunity to use their obvious family situation to be quite open about the realities of adoption. Both parents and children face additional and distinct tasks in building healthy, realistic identities.

The issue of identity – “Who am I?” – is more complicated for children growing up in adoptive
families than it is for children growing up in genetic families. Intercultural adoption adds another layer of identity issues for the family as well as the child. European-Americans often fail to understand that the identity development process is different for members of racial and ethnic minority groups than for members of the dominant culture. Most European-Americans are raised to think of themselves primarily as individuals, as the larger society no longer ascribes an ethnic group identity to most of the Caucasian majority. Most individuals of color, on the other hand, also have to deal with how the larger society perceives them—both as individuals and as members of a group. A group affiliation and identity can also serve to help "minority" individuals develop survival skills.

The more awareness that intercultural adoptive parents have about such concerns, as well as a willingness to act on behalf of their child—even when it may mean changes in customary life patterns—the better prepared the growing child will be to live as an adult in a society where heritage still matters.

**Ages and Stages: Children's Understanding of Race and Adoption**

An overview of how racial and ethnic identity develops in interculturally-adopted children can provide a framework for planful parenting and counseling. The age ranges are approximate and are meant as guidelines for relative stages of child development.

**Birth Through Three:** Toddlers become aware of physical race and skin color differences and learn names for specific groups. They do not comprehend the real meanings of these labels, and may be puzzled by the use of colors to describe both people and objects. Adoption issues at this point are primarily those of the parents: intercultural adoptive parents quickly experience reactions (positive, neutral, or negative) from extended family and community. Some parents are not prepared for questioning and do not receive the same level of support that new same-race families do; some families are regularly praised for having done a good deed. Bonding between parent and child can be affected by a mutual adaptation process that includes cross-cultural factors. By three, children can recite their own adoption stories, but with little comprehension. Toddlers may recognize that they and their families are the object of others' curiosity.

**Four Through Six:** Preschoolers can usually identify their own racial or ethnic group and may place a positive or negative value on their own and other groups. Feelings about groups are acquired by absorbing societal messages from the media, literature, toys, and their surroundings, even in the absence of contact or parental instruction. Children notice their own racial and ethnic differences from their parents and may express a desire to be the same race and ethnicity as the parents the children love. Some children act on this desire by avoiding sunshine, or trying to change their skin or hair color with chalk, flour or soap. By the age of six, children notice that most of their peers are of the same race as at least one parent and that most of their playmates are not adopted. Peers question children about their ethnicity and family composition. Most children at this age have rudimentary knowledge about pregnancy, birth, adoption and their own situation.

**Seven Through Eleven:** Latency age children usually have a firmer understanding of their own racial and ethnic identity and--given the opportunity--will explore what it means to be a
member of this group. This can be a prime age for participating in group activities with a cultural or educational focus, as well as a time when role models are especially important. Adoption issues often come to the fore, especially as children’s understanding of their personal situations expands to recognize the losses they have sustained. Children may grieve for their birthparents as well as begin to question their place or sense of belonging in their adoptive families. Most children are comfortable with their interracial family status, especially if parents strive for open communication regarding adoption, race and related issues. These children are usually accepted by their dominant culture peers with whom they want to fit in. A child may assume a sort of celebrity status, especially if he or she is the one-and-only child of color. At early elementary school age, children are usually receptive to parents sharing adoption and heritage information at school, although some teachers and school assignments may not be sensitive to adoption issues.

Twelve Through Eighteen: Adolescence is usually comprised of early and late stages, but the span is included here because the progression is very individualistic. This is a time of exploration, including determining the significance of race, ethnicity, culture, adoption, and examining how these apply to the individual. A teen’s past experiences with his or her ethnic group identity are important as they determine whether the adolescent’s identity now is positive, negative, or in transition. Teens who have had little or no contact with members of their own group may model themselves after media images, which may be exaggerated and negative. Teens’ interracial family status can add another layer of embarrassment about their parents. Some teens form interracial friendships, while others may experience rejection from dominant culture peers who were previously friends. This may particularly occur with respect to dating. Some adopted teens may meet others of the same racial or ethnic heritage for the first time in school, and may not be accepted by these individuals (who are also dealing with identity issues) as they do not "act their color." This can be a very tumultuous time. Adoption issues may come to the fore, in understanding self, contemplating searching for birth parents, and in the process of emancipating from their adoptive parents. The identity-building process will continue into the post-teen years.

Identity Challenges: How Common?

A major concern about intercultural adoptions has been that such an unusual situation would inevitably result in a gravely confused identity and social marginality for individuals so adopted. Within the child welfare and mental health professions, there are a variety of opinions on outcomes, based on personal experience and philosophy, as well as clinical practice. The results of research that primarily focuses upon African American children adopted by Caucasian parents answers some questions and raises others. As with children in general, most interculturally-adopted children appear to be doing reasonably well, although they face issues and concerns that may be ignored or minimized. There is evidence that while most early-placed interculturally-adopted children do well through their elementary school years (although most experience prejudice, often unbeknownst to parents), many experience additional issues in adolescence. Counselors throughout the country, in programs similar to ours at the Adoption Resource Center of Children’s Home Society of Washington, hear from parents of interculturally-adopted children and teens in numbers disproportionate to their small percentage of the population.
Nationally, statistics on numbers of domestic intercultural adoptions are unknown but are thought to be only a very small fraction of the total estimated 50,000 non-relative adoptions annually. International adoptions constitute about 10-15% of this national total. When our agency ran a statewide post-adoption services program from 1992-94, at least one-third of some 3,000 callers to our toll-free number were such families, representing both domestic and international placements.

Customary reasons that adoptive families may appear over-represented among those seeking mental health services also apply to intercultural adoptive families. It also may be that those parents who are open about adoption may be those most likely to seek services. Adoptive parents of children who have special needs or are interculturally-placed form the majority of most adoptive parents' groups, and thus have the most access to adoption education. Some of the motivations that lead families to adopt interculturally may also have a bearing on the parental factors necessary to help children build strong identities. General adoption issues need to be taken into account. Infertility now appears a frequent motivation for intercultural adoption. There is often a socioeconomic distinction between families adopting children in foster care (public sector adoption) and families adopting children privately (either independently or through wholly private agencies). Most private sector adoptions have become very costly.

For Caucasians, higher income levels tend to correlate to living in less-diverse communities. For the adoptive parents, and those who serve them in some private sector adoption services, placement practice may include elements of "rescue" and "color blindness" as well as a service or business orientation. Perhaps because of the controversies surrounding intercultural placements, general societal taboos about honestly discussing race, as well as the lack of experience and training of many of those who work in the adoption and mental health fields about racial, ethnic, and intercultural matters, services in this area have been slow to develop. Most adoption agencies do not offer post-placement services, and many adoptions now take place outside of agencies. The few programs that do exist typically focus on historic or symbolic aspects of race, ethnicity and culture.

These activities are important and particularly appropriate for young children. Few programs look at the issues and process of racial/ethnic identity development. A growing body of experience indicates that a realistic goal for healthy development of interculturally-adopted people is to become bicultural to some degree. This means that such an individual is able to function both within mainstream society and as a member of his or her racial/ethnic group or groups. The way that adopted persons become bicultural is different from that of peers who are raised by same-heritage families. The idea is not to replicate the latter, but to create a healthy situation where dual heritages can flourish. There are also special situations in adoption that deserve attention, such as the identity concerns of biracial and multiethnic children, international adoptions in general and those of older-placed children from overseas, including children who have spent long periods in institutions; and adopted children with siblings who are their parents' genetic offspring. As long as race matters in this country, there is an imperative for intercultural adoptive parents to raise bicultural children, to help them avoid becoming marginalized people with major identity difficulties.

**What Parents Can Do**

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Parents can do a great deal to help their interculturally-adopted children become bicultural. Prior to adopting, parents can go through a process of self-examination and education (hopefully facilitated by placement workers) regarding their decision and steps that they may take to enhance family life. Consideration of place of residence, friends and neighbors, available schools and community activities, houses of worship, health and grooming needs, and language issues are all relevant. Parents can teach their child correct terminology about his or her own heritage and can create an atmosphere where all issues related to race are discussed openly.

Interculturally-adopted children need to see themselves reflected in the greater community both literally and figuratively. Parents can bring culturally appropriate dolls, toys, books, art and music into their homes to provide positive images of their children's heritage. Frequently, Caucasian parents may feel that this is all that is needed. In fact, using artifacts and educational approaches is only part of the process. More important are the nonverbal messages that children pick up from who enters the family's living room. Parents may need to stretch beyond their usual comfort zone so that they can form intercultural relationships in the community in a natural way. This is also an important reason, when possible, to maintain ongoing contact with the child's birth family or former foster parents.

**Group Activities**

While adoptive family support groups play a vital role, parents also may want to seek out general interracial family groups as well as racial- and ethnic-based community groups. Depending on the interests of the parents, and later, those of the child, there is an array of civic, ethnic, recreational, sports, arts, music, cultural, educational, religious, political and anti-bias groups to choose from. It can be difficult for European-American parents without experience to make connections with members of diverse groups. Often, the help of a cultural bridge person (someone who has a foot in both worlds) can be sought out. Some of the most successful experiences of intercultural adoptive parent groups have been through group-to-group activities, with heritage-specific groups, that have enabled long-term ties to develop and through which some families have developed friendships. When adopted children are reluctant to become involved in ethnic-specific activities (often true when parents make their first attempt during adolescence) parents can and should participate alone. Their involvement also sends a message.

Parents may also seek out activities for their children that are not part of cultural education programs, but which represent children's interests outside of school (scouting, sports, music, church groups), and that have a high level of participation of children of a specific, or diverse, racial/ethnic group and similar social class. Such programs are easiest to find in diverse communities. It becomes difficult to form or maintain friendships when long commutes are necessary and the result can be a situation that feels artificial to the child. It is also hard to sustain the logistical efforts over the years.

When seeking activities for children themselves, parents need to become aware of avoiding "tourist parenting" that focuses on symbolic or ceremonial aspects of culture often through visits to special events, but not on contact with contemporary people going about their daily lives. Many adoption groups offer culture camps, which are a useful adjunct to year-round
involvement with ethnic-related activities, but alone cannot fill the bill for identity development tasks. Holiday celebrations, special events, and museum exhibits all have their merits. More important are relationships that develop in the natural context of community. In some locales, mentoring programs may be available.

**Conclusion**

As we move into the 21st Century, intercultural adoptive families will continue to be a visible part of the increasingly diverse fabric of American society. While most child welfare and mental health professionals see benefits in same-heritage placements, today we also know that intercultural placements are viable if appropriate planning and supports are available. All children in care will benefit from improved permanency planning. The social and political factors surrounding such placements cannot be ignored, as they are an integral backdrop to the process of building biculturality into family life. The continued existence of racism and inequality need to be faced head-on by parents working to raise children in times when youth are seriously at risk in our country. Increased attention to the unique issues connected to adoption, as well as to children's racial and ethnic identity development needs by parents and those who work with them, will go a long way to promote optimal mental health for the interculturally adopted children who will become tomorrow's adults.

*Joan D. Ramos, M.S.W., Counselor, Adoption Resource Center, Children's Home Society of Washington*
Handout #12.6 How a Child Develops A Positive Racial Identity [Source: Dr. Joe Crumbley]

Theories of social learning, object relations, and identification are useful in explaining how a child's identities (racial, religious, ethnic, class, and gender) develop. These theories are also useful in understanding the similarities and differences in how identities develop in children from dominant groups and children from minority groups that experience discrimination.

Social learning theory, originated by Albert Bandura, posits that people learn from one another, via observation, imitation, and modeling. People learn through observing others’ behavior, attitudes, and outcomes of those behaviors. Bandura says:

“Most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action.”

Social learning theory explains human behavior in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences. According to social learning theory, a social identity is constructed as an evolutionary process dependent in large measure upon the socializing environment in which the individual is positioned.

According to object relations theory, a child's identity is influenced by significant role models and relationships to which the child is consistently exposed in his or her environment – family, school, society, and the media. The child from the dominant group – the group that has power over the distribution of goods, services, rights, privileges, entitlements, and status – begins his or her identity formation by:

- Observing what group is in power,
- Observing that members of the group in power are like him or her (i.e. in race, gender, or religion), and
- Assuming that because he or she is like members of the group in power, he or she has the same rights and will achieve similar accomplishments and power as members of that group.

The ultimate result of the child's identity is a sense of positive self-esteem, confidence, worth, entitlement and goals.

In contrast, the child from the minority group – the group subject to the power, control, discretion, and distribution of goods and privileges by another group – begins his or her identity formation by:

- Observing what group is in power;
Observing that group members who are like him or her are not in positions of power and control;
Observing or experiencing prejudice, discrimination, and exposure to stereotypes; and
Assuming that because he or she is like members in the minority group, he or she has the same limited rights, can only achieve the same accomplishments, position, and status as similar group members, and that members of the minority group are not as good as those in power.

The minority child's identity affects his or her self-esteem, confidence, goals, worth, self-respect, sense of entitlement, and expectations by making him or her feel inferior. This inferiority is not the result of identifying with or being a member of a minority group, but from exposure to discrimination, prejudice, and negative stereotypes about the group. A child from a minority group that is celebrated, held in esteem, or that shares power and control with the dominant group can have an identity that is just as positive as a child's from the dominant group.

To counteract a minority child's formation of negative identities, the child must see and be told:

- Members of the child's minority group can also make positive achievements if given equal opportunities.
- The child and his or her minority group should also have the same rights and entitlements as members in the dominant group.
- The child and his or her group are equal to and as good as any other group.
- Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination are wrong.
- There is proof that prejudices and stereotypes are untrue. The child must be able to see it to believe it.

This last task may be the most difficult and challenging to accomplish if the minority child's group is not in a position of power, control, and success in the child's environment. Alternatives may need to include:

- Exposing the child to historical figures and information about his or her group's accomplishments, capacities, values, and culture.
- Redefining and reframing the child's definitions of success, strengths, and accomplishments by not using standards and definitions based on those of the dominant group (e.g. highlight individual accomplishments, family commitment, group survival, spiritual and moral integrity, and civil rights activities against discrimination).
- Exposing the child outside of his or her environment to members of the minority group in positions of power and control (e.g. geographically, in other countries, through films and other media).
Handout #12.7

**Parenting Tasks that Facilitate Positive Racial Identity**

Dr. Joseph Crumbley

Joseph Crumbley, D.S.W., is in private practice as a consultant and family therapist. His most recent areas of concentration have been kinship care and transracial adoptions. This article is adapted from his book, *Transracial Adoption and Foster Care*, available from the Child Welfare League of America Press.

Because children from minority groups (Asian, Latino, African American, or Native American) who experience prejudice or discrimination are subject to developing negative racial identity, they require monitoring, with attention paid to their perception of racial identity. They should not be expected to develop positive racial identity without support and reinforcement from their families, role models, and the community. Parents can provide support and reinforcement through the following 7 tasks.

**TASK 1:** Acknowledge the existence of prejudice, racism, and discrimination.

Adoptive parents must recognize not only that racism, prejudice, and discrimination exist, but that they, too, have been victims and survivors of it. By admitting the existence of inequities, parents can avoid racist, prejudicial, or discriminatory behavior. By admitting being a victim and survivor, parents are able to: 1) recognize inequities and how they affect others; and 2) elicit strategies for intervening on behalf of their child, based on personal experiences and knowledge.

While the victimization of minority groups is fairly obvious, that of members from the dominant culture and race may not be. Children in the dominant group are victims of racism by inadvertently developing superiority complexes.

Superiority complexes occur when a child:

1. observes that those in power are racially the same as he or she is,
2. observes those not in power are of a different race or color,
3. observes or is exposed to prejudicial and discriminatory beliefs and practices against a minority race,
4. assumes, therefore, that he or she and his or her race are better off without having any contact with a minority group.

Once parents understand how racism victimizes members from both the dominant and minority communities, they are prepared for the second task.

**TASK 2:** Explain why the child's minority group is mistreated.

Parents must explain and define racism, prejudice, discrimination, and bigotry, and why such behavior exists. Understanding the behavior exists. Understanding the behaviors beyond their simply being "good or bad" will enhance the child's coping skills. Understanding the functions
and reasons for the behaviors increases the child's range of responses beyond anger or retaliation.

**TASK 3:** Provide the child with a repertoire of responses to racial discrimination.

Parents must work to minimize their children's feelings of helplessness. A child's identity can be more positive if he or she perceives him or herself and members of racial groups to be empowered with choices, resources, and the ability to acquire and protect their rights. This repertoire of responses may include:

1. selective confrontation or avoidance,
2. styles of confrontations (passive, aggressive),
3. individual, legal, institutional, or community resources and responses (i.e. grievances, suits, NAACP, protests)
4. priorities and timing (when to avoid and when not to avoid issues),
5. goal-oriented responses rather than unplanned reactions,
6. institutional/organizational strategies (positioning, coalitions, compromising).

**TASK 4:** Provide the child with role models and positive contact with his or her minority community.

Parents of a different race from their child are quite capable of modeling and helping the child develop various identities (i.e. gender, class). However, counteracting the racial identity projected by a racially conscious or discriminating society requires positive exposure to same-race models or experiences. These contacts and experiences require: 1) interacting with the child's minority community, 2) providing the child information about his or her history and culture, and 3) providing an environment that includes the child's culture on a regular basis (i.e. art, music, food, religion, school, integrated or same race community).

This task requires that the parents be comfortable with 1) being a minority when interacting in the child's community, and 2) sharing the role of modeling with members from the child's race. Same race contacts and experiences function to: 1) counteract negative stereotypes, 2) teach the child how to implement the repertoire of responses, and 3) provide a respite from being a minority (i.e. the only child of color, the object of stares, or needing to prove one's equality).

**TASK 5:** Prepare the child for discrimination.

Providing the child with information on how his or her racial identity might be degraded helps him or her develop better coping skills and methods of maintaining a positive identity. Feeling self-confident about his or her ability to cope with and appropriately respond to discrimination reinforces a child's positive self-image and identity.

Same race role models may be a helpful resource for information and preparation if an adoptive parent has not experienced discrimination similar to the child's minority group (i.e. double standards, slander, interracial dating, and gender issues).
TASK 6: Teach the child the difference between responsibility to and for his or her minority group.

This task relieves the child of: 1) feeling embarrassed or needing to apologize for his or her racial identity or group, 2) not having to overcompensate or prove his or her worth because of his or her racial identity or negative stereotypes. However, the child is able to develop a commitment to both his or her individual and minority group’s accomplishments, resources, and empowerment.

The Clark Doll Test suggests that children are aware of differences in race as early as four years old. This study also found that African American children became aware of stigma associated with race as early as seven years old. Although parents cannot stop the minority child’s exposure to racial prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypes, parents (adoptive, birth, same or different race) of any minority child must help develop the positive racial identity necessary to counteract the effects of racial inferiority.

TASK 7: Advocate on behalf of your child's positive identity.

The purpose of this task is to provide the child an environment that is conducive to the formation of a positive identity. The parent should advocate for family, social, and educational experiences that are respectful, reflective, and sensitive to cultural diversity. Therefore, the parent may need to be prepared to correct or confront individual or institutional racism, prejudice, or discrimination that the child may encounter.

As an advocate the parent models for the child how to advocate for themselves. The child also sees and feels their parent's protection, loyalty, and commitment, which are essential in attachment and bonding. Confronting prejudice and discrimination on the child's behalf is no longer optional once a parent adopts transracially.
Handout #12.8

My Story

As a biracial child growing up in a virtually all-white setting, I set out on a search for a cultural and racial identity. I was looking for a social niche I could fit into, in which I could feel whole and affirmed. I needed such affirmation of who I was culturally because I wasn't taught a racial identity in a clear, straightforward, unambiguous manner. Yet all the while I was receiving very clear messages, from people in my surroundings and from the media, that I was different, unacceptable, and by extension, inferior.

Particularly stressful was my adolescence, the time when we all struggle for an identity separate from our parents. I found I had to struggle very hard to find role models and knowledge to help me answer the nagging question of "who am I?" It was painful because while I perceived racism all around me, I didn't have people around me to talk to who had experienced what I was experiencing, and who could therefore validate and share my perceptions.

You may ask, "Where were you perceiving racism?" I sensed it at school, in the Eurocentric curriculum that excluded a multicultural perspective. I sensed it among my peers. I felt it from the fathers of the white girls I was interested in. I sensed it from prospective employers when I was job hunting, and from security guards in shopping mall stores, and from police who watched me and sometimes stopped me on the streets. I detected it in the comments and jokes that went unchallenged among friends, and even among members of my family.

It took years of pulling away from, and scrambling back to, my adoptive family before I could say with conviction and certainty, "I am black." It took years because I had to figure out for myself what being black meant. I had to unlearn false information and negative stereotypes I had absorbed from the racism in the environment we all grow up in. I had to gather my own strength and proceed to read and educate myself about the black experience, while my parents worried that I was rejecting them, which made me feel guilty and disloyal for seeking knowledge of my black heritage. My loyalties were divided. I was torn and confused by what I felt emotionally and what I had been taught intellectually. I felt hurt and belittled by the racism I was experiencing, yet simultaneously guilty, ungrateful, and maybe even wrong in my thinking. I felt isolated and misunderstood. My days were filled with anxiety and anger.

Many of you are no doubt thinking, "Sounds like a typical adolescence to me!" But let me remind you, I'm just talking about my feelings about race at the moment. Of course I was also dealing with regular adolescent issues around dating, peer pressure, sexuality, gender roles, going to college, and growing up in general. The racial confusion made adolescence that much harder to cope with.


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Handout #12.9

Role Play Scenario

You have been working with Sandra and Joy for three previous sessions. You have learned the following about Joy’s history: When Joy was a few days old, her Asian birth mother abandoned her on the steps of a government building in Seoul, South Korea. She was adopted by an American family and brought to the United States before she was 6 months old. She spent most of her childhood in California, then moved, at age 11, to a small town in Maryland. Sandra and her husband, Tom, felt the best way to help Joy assimilate into American culture was for them to not dwell on her “foreignness”. Sandra and Tom never pretended that Joy was not adopted but just never discussed with Joy her identity as Asian. Sandra says that Joy is her daughter — the child of an Italian engineer and his German-American wife. Korea was the place where Joy was born, and she and Tom believe that being an Asian in America isn’t any different from coming from another faraway place like Denmark or Australia. Joy, now 15, said in the last Module said that she thinks that her parents owed her some information about her Korean heritage. She says that her mom never told her whether it was good or bad to be Asian; she didn't have to. The mocking voices of the kids on the bus had told her that many people thought Asians were second-rate and not as good as whites. When Joy said this, Sandra began to cry and looked away quickly, saying nothing.

In this fourth session, Sandra and Joy seem to be awkwardly looking at one another. You sense that they want to continue the conversation from the last session but are not sure how.
Handout #12.10 The First Sting of Racism

“Perhaps years of rocking me to sleep and answering my cries in the night had truly blinded my parents to our racial differences. Outsiders, however, were always eager to point them out. As my brother and I stood alongside three or four neighborhood kids waiting to start our first day of kindergarten, a busload of older students passed, and many hung out the window pointing to our group and yelled, "Chinese cherries! Look at the Chinese cherries!" Several boys pulled the corners of their eyes toward their temples to form "Chink eyes." They laughed and asked us what we had in our lunchboxes, chop suey?

I looked at the children around me. They were the same kids I had played hide-and-seek with ever since I had learned to walk. I didn't see any Chinese people. I craned my neck, and asked my playmates where the Chinese people were. As they began to snicker, my brother's face twisted in painful awareness. "Dottie, they're talking about us," he said. "We're the Chinese people."

I looked back at him in disbelief. We were not Chinese. We were Swedes born in Korea, living in Minnesota. I vowed to ask my mother all about this when I got home. When the bus came, I purposely sat in the front so I could see my face in the driver's mirror. Relieved, I saw the same features that had stared back at me when I brushed my teeth that morning. When school was over, I came home and asked my mother what those kids had been talking about.

Her response was unsettling. She breathed a long sigh and said gently, "Well, honey, you and your brother do have sort of an Asian look, like many Chinese and Japanese people. This is something people are going to say to you for a long time."

Handout #12.11

Race and Ethnicity in Adoption:
A Resource Guide for Mental Health Professionals

This resource guide is designed to provide mental health professionals with some of the leading literature in the areas of race and ethnicity in adoption. The resources have been organized in general topic areas.

General Resources on Race

The Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America. Brown University. Available at: http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Race_Ethnicity/


Race: Are We So Different? Established by the American Anthropological Association. Available at: http://www.understandingrace.org/home.html


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General Resources on Transracial and Transcultural Adoption

Adoption History Project. (2007). *Transracial Adoption*. Available at: http://www.uoregon.edu/~adoption/topics/transracialadoption.htm


PACT, An Adoption Alliance. Perspectives on transracial adoption. www.pactadopt.org


The Voices of Children and Young People Adopted Transracially or Transculturally
Module #12: Race and Ethnicity in Adoption


**Psychological Issues for Children and Youth Adopted Transracially and Transculturally**


- Special Needs of Minority Children Adopted Transracially
- The Impact of Transracial Adoption on the Adopted Child and the Adoptive Family


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Racial Identity Development


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**Racial Socialization**


**Transracial Adoptive Parenting**

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- Parenting Tasks in Transracial Adoptions
- Assessing a Family’s Ability to Adopt Transracially


Crumbley, J. (n.d.). Transracial Adoption: Love is Not Enough. Available at: [http://www.cwpsalem.pdx.edu/netlink/MEPA/Love_is_not_Enough.pdf](http://www.cwpsalem.pdx.edu/netlink/MEPA/Love_is_not_Enough.pdf)


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